

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE AND THEORY

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter discusses the theoretical background for the research investigation and provides a review of the literature on the topic. The first part of the Chapter presents the theoretical background to the study, namely social constructionism. Social constructionism as a framework was deemed relevant to this study because it parallels the aim of the study and the research methodology. In accordance with social constructionist theory, this study did not aim to come to a conclusion of some final generalizable truth. Instead it aimed to identify, describe and understand how a group of women in a particular social context construct discourses about the phenomena under investigation. The study then aimed to relate these constructions to public discourses on the topic.

As will be reflected in the findings and discussion Chapter autonomy in the marital relationship and marital satisfaction are the results of diverse processes taking place in the context of marriage. These constructions are, however, embedded in the broader social environment, which contributes to the way in which women and society in general interpret and experience autonomy and marital satisfaction. These broader social and individual constructions are context bound and may vary from individual to individual and from community to community.

In discussing social constructionism reference is made to the history of social constructionist theory. As a result the theoretical discussion of social constructionism is preceded by a discussion of modernism, post-modernism, cybernetics and constructivism.

In addition, feminist theory is discussed as this study explored issues relating to women. The Chapter focuses particularly on post-modern feminism, which argues that gender is a social construct. This study touches on identity development and it was therefore also necessary to refer to the construct of identity and discuss various dialogues around identity formation.

The second part of the Chapter addresses the literature concerning marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction. The literature illustrates that social constructs such as autonomy and marital satisfaction come about through interaction between people and through the use of language. It can be concluded that through social interaction we construct our behaviour and define what is acceptable in different social contexts.

2.2 From modernism to post-modernism

Lyell (1998) indicates that during the last two decades of the twentieth century (1980s and 1990s) there was a transition in social research procedures and in psychotherapy from a modernistic framework to a post-modernistic framework. While modernistic theories adopted a linear causal explanation of human behaviour, the post-modernistic theories introduced the idea of the possibility of describing

behaviour in multiple ways. Modernism as a paradigm painted a picture of a world in which a single voice could prevail; the voice of objective truth. This paradigm placed certain individuals in the position of the 'expert' in explaining and 'curing' human behaviour (Gergen, 1992). The knowable world and the belief in universal properties lie at the core of modernism, which believes that the study of single instances can be generalized to other instances (Lyell, 1998). Modernism has been criticized for ignoring the impact of the larger social context on individuals and for believing in the microcosm of the individual rather than in the macrocosm of society (Anderson & O'Hara, 1991).

Post-modern theory emerged in reaction to the modernist ideas regarding the use of a language of objectivity, quantitative measurement, generalization and truth as facts and knowledge and argues for multiplicity, multiple realities and the plurality of voices (Kotze, 1994). McHale (1992) argues that the post-modern individual finds himself or herself in a society in which there are no universally constructed norms or values. Gergen (1992) argues that people are exposed to countless contradictory opinions from multiple forces and this makes it challenging for one to believe that objective conclusions can be reached about anything. From a post-modern perspective knowledge is viewed as a social construction constituted in language (Kotze, 1994).

Post-modernism introduced a shift from the belief in linear causality to a view of the universe as consisting of interrelated parts (Lyell, 1998). This new way of understanding behaviour was referred to in therapy as systemic thinking and behaviour was seen in terms of reciprocal and circular patterns of behaviour

resulting from interaction (Rapmund, 2002). In systemic thinking the emphasis shifted from understanding objects to understanding events and patterns (Keeney, 1983). Within therapy the post-modern framework, as viewed by systemic thinking, sees individuals as telling own stories with multiple meanings. This implies that there is not one universal version of a problem, but that there are multiple ways in which a problem can be perceived. For example, in a family of five each individual would provide a different account or construction of a situation or problem. Within the research context this implies that there are multiple constructions of a situation and that no single construction is inherently better than other constructions.

Systemic thinking in psychotherapy influenced the development of cybernetics, which in turn influenced the development of the constructivist and social constructionist paradigms. These constructs are outlined in the subsequent sections.

2.2.1 Cybernetics

Cybernetics has been defined as the science of communication and focuses on changing our views from the object to the wholeness of interaction (Keeney, 1983). Augustine (2002) defines cybernetics as a theory of interaction between open systems and subsystems. He further states that cybernetics can be first order or second order. In first order cybernetics the system is viewed in terms of inputs and outputs (Keeney, 1983). This way of viewing system is linear and examines causes and effects. In first order cybernetics the observer is seen as someone observing from the outside, analyzing inputs and outputs from the system and relating a

system's interdependence with other systems. The role or interaction of the observer with the observed is therefore excluded or ignored. In research that uses first order cybernetics the researcher is regarded as an expert who analyses the problem and comes to a conclusive account of the situation.

In second order cybernetics the system is seen as a whole. The observer is no longer seen as detached but as part of the system being observed (Keeney, 1983). Second order cybernetics is a result of the realization that it is impossible for a researcher to maintain objectivity when conducting research and analyzing a system. From the viewpoint of second order cybernetics data is co-constructed by the researcher and the participant. This means that factors such as the researcher's opinions, theoretical framework and historical background are all considered in the overall interpretation of the data (Rapmund, 2002). This is referred to as reflexivity in research. The concept of reflexivity is discussed in detail in the methodology Chapter.

The above discussion also applies to social constructionism, which argues that both the researcher and the participants contribute reciprocally and collectively to defining the data (Anderson & Goolishian, 1993). In the interview method of qualitative research, particularly the one used in this study, the participants' responses guide the researcher's questions. The researcher and the participants are therefore both actively involved in constructing discourse or text. The researcher is not seen as an expert. Rapmund (2002) argues that everything that occurs during the research process is entirely self-referential. This implies that the researcher uses his or her

own experiences and refers to his or her own understandings during the investigation.

Dell (1986) states that the move to second order cybernetics implied a simultaneous existence of multiple truths drawn by the observer. Keeney (1983) argues that second order cybernetics allows the researcher to see that your interpretation is one among several possible versions. When viewed from the second order lens the problem no longer has an objective existence but is created through language and conversations (Anderson & Goolishian, 1993). The shift from first order to second order cybernetics and the ideas presented above parallel the move towards constructivism, which argues that the world we live in is created by us and according to what makes sense to us (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). Constructivism is a central component of second order cybernetics and is discussed in the next section.

2.2.2 Constructivism

Constructivism developed from cybernetics in the 1980s as is based on the work of biologists Maturana and Varela (1980), who began asking questions about knowledge and how it is that we come to know certain things. This thinking was developed in relation to biology and the neurology of cognition. These researchers came to the conclusion that all knowledge is a construction or a subjective reflection of reality rather than a representation of an objective reality. Constructivism was developed further by Dell (1986) and Keeney (1983).

Constructivists state that human beings operate on the basis of symbolic or linguistic constructs that help them to navigate the world. Constructivism is a move from the position of having an objective view of the world to the understanding that we have an internal and subjective construction of the objective world (Kotze, 1994). Watzlawick (1984) states that reality is seen as a construction developed by those who believe that they have discovered and investigated this reality.

According to Hoffman (1990), although constructivism allows for alternative views of reality it has been criticized for not being comprehensive and for not taking into account the fact that there is a dominant social reality that constructs meaning. Critiques of constructivism argue that meaning is not developed independently within individuals, but socially through interaction (Lyell, 1998). These criticisms resulted in the development of social constructionism, which is presented in the following paragraphs.

2.2.3 Social constructionism

Gergen, Lightfoot and Sydow (2004) argue that there are many ways to tell the story of social constructionism, with each story constructing constructionism from its framework. For example, the origins of social constructionism have been traced back to George Kelly and his personal construct theory (Mair, 1989) while literature also documents the origin of social constructionism as arising from second order cybernetics and constructivism (Kotze, 1994). Social constructionism is also referred to as third order cybernetics by some authors (Lyell, 1998). Social constructionism has also been linked to post-modernist and post-structuralist paradigms.

Post-modernism developed from the modernist framework which viewed issues in linear and rational terms. The modernist researcher explains findings in terms of cause and effect and draws conclusions based on what he or she deems rational. Modernism placed emphasis on values, beliefs, and 'culture' and referred to the truth of experiences. In conducting research the modernist researcher attempts to find depth and interior meaning beneath events. Once this is completed he or she draws conclusions as objective reflections of the truth and thereby makes his or her findings generalizable (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

On the contrary, as outlined in the earlier paragraphs, post-modernism operates from the framework of multiple views of any situation and holds that no single view holds much more truth than other viewpoints. As a result post-modernist research refrains from presenting findings as absolute truths, but rather focuses on presenting findings as one way in which the events or experiences could be presented (Becvar & Becvar, 2000).

Structuralism also argues for a holistic view of any situation and believes that all situations contain underlying meaning which needs to be unpacked and brought to the surface (Radford & Radford, 2004). As a result structuralists also view the world in binary terms and draw conclusions from observations and events. They then report their conclusions as objective truths. The post-structuralist framework emerged from Michel Foucault's explicit articulations on the impossibility of an objective reality and his argument that there are no definite underlying meanings that should be used to explain human conditions or experiences (Radford & Radford,

2004). Instead Foucault emphasised the plurality of meaning and the subjectivity of interpretation (Ahluwalia, 2010).

It follows from the discussion above that both post-modernist and post-structuralist theories emerged in reaction to the notions of absolute truth, objective reality and knowledge that are advocated by modernist and structuralist frameworks (Gergen, 1999). For post-modernists and post-structuralists knowledge, truth and reality are contextual. Within this framework reality is viewed as subjective (Becvar & Becvar, 2000) and the argument is that there are different views of reality and truth (Gergen, 1999). Language is regarded in these frameworks as an important element in the formation of meaning.

Social constructionism contends that knowledge and meaning is constructed through interaction and through the use of language (Augustine, 2002) and this knowledge in turn shapes human interaction (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Gergen, 2003). For social constructionists what we take to be knowledge of the world and self has its origin in relationships (Gergen et al., 2004). This implies that we behave in ways that we have defined through our interactions with each other and that our lives are constructed through dialogue with each other. Constructionists argued that knowledge is created in conversations between people (Augustine, 2002). We know what we know as a result of the dialogue we have with others and through sharing meaning and experiences with each other.

