SENIOR WOMEN MANAGERS' EXPERIENCES OF SINGLISM IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE: AN AFROCENTRIC AND FEMINIST-PHENOMENOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for

the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

in the subject

INDUSTRIAL AND ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF MICHELLE MAY

FEBRUARY 2022

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DECLARATION

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Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (Industrial and Organisational Psychology)

Senior women's managers' experience of singlism in the South African public service: An Afrocentric and feminist-phenomenology perspective

I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The study explored how single women experienced singlism, through an Afrocentric and feminist-phenomenology intersectionality. It further examined how single women in senior management experienced the South Africa public sector work environment with all their other roles.

The literature review revealed the extent of existing related research; the definition of key terms emerged, and the findings of the study were integrated with existing information. Further, single women's formative years were contextualised through socialisation within a patriarchal African culture, with strong views on masculinity and femininity. The research investigated dominant and influential role models and circumstances that shaped single women's worldview. It explored experiences of singlism in society and at work. The conclusions identified links to childhood experiences and adult choices. Data collection was done through in-depth interviews with participants. Themes and sub-themes were developed from the data collected through the in-depth interviews. The main contribution of this study is on expansion of singlism as also an embodiment of positive attributes based on single women perspectives.

METHOD: The Afrocentrism and feminist phenomenology paradigms were adopted for this study. In-depth interviews were used for data collection. The data analysis was achieved through identifying themes and deriving trends from shared experiences.

FINDINGS: Singleness is a conscious choice; independent, ambitious women value their freedom; the public service is experienced as hostile to single women; enablers for single women include family, domestic helpers, and boarding schools; single women are determined to shape a better future for women in the public service. Recommendations were made about improvements and relevant future research on the same or similar topics.

KEY WORDS: single women, singlism, gendered role socialisation, social constructed identities, stereotypes, discrimination, African traditional practises, patriarchy, feminism, senior female single managers, public service, enablers for single women, Afrocentrism, feminist-phenomenology.

AMAVA ABAPHATHI ABAPHEZULU ABANGAMABHINQA ANGATSHATANGA KWINKONZO KARHULUMENTE YOMZANTSI AFRIKA: UMBONO WASEAFRIKA NOWEBUBHINQA WEFINOMELOJI (FEMINIST-PHENOMENOLOGY)

Uphandonzulu luphononge indlela amabhinqa angatshatanga azakha ngayo izazisi zabo kunye nendlela abafumane ngayo amava okungatshati ngokuhlanganisa indlela yaseAfrika kunye nobubhinqa befinomeloji. Luqhube lwaphononga okanye lwavavanya indlela amabhinqa angabaphathi abaphezulu abangatshatanga eMzantsi Afrika abave ngayo amava kubume bomsebenzi wecandelo likarhulumente laseMzantsi Afrika nayo yonke eminye imisebenzi yabo.

Uphengululo loncwadi ludundubalise ubungakanani bophandonzulu olukhoyo olunxulumene nolu; iinkcazelo zamagama angundoqo eziye zavela, kunye neziphumo zophandonzulu eziye zandindaniswa okanye zaxokonyezelwa kulwazi osele lukho. Kwakhona, iminyaka yokukhula yabasetyhini abangatshatanga iqondwe ngokwemeko yokuhlalisana (socialisation) phakathi kwenkcubeko yeembono ezinamandla zobudoda kunye nobufazi. Uphandonzulu luphononge izibonelelo (role models) ezibalaseleyo nezinefuthe kwiimeko ezibumbe umbono wehlabathi basetyhini abangatshatanga. Iphononge amava okungatshati kuluntu okanye entlalweni nasemsebenzini. Izigqibo eziphawuliweyo zenze amakhonkco kumava obuntwana kunye nezigqibo zabantu abadala. Uqokolelwo lwedatha lwenziwe ngodliwanondlebe olunzulu nabathathinxaxheba. Imixholo nemixholwana iphuhliwe kwidatha eqokolelweyo ngodliwanondlebe olunzulu.

INDLELA YOPHANDONZULU: Indlela yaseAfrika nobubhinqa befinomenoloji ziye zamkelwa kuphandonzulu lwalo msebenzi. Udliwanondlebe olunzulu luye lwasetyenziswa ukuqokolela idatha. Uhlalutyonzulu lwedatha luye lwaphunyezwa ngokuchonga imixholo nokuzuza iintsingiselo kumava ekwabelwana ngawo.

IZIPHUMO: Ukungatshati lukhetho olusengqiqweni; abafazi abazimeleyo nabanamabhongo bayayixabisa inkululeko yabo; inkonzo yoluntu inentiyo kubafazi abangatshatanga; izinto ezinceda amabhinqa angatshatanga ziquka usapho, abancedisi basekhaya, nezikolo ekuhlalwa kuzo; abasetyhini abangatshatanga bazimisele ukubumba ikamva elingcono labasetyhini kwinkonzo karhulumente.

Iingcebiso zenziwe malunga nokuphuculwa kunye nophandonzulu olufanelekileyo lwexesha elizayo kwizihloko ezifanayo okanye ezibusondela kwezi.

AMAGAMA ANGUNDOQO: amabhinqa angatshatanga, ukungatshati, indima yesini kwintlalontle, izazisi ezakhiwe ngokwentlalo, iinkolelo, ucalucalulo, izithethe zama-Afrika, ubusolusapho bamadoda, ubufazi, abaphathi abaphezulu abangatshatanga, inkonzo yoluntu, izixhobo zabasetyhini abangatshatanga, UbuAfrika, ifinomenoloji yobufazi

MAITEMOGELO A TLHOPHOLOLO MALEBANA LE BOFETWA A BATSAMAISI-BAGOLWANE BA BASADI MO MAFELONG A DITIRELO TSA SETŠHABA TSA AFORIKA BORWA: NTLHAKEMO YA SEAFORIKA GAMMOGO LE FENOMENOLOJI YA SESADI

Patlisiso e e sekaseka ka moo basadi bao ba sa nyalwang ba bopileng maitshupo a bone gammogo le mokgwa oo ba itemogelang tlhophololo malebana le bofetwa ka go dirisa ntlhakemo ya seAforika le marakanelo a fenomenoloji ya sesadi. E tswelela ka go tlhatlhoba ka moo basadi bao ba sa nyalwang bao ba leng mo botsamaisi-bogolwaneng ba itemogelang madirelo a ditirelo tsa setšhaba a Aforika Borwa gammogo le ditiro dingwe tsa bone.

Tshekatsheko ya dibuka e supile bokgakala jwa patlisiso tse di fitlhelegang jaanong; tlhagelelo ya ditlhaloso tsa mareo a a botlhokwa; le ka moo diphitlhelelo tsa patlisiso di tsenngwang mo tshedimosetsong e e fitlhelegang jaanong. Mo godimo ga se, dingwaga tsa kgolo tsa basadi bao ba sa nyalwang di ne tsa sekasekwa ka tiriso ya molebo wa tlhakano-le-bangwe mo setsong sa seAforika se se supang monna jaaka tlhogo, mme ebile se na maikutlo a a tseneletseng ka ga bonna le bosadi. Patlisiso e e dirile dipatlisiso ka ga dinna-le-seabe tse di laolang le tse di tlhotlheletsang gammogo le maemo ao a bopileng tebo ya lefatshe ya basadi bao ba sa nyalwang. E sekaseka le maitemogelo a tlhophololo malebana le bofetwa mo setšhabeng le kwa tirong. Dintlha tsa bokhutlho di supa dikgokagano tsa maitemogelo a bone a bongwana gammogo le ditlhopho tsa bone mo bogolong jwa bone. Kokoanyo ya tshedimosetso e dirilwe ka mokgwa wa go botsolotsa batsayakarolo dipotso tse di tseneletseng. Ditlhogo le ditlhogwana di tlhamilwe go tswa kwa tshedimosetsong e e kokoantsweng go tswa kwa dipotsolotsong tse di tseneletseng.

MOKGWA: Ntlhakemo ya seAforika gammogo le sesupo sa fenomenoloji ya sesadi di ne tsa tlhotšhwa go dirisetswa patlisiso e. Dipotsolotso tse di tseneletseng di ne tsa diriswa mo kokoanyong ya tshedimosetso. Thanolo ya tshedimosetso e fitlheletswe ka go supa ditlhogo le ka go fitlhelela mekgwa e e tswang kwa maitemogelong a a tshwanang.

DIPHITLHELELO: Go se nyalwe ke tlhopho e e simololang mo tlhaloganyong; basadi ba ba nang le ditoro ebile ba kgona go ka itlhokomela ba rata kgololosego ya bone;

madirelo a ditirelo tsa setšhaba a masisi go basading bao ba sa nyalwang; bakgontshi ba basadi bao ba sa nyalwang ba akaretsa lelapa, bathusi ba kwa lelapeng le dikolo tse di nang le bonno; basadi bao ba sa nyalwang ba ikemiseditse go ka bopa bokamoso jo bo tokafetseng jwa basadi mo madirelong a ditirelo tsa setšhaba. Dikatlanegiso di dirilwe ka ga ditokafatso le dipatlisiso tse di maleba tsa ditlhogo tse kgotsa tse di tshwanang le tse mo isagong.

MAFOKO A A BOTLHOKWA: basadi bao ba sa nyalwang, bofetwa, bonnaleseabe jwa tlhakano-le-bangwe joo bo tlhotlheletswang ke bong, maitshupo a a bopilweng a loago, ditebo ka leitlho le le lengwe, tlhophololo, ditiro tsa setso tsa seAforika, molebo wa go supa monna jaaka tlhogo, sesadi, batsamaisi-bagolwane ba basadi bao ba sa nyalwang, tirelo ya setšhaba, bakgontshi ba basadi bao ba sa nyalwang, ntlhakemo ya seAforika, fenomenoloji ya sesadi.

Dedication

To my parents, the late Mr Benedict "TaBen" Tengimfene and Mrs Nondiliseko "Kwakha" Tengimfene: you are inspirational to me.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 STUDY INTRODUCTION

DePaulo and Morris (2005) coined the term "singlism" to describe a stereotype of and discrimination against single adults. It is attributed to singles, women in particular, as predominantly bearing negative attributes. They are seen as deficient in certain socially accepted identity traits (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Farrell, 2018; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). For example, single women are predominantly depicted as sexual objects, as evident in the names such as whores, isifebe or nontorotyi which reference to being loose in Nguni, attached to them, while single men are celebrated as eligible bachelors (Budgeon, 2016; Pickens & Braun, 2018; Plank, 2018). Singlism generalises and thus ignores women's individual traits and denigrates their lack of preferred societal marital status and also denies singles certain privileges (Addie & Brownlow, 2014; DePaulo, 2021; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013; Lahad, 2013; Moore & Radtke, 2015; Pickens & Braun, 2018; Sharp & Ganong, 2011).

Pickens and Braun (2018) concluded that there is pressure on single women in relation to certain beauty standards to live up to, gendered views on what is acceptable sexuality, male superiority, and mandatory heterosexuality to aspire to. Women who do not live according to these norms are considered "unfeminine" and are subjected to scorn and social punishment (DePaulo, 2021; Farrell, 2018; Pickens & Braun, 2018). Singlism is a global phenomenon. In China, for example, single women are referred to as "shegnu" (left-overs), which is the similar word used in Nigeria (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Studies conducted in the USA, Britain, Ireland, Germany, Malaysia and elsewhere found similar discrimination against single women (DePaulo, 2021; Jiang & Gong, 2019; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014).

Singleness is more acceptable if celibacy is based on religious convictions (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). However, the word "nongendi", a nun, is among the derogatory words used about the perceived identity deficit of single women in South African Nguni languages. Society celebrates heterosexual coupledom, while single women are stigmatised and discriminated against (Budgeon, 2016; Opie & Phillips, 2015; Plank, 2018; Steffens et al., 2019). The mid-twenties are conventionally acceptable first marriage years, and those single beyond these are frowned upon (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014; Pickens & Braun, 2018).

Stigma and discrimination extend to the separated and divorced (Jiang & Gong, 2020; Plank, 2018; Steffens et al., 2019), although these are much more preferred status than "never married" (Plank, 2018). Divorced women are called derogatory names such as "umabuy' ekwendeni" or "returned soldiers without honour". Single men escape this societal scrutiny with fewer scars than women (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014; Plank, 2018). However, singlism or any stigma matter most if labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss or discrimination cause a loss of esteem and a negative mental state for single women (Jiang & Gong, 2019). The increased number of female-headed families, and reluctance to recognise how many of these there are, is under-researched (Maqubela, 2013), especially in South Africa.

Suen (2015) observes that research mainly focuses on heterosexuals singles celebrating disruption of coupledom at the exclusion of lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI). There are similarities between heterosexual and gay singles such as discrimination and prejudice experiences on those unattached outside of societal heterosexual coupledom (Palkki, 2015). Also, both seem to enjoy sexual exploration outside of patriarchal dictates and under pressure to settle or commit into coupledom (Seun, 2015). Single heterosexuals are prejudiced as sexually "loose" similarly to gays whilst lesbians are perceived as eager to marry and bisexuals viewed as cheaters. LGBTI think over whether to disclose or not whilst this is not a hidden fact for heterosexual singles (Palkki, 2015). Further, they enjoy little or no choice of officially getting married due to prohibitive legislations while heterosexual singles were permitted but choose never to marry and or divorcing (Palkki, 2015; Seun, 2015). Morris et al. (2008) conclude that stigmatised groups such LGBTI face a much more intense form of singlism.

This study explored singlism as experienced by single women working as senior managers in the South African public sector. It examined socialisation in a patriarchal society, the social grooming of children into masculinity and femininity, and the effect of all these on choices made in adulthood. Also examined is how women defined what it means for them to be single; stereotypes, discrimination and challenges experienced as single working mothers; and heading families as women. Further, it looked into how single women experienced the workplace policies of the South African public sector, and the culture and discriminately practices in the public sector. The sample consisted of 11 single senior managers in the South African public service with children under the age of 18.

This chapter explains the rationale of the study. It also outlines the general and specific objectives of the study. It details the background of the research problem and gives reasons why the study is important and how it will contribute to the body of knowledge. The research questions, literature and empirical aims of the study are also detailed. This chapter contains the research design and research method.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Women and girls make up 51% of South Africa's population, according to Stats SA 2011 census results. The last two decades saw an increase in women's employment in both public and private sectors. This period also correlates with improved access for women to education and work opportunities as gender equity legislation and policies such as affirmative action came into effect after 1994.

The composition of African families was affected by the migrant labour policy during apartheid. The demographic group most likely never to have married is African women (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Stats SA, 2020). It is African women of different South African ethnicities that were the subjects of this study. Interestingly, it seems that the single women phenomenon is still viewed as an aberration in South Africa. The irony is that nuclear family composition is embraced against all other forms, despite what demographics show (Akuma, 2015; Little, 2014; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Plank, 2018; Stats SA, 2015; Wilkinson, 2014), which is an increasing number of single working women, divorcees, never married and female-headed families alongside other family settings. The South African statistics show the average age of first marriage rising to 32 years; a high percentages of never married women; and 37% of households are female headed (Hall & Mokomane, 2018; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Rogan, 2016; Stats SA, 2020; Willoughby et al., 2021).

The rising number of female headed households, for example, challenges a patriarchal norm that women should exist and flourish within a heterosexual environment, which Rich (1980) defines as a "compulsory" form of existence. This norm is best illustrated in how bachelors are celebrated while spinsters are viewed as lacking ability to form intimate relationships and are portrayed as living cold and lonely lives (Plank, 2018). Single women are seen as odd and are questioned about their situation while married women or those in long-term heterosexual relationships do not have to account for their life choices (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016).

The underlying belief is that marriage is the epitome of well-being (Lesch & Van der Walt, 2018). This belief constantly puts single women under scrutiny. They are expected to justify their perceived failure to get married, offer apologetic explanations of missed opportunities, regret their current societal standing that is viewed as solitary and miserable, and blame themselves for their inadequacy (Lesch & Van der Walt, 2018; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). This research contributes knowledge on how single women rise through in life in a society that views them as odd, head families which is predominantly a masculine role, and prosper in their careers while raising children on their own.

1.2.1 Socialisation into the masculinity and femininity worldview

Gender is more than just mere description of female and male physical features. It assumes various value added societal descriptors that include personality traits, mannerism, duties and cultural expectations according to respective gender (Koenig, 2018). Nagoshi et al. (2012) argue that society prescribes gender roles based on whether an individual is born female or male using the family as the unit for socialisation. Koening (2018) adds that nurturing and submissiveness is ascribed to females while self-directedness and strength is expected of males. Masculinity and femininity are social constructed phenomena, with individuals making a choice on how to define themselves along this perception (Koenig, 2018; Nagoshi et al., 2012). Further, Nagoshi et al. (2012) maintain that behaviours and emotions such as aggressiveness, dominance and aloofness are associated with masculinity. Femininity is perceived as nurturing, empathy, talkative and emotional, and any behaviour outside of these parameters is viewed as odd (Koenig, 2018).

The single women in this study were socialised within patriarchal family settings and societies. Their adult choices of heading households contradict their upbringing, at face value. Their lived experiences tell a different story, about the presence of female role models, their mothers and their grandmothers being single. Further, the single women were socialised with less emphasis on gender roles within their households. This study adds to the South African research on single women, and describes their unique socio-economic and political environment.

1.2.2 Workplace dynamism for women

Mayer and Barnard (2015) maintain that gender, alongside culture and tradition, in South Africa is best understood in the context of apartheid, post-apartheid and global impact.

Women are joining the workforce in increasing numbers globally and South Africa is not immune in this phenomenon (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014; Suk Ha et al., 2018). Women were 43.4% of the employed in the second quarter of 2021 in South Africa (Stats SA, 2021). The changing socio-economic factors such as the high rate of single parenthood, family dissolutions, improved access to education, and tight economic conditions saw women entering formal employment in large numbers (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Stats SA, 2021; Suk Ha et al., 2018). Employment law promotes increased diversity at work (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014). However, their increased employment does not seem to absolve women from their nurturing role and other social roles and responsibilities. These are some of the fundamental contradictions that gender diversity brings into the work environment (Suk Ha et al., 2018).

The patriarchal system allocates responsibilities along gender lines. For the most part men are perceived as being heads of households and providers of security, and thus have power over most decisions made for and about their families. Women are socialised from childhood into roles such as home makers and nurturers, not as breadwinners, for example (Afolabi, 2019; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Motsa & Mojele, 2019; Sotewu, 2016). However, statistics of working women stands at 43.4% with 33.1% occupying managerial positions, in the second quarter of 2021 (Stats SA, 2021). There is an increase in South Africa with 47% of women participating in the labour force, up from 45% in 2005 (Stats SA, 2011) and 34% of married women are employed (Mutudi, 2002/3).

The South African public service was a white-male-dominated work preserve with women employed as receptionists, typists and kitchen staff until policies such as affirmative action and employment equity came into effect. However, women remain underrepresented in the public service, especially at management level (Shung-King et al., 2018). Women encounter negative experiences in a male-dominated culture (Bishu & Headley, 2020; Segal, 2015; Shung-King et al., 2018). Workplaces are often distant from residences, which makes working and nurturing roles difficult for women. This physical distance augurs well for men who traditionally have little to do with housekeeping or upbringing of children, but it has an extensive impact on women, especially when they have small children at home. Organisations have historically offered men a physical place for economic activities. This was in fulfilment of their responsibilities as providers in accordance with patriarchy (Banihani & Syed, 2020).

The public service in South Africa operates from two seats, namely parliament in Cape Town and national government departments' head offices in Pretoria. A day in the life of a senior public service senior manager is aligned to where the political principals are, and that often depends on the parliamentary programme. Travelling between Cape Town and Pretoria is expected of senior managers in the public service. This travelling creates a good physical demarcation between home and workplace. But it further limits women's ability to attend to family roles. It makes little sense that organisations attract women, but matters that affect their lives and work environment remain unaddressed.

Diversity in the workplace is an important area of research for Industrial and Organisational Psychology in South Africa, particularly on issues such as integration and challenges that confront women (Sarfaraz & Khalid, 2015). South Africa is also contributing to the international body of knowledge. This is a country unique in its diversity in culture, language, constitution and dynamic nature of its relationships. South Africa's history, demographics and diversity offer much to explore and share with the world. Also, women researchers are emerging to tell the South African stories using their own experiences and voices.

1.2.3 Working women navigating work family conflict

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) argue that women are prone to work-family conflict, as work demands dedicated time, which infringes on family responsibilities. The time women spend at work or travelling is tantamount to abdicating their family responsibilities (Bai et al., 2021). Studies of travelling executives shows that it causes stress for the person involved, their spouses and children, and that work also suffers (Bai et al., 2021; Jensen, 2014; Montazer et al., 2020). Preparing for business travel, being away and preparing for the return trip has its own stressors for the individual travelling (Montazer et al., 2020) while impact on non-travelling spouse and children is often neglected. The initial studies were mostly done on specialised sample such as military wives (Bey & Lange, 1974), lorry drivers' wives (Hollowell, 1968) and commuter marriages (Anderson & Spruil, 1993). The increase of women at managerial positions has changed this narrative (Bai et al., 2021; Jensen, 2014).

Organisational culture frowns on senior female executives attending to family emergencies during critical work periods, which affects those women's well-being (Medina-Garrido et al., 2021). Studies shows direct link to stress, poor performance, and high turn-over rate of working women suffering from work-family conflict (Ajala, 2017; Bai

et al., 2021; Jensen, 2021; Montazer et al., 2020; Oyewunmi et al., 2015). Akinnusi et al. (2018) maintain that the increasing number of single women in the labour market add to the number of people suffering from work-family conflict. South African labour legislation does not adequately provide for flexible working conditions or leave. Policies that encourage women to join the work force do not align completely with legislations that respond to needs of employees as caregivers (Akinnusi et al., 2018; Oyewunmi, 2018).

Must women work harder than men to fulfil their work obligations, given their other roles? How well is the public service attuned to this? Is there any awareness of what women overcome every day to meet their work commitments? How can this awareness be expressed to influence policies and procedures in the public service? The increased travel by a senior female executive reverses child-caring and housekeeping roles if the husband stays at home (Aarntzen et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). However, this study excluded married women. Additionally, the Covid-19 lockdown restricted all movements and brought offices and schools home under one roof (Khwela-Mdluli & Beharry-Ramraj, 2020). So, how does work-family conflict affect single women, whether travelling or office bound?

1.2.4 Single working women

The expectation that mothers are the primary caregivers and nurturers is ingrained in African culture (Helman & Ratele, 2018; Magwaza, 2010; Spjeldnæs, 2021). This was reinforced over generations as women ran households and tilled fields in rural areas while men worked as migrant labourers (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016). However, improved access to education and employment opportunities is resulting in increased numbers of female-headed households (Jaga et al., 2018; Stats SA, 2020). Stats SA (2020) reports that female-headed families are close to 50%, with one out of two fathers not living with their children (De Goede, 2018; Knijn & Patel, 2018). These single women assume the role of providers for themselves and their families.

Single working women feel overstretched and exhausted from work and family responsibilities (Girisken, 2021). They remain primarily responsible for the nurturing role coupled with responsibilities of being heads of households depending on a single income. Such women feel guilty, display less emotional warmth and adopt a dictatorial style of parenting (Shakil et al., 2020). Mkhize and Msomi (2016) attribute the cause of strain to the absence of spouses to run families with. There is also the impact of migration from rural to urban areas resulting in geographical distance from families of origin (Clark et al.,

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2017; Jaga et al., 2018; Makiwane et al., 2017; Maqubela, 2016; Mkhize & Msomi; 2016). Research shows that women across generations devise means of supporting younger mothers (Akuma, 2015; Clark et al., 2017; Makiwane et al., 2017; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018) although with a decreased traditional role for grandparents, due to distance (Poggenpoel et al., 2017).

However, De Goede (2018) maintains that single women display well developed tight household routines, scheduling and forming support networks through building relationships. Comparative studies between single and married women show the former managing career better without problems such as husband or partner-envy (Ganiyu et al., 2017; McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Suk Ha et al., 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). It would be a fallacy to assume that single women have it easy in raising children and pursuing their careers. The rise of female-headed households faces resistance from those who believe that family composition is in crisis (Spjeldnæs, 2021). The notion of a crisis arises from a society that continues embracing nuclear families as ideal despite contradictory statistics (Akuma, 2015; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Plank, 2018). The negative attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices which suggest that single women are incapable of running households contribute towards the singlism directed at them.

Figure 1.1 overleaf illustrates children's gendered role socialisation, in which nurturing and caring are ascribed to women while men are thought of as providers, protectors and heads of households and families. This grooming is perpetuated by traditions and culture which dictate societal norms, values and standards. However, women's access to education, work opportunities, divorce, low levels of married people, and high prevalence of female-headed households disrupt this worldview. Women additionally assume the responsibility of running households.

Gendered role socialisation
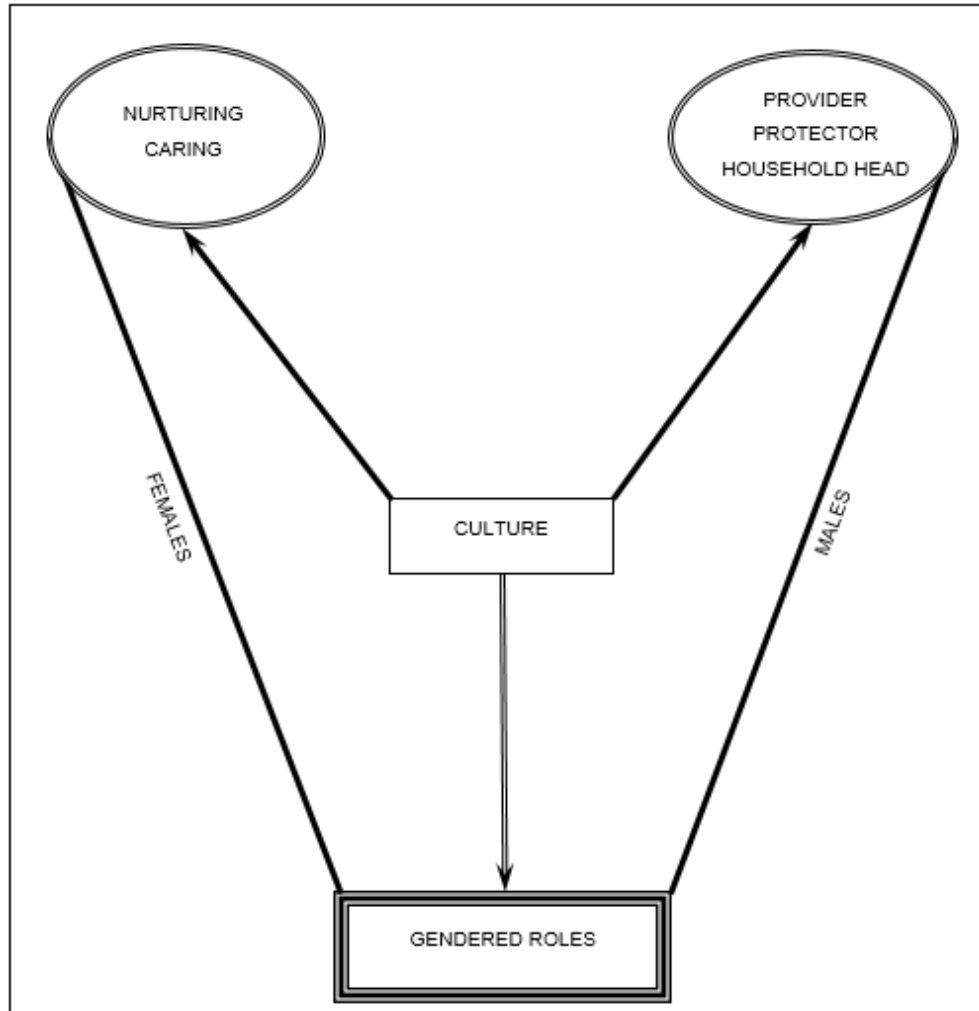
Socio-economic impact on gendered role socialisation
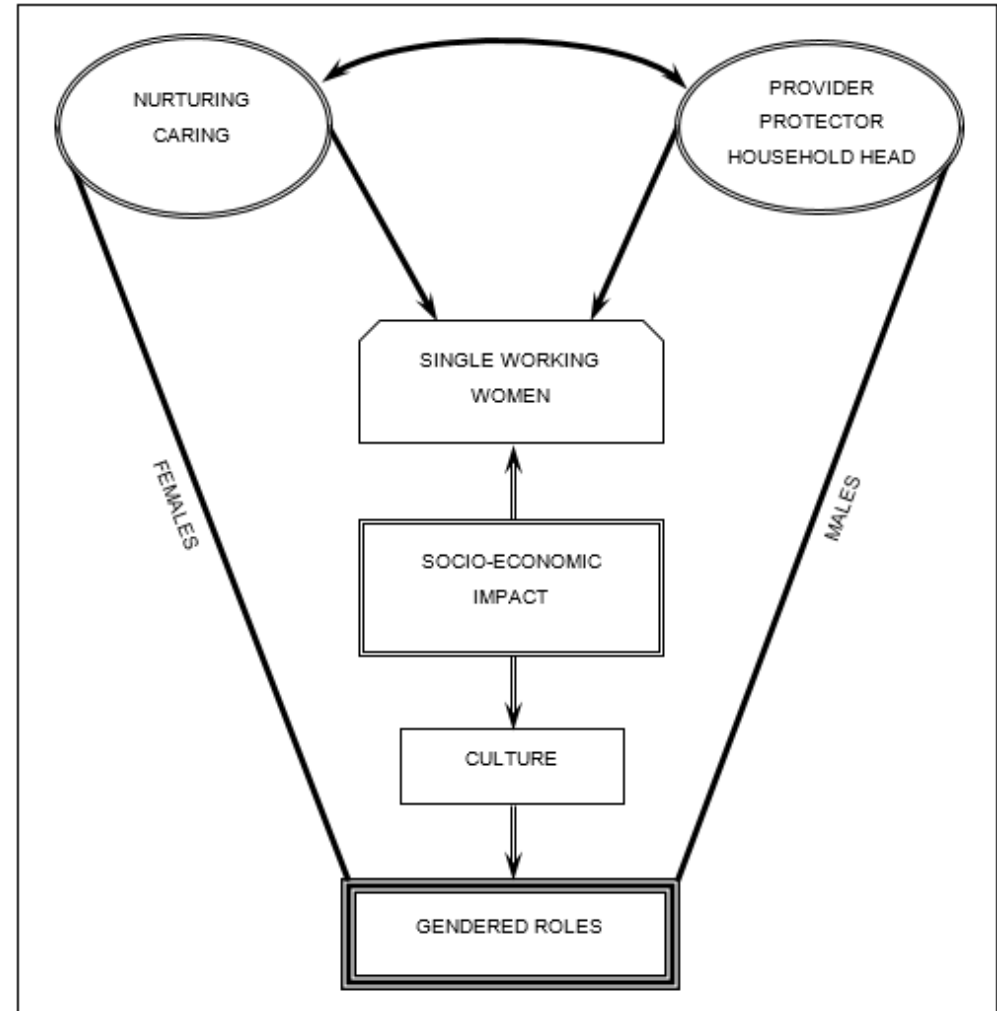
Figure 1.1: Researcher's graphical depiction of gendered socialisation and socio-economic impact on women.

1.2.5 Impact of Covid-19 lockdown on single working women

The lockdowns in response to the Covid-19 pandemic also eroded the geographical distance between workplace and home (Hertz et al., 2021; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2020). They exacerbated inequalities based on gender (Blundell et al., 2020). The paid support network for working women such as day-care centres, domestic helpers and au pairs was suddenly unavailable (Alon et al., 2020). Single women, in particular, were locked down with no other adults as family members isolated themselves at their homes. This was a major disruption to core assumptions of middle class female-headed families, viz., earning income while physically removed from home responsibilities; while children are fully occupied at school or day-care; being fully supported by hired help and family (Alon et al., 2020; Briggs, 2018; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2020). Single women found themselves home during lockdown, the only adults, taking care of children, household management and meeting work deadlines, thus compromising productivity (Hertz et al., 2021).

Working from home also encroached on family time and self-care, and brought a lack of emotional support and socialising, resulting in distress for single women (Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2020; Garcia et al., 2021; Van Gasse & Mortelmans, 2020). The change of environment from home to work diminishes confronting the reality of work being in direct competition with motherhood (Fortier, 2020; Hertz et al., 2021). Single women got confronted with serving a bottle to a screaming child while simultaneously following a virtual meeting, for example. Working from home for single women also meant lack of space for rejuvenation; physical and emotional isolation from family, friends and colleagues; and self-identity re-adjustment as the professional role was repressed in favour of the motherhood role (Hertz et al., 2021; Parry & Gordon, 2020). Alon et al. (2020) maintain that Covid-19 had the advantage of cementing flexible working arrangements thus improving working women's quality time spent with children.

The easing of lockdown in due course allowed schools and day-care centres to reopen and domestic helpers to return, freeing working women from household responsibilities while they still worked remotely. Working women got involved in their children's schooling, well-being and gained of a semblance of work-family balance and increased capabilities in taking care of parents and families (Khwela-Mdluli & Beharry-Ramraj, 2020). Perhaps Covid-19 has altered how working women organise their work and family roles for the better. It seems working from home overburdens single women

with gendered responsibilities that they usually delegate when travelling and spending eight hours a day at the workplace. The stinging issues confronting women in general are the inequalities in care and management of children, family and households. Single women are expected to assume these responsibilities without challenging the morality of fathers who walk scot-free, and Covid-19 illuminated such (Alon et al., 2020; Briggs, 2018; Hertz et al., 2021; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2020; Khwela-Mdluli & Beharry-Ramraj, 2020; Parry & Gordon, 2020).

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The discussion above gave an overview of key concepts, issues and perspectives in this research. It is equally important that there is a shared understanding of concepts and theories applied in the research process (Palinkas et al., 2015). The research explored single women's experiences of singlism. "Singlism" was coined by DePaulo and Morris, the first researchers to study prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination against single women (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). The concept is crucial in this study of negative perceptions towards single women, in which social constructionist theory is used as a guide. Lastly, the researcher made use of feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism in exploring the fundamental assumptions espoused in singlism. The theoretical framework for this study is a combination of theories, as discussed in detail in the sections immediately below.

1.3.1 Singlism theory

There is a steady decline of registered marriages in South Africa, while the proportion of female-headed households has risen to 37% (Stats SA, 2020). The high prevalence of single women and female-headed black families is a historical, socio-economic and political manifestation (Akuma, 2015; Little, 2014; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Plank, 2018; Stats SA, 2015). The single women phenomenon lives alongside a preference for nuclear families and women being in heterosexual relationships as a societal norm (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018). This historical purview offers little solace for how single women are treated in comparison to bachelors, for example.

Singlism assumes that women achieve happiness only through heterosexual relationships, being in matrimony and honoured for their virtue by men (Bhatt, 2020; DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Lahad, 2013). There is an age limit to singlehood for women. Those beyond 30 years invite all sorts of scorn. Single women are portrayed as lonely, miserable and lacking in comparison with married women, who are seen to have

higher social status and happiness (Plank, 2018). Bachelors are also celebrated as eligible and elevated. Pressure is put on single women to marry or else lead a miserable life (Bhatt, 2020; Lahad, 2013). However, there is less pressure to marry as women age. Therefore, singlism is based on age and gender (Bhatt, 2020; Morris et al., 2008).

Studies of single women were mostly done retrospectively during old age, or else were studies relating to poverty (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016). Sharp and Ganong (2011) studied singlism, while Day et al. (2011) added dimensions of societal pressure to marry and discrimination as consequence for single women rejecting the status quo. What is important for this study is gaining deeper understanding on how women themselves experience singlism. This involves exploration of how single women perceive it and its impact on their lives. The role of the researcher is to capture the undiluted voices of single women and interpret the essence of their lived experiences. Hancock (2017) maintains studies such as this one assist single women against internalising stereotypes, and help them move from identity deficit to positive association with their status.

1.3.2 Gender socially constructed

People are classified as either men or women and are also distinguished by masculinity and femininity, which are thought of as gender binary (Aboim, 2020; Hyde et al., 2018). It is assumed that inherent biological makeup distinguishes these categories at birth, remains constant, is central in identity creation and influences other psychological variables and attributes (Hancock, 2017; Hyde et al., 2018). Challengers to the gender binary notion are credited with reframing gender identity outside merely female and male, categories that exclude transgender and intersex people, for example (Aboim, 2020; Haslanger, 2017). Gender non binary argues that sex should account for biological distinctiveness between males and females while gender is socially constructed within particular cultures (Hancock, 2017; Haslanger, 2017).

Single women are born into families where they are socialised and receive their basic value systems. Socialisation defines them along gender lines, including their future roles in life, informed by patriarchy (Haslanger, 2017). How single women identify themselves is a product of what was taught, assimilated, internalised and understood in a particular socio-historical context. Single women develop their gender identity based on biological male and female physical attributes (Wenzlaff et al., 2018).

Society, through socialisation, layers these biological differences with characteristic attributes that each gender should assimilate, and discrimination is considered a habitual association (Haslanger, 2017).

Gender binary contributes to discrimination emanating from institutionalised gender inequality with females accorded a lower social status (Krylova, 2016). Singlism arises from social expectations that women should idolise heterosexual relationships and marriage, and are discriminated against if they defy this (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017; Krylova, 2016). This research explored how single women describe their status in their own words, and what single women have internalised about their gender identity, and the discrimination and stereotypes that come with it. It considered how single women cushion themselves against inequality and discrimination. The researcher served as a conduit of single women's lived experiences of their gender identity and related experiences of singlism.

1.3.3 Feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism framework

Feminist phenomenology places lived experiences of particular phenomena, as described by the participants, at the centre of research (Freeman, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Oksala, 2016). The lived experiences are treated as authentic and are not compared to those of men, for example (Husain et al., 2020). The researcher observed, heard the language used, and interpreted her findings within the same context and/or worldview (Levitt et al., 2018). The researcher conducted a survey of derogatory words used against single women in South Africa (see Annexure G), after one participant mentioned the word "returned soldier", a derogative reference to women divorcees. The centrality of single women's lived experiences and a female researcher augured well for this study.

Institutions such as churches and schools, for example, were segregated along racial lines until the transformation that occurred in 1994. This segregation translated into six of the participants attending schools demarcated for blacks only, while five attended racially integrated institutions. The relevance to this research is that the former group spoke fluently in their mother tongues (Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa and Zulu). Participants had limited access to other racial groups and cultures during their childhood. This is in contrast to the latter group, who interacted with both African and western cultures at an early age. The discussions thus far capture how the women's socialisation occurred within an African value system.

They firstly learnt and mastered their mother tongue languages. Their early socialisation, role models and agents that moulded their outlook were African. Children growing up during apartheid played and formed immediate social networks outside their families with people of the same colour, race and language. Afrocentrism centres research on Africans as active actors and creators of their own knowledge. This research, in an Afrocentric perspective, used the single women's lens to understand and interpret their worldview (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). The apartheid education system propagated Eurocentrism as superior and Africanism as inferior (Chawane, 2016). However, this study treats single women as agents, creating knowledge and deepening understanding of their worldview from an African perspective (Asante, 2009; Chawane, 2016; Mkabela, 2005). Further, Afrocentrism emphasises that the researcher captures and analyses findings through an Afrocentric mind-set.

The study explored singlism through participants' experiences as single mothers and senior managers, and how they fulfil all their various roles. It also examined the interconnectivity of their socialisation, the Afrocentrism value system, patriarchy, education, religion and politics in shaping their adult life choices in their own families, work, relationships and society at large, as illustrated in Figure 1.2 which is a Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model adaptation. The study examined how single women fare with those demands and survive stereotypes for going outside expected gender boundaries, such as staying unattached to any particular man and having children outside marriage. Feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism both put single women's lived experiences, as phenomena under investigation, and Africans at the centre of the study. However, Afrocentrism is criticised for turning a blind eye to women's inequality (Sesanti, 2019). It is up to African women and researchers in placing atrocities that African women suffer on its agenda.

Lastly, the research explored the participants' interactions within their own families as head of the unit, raising children on their own, the roles they assumed, the support network they developed and their other coping mechanisms. Work experiences were an area of interest, as societal dynamics were at play, such as patriarchal attitudes to women, especially single women. It examined how single women survive and dispose of their responsibility at senior management levels in the public service, and lastly, how they interact with their subordinates, especially younger women.
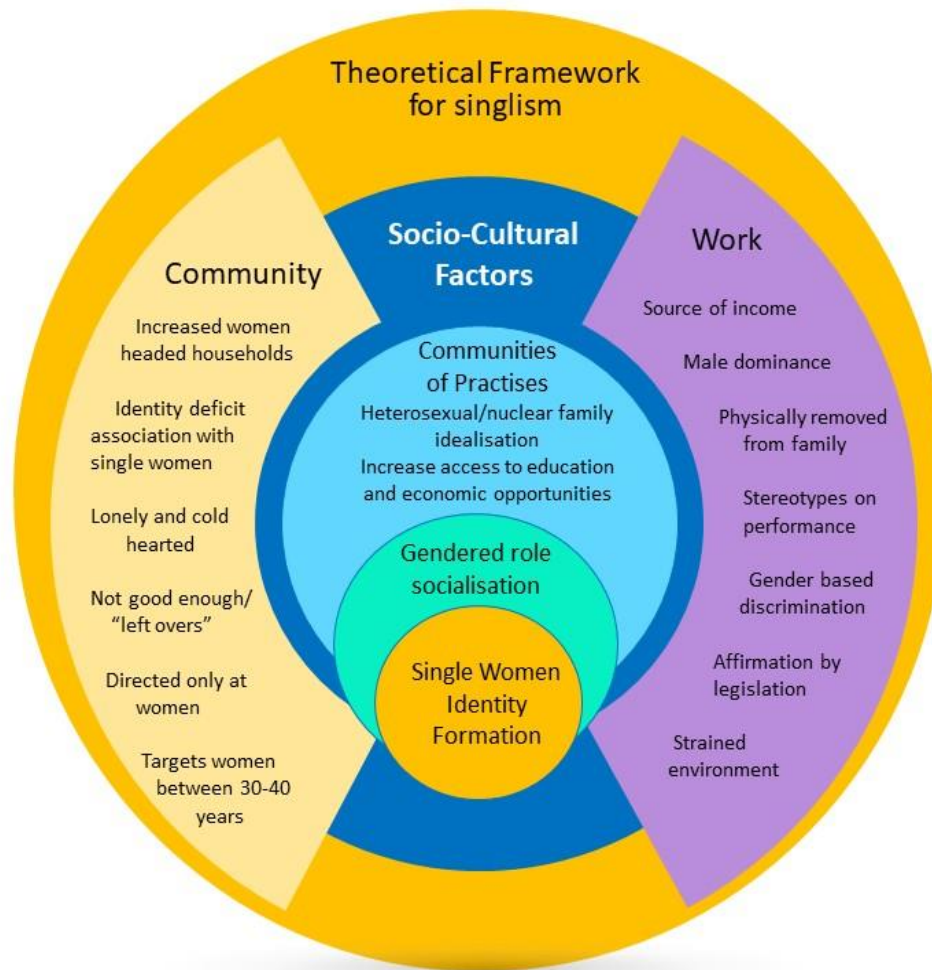
Figure 1.2: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model adaptation for singlism using feminist phenomenology and Afrocentric paradigms theoretical framework.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The conceptual framework is a group of concepts, from various theories and findings that are used to guide research (Palinkas et al., 2015). The conceptual framework served as the researcher's guide from conceptualisation of the research design, to implementation of the project and writing of the final report. It served as a reference point on issues to concentrate on and as a navigational tool in case the researcher ventured off key research aims and objectives. Also, the conceptual framework provided a lens and tool to assist coordinating researcher's thoughts and actions right through the research process.

