

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous Chapter the findings of the study were presented as six distinct discourses that emerged in the interviews. This Chapter integrates the findings with relevant literature and theory concerning the discourses that emerged in order to provide a broader understanding of the various discourses.

In line with the theoretical approach this research aimed at understanding how the participants operating in a particular social context use language to construct their lives. The research focused on how Black South African women in dual-career marriages construct their marriages and how their constructions of marriage also construct meaning with regards to autonomy and marital satisfaction.

Reflexivity is also discussed towards the end of the Chapter. This section highlights the ways in which the researcher's background co-constructed meaning in this research. The Chapter concludes by presenting the limitations of the study as well as making suggestions for future research based on both the limitations of this particular study as well as the findings of the study.

## 5.2 The participants' constructions of marriage

In the literature Chapter it was indicated that marriage is difficult to define as it is constructed in multiple ways by different social groups (Crapo, 1996). In this study the participants defined marriage as the unification of a man and a woman either through cultural practices or in Christian rites. The participants therefore adopted a monogamous view of marriage (Rall, 1984).

The two dominant discourses that informed the participants' talk about marriage were those of culture and Christianity. This section discusses how these two discourses contribute to the participants' construction of marriage. Although the two dominant discourses could be discussed as separate sections the concepts and frameworks contained in these discourses are interrelated and it is therefore appropriate to discuss both discourses in one section. In this way the discussion flow also demonstrates the similar ways in which the participants constructed the cultural and the Christian discourses.

With regards to cultural rites, the participants referred to the customary discourse of marriage which recognizes *lobola* as a formal unification of two individuals in marriage. It is clear from the previous Chapter that the participants accept and embrace the customary or cultural marriage. It is also clear that although they have embraced customary marriage in the form of *lobola*, they also talk about *lobola* as a practice that is oppressive towards women and as a practice that does not take into account the changes in the role of women in marriage. For example, customary marriage gives men or husbands authority over their wives. This is despite the fact

that research shows that in many modern marriages women assume many of the responsibilities previously assigned to men (Shope, 2006), a finding that was confirmed by the participants in the current study. A study conducted by Haddock and Zimmerman (2001) found that cultural ideologies are slow to respond to changes in social dynamics such as the changes that have been brought about by dual-earner and dual-career marriages.

The dominant cultural discourse that the participants refer to is based on the traditional construction of marriage as a system in which the man is in control of the household. For example, traditional culture constructs the role of the husband as a provider (materially) while the wife fulfils the role of nurturer. In constructing the wife as a nurturer culture expects a married woman to attend to the emotional needs of the family as well as attending to gender related roles such as house-chores (Greef & Malherbe, 2001). The findings Chapter shows that the participants indicated that they are aware of the role expectations of a wife in marriage and they make conscious efforts to adhere to what is expected of them.

Since 1984 other social systems, such as the legal system, have endorsed equality of partners in marriages in South Africa. It could be argued that cultural practices are informed by a gender discourse that constructs people's roles according to the biological sexual attribute of being male or female. Culture therefore endorses the gender identity framework by differentiating roles and behaviour expectations for wives and husbands. Both the gender and cultural frameworks place people into hierarchies in which men are placed at the top of the hierarchy.

Although the cultural and gender discourses give power to men in marriage the participants refer to themselves as partners in marriage. By constructing themselves as partners the participants position themselves in marriage as equal to their husbands. According to the South African Matrimonial Property Act of 1984 marriage is a partnership of equals. It could well be argued that the participants draw their construction of marriage from the way in which the legal system in South Africa defines the role of a married woman. Similarly, it could be argued that the participants are defying the cultural (and gender) ideology which places women in an unequal position in relation to their husbands.

The two different viewpoints articulate participants' conflicting expectations concerning how married women should behave in marriages. In the literature discussion of identity formation it was argued that a person's sense of self is dependent on the position that the individual holds in a particular context and time (Hermans, 2001b). The findings of this study further confirm the argument that human beings hold multiple identities (Mleczko, 2011; Schmidle, 2009). For example, it was evident in the findings Chapter that although the participants consider themselves to be equal partners in marriage they also construct themselves as submissive to their husbands. This shows how culture has a marked impact on individuals' daily lives (Clark, 2006) and that people behave in accordance with cultural dictates (De la Rey, 1992)

Similar to the cultural discourse the Christianity discourse also constructs a married woman as someone who is expected to be submissive to her husband. Christianity, as reflected in Chapter 2, section 2.4.3, consistently constructs the wife as

submissive and secondary in relation to her husband. The participants also used language which indicates that they have endorsed the Christian discourse around appropriate behaviour for married women (see Chapter 4, section 4.4.3).

Both culture and Christianity articulate specific ways in which men and women should behave in marriage, thereby constructing the role of a woman in marriage in a particular manner. For example, despite the changes in marriage (such as in dual-career marriages), women are still expected to attend to traditional cultural roles such as cooking. The findings of this study show that the participants still adhere to traditional expectations despite the fact that they construct themselves as empowered and equal to their husbands.

