

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous Chapter discussed the methodology used in this study. It described the use of interviews in the collection of data and discussed how the data was gathered and transcribed into written text. The transcribed data were then analyzed using the method of discourse analysis. In order to understand the meaning participants construct about the topic, the researcher re-read the protocols and listened to the recorded interviews on several occasions in an attempt to gain a holistic understanding of the data.

Each transcribed interview was first analyzed individually to arrive at an understanding of each participant. Common discourses were then identified, focusing specifically on the ways in which the participants constructed the discourses under investigation. This Chapter presents the discourses that were dominant in the interviews, while the next Chapter focuses on discussing the findings in detail. The discourses discussed in this Chapter are the discourse of culture, the discourse of Christianity, the discourse of power, the discourse of independence and freedom, the discourse of fear and helplessness and the discourse of satisfaction. The presentation of the findings is preceded by a description of study participants.

## 4.2 Description of participants

A total of 11 interviews were conducted for this study. However, only 10 of the interviews were used during the analysis as one of the tapes was lost and therefore its contents could not be transcribed or analysed. The participants in this study are young professional women ranging in age from 27 to 35. At the time when the study was conducted the participants had been married for at least one year and for not more than five years. A brief summary of each participant is provided below. As indicated earlier the participants' names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

### *Ria*

Ria is 34 years old and has been married for three and a half years. She is an advocate and currently holds a senior managerial position within her company. She worked for some years before she got married and has held various professional positions which expanded her independence and status. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in law.

### *Mokgadi*

Mokgadi is 32 years old and has been married for three years. She is a biologist and had been in her role as specialist scientist for a few years prior to her marriage. She is currently studying towards her Master's degree in the field.

*Esther*

Esther is a Human Resources Consultant and she has been in specialist roles for most of her career. She currently holds a managerial position in Human Resources. She is 33 years old and has been married for two years. She has been in a relationship with her husband since university but only married him a few years after she started working.

*Getrude*

Getrude is currently an industrial relations advisor. She is an advocate and practiced as an attorney prior to her marriage. She is 35 years old and has been married for three years.

*Toa*

Toa is a 30 year old business development manager and has held specialist positions throughout her career. She has been married for two and a half years and was a professional prior to her marriage.

*Mapule*

Mapule is a strategist within her company, a role she has held for two years. She has a doctoral degree and has been married for two years. She is 34 years old.

*Tebogo*

Tebogo is the director of a business unit with her current employer. She is 34 years old and has been married for three and half years. She has been in a relationship

with her husband for about five years, but they were only married after she had held various managerial positions.

### *Charmaile*

Charmaile is a manager in Human Resources. She is 33 years old and has been married for two and half years. She is currently studying to maximize her academic qualifications.

### *Zanele*

Zanele is a Communication manager within a corporate company. She is 34 years old and has been married for two years. Zanele was in a relationship with her husband for three years prior to their marriage.

### *Refiloe*

Refiloe is 33 years old and works as a Human Resources Specialist. She has been married for three years, although she knew her husband for five years prior to them getting married.

## **4.3 Presentation of findings**

The presentation of the findings is guided by the interpretation of the transcripts, using the method of discourse analysis, in line with the objectives of the study. While conducting discourse analysis the following discourses emerged from the text:

1. The discourse of “culture”
2. The discourse of Christianity
3. The discourse of power
4. The discourse of autonomy, independence and freedom
5. The discourse of fear and helplessness
6. The discourse of satisfaction

The discourses are presented in relation to the broader context of this study, which is the social context of marriage. Direct quotations from the transcripts are provided as evidence for the identification of a discourse. Some quotations appear in more than one discourse as they were found relevant for use in different discourses. The presentation of the identified discourses is preceded by a section focusing on the participants’ construction of marriage.