The data was collected using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis was applied to derive findings. There were four main themes with sub-themes. The findings necessitated revising and adding concepts. It was important in analysing emerging data based on initially identified concepts. The advocacy concept emerged from the fourth theme. It was assumed that singleness revolved around assumption of provider role, social exclusion and power that these women displayed. The data showed that single women not only serve the nation, despite all the challenges, but take it upon themselves to advocate for change through mentoring and coaching younger working women.

1.4.1 Single women as household heads

Phenomena of African black women raising children dates back to centuries in South Africa due to socio-economic factors such as labour laws under apartheid, migration, political activism, amongst others, which contributed to nuclear family disintegration (Maqubela, 2016; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). The letter below shows gratitude for their strength, resilience and sacrifices.

Letter to a Single black Mother:

Dear Black single mother,

We were blessed with each other and we wouldn't have it any other way. You have me and I, thank God, have you. But sometimes I can't help but think: if you hadn't had me, how much better would your life be? …Too many times have you held a strong front while I fluttered along in my life as if there wasn't a target on my back. The truth is, you've been taking all those bullets for me, and only at this age can I see your wounds. I don't know how to say thank you. I don't know how to say how much I love you. Writing this will never be enough. So I'll just give you one small message from my little heart to your remarkable

one. …It's not even as if you're fighting battles anymore. Your battles have become habit. You're black, you're a woman and you're a mother. However you're constantly punished for all of those beauties. Put quite simply, the world wasn't built for you to live comfortably forever…" Ms Khanyi Mlaba. (https://khanyionlineblog.wordpress.com/)

Figure 1.3 below shows a beautiful, strong, determined, serene black African woman. She is in her own world with her child firmly strapped to her back. The baby reflects curiosity and wonder at the world around while remaining content at the mother's back. What seems to matter most is that they are complete in each other's company. Perhaps the world has taught her that "indlov' ayisindwa ngumboko wayo" (Nguni proverb): an elephant never gets tired of its tusk. The essence being that a mother carries on with her responsibilities no matter how hard it is. This is at the centre of this research and discussion below gives an overview of fundamental key concepts, issues and perspectives that encompasses this research. It is equally important that there is a shared understanding of these concepts and theories applied during the research process which form a conceptual framework (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Figure 1.3: Single black woman Source: https://khanyionlineblog.wordpress.com/

The statistics show a drastic increase in female-headed households and in the number of never-married, divorced, and single women assuming the role of providers for their families in South Africa (Stats SA, 2018). This phenomenon occurs against a background of socialisation which emphasises women as nurturers and homemakers (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Motsa & Mojele, 2019; Sotewu, 2016). It is extended families and institutions within women's immediate communities and broader societies such as churches and schools that reinforced such (Helman & Ratele, 2016).

Some issues emanate from the scenario above. It diverges from the script of women playing a supporting role to a man who is head of a household. This scenario was induced through the apartheid migrant labour system in which women oversaw homesteads while men worked in urban areas (Jefferis & Theron, 2018; Maqubela, 2016; Mazibuko & Umejesi, 2015). Men continue to be regarded as heads of households if there is a marital union and heirs are determined by male descent. However, the absence of men from the daily running of households directly contributed to the high rate of female-headed families and single women among black South Africans (Sotewu, 2016).

Yet female-headed families are considered out of tune with acceptable standards of family composition, indicative of value system breakdown and unbecoming (Wilkinson, 2014). There are contradictions to what socialisation deems as gender-appropriate behaviour of women. Single women pursuing responsibilities are not docile and submissive as traditionally expected (Budgeon, 2016; Helman & Ratele, 2016). Single women live in a society that scorns their marital status and family composition, despite single women being numerous. These women live with all these ambiguities.

The female-headed households' rate of 37.9% is linked to increased access to education and work opportunities for women (Stats SA, 2020). The socio-economic situation of the democratic era (post-1994) has also given women choices to marry, divorce or never marry (Afolabi, 2019; Opie & Phillips, 2015). Single women form the second-highest employed group (Stats SA, 2015). The role of breadwinner for the family is taken in addition to the primary caregiver role (Akinnusi et al., 2018; Bai et al., 2021; Jensen, 2014; Montazer et al., 2020; Oyewunmi, 2018). The "busy mum" image (Figure 1.4 below) illustrates a busy working mother with child care responsibilities.

Single women require employment to sustain themselves and their families. The child nurturing responsibility matters most, as they made the choice of raising children on their

own. Workplaces are physically removed from homes. The travelling between them results in social distancing while managing these responsibilities on their own. It was important for this research to acknowledge the conditions that single women operate in. The research questions solicit how they experience being single, working as senior managers, being sole providers for their families, taking care of their households and bring up children on their own.

The research explored single women's interactions within their own families as head of the family, raising children on their own, roles assumed, support network developed and other coping mechanisms. The work experiences were an area of interest as societal dynamics were at play such as patriarchal attitude towards women, especially single women. Further, examined how single women survive and fulfil their responsibilities at senior management levels in the public service. Getting undiluted understanding of the essence of single women's experiences was crucial for the researcher. Figure 1.4 depicts various roles single working women assume that run concurrently on many occasions.

Figure 1.4: Single working mother illustration. Source: https//workhappy.com.au

1.4.2 Stigma, discrimination and social exclusion

Social exclusion sounded harsh at first. It drew images of lepers' banishment in the Bible. Such treatment of people inflicted with physical ailments that were not of their own making is cruel. Giving others less respect acknowledgment based on their physicality, life choices, beliefs and outlook bears significant parallels with treatment meted out to single women. Perhaps research gives permission to unearth forms of stigmatisation and discrimination that society sugar coats. Alternatively, forms of social exclusion embedded in people's daily lives that no one bothers to lift off as the pungent smell is unbearable. Liamputtong and Rice (2021) make direct links between stigma and social exclusion.

Stigma defines some people as below standard, deserving of less respect, corrupted or corruptible and not worthy any investment or acknowledgement (Carter et al., 2013; Liamputtong & Rice, 2021; Powell & Menendian, 2016; Udah & Singh, 2019). The stigmatised are shifted to the periphery of society, labelled as undesirable and exclusion based on certain stereotypes (Udah & Singh, 2019). Powell and Menendian (2019) refer to this phenomenon as "the problem of othering" through preconceived group identities. Single women are treated with prejudice in society and the workplace. Stigma contributes to stress and poor well-being (Major et al., 2018).

South African single women's social ills include centuries of colonisation, decades of apartheid and continued slur, and stigmatisation and stereotypes to this day. Surviving such harsh conditions produces strong black women (Budlender & Lund, 2011). Women are praised as heroines while their oppression is ignored. Women are expected to align their identity with a man's to earn social acceptance and respectability (Budgeon, 2016; Opie & Phillips, 2015; Plank 2018; Steffens et al., 2019). Singlism negatively targets women with no men (Martin, 2019). This happens in a country that fought hard for liberation and to become a non-racial and non-sexist society. It is a struggle that single women fight alone.

The study explored singlism through participants' experiences as single mothers, senior managers and how they fulfil all their various roles. It also examined the interconnectivity of their socialisation, Afrocentrism value system, patriarchy, impact of education, religion and politics. This examines choices in shaping their adult life in their own families, work, relationships and society at large, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. The gender relations and

roles are at play within the society where patriarchy and culture dictate conformity to set norms and behaviour.

The study challenges Afrocentrism's silence on addressing stigma, stereotypes and discrimination against single African women. It illustrates struggles led by men have marginalised women. Research on women should authenticate their lived experiences through their voices. It calls on single women to dictate the terms of issues that the research ought to explore. This translates at becoming agents for their change, including role played by African female researchers (Chawane, 2016). The research topic evolved from what was presented at the proposal phase. The participants challenged the researcher on critical issues, such as those pertaining to identity deficit, stigmatisation and discrimination endured in their lives, particularly in a hostile and male-dominated work environment.

1.4.3 Authority and power: Socio-economic independence

The participants were socialised in the same way as their brothers at some levels. Families do not stick to treatment and grooming along gender lines. This shows women that they can assume equal status with men, and perform the same tasks as men. Adult choices of whether to marry, never to marry, and/or to divorce are borne out of self-confidence and belief in steering their lives on their terms. Black Africans operate within extended families, and children are exposed to independent female role models at an early age. The presence of such role models ingrains practical alternative lifestyles other than those defined in nuclear families and in the presence of male figures. In addition, the participants in the study were educated and some were pursuing postgraduate qualifications.

Education broadens single women's scope intrinsically. There is a sense of continual evaluation of who they are and reflecting on choices they make (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Willoughby et al., 2021). Education is also a springboard to securing employment, resources and lifestyle of their choice on their own (Stats SA, 2015). It is through a combination of hard work and having the right qualifications that their careers progressed. Single women strive to remain independent and ambitious, using all that is within their control. South African labour legislation has increased access to employment for women (Afolabi, 2019; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2015). The growing number of female-headed families seems to directly challenge men's claim to authority over single women's

life choices such their identities, bodies (who they date or marry) and parenting (Rogan, 2016; Willoughby et al., 2021). There is recognition and embracing strength arising from having self-derived and controlled resources. It brings self-accountability and responsibility over their lives and that of their children. The research looks at single women who expressed authority, power and socio-economic independence. It could be expected that society would embrace these independent women. However, this independence goes against patriarchal fundamentals, such as women being attached to men, nuclear families and living in accordance with appropriate feminine societal values.

1.4.4 Advocacy: Asserting status as single and fighting for younger working women

The assumption and embracing of singleness is a choice taken with great care. Socialisation equips women for nurturing and house management, among other things. Single women emerge prepared for roles and responsibilities inherited by virtue of their marital status during adulthood. There are great stereotypes and discrimination in society against single women. The difficulties of singleness also drive women to advocacy on behalf of younger women.

Single women enter a hostile work environment, but they find their space and voice through self-empowerment. There are limited opportunities for coaching and mentoring as single women rise or deploy their skills. It is through developing concrete skills, courage, and self-confidence that they equip the younger women to survive workplace bullying and not to settle for less at work. They guide through mentoring and coaching based on their lived experiences. There are insights best shared by the oppressed, namely single women, on how to avoid falling into the trap of hostility, being bullied and exploited. The assumption of Afrocentrism, for example, is that it is not the oppressor's obligation to free the oppressed, but the obligation of the oppressed is to free themselves.

The feminist phenomenology paradigm has a similar sentiment that the emancipation of women is not dependent on men. Single women embody their struggles on defying societal expectations, remaining unattached to men, raising children on their own and heading households. There is a self-determination that intrinsically encourages fighting for other women (Fernandes & Leite, 2016; Heise et al., 2019). It is a struggle for emancipation and control of their destiny without dictatorship from society and or patriarchy. The study examined the depth of these realities for single women.
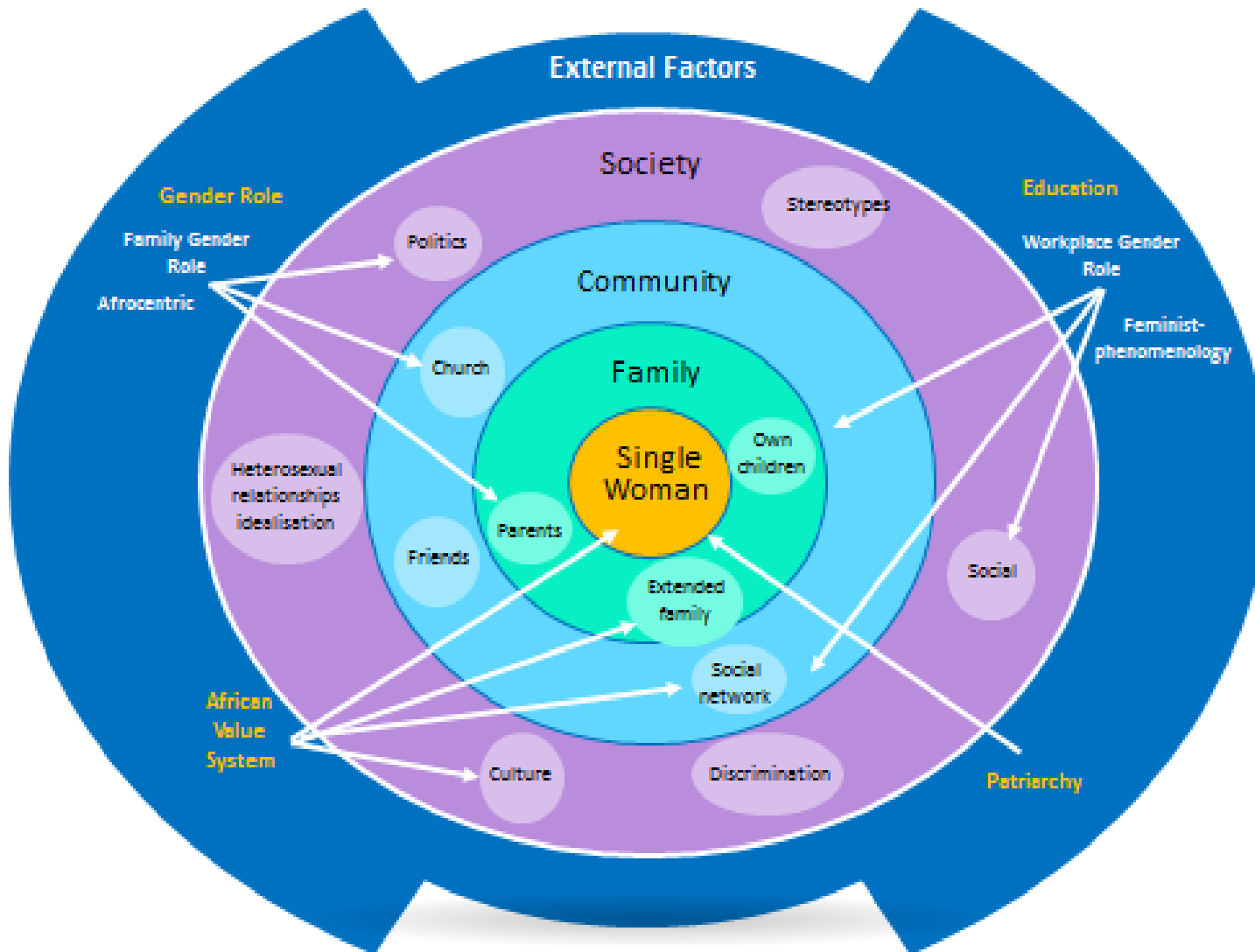
Figure 1.5: Singlism as a societal phenomenon based on researcher's graphical representation.

1.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Social scientists undertake studies through personal experiences, reading existing literature and/or exploring issues pertinent to a community or organisation. This study was influenced by my personal experiences and quest to deepen understanding of singlism. The numbers of never-married women and female-headed families have grown in South Africa in the last two decades (Maqubela, 2016; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2020). Stats SA (2020) puts these figures at 37.9%. However, societal attitudes still value coupledom, nuclear family composition, and men as heads of households. There is a disjuncture with the increased number of single women heading households and raising children in societies that continue to discriminate against them (Akuma, 2015; Little, 2014; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Plank, 2018; Wilkinson, 2014; Stats SA, 2015).

There is a need to reflect these single women lived experience and raise awareness of the detrimental effect of singlism on single women and their well-being. Singlism penetrates the work environment as well. A major task confronting any organisation in the 21st century is diversity management, from male domination to gender balance (Khan & Motsoeng, 2014). This is a hostile environment for women in general and single women experience discrimination based on their status. Single women are considered easy sexual targets, and are unfairly deployed at short notice for travelling, over weekends and on public holidays. The organisational culture, environment, policies, top management's attitudes to women's emancipation and day-to-day responses on gender challenges, all have a direct impact on how women perceive the public service's sensitivity (or lack of it) to their needs.

South Africa has implemented a gender policy to achieve parity and career growth for women. This is engraved in recruitment and hiring procedures, for example. However, transformation at the workplace is not on par with the progressive labour laws. This leaves women fending for themselves in managing male dominance. This study intends to understand more of this anomaly and make recommendations that the public service can adopt to mitigate the negative impact of singlism. The public service in South Africa has made great strides in employment of women, through policies such

as affirmative action and gender equity. Khan and Motsoeng (2014) assert that the increased number of women has not brought family-friendly policies.

This study explored the lived experiences of single female senior managers in the public service. These managers are key policy decision-makers for the country. The work responsibilities at senior management level are demanding. They include travelling across the country and abroad and thus affect employees' ability to fulfil their other roles, such as family heads. However, Covid-19 pandemic grounded single women at home thus nullifying the geographical distance between work and home, with children and no other support (Hertz et al., 2021; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2020). Recent studies on this show single women buckling under pressure, lonely and suffocated with household responsibilities that they had usually delegated (Alon et al., 2020; Briggs, 2018; Kalenkoski & Pabilonia, 2020).

1.5.1 Limited research in South Africa

A detailed search using key words such as "singlism", "stereotypes", "discrimination of single women", "single mother", "stereotypes", "female senior managers", "gender discrimination" and "South African women" and public service produced literature by DePaulo (2017), among others. The other globally relevant research on single women's feelings and lived experiences associated with stereotypes were Bhatt (2020), Hancock (2017) and Slonim et al. (2015). Llano (2020) explored the cruise industry. Day (2016), Farrell (2018) and Magardechian (2017) concentrated on stereotypes in connection with societal preference for heterosexual relationships. Gui (2016) explored identity deficit and derogatory names associated with being single in China, while Ibrahim (2018) examined similar concepts in Malaysia. Kline (2017) and Bowie (2019) investigated the flipside of singlism, which is the strength of single women. There was no research directly linking singlism to a male-dominated public service. However, these researchers offered an in-depth understanding of singlism and its manifestations.

There was one relevant South African article titled "Why are there so many single mothers" by Fourie (2018). However, this investigated the socio-economic conditions that promote the increasing number of single women, as reported by Stats SA (2011;

2015; 2018; 2020). Most studies on women are from the USA. Others studies were done retrospectively, involving old and/or widowed women (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). The single women's experiences were investigated during their old age, rather than while they were raising children, working and fully engaged in all their community roles, as is the case in this study (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Lahad (2013) adds that some studies concentrated on family structural reforms brought by the rising number of female-headed families, and also examined stigma and stereotypes. There are many that used single women in studies relating to socio-economic issues such as poverty, HIV/Aids, food security, climate change, and farming, among others (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018). There are few studies aimed at understanding female-headed family structures and how they operate in a patriarchal society (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Stats SA, 2017).

Also, what is known about single women emanates from comparative studies with their married counterparts (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018) and these studies examined single women as a group. Single women remain treated as invisible and less valued by society (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). The single women in this case are defined as not attached to any formal relationship. They are independent and embrace their freedom (Budgeon, 2016; Hancock, 2017; Rogan, 2016; Van Der Walt, 2015; Willoughby et al., 2021). Maqubela (2016) says that research has overlooked single women's social context, perspectives and worldview. Other related studies included "Experiences of women professionals speaking out against gender marginalisation at the magistrate offices in Limpopo province, South Africa" by Thobejane and Thobejane (2019); "General employee perceptions of gender based discriminate of selected South African organisations' by Steyn and Jackson (2015); "Exploring the career path barriers of women professional engineers in a South African context" by Du Plessis (2015). Barkhuizen (2015) investigated similar issues, such as gender discrimination and marginalisation of women professionals and employees in general.

Modiba (2017) and Adhikari (2017) looked at gender activism and employment with no direct reference to single women. Another study looked at challenges faced by women progressing into leadership positions, using an IT division at ABSA (Singh & Chauhan, 2016). African studies on gender discrimination are limited to Kolawole and

Adeigbe (2016) "Gender discrimination and the Nigeria scenario: a review"; "A legal analysis of gender discrimination at the Nigerian and South African workplace" (Animashaun, 2019); and Sackey and Amponsah (2020) who examined gender discrimination in commercial banks. Tufuor and Sato (2017) investigated "What motivates single women to migrate from northern Ghana to Accra?" There is a study on "Gender stereotypes in selected Igbo proverbs" by Ezeifeka (2017) similar to singlism experienced in South Africa. The other South African studies examined challenges faced by women in leadership positions, and matters related to land, agriculture and health, such as Maqubela (2019); Thobejane and Thobejane (2017); Shung-King et al. (2018) and Steyn (2015). Steyn and Jackson (2015) and Modiba (2017) investigated gender discrimination.

The only study which elicited women's voices was titled "Women's voices, women's lives: QwaQwa women's experiences of the apartheid and post-apartheid eras" by Kwatsha (2015), "The portrayal of single women characters in selected literary texts" was conducted by Seloma and Mushonga (2018). Moloko-Phiri (2015) explored "the meaning and interpretations of the proverb 'lebitle la mosadi ke bogadi' ('a woman's grave is at place/home of her husband': and its implications on indigenous African women's health: a phenomenological study." The proverbs ties women's identity and life as belonging to a husband. It enjoins women to stay married at all costs, while those single are treated as outcasts. Mulovhedzi (2017) tackles the "Challenges of divorcees in the Reformed Churches within the Vhembe District: towards Afro-sensed approach to pastoral care and counselling", which is similar to a study by Jakawa (2010) on "Pastoral ministry to single women in the Church of Christ in Nigeria, Gigiring Regional Church Council, Nigeria". It is concluded that studies on single women and singlism in South Africa are few.

1.5.2 Research questions

The research questions probed women's lived experiences of constructing their identity. It also elicited their lived experiences of socialisation, significant women role models, and what shaped the choices they made in adulthood. Further, they examined what it means to be a single working mother, singlism, and experiences as senior managers in the public service while raising children alone. These questions were

asked to deepen understanding of singlism as experienced in society, at work and while executing other roles. It looked at how single women were socialised, their concept of who they are, experiences of singlism in society at work and how they manage their multi-roles as senior managers, mothers, partners and community members, in their own words. It also looked at social discrimination and stereotypes that single women are confronted with.

The researcher sought to answer the following questions:

- How is gender identity constructed during childhood and impact thereof in shaping adulthood choices?
- How do single women explore singleness?
- What are single women's experiences of singlism?
- What are the single women experiences of the public service and discrimination embedded in the environment?

1.5.3 Aims of the study

This Afrocentric and feminist phenomenological study explored how the participants constructed their self-identity, and their experiences of singlism as working senior managers in the public service and as heads of households. The existing literature is mainly from abroad. There are few done by Fourie (2018) and Stats SA (2011; 2015; 2018; 2020), while Nwosu and Ndinda (2018) and Stats SA (2017) concentrated on female-headed structures and their functioning. The other studies compare single women to married women (Budgeon, 2016; Hancock, 2017; Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Rogan, 2016; Van Der Walt, 2015; Willoughby et al., 2021). Single women's lived experiences remain on the periphery of research in South Africa (Maqubela, 2016). The limited studies are about women in general and do not examine the experiences of those who are single.

The aim of the literature review was to explore existing literature on experiences of singlism using single female senior managers in the public service. The specific aim of this study was to give voice to lived experiences of single women of singlism. The aims of this study were therefore:

(1) To explore how the intersection of gender-based socialisation within the African cultural value system, patriarchy, masculinity and femininity contribute to how single women construct their self-identity.

(2) To explore lived experiences of singlism.

(3) To explore single senior female managers' experiences of singlism.

1.6 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The structure of the various chapters is as described below.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study. This chapter detailed what the study is all about, its motivation and objectives. It defined key concepts of the phenomenon and parameters of the study. The problem statement, choice of research perspective, research design and motivation were discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. The chapter reviewed existing body of knowledge, and analysed opportunities and gaps. Qualitative research depends on analysis of participants' lived experiences, and the literature review revealed little existing information. This study adds more empirical evidence on the body of knowledge.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology. Feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism used as research paradigms were described. The sample and population was defined, data collection methods were described, how information was collected, data analysis, audit trails and ethics considerations during the research process were discussed.

Chapter 4: Research Findings. Findings relating to how single women constructed their identity through socialisation in their families, culture, values, role models; impact of education; adult choices in having children; stereotypes on being single; experiencing cultural lag; relationship with significant others and Afrocentricity posture.

Chapter 5: Research Findings. This included a detailed description of trends and themes that emerged from this study. It also included comparing data among the participants, detailing themes and sub-themes that emerged.

Chapter 6: Research Findings Integrated with Existing Literature. The chapter integrated new knowledge from the research findings with the existing body of knowledge.

Chapter 7: Reflections. The chapter outlines the thesis journey, reflections from the perspective of the researcher and lessons other researchers may draw from it.

Chapter 8: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations. The chapter detailed the conclusions of the study.

1.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter provided the introduction and background to the study. It described key concepts such as singlism, socialisation, masculinity, femininity, and gender diversity. It further discussed the theoretical and conceptual frameworks; the problem statement; the research question; and the aims and objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the existing literature on the topic and identifies gaps that this research can fill. This includes examining previous studies similar to this one and indicating how this research can contribute to the body of knowledge. It also gives a historical view on how gender roles developed, and the evolution of masculinity and in a patriarchal society. It further examines how women are socialised, and the socio-economic dynamics that contribute to the rise of single women and female-headed families in Africa and South Africa. It also explores the experience of singlism, the world of work of single women in the public service, and the support mechanisms that single women develop so that they can balance their different roles.

This chapter starts with a discussion of the concepts of femininity and masculinity from a historical perspective. The socialisation of girl children is examined and compared to that of boys, in an African and South African context. This creates a backdrop for how single women emerge from a family and societal context and construct their self-identity. Significant socio-economic factors that shape their world-view are considered. The single women in the sample were brought up and socialised exclusively in an African context for part of their lives during the apartheid era in South Africa. Their lived experiences of singlism are highlighted, as these impact on their definition of who they are and how they engage across cultural and racial boundaries, in their interactions at work and socially.

Further, this chapter highlights certain ambiguities that confront single women as there is a cultural lag in embracing their choices of raising children on their own, heading families, working fulltime and engaging in intimate relationships outside marriage. Studies reveal that they experience discrimination and prejudice. These prejudices extend to the work environment and how single women overcome managing various other family roles. Lastly, the chapter examines the existing research on single women and work-family conflict. This is done in identifying the knowledge gaps and how this study contributes to the body of knowledge of industrial and organisational psychology.

2.1 FEMININITY AND MASCULINITY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Brossa (2017) maintains that masculinity is associated with social rules that instil and enforce appropriate gender behaviour and actions. The anthropologists trace the earliest signs of how masculinity and femininity developed to the division of labour based on reproductive roles (Brossa, 2017; Motsa & Morojele, 2019). This evolution of masculinity is based on a historical chronology in which men evolved as hunters, food gatherers and protectors of women against invaders. Historical development caused men to be territorial over physical space. Further, men viewed women's bodies and existence as part of their domain and under their control.

Masculinity created the differentiation of women's and men's gender roles, which marked the emergence of patriarchy: a hierarchical societal structure (Anderson, 2018; Motsa & Morojele, 2019). Patriarchy accords men a higher status while women are denigrated and considered inferior (Anderson, 2018; Archip, 2014; Brossa, 2017; Ngulube, 2018). Consequently, women are regarded as men's property (Archip, 2014; Motsa & Morojele, 2019). The emergence of gender roles could also mark the beginning of men ensuring subordination of women through violence, rape and objectification, rather than treating them as equals (Anderson, 2018; Brossa, 2017). The winning party of the war or battle, as an example, acquired not only land and property but included women as part of the spoils, entrenching the culture of women objectification.

This cultural expectation of masculinity and femininity survives through socialisation in families, peers, education and the media (Archip, 2014; Motsa & Morojele, 2019). Men are groomed as physically strong, intelligent, and emotionally detached (Anderson, 2018; Archip, 2014; Brossa, 2017; Motsa & Morojele, 2019; Vial & Napier, 2018). Men who do not possess these qualities are considered lazy or weaklings and they feel disempowered in return (Motsa & Morojele, 2019; Vial & Napier, 2018), from a patriarchal viewpoint. Socialisation grooms men to assume women as their objects (Anderson, 2018; Brossa, 2017). Further, females are seen as less human than males and are thought to add little value for societal existence (Archip, 2014). Girls grow up and are socialised with some of these societal assumptions active within their families, communities and institutions.

As a consequence of this grooming, femininity is considered as inferior from a masculinity viewpoint (Archip, 2014). Women are considered as less human, unintelligent and unambitious (Anderson, 2017; Archip, 2014; Brossa, 2017; Ngulube, 2018). The entrenched objectification extends to women as objects of sexual gratification (Anderson, 2018; Archip, 2014; Opie & Phillips, 2015). The objectification of women breeds in them a lack of confidence and a sense of poor body image. Cultural expectations are that a woman should be in good shape, wearing make-up and keeping her hair in style, in case the right man appears (Opie & Phillips, 2015; Powell, 2020).

In addition, Ngulube (2018) maintains that women, in line with lessons learnt during childhood, tend to defer final decisions to men. These are examples of how masculinity and femininity are entrenched through socialisation (Vial & Napier, 2018). Society offers rewards to females who abide by feminine core behaviours, while punishing those exhibiting traits outside of these social expectations (Anderson, 2018; Opie & Phillips, 2015). Single women's lack of attachment to any particular men for example make them swim against the stream, exposing them to snide remarks and prejudice from society (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017; Plank, 2018). Further, single women confront male dominance and hostility at work (Motsa & Morojele, 2019), which is a reflection of instilled patriarchy in society.

2.1.1 From cradle to womanhood: A double-edged patriarchal journey

Society instils norms, values and behaviours along gender lines (Akuma, 2015). It further allocates roles based on sex and gender. The main socialisation agents are families, religion, education, peers and media (Akuma, 2015, Carter, 2014; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Musetha & Musehane, 2012; Ngulube, 2018; Stead, 2013). The family is the basic unit of any community, producing future generations and passing on values (Poggenpoel et al., 2017). Cater (2014, p. 243) defines family as any primary group of people who share an obligatory relationship with one another. The family definition includes blood relations, adoption or other interconnectedness sharing common space overtime (Hall & Mokomane, 2018; Poggenpoel et al., 2017).

The family's primary function is socialisation (Carter, 2014; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Ngulube, 2018). Socialisation is defined as the imparting of knowledge from one generation to the next (Musetha & Musehane, 2012; Poggenpoel et al., 2017; Stead, 2013). The infant's behaviour is shaped by parents to conform to societal values and norms. There is definite gender specific grooming from birth (Cater, 2014; Musetha & Musehane, 2012). Helman and Ratele (2016) add that families are key sites for gender identity construction, including dominant masculinity and subservient femininity.

Gender differentiation begins with wrapping infant girls in pink blankets and boys in blue ones (Carter, 2014). Behaviours are promoted or dissuaded along gender lines (Helman & Ratele, 2016). Parents tend to discourage girls from climbing trees while discouraging boys from playing with dolls, for example. Girls and boys assume different chores, such as cleaning and cooking for the former, and gardening and outdoor maintenance for the latter (Sotewu, 2016). Motsa and Mojele (2019) maintain that infants in the South African ethnic group context are given gender-specific names, such as Vusumuzi (uplift the family) or Ndondomzi (man of the house) for boys, while girls are given names such as Cikizwa or Bontle (refined beauty) in Xhosa/Tswana, Mbali (flower) or Nonceba (Grace). Girls receive names in Tswana such as Mmabatho (mother of the nation) while boys being named after their grandfathers signifies succession to the headship of the family or a leadership role. Boys get names such as Mojalefa (the heir), which marks them as rightful heirs to the family fortune.

The above names embody social expectations of masculinity and femininity. The girls are affirmed for physical features in line with societal expectations of attracting a suitable man. The children also adopt their fathers' surnames, in line with patrilineage (Akuma, 2015). Children born of unmarried mothers assume their maternal grandfather's lineage. There are different expectations in physical appearance, demeanour, language used with each gender, the toys they play with, and chores, which form the basis for the different roles that they play in later life (Carter, 2014; Musetha & Musehane, 2012; Rarieya et al., 2014). Playing with dolls, washing and brushing them, teaches girls how to take care of their babies and elderly parents, for example. Boys are exempt from nurturing and caring responsibilities from an early age (Carter, 2014; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Musetha & Musehane, 2012; Rarieya et al., 2014). Calmness, courage and cool headedness are associated with masculinity,

while kindness, compassion and cheerfulness are associated with females (Khunou, 2012; Plank, 2018).

The literature shows that children are conscious of their gender from two years and of its unequal status by a year later (Helman & Ratele, 2016). There are African cultural practises such as initiation rites and "ilobolo" (dowry) that reinforce male dominance over women (Maqubela, 2016; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Ngulube, 2018). These practices enforce men as inherently heads of the family purely on gender as prescribed within a patriarchal culture (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018). Women who are not subservient to men or who are defiant are defined as odd or bad (Opie & Phillips, 2015). Women who are aggressive, dominant and loud are penalised (Mkhize & Msomi; 2016; Opie & Phillips, 2015).

This marginalisation of women who do not acknowledge men's superiority is a global and not only a South African phenomenon (Afolabi, 2019; Carter, 2014; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018). However, there is growing evidence of socialisation patterns towards egalitarian power relations along gender lines (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Maqubela, 2016). South Africa offers a different lens on family structure and gender composition, as it reflects the negative impact of migrant labour policies and apartheid spatial planning legislation (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Mokomane, 2018; Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Patel & Mavungu, 2016; Rogan, 2016; Stats SA, 2020). These policies and legislation resulted in the high rate of male parent absence. They promoted woman-headed families in the rural areas while men worked in urban areas. This situation with predominantly matriarchs in the family is considered challenging for boys who grew up without any male figures during their childhood (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Stats SA, 2020).

There are other socio-economic factors such as increased access to education and employment opportunities that contribute to female headed families featuring over decades in South Africa. Further, access to education and work opportunities for women are redefining family structures, as the number of single women raising children on their own is increasing in the democratic era (since 1994) (Stats SA, 2020). Carter (2014) investigated how the family influence on gender, assimilated through ascription, identification with parents and discovery of resemblance, shapes a child's

self-concept and adult choices. Adults at times loudly admit to sounding like their mother or parents, as they observe their own behaviours. This could hold true for single women's experiences of how their socialisation links to choosing being single.

2.1.2 Socialisation of girls in a South African context

There are various cultural rites that Africans conduct for children as they go through stages of growth. These include rituals for introducing children to their ancestors, ear piercing for girls, and others as children reach puberty (Froneman & Kapp, 2017; Sotewu, 2016). Each family performs these rites in accordance with oral history and overseen by family elders. These are done for every child based on patriarchal lineage. It is important to emphasise that the introductory cultural rites are conducted across gender lines. These rites also depend on the families' affiliation to the African culture or Christianity, as the latter denounced any cultural rituals as barbaric during the colonial era (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2018).

Ngulube (2018) maintains that socialisation occurs along gender lines. The distinction by gender becomes more apparent in the cultural rituals at puberty. It is women, for example, who pass values and norms to young girls. The girls at the onset of the first menstruation and physical signs of puberty undergo cultural rites such as wearing grass jewellery symbolising their ripeness for a suitor; "intonjane" (coming of age); "inkciyo" (virginity testing); breast sweeping or ironing. The breast sweeping and ironing using hot and hard objects is meant to protect girls during puberty from unwarranted sexual advances from men (Knopova, 2016). This practice is based on a patriarchal assumption that women with large breasts are loose. Breast sweeping is performed on the girls in an attempt to keep breasts small and maintain their prim and proper outlook for suitors (Maluleke, 2012).

There is also female genital mutilation, practised across Nguni, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga cultures (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Maluleke, 2012). There is ambivalence about the practice of these rituals for women, as they are considered barbaric due to the influence of Christianity and western culture (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2018; Scorgie et al., 2016). These cultural practises are also conducted after the first menstruation which is spoken of in hushed tones, as it is considered taboo, with girls treated as dirty

during their monthly periods (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2018; Scorgie, et al., 2016). These girls' coming-of-age rituals across the African cultures are intended to prepare them for marriage, and being mothers and wives (Hoza, 2010; Sotewu, 2016). The elder women share the wisdom of womanhood, including how to preserve themselves for the right men (Hoza, 2010; Ngulube, 2018). This notion of girls' preservation for marriage is more pronounced in virginity testing and female genital multination (Maluleke, 2012).

Girls are expected to abstain from sex and to receive public acknowledgement as pure during virginity testing (Leath et al., 2020; Zungu, 2021). This virginity testing cultural rite became prominent as South Africa fights the HIV/Aids epidemic, with this sexual responsibility imposed more on girls (Mdhluli & Kungara, 2017). Female genital multination is intended to supress sexual urges and is a control measure for women to preserve themselves only for their partners (Maluleke, 2012). The afore-mentioned rituals include "ukuthwala" (forced marriage or abduction of girls to marry an unknown suitor), which gives power to men to kidnap and rape women into submission in marrying a partner chosen for her (Maluleke, 2012). This "ukuthwala" and grooming into marriage is based on a patriarchal assumption that girls are flowers of the family and symbolise future wealth through "lobola" (Hoza, 2010; Sotewu, 2016). The head of the family decides when and whom their daughters or sisters marry.

2.1.3 A comparison to boys' coming-of-age rites

The female rite of passage has diminished over the years, while male circumcision remains entrenched, despite the negative influence of colonisation and Christianity on African cultural practises (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2018). Male circumcision is prevalent in some of the Nguni, Sotho, Tsonga and Pedi cultures. It was reintroduced among the Zulu culture as part of preventative measures against HIV/Aids (Scorgie et al., 2016; Sotewu, 2016). Male circumcision is regarded as a sacred rite of passage from boyhood to manhood (Hoza, 2010). Boys are taken to exclusive remote places from society for three weeks to a month where they learn about manhood (Hoza, 2010; Maluleke, 2012; Sotewu, 2016).

The initiates go through circumcision under the guidance of elderly males (Maqubela, 2016). They learn history of the clan, a secret language and certain riddles which distinguish them from uncircumcised men (Froneman & Kapp, 2017). The teachings at the initiation school include how to be a man, a father and a husband, establishing wealth, and providing for their households independently (Froneman & Kapp, 2017; Hoza, 2010; Sotewu, 2016). Uncircumcised men are stigmatised, treated like boys and given derogatory names (Froneman & Kapp, 2017). Circumcised men are bestowed with authority and power over uncircumcised ones (Hoza, 2010). The latter are categorised as cowards, excluded from participating in cultural rites, and cannot marry (Froneman & Kapp, 2017).

There are certain anti-social behavioural traits that circumcised men exhibit, such as assuming that they have a right to sex and viewing women as sexual prey (Hodes & Gittings, 2019; Koross, 2020). The circumcision rite is viewed as entrenching attitudes of superiority towards women. Mothers are not spared from being treated as lesser beings (Hoza, 2010). Young men emerge from initiation affirmed in control of intimate relationships, and determining if they lead to marriage or not. The initiates welcome ceremonies emphasise the young men's role as inheritors. They are given essential livestock, a furnished house or room, and start-up money (Froneman & Kapp, 2017).

This is an injection the family gives to a young man towards a life of independence and self-sufficiency. The equivalence of such gifts happens during preparation for marriage in the case of women. Circumcision is considered part of maintaining social order, as this rite of passage turns boys into men and puts them in a higher order in society (Froneman & Kapp, 2017). The circumcision rite emphasises the young men's role as head of the family and presiding over women, as discussed as above. Men propose marriage and pay lobola, which further entrenches their control over the household. Girls, on the other hand, have broadened their worldview through access to education and emerge as equally independent with their resources.

2.1.4 The effect of digitalisation, migration and urbanisation on socialisation

Socialisation is affected by digitalisation, globalisation and migration of families form rural to urban areas, which are far from their ancestral place of origin (Akuma, 2015).

The urbanised percentage of the South African urbanisation has increased from 54% (1996) to 63% (2011) and is projected to reach 80% by 2050 (Hall & Mokomane, 2018). This movement away from the rural areas creates social distance, especially for young families as their children live away from extended families and ancestral communities (Akuma, 2015; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018). It leaves young parents on their own and single women raising boy children without the influence of any male figures (Poggenpoel et al., 2017). This move from the extended family also reduces the socialisation and support role the grandparents play (Poggenpoel et al., 2017).

Further, urbanisation puts a strain on young families as they raise children on their own while building their careers (Akuma, 2015; Poggenpoel et al., 2017). Akuma (2015) and Maqubela (2016) maintain that urbanisation also disrupts the traditional socialisation which allocates responsibilities for value transmission along gender lines. Cultural practices, for example, occur in different contexts or circumstances. There is a trend of circumcisions being performed in hospitals rather than by traditional male nurses (Hoza, 2010). It is common in female-headed families for women to have the most influence on boys and the values that they carry into adulthood (Akuma, 2015).

