

LOVE IN JOZI

THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS,
LOVE AND INTIMACY IN
JOHANNESBURG

GRACE KHUNOU





Love in Jozi

The Black Middle Class, Love and
Intimacy in Johannesburg

Grace Khunou (Ed)



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Foreword

In 2017, during my Fulbright year in South Africa, I had the extraordinary privilege of collaborating with the editor and several authors of this groundbreaking work. *The Black Middle Class, Love, and Intimacy in Jozi* is more than an academic text—it is a profound exploration of human experience that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

At its core, this book illuminates the intricate landscape of relationships, societal expectations, and personal aspirations within Johannesburg's Black middle class. Through nuanced research and compelling narratives, the authors draw meaningful connections between individual experiences and broader demographic and cultural trends.

Each chapter provides a deep, thoughtful exploration of topics such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and the intersectionality of these identities. Written with remarkable accessibility and scholarly rigor, the book invites readers from diverse backgrounds to engage with complex social dynamics. The narratives are at once intimate and analytical, revealing the multifaceted nature of love, intimacy, and relationships in contemporary Black middle-class life.

Beyond academic discourse, this work represents a significant contribution to our understanding of identity, social transformation, and personal resilience. By exploring the evolving dynamics of relationships in Johannesburg, the authors invite readers to reflect on how societal changes shape individual lives and how Black middle-class experiences continually redefine success, connection, and community in our global context.

The Black Middle Class, Love, and Intimacy in Jozi is not just a book—it is a bridge between personal story and collective understanding.

Kris Marsh

University of Maryland, College Park

Author Bios

Grace Khunou is a Professor of Sociology and is currently Director of Scholarship Change in the Department of Leadership and Transformation at the University of South Africa. She writes creatively and academically and has published peer-reviewed journals, book chapters and research reports. These include her edited books *The Emergent Middle Class* (2015); *Black Academic Voices: The South African Experience* (2019) which won the NHISS 2020 non-fiction award; and *Does the Black Middle Class Exist and Are We Members? Reflections from a Research Team* (2020). She has also co-edited four journal special issues. Her most recent edited book is with UJ Press (2024) and is titled *Transforming Higher Education Scholarship: After Covid-19 and in the Context of the 4th Industrial Revolution*.

Lesego Linda Plank is currently a Researcher at the Chief Albert Luthuli Research Chair at the University of South Africa (UNISA). She is also pursuing her PhD which focuses on Black motherhood at the University of Johannesburg. In 2018, she was a visiting emerging scholar at the University of Maryland in the US. Ms Plank is also a co-author of the book entitled: *Does the Black Middle Class Exist and Are We Members* (2020). Her research interests are in studying the Black African society from a Decolonial standpoint. Ms Plank has published articles and has presented her papers in various academic conferences. Ms. Plank composes and performs poetry as a methodological tool and a means of unleashing her creativity. As part of her engaged scholarship, in 2020 she founded the GrassRootFamily (GRF) initiative, a crowdfunding project designed to offer various forms of support to the youth in various communities.

Puleng Kaziboni is presently a Director of Petoskey Contractors; a company specializing in construction and logistics. She is also the Director of Sticky BBQ a fast food restaurant. Between the years 2020-2023 she worked as a Researcher at the Human Science Research Council. Whereby her research pursuits were focused on Women, Peace and Security and Gender Based Violence. In addition, Puleng, is a teacher by profession

teacher. She has worked at Curro Kings College. Her early career began at the University of Johannesburg where she was lecturing Language in Economic Science. Her highest obtained educational qualification is a Masters in Sociology. She is presently reading towards a Doctorate in Sociology with the University of Free-State.

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Author Bios

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Introduction

The Black Middle Class Love and Intimacy

Grace Khunou 

University of South Africa 

There is hardly any activity, any enterprise, which is started with such tremendous hopes and expectations, and yet which fails so regularly, as love. (Fromm, cited in Lee 1976:401)

Although it has been difficult for researchers to speak with one voice about the conception of class, in particular, Black middle-classness (Khunou 2015), the concept has, however, been important in providing us with a sense of who the Black middle class is and how its members go about their everyday lives. This has been particularly important in South Africa, given the growth of the Black middle class since 1994. Most recently, the anthology, *Black tax: Burden or ubuntu*, edited by Mhlongo (2019), has attempted to unpack the everyday subjective experiences of the South African Black middle class, illustrating how, up to the present time, historical inequality has remained a feature of contemporary Black family experiences. Mhlongo's (2019) anthology also shows how remittances, expectations, and lingering ideas of reciprocal care convolute links between working-class and middle-class family members. Most importantly, studies of class and the Black middle class have been edifying for understanding the language of class (Phadi & Ceruti 2013), precarity (Khunou 2015), and mobility (Krige 2014) and have facilitated an understanding of the political sphere in terms of voting patterns and the contradictory actions of the state (Burger, McAravey & Van der Berg 2015; Southall 2016).

Over and above this, most studies of the Black middle class focus on issues of mobility and on residential areas (Crankshaw

1997, 2008; Krige 2014). This includes the effects of government policy on the growth of the Black middle class and questions of distribution and redistribution (Ndletyana 2014). In 2013, Alexander *et al* published an award-winning study focusing on class experiences in Soweto which illustrates the significance of subjective measures in conceptions of the Black middle class. The chapter by Phadi and Ceruti (2013) foregrounds the compelling idea that subjective conceptions of class-belonging are influenced by one's social network; that is, that individuals define their class position in relation to those with whom they compare themselves. Southall's (2016) interest in the composition and character of the post-apartheid Black middle class also represents a much-needed turning point in social science studies of this group. All of these studies make remarkable and relevant contributions to our understanding of the Black middle class in South Africa.

The particular interest in this volume, however, is the themes of gender and intimacy in relation to the Black middle class. For example, although a study such as Alexander *et al* (2013) makes a relevant and lasting contribution to our comprehension of this class, it fails to foreground gender analysis in elucidations of middle-class experiences. This is true of many other studies of class, such as Ndletyana (2014), Southall (2016), and Melber (2017). These studies foreground the objective measures of middle-classness but do not use middle-classness to examine intimacy or to unpack how societal gendering of experience inevitably genders the middle-class experience. This then makes manifest certain gaps in our knowledge. It is these identified gaps in our knowledge of the Black middle class that have influenced the central issue addressed in this volume: how the Black middle class constitutes and maintains intimate relationships.

The literature on the experiences of Black¹ people in South Africa and Black Africans in particular, is inclined to paint a grim

1 In this book, the term Black is taken from Biko's definition of the Black experience in South Africa and includes those designated Coloured, Indian, and African. As articulated by Gordon (2021:84), this conception was meant to reflect "the reality of their political situation", a situation that has not changed considerably since 1994. This idea is further elaborated in the introductory chapter of *Black Academic Voices: The South African Experience* (Khunou *et al*

picture of their lives, including their intimate lives. Studies of intimacy tend to focus exclusively on the challenges of intimate-partner violence (Hunter 2010; Jewkes *et al* 2010) or Black people's inability to marry (Posel, Rudwick & Casale 2011; Rudwick & Posel 2013). The common denominator in these investigations is that they are devoted to gender inequality in the context of intimacy. Specifically, these studies capture the ways in which poverty restricts Black Africans' ability to experience stable intimate relationships and home lives. Accordingly, the question of whether income, education, and professional security create the necessary conditions for stability within the intimate lives of the Black middle-class cohort gives this study impetus and bearing. In other words, the question that is brought to bear here is as follows: To what extent do the material resources that come with the promise of middle-class life sustain the intimate relations of the Black middle class? Given that my previous work on this class reveals that the Black middle-class position is precarious (Khunou 2015a, 2015b), the answer to this question cannot be straightforward. This precarity has been confirmed in other works, including Southall (2016) and, more recently, in the *Black tax* anthology edited by Mhlongo (2019).

In view of Posel *et al*'s (2011) contention that unemployment and underemployment contribute to low marriage rates among Black people, it is worth investigating the Black middle class's experiences of intimacy, both generally and in marriage settings. Given Posel *et al*'s (2011) postulation, does it then follow that marriage rates and perceptions of their intimate relationships by the Black middle class are more stable? The chapters by Kaziboni and by De Mendonca and Khunou provide us with a sense of the experiences of married Black middle-class women. Another question of interest here concerns how the middle-class position influences intimacy – all the chapters in this volume provide some preliminary ideas concerning this question. The ultimate question of interest in this volume is how the stable – or shaky – middle-class position facilitates the firmness or precarity of marriage and intimate relationships for Black people. In a study by Dickson

2019) which emphasises the idea of continued engineering of these categories in the post-colonial state.

and Marsh (2008) in the USA, a certain cohort of the Black middle class is argued to have remained single and childless, suggesting a fruitful line of enquiry regarding whether this phenomenon emerges in the South African context. In this vein, the chapter by Plank focuses on the experiences of single Black middle-class women from Soweto and sheds light on their experiences.

Another important premise in this volume is that, even though class is fundamental in facilitating an understanding of social relations in society, because social relations are dynamic, it is better to examine social life from multiple angles. It is for this reason that the as yet under-researched areas of gender and intimacy in relation to class are used as lenses for exploring the themes encountered in the chapters that follow. In as much as this introduction acknowledges existing thinking and research, it is the contention of this author that theorising should always consider those who are being studied, their context, how they think about their experiences – and how these multiple senses help us reimagine the conceptual frameworks we have used in the past. Such thinking frames how the chapters of this book are presented and the readings of the interview material that are the basis for analysing the key themes presented here.

Notwithstanding the challenges in conceptualising the Black middle class, in this book, both subjective self-identification and objective measures were used to identify the participants for the study and to analyse the findings. Subjective measures include self-identification (Alexander *et al* 2013; Phadi & Ceruti 2011), the location of the neighbourhood in which participants live (Crankshaw 2005; Khunou *et al* 2019; Krige 2012), and their lifestyle and values (Khunou *et al* 2019; Krige 2012). Objective measures that are examined in order to be able to compare the circumstances of participants include income, education, and occupation (Melber 2016). The use of objective or subjective measures alone may be critiqued as being too limited, particularly as the intention in undertaking the analyses in this volume is to provide a comprehensive examination of the experiences of Black middle-classness. This limitation is especially relevant where racial, historical, and/or global comparisons are intended (Khunou *et al* 2019).

In Alexander *et al* (2013), we see the considered use of both subjective and objective measures of class; this is important for addressing the limits of the individual measures. In the chapters in this book, both measures are used. The subjective self-identification measures were used to identify the participants for the studies presented here, and the objective measures to facilitate analysis of findings. Of interest is how, in terms of their income, education, and profession, differentially positioned individuals think about middle-classness and experience everyday life, in particular, love and intimacy.

The studies informing the chapters in this book were undertaken before the Covid-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding this, what emerges from the findings foregrounds some of the issues relating to the socio-economic strain that was a consequence of the pandemic. Given the impact of the pandemic on social, political, and, most importantly, economic life, some of the chapters address how the Black middle-class position shifted as a result, and how this impacted on the precarity of this position – and thus how those who identify as middle class had to redefine their desires and intimate lives.

A Brief Overview of the Chapters in this Volume

The chapters in this volume present evidence from research that illustrate how gender, class, race, and sexuality converge in the making of experiences of intimacy. The first chapter provides a conceptual discussion of middle-classness and intimacy to set the scene for those that follow. The focus of Chapter 1 is shaped by research on the broader themes of intimacy and middle-classness, with a particular interest on the Black middle class.

Chapters 2 to 4 delve into further detail with regard to various challenges related to Black middle-classness, focusing on the complexities and contestations in the intimate lives of women. Of particular interest in these three chapters is that they illustrate the heterogeneity of the experiences of Black women and provide the reader with a glimpse into the dynamics of Black women's lives. For example, in Chapter 2, Kaziboni demonstrates how Black middle-class women in heterosexual marriages

struggle to achieve work, life, and study balance. Furthermore, she reveals that these women experience ambivalence about their professional mobility, particularly because their husbands and society perceive them to be deficient as spouses. These women are perceived in this manner because most of them invest in educational attainment and work success rather than in fulfilling a family role. Kaziboni also grapples with the notion of a double gender standard in terms of which the professional success of women and men is accorded differential meaning as the middle-class mobility of women challenges normative gender roles. The chapter further foregrounds the fact that unmet expectations set by women and men for men to be providers and those set by men and women for women to be homemakers trigger marital conflict.

In Chapter 3, Plank discusses the experiences of single Black middle-class women. Although we see some convergence with the issues Kaziboni examines, the difference here is that singleness is perceived to be problematic, thus marking these women as lacking. Plank looks specifically at the perceptions and experiences of intimacy and middle-classness of single Black middle-class women from Soweto. Plank highlights the contradiction between the promise of class mobility and gendered expectations. She illustrates how Black women must deal with the double standard of patriarchy and capitalism. The findings in this chapter show how the social mobility of Black women leads to challenges in finding a 'suitable' partner. This explains how the conundrum of the patriarchal, capitalist South African context, in which gender roles for men are linked to earning an income and, for women, to nurturing, makes economically mobile women ineligible for intimate association. Plank concludes that, in the context of increasing levels of unemployment for men, the social mobility of women will have long-term implications for marriage and the creation of 'normal' families.

In Chapter 4, De Mendonca and Khunou examine the experiences of married Black middle-class women. Although they echo some of the arguments put forth by Kaziboni, the chapter shows how, in this case, the double standard is experienced when women who earn more than men struggle to provide for the latter. The chapter also illustrates how the breadwinner role, and its

general ascription to men, occasions an identity crisis for high-earning women who also struggle with the idea of providing for their low-income husbands. When high-earning women insist on being supported by their husbands, it raises the question of what the empowerment of women really means. The contexts in which these women find themselves makes it difficult for them to easily assume the provider role as they do not receive the same respect as men do for being high-income earners in their household.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide another interesting dynamic in relation to thinking about intimacy and Black middle-classness. Although, like the first four, these chapters contribute to understanding the dynamics of Black lives, they problematise heteronormativity and Blackness in ways that make novel contributions to the debates. In Chapter 5, Magro examines Black middle-classness and intimacy in cohabiting relationships of Coloured, self-identified middle-class women and men. Magro's main argument concerns how the heterogeneity of experiences of unemployment and income precarity among middle-class couples has the potential to threaten intimacy within a relationship. Furthermore, Magro lays bare how traditional gendered expectations delimit the way in which intimacy is defined. According to Magro, men are expected to provide and women to nurture irrespective of their wage-earning engagements. This tends to lead to gender inequality because women who also work outside the home carry the unequal burden of being both housewife and breadwinner.

In Chapter 6, Scheepers shows how money gives a gendered form to queer relationships. By means of a discussion of the 'top' and 'bottom' phenomenon in gay intimate relationships, Scheepers provides insight into how these intimate relationships follow traditional heterosexual gendering in defining roles in intimacy. Scheepers explains how social mobility and middle-classness contribute to the enactment of these roles. The chapter also showcases how money, an important resource which middle-classness provides, gives partners multiple options and opportunities to express intimacy in a homophobic world.

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Chapter 1

Precarious Love in the Black Middle Class: A Conceptual Discussion

Grace Khunou 

University of South Africa 

Introduction

Race, class, gender, and intimacy have been important concepts in the study of society for centuries. These concepts have made it possible for us to understand social change in a dynamic manner. The adoption of an intersectional perspective in thinking about and studying these concepts in contemporary South African society is important for shedding light on the argument made by Evans (2003) in her book, *Love: An unromantic discussion*, in which she shows how capitalist principles and consumption displace love and intimacy. Evans (2003) argues that love is important in social and in individual terms. In examining love from an intersectional perspective, it becomes clear that intimate relationships do not only concern the individuals involved in the relationship but that these relationships also involve class position, cultural ideas about gender, social roles, sexuality, and race.

The rest of the chapter provides literature pertaining to the themes of the book. The following: theoretical discussion of the themes that make up this volume. These include, the Black middle class; love and Intimacy; Gender, Love and Money; Gender and the middle-class in South Africa and Gender, middle-classness and challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. The intention of this theorising is to illustrate the significance of intersectional analysis in studying the Black middle-class. The theorisation in the following sections is also meant to illustrate the complexities in Black middle-class lives.

The Black Middle Class

Sociological theory teaches that the origins of conceptualisations of class begin with Karl Marx, as captured in his seminal *Das Kapital*, which was originally published in 1867. Many theorists writing in the South African context, including Alexander *et al* (2013), Krige (2012), Ndletyana (2014), Khunou (2015), and Satgar (2018), observe that while the idea of class has advanced since the era in which Marx theorised it, education, societal position, earnings, riches, and ideas about difference and societal resource allocation have remained fundamental to how we conceptualise class. Given the Western origins of the concept of class, some erroneously assume that it is inappropriate in the African context and in relation to Black experience in Africa. The error in this type of thinking is evident in the fact that South African society has been dealing with industrialisation and Western culture for over 350 years. Consequently, as indicated by class theorists writing from South Africa, it is an important concept for understanding socio-economic and political experiences on the continent (Mabandla 2013; Melber 2017; Ndletyana 2014; Phadi & Ceruti 2013; Satgar 2018).

Additionally, the concept of class is important in examining contemporary South African society because the apartheid state and its predecessor thought about and dealt with Black people hierarchically and used a class lens to differentiate them from White people and to allocate and withhold resources from them (Mabandla 2013). Krige (2011) illustrates how class thinking also influenced how Africans conceived of class, and the importance of using it as a marker of differentiation. Mabandla (2013), in his study of the Black middle class in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape, shows how cultural differentiation between the Western educated Black people (*amaqobhoka*) and those who held on to tradition (*amaqaba*, or the smeared ones) also influenced conceptions of Black middle-classness. Krige (2011) goes on to suggest caution about how we use class as a concept for interpreting social life; he asserts that interpretations of hierarchical social class without careful contextualisation, as occurred in Brandel-Syrier (1971) conception of the Black middle class's conspicuous consumption, are not useful.

Since Brandel-Syrier's (1971) conspicuous consumption theory, as presented in their analysis of Reef town, similar conceptions of Black middle-classness have arisen in the South Africa context, many of them, such as the "Black Diamond" study by the Unilever Institute (2008), unfortunately based on market research. These have been critiqued for lazily painting the Black middle class as a homogenous group that blindly engages in conspicuous consumption (Burger *et al* 2015; Nieftagodien & Van der Berg 2007). According to Burger *et al* (2015a), this homogenising of Black middle-class consumption patterns, and the comparison with the White middle class, is based on assumptions of the superiority of the latter and on the immutability of the tastes and preferences of the former.

A recent publication, *Does the Black middle class exist and are we members?* by Khunou *et al* (2019), illustrates how the definition of the Black middle class is a shifting conceptual target. The authors show that the conceptual challenges that occur when working with the construct of the Black middle class are a result of diverse historical contexts into which we read class. Krige (2011), Mabandla (2013), and Satgar (2018) all refer to the significance of context in theorisations of class as well as to how it has been used in the African context. In a discussion of the significance of Marxism in Africa, Satgar (2018:4) argues that Marxism's development in South Africa has allowed for some important "departures, shifts and discontinuities" from the initiating thought, as captured in classical Marxism. To this end, Satgar (2018) shows how Marxism in South Africa has included conceptions of gender and race as important analytical frameworks for examining apartheid and colonialism. It is in this vein that the analyses in this book use the concept of the middle class to analyse the experiences of intimacy of those who self-identify as Black and middle class.

Contextualisation and historicisation are also important for limiting the Black middle-class construct because of the conceptual exclusion that emerges as we study the development of the idea. Mabandla (2013) demonstrates how both early studies of the Black middle class and contemporary ones tend to omit land and property ownership as a framework for defining the Black

middle class. Mabandla argues that to fully comprehend Black middle-classness, land or property ownership, or the lack thereof, are important conceptual factors that coexist alongside education, income, and professional work. In South Africa, the history of land and property ownership and disposition is marred by racial and gender inequality, which still influences contemporary experiences of middle-classness (Mabandla 2013; Ndletyana 2014; Southall, 2016). For example, the Black middle class are forced to pay 'Black tax' (Mhlongo 2019; Ndinga-Kanga 2019) because of a historical wealth deficit and the limits of state social security system and its income provision.

Love and Intimacy

Bhana (2013) writes about how affective relations between Black people are seldom acknowledged in African research and scholarship. This, she argues, is so even though love is transformative, complex, and an important factor in understanding gendered power dynamics. Love or intimacy is an analytical problem "shaped not only by cultural contexts but by material structures of power" (Bhana 2013:4). Intimacy, in the context of this book, concerns more than sexual activity; it entails emotions, connection, autonomy, and myriad other factors, including what Rasool (2013) refers to as ideas of "sticking together through thick and thin". It is the playground for all the complex human emotions.

Intimate relations are social (Bhana 2013; Khunou 2006); they represent an opportunity for emotional and social attachment and for coping with and managing conflicting attachment styles. They also present an opportunity to enact what one observed in one's family of origin, or to construct anew what one lacked there but observed to be normative in the broader community. Intimacy is conceptualised as a sense of closeness (Khunou 2012b), and it is associated with romantic relationships, including marriage (Rasool 2013). In the context of the development of the internet and social media, ideas of closeness need not include the physical presence of the parties involved (Khunou 2012b). In such a context, intimacy can be experienced by individuals who have not met physically, and, in such cases, it thus excludes traditional

notions of physical sexual activity between two people. As societal systems of communication and 'connection' shift, ideas about intimacy also change.

Even though the ideal of love and intimacy is one of stability and living 'happily ever after', the reality is that the experiences thereof are more complex. Khunou (2006:25) argues that "problems, conflict and 'unloving' feelings are a normal part of intimate relationships". Research on intimate partner violence is replete with examples that show how violence may constitute a large part of intimate relationships (Dunkle *et al* 2007; Jewkes *et al* 2010). In her study of help-seeking behaviour by women experiencing violence in their intimate relationships, Rasool (2013) found that certain perceptions of love (for instance, cultural notions that beating is sign of love) play a role in women staying in abusive relationships – and that a change in such perceptions (by deconstructing the idea that being harmed is a sign of love) facilitates the seeking of help by women in such relationships. One of the reasons women in these circumstances seek help is that the levels of love and affection shown by the abusive partner decrease. This is important for understanding how perceptions of love and feelings of affection impact on thinking about abuse and how to handle it. Rasool (2013:60) provides the following as reasons for women staying in an abusive relationship: the abuse does not occur all the time; the abusive partner also shows caring and loving behaviour; the abusive partner declares their love; and the abusive partner apologises and declares their regret for the abusive behaviour. Some of the conflicts found in intimate relationships are gendered and illustrate the dynamic of differential power between women and men.

Love is gendered (Bhana 2013). The ways in which men and women experience and enact love and intimacy are imbued with cultural ideas about the expected behaviours and roles of women and men in their social relations with one another. Where these gender expectations are based on traditional heterosexual ideas, love will be defined using similar norms. In exploring conceptions of intimacy, it is crucial to examine the aspect of gender in intimate relationships, considering that gender plays a major role in how people engage in these relationships (Giddens 1994).

Gender norms in romantic relationships manifest themselves from an early age. This stems from the fact that men and women are socialised differently in relation to love and romantic relationships. For example, men are taught to value money and understand the power of money (Ninsiima *et al* 2018) whereas women are taught to value relationships. Generally, the masculine ideal teaches men to express themselves in essentialised ways (Bhana 2013); this slows or precludes a shift to the construction of egalitarian relationships.

Intimacy is significant in everyday social relations. As a concept, intimacy is important in facilitating our understanding of the links between political, economic, and psycho-social relations and thus how social changes beyond the family affect individuals and social relations. Yet intimacy is vulnerable to structural changes, and the constitution of intimacy in South Africa was transformed by colonialism and apartheid (Hunter 2010). What is currently held to be love or intimacy is colonial love, as it is not free. We see this coloniality of love in how its conception and practices is permeated by capitalist and patriarchal principles. The chapter by Plank briefly addresses how this manifests in ideas about romantic involvement with unemployed men. Similarly, Hunter (2010) illustrates that wage work played a key role in facilitating the shift from the idea of love for love's sake by introducing ideas and practices associating money with intimate relationships.

Gender, Love, and Money

Even though we would like to think about money as an objective phenomenon and not significant in social relationships, research illustrates that there is a palpable entanglement of love and money (Bhana 2013; Khunou 2006, 2012; Zelizer 2005). According to Bhana (2013:6), this meshing involves money being “entangled in feelings, desires and ideals of love”. Zelizer (2005) argues that this enmeshing comes about because of how we use money to make social meaning. In this sense, money is also subjective and not merely the neutral tool of exchange neo-classical economists would have us think it is (Khunou 2012a; Zelizer 1994).

Money is therefore a social phenomenon: its use, how it is earned, and with whom and in what conditions it is shared – what Zelizer (1994) refers to as earmarking – are influenced by socio-cultural ideas. This practice of earmarking is influenced by gender relations and has, in turn, an influence on gender relations. When men earn it, it confers a certain type of power to them because of how they are gendered; the same holds for when it is earned by women. That is to say that “money cannot be understood as neutral, since it produces and reproduces social power and social relations” (Khunou 2012a:7).

As love is also social, it is implicated in how we think about money. The societal expectation is that love influences how money is spent and who it is spent on. The flow of money in social relations takes on a gendered trajectory (Khunou 2012a). Money confers more power to men than it does to women. In heterosexual intimate relations men use money to show affection – thus, when they do not have money, the display of affection is constrained. Then again, in accepting the money provided by a lover or husband, the woman inadvertently accepts a host of caring and conjugal responsibilities in relation to the man (Benedict 1982; Khunou 2012a).

In romantic relationships, for example, on the one hand, men are socialised and perceived to be financially strong and thus best suited to be the head of the household. This then influences them to assume entitlement to legitimate power within the relationship (Bhana 2013). On the other hand, women are taught to be the emotional carers in the relationship, while men are constrained from expressing their emotions. As a result, once a relationship ends women tend to blame themselves for failing due to the societal pressures they face to be relationship experts (Giddens 1994; Khunou 2006).

Gender identity remains powerful as regards the way in which money impacts on gender equality in intimate relationships (Tichernor 2005). Gender equality remains important in shaping intimacy even in the context of what Hunter (2010) refers to as the changing political economy and geography of intimacy. According to Hunter (2010:92), this geography refer to “a group of

interconnected trends, including rising unemployment and social inequality, diminishing marriage rates and increasing female mobility”. In contemporary South African workplaces, women are assuming positions that were historically assigned to men. Given this, and the fact that more women are educated – coupled with an increasing rate of unemployment for men, especially Black men (Chauke & Khunou 2014) – the resulting rise in romantic tensions makes it difficult for single women and men to engage in intimacy. This is due to the belief that women have appropriated roles that are not theirs. In other words, men believe that women have ‘stolen’ their jobs and thus their identity as men. Over and above this, the existence of middle-class women challenges traditional conceptions of the position of breadwinner, which is historically associated with men (Khunou 2006). In this manner, single middle-class women face the stigma associated with their being successful (DePaulo & Morris 2005; Fraser 2003; Plank & Khunou 2020).

Industrialisation cemented the idea of men as breadwinners and its link to women’s dependence on them (Hunter 2010). This is clearly evident in the extent to which the idea of an unemployed man perturbs Black women, a phenomenon discussed in detail in the chapters that follow. This uneasiness regarding unemployed men is real not only for working class women but also in instances in which middle-class women feel uncomfortable about earning more than men and either hide it or over-compensate by taking on more household work (James 2017; Tichenor 2005).

Hunter (2010) points out that the introduction of money into intimate relationships influenced the way in which these are constituted and maintained. He refers to this as “provider love” (Hunter 2010:44). According to Hunter, provider love is constituted by the expectations emanating from employment of men, the idea of men as providers, and the fact that wage work for men enables them to pay lobola and to build a home. He argues that, in the context of provider love, “men and women looked for some of the same things in a marital partner: if a woman fell in love with a man who had the potential to provide lobola, a man looked for a hardworking and respectful woman who would fulfil her side of the patriarchal bargain” (Hunter 2010:44).

In consonance with Hunter (2010), hooks (1990) claims that, in patriarchal societies, intimate relationships such as those consequent to heterosexual marriages, are based on a system of exchange, the transactions of which are centred in intimacy. According to hooks (1990), exchange politics reduces intimacy to what individuals can get rather than what they can give.

Money plays an integral part in intimate relationships (Khunou 2012; Zelizer 2005). Even though women are increasingly financially empowered, capitalism and patriarchy are intransigent as regards the constitution and sustenance of romantic relationships. Romantic relationships have become more transactional – a give-and-take situation in which women and men are not in a romantic relationship for the sake of love but for what they stand to gain from the romantic association (Gwagwa 1998; Khunou 2012; Zelizer 2005). This is a result of socialisation, in terms of which women and men observe in society, in their own families of origin, in the media, and in their communities, how to act as a man or woman.

Zelizer (2005) argues that, in romantic relationships, gendered norms and traditions shape the value of money. These determine who gives the money and gifts and who receives them and what they do or how they spend the money. In the case where a man has money, women are expected to be humble, to take care of men, nurture men, respect their men, and to be submissive and gentle, especially when they acknowledge that the man is a provider (Zelizer 2005). This demonstrates how intimacy is transactional in gendered ways (Zelizer 2005). According to Evans (2003), this centring of money in intimacy is another way of institutionalising capitalism.

Transactional relationships in contemporary South Africa have been written about in ways that suggest that there has been a break with how heterosexual relationships have been conceived historically. Written works that deal with this subject highlight relationships between older women and younger men – the ‘Ben 10’ phenomenon (Bradely-Bougard & Matsi-Madolo 2017) – and relationships between younger women and older men – the ‘blesser’ phenomenon (Makholwa 2018). Although

this literature is useful for illustrating, first, the changing dynamics of intimacy, and, second, the deepening links between capitalism, patriarchy, and social relations, it also demonstrates some discontinuities with patriarchy as we know it, since young women in blesser–blessee relationships often refuse to perform the traditional exchanges (the performance of gendered tasks expected of women) that are generally expected in heterosexual marriage relationships. However, what such work does not attend to is how transactional relationships express a continuity of ideas relating to what it means to be a man or a woman in patriarchal capitalist contexts.

Research on love and intimacy in Africa tend to focus on the pursuit and maintenance of heterosexual unions and/or how these unions break down. For example, a Google Scholar search for ‘intimacy’ generates references to articles on marriage, cohabitation, and the reduction in the rate of the occurrence of marriage. One must undertake a much deeper, deliberate search to unearth studies focusing on love and intimacy beyond heterosexual unions. This is symptomatic of existing thinking about how love and intimacy should work rather than how it is experienced. To make a worthy contribution to the study of love in Africa, Bhana (2013:6) suggests that it is important to pay particular attention to diverse forms of relations “across the diverse sexual spectrum”. This includes the experiences of gay men and lesbian women. Chapter 6 in this volume provides a detailed discussion of the experiences of Black middle-class gay men in relation to intimacy and middle-classness.

Gender and the Middle Class in South Africa

From a gender-relations perspective, one observes a lingering deficit in terms of which patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial ideals of masculinity and femininity remain precarious for Blacks. For instance, Black men are unable to be men and husbands in idealised ways because of high levels of unemployment (Hunter 2006), and Black women are forced to take on the provider role without acknowledgement of their contributions (Gwagwa 1998) or advantages similar to those which this role provides to men (Tichenor 2005). This inability to fully identify as an ideal man

or women as a result of colonialism might be argued to be useful for Blacks as these models of being are dehumanising; however, the reality is that many strive to attain these ideals as they are deeply linked to the socio-economic and political context and conceptions of what is normative.

Acting outside the norm is usually socially and economically punishable and, at times, violent means are used to do so. In the North American context, Lorde (1984) argues that the reasons for such chastisement are ignored by those with the power to see to justice in social institutions, that is, magistrates or other court officials (Khunou 2006). This is so because those acting outside the norm are often objectified. She argues that the norm in the North American context is defined as “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society” (Lorde 1984:116). This is similar to the South African context as the power and social trappings conferred by money are not easily accessible by those who do not fit the white, masculine norm. Lorde (1984) goes on to illustrate other distortions of difference that we experience. A few that are of interest in conceptualising middle-classness accurately include those that tend to homogenise the experiences of women, Black people, and heterosexuals.

For example, Lorde (1984:116) demonstrates how ignoring difference, as does the ‘sisterhood’ argument, “robs women of each other’s energy and creative insight”. Examining middle-classness in tandem with gender is thus important as it allows us to think about difference in creative ways rather than elide it. The dynamism in Black women’s experiences, as illustrated in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, allows us to see possibilities for thinking heterogeneously about Black women’s lives and possibly discover humanising solutions for the various challenges that they face.

Given the ways in which income influences life chances, middle-classness is argued to improve those of individuals and families. However, given the gendered expectations they face, such improvements are differentially experienced by women and men (Plank & Khunou 2020; Tichenor 2005). Importantly,

economic stability, which might also be read to refer to stable intimate relationships and home life, is precarious as opinions on what to spend money on and what to invest in are contested (James 2017). Similarly, Khunou *et al* (2013) and Khunou (2015) argue that the Black middle-class position as a whole is precarious as most members of the Black middle class have an asset deficit due to the social and economic ills of apartheid.