Social constructionism as a theory is founded on the assumption that by reflecting on our own experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world in which we

live (Gergen, 1999; Gergen & Gergen, 2003). This means that our own experiences guide us in the construction of meaning about our lives. However, these constructs are not universal but are based on contexts and thus influenced by the dominant articulations of a particular time (Gergen, 1999).

Constructionism refers to the way that observers create a reality that is consistent with their ideas and the ideas of their broader social and 'cultural' contexts (Rapmund, 2002). Gergen (1999) also states that, for the constructionist, concepts and theories are viable if they prove adequate in the context within which they are created. Both these arguments place emphasis on the role that context plays in creating meaning and reality. Rapmund further argues that for constructionism meaning requires understanding the whole in relation to its parts. Therefore, in constructionism we construct knowledge by asking questions, developing answers, interacting and interpreting the environment.

For social constructionists "the terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts, products of historically [and culturally] situated interchanges among people" (Gergen, 1985, p.267). Social constructions reflect the ways in which people make sense of or interpret human experience. They are collective and systematic attempts to come to common agreements about a state of affairs (Gergen, 1999). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also argue that in social constructionism reality is the result of the social process accepted as normal in the specific context. This means that people know what they know from society; in other words people are born into already defined social structures and their behaviour is shaped and informed to a great extent by how others in their social structures behave and interact.

Friedman (1990) argues that within any given society there are institutions governed by rules and regulations. For example, marriage has established patterns of behaviour that define how individuals should act or behave. In addition, institutions exist in history and reflect concrete interests - they are not abstract. Friedman further argues that understanding these interests will assist in understanding the various institutions. Therefore, in order to understand the various institutions, it is important to understand the historical process in which they were produced.

Gergen and Gergen (2003) argue that social constructionism is not a singular and unified position and that it has multiple roots. Social constructionism is concerned with exploring the processes by which people come to describe, explain or account for the world in which they live (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). The intention is to articulate common grounds around which meaning is attached, looking at the past, the present and the future. This suggests that the understanding assumed by a particular 'culture' acts to frame its members' experience and to shape their behaviour (Rown, 1997). Augustine (2002) argues that the claims and viewpoints that people have at a point in time are taught by our 'culture' and society through learning. This learning is therefore carried into the current life styles and future behaviours of individuals.

The social construction of knowledge emphasizes the importance of language as a social phenomenon through which individuals relate. The next section discusses language as a discourse.

2.2.4 Language as discourse

Both constructivism and social constructionism emphasize the importance of language in constructing meaning. For constructivists language is a means of connecting people, while for constructionism language is a means through which meaning and understanding emerge (Kotze, 1994). This meaning and understanding is seen as always being context and time bound (Bruner, 1990). What this implies is that during interactions our understanding and interpretation of the narrative depends on the historical context within which the conversation takes place.

Language is also described as constituting meaning. The language we grow up with and live in within a specific 'culture' specifies the experiences that are available to us. Friedman (1990) and Kotze (1994) argue that from a social constructionist viewpoint the focus is not on the individual but on the social interaction through which language is generated and sustained.

The preceding discussion highlights that we construct knowledge and meaning through language; that knowledge is relevant within a specific time frame; that knowledge and behaviour are influenced by 'culture'; and that what stands out and informs behaviour is a result of the particular framework that is dominant and powerful at that particular point in time. In the next paragraphs the concepts of culture and power as social constructs are discussed.

2.3 Discussions on culture

This section provides an overview of how the concept of culture is constructed and reinforced in human interaction. It also provides an overview of how the use of the construct has been criticised by some theorists.

2.3.1 Introducing the concept of culture

The concept of culture is a social construct that has been widely researched in various disciplines. Anthropologists consider the construct to be extremely complex and difficult to define (Erikson, 2009). The complexity in defining culture stems from variations regarding the meaning of the term as there is no common usage or definition of the term, even within anthropology (Brumann, 1999). Clark (2006) argues that definitions and descriptions of what constitute culture may vary dramatically depending on the theory being used because various schools of thoughts have defined culture in different ways.

Fox and King (2002) refer to a study that was conducted in 1952 by Kroeber and Kluckhohn in which definitions of culture as used in anthropology and related fields were surveyed that found that there are hundreds of definitions of the concept. The study identified 162 definitions of culture, which varied from an ideational explanation of the construct (using symbols, values and representations) to an inclusive description of the construct (which incorporates ideas, symbols, social organizations and other dimensions of group life) (Fox & King, 2002). There are also differences in opinions on whether culture resides in the human mind (with behaviour and artefacts as outcomes of mental models) or in behaviour (culture viewed as socially

transmitted behaviour). Definitions also differ in relation to whether culture lies within an individual (who exercises choice-making and manipulation) or within a social entity (a group that “has” a culture) (Fox & King, 2002).

Despite these variations in the use and definition of the construct of culture there are also some commonalities and overlaps within these different definitions. Traditionally anthropologists define culture as a highly patterned, cohesive and coherent set of beliefs that shape human behaviour and are reproduced over generations through the process of enculturation (Billington, Strawbridge, Greensides & Fitzsimons, 1991; Crapo, 1995; Fox & King, 2002; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000; Waters & Eschbach, 1995). Enculturation is defined by the same authors as a process through which children learn the customs, beliefs and values of their culture. This learning can either take place through a formal transfer of knowledge to the young generation or through the young generation observing how the elders in their society construct their lives (Crapo, 1995). As a result of enculturation people thus behave in an expected manner in a given situation because they have internalized the norms and values of their particular society (Crapo, 1995).

Socio-cultural theorists argue that culture is a combination of belief systems, behaviours and traditions that are carried from one generation to the next through socialization (Berry, Dasen, Poortinga & Segall, 2002; Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). For social scientists culture thus refers to the norms and values that are regarded as proper and acceptable by members of a particular group (Hutter, 1997; Ruben, 2006).

The various definitions of culture have been criticized for varying reasons. Fox and King (2002) highlight several criticisms that have been levelled against the use of the construct of culture.

The first criticism refers to the fact that the construction of culture suggests homogeneity or delineation amongst people. It is argued that groups have unclear boundaries and it is therefore difficult to draw boundaries between groups. In addition, variations occur within groups and at times the variation within a group can be greater than the variations between groups. It is therefore argued that we cannot draw boundaries between cultures and should instead acknowledge that culture is dynamic and flowing. In support of this argument Brumann (1999) argued that because social realities are characterised by variability, conflict and change, it is linear to think of culture as something that suggests boundedness, stability and coherence. Eriksen (2009) argues that it is important to note that although culture includes shared meanings by a group of people, this does not imply that everybody in that culture has exactly the same knowledge and skills. Instead, it simply suggests that people who share a culture merely share a worldview.

The second objection concerns the inaccurate use of the construct of culture. Eriksen (2009) argues that the culture concept appears wide and vague and is used simplistically in everyday conversations. Other researchers have argued that the use of the construct culture as a noun is problematic. These researchers advocate for the adjective form of the word. Brumann (1999) argues that when culture is used as a noun the construct is turned into a thing, into something that has power, and he suggests that the adjective use of the work cultural moves the construct into the

realm of differences. The adjective use of the cultural concept acknowledges the varying boundaries of cultural practices and therefore endorses the construct of culture as heterogeneous. The socially popular usage of the construct of culture even within disciplines such as psychology and sociology positions culture as something that controls and regulates human behaviour and interaction. For example, Clark (2006) argues that culture has a marked impact on our daily lives and suggests that people's behaviour is largely a result of what has been dictated by cultural practices.

The third objection to the concept of culture is that it is positioned in a "humanistic" manner and that such positioning tends to be singular and evaluative. For example, expressions such as "some people are more cultured than others" (Barnard & Spencer, 1996; Eriksen, 2009) are clearly evaluative. It is argued that a more pluralistic and relativistic description of the construct would be more appealing as it would endorse the existence of different cultures in society as well as preserve the idea that all cultures are worthwhile.

2.3.2 Culture as a social construct

Culture has become a popular concept and the term is now widely used in social interactions. Researches have criticised the popular usage of the term for being too simplistic (Fox, 1999). Fox and King (2002) argue that the loose usage of the term extends beyond disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry, and sociology. Typical common expressions that include the word culture include phrases such as

“corporate culture”, “my culture”, “culture of schools”, “other cultures”, and “in our culture” (Eriksen, 2009).

This usage of the term culture suggests that the construct has become synonymous with a sense of identity; people identify with the norms and values of their cultural groups and they therefore classify themselves as belonging to a particular social group (Crapo, 1995; Falola, 2003). In this way culture becomes fundamental and central to the ways in which people interpret the world and is used to shape the attitudes that people have regarding themselves and others and informs how people interact with each other (Waters & Eschbach, 1995).

Culture as a social construct is used to promote practices that are considered important to a particular social group. Culture thus has a marked impact on daily human interactions (Clark, 2006). According to De la Rey (1992) much of how we choose to live is an enactment of socially constructed cultural representations that give people a sense of continuity with the past.

As will be illustrated in the discussion on social identity theory, people tend to conform to and behave in accordance with socially acceptable norms and values. Culture therefore plays a powerful role in determining how people behave and how they construct their identity. As a form of identity culture also functions to control and limit individual behaviour and ensures that people conform to the predominant values and norms of a particular culture (De la Rey, 1992).

Conforming to cultural expectations is endorsed in society through rewards and sanctions; people are either rewarded for adhering to the rules and norms of their culture or they are punished when the rules of the culture are broken (Crapo, 1995; De la Rey, 1992). However, although culture is intended to shape behaviour, people do not always follow the guidelines of their culture and sometimes people violate cultural ideas for personal gains (Fox & King, 2002). Harris (1991) found that cultural patterns are not always faithfully repeated in successive generations and that in each generation new patterns are continually added. This suggests that culture is not static and that it adapts itself to the dictates of a particular era. This fluidity of culture allows for continuous reconstructions as members of a society redefine and renegotiate their ways of life. Culture is thus continuously constructed and re-constructed. Through interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds people tend to adopt other people's cultures and thereby dilute traditional cultural values (Shope, 2006). All of these factors contribute to the continuing complexity of attempting to define what culture means, stipulates and represents (Clark, 2006).