Motsa and Morojele (2019) maintain that boys exposed to feminine influence displayed more vulnerability than those influenced by men, among whom displays of vulnerability are discouraged. Also, the internet and social media disrupt the shared meaning and expectations of cultural practices and diminish their intended purpose (Akuma, 2015; Ngulube, 2018). The influence of the internet diminishes the family's role in the socialisation of children, especially regarding sexuality and productive matters (Akuma, 2015; Motsa & Morojele, 2019; Ngulube, 2018). Further, the South African migration labour system had a most devastating effect on African families, with women staying in rural areas taking care of households (HSRC, 2004). The effects of this disruption on African families were that women took on household leadership positions and nurturing roles simultaneously (Budlender & Lund, 2011).

Female-headed families are not a new phenomenon in the African population of South Africa. Fifty percent of African rural families were recorded as female headed in 1980. The figures for families in small towns and on farms were 20% and 25%, respectively (Hall & Mokomane, 2018). What is different is that the women under the migrant labour

system were married; they did not choose to live separately from their husbands but were compelled to.

This separation was imposed on women by the spatial segregation and labour policies of the apartheid system. The husbands lived in cities for at least eleven months per year (Budlender & Lund, 2011). The women waited for them to come back. In some cases their husbands kept two families, and others disappeared forever. The family underwent decades of state-engineered destruction of its structure and function (Budlender & Lund, 2011). Apartheid policies disrupted African family structure and socialisation patterns, leading to the rise of female-headed families (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Hall & Mokomane, 2018). Urbanisation also led to an increased number of female-headed families.

Urbanisation contributed to alienation from the extended family influence on socialisation and child care (Ngulube, 2018). The nuclear family is associated with whites, while extended families are dominant in African, coloured and Asian population groups in South Africa (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Maqubela, 2016). The social support provided by the extended family and kinship keeps families afloat within poor communities (Maqubela, 2016). The increase in female-headed families is a product of South African historical socio-economic context. It is also a product of improved access to education and employment opportunities in the country's democratic era (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Maqubela, 2016; Stats SA, 2020).

2.1.5 Choosing singleness: Socio-economic affirmation

Stats SA (2015) reveals that the number of women with matric is now equal to the number of men with the same qualification. This improvement is as a result of government ensuring girls enjoy equal access to education in South Africa's democratic era (Afolabi, 2019; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2015). Further, the statistics show more women than men now attaining a tertiary education qualification. Research by Khan and Motsoeneng (2015) shows that education prepares women for independence, affirms them as intelligent and helps them deal with upheavals such as divorce.

The increased level of education also instils women with abundance of self-confidence and improved well-being (Afolabi, 2019; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010; Opie & Phillips, 2015). The numbers of marriages registered in South Africa fell between 2009 and 2018 (Stats SA, 2020). Statistics also reveal the average age at marriage rising to 32 (Stats SA, 2020). The decrease in registered marriage is complemented by an increased proportion of never-married persons (Stats SA, 2020). There is also a steady rise in female-headed families (37.9%), while 35% of children live with both parents (Hall & Mokomane, 2018; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Rogan, 2016; Stats SA, 2020; Willoughby et al., 2021).

The recent trend of never married, single or widowed women increase is attributed to their socio-economic independence (Rogan, 2016; Willoughby et al., 2021). Single women and female-headed families should be studied so as to understand their experiences as heads of families and related matters, such as work-family balance. The current migration trends from rural to urban areas in Southern Africa include women (Muasya, 2016; Stats SA, 2015). This is attributed to socio-economic conditions such as supporting legislation and access to education, which also contribute to the increase of single women and female-headed families (Maqubela, 2016). The changing South African demographics are also evident in the employment statistics. Stats SA (2015) figures show that widowed and divorced women were the second highest employed group in 2001 and 2014 at 88% and 85% respectively. The never-married group accounted for 48% of the total population and ranked highest on employment statistics in 2014, which was the opposite in 2001 (Stats SA, 2015).

The never-married are prevalent among African women, and registered civil and registered customary marriages are declining (Stats SA, 2020). Socio-economic factors such as education, gender-sensitive policy, migration and colonialism are the causes of the increase in female-headed families (43%) (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Stats SA, 2015) and single women (37.9%) in South Africa (Akuma, 2015; Bonthuys, 2018; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2015; Stats SA, 2020). The never-married and single women profiles depict them as independent, self-sufficient and confident, exhibiting characteristics that are traditionally associated with males (Budgeon, 2016). Perhaps these values augur well as these women assume responsibilities such as being heads

of households (traditionally a man's role), in addition to work-related ones (Budgeon, 2016; Muasya, 2016).

Single women's mental and physical capabilities to withstand pressure compare fairly with those of men. They also fared comparatively well in parenting skills (Steffens et al., 2019). The emergence of strong black women is linked to resilience developed in adaptation to adverse socio-cultural conditions (Jefferis & Theron, 2018). The African women's ability to carry the roles of wife, mother and career is an added advantage in their role as managers (Muasya, 2016). There is intersectionality or interlocking oppressions of race, gender and social class that influences allocation of childcare responsibilities on black single women (Jordan-Zachery, 2017; Smith, 2013). Participants earned their social class status based on race and gender although possessed access to their own resources. It can be deduced that interlocking of oppressions are stronger thus prevail any changes such as socio-economic variables on African single working senior managers. These capabilities are linked to generations of African women who survived adverse conditions, include heading households and nurturing children while their partners were in urban areas, for example (Budlender & Lund, 2011).

However, working women feel guilty about not attending to their families due to work commitments (Gragnano et al., 2020; Steffens et al., 2019). This guilt is due to lack of work-family life balance, which is defined as bi-directional as it affects meaningful participation at work and at home, due to pressures from both roles (Marais et al., 2014; Steffens et al., 2019). This study investigates how single senior women managers integrate their involvement in multiple roles, develop strategies to dedicate sufficient time to all roles, and tap into psychological support (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Steffens et al., 2019). It examines how the division of labour along gender lines remains, even though working women have become the norm in recent decades.

Feminist phenomenology applies a lens that unveils power relations between the genders, as women are still loaded with traditional roles, while men abdicate such to their wives or partners. The carrying of traditional nurturing roles overburdens women and creates conflict with their work-related responsibilities (Steffens et al., 2019). Women are left to take care of children and work responsibilities with little or no support

from the workplace. Stats SA (2015) argues that access to alternative childcare is relevant in gender studies, particularly where families are not available to lend a hand. Childcare at work frees women from family responsibility and thus allows them to participate fully at work.

2.2 SINGLISM

The South African population is 57.7 million, and 51% of this number is women and girls (Stats SA, 2018). There is also a growing trend of female-headed households (37.9%) due to socio-economic factors such as migration, education, rise in divorce, women choosing to have children on their own and or never marrying, as discussed previously. However, this increase in single women and female-headed families still meets resistance from a strong and entrenched social value system which idealises heterosexual marriage and raising children within marriage (Maqubela, 2016; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). The description of femininity and masculinity remains entrenched in the traditional patriarchal confines, despite changing societal family arrangements (Budgeon, 2015).

Single women are viewed as odd and the increase of female-headed families is seen as indicative of complete breakdown of societal values (Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Wilkinson, 2014). This is despite the statistics showing that the nuclear family structure in South Africa dwindling as it co-exists with other forms, such as female-headed, polygamous, same-sex, blended families and cohabitation (Akuma, 2015; Little, 2014; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2015). Further, the stigmatisation and discrimination directed at single women remains entrenched in society (Budgeon, 2016; Opie & Phillips, 2015; Plank, 2018; Steffens et al., 2019).

Additionally, it seems that women are expected to remain faithful while in intimate relationships (Mfono & Mfono, 2008). Women are also are socialised that conflict resolution is their responsibility within intimate relationships, based on their societal grooming as nurturers and peace keepers (Budlender & Lund, 2011). The opposite is true for men, who walk out of intimate relationships when things get difficult (Van der Walt, 2007). Single women are not legally attached to any intimate relationship. This

goes against how they were socialised within patriarchy, and attracts certain consequences, such as singlism.

2.2.1 Single women: Identity deficit and singlism

Single women engage in relationships with men outside the marriage that patriarchal society grooms girls for. These women are independent, with their own resources. This independence contradicts how women are socialised, as it is men who should assume power in relationships through money and providing for their partners (Jefferis & Theron, 2018; Mazibuko & Umejesi, 2015). Singleness is best viewed as socially constructed, a societal categorisation and also an evolving discourse of analysis (Jefferis & Theron, 2018). Single people are put under a spotlight. DePaulo and Morris (2005) coined the term singlism, defined as a prevalent ideology of placing family and couple on a pedestal, through socialisation, engagements, societal institutions, and policies that favour couples over singles.

By singlism we mean the negative connotations and stereotypes directed at women without partners (Martin, 2019). The underlying assumption is that everyone aspires to getting married, and intimacy through heterosexual partnerships is the only way to a happy and fulfilled life (Budgeon, 2016; Hancock, 2017; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Wilkinson, 2013). It polices those who have not achieved heterosexual coupledom and expects explanations of their failure to achieve such (Budgeon, 2016). There is also a different view: that singlism arises from idealisation of marital status (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Singlism is mostly experienced by single women (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Single women are often expected to explain why they have not attracted a man permanently (Hancock, 2017).

The pressure to marry, get into an intimate relationship and have children within nuclear family prescripts is more pronounced for women than men (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017; Wilkinson, 2014). This marriage pressure is based on the fact that the definition and existence of femininity is still firmly rooted in women owing their earthly existence to serving men, including the view that heterosexual romantic relationships are the only normal ones (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017; Plank, 2018). Married people tend to disassociate from their single friends (Pritchard,

2016). This tendency exhibited by married people is sometimes referred to as "social exclusion of singleness" (Hancock, 2017).

Singlism co-exists alongside independent, affirmed and numerous female-headed households as empowered and middle class women refuse coupledom, against societal expectations (Plank, 2018). The disjuncture between societal beliefs on marriage, couples, nuclear family and the increasing number of singles is referred to as a cultural lag (Plank, 2018). The glorification of heterosexual coupledom adds to the persistent view of single women as suffering from an identity deficit (DePaulo & Morris, 2005), as they are swimming against stream and not partnered with a male. This non-marital stigma is stronger for women older than 40 than with 25-year-olds (Hancock, 2017). However, there is a balancing view that women from 35 years of age are more content and adjusted to their single status (Budgeon, 2016).

The sample of this study consisted of single women whose ages ranged from 33 to 47 and were thus more adjusted to their status (Hancock, 2017; Plank, 2018). Stigma and stereotypes are expressed through names reserved for single women, such as spinster, while men are praised as eligible bachelors (Budgeon, 2016; Plank, 2018). South African languages are peppered with derogatory words for women, such as "nondindwa" (long passed her marriage sell-by date), "lefetwa" (women left behind by the marriage boat) (Makhudu, 2010) and "mabuy' ekwendeni" (returned soldier with no honours), which refers to a divorced woman with social status diminished for failing to honour her marital vows, and many others.

There is a Facebook post that asked for more names reserved for single women in South Africa (see Annexure H). It is not a comprehensive list as it does not cover all the languages. But the responses received reflect how these names are thrown around with no regard for their impact on single women. Further, they demonstrated scant appreciation of the origins of these words. However, some of the comments reflected on how vile and derogatory these names were. Singlism is also prevalent in the workplace, where single women are treated as a lower class (Savage, 2019). Single women reported being treated as always available for work assignments on short notice, being expected to stay late at work, to take leave when it suited the employer, and to work over holidays (DePaulo, 2017; Martin, 2019; Morris et al.,

2008). This tendency extends to giving more pay and family time to married women with children, even though single women equally take care of their families (DePaulo, 2017; DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Martin, 2019). In addition, tax laws, medical aid rules, pension fund rules and shopping discount offers favour married couples (DePaulo, 2017).

This discrimination disadvantages single women in terms of financial security (DePaulo, 2018). Widows of South African public servants enjoy life-long pension benefits, while dependants of single ones are cut off after the death of the main member. This shows gender discrimination on financial benefits at the workplace. Single women's family responsibilities are considered less important (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Yet single women are most likely to take care of ageing parents and are more involved in community engagements (DePaulo, 2017; Savage, 2019). Single women are also considered immature, unstable and selfish (DePaulo, 2017; DePaulo & Morris, 2005). The over-glorification of marriage is attributed to a sense of insecurity, as single women have children and are in intimate relationships outside marriage (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). This blanket categorisation of single women ignores the divorced, who tasted marriage and chose to walk away from it (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Gross, 2015).

2.2.2 Single women navigating intimacy

Budgeon (2016) concluded that there are distinct female sexual conditionings. Firstly, sexual socialisation, as also conveyed through mass media, models how women must treat and manage men to win them over. Secondly, it prescribes how they should respond to intimacy and emphasizes being reactive rather proactively pursuing. Thirdly, they are expected to make themselves desirable for males, internally and externally. This aligns with women being sexually groomed for heterosexual relationships (Budgeon, 2016). The rising number of never-married or divorced women, and the number of female-headed families, introduces different dynamics on sexuality and intimacy (Ammar et al., 2014).

There are contradictions on how single women are viewed and treated despite the rising numbers of female-headed families, as discussed earlier. Gender

characterisation regulates women's sexuality (Budgeon, 2016). It puts single women under constant surveillance. Single women are judged harshly on acceptable sexual behaviours and norms (Budgeon, 2016; Gragnano et al., 2020; Muise, 2011). However, single women pursue sexual gratification (Muise, 2011; Van Der Walt, 2015) despite all this. These women defy this script and demonstrate active sexual desire and take charge in pursuance of sexual relations (Attwood, 2011; McRobbie, 2013; Plank, 2018).

This confidence in sexuality follows from a sense of female empowerment that provides single women with an alternative, fruitful and happy life outside of coupledom (Budgeon, 2016; Plank, 2018). Female empowerment includes appreciation of their bodies, eloquence and pronouncement on their sexual desires (Grower & Ward, 2018). Middle class women thus choose to stay single for long as they are well resourced in maintaining their lifestyles and hold specific dating preferences (Leslie & Morgan, 2011; Van Der Walt, 2015).

However, Plank (2018) argues that single women, in most cases, have stories to tell such as violent encounters which made them quit relationships. Previous bad relationships make single women reluctant to have intimate relationships later on (McCann & Allen, 2018). If they embark on new sexual relationships, they start afresh, more empowered. They dictate terms and leave if not satisfied (Van der Walt, 2015). Further, single women are more apprehensive about dating for fear of losing their independence and having a man interfering in their households (Leslie & Morgan, 2011; McCann & Allen, 2018).

Single women contemplate the financial complexities of using their resources to support a man (McCann & Allen, 2018). This thinking about supporting a man, and not the other way round, shows how single women moved from seeking security within marriage (Leslie & Morgan, 2011). There is a trend of women preferring being on their own rather than in unhappy relationships (Leslie & Morgan, 2011). This is viewed as a deviation from basic gendered social construction prescripts that heterosexual relationships are a norm (Gragnano et al., 2020). The patriarchal society views women as sexually passive, with less desire, easily pleasurable and more content with emotional aspects of intimacy, while the opposite is true for men (Gragnano et al.,

2020; Muise, 2011). However, in contrary to this sentiment, evidence suggests that women embrace satisfying their intimacy rather than that of men (Ammar et al., 2014).

Further, they exhibit a sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure. They communicate and initiate actions leading to meeting their sexual needs, rather than waiting for men to do so (Ammar et al., 2014; Grower & Ward, 2018). Society labels single women who are unavailable or who reject men's advances as sexual temptresses (Cowie et al., 2019). However, married and old men feel free to pursue single women in gross violation of their marital vows, while women feel disgusted (Plank, 2018; Van der Walt, 2015). Single women are given bad names yet men think of themselves at liberty to approach them for their sexual pleasure.

2.3 AFRICANIST PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER

South African history is characterised by centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid. It is critical to examine the impact that these forms of oppression had on gender, sexuality and other narratives that affected how Africans define themselves (Maqubela, 2016). The colonisation power matrix included control of gender and sexuality (Mignolo, 2007). A gender study should examine and locate the historical socio-political environment of these phenomena (Asante, 2009).

The discussion thus far captures how women's socialisation occurred within an African value system. They firstly learnt and mastered their mother tongue languages. Schools were segregated by race and ethnicity during apartheid. In early life socialisation, the role models and agents that moulded their outlook were Africans. Children growing up during apartheid played and created immediate social networks outside their families with people of the same colour, race and language. Further, apartheid intended Africans as labourers, with a few designated professions (such as teaching, nursing and police work) open to them. The education system propagated Eurocentrism as superior and Africanism as inferior (Chawane, 2016).

South African attained democratic rule in 1994. This ushered in an era of equal access in education and employment opportunities, especially for women. It is also during the democratic era that women occupied higher ranks in the workplace, including the

public service. In the democratic era African women are in a position to change the narrative about who they are, including how they interact in the workplace. Individuals become knowledge agents of African knowledge based on how they perceive, interpret and analyse their world (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013).

Africans are now in a position to bring forth a deeper understanding of knowledge through an African perspective (Asante, 2009; Chawane, 2016). Africans are agents, actors and participants in the generation of their knowledge (Asante, 2009). This understanding of Africans as agents and actors in knowledge creation extends to research participants (Asante, 2009; Chawane, 2016; Mkabela, 2005). It further extends to the researcher adopting an Afrocentric approach and treating participants as equals during the knowledge creation process (Mkabela, 2005).

An orientation which embodies thoughts, values and perspectives entrenched in African ideology is central (Asante, 2009). The emphasis is on giving knowledge a fresh and new African perspective (Asante, 2009). It reflects and puts African interests, life experiences, cultures and values at the centre of knowledge creation (Bangura, 2012). Further, it propagates anti-oppression in the cultural belief system and worldview on race (Chawane, 2016). Chawane (2016) maintains that Afrocentricity occurs when Africans place themselves as central in their history of origins and actively participate in development and change. Asante (2009) challenges researchers to rightfully place and understand phenomena within an African context. Further, it emphasises that the researcher should be clear if her framework of analysis is Afrocentric.

President Thabo Mbeki's "I am an African" speech captures South Africans' feelings for their continent, its culture and its beauty. President Mbeki's era is renowned for its Afrocentric posture (Gqiza & Ogunnubi, 2019). Further, programmes such as the African Peer Review Mechanism and the New Partnership for African Development, spearheaded by government during this period, are part of reclaiming pride in being an African. The South African public service supported these programmes, as the country transformed into a developmental state (Gqiza & Ogunnubi, 2019).

The developmental state emphasise a people centred approach, which complements the Afrocentric posture of President Mbeki. However, Shai et al. (2018) note that President Jacob Zuma relied less on pan-African counsel, and thus weakened possible support from his African counterparts. On the other hand, President Ramaphosa was criticised for his supporters using the surname of Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma's former husband to frustrate her ambition to become president of the ANC (Sesanti, 2018; Shai, 2019). The Zuma surname was elevated above the Dlamini one, even though she uses both, emulating the Eurocentric instead of an Afrocentric view on married women's gender identity (Sesanti, 2018). It seemed that her struggle credentials counted for nothing and this association with her former husband silenced her voice as an individual.

It seems that the African values of Presidents Zuma and Ramaphosa lack empathy towards gender issues. The former got embroiled in various sex scandals during his tenure while President Ramaphosa earned the moniker "cupcake" after leaked emails from a younger woman (Shai, 2019). Afrocentricity is criticised for not paying attention to women's emancipation or conditions (Chawane, 2016). African women are agents and actors in knowledge creation (Asante, 2009; Bangura, 2012). Afrocentricity puts Africans across gender in charge of changing their world from their own worldview (Bangura, 2012). The end goal of Africans taking control of their affairs is to create a free and just continent for its entire people (Asante, 2018).

2.4 GENDER (IN) EQUALITY: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

The achievement in education cited above reveals other gender disparities. These include subject preferences and performance, as males still dominate in the STEM subjects, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Stats SA, 2015). This subject dominance is significant for careers related to these subjects. Further, women are disadvantaged in pay, promotion, job stability, status and pension benefits relative to men (Stats, 2015). These disparities in employment prompt the question of how men become better off than women given the same opportunities.

There is ample research showing that women remain under represented in senior management due to negative factors such as work culture, intolerance for family life roles, and long hours (Mayer et al., 2018; Steffens et al., 2019; Vial & Napier, 2018). Men still dominate the public service in South Africa, especially at leadership levels. African women are over-represented in lower income brackets (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016). The South African socio-economic context on work-family balance remains under-explored, as most studies are done in the USA and other foreign countries (Maqubela, 2016). Further, research thus far on work-family balance has been done predominantly on women in general and seldom purely on African single women (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016).

There were drastic changes in labour demographics as women joined paid work in large numbers in recent decades. Further, women headed families are also on the rise (Stats SA, 2018). However, women still remain largely responsible for household chores like cooking and cleaning (Akuma, 2015; Ganiyu et al., 2017; Gehrke & Hassard, 2015; Marais et al., 2014; Muasya, 2016; Ncube, 2018; Ngulube, 2018; Suk Ha et al., 2018). Women are taught to take the nurturing role and to be responsible for household management. This is taught at home and reinforced through institutions such as schools and churches (Ncube, 2018; Plank, 2018).

South Africa is not immune to these developments: the rise of working women, dual-career couples, and single parents (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Mostert, 2015). This increase of working women is mainly due to policies and legislations such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000), the Employment Equity Act (1998), the Skills Development Act (1998) and the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000). These paved the way for policies and procedures that ensured equal rights and opportunities for women (Abe et al., 2017; Jackson & Fransman, 2018; Kahn & Motsoeneng, 2014; Maqubela, 2016; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2015).

South African women experienced gender discrimination. There was additionally legislated racial discrimination against blacks, coloureds and Indians until the dawn of democracy in 1994. This discrimination limited women's access to education and work

opportunities. The Constitution of South Africa places huge emphasis on building a non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous nation (Abe et al., 2017; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Shung-King et al., 2018). However, these enabling policies and legislation have not realised immediate growth in women's employment and ascent to the upper echelons of leadership (Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). This includes in the public sector.

Statistics show that there was increased employment of both men and women, although at varying degrees, with the former at a higher rate before the recession of 2008 (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Stats SA, 2015). This gap between female and male employment is exacerbated by rising unemployment which most negatively affected women in South Africa, showing a decrease of 3.2% compared to that of 3.1% of males (Stats SA, 2015). It is a 0.1% that is huge for women as they lagged behind men in the employment statistics. The same Stats SA (2015) report notes that female-headed households were more likely to have no one employed, while men earned more than their counterparts (Stats SA, 2015).

Additionally, women lag behind from decades of limited access to education, skills, business opportunities and asset acquisition. The highest concentration of employed women is in Gauteng, with female employment at 63%, followed by 60.4% in Limpopo (Stats SA, 2018). This is in line with the migration patterns from rural to urban areas, which is also a critical factor in analysing employment patterns (Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Muasya, 2016; Ngulube, 2018) in Southern Africa. The consequences of this migration are that single women live with minor children away from their families (Muasya, 2016). This distance from family for single women includes participants from Gauteng, in the case of this study, as their parents lived an hour or more away from their places of residence.

2.4.1 The South African public service: A male-dominated environment

The South African public service accelerated employment opportunities for women than men post 1994 (Stats SA, 2015). Similar significant progress of women's employment participation was noted in parliament, cabinet, provincial and local government, particularly between 1994 and 2008. The percentage of women

parliamentarians rose from 2.7% before 1994 to 45% in 2014. Cabinet finally achieved gender equality (Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC), 2019). This makes South Africa the third highest gender public service representation after Sweden (57%) and Rwanda (56%) and these three countries are lauded for great achievement in legal, political and gender equality (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014).

However, growth in women's employment stalled for over fifteen years and women's representation in parliament decreased to 42.7% (Stats SA, 2015). This is even though 51% women were registered as voters for the May 2019 national and provincial elections (IEC, 2019). The local government sphere lags behind in gender mainstreaming, having achieved 28% (1995), 38% (2000), 46% (2006) and 38% (2015) (Stats SA, 2015). Further, there is slower progress in gender equality in the private sector than the public service (Stats SA, 2015). These statistics are based on scrutinising chief executive officer positions in the Top 40 Johannesburg Stock Exchange-listed companies.

The statistics indicate that the high number of women voters did not equate to gender balance and public representation after elections. Also, men rise to power on women's votes. N.N. Gwagwa (personal communication, May 10, 2018) emphasises that the task of gender transformation becomes the responsibility of male leadership, as they dominate in the public sector. Lastly, the enabling legislation has not guaranteed a sustained increase in women's employment (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014; Suk Ha et al., 2018). The existing research depicts the public service in South Africa as male dominated, unaccommodating of women's family roles, with long working hours and extended absence from home (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014; Shung-King et al., 2018; Suk Ha et al., 2018). The gap between male and female employment points to other factors which remain unaddressed that prevent women's increased participation (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Stats SA, 2015; Suk Ha et al., 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). The lack of women's representation is most evident at the highest management levels (Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). However, there are limited studies on the impact of work-family balance for women in South Africa.

2.4.2 Women negotiating space within the public service

The emancipation of women must include meaningful employment, including occupation of higher work echelons (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Maaitah et al., 2011; Shung-King et al., 2018). However, there are still more men than women in senior leadership positions in government (Marais et al., 2014; Stats SA, 2015) and state-owned entities. Men occupy 59.9% of senior management positions in government (Shung-King et al., 2018; Stats SA, 2015). Statistics show that top leadership positions are filled at 18% and 27.7% respectively by women and men (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014). The departments that are traditionally male dominated, such as police, defence and some in the justice cluster, fare worst on gender balance at all levels (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014).

The job reservation practices during apartheid brought gross discrimination against women and leave a legacy in departments such as the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) with severe under-representation of women (Shung-King et al., 2018). Naidoo and Khan (2015) obse/rve that Major General Sedibe and Major General Poel were the first women promoted to this rank, in 1996, while three white women assumed brigadier status in 2005. Women held 14.38% of top management posts in the SANDF in 2008 (Naidoo & Khan, 2015). The government's commitment to gender equality is seen in measurable progress in the public service since democracy (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Molotsi, 2016; Onyehuluchukwu, 2014; Shung-King et al., 2018). However, it failed to achieve 50% women representation at Senior Management Service level by 2009 (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014).

It is critical that the South African public service has women managers if it is to function optimally (Marais et al., 2014; Shung-King et al., 2018; Stats SA, 2015). This lack of women in leadership positions limits the public service exposure to new perspectives that women bring to work, such as problem-solving, inclusivity, and participative leadership (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Shung-King et al., 2018). Women work best in teams, are more organised, share responsibilities and are good at developing task monitoring systems (Onyehuluchukwu, 2014). However, women managers are confronted with an anomaly within the work environment, as they are expected to

make solitary and rapid decisions which contradict their traditional socialisation into a more consultative approach (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014).

Masculine values are dominant in the public sector, unlike feminine ones such as care, co-operation and concern for others (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Vial & Napier, 2018). This male domination renders the public service a foreign and difficult terrain for women to master, giving men an unfair advantage. This means that men are at liberty in exercising their power at home and at work (Kahn & Motsoeneng, 2014; Molotsi, 2016; Onyehuluchukwu, 2014). The few women who rose into leadership positions in such an environment did so by emulating men's leadership styles, which include controlling and commanding (Molotsi, 2016; Steffens et al., 2019).

The relationship of women with work colleagues needs further scrutiny in the male-dominated public service. It is not surprising that men are accused of going to extremes to prove women as incompetent; to show themselves as better; and failing to support them with their work responsibilities (Marais et al., 2014). There are two main responses to this male behaviour in the public service. It either silences women or it drives them to achieve their best against all odds (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). The South African public service lacks a gender-sensitive environment that allows female employees to prosper, despite putting in place enabling legislation and policies (Abe et al., 2017; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014).

This lack of transformation keeps working women trapped in household responsibility and as primary care givers (Jackson & Fransman, 2018; Suk Ha et al., 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). N.N. Gwagwa (personal communication, May 10, 2018) appreciated that the late Minister Zola Skweyiya recruited her to a commission in the early 1990s knowing very well that she had just given birth. He made sure that her child was accommodated, and enabled her to contribute significantly without feeling torn away from her motherhood role. She breastfed her child at will and kept her within her sight during the course of the proceedings. However, I know that the public service currently offers no childcare facilities, despite the increase in women employees.

In addition, the existence of two centres of power (parliament in Cape Town and the administrative arm in Pretoria), makes it difficult for senior women executives. Public

servants are expected to travel between the two cities and to leave their families behind (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). The women feel this mostly during family emergencies, such as if a child is sick. Single women are more vulnerable to feeling torn between family and work under these circumstances (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018), as there is no other parent to step in. The travelling removes women from their families for days and widens the gap between work and family roles. The continuation of entrusting women with family role undermines efforts in affirming them in the workplace. There is another dimension that single women are abused and exploited with demands to work over weekends and after hours, as they have no spouses to account to (Van der Walt, 2015). The men use their spouses and mothers of their children to absolve themselves from nurturing responsibilities. They are free to travel and spend long hours at work, free from guilt about family responsibilities.

2.4.3 The public service is associated with ineptitude

Research on public servants in Ghana revealed low commitment levels, late coming, leaving work early, absence without permission and bribery as prevalent (Ojedokon et al., 2015). These issues contribute to low organisational commitment by public servants, which affects the quality of work done and perceived external prestige (Ojedokon et al., 2015). Public servants consider the private sector as better in terms of pay and prestige than the public service (Ojedokon et al., 2015). South Africa's public service is not immune to these descriptors, as many citizens bemoan poor service from, and bad attitude of, public servants (Mafini & Pooe, 2013; Marais et al., 2014).

The South African public service receives consistent criticism from citizens for ineptitude, poor service delivery, internal fighting, among other things (Mafini & Pooe, 2013). Public servants display poor motivation and job satisfaction (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014; Marais et al., 2014). A positive correlation was found between increased remuneration and job satisfaction which also translated into improved quality of work (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014; Marais et al., 2014). Public service pay is viewed as lower than in the private sector (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014).

Further, research showed a positive association between supervision and job satisfaction, including life satisfaction (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014). A study by Khan and Motsoeneng (2014) found that 55% of participants experienced their line managers in the public service as not having their best interests at heart. The lack of support from supervisors presents hardship for women, and a hostile and a constraining work environment (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). Supportive supervisors contribute positively to work-to-family enrichment (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010; Marais et al., 2014; Muasya, 2016). The women take it upon themselves to be advocates of gender equality (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014).

2.5 FLYING SOLO AND ITS ADVANTAGES AT WORK

The single women in this study were senior managers who thus earned their income, unlike those who depend on government grants, which provided only for their basic sustenance (Rendall, 2017). Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado (2018) show the employment rate of female-headed families stand at 80% among 24 societies studied globally. Work also offers an opportunity for single women to network and engaging with other adults (Eismann et al., 2019). Employment offers single women escape from poverty and is also a motivator for the work ethic. A study by Eismann et al. (2019) concluded that single women stayed longer at work to maximise social connection, and that they do not suffer from spousal pressure to retire.

Astin and Davis (2019) maintain that single women academics produce more material than their married counterparts. They argue that men feel threatened if their wives are more educated than they are. Secondly, single women do not consult a partner in considering a promotion, while married ones may find themselves in a conflict over whether to accept or not, due to their husband's envy. Suk Ha et al. (2018) concur with this study and add that single women compared favourably in job satisfaction with men. Further, single women are mentally healthier than their married counterparts.

Men's socialisation leads them to assume that a position of dominance and leadership is their birth right. Women's access to education and equal work opportunities upset men's rise to power. This may threaten marriages or relationships, particularly if a man has low self-esteem (McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Ngulube, 2018) and feels threatened

by his wife's achievements. There are fewer married women at top executive levels than divorced or never-married women (Finkelstein, 2018). Further, the husband or partner's ambivalence about married women's capabilities negatively affects their confidence, assertiveness and managerial performance (McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Opie & Henn, 2013; Suk Ha et al., 2018). This may also link to increase in divorce rates and women choosing never to marry (Stats SA, 2015). Single women perform better at managerial levels with no husband or partner to appease (Suk Ha et al., 2018).

Some married women have mental disorders due to heavy responsibilities as workers, mothers and wives (Opie & Henn, 2013; Suk Ha et al., 2018). Married women demonstrated a low family-life balance (Opie & Henn, 2013; Suk Ha et al., 2018). Single women use their salaries to achieve work-family balance through buying themselves out of certain family responsibilities (Suk Ha et al., 2018). Further, single women pursue their career ambitions, while married women are cautious about how these affect their families and tend to hold back (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Suk Ha et al., 2018).

The Covid-19 pandemic brought various changes for single women and work. There was abrupt discontinuation of social connectivity and structure (Eismann et al., 2019) thus leading to loneliness due to detachment from work, family and friends (Gao & Sai, 2020). Single women found themselves working from home with no household support (Alon et al., 2020; Hertz et al., 2021; Kalenkoski & Panilonia, 2020). Loneliness suffered by single women occurred in parallel with spikes of domestic violence in dual parental families during the pandemic. Countries such as Austria recorded 5% spike, France 30%, India 45% while SA recorded 87000 domestic violence complaints (Dube, 2021; Nduna & Oyama, 2020; Nduna & Tshona, 2021; Odeku, 2021; Tisane, 2020). It seems that gender-based violence reared its ugly head as spouses spent more time at home. Single women suffered from social isolation while gender violence increased.

2.5.1 Single-handedly managing households

A study of women managers in the Free State provincial government noted that single women accepted their role as heads of household, raising children and being responsible for their welfare (Marais et al., 2014). The work-life balance affects all women in leadership in the public sector, regardless of marital status (Mahasha, 2016). However, this is a study of single women. Another study found that single women gained strength and independence, and enjoyed a sense of accomplishment in carrying out the responsibilities on their own (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010). Further, single women develop a strong support structure that enables them to enjoy social life while also progressing in their careers (Lues et al., 2013; Marais et al., 2014; Suk Ha et al., 2018). Marais et al. (2014) concluded that the skills gained from work are used to improve performance in other roles, such as family. This transference of skills is referred to as work-family enrichment.

The relationship between work and family is bi-directional, as each directly and indirectly impacts the other (Marais et al., 2014). Marais et al. (2014) maintain that that affirmed women gain confidence in carrying out their other roles (Suk Ha et al., 2018). However, a study by Cox (1996) and supported by Suk Ha et al. (2018) concluded that women in the public service modified their roles. They carried limited household responsibilities, even though they still spend more hours on household work than men. The reduced involvement in households still causes expression of role conflict and anxieties to some career women (Opie & Henn, 2013). However, there was less role conflict observed among single women than their married counterparts (Suk Ha et al., 2018).

A study by Suk Ha et al. (2018) showed that single women prioritise the career role and others follow. In this argument, single women put more energy and investment into their work and career. Also, single women develop a firm support structure directed towards managing social, family and community roles (Oyewuni & Sonubi, 2018). The support single women receive from family and friends in managing their various roles involves clear prioritisation of duties; establishing mutually beneficial relationships with family and colleagues; maximising flexible work arrangements; and engaging in physical exercise, meditation and religion (N.N. Gwagwa, personal

communication, May 10, 2018). Further, Opie and Henn (2013) identified a correlation between work engagements, defined as a positive mind state featuring dedication, vigour and absorption being associated with less episodes of burnout. Personality (such as proactive personality) and mental competencies work in favour of positive work engagement, thus reducing work-family conflict (Marais et al., 2014; Opie & Henn, 2013).

The other dimension in managing work-family balance is being conscientious, which is the ability to plan, organise and execute tasks. Conscientiousness is heavily reliant on personality attributes such as self-discipline, control, order, dutifulness, effort, prudence and need for achievement (Marais et al., 2014; Opie & Henn, 2013; Van der Berg & Martins, 2013). These are attributes are characteristics of diligent, strong willed and disciplined persons (Van der Berg & Martins, 2013) and contribute to decreased stress. Lastly, women who possess emotional stability, i.e. low neuroticism, suffer less from work-family conflict. These show the critical role of personality and its effect on work-family balance (Opie & Henn, 2013).

2.5.2 Family support

The increasing number of working women and female-headed families is not complemented with a decrease in their nurturing responsibilities (Gehrke & Hassard, 2015; Muasya, 2016; Stats SA, 2018). Working women manage work and family responsibilities simultaneously (Ncube, 2018; Plank, 2018). Family's physical presence and emotional support ease women from work-family role strain (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011). The positive impact for women is felt more through receiving emotional and psychological support from family (Leung et al., 2020; Russo et al., 2016). Family includes older children taking care of younger siblings in support of the mother (Ajayi et al., 2020; Akinnusi et al., 2018).

Family support contributes to employees' improved well-being (Baral & Bhargava, 2011). Further, the presence of a supportive family contributes to satisfaction in the job and family spheres (Abd Hamid & Salleh, 2013; Zhang et al., 2018). Family support is also linked to women's ability to improve their education and careers (Shu-King et

al., 2018). Conversely, the absence of family support has a detrimental effect on women pursuing their careers (Russo et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2018).

2.5.3 Reliance on domestic helpers and au pairs

Domestic helpers and au pairs step in to take care of children and household responsibilities while women are at work (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Oosthuizen, 2010). Women counted hiring domestic helpers as part of their coping strategies (Abd Hamid & Salleh, 2013; Ajayi et al., 2020). Further, working women consider helpers as a gift they afford in exchange for buying themselves out of childcare (Groves & Lui, 2012). Research shows a correlation between working mothers' job satisfaction and their comfort with child care arrangements (Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2015).

Mothers' anxiety increases during a child-related crisis while they are away at work (Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2010). However, this is mitigated by dependence on paid domestic helpers and au pairs (Oosthuizen & Mostert, 2010). Research shows work-family balance in women when they manage their personal lives and are in control of their work responsibilities (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). Women in turn take responsibility for their physical and emotional well-being (Groves & Lui, 2012). However, Nyamnjoh (2005) maintains that the relationship between maids and madams is marked with inequities tensions, frustration, and lack of satisfaction. Further, employers tend to exaggerate their generosity.

2.5.4 Sending children to boarding schools

There is a long history of upper class families sending children to boarding school (Behaghel et al., 2017). This is convenient for parents, as it offers a safe space and grounds children in discipline (Isoe et al., 2020). Children receive high-quality education, and spend a longer time studying (Behaghel et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2014). There was no research on parents' decision to opt for boarding school. The existing research concentrated on topics such as the categorisation of different boarding schools, and the advantages and disadvantages for children (Behaghel et al., 2017; Isoe et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2014). There was nothing on why parents send children to boarding schools or the advantages of such a decision for parents.

2.5.5 Keeping track of children through technology

Working women appreciate immediate access to their family and children through using cell phones, email and the internet (Romero-Ruiz et al., 2017). In my master's research, I found that working women tracked their children through cellphone and telephones, ascertaining whether they arrived at school, are on time to catch transport home or are on time for extramural activities, how they were proceeding with homework and other chores or activities. I concluded that although these virtual engagements occur for few minutes between work activities, they contribute immensely in reducing anxiety for mothers (Tengimfene, 2009). Further, mothers keep in touch with their children using text messages, email, social networking sites and Skype (Rudi et al., 2015).

Technology closes the distance divide through distant communication, exchange of photos, and video calls (Huisman et al., 2012). Romero-Ruiz et al. (2017) list several advantages of technology such as access to information, for school projects and homework and being updated on family matters. In addition, working women consider technology as a trusted babysitter (Mahasha, 2016; Villegas, 2013). However, single women were locked with their children and were without normally delegated household support (Khwela-Mdluli & Beharry-Ramraj, 2020). This resulted in virtually connecting to work while also overseeing school work during Covid lockdowns.

2.6 COACHING AND MENTORING

Although there are single women in senior leadership positions in the South African public service, the public service remains male dominated. Ngomane (2017) maintains that men find it easy to climb career ladders, as socialisation instils in them superiority, autonomy, decision-making capabilities, and bravery, among other things. Socialisation creates gender imbalances as girls are groomed for dependency, submissiveness and nurturing, and are over-burdened with family responsibilities (Maqubela, 2016; Ngomane, 2017; Ngulube, 2018). The single women fought through their careers to break the glass ceiling (Ngomane, 2017). Further, the public service is fraught with negative perceptions such as poor pay, ineptitude and laziness (Ojedokon et al., 2015).

These perceptions impact negatively on single women in leadership positions (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014; Marais et al., 2014; Nilsson, 2010). Further, single women bemoaned poor support received from their supervisors and the public service (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010). These single women occupy top positions and assume responsibility in changing the public service to be a better place for subordinates and other women (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014). The public service lacks training programmes, and coaching and mentoring services for women (Ngomane, 2017). This lack of mentoring and coaching is characteristic of a male-dominated environment (Ngomane, 2017). Research shows that women in leadership either neglect coaching or mentoring other women or they mentor or coach others in hard and soft skills (Ncube, 2018). These interventions prepare women in the next layer of management for higher positions (Ngomane, 2017). Women choose embracing others in sisterhood and solidarity (Ngomane, 2017).

The opposite of this is adopting the "queen bee syndrome", a phrase coined by Staines et al. (1974). Women in leadership positions view other women as possible threats, and close opportunities for them to grow into leadership positions (Johnson & Marthur-Helm, 2011). Where the queen bee syndrome is present, women on top block the ascendancy of competent females to the top. Further, these women in leadership cherish their rise through rough work terrains and expected younger women to feel similar pain (Ncume, 2018).

2.6.1 Lack of aftercare facilities

As noted, the late Minister Zola Skweyiya afforded reasonable accommodation for Dr Gwagwa's daughter during commission activities (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). Parliament ran a childcare facility during the early years of democracy, but no longer does so. Working women send their children to day-care and aftercare centres (Ajala, 2017; Reddy, 2015). These are situated far from work, so working women form syndicates, taking turns fetching them (Akinnusi et al., 2018). Working women establish links and relationships with colleagues and/or other mothers who share the same routes, live close by, and/or their children are friends. This is based on my lived experiences as I picked up from school and took care of my daughters' friends whom they met at school. The mothers did same for me when I was

running late or held up at work. Childcare facilities matter, as closeness to work serves women with children best (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2012). Ninety percent of respondents to one survey wished that employers provided aftercare facilities (Akinnusi et al., 2018).