The participants' presentation of contradicting constructions in terms of how they perceive themselves is in keeping with what identity theories term multiplicity of identity (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). Firstly, in terms of personal identity the participants construct and position themselves as empowered and as a result see themselves as equal to their husbands. Secondly, by positioning themselves in the traditional, cultural and Christian discourses the participants acknowledge their social identity (as married women in a particular context). This type of positioning is what positioning theory refers to as the "me" attribute of the self, an attribute through which individuals are connected to the world and through which the social self is developed.

It could further be argued that by adhering to the social constructions and expectations related to their role as married women the participants are identifying

with other women in their social circle and thus meeting a need to belong. The findings Chapter showed how some of the participants associated their behaviour with other women in their lives (e.g. aunts, mothers). These participants also indicated that they observed how these women conduct or conducted themselves in their marriages and then used these observations to shape their own conduct within marriage. Some participants further indicated that they choose to adhere to what is expected of them by both culture and Christianity in order to avoid victimization. This aspect is discussed in more detail later in this Chapter. This aspect of the participants' constructions can also be linked to the literature concerning identity formation (Chapter 2, section 2.3) as it relates to the way in which people identify with others in order to feel accepted and to experience a sense of belonging.

The different constructions reflect what Turner (1985) referred to as self-categorization, which states that while people have a unique identity they also categorize themselves in groups. In line with group identity, people tend to see things from the group's perspective and behave in accordance with the norms, values and practices of the group (Foster & Louw-Potgieter, 1991).

The participants' talk indicates that they construct culture as static, as something that is not dynamic and changing. Traditional cultural practices regarding gender roles remain dominant in their lives and continue to inform their construction of marriage. For example, although the participants describe themselves as empowered outside their marriages, their home environments still require them to behave in accordance with traditional and cultural expectations. Similarly, Haddock and Zimmerman (2001) found that the changing position of women in marriages has not led to changes in

cultural practices. It is clear that the cultural principles that dictate how a woman should behave continue (Manganyi, 1973; Shope, 2006) to facilitate the construction of the social component of the self, as illustrated in the previous discussions around the development of the social self through what the positioning theory refers to as the “me” attribute of self.

These cultural principles are described by South African feminists as oppressive and exploitative of married women (Padayachee, 1997; Ssali, 2006), a description which is supported by the findings of this study. It is argued from a feminist viewpoint that cultural dictates promote unfair behaviour towards women and unfair distribution of power (De la Rey, 1997; Gouws, 1996). Black married women in South Africa are expected to continue behaving in ways that contradict social changes (Hoza, 2010). This study shows that despite the fact that as professional women the participants are significantly contributing to the maintenance of their households, they continue to construct themselves as oppressed by cultural behavioural expectations in married life. Participants construct a discourse around culture as the mechanism that oppresses professional married women and suppresses their inherent independence

The participants also see themselves as key to maintaining peace in their marriages. The Christian discourse contains the idea that “her paths are peaceful”, meaning that a wife should be peaceful in her interactions with her husband. Similarly culture places the responsibility for keeping peace in marriage with the wife. As a result of these expectations the participants avoid challenging their husbands even when they do not agree with them. The participants expressed that “if it means keeping the peace at home I would not mind”; “in such instances I would bite my tongue”. These

expectations are silencing women in marriage and as a result of this silence the women act in accordance with the construction of wives as submissive and followers in marriage. Other studies have also found that women are unable to voice their opinions as this would be in defiance of the collectivist tradition (which expects women to embrace everything without question). In addition, other studies also suggest that women are responsible for maintaining interpersonal harmony (Bartley et al., 2005).

The diction used in the previous examples illustrates that the participants see culture and Christianity as problematic and they experience self-pity around how they are treated and feel helpless about their situation. However, the language used by the participants indicates that they have consciously embraced the cultural and Christian discourses around how they should behave despite their disagreement with certain of the principles in these discourses (“I ascribe to traditional or cultural principles, meaning that I don’t take the constitution home”; “I always go back into saying that I am a Christian and I have to apply certain Christian rules, whether I like it or not it is up to me to adopt because I if don’t adjust to it then it will affect my happiness and satisfaction in my marriage”).

It would also seem that the participants are unable to refuse to comply with the expectations. De la Rey (1992) argues that culture designates what an individual pays attention to and what an individual chooses to ignore. She further states that challenging any of the cultural norms becomes difficult as it may result in consequences, such as being isolated by people in one’s community. This could explain why the participants in this study choose to embrace cultural dictates despite



their misgivings concerning these expectations. This decision is discussed further in the section of the discourse of fear.

Some participants argue that their Christian background has helped them come to terms with the roles they are expected to play within marriage. The participants whose behaviour is informed by culture also stated that they have learned how to interact appropriately within their marriages through observing the behaviour of their mothers and other women. The participants have thus identified with other women in their lives who have undergone similar experiences. The group of women with whom the participants identify includes their mothers, aunts and other women in their community who are married. This illustrates what social constructionism terms the construction of knowledge through interaction (Augustine, 2002). In addition it also highlights that the participants derive their identity from perceived membership of social groups (Duncan & Ratele, 2003). Through this identification the participants are able to adapt their behaviour in accordance with what is socially acceptable conduct for a married woman and they also obtain a sense of continuity with their past (De la Rey, 1992).