Robinson and Howard-Hamilton (2000) found that variables such as age, geographic location and ethnicity have an influence on the extent to which people adopt cultural values. It is therefore not uncommon to find that not all individuals in a given culture necessarily subscribe to the dominant and core values of their culture (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000).

Research also suggests that cultural ideologies are slow to respond to changes in social dynamics. Dual-earner and dual-career marriages are one example of this

slow rate of cultural change (Haddock & Zimmerman, 2001). Thus, although in traditional African culture women are expected to stay at home and be cared for by their husbands, African women are increasingly entering the world of work and contributing to the finances of the family. The traditional gender expectations prescribed by culture may or may not adapt to such changes. Haddock and Zimmerman (2001) argue that until cultural ideologies change to fit new realities, institutions such as dual-career marriages will continue to face unnecessary obstacles. One common challenge faced by dual-career marriages relates to the gender defined role expectations prescribed by culture and the negotiation of these roles. The next section discusses the construct of gender and power given its relevance to the study.

2.4 Gender and power

The term gender refers to the socially constructed attributes of being male or female, and is used in relation to the physical characteristics of being male or female. Gender is related to biological differences in terms of being male or female. The term used in biology is sex. People are born either male or female in terms of biological traits but it is through socialization that people are shaped to behave in accordance with the attributes that society deems appropriate for each of the sex groups. These learned behaviours constitute a gender identity and represent socially constructed norms regarding the division of labour, as well as the distribution of power, responsibilities and rights between men and women (Borgata & Montgomery, 2000).

According to Quek and Knudson-Martin (2008) gender is an intrinsic part of institutional systems such as law, education, and economics. They argue that gender is so deeply embedded in institutions that it is often unnoticed and unquestioned in everyday life. Gender places people in hierarchies and assigns power to those groups of people placed at the top of the hierarchy (Shope, 2006). Gender constructed roles in cultures and in societies dictate appropriate behaviour for both men and women, with men generally occupying positions of power (Ruben, 2006). For example, in Black South African “culture” the husband is traditionally regarded as superior to the wife, which results in women being placed in less powerful positions in marriage (Shope, 2006). Culture therefore continues to be a pivotal way in which gender is produced (De la Rey, 1992).

The ideology of gender determines what is expected of us, what we are allowed to do, what is valued in us, as well as the nature and extent of disadvantage, disparity and discrimination (Ruben, 2006). Institutionalized gender inequality continues to structure the domestic life of heterosexual women and men (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Moen, 2003). For example, within the framework of traditional African culture a married woman is expected to carry herself in a submissive and dependent manner. In this culture a woman is valued based on her reproductive abilities and her ability to rear her children. This construction of women often leads to discrimination against women (Hoesen, 2000; Kuumba, 2006).

Within the social constructionist discipline the work of Foucault plays an important role in understanding the constructs of power and power relations. Foucault states that power and power relations are seen in everyday interactions and practices

(Kotze', 1994). This includes the placing of people in hierarchies in relation to one another (Parker, 1990). According to Ssali (2006) all social practices are shaped by power and this includes gender roles. For example, as stated in the discussion on culture, men enjoy the privilege of being constructed as powerful and as having authority over women. Parker (1990) further argues that power plays a role in the way the self is constructed as the subject and object of discussions.

Berdahl and Fiske (2007) state that power is socially situated and relative within a particular social relationship. This implies that one can be powerful in one social context and not have power in another context. For example, a professional woman can have power within her circle of friends and in a work environment as a result of her position, but at home she may be powerless as a result of her position within the context of African traditional marriage.

Farganis (1993) argues that within any given society there are institutions that are governed by rules and regulations. For example, marriage has established patterns of behaviour that define how individuals should act or behave. According to Farganis, institutions exist in history and reflect concrete interests, they are not abstract. Understanding these interests assists in understanding the various institutions. Farganis further states that in order to understand the various institutions, it is important to understand the historical process in which they were produced. With this framework, Farganis operates from the principle that history determines what is current and in order to understand the current situation it is necessary to understand the historical background.

The feminist framework is closely linked to the construct of power and the parameters of this research. Feminism is not the main theoretical framework for this study, it was deemed necessary to briefly refer to feminism because this study focuses on women's issues. Particularly relevant to feminism in this study is the construct of patriarchy and culture, which has been questioned by feminists. The next section gives a brief overview of the feminist framework.

2.4.1 A feminist framework

The term feminism is used to describe a political, cultural, or economic movement aimed at establishing rights for women. Feminism is also referred to as a political discipline that is directed at changing existing power relations between men and women across all spheres of life (Hassim, 2001; Weedon, 1997). Although feminism is universal or global, the exact definition of the construct and what it stands for vary globally (Anderson & Cudd, 2005; Campell, 1993).

The fundamental interest of all types of feminism is to understand gender politics, power relations and sexuality. Some of the discourses explored in feminism are patriarchy, stereotyping and discrimination (Buttler, 1995; Byrne & Carr, 2000). This thesis refers to the cultural doctrine in which patriarchy is advocated and which expects women to behave in a particular manner. In the preceding discussion reference was made to the stereotypes associated with women, society's expectation regarding appropriate behaviour for married women as well as the distribution of power in families.

As already stated there are different approaches to feminism. This thesis focused on post-modern feminism, which has been built on the ideas of Foucault, De Beauvoir and Derrida. The proponents of post-modern feminism criticize the structure of society and the dominant order, especially its patriarchal aspects. Post-modern feminism operates on the premise that gender issues are socially constructed through language and in interaction and that universal claims about women, gender and patriarchy should be avoided (Anderson & Cudd, 2005; Butler, 1995). This implies that social constructions of gender and behavioural expectations are relative for each society.

The most notable distinguishing factor of post-modern feminism is its belief in multiple truths, multiple roles and multiple realities (Olson, 1996). This means that dialogue around women's concerns will always be susceptible to new interpretations (Butler, 1995; Gouws, 2004). This belief system parallels the social constructionist view on multiple constructions of reality. In this study the researcher attempts to present a view of the ways in which Black South African professional married women construct the concepts of marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction.

Feminism in South Africa has been criticized for relying on ideas dictated by American or European models, and for not catering for the specific cultural, socio-political and socio-economic contexts of South African women. African feminists contend that women's issues are not homogenous, but are characterized by different historically developed trends that try to explain subordination, exploitation and oppression of women within different socio-political and cultural contexts (Ssali, 2006).

Although the need to redefine feminism in South Africa is acknowledged, most South African feminists agree that South African feminism needs to focus on the liberation of sexist roles, domination and oppression (Padayachee, 1997). South African feminists contest the cultural oppression that women face on a daily basis (De la Rey, 1997; Kotze', 1994) as well as the unfair distribution of power (Gouws, 1998). Campell (1993) also argues that in South African society men are awarded dominance in their marriages and culture poses restraints on women in terms of how they should behave. As a result of the restraints posed by cultural expectations on women, women in marriage form an identity that supports these cultural expectations.

2.5 Formation of an identity

According to positioning theory a person is positioned or positions him or herself by reference to a combination of personal attributes that influence the possibilities for interpersonal relationships (Schmidle, 2009). Identity is seen as an attribute or characteristic of the self that is determined by the social and historical context within which that self operates (Ligorio & Pugliese, 2004). Identity is seen to be generated and constructed through some form of internal and external dialectic within a particular environment. Thus, identity is seen as fluid rather than fixed (Mleczko, 2011). This suggests that an identity is constructed and developed through social interaction and that it is not an innate quality of an individual.

It is further argued that the self is multiple, complex, contextualised and can adapt to changes in time and place (O'Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2010), once again confirming

that the positioning of the self is relative and constantly in flux. Dialogical self theory agrees with positioning theory and argues that in the era of globalisation, changing cultures and societies the self is constantly developing and should therefore always be located in time and space (Hermans, 2001b). According to Hermans the self is a fluctuation of positionings. Based on these fluctuations and the way in which the self is developed, the type of identity that an individual creates can either be personal or collective, with both identities closely entangled (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010; Mleczko, 2011; Schmidle, 2009).

An individual's identity includes both the personal attribute of self as subject "I" and the self as object "me". These two senses of self operate on a continuum by maintaining equilibrium (O'Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2010; Valsiner, 2008). According to dialogical self theory, an individual is connected to the world through the "me" attribute of the self and this connection is used to develop a social self. As a result of multiple connections with the social world an individual develops multiple social selves. As a result of these multiple connections the "I" component of the self allows for variations in interactions among different selves and the position that the "I" holds can change from one moment to the next (Hermans, 2008; O'Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2010).

Dialogical self theory therefore argues that a sense of self is influenced and co-constructed by relationships with others (Hermans, 2008). This supports the constructionist view that an identity is a construction that results from labels provided by others or the self during social interaction (Mleczko, 2011). Positioning theory

and dialogical self theory thus highlight the role of social relationships in shaping the self (Holmann & Hannover, 2006).

Both positioning theory and dialogical self theory maintain that an individual has multiple selves or social identities and that it is possible for a person to belong to multiple social groups simultaneously (Mleczko, 2011; Schmidle, 2009). This multiplicity of the self produces a healthy, well-functioning individual (O'Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2010), as the individual is able to behave in accordance with what is expected of him or her at a particular point in time.

According to social identity theory (SIT) the construction of an identity can be either public (social) or private (personal) (Katsiaficas & Kiros, 1998; Tjafel & Turner, 1986). SIT is a popular theory of identity that was developed in order to understand the psychological basis of intergroup discriminations (Tjafel & Turner, 1986). According to Tajfel and Turner the self has two components: a personal identity and a social identity. In the case of personal identity, a person does not have only one "personal self", but rather has several selves that correspond to circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on the basis of his or her personal, family or national "level of self" (Turner, 1982).

Social identity is an individual's self-concept and relates to the knowledge, value or emotion attached to the group to which that individual belongs. The social identity framework focuses on the extent to which individuals feel strongly connected to their group as well as the degree to which being a member of a group constitutes a central aspect of self (Fuligni, 2008).

Duncan and Ratele (2003) argue that social identity can be defined as the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups. In other words social identity is an individual-based perception of what defines the "us" associated with group membership. This form of identity is distinguished from the notion of personal identity, which refers to self-knowledge that derives from an individual's unique attributes.