#### **4.3.1 The participants’ construction of marriage**

The participants’ construction of marriage stems from their subjective experiences in marriage and is informed by the ways in which dominant social discourses such as Christianity and culture construct the position of a married woman. Through the lens of the cultural discourse the participants construct marriage as the unification of a man and a woman resulting from the practice of *lobola*. The payment of *lobola*, as argued in the literature Chapter, gives the husband power over his wife (Chambers, 2000; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010; Kambarami, 2006). Culture is constructed by the participants as a powerful means of determining a woman’s behaviour in marriage. Through their experiences and through the manner in which they articulate their

experiences the participants give culture power. The discussion of culture in the literature review found that one of the criticisms of the concept of culture relates to the way in which culture functions as a mechanism of power. The construction of culture as powerful is illustrated in the following extract:

“With us as black women it [marriage] starts with *lobola*... It [culture] is always coming in to shape up what your marriage is and it will continue to be there because people are from backgrounds and knowing with us as black women it starts with *lobola*. The moment your husband pays *lobola*, it says he’s got the whole dominion over you” (Ria).

The participants also construct marriage as a partnership and in so doing they construct themselves in marriage as partners. The word partner is a construct used to communicate a relationship between people that reflects some sort of equality or equity in that relationship. The participants’ construction of wives as partners contradicts the dominant discourses around how women’s behaviour in marriage is socially constructed (see Chapter 2, section 2.6.3.2). Similarly in the same section of the literature review, it is indicated that the RCMA of 1998 accords wives equal legal status to their husbands and therefore recognizes woman in marriage as independent (Mamashele, 2004):

“When you agree especially in marriage as partners” (Esther).

“We are partners in the running of the household” (Getrude).

“In a marriage, I would say it depends on the conduct of your partner”

(Ria).

Even at this early point of the discussion it is clear that there is a contradiction in terms of how the participants construct themselves in marriage and how they construct marriage in general. From the cultural perspective (to be discussed below) a married woman is expected to be submissive and dependent on her husband, whereas the participants see themselves as partners in marriage. A partner denotes someone of equal status and the women thus elevate themselves to a status of equality with their husbands. It could be argued that in this way the participants subtly oppose the cultural construction of a woman as someone who is inferior and their subtle opposition could be informed by how the RCMA construct the position of women in marriages. This contradiction raises questions in relation to who defines the customary marriage and the extent to which the expectations of marriage relationships stipulated in the various marriage acts are practiced by society. In a society that is attempting to promote democracy it could be argued that the constructions of various acts could be aimed as a diverse population, including women, who will then use these forums to ‘defend’ or ‘articulate’ their preferred status in marriages and in society at large. The next paragraphs present the discourses that emerged in the study.

### 4.3.2 The discourse of culture

Culture is a dominant discourse that the participants used to construct meaning about marriage. Culture was described by the participants as placing people into hierarchies with women positioned as inferior to men. This differential power hierarchy was discussed in section 4.3.1. The participants acknowledge certain cultural expectations and conform to these cultural expectations by behaving according to expectations. Through subscribing to these expectations the participants adhere to the social construction of a married woman as someone who is under the authority of a husband and as someone who should be submissive to the headship of the husband. Some quotations that illustrate this are:

“I ascribe to traditional or cultural principles, meaning that I don’t take the Constitution home. I understand that my husband is the head of the family meaning that we are partners in the running of the household and the business of the house, but then most of the time he has the ultimate say” (Getrude).

“I think I did that to respect the cultural context of the marriage. In our culture I know what a woman’s role is whether I have taken that consciously or subconsciously there is a certain way I believe a woman should be in marriage, I am expected to be under the headship of my husband and I am conscious of that” (Toa).



“In terms of culture men are standing up to ensure that the household is run by them... the man is the head and the wife is the neck and if the neck is not there, the head will not be able to turn sideways” (Ria).

“You are told what you can do in marriage and what you cannot do”  
(Tebogo)

It is clear from the transcripts that the participants’ construction of their behaviour is a conscious effort that results from their understanding of cultural roles and hierarchies. This could be a result of their awareness around how traditional customs enforce the position of wives in marriages as subordinate and inferior (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010; Hoza, 2010). Simultaneously the participants also construct themselves as equals in marriage, as reflected in the preceding discussions. For example, Ria insinuates that her husband is dependent on her or that she at the very least co-contributes to the running of their household.

The participants also describe culture as oppressing women and cultural expectations of how a married woman should behave as forcing them to compromise their views due to fear of being victimized. Nonetheless, the participants choose to embrace their constructed cultural identity. Some quotations that illustrate this are:

“Culture has been and still is very oppressive... I still see culture oppressing us as professional women” (Ria).

