

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1. Introduction

This thesis presents findings from a qualitative research study that was conducted with Black professional women in dual career marriages. It highlights the ways in which the participants in the study talk about marriage, autonomy and satisfaction in their marriages and the discourses that inform their talk.

In this introductory Chapter the rationale for this study is explained and an overview of the thesis is provided. The Chapter starts off by presenting the context within which this study was conducted as well as the researcher's background. This is followed by definition of terms that are commonly used in the thesis. It then proceeds to explain the rationale and objectives of the study. The theoretical background used in this study, social constructionism, is briefly outlined. Finally, an overview of the way in which the study was conducted is provided.

#### 1.2. Context of the study

In this section the context of this study is provided to provide the reader with the background that informed the research. This section includes information regarding the academic rationale as well as the researcher's background. The discussion of the academic context provides some insight into the work that has been conducted

internationally on the subject of dual career marriages and it further articulates the gaps that still exist within the South African literature with regards to dual career marriages. In line with the research methodology and the concept of reflexivity, the researcher's background is presented to provide the reader with some background information that contributed to the initiation of this study.

### **1.2.1 Academic rationale**

The institution of marriage has undergone many changes in recent years (Carlson & Sperry, 1991; Rall, 1984) and it is continuing to evolve in accordance with the changing dynamics within which marriages operate (Arthur & Parker, 2004; Larkin & Ragan, 2008). The involvement of women in paid labour has significantly impacted on traditional family structures (Haddock, Zimmarman, Ziena & Current, 2001; Jano & Naidoo, 2002). Almost two decades ago Silberstein (1992) commented that in the span of a single generation the family in which both parents work outside the home has gone from being an exception to being a rule. The increase in the number of women in the workplace has introduced a shift from traditional marriages to dual earner and dual career marriages. These marriage types challenge cultural norms about family configuration, gender roles and decision making (Williams, 2000). These changes sparked interest amongst researchers and initiated a body of research concerning the institution of marriage.

International literature on dual career marriages focuses on understanding or exploring role conflict (Kiger & Riley, 2000; Larkin & Ragan, 2008; Mackinnon, 1983), role sharing and marital satisfaction in dual career marriages (Baskin, 2002;

Silberstein, 1992), gender expectations (McLanahan & Walley, 2005); marital quality (Al-Krenawi & Lev-Wessel, 1999; Betchen, 2006), stress (Baskin, 2002; Puckin, 1990), decision making (Baucon, Burnett, Esptein, Rankin-Esquer & Sandin, 2002) equality (Quek & Knudson-Martin, 2008), and autonomy in dual career marriages (Ozzie & Harriet, 2002). Furthermore, a lot of research has focused on the negative impacts of dual career marriages such as divorce in dual career marriages and increased marital dissatisfaction (Carlson & Sperry, 1991; Silberstein, 1992). Recently research has also focused on the impact of dual career marriage on traditional values and the changing expectations of women in marriages (Arthur & Parker, 2004; Baloyi, 2007; Bartley, Blanton & Gilliard, 2005; Higgins & Duxbury, 1992; Mawere & Mawere, 2010; Mbatha, 2011).

Silberstein (1992) argued that women's pursuit of careers may introduce complications to their marriages as a result of the expectation that these women should break gender roles in families and lead the way towards equality at home, just as they do in the industrial world. The literature suggests that dual career marriages are contributing significantly to increased marital dissatisfaction and stress on spouses (Carlson & Sperry, 1991).

Baskin (2002) found that wives in dual career marriages tend to be more inner directed (i.e. they act on their own personal value systems in leading their lives) rather than focused on societal expectations and value systems. These women frequently break gender norms and this tends to create strain in marriages (Silberstein, 1992). More recent research has found that dual career marriages face the challenge of sharing power in a manner that is acceptable for both partners

(Coverman, 2001). In addition, Greef and Malherbe (2001) found that despite the increasing norm of women's employment and the expectation that women should contribute to the family's financial situation, traditional social assumptions about gender roles continue to enshroud many of society's attitudes.