According to SIT social identity consists of three central ideas: categorization, identification and comparison. Categorization refers to the process of categorizing objects or people in order to understand things and social categories. These categories could include ideas such as Black, professional, married and woman. Through categorizing, people place themselves and others in groups. For example, a person would include herself as a member of one group while excluding herself from other groups. The groups in which an individual would categorize herself are considered to be an in-group, while the groups from which the individual would exclude herself would be out-groups (Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991). A simple illustration of this would be a biological categorization of self as either female or male based on biological traits or attributes. Foster and Louw-Potgieter further argue that behaviour is also defined by reference to the norms of the groups to which we belong.

Identification refers to the process of identifying with groups to which we perceive ourselves as belonging. One can identify oneself as an individual (personal identity) or as a group member (social identity). Foster and Louw-Potgieter (1991) define identification as a social, transitive and dialectical process which takes place within a

specific historical context. It is argued that individuals do not simply identify; instead they identify with something or someone. In addition, social identities or social categories have an evaluative component and the process of social comparison is used to determine social membership (Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991). With social comparison, one's own group is compared to other groups using some dimension of comparison.

Turner's (1985) self-categorization theory is closely linked to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This theory postulates that at certain times we perceive ourselves as unique individuals and at other times we perceive ourselves as members of groups. Turner (1985) argues that these two perceptions are equally valid expressions of self. Self-categorization theory thus suggests that our social identities are as true and basic to the self as our personal identity. The definition of the self as either personal or social is flexible. Having a particular social identity also means seeing things from the group's perspective, which includes acting to fulfil the expectations of the role.

The preceding discussion detailed the theoretical framework (social constructionism) that was used in this study in order to explore and understand the ways in which the participants construct the concepts under investigation. As outlined in this section the social constructionist framework argues that meaning is constructed through interaction and it is through interaction that people construct their behaviour. The social constructionist framework also argues for the multiplicity of constructions, which means that for each experience there are multiple constructions as each person will have his or her own construction of the same experience.

It is interesting to note that while the preceding discussion highlighted at least three theories of identity, these theories have significant overlaps. These overlaps include the arguments that the self has multiple identities, that the description of oneself can either be personal or social depending on context, that a person's identity and how he or she positions or constructs him or herself operates on a continuum, and that to develop a healthy sense of self requires understand the different contexts within which he or she operates. The next section of this Chapter presents the literature on marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction.

2.6 Literature review on marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction

In this study the literature review was conducted in tandem with the data collection and data analysis. As new information emerged during the data collection the researcher interviewed more participants to determine whether the ideas were consistent. Similarly the literature was studied on an ongoing basis based on the emerging 'themes' that were identified during the process of data collection. Creswell (1994) views this as a common process in qualitative research, where data collection informs the literature that needs to be reviewed.

The literature presented in this section is aligned with the theoretical framework of the study which is social constructionism. The sub headings are formulated to accommodate the theoretical framework and each section of the reviewed literature provides multiple constructions of the concepts of marriage, autonomy, and marital satisfaction.

2.6.1 Overview of the meaning of marriage

The construct of marriage is difficult to define as there are many variations of marriage in society; these variations depend on the ways in which a particular social group defines marriage (Crapo, 1996). As a result there is no single definition of marriage, instead definitions of marriage are relative to individual beliefs or are constructed by a particular social group. Within the social constructionist paradigm from which this study is conducted it is not possible to formulate any definitive or essentialist definition of marriage since the paradigm acknowledges that people differ in the ways they construct marriage. For example, McLanahan and Waller (2005) state that a marriage often embodies two distinct views: “his” and “hers”. These authors argue that men and women have different subjective experiences of marriages as a result of gender inequalities within society. Each partner therefore brings a set of beliefs and characteristics to defining marriage.

While it is acknowledged that there is no single definition of marriage in this section a few definitions of marriage are presented to highlight the different ways in which marriage is constructed. These differences show that the construction of marriage can be problematic due to the variations in the way in which the concept is defined. However, these constructions do share similar themes, including the endorsement of marriage as the formalization of an intimate relationship with defined roles, a legal commitment and as a permanent ‘feature’. Although this endorsement is widely accepted it is not necessarily the only way in which marriage can be interpreted.

- Silberstein (1992) argues that marriage is a formal union of a man and a woman by which they become husband and wife.
- Ingoldshy and Smith (1995) define marriage as a socially legitimate sexual union, beginning with a public announcement and undertaken with some idea of permanence. They further argue that marriage is consummated with a more or less explicit marriage contract that spells out reciprocal rights and obligations between spouses, and between the spouses and their future (or present) children.
- Crapo (1996) argues that marriage is a rite of passage that unites two or more individuals as spouses. It is a socially accepted sexual and economic union that gives parental rights to the couple and it involves a lasting commitment between the spouses.
- Rall (1984) defines marriage as a man and a woman living together in an intimate relationship, committed and responsible to each other, and liable to certain societal expectations.
- The unification of individuals as spouses can take on various forms, such as monogamy, polygyny and polygamy (Crapo, 1995; Rall, 1984). Monogamy occurs when two persons are joined as spouses; polygamy occurs when a person is permitted to have more than one spouse at the same time; polygyny occurs when a man is permitted to marry and have more than one wife. The constructs of polygyny and polygamy are often used interchangeably to refer to a man having more than one spouse; this could be because instances of a wife having more than one husband are rare.

The most common type of marriage in most societies is monogamy (Crapo, 1996), but other societies also practice and legalize polygyny. For example, in South Africa it is not uncommon for men from Black ethnic groups to have more than one wife at the same time (Mbatha, 2011). The practice of polygyny in South Africa is supported by customary marriage practices, which form the core practice of marriages amongst Black South Africans (Mbatha, 2011).

2.6.2 Marriage in the Southern African context

In South Africa there are two legally accepted forms of marriage: civil marriage and customary marriage (Bunlender et al., 2004). However, these authors argue that in addition to the two legally recognized types of marriage there are other social definitions of marriage that do not always match the legal definitions, for example, cohabitation and “parenting a child”. It is argued that such differences are the result of the multiple ways in which people construct or attach meaning to the construct of marriage. The different constructions relating to the concept or practice of marriage illustrate the changes that are occurring in society in relation to the construction of marriage. In the next sections an overview of civil and customary marriages is presented.

2.6.2.1 Civil marriage

A civil marriage is defined by law as a marriage that must be conducted in a church or another building used for religious services, or in a public office or private house with open doors, and in the presence of the parties to the marriage and at least two

witnesses [however, in the case of serious illness or injuries, the marriage may take place in the hospital or facility concerned] (Department of Home Affairs). Although people register their marriages under the civil marriage act, amongst many Black South Africans the registration of a civil marriage is preceded by traditional marriage practices (Bunlender et al., 2004; Mbatha, 1998b; Meekers, 1992; Nhlapo, 1999).

2.6.2.2 Customary marriage

Customary marriage, which is documented under the Recognition of Customary marriage Act 12 of 1998 (RMCA), refers to any marriage that has been conducted in accordance with the customs and practices that are traditionally observed amongst African people of South Africa and which forms part of their culture (Hosegood, McGrath & Moultrie, 2006; Mamashele, 2004). Once the couple has adhered to the rules specified in their culture they can register the marriage under the RCMA. The act accord a wife equal legal status to that of her husband and grants the wife full capacity to enter into contracts, to acquire assets and to dispose of assets (Mamashele, 2004). The legislation further acknowledges that the wife or married woman is capable of making decisions that are sound and it therefore recognizes the married woman as an independent individual (Mamashele, 2004).

Although the legislation recognizes wives in customary marriages as independent this recognition contradicts the customary or traditional role expectations as set by these cultures. For example, traditional customs continue to dictate and construct women as inferior and secondary to their husbands (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010). Hoza (2010) argues that Black women's subordination is constructed and maintained

through traditional African marriage institutions. The equality status accorded to women by the laws surrounding customary marriage is therefore currently more of an illusion than a reality (Mamashele, 2004).

Socio-cultural or traditional expectations of the roles of men and women in marriage dictate that the man provides for his family and he is given all authority to direct his household. The roles within the marital setup are socially constructed and defined in accordance with sex role stereotypes (Carlson & Sperry, 1991), with the men given the authority to make all major decisions in relation to the family including the nature of the family's lifestyle (Rall, 1984). In contrast, women are expected to take care of the emotional needs of their families, thus assuming a nurturing role (Greef & Malherbe, 2001).

Rall (1984) further argues that historically marriages were the central institutions through which men and women's interactions and behaviour were channelled. Marriage served political, social and economic functions to the extent that individual needs were a secondary consideration. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when other institutions began to take over some of the functions of the family, for example education, the particular socially constructed definition of marriage began to fade (Carlson & Sperry, 1991).

This thesis focuses on one such change in the institution of marriage, the emergence of the dual-career marriage. This form of marriage is the result of women's participation in paid labour outside of the home. Later in the section the two types of

marriage (dual-earner marriages and dual-career marriages) that followed economic transitions in society are discussed.

A common custom that relates to marriage amongst Black Africans across the African continent and which forms the basis of traditional or customary marriages is the practice of lobola (Ansell, 2001; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010; Heeren, Jemmott, Tyler, Tshabe & Ngwanye, 2011; Mawere & Mawere, 2010; Mbatha, 2011). In certain areas of the African continent all customary marriages are anchored on the payment of lobola (Mawere & Mawere, 2010). In the next section the construct of lobola is discussed in detail.

2.6.2.3 The practice of lobola

African marriages are negotiated through the lobola process, which is a widely recognized marriage custom across the Southern African continent (Ansell, 2001; Mbatha, 2010; Mawere & Mawere, 2010). The concept of lobola can be translated into English as bride-wealth or bride price (Ansell, 2001; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010; Hosegood et al., 2006) and involves the payment of property from the groom's family to the bride's family. The payment of the bride price follows negotiations by the delegates from the two families (bride and groom's families) through a messenger (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010). While traditionally cattle were transferred from the groom's family to the bride's family, the bride-wealth now frequently takes the form of both cash and live cattle (Heeren et al., 2011; Kambarami, 2006). The number of cattle or the value of the bride-wealth is dependent on the bride's background, her education, and the social position of her family (Heeren et al., 2011).