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter explored the existing literature on the topic of this study. Key items such as socialisation, the journey followed by women into motherhood, and women as workers were reviewed. The gendered lens of socialisation was discussed and analysed, with parallels drawn on the choice to remain single in adulthood. Socio-economic factors contributing to the increase in numbers of single women were considered. The concept of singlism and its impact were explored. Literature on the existence of inequalities in South African society was reviewed, with specific focus on the public service. The rising number of female-headed households and support networks that single women create received attention, as they are fundamental in a study such as this one. Lastly, the involvement of single women occupying leadership role in coaching and mentoring was analysed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the qualitative research approach that was adopted in the study. This gives a descriptive account of the feminist phenomenological and Afrocentric paradigms that were used to investigate the research questions and realise the aims of this study. In this chapter I discuss sampling, the research population, biographical details, data collection and analysis methods employed. An account of the audit trail and ethics applied during the course of this study is given. The purpose of the research, the role of the researcher, and the stages of research are discussed (Astalin, 2013; Percy et al., 2015).

3.1 THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE DIMENSIONS

Edmund Husserl and Jules Vuillemin are credited for a philosophy espousing rigour, ontology and ethical values in social sciences (Moon & Blackman, 2014; Sinaceur, 2014). Gottlob Frege is also credited in making progress towards measurement of concepts such intuition, experience, object, subject and consciousness (Göcke, 2018; Sinaceur, 2014). The philosophy of science is rooted in concepts borrowed from the physical sciences and traditional philosophy (Sinaceur, 2014). Phenomenology involves a lack of self-consciousness and concentrating on critical information as it emerges (Sinaceur, 2014). Moon and Blackman (2014) highlight that the philosophy of science dimension offers an explanation of the philosophy adopted and substantiates methodological choices made throughout the research.

3.1.1 Ontological, epistemological and axiological dimensions

The philosophy of science dimension clarifies knowledge that is already known, which is ontology; and epistemology, which is how knowledge is created and the theoretical perspectives that guided the researcher. Recognising that the research participants are bearers of truth underscore the ontological dimension of this study. Clarity about the assumptions made by the researcher reveal the researcher's understanding of reality, and his or her purpose, research methods, data collection, analysis and interpretation (Moon & Blackman, 2014). A social scientist begins with certain presumptions about reality which are exposed through his or her adopted methods and purpose (Göcke, 2018).

The ontological dimension clarifies what is to be studied and what can be learned from the participants (Martin et al., 2014; Moon & Blackman, 2014). This study explored participants' experiences of singlism as senior managers in the public service. It was also about their lived realities as full-time employees and mothers, and about their relationships with significant others, and the prejudices and stereotypes they experienced as single women. The epistemology dimension specifies the relationship between the researcher and what can be known (Martin et al., 2014; Moon & Blackman, 2014). This dimension "provides for a lens through which the results of a study can be interpreted thus provides a frame of reference for acquiring and communicating the knowledge to others" (Pretorius & Morgan, 2012, p.35).

Feminist phenomenology is anchored in exploration of participants' lived experiences, while the Afrocentric paradigm is centred on African intellectualism (Asante, 1987; Fairfax, 2017; Moon & Blackman, 2018; Oksala, 2016; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020). Feminist phenomenology's assumptions delineate what is truth, who can be a "knower" and what can be "known", as it empowers women to be central in knowledge development of their lived experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p.5; Husain et al., 2020). Afrocentric paradigm propagates African intellectual agency in research on historical, political, cultural and development (Asante, 1987). Feminist phenomenology and the Afrocentric paradigm put emphasis on participants as the source of information on their experiences, Africans in particular (Asante, 1987; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Fairfax, 2017; Morgan & Sklar, 2012).

Feminist phenomenology also recognises the importance of women's lived experiences in understanding their worldview (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Husain et al. (2021) maintain that although "the oppressed" predominantly refers to women in feminism, this definition also extends to specific underprivileged gender groups, such as transgendered, eunuchs, etc. Further, feminist phenomenology reclaims definition of being a female away from just being a sex object to the position of controlling knowledge production and narration of their own experiences away from the voices of male supremacy (Hesse-Biber, 2012). The single female senior managers are the authors of their own truth and this study carries the voices of their lived experiences. Further, participants' lived experiences were explored and acknowledged as truth-bearers of their own realities (Martin et al., 2014).

Feminist-phenomenological axiological assumptions embody women as phenomena that bring the value of truth, and thus are the authentic voices of their lived experiences (Fairfax, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hussain et al., 2020). The methodology and techniques applied should encapsulate that they are worthy and the researcher brings out how their worldview is shaped through their eyes (Hussain et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2014; Mascolo & Kallio, 2020). The beliefs, perceptions, intuitions and understanding of lived experiences within an African context are fundamental in an Afrocentric paradigm (Bent-Goodley, 2017; Fairfax, 2017). I am an African woman, so my credentials augur well for this feminist phenomenology and Afrocentric paradigm study of women (Chawane, 2016). The researcher is an active component of the research, also bringing her lived experiences (Babbie & Mouton, 2015; Baird & Mitchell, 2014). This research is conducted using dialogue and the aim is to share the report with other oppressed women so as to improve their lives (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hussain & Asad, 2012; Hussain et al., 2020).

3.1.2 Methodological dimensions

This dimension stipulates which methodology and techniques are used, and how the research should unfold (Käll & Zeilher, 2014). The researcher immersed herself in the participants' stories, and deepened her understanding of the phenomena to provide insight into participants' lived experiences. The research report therefore gives a descriptive, textured overview of the participants, using their voices and through their worldview (Babbie & Mouton, 2015; Baird & Mitchell, 2014; Fisher & Hamer, 2020; Käll & Zeilher, 2014). Secondly, the aim of the methodology applied is to bring out the essence of their lived experiences, using their language and how they structure interpretation of their world. These women were accorded liberty to tell their own stories. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit each participant's uniqueness and opinions. The questions were open-ended and were about the essence of being single, and the lived experiences of a senior manager in the public service and single mother, for example.

The questions were not prescriptive on who they are or should be, or how they perceived their lived experiences. This was a conscious effort not to impose my own views and thus remain reflective and self-critical of my engagement, thinking process

and possible inference based on my prior understanding of the phenomena (Käll & Zeilher, 2014). The researcher observed intuitively and sought to understand beliefs and cultural interpretations of women's' lived experiences in line with the Afrocentric paradigm (Fairfax, 2017). The epistemology dimension underpins intersubjectivity through clarity in initial theoretical concepts, and through the research process itself, including interaction with participants and knowledge verification (Martin et al., 2014; Mascolo & Kallio, 2020).

Lastly, feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism emphasise intentionality, which means presenting a phenomenon as it is, with its unique perceptions, beliefs and descriptions of reality. The participants produced different interpretations of their lived experiences which were viewed as authentic. The data analysis was through thematic analysis which identified trends, similarities, differences, contradictory experiences and underlying beliefs or assumptions on participants' reality.

3.1.3 Feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism scientific integration

Social sciences purpose is conducting scientific understanding of human relations and worldview that influence their perspectives (Khaene, 2017). Thomas Kuhn introduced notion of a paradigm which offers logic, model, guidelines or framework on the subject or object of study, questions used and how and applicable rules for results interpretation (Khaene, 2017; Wijaya et al., 2021). Humans are different and complex thus there is no model sufficient in capturing their essence (Khaene, 2017). Humanities share an ontology based on studying human relations with an epestiminology of revealing truth about the subject (Wijaya et al., 2021).

Feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism their scientific integration is based on understanding lived experiences of single women senior managers that are of African origin (Martin et al., 2014; Moon & Blackman, 2014). The epistemological congruence is mainly on female researcher deemed appropriate for a gender study whilst Afrocentrism emphasises the cultural context of the researcher (Martin et al., 2014).

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research design outlines steps entailed in designing, conducting and producing the research report (Johnson et al., 2020). It stipulates the research question interrogated using an appropriate conceptual framework, including adopting the right qualitative methodologies (Martin et al., 2014; Ngozwana, 2018). All this is to ensure that the qualitative research pass rigor and quality standards (Johnson et al., 2020).

3.2.1 Distinctive features of a feminist phenomenological, Afrocentric study

The researcher used a qualitative approach. There are advantages in such an approach for research on women, as it allows for direct engagement with participants; investigates humans holistically; offers flexibility on design and approach; provides detailed description of feelings and experiences; and gives researcher leeway into assessment of participants feelings (Levitt et al., 2018; Rahman, 2020). According to Caufield (2019), the qualitative approach is time consuming: data collection and data analysis take long.

The feminist phenomenological approach emphasises human and lived experiences as critical in understanding participants, and notes that the researcher brings her own experience to the research. Afrocentric paradigm adds that the researcher must understand culture and beliefs from an African perspective (Fairfax, 2017). This served as a reference point for identifying sources of bias and deepened the desire to explore further the phenomenon under study. Feminist phenomenology allows the researcher to share her experiences, which I did where I deemed it necessary and appropriate. It allowed the participants to feel at ease and my experiences offered points for reflection.

The research strategy refers to means deployed to search for truth whether in a nomothetic or ideographic manner (Creswell, 2018). It offers a plan and protocol on how the research will unfold (Christensen, 2017). Further, it encapsulates the various parts of the research, how they interface, and methods deployed (Christensen, 2017).

3.3 RESEARCH STRATEGY

Babbie (2020) defines a paradigm as "a model or frame of reference through which to observe and understand phenomena." It is the philosophical outlook of participants' worldview with key tenets that define it and how this shapes the structure of the research (Levitt et al., 2018). Social sciences employ different paradigms which offer insights to different aspects of life (Babbie, 2020; Martin et al., 2014). The study falls within the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology. This research explored how single female managers explored singleness, singlism and experiences in the public service. The feminist phenomenology and Afrocentric paradigms were deemed appropriate for this study. Feminist phenomenology aims at understanding the lived human experiences, and thus is considered both a philosophy and a method (Levitt et al., 2018). Giorgi (2008) maintains that social sciences view phenomenology not only as a research tool but also a philosophy.

Feminist phenomenology allows for true reflections of human experiences of the phenomena as described by the participants (Freeman, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Oksala, 2016). Research is thus largely due to observations of women's experiences as fundamental in knowledge development. Further, it emphasises that women's experiences are not glossed over or inferred in relation to men's, and thus also carries messages of empowerment (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Feminist phenomenology maintains that women are creators of their knowledge, using their language of expression and the role of the researcher as an integral active part of research (Husain et al., 2020).

The researcher keeps his or her own views in check so as not to be participative (Levitt et al., 2018) and thus keep a slant towards the phenomena under study (Giorgi, 2008). The researcher makes interpretations of the participants' lived experiences in accordance to their culture, history, contexts and prior understandings (Levitt et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2014; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The researcher and readers can make comments and interpret research after publication, thus adding to multiple views on participants' worldviews (Levitt et al., 2018). The Afrocentric paradigm was conceptualised within an African philosophy, culture, principles and critiqued intellectually within that framework (Fairfax, 2017; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020).

This paradigm applies pre-colonial African traditional thinking and intellectualism (Asante, 1987). Feminist phenomenology investigate woman experiences based on their worldview which Afrocentric emphasises their cultural origins of being Africans (Asante, 2009; Fairfax, 2017). The difference in the two paradigms is that the former is of European origin while the latter is African. The Afrocentric paradigm aims at recreating knowledge prior to colonialism, which Europe has historically negated (Asante, 1987; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020). The participants were women of African origin, and thus suitable for feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODS

The following steps were conducted during this study. These were not followed in any particular order as I needed to refer to literature, confer with participants during data analysis and also consult with the supervisor on certain matters. However, each step occupied my attention for some time and forms a phase in the research process.

3.4.1 Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to examine existing knowledge on the topic and compare the findings with prior studies (Levitt et al., 2018). Creswell (2018) says the literature review provides a reference of existing material that is applicable to the study. The researcher also identified gaps or aspects of the study that needed further exploration or inquiry (Johnson, 2014). Further, the research report provided for a benchmark to compare findings with other studies.

In a qualitative study, the participants' experiences are central and determine the course of action. The assumption is that the participants offer new insights into the topic, so a literature review was not used to chart the course of the research (Levitt et al., 2018) but rather to support or confirm themes emerging themes from the research with the existing body of knowledge (Nishishiba et al., 2013). Further, it is used to define broad themes (Levitt et al., 2018) and describe key concepts of the topic (Babbie, 2016). The literature review further guided the researcher's thinking process (Nishishiba et al., 2013), as the study unfolded, particularly during analysis of findings.

The literature review was conducted to ascertain existing research on the same topic in Africa, South Africa and globally. New knowledge is built on existing knowledge through analysis of relevant literature and concentrating on identified gaps (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Analysis of existing knowledge allows the researcher to develop sound hypothesis on how to develop knowledge further (Xiao & Watson, 2019). This formed the background and rationale of the research. Key words searched in the Unisa Library Catalogue were terms such as "singlism"; "female senior managers"; "gender discrimination and boardroom"; "gender discrimination and work place"; single women"; single working women"; "femininity"; "masculinity"; "gender" "family" and "socialisation". Databases deployed included Index to South African Periodicals, SA ePublications and EbscoHost revealed relevant journals and articles (Snyder, 2019). Further, an appropriate research design, methodology and techniques were explored and adopted (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

3.4.2 The role of the researcher

Creswell (2018) emphasises that qualitative research expects the researcher to commit to extensive time in the field, collect extensive data, labour over access issues, build rapport, and gain insider perspective. The research matured over time and was not rushed. The researcher engages in the time consuming process of data analysis through the ambitious task of sorting through large amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories. The amount of data that came out was overwhelming. However, one transcript was tackled at a time and read many times. In the end, the researcher became at ease with the data, and was comfortable with cross-checking it.

The researcher must write lengthy passages because evidence must substantiate claims and show multiple perspectives. There are two findings chapters produced due to the volume of data and researcher's commitment not to gloss over anything. Lastly, this is a form of social research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and is evolving or continuously. Participants proved to have their own idea of what the research meant for them. The research adjusted to their interpretation and understanding of their own lived experiences.

The feminist phenomenology paradigm places the researcher at the centre of the research process (Giorgi, 2010). Babbie and Mouton (2015) echoed by Baird and Mitchell (2014) argue that the researcher's involvement challenges the traditional notion of distant and uninvolved. Afrocentrism on the other hand stipulates that the researcher treats participants as equals (Asante, 2009). I fitted the feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism paradigms as an African woman with declared similar lived experiences to the participants. I was cognisant of playing a central role in not only driving the research process to its logical conclusion but also in actively deriving truth through various methods at my disposal (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The background, experiences and vested interests in the study were declared upfront, beginning with my ethical clearance application (Allen-Collison, 2011; Giorgi, 2010; Levitt et al., 2018).

I shared my lived experiences which allowed me to probe further and became useful during data analysis as I had great affinity with the context of the emerging data. Participants opened up freely as I am also a single female senior manager. The gender of the researcher matters, as women's voice and experiences are best investigated by women themselves (Baird & Mitchell, 2014). Afrocentrism emphasises that the research should amplify the voices of participants, treats them a unique and authentic (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017).

Lastly, feminist phenomenology maintains that the researcher is viewed as having an interest in the subject and challenge the assumption that existing methodological approaches are adequate to eliminate or reduce the androcentric bias in research (Babbie & Mouton, 2015; Baird & Mitchell, 2014). The study was motivated entirely by my experiences as a single women and my desire to change the status quo. Feminist phenomenology maintains that the researcher should establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships and conduct research objectively while protecting the interests of the participants. This enables the researcher to project the true female experiences in ways that removes distortions and brings to end unequal social positions (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Levitt et al., 2018). Afrocentrism maintains that social inquiry restores the ways Africans conducted their thinking, structures and processes within its cultural perspectives (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017).

I listened consciously to the participants' voices, focused and not distracted keeping my mind from wandering and not allowing my thoughts to direct the interview away from the authentic source. For example, the pilot interview swayed the initial direction of the research through listening to what participants voiced and interpreted about their experiences. Fuchs (2020) argues that intersubjectivity is co-constitution of knowledge by participants and researcher. Ngozwana (2018) adds that knowledge creation is best achieved through action learning: jointly performing activity in an African way. Hussain et al. (2020) emphasise that the researchers must self-reflect and evaluate on values, attitudes and agenda they bring to the research so as to maintain their objectivity. Intersubjectivity is a way of safeguarding participants' right as knowledge developers and agents in their own right in understanding and propagating their social context, in accordance with Afrocentrism (Asante, 2009; Chawane, 2016; Mkabela, 2005).

Chawane (2016) maintains that feminist phenomenology researchers should view themselves as interested parties in the subject under investigation (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017). This means that researchers do not maintain a distance and hover above the research, but rather conduct the research from a particular angle. However, the caution is that researchers should remain conscious and aware of their own perspectives and biases (Allen-Collison, 2011). The researcher is seen as not neutral and shows interest in the phenomena. The researcher's most crucial role is to decipher or describe the abstract nature of the phenomena.

Fairfax (2017) further argues that the researcher keeps an open mind and tries to see the world through the participants' eyes even if different from her own perspective during data collection and analysis. This allows new perspectives to emerge without preconceived ideas tainting them. The researcher's consciousness of preconceived ideas, bias and subjectivity is limited through a practice known as bracketing. This involves suspending assumptions about a phenomenon. It allows a flow of new meanings and understanding to emerge (Giorgi, 2010; McNarry et al., 2019; Roseth et al., 2011; Smith & Noble, 2014).

3.4.2.1 Researcher's lived experiences

A researcher is affected by the phenomenon under exploration, has a direct experience of it, reflects and shares it with the readers. Feminist phenomenology also insists that a woman conducts research about other women. Afrocentrism emphasises the element of Africanism and is silent on gender, but the fundamental assumption that men are ill equipped to explore women's life experiences prevailed in this research (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hussain & Asad, 2012).

Women are not fully represented in most research and feminist phenomenology questions whether knowledge produced about women corresponds with their social realities in a methodology that is dominated by men (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hussain & Asad, 2012). If the researcher was a man, the women's experiences could have been shaped and determined through male worldview, and thus distorted (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hussain & Asad, 2012). Feminist phenomenology is focused strictly on gender issues which emphasise the impact of power differences between men and women in the socio-economic environment (Hesse-Biber, 2012). A gender study by a female researcher can draw on experiences where women are subordinate to men (Bent-Goodley, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hussain & Asad, 2012).

Feminist epistemology stipulates determines knowledge agents, content, validation as truth and parallels on knowing and being (Bent-Goodley, 2017). This is supported by Afrocentrism (Asante, 2009; Chawane, 2016). Women's experiences were portrayed in their languages and raw, without filters or external influences (Hammersley, 1992). Their views of exploitation by men cannot be quantified but were evident in their voices through in-depth interviews (Hussain & Asad, 2012; Westmorland, 2012). Traditional research allows men to influence the narrative.

Lastly, feminist phenomenology rejects power relations between the researcher and the researched (Hesse-Biber, 2012) and so does Afrocentrism (Asante, 2013; Bangura, 2012; Chawane, 2016; Mkabela, 2005). I was open about my emotional attachment to the research and participants (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Hussain & Asad, 2012). Also, I shared information and experiences, rather than just extracting data (Freeman, 2018; Hussain & Asad, 2012). Hesse-Biber (2012, p.4) maintains that

feminist phenomenology exposes the "layers of sexist, homophobic and colonial points of view", a posture shared with Afrocentrism (Asante, 2009).

3.4.2.2 Entrée and establishing researcher's role

The feminist-phenomenology and Afrocentrism paradigms emphasise the central role of the researcher. The researcher describes the structures of the experiences based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participant's story (Giorgi, 1985, p. 69). Bent-Goodley et al. (2017) maintain that the researcher should have sufficient knowledge of the research topic and must read relevant literature. Secondly, each research process decision was thought carefully and weighed the pros and cons, as the study progressed. Thirdly, a realistic and feasible research plan was devised. Fourthly, the researcher audited and made a true reflection of her experiences and interests. Lastly, realistic timeframes, in consultation with the supervisor, for the research project were drawn up.

The researcher took cognisance of personal attributes such as ability to manage time; relationship building with the supervisor; personality impact on the research; and how the research will affect the researcher (Riley & King, 2012). In retrospect, the research process hardly progressed in linear fashion. Participants were not easily available; transcripts took longer and other unforeseen pitfalls such as Covid-19, death of loved ones and work challenges impacted negatively on the researcher's morale. This called for inner strength, resilience, flexibility, acceptance of the status quo and openness to support from the supervisor. The completion of the research required more internal drive, support, encouragement from family and friends (Riley & King, 2012).

3.4.3 The research setting

Sullivan and Riley (2012) maintain that a research study unfolds with a clear plan around methods of data collection and analysis considered relevant for application. However, Moustakas (1994) advocates that an imposed and preconceived research design could distort participants' true essence. In this case, the researcher checked on how previous research students approached similar studies, as per the supervisor's recommendation. A literature review, using latest methodological approaches and relevant topics, was also undertaken. Further, the researcher evaluated the relevance

and appropriateness of data collection, analysis research methods for use in the current study and also involved identification of implications in rolling them out.

The South African public service consists of 34 national departments, and many state-owned entities with different mandates and settings, and so organisational culture cannot be the same. The participants brought unique experiences from their environments. The researcher concentrated on investigating behaviour as it unfolded within the diverse setting of the public service (Freeman, 2018). The second planning phase included identifying and recruiting participants for the study. This involved clearly demarcating the population where participants came from (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample population consisted of single female senior managers in the public service. I then drew up the interview guide. Further, I considered the appropriateness of recording the interviews and a tactful manner to seek permission for its use from participants (Freeman, 2018).

Thirdly, conducting the research required resources such as access to material; technology such as a computer, internet, telephone and recording devices; professionals for editing, graphic designers and transcribing, printing, and funds for travelling to participants and conferences. Fourthly, the research involved dealing with humans on issues that are personal and sensitive, which required adherence to ethical standards. The human rights of participants were respected, including their right not to participate, as discussed below in detail. Lastly, I drew up a plan that detailed each step of the research process for approval by the supervisor, including timeframes.

3.4.4 Sampling and participants

The study targeted a certain category of single women in senior management posts in the public service. The selected population reflected such. This is referred to as purposive sampling, where participants are selected according to the researcher's judgement (Babbie, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018) and where "the probability of an individual being selected cannot be determined" (McBride, 2013, p.126). Morgan and Sklar (2012) maintain that description of criteria for selecting participants with relevant experience for the study is crucial. Inclusion criteria were mainly: being a single female manager in the public sector and raising a child or children aged 18 and below.

Excluded from the sample were outside these criteria, such as single female managers outside the public sector, or those within it but with older children.

I selected participants based on my analysis of whether they could be informative on the research topic (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The inclusion and exclusion criteria allowed for delineation of sample and more streamlined data and analysis thereof (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Soilemezi & Linceviciute, 2018). Further, sampling directly correlates with what the research questions seek answers for (Sullivan & Riley, 2012). The participants' roles were to provide specific answers in response to research questions. The selection was also based on the quality of their lived experiences, thus their ability to provide rich data. The purposive sampling methods used in this research are appropriate techniques for recruiting participants who fit in this study (Sullivan & Riley, 2012).

3.4.5 Purposive sampling

The sample consisted of eleven single working women. These participants defined their gender as women, born and raised as such. The study's general aim was to get an in-depth exploration of singlism. A small sample was selected, allowing more time for in-depth interaction and engagement with the participants (Creswell, 2009). Also, provided time and space of producing an exhaustive account of each participant's experiences, as Ames et al. (2019) propose.

I made a list of possible participants based on my judgement. Participants were approached individually by phone and asked to form part of the study. This recruitment also involved confirming willingness to participate, sharing an information letter which detailed what the study was about (Etikan & Babtope, 2019). Strands of "convenience" sampling were included as I invited participants who were relatively accessible (Benoot et al., 2016; Frost et al., 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015; Sullivan & Riley, 2012).

The selected participants represented more of what the research sought to understand. This meant that a director-general stood a better chance of recruitment than a director, although both are in the senior management category. The former was perceived as more experienced (Ames et al., 2019). The participants were all Africans

of Sotho, Tswana and Xhosa ethnicities, but were not a homogeneous group, in terms of their single status and other demographics, as depicted in Table 3.

The main criterion for selecting participants was that they be women. Five participants were never married, four were divorced, one's partners died before the marriage was solemnised, and another was married by customary law and then divorced. These single women were all primary custodians of their children, with varying degree of participation by the fathers. Participants were fluent in English, although language was not a requirement. Their ages ranged from 33 to 47 years. They were all employed at various government departments and a state-owned entity, as senior managers in salary brackets ranging from R900 000 to R1.7 million per annum, at the time of data collection in 2016 and 2017. They all held three-year post-matric qualifications, some had more than one postgraduate degree, and others were pursuing further studies.

Table 1: Sample biographical details

Participants Code	Age	Children	Status	Academic qualifications
P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/ Dip	40	2, same father (F1)	Divorced, married through African custom (D-AC)	Diploma (Dip)
P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/Junior Deg	46	2, same father (F1)	Divorced, married in Western custom (D-WC)	Junior Degree (JuniorDeg)
P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons	39	2, different fathers (F2)	Never married (NM)	Honours Degree (Hons)
P4/42y7ars/3F2/D-WC/Hons	42	3, 1 pair of twins and different fathers (F2)	Divorced, married through Western custom (D-WC)	Honours Degree (Hons)
P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons	36	2, different fathers (F2)	Never married (NM)	Honours Degree (Hons)
P6/33years/1/NM/Hons	33	1	Never married (NM)	Honours Degree (Hons)
P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA	43	2, different fathers (F2)	Never married (NM)	Masters Degree (MA)
P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip	37	2, different fathers (F2)	Divorced, married through Western custom (D-WC)	Diploma (Dip)
P9/43years/1/NM/ JuniorDeg	43	1	Never married (NM)	Junior Degree
P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA	47	2, different fathers, (F2)	Never married (NM)	Masters Degree (MA)
P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons	39	1	Divorced, married in Western custom (WC)	Honours Degree (Hons)

3.4.6 Data Collection

The phenomena under investigation influenced the choice of techniques adopted during research. Feminist phenomenology methodology emphasises capturing the essence of women lived experiences in their voices, in full appreciation of gender imbalances in a patriarchal society and investigated by a female researcher (Clark, 2019). The Afrocentric paradigm assumes African culture, philosophy and beliefs underpin the worldview of participants (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; Fairfax, 2017). The researcher treated participants' experiences as unique, authentic and located within an African perspective (Clark et al., 2019; Fairfax, 2017). Semi-structured interviews allowed for authentic capturing and depiction of lived experiences with a particular worldview (Babbie, 2020; Clark et al., 2019).

3.4.6.1 Invitation to participate in interviews

Participants were invited and confirmed by telephone or face-to-face engagements in some cases. The details about the research were emailed to them, if further clarity was requested. Confirming availability of the participants' proved easier said than done. Participants were senior public servants who travelled frequently and kept tight schedules. Mostly they also reported on duty during weekends and public holiday, thus any time available was reserved for family or other community activities.

3.4.6.2 Consent form

The participants were given consent forms during the introductory briefing, and signed on paper to confirm their voluntary participation (see Annexure A). This was to uphold participants' rights, which include the right to withdraw from the research (Dietrich et al., 2019; Gelinas et al., 2018; Resnik, 2015). Secondly, time was dedicated to inform the participants of the purpose for which their information would be used, and to explain that their information would be protected and treated confidentially.

3.4.6.3 Introductory briefing for the interview

An interview guide which spelt out how the interview unfolded was drawn up (see Annexure B). Firstly, it served introductory purposes, reiterated the purpose of the interview and the aims of the research, restated the confidentiality of the engagement, the intended use of the data, and sought permission to proceed with the interview. This is called scene setting and included seeking permission to use a recorder, checking if the

participant was comfortable and solicited any clarity-seeking questions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Qutoshi, 2018). The participants were also reminded of their right to participate in or withdraw from the process (Babbie, 2020; Forero et al., 2018; McNarry et al., 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Percy et al., 2015).

3.4.6.4 Biographical data form

The participants' biographical information was collected for statistical and analytical inclusion into the thesis. These were standard questions for all participants. It formed part of section 1 of the interview guide (see Annexure B) and included questions about age, number of dependants, their gender, age and educational levels, occupation, level, years at senior management level, salary bracket and highest educational attainment. Each participant completed the form before proceeding to the next phase of the interview. This assisted with statistics and also added value for comparison during the data analysis process.

3.4.6.5 Interview questions

Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate for this study as they allow for structured sequence and probing for more in-depth information (Babbie, 2020; Forero et al., 2018; McNarry et al., 2019; Moser & Korsthens, 2018). Interview questions were pre-set based understanding of the topic and on my experience as a researcher, aimed at soliciting relevant information in line with the purpose and objectives of the study and explicitly written in an interview guide (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). An interview guide was developed(see Annexure A) which allowed for consistency of topics raised, gave an opportunity for preparation, digging deeper into issues as they emerged and thus creating dialogue with each participant to reveal new aspects of their lived experiences (Babbie, 2020; Jamshed, 2014; McNarry et al., 2018).

The interview question sequence served as guidelines and structured dialogue rather than a question and answer session (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). I followed leads for more data during each interview. The questions were broadened to accommodate different strands of data whilst being vigilant at exploring all questions to all participants. The interview guide also included probing questions and prompts to elicit more information. The pilot interview was used to test if questions fit purpose of the study (Babbie, 2020; Forero et al., 2018; McNarry et al., 2019). Post pilot interview assessment including

evaluating of the transcript concluded that the questions were fit for purpose. The supervisor served as an expert in this case.

3.4.6.6 Pilot interview and analysis thereof

The pilot interview is designed to establish if questions yield the desired results, whether the researcher applied the right skills and whether instrumentation deployed functioned appropriately (Baird & Mitchell, 2014; Jamshed, 2014; Levitt et al., 2018). It allowed for the refining of questions; assessment of interview bias; collecting background information; and adapting research procedures and data analysis plan, if necessary (Christensen, 2017; Levitt et al., 2018). The interview with P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip served as a pilot interview. It was crucial to emphasise issues of confidentiality and clear all preconceived ideas about her lived experiences. The transcript was shared with the supervisor. It was viewed as comprehensive, as it prompted the required lived experiences from the participant.

The interview touched a nerve with P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip. She later posted on Facebook (see Annexure F) about her experience of the interview. The content of the interview wasn't shared, which was a huge relief. However, this provided good feedback on how she viewed the interview, the researcher and impact thereof on her. She was surprised but pleased that the researcher was formally dressed and wore stockings to the interview (see Annexures F and G).

3.4.6.7 Interviews

Fairfax (2017) argues that the research should have a fair grasp of participants' language, including key concepts in their history and background (in the African culture in this study). Semi-structured interviews were conducted which prompted participants to answer pre-set open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014).The interviews enabled gathering of rich and descriptive information that gave deep understanding of participants' social reality and fast-tracked data saturation (Seabi, 2012). Also, this form of interaction allows for probing, immediacy of response, and enables judging the time between question and response (Babbie, 2020). Eleven interviews were conducted before data saturation was reached, as no single interview can satisfy the research question all at once (Babbie, 2020). The interviews took an average of fifty minutes to over an hour each. The shortest interview was thirty minutes. Jamshed (2014) argues that the interviewer must be conversant in the

language of the interviewee. This is particularly relevant in South Africa with eleven official languages. The interviewees were all conversant in English. The languages used during interviews also included Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and Tswana.

These interviews were held at different venues such as the participant's homes, offices and secluded areas at restaurants. These venues were chosen for participants' convenience and allowed for open sharing of information without inhibitions. Some participants expressed strong emotions such as hurt and anger, and tears flowed freely as the interview progressed. No money or gifts changed hands, in line with prescribed ethical conduct to prevent undue inducement (Mita & Ndebele, 2014).

a. Interview recordings

Permission to use a recorder was requested, prior to the commencement of the interview. The recording allowed for capturing each interview accurately and comprehensively. A Samsung 7 cell phone recorded verbatim all the interviews. There were standardised questions about biographical information, followed by a few questions posed to each and every interviewee and complemented with probing (Christensen, 2017). The cell phone device was secured using Gmail account as backup. The Gmail account has its different set of security code and authentication techniques. These ensured that all recordings were secured.

b. Completion of the feedback form

The interview feedback form, (see Annexure C) was a useful tool in capturing initial thoughts about the interview while the information was still fresh mind. This also served as reference during the transcription and data analysis stages. The feedback forms were completed immediately after each interview labelled and enclosed it in the biographical data form into a pile for later use.

3.4.6.8 Interview transcriptions

The audio recordings were transcribed by a company whose representative signed a confidentiality clause (see Annexure D)**.** The company did not accommodate any other South African languages than English. The transcripts were returned with missing information in Xhosa, Zulu, Setswana and Sotho. I filled the gap and also requested assistance from relevant participants. Each participant received their transcript and was asked to verify accuracy, which included capturing essence of what was said in their

mother tongues. The transcripts were augmented with notes taken during interviews to produce a comprehensive report of each interview. Any information that could compromise identity of the participants, such as names of the participants, their children, that of their significant others, place of birth or their workplace was removed. Certain shared life incidents were coded as these could compromise participants' identity. The participants had high public profiles and were also active on social media. Lastly, the transcripts were scrutinised and commented on by the supervisor.

3.4.7 Data saturation

Data saturation refers to a conceptual measure of figuring and assessing sufficient qualitative research sample size, a state when the data collected and analysis suffices thusthere is no need for further sampling or collecting more information (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2018). Researchers reach a saturation point during interviews when participants' information dries up and nothing new emerges (Guest et al.,2020; Jackson et al., 2015; Nascimento et al., 2018). Saunders et al. (2018) add that data saturation applies when there is redundancy of information. It is also applies during interviews, when an end point determination was made by the researcher that the participant circulated similar information repetitively.

Saturation also applies to data analysis as the researcher combs through data generated in reaching this decision (Hennink et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2018). It became apparent from the eighth transcript that there were no new emerging categories and themes (Hennink et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2018). Saunders et al. (2018) emphasise that the decision on when data saturates is made by the qualitative researcher using different approaches. A stepwise study by Guest et al. (2020) showed that 70% and 92% of 114 themes identified were from their first six and 12 respectively of the 60 interviews conducted. The supervisor advised at checking on data saturation as she reviewed P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip transcript thus I checked if emerging data of the following three interviews produced additional data. I concluded that there was a descending threshold of new information especially with the last two interviews and conducting further interviews was unlikely to produce further new data strands (Guest et al., 2020).

3.4.8 Data analysis

Qualitative data contains an in-depth description of the phenomena under investigation (Qutoshi, 2018). Data analysis in qualitative research involves categorisation of similar items, making connections and differentiations using researcher's knowledge (Graue, 2015; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Qutoshi (2018) maintains that there are no distinct phases of data collection and analysis, as they happen concurrently. Data analysis in qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a deeper sense of the data and spend time reflecting on its meaning (Lester et al., 2020; Levitt et al., 2018). There are no specific guidelines on conducting qualitative data analysis, and many approaches are applicable (Graue, 2015; Lester et al., 2020; Nowell et al., 2017; Qutoshi, 2018).

Data analysis in a feminist phenomenology paradigm study offers deep descriptive narrative of the subject and also an opportunity for deeper reflections on lived experiences (Ho et al., 2019). On the other hand, the Afrocentric paradigm emphasises detailed description of a phenomenon in the African perspective and analysis essence thereof in its original framework (Fairfax, 2017; Pellerin, 2012). The onus is on the researcher to possess clear understanding of the African worldview under investigation and reflect it accurately (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; Fairfax, 2017; Pellerin, 2012).

The thematic data analysis technique was deemed appropriate in identifying emerging patterns from a detailed set of information (Braun et al., 2019; Cassol et al., 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The themes were a product of what the data presented at face value but also latent meaning thereof, as unearthed through analysis by the researcher through raising data to an abstract level (Javadi & Zarae, 2016; Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

These themes were developed based on phrases used by participants. All transcripts were compiled into a thick colour-coded booklet, numerically arranged by the participants' initials (see Annexure E). The researcher must read the data without any preconception over and over again until it begins to make sense and themes emerge (Henning, et al., 2013). This involved verifying data with P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip and P9/43years/1/NM/ JuniorDeg, for example (Henning, et al., 2013). Data analysis included identifying emerging themes (Braun et al., 2017; Braun et al., 2019; Levitt et al., 2018) and these were typed in a long list. Data familiarisation facilitated identification of emerging similarities and patterns, leading to the coding process that is part of the data analysis (Braun et al., 2019; Hayfield et al., 2019).

Creswell (2018) maintains that coding is embedded in the data analysis process, which involves tearing data apart to derive its ultimate value and assembling it in meaningful ways. Qualitative researchers rarely document coding (Elliot, 2018). There is no beginning or end to coding, as it occurs throughout the research process (Braun et al., 2019). Findings themes, sub-themes and coding thereof underwent reconfiguration until finalisation of the research report (Hayfield et al., 2019).

It took weeks and months for the categories to lead to themes and subthemes. This information was overwhelming and did not seem to be connected. The next step included re-reading and making notes on what came up with each passage. This unleashed other pieces of information, such as expressions associated with the data observed during data collection, for example. The more familiar and at ease it became manipulating with the data, the more it flowed towards identifying broad themes that came up. This led to broad categories taking shape and proceeded to search for commonalities (Levitt et al., 2018). This was not a linear process.

The researcher makes detailed analysis of how the phenomenon presents itself, based on the emerging data using logical explanations (Graue, 2015). Firstly, origination traces how a theme was conceptualised, especially by participants. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) add that this includes rereading of transcripts, notes, journals and artefacts that give a full picture of what transpired during data collection (see Annexure E). The verification of themes was achieved through multiple feedback from the supervisor, checking existing literature, and rephrasing as data analysis progressed. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) warn that the researcher uses intuition to develop themes, making it difficult to trace their genesis. This included verification of notes scribbled on the transcripts and information maps drawn (see Annexure H).

Emerging trends were identified and similar ones were grouped together. Further, emerging new evidence was concretised and substantiated. Nomination included labelling each theme and sub-theme to different participants. This also involved words or phrases used by participants. I also used names that best captured the essence of what these themes and subthemes entailed. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) and Nowell et al. (2017) add finalisation involves writing up themes, extracting interconnectedness and descriptive analysis thereof.

3.4.9 Integration of findings with literature

The literature review is used mainly to describe, review and synthesise (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Literature identification, inclusion and exclusion involved choosing relevant knowledge, excluding those outside the study (Booth et al., 2018; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Xiao and Watson (2019) emphasise developing an extraction process and matching each piece with findings organised in themes and sub-themes.

I was familiar with the emerging themes and sub-themes, which in retrospect were rudimentary. It gave me comfort in having crafted preliminary findings which mapped key aspects based on data analysis. I put aside data that was not yet allocated as I contemplated its future use (Booth et al., 2018). It was useful to remember that findings remained fluid for it allowed me to add and re-organise themes and sub-themes over time. I began to reread my literature review. Findings introduced new terminology, directing me to seek other relevant data (Booth et al., 2018). The process of reviewing the literature was open-ended, and coupled with refining themes as existing knowledge provided pointers on gaps, expansion of existing knowledge, comparison and addition of new knowledge (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The final synthesis of findings and existing literature involved extrapolating hypotheses based on existing and emerging knowledge from the findings.

3.5 RIGOUR OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Morse (2015) maintains that Guba (1981) introduced criteria for determining rigour which ensures trustworthiness of qualitative research. Cypress (2017) defines trustworthiness as reference to quality, authenticity, and truthfulness of findings of qualitative research. Korstjens and Moser (2018) emphasise whether the results are to be trusted. The qualitative research receives ongoing scrutiny and is compared to quantitative, which has a linear and well-defined research process (Cypress, 2017; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018; Morse, 2015).

The criteria developed by Guba (1981) raises key issues that a qualitative researcher should consider in ensuring the trustworthiness of the data. These criteria include assessment if the sample was selected using probability methods. Secondly, if there was any instrumentation used. The answer is affirmative on both on these questions and all diligence in terms of sample selection and instrumentation was ensured. Guba (1981)

and Wallendorf and Belk (1989) maintain that each researcher choses which strategies to deploy in achieving data trustworthiness. The researcher is key in the process and form part and parcel of it.

There is no absolute truth, and so qualitative inquiries are not generalizable as they aim at developing idiographic knowledge (Forero et al., 2018; Korstjiens & Moser, 2018). The onus is on the researcher to apply flexibility on biases, prejudices and preconceived ideas on the phenomena that could affect the research process, or interpretation or conclusions drawn (Hadi, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morse, 2015; Smith, 2015). Feminist-phenomenology adopts women's lived experiences as authentic and valid (Käll & Zeilher, 2014). Afrocentrism shares similar sentiments of treating participants as reflecting unique experiences from an African worldview (Asante, 1987; Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; Fairfax, 2017). Therefore the aim was to reveal women's truth to a female researcher, and interpreted through their worldview.

The participants' shared stories were embraced as credible and authentic, with emphasis on giving them a voice as the oppressed while also using their language in reflection of their true nature (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The semi-structured interviews allowed for interrogation of women's lived experiences, using thick descriptions to unearth true intended meaning (Baird & Mitchell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Käll & Zeiler, 2019; McNarry et al., 2019). In qualitative research the evidence, findings and conclusions are situation based. However, transferability is gauged by how social, historical and political context interact with individual development (Baird & Mitchell, 2014; Käll & Zeiler, 2019). The participants are viewed as having shared credible lived experiences, and so these findings could be used to understand other women better.

