



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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