It should be noted that although the lobola practice is common in Africa, there are procedural differences from one cultural group to the other. For example, in the Zulu culture and particularly in rural KwaZulu Natal the British colonial administration of 1869 set and fixed the lobola price at 11 head of cattle or their equivalent value (Burman & Van der Werff 1993; De Haas 1987; Hunter, 2005; Preston-Whyte 1993). In Kenya Chief Kirera attempted to proclaim a bride-wealth limit of six cows and a bull in order to make it affordable and within the means of most young men. However, the wealthy people ignored the limit and pushed the bride-wealth into an upward spiral, thus edging some men out of the marriage market (Shadle, 2003).

It is argued that the payment of lobola gives the man power over his wife and his children (Chambers, 2000; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010; Kambarami, 2006). The inequality that is promoted by the practice of lobola is seen as placing women in subordinate positions (Kambarami, 2006). Despite reports that the practice of lobola results in inequality between men and women in society and between wives and husbands in marriage (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010) the practice remains highly valued by its practitioners (Ansell, 2001).

There are different arguments around the subject of lobola and this subject has sparked debates and various outlooks in society. Although this study is not centralized around the concept of lobola, a brief overview of some of the debates around this practice might be beneficial in providing the reader with a context from which to understand some of the challenges and concerns that are raised by the participants in the findings. For readers who are interested in following the debates

around the practice of lobola, the sources cited below can be used as a point of reference for further investigation of the subject.

There are both positive and negative perceptions of lobola (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010). The positive constructions around the practice of lobola include seeing it as a symbol that a wife is valued (Chamber 2000), a valuable part of African culture that needs to be preserved (Ansell, 2001; Burn, 2005), a morally correct act, and a tradition and cultural heritage that needs to be preserved (Ansel, 2001; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010). In addition, lobola can be seen as a guarantee of good faith on the part of both the husband's and the wife's families (Heeren et al., 2011; Thorpe, 1991); as a gift symbolizing an earnest belief in the successful outcome of the marriage and as an act that both validates and shows the seriousness of the man, thereby reducing the divorce rate (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010). Finally, lobola is also understood as a token of appreciation and a way of thanking in-laws for bearing and rearing a wife for the husband (Ansell, 2001; Heeren et al., 2011; Meekers, 1992) and as a unifying force, binding and cementing the relationship between two families (Bourdillon, 1990).

The negative constructions around the practice of lobola reflected in some studies are centred around the view that the practice of lobola has become commercialized in society and that bride's families ask very high prices that result in women being treated (Ansell, 2001; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010). In addition, critiques of lobola argue that it is a source of oppression for women and it perpetuates gender inequality (Ansell, 2001; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010); that fathers of the brides (to

be) are using lobola as an escape from poverty (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010); and that it places women in subordinate positions (Kambarami, 2006).

Billington et al. (1991) argue that while cultural practices are intended to shape behaviour, people do not always adhere to the guidelines of their culture. It is therefore not uncommon to find that some individuals abuse the practice of lobola while others attempt to dilute or abolish the practice. Following from their research about the perceptions of lobola among university students, Chireshe and Chireshe (2010) conclude that, like all traditional customs, the practice of lobola is open to abuse and distortion in the modern world.

Despite the controversies surrounding the practice of lobola, the research discussed above indicates that this practice persists even among urbanized and educated Africans (see Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010; Mawere & Mawere, 2010; Meekers, 1992). The custom of lobola can thus be seen as a cultural ritual that has endured the test of time (Heeren et al., 2011; May, 1993), and it continues to be practiced as it forms part of the culture (Ansell, 2001; Burn, 2005). From a cultural perspective lobola is regarded as the right thing to do and as a practice that preserves the traditions and customs of the African community (Heeren et al., 2011).

Literature focusing on the practice of lobola around the African continent suggests that the practice should not be abolished (Ansell, 2001; Burn, 2005; Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010; Getecha & Chipika, 1995; Heeren et al., 2011; Mawere & Mawere, 2010). Chireshe and Chireshe (2010) write that opposing this ritual would be similar

to making a cry in the wilderness in that those individuals who attempt to oppose this custom are likely to be ignored.

During the interview process the two dominant marriage practices that the participants referred to were the Christian and cultural constructions of marriage. As a result the literature discussion is limited to discussing the construction of marriage from the Christian and cultural frameworks. This is followed by a brief discussion concerning dual earner marriages and dual-career marriages. The last part of the discussion presents an overall summary and conclusion regarding the discourse of marriage.

2.6.2.4 The Christian discourse on marriage

Christian marriages were introduced to the African continent by Christian missionaries who found customary marriages to be 'barbaric' (Mann, 1983). Unlike the customary marriages, which allow for polygyny, Christian marriage promotes monogamy as a fundamental marriage practice and thereby constructs marriage as the unification of a man and a woman. A study conducted in Lagos found that, regardless of their denomination, missionaries regarded monogamy as the most fundamental characteristic of Christian marriage (Mann, 1983). Christianity is argued as giving Christians the right to monogamy (Weber & Craig, 2003). In Christian marriage the marital vows unite two individuals and sets responsibilities for both husbands and wives. A important difference between Christian marriages and traditional African marriages is that while Christian marriage is seen as uniting two

individuals, traditional African marriages are seen to be uniting two kin groups (Baloyi, 2007; Weber & Craig, 2003).

The Christian discourse on the unification of a man and a woman begins with the story of creation as narrated in the Bible, which argues that after the universe was created God created a man and then immediately found it desirable for a man to have a companion. A woman was formed from a man's rib, hence called woman (Good News Bible: Genesis 2, vs. 18); in this way a man and a woman were unified. This unification is currently understood as being marriage. The Christian framework therefore defines marriage as something that followed the creation of the universe and as something that preceded the establishment of societies and cultures.

Christian literature also documents clear and explicit roles and power relations between husbands and wives. For example, Ephesians 5:22-24 states "wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband has authority over his wife ... and so wives must submit completely to their husbands just as the church submits itself to Christ". Women are thus clearly expected to be submissive to their husbands. Within the Christian framework within the family context the man is seen as an equivalent of Christ. Christians are Christ's followers and they regard him as superior and almighty, by positioning men as the equivalent of Christ the Bible clearly describes the superiority of men in the marital context. Baloyi (2007) argues that God expects individuals to be submissive and that submission is therefore part of the Christian life-style.

Weber and Craig (2003) argue that God determined how the partners in marriage should behave. According to Christianity the wife was created as a helper to the husband and for that reason the wife ought to subject herself to her husband. The Christian discourse on marriage thus distinguishes clear roles for husbands and wives. While the husbands are portrayed as economic providers, the wives should be mothers and homemakers (Mann, 1983). Within the Christian discourse wives are clearly constructed as people holding a less powerful role. Wives are also expected to be dependent. The submissive role and behaviour of women is emphasized throughout the Bible and this emphasis clearly demonstrates that within the Christian discourse wives are expected to be inferior to their husbands. Examples of these Biblical verses include, but are not limited to Titus 2:4; 1 Peter 3:1; and Colossians 3:18. In addition to their responsibilities as mothers and homemakers missionaries also depicted Christian wives as moral exemplars and custodians of society's moral values (Mann, 1983).

As a result of the influence of Christianity, Baloyi (2007) argues that a lot of Biblical scriptures have been used by African men to subject their wives and to further their own socially constructed power. He further argues that communities have treated women in a manner that has led them to believe that they cannot do anything without the approval of their husbands.

2.6.3 Dual earner marriages

Industrialization, urbanization and modernization have changed the nature of marriages, resulting in a tendency for both spouses to be engaged in paid work

(Ferree & Wilkie, 1998). Silberstein (1992) argues that in the span of a single generation the family in which both spouses work outside the home moved from being an exception to being a rule. With this change husbands were no longer the sole providers in their families and women began sharing the provider role.

The practice of dual-earner marriage is based on egalitarian principles, where both spouses are breadwinners. This results in sharing domestic chores and childrearing responsibilities according to aptitude and time availability (Silberstein, 1992). This contrasts with the traditional gender related sharing of household responsibilities, where the wife assumes the domestic chores and childrearing responsibilities. As a result of both partners working the negotiation of roles is often a point of contention in dual-earner marriages. In dual-earner marriages roles are constantly negotiated and agreed upon by the two partners (Kiger, Riley & Stevens, 2001; Rall, 1984).

In dual-earner marriages, although both partners have jobs and are contributing to the economic needs of the family there are no demands on an individual's commitment to work role or constant updating of professional development (Sekaran, 1986). In dual-earner marriages the point of interest is that both partners bring income or sustainable income to the family.

As women began to contribute to family income there was also a noticeable increase in the number of educated women in the workplace (Byrne & Carr, 2000). According to Betchen (2006) the gains made by women in society as a result of achieving higher education and training have resulted in women establishing themselves in prestigious careers and earning substantial incomes. The presence of women in the

workplace has also resulted in a tendency for professional males and females to marry each other. This has led to the establishment of yet another type of non-traditional marriage, the dual-career marriage (Larkin & Ragan, 2008), which is discussed in the next paragraphs.

2.6.4 Dual-career marriages

The term dual-career marriage was first coined in the late 1960s and mid 1970s by Rapoport and Rapoport (1978), who are regarded as the pioneers and founders of dual-career family research. They described a dual-career marriage as a family structure in which both husband and wife pursue careers while simultaneously maintaining family life. These authors found that partners in dual-career marriages tend to emphasize occupation as the primary source of personal fulfilment.

Dual-career marriages differ from dual-earner marriages in that in dual-career marriages both spouses are pursuing a career. Stoltz-Loike (1992) found that in dual-career marriages both spouses are highly committed to their careers and view work as essential to their psychological sense of self and as integral to their personal identities. According to Rapoport and Rapoport (1978) a career, as opposed to a job, requires a high degree of commitment and it develops continuously. Arthur and Parker (2004) state that a career provides an important context for self-development and personal identity through which individuals can nurture their passions and become more independent.

Sekaran (1986) found that self-actualization is valued in dual career marriages and that self-actualizing individuals value autonomy and independence. Ozzie and Harriet (2002) found that the autonomy of the spouses in dual-career marriages is a central concern. According to Ozzie and Harriet (2002) men and women are autonomous individuals with wants, hopes, desires, expectations and free will. In order for marriage to succeed there should be respect for the autonomy of each individual.