“There are things I don’t do which will shock you because people have preconceived ideas about professional women. For instance, I don’t argue with my mother-in-law, I don’t answer back, that’s how I was taught at home. I’d know that this woman is wrong now she is really pushing it, but I’d smile and she would not even hear it from me, if it is really burning me and I have to complain, eh, being the lawyer that I am, I’d find the way of linking somebody else whom I’d have to ask what is happening or whom I’d have to then carry or make use as a vessel to carry the message through and hope to God that the message gets through to her that I did not appreciate that. Seriously I really don’t answer back, she’d be wrong I’ll just smile” (Getrude).

“In my situation I have also found that I got to compromise because of fear of being criticized. In our culture in black families we are taught that it is family first and the rest later, that rest basically meaning you come secondary to the needs of the family” (Mapule).

“The challenge there is to bite my tongue and not even say” (Toa).

By constructing the position of a wife in marriage as inferior and submissive the participants see culture as belittling of women in marriages. According to Mapule women in marriages are basically treated like children, as illustrated in the following quotation:

“I find that in marriage you are limited, you have these African husbands who are the head of the family and you are treated like a baby where you need to listen to what he says and support him continuously” (Mapule).

Although the participants prefer to construct themselves as partners and equals in marriage and want to be acknowledged as equally significant in the running of the household, they continue to construct their identity and behaviour in terms of cultural expectations. In doing so the participants maintain the cultural construction of a married woman and maintain the gender role constructions of what is expected of a married woman. Some of the quotations that illustrate this are:

“I observed how my mother conducted her business in her house...I knew that my father was the head of the family and whether you knew the law or not, his word was the word, and my mother said very little about how their household business is run. For instance I knew that if there was something I wanted to do, like going out, I would go and ask my mom but at the end she'll say my father would have to approve... That practice I was able to proudly take into my marriage life” (Getrude).

“The thing that a man wants from his life partner is somebody to pamper him, somebody to look after his family. In the context of the marriage it boils down to what your husband wants. It is clear that you need to adapt your behaviour to suit your marriage context” (Toa).

The participants also choose to compromise their need for a different construction of marriage in favour of the need to complete their life cycle and life roles (in this instance the life role of being married). They connect marriage to biological and social inevitabilities, as something that is 'natural'. Some of the quotations that illustrate this are:

“Being a professional woman does not mean I don’t want a home, I don’t want a family and I derive a great deal of satisfaction from being a good wife” (Toa).

“At the same time marriage I think is a natural thing that is triggered by biology or socially when you are of a certain age and you are dating it is expected that you will marry...you understand that marriage is about compromising” (Tebogo).

However, the participants reflected on contradictions between their constructions of their roles in the family and what actually transpires in the running of the household. Getrude, for example, describes herself as a partner in marriage, but she says that the husband has the final say. This is an indirect acknowledgement that no partnership exists because in a relationship of partners, conclusions are agreed upon through negotiations. By accepting the husband as having the final say, the participant accepts the cultural construction of man as dominant. Ria also describes herself as a neck, a figurative expression which indicates the “equal” position that she holds in the marriage while still maintaining that her husband makes the final decision.

Although the participants seem 'unhappy' with how culture constructs their identity they are also responsible for conserving their 'cultural identity'. This is observed by how they continue constructing their identity and behaviour in marriage in accordance with the cultural constructions of appropriate identities and behaviours for married woman. There is an internal contradiction between the need to construct themselves differently from how culture constructs them, and the need to remain rooted in cultural norms and expectations. These two varying constructions of the self can be linked to the discussions in Chapter 2 concerning the social construction of an identity. The cultural identity of a submissive, less powerful role talks to the "me" attribute of the self, in other words the social self. The participants' construction of themselves as powerful and autonomous could be linked to the "I" attribute of the self, which allows them to construct themselves as independent and autonomous.

The participants also attribute their acceptance of and ability to cope with cultural expectations to observations they have made from their interactions with other women in their lives. This indicates the role that enculturation and identification play on how people construct themselves. The socially constructed behaviour expectation of married woman is carried from one generation to the next. Some quotations that illustrate this are:

"I think I am also fortunate like I said in my case I had the experience of having professional women around me, my mother, and my aunts. So I had the opportunity to see them in two different contexts. I will see how they were at the office, my mother was a go getter, very assertive at work, and I will see how she behaved at home. And this made me realize that

oh this is how it is, when she gets home she gets water for my father to wash his hands, she is serving him on a tray, she is doing things that my father could do for himself. My father would sit comfortably in his chair and ask my mother to get him something from the kitchen like getting him a glass of juice or water. So I think it is fortunate that I saw that because rightly or wrongly my mother and my aunts developed a coping mechanism or a way of dealing with these dual roles” (Toa).