As discussed in the literature Chapter the Christian discourse expect married women to be submissive to their husbands and regards the husband as head of the family. In accordance with both the Christian and the cultural discourses the participants in this study view their husbands as heads of their families. The husband is therefore seen as the one who makes all major decisions. These constructions automatically place the woman in a dependent role where she constantly has to refer most, if not all, decisions to her husband.

While interviewing the participants I found that although some participants stated that they would make decisions about minor things (mostly decisions associated with traditionally female roles), some of the participants even consulted with and asked permission from their husbands for minor decisions. The women were therefore constructed and dependent on their husbands and as having to submit to their husbands.

### **5.3    Autonomy, independence and freedom discourses**

Rhyne (1991) found that autonomy is a personal experience that is valued in dual-career marriages. The participants in this study are professionals who hold relatively senior positions at work and who are expected to be independent and autonomous in their jobs. However, the participants are also married and within their marital context a different kind of autonomy is expected.

Autonomy is therefore constructed from two competing and contradictory discourses based on the context within which the participants operate. The first discourse is the individualist discourse towards autonomy, in which the participants construct themselves as autonomous and independent. This individualistic construction of autonomy was discussed in the literature Chapter (section 2.5) as the more dominant construction of autonomy. The second construction of autonomy relates to the collectivist discourse, whereby the participants acknowledge the constraints that marriage places on their individual autonomy. From the viewpoint of this discourse an individual's autonomy is dependent on how it would impact on other people (Chirkov et al., 2003).

In constructing their reality in relation to autonomy the participants expressed themselves in personal terms with words like “I” and “me”, thereby endorsing the individualistic construction of autonomy (Taylor, 2002; Triandis, 1995). These expressions of self are in contrast to words that would construct the participants as “us” or “we” in accordance with the collectivistic framework. These constructions show that the participants are taking control and ownership of their constructions around autonomy (“autonomy to me is a right”; “autonomy for me is the right to choose, the right to be what I want to be”). Furthermore in constructing their discourse on autonomy the participants refer to themselves as being autonomous prior to marriage (“I believe as far as autonomy is concerned, before I got married as a person, I am as autonomous as one can define the word autonomy”). This extract shows that the women experienced changes in their autonomy as a result of their marriages.

The participants also construct autonomy as something that is determined by the marriage context within which they operate (“There is always a conflict between my autonomy as an individual and being a wife as well as being a working professional”; “even though in my marriage as this point, I am given the right to do things my way, it’s not like I can do everything my way, you always have to consult on certain things”; “marriage for me is a totally different institution in the sense that I ascribe to traditional or cultural principles”).

The participants thus construct their autonomy in marriage as something that is the result of negotiation or consultation with their husbands. This construction of autonomy acknowledges that in marriage a woman cannot act independently from

her husband. Although in the extract in the preceding paragraph the participant refers to her individual rights, Manganyi (1973) argues that the wife's rights in marriage are transferred to her husband. Despite the fact that the source referred to here is relatively old it does confirm the finding that traditionally discourses concerning the role of married women have not changed substantially. However, the way in which the participants construct their autonomy has not changed. The participants see themselves as autonomous and independent although they acknowledge that marriage constructs them as less autonomous.

However, the participants' behaviour at home is different to their professional behaviour and is strongly influenced by the social expectations of married women. The participants stated that when they are at home they ascribe to traditional and Christian expectations associated with their role as married women. At home the participants consciously change their behaviour to adopt a different disposition, that of a submissive and traditional wife. There are variable reasons for this behaviour. Some of the participants argue that their behaviour helps them gain acceptance from their husbands while others argue that it helps to emphasise to their husbands that they are still the figure of authority at home. For example, the participants state: "if it means keeping the peace at home...I find that I get to compromise"; "in my family I would like to see peace"; "I know you have to be submissive"; "I understand that my husband is the head of the family...but then most of the time he has the ultimate say"; "with men it's a matter of my wife subsume herself into my "culture". The two competing discourses thus reproduce and maintain the participants' lack of autonomy by arguing for the necessity of appearing less powerful in the home while

at the same time resisting this discourse by constructing the Black professional woman as autonomous in her own right and in the workplace.

## **5.4 The discourse of power**

Power is a social construct that articulates supremacy and is used to shape social interactions and place people in hierarchies (Parker, 1990). According to Foucault power and power relations are seen in everyday interactions and practices (Kotze', 1994). It is evident from Chapter 2 that gender is a social construct that is used to distribute power, responsibility and rights as well as to justify unequal treatment amongst people. Three discourses on power can be identified in the participants' talk; each is briefly discussed in the sections below.

### **5.4.1 Participants as powerless**

In the first discourse, participants construct women in marriages as powerless. Two dominant social discourses (Christianity and culture) that continue to construct a man [husband] as having power over a woman [wife] were identified in the participants' talk. For example, the participants expressed that as women they are expected to be subservient. As a result they are not able to position themselves as having power when compared to their husbands but instead construct themselves as powerless in their marriages.

The distribution of power along gender roles is historical and has been reported in many other studies. For example, Rall (1984) found that in marriage the men make all major decisions in relation to the family, deciding even on the lifestyle to follow. In marriage a wife is placed in a less important role and her husband is constructed as a powerful figure. Even though Rall's (1984) study is almost 30 years old the participants in the current study still stated that power is given to men within marriage. This shows that despite changes in women's roles in societies and within marriages they continue to be constructed as less powerful and important within marriage. Recent research also confirms that husbands are seen as more powerful than wives and, as a result, men make major decisions in marriages while women make decisions relating to day-to-day operational issues (Bartley et al., 2005).