Although dual-career households are still in the minority they are a growing minority (Hardill & Watson, 2004; Silberstein, 1992). A recent study conducted in America indicates that there are more than 40 million dual-career couples in the work force (Larkin & Ragan, 2008). In the United Kingdom it has been reported that at least 60% of households consist of dual-career couples (Arthur & Parker, 2004; Hardill & Watson, 2004). Although there are no statistics about dual-career marriages in South Africa it seems likely that the South African context would follow international trends.

Studies show that although there are significant benefits to dual-career marriages, such as increased family income and a sense of fulfilment (Larkin & Ragan, 2008), dual-career couples also tend to experience sociological pressures and complications (Arthur & Parker, 2004; Larkin & Ragan 2008). One such complication is that in some marriages wives earn more than their husbands and this can cause strain due to men's traditional role as bread-winners (Betchen, 2006; Larkin & Ragan, 2008). In addition, women in dual-career marriages are expected to break gender roles in families and lead the way towards equality at home, just as they do in

the industrial world (Silberstein, 1992). However, this expectation clearly contradicts socio-cultural and Christian discourses about the roles of women.

Haddock and Zimmerman (2001) have argued that cultural ideologies have been slow to respond to the rise in dual-earner and dual-career marriages. They suggest that until cultural ideologies change to fit new realities, dual-career couples will continue to face unnecessary obstacles. One of the challenges faced in this marital setup is the negotiation of gender expectations in marital relationships.

Betchen (2006) highlights that dual-career couples are potentially vulnerable to power and control struggles, especially when the wife is more financially and professionally successful than the husband. Research conducted from the 1970s through to the 1990s shows that female professionals have higher divorce rates than woman in general (Silberstein, 1992). Existing societal norms and expectations contribute to the women's level of distress and marital dissatisfaction (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1978; Silberstein, 1992). These expectations include the role of a man as the primary bread-winner as well as cultural and Christian expectations such as the woman assuming a submissive role in marriage.

It is further stated by Silberstein (1992) that, according to Parson's theory, dismantling the man's role as provider and as the primary source of family status generally destabilizes marriages. In his theory of social systems Parsons (1991) argues that roles are essential starting points for human interaction and that in order for interactions to be stable roles must be governed by shared rules. According to

social systems theory roles are clearly defined and interruptions to the roles lead to interruptions in stability.

My personal observation as a professional married woman is that within the South African context, and particularly amongst the Black community, the traditional socio-cultural discourse still informs marriages. This is despite the increasing rise of dual-career marriages amongst Black South Africans. Greef and Malherbe (2001) also found that despite the increasing norm for women's employment and the expectation that women should contribute to the family's financial situation, the traditional social assumptions about gender roles continue to enshroud much of South African society's attitudes.

It is argued that non-traditional family members experience several dilemmas and challenges as they go about their daily lives (Arthur & Parker, 2004; Larkin & Ragan, 2008; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1978). Arthur and Parker (2004) state that in dual-career marriages the couple deals with challenges relating to family structures and the loss of community and traditional values. Rapoport and Rapoport (1978) found that dual-career marriages face five major dilemmas: role overload, role cycling, social network dilemmas, identity dilemmas and normative dilemmas. These dilemmas are briefly described below with the addition of more recent sources that concur with Rapoport and Rapoport's (1978) original findings.

2.6.4.1 Role overload

Role overload occurs when specific family members take on several roles. For example, women/wives occupy the so-called second shift at home despite their eight hour day work. The division of household chores has been investigated and results suggest that this factor plays a major role in the level of spouses' satisfaction with marriage. Due to the role overload, employed wives are more likely than fulltime housewives to expect their husbands to share domestic work (Baskin, 2002).

2.6.4.2 Role cycling dilemma

The role cycling dilemma is defined as the strain the marital partners face when they want to have a family and a career at the same time. Research indicates that family and career success can hinge on a young professional's ability, especially the woman's ability, to maintain a healthy work-life balance (Ruben, 2006). In many instances women decide to put their careers on hold while raising a family and then return to work after staying at home. It is argued that regardless of their occupational status, working mothers face challenges in achieving a balanced work and family (Fredman & Greenhaus, 2000). This is especially because traditional values continue to shape the division of labour at home, where women take on or are expected to take on more responsibility for their homes than men.

2.6.4.3 Social network dilemma

Society grooms males and females to behave differently. While a specific behaviour may be seen as socially acceptable when performed by males, it may be seen as unacceptable when performed by women. Spouses in non-traditional families experience internal conflict trying to establish who they are and what they are becoming (Baskin, 2002).

Internalized gender roles and values learned early in life conflict with the acquired non-traditional roles that spouses are trying to establish. For example, career wives experience enhanced self-esteem and self-worth as their careers provide them with opportunities for accomplishment, creativity and self-actualization. This empowers these wives to be autonomous or to regard themselves as autonomous; feelings that are not encouraged by the traditional gendered society. Society generally expects women to be directed by their husbands who are given authority over women. Crossfield et al. (2005) found that wives in dual-career marriages are often inner directed, i.e. they act on their own personal value systems in leading their lives rather than on societal expectations and value systems.

2.6.4.4 The normative dilemma

Despite the major dilemmas faced by women in non-traditional families Rapoport and Rapoport (1978) argue that there are at least four needs that manifest themselves in dual-career homes. These are needs for achievement, affiliation, power, and autonomy. The intensity of these needs changes depending on the

stage of marriage. Marital satisfaction is derived from the need an individual experiences as a particular point in his/her life. Individuals with a need for autonomy are likely to define success as being able to establish their freedom and operate effectively on their own without being subjected to behaviour control. Such individuals would not want to be constantly instructed and rather resist being instructed, watched, controlled, supervised and restricted in any way.

Larkin and Ragan (2008) outline five critical factors for successfully managing dual-career relationships. These factors are mutual commitment to careers, flexibility, coping mechanisms, financial considerations, and energy and time management. The personal flexibility and coping mechanisms factors are particularly relevant to this study and are discussed in detail below.

Personal flexibility is described as the willingness and ability to adapt and improve in dealing with problems faced in dual-career marriages, such as flexibly sharing roles and responsibilities at home (Larkin & Ragan, 2008). This is similar to the findings reported by Coverman (2001) and Ozzie and Harriet (2002). Coping mechanisms can either be learned or unconscious skills through which people deal with minor to major stress and trauma. Coping mechanisms are critical for dual-career couples (Larkin & Ragan, 2008) as they tend to face many challenges and need to have effective coping mechanisms in order to address these challenges. Betchen (2006) refers to the need for adjustment due to the inevitable challenges in dual-career marriages.

2.6.5 Summary and conclusion

The institution of marriage has undergone a lot of change over the past 50 years and this change has resulted in several observable challenges (Carlson & Sperry, 1991; Rall, 1984). In addition, according to Rall (1984) the modern emphasis on individual freedom and personal happiness may be a factor contributing to the challenges faced by most marriages.

The literature constructs dual-earner and dual-career marriages as challenging and as contributing significantly to increased marital dissatisfaction and stress on spouses (Carlson & Sperry, 1991). However, regardless of these findings and stated complexities or challenges marriage remains, in my opinion, one of the most highly valued forms of human association.

The importance of marriage is reflected by the large body of research concerning issues around the concept of marriage. Since the 1990s emphasis is continually placed on understanding the quality of marriage as an end in itself and as a means to understanding its effect on numerous other processes inside and outside the family. Researchers are continuing to explore the discourses informing marriage as a social concept.

The above paragraphs outlined the continuing changes in the roles that women play in society and in families. This thesis explores how these changes contribute to the construction of satisfaction by professional women in marriage. The literature highlights women in dual-career marriages' need for autonomy and this study

explored the participants' perceptions and constructions of autonomy and the ways in which these constructions contribute to their construction of marital satisfaction. The next paragraphs outline some discourses surrounding autonomy.

2.7 The social construction of autonomy

Autonomy is a social construct whose meaning differs based on the context within which it is used. It is defined as an individual's need or right to be in control or to take ownership of his or her life (Le Roux, 1987). It is also defined as the right of all individuals to develop their highest potential (Taylor, 2002) and it is associated with self-esteem (Moneta, 2002). Taylor (2002) further states that each individual has freedom of action, the opportunity to work independently, to make decisions and to take responsibility for their actions. Taylor (2002) indicates that autonomy is sometimes used as an equivalent to liberty, self-rule, self-determination or self-assertion. The dictionary definition of autonomy includes self-rule and volition, to act willingly, without a sense of coercion (Kagitcibasi, 2005).

According to Poortinga (1992) the psychoanalytical orientation has constructed a sense of autonomy and independence from others as essential to healthy human development. As a result psychological theories have also stressed the importance of individual independence, self-efficacy, self-reliance, self-actualization and freedom of choice to the extent that individual independence is perceived as a cherished value in societies such as the United States (Kagitcibasi, 2005).

Autonomy has been positioned by Self-Determination theory (SDT) as one of the basic psychological needs that contributes to human well-being (Chirkov, Kim, Ryan & Kaplan, 2003; Sheldon & Gunz, 2009). The other two psychological needs are relatedness (the need to feel close to and accepted by important others or the need for belongingness) and a need for competence (a need to feel effective, skilful and able to master challenges of life) (Sheldon & Filak, 2008; Sheldon & Gunz, 2009; Vansteenkiste, Lens & Soenens, 2006). According to SDT autonomy can be described as the extent to which one fully accepts and stands behind one's action (Choy, 2002). In this description the issue of taking accountability for one's action is given prominence.

The construct of autonomy is seen as underlying the self, self-other relations and social behaviours. From a self viewpoint it refers to the extent to which a person is subject to his or her own rule, whereas self-other distinction refers to the extent to which one distances oneself from others by defining boundaries of interaction and social behaviour (Kagitcibasi, 2005). It is believed that human beings have a need for autonomy and relatedness and different cultural groups tend to emphasize or prioritize either one or the other (Poortinga, 1992).