Gender, Middle-Classness and Challenges in Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities

For those in the Black middle-class upward mobility is signified and fuels ambition. Therefore, those who have already entered the Black middle class strive to climb up the corporate ladder once their employment in such professions has been confirmed. To illustrate this, consider the following: A study of the future aspirations of Black middle-class individuals indicated that their goals are related to professional development. Of the sample of 147 participants, (1) 37.0% wanted more senior positions; (2) 29.5% aspired to have their own business; and (3) 8.2% expressed the wish to enter a profession; while the remaining 25.3% wanted to achieve other goals (Ungerer 1999:101). It is evident that members of the Black middle class aspire to grow within their professions. Nevertheless, Seagal (2013) suggests that, noble as these goals are, Black middle-class women struggle to achieve them. This is because women are also expected to spend time taking care of the home – though society does not expect the same from fathers. Often fatherhood is understood as involving the father being the financial provider (Khunou 2006, 2012; Mkhize 2006).

Scholars of the Black middle class agree that education is an integral component of Black middle-class belonging (Chipkin 2012; Khunou 2015b; Mabandla 2015; Melber 2016; Southall 2016). In South Africa, for example, there is a general understanding, as regards both the apartheid and the post-apartheid periods, that the Black middle class is more educated and wealthier than the lower echelons of the working class in the townships (Krige 2011). Much of the privilege enjoyed by the Black middle class in the period before high-apartheid was based on missionary education, which provided entry to professional work (Mabandla 2015).

According to Southall (2016), one of the variables that contributed to the success of the Black middle class, relative to the Black working class, was access to Black tertiary education institutions. That is, education is an important marker of objective conceptions of middle-classness.

The challenges faced by Black middle-class women in balancing work and home responsibilities would not be as problematic as they are if there were gender equality in Black marriages. In South Africa, the equal division of domestic chores is a source of conflict in Black marriages mainly because orthodox gender norms, to the effect that work at home is the responsibility of women alone, are maintained and sustained by both men and women (Seagal 2013). Amato (2010) suggests that even though the wife's contribution to family income can improve a household's financial position, this can also increase her awareness of the problems in a marriage, such as the unequal division of household chores.

However, it is important to note here that not all South African Black families are of the view that a women's place is at home. Research supports the idea that, historically, both South African women and men have worked for wages (Mokoene & Khunou 2019). That is, the fulfilling of the role of financial provider has been the responsibility of both men and women, even when this is not fully acknowledged (Gwagwa 1998; Khunou 2006). Mokoene and Khunou (2019) show that much of the poverty experienced by Black communities has required Black women to seek employment in order to provide for the needs of their family. Such employment often required these women to migrate to distant places, leaving childcare and other domestic responsibilities to grandmother's (Mokoene & Khunou 2019) and extended family members (Bozalek 1999). Even though Mokoene and Khunou's study does not focus on professional Black middle-class women, it helps us get a sense of working women's history and their impact in terms of financial provision to families.

Feminist scholars have argued that families operate as gender mills by means of which hierarchical gender relations are reproduced (Helman & Ratele 2016). In the context of the family,

a variety of discourses can be seen to position men and women in unequal ways. For example, discourses of 'natural mothering', which position women as possessing innate nurturing capacities, can be seen to make women primarily responsible for the care of children (Helman & Ratele 2016). Conversely, men are exempt from caring activities by virtue of their being positioned as providers, protectors, and disciplinarians. Research has documented the ways in which such discourses produce unequal relations within families (Helman & Ratele 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided the reader with a broad snapshot of how the Black middle class has been conceptualised in South Africa and how this interfaces with other ideas, such as gender, race, intimacy, and sexuality. An important idea considered in the chapter is that money is central to how middle-classness is conceived. This idea is important in this book because of how it links with intimacy and ideas of who deserves love and who does not. The intention of the theorising offered in this chapter is to allow the reader a glimpse of how the chapters that follow are broadly positioned in terms of the themes developed in each.

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Chapter 2

Inadequate Mothers and Wives: The Challenges of the Black Middle-Class Position

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Introduction

Studies of the South African Black middle class have been growing in number since 1994. These studies differ in their intentions and methodological approaches. To illustrate this variation, some of these studies have taken an interest in understanding the growth of the Black middle class; others examine one or more approaches to understanding its emergence; while others still pay attention to the life chances afforded by the middle-class position by means of critical interrogation of the inequality of opportunities for the youth in South Africa (Burger *et al* 2015; Visagie 2015; Zoch 2015). These studies have made significant contributions to our understanding of the Black middle class in South Africa. However, none of them concurrently examine the Black middle class, marital conflict, and intimacy. I thus felt energised to attend to this knowledge gap by paying close attention to situations that contribute to conflict in Black middle-class marriages and to the ramifications of marital conflict for intimacy.

This knowledge gap in discourse on the Black middle class in South Africa was not the only reason I developed a personal interest in the issue of Black middle-class women and their experiences of marital conflict and intimacy. It was also fuelled from the stories emerging from Tyler Perry's (2007) film, *Why did I get married?* My interest in the film was not spurred by there being no similar stories and cinema in South African context;

rather, it involved how Perry was able to draw me into the story of middle-classness and intimacy – his work provides a very different vocabulary for Black middle-classness and love in ways that resonated with my own observations and compares easily to the South African context. Perry's *Why did I get married?* resonates not only with his American audiences but also with international audiences because of the universality of experiences with conflict within intimate relationships (Kakora 2008).

I was thus inspired to undertake a voyage to discover as yet untold stories of conflict in the marriages of Black middle-class women in South Africa. To attain this goal, I employed narrative research methods in conjunction with vignettes containing images from Perry's *Why did I get married?* Juxtaposing South African experiences of marital conflict and intimacy with those from the film was a central component of the study and is a central component of the information in this chapter. Thus, the reader should not be surprised to find, interwoven with the dialogue presented here, reflections on and comparisons with Perry's film.

Besides seeking a comparative analysis of experiences of middle-classness, marital conflict, and intimacy among African-Americans and South Africans, I considered Perry's film ideal for breaking the ice with participants in the research. As a young Black scholar interviewing older women from various Nguni cultures in South Africa, I was of the view that probing the marital issues of the 'elderly' may be considered disrespectful or lead to evasiveness when it came to discussing personal matters. With this in mind, I used the vignettes as a means to approach the issues of concern in a creative way, and, by asking the participants which of the couples from the film had issues which resonated with them, we were able to address matters of infidelity, intimacy, and conflict with ease.

It was of paramount importance that the research approach for this study be a qualitative one. This was because much of the research undertaken on the Black middle class has predominantly depended on quantitative research methods and hence has been of a general nature – in the sense that it has not employed a narrative approach to deciphering phenomena associated with intimacy and

conflict from the perspective of women. The only research that attends to Black women's lived experiences and understandings of their Black middle-class position is Phadi and Ceruti's (2010) work undertaken in Soweto and their 2011 follow-up article and Khunou's (2015) article commenting on the dynamic and shifting middle-class position of Black South Africans during and after apartheid. This limitation, together with marital stories from Perry's film, influenced my decision to pay attention to Black women's experiences of their middle-class positioning, marital conflict, and intimacy using storytelling.

The findings presented in this chapter come out of a master's research project that focused on Black middle class women's experiences of marital conflict and intimacy show that relationship conflicts in heterosexual Black middle-class marriages occur because of both subtle and overt male resistance to strong (but often silenced) female power – itself a result of education and career success – manifesting in various forms within the domestic space.

There is consensus in the literature on the Black middle class that some of the factors contributing to the empowerment of this class in general include the acquisition of higher education, employment in professional occupations, entrepreneurship, and land ownership, along with the enactment of economic and political legislation to redress historical racial and gender-based inequalities (Cronje & Roux 2010; Khunou 2015; Southall 2016). Examples of such legislature include affirmative action and Black economic empowerment. Even so, the professional success of Black women has not been celebrated to the same degree as has that of professional Black men. This argument lies at the heart of this chapter and will be supported with evidence and examples as the chapter unfolds.

In the pages that follow, I present and discuss the narratives of two women who are perceived as not having the right priorities due to their aspiring to further their education and to place their careers ahead of domestic responsibilities. The chapter further unveils the struggle of women, through career and education, to maintain their Black middle-classness while attempting to

successfully perform their roles as mothers and wives. It hence provides significant pointers for a critical re-examination of the traditional gender roles of women in the context of their aiming for upward social mobility, and then, the maintaining the class position achieved, through education and work. The argument in this chapter is that women's empowerment threatens both masculinity and traditional ways of being a woman and is thus greatly resisted by the men to whom they are married. The rest of this chapter is organised as follows: first, an overview of the challenges Black middle-class women encounter in Tyler Perry's *Why did I get married?* is presented. A literature review of the key themes of the chapter follows. Thereafter, a brief explanation of the research methodology used in the study is provided, followed by a discussion of the findings. The chapter closes with a conclusion that provides critical remarks on the findings.

A Brief View of the Film, *Why did I get Married?*

As indicated above, Tyler Perry's movie, *Why did I get married?* (2007) was a starting point for attempting to understand the challenges that exist in Black middle-class marriages.

Integral to this chapter is the contrasting of the marriages presented in the movie with the marriages of the participants in the study. It is hence important to provide some insight into the struggles of Black middle-class women in the film. This enables the reader to discern, through the characters in the movie, links between the film and the overarching theme of the role of money in intimate relationships, and, additionally, it functions to acquaint the reader with the plot of the film.

In the film, Dianne is a highly achieving lawyer who has just been made a partner at work. Dianne is career-obsessed and, as a result, is unable to meet her responsibilities in raising her daughter and being a time-giving and affectionate wife. Underlining this point, the audience learns through her husband, Terry, that at one point in the past she had forgotten to pick up her daughter from school because she was heavily occupied with work responsibilities. Through an argument about her negligence in child-rearing that she has with Terry on his birthday, viewers'

further understand that Dianne prioritises her work. In the course of the argument, Terry complains that Dianne has no time to help their daughter with homework, nor to pick her up on time from extra-mural activities, nor read her bedtime stories and put her to bed. Embedded within the debate about whether she is an incompetent mother is his complaint about spousal neglect and being deprived of physical intimacy.

Dianne's struggle to maintain work-life balance is the cause of many of the arguments in her marriage. Work-life balance is defined as an employee's awareness that the various domains of personal time, family care, and career should be maintained and incorporated with a minimum of role conflict (Clark 2000). Work-life balance has become a crucial issue in all types of employment as dual-career families have become common and high levels of work demands with long working hours have become the norm (Clark 2000). One of the benefits of the knowledge economy is that women who have obtained qualifications and entered robust careers have become empowered. However, with women now also occupying the public spaces of work, there have been changes in marital patterns (Clark 2000). Being professionally employed does not excuse women from their domestic duties. Research suggests that women who are professionals and are married are pressured for time and rarely have enough time for entertainment, family, friends, and themselves. In light of this, Dianne's character can be said to be engaged in the work-life struggle faced by professional women who aspire to career advancement. For Black middle-class women, the consequence of having to balance work and life is pressure to choose between two apparent parallels: a successful career or a family-orientated life-style.

For example, in a scene in which Dianne and Terry drive to Colorado, their holiday destination, I learnt through her actions that she struggles to balance her time; she works more than she spends time with her family. Her actions of being pre-occupied with her cell phone and attending to work-related issues instead of engaging in relationship-building conversation with her husband illustrate her work-life balance issues. Dianne's dilemma and marital conflict can be explained by means of Engels' (1988) argument about women in the work-place.

Globally, with the advent of the industrial age, women were welcomed into the work-place and took up paid employment outside the domestic space. This opportunity gave rise to a pressing dichotomy: being a participant in industrial labour made it difficult for them to maintain domestic work, which became a basis for conflicts involving the division of labour at home (Engels 1988; Fowler 2007).

As the film progresses, one observes that Dianne's lofty feminist ideals put her at risk of losing her husband, Terry. These ideals hold that a woman should have autonomy over her body and that a woman should be able to enjoy career and financial success to the same extent as men do. Finally, and most relevant to this study, they stipulate that the confinement of women to home-making roles is oppressive and hinders the career growth of women. These notions are reflected in the argument Dianne has with Terry in which she attempts to justify her reasons for using a contraceptive without his knowledge or consent. Dianne's argument is that the process of conceiving and raising a child disadvantages a woman (as opposed to a man) in terms of career advancement because it is the woman who carries the child and, in so doing, misses out on work opportunities. According to Dianne, this results in a woman missing out on prospects for career growth while the man may continue to enjoy climbing the corporate ladder without hindrance.

Patricia, a character in the film, is a psychologist who writes about marriage problems. Patricia too is highly successful in her career. Her book, which was inspired by the marriages of her friends and her own marriage, won a prestigious academic award. Patricia is presented as a Miss Know-It-All about marriage because she is the go-to person in this regard and the voice of wisdom for her friends' troubled marriages. Initially, her marriage to Gavin appears to be blissful and trouble-free. However, in the final scenes of the movie, in particular, the dinner scene in Colorado, Patricia learns to her surprise that her husband confided to their friends that he blames Patricia for the death of their son. This couple's conflict is different to those of the others because it is silent. This can primarily be attributed to Patricia's suppression of the issue, which prevents her husband from talking about

it. Were it not for Mike, who reveals the matter over dinner, the couple would probably have continued to suppress it.

This revelation then gives Gavin the courage to confront Patricia about the issue at home. Following Gavin forcing her to talk about it, she confesses, lamenting that their son is dead because she was in a rush. Gavin argues that she would have checked to see if the child was strapped in and secure if she had not been in a rush. Gavin's comment further foregrounds the complexities, effects, and pressures of juggling a career and fulfilling the duties of being a mother. Using the sociological imagination, I attribute the pressures that working professional mothers face to their trying to be successful in relation to both domestic and career responsibilities without subscribing to patriarchally engineered gender roles and expectations within the context of marriage. Furthermore, although it is not addressed in the movie in any great detail, the incident is, once again, an indicator of the work–life balance conundrum faced by professional women.

Angela, another character in the film, is a successful businesswoman with a line of women's hair-care products. Angela is outspoken. Her outspokenness is demonstrated by the manner in which she unapologetically and overtly ridicules her husband, particularly about his unemployment and his financial position. Angela's independence is linked to her financial success. She is aware of the economic power she has over her husband and his dependence on her. This is demonstrated in the course of an argument they have in the car when she obnoxiously tells him that he is not going to leave her. She does this by pounding her hand on the interior of the car and then exclaiming, "Do you know why you ain't going nowhere? 'Cause this is my money." Her beating her hand on the interior of the car is an indicator that she owns it because she bought it. In light of this incident, I come to the conclusion that she mistreats her husband because of the financial power she has over him. This is mirrored in the interaction between another couple in the film: Mike mistreats Sheila due to the financial power he has over her.

Angela is also portrayed as disobedient. This is evident in her unwillingness to listen to Marcus. For example, when they arrive at the Colorado holiday house, he asks her to “lay off the alcohol for a while”; her response is: “Could you go to hell for a while?” In addition, Angela’s arguments with Marcus also involve the issue of infidelity. Marcus is having an affair with Keisha, a woman with whom he has a child. Marcus admits this at the dinner table when Angela asks him if it was Keisha who gave him the sexually transmitted infection.

Conflict Theory as a Lens for Understanding Marital Conflict

The theories developed by Marx and Engels can be applied in the case of *Why did I get married?* in an attempt to provide an analysis that explains the oppression Sheila encounters in her marriage. However, it is important first to present an overview of Marx and Engels’ theories. Thereafter, I explain how these theories apply to Sheila and Mike’s marriage. Social theorists Karl Marx and Frederick Engels developed sociological lenses to explain the social relations, struggles, and conflicts which contributed to what scholars today understand as conflict theory (Fowler 2007:66). According to these theorists, the history of society is a history of class struggles (Fowler 2007:66). Class struggles involve power struggles over limited resources among groups with conflicting interests (Fowler 2007:66). In the film, Sheila represents a social group with limited resources.

Marx’s principal concern was the power of the capitalist bourgeoisie over the working class, the proletariat. In his writings, Marx predicted that the proletariat would attain consciousness of their exploitation and consequently rise up against their oppressors (Fowler 2007:66). Engels adds to this, contending that marriage is an expression of such class struggle: “The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male” (1988:17). Vital to this theory of marriage is the notion that the interests of these different classes,

men and women, are continually in conflict such that the success of men is inevitably followed by the exploitation of women (Fowler 2007:67). Mike represents the privileged societal group – in this instance, that is, men empowered by the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism – that exploits the underprivileged – Sheila, in this case; that is, women disadvantaged by this intersection.

In the film, Mike's privilege, which is in essence male privilege, is his employment status and his financial status. Sheila, on the other hand, is disadvantaged because she is unemployed, resulting in her financial dependence on Mike. As a result of this, she is susceptible to various forms of exploitation within the marriage institution. The emotional, physical, and financial abuse she discloses to Troy, such as Mike having emptied out her bank account, is a manifestation of such oppression.

Engels explains that monogamous, patriarchal family structures in which the husband is the breadwinner and the wife the homemaker echo the exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie in the labour market. Thus, Mike and Sheila's relationship mirrors the type of patriarchal family structure about which Engels theorised. In this manner, the bourgeoisie is represented by the husband (Mike) and the working class by the wife (Sheila). Such a comparison is justified by the fact that when a wife is unemployed and remains at home, she is often underpaid or even unpaid for her labour there (Fowler 2007).

This lack of even minimal financial remuneration may be the source of conflict in such a household. Engels explains: "The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman; and modern society is a mass composed solely of individual families as its molecules" (1988:21). It is noteworthy that the movie portrays Sheila as yearning more for affection from Mike than for financial resources and power. This depiction may well perpetrate the stereotype that women should assume the role of carer and not that of financial provider.

Such theories, what later came to be referred to as conflict theories, suffice to explain marital conflict in the US context. The strength of these theories is that they demonstrate how

the structure of the economy, work, and money contribute to conflict. In light of such considerations, in what follows, I apply an intersectional analysis to understand the lived experiences of Mrs Peaches and Qhawekazi (pseudonyms), the two participants whose experiences shape the content of the remainder of this chapter. This helped me to explore not only how the capitalist structuring of the economy, patriarchy, race, and class contribute to the challenges faced in marriage by economically empowered Black middle-class women; but also to examine how religion, politics, history, and culture intersect so that women and men experience conflict differently in the South African situation.

Challenges with Balancing Work and Family Responsibilities

There is consensus in the South African literature on the Black middle class that professional employment qualifies one to be regarded as middle class (Burger *et al* 2015; Makhotsho 2009; Southall 2016). Examples of such professions includes teachers, lawyers, nurses, doctors, and government workers. The goals of those who have already entered the Black middle class indicate that they strive to climb the corporate ladder once employment in their profession has been confirmed. To illustrate this, consider the following research findings: a study of the aspirations of the Black middle class indicated that their goals are related to professional development. It is evident that members of the Black middle class aspire to grow within their professions. This also applies to business-minded members of the Black middle class who show interest in exploring entrepreneurial spaces. As noble these goals are, it is a struggle for Black middle-class women to achieve these (Seagal 2013). This is because women are also expected to spend time on duties in the home, though society does not expect the same of men. This gender-role challenge is a challenge faced by all women irrespective of class background.

Scholars of the Black middle class agree that education is an integral feature of belonging to it (Chipkin 2012; Khunou 2015; Mabandla 2015; Southall 2016). In South Africa, for example, there is a general understanding, as regards both apartheid and

post-apartheid periods, that the Black middle class is more educated and wealthier than the working class of the townships (Krige 2011). Much of the privilege enjoyed by the Black middle class in period before high-apartheid was a result of missionary education, which provided entry to professional work (Mabandla 2015). Furthermore, one of the variables that contributed to the success of the Black middle class relative to the Black working class was access to Black tertiary-education institutions (Southall 2016). As education is a means of gaining entry to a professional occupation and hence to a middle-class position, obtaining a post-graduate qualification is an important feature of Black women belonging to this class.

The challenges faced by Black middle-class women in balancing work and home responsibilities would not be as problematic as it is if there were gender equality in Black marriages. In South Africa, equal division of domestic chores is a source of conflict in Black marriages primarily because the gender norms sustained by both men and women hold that work at home is the responsibility of women alone (Seagal 2013). Following the second wave of feminism, more women found wage work opportunities. Given its racist history, in South Africa, Black women have been wage workers since early industrialisation (Mokoene & Khunou 2019); thus, the notion that they should work in the home involves a conundrum. The participation of women in wage work became a source of conflict in some households as women have further responsibilities at home that include the cleaning of the house, laundry work, cooking, and taking care of the children's needs (Faulkner, Davey & Davey 2005).

Thus, when a wife works, new arrangements need to be made to ensure that her previous responsibilities are still fulfilled. These discussions relating to new arrangements in respect of the division of labour at home become problematic, especially if the husband holds rigid traditional Western beliefs about gender roles. In *The invention of Women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses*, Oweyumi (1997) illustrates how the bio-logic of Western culture influenced how we think about and do gender in African contexts. An example of Western-based gender ideas would be that a women's role is to be pregnant and barefoot in

the kitchen. While a wife's contribution to family income can improve a household's financial position, it may also increase her awareness of the problems in a marriage (Amato 2010).

It is important to mention here that not all South African Black families are of the view that a women's place is in the home. Research supports the idea that, historically in South Africa, both women and men worked for remuneration (Mokoene & Khunou 2019). That is, the role of being the financial provider has been the responsibility of both men and women. Mokoene and Khunou (2019) show that the poverty experienced in Black communities required Black women to seek employment to assist in fulfilling the needs of the family. Such employment often required these women to migrate to distant places and to leave childcare and other domestic responsibilities to the children's grandmother (Mokoene & Khunou 2019). Even though the study did not focus on professional Black middle-class women, it sheds light on the phenomenon of dual-earner households, and the role of wage-earning women in providing for their families.

Furthermore, Black middle-class women are confronted with intimate-relationship conflict because unreasonable amounts of care-time are expected from them by their partners. Research on gender and time-use show that women spent proportionally more time in care roles than men (Charmes 2006). Conflict might arise when there is no consensus regarding expectations in respect of time; moreover, time can be used to make a partner behave in line with that expectation. Usually, this includes control over how the woman's time should be used or where and how the partner should be at a certain time. Role-strain theory contends that social structures comprise numerous roles and that individuals are sometimes unable to meet the demands of all of these roles and responsibilities (Brough *et al* 2014).

Married Black middle-class women must constantly negotiate their involvement in unfulfilling roles in an attempt to adapt to the demands placed on them in various areas of life. Role strain has been correlated with the tension, disharmony, and conflict between members of dual-career marriages (Perrone & Worthington 2001).

Although physical and temporal boundaries generally exist between work and family, carry-over of emotions and behaviours between these domains is common in dual-career marriages in which spouses are both committed to a professional career and to family life (Brough *et al* 2014; Perrone & Worthington 2001). Marriage studies also show that married mothers in professional careers generally experience greater levels of pressure relating to work–family conflict than do working fathers (Brough *et al* 2014; Perrone & Worthington 2001). Brough *et al* (2014) contend that if a professional working woman and mother is perceived as being ambitious about her career goals, she bears the risk of being blamed for neglecting her primary duty to care for her family. Married mothers encounter the burden of simultaneously being committed to their professional work–roles while being expected to give priority to their family–role responsibilities (Brough *et al* 2014).

Read and understood collectively, this review of the literature suggests that there are different expectations in marriage for women and for men. Women have been expected to devote more time to care–giving and domestic roles at home, while men have been expected to excel in salaried employment and to be able to provide financially and materially for the family’s needs. Yet the world has changed. Long-held beliefs about what it means to be women have undergone transformation and are not experienced homogenously across social contexts. In South Africa, as in most parts of the globe today, women seek out the same career success and higher education as men do. In order to accommodate this shift in today’s world, both men and women have to engage marriage and gender roles in a manner that accommodates career advancement.

Methodology

Almost every anniversary celebration, wedding, and engagement party I have attended is marked by a speech in which the speaker says something along these lines: “So, I’m sure most of you are wondering about where it all began”; or, alternatively, the speaker will say: “I’d like to share with the audience a story of how these two met”. Such comments are also common in grooms’ speeches

as they reminisce about how it all began. Such speeches often go something like this: “I remember the first day I laid my eyes on this wonderful woman of mine ...”. Lines like these indicate that when a man and a woman marry, a story begins. It is in line with experiences like these that, in examining experiences of intimate relationships in the context of marriage, I saw fit to adopt a narrative approach. There are a variety of reasons for this.

First, a narrative approach is most suitable for this study because it aims to understand the lived experiences of Black middle-class women’s marital conflict through the recollection of memories, which were delivered as stories. In answering questions pertaining to the past, of how conflict affected intimacy in their respective marriages, the participants presented their responses by telling a story of what happened, who was involved, what words were exchanged, and how it ended. The involvement of characters, the exposition of conflict, dialogue, climax, and denouement are all key components of stories (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber 1998). The narrative approach yields information that may not be available through other methods. Moreover, narrative analysis permits a holistic approach to discourses, preserving context and particularity (Smith 2000).

Second, I entered this research space with the aim of contributing not only to knowledge but to redressing a long-standing academic and political concern: Black women in South Africa have previously been marginalised in knowledge production as their voices have not been heard in ways that fully address their concerns. In omitting the voices of men from this study, I am not on a campaign of gender discrimination; nor do I have radical objectives that advocate the removal of male voices from knowledge production. Rather, I draw on the logic of advocating equality as Nelson Mandela did in relation to race in his biography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. Like Mandela, I advocate domination for neither camp but rather gender equality between men and women. The focus on women in this chapter is thus a means of fighting against patriarchal domination – not with the intention of replacing it with female domination – but in order to attain an equilibrium between the genders in knowledge production. The starting point is then a matter of producing more

knowledge about women by a woman for all humanity. Once sufficient knowledge of this kind has been produced, then the inequalities of the past, of female inclusion and exclusion, will have been redressed.

My intention in undertaking this study was also to tell a story, a story about class and marriage. I was very particular about who would be involved in this story and whose perspective the story would be told from. I wanted the story to be focused on women – Black women. It was crucial that these Black women self-identified as middle class. In addition, the people in my story had to be either married or divorced within a heterosexual context. Finally, they were required to be graduates and be employed. These selection criteria were influenced both by research that involves objective conceptualisations of middle-classness (Melber 2017) and that which argues for the importance of subjective measures thereof (Alexander *et al* 2013; Khunou *et al* 2019). I recruited eight participants for the project, though, for this chapter, I chose to focus on the narratives of two of them as their life stories resonate best with the overall theme of this volume. Qualitative research, narrative research in particular, is not intended to generalise but to illustrate nuance; this chapter is therefore not meant to make generalisations about the experiences of all Black middle-class women but to illustrate how the particular experiences of these two participants can begin to help us think about Black middle-class women in a holistic way.

I used two tools for interviewing, a narrative interview guide and pictorial vignettes. Vignettes are visual sources which include photographs which are presented to research participants during the interview; the participants are tasked with responding to them with the aid of question prompts by the interviewer (Hughes & Huby 2004). I chose to use vignettes to lessen the difficulty of, and my apprehensiveness at, having to engage in seemingly private and sensitive discussions with the participants about conflict in marriage and intimacy. As I was a young, unmarried Black woman at the time of the study, I felt uncomfortable at the prospect of having to ask older woman questions about marriage and conflict. The use of vignettes from *Why did I get married?* was a strategy to address this cultural discomfort. The effect of using

the vignettes was that the participants were prompted to speak about their own lives through art, as reflected in the characters in the film. This was helpful in that it made them realise that what they had thought was personal or private and should be confined to the domestic space is rather a pervasive experience. Again, the use of vignettes from the movie was methodologically useful as it allowed me to overcome the cultural dilemma I faced as a young researcher. In the article, "Sister-to-sister talk: Transcending boundaries and challenges in qualitative research with Black women", Few, Stephens and Rouse-Arnett (2003) illustrate the importance of researchers negotiating their insider status. In the spirit of care in research with Black women and my sensitivity as an insider (a Black woman), I was grateful to have Perry's movie as a methodological tool to navigate being an outsider (an *unmarried young* Black woman).

During the interview process, it was observed that, as had already been encountered in early sociological theory, participants realised that the relationship problems they experience are not individual problems but are social ones (Mills 1959). The decision to employ the vignettes also found a rationale in the fact that comparing marital issues in South Africa with those experienced by African-American couples in Tyler's film is an integral component of the study. To begin the process, I showed a participant a page with photographs depicting the four couples from the film. Then I gave the following directive: "These photographs show the couples from the film, *Why Did I Get Married?* Please study these photos and then indicate which of the couples from the movie you identify with the most." I then gave the participant the opportunity to assess the photographs and identify the character she related to the most. Once she had made her selection, I asked her to tell me more about why she had selected that character.

I also relied on pre-set questions from the narrative interview guide which posed questions that would help to fulfil the objective of the study of understanding individual conceptions of middle-classness. Examples of the questions that were asked are as follows: Earlier on, you self-identified as middle class; please tell me what you mean by that term? What do you and your

partner argue about? How do you respond to conflict? How do you resolve conflict? How does arguing impact on your intimate life?

When I was drafting the questions that address the issue of marital conflict, I wanted to pose them in such a way that they would elicit a response in the form of a story, so as to adhere to the narrative nature of the project. To achieve that goal, the task of “stage outline” as proposed by Lieblich *et al* (1998:24) was employed. The stage outline was introduced to the participant in this manner: “Every couple’s marriage can be written as a story. In so saying, I would like you to think about your marriage as a story. First think about the chapters of this story. I have here a page to help you in this task. Write down how many chapters your story has; now may you please give each chapter a title.” The one-page form handed to the interviewee comprised two columns – the one on the left for recording of the stages, or chapters, according to the year they began and ended and the one on the right for providing a title for and a summary of each stage.

Once these narratives had been generated, they underwent structural and data analysis. Structural analysis consists of scrutinising the following components of a narrative: (1) the plot; (2) the sequencing of events and which characters were involved; (3) the narrative considered chronologically in relation to a time axis; (4) complexity and coherence, and (5) the feelings evoked by the story (Lieblich *et al* 1998).

The plot is a significant component of all stories. To identify the structure of the plot, I read each narrative several times. I then categorised them using a plot-classification model proposed by Northrup (1963:47). Northrup (1963) proposes that four basic narrative structures give form to human experience: the romantic, the comic, the tragic, and the ironic.

The study relied on the following strategies to ensure ethical research practice: a signed consent form, the use of pseudonyms, and the storing of data in a password-protected zip file. In order to avoid any semblance of coercion, all the participants were asked to sign a consent form that covered their voluntary participation in the study and the use of audio recording during the interviews (Nduna *et al* 2014). For convenience, the interviews

were conducted at the home of each of the participants; this was negotiated with the participants and agreed to by them (Nduna *et al* 2014).

Psychological harm in research may occur as a result of painful emotions and thoughts that arise during the interview process (Nduna *et al* 2014). Certain research topics may compromise the psychological welfare of the participants, particularly in cases that involve discussing past traumatic experiences (Nduna *et al* 2014). Discussing the sensitive issue of marital conflict did stir up painful emotions and memories in some of the participants. However, even though the topic was sensitive, none of the women broke down emotionally during the interview. At the end of each of the interview recording sessions, I informed the participants about the psychological services available to them in case they required further, professional debriefing.

To safeguard the privacy of the participants, their audio-recorded data was saved in a password-protected file on my computer. In relation to the use of pseudonyms, first, at the initial meeting, I assured the participants that their real names would not be disseminated in the thesis or any publication that might follow the study. Second, to emphasise this, it was the pseudonyms that were captured on the biographical questionnaire. Third, to further maintain confidentiality throughout the study and protect the participants' identities, I referred to them by these pseudonyms in the course of the interview process.

In the context of qualitative (narrative) research, validity means that the data that has been collected is trustworthy (Brophy 2009:29). Reflexivity was engaged in throughout the study as a way of abiding by the principles of feminist scholarship, as outlined earlier in the chapter in principles of intersectionality that guided the study. I did this by reporting the study in the first person, using 'I'. The use of 'I' reaffirms both my epistemological and ontological positions, primarily that of recognising lived experience as a vital source of gaining knowledge and of rejecting the assertion of an objective reality. The use of 'I' became useful for indicating that, as a researcher, I was involved in the process of co-creation of knowledge alongside the participant.

The Making of Inadequate Mothers and Wives: The Case of Mrs Peaches and Qhawekazi

The two narratives presented below are useful for making a case that marital conflict in Black middle-class family relations is a result of the vocational and educational goals required for middle-class advancement which challenge normative gender roles for women. The stories here illustrate how women who are successful in their careers earn the negative label of being inadequate mothers and wives. Even though marriage conflict could be attributed to women in general, what is illustrated by experiences of middle class women demonstrates the complexity of the assumptions society makes about the benefits a middle-class position, with its educational attainments and high level of income, provides to women. Even though women who work and are independent have generally been labelled in a negative manner, as Mrs Peaches' story more specifically indicates, the challenges faced by middle-class working women show the difficulty of attempting to pursue work goals and success within the boundaries of being a wife and mother. Mrs Peaches is a 26-year-old, Xitsonga-speaking Black middle-class woman. She holds a BA in Journalism and a BA Honours in Sociology and is presently reading towards her Master's in Sociology. Mrs Peaches is an entrepreneur who offers educational services. At the time of the interview, she had been married for two years and had one child. During pregnancy she was concerned that being pregnant was bringing her studies and professional life to a standstill.