Moser and Korstjens (2018) maintain that the researcher should be self-aware, reflect on the role or influence during the entire process of collecting, analyisng and interpreting data and pre-conceived ideas about the research. Frost et al. (2014) maintain that feminist-phenomenology embraces researcher reflexivity and bracketing. Reflexivity is twinned with the application of researcher intuition in Afrocentrism (Asante, 1999; Bent-Goodley et al., 2017). This is when the researcher continually reflects on the values, attitudes and agenda she brings to the research (Baird & Mitchell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2010; McNarry et al., 2019). Further, reflexivity levels any socio-economic or class status between researcher and participant (Frost et al., 2014). Audit trail which is based on my

field notes, observations and reflections was reported on each phase of the research process. Furthermore, Chapter 7 contains my reflections based on my background as a child; influential individuals and circumstances that shaped my psyche; and how my adult life was shaped with relevant experiences that influenced my worldview. Lastly, this chapter also points out preconceived assumptions and biases I brought into this research.

By credibility we mean validating whether these experiences are a true reflection of the participants: whether they are genuine. Transferability is whether the research findings are transferable or can be generalised to other settings. Thirdly, dependability is participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations that are supported by the data as received (Guba, 1981; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morse, 2015). The participants confirmed the transcripts, during data analysis and consolidation of the findings, and when clarity was required.

Fourthly, confirmability is an evaluation of whether other researchers are able to draw similar set of conclusions from the data. This examines if findings represented the participants' lived experiences thus are free from the researcher's bias (Cypress, 2017; Forero et al., 2018; Guba, 1981; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

A detailed audit trail was followed (as discussed in section 3.5.6) at each stage of the research process and forms part of the research report. It records researcher's reflections and observations made at each step of the research. These points are recommended in the qualitative researcher's attempt to apply rigour and truth in research (Cypress, 2017; Hadi, 2016; Forero et al., 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Cypress (2017) adds another dimension which puts emphasis on the integrity of information received from the participant.

3.5.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the data represents expressed lived experiences of the participants and corrects interpretation thereof by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is the accurate description and truthful representation of the participants' lived experiences (Cypress, 2017; Hadi, 2016). Demuth (2013) adds that this involves rereading the transcripts, revision of interpretations and supporting these with thick extrapolation from the participants. The data gathering process was over nine months of interviewing the participants and absorbing strands of information received. It consumed

time and energy. It was convenient for the researcher to keep a note book to scribble down emerging thoughts and themes. This was most useful while developing or shaping a model that best graphically represented the findings.

The supervisor was consulted after each interview, sharing emerging thoughts and patterns which was part of peer debriefing. Referring transcripts to the participants and checking certain details with them was part of member checking (Cypress, 2017; Hadi, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morse, 2015). Another important matter emerged during the data analysis process. Dr Zola Skweyiya, former minister of social development, died while the researcher was finalising her research findings chapter. My attention was piqued by Dr Nolulamo Gwagwa's tribute post on Facebook. This was an account of how Dr Skweyiya phoned her while she was on maternity leave and her daughter was just five days old, to invite her to serve on a commission that was charged with reviewing social services in the then newly democratic South Africa.

The request fazed her a bit, and the more she used her child as an excuse not to serve, the more persistent Dr Skweyiya was. The phone call ended with him assuring her that her child would be accommodated each time she was invited to a meeting. There began a long journey of travelling with her baby, and finding a comfortable space for the child in boardrooms during commission sessions. She also recounted how the room became still as she stood up to make a point at the commission with a baby latched on her breast. This presented a cultural shock, not only to those inside the commission: a photo of this appeared in a local newspaper.

3.5.2 Transferability

The rigour of the qualitative study is embedded in each and every step of the research. It is also critical that the research context, assumptions, situations, period and population are clearly sated (Abimana et al., 2020; Elo et al., 2014). This stipulation of research fundamentals allows other researchers to assess the transferability or generalisability of the research (Abimana et al., 2020). The added value of the research is derived from its generalisation in future research (Elo et al., 2014). Abimana et al. (2020) emphasise that strict attention to detail is applied for the sake of others who wish to transfer theoretical frameworks used and research findings.

3.5.3 Dependability

Dependability is closely associated with reliability in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is whether the data stands the test of time, and participants see that the findings, interpretations and conclusions are aligned with their lived experiences (Cypress, 2017; Guba, 1981; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morse, 2015).

Dependability was also achieved by the supervisor reading and commenting on each of the interview transcripts. The transcripts were reviewed and missing information inserted, as the transcriber left blank spaces when any language other than English was used. The participants were given an opportunity to review their transcripts, and no feedback was received. A post-doctoral graduate also offered to review my findings and made suggestions. The inputs and comments were incorporated in the final research report. This served as peer review, and comments added to the credibility of the thesis.

3.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to whether other researchers could reach similar conclusions given the same set of data through application of triangulation and audit trail (Cypress, 2017; Guba, 1981; Korstjens & Morser, 2018; Morse, 2015). The supervisor and other peers served as advisers at each step of the research. Further, the researcher kept a journal and did introspection right through each stage of the research process. These were reflections on the mind-set, what caused delays during sampling, data collection or analysis process and sharing the findings perhaps for fear of the unknown, failure or procrastination to wind up the research analysis process and report.

3.5.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity emerged as a tool that aids validity of knowledge derived from social research (Göcke, 2018; Moon & Blackman, 2014; Sinaceur, 2014). The researcher should apply reflexivity to counter bias, misconceptions and prejudices that may obstruct authentic portrayal of data (Cypress, 2017; Guba, 1981; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Morse, 2015). The researcher's familiarity with participants offered both advantages and caution. This offered "familiarity, respect and rapport" (McDermid et al., 2014, p 2). Vigilance ensured that lines were not blurred and authenticity of information was preserved from contamination with what was known before (McDermid et al., 2014). This included the researcher maintaining stringent professionalism, acknowledging that the participants'

sharing of their experiences as remarkable, and emphasising confidentiality of shared information with participants. Further, reflections during each stage of the research served as a container for the researcher's emotions that emerged from time to time.

3.5.6 Audit trail

The audit trail is a detailed description of each step of the research process, and how precise the researcher was with checks and balances during the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail helps critics to track steps of the qualitative method and provide proof of rigour and thoroughness applied during research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Krathwohl, 2009, p. 331). The audit trail serves as a reflection mechanism on what happened and what could have been avoided and also documents lessons learnt during this process to share with other researchers (Anney, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

The audit trail involves scrutiny of how raw data was managed; data reduction and analysis products; data reconstruction and synthesis products; process notes; materials relating to intentions and dispositions; and instrument development information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 319-320). Carcary (2020) adds the dimension of researcher's self-awareness of their deep involvement in all the phases, and potential biases that could influence the direction of the research. The early stages of this research began with conceptualisation of the topic. The researcher was certain she wanted to focus on issues confronted by single career women. The profile of the sample mirrored that of the researcher, which was also a potential bias (Carcary, 2020).

The sampling process started with a list of potential participants based on their profiles and suitability. This list was ticked off with each confirmation for availability and participation. Getting participants who were enthusiastic was a confidence booster that the correct research topic had been chosen. Participants fuelled the researcher's commitment to carry the research to its final conclusion. It seemed there was an unconscious contractual obligation between researcher and participants to honour each other through public sharing of single women's stories for the benefit of society.

The data collection, starting with the pilot interview, allowed the participants to redefine the content and research topic. It was initially centred on work-family conflict in the public service. Participants shaped it alongside of what defines singleness and values that ground them as individuals, mothers, senior managers and in their intimate relations. Data

collected embodied more of participants' stories told from their perspective. The role of the researcher was safeguarding the authenticity of the single women's experiences through embracing them as valid.

The process of data analysis started from transcription and combining it with notes the researcher compiled during interviews (Anney, 2014; Henning et al., 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Much time was dedicated to reading the data repeatedly. This was the only way the researcher could understand the deeper meaning of the data while also viewing it from different angles (Krathwohl, 2009). The process of reading the transcripts over again provided greater confidence and deepened understanding of every bit of the data. This made it easy to colour code related bits of information and to cross-reference them. Further, it allowed for identifying gaps, searching or requesting for more information to create a composite picture of the data. The meaning of the information was reflected on a piece of paper and later typed into a long list of what emerged for the researcher. This allowed the researcher opportunities to play around with the information and none of it was discarded, just in case the puzzle needed one more piece or another realisation emerged later during the data analysis process. It was also draining, with emotions such as anger, tears, and at times joy as I chuckled at a participant's humour.

The researcher sailed through each transcript, while mirroring at times emotions that were displayed by the participant during the interview. There were moments filled with deep emotions solely evoked by strong association and a reflection based on the researcher's own lived experiences, as a mother and senior manager in the public service. There were shared experiences with participants on toxic work environment, relationships and longing for children amidst huge work. This reduced the researcher into tears and getting emotional during reviewing of transcripts, especially for P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons and P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA. These mirrored divorce and work trauma as experienced by the researcher.

This left the researcher physically incapable of touching the research, for some time. This experience was shared with the supervisor. This telephonic conversation was therapeutic on many levels. It offered an avenue that was both trusting, open, that received the experience with no judgement, offered empathy and other means of containing the researcher's feelings. The supervisor suggested recording emotions in a notebook or diary as they emerged. What worked best was switching off the research process and

documenting everything else before touching the research again. Facebook, electronic and ordinary notebooks served as a journal where the researcher captured a series of long letters on everyday observations of life, work, children and extended family. It did not involve any aspect of the research and gave a good distraction from the thesis.

These reflections also involved emotions that I dealt with at particular moments. It was an escape that evoked creativity while the researcher also regained composure and strength to proceed with the thesis. This process was worth every moment. It also exposed that there were past experiences in my time as a public servant that needed attention and healing from. The data analysis was thus not a straightforward process that produced findings easily. It was a laborious and painstakingly scrutiny of the data over and over again. It was worth taking cooling off periods from data analysis. This allowed the mind to re-energise, thus producing fresh insights about the data. The themes were re-organised, dismantled and put into different categories. The researcher was mindful of possible biases, assumptions, beliefs and presuppositions and effect thereof on the research (Cypress, 2017). The participants were single and worked in the public service, as I did. I was also privy to some of their background. Use of reflexivity and bracketing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; McNarry et al., 2019) kept me from imposing my own ideas and views, and thus neutralising the participants' lived experiences.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics clearance approval was received from the College of Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee at Unisa. The application process included a detailed descriptions of skills as a researcher, that of the supervisor, research proposal, sample to be used, methodology and declaration in upholding ethics in relation to conducting research on humans. The final approval dragged, thus delayed commence-ment of the research (see Annexure G). Wassuna et al. (2014), note that there are two research ethical considerations. Firstly, respect for the autonomy and respect for people. This translates to a person's right to choose to participate or not. Secondly, the researcher has an obligation to protect vulnerable persons with limited autonomy, caused by poverty or low literacy, for example.

Kruger et al. (2014) maintain that colonialism and the international research history resulted in the development of research ethics in Africa. This is firstly to ensure credibility, and is also required by the funding agencies. Human rights abuses were also reported in

the continent (Kruger et al., 2014). Industrial and Organisational Psychologists, students included, are governed by legal and institutional constraints to protect people who participate in research, and must conduct themselves above reproach (Krathwohl, 2009; Mutenherwa & Wassenaar, 2014). The Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology in South Africa and the Health Professionals Council of South Africa regulate professional conduct, so registration with them is a prerequisite.

A written consent form (see Annexure A) was signed by each and every participant, who were all reminded of their right to disengage from the research process (Wassuna et al., 2014). Also, signing of consent forms prior to engaging in the study was proof of participants' voluntary involvement and willingness to make a contribution. The purpose of the research and how the information will be used and kept confidential was shared with each participant upfront (Henning et al., 2013; Krathwohl, 2009; Levitt et al., 2018). Further, the right for withdrawal from the research at any time was emphasised (Wassuna et al., 2014). The ethics compliance also included scrutinising the researcher's role while interacting with participants, holding information confidentially, gaining trust of the participants, maintaining a respectful relationship, giving support to participants and reporting findings truthfully (Kruger et al., 2014; Levitt et al., 2018; Wassuna et al., 2014).

Interviews were held in secure environments and information was stored safely. Information about the participant was kept confidential, including their true identity. However, P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared about the interview twice on Facebook (see Annexures F and G). I was concerned about how this compromised confidentiality. It was more an appreciation of the interview, how it served her as she was going through challenges and how I steeped in as a professional and respected her time. There was comfort that her identity was well hidden within the research report.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the distinctive features of the qualitative research, using feminist phenomenology and Afrocentric paradigms. It detailed research procedures, processes and how they were applied in line with this qualitative inquiry. This also included instruments used during data collection and how they were designed. Data analysis approach and structure was also discussed. The role of the researcher through the various stages was spelled out. The ethical issues and how they were applied were detailed, including the audit trail.

CHAPTER 4: EMBRACING SINGLENESS BY INDEPENDENT, AMBITIOUS WOMEN WHO VALUE THEIR FREEDOM

4.1 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The findings of this research are presented in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 discusses the findings in relation to how single women define singleness and singlism. It also highlights key issues that emerged from experiences shared by the participants, before delving deeper into the various themes.

Firstly, many of the women viewed being single as a choice that they had made, although some felt it was forced upon them by certain circumstances, such as divorce or the death of a partner. Secondly, socialisation into gender roles is entrenched. This contributes to how single women battled to define their singleness outside of their role as mothers and or responsibilities associated with motherhood. Thirdly, they said that it was hard to carry the motherhood role alone while also assuming the responsibility of head of the family. Discrimination against, and stereotypes of, single women, and the celebration of coupledom and heterosexual relationships continues alongside a rising number of single women and female-headed families in South Africa.

Fourthly, the women shared a belief that their single status had made them achieve much more in their careers: they did not have the burden of having to consider the feelings of their significant others. Fifthly, there was a sense of appreciation of their freedom, especially of choosing partners or relationships that suited their own needs, of financial freedom, and the ability to make their own decisions independently, without any imposition from another person.

The themes and sub-themes of findings discussed in this chapter are depicted in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Embracing singleness as independent and ambitious women: Summary of the themes and sub-themes.

Main theme: Singleness as a conscious choice.	Main theme: Defining singleness by independent, ambitious who value their freedom.
Sub-themes:	Sub-themes:
• Socialisation's influence on choice of marital status.	• Education and divorce as contributing factors.
• Family composition and impact on adulthood choices.	• The hardships and glories of singleness explored.
• Presence of influential female role models.	• Hard choices: single, raising children and working in the public sector.
• Freedom to be: By choice never married/ or divorced. • Anchored within African value system.	• Embracing body and sexuality: freedom of choice.

The themes and sub-themes are discussed in detail below. This chapter includes extracts using the single women's actual words. The views of the different participants were critically analysed and compared, to identify areas of convergence and divergence.

4.1.1 Descriptions of participants

Table 1 contains brief descriptions of each participant. A high-level description of each participant gives the reader an overall impression of who they are and their background. There was due consideration and synthesis of their details in order to maintain their confidentiality. All the participants were of African origin, from different ethnic groups. The abbreviated descriptions follow this sequence: Participant number (allocated according to when they were interviewed); age at the time of the interview; ethnicity; number of children (and an indication if they are by the same father); differentiation on their single status; and their academic qualifications.

The descriptions of participants, as captured at the time of the interviews, follow:

- **P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip:** This participant was then a 40-year-old mother (Xhosa) with two boys by the same father. Married by African custom, and divorced. She co-parents with her ex-husband. She started her primary education in a township school and later went to a former Model C one. Holds a university diploma and was studying towards another qualification in her career field. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip was the head of her unit, being a chief director in a national department.

- **P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg:** Participant 2 was a 46-year-old divorced mother (Tswana) of two girls by the same father. The ex-husband played no role in the children's upbringing, financially or otherwise. Her primary and high school education was in a township, and she holds a postgraduate degree. She was a director (second in command) in a national department.

- **P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons:** Participant 3 was a 39-year-old (Zulu), never-married mother of two children, with a partner who is the father of the youngest child. He was active in raising both children. She obtained her education firstly in a neighbouring country and later at a township school. She holds a postgraduate degree. She was a director in a national department.

- **P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons:** Participant 4 was then a 42-year-old divorced mother (Tswana) of three, with the youngest being a pair of twins from a different father. The ex-husband and former partner did not play any role in

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raising their children. Her education was at township schools. She holds a postgraduate degree and was a director in a national department.

- **P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons:** Participant 5 was a 36-year-old, never-married mother (Xhosa) of two children from different fathers who lived with their grandmother in a different province. Neither of the fathers were involved in raising their children. She studied at township and former Model C schools. She holds a postgraduate degree and was a director in a national department.

- **P6/33years/1/NM/Hons:** Participant 6 was the youngest, a 33-year-old (Tswana) with one daughter who lived with her grandmother. The father was not involved in raising the child. Her education was at both township and former Model C schools. She has a postgraduate degree and was studying towards a master's degree. She was a director in a national department.

- **P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA:** Participant 7 was a 43-year-old never-married mother (Xhosa) of two boys. The father of the youngest child gave some financial support and was involved in parenting, to a limited extent. She received her education from township schools and was studying towards her second master's degree. She was the most senior of all participants.

- **P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip:** Participant 8 was a 37-year-old divorced mother (Xhosa) of two boys by different fathers. Neither father was involved in raising the children, who were in their mother's custody. She attended township schools and obtained a diploma. She had previously worked as a chief director in a national department, and at the time of interview was working as an executive at a state-owned entity.

- **P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg:** Participant 9 was a 43-year-old, never-married mother (Xhosa) of one daughter. The father of the child was involved, although she had full custody. She studied at both traditional and former Model C schools and obtained a junior degree. Her position was a chief director in a national department.

- **P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA:** Participant 10 was a 47-year-old (Xhosa) mother of two children by two fathers. The father of the youngest was involved in raising both children until he died after their engagement. She studied at township schools and obtained a master's degree and was a chief director in a national department.

- **P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons:** Participant 11 was a 39-year-old divorced mother (Xhosa raised in a Sotho culture) of one child. The child lived with her

mother and the father was involved in raising their daughter. She studied at township school and held an honours degree. She was a director in a national department.

The themes and sub-themes are discussed in detail below. This chapter includes extracts using the single women's actual words. The views of the different participants were critically analysed and compared, to identify areas of convergence and divergence.

4.2 SINGLENESS AS A CONSCIOUS CHOICE

The women had different experiences of how socialisation shaped their views as adults and in making choices to bring up their children on their own. These included how chores were allocated by gender in their families, the marital status of the parents or parent with custody, how parents related to each other, and the role played by women in households and/or in their communities. There was also the presence and influence of strong women during their formative years. The section below discusses this in detail, through the single women's eyes.

4.2.1 Socialisation's influence on of marital status choice

The participants alluded to the role played by their parents, custodians and families which shaped their adult choices as single women. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip felt that she, for example, was exposed to chores in the same way as all her siblings which were not different from her brother. This was expressed as follows:

"*The children at home were raised equally (as) our brother... There were no different rules for him and us (girls). You know, the one who came home first, cleaned the house.*"

P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said of her experience of being brought up by her paternal grandmother:

"*I think it's because I come from a family, (as taught by) my grandmother… So you'd be allocated five chicks… (This was) across gender… washing dishes, supper dishes, cooking supper and or being taught (how to). So everyone needed to learn how to do all those things and you were allocated on a roster.*"

However, there were two realities that altered P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip's course of life: she had a child as a teenager then immediately thereafter her paternal grandmother died. She was brought up by her uncle and aunt whom she fondly called mother and father. This gave her different experiences, along the lines of a gendered female role:

"Most children of my age at that time, had a domestic worker at their homes, or mom will do it (for them), you know. For me, it wasn't like that... Yes, (I am) the eldest, so I had to manage my child, my siblings and then be the authority in a way in terms of managing the domestic worker that was babysitting the child when I was at school."

P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said that this exposure to household chores, and taking care of her eldest child and siblings at an early age, prepared her for her adult life as a single mother. This probably added a gender bias in how roles were allocated. She was the eldest daughter, and so assumed responsibility for nurturing her younger siblings, and for household management, even though her father was present.

Her uncle lived permanently with P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip while her aunt worked away from home and came back over weekends or holidays. The responsibility for household management fell on her as the eldest daughter, in line with patriarchal prescripts. The uncle, an adult in this scenario, absolved himself from taking care of his family and deemed a teenage girl old enough for such. He provided money for whatever was needed around the house. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip was relieved by her aunt whenever she came home at the end of the month.

Socialisation is broader than the experiences shared above by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip and P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip. It is fair to say that the chores may just be symbolic of their association, with subliminal messages passed down from their parents and guardians which armed them with hard-core skills for adulthood. Further, it could be deduced that family gave them reference points on their worldview on gender, power relations and family as a system, with the chores illustration thereof.

P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip mentioned falling pregnant as a teenager, disappearance of the father to her son and responsibilities that fell on her lap showing no more anger towards her former boyfriend. It could be because of the time lapse as the son was in tertiary when the interview took place and his father was playing a role. Perhaps teenage

pregnancy had its toll on her a woman. She was divorced and engaged to her soon-to-be second husband. One can deduce that negative emotions associated with teenage pregnancy and a divorce did not deter her in making choices about staying single or towards coupledom.

Other participants such as P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons; P6/33years/1/NM/Hons; P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA; P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA; and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons were raised by their grandparents, as was P8/37years/2F2/D-WC. They add various other dimensions about socialisation without directly mentioning chores. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA, for example, links her religious grounding to her grandmother's teachings, family prayer rituals, and insistence on church attendance. P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons on the other hand attributes her love for fine crockery to her maternal grandmother, while her mother fine-tuned her cooking skills, which could be attributed to grooming her nurturing abilities.

P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons acknowledged the role played by their maternal grandparents in their upbringing, when they stepped in as their parents divorced. Further, the leadership role their grandmothers and mothers played influenced their outlook in life. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg is an only child, however, she was influenced by strong women who were present in her formative years. P5/36years /2F2/NM/Hons emphasises her mother as a contributing factor in her drive as an independent woman. This is the same for P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons and P2/46years /2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg.

The single women acquired essential skills for their welfare and were affirmed as young children that they are capable of taking care of themselves. The socialisation seemed uniform across gender. However, there was also exposure to gendered roles, such as taking care of younger siblings. There was modelling along gender lines, such as grandmothers and mothers whom the single women emulated in their adulthood.

4.2.2 Family composition and impact on adulthood choices

Family values, family composition and family structure have lasting impressions on the children and subsequently on their choices in adulthood. The younger generation absorbs the said and the unsaid, and observes behaviour and emulates it, or allows it to form the

foundation for their adulthood. This is shown by how the sample looks in terms of their childhood family composition and structure.

The parents of P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip; P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg; P3/39 years/2F2/NM/Hons; P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons; P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons; and P10/ 47years/2F2/NM/MA were married, and they were all raised in a two-parent family environment. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons were raised in female-headed households, due to divorce. However, the parents of P7/43years /2F2/NM/MA; P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg, were never married. In the case of P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip this was apparently due to her father's death while her mother was pregnant. The paternal grandparents raised her until their death. Her aunts stepped in as her guardians after her grandmother's death.

Grandparents as custodians featured prominently, particularly where parents were divorced or never married. But P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg and P5/36years/2F2 /NM/Hons did not share any experiences of being raised by their grandparents. The rest of the participants shared childhood experiences of family composition and structure, such as living with grandparents and extended family. For P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip, these experiences included growing up with her aunt and uncle's family.

P6/33years/1/NM/Hons expressed clearly how this experience affected her:

"(My mother's single status) has influenced me because I grew up in a Tswana culture, where women generally take care of the household… I saw that (my mother's) singlehood became an advantage for the family, because she then could accommodate my uncles, cousins, would stay at my mother's house for six months."

P6/33years/1/NM/Hons's comments above illustrated a view that being single improved the latitude for freedom of association. This, in her view, was demonstrated by her divorced mother's flexibility and ability to support her extended family, as a head of a household. She did not have a significant other to consult, nor perhaps did she seek his collaboration towards accommodating her extended family.

These thoughts were echoed by P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons, who was also raised by grandparents and a single mother:

"My parents divorced when I was 5 years… I always looked up to my mother, playing all these roles… I never received maintenance from my father... My grandmother who is my mother's mother- was the one who …took care of me and my younger brother."

P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg also gave credit to her single mother and to the presence of strong women during her upbringing. On the other hand, P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons might have agonised about divorcing her ex-husband. Perhaps she was strong in her psychological makeup, as this was a road that her mother travelled and triumphed over many decades ago. She had own scars of a father who deserted her and she wanted a different experience for her daughter, as shared below:

"(My childhood experiences) helped me to make sure that whatever the challenges I might have with my ex-husband (that) I do not let them affect my child…. I did not want her to feel that because my parents are divorced, (she) does not have a father."

There was seemingly a longing for a stronger and deeper relationship between her daughter and ex-husband that P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons felt she missed out on. Perhaps that was something that gave her pain, however there were "six uncles" who filled the gap and acted as father role models. The absence of a biological father seemingly cut deep into her. She identified with the "longing" for a father she saw in her daughter, through her own childhood experience of an absent father. Her triumph over adversity was in breaking that painful cycle for her child, by going to great lengths to ensure that her ex-husband and daughter developed their relationship.

There was also the impact of the parents' relationship on the choice to stay single. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons witnessed her parents struggling against the odds in an arranged marriage, and their miseries while doing their best to stay married and raise a family, as shared below:

"Significant other? I think I struggle with relationships. As a result I did not really care much for them... I think I prefer flings, so a significant other for me would mean some form of commitment and for me that scares the hell out of me."

P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons observed that her mother stayed in an arranged marriage and learnt to love her husband for the sake of her children. This meant that her own mother

was married but unhappy, unfulfilled by the choice she was forced to make. It seems that this was a great influence with P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons and choosing to have two children and remain single. She said that she exhibited unresolved issues from witnessing her unhappy parents locked in a relationship not of their own making or desire. She would rather opt out from any form of commitment with a partner.

It seems that her parents' marital situation instilled a commitment phobia. The best she could do was to escape through embracing sole parenting, and intimate relationships with no strings attached. Making the opposite choice to her mother, she walked away from the fathers of her children. Perhaps her message was that she sought no security from the institution of marriage. It was her freedom and independence that mattered most. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA appeared sceptical of a committed relationship, in the light of her parents' marriage. Her father was a freedom fighter who married a young wife after his release from prison. She drew a picture of an aloof and self-absorbed father.

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/DIP; P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg; P3/39years/2F2/NM /Hons; P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA chose being single through divorce or never marrying, although they were raised in two-parent families. Single parenthood was unintended with P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA and P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip, as neither planned their children (the latter had her first child as a teenager). However, the former chose being a single mother based on her religious beliefs that prohibit abortion. Further, the fact that she was also financially stable was a factor. Perhaps it seems that participants made life choices based on their financial security.

It seems from the above discussion that family operates as a system which is distinctive and differs in composition and structure. However, there is no formula that any family form will definitely produce specific experiences for their children. Maybe the participants chose experiences that worked for them as adults. Alternatively, reflections on the marriage of their parents dissuaded them, as shared by P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons, who chose to be single. This reluctance to marry is perhaps also reflective of the role played by institutions such as family during socialisation and how this shaped choices the women make in adulthood.

4.2.3 Presence of influential female role models

P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA and P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg specifically made reference to the fact that they were raised with the influence of strong women who headed their families. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg drew from her lived experiences of witnessing the unrealised personal ambitions of some married women, as she observed while growing up. It seems that these influenced their choices to remain single and raise children on their own, as shared by P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA:

"My mother literally gave birth to me and handed me over to my (paternal) grandmother... I come from a family where every Sunday we would wake up very early in the morning, cook and lock the house and go to church with grandmother."

P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA attributed her Christian values to the teachings of her grandmother. This probably provided her with a moral compass on her choices as an adult and a single mother. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA linked her Christian upbringing and choices she made as an adult as follows:

"So when I realised I was pregnant may be, I had a choice to terminate (the pregnancy) but my Christian value system would not allow me to do that."

Her values were nurtured by her paternal grandmother and those were what she was transmitting to her own children. This suggests that children draw lessons and conclusions from what they learn from adults and significant others during their formative years. The decision not to terminate a pregnancy for P/7/43/2F2/NM/MA illustrated this point clearly.

Further, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg linked her childhood experiences and lasting impressions of what she observed as the impact of bad marriages on women's socio-economic development, as follows:

"When I (was growing) up, there were so many women who had chosen to find husbands, or who had chosen to (stay) … (married)… and they (were) miserable and their success was hindered. They've made choices and decisions because they had to accommodate this person (a husband) ... a lot of them have found themselves stuck at lower (work) levels."

Marriage, in the experience shared by P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg, seems equated with loss of self-identity, ambition and personal growth. Additionally, it appeared that the mothers played a direct role in influencing the daughters' choice to be a single mother or not, as shared by P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons:

"So I cook for (my partner). My mother, as difficult as my relationship is with her … she taught me that when you cook, you cook… (that when) you do things, you do them well."

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons was open about her difficult relationship with her biological mother. However, this did not prevent her from emulating some of her mother's teachings in her adult life. This was evident in how she treated her long-term partner. It is important to delve more into the impact mothers have on their daughters' adult choices using lived experiences, as shared by P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons:

"It goes back to freedom. The fact that there's this person that I need to consult with from time to time. And I think I also grew up or mom raised us in such a way that she actually discouraged us from getting married."

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip; P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg; P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons; and P6/33years/1/NM/Hons did not mention any specific female role models who influenced them during their upbringing. However, P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons, P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons mentioned the role played by their grandmothers.

Participants looked beyond their nuclear family to learn from strong female role models. These role models included their grandmothers, who also stepped in as primary custodians during certain periods in their lives. Further, their social networks extended to their communities and society and included other strong female role models who exhibited attributes that they admired.

4.2.4 Freedom to be: choice never married or divorced

The single women made various choices towards attaining their status. Some were second-generation divorcees in their families, such as P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons; P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons; P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip; and P11/39years/1/D-WC /Hons. However, P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip and P2/46/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg were

divorcees who were raised in two-parent families. It seems that divorce was an option that P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg chose to shed limitations she experienced within marriage:

"I felt like I was in the military camp … my abilities were not appreciated and I found limitations when I had to express myself. I was expected to operate like a robot and I was not comfortable with that because I want to be on my own."

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip was also raised by married parents, and felt empowered to choose what she wanted and how to realise her ideal life from an early stage. She expressed that her parents instilled confidence in own abilities, and not to depend on a husband or partner. She shared that this could be why she does not seek security from anyone, least of all from marriage as an institution for her comfort:

"I wasn't raised in that set-up… I've never dreamt of a marriage (thus) had no clear picture of what my wedding is going to look like… But I think I am from a family that does not put pressure on whether we are married or not."

Lobola was paid by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip's husband (the father of her two children). This was a milestone towards unification in marriage of not only two individuals but also their respective families in African culture (Ansell, 2021; Segami & Van Eeden, 2020). She lived together with her ex-husband, as a married couple in customary marriage, as expressed below:

"Lobola was paid and everything was done within the customary union rites… This signifies the couple's intention of unifying the two families through their marital union, in line with the African tradition marriage procedures."

Most of the participants were at various stages of re-building their lives and dealing with the responsibility arising from assuming full custody of their children. They remained confident of their choices to move away from the marriage institution, as expressed by P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg:

"I want to express myself at a time when I feel and I did not want to be limited or you know stopped or blocked somehow."

Participants P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip; P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg; and P4/42 years/3F2/D-WC/Hons expressed that their quest for freedom and independence outweighed remaining in relationships that did not affirm them. They felt there is much more to life than being in toxic relationships, as echoed by P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons:

"So I felt unhappy, I felt bottled in and I left. It was a toxic kind of marriage. He was a lovely man before we got married…I was starting to get ambitions. I wanted to continue doing a sport which was tennis then which I had stopped when I fell pregnant… He would hear (none) of it. So I did not have a life basically."

The divorced women shared similar sentiments about marriage not defining their true essence, as illustrated by P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons above. It was not an ending. There were other ambitions for them to chase, as P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip observed:

"(Marriage) did not define me. I think I am a rebellious person by nature. Because even I am sure if you were to ask him now, I was never your typical woman who is expected to do certain things… There was a lot of pressure to be successful. Also pressure of being successful, creating an identity for yourself…"

Some felt that marriage constrained their voices and stifled their personalities despite giving them access to financial resources, as expressed by P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons:

"He expected me to come home immediately after work and sit and look after the child. He was hardly ever home himself and when he (was) around he (was) grumpy…. I raised it with both my mother and his mother. My mother-in-law was more on his side, asking 'What did you expect?"

P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons felt betrayed by her mother-in-law's stance about her ex-husband's behaviour. The stance taken in this case sounds dismissive and portrays the participant as raising an obvious or perhaps petty issue. There was nothing recorded on how the participant's mother responded to her daughter's marital issue. The silence could be construed as agreement, or as being powerless to tackle her son-in-law behaviour. What P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons challenges is an old patriarchal norm that the two older women were long resigned to.

This attitude reminds me of the saying "Boys will be boys," which brushes off men's irresponsible behaviour and places responsibility on women to soldier on and fulfil their obligations, as in P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons' case. Men's behaviour is prescribed by patriarchal power and is passed on through generations. She was young, found herself in a lonely marriage, with a child, pushing against all odds while her ex-husband lived his life to the fullest outside family responsibilities. This suggests that the women needed more from their husbands, as experienced by P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip:

"(I) got married, had another child, (but) continued caring for the kids and providing (for them). Yes the husband was doing that little bit here and there, but the bulk of the caring financially, physically and emotionally (that) I was still doing for the child."

P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip ultimately divorced her husband, as she ran her family with or without his participation. The decision to leave the marriage was well-considered and thought of as a life-changing event. There were pros and cons that women considered before making life choices. The issue of survival after separation and divorce was considered as shared P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons:

"*I had the financial freedom (when considering leaving ex-husband), which I didn't have (before) because at some point I wasn't working and he was.*"

In some cases women considered the well-being of the ex-husband or father of their children while also protecting their children's feelings, as shared by P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons:

"(*Family and friends*) *were saying (best) I take (the furniture during divorce). I said no, I do not want furniture, because at the end of the day (if my husband keeps the furniture) … my child will come (back) to a home (when she visits her father)… (Otherwise) where will she sleep at the end of the day?"*

The journey of divorce was portrayed differently, especially by P4/42years/3F2/D-WC /Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons. A cordial relationship between P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons and her ex-husband remained. However, P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons planned her escape from her marriage clandestinely.

There was physical abuse and she did not want the ex-husband to trace her. The relationship broke down between her ex-husband and the in-laws for some time thereafter, as shared below:

"I borrowed my sister's car, because I did not have a car then. And I packed things in the garage… (I) moved on this particular day. I had already found myself a flat… Paid my deposit, had my keys in my pocket, got curtains. I took my son and I left."

The key conspirators during P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons' great escape to freedom were her sister and her domestic worker. The former provided material and emotional support while the latter kept a veil of secrecy after witnessing packing and shelving of clothing items in the garage. There may have been empathy with what P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons was going through.

However, this women's solidarity was betrayed at some point by P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons' mother-in-law's insistence that she should understand that her ex-husband was just being a man, as discussed earlier. Blood was thicker than water and subdued her natural instinct of extending support to her daughter-in-law. She chose to support her son, thus shunning gender-based solidarity. Alternatively, it can be argued that patriarchy perpetuate dominance against women by using other women. This was perhaps one of the female-to-female gender relationship dynamics.

It would be wrong to suggest that these women "lived happily ever after" immediately following their divorces. The consequences were dire for their mental and emotional well-being as they dealt with their pain and loss, especially P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip:

"It was hard. It was hard and I actually got depressed. I was diagnosed in 2009. Ja, 2009, I think I that was the peak of my career actually. I was depressed and I was on anti-depressants. It was hectic, travelling, responsibilities and I think just the level of responsibilities."

P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip got emotional and cried during this part of the interview. The pain of her divorce still cut deep and it hurt her just to remember what she went through. There was a sense of loss of shared experiences within the marriage. P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons added her views on this:

"Let me start by saying I knew my husband since I was 20… And whatever that I acquired as a person, my husband has always been there… All my achievements, my husband was there. He was the father of my first kid. So all of a sudden you are single, you move somewhere and a memory just strikes."

The feeling of loss after divorce was also echoed by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip:

"I've also experienced how it is to have a partner around. You know?… when I reflect and look back I did not suffer. (He) used to take care you know? I did not buy petrol and I think the reason it's difficult for me to look for a house is because I feel it's too much… It's hard."

The divorced single women embraced motherhood, and being heads of their families and the responsibilities that suddenly confronted them. They also experienced loneliness and difficulties in their lives as single women. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip felt that she pushed herself too hard. In retrospect, she thought someone could have advised her differently:

"I think also the narrative is that you're supposed to work, raise your children, push your career – be a wife and actually to have it all. And right now I just feel 'okay,' for instance, if the house is not cleaned. I did not have a full-time domestic worker right now. If the house is not cleaned, it's ok for it's not a catastrophe."

The above experiences of hardships took me through the various emotions, struggles, hurt, pain and loss of what were once cherished marriages and carving out their lives as single women after divorce. The relationships with significant others were more about what was in it for them than seeking social security. It mattered less that they were brought up by married parents. However, they did not express regret about their decisions to go solo. These single women embrace their independence to follow their dreams, to shape their children's destiny and to enjoy career growth without feeling inhibited. Most of the women bore scars from abusive relations, and thus appeared protective of themselves through abstaining from fulltime intimate relationships. There was a sense of escaping from domestic chores relating to a partner and children, with much of this delegated to domestic helpers. Lastly, it can also be deduced that the resources at the single women's disposal enabled them to choose how to live their lives, and to outsource aspects of it at will.

Singleness is a choice that these women made under different circumstances. Their various journeys as single women took place in difficult circumstances. Divorced women were 36% of the sample, while 64% were never married, while P10/47years/2F2/NM /MA's fiancé died during their engagement. She had a child as a young adult and the father of her daughter absconded. It seemed that the father of her son wanted to commit but died before this. Perhaps, the choice made as she mourned her fiancé was to bring up her children on her own. The women shared their hard experiences of unfulfilled married life, of choosing to divorce, of separation from the fathers of their children. These difficulties did not break the participants, but made them to ponder and push boundaries on how best to carve out their lives, moving forward on their own while using resources within their control.

4.2.5 Anchored in an African value system

The participants were all African women and the study was conducted by an African woman. Their socialisation was through African families and occurred within an African value system. The women had different exposure to chores along gender lines, even though patriarchy features strongly in African culture. The women did not mention undergoing any girls' or women's cultural rites. P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons mentioned her brother undergoing circumcision. Circumcision rites are prevalent in some African cultures in South Africa, and the government promotes circumcision as part of controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Socialisation is supplemented by institutions such as education and religion. The participants attended school in exclusive African segregated schools under the apartheid system, except P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P9/43years/1 /NM/JuniorDeg. This means that most of them were exposed to their mother-tongue languages at both primary and high school.

Further, the migrant labour system that destabilised African families was historically entrenched in South Africa. In this system women raised children alone and oversaw the households in the rural areas. The men sold their labour in urban areas, some starting dual families, or abandoning the rural one for good. The absence of fathers runs deeper than the mere choices made by the participants. It is a common feature, and thus it is not surprising when the participants mention the influence of strong independent women in their childhood.

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4.3 SINGLENESS EXPLORED BY INDEPENDENT, AMBITIOUS WOMEN WHO VALUE FREEDOM

The participants in this study were educated, possessing at least three-year post-matric qualifications, and were meaningfully employed, upper middle class women who had earned their socio-economic independence. The participants explored what it means to be single in different ways, as shared by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip:

"A single (me), (I) have no partner, (am) working you know, independent and staying with (my) children. But I have a lot of support from their father because we are co-parenting. I am single in the sense that I do not have a partner."

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip was involved in intimate relationships that she considered not committed. This was central in embracing what singleness meant for her. There was no steady association with a man, and this was captured without any sense of loss or regret. She further linked it to raising her children on her own. Independence was one of the traits that women emulated. This was shared by P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons, P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons and P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons, as captured best by the latter:

"It means I have control over my life. There is nothing I cherish more than freedom and for me being single is really an extension of my freedom, my individuality, who I am and my uniqueness. But the fact that I can do what I want at any given point and time. That's exactly what it means for me to be single."

The women enjoyed the freedom of choice that came with their single status, as experience by P6/33years/1/NM/Hons**.** She cherishes the sense of control over her life, freedom, full expression of her individuality and uniqueness that being single affords her. This is echoed by P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg:

"Being single for me means freedom of choice. I have a lot more freedom, I think, than people who are not single. Freedom to make my choices, to make my decisions, to decide what is good for me and what is not, and to do what I think is best for me. There is literally zero consultation…I think I have achieved some level of success in my life."

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg concurred with this notion of freedom she is experiencing since her divorce, as supported by P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA. P2/46years

/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg added elements of raising children alone and feeling lonely at times, as shared below:

"For me I really I didn't experience the freedom that I'm experiencing now. It's someone who's just trying to have children and bring them up alone…who is making sure that the upbringing of the kids is successful in terms of health, shelter, education and in general... It has got then some elements of loneliness and you know but for me it also serves as a barometer of your strength."

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg brought in "loneliness" alongside the word "barometer," which is a measure of strength. This was a contradiction, as being alone is associated with negative emotions yet withholding that seemed equated with resilience or strength. She is a divorcee who perhaps would rather be alone than in an unfulfilling marriage.

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons raised the issue of raising the children alone, adding that it is double the work, as also described by P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip. She also brought in that the family and work roles overlap, especially when domestic helpers are absent from work. She added that challenges do not hamper career ambitions and seizing opportunities as they arise, as narrated below:

"Being a single woman means double the work. I even took my children to Union Buildings. My son has been to Mahlamba Ndlopfu (presidential residence) … I went back (to work) after six weeks because it was 2009 and we were welcoming a new administration… so I said to my partner, 'I am going back to work. I cannot miss this opportunity.' And my supervisor then said, 'You will only be allowed to work half days….'"