“At home I am a completely different person, I am also influenced by tradition, by culture and perhaps I am also a product of the environment within which I was raised. I observed how my mother conducted her business in her house even though she sent me to law school. I knew that my father was the head of the family and whether you knew the law or not, his word was 'the' word, and my mother said very little about how their household business is run...that practice I was able to proudly take into my marriage life ... I subscribe to the traditional cultural role philosophy of a woman because that is how I have been taught, and I don't have a problem with getting out of my professional self when I am at home to fulfil that role” (Getrude).

During the interviews it was also apparent that the participants find that their voices are silenced in marriage due to cultural expectations. Therefore the dominant voice becomes that of the husband. Women are not allowed to express their dissatisfaction around what happens in their marriages because such expressions would be interpreted as defying culture or being rebellious. Some of the quotations

that were presented in section 4.4.2 show that women are not expected to challenge their husbands or express their dissatisfaction in marriage. More evidence is reflected in the following extracts:

“In my situation I have also found that I got to compromise because of fear of being criticized. In our culture in black families we are taught that it is family first and the rest later, that rest basically meaning you come secondary to the needs of the family” (Mapule).

“The challenge there is to bite my tongue and not even say” (Toa).

“But if it means keeping the peace at home and remain silent I find that I get to compromise and I am happy to compromise, I don’t mind at all” (Getrude).

The discussion above indicates that the participants have identified with other women in similar contexts and constructed their behaviour in accordance with this identification. Some of the participants stated that they had observed their fathers as ‘heads’ of their households and saw how their mothers behaved in a subordinate manner. They expressed a clear understanding of the cultural expectations and the importance of adhering to these expectations.

In the interviews it was also expressed that the participants behave in ways that are prescribed by the dominant discourses in their lives due to fear of being rejected. Cultural practices and expectations are described as constructing and directing the

participants' behaviour. The participants behave in accordance with expectations due to the fear of being isolated, criticized or victimized. It is also clear that although the participants could chose to reject this imposition they would also then have to deal with the consequences of being rejected.

In general, the participants see culture as a dominant attribute that informs how they construct their identities in marriage. This is evident in the preceding discussion where the participants indicated that culture imposes role and behaviour expectations on them and they conform to these expectations. While some participants expressed contempt for these impositions, some of the participants have found ways of being content with these impositions and have embraced the expectations. The construction of culture as something that has power has been criticized (Brumann, 1999). Furthermore it appears that the construct of culture is used as part of everyday conversation by the participants, and this use of culture has also been criticized because when the term is used in everyday situations it becomes wide, vague and simplified (Brumann, 1999).

#### **4.3.3 The discourse of Christianity**

Another dominant discourse presented by the participants as informing the construction of their identity in marriage is the discourse of Christianity. In a similar manner to cultural expectations Christianity is presented as constructing the position of a married woman as someone who should behave in a subordinate manner. The Christian discourse places the husband in a superior position and the wife is expected to respect and honour her husband.



The expectation set by the Christianity discourse influences how the participants behave in marriage and how they construct autonomy in marriage. This is illustrated in the following quotations:

“Christianity also says that women have to submit themselves to their husbands. It is stated in the Bible that our freedom lies with our husbands. I associate autonomy with submission, because as a true believer I have to be submissive to my husband because if I am not submissive then I will not be happy in my marriage” (Mokgadi).

The extract above suggests that the Christian discipline gives women no choice in terms of choosing appropriate behaviour. According to this statement women in marriage are expected to be submissive and ‘have’ to construct themselves in a submissive manner. The extract also implies that unless a woman becomes submissive she will not be happy. This suggests that in marriage the participant compromises her need to be autonomous for the sake of her happiness.

The Christian discourse further constructs the role of a woman as that of someone who is expected to maintain peace in families, as illustrated in the following quotations:

“When you look at our spiritual background as Christians, you need to make sure that there is peace, you need to reach out to the other person, you need to give the other person at least the right to do things her own way and ensure that the other person is satisfied” (Ria).