In Mrs Peaches' story, we see how she battles with depression because of her feelings that her growth is being impeded by the obligation to prioritise her new family over her own career goals while her husband is not being impeded in the same manner. Mrs Peaches' story also shows that, despite global changes that welcome women into spaces of work and higher education, the value and or success of a woman is still largely determined by home-caring and child-raising roles (Clark 2000; Nielsen Survey 2011).

Even though there are some similarities between the stories of Mrs Peaches and Qhawekazi, it is obvious that Qhawekazi's

story primarily illustrates how women who are more financially empowered than their husbands endure multiple hardships (Greenstein 2000). Qhawekazi is a 42-year-old woman. Her highest educational qualification is a Master's in Business Leadership. She works as a senior manager in the industrial relations department of a large corporation. At the time of the interview, she had been married for 13 years and had one child. Qhawekazi owns a funeral parlour and property business. At the time of the interview, she was separated from her husband and was seriously considering divorce.

Qhawekazi's financial success was at the root of her marital conflict and threatened the masculinity and power of her husband. In Qhawekazi's marriage, the threat to the masculinity of her husband resulted in various forms of abuse and infidelity, physical violence, and high levels of alcohol consumption. These behaviours are typical gender norms associated with masculinity. I argue that, in heterosexual marriages, engagement in these gender behaviours maintains male power and female oppression (Njezula 2006).

Mrs Peaches' Story

The plot of Mrs Peaches' narrative unfolds as both a romantic and a regressive narrative. According to Makoba (2005), a romantic narrative is one in which an aspect of life is configured as a quest or a pilgrimage to some desired end. The quest or desired end for Mrs Peaches was to get married at a young age, and her goal was achieved: she married her husband at the age of 24. Mrs Peaches and her partner are happily married and enjoy a warm and loving bond. She states that they are both lovers and friends. Despite the fact that she has experienced bliss in her marriage, being married has hindered progress in another significant area of her life.

Mrs Peaches' indicated that her academic life was hindered by her pregnancy, and it is at this stage that the narrative becomes a regressive one. Gergen and Gergen (1986:27) describe a regressive narrative as one in which progress towards a goal is impeded. Mrs Peaches perceived her new life that began with her being a mother as something that hindered her academic progress

and that evoked feelings of loss and disengagement, which were later diagnosed as depression.

Middle-classness can be affordable through loans or by saving

Mrs Peaches began her narration by sharing her conceptions and experiences as a Black middle-class woman. In providing a definition of ‘middle class’, Mrs Peaches started off by raising questions about her full identification with this class position:

Besides the other social factors, my mind always runs to finances: Where I am financially? Am I really in the middle? Am I in the middle because of where I live or what I drive?

The raising of such questions is to be expected: middle-classness for Blacks has been shown to evoke important questions about how Black middle-classness can be compared to that experienced by whites – and, again, about how this class position is not permanent for Blacks (Burger *et al* 2015; Khunou 2015; Ngoma 2015). The questions raised by Mrs Peaches show how this class position is difficult to define as well as indicating the importance of subjective conceptions thereof (Phadi & Ceruti 2011). She poses an important question to illustrate this dilemma: “Am I really in the middle? Am I in the middle because of where I live or what I drive?” This question is important in considering the complexity and instability of the middle-class position and our reflections on what really qualifies one as belonging to this category.

As Mrs Peaches continued to reflect on definitions of middle-classness, she stated that class to her is all about finances, about the ability to afford things, which can either be via loans and or saving “hard”:

The reason why I say I am middle class, I think being middle class is being able to afford certain things ... It’s either you have to save up really hard for them, or you are able to get a loan. So, when you are middle class, you are willing and are able to get a loan, that’s another thing. Because not everybody can get a loan. So, I think when you are middle class somewhere, somehow you are able to get a loan.

She stated that being middle class comes with societal pressure to always acquire more material possessions. According to Mrs Peaches, meeting the obligation of having more implies that those who belong to this class need to work more. This is a telling definition of middle-classness; it resonates with Ceruti and Phadi's (2011) conception of middle-classness as entailing the affordability of items one might want to purchase. However, Mrs Peaches adds another interesting aspect to what it means to afford to purchase goods: either you obtain a loan, or you "save really hard". So, this affordability of commodities is not automatic or without challenges – saving "really hard" means forgoing certain things and obtaining a loan means being beholden to banks or loan sharks. In this manner, Mrs Peaches illustrates an important aspect of middle-classness, and perhaps of Black middle-classness in particular: a historical lack of a financial safety net such as that which might come with inheritance.

Mrs Peaches extended her construction of Black middle-classness as follows:

I need to do more. I'm, like, I need to live in a better place, I need to buy a better car. I need ... you just find yourself always needing to work so that you are able to afford everything else that you have. And, unfortunately, that means that a lot of people are in debt because of the way that society pressurises us. We end up saying, as long as bangibona ngimuhle [they see me as beautiful], it's fine – but they don't know that when I get home I have to be ticking did I pay this did I not pay that...

Her understanding of the middle-class position contributes to the reader understanding her story: that being hindered in studying and working because of expectations placed on her to raise a family brought about an internal struggle for her. The literature on the Black middle class indicates that conspicuous consumption in relation to tangible assets is an indicator of middle-classness (Burger *et al* 2015). A deep reading of Mrs Peaches' definition, as presented in the above quote, reveals the tremendous pressure one experiences to show one's middle-classness. This need to show it leads to a pressure to consume and hence to the pressure to work harder so as to be able to afford these markers of middle-

classness. Given this definition, it is clear why Mrs Peaches finds it difficult to deal with what she refers to as being hindered from working and studying. Working hard and studying are linked to her definition of middle-classness – these activities will result in greater pay and thus an increased ability to afford the markers of her class position. Not being able to work hard and study means that her means of engaging in appropriate middle-class consumption is not practicable. We thus begin to see the dilemma in Mrs Peaches' story; we see her grapple with the potential loss of her middle-class position.

Following her discussion of her conception of middle classness, Mrs Peaches continued narrating her story by providing insight into how she met her husband. Mrs Peaches narrated her account in a chronological fashion, starting from the time they met in 2014. Time is also an integral requirement of structural analysis. The components of a story that relate to the time axis involve what Labov (1982) refers to as orientation. Orientation refers to how the storyteller orientates the listener to both the time and place of the events being narrated (Makoba 2005:63).

Pregnancy: A Hindrance to Middle-Class Dreams

Mrs Peaches related that, on the weekend they met, what was notable was that the first question her-husband-to-be asked her was what she did for a living; she also asked him the same question. Much of their initial conversation centred on education and work. Their conversation illustrates that education and career are important features indicating that one belongs to the middle class (Mabandla 2015; Southall 2016) – to the extent that, even when one is speaking the language of love and considering loving somebody, this aspect is centred. The materialising of such a relationship is dependent on one's social ranking. She explained in detail what happened that weekend:

He asked me: "So what do you do?" I said, nah, I'm still studying. He asked: "What are you studying?" I said, "I'm studying for my degree in journalism ... I'm doing my third year; it's four years, so I will finish next year." So, he said: "Oh, okay, that's interesting." I'm like, "What do you do?"

He said: “Ah, nah, I do something very boring – I work on the farms.” So I’m like, whatever, dude. He’s like: “Nah, I do engineering, I work for Eskom right now.”

Mrs Peaches explained that he wanted to get engaged in 2015, a year after they met; however, she wanted to accomplish her academic goal of completing her master’s degree prior to formalising marriage and having a baby. In the extract below, Mrs Peaches expresses how her husband adjusted her thinking on the matter:

I think it’s more on me than it is on my husband. Because he has always been, like, life does not stop for anybody. No matter what you are doing in life, um, you can’t put certain things on hold just because you want to do something else. Whether you put it on hold or not, life happens. When I said things turned otherwise, I was hoping that, by this year, my master’s would be, like, on a different level to what it is right now; but, because I fell pregnant, I fell into a mini-depression. Because that is not what I had in mind. Like, you know when you have a plan, and your plan gets diverted, it’s so hard to actually see things for what they are right there and then. Like, it was even hard for me to say I’m going to continue with my master’s. So, I was at that place where life is over. I just have to deal with now having babies and what not.

We see in this quote that Mrs Peaches narrates a regressive story because of the tension she feels between what she feels is expected of her for her to be defined as successful, that is, as middle class, and how her life has turned out. She falls pregnant before her master’s degree has been finalised; for her, this is not how her story was supposed to unfold. Having a child is not part of her definition of success, and, thus, she is thrown off course. Mrs Peaches’ husband did not view the pregnancy as a hindrance to her continuing with her studies; he even proposed a solution for her problem. Mrs Peaches explained that he attempted to resolve her fear of not being successful in both her home-making and academic-achievement roles by proposing a work-plan:

His view was that all will be well. Like, this baby does not have to stop anything. Then he gave me like a little plan. He is, like, Baby, just study three hours a day. You do not have to do it consecutively, like, you can wake up in the morning and just give yourself one hour to focus on your studies. And then do whatever that you want to do in the house and then study for another hour. Or finish the other two hours, or you do another hour, then later on in the evening before you sleep you do another hour. Like, he was just giving me a plan of how to work, but because I was so, I don't know, I was so invested in this thing that I am pregnant and I cannot do anything, it means that I cannot do certain things right now. That is what stopped me. But he has been the most supportive out of everybody.

In the above extract, it is clear that the husband was not in touch with how Mrs Peaches was feeling; he did not appreciate the situation, and thus his plan might make sense only superficially. It's practical application was unrealistic because of the human element. Humans', and in the context of this study, women's lives cannot be lived according to a pre-programmed formula, particularly in the case of pregnant women. Pregnant women experience drastic hormonal shifts and concomitant bodily and emotional changes that impact on the way they do things (Kusama, Vedavathy & Renuk 2017). For example, hormonal shifts can contribute to changes in their sleeping cycle (Kusama *et al* 2017). Furthermore, they may be prone to morning sickness, making them unproductive in terms of work required of them during those hours (Kusama *et al* 2017). In short, Mrs Peaches' husband's proposal of a timetable that incorporates work and life activities did not allow for the complications associated with pregnancy.

Moreover, in the quote, Mrs Peaches highlighted that she experienced depression during her pregnancy. Oversleeping, a lack of energy and enthusiasm for life, and the inability to undertake normal everyday tasks are some of the symptoms associated with depression (Yu *et al* 2020) The assumption that a pregnant woman can maintain a specified time-schedule to help

her to achieve work–life balance is not feasible for a person who might on many a day find it impossible to even get out of bed, let alone engage in the intellectual pursuit of writing a thesis.

The idea of achieving work–life balance by adhering to a time-table is also challenging following the pregnancy. This is because new mothers have to adjust to their new role of mothering (Kristen, Simpsen & Pontoppiden 2018). There will be occurrences in caring for a newborn infant that take them off-schedule. For example, attending to a crying baby at night, cradling the baby, milk-bottle or breast-pumping sessions, and washing the baby's clothes. All these responsibilities may occur at any time of the day and will likely overlap with the time that was assigned for studying. Thus, scheduling a time-table is not a solution that will address the challenges faced by a pregnant women or a new mother in achieving a work–life balance. The idea that the pregnancy was a hindrance to Mrs Peaches' plans to complete her master's degree make sense in the context of what having a baby means for someone who also has to deal with depression. This difference in perceptions regarding what pregnancy means is an indication of a lack of meeting of minds in an intimate relationship and may be a contributor to later conflict.

A more practical plan to address the issue of work, life, and study balance for married women would be to include the men more in handling the domestic responsibilities of the home. Mrs Peaches' husband could have alternatively proposed the drafting of a timetable for their household duties. The nature of this schedule would involve them dividing the cooking, cleaning and running of household errands. For example, each partner could take three days in a week to manage those responsibilities and then the other partner could resume with their studies. Perhaps this division of household duties between women and men at home could contribute to lessened conflict and consolidate intimacy.

Mrs Peaches felt that her husband did not comprehend her internal conflict in relation to having a baby at a time when she felt she needed to be developing herself:

Chapter 2

I really feel like he does not know what is going on inside of me. I can't even have kids. And the funny thing is that, actually, it's sad. The sad thing is that you get to a point where it takes time to connect or even really to start to fall in love with the fact that you are expecting. I'm, like, six months pregnant and, like, it's only probably now that I'm, like, ncooh, I'm going to have a baby. Oh my gosh! But all the other three months I was, like, no, no, it's not happening. Like, you know, you wish you could wake up and it's like a dream and you're like, yay, let me go do my work. So that's why I said I felt into this mini-depression where I was crying all the time.

Society assumes that women should be happy about pregnancy, but, as illustrated here, the context in which this happens impacts on how it is experienced. Mrs Peaches is able to illustrate for us how one's internal state and one's dreams and goals influence how life-experiences like pregnancy are perceived. In her case, we see how her initial encounter with the fact of her pregnancy was not received well because it was not what she wanted at the time. When someone who is supposed to love you does not understand that, it can be a source of pain.

Mrs Peaches stated that they identified with Terry and Dianne in *Why did I get married?* She said it provided insight into the depth of her internal and external struggles. In the film, Dianne is a high-achieving lawyer who is promoted to being a partner at the law firm at which she works. Dianne's struggles to maintain a work-life balance are the source of the conflict in her marriage. Dianne makes the argument that the process of conceiving and raising a child disadvantages a woman – rather than a man – in terms of career advancement because, ultimately, it is she who must carry the child and miss out on work, thus forgoing opportunities for career growth. In the same vein, Mrs Peaches felt that her pregnancy would hinder her progress. Mrs Peaches explained why they identified with Terry and Dianne from the film:

Dianne and Terry, neh. Because ... Dianna was, like, doing her things like her career, and what not, right, and it clashes

with her marital life and how she looks after her husband. And at the same time, Terry seems to have his life in order – he just wants to have time with his women. The reason why I identify with them is because I didn't want to have a child this year. Because I wanted to get my master's going; I needed this thing to flow, I needed it to move, and I just wanted to establish myself because I would have had this year to push my master's But I feel my husband is going on with his life, he's going to work coming back, and he's pushing his books at the same time. And here I am trying to push my master's and I am pregnant.

Reading Mrs Peaches' story using the lens provided by the movie allows one to perceive the challenges faced by working women in their marriages. It shows the difficulties encountered when work and success outside the normative confines of being a proper wife and mother are of interest to women. What was shared by Mrs Peaches in her story is similar to what has been found in other studies, that is, that achieving a work–life balance becomes a challenge for working women who simultaneously occupy the position of mother and wife (Clark 2000; Nielsen Survey 2011). Work–life balance is defined as an employee's awareness that the various domains of personal time, family care, and career should be maintained and incorporated with a minimum of role conflict (Clark 2000). When women enter spaces of work, changes occur in their marital behaviour. Social gender norms suggest that being professionally employed does not excuse women from their domestic duties; that is, a woman may be a top executive, but the roles of nurturing and caring still must be maintained (Hochschild 2003). Moreover, research (Nielsen Survey 2011) suggests that, in all parts of the world, female respondents who are working and are married are pressured for time and overworked and rarely have sufficient time for recreation and relaxation.

The case of Mrs Peaches shows that disharmony in their marriage occurred when she wanted to postpone plans to grow her family for the sake of striving to fulfil her academic and professional goals. Conventional gender-role expectations require women to assume the identity of homemaker (Tichenor 2005).

This necessitates that she spend time tending to domestic labour, cooking, bearing children, and caring for her family, particularly her children. With the advent of a capitalist economy and the industrial age, women have been able to work as paid labour outside the domestic space. This presents varying challenges for the family as participation in production processes makes it difficult to engage in domestic work and to prioritise the goal of extending the family. Such challenges may then form the basis for conflicts at home (Engels 1988:21; Fowler 2007). It is with this in mind that I maintain that the inability to fulfil gender-role expectations contributes to conflict in Black middle-class marriages. As did Mrs Peaches, Qhawekazi had a desire to prosper in her career. However, her case differs from that of Mrs Peaches in that her success threatened her husband's manhood. Even though her husband is financially less powerful than she is, he used tactics that are associated with masculinity to subvert these perceived threats.

Qhawekazi's story

Qhawekazi's story unfolded primarily as a regressive narrative. According to Gergen and Gergen (1986:27), in a regression narrative, progress towards the goal is impeded. Qhawekazi was a successful middle-class woman who is striving towards being in a higher class than the one she was occupying at the time. Her story was told in a way that illustrates her husband's view as an obstacle to her ability to achieve her definition of success. Her husband had no interest in accumulating higher-educational qualifications, which is then framed as a frustration for Qhawekazi and an impediment to her ability to achieve her goal of class progression.

The next section accounts for the cause, response, and resolution of the marital conflict experienced by Qhawekazi. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of conflict for intimate dialogue.

The Conception of Middle-Classness

Qhawekazi's story unfolded as the narrative of a middle-class woman who aspires to continue climbing the class ladder but who

is hindered in this goal by her husband's lack of ambition and waywardness. Unlike Mrs Peaches, Qhawekazi defined middle-classness as being in between the upper and lower classes. She came to this conception by reflecting on her social context:

It's not a high class, it's not a low class; it's being in a class in which you can afford basic things.

Even though there are differences relative to Mrs Peaches' conception of class, the issue of the affordability of commodities is also present in Qhawekazi's definition. However, Qhawekazi emphasised the 'middleness' of the middle-class position – it is neither low nor high. This is important as how she defined class is linked to how she told the story of her marriage and the nature of the conflict she experienced.

Even though her conception of middle-classness was centred on the affordability of items her view differed from that of Mrs Peaches in that, for Qhawekazi, being middle-class was not about debt, loans, and saving hard but about accessing the pleasures life has to offer:

The vacation you can still afford, but not your five stars, the three star you can afford. At least you can afford Spur or maybe Debonairs, you know, once a week.

Qhawekazi spoke about eating out and vacationing. Later on, she added quality education as something that is important in how we should think of the middle-class position:

I would recommend a certain school for my child, but he [her ex-husband] will always want to go for the cheap one. He will always want what other people are doing. Without looking at the value, outcome, or the output of the school that friends are taking their child to. I am the opposite, I am looking at the outcome, the values of the school that my child will be benefiting from.

In this quote, we begin to see a divergence between Qhawekazi and her husbands' ideas of what it means to live a good life. She

stated that her husband always preferred the cheap option, even when this concerned their child's education, something she felt should be reconsidered. Such value differences influenced their relationship in many ways, as is evident in the types of conflict the couple experienced. The issue of what is deemed worth pursuing is also observable in Qhawekazi's prioritising of education as an important marker of socio-economic mobility, while her husband felt differently about the matter:

I think it depends on the partner that I have chosen. I've got certain goals; you know, in life you've got to aim higher. I aim to be in a high class and my husband is not there, for example, I would study further. I am studying further, and because I am studying while he is not, he does not understand. For example, he would say, let's go socialise, but I cannot because my priority is to pass, is to achieve whatever I want to achieve, and he is not there, totally not there.

In this quote, it is clear that the couple was at odds: the husband wanted to socialise, while Qhawekazi wanted to study, prioritising the future by using the time to study. The emergence of marital conflict here may be observed with her saying, "He does not understand". This lack of understanding functioned as a frame for how Qhawekazi told her story, and was further illustrated by how the conflict in the marriage was experienced and understood.

Alcohol Abuse, Violence, and Infidelity as Hindrances to Upward Class Mobility

Many of the disputes in Qhawekazi's marriage had their origins in alcohol consumption. Her expectation was that the husband would contribute his 50% towards paying for the bills, which comprise of items such as cars, food and rent, and she would contribute hers. However, the 50/50 expectation was not realised as the husband had other ideas. Consequently, she had to carry more of the load. Qhawekazi had the following to say regarding alcohol abuse and the types of conflict she experienced in her marriage:

What I was expecting from him is when it comes to the cars, I mean, for the household things like food, like rent, like the alarm, like anything that has to do with us, you know, like, we would go 50/50 Now, because of consumption, alcohol takes more time, alcohol takes more finances, alcohol creates unfaithfulness.

Qhawekazi's narrative reveals that the husband did not act like an equal partner as his focus was taken by the attention he gave to alcohol consumption. Due to his focus on alcohol, the 50% he was expected to contribute did not materialise because the money that should have been spent on maintaining the household went to drinking, which Qhawekazi suggested also led to intimate partner violence. The violence occurred because she was not supposed to ask questions about his alcohol consumption and his neglect of his responsibilities:

He will go and get drunk. When he gets back, he will try to do anything, like, for example, I forgot to close the garage door. He will beat me. That thing happened quite a number of times ... neh, but I have realised that the pattern is linked to me asking about his whereabouts, or where he was from 3H00 up until 12H00... then when he comes back, he will create something then he will beat me.

The use of violence to silence women who are seen to be nagging is a strategy employed by men who do not want to take responsibility for their actions. Qhawekazi's husband used violence to silence her and to avoid taking responsibility for his actions. In this instance, we see Qhawekazi being silenced first by the husband's disappearing act, his going out to drink and then coming back to start a fight about an unrelated matter. This is a means of instilling terror, of trying to make the 'victim' feel she is wrong simply because she exists. As Qhawekazi's story progressed, we see that the husband, who lacked power as he earned less than she did, claimed it back in ways that demeaned Qhawekazi and stripped away her dignity – by being violent and, later, by being with other women.

Since his power could not be maintained in the traditional manner by his being the primary breadwinner, one of the ways in which it was preserved was in his overcompensating to re-establish masculine gender norms by engaging in high-risk sexual practices. Infidelity was another cause for conflict in Qhawekazi's marriage:

For example, if I accidentally encountered his personal phone, I would meet all these girlfriends talking to him, exchanging I love you, I love you ... and his disappearances, and I find other people telling me, I saw your husband walking with a girlfriend somewhere. You understand when I confront him, he will deny it, and he will try all the means to stop me from trying to know more about what happened ... and even if I can find strong evidence – after the separation, I found strong evidence to say he was sleeping with a girlfriend in my house. He denied it, totally denied it. I believe that if I had found it while I was still with him, he was gonna beat me; but because now I stay on my own, and he is also living alone he would rather deny it, which would really make me sick again.

For Qhawekazi's husband, infidelity was a way for him to assert his masculine power in the context of financial disempowerment (Munsch 2015). Qhawekazi's professional, financial, and educational success far outweighed his own, and he was disempowered by this. Qhawekazi's experiences align with the findings of previous work on marital conflict which shows that, in the small-scale society, the Tsimane of Bolivia, conflict occurred over the husband's infidelity and his division of resources (Stieglitz *et al* 2012). Infidelity not only causes conflict; it also contributes to conflict responses in the context of financially empowered women being oppressed in marriage.

Research shows that men engage in high levels of alcohol consumption to display characteristics of manhood (Peltzer, Davids & Njuho 2011). Alcohol is consumed in excess in the hope of preserving their masculinity, which is under threat because of the financial empowerment of women (Schuler *et al* 2018). In addition, dominant masculine gender norms are pursued through

men's involvement in activities such as violence, high-risk sexual activity, and the use of alcohol (Peltzer *et al* 2011). Alcohol consumption by men often leads to domestic violence and the oppression of women.

Alcohol abuse by men results in quarrels between marital partners. A study of intimate partner violence reveals the link between male alcohol consumption and relationship conflict (Miles *et al* n.d.). The study further illustrates that 45% of men and 20% of women were drinking alcohol during episodes of intimate partner violence (Miles *et al* n.d.). Moreover, in 2006 in South Africa, 70% of domestic violence cases were linked to the consumption of alcohol (Miles *et al* n.d.). Alcohol abuse among men and intimate partner violence is often a manifestation of an underlying need for power and control related to gender-based distortions and insecurities (Jewkes 2002).

Qhawekazi did not identify fully with any of the couples in *Why did I get married?* However, analysis of her narrative indicates that she experienced problems similar to those of one of the characters in the movie. For example, the emotional abuse and infidelity she experienced mirrors Sheila's marital life. Qhawekazi's story of her marriage shows that women who are more financially empowered than their husbands endure multiple hardships (Greenstein 2000). Qhawekazi's financial success was at the root of her marital conflict as it threatened the masculinity and power of her husband. In Qhawekazi's marriage, threats to her husband's masculinity produced various forms of abuse and infidelity, physical violence, and high levels of alcohol consumption. These behaviours represent typical gender norms associated with masculinity. Engaging in such gender-normative behaviours is a means of maintaining male power and female oppression in heterosexual relationships (Njezula 2006).

Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated that career-orientated Black middle-class women are stigmatised as poor performers as this concerns taking care of their families. If the truth be told, the success they pursue necessitates that they dedicate time to

achieve their desired goal. I believe that rather than castigating his wife, a husband should demonstrate true partnership and help her with household duties. Sharing duties would enable them to complete household tasks more quickly. This is likely to provide them with the means to spend more time with each other consolidating their intimacy.

There is therefore a need to rethink gender roles in relation to wives in Black middle-class marriages who are employed and following educational pursuits. The habitual practices of traditional gender roles in marriage in a world that has evolved to accommodate women in spaces of work and education are a recipe for conflict in marriage and result in burgeoning feelings of inadequacy among married women. For the Black woman, the moral of this story is that work-life balance and housework are not goals that she should seek to achieve on her own. She shares her life with both her husband and her children and household responsibilities need to be shared equally among those who occupy the household. The story also has a lesson for the Black man who feels disempowered by his partners' success. He needs to understand that his being is not determined only by his role of financial provision; there are other ways to be powerful and successful that do not involve financial success. His children and wife would glorify him and perceive him as having succeeded in loving them if he also assumes the roles of home-maker, caregiver, cook, and cleaner.

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Chapter 3

‘The Undesirables’: Black Middle-Class Women Versus Unemployed Men

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Introduction

In patriarchal and capitalist societies, intimacy and economic transactions are intricately linked. When people decide to engage in romantic relationships, the issues of class and money are viewed as important because monetary transactions and intimacy are co-produced and mutually sustain each other. Men and women are socialised into thinking about and engaging in love from a heterosexual perspective from an early age. This heteronormativity is instilled in gender norms sanctioned by social institutions, including the family (Adichie 2017). These early-gendered processes of internalising societal norms that teach men and women what is acceptable in intimate relationships are influenced by capitalist and patriarchal principles.

From an early age, men are socialised into thinking about provision and dominance and into behaving in accordance with these ideas. On the other hand, women are taught about taking care of their partners and being submissive (Adichie 2017; Maharaj & Shangase 2020). This relationality as informed by the capitalist system’s view of exchange as the basis of intimate relationships. Constable (2009) aptly illustrates how the family and intimate relationships are not safe from capitalist principles of exchange. What is of concern in this chapter is how this exchange is gendered: men must provide and women must nurture.

Thus, in this patriarchal society, despite the class position they hold, some women find it difficult to provide for men financially (Gcabo 2003; Parry 2014). In the same vein as this study, when Black middle-class women were asked if they would be romantically involved with an unemployed man, most stated that they would not. Only one indicated that she would be able to date an unemployed man, stating that this would be considered only if the unemployment status was/were not permanent.

The economic position of single Black middle-class women influences how they experience and define intimacy. Most women in this study avoided romantic relationships with unemployed or underemployed men. The argument of this chapter is that the middle-class position of the women interviewed provides them with choices: they have the opportunity to become involved with someone who fits their standards and criteria when it comes to intimate relationships. Yet even though most of these women enjoy the agency provided by their social and class position, it is imperative to emphasise that their middle-class status restricts them in numerous ways, specifically as this concerns intimate relations.

To illustrate how this choice manifests, this chapter provides a brief review of the literature followed by an overview of the methodology of the study and then a discussion of two themes. The first theme concerns the Black middle-class women in the study not finding unemployed men desirable and that they would not consider being in a romantic relationship with them because they do not have aspirations or resources; These women emphasised the importances of their potential partners aligning with their own aspirations. The second theme involves the case of the one Black middle-class woman who would date an unemployed man and does not find unemployed men undesirable as they are human too.

The women discussed in relation to the first theme believe that, because of their class position, they deserve romantic involvement with someone who is either of a higher socio-economic status or at the same level as them (Marsh 2023; Plank 2018). As a result of previous romantic relationships with

unemployed men who cheated on them, these middle-class women fear a recurrence of their bad experiences. They believe they know how unemployed men behave in relationships in which the women are middle class and have more money than the men. For them, this is a clear indication of how a middle-class position does not accord women the same power as it does men. It is therefore the contention of this chapter that Black middle-class women are punished for their socio-economic status relative to men who are in the same position.

A Brief on Methodology

This chapter is drawn from a master's study which focused on the experiences and perceptions of single Black middle-class women in relation to intimate relationships. A qualitative research approach was used to engage with the participants. For the master's study, twenty single Black middle class women from Soweto were interviewed (see Table 3.1 for participant details), and thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data. Thematic content analysis is often mistakenly thought simply to involve the identification of themes; however, in the study, as indicated by Bazaley (2013), it was used because of its ability to provide a nuanced review of the meaning participants attach to the events, situations, experiences, and actions in which they engage.

For this chapter, the experiences of six of those participants are used to shed light on how unemployed men are viewed as prospective partners in a relationship. Soweto was selected as the research site as it has a burgeoning Black middle-class population (Phadi & Ceruti 2011). Through my critical appraisal of Soweto, I became aware of these developments, confirming the growth of the Black middle class as articulated in Phadi and Ceruti (2011) and Krige (2015).

My observations during fieldwork indicated that several privately owned companies are housed at Orlando Industrial Park, which was near the famous Vilakazi Street in Orlando West. Even though Soweto has made great economic strides in the course of democracy in South Africa, many residential areas continue to be impoverished and unemployment rates remain elevated

(Mahlatsi 2022; Mushayanyama *et al* 2024). Studies have shown that important middle class-related structural transitions have occurred in Soweto during the thirty years following the end of apartheid (Crankshaw 2022; Mahlatsi 2022; Mushayanyama *et al* 2024; Steyn 2013). Some of the notable changes in Soweto that have been observed in the literature include the renovation of residences that have been protected with higher walls and gates and the presence of expensive cars and malls.

I developed an interest in single Black middle-class women after personally observing my single, middle-class aunt. As a result of these observations, I had formulated several assumptions about single Black middle-class women. When I sat down and thought about the research topic, I kept thinking about my aunt, who was single and faced considerable criticism despite her personal achievements. She was blamed for not 'having a man' and was often assumed to be at fault for the termination of her previous relationships.

In the course of the interviews with the participants, I felt I was in a conversation with my aunt, because some of the experiences the participants related resonated with what I had observed my aunt go through. Thus, I felt a closeness and familiarity with the participants. I could not downplay the moments of closeness with the respondents. The good rapport I established with the women interviewees allowed them to freely share their personal experiences.

Singles and Intimacy

Singlehood is a phenomenon that is gradually increasing in frequency both globally and, evidently, in South Africa. Society views being single as contrary to the conventions of romantic relationships, which has led to its stigmatisation (Lawton & Callister 2010; Marsh 2023; Plank & Khunou 2020). Singletons are perceived to be lonely, unhappy, and dissatisfied (Masinga 2023; Marsh 2023). This is because it is believed that intimate relationships provide purpose and satisfaction for human beings (Johnson, Kent & Yale 2012; Marsh 2023; Masinga 2023 Van der Watt 2015). What cannot be ignored is that several women spend

their lives single, especially ageing women. Since patriarchy relies on relationships between women and men flourishing, to sustain its practices and belief systems. In essence, there is nothing wrong with deciding to remain single (Marsh, 2023; Masinga, 2023; Plank & Khunou 2020). However, society makes women feel and believe that there is something wrong with them when they remain single.

Yet there is no fixed definition for what constitutes an intimate relationship. Various conceptions of intimacy emphasise different elements thereof. For example, Jamieson (2011:2) describes intimacy as a “close connection between two or more people”, referring to those people are in a process of building a close quality connection. In relationships that involve love, emotions and attachment are essential for their maintenance. The formation of intimate relations is essential for the development of human beings. Johnson *et al* (2012) believe that intimate relationships provide a sense of purpose to human existence, the implication being that single people may be lonely because they do not engage in intimate activities (Johnson *et al* 2012). In as much as this may be true, it is difficult to imagine that single people *must be* lonely or that they do not have any purpose (Ademiluka 2021; Marsh 2023). Single people may be happy and fulfilled in their lives relative to people engaged in romantic relationships.

The Complexities of Intimacy for Black Middle-Class Women

In democratic South Africa, it has become evident that marriage and family formation have undergone significant transformations (Moore & Govender 2013). For example, divorce rates have increased, and women remaining single and childless have become a trend (Ademiluka 2021; Lesch & Van der Watt 2018; Maharaj & Shangase 2020). A plethora of economic, political-structural, and ideological concerns have been cited as reasons for the rising reluctance to marry and establish a nuclear family (Lesch & Van der Watt 2018; Maharaj & Shangase 2020; Moore & Govender 2013).