This study is informed by the observable changes in marriages amongst Black South Africans. In the past traditional marriages were the norm amongst Black South Africans and within this marriage structure the husband was the breadwinner in the family and the wife was the caregiver at home (Shope, 2006). In traditional marriages a woman is expected to be submissive and dependent on her husband (Manganyi, 1973; Shope, 2006). However, the industrial period has seen women entering the labour market, which has resulted in the dilution of the traditional role expectations of husband as providers and wives as caregivers. Women are no longer financially dependent on their husbands, they are self-sufficient and contribute equally to the successful maintenance of their families (De Bruin, 2000). Their financial independence, level of education and powerful position in the workplace allow women the opportunity to make autonomous choices and decisions. However, despite these opportunities and their empowerment in the workplace, professional women find themselves in marital relationships where cultural expectations still dominate (Naidoo & Jano, 2002; Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). These different social contexts present differing and conflicting expectations around how these women should construct their behaviour.

Within the work environment the professional woman is expected to behave in an independent, assertive, challenging manner (Harvey, Napier & Moeller, 2009) and to

demonstrate self-efficacy (Birchall, Hee & Gay, 1995). However, within the home environment the same woman is expected to behave in a submissive manner and to carry the roles and responsibilities that are traditionally associated with the role of a woman in the family (Frans, Schurink & Fourie, 2006; Hoza, 2010; Kambarami, 2006; Naidoo & Jano, 2003; Shope, 2006; Ssali, 2006). Such expectations are not aligned to the changing roles of women in marriages where most women are in full time paid jobs and where women are also contributing significantly to the economic survival of many families (Arthur & Parker, 2004; Crossfield, Jones & Kinman, 2005). These expectations in turn reduce the construction of women as equal partners in marriage.

Conflicting expectations make dual-career marriages an interesting topic of research, particularly in a society where dominant cultural customs still prevail (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010; Heeren, Jemmott, Tyler, Tshabe & Ngwane, 2011). South Africa is a diverse society with multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual attributes. It is a country that has a rich history, a history that has contributed to how people of this society construct their lives, their identities, their behaviours and their world-views. This study made use of this diverse context by choosing a sample from the wide population that could be experiencing similar challenges. The target population for this study was Black women who have professional careers.

Although both Africa in general and South Africa in particular are diverse societies certain experiences and common beliefs are shared by different groups of people. The sample used in this research study was chosen based on their common identity, which is African, Black women who are professionals in a specific marriage context.

Nwoye (2006) argues that Africanity is based on the sharing of similar experiences of the world as well as the dissemination of cultural traits. Nwoye further argues that in traditional African societies individuals operate within a community and one's identity is largely influenced by sharing and acknowledging cultural principles. He also suggests that the communal identification comes with multiple obligations and loyalties. For example, amongst Black South Africans in particular, there are cultural practices relating to marriage, which will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections. These cultural practices can be seen as socially constructed loyalties to which people adhere.

It is therefore not surprising that although research conducted at the beginning of the twenty-first century anticipated that the female labour force in South Africa would continue to grow significantly as young women become more career-oriented and aspire for higher educational status (Johnson & Mortimer, 2000) and financial independence (Brink & De la Rey, 2001), research also found that despite the aspirations to be career-oriented and financially independent, young South African women still feel obligated to maintain cultural values and norms (Johnson & Mortimer, 2000).

The author acknowledges that identities are always constructed and reconstructed and that, in the process of reconstructing our respective identities, every individual is faced with a variety of choices from which to select. This is also relevant to Black South Africans who, through integrating and engaging with people of other cultural groups, are faced with options to adopt different identities at different times (Miller, 1994). Although the individual identity of Black South Africans continues to be

transformed and recreated, the 'cultural' identity, which is shaped by tradition, seems to hold and remain relatively stable. Cultural marriage practices are an example of this traditional system that has remained relatively stable in the process of reconstructing identities. This 'cultural' identity provides a frame of reference and meaning for Black South Africans (Rudwik, 2006). This 'cultural' identity is discussed further in section 1.7.

In the next section the researcher's background is presented in order to further describe the context in which this study was formulated. The researcher's background is presented in the form of a first person narrative instead of a third person narrative.

### **1.2.2 Background of the researcher**

This study was conducted by a professional Black woman in a dual career marriage who has faced challenges in the traditional marital arrangement. My status as an educated young woman allowed me to have dreams, and to aspire to be independent and successful, not only in my career but also in my marital and social life. I was raised by a single professional mother (following the death of my father when I was five years old) and I was taught to be independent and self-sufficient. My mother is a very independent, extremely hardworking woman who dedicated herself to the success of her children.

The nature of my profession is such that I am expected to function independently and autonomously. I found these qualities to be incompatible with the expectations

within my marriage. Within my marital context I was expected to be dependent, and to be cautious of how I behave. I was therefore not fully autonomous within the context of my marriage. In my marriage I am also expected to lose my sense of power and authority to my spouse. As a result I found myself constantly feeling caged and feeling that my autonomy was taken away from me and this was frustrating.