“Yes, the word of God teaches us to move away from our human nature and do things in a Christian way. Human nature and Christian ways are very different. I have realized that if I choose to prescribe to the Christian ways, I tend to be happier and at ease with things that happen than if I have to fight and respond in a human manner. Autonomy is opposite to what the Bible teaches us and as a Christian I draw my strength and my principles mostly from my Christian teachings hence I am able to be calm on issues such as autonomy. The Bible teaches us to submit ourselves to our husband but not hundred percent because God has also given us freedom as women” (Mokgadi).

The Christian discourse constructs the position of a woman as submissive and places men in a powerful position by equating the husband to Jesus. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

“The Bible says you need to respect your husband and your husband is like Jesus” (Esther).

Christianity has clear behaviour expectations for women and one of these expectations is that wives should respect their husbands as their husbands are seen as senior and more powerful in marriage. While the participants acknowledge that Christianity constructs them as submissive they also express that there are times when they are not submissive. At times the participants contest issues they are in disagreement with, although some of the participants also compromise for the sake of maintaining the peace at home. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

“I know you have to be submissive in a religious way, but I don’t think you always have to be submissive even if your husband is doing wrong” (Esther).

In compromising on expressing their views in marriage the participants rely on a higher power, God, to fight their battles. The interview texts illustrate that it is not uncommon for professional married women to not resist their situation. The participants draw on a religious discourse, i.e. ‘Christian principles’ to cope and deal with their challenges. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

“Some women end up fighting the situation which I also did, I fought the situation as a Black person but also as a spiritual person I ended up looking at the spiritual side of things to say in my family I would like to see peace and what would God maybe require of me.” (Ria).

As with the cultural discourse the Christian discourse constructs the position of the wife as submissive and under the authority of her husband. It is clear from the texts that while the participants tend to accept their constructed identity they are not fully satisfied with how the dominant social discourses construct the position of women.

#### **4.3.4 The discourse of power**

The preceding discussions illustrated how the discourses of Christianity and culture construct the position of a man as superior and a husband as someone who has

authority over his wife. Although the participants have embraced this construction they also construct themselves as having a degree of power. There is constant reference in the texts to the ways in which the participants see themselves as empowered. In the discussion on culture it was clearly shown that the participants constructed themselves as equally powerful as their husbands. This was illustrated through statements such as “I am the neck”, and “we are partners”. However, the next quotations illustrate that although the women are empowered or made powerful by their professional status and their financial abilities this empowerment does not apply to the marriage.

“Women are empowered and more so professional women are empowered so” (Toa).

“When I am at work I become the lawyer, I know that there might be people whom I have to exercise my authority over because of my work... At home I am a completely different person” (Getrude).

As a result of their professional status and the resultant empowerment the participants stated that there is a struggle at home in terms of power sharing. The struggle for power is a result of the participants’ need to share in the power at home in accordance with their empowered position in the workplace. However, the participants still construct the possibility of sharing of power in the household as a decision that needs to be taken by their husbands. This suggests that the participants construct a view that the interests of men or husbands are prioritised. This view is in accordance with cultural expectations. The participants also indicate

that they understand the construction of a woman as subordinate and instead of struggling for power they revert to cultural construction regarding appropriate behaviour for women. Some of the quotations that illustrate the above are:

“There is a serious struggle for power, but for me it is not a struggle as such because I indicated that I subscribe to the traditional cultural role philosophy of a woman because that is how I have been taught, and I don’t have a problem with getting out of my professional self when I am at home to fulfil that role” (Getrude).

“If your husband gives you an opportunity to decide on certain things (or gives you some power), then he shift/shares power. If, however, that man sees himself as the sole person in power then it means that power will always lie in him and you will not have anything to contribute or say as a wife. So really power relations are related to how we define autonomy. If your husband stamps his foot and tells you that culturally as a man he must decide on things, he is then using the power granted by culture. If he approaches you and shares the power then he is acknowledging that you can also decide on issues rather than him imposing his cultural background on you” (Ria).