Considering the efforts made to retain Black women in the labour force and for them to attain educational qualifications, lobbying and affirmative action in this regard, and generally, in the post-apartheid era has influenced romantic relationships (Maharaj & Shangase 2020). Black women have been provided with the ability to negotiate, criticise, and reject their established gendered roles within institutions like the family. This is considered to have emerged as a response to various institutions that have promoted and governed the ideal of heterosexual, monogamous, intimate relationships (Ademiluka 2021; Maharaj & Shangase 2020; Mazibuko & Umejesi 2015).

The class position of single Black middle-class women restrains them as it takes away the ability for them to be genuinely loved. It has been contended that these women's middle-class status reduces their reliance on men, prompting them to choose more permissive ways of living, including being single (Mohlalane, Gumede & Mokomane 2019). Conversely, men feel scared by the financial status of single women, which hinders their ability to approach middle-class women with a romantic proposal. This is a significant disadvantage for some Black middle-class women who are, in fact, seeking romantic relationships (Ademiluka 2021).

Due to their education and economic success, when it comes to finding a partner, these Black middle-class women tend to be more discerning than poor women (Marsh 2023). They prefer men who are similarly ambitious, well-educated, and financially secure (Lesch & Van der Watt 2018; Marsh 2023; Moore & Govender 2013). As a result, these women often postpone being involved in a romantic relationship until they have discovered their ideal partner (Maharaj & Shangase 2020).

The Power to Choose, Breadwinning, and Gender-Role Definition

This section of the chapter focuses on a discussion of the findings of the study. First, how the class position of single Black middle-class women empowers them to choose the type of romantic partners they want is demonstrated. This power to choose

primarily relates to the financial status of the men they date. The findings show that middle-class women find it difficult to reconcile themselves with the notion of providing for men because they believe that men should be the main providers for the family (Mazibuko & Umejesi 2015). By adhering to the assumption that men are providers, they ironically nourish and preserve the capitalist and patriarchal gender-role expectation that men should be the only financial providers for their families.

This section is divided into two parts. The first discusses experiences of middle-classness and problems involved in dating unemployed men, who are perceived to be undesirable. This part of the discussion illustrates how dating unemployed men goes against the women's desires for a middle-class lifestyle. Whereas mainstream ideas about relationships suggest that women stay with men because of the latter's financial position, the experiences discussed here take this idea further, confirming that when women have money, they do not remain involved with an unemployed man. This challenges the narrative of Black women as dependent, bitter, and hopeless victims.

The second part presents a view contrary to the overarching idea that unemployed men are romantically undesirable by showing the tension that plays out for Black middle-class women – between giving up their desire for improved material circumstances that a dual-income household may provide and the idea of love outside capitalist exchange. The choice presented here is useful for helping us to begin to think about whether decolonial love is possible and what types of things can make it possible or remove it as an option. Decolonial love is a type of love that can liberate people from the catastrophic effects of colonial violence (Butler 2023; Díaz, 2007). This would entail fully accepting and valuing people, such as unemployed men, who are typically considered undeserving of love (Butler 2023).

The Undesirables: Single Black Middle-class Women and Unemployed Men

The women in my study would not contemplate dating unemployed men. These women believe that a compatible partner

should occupy a high-paying position or at least have adequate financial resources. Their past experiences with unemployed partners influenced their decisions to stay away from unemployed men when it came to romantic partnering. This limits their options for finding a partner as they think unemployed men are unappealing. For instance, Dini, a 29-year-old single Black middle-class woman, who held a diploma from a tertiary institution at the time of the interview and worked as an executive receptionist, said she would never date an unemployed man. She explained her rationale for rejecting unemployed men as follows:

I would not go out with a person who is unemployed again!
He could not provide, and I had to support him.

Dini's issue with unemployed men stems from the fact that her previous partner was unable to either provide for her or to support himself. This meant that Dini was forced to bear all the weight of providing for both of them. She shared her frustration:

The pressure of my work was just too much, and the relationship was demanding and financially draining – remember he was unemployed; but I loved him.

On the one hand, as men are supposed to be the providers, Dini's ex-boyfriend must have felt powerless and useless with Dini supporting him financially. Dini became financially exhausted from supporting her ex-boyfriend; though it would have not been a problem if they were to swap the roles (Khunou 2006). This is because the social expectation is that men support their partners, rather than the other way around. Dini's frustration arose not only because the ex-boyfriend was unemployed; it was also because he was "too much" – he relied on her finances, and he also experienced other challenges: he was demanding of her time and jealous of her accomplishments. For Dini, it did not seem as if there was going to be any progress in the relationship:

I could not balance my life because he wanted my attention all the time. He got angry when I went to work and when I just did my work things.

When men are unemployed their ability to participate in exchange is reduced, and it becomes more difficult to deal with their demands. In Dini's experiences, we observe what Constable (2019) refers to as a reconstruction of historical conceptions of intimacy.

Tintswalo, a 43-year-old single woman who worked for the government and held a degree at the time of the interview also stated that she would not date an unemployed man. She reasoned that providing for a man is tantamount to giving him "pocket money", and pocket money, in her experience, is typically money parents give to children. For Tintswalo, a mother of two children, giving money to an adult was not an option. The notion of pocket money, when used in reference to money given men, is a derogatory way of conveying the idea that the man is not 'man enough'. A man who expects to receive pocket money or is forced by a lack of employment to receive pocket money is essentially reduced to the status of a child. This is why Tintswalo felt that an unemployed man would compete with her children for her attention. When asked if she would date an unemployed man, she stated the following:

I don't think so; isn't it that he will want pocket money from me, want me to give him a car? During the day he will come stay here and eat the polony and cheese that is meant for my kids, hai no! A lot of women here give pocket money – it's even worse here at Glen. I would rather live alone than give pocket money to a man.

Tintswalo is a single mother, and her children are her responsibility. They depend on her alone for their well-being, their school fees, food, clothing, and general care as she does not receive maintenance payments from their father. Over and above her other responsibilities is ensuring that the needs of her children are met. Thus, she works to provide for them. The thought of an unemployed man who would romantically and financially depend on her seems a burden she would not be able to carry. In the quote, the statement, "during the day he will come stay here and eat polony and cheese that is meant for my kids", conveys a sentiment common in the township, where dating an

unemployed man is seen as inviting an adult child into your house to compete with your kids for your attention and resources.

The other popular idea relating to unemployed adults who receive pocket money is that they would then not look for a job. In an article titled, "Why being unemployed is worse for men", Van der Meer (2012) illustrates the dehumanisation and reduction in social approval that men experience when they are unemployed. This is yet another indicator of the stigma unemployed men face. They are ranked very low within the social hierarchy – to the extent that they are considered children, as less than men, because of their inability to provide for themselves and others.

For Tintswalo, an unemployed man is tantamount to a parasite. He would be in a relationship for financial gain. To her mind, unemployed men do not date for love; they date to improve their financial status. This is likely to be a sentiment shared by most successful women. It is likely that they assume that unemployed men who express romantic feelings towards them are being deceitful. As such, they become suspicious that such men want to be in their lives for the money and not for love (Lewis & Scott 2000; Zelizer 2005).

Tintswalo retained a firm belief that men should provide for women and not the other way around, even though it is almost a norm in Protea Glen, where she lives, for women to provide for their unemployed partners. She declared that it was possible that these women support their partners because they believed they should provide them with a helping hand. However, middle-class women who offer money to their partners are perceived as being desperate, hopeless women seeking love (Boshoff & Mlangeni 2021). Tintswalo vowed that she would never allow that to happen to her.

Mpho is a 42-year-old divorcee who worked as a personal assistant and lived in Tshiawelo at the time of the interview. Mpho claimed that her experience with her unemployed ex-husband influenced her decision to not date unemployed men. She expressed the following when asked about dating unemployed men:

I do not think I would ever date a man who does not work. My ex-husband, at some point, was unemployed and he depended on me. I had to pay for everything. The bond, the school fees, the groceries. Worse, he would demand that I give him money as if I was obligated to do so. He acted like a child. He would just sit and watch TV and do nothing! Not even cook or clean the house. It is a problem when a man is unemployed; they are powerless.

The burden of daily household chores like cooking and cleaning the house rests with women irrespective of whether they are wage-earners or not. Although Mpho assumed the breadwinner role while her husband was unemployed, he expected her to perform domestic duties once she had finished work for the day. Given that most employed women expect unemployed men to assist with household duties, Mpho felt betrayed and encumbered by her husband's reluctance to 'assist' with domestic commitments. The problematic word 'assist' illustrates that the assumption is that it is not the man's responsibility to ensure that his family eats and that they live in a clean house. The sentiments expressed by Mpho reflect the findings of Van der Meer (2013) regarding the dehumanisation and reduction in social approval men in relationships face when they are unemployed.

His idleness at home and professionally made Mpho entertain the notion that her ex-husband was, like most unemployed men, reclaiming all the years he spent working and providing for the family (Rabe 2021; Van der Meer 2014; Zelizer 2005). Mpho's experience illustrates the way patriarchy benefits men – her ex-husband's propensity to demand money made Mpho feel as if she was "obligated" to take care of him while he was unemployed. Such feelings arise because this was not the norm in Mpho's community, nor in her relationships with men; men provided rather than it being the other way round.

Unemployed Men are Insecure and Lack Ambition

Lucy, a 47-year-old divorcee, worked as an assistant director and lived in Protea Glen at the time of the interview. Lucy had unhappy experiences with her ex-husband who was unemployed.

As a result, she also decided never to be involved with an unemployed man again. Part of the reason for her decision was what she referred to as the insecurity her husband displayed. The following is what she said when asked about her views on dating an unemployed man:

Uhm, no I wouldn't, because he would be insecure. He will end up being abusive, be it financially, verbally, physical, and whatever. They tend to be insecure. My husband for one would accuse me of many things. This is when he was doing all his things, running around with women. He was, like, kind of insecure when I came from work; he would say I was with men.

Lucy's husband was insecure and often made Lucy feel bad about her job. His insecurities made him abuse and threaten her. This included accusing her of cheating with her colleagues or other men. Men become insecure when they lack something in a relationship; in the case of Lucy's ex-husband, lack of employment made him controlling and abusive. Lucy's husband was insecure because he had no source of income and was failing to financially provide for his family.

It is clear from Lucy's experience with her ex-husband that, in patriarchal societies, men acquire authority and masculine status on the basis of their being able to financially provide for their families. Unemployed men are hence perceived as weak and effeminate. It also seems that they consider themselves weak without the status associated with being a wage-earner and provider; this is why, lacking this status, as in the case of Lucy's husband, unemployment was followed by overcontrolling and abusive behaviour. It is most likely that he resorted to violence, cheating, drinking alcohol, and being absent from home because he wanted to reaffirm and prove his manhood.

While insecurity was central to Lucy's aversion to unemployed men, Promise's distaste for them stemmed from her belief that they are lazy and lack ambition. At the time of the interview, Promise was a 28-year-old traffic police officer

and the owner of a small business in Soweto. She articulated her experience thus:

I've been with a person who doesn't have a job! It was stressful because he wasn't goal-orientated and didn't know what he wants in life. I'd be like, "Okay, in two years' time, what do you see yourself doing, are you looking for a job?" And he is like "No, I am just seeing whatever comes"! I don't want a guy like that anymore It didn't work out. I would want to go on a vacation with bae and we could not, because with bae, I must pay for everything, and sometimes their pride is so big.

A reflection on Promise's response indicates that unemployed men lose hope and become less ambitious. Her ex-husband saying, "No, I am just seeing whatever comes", becomes disconcerting for someone who is ambitious, who wants to see her life moving forward. 'Waiting to see' makes it appear as if one is not planning and or anticipating the future and one's place in it. The ambition of the middle-class women interviewed for this project was to improve their access to life opportunities; this was one of the things that drove them. Being involved in a relationship with someone who is 'waiting to see' is understandably frustrating.

The idea of 'waiting to see' and not planning can be argued to be a symptom of unemployment: it strips men of their certainty when it comes to income and the possibilities this provides. Unemployment is disempowering, especially when there might not be other options. According to a labour-force survey, unemployment, using the expanded definition, was at 41.2% in the third quarter of 2023; for men it sat at 30% (StatsSA 2023). Masculinities research shows that unemployment influences how gender and love are constructed and are experienced (Khunou 2012; Malinga & Ratele 2016). Their experiences with unemployed men drive the aspiration of these middle-class women to be involved with men who are employed and are in a better position than them.

Men Must Be Loved for the Sake of Love Not Their Employment Status

Normative assumptions about love and heterosexual relationships include that men must provide financially for the partners and families (Boshoff & Mlangeni 2021; Masinga 2023); women can work, though this is not necessarily their primary role. Thus, in cases where the man is unemployed, we not only see frustrations from the women around them; we also see, as indicated in the previous section, that this frustration is a serious matter as men's unemployment is accompanied by a rigidity that involves them not wanting to contribute in other ways. This may contribute to the notion that living with or dating unemployed men is undesirable. However, interestingly, one of my research participants held the contrary view.

This is the case with Kamogelo, a 26-year-old single Black middle-class woman from Diepkloof Zone 5. At the time of the interview, Kamogelo was studying for a degree and was also working as a sales consultant. To her mind, unemployment should not be a determining factor in choosing who to love. As a result, her peers and cousins perceived her as being odd and boring. She was viewed as boring because she did things differently from the way her peers did them. For example, at her age, Kamogelo was childless and unmarried. Her cousins made her feel bad about her life choices and problematised her status as a single woman. She was often made to feel as if something was not quite right with her and was pressured to have a child as almost all her contemporaries had children. Unfortunately for them, they could not easily convince Kamogelo as her mind and energy have been devoted to her education and building her career.

Adichie (2017) argues that society needs odd and brave people whose characters enable others to question homogeneity. Kamogelo falls into the category of such women: she does not care what others think about her, only about what she thinks of herself. She does not allow societal norms to define who she is and what she believes in. For instance, contrary to the other Black middle-class women interviewed, Kamogelo stated that she would not mind dating an unemployed man. She believes in

unconditional love. For her, material love is secondary; true love is primary. This is how she reasoned when asked if she would date an unemployed man:

You know I had this conversation yesterday with my cousin. She was saying I should not date an unemployed man. I was so angry! I think, with me, it's not about money and taking me out. With me it's time, I just need your time. I know how it feels to be unemployed, so downgrading someone, saying you not going to date them because they are unemployed, it is just downgrading a person. Because that person, even when they are unemployed, they could make a plan. I would date an unemployed person, I don't mind!

It is apparent in what Kamogelo says about her conversation with her cousin that she is a change agent. While she does this unconsciously because of her beliefs, there is a strong likelihood that her beliefs may positively impact on her life outcomes. Kamogelo's humanising energy is clear when she says, "I know how it feels to be unemployed, so downgrading someone, saying you not going to date them because they are unemployed, it is just downgrading a person" – she knows how it feels to be unemployed and does not want another person to be dehumanised because of their economic situation. This is an important observation as one's employment status is not permanent. This observation raises the following question for middle-class women: What happens if an individual with whom you initiated a romantic relationship based on their employment status is subsequently retrenched or otherwise becomes unemployed? One perspective would be to contemplate Kamogelo, who is receptive to dating an unemployed man and who may witness her companion gain employment in the course of their relationship.

Kamogelo's humanist perspective is sobering, particularly in a country like South Africa where unemployment is rife. To make matters worse, Black men, rather than White men, experience the worst of this unemployment (StatsSA 2023). Thus Kamogelo's considerations might be important for thinking about the limits of centring wage-earning in considerations about relationships. The most important question when thinking

about Kamogelo's position is as follows: Who would the majority of unemployed, heterosexual Black men date if employed and unemployed Black women find them unacceptable?

Kamogelo believes unemployment is not an inherent attribute. As such, she does not believe that it should stand in the way of love. She is aware that men have the capacity to procure sources of income which may ultimately alter their social standing. Her saying that the man "could make a plan" suggests that she is hopeful that he might become employed. Even though Kamogelo says that she would agree to dating an unemployed man, there is the implication that it would not necessarily be permanent. This problematic is a real one – there is a clear sense of the injustice of mistreating someone, deciding someone is not deserving of love merely because that person is unemployed.

While the other participants had valid reasons for their stances, the question remains as to whether Kamogelo would change her opinion about unemployed men should the realities of dating them diverge from her ideas thereof. What happens when she is the provider, and her partner does not take on the nurturing role, abuses alcohol, and is unfaithful? Would she be happy carrying the burden of providing for and nurturing a man who does not support her?

Kamogelo's view is important in that it helps us to reflect on an alternative possibility; it allows us to see that while colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism provide space for only a particular kind of exchange in relations to intimacy, there is a need to find another way. Thinking about gender, love, and intimacy in the context of unemployment, and especially in relation to Kamogelo's reflection on the idea of 'love for love's sake', has strong links with the notion of love that is accepting and radical (Makhubo 2019) – a romantic love that is liberated from the shackles of patriarchal and capitalist prescriptions about love (Ratele 2021). When all is said and done, the challenge is whether Kamogelo's idea would be practicable in a context in which not only do men themselves expect to be the provider but are also expected to do so by the women in their lives.

Table 3.1: Profile of participants interviewed

Participant's Pseudonym	Age	Marital status	Residential area	Highest level of education	Occupation
Dini	29	Single	Diepkloof Zone 6	Technical diploma	Receptionist
Kamogelo	26	Single	Diepkloof Zone 5	Grade 12 (furthering her education)	Sales consultant
Lucy	47	Divorced	Protea Glen Extension 12	Technical diploma	Assistant director
Mpho	42	Divorced	Tshiwawelo	Technical diploma	Personal assistant
Promise	28	Single	Jabulani	Grade 12 (furthering higher education)	Traffic police officer and owner of a small company
Tintswalo	43	Single	Protea Glen Extension 11	University degree	Office clerk

Conclusion

The experiences discussed in the chapter illustrate the ways in which gendered norms have socialised men and women: it becomes clear that, in capitalist and patriarchal society, romantic love is largely transactional. Based on their personal experiences with unemployed men, most of these women have decided that it is not worth dating them as it leads to negative life experiences, including abuse, lack of alignment with societal norms and gender expectations, and, most importantly, not fulfilling the aspirations that success and middle-classness offers.

In this study, Kamogelo is the epitome of decolonial love. She was the only one of the six participants who is a proponent of unconditional love. While the other women found unemployed men intolerable due to their bad experiences with them – such as cheating, abuse, and not being helped with household chores – Kamogelo believes that unemployed men should be given a chance. Her independent thinking makes her a change agent. A middle-class society needs women who are capable of challenging and changing traditional gender norms that have made it difficult for others to be involved in intimate relationships because they lack resources. Kamogelo speaks of a new way of doing things. This new way requires us to think differently and do things differently.

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Chapter 4

Black Middle-Class Women and Challenges with Breadwinning

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Introduction

The Black middle class in South Africa has emerged and expanded significantly since the end of apartheid. Historically, due to the racist policies of apartheid, the majority of Black South Africans were denied access to education, economic opportunities, and social mobility. However, since the advent of democracy, many Black South Africans have been able to access education and employment opportunities that were previously unavailable to them. The growth of the Black middle class represents a significant step towards building a more inclusive and equitable society in post-apartheid South Africa. As it relates to social class, the term “middle-ness”, refers to individuals who occupy the middle strata of the income distribution in each country (Mattes 2014:2).

Economic transformation has also involved economic redistribution along racial lines, which, from the beginning, has meant – among other things – the creation of a new, Black middle class which has not only signalled access to economic power by Black South Africans but also acts as a patriotic bourgeoisie and helps drive the larger process of development. The middle class is characterised by a relatively high level of income, involvement in specific occupations (e.g. in entrepreneurship, management,

and teaching) and specific levels of education with an emphasis on post-matric qualifications (Mattes 2014:3). Receiving a regular income, accumulating savings and pension funds, and owning property give middle-class citizens a greater interest in the protection of private property and in gradual rather than radical social, economic, and political change. Beyond the hopes that Africa's new middle class will become an engine of economic growth as a result of shifting consumption and production patterns, some analysts expect this class to foster stability, progress, and democratic consolidation throughout the continent (Schotte 2017).

The notion that the Black middle class often supports democracy and progressive political platforms is grounded in the historical and socio-political contexts where the growth of the middle class was linked to the strengthening of democracy (Mattes 2014). A demographic that has historically faced systemic discrimination and barriers to economic and social advancement, many members of the Black middle class are keenly aware of the importance of democratic principles in fostering equality and opportunity (Mattes 2014). The influence of members of the Black middle class on economic development and political participation stems from their commitment to democratic values, social justice, and inclusive growth. By leveraging their collective voice and agency, the middle class contributes to building a more equitable society for all (Mattes 2014).

When examining the expansion of the Black middle class in South Africa, it is crucial to acknowledge the role of women in social, economic, and political progress. Women's economic empowerment is not only a fundamental human right but also a catalyst for sustainable development and societal progress. It encompasses the ability of women to participate fully in the economy, have control over their economic resources, and enjoy equal opportunities for economic advancement.

One of the reasons for undertaking this study is the dearth of Black middle-class studies that focus on women and how this class position empowers them. This is because, generally, studies of social class have been very generic, focusing on macro-

economic concerns such as unemployment and spending patterns. This is illustrated in the seminal work by Alexander, Ceruti, Motseke, Phadi and Wale (2013) on the middle class in Soweto. This study does not provide a sense of how gender is experienced and how it might influence our understanding of middle-classness in particular ways. This omission may be similarly observed with regard to studies of intimacy – they seldom provide a sense of how this is experienced from a class perspective.

It is therefore the intention of this chapter to focus on how a Black middle-class position empowers Black women to take on the role of breadwinner and to have a voice in decision-making in their relationships. Women's economic empowerment refers to a process whereby the lives of women and girls are transformed from a situation in which they have limited power and access to economic assets to one in which they experience economic advancement (Hunt & Samman 2016). Such power is usually contingent on increased access to money and educational and work opportunities. The Black middle-class position, as is shown in this chapter, provides access to money, a desire to advance one's educational achievements; and access to better work opportunities; it is thus of particular significance to the economic empowerment of women occupying this position.

Furthermore, women's economic empowerment allows equal access to and control over economic resources. This financial control then affords women control over other areas in their lives (Hunt & Samman 2016). The economic advancement of women has led to increased investments in the education and health of children and has reduced household poverty (Levin 2004; Tshoaedi 2008). It is important to recognise that the process of women's economic advancement is not a linear and uncontested one; rather, it is one of constant negotiation and compromise, and it often involves uncertain outcomes (Hunt & Samman 2016). The ability of women to succeed and advance economically, and the power to make and act on economic decisions, is crucial to understanding women's overall development (Levin 2004).

This chapter is drawn from an analysis of the findings of a study conducted in Sandton, Johannesburg, of twenty Black

middle-class women. The project received ethical clearance from the University of Johannesburg, employed a qualitative research methodology (for further information on the methodological considerations involved in this project, please see De Mendonca, 2019). The main argument of this chapter is that women use the financial resources made available by their middle-class position to gain power and control over their lives. This, however, comes with other challenges, including being subject to violence and power struggles in their intimate relationships. To illustrate this argument, the chapter first briefly reviews the literature on the economic advancement of Black women and breadwinning. Thereafter, an overview of the research methods used in the project is provided. Finally, the chapter examines the historical background of women's access to money and considers the ways in which gender norms and patriarchy manifest in their intimate relationships.

Women Empowerment

Africa has been celebrated as having “the fastest-growing middle class in the world” (Southall 2014). The rise of a growing, politically conscious middle class is evident in shopping malls, European-style coffee shops, movie theatres, and new housing complexes springing up in several African cities (Schotte 2017). Following the advent of democracy, Black women were finally acknowledged as ‘full citizens’ of South Africa; however, inequality still looms large as women's lived experiences continue to be only minimally recognised (Parry & Segalo 2017).

Women generally earn less than men and have limited access to economic opportunities. In addition, they experience discrimination in the workplace (Nwosu 2018). Due to continued workplace discrimination, many organisational structures continue to ignore the dual role women play. Women work longer hours to meet deadlines and must do household chores when they get home. However, the economic participation afforded by having jobs outside the home allows women the opportunity to access financial assets and control these and how they use their time. South Africa is a relevant context to study the economic empowerment of women as it has witnessed Black

women increasingly becoming economically active, even though women continue to face inequality and several other challenges. Nevertheless, the economic progression of women in the country allows them the opportunity to escape some aspects of patriarchy while also ensuring their personal autonomy and mobility (Parry & Segalo 2017).

Research illustrates that women become empowered when they have access to financial resources; such access increases their power to make decisions within both the domestic and public spheres (Tshoaedi 2008). This power within the home influences their public power. For instance, women who are financially empowered may choose to go out socialising alone or to attend public meetings (O'Neil & Domingo 2016). Moreover, education and employment outside the home can increase women's power and status within the family and community (Mokotso 2009). Decision-making power refers to the ability to influence decisions (McDermid 2014). This power includes access to decision-making as well as participation in and influence over the decision-making process (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

Gender and Women Breadwinners

In the South African context, women have overcome traditional gender norms by becoming primary breadwinners and providing primary financial support in their homes (Parry & Segalo 2017). Moreover, the patriarchal political policies of the apartheid era, such as the migrant labour system, meant that Black women were employed as domestic workers in distant urban areas away from their families, which transformed the dynamics of African households (Mokoene & Khunou 2019, 2022). Labour migration for women continues as they seek opportunities for economic empowerment in harsh socio-economic conditions (Mokoene & Khunou, 2019). Simultaneously, women in rural areas stayed at home, working in agriculture, while relying on male migrants to send money (Parry & Segalo 2017). Labour migration for men has, over the years, resulted in women remaining behind in rural areas and thus becoming the heads of households (Nwosu 2018). In cases where women are engaged in wage-based employment, sexism and discrimination in the workplace has ensured that

women remain in low-skilled and low-paying jobs (Winston 2005; Parry & Segalo 2017).

As a result of patriarchy and continuing workplace discrimination, women remain marginalised in society. Economic marginalisation is evident in how young, uneducated migrant women remain unable to provide for their children and extended families due to high levels of unemployment and underemployment (Mokoene & Khunou 2019, 2022). Interestingly though, this marginal position of low-pay and low-skilled work generally does not deter women from taking on the breadwinner role in families. In dual-earner marriages, women are less likely to rely solely on the man as the source of family income. As a result of this various types of female-breadwinner families have emerged (Drago, Black & Wooden 2004). First, temporary female-breadwinner families refer to cases where the woman earns more than the man at one point in time but not at others (Sewpaul & Pillay 2011). Temporary female-breadwinner families may emerge accidentally in cases when the woman experiences unusually high earnings or if the man is briefly unemployed or for other reasons temporarily receives low earnings (Drago, Black & Wooden 2004). Second, economic female-breadwinner families refer to cases in which the family may have a female breadwinner because of adverse events affecting the man, such as long-term unemployment or persistently low earnings (Nieuwenhuis & Maldonado 2018). In such cases, when the man has fallen on hard economic times, the family is highly dependent on the woman's income, which affords the woman a sense of economic power within the family (Drago *et al* 2004).

With growing calls for equal opportunities for women in education, employment, and pay, marriages in which both the husband and the wife pursue careers are becoming more prevalent, and it is increasingly possible for each partner to earn equal amounts or for women to earn more than men (Coughlin & Wade 2012). Given these changes in the breadwinner role, it is imperative to better understand this actuality and its influence on the experience of marriage and on romantic relationships. Coughlin and Wade (2012) show that even in relationships in which the man does not fulfil his traditional role, he does not

recognise his wife as being the family's main provider and, hence, fulfilling such a role. This is because men and women usually view men as the provider, even in cases where they are not (Gwagwa 1998; Khunou 2006). Even in circumstances in which a woman is the sole household earner, as when the man is unemployed, husbands and wives may deny that the wife is the provider (Khunou 2006, 2012). The relationship between money and decision-making power exists only for husbands, as women are more likely to view themselves as being part of a team than being the main breadwinner. Women are rarely seen as providers; rather, they are seen as aiding the family (Sewpaul & Pillay 2011). This implies that gendered notions of breadwinning persist in instilling the expectation that this role is for males. This then results in a tug of war among the genders as to the source of breadwinning. Nonetheless, the updated version of the male-breadwinner/female-carer model entails various scenarios in which mothers work for pay but remain primary carers. This may have either positive or negative results. The next section explores narratives relating to this phenomenon.

Consequences for Women Breadwinners

In reality, the situation involving woman breadwinners is more complex than it is when the breadwinner is male, as women in this category face challenges in reassuring society, and their spouse, that the husband remains the logical and legitimate head of household (Muzvidziwa 2013). This is significant because women, particularly Black women, often have to be apologetic about their success and overall career progression, which is not the case when success and progression can be attributed to their spouse.

Although gender norms are transforming, the idea that breadwinning is the role of men alone has thus far been preserved (Holter 2007). This is true even in contexts where a succession of women has assumed the provider role for centuries (Gwagwa 1998; Khunou 2012). The decline of the male-breadwinner role has not meant a shift to more egalitarian (work-sharing) models in the household. Furthermore, gender equality, including women's equal participation in attaining education and in the

labour market, requires transformation in the behaviours and ideologies of men (Waite 1995).

Working men as breadwinners are often commended for providing for the needs of their families. However, when women assume the breadwinner role, they do not receive the same recognition (Folbre & Nelson 2000). Women are often condemned for neglecting their family's needs when they participate in paid work. Parry and Segalo (2017) suggest that the dominant position of being the primary breadwinner in the family does not necessarily secure the safety of women within their homes. In some cases, men who feel disempowered by women's increased earnings attempt to maintain their power through violence, sexual coercion, and marital infidelity (Gendenhuys 2011). According to Conner (2014), money and power influence male violence against women and have an impact on the economic challenges women experience.

Where men do not have the opportunity to validate their masculinity through income provision, they may resort to the use of violence to reinforce traditional ideas of what it means to be a man (Atkinson 2005). The resource and relative resource theories are two perspectives on social structure commonly used to explain wife abuse. According to these theories, married men who have few resources to offer (resource theory) or have fewer resources to offer than their wives do (relative resource theory) are more likely than their resource-rich counterparts to use violence (Atkinson 2005). In both cases, the primary predictor is resources, which are typically operationalised as education, income, and employment. Scholars who employ the relative resource theory argue that men who do not have status superior to that their wives use violence to regain power. Violence often serves as a compensation for men's shortage of resources (Atkinson 2005). Furthermore, violence or the threat of violence can be used to obtain obedience and compliance in the absence of material resources. Violence, or the threat thereof, serves as an alternative power base in cases in which material resources are absent or in short supply. Therefore, husbands of lower social status would be more likely to use violence than would husbands of higher social status (Atkinson 2005).

According to patriarchal perspectives, violence may occur as a man's response to a feeling of powerlessness and his being threatened by a loss of control over an independent spouse (Antai 2011). Key elements to consider when examining control within relationships is the unequal social distribution of power between men and women as well as the economic dependence that may be present. Women whose behaviour diverges from societal expectations of gender roles may be regarded as challenging their partner's masculinity as provider or breadwinner; these partners may then resort to using control tactics to curtail such 'deviant' behaviour, which may result in violence (Antai 2011). For example, women whose economic resources exceed those of their partners are more likely to report experiencing control and violence (Antai 2011).

A Brief Methodology

As indicated, the data informing this chapter was drawn from a study conducted in Sandton, Johannesburg. The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of Black middle-class women's experiences of work-life balance and intimacy. This interest was a result of the observation that even though there are numerous studies and research on the emerging Black middle class and work-life balance, yet very few studies analyse the relationship between class and intimacy. The study aimed to answer the following research question: How do issues of work-life balance create challenges in intimate relationships for Black middle-class women?

The study used a qualitative research approach as this was the most appropriate exploring women's perceptions and experiences. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was employed to select participants for the study. At the conclusion of the fieldwork a total of twenty Black middle-class women of 30 to 50 years of age had been selected and interviewed for the study. The informants were all married and had children; one was in the process of getting divorced. All twenty participants had obtained some form of tertiary education and occupied senior managerial positions at the time of the interviews.

The data was collected over a five-month period. Semi-structured interviews were used as the method of data collection. Such interviews allowed the researcher flexibility while presenting an opportunity for participants to express themselves to the fullest extent possible. The interviews were conducted in English, and a variety of themes were covered, such as age, gender, occupation, household expenses, class, work–life balance, and intimacy. Thematic content analysis was then used to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a qualitative descriptive approach for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. It allowed for flexibility in analysing and interpreting meaningful data. Each participant was given the opportunity to select their own pseudonym, which allowed for anonymity and creativity in the research process.

Research ethics play a crucial role in protecting the research participants and the researcher from harm. Each of the participants were provided with a study information sheet to read prior to the interview. This contained details about the researcher's identity, the overall purpose of the study, and an invitation to participate in it. The information sheet also informed prospective participants that the interview would be recorded and that all their details and their identity would remain confidential, with only the researcher and study supervisor having access to such information. Once the prospective participants had agreed to partake in the research, they were provided with a consent form. Each of the informed consent forms was signed, dated accurately, and retained for record purposes.