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons strategically weighed the pros and cons of nursing a new-born child versus missing a once in five years' opportunity of welcoming a government to a new term of office. She weighed that her career ambitions rested heavily on being at the forefront of setting up innovative systems. It seems that there was sound support from her supervisor, partner and extra hands to take care of the baby.

P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA experiences embodied contradictions of excitement and challenges. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA used the word "hard" nine times in association with being single. P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons also found being single challenging, as she had

to be everything to her daughter. This included being a mother, father, aunt sister, brother and friend, as she had to play with her child. This was complicated by the fact that her family was in another province, which was true for every participant except for P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg and P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons. However, these mentioned participants both were an hour away from their respective homes and lived in suburbs closer to work, which offered better facilities for children and their overall wellbeing.

The participants glowed about what being single meant in terms of freedom of choice, including pursuing their careers. Independence and freedom fuelled their ambitions with little concern for accounting to anyone. However, the women acknowledged the heaviness of being away from their parents and being everything to their children. There is probably a reflection of inner voices that nag their consciences: at what cost is freedom, independence and full pursuit of their ambitions obtained?

The women ponder if they can give themselves equally to their personal goals while taking care of their children. Singleness means living without a partner or committed intimate relationships. It was embraced as filled with freedom of choice and control over their lives. The women admit to being lonely and experiencing hardships, yet these negatives were viewed as barometers for their strength at forging ahead regardless. Their lived experiences inclined towards embracing careers over nurturing and household responsibilities. Perhaps the latter also discouraged interest in committed relationships, as these weigh heavily on single women's pursuit of careers. It seems that if these women could revisit their choice of being single, they would make the same choice again.

4.3.1 The hardships and glories of singleness explored

The question of what it means to be single included acknowledgement of hardships, as shared by P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg, P11/39years/1D-WC/Hons and articulated below by P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons:

"Being a single woman means double the work. Double the contribution to your kids' upbringing and double the resources that you need to acquire and double the support that you need to get."

Similar sentiments were echoed by other participants, such as what P10/47years/2F2 /NM/MA shared:

"Yes it's very hard. It's very hard to have to hire and pay the garden services... The house needs maintenance, the house bond needs payment, the rates, the school fees, the lunch box of the child then the shoe is small. Then the child does not have winter school clothes, then the people does not have money for her and then its petrol and then… you understand that is just, it's if you can be overwhelmed."

P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons, P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons did not live with their children. They shared the sense of feeling of being overwhelmed by the realities of living alone. These also included hardships associated with long list of responsibilities from the most mundane thing to making complex decisions about their children's education and buying a home. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA shared instances when they used prescription anti-depressant medicine and admitted to psychiatric hospitals, which is on annual basis for the former. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip reflected:

"It's literally being everything to the child, provider both financially, emotionally and physically. So everything relies on you. Not even your family is there to support you. You must just figure out."

P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons expressed that it is a difficult place to find oneself in. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA added that the responsibilities could consume the single women:

"You can be completely overwhelmed so you just try and take it one day at a time. So for instance this week… I'd forgotten that on the seventh it was the last day for ordering stationery for my son for Grade two… (So) I stopped the garden guy, the garden can grow."

This was echoed by P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA:

"I think what you struggle with as a single parent, is whether you're playing the role correctly… because there are no checks and balances. It's you, you're checking yourself so it's your laws in your house, and it's your implementation in your house."

I noted that P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA mentioned the word "hard" nine times, while P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip said "hard" and "difficult" six times when asked about how it was raising children on her own. These negative sentiments were expressed in recognition of single women being overloaded in bringing up children, and also as reflection of this as being a long and lonely journey. Hard work in other roles defines them as well, as P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA shared below:

"So and the reason why I'll be up at 3:00am writing these emails it's because when something is playing out in my mind I cannot sleep and I cannot rest and I go on overdrive so I've had to work on my mind. I've had to learn to switch off and switch on."

P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA described a routine of coming home from work, catching up with their children, supervising homework, preparing and bonding over supper, putting them to bed and switching on their laptops. This ensured that they finished outstanding projects, thus putting their minds at ease in preparation for the following day. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip included scheduling time for mid-week movies so that she could spend more time with her eldest son.

However, P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip took a different angle on what difficulty meant for single women. This was at the very beginning of the interview while filling in the biographical form. I was taken aback as she retorted by asking who defined singleness.

"No you know, maybe as well we need to talk about that. Because it is also part of the things that are our struggles as women… Perhaps let me start by saying. I've always not known how to describe my status. Am I single but divorced? Single, am I a 'returned soldier?'"

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip's confusion it seems was based on two fundamental issues. Firstly, the emphasis was on the "returned soldier." This is South African slang for divorced women, women abandoned by their husbands, or women who left marriage of

their own accord. This is a derogatory term, equating such women with soldiers who return from war with no honours to boast of (see Annexure H).

The implication is that they have lost their societal value and can never be referred to as married or with a potential for further marriage. Divorced women carry deep scars from what happened during their marriages and separation processes, and are further judged harshly by the community as failures for not remaining stoically in their marriages.

Singleness was experienced as difficult, physically and emotionally. These women have to be everything to their children, must be nurturing, are the sole breadwinners and are heads of households. Additionally, the societal stereotypes, discrimination against single women and negative connotations associated with being single weighed heavily on them. The women felt the sting of a society that judges the essence of who they are. This discrimination against single women hurts, as society gives little heed to the circumstances that led these women to divorce, or never to marry.

4.3.2 Hard choices: single, raising children and working in the public service

The women shared varied experiences on the presence and/or complete absence of their children's fathers and overall sense of responsibility, regardless of any co-parenting arrangements they might have. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip is co-parenting with her ex-husband, including stipulated time children spend between their two houses. However, she went to court a number of times fighting for child maintenance. Co-parenting arrangement was similar for P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons, even though the latter's child lived permanently with the grandmother.

P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons said that the ex-husband needed reminding and coercing at times to honour his obligations. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared her experiences:

"*I've taken a conscious decision that I am going to let him be the father of my kids because I cannot be the father to my kids. I can only be the mother. There are things I know if he wasn't there I would not have achieved at all.*"

P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons echoed similar sentiments and felt that it took effort on her side to drag her ex-husband to meet his commitment. She said:

"Because I can see this longing part from my child's side that needs the father all the time. And I did not want her to feel that because my parents are divorced, I did not have a father. She stills has a father who plays a role in her life… It is unfair when the other partner does not want to come to the party."

P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip brought a different dimension, as she admitted that she cannot bring up the children on her own thus was jointly co-parenting with her fiancé, although they did not share a child. However, the fathers to their second born were present and also took care of their eldest children for P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA. This was until the latter's fiancé died, thus leaving her to take full responsibility for both children. The father to P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA's eldest child was not involved, and the other father came in as and when she called upon him. She did not mention if he contributed financially. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg, P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons, P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons and P6/33years/1/NM/Hons' former husbands / or partners were not involved in the upbringing of their children.

They shared experiences of one father's complete absence from raising a child, while the other was present, even taking responsibility for the stepchildren. However, P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons said she does not know if the father of the twins is still alive and suspected that he no longer resides in South Africa. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA shared her experiences as follows:

"The second father was very involved, in fact there was a point when I fought with him and I changed contact telephone numbers of everybody that was in the house (during a disagreement and partial separation). He took me to court and won… He took some of the responsibilities… I could go to work because he was flexible."

The description above showed different involvement, or lack thereof, of the fathers of their children. Participants shared experiences of complete non-involvement by one of the fathers of their children, except for P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons who had the ex-husbands or partners involved in the upbringing. The other participants felt pursuing the fathers of their children for money was mentally and emotionally exhausting, so they left it. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg shared her experiences as follows:

"We've got no relationship (with my ex-husband), no communication, nothing so I am not getting a cent (from him). I'm fine. I've made peace with it. I'm just saying it is (what it is)."

P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg said that her daughter's father never abdicates his financial contribution role. This was in contrast with P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA experience:

"… the father disappeared on the day I told him I was pregnant. In fact, when I tried challenging him through courts for maintenance, I felt that the courts failed me… I was granted R150…. But the father never, never fulfilled his part of the deal and I think for seven years I tried to pursue him… I gave up because it meant I spent more money looking for him."

The experience shared above illustrated sheer disregard of parenting obligations by the biological fathers, with few exceptions. This was no different for P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip who gave birth to her first child while young. It was a court order that forced the father to some effort towards child support. The participants opted to move ahead, and embraced child rearing obligations without the delinquent fathers.

However, it seems there is joy that comes with being a single mother. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA shared her experiences as follows:

"So it also allows you to reflect when you see your child grow in front of your eyes. It's unbelievable… because it's almost miraculous that this… is this my child? Is this me? Is this (through) my hands you know?"

Some participants used the African appeals customs on declaring pregnancies to the families of their ex partners, as in the cases of P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P10/47 years/2F2/NM/MA. The families failed to compel the fathers to pay child maintenance. This failure of protecting women and children shows how patriarchy pays no attention to how these abuses occur in the African cultural context. In addition, the African customary system left these single women in the lurch as far as holding men accountable for their negligence in raising children.

However, it is worth noting that men took part in raising their children when they remained intimately or emotionally attached to the women. The single women shared how their

current partners stepped in and assisted in raising their children when the biological fathers abdicated this role. It seems that men are cognisant of their role as fathers and assume it even when they are not related by blood to the children. Perhaps current partners realise the children form part of the single women's reality and they get best in their pursuance of intimacy if they embrace the children as well.

4.3.3 Embracing the body and sexuality: freedom of choice

The previous sections discussed in detail the heavy load of chasing their career ambitions, raising children alone, being household heads and being lonely at times. However, the participants revealed snippets of their intimate relationships during the interviews. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons did not share anything about any intimate relationship. She mentioned that her fiancé and father of the twins disappeared. I am unable to say whether she was or was not in an intimate relationship based on the evidence.

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, on the other hand, made it clear that the appointment with me as researcher should end at a particular time. The children were with their father and the domestic was off. This meant she had freedom to do as she pleases at her house and could not hide her excitement about her expected visitor. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip captured her experiences as follows:

"It's hard because as you grow older you are also aware of your own body and also your needs…. I choose who I want to have sex with. Yes. I choose, because I am the owner of my life and the owner of my body and if I did not feel like sleeping with someone I do not. Because I am the master of my destiny, I'm driving my life. I am the captain of this ship."

What she expressed was that the intimate relationships occurred in fulfilment of her needs and desires, and the terms of engagement were fully under her control. There was a conscious choice not to be submissive to male demands. This also affected the nature and frequency at which these relationships occurred, as echoed by P5/36years/2F2 /NM/Hons:

"It goes back to freedom…I prefer flings, so a significant other for me would mean some form of commitment and for me that scares the hell out of me. So I'm not really into (that)."

P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg fulfilled her sexual desires within short-term relationships, as shared below:

"Because there are ways of defining these things but that is why I said in the conventional sense, there is no boyfriend as in a boyfriend, as in someone. But from time to time you have a client, or, okay saying that sounds a bit weird but you know what I mean?... you have people that you work with from time to time, maybe for a three month period you work with…"

However, she showed an interest in having steady intimate relationships, which was the same for P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA and P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA. However, not every man captured their interest. There was also scrutiny on the value the men would bring to their lives. Lastly, maybe the busy work schedule did not allow them sufficient time to concentrate on their search for a suitable match. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA shared her experiences:

"I'm very keen on a partner but it's got to be an honest partner so I think I'm going to take my time to find a partner definitely I'd never thought of a life without a partner. I cannot imagine it. But, but I have not, I've not been successful as you can see so I think it's a department that I work continuously."

The participants appeared cautious about relationship with men, particularly those divorced or hurt previously, as shared P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons:

"Because I also felt that he also has his own baggage and stuff, which he needs to deal with. So let us not rush it. We will meet as and when, and we will be okay and so on. And if it is meant to be, things will happen at the right time. But my worry has been my child has never seen me with anyone else, since – she just knows that my mother has been with my father."

The participants wanted intimate relationships in varying degrees. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC /JuniorDeg was involved in an inter-continental relationship. This allowed her flexibility in managing work, motherhood and other roles which left her feeling lonely. The fear of commitment seemed to be based on previous disappointments, as shared by P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons:

"I think because of my fear of commitment, I probably also...I haven't really had a best eye or wisdom when choosing partners. As a result I think I go into a relationship to get out of it. I go into a relationship to get out. So I think I intentionally do stuff that would turn or demoralise or to discourage them and so I think I probably choose my victims, for lack of a better word, well."

The women experienced moments of loneliness. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared her experiences:

"*The other times you just want to come home and just want to come home and just cuddle, you know? And speak nonsense and not think about anything, you know? Also when things are difficult at work because I have me only. When there are problems I only have me. I did not have anybody else to come to and say, baby this and that happened. I miss that. This is where I also think that balance is important.*"

The above experience was echoed by P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA:

"For me, but the downs of being single, really, really, is just when you're lonely. When you really, really, need companionship and there's just you know there's no one. That you really want to bother at that time to just be with you or just to make that decision, or when you're short of money. I have to call my mom when I'm short of money. I cannot say so to my partner."

However, the women expressed reluctance and had reservations about the calibre of partners they wanted. They viewed this as an extra load that could impact on their freedom, space and time in relation to their hectic work schedule. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC /Dip shared her experiences as follows:

"You know, but I have also achieved a lot. I have also learnt to get terrified now at the prospect of thinking what will happen if I meet a new partner, you know? I do my own things. I have my own time. I take care of myself, you know? I do not cook, clean and I just do nothing, you know. I wake up, take care of my body and leave. My life is busy with work, I leave for work to Cape Town and (may) proceed to Durban. What will I do with him or will he fit? My life is busy. I also think about what will my children call him?"

There was also a sense of freedom in scheduling their time as they please without considering a partner. For example, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg ran the Comrades ultra-marathon a number of times:

"*Like in the mornings I do not have to wake up at like 5:15am. I can wake up at 4:00am and go and run and come back, take a shower.*"

This is what P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons referred as a happy space:

"*So my first happy place is swimming and it's where I don't have to answer the phone. For an hour and a half, it's just me. Five times a week which is the coolest thing because I go for swimming and then afterwards I will go to the steam room and there's no, 'mama, please help me with this."*

The other participants drew a picture of their time being filled to the brim with domestic and international travelling, and their being overstretched by their various roles, and so hardly any time left for a relationship as shared by P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons:

"*You will cook, whatever. But you hardly have time to yourself to say you know what, today is about me, can I go and pamper myself? Can I go to a spa?*"

However, it is important to note that P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons and P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip lived fulltime with their partners, with the latter then engaged. She did not have a child with her fiancé and plans were ahead in preparation for their wedding.

P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip shared her experiences as follows:

"*(Our relationship) is working fine because, I think the person has got the same responsibilities as me, in that (he's) got 3 children… And I think we both met at a time, where we both … needed to have an (intimate) relationship about (just) the two of us.*"

The evidence discussed above shows that the participants were in varying degrees of attachment to committed intimate partnerships. These single women enjoy and embrace time alone or with family to escape from the demands of the world. Therefore, the significant others suffered the most. They were scrutinised first on whether they were

worth the time and effort. Further, they were tested on whether they were a family fit, viz., where did the kids fit in this arrangement? If they fell short in this regard, then participants continued with the intimate relationships without introducing them to their children or family.

Some of the participants liberated themselves from the straitjacket of the societally acceptable form of relationships. This meant that relationships worked for them and not the other way round. They were conscious about satisfying their needs, and set upfront the terms and pace of engagement. In short, the women in this study assumed overall control, and were cautious of making choices on love relationships, particularly in consideration of their children. The stereotypes associated with being a single women included labelling words such as "loose", "whores", "left-overs", and "reached sell-by date" (see Annexure H). These stereotypes portray single women as belonging to the lowest levels – trash, if I may use that word. Despite this negative narrative, these single women embrace their sexuality and make their own sexual choices. These single women refuse that anyone dare dictate how they run their matters of intimacy.

The preceding discussion showed various commitments to intimate relationships. The single women said loudly that these are their bodies and insisted on freedom of choice in deciding on their shape, size and who they share them with.

4.4 SINGLENESS EXPLORED BY INDEPENDENT, AMBITIOUS WOMEN WHO VALUE FREEDOM

Figure 4.1 is a graphic representation of the findings discussed so far. The women in this study were brought up in an African cultural system. Africanism was their main source of influence and cultural grounding in norms, values, language and behaviour. The family serves as the basic unit of socialisation, which occurred mostly along gender lines. Single women were also exposed to similar roles as their male counterparts during childhood. This exposure and equal treatment received from their parents affirmed that women are equal to any task. Other socialisation factors include family structure and composition, chores, mother's role and presence of other female role models during their formative years.

However, there was a disjuncture along gender lines in terms of exposure to cultural rites during puberty. African culture continues in conducting male coming-of-age rites such as

circumcision, while traditional female ones barely occur, due to western culture and Christianity. Perhaps this is where masculinity is re-emphasised for men, resulting in a cultural lag in appreciating women as equal partners. Further, women's access to education increased their appreciation of self-worth and independence.

The participants defined themselves as independent and ambitious. These traits are seen in the rise of never-married and divorced women, the rise in female-headed households, and the decrease in registered marriages. Singleness is a conscious choice. Single women celebrated freedom that came about with financial security and raising children on their own. Singleness is filled with freedom, including choices about intimacy and taking control of their bodies. Participants described singleness as filled with both hardships and glorious moments.
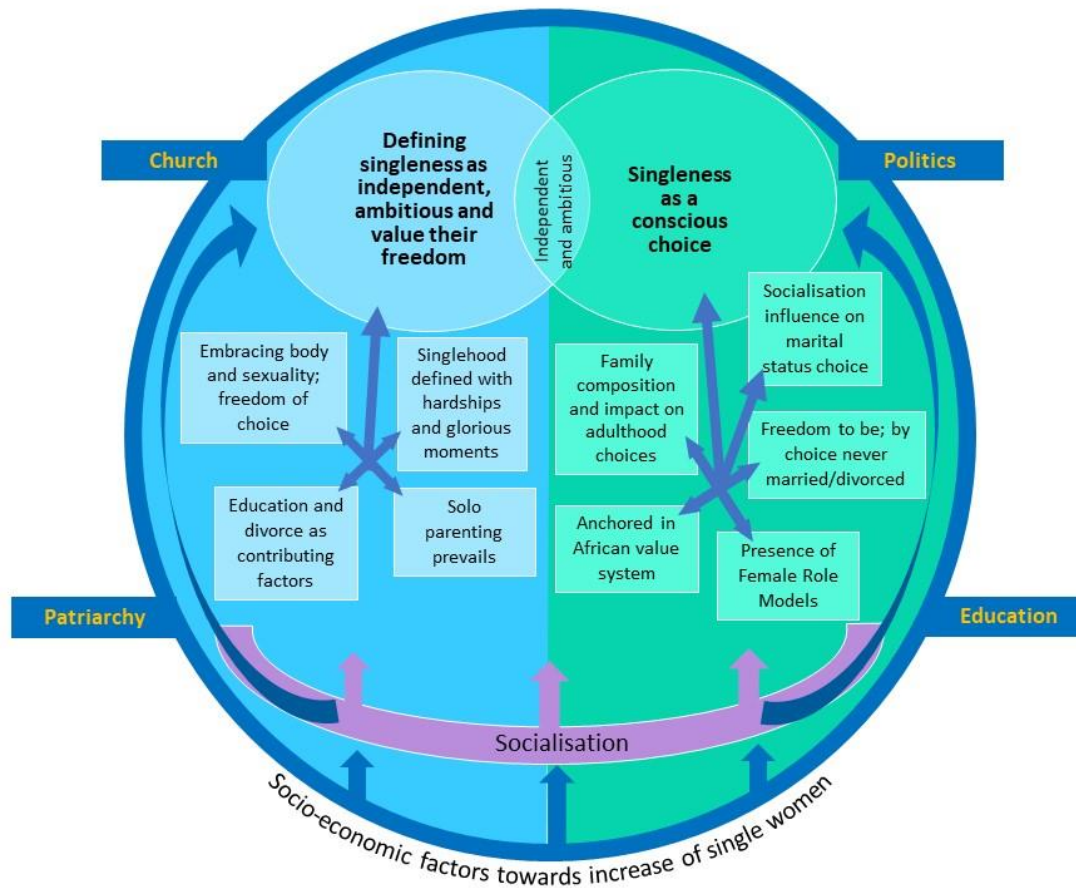
Figure 4.1: Graphic presentation of the findings: Embracing singleness as independent and ambitious women.

4.5 AUDIT TRAIL

I stood for some time and was dazed by the thickness of the book made out of bound transcripts: 268 pages long. It was the result of 650 minutes that were donated by eleven single working women who were senior managers in the public service in South Africa. This presented me with many guilt trips, as some of the participants kept checking on the progress of the research. It felt as if they had shared their experiences in the hope that their voices would be amplified through the research report. There was much effort made in recording their experiences, which would all be in vain if the data analysis did not start in earnest.

Where did one start? It was the beginning of a long, frustrating, painful journey: like a sometimes poorly attended to or abandoned baby. It seemed abandoned at times yet it occupied my mind throughout the day. I would get a moment of clarity while taking a shower, scribbled ideas about a model and/or received recommendations for books to read that were in line with the research topic.

The data analysis began in earnest with reading, re-reading and getting confused with what these transcripts were revealing. It was in the midst of the confusion that patterns developed. It seemed to work just to read through each transcript and note any theme that emerged.

Personally, this was also one of the loneliest periods for me. It was about sacrifices such as cutting off social media until a certain level of progress was reached. This was due to moments of introspection that revealed much time wasted as if avoiding or procrastinating what was gnawing my conscience, viz., getting moving with the data analysis. I would write long posts on Facebook, and attracted a following that demanded more of my stories. The internal conversations were about diverting the energies and writing skills towards the research, first and foremost.

I ended up dedicating at least one hour each evening confronting the data. This paid off and resulted in a long list of themes that filled more than three pages. It suddenly became clear that there was more than enough data to fit one chapter. Secondly, the data seemed cut into two parts, viz., and description of a single working woman. It sketched what groomed her into what she became as an adult: who were her fundamental family values and what were they based on. There were choices made about children, relationships

and her life in general. Lastly, there was evidence that described the public service as an environment that the single women spent the best years of their adult lives in.

I decided to split the research data analysis into two chapters. It seemed as the right thing to do. It would allow for more synthesis of these two areas of evidence. The supervisor was consulted, who supported the idea. What became clear in all the conversations with the supervisor was that the researcher knew best. It was about trusting her intuitions on what would best drive the research towards making a great impact on the body knowledge.

I marched on, buoyed up by the sense of confidence that I have what it takes, and following the nuisances that were being unveiled by the experiences of these single women. I felt like the chosen one in telling their stories and unveiling their rich worldviews. This was a moment of clarity and provided a sense of purpose. It was a clarion call to keep moving on, even when the going got tough. There were times that it felt like this was a meandering and an unending journey. But the women's stories resonated deeply with me. There was something in their experiences that made me got in touch with who I am and what kept me going, as a single woman myself.

Last thoughts: the data analysis timelines kept changing. What was nagging me the most, was whether all the data was attended to and not just glossed over. I re-read the transcripts over and over again. The newly found data was incorporated in between the themes. It sometimes resulted in more sub-themes added and/or re-organised. The latter revealed more about my Type A borderline personality. It was time to let go in the belief that all data was milked to the bone of its true worth.

Finally, a visual representation depicting evidence coming out of this research was given to a graphic designer for more than two weeks. It took many weeks if not months of scribbling on the back of the bound transcripts book. I lost count of how it metamorphosed into something which resembled evidence revealed. There was at long last clarity on what the model should depict, but not the ability to craft it into a graphic illustration.

In conclusion, Chapter 4 presents the truth about the essence of this research topic. It was the core of the very reason to question single working women as senior managers in the public service about their experiences. I hope that the experiences of the participants

not only tell the stories through their own world views, but also encourage those on the brink of reaching their true self-purpose. Figure 4.1 depicts the findings, as discussed above.

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 4 described in detail the research findings in relation to the following key themes. Firstly, experiences of singleness as a conscious choice. Secondly, defining singlehood with its hardships and glorious moments. Lastly, the defining single women as independent, ambitious individuals who value their freedom. The themes were also broken into sub-themes analysing what shaped and prepared these single women to make certain choices in adulthood.

Further, the sub-themes looked at their socialisation, family structures, role models and influencers who nourished their adulthood worldview. There were socio-economic factors such as increase in women's employment, divorce and the liberation to choose what works best that emerged from the participants' experiences. These single women's life journey experiences were peppered with hardship in relation to responsibilities of solo parenting and establishing meaningful relationships with significant others. Lastly, how the single women embraced their bodies and sexuality abundantly showed their freedom of choice with partners. The audit trail was incorporated, which gave an insight into the researcher's journey though the unfolding of this chapter.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS – NAVIGATING A HOSTILE PUBLIC SERVICE

The findings presented another picture: the single women's interaction with the work environment; viz., cracking the glass ceiling; dealing with gender stereotypes; hostile environment; and relationship with peers and supervisors. The final synthesis was how the single working women tapped into their inner capabilities in what they described as a hostile work environment. The main themes and sub-themes that emerged are depicted in Table 3 below and are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Table 3: Summary of findings themes and sub-themes: Navigating a hostile public service

Main Themes	
Hostility of the public service to single women	**Shaping a better future for women in the public service**
	Sub-themes:
5.1.1 Hostile public service for single women.	5.3.1 Serving the nation: when the patriotic duty beckons.
5.1.2 Prescribed macho behaviour.	5.3.2 Coaching and mentoring younger women.
5.1.3 Suffering in silence: over-reliance on prescribed medication, food and shopping.	5.3.3 Advocating for aftercare services at work.
5.2 Enablers for single working women.	
5.2.1 Families lending a hand.	
5.2.2 Mothers as the bedrock in nurturing their daughters career ambitions.	
5.2.3 Hired help: the surrogate mothers and au pairs.	
5.2.4 Boarding schools as a convenient alternative.	
5.2.5 Technology to the rescue.	

5.1 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The findings in Chapter 4 explored singleness through the lived experiences of single women. This included embracing responsibilities as household heads and providers for their families with salaries as the main source of income. The South African public sector is the workplace in question, and it remains largely male dominated, especially at leadership levels where the single female senior managers operated. There is an acknowledgment of progressive legislation that increased access to education and employment through employment equity and affirmative action.

The lived experiences of single women are that the public service is hostile. Single women who are senior managers swim against tide, as evidenced by the sub-themes that depicts an environment of prescribed macho behaviour. Single women are expected to navigate a public service that is contradictory to their socialisation and femininity and hence is constraining for optimal work productivity. These women are often silent about the harshness of the public service, and they thus incline to over-reliance on prescription medication, food and shopping as coping mechanisms. The findings reveal various enablers that single women deploy that help them adapt and survive the hostile work environment and in managing their nurturing responsibilities.

The hostile public service does not dissuade single women. Instead they use their skills, wisdom and insights in shaping a better future for women in the public service. Single women senior managers remain dedicated to serving the nation while also uplifting young women through coaching and mentoring. Lastly, they join in advocating for amenities such as aftercare facilities at work to ease the burden on working women with young children. The next sections discuss the themes and sub-themes in detail.

5.1.1 Hostility of the public service to single women

The single women in this study described their work environment as hostile towards them. Women have joined the public sector in growing numbers since the attainment of democracy in South Africa. The women partly owed their positions in the higher echelons of the public sector to policies such as affirmative action, promotion of diversity and those that prohibit discrimination by gender, as concluded from a desktop review are of pro gender emancipation labour policies. However, the environment was experienced as

hostile and favoured men as demonstrated by attitudes and lack of tolerance for women are other roles. The sub-themes were experiences of prescribed macho behaviour; suffering in silence: over-reliance on prescription medication, food and shopping; and enablers for single female senior managers, as discussed below.

The single women senior managers expressed that they received cold treatment from their male counterparts who dominated at senior management levels. Their cold stares seemed to question their ascendance into public service higher echelon. P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons shared her experiences as follows:

"Public service is not kind to women. That's the starting point… Because they did not take into consideration that you're not just a worker… You are a mother and a caregiver and a daughter to your mom who's probably a pensioner."

This was a pregnant statement shared by P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons. It embodied layers of experiences that perhaps left her with a sour taste, feeling unrecognised and or unappreciated because of her gender.

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip elaborated:

"We are also undermined as women. You have to work twice as hard than your counterparts to prove that I deserve to be here and I know what I am I am doing."

The experience shared by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip could be generalised as applicable to all women in the public sector. The single women hardly see themselves as a distinct sub-group. They first and foremost identified themselves as women, and thus viewed their struggle as against men. P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons added her experiences of male counterparts' coldness as a matter of great concern, as follows:

"The environment that I am at now is male dominated… Firstly when you walk into the boardroom... You get there, you find these men in ties and whatever, and with their big titles and so on … they have been there for ages. Most of them, they are old… You just see it in the facial expressions – it sort of changes (when they see a woman)."

P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons described a meeting in her department where men are in the majority. The men were unwelcoming and made her feel uncomfortable. She experienced an internal turmoil. P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons' uneasiness also stemmed from the fact that she was there to make a presentation, so as to receive an endorsement for a campaign.

Further, she was going to lead implementation of that particular project and was mobilising for senior management cooperation. However, she felt as if she were lost or was at the wrong meeting due to the icy reception she received. The point of departure was fear of the men she needed to work close with. In further illustration of the above point, P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons shared experiences of animosity in the public service, coldness and uncaring, as follows:

"*I always feel like there's so much animosity and people waiting for you to fall and break down. So I would not dare go to my colleagues or counterparts in the public service. I'd rather take my emotions and feelings to someone outside.*"

This participant experienced the public service with suspicion. She had intense negative feelings about it, and antagonistic relationships. There was also distrust of colleagues' true intentions, and colleagues were thought to wish bad things would befall others. She did not ascribe this to any specific gender, but to the work environment.

Further, the public service environment was described in a bad light by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, in as far as women are concerned, as follows:

"*The public service … work environment does not cater for us (women). (Men) will go on with meetings up until whatever time they think is appropriate for them and I've made it my business to always tell them, this meeting has to end because I am still looking for a wife… Because as well we know they will find a cooked meal and kids already prepared. So they could go on for days. I do not have such luxury as woman you know.*"

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg's experiences supported the above mentioned sentiments:

"You have to be strong and to play a balancing and like for instance if there are major projects where you're supposed to be… you are expected to be at the office on weekends…. And you've got a child … and to attend volleyball clinics you know? … its, it's a bit difficult because you can't divide yourself you have to be with your child."

The odds seem stacked against women in senior management positions in the public service. These women rose through the ranks, are skilled and educated yet were confronted with work arrangements that did not allow them space for their other roles. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons said she found that people did not appreciate the hard work that comes with motherhood or singlehood. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip added the following:

"It was just you, (travelled) … didn't know whether you'll have a full week at home while at (Department name withheld). (If) I think I spent a full month at home in a year, it was too much."

This absence from family did not sit well with the participants. P9/43years/1/NM /JuniorDeg described women in the public service experiencing fear:

"We (women) are scared … I think (also) there is a huge element of feeling a level of inferiority when it comes to men…. One, because men are seen to be a little bit bolder. Secondly, you want to ingratiate yourself to the men lest they want to gang up against you…. We know of instances where the men have decided they did not want this woman here, we do not want (her) here."

She observed that female top managers, especially those in the cabinet, are the worst oppressors of other women. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons shared an experience:

"I was living with my son alone and a full-time helper and it was quite a hectic job. The boss (female Member of the Executive Council) was hectic and so was the job. I had to learn very quickly, I had to have all the energy and it was tough when I have to spend long hours in the office … weekends, there was no rest …"

P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA was contemplating with agony, the idea of working during a long weekend at the instruction of a male political principal. This coincided with an out- of-

province family event that was planned long before. She apparently had "*a bad track record of not being part of family things and it's always work, work, work, as an excuse".*

This is perhaps why P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons' meeting encounter discussed above illustrated also that power was defined through a macho worldview, with certain behaviours such as being young, soft and friendly, were viewed as not professional. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg illustrated her experiences of work encroaching into weekends and her mothering role:

"… there was one Saturday that they had a meeting. The political principal called a meeting. My apology was (that) I am participating in a sporting event… You know, what I have also realised is that once you tell them (at work) that, they do not become weird about it…"

However, P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA held a contrary view of women top managers to whom she reported:

"I love the public service. I think I've been very lucky with the supervisors throughout my career, throughout I don't want to lie, throughout my career. My first DDG (department and name withheld) was very good to me … then when she took early retirement and (the current, name withheld) got promoted, she's (also is) marvellous to work with…"

Further, this is contrary to all other participants' experiences of the public service. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA had worked in provincial and national departments with women supervisors who gave her better work experiences than all the other single women received. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons and P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA, for example, who also worked in various parts of the public service had traumatic experiences with their women supervisors.

The experiences shared here were all the experiences of single women. But they were experiences that other women could share. These findings were thus synthesised and included without dismissing their authenticity as pronounced through the single women's views. The disclaimer is in as far as they apply generally to other women before these views are tested against the existing body of evidence. The male domination and macho environment affects single women. There is discrimination along gender lines. This

discrimination questions feminine power by imposing masculine attributes. If that is the case then it robs the public service of the full benefit of what women bring to the workplace.

The participants were intimidated during meetings. I guess men attack single women as a pack. Men have an advantage because they have worked in the public service for a long time, and dominate in numbers. Lastly, work commitments encroach on single women's time, rendering them unable to take care of their families due to work invading their day, beyond the prescribed hours.

5.1.2 Prescribed macho behaviour

The single women believed that power in the public service was perceived through the male lens, as P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons noted:

"I realised that, with the series of meetings that I had that being firm means not smiling… Their definition of power, means (that) the face must sort of change and whatever – which is something that is so foreign to me."

The underlying message was that women should "man-up" or develop thick skins by adopting typical male power behavioural traits and adopt hobbies, as an example, as P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg observed:

"You see, men can go and play golf, you know, and they can say, 'At 12:00 I have got a golf game,' and that is seen to be quite acceptable. And women are too afraid to say, at 12:00 I have to go, (as) my child is singing in the school choir at 12:00. It seems to be a weaker and less acceptable reason to have to leave work… The public service is the absolute worst place. I think the private sector even has a better understanding of working mothers."

Perhaps golf was used as an illustration of the luxury that men can afford to fully participate in despite working fulltime. Women play golf too, or other sports, for socialisation, relaxation and health benefits. What I hear single women say is that playing sport is not a right automatically available for them. There are unwritten rules along gender lines that exclude women from permission to leave work at will. However, the comparison is on what public service allows while ignoring other family obligations. As

another illustration, a supervisor demanded that P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons was available all the time, contrary to what is shared above:

"The (previous female) boss was hectic…. There was not really much time to spend with family…. So it (was) challenging … the long hours and the fact that you've got an open contract that says you are on standby 24 hours/7 days a week."

P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons had no relatives on whom she could depend, as she was working in Gauteng while her first born was young. She opted for paid help, as she dealt with her hectic work schedule and heavy load. The reliance on paid help did not absolve single working women from their nurturing responsibility. There were times when the domestic helper took time off on certain weekends. This left the single young working mother with no option but to take the child with to work engagements over the weekends. Colleagues also became willing babysitters. This was echoed by P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons:

"I remember how I would have a problem with the helper and then I said, 'But I'm not going to miss work, nê.' So, I'm going to take this child and I'm packing all his toys and blankies and everything I needed. Packed him into the car and go to work. And I would arrive and someone else would say, 'Oh I'll take the child.' Then off they went with (my son) and off I went to my meetings."

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip used sarcasm in reminding her male counterparts that meetings should end so that she can go and cook. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons shared her experiences:

"Well, so the top heavy structure is also very male, very, very male heavy … and I think there's a layer of women in the middle, but they're very silent. They're very silent … there's an Exco that sits, so I will go and I will represent my manager … there was a lady who wanted to put an issue (around transference of a staff member) on the agenda and everybody felt that it's not a strategic issue. And she started banging tables and then a gentleman said, 'No, but you don't have to bang tables.' You know…part of me …thought no one is realising how this thing is affecting her as a manager."

The experiences shared above by P6/33years/1/NM/Hons show a senior woman manager dictated to on what to add on the agenda, and being reprimanded for showing emotions at work. This was a demonstration of pent up frustration of a problem that she wanted collective wisdom to resolve. Further, the nature of the meeting was unfriendly and she felt not listened to. Lastly, the men seem to control what gets discussed, and to define professional behaviour.

Only P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip did not specifically mention long meetings, although she alluded to absence from family due to travelling. The other participants experienced serious frustration with long meetings, long working hours and work over the weekends which clashed with taking care of their children, except for P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA, as her supervisor was more accommodating of her family responsibilities. However, she did admit finding the experiences of being a single mother and working in the public service as hard.

The findings suggest that the public service functions with little regard for competing roles, which is predominantly a domain for women. The environment seemed to suggest that single women should neglect the other roles in favour of their work responsibilities. However, such neglect does not augur well for single women's psycho-social make-up.

Women had little influence on how the public service environment was shaped and operated, as discussed thus far. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons added another dimension of silence amidst sexual harassment in the workplace, as follows:

"… there is a colleague of ours, he is just, he really, really, conducts sexual harassment on a day to day basis and when I talk to other women I realise … he's busy, interns, juniors, he's just busy, busy, busy and I keep asking (women), how come no one has reported him?"

This man gets away with this sexual harassment, while women kept quiet about it and so did men. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg observed that men seemed at liberty to use women for their gratification:

"There are, of course negatives (being single) … especially in the work environment…. The minute (men) realise or they get to understand that you are single, it is like you are

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fair game, especially if you are female because you find that the married colleagues think it is perfectly okay for them to be hitting on you because even though they are married … and you (also) know that they are married, but it is something that is largely accepted that you can actually have a relationship with them."

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip did not mention her direct experiences with sexual harassment. However, she referred to her role in protecting female interns against sexual predators at work as follows:

"… I tell my interns when they come in … (that) I expect you to see yourself as a person that's at work … there's no one that should expect (because) he gives you work (then) they have to sleep with them, you know?..."

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg; P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons; P4/42years/3F2/D-WC /Hons; P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons; P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA; P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip; P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA; and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons did not make specific mention of sexual harassment. However, the participants who mentioned it did so sharply and with emotion. It is safe to conclude that sexual harassment exists and affects women negatively.

The other matter that arose was the heavy handedness that single women suffered from political principals and senior executives in the public service. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA lived through her worst work experience at the hands of a female political principal and supervisor:

"The investigation (was) done. It was finished but they got nothing. And I did not expect them to get anything but still … they went ahead and charged me without anything substantive because they had an agenda…. You know the political principal…did not want me there…I think the political principal is not a bad person but … wanted to do certain things and she did not trust me."

The underlying unsaid message was that P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA did not play along with fulfilling the political principal's agenda. It seems that the supervisor trumped up charges against P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA. The charges were meant to discredit her integrity and ultimately cause her to leave the department or the public service. Maybe this would have

allowed the political principal to appoint someone she trusted, who would carry out any instructions in pursuit of her personal or political interests.

P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA was suspended on full pay for more than a year. She suffered loss of self-esteem, as work gave her a sense of purpose. She was left to her own devices to fight someone who was politically powerful. It was a time of great uncertainty, huge legal bills, vulnerability and insecurities that affected her children, social life and extended family:

"*I wanted to go (abroad) … I knew (this would be) expensive and I wanted to fly business class. It was my birthday. I wanted to do this and that but you know what it did not happen and I just had to go through the process (suspension).*"

P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons chose to resign for another job outside the public service after her unfair treatment from a female political principal she was attached to. She came back to the public service years later, to work in a national department for another female political principal. The second experience was different, and she has worked for eight years with her current political principal.

Also, there were times when women were pigeon holed and ridiculed in an attempt to make them conform to dominant prescription of how women should be or behave, as P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg shared her experiences as follows:

"*(They will say) … this woman is moody, this woman is, you know, you'll have those things thrown around. Nobody will ever say a man has attitude, a man is moody, or you know, that terminology that is associated with women, and the men will gang up against you and spit you (****) out.*"

The above shows how women were dressed down if they failed to conform. It is interesting how some women bowed to the pressure and would rather associate with men than their female colleagues in such cases. It was said that men operated as a gang, so perhaps if you cannot beat them, join them. Single women experienced the public service as treating them badly, judging from what P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg highlighted below:

"*The public sector is the absolute worst and the women who are senior, like really senior, you know, like the DGs and DDGs, they are the ones who are the most oppressive when it comes to women. I think even if you have a female political principal (are like that) ...*"

P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons added to the above:

"*It was a Sunday morning ... I'm still sleeping and I have 3 missed calls (from a female political principal) and I panic obviously. Calls were at about 6.30am ... then I (called her back) … I think it's just at 08:00am…. She screamed 'You are sleeping, and what is your job?' and she was in a bad mood screaming and I just listened. This is a person who lived, let's say, 20km from me … so I took my sleeping child, put him at the back seat of the car and went. I got there, panicking.*"

This happened more than a decade ago, but P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons shared it in minute detail. The political principal screamed at her for not answering her calls on Sunday at 6h00. This was treated like the worse offence ever. It seems it was the political principal right to call her at any time of the day and vent her frustration. She waited for the political principal who was in church when she arrived at her house after that telephone call. The political principal was surprised that she had taken such trouble and was waiting to brief her when she came home late in the afternoon.

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip; P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons; P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons; P6 /33years/1/NM/Hons; P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA; P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip; and P10/47 years/2F2/NM/MA worked directly with female political principals and female supervisors during their careers. P4/42years/3F2/D/D-WC/Hons; P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons; P7/43 years/2F2/NM/MA and P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip saw the worst form of victimisation, while P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA had close relationships with a female political principal and boss, respectively.