My identity had previously been largely defined by my professional status (I was a professional before I got married). I was accustomed to being independent in every aspect of my life. I had the autonomy to be and to do what I wanted, when I wanted without consulting with anyone else. When my marriage expected me to be dependent, I felt that it was interfering with my right to be an autonomous individual.

As a professional woman, I understood my rights and I saw myself as an equal partner in marriage. I also did not see myself as a traditional wife. I was working and sharing equally (expected but voluntarily) towards the maintenance of the household. As a result I found it difficult to assume behaviour associated with that of a traditional wife, as would be expected by my culture.

The first few years of my marriage were characterized by the constant power struggle and my attempts to maintain my own identity. Based on the demands set by 'culture' and Christianity, I found myself conforming to social expectations through my behaviour.



Although I would behave independently and with high levels of autonomy within my work environment, I adapted my behaviour within my marital context. My experiences taught me that a 'successful' definition of the self should take into account the context within which one operates. I learned to embrace the multiple social identities I faced and to behave according to the different roles. This implied continuously juggling roles and this adaptation has led to greater acceptance and a sense of personal well-being.

My personal experiences sparked my interest in exploring the subject of autonomy in dual career marriages. I was interested in understanding how women who have similar identities to mine construct their experiences. I hoped to give voice to women in dual career marriages and to contribute towards literature around this topic.

### **1.3. Rationale and objectives for the study**

Considerable effort has been made internationally to research the experiences of people in dual-career marriages (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). However, there is still some a paucity of literature within South Africa in relation to dual career marriages. This paucity has been noted by various researchers while exploring this topic (Naidoo & Jano, 2002; Puckrin, 1990; Whitehead & Kotze, 2003). Most of the emerging literature in South Africa on dual-career marriages has been published in the field of industrial psychology. This research tends to focus on the impact of this marriage type on women in leadership roles (Booyesen, 2000), as well as coping strategies, role salience and coping mechanisms for professional women (Naidoo &

Jano, 2003), career and life balance (Brink & De la Rey, 2001; De Bruin, 2000; Whitehead & Kotze, 2003) and role attitudes (Dimati, 1997).

The current research explored the ways in which professional women in dual career marriages where customary or traditional customs still dominate construct their experiences of marital satisfaction and autonomy. In this thesis the researcher presents the discourses that professional women in dual career marriages use to construct marriage, their autonomy in marriage and the ways in which their construction of autonomy in turn informs their construction of marital satisfaction.

Given the scarcity of literature in South Africa on dual career marriages it is hoped that the findings shared in this thesis will expand researchers' understanding of the experiences of professional women in dual-career marriages. In addition, it is hoped that the thesis will provide some insight regarding the specific population's endeavour to make sense of their situation. It is further hoped that the insights gained from this study will assist in developing therapeutic programmes for clinicians dealing with marital issues.

This study also aims to give a voice to women who are traditionally silenced under the practice of patriarchy. It is not uncommon for Black South African women's experiences and voices to be neglected or marginalized (Motsemme, 2002). Motsemme describes ways in which patriarchy plays a role in belittling and silencing women and she illustrates how, as a result of fear of being victimized; the participants in her study chose to remain invisible and silent in order to protect themselves and to satisfy the expectations of others. Silence for women in the

patriarchal system becomes the voice of self-protection (Motsemme, 1999). In addition, silence can be seen as a way of seeking acceptance and a sense of belonging.

#### **1.4. Research questions**

As indicated in the preceding discussions South Africa is a diverse society and as a result it is probable that a universal construction of experiences does not exist. With this consideration this study centred on the experiences of a particular social sub-group, that of Black South Africans. Black South Africans as a sub-group in society have their own ways of doing things, they operate within customs that have been passed on from one generation to the next (Shope, 2006). Their construction of their experiences is based on factors such as their historical, personal, cultural, social and educational experiences (Mare, 2001).

This research explored some of the challenges experienced by women in dual-career marriages where traditional norms regarding women's behaviour within marriage still prevail. The questions raised in this research were:

- 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?

## 1.5. Theoretical framework

The topic of marriage can be investigated or researched from multiple theoretical backgrounds. These perspectives include, amongst others, cognitive theory, systemic theory, and socio-cultural theories. In this thesis the researcher chose to use social constructionist theory.