To ensure the psychological well-being of the participants, all twenty female participants were provided with a referral letter to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group, which offers free counselling sessions, in the event that they experienced psychological distress as a result of participating in the research.

Gender-Based Violence and Women Breadwinners

In this section, two findings are discussed. The first one concerns women's resentment of breadwinning and provides a sense of how Black middle-class women in management positions

experience being positioned as breadwinners in their families. Many of the women found having to deal with unemployed or underemployed husbands challenging as it was beyond what they had been led expect based on their experience in their families of origin. Most importantly, these women revealed how living with an unemployed or underemployed man presented an obstacle to what they desired from a middle-class lifestyle. This then led to resentment of the husband and to a wish for a 'soft life' in which they were taken care of by the husband as this seemed to be the norm in their social circles.

The second part of this section focuses on telling the story of how Black middle-class women who are high-income earners experience gender-based violence from their spouses because their high-achiever positions make them 'act outside of the norm of what a woman should be'. What was also made visible here is that while a middle-class position gave these women a high income and status in the workplace, it tended to remove some of the comforts they expected in their intimate relationships.

The third section examines the significance of communication in curbing misunderstandings and addressing fears and challenges that might arise in a marriage due to the changes in gender roles that result from the benefits of women occupying a middle-class position. Finally, the story of one of the women, one whose high income had not led to gender-based violence, is discussed. This scenario suggests the possibilities for egalitarian relationships in a context in which Black middle-class women occupy high-level positions in the workplace and earn more than their husbands.

Women's Resentment of Breadwinning

Individuals view, appreciate, and manage money in different ways. According to Shapiro (2007), while money is regarded as a taboo topic, it is closely related to feelings of success, competence, safety, security, and acceptance in a community. Men and women also differ in their attitudes towards money. Men are often more concerned about power and performance, whereas women tend to become anxious about money; thus, they have a greater tendency

to save, whereas men are more inclined to make risky investment decisions (Weaver, Vandello & Bosson 2013). The participants in the study indicated that their husbands were self-employed. Jane indicated that she wanted to be financially taken care of by her husband and felt that her income being the main income in the household placed pressure on her:

Like I am saying, there is so many times when I feel like I have a lot of weight and I don't feel like ... you know, as a woman, there are times when you feel like you want to be a little girl to your husband ... because it's like I am a soldier in the army. You know, growing up I used to dream of a husband who takes care of you, who you look up to and feel is like my dad was to my mother. He was the hero, he was the main man, while with me it's totally opposite.

Jane's view that her husband should take care of her is based on her experiences of her own family of origin: her father took care of her mother, but the opposite is true for her. As a result, she felt pressure from all the responsibilities she has. The phrase she used to illustrate the extent to which she felt overwhelmed is telling: "it's like I am a soldier in the army". War is armed conflict; it is chaos, and soldiers go without sleep or food for days. War is a condition that is unsustainable; it crushes the soul. For Jane to use this metaphor to explain her experience of breadwinning is an indicator of how outside the norm it was for her. She expected to be taken care of by her husband because this was what she experienced in her home of origin. This metaphor of soldiering paints a disturbing picture of the resentment she feels: the context of operations for a soldier is one of very little autonomy and control. Hence, it may be said that Jane experiences her context as being one involving a lack of autonomy.

Like Jane, Tsholo expressed feelings of resentment towards her self-employed husband due to her having to take care of most of the household expenses:

I must say, I never felt it until two months ago ... not two months, no, I'm lying, until two years ago, and solely because I wanted to take sabbatical. I wanted to take off for

a year and I really wanted to take a break, but I cannot do that because I am now the anchor and the sole consistent breadwinner. I know things will happen, but I then felt some sense of resentment, that if all things were equal and he was working, then I would be able to take the sabbatical.

Tsholo explained that she was the sole breadwinner in her family as her husband had been unemployed at the time. She experienced feelings of resentment due to her being unable to fulfil her personal interest in taking a sabbatical. Feelings of resentment have been recorded in other studies of intimate relationships and are usually an indicator of a disproportionate division of labour in terms of income contribution and nurturing responsibilities (Goldberg, McCormick & Virginia 2021; Hatfield, Traupman & Sprecher 1984). Tsholo also indicated that her feelings of discontentment were influenced by her social circle:

And I look at my peers, some of them are stay-at-home mums, and I have that envy, I wish, I wish, just for once, that I could be a girl and be pampered ... look, he does pamper me, but I'm saying, just to stay at home and drive these big cars and not do anything.

Like Jane, Tsholo clearly expects in her marriage what has been mirrored to her by society. Specifically, Tsholo refers to her social circle – these are the people to whom she is comparing herself; they are stay at home moms who drive big cars because their husbands provide for them. Tsholo's expectations are based on normative values. According to Phadi and Ceruti (2011), class is defined not only by consumption but also relative to those in one's social circle. This is also true with regard to acceptable social norms: we compare what we are experiencing to what has been modelled to us in our social context. Thus, the idea that men should be the main provider abounds even in contexts in which women clearly are more empowered to do so.

It is, however, clear from the experience related by Tsholo that the challenge is also that her breadwinning means that she is unable to pursue her other interests, such as being able to take a sabbatical. This is serious inequality because, in cases

where men are the breadwinners, they are most likely to engage in their personal interests regardless of whether the family is taken care of (Williams 2012). This confirms that money and family responsibilities confer differential experiences on women and men.

The inability to operate at a level that one aspires, but not because one is unable to afford to do so, also contributes to discord in marriage, especially when the husband is the one who is unable to afford to take care of his family. Queen shared that she felt her husband was restricting her from achieving personal career and educational aspirations. From Queen's perspective, it appeared that her husband's anger and jealousy was obstructing her ability to achieve her personal goals, which consequently led to a sense of resentment.

So, my friends that I had gone to school with had done very well for themselves, they had got post-grad qualifications, got good jobs, bought cars, and lived in estates, and we would visit them. So, all of those things didn't sit well with him. They would make me uncomfortable in the sense that I would feel inspired that I need to move. I had just got my degree when they had already started working. And I think for him, it was a case of "I will never get there" ... and it caused so many problems for us and arguments and it started getting violent.

Like Tsholo and Jane, Queen also felt resentment because she was unable to live the lifestyle her income and social status should have allowed. She compared her ability to do so with her friends who she says had 'made it', because they had the cars and houses in estates. This middle-class desire contributed to the strife in her relationship because her husband could not afford to contribute to the attaining of this lifestyle. Even though the inability of their husbands to contribute to an improved lifestyle was a considerable challenge, based on the preceding extract, one may observe that a contributing factor to the resentment that Tsholo, Jane, and Queen experienced was that they engaged in a social comparison of what a middle-class lifestyle should comprise. These women used these ideas to judge their status as a family and, most

importantly, their husband's ability to provide for the family. This social comparison was based on the expectations mirrored in their families of origin and close social networks. Simultaneously though, their resentment was also a result of the disproportionate responsibility placed on them, a result of the gendered division of labour.

Gender-based Violence: Men's Resentment of their Wife's Breadwinning

Women who are perceived to act out of turn in public and private social settings usually meet with punishment (Faith 2011). This is the case in contexts where women earn more than their respective husbands and also have a higher social status (in terms of their occupation, education, and economic status). The experiences of the women interviewed for this project illustrate that hegemonic notions of masculinity and tradition and jealousy on the part of their husbands may result in violence and, in some cases, in a complete breakdown of the relationship. For Jane, the issue was that when she addressed the matter of feeling herself being under considerable pressure with her husband, she did not receive the response she expected:

And he said that, no, I must just be patient, he's going to be "that man". In his mind, he's going to be "that man". He always says, "Chill, I'm going to be that man."

The pressure felt and expressed by Jane is the reality of most women who earn more than their husbands or have unemployed spouses. This pressure is not only a result of the actual everyday pressures of supporting a family with one income but also a result of their misalignment in relation to societal gender-role expectations. Gender roles are socially constructed, which implies that each society allocates roles to girls and boys, men and women according to what the society considers appropriate (Thobejane & Khoza, 2014). These gender roles are differentiated and allocated according to what is considered suitable for men and women. Moreover, men are allocated roles that are considered to be masculine, such as providing for, and protecting the family.

Furthermore, the system of patriarchy was conceptualised as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women (Thobejane & Khoza 2014). This is what Janes' husband is referring to when he says "I'm going to be that man" it suggests that he will provide, protect, and be the dominant one in the family. It is also clear that Jane experienced dissatisfaction in her marriage resulting from the role mismatch, which did not align with her expectations. Based on the evidence presented here, one may observe that two of the most common reasons that couples experience problems in their marriages are a lack of money and not enough money (Gottman 2012).

The mismatch between what was expected from each spouse, as this relates to gender roles, proved to create challenges in Jane's relationship. When she was asked about how her husband felt about her being the main income-earner and breadwinner in the home, Jane stated that there was a power struggle within her marriage due to her husband attempting to control her:

I think it's also the personalities. My personality ... I was raised in a way that meant I learned to stand up for myself and do things, and also I can say it's career driven. As I said, I want to be hopeful, I don't want to end up looking at myself and saying I did not do that much. I think I still have a lot to offer, and I think it's too much for my husband to take. I think he needs to work extra hard to be able to control that kind of woman. When we fight all the time, I say to him, you are trying to dim my light [giggling].

Jane expresses here how she feels like her husband is trying to "dim [her] light". Considering what was said here, the couple does not appear to have the same values; Jane seems to be goal-oriented and wants to achieve all that is possible for her to achieve. Her saying, "I don't want to end up looking at myself and saying I did not do that much. I think I still have a lot to offer, and I think it's too much for my husband to take", illustrates that the husband does not have the same drive and needs to achieve more. This might mean that Jane feels she is doing too much in the relationship; hence the notion of him trying to dim her light. This is a recipe for unhappiness in a relationship. Historically,

in order to keep the peace, women also often handed financial management over to their husbands or fathers. Such a move might not be useful for women of this generation as the power that managing their own money affords is important for their success and safety. Research on intimate partner violence shows that access to economic power allows women to leave violent partners (Vyas & Jansen 2018).

Tsholo also indicated that she was aware that her husband was frustrated because she earned more than him; and sometimes she too became frustrated because they could afford fewer luxuries:

Look, it has come through ... we haven't talked about it, but I think it does bother him, uh, that he is not doing it quick enough; his business is not taking off fast enough, and I see that level of impatience. But what matters to me is he does what he loves, he loves it the most. But he can see when I get frustrated. Uhm, we don't travel as much as we would have wanted to ... but I have the maturity to understand that we are building wealth, and he is in a good space.

Tsholo rationalised her negative experiences by explaining that she is happy that her husband does what he enjoys doing to generate income. However, his business had not progressed as quickly as they had hoped, thus setting their family back – they could afford fewer luxury holiday trips. Intimate relationship studies show that the presence of negative feelings does not mean that there is an absence of positive feelings (Hatfield *et al* 1984). This explains Tsholo's experience of understanding her husbands' position while also reporting her negative feelings about his financial position. The disproportionality reported in the experiences of Jane, Queen, and Tsholo may also be understood in terms of a context in which women are forced to make sacrifices for their families by participating in employment for the sake of generating a stable wage as opposed to seeking a job that is fulfilling and aligned with their interests.

In the experiences of these women, we see how their husbands chose to engage in 'risky' business opportunities

without consideration for their families' well-being. African countries are increasingly recognising entrepreneurship as a vehicle their citizen can use to create jobs, foster economic development and growth while reducing poverty (Nyakudya, Simba & Herrington 2018). However, there is a disproportion of engagement between men and women in both developed and developing countries. Existing evidence indicates that, in 2015, 22.7% of men and 17% of women in Africa were actively engaged in early-stage entrepreneurial activity, one of the highest rates in the world (Nyakudya, Simba & Herrington 2018). This confirms that there is an increase of individuals who transition into entrepreneurship as an alternative to paid employment offered by the labour market. Moreover, attitudes towards entrepreneurship are shaped by the expected risks and rewards of engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Research further suggests that men are risk-tolerant while women display higher levels of risk-avoidance across various contexts (Nyakudya *et al* 2018). Women with high incomes from the labour market may choose not to become entrepreneurs if entrepreneurship leads to reduced income compared to the income from their current occupations. This relates to an individual's level of fear of losing a constant flow of income from current employment and the possibility of no return on investments (Nyakudya *et al* 2018). Gender plays an important role in terms of risk attitudes where women are more risk averse than men.

This may explain the case of Tsholo's husband pursuing a business interest that is not bringing in money, doing so because it is what he loves, while Tsholo is unable to pursue her interests, in this case, taking a sabbatical. This further confirms that men and women manage and view money and family responsibility differently.

While Tsholo and Jane did not straightforwardly articulate how their higher incomes had a negative impact on their marriages, Xoli stated expressly that her earning a higher income than her spouse destroyed her marriage. She maintained that this was especially true because her husband was a very traditional man:

It actually killed our relationship, I must confess. Because men, especially Zulu men – it has a huge impact on their self-esteem, their egos, and what made it worse in our environment is that he is a qualified chartered accountant. And he kept on thinking his going to catch up, his going to catch up... and later on, I started serving in different boards as a non-executive, I served, uh ... in listed companies, I served in NGOs as a non-executive, and currently where I'm serving, I get paid for my board, uh ... uh ... seating – that's why I mentioned it; then I was also getting lots of bonuses, then I started also buying lots of properties, so my net worth was just sky rocketing and he couldn't ... it didn't make sense ... “Why is this woman getting it right? Why am I battling so much?”

Xoli said she felt that her husband's Zulu culture played a role in his attitude towards her and that it impacted their marriage. In South Africa, there is a common view that traditional Zulu masculinity is rooted in ideas of deep gender inequality, that the man should be the main breadwinner and provider for his wife and children and that this should be the basis of their relationship. Research, however, shows that hegemonic masculinity is something many men aspire to (Connell 1995; Jewkes *et al* 2015; Khunou 2012). Hegemonic masculinity presents its own version of masculinity, of how men should behave and how putative ‘real men’ do behave, as the cultural ideal. The concept of hegemonic masculinity provides a way of explaining that though several masculinities coexist, a particular version of masculinity is dominant and bestows power and privilege on men who espouse it and claim it as their own (Jewkes *et al* 2015).

The idea of masculine traditional power also played a role in Queen's experiences of violence in her relationship. In Queen's experience, her educational attainment and ability to clearly express what she wants and what she thinks contributed to the physical abuse in her marriage:

I mean, we would have silly arguments, he would say something, and I would respond, and he would say “You respond that way because you are the man of this house”,

you know, and I would wonder where that comes from. He would make comments like “Oh, you are educated, and I am not”. He dropped out of tertiary, and he never completed his chemical engineering course. There was always that complexity issue.

This extract indicates that Queen’s education was a problem for her husband. The reference to her being educated and him not being educated during their arguments is clear example of how jealousy can manifest in intimate relationships when the women have a higher status and income. When someone says this, it is also a way of gaining some power over one, a way to silence one. Queen further expressed how her education and status created further challenges for her:

Because of me and my big mouth – and I would just go on and on because I am a very logical person. But I would be like, “As long as I do not disrespect you, let’s talk, let’s have this conversation”. But then obviously his logic gets to a certain stage where he can’t continue anymore, and then the one time, he threw a slap, and I was like “Ha! Did you just?” ... it happened the first time. We separated for a while and then months later, we got back together, and we were kind of okay, and then it happens again, and it’s in front of the kids and I’m like “No no no no... something has got to give”.

It is evident that Queen’s husband used violence to obtain obedience from his wife. Queen earned more than him, had a higher qualification, and was ambitious; this created problems for her relationship that lead to violent outbursts and physical abuse from her husband. Research argues that intimate partner violence is about power (Vyas *et al* 2018); this is evident in Queen’s experience: her husband slapped her to take away from her the power her education, status, and financial ability gives her. Yet, in this context, her middle-classness gives more than it takes away – she can leave her husband due to his abusive ways. The breaking point for Queen was when these violent acts were committed in front of her children – she could not allow that to continue.

Queen referred to her speaking up during arguments as her having a big mouth; this suggests that she also saw herself from the perspective of the societal norm that women need to be submissive and passive. Women who have assertive personalities or who express their views are often considered to have a 'big mouth', which is an indication that Black women find themselves in a patriarchal society. In many Black cultures, violence is often justified with the statement that the woman should have not spoken back to her husband and that he used violence to 'put her in her place' (Thomas 2011). It is clear from the above extract that, as Queen grapples with her experiences of violence from her husband, she blames herself to some extent.

It is evident that, in terms of academic qualifications and employment, Queen's husband had fewer resources than she did and thus used violence to maintain his masculinity within the marriage, which led to Queen feeling angry most of the time. Feelings of resentment, unexpressed anger, and hurt can result in some women withholding sexual intimacy from their partners. Women often experience violence in their intimate relationships because of the social status their middle-class position confers on them and because of the higher income they receive because of their education and level of employment, such as being in management. Thus, in addition to the benefits it provides, being middle class also removes the element of feeling 'safe' within one's marriage as women who earn more than their spouse are more likely than those who do not to experience emotional, sexual, and physical abuse, especially in the South African context where cultural norms support the abuse of masculine power.

Women's Monetary Power and Decision-Making

Money talks, and research on money and social relations illustrates that it provides power to those who have it (Khunou 2006, 2012). This has been true for men as traditional wage-earners; the same is uncomfortably true for women too. It is uncomfortable because it challenges the gendered belief that men are the natural breadwinners and wage-earners. For example, Jane indicated that, due to her earning a higher income than

her self-employed husband, he viewed her as being 'bossy' for making all the decisions related to their household:

Uhm sometimes it becomes a bit of a weight, you know, as a woman to, like, run the household. There are so many decisions that you take, that you get viewed totally wrongly because you appear to be bossy, you appear to be that person who thinks that 'they are all that'. And it also becomes a weight on my husband when he looks at me and he says that "I cannot do that to you, you can't do it all by yourself". I wish that he could earn more than me because I think it would be so much easier to do things my own way, because ... uhm ... I always have to prove to him that I am not being bossy.

It is evident that Jane felt uncomfortable earning more than her spouse as she ultimately had to make decisions which resulted in her being perceived in an unfavourable manner by him. Being defined as bossy because you are a woman who earns more is one way of someone trying to control and minimise one's sense of self and achievement. As a result of being perceived as bossy, Jane is then put into a position in which she must constantly question herself, thus undermining her power. Jane indicated that she made all the decisions in her marriage because she believed that her husband did not make decisions that help their marriage and family life progress:

Honestly, I make most of the decisions, because ... uhm ... I feel that there are more decisions that my husband makes, and they are dragging us back or down.

Jane's perception was that her husband made decisions that were bad for the family and negatively impacted on her marriage. This is especially so because her husband he earned less than she did. As argued above, women have a greater tendency to save, whereas men are more inclined to take risky investment decisions. It is evident that Jane did not trust her husband's decisions as she believed that they did not help the family progress.

Chapter 4

Similarly, Xoli indicated that she noticed that her financial power provided her with an opportunity to make all the decisions in the marriage; however, this caused conflict within the marriage:

Unfortunately, I ... it happens, and I'm not saying it's right, but the one who has money has the power to decide. It's very difficult for a Zulu man! They are born with that control ... kind of mentality, and now you want to make all the final decisions... obviously it is difficult but, unfortunately, if I'm earning more ... somehow ... I need to define what is affordable for me, and I will have to decide what is doable and what is not doable; you can't decide for me, that's the dynamic.

Xoli made an important observation in articulating how what is affordable should be defined by the person who brings in the money. This is especially important when values concerning what to spend money on are not the same. Xoli also mentioned an interesting view to the effect that due to her earning a higher income than her spouse, she needed to define what is or not affordable based on her income. This view illustrates how Xoli used her earning power to claim back the power to make important decisions in her marriage.

Mary, on the other hand, indicated that, even though her husband earned more than she does, he did not confront issues and did not communicate much; therefore, she ended up making all the decisions:

So, you know, we have a store in Cape Town, to relocate to Cape Town, so my husband is that kind of person who ... he ... I don't know.... I think he has some issues when it comes to that ... he's not that person who wants to confront things. We were planning a holiday: "Oh, okay, babe, so what countries are we going to go to?"... "Let's talk about it later". It's frustrating ... later is later, then you end up making the decision: "Oh, okay, guys, in February we are taking a holiday; we are going to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina" ... you know? That type of thing....

Mary indicated that she did not feel supported where decision-making was concerned. Reading between the lines, it may be that Mary was not supported in decisions she made because she was not the main breadwinner in the family, and her husband's lack of commitment to her decisions resulted from their not having the same idea of what is worth spending on. It may also be that she and her spouse lacked effective communication skills. Communication is a central part of intimate relationships and is reflected in both communication skills and communication behaviours. Communication behaviours are verbal actions by the speaker that are perceived by others.

In contrast to Mary, Tsholo and Mohau indicated that considerable communication takes place in their marriages and, therefore, decision-making is balanced, regardless of who earns more:

Most ... No, we do actually balance out, uhm, like I say, we communicate quite a lot ... uh, I do make the decisions, but his not a very passive man, he is quite vocal; he is firm, he doesn't take things lightly, so there is a lot of persuasion that needs to happen. By the time we make a decision, whoever it is, you are not going to take the other for granted, trust me.

Tsholo stated that she made decisions by herself in the marriage. However, she justified this by indicating that her husband was not passive; rather, he was outspoken. Irrespective of this, she maintained that effective communication took place and that they could conclude the decision-making without one feeling as though they had been taken for granted, thereby creating a win-win situation. Tsholo confirmed her husband's masculinity by stating that he was vocal and firm.

Mohau expressed sentiments similar to those of Tsholo's:

He's not a ... he doesn't have macho issues, like, and you would have thought that because I earned more than him, he will be too much on that, because a lot of husbands, they want to show. So, I will go to him, and I will say "Papa,

what do you think we should do about this and this?” He will say, “What do you want to do about it?” His not big on ... so he does make decisions right ... But he’s not too much, he’s liberal. If I say, “I am uncomfortable with that”, he will say, “okay”; he will go along with certain things.

Mohau implied that her husband did not have a tendency towards hegemonic masculinity that led to treating women as if they were incompetent in relation to money. It is evident that effective communication took place within her marriage and that fair negotiation occurred. When there is a strife about how each gender should behave, there will be conflict about spending, which is linked to gendered normative ideas. However, what is clear is that when women make the money, they have more power to make decisions about how that money should be spent; earning power provides power to women.

Is an Egalitarian Relationship Possible When Women Earn More?

As has been observed in the preceding sections, when women earn more, power struggles occur in intimate relationships; this reflects challenges with normative ideas concerning breadwinning and the position that each gender should occupy. It was therefore interesting to hear Mohau talk about her experiences as the high-income earner in her relationship. In contrast to Tsholo, Jane, and Queen, while Mohau indicated that she earned more than her husband, they never experienced problems relating to this; rather, she and her husband managed to come to an equitable resolution:

We sit down and we see, what do you pay for and what do I pay for ... based on the income, taking into consideration that there are months where his payment will be delayed, and this is one of those months. He’s only going to get paid on Friday, so if there is an expense that is urgent, like, let’s say it’s electricity in this case – I paid it already but he is only going to get paid on Friday, so what he does is that he will refund me when he gets money.

It is evident from the above example that where there is mutual respect, there is a partnership. Mohau was clear that, due to mutual respect and the alignment of priorities, the fact that she earned more is not an issue in her relationship. Mohau and her husband could negotiate money matters among themselves, and they provided support to each other regardless of who earned more.

Mohau indicated that her husband did not obtain a consistent income; this compelled them to implement money-management measures and to plan their finances effectively. In this context, the financial contribution of women to the household was a positive one as they were able to assist their families with urgent matters concerning their home. It is evident that Mohau's middle-class position did in fact allow her to effectively contribute to her household. There was a sense of trust that Mohau would be able to take care of the family financially should anything happen to her spouse.

Conclusion

The economic empowerment of women allows for equal access to and control over resources. This financial access then allows women control over other areas in their lives. However, it has been argued here that this does not provide protection from violence in intimate relationships. The stories shared above illustrate that when women are high-income earners in their relationships, this generally leads to resentment on the part of their husband's inability to provide. The reasons for this resentment are linked to societal expectations that men should provide, as well as societal comparisons relating to what it means to be middle class,. Societal gender norms and role expectations create challenges for high-earning women as they understandably struggle with their positions relative to others in their social circle (Alexander 2013) when their partners do not meet their expectations of being a provider or protector of the family.

This chapter has illustrated that there is often resentment on the part of the husband which, in some cases, leads to gender-based violence and which might eventually lead to divorce. Men

being unable to meet the expectation that they be the higher earner and the main breadwinner creates challenges for them and leads to their inability to interact with their wives in a positive manner. In such cases, the only way they can show their power and frustration is through violence. This finding echoes those of other studies (Antai 2011; Conner 2014; Thomas 2011) which have shown that one of the primary causes of gender-based violence is women earning more than the men with whom they are in a relationship.

It is also clear from the interviews above that communication challenges contributed to some of the strife that these women experienced in their relationships. Communication challenges were a result of the gendered misalignment of expectations about who should be the breadwinner. The couples having to grapple with this non-normative reality made it difficult for them to deal with everyday relational issues, thus leading to communication problems in relation to decision-making.

In this chapter, one case has been discussed in which the high income of the woman did not lead to strife in her relationship. On the basis of this story the question arises as to whether there is the possibility for egalitarian relationships in which the earning status of one spouse does necessarily confer on them more power than it does on the other. In conclusion, the Black middle-class position provides women with access to much-needed resources for their empowerment. However, their access to such power is usually not well received by their intimate partners – and it also seems to require much from the women in terms of accepting the full extent of the changes in their relationships that comes with such power; that is, that they might have to take on the full breadwinning role, which involves not only providing for their children but for their unemployed and or underemployed husbands. The complexity of these cases is that while their middle-class position provides these women with status and financial power, it also precludes the apparent simplicity of conforming to the norm.

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Chapter 5

Gender and Money in Cohabiting Relationships among Coloured Heterosexual Middle-Class Couples

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Introduction

Studies of the Black middle class are increasingly prevalent in South Africa. This is primarily because this group is viewed as being significant for sustaining democracy and for understanding the political trajectory of the country. While most research on the Black middle class in the context of post-apartheid South Africa places great emphasis on comprehending how it was established (Adhikari 2009; Southall 2013), its emergence and growth (Canham & Williams 2016; Edwards & Hecht 2010), and what the preferences of its members are (Cronje & Roux 2010; Khunou 2015), not much work has been done to understand Black middle-classness and intimacy. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to centre the idea that *intimate experience* within Black middle-class spaces is as important as the class's origins and preferences. Studying intimacy is ideal for understanding how socio-economic conditions influence social relations. With this in mind, it is the intention of this study to learn about intimacy from the perspective of the Black middle-class, specifically that of Coloured people,¹ and the dynamics of their intimate relationships in cohabiting settings.

1 Under the apartheid classification system, Coloureds were categorised as "Black," along with Black Africans and Indian communities, forming the Black majority in South Africa. According to Biko's (1978) conceptualisation, "Black" is a socio-political category that includes Black African, Coloured, and

The Coloured community is particularly important in studies of South Africa due to the historical injustices inflicted upon this racial group during the apartheid era. Enduring systemic disadvantages have underscored the need for targeted efforts by the government to address and redress the socio-economic challenges faced by Coloured individuals and communities in post-apartheid society (Southall 2013). Conducting studies on the Coloured population is crucial as much of the work on this group that has been published since the mid-1990s have been controversial, inadequately researched, or extremely biased (Adhikari 2009). Furthermore, the relationship experiences of Coloured people are infrequently researched and documented (Brown 2000). Studying Coloured middle-class heterosexual couples in cohabiting relationships in a post-apartheid South African context holds immense significance for several reasons. First, understanding the dynamics of intimacy within this demographic sheds light on the nuanced experiences and challenges faced by individuals, couples, and families within historically marginalised communities. Given the complex socio-political history of apartheid and its enduring legacy, exploring intimacy among Coloured middle-class couples offers insights into how past injustices continue to influence contemporary social relationships and identity formation. Second, examining intimacy in this context contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the broader socio-economic landscape in South Africa, including patterns of social mobility, family dynamics, and community cohesion. By delving into the intricacies of cohabiting relationships, researchers may uncover valuable insights into the ways in which economic factors, cultural norms, and historical legacies intersect to shape intimate partnerships and household dynamics. Moreover, studying intimacy among Coloured middle-class couples provides an opportunity to challenge prevailing stereotypes and assumptions about race, class, and gender in

Indian individuals who have historically faced marginalisation and collectively identify in the struggle for liberation (Biko, 2002). Officially, the term "Coloured" refers to people of "mixed-blood," encompassing descendants from unions among Black-White, Black-Asian, White-Asian, and Black-Coloured individuals (Brown, 2000:198).

the South African context, fostering greater awareness of and empathy towards diverse lived experiences, and ultimately, centring Coloured voices and experiences as a contribution to more inclusive dialogues and discourses.

A crucial element in this study is the role of socio-economic circumstances and class positionality in the maintenance of intimate relationships. Research has consistently highlighted the significant impact of socio-economic factors on intimate relationships, including factors such as financial stability, access to resources, and social status (Blackstone 2003; Edwards & Hecht 2010; Khunou 2012). Socio-economic disparities can introduce complexities into intimate relationships, shaping power dynamics, decision-making processes, and overall relationship satisfaction (Khunou 2012; Lichter & Qian 2008). Furthermore, class positionality speaks to how individuals navigate their roles and responsibilities within relationships, as well as the expectations placed upon them by society and cultural norms. In considering class positionality, 'middle class' is a multifarious term, socio-culturally constructed and context-dependent (Brown 2000). In this study, a subjective understanding of middle-class has been adopted; one that focuses on how participants self-identify within this socio-economic category. The prevailing assumption is that individuals within the middle-class category generally experience some benefits from their social position, typically having access to economic, social, and political resources, including government services, and even gaining from policies of affirmative action (Seekings & Natrass 2008; Southall 2013). Additionally, this demographic may be characterised as living above the subsistence level, possessing the ability to save and invest, and being able to afford both the fulfilling of essential needs as well as luxuries (Adhikari 2009).

Consequently, this chapter illustrates the intricate interplay between geographical context, social and economic positionality, psycho-social dynamics, and communal structures, shedding light on how these factors shape the intimate relationships and gender roles of self-identified middle-class Coloured individuals in cohabiting relationships. A central theme underlying this argument is the perceived precarious nature of the Black middle-

class position and how this may affect the personal lives of Coloured couples, considering that one's class position or socio-economic status may play a significant role in maintaining these intimate relationships. This chapter further shows that gender-role expectations may alter when socio-economic positionality changes and, although this is not homogeneously experienced, gender roles influence levels of comfort in the relationship. Matters such as the division of breadwinner responsibilities versus domestic duties, as well as the potential for role interchangeability or domestic role reversal in the face of unemployment, are shown to have an impact on the sustainability of intimate relationships.

Colouredness and being Black

To be Coloured is to be outside of whiteness and of European-ness. It is to be inside of non-whiteness and non-European-ness. To be Coloured is to be outside of hegemonic ideas about what it means to be African. These ideas conflate blackness with African-ness. To be Coloured is to be outside of hegemonic ideas about what it means to be Black. (Erasmus 2017:9)

In considering the historical context of South Africa, the 'Coloured' populace as a racial *people* "have served as an intermediate group between whites and blacks in South Africa" (Brown 2000:199). The term 'Coloured' describes individuals of mixed parentage, forming a multi-racial ethnic group characterised by mixed racial descent or "mixed blood" (Brown 2000:198), with historical ties to European colonialists, foreign slaves, and indigenous South Africans. This group was classified as such because it did not neatly *fit* into either the 'Black' or – especially – 'White' racial categories.