The participants who construct themselves as sharing power in marriage also experience guilt around this power sharing as a result of the awareness that they are not fulfilling cultural expectations. In the extract below the participant becomes apologetic about her behaviour and states that although her behaviour can be easily

interpreted as her having power over her husband this is actually not the case. In constructing her position as a perception, the participant protects herself from being judged for behaving differently from the norm. She states that:

“You know sometimes it becomes difficult because I tend to speak my mind and somewhere I feel I overpower him... For example, if you come into our house you will think I have power than my husband because I am more talkative and somehow I jump into taking decisions” (Esther).

Although the participants enjoy the privilege of sharing power with their husbands they also indicate that their husbands have the final decision making power in terms of this power sharing arrangement. It is evident from the interviews that the participants continue to construct the position of the husband as powerful and in control while they construct themselves as being less powerful. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

“Men are powerful and have control, they should tell where the family is going, what needs to be brought or bought into the family and this also depends on how marriage is setup. If your husband gives you an opportunity to decide on certain things (or gives you some power), then he shifts/shares power. If, however that man sees himself as the sole person in power then it means that power will always lie in him and you will not have anything to contribute or say as a wife” (Ria).

#### 4.3.5 Autonomy, independence and freedom discourses

During the interviews the participants constantly used the words ‘independence’ and ‘freedom’ when they discussed autonomy. Autonomy, independence and freedom were constructed both from an individualistic framework and from a collectivistic framework. As individuals the participants constructed themselves as independent and as having the freedom to behave as they wish. Some of the quotations that illustrate this are indicated below:

“Autonomy for me is freedom, being myself and being able to behave in a way that will be satisfying to me” (Esther).

“Autonomy for me is the freedom to do what I want to do. I think as women we need freedom to do whatever we want to do...autonomy for me is being able to be autonomous in all areas of your being” (Mapule).

“Autonomy for me is the ability to make decisions on your own without worrying the other will feel not consulted” (Tebogo).

“Autonomy for me is freedom, being myself and being able to behave in a way that will be satisfying to me” (Mokgadi).

The participants also link autonomy to their ‘rights’ and particularly to their birth rights and the South African Bill of rights. Some quotations that illustrate this are:

“Autonomy for me is the right to choose, the right to be what I want to be in a marriage, the right to do things I want to do in a marriage... Not to say that I shouldn't be questioned but really the right to be free in any manner that I'd like to conduct myself as a person and be satisfied” (Ria).

“Autonomy to me is a right; it is a birth right to both men and women. Well when it comes to marriage, especially in South Africa, since we are having the democracy here, I think it is going to work well if both parties understand that they have freedom towards whatever they are doing in marriage...things have changed and as I indicated to you that autonomy means a right, I think I have some rights in a marriage that I can just work on without my husband saying anything and as a professional woman I think it will be easy for me” (Esther).

The participants also define autonomy as one's ability to depend on oneself and to make independent decisions. The participants indicate that as individuals and as professionals they are independent and as a result they are able to confidently carry out tasks or achieve their wants, goals and desires by themselves. This is illustrated in the following quotations:

“I believe as far as autonomy is concerned ... I am as autonomous as one can define the word autonomy ... I believe autonomy is the self” (Getrude).

“A woman can be independent not always making sure that she consults her husband in making some decisions” (Esther).



The use of the word 'can' emphasizes woman's ability to be independent. It is possible that Esther perceives that women are not treated as people who act or behave independently of men. In the extract from Getrude's interview there is a strong emphasis on her being autonomous and this also indicates her assertion of herself as being independent. The construction of the self as autonomous could be linked to the "I" or personal attribute of identity. In accordance with SIT it also illustrates that the participants have constructed their sense of self as autonomous based on what is expected of them in their professional category or classification.

Furthermore Getrude contextualizes her independence within her status as a professional and states:

"Professionally being autonomous means being able to dependent on yourself hence the word being independent, and when I say being able to depend on yourself I mean you look at what your role entails as far as the profession is concerned. For example as a lawyer, working in the ER (Employee Relations) department, I know that all the business of the ER depends on me. That does not mean that I don't rely on other people, it's important for me to rely on others so that I can fulfil my role. I delegate a lot where is possible but I understand that even with delegation I am the person who is ultimately responsible for everything that occurs" (Getrude).