Since autonomy and relatedness emphasise different needs they are at times seen as conflicting with each other. While autonomy reflects tendencies toward independence from others, relatedness reflects tendencies towards interdependence or close association with others (Kagitcibasi, 2005). Research has found that the pursuit of autonomy may have either positive or negative social consequences, depending on how the environment trades off the value of individual independence

against the value of social interdependence (Moneta, 2002). For example, it has been found that the pursuit of autonomy hampers the development of satisfying relationships in collectivistic societies (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

Autonomy is therefore seen as most promoted in individualistic societies, which also promote the development of an independent, self-reliant and self-efficient self (Mann & Hannover, 2006). Collectivist societies are seen as emphasising the need for interdependence, interconnectedness and belongingness with social in-groups (Bao & Lam, 2008; Moneta, 2002) and thus promoting the development of an interdependent self (Mann & Hannover, 2006). It could be argued that collectivist cultures promote relatedness instead of autonomy. Research findings have questioned the existence of autonomy in collectivistic societies (Lyengar & Lepper, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oishi, 2000).

However, SDT sees autonomy and relatedness as compatible psychological needs that are not mutually exclusive but complementary (Moneta, 2002). According to SDT both autonomy and relatedness are necessary for the well-being and adjustment of all individuals (Sheldon & Gunzl, 2009; Vansteenkister et al., 2006). This suggests that while individuals might have a basic psychological need to have freedom and independence, there is also a need for belongingness and acceptance by social in-groups. It could be argued that regardless of the social standing of human beings both constructs are necessary for individuals' survival and well-being, suggesting a need for people to understand which attribute to lean on in a particular context.

Triandis (1995) argues that while individual autonomy has been closely linked with psychological well-being, psychological well-being is in turn closely related to one's need to feel a sense of belonging. As a result when exercising the right to be autonomous, individuals need to consider the social context within which they operate. Therefore, where a need to belong is important to an individual he or she would need to consider how the need to be autonomous would affect the need to belong. For example, one could argue that in South Africa and particularly amongst Black South Africans there is emphasis on maintaining equilibrium between a need to be autonomous, self-driving and competent and being considerate of others in one's pursuit of autonomy. Such balance or emphasis is illustrated through expressions such as *motho ke motho ka batho* (Sotho language) and *Umuntu ngumtu ngabany' abantu* (Nguni language)¹, which suggest the importance of the collective in one's success or even sense of identity. Another popular concept amongst Black South Africans, which is closely linked to the construct of consideration of others, is that of "Ubuntu", which is considered to be a way of life that has sustained African communities (in South Africa and Africa as a whole) for centuries (Murove, 2009). Ubuntu means humaneness and it refers to a way of being, a disposition that contributes to the well-being of others (Murove, 2009).

While the previous discussion introduced the construct of autonomy and showed how it relates to a sense of belonging, the next paragraphs briefly isolate the various areas related to the construct of autonomy that are relevant to the study.

¹ This means that we are who we are through our association and interactions with other people.

2.7.1 Autonomy and individualism

Individualism is a framework that values individual success and achievement over group success. Within the individualistic framework people are encouraged to be autonomous and to behave independently from others (Harway, 1996). Personal choice, self-expression, attending to personal needs and achievements (Triandis, 1995) are paramount for an individual's sense of well-being within an individualistic framework. The section outlining dual-career marriages also illustrates the importance that professional and educated women place on being independent and fulfilling their personal needs. This need is an individualistic one that is encouraged by institutional discourses such as the education system, the workplace and the legal system.

2.7.2 Autonomy and collectivism

Collectivism as a cultural dimension fosters interdependence, group goals, communal outcomes and group success over individual needs. For collectivists maintaining social relationships and group harmony is of paramount importance (Triandis, 1995). Collectivism thus promotes group consensus and coherence to social or collective norms. In a collectivist culture the self is defined in terms of in-group membership in which shared values, norms, common goals and utilitarian relationships are highly regarded (Harway, 1996). Collectivism is also associated with stable, hierarchical roles that are informed by gender, age and family background (Chirkov, Kim, Ryan & Kaplan, 2003).

Black South African society can be described as a collectivist society in which individuals are more likely to privilege group culture over individual goals (Eaton & Louw, 2000). It is thus not uncommon to find that communication patterns typically reinforce gender inequality (Sullivan, 2006) because the collectivistic framework would construct autonomy as a collective or group autonomy in which a group decides how to govern themselves. As a result an individual's construction of autonomy is informed by the group's construction of how to behave. For example, marriage is a union of two or more individuals who operate in constant interaction with one another. It is therefore a collectivistic micro-system and this implies that within marriage the individuals need to take others into account when they exercise their autonomy.

Research illustrates that married women are expected to relinquish their independence and to abide by the collectivistic systems that promote gender inequality by placing domestic power and decision making in the hands of men (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2008). It is also found that within collectivist cultures husbands are more likely to maintain the upper hand in decision-making and to be responsible for making major family decisions whereas the wives make decisions concerning day-to-day operations (Bartley et al., 2005). Decision making in marriages is still divided along traditional gender lines (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2008).

It is clear from the literature reviewed that there are at least two ways in which autonomy can be constructed. One construction reflects an individual's need to be in control of his/her own life, while the other reflects an individual's autonomy as

defined by others. In support of the preceding arguments concerning autonomy Christman (1989) argues that each person is autonomous at a given time and the degree to which an individual is autonomous depends on the context within which they are operating at a specific time

2.7.3 The gender discourse and autonomy

Women's autonomy is embedded in the broader context of gender ideology, which is influenced by the ideology of patriarchal authority. Previous sections discussing cultural and Christian discourses on marriage have illustrated how the dominant patriarchal gender ideology has awarded men the privilege of being in power, which includes dominating and having authority over women. Hoesen (2000) argues that in the past women have lived under the shadow of men and as a result some men still think that they should have full control of women.

Given the dominance of patriarchal society it was not surprising that throughout the literature search a significant proportion of articles addressed women's autonomy in relation to their own bodies and reproductive rights (Bobak & Saleem, 2005; Jejeebhoy, 1995; LeRoux, 1987). Issues around power, decision-making and independence receive little attention and are often not considered at all. According to Bobak and Saleem (2005) and LeRoux (1987) women's autonomy is limited and discussions on autonomy are also related to behaviour associated with roles of women such as the bearing of children.

Based on the literature I concluded that that autonomy of women is largely socially constructed. While patriarchal gender ideology strives to limit the extent of women's autonomy, the growth in industrialization encourages or allows women to be independent and autonomous (Allen, 1999; Karney & Thomas, 1997).

2.7.4 The legal discourse and autonomy

In theory, South African women are encouraged and supported by the legal system, which allows them to be autonomous, independent, and educated. The South African Bill of Rights - sections 7 to 39 - of the 1996 Constitution enshrines the rights of all people in the country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom (Constitutional Court). Furthermore, although the South African Bill of Rights is all encompassing, section 9 of the constitution specifically gives women the right to equality. Following the post-1994 election period women in South Africa are entitled to be treated as equal to men and women are further empowered and encouraged to make independent decisions. The legal discourse constructs women's autonomy as equal to men's autonomy and women are given the platform to be in control of their lives and to be independent.

2.7.5 Christian discourse and autonomy

Christian discourse constructs women as powerless and contains the expectation that a married woman should be submissive to her husband. The discourse prevents women from behaving autonomously as they are expected to be

submissive and under the authority of their husbands. For example, in the Good News Bible in Ephesians 5:22-24 it is stated that “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord, for a husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over the church...And so wives must submit completely to their husbands”.

2.7.6 The marital discourse and autonomy

Marriage involves the unification of at least two individuals. Although an individual entering a marital relationship has a right to self-govern, to take responsibility for the self and even to aspire to self-actualization, that individual does not act in isolation, but rather in a context that involves the other. It is my experience that for Black South Africans that interaction usually involves extended family members as a result of the understanding that when a woman gets married she is married to a family. Research has also found that, consistent with their culture, extended family members play a role in the marital affairs of Black South Africans (see Amoateng, Heaton & Kalule-Sabiti, 1997; Nzimande, 1987; Wilson, 1986; Ziehl, 1994).

Sekaran (1986) states that a marital relationship should ideally allow both partners to be self-actualizing. Thus, by implication marriage ‘should’ allow partners to be autonomous. In marriage autonomy is defined as the spouses’ perception of the extent to which partners encourage a sense of independence and individuality for each other (Baucom, Burnet, Epstein, Rankin-Esquire & Sandin, 2001). According to Ozzie and Harriet (2002), the autonomy of marital partners is of central concern in determining marital success. For these authors a marriage is a social unit created

by autonomous individuals and for the marriage to succeed there should be respect for the autonomy of each individual.

Based on the above discussion the question could be asked: Is it possible for an individual in marriage to be fully autonomous and to self-govern? It is also possible to ask: Can one be fully autonomous within a marital context? These questions were posed during the analysis and interpretation of the data, which is discussed in the later Chapters of the thesis.

I believe that in order to fully understand and appreciate the concept of autonomy within the context of marriage, it is vital to acknowledge that marriage involves both an individual and a group, i.e. at least two individuals and often their extended family members and community. The concept of autonomy in marriage should therefore be seen as existing on a continuum. The one end of the continuum ideally needs to acknowledge individual autonomy while the other end of the continuum needs to acknowledge group autonomy.

The various discourses presented thus far illustrate the difference in perceptions concerning autonomy. While the legal and the broader social context expect professional women to be autonomous, other contexts such as culture and religion do not have the same expectations. It would seem likely that all these contradictions would create confusion and difficulty for professional women in dual-career marriages. The analysis Chapter provides an account of how the professional women who participated in this study deal with the various constructions in their marital system.

2.7.7 Summary and conclusion

The preceding discussions illustrate the difficulties involved in conceptualizing autonomy in linear terms. The discussion shows that one cannot completely practice individualistic autonomy as we all live amongst other individuals. Autonomy is a social construct and therefore people articulate different grounds for autonomy, bearing in mind the context of behaviour. Christman (1989) indicates that all people are autonomous at a given time.