Identification of coloured people proved problematic because of their diverse phenotypic traits and adherence to the dominant language and religion of South Africa. Often coloured individuals confounded racial classifications because they varied in complexion from white to very dark, spoke Afrikaans as a first language, or followed the Protestant faith of the white minority. Consequently, the white group needed a method of

identifying coloured people and preventing these individuals from passing as white without the approval of members of the white community. (Brown 2000:200)

Presently, South Africa continues to recognise the division of the South African population into the four racial classifications of Black, Indian, Coloured and White (Brown 2000). As of 2022, the Black [African] (81.4%), Indian [Asian] (2.7%), and Coloured (8.2%) demographic groups collectively comprise the Black majority, accounting for 92.3% of the nation's total population (StatsSA 2022). Biko argued that the term 'Black' should be used to denote all non-white South Africans who were subjected to racial discrimination and marginalisation under apartheid rule (Biko 1978, 2002). This inclusive definition of Blackness has been influential in shaping discussions of race and identity in South Africa, and in dismantling racial divisions. It serves to contest racial hierarchies upheld by the apartheid regime through the embracing of a collective Black identity in order to foster solidarity among oppressed communities (Biko 1978; Seekings & Nattrass 2008). Racial classification of Coloured people has always been a challenge in South Africa, more especially since the country was ravaged by a segregationist regime, and while is still evolving into a post-apartheid state (Canham & Williams 2016; Chisholm 2004). At the core of this racial classification system lies a framework that facilitates the oppression of certain groups while privileging others (Canham & Williams 2016; Huschka & Mau 2006) based on their distinctive genetic composition and diverse phenotypic characteristics (Brown 2000). Recognised historically for occupying an 'in-between' status and having served as a 'buffer group' between Whites and Blacks, Coloured individuals, stemming from both parental groups, sometimes had the ability to pass as White (Brown 2000:199). The Coloured individuals who could pass for White based on phenotypic traits such as fair skin and eye colour, were fortunate enough to receive benefits from their close association with the White dominant group. They had the privilege of "becoming 'Pass-Whites'; individuals who obtained legal reclassification as 'White' from the government" (Brown 2000:199), which afforded them more opportunities for better employment, education, and housing compared to their

Black African counterparts. Currently, the post-apartheid era sees Coloured people – also referred to as multi-racial, multi-cultural, or multi-ethnic – socially and politically affiliated with the Black disadvantaged majority (Brown 2000; Southal; l 2013). Included in this definition of Black, ‘Coloured,’ stands as a type of racialised identity formation commonly associated with and assumed to be the product of miscegenation² (Erasmus 2017). Additionally, many accept that they have ancestral lineage links to the indigenous Khoisan of southern Africa (Adhikari 2009).

The Coloured ‘racial category’ created to identify ‘mixed-race’ people emerged during the apartheid era, referring to a people who descended from Cape slaves,³ the Khoisan,⁴ and other Black people who became part of Cape colonial society in nineteenth-century South Africa (Adhikari 2005; Erasmus 2017). Individuals within the contemporary Coloured population trace their ancestry through multiple generations of ‘mixed’ lineage, whose origins stem from interracial unions among Black, White, European, indigenous, and other foreign populations. This diversity results in a group with ancestral ties spanning various regions around the world (Nilsson 2016).

Racial categorisation, created under the apartheid regime, is still prevalent in South Africa. It enables disparities in

2 Miscegenation denotes the mixing or interbreeding of races, resulting in individuals perceived as ‘multi-racial’ due to the blending of various racial categories that contribute to their Colouredness or Coloured identity. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, the term ‘miscegenation’ is avoided due to its negative connotations and the potential implications of its usage. The concept is employed solely to articulate a recognised conceptualisation of ‘Colouredness’, without intending to excessively emphasise it. The goal is to render the term devoid of significant meaning within this context (Erasmus 2017).

3 The first slave shipment arrived in the Dutch Cape colony in the 1650s; two categories of slaves existed: those owned by the Dutch East India Company (VOC), known as ‘Company Slaves’, and those purchased by the free burghers. The free burghers were Dutch residents of the Cape who owned and cultivated farms but were not affiliated with the VOC as employees (Adhikari 2005).

4 The Khoisan were the first known inhabitants of southern Africa (Erasmus 2017). The term ‘Khoisan’ refers to two distinct groups in southern Africa: the San, who are nomadic hunter-gatherers, and the Khoikhoi, traditionally pastoralists, historically referred to as ‘Hottentots’.

opportunities and benefits and delineates instances of dominance and marginalisation across different racial groups. Coloured individuals, for instance, have long endured inadequate and insufficient opportunities, remaining part of the disadvantaged majority despite the purported progress towards equality. Their socio-political and economic influence remains limited, and their marginalisation is further compounded by their ambiguous position between the binary racial classifications of White and Black. This can often lead to the lack of a sense of belonging or acceptance. Coloured individuals have always contended with social and psychological ambiguity concerning their racial identity (Brown 2000). Collectively, the Coloured community in South Africa have experienced a form of marginalisation that restricts broader interpretations and meanings associated with identity beyond historically inherited stereotypical definitions. Coloured individuals are relegated to the margins of society and are stereotypically associated with notions of 'otherness' and inferiority (Adhikari 2009). This enduring disadvantage manifests in ongoing disparities, as Coloured individuals remain disproportionately deprived of the benefits of local socio-economic development, community empowerment, improved living conditions, and broader access to resources and opportunities. Woolard and Leibbrandt (1999) highlighted the profound economic disenfranchisement experienced by Coloured communities, with a staggering 46.1% of the population categorised as ultra-poor due to the historical lack of employment opportunities during apartheid (Woolard & Leibbrandt 1999). This systemic exclusion from the formal economy perpetuated socio-economic disadvantages within the community, exacerbating poverty and limiting access to essential resources and opportunities for advancement.

The Coloured Black Middle-Class in Post-Apartheid South Africa

As indicated in the introductory section of this chapter, understandings of and scholarly enquiry into the Black middle-class are expanding in post-1994 South Africa. This chapter primarily explores the conceptualisation of Black middle-class

identity within the context of being both Coloured and middle-class. As documented by Southall (2013), the percentage of Coloured individuals within the middle-class bracket in South Africa increased from 6.5% to 15.6% over a span of six years. Those identifying as middle-class among the Coloured community base their classification on various factors, such as the extent to which their lifestyle is comfortable, access to basic necessities, resource availability, ownership of luxuries, capacity for savings, and job security. Additionally, socio-economic indicators such as education level, occupation, income, and opportunities significantly influence the social standing of Coloured individuals (Southall 2013). Those self-identifying as middle-class tend to perceive themselves as occupying a middle ground between wealth and poverty, neither excessively affluent nor destitute but possessing sufficient means (Melber 2016). Middle-classness has been perceived as being neither rich nor poor and neither above nor below others, but rather “living somewhere between those who are suffering and those who have everything” (Melber 2016:4). Furthermore, a middle-class ‘self-perception’ or the perception of *belonging* to the middle-class is intricately linked with feelings of pride, dignity, self-respect, upward mobility, and aspirations (Melber 2016), an important socio-cultural assertion that ought not to be denied to any individual who identifies with it.

The emergence of the Black middle class in South Africa has been a significant phenomenon in the post-apartheid era, reflecting both socio-economic progress and ongoing challenges. Factors such as education level, occupation, income, and access to opportunities have all played crucial roles in shaping the socio-economic status of the Black middle class (Southall 2013). However, the concept of middle-classness among *Black* South Africans is multi-faceted, encompassing not only economic factors but also cultural and social dimensions. For instance, many Black individuals identify as middle class based on the comfort their lifestyle affords, the ability to meet basic needs, access to resources, and especially employment security (Seekings & Natrass 2008; Southall 2013). Despite these advances in relation to these factors, challenges such as income inequality, racial discrimination, and limited access to quality

education and employment opportunities persist, posing barriers to the full realisation of the potential of the Black middle class in South Africa.

The expansion of the African middle class has signified a marked increase in the upward mobility of Black individuals into skilled employment roles (Southall 2013). This trend reflects a growing prevalence of Black employees occupying clerical, technical, and non-manual positions within the workforce. Such developments can be interpreted in two ways: either as a gradual dismantling of racial barriers, where employers actively promote Black workers due to a shortage of White employees, or as a means for employers to assign previously 'White jobs' to Black individuals at lower wages (Southall 2013). Alternatively, the promotion of Black workers into higher-level positions in response to a shortage of White employees could be viewed as part of broader efforts to diversify the workforce. The shifting employment patterns highlight both advancements and challenges in the quest for racial equality in the South African labour market. This could be interpreted as a sign of progress towards racial equality, where institutional changes and affirmative action policies facilitate greater inclusion of Black professionals in roles that were historically reserved for Whites. On the other hand, another interpretation could reflect a more superficial change where racial integration occurs without addressing underlying issues of pay equity and job security.

The emergence of the Coloured middle class in South Africa has been shaped by a combination of historical legacies, economic policies, and social dynamics, that is, by a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, and political factors (Seekings & Natrass 2008). Post-apartheid policies, such as affirmative action and Black economic empowerment (BEE), have assisted in creating opportunities for access to education and employment for previously marginalised groups (Southall 2013). These policies have contributed to the upward mobility of Coloured individuals into skilled occupations and positions within the middle class. Furthermore, economic transformations and urbanisation have played a role in the expansion of the Coloured middle class (Southall 2013). As South Africa's economy has evolved, new job

opportunities have emerged in various sectors, providing avenues for Coloured individuals to advance professionally. Additionally, cultural and social factors have influenced the emergence of the Coloured middle class. Changing attitudes towards race and identity, in addition to increased access to education and opportunities for social mobility, have contributed to the development of a distinct Coloured middle-class identity (Southall 2013). The end of apartheid brought about a re-evaluation of racial classifications and a greater emphasis on the inclusion and representation of previously marginalised groups. As educational opportunities expanded, Coloured individuals were able to acquire the skills and qualifications necessary for entry into professional and skilled occupations. Educational upliftment facilitated upward mobility. Furthermore, social mobility has also been supported by changes in economic policies and affirmative action measures aimed at addressing historical injustices. Attempts at the economic, social, and cultural advancement of Coloured people helps to foster a sense of community, contributing to the growth of a distinct Coloured middle class.

Colouredness, Money, and Intimacy

Intimacy and Cohabitation

In this study, intimacy refers to the romantic bonds between men and women in heterosexual relationships who cohabit as both sexual and life partners. The research delved into their individual experiences within the household, including their private emotions and attitudes concerning their relationships, as well as their day-to-day interpersonal interactions. In this context, intimacy is explored by examining the personal and societal constructs, ideologies, perceptions, and experiences of individuals in the study regarding the roles, expectations, attitudes, and behaviours of their partners within the intimate relationship (Shipley 2011).

Cohabitation, positioned as an alternative avenue for intimate partnerships (Domínguez-Folgueras *et al* 2017), distinct from marriage, is characterised by Levin (2004) as a mutual

arrangement between unmarried individuals who opt to cohabit as intimate companions and engage in a sexual relationship. Such a decision to reside together without formalising a marital union has evolved into an acknowledged social institution. Nevertheless, cohabitation is often perceived as a transitional phase that may precede marriage; it is seen as a temporary arrangement that may culminate in either formal matrimony or dissolution of the relationship (Mokomane 2013). This perspective implies that the ultimate objective is marriage unless the cohabiting arrangement is terminated. As with marriage, a cohabiting couple shares the same living space and engages in similar daily routines of shared domesticity (Levin 2004; Wilcox & Nock 2006). The most salient difference lies in the absence of the ceremonial and legal aspects of marriage, as cohabiting partners do not attain the legal status associated with marriage (Levin 2004). However, the intention of cohabiting couples is to eventually marry since couples who do cohabit predominantly do so in preparation for marriage and are thus “significantly more likely to get married at some point in the future” (Moore & Govender 2013:623). In South Africa, the prevalence of cohabitation stands out as one of the highest among sub-Saharan countries. Socio-economic disadvantage seems to play a significant role in the increasing numbers of cohabiting couples (Mokomane 2013; Moore & Govender 2013), as structural changes and high levels of unemployment or low-wage employment often act as barriers to marriage. Notably, financial constraints, including the considerable monetary investment required for a wedding, contribute to this trend. Such financial burdens impact on the ability of couples, especially men, to afford the costs associated with marriage (Mokomane 2013).

One of the primary reasons Black couples tend to oppose or delay marriage, apart from the fear of high divorce rates, is the importance placed on establishing social status beforehand (Nurse 2004; Raley 1996). Particularly for Black men, choosing to cohabit rather than to marry is often associated with concerns about employment uncertainty and financial stability (Mokomane 2006; Nurse 2004). At times, it is typical for women to seek reassurance in the form of job security from their partners, while men wait for a stable, reliable income before contemplating marriage or

committing firmly to their partners. Nurse (2004:4) suggests that levels of socio-economic achievement are viewed as a key determinant or prerequisite for marriage, a dynamic that affects men in “minority communities or subordinated masculinities” to a greater extent, since employment opportunities are significantly scarcer for Black men than for their White counterparts. Without stable employment and adequate income, Black men may feel hesitant about committing to marriage or making firm commitments to their partners and may choose to then cohabit instead. Hunter (2007) demonstrated that unemployment led to a reduction in marriage rates by eroding men’s perceived ability to serve as dependable providers. Thus, economic challenges faced by Black men influence their decisions about marriage, and they may postpone marrying until such time that they can achieve a level of economic security that aligns with societal expectations.

Intimacy and Socio-Economic Instability

The inability to generate income is perceived as emasculating for men as it renders them incapable of fulfilling the traditional patriarchal role of being the breadwinner and provider. Khunou (2012) raises an important point about the existence of a flawed notion that men are inherently inclined and capable of providing, which leads to the minimisation of the financial contributions made by women to the household. This expectation is particularly burdensome for Black men, who contend with disproportionately high rates of unemployment and underemployment (Khunou 2012). Nurse (2004) also illustrates how a decline in the traditional masculine role as breadwinner—an essential source of authority, power, and prestige for men—is associated with difficulties in attracting women and consequently fewer opportunities for long-term companionship. Under these circumstances, men face immense pressure to secure employment that allows them to earn income, and this solely to maintain their status of masculinity within a patriarchal society (Khunou 2012).

Komarovsky (2004) examines how unemployment affects masculinity, the man’s status and role within their families and households, their *male* identity, and intimate relationship and familial dynamics, revealing that unemployment often leads to

a decrease in men's perceived status and self-esteem. Women often play an integral supportive role when their male partners are unemployed. Women's support can be crucial in maintaining family stability and morale during periods of unemployment. However, Komarovskiy notes that the dynamics and effectiveness of this support depend on several factors, including the man's attitude towards job seeking and the couple's overall relationship quality (Komarovskiy 2004). When men are perceived as making sincere efforts to secure employment, women are typically more inclined to offer emotional and financial support.

Socio-economic achievement, often regarded as an essential criterion for long-term intimate relationships, disproportionately affects men in "minority communities or subordinated masculinities" (Nurse 2004:4). Specifically, Black men face significantly lower employment opportunities compared to their White male counterparts, which exacerbates these challenges (Nurse 2004). The interplay of love and money cannot be overlooked since the intricate ways in which emotional affection, including love, is often demonstrated and expressed through material support, including financial assistance, in many African contexts (Khunou 2012).

Khunou (2012:11) asserts that money takes on significant social meaning for couples, which is influenced by how it is acquired and spent, and that it thereby shapes social exchanges, intimate interactions, relationship dynamics, and gender roles. Money plays a central role in the functioning of intimate relationships (Khunou 2012:17), influencing their formation and maintenance. Consequently, one's class position becomes a crucial determinant of one's intimate experiences. Unemployment, particularly when it affects men, can affect households' and intimacy dynamics.

Unemployment among the Coloured population surged from 18.8% to 24.1% from 2004 to 2014 (StatsSA 2014) and, almost another decade later, the unemployment rate of Coloureds in South Africa stood at 21.9% (Statista 2023). Financial insecurity, unemployment, and disparities in socio-economic status can introduce strains into the intimate partnership,

affecting overall relationship satisfaction (Plank & Khunou 2020). Moreover, societal expectations regarding gender roles and economic contributions within relationships – particularly those related to cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity – can further complicate the relationship between intimacy and socio-economic instability (Butler 1990). The significance of money in shaping social transactions and relationship dynamics, as well as the impact of unemployment and economic marginalisation on individuals' ability to form and sustain intimate connections, are crucial for comprehending the complexities of human relationships and intimacy within Black social contexts.

Intimacy and Gender Roles

At the heart of romantic relationships involving cohabitation lies the societal construct of gender roles (Edwards & Hecht 2010). According to traditional gender norms, women are expected to be nurturing and to take responsibility for household duties, while men are assigned leadership roles within the broader society and in the household, including financial provision and decision-making (Blackstone 2003). These gender roles have been deeply entrenched in South African society and are influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors. Despite some evolution in these views over time, many traditional gender expectations persist, influencing contemporary relationship dynamics (Shipley 2011). Khunou (2012:8–9) argues that gender roles are “specified and accomplished” through social interaction and shape life organisation and societal norms. Traditional ideals of femininity and masculinity dictate the specific roles expected of women and men, respectively. As noted by Woolard and Leibbrandt (1999), women are often tasked with a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities, while men are expected to be the primary breadwinners. Women are rarely viewed as providers, just as men are seldom seen as nurturers. Even when given the opportunity to *do gender*, women often opt to fulfil caregiving roles. Khunou (2012) argues that, as a result, the responsibility of being a provider is consequently assigned solely to men.

Even though traditional gender-role expectations persist, there is increasing recognition and acceptance of more egalitarian

gender roles within cohabiting partnerships, where couples negotiate and share responsibilities (Domínguez-Folgueras 2012:14). Economic instability may challenge traditional gender norms, as both partners may need to adapt their roles and responsibilities to navigate financial hardships. Women may find themselves taking on additional burdens, such as seeking employment to supplement household income, while men grapple with feelings of emasculation due to unemployment (Woolard & Leibbrandt 1999). While some couples may adhere to traditional norms, others may renegotiate roles and responsibilities based on individual circumstances and preferences (Khunou 2012). This renegotiation process may involve open communication, mutual support, and a willingness to challenge societal expectations.

A Brief Overview of Methodology

The methodological questions pertaining to this chapter are discussed in detail in Magro (2018). This section provides a summary of the methodology, offering readers brief insight into the framework and setting of the study.

The research site for this study was Eldorado Park (also known as Eldos), an area southwest of Johannesburg, approximately 20 kilometres from the central business district, which is predominantly inhabited by Coloured individuals. Established in the 1960s during apartheid rule, it was specifically designated for those classified as Coloured. Eldos lies on the southern boundary of Soweto and, prior to 1994, was a 'Coloured township' as designated by apartheid race engineering. The population of Eldorado Park has been recorded as being 65 698, with 55 884 (85.06%) of the inhabitants identifying as Coloured (StatsSA 2011). The intention of this study was to understand Coloured identity, specifically in relation to intimacy and middle-classness, in a locale different from that which is usually the area of focus for studies of what it means to be Coloured. Many such studies are typically undertaken in the Western Cape, primarily due to the high concentration of Coloured people in that province (Nilsson 2016). In 2016, the Coloured population in the Western Cape was 2 984 398 individuals, representing 47.5% of its total population, compared to 35.7% for Black Africans, 0.8% for

Indians/Asians, and 16.0% for Whites (StatsSA 2016). Shifting the focus to Gauteng from the Western Cape, or to Johannesburg rather than Cape Town, provides a novel perspective on Colouredness and the experiences of Coloured identity.

A total of twenty Coloured individuals from Eldorado Park who self-identified as middle class, ten women and ten men in heterosexual cohabiting relationships, were selected to participate in the study (see Table 5.1. for participant details of those used in this chapter). The participants were identified and selected based on specific requirements, in accordance with the participant-characteristic criteria for this study. This included the following: self-identification as Coloured and as middle class, between the ages of 20 and 35 years old, and in a heterosexual cohabiting relationship. Despite objective measures indicating that most of the participants could be categorised as lower middle class, Melber (2016) suggests that the desired self-categorisation of many individuals is a subjectively defined middle-class. Participants' conceptions of middle-classness involved them being neither rich nor poor, but rather being in the *middle*, and capable of finding ways to sustain themselves in order to survive and be comfortable.

Data was collected by means of one-on-one, face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed. Once transcription of the data had been completed, thematic content analysis was used to identify, code, examine, and interpret meanings present in the data. The following section presents a discussion of the findings derived from interviews with thirteen participants. These interviews are highlighted as they align closely with the themes explored in the book.

Understanding the Interplay of Unemployment, Intimacy, and Gender Roles

This section evaluates the stories recounted by the participants, offering insights into the experiences of Black middle-class identity and the factors influencing intimate relationships. It is organized into four distinct parts. The first explores how women

and men perceived unemployment and its effects on their experiences of intimacy. It illustrates how both women and men emphasise the significance of love and not money in the shaping of their relationships.

The second part presents a discussion on how men's views of women's roles are gendered. It briefly illustrates how the views of men underplay the provision role of women as one which the latter do not have to undertake. This undermining is the result of gendered thinking, which is explored further in the fourth part of the section.

The third part focuses on the experiences of the women in the study, exploring the reasons they cited for their perspectives on – and positions taken in relation to – their partners' unemployment. They indicated that their responses were influenced by the underlying causes of their partners' joblessness. For instance, they differentiated between cases of voluntary resignation or outright refusal to seek employment, and situations in which the partner was instead a victim of external circumstances such as retrenchment, redundancy, or a lack of job opportunities. Participants showed greater understanding in the latter scenarios. For most of the women, the prospect of unemployment seemed to have little or no bearing on their perceptions of their relationships. For them, it was inconsequential whether their partners were unemployed or not. They attributed this to one of three reasons: first, their partners had been previously unemployed at least once; second, the men still managed to provide financially through alternative means; or third, the woman's income alone was sufficient for sustaining the household and the family unit.

The fourth part of this section examines how gender roles shape intimate relationships and influence perceptions of care and provision. This is accomplished by exploring the perspectives of women and men on their role in their relationship and their individual gendered experiences within their household. The section highlights the considerable importance placed on gender-specific role-functions and couple-specific task allocation, even when these are flexible and regardless of whether they were

covertly observed, that is, as an unspoken rule. Women and men expressed similar views regarding the significance of these roles. In each household, there were anticipated role-functions for both genders, whether these were acknowledged or not. Women were predominantly responsible for domestic and childcare duties, which encompassed tasks such as cleaning, laundry, shopping, and cooking, while men were expected to assume leadership roles by heading the household and providing financially. While some distinctions may have emerged, traditional expectations of gender roles have persisted.

Navigating Intimacy Amidst Unemployment: The Female Gaze

The participants shared their perspectives on the intricacies of their intimate female relationships in the face of the looming threat of unemployment. The resilience of love, commitment, and steadfast support when confronted with economic uncertainty proved to be a recurring theme, though with certain exceptions. The personal narratives provided insights into the ways in which the participants navigated economic instability and whether it influenced the relationship.

Lisa, a stay-at-home mother who lived with her partner of over nine years, her children, and both her parents, indicated that she loved her partner for reasons unrelated to money. Her partner, who worked in construction as a mechanical engineer, was the only breadwinner and supported the entire household. She implied that it would be cruel and unjust to let his unemployment alter her perception of her man. Her view is shared below:

For me, it's like, you love this person, now he's not working; you don't love him, then I will be a gold-digger, you understand. So, I would actually just love him for his money, that's wrong, so, no, it won't change me ... I don't think I'll be that nasty to him.

Lisa expressed her affection for her partner, emphasising that if his financial challenges were to affect their love, it would signify a relationship that had been founded on inappropriate motives.

She used the term “gold-digger”⁵ to illustrate her point that prioritising money over genuine affection would be inconsistent with the fundamental nature of a loving relationship. Jade, a high income-earner and breadwinner in her household, indicated that her income alone was sufficient to sustain her and her partner (and their growing family). Jade was pregnant at the time of the interview and had been living with her partner for only a year. Regarding love and money, Jade expressed sentiments similar to those of Lisa. She maintained that her opinion of her partner would not change, and that the relationship would not be negatively affected should he be unemployed. She said the following to illustrate her position:

It all goes back to the fact that I met him not working; I liked the person that he is I would respect him, whether he has money or not, whether he’s working or not, whether he’s investing or not, I would respect him.

Both Lisa and Jade challenge conventional relationship norms, where many women typically avoid dating men who are unemployed. Plank & Khunou (2020) note that this hesitation is particularly prevalent among young Black middle-class women, often leading to some choosing to remain single rather than pursue relationships with unemployed partners. In contrast, Lisa and Jade prioritise their commitment to their partners regardless of their employment status. Jade’s stance underscores the significance of respect and genuine affection, emphasising love for love’s sake. Her point of view does not diminish the importance of financial stability; rather, she advocated that love should transcend monetary considerations in determining whom to love and how to love.

On a similar note, Megan, whose partner supported her and their children financially, also expressed that her view of him would remain unchanged should he become unemployed. This stance held true despite his role as the sole provider and

5 Referring to an individual, often a woman, who participates in a form of transactional (sexual) relationship where financial gain takes precedence over emotional connection or love.

primary breadwinner for the family. Megan had been in a mixed-religion relationship with her partner for four years; she had been a stay-at-home mother throughout their cohabitation. She said the following:

I knew him before, you know, he even actually started with this business, uhm, so, I don't know, I don't think I will change my perception of him ... he's not someone that will just sit and wait for something to come along. I will still respect him and, you know, regard him as the same man that he is.... I knew him before he was working at that place at the time, when I can say that I've earned more money than him ... he's still the same person.

In contrast to Jade and Lisa, Megan acknowledged that financial difficulties could indeed cause stress and strain in intimate relationships:

I guess everybody – you know, when there are problems financially in a relationship, they will have that stress or strain that they have to deal with ... but it won't, like, change the whole, uhm, this-thing [perception] of him.

However, as did Jade and Lisa, Megan affirmed her commitment to respecting her partner, regardless of the unfavourable financial circumstances. The one common attribute amongst most of the women was their experience of meeting and falling in love with their respective partners during a period of unemployment. In this regard, they professed eternal love and unwavering devotion to their partners; love that no financial strain would alter. This perspective contrasts with prevailing societal attitudes and findings outlined in research by Khunou (2012) and Plank and Khunou (2020), which suggest that unemployed men are often considered undesirable for intimate relationships.

Gendering Women's Role to Nurturing: Their Money Viewed Differently

It is important to note at this point that the socially imposed gender norms concerning men being providers dominated

the responses of male participants in this study, reinforcing the idea that their perspectives on the potential of women as providers were regressive. This may be attributed to the ongoing expectation that employed women must still fulfil nurturing roles within the private sphere. As a result of this, these men maintained that the women were not obligated to contribute financially, since they are traditionally tasked with nurturing the family and managing household affairs. Such a belief confines a woman to keeping within the limits of domestic work rather than pursuing employment outside the home (Blackstone 2003). The men claimed the financial responsibility of providing for the household, asserting that women's lack of financial contribution would not adversely affect intimacy within the relationship.

Lever, a Jewish Coloured man without children, who had been in a relationship for less than a year, maintained that his relationship was not in any way dependent on his partner's financial contribution. Like many of the other men, he believed that the traditional feminine role required a woman to be confined to the home rather than to working outside the home for a wage (Blackstone 2003). Lever noted that his partner at the time was the first and only woman that he had lived with and acknowledged that adjusting to sharing his space was a new experience for him. Nonetheless, he commended her for *easing* his home life by assuming domestic responsibilities when she moved in.

Lever admitted that he cared about her dearly and invited her into his personal space regardless of her socio-economic status. Lever did not place much value on what his partner contributed financially; instead, he valued her nurturing role. This indicates that men often undervalue women's economic contributions, focusing less on the financial aspect and more on their roles inside the home. They tend to minimise the significance of women's financial input, reflecting a broader disregard for the value of women's financial contribution to the household. Lever preferred to think of being in a relationship as being with someone with whom he could build a life, and had little to no concern for her economic positionality or material wealth:

I found her when she was unemployed; I would rather start with someone in life who is unemployed, who's got nothing, because at the end of the day then we can achieve everything together ... if you like somebody and you are, like, really searching for love, I mean that person's circumstances should not be an issue to you, isn't? ... You like the person; you don't like the person for their education or their job.

This quote illustrates that Levert does not subscribe to the normative societal belief of prioritising material position over love. Evidently, he places emphasis on love for its intrinsic value, although, to some extent, the idea of women as nurturers remains important in his conception. The significance of Levert's statement is highlighted by the fact that he met his partner when she was unemployed and treated her with respect. This underscores his principle that their partnership should not be centred on material possessions. This prompts consideration of whether his stance would have been different had he met his partner when she was employed.

Earl's story of intimacy paralleled Levert's in several ways. At the time of the interview, Earl was 33 years old and in a two-year-long relationship with his partner, who was the main breadwinner in the home. Earl noted that they had grown up together, had attended the same school, and had lived in the same neighbourhood throughout his childhood. Partners who have known each other for a long time have the most comfortable relationships because a strong foundation is built over time (Overbeek *et al* 2007). Earl claimed that he had known his partner for his entire life prior to pursuing a relationship with her later. He had the following to say about their relationship:

When it comes to how I feel about her or love her ... it wouldn't really change because money can't buy love ... so, why would it change? I would still be there for her, I would still love her the same, still go out of my way for her ... she would do the same for me, if I was in her position, if I had to lose my job ... no one really deserves that, what you really need at that time would be the love and support.

Earl believed that money could not replace love and that even if his partner were to lose her job, it would not affect their relationship. He said that he would support his family and uphold the household with his income alone, and that it was the love between them that was most important. A foundation built in the face of adversity determines the longevity of the relationship (Overbeek *et al* 2007), a sentiment that was emphasised by Earl when he affirmed that he would have loved his partner even if she were unemployed.

For all the men in this study, the employment status of their partners did not seem to negatively influence their perceptions of or attitudes towards their women. The male participants unanimously acknowledged that an additional income would benefit the household, yet they were not inclined to pressure their partners into earning a living. This stance reflects the belief among men that it is not the primary responsibility of women to provide financial support for the family, but rather to be the nurturers in the home (Blackstone 2003; Domínguez-Folgueras *et al* 2017).

Money ‘Matters’: If the Man Can’t Provide, What is He?

Monica, a 29-year-old mother of three children and expecting her fourth at the time of the interview, noted that her partner had been unemployed prior to her pregnancy. During this time, she supported the household until he managed to secure employment. Enduring her partner’s temporary unemployment until such time that he found a job, likely shaped Monica’s views on unemployment and intimacy. Asked whether her perception of her partner would change if he became unemployed, she had the following to say:

It will depend on the reason, okay, but I don’t think it will change my perception of him because he’s lost his job previously and we are still together, and I’ve always supported him ... it won’t change my perspective of him because I know he’s very determined; even though he loses his job, he’ll always find a way Like I said, he is ambitious, so, he will definitely find something – he won’t

just sit around and do nothing, waiting for my salary to come in.

Monica was supportive of her partner when he was unemployed because she recognised his unwavering determination to succeed. She had patience with him, acknowledging his resilience and ambition. Monica's response reinforces the idea that when men are perceived as making genuine efforts to find employment, women are generally more willing to support them emotionally and financially (Komarovskiy 2004). This support is often contingent on the belief that the man is committed to improving his situation. Komarovskiy's (2004) study highlights that women's willingness to support unemployed partners is influenced by their perceptions of the partner's effort and responsibility, as well as the broader socio-economic context in which they live. This sentiment is also evident in Monica's words:

Unless he changes his attitude towards – uhm, let's say – unless he changes his mind and, say, he's given up on life, and then only, because you can't work with someone like that ... nothing will change.

Thus, according to Monica, if a man were to behave as if his unemployment is an insurmountable reality, navigating such a circumstances would be challenging. This suggests that, for Monica, there are conditions for being unemployed while being in a relationship: while actively seeking employment is acceptable, adopting a defeatist attitude is a deal-breaker.

Mary-Jane's perspective differed significantly from Monica's – she regarded her unemployed partner as weak and feeble due to his inability to provide. Mary-Jane was the only woman in the study who candidly admitted that her attitude towards her partner shifted immediately upon his loss of employment. Her partner was the sole breadwinner and often changed jobs, while Mary-Jane stayed at home and took care of their daughter and domestic duties. His employment brought him a necessary salary, and without it, his family was severely affected. Mary-Jane responded as follows to the question of how she perceived her unemployed partner:

Sometimes I look at him as weak, not a man, who can't provide; just sitting at home makes him very depressed ... I do see and look at him different, and when he does have a job, I also look at him different ... Him not working, it's him being at home all the time ... us doing everything together, it's irritating because wherever I am, he is; wherever he is, I am; uhm, it turns around to us even arguing, and the arguments get so big where we fight, and the child sees this.

Mary-Jane's response underscored the destabilising impact of her partner's unemployment on their family, particularly as there was a child involved. She firmly expected him to provide financially, and his inability to do so led her to view him as lazy and irresponsible. Nurse (2004) notes that, within a patriarchal framework, masculinity is often measured by men's ability to support their families financially. Mary-Jane's partner's perceived powerlessness and failure to generate income positioned him as emasculated, unable to fulfil the traditional role of provider (Khunou 2012; Plank & Khunou 2020). This perception of the link between men and unemployment may have been the primary factor that contributed to the conflict in Mary-Jane's relationship.

The prospect of financial strain or unemployment did not pose a significant threat to the intimate relationships of Mary-Jane, and most of the other women who participated in the study. However, the prospect of being in a relationship with a man perceived as powerless and emasculated was a notable source of distress for Mary-Jane. This sentiment is understandable, given the Coloured community's unemployment rate of 21.9% (Statista 2023) and the fact that many men often engage in informal employment or temporary business ventures to generate income. That is, the women did not see financial issues per se as particularly threatening – or as the primary threat – to the relationships. Instead, their concern lay with men who lacked drive and ambition to secure employment, or lacked additional sources of income and showed no inclination towards exploring or pursuing such alternatives.