However, P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA and P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons also told different tales of experiencing good relationships with their current female political principals. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA was at the highest echelons of the public service management with two young children and appreciated the support received from her current boss:

"*I have experienced the highest levels of support from at least two or three of the women bosses…. This kind boss that I have now respects my space with my kids and my family…. By the way she even recruited a helper for me.*"

P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA had a relationship with her current female boss that allowed her to open up about personal or family issues. Her boss was a single parent as well. Perhaps there was empathy based on shared experiences. She perhaps could identify with what it took for her rising through the career ladder, with a child and being single.

Discrimination against women based on gender, irrespective of marital status, is not a phenomenon unique to the public service. It seems that its tentacles spread through the private sector. This study was confined to the public sector, but P9/43years/1/NM /JuniorDeg and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA made comparisons and made reference to it based mainly on their lived experience with the private sector. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA shared her experiences as follows:

"*I did not qualify for maternity leave … I was three months at a (local bank) when I gave birth to my daughter and the five days I took to give birth and to be with her for the week was all unpaid…. So they did not compensate you for that…. Yes, because the bank saw a pregnant woman as an unfit person. It's like as if you are disabled, you're not supposed to be at work.*"

However, the public sector in South Africa leads in the implementation of pro-women legislation and policies (Du Plessis et al., 2016; Falon et al., 2017). The public service, compared to the private sector, is successful, with maternity policy and benefits. Women were therefore free to make informed choices on how and when they could return to work. However, P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons chose going back after six weeks because it was her first time being part of a government transition period after the 2009 elections. The supervisor allowed her to work for half-days until her maternity leave was over.

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons enjoyed a four months fully paid maternity benefit. The comment above probably depicted the managerial influence in making sure that she did not work fulltime while still nursing an infant. It was the flexitime arrangement that balanced out her quest not to miss public service change of administration, which had also been given an opportunity to recover from pregnancy. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons took

her full four months maternity leave, travel to her home province to give birth and decided to leave her child, then five months, with her mother.

She reasoned that it was a decision based on her lack of support and extended family that could pitch in with the baby. Perhaps this was one of the benefits women considered when choosing employment in the public sector. However, the public service pays little or no attention to sexual abuse experienced by women. It seems to target the young and vulnerable, or perhaps the older and senior ones found strategies to defend themselves. Equally, the participants protect the young interns. Further, single women felt targeted and abused by female political principals and supervisors. Evidence further appreciates paid maternity leave as something the public service has done well for women.

The single women pointed as senior females, political principals and supervisors, as main perpetrators in subjecting pain and suffering to them in the public service. Perhaps the toxicity in the public service rests more on who holds the reins of power than looking at it purely on male domination or macho power.

5.1.3 Suffering in silence: over-reliance on prescribed medication, food and shopping

The participants shared sentiments about the public service as uncaring, particularly with regards to the plight of working women. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said:

"Government does not pay enough attention to supporting its employees … I mean, I cannot believe that government departments did not have crèches or did not have transport facilities to say "okay, if you work here, your child goes to this school in this proximity."

Therefore it seems that single women survived by their own devices. P9/43years/1/NM /JuniorDeg shared her experiences as follows:

The women, even if they have things, they would shelve it, sacrifice it, shut their mouths and not talk about it because it is seen as some kind of a weakness. Yes. And it is seen as some kind of weakness so you do not want to be vulnerable and weak because you are the boss…. But there is silence, there is complete silence…. You will never hear women in senior management talking to women at lower levels about their families."

The veil of silence on issues affecting women was echoed by P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons:

"*So it becomes a challenge. And it becomes even worse if you are a young woman. I did not know in the other branches… We are three female senior managers … although we are not talking, but you will realise when you share, giving feedback in the meetings, that we are sort of having the same frustrations.*"

The preceding discussions touched on male dominance in the public service. This was reflected in the number of men across board and representation in the top decision-making structures. Perhaps this gave men a loud voice while silencing women, who were also in the minority. This made women feel isolated within the organisation and more so at key decision making structures that drive the public service. They attended meetings and became bystanders while men flexed their muscles about how the meetings were held, for how long and what items were discussed. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons elaborated:

"*Yeah, there's silence you know and I think also what attributes that, is that I've never seen a programme that targets women, I did not even think we've got like a gender office there at work. I do not remember, or some kind of correspondence that says women must enrol for a management programme. I just do not remember. There is no forum; there is no space as well to ensure that women have a voice generally.*"

The feeling of being alone was worse when single women went through hard life events. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip shared the experience of going through her divorce:

"*It was hard. It was hard and actually, that's when I got into depression.... It was hectic, it was hectic, travelling, responsibilities and I think just the level of responsibility. You know, you can be a manager, but I think I was a manager with so much responsibility and I think at a high level, things where you just cannot afford to drop the ball it really becomes hard (as tears rolled down).*"

There were striking similarities in the experiences of the public service as cold and uncaring to single women. Note that P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip cried while recollecting this experience, which had taken place more than five years before the time of the interview.

P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons also cried while sharing her experiences about the public service as cold:

"(Public service) is the coldest place I've ever had to work in. It's cold in terms of emotions and people are not caring. You're on your own basically…. Just that comradeship you know ... I mean only this morning I was shouting at my colleagues because one of our colleagues lost his child … I haven't seen him for two weeks and I'm like 'Where have you been?' and no-one wanted to tell us."

How does this coldness affect single women? P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA were admitted to a psychiatric hospital, and prescribed anti-depressant medicine when they struggled to cope during a divorce and after the death of a fiancé, respectively. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared that she is admitted annually to another hospital to manage her depression.

The public service as the employer was not seen to offer any form of support. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg shared her experiences as follows:

"(The women's voice) is still quiet. Because we are just expected to perform (work) irrespective. You are just a (robot). That's why most of our people get admitted to (a psychiatric hospital, name withheld) … and most of our people are addicted to this (name of the anti-depressant tablet withheld)."

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg and P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg mentioned the same psychiatric hospital as a "retreat" for burnt-out public servants, especially women. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg shared her observations:

"So you are just causing yourself stress and you are going to end up in that mental place where most government people end up at a psychiatric hospital (name withheld). I know so many people who've been there. Six weeks here, six weeks there. All because people do not have a balance."

Participants sought solace elsewhere, as P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons said:

"When I go to my darkest hole I shop. I shop. I phone my mom. I simply sit and eat, probably that's why I've just haven't been able to control my weight ... I eat and overspend on material stuff, hoping that that would make me feel good about myself. I see a psychologist or psychiatrist from time to time."

The experiences shared thus far touched on negative coping mechanisms such as reliance on prescribed medication, shopping and overeating. These are forms of escape from reality, perhaps allowing them to feel happy briefly. There was no direct mention of illicit drugs. P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons, P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons and P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA did not mention using any anti-depressant medicine or being admitted to psychiatric hospitals. There were experiences shared about the public service lacking in programmes that support employees' wellbeing. The single women endured all of this without support from the Employee Assistance Programme, as raised by P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg. There were trust issues, as she felt that resorting to the programme would compromise her privacy:

"You know what I've experienced that the public service is not well in terms of support services. (What) you are expected to do, (is) to excel irrespective of your background. You are just expected to hit the ground running irrespective of your, your social make-up."

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons shared her experiences as follows:

"Employee wellness is about the emotional, mental, physical being of your employees…. But (also) the person inside, this worker. So it means we have to make sure that our managers are sensitised… That someone comes into work and they are very rude. It's not because of you. They may be bringing something that has happened to them at home. So, then you need to step away and help them deal with it."

The participants also described the public service as having little regard for working hours and their negative impact on family. All the participants travelled extensively between Parliament in Cape Town and their offices in Pretoria. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA was working in a provincial department when interviewed, but had similar experiences of working in national government. Working for a province meant she could sleep at home most nights. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons shared her experiences as follows:

"I got a SMS from the school. In an ideal world, in my head, if I'm a senior manager, I should be able to have sufficient staff that I can apportion work to and make sure that this week because it's also part of a long weekend, I take leave so that I can attend to that, you know?"

P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg said:

"But when you are single, you are it, you know … I remember not long ago we had a meeting with the political principal and I was looking at the time … I had fetched (my daughter) at lunch time and she was in the car in the parking lot. And the political principal wasn't stopping, so I went to him and I told him that I have to go … and drop off the child and then he said, "Okay," … I heard subsequently … from one of the colleagues that political principal remarked … (and) said, Aba – these ones with small children are troublesome".

I suppose it took time for P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg to gather enough courage to approach the political principal and excuse herself from the meeting. These were probably moments filled with internal turmoil, anxiety and concerns not only for her child's safety but also for career implications of leaving a meeting convened and chaired by her political principal. Permission to take leave was granted, but the remark by the political principal seems to have left a bitter taste.

By leaving the meeting to take care of her child P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg demonstrated her self-confidence, and freedom to exercise her choices without fear of repercussions. Long meetings convened at short notice seemed more a norm than an exception. The political principal cited above was a man, and perhaps these meetings suited those with no responsibilities for children and families. The above observations were illustrated by P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons as follows:

"That is when I decided that I need to make the decision to move the child. Because now – It seems like ... an excuse every time you tell your boss that can I be released at this particular time. (Male counterparts) will stay (and continue with work or a meeting) and they will tell you, my partner is going to fetch (the child or children). There is a partner, wife or whoever they are living with will do that".

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The sentiments shared by P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons were echoed by P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg:

"You see what – she is at boarding school now for the last two semesters of this year. I took that decision primarily because of the distance from home to school. Firstly, and then the fact that work, the place that I am at now, there is meetings happen until late..., there is a lot of travelling involved and we did not have a reliable transport that I was happy with that I knew would take her. I just felt that she was waking up way too early."

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip added that she reminds her colleagues if meetings went for too long, as follows:

"Because as well we know they will find a cooked meal and kids already prepared. So they could go on for days. I don't have such luxury as woman you know."

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip uses "they" in reference to men colleagues who have wives and partners who take care of their children and cooking, as P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons, also shared. She further shared her frustration with an expectation that she goes to work while no acknowledgement of the time it takes for travelling and outside the working time engagements, as follows:

"I sometimes wake up very early because I have to do interviews first thing…. Why can't I just open my computer and work? Nobody bothers to ask me about those hours spent on interviews. Yes and the traveling when I have a meeting in Cape Town at 8am. It simple means that I either leave the previous night or I leave at 3am to get to the airport so that I take the 6am flight."

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg added that the travelling had an impact on raising her eldest daughter, in particular, as shared below:

"Because I used to travel a lot and I thought you know or I've observed that I did not do justice in terms of the eldest daughter."

P6/33years/1/NM/Hons added that she felt exploited as a single woman, as colleagues threw more work involving traveling on them, and at short notice:

"So they then conclude that I'm single … (this time) I literally had to just leave and go to Limpopo. Get on a plane, nothing on my back, get there, buy clothes, toiletries, … get a hired car … to get to that venue which is three hours away… I'm single … I don't have a husband to consult with. We get a message that the political principal is going to a church in Limpopo on Saturday…. Later … now he's also going to meet a chief, so it's a full day's programme."

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons mentioned that she travelled abroad when her daughter was few months old and her partner took care of the household. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons leaves her eldest son responsible when she travels, while it is the sister for P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA. P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons; P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons; and P11/39 years/1/D-WC/Hons mentioned travelling as one of the reasons that they decided their children should live with their mothers. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said there were times that a week at home was rare for her, when she worked for a particular department.

This sub-theme shows an inter-phase between work and family, on many levels. Single women bemoaned living an erratic life due to poorly scheduled working hours and traveling away from home. This unhappiness is due to their inability to be present for their children. There is also a sense of frustration that are unable to attend to their families despite their seniority, and I guess feel entitled to compensation for all the time unduly taken by the public service. However, it seems the same does not apply to their male counterparts, who delegate these responsibilities to their spouses or the mothers of their children.

Inability to taking care of their children leaves single women feeling guilty and making choices such as taking them to their parents or putting them in boarding school. Lastly, the women felt exploited with regard to after-hours work, weekend work and travelling, all of which they were expected to do on the assumption that, being single, they have no spouses to account to. Single women may be soft targets as their marital status seems to leave no credible barriers to protect them from this abuse.

The participants bemoaned the lack of training and development to equip them for their senior positions. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg P6/33 years/1/NM/Hons and P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA also felt that women were appointed to

senior positions with little or no training for the task. They were pushed into the deep end and expected to sink or swim.

There seems to be more funding for academic studies than for work-related skills. Most participants undertook further study while in the public service. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC /Dip, P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons, P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA and P11/39years/1/D-WC /Hons were busy with their studies at the time of interviewing. This was an added burden, necessitated by embracing the management principle that one must upgrade one's skills through learning. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons and P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg were the only participants who did not register for an additional qualification while in the public sector. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA described simultaneous working, studying, and child rearing best:

"It's hellish that thing I'm telling you I did not have a life, I did not see a mole that year literally until I graduated. We were there on Sundays until twelve midnight … the kids had a fulltime maid there were days I did not see the children for days because I (would) come in at 4am ... I (would) shower and I would leave again. And there was (at parliament) in Cape Town because of my portfolio and all those things. So at some point in 2008 I got a letter from my daughter complaining that I did not care about them meaning her and the brother."

It is important to note that the participants who had registered completed their studies, despite all the challenges. P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons opted to take a year off work to study fulltime and then re-joined the public service. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA registered for her master's degree after her experience quoted above and was contemplating further study.

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip felt so strongly about the burdens on young and junior women that she took it upon herself to mentor them. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA said she became a compassionate manager thus refrained from having 7h00am meetings, in recognition of what it takes for women with young children to make it to work.

Discussion of the lack of Employee Assistance Programmes and wellness support ties up with earlier remarks about use of antidepressants and admission to a psychiatrist hospital. There is a lack of support as public servants manage their roles at work, at home

and in the community at large. Single women find themselves lonely, bullied and victimised at work. Their experiences of coldness in the public sector left them frozen emotionally. The home environment and society do not offer adequate solace, hence they overly rely on prescribed medication, food, shopping and the psychiatrist hospital in the hope of filling the void. This is scant reward for all that they go through in the service of the public and nurturing future generations.

5.2 ENABLERS FOR SINGLE WORKING WOMEN

The single women in this study had full custody and were primary caregivers of their children. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons, P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC /Hons' children lived fulltime with their grandparents. This arrangement of grandmother serving as guardian lasted until P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons's mother died, when her aunt took over until she was back on her feet again. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip eldest son, born when she was a teenager, lived with the grandparents until she was gainfully employed.

But this parental support this did not absolve these single women from overseeing the children's well-being, maintaining them financially, and attending to their school needs. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg, P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons, P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA raised their children on their own. However, parents stepped in during crisis and hosting their grandchildren for holidays.

5.2.1 Families lending a hand

The extended families, particularly grandmothers of the children, stepped in as primary caregivers while the single women paid for the upkeep of their children. P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons shared her experiences as follows:

"It became ridiculous. So I had to wake her up. We needed to leave the house at 05:45 so that she is at school by 07:30. Yes, traffic is very hectic from this side to that side. Then after school she goes to aftercare. She is still ... wearing (a) uniform. So I have to look at the time, exactly 16:30 – if there is a meeting, it is a problem for me – because now I must go … that is when I decided that I need to make the decision to move the child."

The grandparents also stepped in when their single daughters were faced with temporary set-backs. They offered help and/or accommodated their grandchildren until the bad times were over in the case of P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons, who shared her experiences as follows:

"While we were battling to make ends meet ourselves, with the eldest son we (then needed) to make time and provide for these ones (twins) that were not staying with us…. We went (to visit my mother and twins) on weekends … I mean my mother was old, not so old but she's a granny, and there (was) a helper that assisted for the two babies. So we needed to pay her as well, and my mother stopped that and said 'No look, I have got a pension, leave the nanny for me because you guys are battling."

However, living away from their children was not an easy decision. It took a toll on the single women's conscience, as they felt that they were abandoning their children. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons said:

"It wasn't an easy decision, because (when my daughter was) three months, I remember … one of my aunts was asking me if I'm going to leave the child. I could not answer her. I just literally broke down, but that moment was a catalytic moment…. So I then decided at three months, that I am going to leave this child."

P6/33years/1/NM/Hons cried at the memory of this conversation with her aunt and subsequently with her mother. The child was five years old at the time of the interview. This decision weighed heavily on her. It is important to point out that this was a generational re-occurrence for her and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons, as they were brought up by their grandparents while their mothers sorted out their lives after divorce.

The grandparents offered stability and a steady routine for their grandchildren. The children strived academically and also participated in extra-mural activities. However, the children also expressed longing to live with their parents. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons shared her experiences as follows:

"My kids, in all of this they are with my mother in (another province).... My kids think I'm that lady who just looks after their needs financially.... It makes me feel sad at times, but when I see the fruits of my labour and what it has afforded them to have in life, I probably

take pride in that. The kids have tutors and my mother does the bulk of the homework because she's a former teacher. I mean that's one of the prizes that I've had to pay for not being there."

P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons said she felt like an onlooker at her children's upbringing expressed. This was echoed by P6/33years/1/NM/Hons below:

"(in tears) because lately, particularly these past two months, she keeps calling me, when are you coming, when are you coming? ... So every day she will say, 'Mommy. I miss you. Mommy when are you coming?' ... You know at five she is saying, 'Hello, why am I not staying with you?"

The tears were an expression of how much she was hurt by this separation. This was a bitter pill to swallow for P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons and P6/33years/1/NM/Hons, even though they were grateful for the chance to pursue their careers. P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons's daughter appreciated time with her grandmother and not waking up early, as she had to while living with her mother. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P5/36years/2F2/NM /Hons were contemplating taking their children to live with them the following year, as their mothers were getting old, and might struggle with teenagers and school work supervision. The former had bought a house while the latter was in the process of doing so, so as to adequately accommodate their children.

It was not only the grandparents who stepped in to help. Older siblings, aunts and uncles also played a role. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons' eldest son could not continue with his university studies and was home for a year. He became handy helping with homework and dropping-off the twins, his younger brothers. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons shared her experiences as follows:

"The twins struggle with maths, but it's an attitude problem more than anything. (eldest son) shouts at them. I said 'Do this, this is how you do it'. Mmm, they sulk. That time I just got back from traffic and work … I am tired. I did not understand this maths myself, the brother does. It looks like they are seeing it for the first time and it's in the homework book. But he's very, very helpful. Helps them revise and he's very keen."

This was a relief for P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons who was often tired from work and all other stressing episodes in her life. She had one less thing to do (i.e. chasing the twins to do their homework). It also saved her money from getting a tutor or au pair to coach the twins as she did not understand maths herself. This was the same for P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg as her eldest daughter tutored her younger sister. The eldest son of P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons also stepped in as the twins' guardian and driver when their mother was away on business. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, on the other hand, lived close to her sister, her only relative in Gauteng. This was the same for P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg. There was mutual assistance in relation to their children. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared her experiences as follows:

"*My sister on the other side also becomes very important in this whole situation because when I am unable to do certain things they know she is around. She will come around and sort them out. Even with her, her daughter does not like for instance the kids in their complex so she comes around my place to play.*"

This became a working solution for P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and her ex-husband to accommodate their respective siblings, as they offered extra hands for childminding. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip shared her experiences as follows:

"*Homework, I think I've always been fortunate to have, I think from 2007 onwards we had a sibling (hers or ex-husband's side) at home, so someone would help with the homework. And I think also me then, I was fortunate that my domestic helper was someone who had (Grade 12).*"

The extended family, aunts and older siblings offered love and support to the children, and the participants came to rely on this. However, there was also a geographic distance from the participants' mothers' homes and the participants' workplaces, expect for P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg and P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons who were in the same province as their mothers. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA said:

"*… when I had my first child, I was (147 km) from my family so I was by myself. (then) I moved (917 km). I was the only (family member), which I still am except for the visitation of by siblings ... my parents never played a role because at least I was working when I had my first child even if it was a junior position.*"

P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA's sister came to live with her and help with her children. All the participants were assisted by their families at some point. The career necessity of being available at the public service's whims affected the women's nurturing role. Their salaries allowed them to delegate the nurturing responsibility to their family, with children living permanently with relatives, relatives or coming to participants' homes. This delegation frees single women to pursue work responsibilities. Families are entrusted with passing on values to the single women's children. Emotional bonds with grandparents, aunts, uncles and other extended family members are strengthened.

P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons, P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons repeated the cycle of grandmothers stepping as guardians, as it had been in their own case. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA and P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg are taking care of their children fully, even though they themselves were brought up by their grandparents. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons and P6/33years/1/NM/Hons did not mention grandparents taking care of their children. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg and P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons specifically mentioned the role played by the elder siblings in taking care of the younger ones.

5.2.2 Mothers as the bedrock in nurturing their daughters' career ambitions

P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons's children lived with her mother fulltime, at the time of the interview. Her mother saw that the children were well cared for. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons' children also lived fulltime with their grandmothers. After her mother's death P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons was reunited with her twins. However, her aunt stepped in temporarily until she found her feet again, as she battled with unemployment and later a new job that involved travelling. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons said:

"*They've always been with my mom. My youngest, my daughter stayed with me for a year ... and then my mom felt no you know what I'd rather check out this side (for her too).*"

This is the same with P6/33years/1/NM/Hons whose daughter lives with her mother:

"*… my daughter lives with my mother. I left her with my mother at five months…. And the reason why I left her, (is that) I had to analyse and (concluded) that, to raise a child fully and holistically, (as) I was raised in a single household, you need a support system. (This)*

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is very critical and leaving my child at home meant that I've got my mother who is there (and) she has a helper in the house."

P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons were also raised by their grandmothers after their parents divorced. The former has never married while P11/39 years/1/D-WC/Hons was divorced. The latter said:

"I have a very big staff complement of 30 people…. It became ridiculous… So … that is when I decided … to move the child. (Fortunately), my mother teaches the foundation phase."

P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons mother had said that she would return to her own teaching career if her daughters got married. She is raising her grandchildren in showing solidarity while P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons fulfils her career ambitions. However, there were consequences for participants who opted to leave their children with their mothers or in alternative care while pursuing their careers. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons said:

"My daughter always says 'I've got a Ma, I've got a real Mom. I've got a fake Mom and a real Mom.' (P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons) is the fake mom…. The fake mom, she pays for everything that we want ... and the real, real, real mom does stuff with us."

The eldest child of P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip lived with her uncle and aunt who raised her. Other participants raised their children on their own, with the grandmothers offering relief during holidays, with the exception of P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons who lived with her children and only visited her parents' home with them. The participants hardly mentioned their fathers lending a hand with their grandchildren. The grandmothers used their tested nurturing skills.

It seems that this arrangement benefited children with security and stability that their parents were unable to provide due to travelling and long working hours. The grandparents are probably paying a family debt, as their mothers did same for them. Perhaps the empathy arises from the grandmothers' own lived experiences of competing roles keeping them away from their nurturing responsibilities. The same does not apply to the grandfathers or children's fathers, hence their distance from this arrangement.

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5.2.3 Hired help: the surrogate mothers and au pairs

Section 5.2.2 above showed women in the family such as grandmothers and aunts stepped in as caregivers to help single women. But the participants also needed hired help. They all relied at some point on domestic helpers, who played the role of surrogate mothers, particularly when the children were still young. This is with the exception of P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons and P6/33years/1/NM/Hons who never lived with their children. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip said:

"You see, it could have been much harder if I did not have the support that I have. I have a full time helper. I cannot, besides me not liking house chores. I have a full time helper."

However, the domestic helpers did not seem to exonerate single women from domestic chores and child related responsibilities. The issue of affordability also featured. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA shared her experiences as follows:

"I had to decide whether to hire a maid or to put my child in an aftercare.... Pay the aftercare and get benefits of my child interacting with the other children. They get food in aftercare so he won't be hungry and get the homework assistance then I just come home and I just double check."

P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA felt she couldcope without a domestic helper:

(But) … remember I must also do supper. So I decided on putting him (at) aftercare. Meaning that I then forgo the maid…. But I can see that I'm not coping with that, when my son comes from school I wash his shirt. I wash his socks. I iron again his trouser. Put it there. Take his clean uniform for tomorrow, out. If he's got a sport, I put in his sports bag. So in the morning I just need ten minutes in the kitchen to prepare his lunch and that's it."

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg, P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons and P10/47years/2F2 /NM/MA were the only ones living with children and without any domestic helper. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg's children were big, while P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons relied on her eldest son to take care of her twin boys. This choice seemed heavy on P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA, who mentioned a long list of household duties she undertook after work. She said this in a hurried, singsong manner, with no pause for breath, and

then let out a big sigh. Her look seemed to say that her days were long. She was relieved whenever one of her sisters came to stay with her, though this was not for long. However, participants did the chores whenever time allows, as P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said:

"I had a full-time domestic worker for the children ... I'd already figured out … I'm home, I must cook so that there are a variety of meals to last them over a week until I'm back. And you then have systems that movie nights now are not weekends.… When they get out of school we go to the movies. So I literally devised systems."

The pressure also came from the children who demanded a taste of their mother's cooking, attention or hands-on housekeeping. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA said:

"So, my kids are very particular with food. They demand that 'Mama, we want you to cook for us because mama we love your food.... Mama if you're not going to cook for us, please buy us food at Woolworths.' So, I have to create that balance, so sometimes when I am home early I cook. … So that they eat veggies twice or three times (a week) because mummy has cooked them, you know?"

The single women expressed appreciation of the role domestic helpers played in their lives and that of their children, as P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip said:

"So that (domestic) support is very important and also making sure that you look after the person who looks after your kids and your household. It is important to me that she's treated well and does not complain."

However, tutors and au pairs were also secured for homework and transporting children between school, home and extramural activities, as captured by P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA:

"So I have the au pair who is like now a family member…. She comes in every day.... She assists the older one with the homework…. The au pair helps a lot. She's in a way an extension of my family now."

The participants described their mothers, aunts, sisters, helpers and au pairs (all females) as their extended hands in raising their children. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons said her uncle assisted with her daughter's school activities and support from time to time. P3/39years

/2F2/NM/Hons and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA's fathers were still alive, but they hardly featured, except mentioned in passing in relation to how they related to their grandchildren. This was the same with the brothers, except when P1/40years/2F1/D-AC /Dip mentioned her contribution to the welfare of her nieces with no indication of how he reciprocated with hers.

Society designates women the nurturing role. This is supported by the evidence above, with the children cared for by willing hands and hearts while the single women concentrate on their careers. The female family members are trusted with offering what single women cannot. However, the hired help fulfil same with satisfactory results. In addition, it seems single women buy themselves out of the nurturing role using their salaries.

5.2.4 Boarding school as a convenient alternative

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg, P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons, P4/42years/3F2/D-WC /Hons, P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P10/47years/2F2 /NM/MA sent their children to boarding school. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg shared her experiences as follows:

"She is at boarding school now for the last two semesters of this year. I took that decision primarily because of the distance from home to school. I just felt that she was waking up way too early."

P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA's daughter was in her third year at university when the interview was conducted. She still bore the brunt of her decision to send her to boarding school. This decision had its pros and cons for the parent and the child as it could be experienced as abandonment or seen as character building. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA said:

"She still talks about it she says I shipped her off to a boarding school … and then I took someone else's child. She did not take it well. She still does not take it well."

The child hated the boarding school experience and felt betrayed when P10/47years /2F2/NM/MA took custody of her niece during her absence. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA was caught between a rock and a hard place. She wanted to study further, but was living far from her parents. She thought boarding school would be an ideal alternative for her daughter. There was also a great sense of compassion in rescuing her destitute young

niece. But this was at a huge cost to her relationship with her daughter, who felt she had been sacrificed to the realisation of academic dreams and extended family responsibilities.

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons; P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons; P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg painted a different picture of their children's boarding school experiences; P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said:

"(He is doing) very well. I see it in his academic work. He was a very independent child, but right now, he's a very centred child. He understands that he's a human being in a community, in a rural society and he understands that you did not just live for yourself. So it's really helped."

Participants expressed that there were mutual benefits, and also that the children enjoyed boarding school. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons said:

"He happens to be a smart one that one…. He was in a boarding school. He also got himself a scholarship. When he was in Grade 7 …. I was happy for him and besides it was time for him to grow and go live with other boys, come home during weekends and tell me all about it. It took him a while. He was a bit scared of boarding school, having heard stories."

The single women also shared the positive impact that the boarding school had on their children. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said:

"So it's really helped…. So now he gets excited because he had to do entrepreneurs day. He had to raise funds and all of those, so now he's taken interest in how I take financial decisions around the home. And I think that would never have been there if he had not gone to boarding school."

The influence children received at boarding school contributed to their overall wellbeing, not just on the academic front. This was also true for the mother who got more time for herself and space to pursue what mattered for her career and wellbeing. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg shared her experiences as follows:

"Like in the mornings I do not have to wake up at like 5:15am. I can wake up at 4:00 am and go, run and come back, take a shower, think about what am I going to wear today? I can even leave home at like 7:30am.... Yes, there's definitely more time for myself. I can even go and see people during the week… So it is given me a lot more freedom."

With a child at boarding school there was no inconvenience in coordinating extramural activities and transport. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said:

"Actually, I know that Monday, up until Friday, I did not have to worry and rush home from work to cook, because he's in boarding school. So he comes back … Friday evening is about being home, catching up on what he was doing at school."

P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg echoed these sentiments:

"Boarding is much better, well the time issue's much better for her. I feel like she does not have to wake up so early and there is no rush because she is living at the school, so you know, they leave the boarding house at like 7:00 and they just walk across to the class and she is able to do her extra-murals without me having to say…. So logistically for me it is just a lot easier."

The above showed the positive spill-offs of boarding school for the child and for the mother. But things did not always work out perfectly for the child. As discussed previously, P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA's daughter still believed that that her mother abandoned her and replaced with her niece. This harmed their trust and relationship. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA felt guilt not only about taking her at an early age to boarding school, but about the fact that she should have taken her out immediately when she complained. Secondly, taking her niece could have been justified, but the timing was entirely wrong in her daughter's eyes.

The family and hired help are the first port of call for lending a hand with children. However, boarding school also fits in the category of hired support, offering both accommodation and tuition. Boarding schools provide safety for the children in their care. The single women want security for their children. However, the family could offer same for children. It could be that the family, domestic help and au pairs were initially

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considered, and boarding school offered more security and support for the single women in the end.

5.2.5 Technology to the rescue

Computers, smart phones and other gadgets introduced many applications that made communication easier. The participants welcomed the technology that keeps them in touch with their children while at work. Single working mothers mediated work-family conflict through technology, particularly in life threatening situations affecting their children. It was of great help when their children were sick or in distress and needed their support. However, work deadlines needed their attention as well. Technology was their lifeline. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA said:

"I knew when the doctor says, 'I'm booking him in.' Two weeks, if I'm lucky or a week … and I was the (top executive at a public service agency) at the time. So, it was a very difficult balance. I mean I literally used to carry the laptop and be at the hospital bed and would be busy typing all my emails and doing work."

Work demands that single women senior managers spend time away from home. This caused disruption of the home management for the mothers. Absence and physical distance caused most strain for both parents and children, and required any means of keeping in touch. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared her experiences as follows:

"I am parenting via technology now…. With Uber and all of these things coming in life is becoming very easy, you know? I did not worry about who is going to pick up my kids. Whether I am in New York or I am in Cape Town, I know that at 7am if my kids want to leave for school I just get onto my gadgets … IT has become very important, you know? I just call Uber and my kids go to school. I "Facetime" with them. I WhatsApp with them, you know? … I am Facetime away or WhatsApp away."

P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA also relied on Uber, a ride-sharing cell phone application, when she could not transport the children, saying:

"(If the eldest son) misses transport and is stranded, I then get called by the school and organise Uber to go and pick him (from school to home)."

There was a downside to relying on technology, as the parent must be connected all the time to receive distress calls. This was not possible as gadgets and cell phones were not allowed at high security sensitive areas and or meetings. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA said:

"*But you know I must be alert of that possibility. And you would know some of the meetings we go to, you are not allowed to bring phones … (thus) you must keep on going out and checking the phone. And we work with older people who are grandparents.*"

Access to IPads was restricted in the early years, and these were a perk only for senior executives in the public service. This had a negative impact on a single mother desperately seeking connection with her young children, as P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons said:

"*Yoh (my daughter) was a toddler, if not an infant. She was small when I went to Paris... She was very young… Because iPads were only given to senior manager or executive management and so we could not even FaceTime each other but I would call and I would talk to them.*"

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons' trip abroad was filled with anxiety, as she longed to see her children, even if it was remotely. Her trusted domestic worker and the father of the child assured her that all was well at home.

All the participants relied on a combination of technology for keeping in contact. This is in addition to conventional transport between home, school and extra-murals and ensuring that children had access to a cell phone. This gave them comfort that their children were safe at school, at extramural activities, and in between everything else and home.

5.3 SHAPING A BETTER FUTURE FOR WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

The single women defined public service as hostile, hard and a macho environment. Also, it offered no mentoring and coaching for single women. But this poor treatment does not deter single women for grooming younger women. This theme was supported by the sub-themes of serving the nation; when the patriotic duty beckons; coaching and mentoring young women; and advocating for aftercare service at work.

5.3.1 Serving the nation: when patriotic duty calls

A lingering question after listening to the experiences of these single women was, "Why did they choose to remain in the public sector?" P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA said:

"What keeps me in the public sector is because I am a server. I want to serve, you know. And I think that drives me. It drives me because I want to see people changing their lives. And I get so happy when I bump into somebody I've met in the past, that I've helped to organise a job whatever or deliver a service (for them) (and) now they are in a better space. So that for me is what I seek. I did not care about money. But I need money to survive."

It seems this conviction drove her against all odds to deliver the best services to those that were most deserving.

P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA embraced her choice as a public servant and seemed to have enjoyed it. She credited her supervisor's support and shaping her behaviour, in making it a better place to work at and also added her hard work, as shared below:

"And I think it's alsogot something to do with me also being meticulous and trying my best."

The participants bemoaned the public service as hostile, cold, victimising and discriminating against them, yet all of them remained committed to it. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip was in her third year as a senior manager in the public service, as was P6/33years/1/NM/Hons. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons rose through the ranks of the public service while the rest occupied various positions in the public service for at least ten years or more. This long duration in the public service demonstrates the participants' commitment to serving the public, despite all the negative experiences they encounter.

5.3.2 Coaching and mentoring younger women

The participants shared their frustration at being expected to jump into their jobs with little training or guidance and without coaching or mentoring. Such challenges require certain

emotional intelligence to deal with. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA demonstrated that these contributed to developing empathy for young working mothers:

"I think that (what) I've found first, that having children and having them relying solely on me has taught me lots of patience ... I'm the type who wants 7:00 meetings…. But kids have taught me to understand that like while I can still afford to go to a 7:00 meeting because I have a helper… Women who earn far lesser and … there's even men by the way who take their kids to school. So I have to at least make sure that my senior management meetings start slightly later to accommodate the rush."

The participants, by virtue of their seniority, assume some influence over their subordinates. This was so except for P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons, P5/36years/2F2/NM /Hons and P6/33years/1/NM/Hons who had no direct subordinates, although they occupied senior management positions. They did not mention any experience in this regard. For the other participants, their experiences inspired them to assist women at the entry or lower levels in the public service. This was expressed by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC /Dip as follows:

"There is not even a programme that arms women who are getting to the workplace for the first time, so that they are empowered. It becomes my duty because the first thing that I tell my interns when they come in, is that you are not here to make tea. You are a graduate if you did a 'Bachelor of Tea' then you will (make) tea but I expect you to see yourself as a person that's at work."

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip said that she passed on the favour received from her boss.

"I think we all have a duty and whether you are young or you are old…. We need to mentor others or coach others its things that we pick up along the way…. I have had the opportunity to be exposed so that I canexpose others."

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons shared her wisdom with younger women employees:

"I say be fearless. Speak up and speak out. And immerse yourself in the processes and procedures because many times you will be challenged by subordinates who want to take advantage because you are younger than them or who believe they can just pull the wool

over your eyes and you must also speak up in meetings. And also claim your space and claim your place and demand to be empowered."

It seems the tough environment made women stronger, and to view themselves as fighters and survivors determined to shape a better environment for the next generation. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA said:

"I say that if she got kids she must have a very strong support structure. So that she does not have to use this, my child this, my child that, excuse often. Also, that if it is possible for her to have a partner so that the responsibilities… especially the parental responsibilities can be shared, split down the middle that would really help. I would also say that in the work environment be open about your situation."

Perhaps these conversations between senior managers and young working mothers started with sharing pearls of wisdom, as P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA said:

"I say that firstly they must breathe … and they must create spaces to think and to reflect … and I would say that they must have conversations with the family especially the husband. There must be some level of sharing of responsibilities in the household…. She must be interested to understand what the strengths of her husband are … and what are her strengths in the household."

There were also more practical approaches in imparting knowledge from one generation to the next, as observed by P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons.

"(Avenues for mentoring) means someone sends you to something bigger than your role. And then they expose you (to new opportunities). And then you also now have to rise to the occasion and you feel you belong there and you do what's right."

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg advised younger women to ensure their well-being and take care of themselves first, so as not to be consumed by taking care of others. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg advised that younger women developed a good support structure to cope with raising children on their own. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA was not specific on how she mentors her staff, except in relation to work assignments. Lastly, P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons encouraged each one

of her employees to identify and contract with a mentor, according to areas of interest for future career development.

There is an irony in the discussion above, as this mentoring of young women is borne of pain that the single women went through. The participants chose to take a high moral route. They could have chosen not to care of how the younger women are treated, or integrated into the public service. This mentoring is probably an extension of their nurturing roles. They had empathy with what the interns were going through. The empathy moved them to hold the hands of younger women.

5.3.3 Advocating for aftercare services for children at work

The participants thought government could do more to mitigate the work-family conflict of women. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip said:

"For me, if for instance there was an aftercare service or something of that nature. I would know that my kids are sorted.... It would also assist in terms of that or even flexi working hours."

This was also shared by P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons, with the former observing as follows:

"So, not taking care of the needs of your employees, actually has got adverse effects on their behaviour as well and their accessibility to be coerced into such things … I mean, I cannot believe that government departments don't have crèches or don't have transport facilities to say 'Okay, if you work here, your child goes to this school in this proximity.' … People spend less time, leaving the office, going to pick up the child, drop them off at home and come back to the office."

P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons shared their experiences of resorting to bringing their children to work. They also mentioned their frustration of leaving children in the car or asking colleagues to look after them while they carried on with work. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons, P7/43years/2F2/NM /MA and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA did not mention this in their interviews, except when the former took the child with her during a particular weekend when the domestic helper

was off duty. This was the same for P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg, perhaps it was a distant memory, as her daughters were older.

In conclusion on this matter, P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg proposed that women in the public service should create platforms to share their experiences and seek solutions for themselves. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip further proposes:

"I am finding that we should have an advocacy wing in the gender desks. We should have a policy, you know, section in the gender desk. Because now we just tick only the boxes only on how many Chief Directors are women? Are we just complying with what (Department of Public Service Administration) is looking for. (There) is not a place that I can go to if I have a problem as a woman, in the workplace."

The issue of reasonable accommodation of single women who are senior managers in the public services remains a challenge, as per the experiences shared above. Figure 5.1 illustrates the findings discussed above. It provides an integrated view of the single women senior managers' lived experiences in the public service.
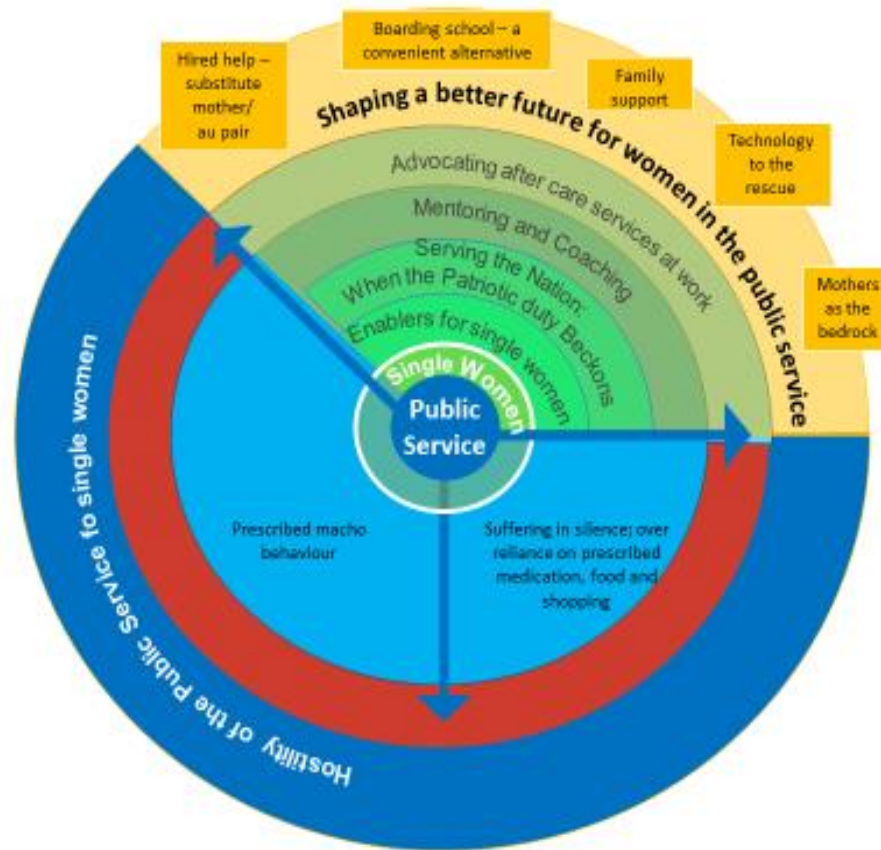
Figure 5.1: Graphical representation: Navigating a hostile public service

5.4 AUDIT TRAIL

It was not at first my intention to write this chapter. I was half way through data analysis when the idea cropped up of splitting the findings into two chapters. It became apparent that there was information that directly described the public service as an environment with which the single women interacted most of the time. There were distinct experiences shared that provoked negative emotions for the participants. Their vulnerability became apparent in how they felt estranged from their families due to travelling, long meetings that were poorly scheduled at times and overall sense of feeling over loaded with responsibilities while lacking in support. This was a road that I once travelled.