The participants in the study are also placed in a position that renders them dependent on their husbands for various things. For example, despite the participants' financial independence they still consult with their husbands regarding how to spend their money. Thus, despite their financial power the participants are subtle about their financial independence. The words used by the participants clearly articulate this: "I don't want him to know that I earn more than him, I just let him feel free as a husband, he'll bring whatever and I bring whatever"; "I personally do everything in the house... because I love beautiful things". By choosing to understate their financial independence the participants are continuing to construct an image of the husband as financially powerful or more powerful than the wife ("I am not able to show off my financial achievement or openly take pride in my achievements because that would be seen as if you are trying to make your husband look small"; "It's a very interesting dynamic because I find that I have to constantly

affirm his position as a husband”). In doing so the participants reproduce socially constructed identities of married women in relation to their husbands.

Although the participants are not completely happy with their less powerful status and resistance can be identified in their talk, the language they use shows that they contribute to the reproduction and legitimizing of male power and dominance in their marriages. This is reflected in the following statements: “When it comes to dealing with your husband you end up compromising your situation”; “The challenge there is to bite my tongue”; “I would not do anything without his consent because it would be read differently”; “As a professional I know how to draw the line at home”. The participants are also responsible for the co-construction of the powerless female identity.

#### **5.4.2 Participants as equally powerful**

Although the participants construct themselves as powerless they would also like to be in a power sharing position with their husbands. This is shown through the participants’ use of language. One of the participants states that “I understand that my husband is the head of the family meaning that we are partners in the running of the household and the business of the house, but then most of the time he has the ultimate say”. Other statements are: “I am the neck and he is the head, and the head cannot move without the neck”; “we are partners in the running of the family, yet my husband has the final say”. The word partner denotes someone of equal importance, yet the participants view their husbands as heads of the households. It is possible that the participants’ use of a language of equality is a form of subtle

resistance to the dominant discourses that give power to men. The subtle resistance of the exclusive power assigned to men by the dominant social discourses in marriage suggests that the participants are not able to openly express their dissatisfaction. This could be due to the possible consequences or social sanctions that they may face if they express this dissatisfaction (De la Rey, 1992; Shope, 2006).

#### **5.4.3 Participants as empowered**

The participants also construct themselves as empowered in relation to their personal identity, especially in the work context. At work the participants hold positions of power and are able to exercise that power with the men at work (“I know my males very well. I have males I interact with at work, I have a male at home, so when I am at work I become the lawyer, I know that there might be people whom I have to exercise my authority on because of my work”). By constructing themselves as empowered the participants are communicating that despite the cultural and Christian discourses that construct them as subordinate they have some level of power in other spheres of their lives. The constant reference to their empowered status is a subtle reminder that they can be as (or more) powerful as their husbands and that the dominant social construction of a husband as powerful is relative and limited to the marital institution.

It is clear from the previous sections that the participants are constantly juggling their behaviour in order to be accepted within a particular social context. In marriage the participants understand the history associated with the role of women and they make



a conscious effort to embrace the expectation. As a result the participants embrace their disempowered situation. In the next section I outline some of the reasons why the participants accept this disempowered status.

## **5.5 Fear and helplessness discourses**

Despite their desire to be treated as equal partners in marriage the participants choose to embrace the expectations set by the dominant social discourses in order for them to remain accepted members of their societies. Sullivan (2006) found that although most of the participants in his study (married women) were capable of taking positions and were aware of their power to contribute financially, they chose not to do so. Sullivan (2006) attributed this decision to the way in which gender structures how women seek influence. Thus the participants in this study frequently choose a non-demanding attitude when asking for their husbands' input and in so doing they are attentive to protecting their husbands' position. This finding is similar to the findings regarding the participants' choice to conform in order to remain accepted in their socio-cultural context. This is in agreement with Motsemme's (2002) conclusions that women choose to remain silent in order to protect themselves in patriarchal societies that expect them to remain unseen and unchallenging to males who are deemed superior to them. She argues further that Black women consciously assume secondary roles in order to avoid challenging Black men's power. Challenging this power would place Black women in opposition to societal expectation. She also states that women are socially discouraged from challenging men in order to sustain the patriarchal structure and the myth of the man as supporter, protector and provider.

According to Tajfel and Turner (1986) every individual has a need to belong and to become a member of a social group. Individuals therefore comply with certain rules in order for them to be accepted (Duncan & Ratele, 2003). This confirms the findings of this study, which are that the participants comply with societal expectations in order to achieve a sense of belonging.

SIT argues that we tend to identify with groups with whom we associate ourselves (Turner, 1982). In identifying with groups we then construct our identity according to the groups' values and norms so that we are in turn accepted by the groups. As a result of a need to belong and to be accepted the participants in this study embrace their constructed identity as married women. Failure to embrace these socially and culturally constructed norms would result in the participants experiencing rejection from society. For example, one of the participants stated in the interview that "you are bound by culture to behave in a certain way. It is about how you are brought up, you still embrace culture you don't want to be a victim". Another participant also referred to the fear of being judged for questioning and challenging culture ("in my situation I have also found that I got to compromise because of fear of being criticized").