Joblessness may have unfavourable consequences for intimate relationships as perceptions and experiences of intimacy

may be significantly impacted by socio-economic challenges. Financial difficulties within the relationship or household, particularly when children or dependents are involved, can lead to strain and tension. Couples may find themselves in difficult positions, either having to deal with the pressure that comes with having an unstable income or making a tough decision regarding continuing the relationship. Khunou (2012) has argued that the masculine idea of socio-economic well-being is synonymous with money being perceived as a representation of power and manhood. In patriarchal societies, notions of masculinity revolve around men working, making money, and providing. Contemporary perceptions of masculine identity and self-worth are based on men's employment and their ability to support their families financially (Nurse 2004). Most of the women involved in this study echoed these sentiments, indicating that their relationships would inevitably be affected to some degree if their partners were unable to generate income and provide for the family financially.

Those who held opposing views or felt that their men's unemployment would not affect the relationship attributed this to a number of factors. First, they noted that their partners had experienced joblessness previously and had the potential to regain employment. Second, they felt their income could adequately support the man (and children) until he found employment again. Lastly, they believed that these men could still generate income through informal employment. Lee-Ann, for example, who worked as a beautician, had been supportive of her partner during his past period of unemployment, even while she was pregnant. She and her partner had already been in a relationship for eight years at the time of the interview. She said:

We were like that when we just met and things wasn't well; we were sitting and waiting, there was nothing ... and I was pregnant that time, that's why all that was building us up. It's like we have to look after each other; maybe that's why we so long together, because we are looking after each other.

Even through the worst of times, Lee-Ann stuck with her partner of eight years. This supports the idea that couples in relationships

go through the ups and downs, experiencing both highs and lows (Nurse 2004). Even amidst adversity, individuals who are deeply invested in their relationships often choose to preserve their partnerships rather than to allow challenges to derail them. We see Jade here, once again, exemplifying this resilience. Despite her partner's financial struggles, she remained by his side, even stepping into the primary breadwinner role herself. Although she consistently earned more than him while he was employed, she did not allow this to disrupt their relationship. Instead, she supported him until he could work again. For Jade, providing for her children was her responsibility too, not solely her partner's, yet she valued his assistance. She said:

I take him as he is... whether he has money or not I provide ... I know that my job comes from God, I prayed for it.

The fact that Jade provided for her partner did not make her undermine him. Generally, women who are committed to their relationships and their partners have an obligation to support their families in any way that they can, no matter the circumstances, even though women are not expected to carry that mantle (Woolard & Leibbrandt 1999).

Like Jade, 32-year-old Candice was supportive of her partner – who served as the primary breadwinner – because, despite facing financial challenges, in the home he still managed to provide for their needs. She said:

Because he also – he makes a plan I must be fair to him.

That he “makes a plan”⁶ is an indication that Candice's partner would still provide, even if it was by means of an informal ‘hustle’.⁷ She felt as if she owed it to him to “be fair to him”, which indicates her sense of obligation to support her partner since,

6 A colloquial expression describing the taking of initiative and the devising of strategies or methods, in this case, to generate income, implying resourcefulness, adaptability, and creativity in finding solutions to challenges.

7 The activity of making strenuous efforts to obtain especially money or business; working hard to make money.

at the very least, he always tried. Conversely, the women who believed that their relationships would be negatively impacted by their partner's unemployment were those who were primarily concerned about the well-being of their children. They feared that the instability or absence of their partner's income reflected his inadequacy in providing for the family. Mary-Jane, who viewed her partner negatively when he was unable to support their child, had the following to say:

He can't fulfil my expectations; I'm expecting him to do things for me and my child, seeing that he's still my child's father and he's still my man, we're living together; I'm expecting him to fill my child's tummy and everything; I'm expecting him to buy clothes for her ... He promises but then he doesn't deliver.

For Mary-Jane, her partner's inability to provide made him an unfit father. Women need reassurance in the form of job security on the part of the man (Hunter 2007; Mokomane 2013; Raley 1996). Mary-Jane's negative perception of her partner stems from her unmet expectations regarding him being a provider for their daughter.

Conversely, men often associate a child's well-being with nurturing from women. Martin, who had been cohabiting with his partner for over ten years, said the following when asked about his role expectations in the relationship:

She's the one looking after the children, while I'm at work.

The idea that women are not expected to provide financially and that the man alone is responsible for this reflects the persistence of socially conservative gender norms, and is an indication that women and men still subconsciously abide by traditional societal expectations regarding gender. This involves the notion that women and men are expected to play out stereotypical, traditional gender roles according to what society deems appropriate (Blackstone 2003; Domínguez-Folgueras *et al* 2017). When men fail to fulfil this provider role, may often be perceived as weak, leading to conflicts within the relationship and household. Men

typically do not expect women to contribute financially; while most women seem to judge men based on their ability to provide. This raises the following questions: Does financial obligation constitute grounds for relationship success or failure for these couples? How do gender roles then manifest in the context of these cohabiting relationships?

Gender Performance: The Role of the Woman Versus the Role of the Man

The general idea is that women are confined to domesticity in the private sphere, while men are the financial providers, fulfilling the role of head of the household and making the important family decisions (Blackstone 2003; Lichter & Qian 2008). This is because the feminine role has always been equated with nurturing, while the masculine role has always been synonymous with providing, protecting, and leading (Khunou 2012; Shipley 2011). Levert held a notably conservative view of women's roles within the household. He made a persuasive argument, asserting that women naturally assume the role of caretaker due to their domestic proficiency, while men are inherently providers. He expressed this in the following way:

Because women are so dominant ... benefits of having a 'wife' – somebody to clean after you, cook for you ... I suppose – you know what, men are very content to look after women; I suppose because that's our primordial instinct, to provide.

Levert does not appear to consider the possibility that he might fail in his role as the provider, potentially resulting in his partner becoming the breadwinner. This scenario would leave Levert spending most of his time at home while his partner works. More broadly, if the woman assumes the financial provider role and the man spends more time at home, would household chores then become the man's responsibility, or would they remain viewed as 'women's work'? This situation would mean that the woman assumes both nurturing and providing roles, while the man does not assume either. One aspect that both women and

men might overlook is the fluid nature of gender roles and the fact that these roles can be continually redefined based on the unique circumstances of each relationship and household. Roles can be adjusted to suit the couple's needs in ways that are both convenient to them and beneficial for the relationship.

Many of the women expressed a preference for taking on domestic responsibilities and for fulfilling the household duties in the home. The women were self-proclaimed housekeepers, identifying themselves as the primary caretakers in the home, and maintaining that their male partners were not obliged to perform household tasks. Here, women's *accountability* for all the household tasks seemed equivalent to men's *accountability* for protecting the family and supporting the family financially. This division of labour, with women assuming domestic duties and men providing financial support, was perceived to be a fair arrangement within the relationship. As long as the woman fulfilled her duty and the man fulfilled his, the partners were considered equal in the relationship. Mary-Jane, for example, believed that she and her partner had equal parts to play in a relationship:

It's not about a male and a female; it's just about me doing my part.

What for her "my part" was is open to question; she seemed to think that it was to perform domestic duties. This is the most basic stereotypical view of the division of labour as it relates to gender roles in the household. The perception that women are not only responsible for domestic duties but are also 'good at it,' or 'better' than men are, is misleading and promotes unwarranted ideas in society about intimate relations. It reinforces the notion that women are not only responsible for domestic chores but are also inherently skilled or more proficient at them than their male counterparts. This leads to misconceptions and unjustified beliefs about the 'role' of an individual within an intimate relationship.

More notably, religion proved to be a factor in the participants' perceptions. Jewish and Muslim traditions appear to favour female dominance in the private sphere of the home.

Collan, Levert, and Megan, who affiliated themselves with – or were in relationships with partners who belonged to – the Islamic and Jewish religions, held extremely conservative beliefs about gender roles. Religious parents and families value conformity and accept what the community considers socially acceptable (Vaquera & Kao 2005). Adherence to traditional gender norms may often be influenced by familial and community expectations that are shaped by religious teachings. As noted by Vaquera and Kao (2005), families often uphold and reinforce within their own households societal norms that reflect the broader cultural values and expectations prevalent in their religious communities. Collan, a Christian man, who had been in a mixed-faith relationship with a Muslim woman for almost eight years before cohabiting with her for four years, expected his partner to take on the role of a homemaker. The couple had two children together and Collan was the primary breadwinner, while his partner cared for the household and children:

Well, I think her duty is, like, to cook for me, uh, washing, make sure my kids are clean, makes sure she's caring, that's basically it; mine is to provide.

The notion that the woman ought to take care of the home and engage in childcare was dominant in this case. For Collan's Muslim female partner especially, it was customary for her to have internalised this position as the nurturer who takes care of the household and the family. Domestication becomes a job, like any other, for a woman in the home, just as a man works to accumulate money for the household. Likewise, Levert, a Jewish man, shared similar views on women's roles, espousing female domesticity and believing that women were duty-bound to managing tasks within the home:

It's life, man, it's the average life, I mean, where – which household have you seen a woman not doing a lot of domestic work, even by the wealthiest of wealthiest, the man is still going to leave most of the doing and saying stuff to the woman.

The idea is that a woman will assume control over the household, in the sense that she oversees matters within this private sphere. In any given space, regardless of circumstance or socio-economic position, women occupy the domestic role of caring and affectionate nurturers who are responsible for the emotional well-being of the family (Blackstone 2003; Lichter & Qian 2008; Vaquera & Kao 2005). Megan, who had been in a mixed-faith relationship with a Muslim man for almost four years, claimed that her partner preferred leaving domestic duties in her “capable” hands. This meant that she was required to perform household chores, including cooking and cleaning, and taking care of the children. Blackstone (2003:337) has shown that women normally engage in the traditional feminine role of nurturing the family, which requires her to be confined to ‘home work’.⁸ Megan’s partner was the main breadwinner, and he expected her to play the role of housewife while he supported the family financially. Megan confessed that he had prohibited her from working, insisting that she focus on caring for their children and handling domestic duties, as he believed it was his responsibility to provide financially:

It’s a woman’s work ... he has that in a sense because – you know, he’s a Muslim man and they believe strongly that women need to be in the kitchen and do all these things.

‘Woman’s work’ seems to be the term used to describe this gendered phenomenon. This view, held by both the women and men, dominated this study, irrespective of whether the participants had religious affiliations. The widespread perception was that it was expected that women in relationships would fulfil household obligations, while men assumed the positions of head and protector of households and the main breadwinner who provide financially (Blackstone 2003). Surprisingly, in their relationships, many women do not perceive this arrangement as being unjust or dissatisfying. Even when there is a perceived imbalance in the distribution of housework and family

8 That is, domestic work, often considered a labour of love, whereby women are confined to the private sphere, staying at home, taking care of their children, and attending to household chores.

responsibilities between men and women, it does not always lead to a sense of unfairness. This division of household 'labour' is often rooted in socially constructed gender roles and is not perceived as an inequality of distribution of such tasks.

A fascinating finding was that many of these women seemed to support and live by this very notion of female domesticity, recognising this position as both expected and inevitable and thus voluntary. 'Woman's work' is internalised as an obligation for women, who then commit to home and familial domesticity in the private sphere as a feminine *duty* (Domínguez-Folgueras *et al* 2017). The masculine gender role, on the other hand, is associated with leadership (Khunou 2012; Lichter & Qian 2008). Martin adhered to traditional gender roles within his relationship, perceiving women as nurturing mothers and men as protective and providing fathers. This conventional outlook was evident in his dynamic with his female partner of over ten years; the division of gender roles mirrored traditional expectations of familial responsibilities. The idea was for the children to be taken care of by the woman, while the man worked to earn a living in order to support the family:

She's there to watch out for my kids, I'm there to work ... she's acting like a mother and I'm acting like a father ... that's why – what – a wife and a husband are supposed to do She has to fetch the children from school, I have to go to work I'm the father, I'm the one who has to go out and make sure that they have food on the table. We have different tasks, but we do the same thing: she has to fetch the children from school, I have to go to work; I can't do it because I'm at work every day, so ... which means it's the same thing.

Martin claimed that his partner, whom he referred to as his 'wife' because they had been together for so long, was in fact expected to be responsible for the household and familial tasks – just as he was responsible for financial provision. He believed that child-rearing for women and employment for men levelled the playing field in a relationship. He attributed his belief to the fact, as he saw it, that women are deemed much better suited to

fulfilling household tasks and that, for this reason, men claimed the 'financial provider and protector' title (Blackstone 2003; Domínguez-Folgueras *et al* 2017).

Appropriate gender roles are defined according to a society's beliefs about the differences between femininity and masculinity; these women and men conform to the expected gender rules in society (Blackstone 2003). Daniel is another example, a civil engineer and the main breadwinner at home, who had been cohabiting with his partner, a beautician in her spare time, for only a month at the time of the interview. Her primary commitment was to ensure that the household was taken care of, while his role was to secure an income to ensure the upkeep of the home. Daniel exemplified adherence to traditional gender roles within a relationship. Their roles were clearly delineated based on societal expectations of femininity and masculinity. For Daniel, his priority to provide, and his partner's duty to take care of the home, was how they took care of one another:

I'm the breadwinner, first of all, I bring the money into the house. I'm the head ... she cooks, I do nothing [at home] ... she's a housewife.

The idea here is that fairness and equality meant that his partner would be a housewife whose responsibilities predominantly involved chore-related duties and caretaker tasks, while he provided financially. Similarly, Luiz, a contract worker, was of the opinion that his and his partner's roles were equal because they both played *their respective parts*. She was the nurturing wife and mother-figure, and he was the protector and provider. Luiz expressed the view that certain 'obvious' tasks were not to be completed by a woman, but that she was obligated only to perform her 'rightful' female duties – that is, the household tasks and chores:

She's not going to take a weed-cutter to cut grass; she's not going to do any manual, physical tasks in the house; the only thing that she basically is required to do is clean.

Luiz believed that the woman was expected to carry out the household duties. As with Luiz's view of what is "required" of women, both Martin and Daniel's ideas of equality between partners were informed by societal expectations of gender roles.

Interestingly, there was also a belief among some of the male participants, including Luiz, that partners should share household duties when this was necessary. Whilst traditionally, women were expected to handle domestic tasks, while men provided financially, there was also an emerging perspective that household responsibilities should be shared alternately between partners. This shift highlights another aspect of men's attitudes. Some men collaborate with their partners in household chores by taking turns, as a means to achieve balance and equity in the relationship. When partners share duties in the home space, this promotes fairness, and thus the intimate environment is peaceful. This approach fosters mutual respect, collaboration, and a sense of partnership within the relationship.

Yet, when men work with their women in the private sphere and participate in domestic tasks, it is also often viewed as men merely *helping* women with 'woman's work,' assisting women with traditionally *feminine* responsibilities. Unravelling what balance means is a delicate task as deciding what constitutes 'equal work' in this context is complex. It is noteworthy that all the men who advocated for traditional gender roles in their relationship were employed or had income-generating ventures that allowed them to fulfil their provider role.

One could argue that sharing domestic chores promotes a more egalitarian relationship dynamic, a situation in which both partners contribute equally to household tasks, regardless of their employment status. In this view, the traditional notion of men being the sole provider is challenged, and women are encouraged to pursue their career goals and also provide financially, without being burdened by disproportionate domestic responsibilities. Moreover, by sharing household chores, couples can better navigate the challenges of modern life, such as dual-career household dynamics and contemporary parenting responsibilities. Supporting the traditional view of gender roles can be seen as

emphasising the importance of preserving conventional family values and gender norms. The conception, in this latter case, is that assigning domestic chores based on gender reflects the natural order of things and contributes to the stability and cohesion of the family unit. Moreover, traditionalists could argue that men who fulfil their role as providers deserve recognition and respect for their contributions to the family's financial well-being – in the same manner that women should receive comparable reverence for their nurturing roles in maintaining the family and household.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on two main themes: perceptions of the impact of unemployment on intimacy, and the persistence of traditional gender roles – regardless of employment circumstances – in shaping intimate relationships.

It has illustrated that the Coloured couples interviewed in this study perceive themselves to be middle class, despite primarily relying on a single formal income, and that the unemployment of the man in the relationship did not necessarily have negative repercussions on intimacy, contrary to what the mainstream literature suggests. Most women did not view unemployment as a significant factor that negatively affected their intimate relationships. This indifference may be attributed to various factors, including past experiences of unemployment, alternative forms of financial support by the men, or the women's own ability to sustain the household financially. The study also reveals that the employment status of women does not significantly impact how the men perceive or value them. Male participants consistently indicated that while additional income from their partners would be beneficial, they did not feel inclined to pressure their partners into earning. This attitude illuminates a prevailing belief that financial provision is primarily a male responsibility, with women's roles more centred on nurturing and managing the home. Both the women and men emphasised love over financial stability in *maintaining* their relationships.

To illustrate the argument of this chapter, themes relating to the perceived role of the woman versus the perceived role of the man, in both the relationship and the home, were discussed; namely, the role(s) that each partner was expected to perform regardless of employment status. A central thread of the study has been the depiction of patriarchal privilege espoused by the women who praise the men for *helping* them with ‘woman’s work’ – the domestic chores and duties that society prescribes to women. In the same way, women are revered for their domestic efforts in performing femininity. Despite societal shifts, these roles continue to shape expectations and behaviours within households. Women are predominantly responsible for domestic and childcare duties, while men are expected to provide financial support and assume leadership roles. This division of labour, although sometimes flexible, remains deeply ingrained in the dynamics of the relationships studied. While some couples conceptualised their gender roles as fixed, regardless of employment circumstances, others felt that these roles could be destabilised and become flexible. It is worth noting that the study uncovered a growing acceptance among men of sharing household responsibilities, even though traditional gender roles typically assign these tasks to women. This evolving perspective reflects a recognition of the need for balance and equity within relationships. Some men actively participate in domestic chores and tasks alongside their partners, fostering a more collaborative and respectful environment. The adoption of this approach cultivates a sense of fairness, enhancing harmony and satisfaction in the household, and supporting the maintenance and longevity of the intimate relationship.

The general consensus was that the men who participated in housework were seen as *helping*. This perception, held by some of the women and men, persisted even in circumstances in which couples aimed to achieve an equal division of labour. Similarly, when the traditional provider role was reversed, with the woman becoming the breadwinner and the man assuming the homebound role due to unemployment, domestic chores were still largely viewed as women’s work with men contributing supportively. In these cases, *helpful* and *contributing supportively*

Table 5.1: Profile of participants interviewed

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Level of Education	Occupational Status/ Profession	Duration of cohabitation
1	Lisa	28	Female	Secondary	Unemployed	3 years
2	Megan	35	Female	Diploma	Self-employed	4 years
3	Collan	35	Male	Diploma	Laser operator & welder	4 years
4	Earl	33	Male	Matric	Unemployed	2 years
5	Mary-Jane	25	Female	Diploma	Unemployed	3 years
6	Lee-Ann	25	Female	Secondary	Beautician	8 years
7	Monica	29	Female	Matric	HR administrator	1 month
8	Leverit	35	Male	Diploma	Self-employed	4 months
9	Luiz	35	Male	Secondary	Glass bender	3 years
10	Candice	32	Female	Matric	Unemployed	1 year
11	Jade	25	Female	Diploma	Editor	1 year
12	Martin	27	Male	Secondary	Paver	10 years
13	Daniel	26	Male	Matric	Foreman/civil engineer	1 month

implied that they were undertaking duties that were not theirs. Essentially, the study has sought to provoke contemplation of the following scenario: If the traditionally masculine role of provider shifted to the woman, would the corresponding feminine role of nurturer, entailing domestic tasks and childcare, be assigned to the unemployed man? Lastly, it is significant to recognise that unemployment in relationships did not consistently have adverse effects on intimacy for women, and that men did not assign much value to women's financial contributions in the home. This indicates that love, for its own sake, is often greater than the importance placed on money.

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Chapter 6

Black Middle-Class Gay Men and Queer Intimacy: Stereotypical Roles and Signifying Money in Relationships

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Introduction

South African studies of the Black middle class have been increasing in number since 1994. These studies illustrate the complexities involved in conceptualising the Black middle-class position. Consequently, some of them emphasise the economic and political possibilities for the growing Black middle class and issues relating to the new consumption trends among its members. The growing interest in understanding the Black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa is a result of the socio-economic and political changes that occurred at the end of apartheid and the promulgation of legislation, such as that relating to affirmative action and BEE, that addresses past inequalities.

The focus of this chapter is on how class positionality plays a major role in how gay men define and experience intimacy. When we understand the connection between money and how intimacy is expressed, we can uncover relationships related to the functionality of money. Intimacy is defined and experienced differently by people of different races, classes, sexualities, and genders. This is particularly this case with queer intimacies and when considering how intimacy from this perspective is unbounded and destabilises heterosexual Judeo-Christian notions of intimacy (Canham 2017; Matebeni 2008, 2013).



Intimacy is rooted in the deep connections individuals express within private relationships. In this study, intimacy is defined as queer affection; this can be thought of as any form of connection, including physical or sexual interaction within a same-sex couple. When we study intimacy from a queer perspective, we understand that homophobia affects how gay men define and experience intimacy. Homophobia in relation to Black bodies should be viewed as a continuation of colonialism and the colonial gaze. Matebeni (201:405), in her writing on the queer Black female body, indicates how queer enactments of intimacy disrupt the “colonial constraints and constructs” of these bodies. The same ideas may be used to understand the hate gay men experience from those who would have them follow a particular script. However, due to the pain and gruesomeness of homophobia, gay men find themselves following a heteronormative script in order to avoid discrimination. Understanding the impact of homophobia is useful for comprehending how gay men respond to discrimination and the impact it has on how they experience intimacy. The existence and continuation of same-sex partnerships challenge dominant ideas that normalise heterosexual partnerships (Adeagbo 2019; Mupotsa 2020). Same-sex partnerships exist and continue to exist in a society that denounces gay people. Gay relationships challenge exclusive norms by redefining sexist and heterosexist customs, which are inherently bounded and exclusionary. For example, in the article “Conjugalinity”, Mupotsa (2020) amply illustrates how heterosexual exclusions are built into the moral code that suggests that queer sex is bad sex because it is not procreative.

Knowledge about how gender shapes intimacy is dominated by a heteronormative idea of intimacy. Although research has demonstrated gendered (and unequal) emotional work in heterosexual relationships, we do not know enough about how intimacy and emotional work unfold in relationships involving two men who self-identify as Black and middle class. This chapter presents findings on the stereotypical gender roles and the interplay of class and intimacy in gay men’s relationships. Based on these themes, differences and similarities in how Black

middle-class gay men understand intimacy and the middle-class position is explored.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate Black gay men's conceptions and experiences of intimacy as this is guided by their position as member of the middle class. Interestingly, in the findings, we may observe that some of the experiences of intimacy shared by the participants in this study adopt a heteronormative point of view. These Black middle-class gay men adopt heterosexual gendered role divisions in their conceptions and experiences of intimacy.

When it comes to romantic relations, heteronormativity is deemed the norm, and this influences how individuals undertake their everyday affairs. In context of homophobia, heteronormative roles can be used as a protection mechanism for gay men and to reduce the level of exclusion experienced. Matebeni (2013:410) shows that homophobia and notions that involve the claim "that to be black and gay is to betray the race" create isolation for Black queer individuals. One of the ways in which gay men are discouraged and stigmatised is that they are regarded as feminine and less masculine. Heterosexual couples, on the other hand, enjoy a privileged position in society. Societal ideas of queer intimacies are often linked to patriarchy and the idea that homosexuality is un-African (Matebeni 2008). Similarly, Mupotsa (2020) refers to the notion of "compulsory heterosexuality". Such ideas emerge from the fact that gay identities and queer intimacies oppose the idea that monogamous relationships are the norm.

The rest of the chapter provides a brief overview of the methodology of the study and then reviews the literature associated with it. The first section of the review provides an overview of research related to the middle class and the Black middle class. The second examines debates on gender. This part of the chapter explores the impact of hegemonic masculinity on gay men. The third section of the literature review explores the discussion on gender and queer intimacies. The literature review focuses on the impact of homophobia on the lives of gay people. The chapter also includes analysis and discussion of the findings.

A Brief Methodology

The data for this chapter was gathered in Johannesburg by means of qualitative, life history interviews (see Table 6.1 at the end of the chapter for the profiles of the interview participants). Life histories were selected because stories are important: they occupy a central role in the place of knowledge that is generated in society (Dhunpath & Samuel 2009). Moreover, life stories give rise to structures that continue to shape, divide, and separate human beings, opening up debates connected to power, ethics, and subjectivity. In addition, the life-history method adds structure and significance to the narrative being shared (Atkinson 2007). Moreover, the life-history method brings order and meaning to the life story being told. It is used to understand the past and the present more fully (Atkinson 2007). Life-story interviews were used to capture the participants' accounts of what it means to be a gay Black middle-class man. The life-history interviews allowed them to share their experiences with the researcher, thus allowing the researcher to explore rich data on how sexuality, race, and the middle-class position have an impact on their experiences and conceptions of queer intimacy.

Five participants took part in this study. Three were in the early forties and two in their early thirties at the time of the interview. Four of the participants were born in South Africa, and the other was born in Namibia and now lives in South Africa. All the participants were Black African. Their relationship status varied, being characterised by one of two configurations: single, or in a relationship.. Two were in a relationship, and three were single at the time of the interviews. The career interests of the participants varied: two were in academia, two in consulting industries, and one held a position in government. The intention of the study, as is the case in qualitative studies more broadly, is not draw generalisable conclusions but to offer a contextualised understanding of the experiences of the participants to inform further research.

Conceptions of the Black Middle Class

As already alluded to in the introduction and Chapter 1, conceptualising class is a daunting task. Among the reasons for this are the differences in the contexts in which class is used and in vocabularies used to describe it (Phadi & Ceruti 2011). Of the other important criteria in conceptualising class is whether education or a certain level of income is at the heart of the meaning of the term (Atkinson & Brandolini 2013). Education and income were the two markers of class relevant to participation in the study. The idea that education enables class mobility influences much theorising on conceptions of the middle-class (Alexander *et al* 2013; Khunou 2015; Mabandla 2015; Melber 2017), and it was also a strong determiner of middle-classness for the participants in this study. The participants' ideas of what it means to be middle class were first and foremost influenced by their level of education. Their upward class mobility was assumed to be closely tied to further improvement in their educational achievements, which would in turn improve their projections for their careers and increase their income.

Notwithstanding the significance of education and income for entry into the middle class, what remains fundamental for Blacks now (and, historically, for whites) to attain a middle-class position is the state and its policies. According to Mattes (2015), the South African government's efforts to establish a middle class of Black individuals have been marked by several key moments. These include the implementation of affirmative action policies for hiring in the public sector and promoting diversity in private-sector employment by setting demographic employment targets, benchmarks, and timelines governed by specific codes of practice. Furthermore, to be awarded state contracts, bidders must meet minimum numeric scores in terms of Black economic empowerment. Due to apartheid racism in South Africa, we encountered exponential growth in the Black middle class only after 1994 with the advent of democracy and the implementation of policies of transformation and equality. According to Mattes (2015:671), in South Africa, "the Black middle class grew from 350 000 in 1993 to almost 3 million by 2012". Even though the Black middle class in South Africa has grown significantly

since the end of apartheid, the position of its members remains precarious (Khunou 2015; Mhlongo 2019).

Like other middle-class groups in the country and abroad, the growing Black middle class in South Africa continues to look to the state to counter perceived racial barriers to further the upward progress of its members. This matter was mentioned by the participants in the stories they shared about their challenges in the workplace and about access to the market. This reliance on the state reflects the insecurity which defines middle-classness (Mabandla 2013; Ndletyana 2014; Southall 2016).

In the years since the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen how especially those at the lower end of the middle-class scale have been negatively impacted on by rising inflation (Buheji 2022). The precarity of the Black middle-class position is evident from a reading of consumption patterns which show that the affordability of goods by the middle class is being outpaced by constantly rising food and fuel prices and financial commitments such as school fees. In early 2021, it was estimated that one-third of middle-class families in South Africa were financially vulnerable (BusinessTech 2021a). Based on monetary categorisation, southern Africa has the highest percentage of middle-class segments on the continent. According to data released by a think tank in Cape Town, due to the economic challenges emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of people in the middle class in South Africa decreased from 6.1 million in 2017 to 2.7 million by mid-2020 (BusinessTech 2021b). This is a significant decline and confirms the precarity of this class position (Khunou 2015). With the economic slowdown, many faced the danger of retrenchment and the loss of the benefits that this class position affords (Southall 2017).

Conceptions of Masculinities and the Place of Gay Men

Gender is not established by the biological makeup; rather, it is founded on social relations and societal norms (Connell & Pearse 2015). The way men and women act, dress, and talk can be expected to be different. Borisoff and Victor (1998, cited in Eguchi 2009:193) show that gender “simultaneously creates expectations

about how women and men ought to act and to respond in various contexts and relationships”. With regard to understanding masculinity and femininity, Bhasin (2004) writes that they are what one makes them out to be. Gender is influenced by the process of socialisation but can be reconstructed by individuals. Gender is a socio-cultural construct and relates to norms, values, customs, and practices which are constructed and reconstructed over time and across societies (Adhiambo-Oduol 2003).

Traditionally, being masculine is defined as being an individual who is in possession of qualities that are considered to be within the boundaries of manhood (Langa 2020). Among the characteristics of masculinity are aggressive behaviour, strength, and being a breadwinner and a protector (Williams 2002). Acting outside of or violating these expectations attracts homophobic attitudes and behaviour. Morrell (2001:7–8) notes that “the term masculinity is often employed to talk about a specific identity, belonging to a specific male person”, while Bhasin (2004) contends that it is socially constructed rather than biologically enacted. In other words, masculinity is not fixed but is rather constantly reconstructed over time.

Over time, the concept of masculinity has developed multiple meanings. These meanings generally relate to the context of a specific era. These foundations are discussed in the article, “Towards a new sociology of masculinity”, which reviews sex-role theory (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). The critique proposed in this seminal piece by Connell and Messerschmidt is that there are multiple masculinities. In Connell (1987), “Gender and power”, the argument is that there are differences between masculinities and that each masculinity advocates an understanding of the social construction of the term (masculinities). Connell (2005) defines four types of masculinities: hegemonic, subordinate, complacent, and marginal. The subordination of women, as well as some men, to those who embody hegemonic masculinity highlights a crucial distinction between males and females. It also illustrates that various forms of masculinity are in conflict with one another regarding their relations to power (Connell, 1995). In terms of this conception, given that patriarchy is linked to heterosexuality, men who present masculinity in a manner that

differs from the hegemonic notion thereof do not have access to the same extent of power that is available to those who adhere to the hegemonic version.

South African theorists who have engaged with Connell's (1995) conception of masculinities provide relevant discussions for understanding South African masculinities. The norm of power and resistance to it is where Ratele (2008) and Langa (2020) place the hegemonic construction of young Black masculinities in South Africa.

The norm of power in South African society has historically been rooted in a complex interplay of race, class, and gender hierarchies. This norm establishes heterosexual, economically successful, and culturally dominant forms of masculinity as the ideal. Ratele (2008) argues that this hegemonic masculinity in South Africa is intrinsically tied to the country's history of apartheid and colonialism, which privileged white masculinity while simultaneously oppressing and emasculating Black men.

The power held within this normative framework manifests in various ways. It is evident in social institutions, cultural practices, and economic structures that reinforce traditional notions of masculinity. This power is expressed through the marginalisation of alternative masculinities, particularly those embodied by Black gay men. Langa (2020) notes that this power dynamic often results in the exclusion of queer Black men from spaces of cultural and economic influence, as well as from narratives of 'authentic' Black masculinity.

Resistance to this hegemonic power takes multiple forms. Black middle-class gay men, in particular, challenge these norms through their very existence and visibility. By occupying spaces of economic privilege while simultaneously embracing their queer identities, they disrupt the traditional linkages between masculinity, heterosexuality, and success. This resistance is not merely passive but often involves active efforts to create alternative spaces and narratives.

Ratele (2008) describes how this resistance operates on both individual and collective levels. Individually, Black gay men may resist through personal choices in self-expression, relationships,

and career paths that defy stereotypical expectations. Collectively, resistance manifests in the formation of support networks, advocacy groups, and cultural productions that celebrate queer Black masculinities. Langa (2020) further explores how this resistance confronts power by challenging the very foundations of hegemonic masculinity. By demonstrating that one can be Black, successful, and gay, these men force a reconsideration of what constitutes 'authentic' Black masculinity. This resistance often involves navigating complex intersections of privilege and marginalisation, as the middle-class status may provide certain protections while queer identity continues to be stigmatised.

Ratele (2008) explores the idea of bravery, guts, or fearlessness as a common and dominant stereotype characterising hegemonic masculinity in South Africa. In his work, Langa (2020) illustrates how several boys conform to and defy prevailing conventions of masculinity, indicating thereby the difficulties of navigating the conflicting voices that would define what constitutes masculinity. Malinga and Ratele (2016) found that men feel pressured by the media to express their love in a particular way. Spending money on their loved ones was identified as a popular technique that men use to demonstrate their sense of responsibility and to validate their affection for them.