The construct of independence as linked to autonomy is also associated with the financial independence that is brought about by the participants' professional status and the fact that they are earning their own income. In the texts the participants

explain how they use their financial independence to act autonomously. Some quotations that illustrate this are:

“It doesn’t matter whether he earns more or I earn more, what is left after the running of the household projects is mine, in that way I feel free... If you want to buy couches and they cost R20 000, and you have it as a woman, don’t ever look at the other person, do it yourself. I personally do everything in the house he only pays the bond because I love beautiful things. For me not to create the fights I pay for whatever I like for the house” (Esther).

“There are things maybe without thinking I’d do because I feel they are necessities. Like buying a dishwasher, I’d buy it whether he agrees or not, not necessarily for me, I believe for all of us, just for the sanity in the house...When I feel tired and if I have the money I just go and buy food I don’t consult with anyone. My take is that come 20H00 there has to be food on the table, whether it is homemade food or take-away, but I also strike a balance. I know that takeaways are not necessarily healthy for them and even for me, so you find that I don’t do it all the time, but when I am seriously tired and I can afford, I simply go to the restaurant and I buy” (Getrude).

It is also interesting to note that the financial independence referred to in the above extracts relates to traditionally female roles. For example, women are associated with a nurturing responsibility and buying food, so ensuring that there is food on the table and being accountable for clean laundry in the home is aligned to such a role.

While some of the participants are able to act independently others indicate that despite their financial independence their autonomy is still limited and they express dissatisfaction around these limitations. Some participants state that despite their financial independence they are still expected to consult with their husband regarding how to use their own money. Some of the quotations that illustrate this are:

“For me my autonomy is limited when it comes to financial autonomy in a sense that I cannot just decide to buy myself anything with the money I earn, I need to consult with my husband on how to use it” (Mokgadi).

“There are certain instances where I would decide to buy something for example a bicycle for my child because I can afford it I would feel it is not necessary to discuss it with my husband. However at times such decisions are sensitive regardless” (Tebogo).

Although the participants acknowledge autonomy as freedom and thus construct themselves as independent, they also acknowledge that in the context of marriage individual freedom is not completely possible. As a result of their awareness of cultural behavioural expectations the women are conscious of how they present themselves in marriage. The participants distinguish between the different contexts within which they operate and state that each context calls for a different way of behaving (behaviour expectations in accordance with multiple social identities) and therefore impact on their sense of autonomy. Some of the quotations that illustrate this are:

“For me as a Black woman there is a difference in roles or paradigm shift between my role and responsibilities at work and my role and responsibilities at home. And I also mentally prepare myself as I am going home that leave the very assertive Toa the manager at work because now it is Toa the wife and the dynamics are very different. So there is always a complex between my autonomy as an individual and being a wife as well as being a working professional” (Toa).

“I believe as far as autonomy is concerned, before I got married as a person, I am as autonomous as one can define the word autonomy, but marriage for me is a totally different institution in the sense that I ascribe to traditional or cultural principles, meaning that I don’t take the constitution home. I understand that my husband is the head of the family meaning that we are partners in the running of the household and the business of the house, but then most of the time he has the ultimate say” (Getrude).

“It is not possible for a professional woman to be autonomous given the cultural background that we all as couples come from in our marriages” (Ria).

The transcripts clearly illustrate that in marriage individual autonomy and independence are dominated by collectiveness and consultation on issues. Some of the quotations that illustrate this are:

“I have learned as a result that in marriage you need to discuss issues and jointly decide what action needs to be taken and how such action would be taken and by whom” (Tebogo).

“Autonomy for me is the ability to make decisions on your own without worrying the other will feel not consulted. Based on what I am saying there is therefore no autonomy in marriage because if you just listened to me now (she laughs) most and almost all decisions at home are jointly made however small or big they may seem” (Tebogo).

“I would not do anything without his consent because it would be read differently” (Toa).

#### **4.3.6 Fear and helplessness discourses**

During the interviews the participants stated that they are not in a position to openly contest the constructions of the dominant social discourses such as culture and Christianity due to fear of being victimized or isolated. As a result of their need to feel that they belong the participants choose not to challenge the dominant social discourses that construct them as submissive, dependent and less powerful. Although they are empowered by their professional status and financial independence they are also disempowered by the dominant social discourses and this result in feelings of helplessness. Some of the quotations that illustrate this are:

“It is more forgetting yourself and compromising yourself for the others. In my situation I have also found that I got to compromise because of fear of being criticized” (Mapule).