The above discussion illustrates that while the participants are unhappy with their position in marriage they do not express their dissatisfaction due to fear ("I fear cultural discrimination"; "fear of being criticized"). The language used by the participants also suggests that their behaviour in marriage is informed by the fear of possible victimization. Women are afraid of being isolated by society or of being

viewed as defiant. As a result they do not contest the treatment received despite their dissatisfaction with this treatment.

## **5.6 The discourse of satisfaction**

Bradbury and Cobb (2003) describe satisfaction as the component of psychological well-being that reflects how people evaluate their lives as a result of their social interaction. Spouses expect to experience satisfaction in marriage (Rhyne, 1991) and this expected satisfaction is associated with issues such as power sharing, role division, sexuality and conflict resolution (McCabe, 1999).

The participants in this study stated that they are not completely satisfied in their marriages. This dissatisfaction seems to stem from the failure of marriage to acknowledge the changing position of women and the way in which marriage continues to disempower women. For example, although the participants are contributing to maintaining the standard of living in their households, they are able to play an equal role in making family decisions. This aspect of their dissatisfaction correlates with expected levels of satisfaction in relation to power sharing (McCabe, 1999).

In the previous discussions I indicated how the participants used language to subtly express their unhappiness around the ways in which they are constructed in society and in their marriages. The subtle expression of unhappiness could be a reflection of the participants' dissatisfaction around how they are constructed. The fact that the participants constantly refer to themselves as being empowered and being the 'neck'

in the running of the household indicates dissatisfaction around the dominant constructions of a married woman as less powerful and a follower in her marriage.

Some of the statements that the participants used (“I also mentally prepare myself as I am going home that leave the very assertive manager at work and be the non-assertive wife because the dynamics are very different”) suggest that they make a conscious effort to adopt a different position when they are at home. This decision is based on the fear of being victimized, as discussed in the preceding section. Sullivan (2006) found that the traditional gender hierarchy encourages partners to overlook women’s contributions. Sullivan’s (2006) study found that both women and men repeatedly speak of women’s efforts to persuade men to treat them as equal partners in marriage. He argues that this indicates how the dominant power structure continues to subtly guide the communication processes between couples.

The participants in this study did not openly express their dissatisfaction during the interviews. While this could linearly be linked to the possible fear of being sanctioned or isolated it could also reflect the fact that it is not culturally acceptable for women to state their dissatisfaction with what is prescribed by culture. This further illustrates that women are continuously being silenced by society. However, it should also be noted that the participants acknowledged that it is not possible to be fully satisfied in life, and that it is therefore also not possible to be completely satisfied in marriage.

By allowing themselves to be silenced and embracing the construction of women in marriages as dependent and less powerful the participants contribute to the

maintenance of these constructions. The participants are actively involved in maintaining socio-cultural constructions regarding the role of women in marriages. This is shown by their expressed complacency around their situation, with metaphors such as “*lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi*”<sup>2</sup> or their acceptance of the practice of *lobola*.

## 5.7 The construction of the participants’ identity in dual-career marriages

Dual-career marriage emphasizes equality at home, breaking of gender roles and egalitarian principles (Silberstein, 1992). Although the participants’ marriages easily fit the description of dual-career marriages, they also operate in a cultural context that prescribes behaviour expectations that are different to those of other women in dual-career marriages. For example, in the literature reviewed for this study women in other contexts do not seem to be expected to be submissive to their husbands (Arthur & Parker, 2004; Hardill & Watson, 2004; Larkin & Ragan, 2008). At the same time, Sullivan (2006) has provided compelling evidence of the slow rate of change in Western industrialized countries. He argues that gender change happens incrementally despite the rise in dual-career and dual-earner marriages.

However, the participants in this study have constructed a different identity to that of traditional wives in Black South African society. Traditional wives are expected to be both submissive and dependent on their husbands (Manganyi, 1973; Shope, 2006).

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<sup>2</sup> Literally translated this metaphor says that a married woman should be buried at her in-laws. Traditionally a married woman was not expected to divorce herself from her husband and her in-laws regardless of how unhappy she might be in her marriage.

Although the participants acknowledge and embrace the cultural and Christian identity of not being overly autonomous in marriage, they also describe themselves as autonomous outside of marriage and, at the very least, as equal to their marriage partners. This suggests a subtle resistance to the dominant identity, but this resistance does not go as far as constructing their identities in the same way as women in dual-career marriages in Western societies. The contradictory power discourses discussed in section 5.4 are connected to this particular construction of identity.

Previous discussions in this Chapter have focused on the participants' changing behaviour in differing contexts and on the construction of multiple roles in relation to the "I" and "me" components of the self. Social Identity theory argues that different social contexts may cause an individual to think, feel and act on different levels of the self depending on whether the context relates to the personal, family or national level of self (Turner, 1982). In addition, positioning theory argues that the self is a fluctuation of positioning (Hermans, 2001b). The participants in this study indicated that when they are at home they behave on the family level of self, while when they are at work they behave on the individual and professional level of self. This is a further illustration of how the participants contribute to maintaining the socially constructed identity of married women.