Social constructionism is concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain or account for the world in which they live (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). It has its roots in post-modern and post-structuralist frameworks. Both post-modernism and post-structuralism emerged in reaction to the notion of an absolute truth and an objective reality. These theoretical frameworks argue that knowledge, truth and reality are contextual (Becvar & Becvar, 2000) and that there are different views of reality and truth (Gergen, 1999). Chapter 2, section 2.3 and sub section 2.2.3, provides more background and discussions around the concepts of modernism, structuralism, post-modernism and post-structuralism.

In accordance with the principles of post-modernism and post-structuralism, social constructionism attempts to present findings as one of the multiple views around which the investigated issues could be articulated. The social constructionist framework was found relevant to this study as it fits well with the purpose of this research, which is to provide a perspective concerning the ways in which Black professional women in dual career marriages construct autonomy and how their constructions inform their perceptions of marital satisfaction. The findings are not presented as absolute truth, but as one of the multiple ways in which the investigated

issues could be construed. In this study social constructionism was used to identify discourses around marriage and autonomy in dual career marriages and to further understand how these discourses inform women's construction of their identities in this context.

These constructions were by using discourse analysis, which focuses on examining how people use language to construct versions of their own world. It is clear therefore that the theoretical framework and the analysis in this study supported each other. Both social constructionism and discourse analysis are concerned with examining and understanding the processes through which people construct meaning and their behaviour.

The topic of investigation and the main theoretical framework are also closely linked to feminist theories. Although the study did not adopt a feminist approach it did touch on women's issues, power relations and patriarchy. For this reason a high level discussion of a feminist framework was deemed necessary, and this is included in the theoretical section of the thesis.

## **1.6. Research approach**

In this section the research design, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, is introduced. This study used a qualitative research methodology since the aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation. Leedy (2000) described qualitative research as useful in answering questions about any

phenomena that aim to describe and understand the phenomena from the participants' point of view.

Data was collected by means of unstructured interviews with 11 participants. The aim of using unstructured interviews was to allow the participants to guide the direction of the research instead of using pre-formulated questions to guide the research process. All participants had been married between two and five years at the time they were interviewed. In addition, their husbands all held senior positions in their work environments. The participants are professionals and most of them are in senior positions at work.

Discourse analysis was used to make sense of the constructions of the participants. Discourse analysis is an approach that explores the underlying meaning and motivation behind a text (Parker, 1992). A discourse is referred to as the conversations and the meanings behind the conversations as understood and articulated by a group of people (Parker, 1992). According to Forrester, Ramsden and Reason (1997) Foucault argued that a discourse consists of acceptable statements made by a certain type of community such as people who share similar thoughts and ideas. The constructions that were articulated in this research were analyzed using discourse analysis in order to understand the meanings behind these constructions. Through using the discourse analysis approach the researcher endeavoured to explore how the participants construct marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction in relation to the broader social discourses about marriage.

## **1.7. Definition of terms/key constructs/concepts**

This study contains certain key concepts and constructs. Although these constructs are discussed in detail in Chapter 2, they are briefly introduced in this early Chapter of the thesis to allow the reader to make sense of what is presented in the subsequent Chapters.

### **1.7.1 Black South African**

Mare (2001) found that when people are asked to classify themselves, they tend to instantly use racial identity as a classification. It is argued that the attention that is placed on race globally has made people increasingly conscious about their own and others' race (Mare, 2001; Telles, 2002).

In South Africa this emphasis on race is not surprising given our Apartheid history, which placed emphasis on racial classification for the purposes of enforcing and maintaining Apartheid laws (Telles, 2002). Racial categorization in South Africa is one of the salient identity constructs used to assign people into group membership (Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). This racial identity is typically informed by the colour of an individual's skin.

Under the Apartheid regime the South African population was classified and categorized into four major racial classifications, namely White, Black, Coloured and Indian (Jano & Naidoo, 2002; Mare, 2001). Since the inception of the democratic government in 1994 legislative changes designed to address past racial discrimination and promote the equality and upliftment of the historically

disadvantaged people of South Africa (for example, the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998 and the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 53 of 2003) have resulted in a different construction around the racial classification of people in South Africa (Lewis, 2001). These acts define 'Black' South Africans as all previously disadvantaged groups – Africans, Coloureds, Indians – with the term Africans referring to the group historically classified as Black. However, It should be noted that these legislative classifications are context bound and the socio-historical racial classification is still dominant (Mare, 2001). These different constructions suggest that the definition of Black using historic racial classifications cannot be universally adopted.