In the context of normative masculinity, gay men may be viewed as subverting such ideas, which then presents a rationale for the violence perpetuated by some heterosexual men on gay men. Not presenting as heterosexual creates multiple challenges for gay men, including the threat of violence, being denied promotions at work, and denial of access to other, everyday opportunities easily accessed by those who express heterosexuality and other traits valued by hegemonic masculinities (Eguchi 2009). Thus, gay men are perceived not to be 'ideal' men and occupy what Connell (2015) refers to as marginalised masculinities.

Gender and Queer Intimacy

Lorentzen (2007) writes that, except for same-sex intimacy, men and intimacy is not a topic that has been given much academic

attention; in light of this, he calls for a deeper examination of the matter. It is in this regard that the study aims to contribute to knowledge by understanding the intimate lives of Black gay men. Even though Lorentzen (2007) writes from the context of Norway, his concerns relating to men and intimacy are relevant to the South African context as there is a dearth of research in this area, other than studies by Hunter (2010), Malinga and Ratele (2012, 2016), Bhana (2013) and a few others. What these studies illustrate confirms Lorentzen's sentiment, to the effect that society does not think men's affections are significant topics for discussion or theorising; this is especially the case for Black gay men. The source of this neglect may be the stereotype that intimacy is a feminine trait (Gaia 2013).

Conceptualisations and experiences of intimacy cannot be separated from how individuals are socialised into either being masculine or feminine; that is to say, love is gendered (Bhana 2013). Men are socialised to demonstrate intimacy through the completion of certain tasks, whereas women are socialised to navigate situations from a relational point of view (Gaia 2002). In brief, it is important to note that while same-sex relationships may be perceived to be different from heterosexual relationships, they share certain qualities (Diamond, Hicks & Otter-Henderson 2006). For instance, the same factors predict relationship maintenance and dissatisfaction in both heterosexual and queer relationships.

However, gay and lesbian couples reflect more on the meaning and purpose of their intimate relationships because of the constant pushback from society that they encounter. This comparison of lesbian women and gay men is made with the acknowledgement that there are differences as well as similarities in their everyday life experiences (Canham 2017; Matebeni 2008). The reflection undertaken by homosexual individuals fosters greater creativity and imagination in developing family structures that suit their circumstances (Kuderk 2005; Solomon, Rothblum & Balsam 2005; Szymanski & Hilton 2013) For example, gay men may craft a unique family arrangement that honours both their queer identities and cultural heritage by engaging in discussions about their desire for children and the importance of maintaining

connections with their extended families. Some of the attributes that have been observed as being prevalent in same-sex relationships are equality and the use of humour (Kuderk 2005; Solomon *et al* 2005; Szymanski & Hilton 2013). Yet, due to the strict heteronormative ideals of the contexts in which they find themselves, gay individuals tend to show restraint in their everyday interactions and suppress their expressions of intimacy (Bird 1996; Hammarén & Johansson 2014).

Homophobia and Queer Love

In post-apartheid South Africa, being a queer black person involves having a complex identity based on a particular socio-historic background (Matebeni 2011; Mupotsa 2020). From verbal abuse to gruesome acts of corrective rape, queer Black people continue to face discrimination (Gibson & Macleod 2012; Matebeni 2011; Scheepers 2023; Smuts 2011). Regardless of South Africa's Constitution and Bill of Rights, violence against sexual minorities persists. Families and those components of society that condone the stigmatisation of sexual minorities sustain the violence against gay men and lesbian women; this violence is understood as homophobia.

When men who identify with ideal notions of what it means to be a man perceive that they are being stripped off their power, they react with violence. Gay men in South Africa who challenge the traditionally gendered stereotype of manhood are considered unmanly thereby threatening 'traditional' ideas of masculinity; for this reason, they are punished (Batisai 2015; Bhana 2013). This punishment is meted out in violent ways and includes sexual, physical, and psycho-social violence. Bhana (2013), in her definition of love, illustrates that, even though it is associated with intimacy, it also involves violence. The life experiences of gay and lesbians illustrate this clearly as their love for those of the same sex is erroneously viewed as non-normative. Thus, gay men continue to be victims of gender oppression, discrimination, and abuse. In most South African communities, being gay is viewed as a Western phenomenon and consequently perceived as alien and un-African (Matebeni 2008). The idea that being gay is un-African "conceals a moral and sex panic that is externalised as an acute

psychiatric and security emergency” (Reddy 2001:83). Despite the South African Constitution’s upholding of human rights, gays find it difficult to express their identity freely. As a result, sexual minorities that have experienced any sort of discrimination question the legal frameworks employed to protect all citizens. Calala (2014) stresses that the extent to which homophobic attitudes, practices, and hate speech and related crimes occur may have increased in recent previous years.

Re-Conceptualising Intimacy and Gender Roles

To unpack the argument of this chapter, two themes are discussed to illustrate how gay men experience and define intimacy. The first theme concerns stereotypical gender roles and gay relationships. Here, how normative notions of differential gender roles influence how intimacy is experienced by gay men is unpacked.

The second theme, concerning money and intimate relationships, focuses on how money and middle-classness influence ideas and actual experiences of intimacy. Normative considerations of money sometimes influence the gay relationships of Black men in ways that mimic heterosexual relationships.

Stereotypical Gender Roles and Gay Relationships

Contrary to the generalisation regarding the existence of a significant difference between heterosexual and homosexual relationships, in this study, the enactment of gender roles in the relationships of the participants demonstrates that gay couples adopt stereotypical heterosexual structures.

Men have been argued to exercise more power than women in heterosexual romantic relationships, irrespective of women’s socio-economic status and independence (Bogle 2008; Laner & Ventrone 2000; Lever, Frederick & Hertz 2015). For example, in this study, one of the participants who described themselves as the more feminine in their relationship was responsible for maintaining its finances. There is often a distinction in sex roles as well as other social, cultural, or monetary differences between

individuals in a gay male relationship, and these often parallel differences in heterosexual pairings.

Given that gay love happens in a patriarchal context, it is not easy for individuals in such relationships to act completely outside the broader societal script for relationships. Kutlwano, one of the participants in the study, concurred with this view. He contended that intimacy in gay unions is influenced by the need to live up to a heterosexual script that determines how one should act with an intimate partner:

We have to link this to people with same-sex identities because our identities were denied. We operate on heteronormative basis; we adopt values of the heterosexual world. That's the one aspect, the other aspect is that we have been rejected in so many ways, often by people we love, and when we want to have this intimacy, it is just to have a sense of belonging, a sense that somebody loves me, somebody appreciates me, somebody doesn't judge; it is a sense of – you know what? – I take you for who you are, and because of that we become so desperate that we eventually start to perform what we think are the ideal values in an intimate situation. If you are familiar with the work of Judith Butler, performativity – we come in this world with a script, what is romance? It is when you have champagne, strawberries, and cream; so you perform to this script, but is that who you are?

Kutlwano described intimacy in gay relationships as being influenced by heterosexual values. In his description, he also evokes Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler (1990) explains that when one is born male, one is expected to act in ways that illustrate masculinity, and vice versa for women (Butler 1990). People come to perform the acts repeatedly, as one does a script. For example, when intimacy is shown, some gay couples may be involved in role-playing; they follow the heterosexual script for intimacy. Research by Hollander, Renfrow and Howard (2011) shows how intimacy is gendered: men perform an instrumental role, and women play an affectionate role. In the above quote, Kutlwano also indicates that money plays a role in

how people express intimacy and that it gives those who have it the power to direct how this intimacy is expressed. Intimacy, to his mind, is attached to having access to material things. Intimacy signals strong affectionate behaviour that is experienced with a loved one. This can be demonstrated for example, by buying expensive dinners and having picnics. Hollander *et al* (2011) note that intimacy in heterosexual relationships is linked to money, such as when men invite women on a date and ensure that they sponsor the event. In the excerpt below, Kutlwano uses the example of fine dining in Sandton to illustrate how the same is experienced in gay intimate contexts:

Coming back to your class and where we socialise, when thinking about dating, I am interested in you, so I must take you to Sandton, that will create the chemistry if we go for a night out, we must go to a particular restaurant, look into each other's eyes, but is that who we are? So, intimacy is blurred for me, especially for a same-sex person with rigid, existing heterosexual values about what intimacy is about.

In this case, the one who is paying is the one who defines the type of intimacy that will be experienced. Another experience that illustrates the use of heteronormative performativity was related by Segopotso.

Segopotso described how he connected closely with his partner; he also showed how their relationship was based on heteronormative roles, as was the case in Kutlwano's experience:

Whatever I needed, he could do. And he didn't mind coming to see me every month, and when I visited him, he would book a bus ticket. He was one person to tell me, Baby, I don't want you to use your money, I am here as your boyfriend. I am the head of the house, so let me do the big stuff, let me provide, so, yah. It was crazy, like, I will never forget.

Being responsible for the financial side of things was important for Segopotso's partner as he identified himself as the "boyfriend". As in heteronormative relationships, the financial aspect of the

relationship is traditionally the responsibility of the boyfriend or the hegemonic masculine partner.

Segopotso also revealed that, because he occupied the submissive role, it was expected that he would cook:

[Laughs] Okay, first of all, my role, I am a bottom. So, the guys who date me like that I am bottom, so they treat me like their lady. I like it, but they know that I hate cooking; it is the first thing we talk about. So, I always question why they ask about cooking. Okay, I can cook, but I don't see myself doing it every day. But cleaning, I love cleaning; you can cook and mess up and I will clean. I love doing the laundry, the curtains, the bedding ... but just not cooking.

For Segopotso, even though he was able to provide for himself, the boyfriend was the provider. In this way, the relationship was conventionally gendered: Segopotso's boyfriend was perceived as the provider and Segopotso occupied the feminine role of nurturer. This mimicry of societally normative gender roles is also evident in how easily Segopotso linked being the bottom and being the feminine and nurturing one in the relationship. Specific gendered identities are linked to sexuality, and they influence behaviour patterns and performance (Maines 1996).

Identity has been extensively studied within queer studies. It involves the idea that labels are attached to particular ways of behaving, and that these labels in turn categorise the individual's behaviour. For instance, the idea of 'tops' and 'bottoms' as categories of identification refers to a range of experiences that are both potentially sexualised and indicative of the gendered behaviours that individuals in homosexual partnerships exhibit (Edwards 1994). The top/bottom distinction is not always rigid in practice but may be characterised as applying to different contexts of being or performing 'top' or 'bottom'. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that this distinction is a social construct rather than a stereotyped depiction of many gay relationships and interactions. Pachankis, Bütünwieser and Bernstein (2013) argue that top and bottom identities are constituted by multiple aspects of sexual position, behaviour, identity, and other developmental

influences. This flexibility in performance and identification highlights the importance of questioning binary productions and reproductions of gendered and sexual subjectivities in general.

According to Eguchi (2009: 194), “these gendered semantics communicate that the power struggle of gender is also at the core of the gay male identity negotiation processes and their everyday interpersonal relations”. Research has illustrated, for instance, that men who self-identify as tops are less lady-like than men who self-identify as bottoms (Han 2006). This is much like what was evident in Segopotso’s relationship: the partner played a more dominant role and perceived himself to be the ‘man’ of the house, while Segopotso preferred domestic tasks usually associated with women.

Heteronormative gendered roles are hence present in gay romantic relationships. Kutlwano noted how this paradoxical juxtapositioning can cause tension in a relationship when the duties expected by one partner are not fulfilled by the other:

What I have picked up from my previous relations is also that Black people do not have a real culture, they do not have good communication skills. They come from a very patriarchal space where the woman’s role was to be involved in the domestic sphere and not have a say, and the husbands’ role was to provide. So much of that has been transferred to same-sex relationships. However, you might find that your softer partner has more capital and the butch one does not have any [Laughs], and it creates tension, because he is the ‘man’ and the ‘man’ has to provide – and you have most of the resources. So you have power contestations, so he uses his private parts for power – so you have the economic power and he has the sexual power – so both these parts have a critical effect on the relationship, and often these powers collide and it creates conflict in the relationship. The traditional role of a man is to provide and here he is at the receiving end; so it troubles this role of the man as the provider.

This is illuminating as Kutlwano foregrounds the contradiction resulting from a need to follow normative gender divisions of labour and confrontation with their inherent limitations. Kutlwano grew up in a heteronormative environment, and his current experience illustrates that, even though he is in a relationship that is supposed to challenge normative gender roles, the actual everyday experiences involve challenges relating to the linking of the provider role to men which are similar to those in heterosexual relationships in which the woman earns more than her male partner. Conflict arises when a man cannot fulfill the role expected of him, due to the misalignment between his actual experiences and the form he believes he should embody.

To reiterate, in most cases, individuals with a soft demeanour in gay relationships take on the submissive roles, and vice versa. In this case, Kutlwano revealed that the person who was expected to be in the submissive role was placed in a position that made him the breadwinner in the relationship because he had the financial power to do so. One should remember that when men and women perform gender in a traditional manner, the taking of these masculine and feminine roles indirectly suppresses sexual satisfaction for women, though not for men, because traditional gender-based sexual roles dictate sexual passivity for women and sexual agency for men (Kiefer & Sanchez 2007).

In heterosexual relationships, it is likely that the man is expected to be more sexually experienced than the women and to initiate and direct sexual activities. The internalising of traditional gender roles has taught women to avoid expressing sexual agency and to adopt a submissive, passive sexual role (Schwartz & Rutter 2000). In the same vein, conversely, Kutlwano's partner, as the 'man' in the relationship, was left only with sexual power, which he used since he could not provide financially and thereby fulfil his perceived 'role' as breadwinner. Thus, he used their bedroom interaction to affirm his power as the 'man' in the relationship.

Such misalignment between what is expected and what actually occurs causes tension within the relationship. That being the case, Kutlwano questioned the gender division and role-playing adopted from heterosexual relationships into homosexual

relationships. This questioning presents Kutlwano and his partner with an opportunity to re-imagine what is possible in their relationship. Higher education, social status, and income have been noted to be powerful tools for negotiating power within gay men's romantic relationships; For example, Stacey (2004) writes that older, richer partners have more power than their partner in gay relationships.

Moreover, Kutlwano observes that since the 'man' in the relationship could not fulfil the role of breadwinner, the 'man' used the bedroom to gain power:

He is the 'man', and the 'man' has to provide, and you have most of the resources, so you have power contestations – so he uses his private parts for power; so you have the economic power and he has the sexual power.

Based on what society expects, for a man to be embraced as a 'good' man, he needs to fulfil the provider role. This being the case, money is a fundamental asset for men because such an asset gives men the opportunity to provide financially (Khunou 2006, 2012). Historically, men have been credited with the status associated with the provider role as they are the leaders of the family.

Kutlwano indicated his disapproval of the existence of traditionally gendered roles in same-sex romantic relationships:

I hate it, traditional roles that are associated with women, I hate it, so I appointed a nanny who could do it because I have a son, I adopted a boy. But my partner loves it, ahh, he's so pedantic, so he cleans, he presents a very masculine role. I cook because I am a good cook. Both these activities are associated with female roles; we are both involved in my son's life.

Most same-sex relationships involve less role playing associated with their preferred sex role (top or bottom) than do the relationships of heterosexual couples. For example, although gay men may exhibit high levels of femininity and low levels

of masculinity in some aspects of their identities, in other areas they may display aspects of the masculine identity similar to heterosexual men. This is not usually the case with most heterosexual men, as there might be an expectation for them to maintain a masculine identity most of the time. For some gay men, these roles linked to their preferred sex role dichotomies are not critically important. In his research on queer intimacies, Adegagbo (2019) demonstrates that gay men view themselves as equals in their relationships.

Kutlwano described his frustration with the heterosexual love script he had experienced in his gay relationships and indicated that he would prefer a different sort of experience of intimacy. Thus, he argued for a redefinition of gay intimacy, one that moved away from heteronormativity.

I have experienced it the same way when you want a night out, that the two of you go for dinner. I don't know if I can touch on this, even in the intimacy, although you are two men or two women, there must be a performance of one endorsing a feminine role and one subscribing to a masculine role. So, we are not two men, and we cannot live as two men in our unique way – there is always this role that one has to play. When we go out, people will ask, who is the female in the relationship? Who is the man? When we go out, there is always, the more masculine one, and when the people at the restaurant pick it up, they put the bill close to the more masculine one. So, those were my experiences, and ironically, my partner, who is very masculine in appearance, is just the opposite role; and I am softer; however, we play different roles, so when we go out to these places, we are bound to subscribe to these heterosexual roles. If not, we must perform as two guys, which has a bearing on the intimacy. Whereas if you are two men who do not subscribe, people question the intimacy. How can this happen? So, at a point when I was attracted to a feminine gay person, people would ask, what kind of lesbianism is this? Even people with same-sex identities.

Kutlwano confirms that gay intimacy is gendered. He shares that gay men occupy dominant and submissive roles that are similar to those found in heterosexual relationships. In gay relationships, men who are labelled 'tops' are commonly ascribed characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, such as power, dominance, and physical strength; whereas 'bottoms' are often defined as passive and effeminate. For example, labelling oneself 'top' or 'bottom' reproduces specific sexual scripts that uphold heteronormative ideas about masculine versus feminine identity and gender roles (Kiguwa 2015). These terms may be elements of self-identify that indicate an individual's usual preference but might also describe broader sexual identities.

Many gay relationships involve marginalisation practices that, depending on the context, can either evoke and reproduce heteronormative categories of behaviour and identification; or, in other cases, produce functional intersectionality matrices (Kiguwa 2015). According to Kiguwa (2015), cultural norms have influenced the idea that gendered sex roles and penetration during sex are synonymous. These rigorous definitions of sex roles dictate what it means to identify as masculine or feminine in heterosexual relationships as well as among gay men. Plummer (1981) shows that classifying gay individuals is difficult, particularly when the various and ever-changing meanings people attach to their relationships are not clear. This draws attention to how societal perceptions of homosexual relationships are evolving. We must investigate the role that essentialising these gay relationships plays in the construction of the meanings that are associated with them. Plummer (1981) thus urges us to reject overly simplistic interpretations. This will draw attention to how societal perceptions of gay relationships are evolving and contradictory. According to Kiguwa (2015), the top/bottom divide is not always as clear-cut and cannot be distinguished by many circumstances in which one is or is not acting in a 'top' or 'bottom' capacity. Furthermore, to reiterate, it is important to recognise that these distinctions in identity are social constructs rather than the actual stereotyped depictions of many gay relationships and interactions.

Pachankis *et al* (2013) have drawn attention to how societal norms for sexuality influence the way we understand gay men's sexual behaviours and identities. According to Kiguwa (2015), these norms construct non-heterosexual behaviours and identities through a heterosexual lens, which is problematic because it reinforces the very norm they are trying to challenge. However, Gill (2007) argues for a more nuanced approach that recognises both the opportunities for change and the moments when the norm is reproduced.

In this chapter, it is clear that the notion that all claims to identity are, to some degree, performances corresponds with Butler's theory of performativity. Butler (2011) argues that gender and sex are shaped and maintained by hegemonic heterosexual norms. People repeatedly exhibit specific, gendered modes of existence which highlight the crucial role that practice and discourse play in the formation of identities, and how they either support or impede specific behaviours and agency. The diverse context of post-apartheid South Africa, including the economic factors here, influences how Black middle-class gay men experience and express their sexual and gendered identities. The unique characteristics of same-sex intimate relationships are overshadowed when perspectives germane to heterosexual relationships are used to study such partnerships.

Kutlwano advises that intimacy should create a space for versatility, a space where individuals can openly express who they are and not be coerced into roles. Intimacy requires a level of versatility and adaptability that may not be a matter of the individual's ascribing to a manly or a feminine sex role. Two men, raised in accordance with the social perspective that they are masculine, will face immediate difficulties in attempting to adjust.

When 'Relationship Requires a Bit of Money'

In the interviewing process, Sifiso, Mandla, and Masilo revealed the importance of money within an intimate relationship. These participants noted that money can buy resources. For example, when one is in a romantic relationship, one will need to go on dates and to have a private space for sex and conversation. Money

thus proves to be an important aspect of a romantic relationship. Employment provides an income, allowing individuals to maintain intimate relationships (Khunou 2006, 2012; Krige 2012).

Sifiso shared his thoughts about and experiences of why money is important in intimate relationships:

We live in a world which works on money, so me attempting to be in a relationship requires a bit of money. It is a world of materialism. The class thing; before, then I had a boyfriend, it was lovely, we loved each other. I could afford to have him around and when I couldn't afford him, I let him go. However, now I am much more serious about relationships, and looking for a soulmate.

The concept of affordability is central in research by Phadi and Ceruti (2011), who assert that it is a key aspect of class for most SoweTans, who argue that it is the key concept as regards class for most SoweTans. This word is used to indicate that a certain commodity is within a person's capacity to purchase it. One's class depends on what you can afford. Class has frequently been used to describe things one possesses or lacks. Alexander *et al* (2013:29) note that affordability "provides a link from subjective experiences (including classed culture and verbalised class identities), through income, to occupation (or lack of occupation). Thus, it connects consumption and production". Sifiso's quote above illustrates that the idea of affordability is central to middle-classness, and he states that when he could not afford his partner, he "let him go". Hence, money, which in Sifiso's case is accessible because of his middle-classness, is central to how he thinks about relationships. Lacking money or a middle-class position, he felt he could not keep a partner. He elaborated as follows:

You need resources to do things to have an intimate relationship. For example, if you live in rural areas in a shack, and you live with your five brothers, like back in Alexandra, I realised that there was nowhere to chill. So, when you want to escape your five brothers, you go outside, you go to the streets [laughs]. And other people come chill with you. There is no intimate space; it is harder when you do not have the resources.

And when you look at class and culture in this country, black means poor. This is due to the history of this country.

Sifiso described intimate relationships as “a world of materialism” and as being difficult for those who are black and poor. He said that, earlier in his life, he did not have the resources to have a boyfriend and so he let the boyfriend go. Relationships require one to have money to afford commodities and services. Sifiso’s example of a lack of resources shows that things like privacy are a commodity and can be afforded with money. He indicated that, growing up with five brothers, he did not have privacy, especially the privacy to express intimacy with his gay partner, since they all lived in a small house. Sifiso also mentioned that living with brothers who were not familiar with the gay lifestyle was problematic, especially because gay people are stigmatised. This made it difficult for him to engage in the romantic aspects of his life. Only later in his life did his middle-class position provide the power for him to negotiate his ideas of intimacy. He expressed that he was able to talk freely about his sexuality and to introduce his gay partner to his family. Vanyoro (2021) and Scheepers (2023) write that gay men in different contexts, such as rural spaces, experience challenges coming out, which is a matter of both class and race privilege (and the lack thereof).

In contrast to the findings of Plank and of De Mendonca and Khunou in this volume, who focus on the experiences of Black middle-class women, for the Black middle-class gay men interviewed for this study, their position gives more than it takes away. As a result of their class position, they are able to purchase the freedom to be intimate in a violent, homophobic world. For the women interviewed by Plank and by De Mendonca, for example, being middle-class high-earners took away the simplicity that comes with being in a heterosexual relationship in which women are taken care of and do not have to contend with the various problems associated with being with an unemployed man in a context in which the provider role is normatively associated with men.

Another example of middle-classness is evident in Mandla’s experience:

We were insulted by this group of people, but he did not understand them because they were insulting us in isiZulu, and he is Sotho, so he did not understand a thing. They said, “Look at these moffies. What nonsense is this?”

Here, we can see how lack of money – and, for some in the middle class, this may mean being able to afford a car – could be to one’s detriment. Mandla experienced this abuse in the course of using public transport, whereas, if he had had a car, a valuable resource, he would not have had to experience this discrimination. Thus, money or as Sifiso expressed it, having resources, is an important aspect of a relationship for gay men.

Mandla’s experience highlights the ongoing victimisation of gay men. Gays are constantly reminded of how their sexuality is associated with disgust. It is clear from the stories that have been presented above that the Black middle-class position does not remove the challenges of being in a relationship; what it does, rather, is insulate these individuals from some aspects of the violence and discrimination that occur when one expresses same-sex love.

Masilo was of the opinion that, for him, intimacy includes presenting middle-classness:

Middle-class people prefer a certain space; KFC does not offer you the luxury of being served; you eat from a box, on a tray, it is too full, the ambiance there is not for smooching. So, no, I would not take people to KFC or Chicken Licken. If you take someone out, make it worth it. Like if I invite you to my house, I would not serve you leftovers. I would make you lasagne, spaghetti bolognese; like, I would even go search for a recipe to make something nice....

Masilo added that, when you have money, you can dine at places that have an ambiance that facilitates romance. He compared the offering of KFC and a steak house in Braamfontein; of the two places, he opted for the one that creates a mood for intimacy.

Conclusion

What emerges in this chapter is that gay men challenge dominant theories of masculinity that box men in. Gay men have found alternative ways to welcome and embrace intimacy, even in the face of discrimination. They do away with boundaries that force them to guard their behaviour while embracing intimacy. However, as shown in the chapter, gay men often replicate traditional roles seen in heterosexual relationships.

Stereotypical roles influence how gay men experience intimacy. In this chapter, it has been argued that even though gay relationships are praised as being void of gender, roles such as 'top' and 'bottom' guide gay men in performing gender within their relationships. Stacey (2004) contends that decision-making in gay relationships is negotiated on the basis of education, social status, and income. The findings here also suggest that money is an important aspect of gay relationships because gay men do not always have the freedom to be affectionate in spaces that are heteronormative. Patriarchy and homophobia are two of the key factors that hinder gay intimacy. Many gay Black men in South Africa live in environments in which homophobic violence is common. A middle-class position allows for gay men to choose spaces that cater for public displays of affection, reinforcing queer love and disrupting the hegemony that discourages same-sex intimacy. The importance of class to how one expresses and lives one's gender and sexual identity is of utmost salience.

Table 6.1: Profiles of participants interviewed

Name	Relationship status	Age	Occupation
Kutlwano	In a relationship	41	Teaching and learning sector
Segopotso	Single	32	Social worker
Masilo	Single	30	Consultant
Sifiso	Single	40	Consultant

Name	Relationship status	Age	Occupation
Mandla	In a relationship	40	Teaching and learning sector

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Conclusion

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Introduction

The chapters in this volume provide an important lens for viewing the intimate lives of the Black middle class in South Africa. A major thread running through them is how access to money as made possible by middle-classness and how intimacy influences the life experiences of the women and men interviewed for the various studies that make up this book. The chapters thus shed new light on the complexities of Black lives, intimacy, middle-classness, and issues of gender and money. The main finding presented in each chapter illustrates how middle-classness comes with its own challenges. Although being middle class confers access to opportunities and possibilities for accessing improved life circumstances, it does so in ways that also take away other normative benefits, particularly that of fully challenging and disrupting the norms which are assumed to be a characteristic of middle-classness. This is true for both women and men. For example, even though women gain financial benefits as well as those pertaining to status from their middle-class position, they also face unanticipated challenges which arise from their new identity as high-income earners.

The chapters by Kaziboni and De Mendonca and Khunou illustrate how the high-income earner identity foregrounds the women as breadwinners and the main providers for their families in ways that challenge their expectations of what it means to be a woman. This was particularly true as their husbands did not earn enough and thus could not provide at the same level or more than the women could. Their high earnings did not confer on them the respect that men usually receive as high-income earners.

What the studies also show is that men being unable to earn more than their wives, and thereby failing to fulfil the



socially constructed ideal of masculinity, largely led to normative responses like physical abuse and extra-marital relations and failed to create an opportunity for decolonial love. Some of the men were described as becoming violent in cases in which their wives earned more than they did. Such behaviour indicates that the promise that middle-classness brings comfort does not always ring true.

The book contributes to the study of Black middle-classness and intimacy in three distinct ways. First, it contributes to knowledge of the complexity of Black lives. This shifts the focus from thinking of Black lives and love in terms of poverty and homogenous experience. Second, the book provides information on Black women and heterogeneity, elucidating the dynamism involved in the varied experiences of the women interviewed for chapters 2 to 5. Finally, the last two chapters illustrate a problematic concerning heterogeneity: first, as regards Blackness; and then as regards heteronormativity.

Complex Black Lives: Beyond Poverty

While the authors of the chapters discuss old questions, the book's novel contribution is its reframing of how these questions are addressed. The starting point of this volume involved the question of reimagining Black lives outside the trope of poverty and lack. This was particularly important for framing the questions the studies respond to by allowing for a nuanced reading of intimate relationships beyond the narrative that tells that poverty does not allow for intimacy.

Chapter 1 provided a discussion of existing literature, making the case for thinking about Black lives in a dynamic way by foregrounding the idea of understanding Black intimate lives through an intersectional lens. This then provided the reader with the theoretical basis for the chapters that follow.

The chapters then go on to illustrate a shift in thinking about the Black experience by foregrounding experiences of Black prosperity, ambition, aspiration, success, and complexity. Such complexity is illustrated in how Black women strive to achieve higher levels of education and income in a manner removed from

normative assumptions of the Black woman as a 'gold digger' or 'baby mama', ideas which presume to represent how Black women move in the world.

Black Intimacy

The other important theme of the book is intimacy in the experiences of Black people. As indicated in the literature reviewed in Chapter 1 and throughout the book, love and Blackness in the South African context has not been adequately conceptualised. Recently though, there is a growing interest in studying the intimate lives of Black South Africans outside of the assumption that the assumption that Black people are hypersexual and/or diseased. The chapter by Kaziboni provides an interesting juxtaposition of interviews with the film, *Why did I get married?* – linking the life experiences of the participants in her study to the film allows us to imagine and to read Black love in a nuanced manner that accesses the complexity of Black lives. Similarly, the rich data supplied by Scheepers affords the reader the possibility of comprehending the intimate lives of gay Black middle-class men.

Black Women and Heterogeneity

This book has shown that Black women's lives are dynamic, not only as regards access to resources but also in terms of the complexities and heterogeneity of experience. The experiences of the women in chapters 2 to 5 provide a depiction of singlehood and the Black middle class. Plank illustrates how women grapple with the idea of being single in a context in which they lament the idea of dating unemployed men. Plank shows that these women's laments are the result of their previous experiences of love relationships with unemployed men, who failed to show appreciation for their efforts. In the chapter by De Mendonca and Khunou, the differential experiences of middle-classness shed light on the encounters of married women who struggle with the idea of breadwinning in a context in which being the provider is misaligned with their ideas about their expected role and the expected role of their husbands in their relationships. In these

two chapters, Black women's experiences are differentiated from their peers and family members by the class position and status of being party to an intimate relationship.

Troubling Hegemonic Narratives

The last two chapters in the volume trouble existing normative narratives about questions of race identity, gender and sexuality, and the role of class mobility in making and remaking these norms. In Chapter 5, Magro provides a reading of the experiences of Coloured middle-class couples. Magro foregrounds the problems of homogenous thinking about what it means to be Black. Elsewhere in the chapter, she illustrates the importance of this cohort for addressing earlier studies that involved distortions and inadequate investigation. Magro does a great work reimagining this cohort and addressing homogenising narratives. She illustrates how past injustices continue to influence contemporary social relationships and the identity formation of its members. The chapter makes a much needed contribution to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the broader socio-economic landscape of South Africa, including patterns of social mobility, family dynamics, and community cohesion.

Chapter 6 problematises societal blindness to diversity in experiences of love and intimacy. Scheepers offers a brilliant reading of queer love based on the experiences of gay Black middle-class men in Johannesburg. He addresses the research gap noted by Bhana (2013:6), that "same-sex relations and emotive ties binding people together are often denied and silenced". Scheepers' focus on gay Black middle-class men provides insight into how being a member of the Black middle class benefits – and takes away different things from – different individuals. As illustrated in the chapters by Plank, De Mendonca and Khunou, and Kaziboni, the middle-class position provides status and higher income to women but also removes certain possibilities for intimacy, possibilities which they would have expected to be available. In contrast, with the participants Scheepers interviewed, we see how the middle-class position provides both status and high income as well as giving these men options to

engage in love in more open and public ways than is the case for gay men who do not have the ability to buy security.

Intersectionality

In the initial stages of this project, it became clear that, in order to study complex lives, it is important to recognise that these lives are made and remade as individuals deal with multiple and consecutive issues. Drawing from Lorde's (1984) assertion that "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives", we intentionally mapped out our study objectives, interview schedules and search for participants with a deep awareness of how single-issue research reduces those studied and their social experiences in ways that not only limit what we know about them but also constrains the possibilities for them to overcome the challenges imposed by inequality. While this book does not provide a conclusive unpacking of the intersecting issues to be considered when thinking about the intimate lives of the Black middle class, it lays the foundation for further discussion and research. Some of the themes that have come up here are love, resentment, money, masculinities, women's rights, work-life balance, middle-classness, and aspirations.

Concluding Remarks

In illustrating the tensions and challenges experienced by members of the Black middle class in their relationships, this book has provided another important level of complexity to the concept of the middle class. The dynamism illustrated in the varied experiences of women who self-identify as middle class has shown how this class position foregrounds the already-existing complexities of gender identity. The experiences of the women discussed here cohere around their class position, though other life experiences add to this dynamic, as illustrated in the chapters by Plank, Kaziboni, and De Mendonca and Khunou. This complexity was further problematised by the narratives discussed by Scheepers and Margo; their studies illustrate the challenges of identity politics in a context that includes a history of discrimination and continued harassment and othering.

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