The literature review Chapter showed how the position of a married professional woman illustrates the possibility of multiple social identities. Each identity has its own expectations based on context. Thus, within a social identity a person fulfils the expectations of the different roles and by implication behaves in accordance with the

norms of a particular group and role expectation. In order to comply with social, cultural, religious and professional expectations the participants in this study have developed multiple identities that they invoke in different contexts. They are also able to move flexibly between roles. This supports the argument that the self operates on a continuum that creates a healthy balance in human functioning (O'Sullivan-Lago & Abreu, 2010).

The cultural discourse referred to in this study fosters interdependence and group consensus. Married women are therefore not expected to act independently. This is contrary to Western culture, which fosters independence. As a result married women in Western cultures tend to emphasize their individuality despite their multiple social identities (Arthur & Parker, 2004). Although the participants in this study express the need for independence, autonomy, satisfaction and equality in their marriages, they maintain separate identities in different contexts as a result of fear of social sanctions and marital discord.

The reality that the participants create is a result of the constructions they make in their interaction with other married women who behave in ways that are dictated by both the cultural and Christian discourses. Similarly Rapmund (2002) found that people's construction of their reality is consistent with the ideas of their broader social and cultural context. The understandings that the participants have around the discourses of culture and Christianity therefore construct and shape their sense of autonomy in marriage. In this way the women construct themselves as somewhat autonomous. These constructions of autonomy in marriage are associated with the social discourse of collectivism, which fosters group consensus.

The above examples illustrate that while the participants are attempting to adhere to social expectations in relation to their role as married women they also behave in ways that are typical of capable and independent people. Furthermore, the participants have constructed a position where, if they feel strongly that they need to behave in a certain manner, they are able to do so despite the dominant social discourses. For example: "If I need a dish washer and he disagrees I will buy it anyway because it is for my good"; "if I need an expensive furniture and he does not agree I will buy it anyway because I love beautiful things"; "Sometimes I even ignore the fact that he is not happy about certain things which I am happy with"; "because sometimes you even end-up becoming selfish and saying what matters is about how I feel"; "if my husband does not do things that I reasonably think I am entitled to I've got the right to I just go ahead and I do them." These sentiments could be interpreted as indicative of an emerging phenomenon in marriages in the Black community where wives are beginning to establish their assertiveness and independence and are being to contest matters about which they feel strongly.

In summary married professional women have dual identities that place different expectations on them. One identity is that of being a married woman within a cultural and Christian context while the other identity is being a professional in a society that expects them to behave in an autonomous manner. This mixture of professional status and traditional culture results in the participants operating in a different type of dual-career marriage to that described in the literature. While dual-career marriage advocates for egalitarian principles, traditional marriage within the South African context advocates for patriarchal principles. The participants integrate their different social identities by consciously adopting different behaviour in different



contexts. Although they construct themselves as empowered and autonomous within their individual self, they also construct themselves as less autonomous within their marriages. This is in keeping with what SIT defines as multiple social identities.

## **5.8 Answering the research questions**

This research aimed to identify the discourses that a sample of Black professional women in dual-career marriages use to construct marriage and their autonomy in marriage. In addition, the researched aimed to investigate how these women's construction of autonomy in turn influences their construction of marital satisfaction in their marriages. The questions that were asked in this research are:

- What discourses inform Black professional women in dual-career marriages' constructions about their marriages?
- How do they construct their autonomy in their marriages?
- How does their understanding of marriage and their construction of autonomy in their marriages inform their construction of marital satisfaction?

In relation to the first objective the study found that cultural and Christian discourses are dominant in informing the participants' constructions of marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction. The participants in this study construct their marriages in terms of traditional cultural discourses. The study further illustrates that the participants endorse the way that Christian discourses construct marriage. These discourses both expect married women to be submissive and dependent on their husbands. By accepting the social construction regarding appropriate behaviour for married women

the participants contribute to maintaining the construction of women within the Christian and cultural frameworks.

In relation to the second objective, traditional marriage gives the husband authority to decide on the lifestyle to follow and this gives the husband authority to make decisions concerning the wife's autonomy. The Christian discourse is also powerful in informing how the participants construct their autonomy. The participants construct their autonomy on two levels. On the individual level of self they construct themselves as autonomous whereas on the socio-cultural level of self they construct themselves as less autonomous.

With regards to the third objective, the participants' construction of marriage and autonomy informed their construction of marital satisfaction. For example, the participants indicated that they would like to be treated as equal to their husbands and they would like to be allowed the freedom to be independent and make independent decisions without consulting their husbands. These statements all suggest that the participants are not fully satisfied in marriage.

Although the participants are not completely satisfied in marriage they have embraced the cultural and Christian discourses regarding appropriate behaviour for married woman. This acceptance helps them to be somewhat content with what is expected of them by the dominant social discourses. The participants further acknowledge that they cannot be fully satisfied in marriage, and this is why they express some level of contentment in relation to their marriages.

## 5.9 Reflections on the study

Social constructionism and qualitative research acknowledge that the research process cannot be objective since the researcher has his or her own subjective experiences, values and beliefs. In addition, the research process is prompted by questions the researcher wishes to answer (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This study was initiated as a result of the experiences that the researcher had in her own marriage. The aim was to identify how other professional married women construct their experiences in marriage.

