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 & Nattrass 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 miscegenation[2] (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 & Nattrass 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 & Nattrass 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, Komarovsky 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 (Komarovsky 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.

Levert, 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). Levert 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.

Levert admitted that he cared about her dearly and invited her into his personal space regardless of her socio-economic status. Levert 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. Levert 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 (Komarovsky 2004). This support is often contingent on the belief that the man is committed to improving his situation. Komarovsky'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	Levert	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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