In this study, an ethnic definition is adopted as it encompasses a holistic construction or classification of people. Ethnicity refers to a group of people who share a common history, background, who may be identifiable through their sharing of similar physical features, who through the process of interacting with each other identify themselves as a member of the group, and where similar cultural practices are shared and transmitted (Pinderhughes, 1989; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000; Smith, 1991; Waters & Eschbach, 1995). It is argued that people can be of the same racial group but have different ethnicities (Alba, 1990).

### **1.7.2 Culture**

Anthropologists agree that the construct of culture is extremely difficult to define (Eriksen, 2009). These difficulties are discussed further in Chapter 2. A definition of culture includes the view that culture represents customs, belief systems,



behaviours, and ‘traditions’ or ways of life of a particular group of people (Billington, Strawbridge, Greensides & Fitzsimons, 1991). Others argue that culture is constructed through interaction between individuals or a group of individuals and is learned through the process of enculturation (Hofstede, 1991; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). For example, the practice of lobola (which is discussed in Chapter 2) is a result of customs, beliefs and ways of doing things that are associated with a particular group of people in society. In Chapter 2 a detailed discussion around the social construct of culture is provided.

### **1.7.3 Marriage**

Marriage practices differ around the world and from society to society and as a result there is no universal definition of the concept of marriage (Hosegood, McGrath & Moultrie, 2009). However, marriage is commonly defined as a legal unification of two or more individuals, through which sexual and parental rights are legitimated (Billington et al., 1991; Crapo, 1996). There are different types of marriages; in South Africa the two legally recognized marriage types are the civil marriage and the customary marriage (Bunlender, Chobokoane & Simelane, 2004). According to Bunlender et al. (2004) while there are the two legally recognized types of marriage the social definitions of marriage do not always match the legal definitions; people construct or attach meaning to the construct of marriage in multiple ways.

#### **1.7.4 Dual-career marriage**

As pioneers of the concept of dual-career marriages Rapoport and Rapoport (1978) defined a dual-career marriage as a family structure in which both the husband and wife pursue careers while simultaneously maintaining family life. Partners in dual-career marriages tend to emphasize occupation as the primary source of personal fulfilment (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1978). The roles held by the spouses in dual-career marriages require continuous development and thus a high degree of commitment (Rosin, 1990). The spouses in dual-career marriages are referred to as heads of the household (Mackinnon, 1983; McLellan & Uys, 2009; Rosin, 1990).

#### **1.7.5 Autonomy**

The term autonomy is associated with being independent, self-sufficient and self-governed (Boni, 2002) and is defined as the extent to which an individual or a group of individuals have control over their own lives as well as having the authority to make independent decisions (Olubukola, 2008). Various psychological theories have emphasised the importance of the qualities of independence, self-sufficiency and self-actualization (Kagitcibasi, 2005). For example, psychoanalytic theory regards being autonomous as key to human development (Poortinga, 1992) while self-determination theory sees autonomy as one of the basic needs of human well-being, in addition to relatedness and competence (Sheldon & Gunz, 2009). From the social constructionist perspective the construction of the self as autonomous relates to the extent to which individuals 'define' their interactions with others as well as defining how they perceive themselves relative to others. Such a construction is

closely linked to the concept of identity. This discussion of autonomy is furthered in Chapter 2, section 2.7.

## **1.8. Outline of Chapters**

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 introduces the concepts of autonomy, marriage and marital satisfaction by referring to the literature on these three discourses and summarizing previous research on dual-career marriages. Chapter 2 also provides the theoretical background to the study. Chapter 3 presents a description of the research process and the stages of the research process. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study in detail while Chapter 5 provides an integration of the findings with the theoretical framework and literature reviewed. Chapter 5 also concludes the study by presenting a summary of the overall research, stating the limitations of the research and providing recommendations for future research.

## **1.9. Conclusion**

This Chapter has provided a synopsis of the thesis by highlighting some of the previous research on dual-career marriages. In doing so the Chapter briefly stated how this thesis will contribute to the broader literature on dual-career marriages, both in South Africa and internationally. The Chapter also reflected on the challenges that the researcher faced in her marriage and how these challenges served as the instigating factor for this research project.

In Chapter 2 a detailed background for the study is provided in terms of the discourses of marriage, autonomy and marital satisfaction. This is done by reflecting on the literature around dual-career marriages. Chapter 2 also discusses the theoretical framework used in this study.