The researcher's experiences during her first few years of marriage to what she had anticipated when she entered the marital relationship. Having been a professional prior to marriage, the researcher expected her marriage to acknowledge this professionalism and allow her to be independent and autonomous. However, within the marriage context she found that she was expected to be submissive and dependent on her husband. In addition, she was expected to consult her husband when making decisions, even when the decision could have been taken autonomously.

During the interviews it was therefore easy for the researcher to understand and relate to the participants' constructions of marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction. Although the mutual understandings of the constructions were beneficial for both the researcher and the participants, the researcher's experiences may have limited the extent to which she probed or interrogated some of the responses from the participants. However, the mutual experiences also made it

easier for the participants to share their own experiences without fear of being judged.

For social constructionists and qualitative researchers the researcher is seen as an instrument of data collection and analysis (Gibbs, 2002). The researcher is as important as the participant in constructing meaning. However, it is also important for the researcher to remain open to how other people construct the same phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As a result despite the researcher having her own construction of marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction, she remained open to understanding how the participants constructed the same phenomenon. The interview therefore took the form of a conversation between two professional married women sharing their experiences of marriage. During the interviews the researcher would at times articulate her similar experiences when appropriate. This is in keeping with a feminist approach to research and confirms that in qualitative research the researcher is part of the construction of meaning and data collection (Matsumoto, 1996).

During the analysis of the data, although the researcher remained true to what the participants said she was also able to draw on her own experiences. As a result the analysis of the findings was relatively easy for the researcher. However, her in-depth understanding of the participants' construction could have influenced how she identified discourses and presented the findings, a limitation that will also be referred to in the next section.

## 5.10 Limitations of the study

This study used the social constructionist paradigm to make meaning of the discourses under investigation as articulated by the participants in the study. As a result the study presents the subjective experiences of participants without necessarily allowing the reader to make generalizations from the findings. While social constructionism has been applauded for its emphasis on subjectivity this subjectivity has also resulted in criticism. Critics of social constructionism argue that social constructionism presents philosophical responses to issues and fails to give concrete answers. Social constructionism is thus criticized for not providing absolute answers to issues (Ferreira et al., 1998).

Although social constructionism places emphasis on the role of the researcher as part of the construction of meaning, this is also disadvantageous as it introduces the possibility of subjectivity into the research context. For example, this research topic was informed by the experiences that the researcher herself faced as a professional woman in a dual-career marriage. As a result there is a possibility that the study did not identify all the constructions of the subject under investigation. In addition, the researcher's understanding of the experiences of the participants made it challenging for her to put the constructions clearly for the reader as she might have assumed that these constructions were easy for everyone to understand. The researcher might also have found the discourses that she wanted to find due to her subjective relationship with the topic of research.

Furthermore, the researcher was 'sensitive' to the sensitivity of the topic. This resulted in her allowing the participants to avoid issues with which they were uncomfortable. In doing so the researcher could possibly have missed important information. On reflection she identified with the pain that the participants experienced, as well as with their attempt to appear brave and fulfilled. The researcher's experience of empathy with the participants may have allowed them to share more in-depth information.

Social constructionism is further criticized because it is seen as encouraging relativism (Ferreira et al., 1998). Social constructionism views all stories as equally meaningful and this has the potential to lead to radical individualism in which there are no limits. Within this study this implies that the participants' constructions of meaning are no more valid than any other constructions that could have emerged. Social constructionist methodology is therefore not able to allow for the possibility of making inferences around common constructions. It rather allows any construction to be evaluated as meaningful.

Another criticism of the study could be that due to the methodology used in this study and the aim of the study (to understand the discourses constructed by professional women in dual-career marriages) only a few women were interviewed. As such the findings cannot be generalized to all Black South African professional women in dual-career marriages. However, the purpose of this study was not to gain generalizable findings from a representative sample of participants, but rather to identify discourses in the talk of selected Black South African women in dual-career

marriages. A theoretical framework (social constructionism) and methodology (qualitative) that were appropriate to this aim were thus chosen.

Furthermore the study only looked at a particular age group and was not broadened to include all age groups within dual-career marriages. Broadening the study to include professional women of other age groups and women who have been married for longer could have resulted in the identification of more constructions. Such possible differences would have allowed the research to draw a comparison between the different age groups in terms of the discourses under investigation.

A series of research studies conducted by Nisbett and Wilson (1977) found that higher order mental processes such as making judgements and decisions leading to voluntary actions are non-conscious. As a result they argue that what people articulate as causes or effects of their behaviour is based on prior beliefs around what happened. Therefore, if these reports happen to be correct this is not a result of what they consciously know but because a result of correct prior beliefs. It could therefore be argued that the study is further limited as analysing the participants' language may not provide access to the non-conscious reasons for their behaviour. In the same way, the participants' reports that they have voluntarily or consciously chosen to adhere to cultural dictates could also be criticised given the possibility that these decisions are not actually conscious. Therefore, followers of Nisbett and Wilson's (1977) school of thought could criticise the research findings because they are based on the participants' prior beliefs about their experiences in marriage rather than on their actual and conscious experiences. However, from a social constructionist perspective, the research findings indicate how participants in this

study constructed their experiences in marriage and it was not within the scope of this study to explore unconscious processing.