My understanding is that although an individual can individually decide on a life-style to follow, this decision is always informed by the context within which the individual operates. Society promotes both individualistic and collectivistic autonomy depending on the context. Meaning is constructed through interaction and reality is the result of the social processes accepted as normal in a specific context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

I am of the opinion that the concept of autonomy in marriage can only be appreciated if it is seen from both an individualistic and a collectivistic perspective. Furthermore, I believe that societies as macro-systems and marriages as micro-systems cannot be rigidly differentiated as being either individualistic or collectivistic. It is, however, possible that different societies and marital setups emphasize different aspects of the two constructs in human interaction, based on cultural norms, values and interests.

In dual-career marriages (where power is ideally shared by both spouses) both spouses need to redefine already existing normative behaviour. Couples can decide on when they should practice individualistic autonomy and when collectivistic autonomy is necessary. Once this decision has been made it might be possible to be autonomous within a collective setting (which also contradicts the basic definition of autonomy). This is paradoxical because it suggests that one can be autonomous in marriage but not fully autonomous.

Autonomy in the marital relationship depends on the outcome of diverse processes taking place in the context of the marriage and is embedded in the broader social environment. This in turn contributes to the way in which women and society in general interpret and experience autonomy. These broader social and individual constructions are context bound and may vary from individual to individual and from community to community. All these aspects of autonomy are discussed in the analysis of the text that is presented in the later Chapters of the thesis.

2.8 Marital satisfaction

The increasing amount of research interest in marital satisfaction since the period of industrialization illustrates the importance placed on understanding marriage as an end in itself and as a means to understanding its effect on the broader society (Bradbury, Fincham & Stevens, 2000). The study of marital satisfaction could also assist in developing effective interventions for couples presenting with marital dissatisfaction and/or challenges. In this section the concept of satisfaction is first discussed in order to provide a backdrop for the discussion of marital satisfaction.

Satisfaction is a component of psychological well-being and it reflects how people evaluate their lives. Such evaluations may be in the form of cognitions (i.e. when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about his/her satisfaction in general or about specific aspects of their lives), or it may be associated with the frequency with which people experience pleasant or/and unpleasant emotions (Bradbury & Cobb, 2003). The evaluation of one's life as either satisfying or unsatisfying indicates that satisfaction is a social construct. Satisfaction is a result of our evaluation of our lives, which is informed by how we experience our lives through social interaction.

Satisfaction can be related to various domains of life such as recreation, love, marriage and friendship. These domains can be divided into narrow facets like marital satisfaction (Diener, Oishi & Suh, 1997). This statement further confirms that satisfaction is an outcome of social interaction. Satisfaction is therefore socially situated and is relative within a particular social relationship. For example, it is not possible to say that one is not satisfied without specifying over whom or what.

Diener et al. (1997) argue that studying the narrow facets of satisfaction assists researchers in gaining a greater understanding of the specific conditions that might influence well-being in other domains. Bradbury and Cobb (2003) argue that in order to understand behaviour we need to consider the broader context in which such behaviour occurs. In this study satisfaction was studied within the broader context of marriage. Marriage in turn exists within the broader context of society and cultures.

This thesis focused on the interpersonal processes that operate within marriages, within a specific timeframe (significant life event or life cycle) and within the socio-

cultural ecologies and contexts within which marriages operate. The aim was to retain a strong focus on understanding the interpersonal variable of autonomy and its significance in the discourse of marital satisfaction within the context of dual-career marriages.

2.8.1 Overview of marital satisfaction

McCabe (1999) argues that while previous research focused more on divorce in marriages there has been a shift towards understanding satisfaction in marriages. Astone, Kim, Rothert, Schoen and Standish (2002) found that satisfaction is important in marriages and that marital satisfaction is the central variable that reflects the marital quality. According to Rhyne (1991) marital satisfaction is sought or expected by most married individuals. He argues that it is crucial to continue studying factors that contribute to marital satisfaction since marriage is central to individual and family well-being. A study conducted by Carlson and Sperry (1991) found that marital satisfaction is at its highest when the marital experiences of each spouse match his or her expectations.

Marital satisfaction is informed by various social discourses and as such it is socially constructed. These discourses include personality differences or personal qualities, educational status, power sharing, role division, sexuality and conflict resolution (McCabe, 1999). According to Campel (1976) marital satisfaction is a construction based on what people perceive as appropriate. This implies that marital satisfaction results from an individual's feelings of fulfilment within the context of marriage. For

example, if one expects to be autonomous in a marital setup, then the lack of autonomy might result in dissatisfaction.

Rhyme (1991) states that personal qualities such as educational status, income and age play a less significant role in perceptions of marital satisfaction than subjective and interpersonal relations. Subjective issues would include perceptions of autonomy, which are explored in this study. Significant life events also influence an individual's general level of satisfaction and within the family setup life cycles contribute to marital satisfaction (Applegate & Fowers, 1996).

Esquer, Burnett, Baucom and Norman (1997) found that spouses that report satisfactory interpersonal interactions such as being respected and being treated fairly generally also reported their marriage as satisfactory. Al-Krenawi and Lev-Wiesel (1999) found that the more women perceived equal treatment in their marriages, the higher their level of marital satisfaction. They also found that marital dissatisfaction is high amongst highly educated women.

2.8.2 Autonomy and marital satisfaction

The previous discussions illustrated that each individual has a right to be autonomous and that most individuals aspire for satisfaction in most aspects of their lives. In marriage autonomy and marital satisfaction are informed by individuals' constructions of what is ideal, based on their expectations when they commit to marriage.

The literature search showed that few studies have focused on autonomy in marriage or autonomy and marital satisfaction. The few studies that have been conducted indicated that autonomy is one of the discourses that inform marital satisfaction (Ozzie & Harriet, 2002; Rankin-Esquire, Burnett, Baucom & Epstein, 1997). Bradbury et al. (2000) found that autonomy contributes to marital satisfaction in women.

Ozzie and Harriet (2002) found that a marriage will only succeed where there is respect for the autonomy of each individual. Respect is generally associated with equality and it has been found that in dual-career marriages a sense of equality between the spouses contributes to marital satisfaction (Kiger et al., 2001).

Trumbach (1978) argues that marriage provides socio-psychological support for individuals and that marriage creates a sense of order for the individual which allows them to experience their lives as making sense. By implication if experiencing autonomy makes sense to a woman, marriage should legitimate, mediate and allow the realisation of such a perception (Trumbach, 1978). On the contrary I have found that marriages amongst Black South Africans often fail to do so because, despite all the changes in women's roles in society at large, these marriages are still subject to traditional expectations. The marriage context seems to be resisting the change that is being created by the larger social context. This resistance may result in constant stress and marital dissatisfaction.

This study explored how constructions of autonomy contribute to constructions of marital satisfaction for women in dual-career marriages. The findings of this study

show how participants from a specific culture and tradition construct meaning in their lives.

2.8.3 Dual career marriage and marital satisfaction

Since the industrial revolution many social scientists have investigated marital satisfaction amongst working women and their husbands. This interest is related to the fact that dual-earner and dual-career marriages bring into question traditional gender norms and traditional understandings of marital satisfaction (Hochschild, 1990; Kiger & Riley, 2000).

Over the last few decades family life styles have changed, with dual-career marriages increasing in number (Blaine & Brooks, 1996). Women are increasingly pursuing goals and ambitions beyond the traditional female roles of wife and mother (Johnson, 1996). These women are empowered to be autonomous and independent and therefore do not expect to have to behave in submissive and dependent ways. McCabe (1999) also reports that the changes in female work roles as well as responsibilities in families have impacted on marital satisfaction.

The increasing employment rates of women, the rate at which women are pursuing careers and the increase in educational achievement amongst women, all result in women experiencing an increasing need for freedom and status (Carlson & Sperry, 1991). According to these researchers the changing position of women has resulted in increased freedom of choice for women. However, this freedom has also resulted

in an increased level of marital stress, which in turn contributes to higher divorce rates.

Previous research conducted in the United States indicates that more than 50% of marriages currently end and will continue to end in divorce (Larson & Olson, 1989; Rhyne, 1991); that about a third of divorces occur within the first two to four years of marriage; and that marital satisfaction within the first ten years has declined since the 1970s and continues to decline (Silberstein, 1992). Although these sources are fairly old more recent sources (e.g. Kiger & Riley, 2000) show similar trends.

Research findings show that men tend to be more satisfied in marriages than women (Blaine & Brooks, 1996). In my opinion this variance could be due to the fact that men are given power in marriages and are thus likely to be satisfied. It is also possible that men and women assess their marriages differently. Research shows that a husband's dissatisfaction in marriage is linked to two factors: Firstly, from the feeling that their wives are less available for them; and secondly, when their wives are more successful in their careers than they are (Johnson, 1996). In contrast, women report dissatisfaction due to the continuing gender biases existing within the marital setup, including division of domestic labour, autonomy and decision making. According to Johnson (1996) wives' commitment to their careers may be a contributing factor to their dissatisfaction with the marriage system.

2.9 Conclusion

This Chapter illustrated how people come to construct their reality and shape their behaviour. Through the use of language people construct meaning and define what is acceptable in their interaction. For example, cultural practices are a result of the collective agreements about several issues, including what constitutes appropriate behaviour for a married woman.

The literature findings on the social constructs under investigation in this study illustrate the socially constructed nature of institutions, for example marriage is an institution that is governed by rules and regulations. The construction of behaviour in marriage is regulated by the Christian and the cultural discourses. These discourses endorse the position of a married woman as subservient and do not expect a married woman to be independent. However, the legal discourse enshrined in the South African constitution endorses equality in marriage, thereby constructing the position of a married woman as equal to that of her husband.

On the construct of autonomy the literature indicates that an individual's construction of autonomy differs from one context to the next. As individuals people are allowed to behave independently and make autonomous decisions. However, in contexts that involve other people a more collective approach is encouraged. In such contexts individuals are expected to compromise their individualistic operations in order to accommodate or prioritize group success.

The reviewed literature indicates that most married individuals seek marital satisfaction and that marital satisfaction is a central variable reflecting the quality of marriage. Investigations concerning autonomy and marital satisfaction indicate that individuals who experience or report greater autonomy in marriage also report greater satisfaction.

The Chapter that follows discusses the methodology that was used in conducting this research. The rationale for choosing the methodology is outlined. In addition, the process that was used in selecting the participants and gathering the data is also outlined. In addition, the Chapter discusses the method of data analysis and focuses on the importance of the construct of reflexivity within the research.