“At the same time once you deny or don’t follow, you are being rebellious; you are treated as disrespectful to an extent of being victimized. Due to fear of being rejected a lot of educated women still do this, they would follow and not question some of the things imposed on them ... you don’t want to be a victim of cultural imperialism” (Tebogo).

“The challenge there is to bite my tongue and not even say” (Toa).

Once again it appears that the dominant social discourses impose certain behavioural expectations on women. Women are also silenced by culture to the extent that they are not able to argue against or defy what is expected of them by dominant social principles.

#### **4.3.7 The discourse of satisfaction**

The participants view satisfaction as necessary for an individual’s overall sense of happiness or well-being. They therefore believe that marital satisfaction contributes to an individual’s overall sense of well-being. The participants state that they draw their satisfaction from their personal achievements and they acknowledge that these achievements are not necessarily celebrated in their home environment. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

“I believe as a person you have to be happy in all areas of your life, being it at home, at work as an individual you need that complete happiness and satisfaction. In the marriage I find that that satisfaction is not always there because you have to always compromise yourself” (Mapule).

In order to feel fulfilled one participant states that she also draws satisfaction from being a good wife. She thus behaves differently at home from how she behaves at work. By being able to adapt her behaviour to the two different contexts in her life she achieves overall happiness. This is in keeping with positioning theory (see Chapter 2, section 2.5) as this participant is able to adapt to her positions and thus experience a healthy functioning of the self. In her statement she also suggested that expecting to be treated as a professional in her marriage context would be unreasonable. The participants states that:

“Being a professional woman does not mean I don’t want a home, I don’t want a family and I derive a great deal of satisfaction from being a good wife. When I look at it on balance I am quite happy to play that dual role or to adapt from one environment to the other because if we want to be professionals at home we are just pushing it” (Toa).

Overall the participants agree that it is not possible for them to be completely satisfied in their marriages. The general feeling is that although one can be satisfied with certain aspects of the marriage there will be aspects of the marriage that are unsatisfactory. As reflected in the previous paragraphs the participants indicated that they usually tend to compromise for the sake of peace and happiness at home.

Some of the quotations that illustrate the participants' acknowledgement that they cannot be fully satisfied (in marriage) are:

“Yes it doesn't but yet again we can never be fully satisfied. I am content in that I told myself that I get recognition as a professional from work and if I can gain that respect and recognition of the people I work with then I am satisfied with that. It really will be icing and a cherry on the cake to get that from my husband, to get it at home” (Toa).

“On certain things you will agree and on others not, on certain things you'll have satisfaction and on others not” (Ria).

“I will be lying if I say I am comfortable. I have embraced them but I would not say it is totally comfortable, it is not. For me there is the ideal and there is also reality (Getrude).

One participant stated that she uses Christianity as a source of inspiration in order to find satisfaction in her marriage. The Christian discourse is evoked by the participant to enable her to react positively to the challenges faced in her marriage. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

“At the moment I am happy with how I am conducting my marriage. Saying I'm quite happy I would say the spiritual background has really lessened so many things for me. If it was not for the spiritual background, I would be saying something else, and if it was not only because of my husband also



being a staunch Christian, I will be saying something else. I have also found that interacting with other couples and getting to know how they behave around issues also helped to change our stance on some issues, when other men allow their wives he also allows his wife” (Ria).

Although the participants feel that they are not fully satisfied with the status quo in their marriages, they also feel that it is important for them to feel respected in marriage as this would result in some level of satisfaction. Although complete respect is not always possible it is the feeling of being respected that would bring about a sense of satisfaction for some participants.

“I think really mainly it has to do with character, acknowledging and respecting each others’ character, opinions and views despite whether you agree or not, but respect them. That brings marital satisfaction for us to say there is marital satisfaction it’s not easy because there can be marital satisfaction on certain things and on others they may not be” (Ria).

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This Chapter outlined the discourses constructed by the participants about marriage, autonomy and satisfaction. The findings presented were guided by the research questions and what transpired during the interviews. Six discourses were identified, with the cultural and Christian discourses being dominant. In the next Chapter the discourses are interrogated, interpreted and discussed. In addition, the identified discourses are linked to the literature reviewed.