Despite the above mentioned limitations steps were taken in the study to ensure reliability and validity. During the interviews the researcher constantly checked with the participants to ensure that she understood what they said, in order to limit her own bias and interpretation. Both qualitative research and social constructionism place emphasis on understanding the phenomenon under investigation and ensuring that the researcher captures what the participants say (Miller, 2000). This is done in order to ensure that the analysis reflects what the participants are saying. The project supervisors (the late Professor Johan Schoeman and Professor Claire Wagner) also played a useful role in questioning certain aspects of the analysis. Although it was clear during the data gathering stage that by the sixth interview the data obtained was the same, the researcher continued interviewing more participants to ensure that a point of saturation was reached.

In addition, it is important to note that in qualitative research and discourse analysis the constructions or articulations of participants remain open to discussion and further analysis. While the study only presented an analysis from the researcher's viewpoint it should be borne in mind that discourse analysis is multifaceted and not every researcher will agree with the manner in which discourse analysis was conducted in this study. The findings in this study are therefore open to re-interpretation.



## 5.11 Recommendations for future research

In relation to what was discussed in the previous section and in light of the limited research conducted on dual-career marriages in South Africa, it is recommended that further research be conducted on the topic of dual-career marriages within the South African context. This study focused on one aspect of the challenges faced by professional women in dual-career marriages, the construction of autonomy and marital satisfaction, future research should explore other challenges in dual-career marriages, such as sharing of power, division of house-chores, childrearing as well as comparison of men and women's construction of dual-career marriages. This study also did not explore the possible impact that the dynamics of having children could have on how the participants construct their identity in marriage and this is something that could be explored in future research.

In conducting these studies it will also be worthwhile to use other research methods so as to enable to researchers to draw on different data and make comparisons. These methods could include quantitative research methods or a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. For example, international research that has been conducted on various topics about dual-career marriages could be conducted in South Africa to determine whether similar trends emerge. Some of the quantitative research studies recommended below could make use of data collection methods such as questionnaires with large samples to explore various topics within the field of dual-career marriages.

- The challenges and solutions of dual-career marriages at different phases of the family life cycle (Haddock, Zimmerman, Lyness & Ziemba, 1991).
- Issues that contribute to divorce with dual-career couples (Silberstein, 1992).  
In line with the findings in this research quantitative research could explore issues that impact satisfaction in couples in dual-career marriages.
- Since the study highlighted some of the coping strategies used by the participants it could be worthwhile to conduct quantitative research on adaptive strategies for dual-career couples. This research would be similar to research conducted by Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba and Curent (2001).

Furthermore, it might be beneficial for future research to compare the experiences of professionals in dual-career marriages with those of women in traditional marriages in Black South African communities to determine whether their constructions of marriage, autonomy and satisfaction vary significantly. Moreover it would be interesting to conduct a longitudinal research of married women over a period of time to investigate whether the discourses surrounding marriage change over time. Similarly, the discourses of women in different life stages could also be explored.

This study has contributed to the broader discourse and literature on dual-career marriages, especially the literature on dual-career marriages in the South African context. It will be valuable if some of the information gained in this study is used for further research with a different focus from the one in the present study. For example, traditional cultural discourse still appears to be dominant in the identity of Black South Africans. Research on dual-career marriages frequently refers to the construct of egalitarianism (Arthur & Parker, 2004; Crossfield et al., 2005;

Silberstein, 1992). Egalitarian marriages are ones where both spouses are breadwinners and where domestic chores and childrearing are shared according to aptitude and time availability (Silberstein, 1992). The principles of egalitarianism endorse that roles in marriage are constantly evolving through negotiations between spouses rather than being prescribed and fixed. The findings of this research suggest that the principles of egalitarianism are not currently applicable in the South African context. It might therefore be worthwhile to specifically research how the construct of egalitarianism is constructed by South Africans in dual-career marriages.

The study also highlighted that despite the empowered status of women in dual-career marriages these women adopt identities at home that contradict this position. Future research should explore the coping strategies used by women in dual-career marriages. This research may contribute towards empowering other women in similar situations with the skills to cope.

## **5.12 Concluding remarks**

The current study identified Christian and cultural discourses as dominant in constructing the participants' views of marriage. Both these discourses construct a married woman as powerless and expect her to be submissive to her husband. While the participants embrace and contribute to the construction of married women as submissive, they also subtly construct themselves as empowered. The participants' construction of themselves as empowered is an illustration that they resist the dominant construction of a wife as submissive. The study also found that

this resistance is expressed subtly due to fear of being rejected by society and marital discord.

Overall, it was found that the participants in the study viewed themselves as powerless in some instances. However, at other times they viewed themselves as equally powerful or even empowered. This relates well to the multiple constructions of self as outlined in the discussion on SIT.

The participants in the study also present two different identities. The one identity is the identity of being a married woman and the other identity is that of being a professional person in the work context. The two identities are associated with contradictory behavioural expectations; as professional women the participants are expected to be independent while as wives they are expected to be submissive. This study found that the participants make conscious efforts in their daily interactions to adapt their behaviour to suit the context within which they operate at a given point in time. As a result the participants construct themselves as both autonomous and less autonomous depending on the context within which they operate at a given time in their daily interactions.