The data analysis was a lengthy process too, as it unearthed past negative experiences, particularly relating to power abuse of senior managers experienced by their political heads. This made me confront the underlying issues for me, in my role as a public servant. These experiences were compounded by my inability to proceed with the data analysis for days. The research felt like an albatross and something that to avoid so as not to have emotion-provoking occurrences.

However, ditching the research was also not an option. My experiences were shared with the supervisor in order not just to understand what they signified but also to gain strength and move past the immobilising feelings. It was a slow process to let go of the blockage. However, it happened, by allowing time as an arbiter and by acknowledging past experiences. This was perhaps a healing process for me and also it could have been a contributing factor to the choice of the research topic.

The data analysis was not a symmetrical process. There were pieces of data that emerged at different times in reading the transcripts. This resulted in information being plugged into and or shifted to different sections, including between Chapter 4 and 5. It also resulted in re-phrasing of themes and sub-themes. Different insights or interpretation were added to the initial observations. I became conscious that the more I continued scraping through the data, the more the chapters changed, thus moving the submission date further out.

I also got inquisitive about other information related to the research topic. A case in point was the passing of Dr Zola Skweyiya, the former political principal of Public Service and Administration after the first democratic elections. There was a tribute posted on

Facebook by Dr Lulu Gwagwa, who was among the technocrats during that era. She shared how Dr Skweyiya called her when she had just given birth and her daughter was five days old. This resulted in her flying with her daughter and the little one became a permanent feature in all the meetings, in line with Dr Skweyiya's orders.

This piqued my interest, as Dr Gwagwa's experiences mirrored and also contradicted some of the experiences shared by women, 22 or 23 years later. There was also an earlier statement in the research that government had laid the ground for sound labour relations and pro-women policies. However, the practical implementation thereof presented a different picture.

The dilemma for me was whether to consider this as part of the evidence or not. Dr Gwagwa was married, unlike my participants. However, this was her unprompted and sincere experience of an institution that was the object of investigation. It took few weeks to conclude that Dr Gwagwa could be a well of information about the earliest building blocks of the democratic public service that could be contrasted with how it exist currently, as experienced by single women in particular. The interview with Dr Gwagwa proved worthwhile and was used as part of the literature review in this study.

Social media was another window of opportunity for me. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, for instance, dedicated a very long Facebook post giving a review of the interview. It summarised her feelings and key issues that came out for her. This was apart from feedback given immediately after the interview ended. The post revealed insights on what moved her, and her impressions of the researcher. She felt she had been treated professionally and with respect and professionally, especially by the researcher arriving 15 minutes early for the interview. Little things matter and ought to be observed as researchers enter people's private space in search of new knowledge.

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip and P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons also commented on her Facebook, with the latter describing the interview as a much-needed free counselling session. Perhaps this redefines confidentiality, but I knew and observed it. The participants redefined confidentiality themselves. The posts were both complimentary and filled with gratitude on an opportunity to exhale, while I was grateful to all the single women who shared their stories generously with me.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 5 consisted of findings of how single women experienced the public service. A picture of a hostile environment which was also prone to victimisation based on gender emerged. However, the women used certain coping mechanisms to mitigate the negative effects of a work-family role conflict. Further, the single women proved to be the change they wished to see in the public service. They offered coaching and mentoring to other women, particularly those younger than and junior to them. Figure 4.1 is a graphic presentation of findings discussed in this chapter, while Figure 5.1 integrates all the findings. An audit trail was included, which documented the experiences of the researcher during the synthesis of data, as presented in this chapter. Lastly, the integrated research findings were analysed.

CHAPTER 6: AN INTEGRATED VIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter integrates the findings of this study, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, with the existing literature on the topic. The following sections give an integrated analysis of the research findings which include: an exploration of single women, their socialisation, singlism, choices made in their adult lives such as raising children alone, and relationships with significant others as they navigate intimacy. The chapter integrates findings on single women's experiences of the South African public service, and the challenges they faced as senior managers while raising children on their own. Further, the support mechanisms that the women developed to cope with their various responsibilities and their contribution towards improving working environment for younger women are analysed.

The emerging themes and sub-themes are discussed in detail, compared and contrasted to the existing literature. We consider whether the findings bring forth new evidence, and support or contradict existing knowledge. The themes and sub-themes are summarised in Table 4 overleaf.

Table 4: Integrated overview of findings: Summary of themes and sub-themes.

Main Theme: Singleness as a conscious choice	**Main theme: Defining singleness by independent, ambitious who value freedom**
Sub-themes:	**Sub-themes:**
• Socialisation influence on marital status choice	• The hardships and glories of singleness.
• Family composition and impact on adulthood choices	• Solo parenting prevails
• Presence of influential female role models	• Embracing the body and sexuality: freedom of choice.
• Freedom to be: by choice never married/ divorced	
• Anchored within an African value system	
Main Theme: Hostile public service for single women	**Main theme: Shaping a better future for women in the public service**
Sub-themes:	**Sub-themes:**
• Prescribed macho behaviour	• Serving the nation when the patriotic duty beckons
• Suffering in silence: prescribed medication, food and shopping.	• Coaching and mentoring young women
• **Enablers for single working women**	• Advocating for aftercare services at work
Families lending a hand.	• Embracing body and sexuality: freedom of choice
Mothers as the bedrock in nurturing their daughters career ambitions	
Hired help: the surrogate mothers and au pairs	
Boarding school as a convenient alternative	
Technology to the rescue	

Further, the themes and sub-themes are linked and reviewed in accordance with the research objectives.

6.2 INTEGRATED FINDINGS

The main research objective of the study was to investigate the intersection of gender-based socialisation within an African value system, and the effects of patriarchy, masculinity and femininity on how single women define themselves, as discussed below.

6.2.1 Singleness as a conscious choice

Socialisation plays a critical role in grooming children (Akuma, 2015; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Musetha & Musehane, 2012). The family anchors this responsibility while socialisation is reinforced through institutions such as religion, education and the media (Carter, 2014; Ngulube, 2018; Stead, 2013). Families shape infants' behaviour, and pass on societal values and norms, especially patriarchal ones (Musetha & Musehane, 2012). Young children assimilate gender differentiation from their families which implant early awareness on masculinity and femininity (Helman & Ratele, 2016).

Families instil traits and behaviours that shape children across gender lines (Maqubela, 2016). In addition, socialisation grounds children in the African value system and prepares them for adult choices (Akuma, 2015). The women are affirmed in making adult choices, such as raising children on their own (Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018). The choice of being single for these women follows other generations of African women who fulfilled roles as head of families while their husbands were in urban areas for eleven months a year (Hall & Mokomane, 2018).

The participants are among the increasing number of female-headed families, a phenomenon accelerated through socio-economic factors such as women's access to education and work opportunities (Stats SA, 2020). There is a link derived from the findings between single women's independence and their choosing never to marry, divorcing or delaying getting married (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Stats SA, 2020). P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons secretly planned her move to leave her husband and to rely on her own resources for future survival. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip concluded that she was a provider and was responsible

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for the household and thus did not find value in staying married. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg expressed her great sense of relief after living the "prison", as she referred to her marriage. The never-married participants had admired strong single women as children. Strong female role models made lasting impressions on the participants (Bonthuys, 2018; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014) and showed that it is possible to raise children alone, especially with increasing access in education and work opportunities in the public sector (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Stats SA, 2015).

The single women expressed no regrets at being single. Women are affirmed in making choices about their lives which are also attributed to the rising divorce rate (Marais et al., 2014; Stats SA, 2015), and the choice to remain single. The participants concede that they were lonely at times, but cherished the freedom that comes with their single status. These women defied their socialisation which groomed them to bear hardships and to be peacemakers (Khunou, 2012) while men posture or provoke fights rather than stopping them (Van Der Walt, 2015).

The literature broadly confirmed that singleness is a conscious choice that women make. It is also proven that that socialisation plays a crucial role and is anchored within the family that transmit shared values and norms. Also, affirmed teaching of roles along gender lines as part of entrenching masculinity and femininity. In addition, the presence of strong female role models during socialisation is confirmed in the existing literature, and so is the role of education and career in the choice of being single. The literature consulted in this regard was from disciplines such as sociology, gender studies and anthropology, as these points fell outside the ambit of industrial and organisational psychology. However, borrowing from other social sciences proves the interconnectedness of research involving women, in this case.

6.2.2 Socialisation influence on marital status choice

The findings of this study show that some families instil a sense of gender equality during socialisation through allocating similar chores to boys and girls, especially when women are powerful in the families (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Maqubela, 2016). There is proof that some families raise girls and boys the same, thus disrupting the traditional construction of masculinity and femininity (Helman & Ratele, 2016). This gave participants confidence that they can achieve anything they want in life and made them feel equal to the task of heading a household. What is of essence is a seeming shift

from traditional gender roles to a more collaborative approach to socialisation. The single women alluded to this permeating the family practices in relation to girl and boy children. The study points towards a mixed approach to handling children, and how that affirms girls towards independence in adulthood.

The participants are emancipated, of strong character, hold leadership positions and chose to raise children on their own. They fully assumed responsibility as primary caregivers for their children. This is in conformity with socialisation that promotes the female nurturing role (Brossa, 2017; Carter, 2014; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Musetha & Musehane, 2012; Rarieya et al., 2014). P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip demonstrated that nurturing is a role that girls assume early. She oversaw the household as a teenager while her aunt worked away from home.

Children's names also bear gender identity (Mensah & Rowan, 2019). Traditionally, African names are easily distinguishable along gender lines (Pilcher, 2017). In the Nguni languages girls' names are commonly prefixed with "No", for example. Discussing the participants' actual names may compromise their confidentiality, as most of them have public profiles. It suffices to note that the names of the single women were gender neutral, a socialisation process referred as de-genderisation (Mensah & Rowan, 2019). However, the participants' names co-exist with those such as Mbali (flower), Lerato (love), Mojalefa (heir) and Vusumuzi (uplift the family) (Akuma, 2015; Mensah & Rowan, 2019; Motsa & Mojele, 2019; Pilcher, 2017). Boys are named along lines of their expected adult roles as providers for families or as heir apparent to the family estate, while girls' names have feminine attributes (Akuma, 2015; Motsa & Mojele, 2019; Pilcher, 2017).

Colonilisation and, later, Christianity influenced naming in Africa (Kanu, 2019). The naming of children is rooted in culture, gender, socio-economic context and parents' aspirations (Mensah & Rowan, 2019). The names of the participants in this study exuded positive character attributes. These names augur well for their adult roles as they align with positive affirmations and imply strong character traits for independent adult life choices, such as to be heads of households.

The study showed the influence of western culture in eroding the precolonial socialisation of African girls (Sotewu, 2016). The participants did not undergo any

African coming of age rituals. The female rite of passage occurs sparingly due to the negative influence of colonisation and Christianity on African culture (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2018). There is little or no celebration of traditional coming of age of girls during puberty. These rituals prepared girls for marriage, being mothers and wives (Hoza, 2010; Sotewu, 2016). There was a deliberate effort to show young girls the virtue of marriage through these rituals. The erosion of these rituals open women to possibilities beyond pursuing marriage.

Further, not steering girls towards marriage grants time to pursue education and careers that could have been halted had they got married as young adults, which was the norm in traditional African society. Yet circumcision for boys remains a common practice in African culture (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2018). It can be inferred that the patriarchal system is resistant to outside influence. Alternatively, western and African cultures find a common ground in preserving men's dominance. Secondly, perhaps women's African identity was sacrificed so that men remain unquestionably dominant in the culture. In essence, gender socialisation is polarised, with males entrenched firmly in an African system that affirms their superiority. Females assume certain aspects of the culture outside of what seems is preparation for docile wives and embracing marriage as symbol of success. This finding augments existing knowledge on the impact of female access to education and careers also associated with the absence of girl children's coming of age rites. It adds the new dimension of the resilience of patriarchy throughout colonisation and western civilisation in Africa.

The literature described socialisation's influence on choice of marital status. However, there were instances where single women were brought up in dual families and it was not certain what led to their making different choices from their family of origin. Also, no literature reported that fear of committing is linked to parental marriage. There was confirmation in the study of single women embracing the nurturing role, factors contributing to development of masculinity and femininity, African naming of children along gender lines in the existing literature.

There was no mention in the literature of gender-neutral names having positive connotations, as was the case with the participants. Also, there was no literature to explain the erosion of girls' coming of age rites while male rites continue regardless of the impact of Christianity and western culture. African family composition had an

impact on choices in adulthood, as evident in this study with intergenerational divorce experiences supported in the literature. Further, the impact of migration and urbanisation on African family composition and singleness is well documented in existing literature. Also, literature confirmed reduced family support due to physical distance when single women worked in urban areas. There was also confirmation in the literature of the role played by elder children in support of younger siblings. In addition, the literature confirmed the impact of influential female role models during childhood on adult choices. What was not specifically confirmed was the mothers' role in nurturing daughters' career ambitions. There was no specific mention of the reasons for mothers' support, although this is recorded through generations.

6.2.3 Family composition and impact on adulthood choices

Family structure and composition are among the contributing factors to this phenomenon of an increase in female-headed families. There was also a link to marital status of parents, to how chores were allocated and dominant female role models during childhood, which shaped single women's adult choices. This included how parents related to each other, and the role played by women in households and/or in their communities.

P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons' parents divorced while they were young, and P9/43years/1/NM/ JuniorDeg was raised by a single mother. Female-headed families were what they witnessed through their mothers raising children with the support of grandparents and families. It is assumed that their lived experiences as children convinced them that they can pull off the responsibility of being single mothers (Bonthuys, 2018; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014). These findings concur with a study by Bonthuys (2018) which showed that 48% of African adult women were not married compared to 17% of white adult women. There are historical aspects that led to the disenfranchising of African families during colonisation, migrant labour system and apartheid (Maqubela, 2016). Female heads of households, whether married or single, are common among black families.

It is worth underscoring the interdisciplinary nature of the literature in an industrial and organisational psychology study. Concepts such as socialisation, gender, naming, migration, among others, were sourced from a variety of disciplines like sociology, gender, family, geography, for example. Perhaps some of the qualitative research

essence gives latitude on drawing meaning using available strands of information for analysis.

6.2.4 Presence of influential female role models

Participants attested to the influence of strong female role models during childhood, which shaped their worldview (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Willoughby et al., 2021). Findings in a study by Maqubela (2015) concur that African families structure was compromised by the migrant labour policies and apartheid spatial planning. The high absence of fathers and over-reliance on extended families is a norm in African society (Hall & Mokomane, 2018; Stats SA, 2020). Women such as P3/39years/2F2/NM /Hons, P6/33years/1/NM/Hons, P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA, P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons were raised by their grandparents and or divorced mothers. This is 54% of participants and the remainder also grew up in African-dominated communities with strong black women, and assimilated these attributes during childhood (Carter, 2014; Hall & Mokomane, 2018).

The female role models that participants alluded to were single females who formed part of their childhood. There was no sense of indoctrination pertaining to these role models' lifestyles back then. These single women left a mark on the participants' young minds. It seemed that singleness with associated freedom and independence was inviting. The influence of these female role models confirms that the participants assumed lessons from other African women who emerged resilient in adaptation to adverse socio-cultural conditions (Jefferis & Theron, 2018). These single women were socialised to carry multiple roles, which is an added advantage in other their roles such as senior managers (Muasya, 2016). These capabilities are linked to generations of African women who survived adverse conditions, which include heading the household and nurturing children while partners were in urban areas in South Africa, for example (Budlender & Lund, 2011).

The question is, if singleness and female headed households are a norm in South African black families, then what value does this study contribute to existing knowledge? There is limited research on women and single women experiences in South Africa (Fourie, 2018; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Lahad, 2012; Sharp & Ganong, 2011) with few dedicated on female headed families (Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Stats SA, 2017). Feminist phenomenology paradigm emphasises exploring uniqueness of

experiences and evidence show that research has limited exploring single women experiences (Maqubela, 2016).

This study contributes to the body of knowledge. It gave single women a platform to share their experiences using their languages and voices. Further, it allows the reader to explore singlism, socialisation and the choices that single women have made in their adult lives. Perhaps the insider perspectives shape thinking about what lies underneath the single women's psyche without an infused male outlook. Lastly, an Afrocentric paradigm provides a framework in understanding key language, culture beliefs and interpretation from an African context.

6.2.5 Freedom to be: choice never married or divorced

It seems the current generation of women choose upfront to remain single rather than getting married on paper, or perhaps their income was enough for them to have little appetite for a husband to manage the household with. By choosing to divorce their husbands, or by choosing never to marry, they were perhaps also subconsciously continuing the African tradition of female-headed households. They were also in a sense controlling the narrative on how they define family, entering into legally binding marital relationships and exercising their life choices. This choice to be single could illustrate single women's desire to break out of the marriage mould as previously prescribed by the society and entrenched through socialisation. Perhaps divorce or choosing never to marry fit within the disenfranchised African family composition and exposure participants had as children. P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons, P7/43years/2F2 /NM/MA and P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip were raised by their grandmothers, further confirming the role of the extended family in socialisation.

Participants in the study add insights on how the absence of enforced traditional African socialisation of girl children results in women being confident in living on their own. It could also be assumed that women and men undergo different socialisation regimes, one less rooted in strictly African traditional values. Inevitably, single women exercise the choice of moving away from marriage or committed heterosexual relationships. Therefore, the choice of single marital status is a by-product of how families groomed girl children, which adds new dimension on the evolution of socialisation in an African culture.

Education too equips women to be independent, and thus less tolerant of expectations dictated by culture. Women and men enter adulthood with different scripts of what it means be female and male, and so finding each other as equals within a relationship or union becomes a tussle. Therefore socialisation contributes towards women and male emerging with different expectations towards marriage, family and intimate relationships. The single women gained freedom to choose partners, as arranged or forced marriages and abduction are now seldom practised (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Maluleke, 2012). P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons shared the devastating affect her parents' forced marriage had on her psyche. She confessed fearing commitment and is supported by her mother's disapproval for her daughters to marry. In addition, participants assumed control of their bodies as they did not received virginity testing or enforced abstinence and public celebration of their purity for prospective husbands usually conducted during girls coming of age rituals (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Maluleke, 2012).

There is both subtle and overt support expressed by mothers for their daughters to have freedom to choose whether to marry or not. Inter-generational experiences of intimate relationships, marriage and living out of the marriage institution are passed through to girls and younger women. Participants drew their inspirations from their mothers and there was little mention of father's direct role in shaping their adult choices (Hall, 2018; Pustulka & Sarnowska, 2021).

Women's rate of marriage has substantially declined while that of divorce is high (Stats SA, 2020). Socio-economic factors such as migration, the rise of female-headed females, media and technology advancement, neutralise the family as a centre of socialisation (Akuma, 2015; Ngulube, 2018). The participants lived far from their families and mostly were from outside of Gauteng, except for P2/46years/2F1/D-WC /JuniorDeg and P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons. The afore-mentioned also migrated from the townships to suburbs which are closer to work, thus rendering daily family support impractical. The significance of this migration is that the children miss certain teachings disseminated through oral culture, as kinship weakened due to social and physical distance (Akuma, 2015).

6.2.6 Anchored in an African value system

The single women in this study were Africans, speaking different home languages. Further, the study was done by a female African researcher on single female senior managers and other diversity markers. This is important to highlight as it allows for a window into what informs orientation of single women thoughts and actions. The single women socialisation occurred within an African value system. Asante (2009) advocates that any gender study should be centred on the socio-economic environment of the phenomena. The single women were subjected to a segregated educational system under apartheid.

Colonisation and apartheid oppression has negatively affected women, gender and other narratives that affected how Africans define themselves (Asante, 2009; Maqubela, 2016; Mignolo, 2007). This study contributes to a body of knowledge created by African women. It puts single women as agents, actors and active participants at bringing forth a deeper understanding of knowledge through an African perspective (Asante, 2009; Chawane, 2016; Mkabela, 2005). The participants were treated as equals during the knowledge creation process (Mkabela, 2005), in order to capture the essence of their experiences.

The study gave single women an opportunity to define who they were, outside society labels. Single women expressed scorn at the African culture bigot in letting women fend for themselves in the case of divorce, stripping them off resources, showering them with ugly labels and stereotypes yet seeing them as good for illicit liaisons (Chawane, 2016; Van der Walt, 2015). The African emancipation advocacy movement is criticised for not paying attention to atrocities committed against women, such as genital mutilation, rape and a culture that socialise women as sexually submissive (Chawane, 2016).

The single women seized the opportunity at voicing criticism of an African society and patriarchy that oppress and disregard women and children. Perhaps, the study offered single women a voice that bare issues from their perspective, advocacy through Afrocentrism failed in addressing these. Single women in this study assumed a role as agents and actors in knowledge creation (Asante, 2009; Bangura, 2012). Afrocentricity puts Africans across gender in charge of changing their world from their own lens and worldview (Bangura, 2012). Yet Afrocentrism falls short of addressing embedded

discrimination, suppression and abuse of women (Asante, 2009; Bangura, 2012; Chawane, 2016). The men, for example, also failed to honour their parental obligations and in collusion with their families which sided with their sons rather than holding them liable. Afrocentrism is absent on confronting the men that fail to honour their financial and full participation in raising their children.

The increase in the number of single women and female headed families in South Africa (Stats SA, 2011) seems to rattle the patriarchal status quo. Perhaps, this give rise to why single women receive backslash and are considered cultural change agents, assertive and defiant of the domineering system (Livingston et al., 2012; Opie & Phillips, 2015). Frenkel (2008) added that this a patriarchal bullying tactic aimed at enforcing women subservience compliance using culture. The backlash is earned simply for being single.

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P11/39years/1/D-WC /Hons enforced their ex partners in financial support and joint parenting, although this was true for their younger children with P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons and P10/47years /2F2/NM/MA. The latter's experience in child co-parenting did not last long, as he died while the child was a toddler. This is perhaps another form of oppression against single women for daring scorning patriarchy in walking away from their marriages or bearing children out of wedlock: they thus becoming change agents (Livingston et al., 2012).

Further, the single women experienced male domination and oppression at work. Steffens et al. (2019) argue that this is a symptom of unequal gender proportional representation which view women as tokens thus single women experienced the public service as hostile. It is mostly at leadership levels that this underrepresentation is glaring (Vial, 2018) and this is real in the South African public service. The Department of Public Service and Administration reported in Parliament that there were 9976 positions at SMS level and women occupied 40.6 of those (PMG, 2016). This results in single women facing similar challenges of perpetuating family and societal gender hierarchies and non-recognition of their nurturing role, thus causing work-family conflict (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

Therefore, this study observes that the single women are at odds with male domination in their families, society and at their workplaces. They defy patriarchal stereotypical

gender definition and their roles in family, society and assume attributes that were traditionally a male preserve. The world of work is no different: they push back frontiers of discrimination while also assuming a role as agents of transformation for their subordinates and younger women. The findings show that single women assume fights against sexual harassment by young women, bullying, delegation of gender stereotyped duties and male privileges. Mayer et al. (2018) ascribe this to women leaders embracing a role as organisational anxiety containers, through extending their nurturing a role learnt during socialisation.

The single women implemented African renaissance inspired programmes that were integral of President Mbeki's term of office. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons operated as middle managers during this era while the rest were at senior management. This was true for all except P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons who worked at the private sector then. It puts single women as agents at redefining South African policies and leading within a developmental state (Gqiza & Ogunnubi, 2019).

It can be concluded that the single women in this study contributed towards giving South African policies and programmes a fresh and new African perspective (Asante, 2009). In addition, single women shared their experiences that provided clarity on how they define themselves; the effect of their socialisation; female role models during their childhood; choosing being single; and relationship with significant others, thus created knowledge embedded in African interests, life experiences, cultures and values at the centre of knowledge creation (Bangura, 2012). Fairfax (2017) and Bent-Goodley et al. (2017) join criticism that Afrocentrism turns a blind eye to discrimination against women. It advocates for the emancipation of Africans yet fails to confront intergenerational oppression of women (Chawane, 2016). The single women in this study confront head on the notion that their stories are not central in the African context. Their stories are shared distinctly and authentically in full appreciation of their language, culture and beliefs system. This study contributes towards a body of knowledge seen through an African prism.

The limited research on specific African culture made it near impossible in confirming issues pertaining to customary marriages, separation, divorce, child welfare and desolation of marriages, except anecdotal evidence and the researcher's personal knowledge. There was no literature on the concept of singleness in Africa, except with

regard to fathers, brothers and husbands anointed as owing women. The literature fell short of supporting existing knowledge that African culture embraces single women with property of their own, children born out of wedlock, family engagements, and unpacking reasons for male abdicating children upbringing.

6.3 SINGLENESS EXPLORED BY INDEPENDENT, AMBITIOUS WOMEN WHO VALUE FREEDOM

The participants were reluctant at first to define their single status outside of their responsibility of raising children on their own. It was after further probing that they added their non-attachment to any intimate relationship and a sense of appreciation for their independence and freedom to their definition of being single (Budgeon, 2016; Hancock, 2017; Lahad, 2012; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Van Der Walt, 2015). Perhaps, it was less of reluctance and more of embracing their nurturing role that is paramount in their language. There is an umbilical cord that seems to attach these mothers to their maternal responsibility. It could be that parenting on their own is hard. It is a responsibility that weighs heavy on their consciousness and thus defines primarily who they are.

There are also the issues of a cultural lag alongside the increasing numbers of unmarried women and female-headed households in a culture that still celebrates heterosexual coupledom (Budgeon, 2016; DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Plank, 2018; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). When single women reveal their marital status, they observe reactions, ready to face any stereotypes directed at them. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip's reaction when asked about her status during the initial phase of the interview illustrates this point. She responded defensively. This attitude could arise from ambiguities in how African culture responds to marriage breakdowns, especially in relation to protection and rights of women and children (Archip, 2014; Motsa & Morojele, 2019). Moshi (2017) argues that girls are deemed to belong to their fathers and husbands, hence remaining single or being divorced upsets the societal arrangement. The question becomes who controls the single women, outside of their fathers and husbands? Further, the intersection of customary that joins two families and western marriage based on civil law also adds to the ambiguities (Yarbrough, 2020). African women perform lobola, related customary rites and a church wedding.

The civil marriage is clear on definition of divorce, while the customary maintains that women remains married, especially where children are concerned. This ambiguity was raised by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, for example, on the significance of lobola, which symbolises sealing of a marriage not only between the parties but their families as well. The comparison is with the Roman Dutch law and consecration of the civil marriage (Yarbrough, 2020). The latter is clear on the rights of the two parties in the event of a separation, the custody of children and the division of joint properties while the former is subject to various interpretations, leaving women and children vulnerable.

P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip was married by customary rites. However, there was no recourse for her in terms of any claim on communal property when she walked away from her husband. She started afresh with her children and has ongoing battles with their father on maintenance and co-parenting matters, like any other single woman. She compared her status to the certainty of civil divorce (Moshi, 2017; Yarbrough, 2020). Moshi (2017) says African culture has not moved beyond women as possessions of their fathers and husbands. Perhaps African culture has not yet accepted women that have earned their rights to property, as in the case of divorce, are entitled to what they gained by their own sweat and blood.

There is further ambiguity in relation to children born out of wedlock. There is an African cultural practice, which bestows thehonour for the woman's family to report a pregnancy out of wedlock to the father-to-be's family. There is a penalty paid in the form of money (in the modern day), which is confirmation of paternity and a contribution towards unforeseen costs of the new-born child. The father-to-be may decide to propose marriage, and lobola negotiations resume, in accordance with some African customary practices. Women are sometimes uneasy about this, as it puts the responsibility squarely on the woman's family to initiate the negotiations, although sometimes the man's family take the initiative. Perhaps the responsibility for keeping pure for marriage and contraception responsibility rests on female shoulders (Bhana & Nkani, 2014).

Mjwara and Maharaj (2018) found that the maternal family care for the child, if the father fails to honour this responsibility. This aligns with socialisation of girls for the nurturing role (Helman & Ratele, 2016; Sotewu, 2016). The embracing of this role gives men the opportunity to deny paternity, often with the backing of their families,

thus most women avoid this for fear of denigration. P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA, for example, approached her former partner's family to no avail. All the other participants, except P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg, approached the maintenance court, with varying results. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg chose to raise the children without any assistance for her ex-husband. This is evidence enough of how the women felt let down by the safety net of patriarchal society, which failed to provide for their children.

Lobola makes provision firstly for the welfare of women. The bride traditionally takes a cow with to her in-laws, which becomes her security for wealth and sustenance. This cow and its future progeny is under her complete control, not her husband's. Further, there are standard practices for dispute resolution between couples, respected by both families. The aim is to assist the young couple to navigate the marital journey (Button et al., 2016). But P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip found that this dispute resolution mechanism was not considered by their families.

However, if separation is the best option then the welfare of the woman and children is well considered. She has the cow that was bestowed on her family to build on. The families jointly look at best the option in securing a home for her and children. Either she remains in the house with the children or she leaves the children with the paternal family. She retains the status of wife, as severing of ties is done under extreme circumstances.

These issues confront single women as they chart their lives after a relationship or a marriage breakdown and find themselves caught between the African culture and the Roman Dutch law, with conflicting interpretation or implementation of the former (Moshi, 2017; Yarbrough, 2020). The participants indicated men who they felt were selective on how culture applied in relation to women and children's rights. We note that culture keeps women compliant to gender stereotypes and coupledom (Budgeon, 2016; DePaulo & Morris, 2005) and does not pay attention to their protection.

The experiences of singleness as independent and ambitious women were confirmed in the literature. What was not confirmed was the reason single women were reluctant at first to describe their singleness, except from a mothering-alone perspective. The increasing number of single women (through never marrying, delaying marriage, or divorce) and female-headed families was confirmed. The matter of a cultural lag in

embracing singleness in totality was reflected in existing literature. This confirmation was also true in relation to ambiguities of customary compared with civil marriage and divorce.

6.3.1 Education and divorce are contributing factors

The participants in the study are educated, all having tertiary qualifications and some having postgraduate degrees. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P6/33years/1/NM/Hons, P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons were pursuing further academic qualifications during data collection. South African policies and legislation have accelerated access to education for girls in the democratic era (Afolabi, 2019; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2020). The increased levels of education give women self-confidence and improved well-being (Afolabi, 2019; Opie & Phillips, 2015). Further, single women lived independent lives, not reliant on anyone for material support (Afolabi, 2019).

Single women have traits such as independence, self-sufficiency and confidence, characteristics traditionally associated with men (Budgeon, 2016). These attributes may have contributed to the decrease in the number of registered marriages, and the rise of female-headed families to 37.9% (Hall & Mokomane, 2018; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Nwosu & Ndinda, 2018; Rogan, 2016; Stats SA, 2020; Willoughby et al., 2021). The statistics also show increased number of never married women (Rogan, 2016; Willoughby et al., 2021). The participants conformed to the above trends. Single women who had never married formed 55% of the study population, while 45% were divorced.

Widowed and divorced women were the second highest employed group in 2001 and 2014 at 88% and 85% respectively (Stats SA, 2018). The findings show that single women calculated their moves while planning their separation and appear heavily reliant on security based on their jobs, resources, family and supportive networks. The single women used words such as "freedom", fled from a "military camp", "financial freedom" and "cherished carving their own lives". However, findings show that there was ambivalence in committing to relationships after strenuous episodes such as divorce (Plank, 2018). Research shows that middle class women enjoy being single, as they possess resources for their lifestyles and date at their will (Jones, 2011; Leslie & Morgan, 2011; Van Der Walt, 2015).

It can be deduced that women in South Africa progressed from discrimination imposed through job reservation, segregation based on gender and being treated as second class citizen by men into a self-determination era. Further, Stats SA (2015; 2020) directly links this emancipation to increased access to education, careers and economic participation. In turn, women's empowerment contributed to reconfiguration of the family, and in participants' case represents single women living way above poverty and social grants. This study contributes towards reflecting single women as independent, ambitious and driven, among others.

6.3.2 The hardships and glories of singleness explored

Single women use words such as "hard", "difficulty" and "lonely" in describing their lives juggling parenthood and careerwith other roles. The responsibility of assuming roles as head of families, providers and working fulltime while still being responsible for household chores was experienced as heavy by single women (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Gehrke & Hassard, 2015; Ncube, 2018). P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA used the word "hard" nine times, while P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons described singlehood as "challenging". Society punishes single women for defying basic tenets of femininity (Carter, 2014; Helman & Ratele, 2016). P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared "returned soldier", which is a derogatory term for divorced women, while never-married women are called names such as "nondindwa", loosely translated as a single woman who has long been sleeping around with all kinds of men. Their single status contradicts an entrenched view that every woman aspires to marriage, and that intimacy through heterosexual partnerships is the only way to a happy and fulfilled life (Budgeon, 2016; Hancock, 2017; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Wilkinson, 2014). Wilkinson (2014) cautions that anything that threatens the entrenched "heterorisation" of society is demonised.

The study confirms that single women are viewed as incomplete and suffering from an identity deficit (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005), as there are no men formally associated with them. Single women are subjected to discrimination referred to as singlism (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017). Single women's lack of formal attachment to any particular men, for example, makes them swim against the tide thus suffer from snide remarks and prejudice from society (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017; Plank, 2018). P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip was eloquent and aggrieved about being called a "returned soldier". The country's vocabulary is brimming with derogatory

names for single women such as spinsters, while men are praised as eligible bachelors (Budgeon, 2016; Plank, 2018). Further names collected through a Facebook post (see Annexure H) make a long yet not exhaustive list as it hardly covered all the eleven official languages.

Annexure H depicts the stigmatisation, slur and scorn that single women endure in their communities. This stigmatising of single women is fuelled by the "heterorisation" of society and putting coupledom on a pedestal (Wilkinson, 2014). However, the literature shows that single women above 35 years of age are content and adjusted to their single status (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Participants in this study were mature and settled, regardless of societal expectations. Further, they demonstrated attributes such as independence, self-sufficiency and confidence, characteristics usually associated with men (Budgeon, 2016).

The single women in this study defied the patriarchy's claim that their core existence is serving men (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017; Plank, 2018). Women are more affirmed in their single status, as their ages ranged from 33 years to 47 years (Morris et al., 2008). Lahad (2012) makes an analogy about the unmatched expectations of mature bridesmaids, as society attaches time to women's marital possibility, according to age. Single women were matured and more settled, regardless of societal expectations. Single women defined their experiences as hard and difficult, because they had to be all-rounders in their nurturing role. It does not help that society view them as in defiance of patriarchy through lack of attachment to a man. Also, society judged, discriminated and threw stereotypes at them. It seems that women develop strong internal drive that is part of their coping skills in tackling their responsibilities. They also gain confidence and independence. These personality traits become stronger with age and maturity.

The study did not reveal that single women wished to change their lifestyles or were buckling under pressure of their responsibilities. Stereotypes and prejudices seem not to define them, but were described as irritants that they deal with. It was clear that being able to afford a comfortable lifestyle for themselves and families mattered most. The hardships were only a part of their lives, and they accepted both good and bad experiences. Hardship adds authenticity to the narration of their lives.

The literature confirmed that singleness has both hardships and glorious moments. Further, the literature described societal discrimination and stereotypes against single women. This study identified derogatory South African names for single women. The exaltation of coupledom and heterosexual bias was confirmed by the literature. The hardship single women experienced included solo parenting was confirmed by the literature. This solo parenting is traceable from girls' nurturing role taught in socialisation. That single women were at peace with their adult choices and embraced freedom was supported. However, single women's current intimate partners embracing parenting was not described in the existing literature. But some participants described how men embraced women with children from previous relationships.

6.3.3 Hard choices: single, raising children and working in the public service

The participants were forthright about attending to their children, and they negotiated work deadlines, including working into the night while the children slept. Research contradicts this as it shows women resorting to hiding to attend to family matters (Ellias, 2018). The experiences shared in this study show participants' resoluteness towards their family welfare while dedicating their energies towards work. It seems the participants accept what each role brings to their overall being.

On the other hand, participants admitted feeling despondent at handling huge responsibilities. However, research shows that single working women have an advantage over their married counterparts in dealing with work-family conflict (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Stats SA, 2015; Suk Ha et al., 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). Firstly, single women rise in their careers without confronting husband or partner envy. This involves a husband feeling threatened if the wife is more educated or occupies a higher position than he does (Kabir et al., 2018). Perhaps single women figuratively kill the chance of any males interfering with their pursuit of career and economic ambitions, and so they divorce, delay or never marry.

Single women have latitude in making choices about their careers, promotion and re-location for better job prospects, while married women may find themselves in conflict on whether to accept or not due to husband's or partner's envy (Suk Ha et al., 2018). Single women present themselves as confident, with a good self-esteem, assertive and affirmed as there are no husbands' disapproval of their career trajectories (Opie & Henn, 2013; Suk Ha et al., 2018). P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg expressed that

her divorce freed her from prison thus she could study and progress in life with ease, in line with the Stats SA (2015) report on women.

The participants were all university graduates, with P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P6/33 years/1/NM/Hons, P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons pursuing postgraduate qualifications. Stats SA (2015) showed that single women as more driven in attaining academic qualifications. Moreover, a study by Koekemoer and Mostert (2010) concluded that single women accepted their roles as household heads, raising children and being responsible for their welfare. Single women developed strength, resilience and sense of independence in carrying these responsibilities (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010; Suk Ha et al., 2018).

Further, Cox (1996) concluded that women in the public service limit their household responsibilities to be more available for work commitments. This results in reduced role conflict and anxiety (Marais et al., 2014; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018; Opie & Henn, 2013; Suk Ha et al., 2018). Single women prioritise their careers and engineer a strong support structure for their other roles (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). Single women use their salaries to attain work-family balance. They buy themselves out of certain family responsibilities and can afford to pay for help that fills in during their absence, for example (Suk Ha et al., 2018).

Further, single women pursue their individual career ambitions, while married women are cautious of how these affect their families and thus tend to hold back (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Suk Ha et al., 2018). The absence of wife duties was also a positive factor in reducing role conflict observed among single women (Davidson, 1997). Single women are comparatively mentally healthier than their married counterparts. Suk Ha et al. (2018) maintain married women emerged with psychological disorders due to heavy responsibilities of work, family and wife duties. The participants concur with the later conclusion, as they experienced working and raising children alone as hard.

However, single women earned executive perks and remuneration, which made them afford their children and overall lifestyles (Baral & Bhargwa, 2011; Lues, 2013; Marais et al., 2014; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). They display personal attributes such as the ability to plan and execute tasks, self-discipline,

control, order, dutifulness, effort, prudence and need for achievement (Marais et al., 2014; Martins & Van der Berg, 2013; Opie & Henn, 2013). Participants demonstrated traits such as diligence, strong will and discipline (Van der Berg & Martins, 2013), which contributed towards better stress management (Martins & Van der Berg, 2013). This study demonstrated that single working-women relied on their internal control as their major source of support mechanism. However, they succumb to stress and fatigue at times.

In the final analysis, the study shows that single women raise children on their own. All the participants were primary caregivers. This is in line with socialisation imposing a nurturing role on girls (Steffens et al., 2019). P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared custody with her ex-husband, which extended to pre-approved visitation and shared decision-making.

The absence of fathers was explained through divorce and intimate relationship breakdowns. Findings explain why society turns a blind eye to the absence of fathers from parenting, except through the South African historical socio-political landscape. Milkie and Denny (2014) maintain that fathers' roles and the benefits of their involvement in child rearing, remains under-investigated. The rise of single women in South Africa and the experiences raised by women in this study reflect how men abdicate their responsibility with no societal consequences.

Critics of African culture point to the erosion of women and children's rights and protection. There was no existing literature describing single women's experiences of discrimination, stereotypes and delinquent fathers. However, the participants stood up as activists for a transformed future for other women, as in the existing literature. This study adds voices from African women's perspectives and lived experience. There is limited existing knowledge based on lived experiences of single women. Therefore this finding adds new insights on how singleness is experienced and embraced.

This generation of single women are left to take care of children, families and work responsibilities with little or no support from the workplace (Ncube, 2018; Plank, 2018). Single women held senior leadership positions in the public service, work long hours and travel domestically and abroad. This solo parenting role left them feeling guilty for not being there for their children at critical times, and sometimes feeling overwhelmed

(N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). Single women demonstrated internal strength to withstand the pressure of their different roles (Suk Ha et al., 2018). They all expressed being at peace with their choices and embraced the freedom that comes with being single.

Ncube (2018) observed that the African women's ability to carry multiple responsibilities prepared them for their role as managers. Research shows that single women fare comparatively well in parenting compared to married women (Ganiyu et al., 2017; McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Suk et al., 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). This study confirms the frequency of female-headed households among black South African families, and the absence of fathers from parenting. Further, it describes the hardship of raising children alone. Single women are not victims of discrimination through an oppressive system, although that forms part of their history. Perhaps the single woman phenomenon is borne out of conducive economic conditions. Participants did not mention restoring African men as parents.

6.3.4 Embracing the body and sexuality: freedom of choice

Single women pursue intimate relationships on their own terms. These women engaged in flings or sexual arrangements meant to satisfy their physical needs, were in command of their resources and upheld specific dating preferences (Jones, 2011; Plank, 2018; Van Der Walt, 2015). This is contrary to sexual passiveness and lack of desire as feminine qualities asserted by patriarchy (Budgeon, 2016; Muise, 2011). Proactively pursuing intimate relationships is a behaviour traditionally associated with masculinity (Illouz, 2007; Khunou, 2012; Plank, 2018). P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip was eloquent and best captured how single women embraced their sexuality and enjoyment thereof.

They chose who to be with and when (Muise, 2011; Plank, 2018; Van Der Walt, 2015). This behaviour on sexuality and intimate relationships closes a loop on how single women live their lives outside prescribed gender roles and norms (Budgeon, 2016). However, single women were in varying degrees of attachment towards committed intimate partnerships. This reluctance about relationships was attributed to their hectic schedule that left no space or caused ambivalence about adding committed intimate relationships on top of their load. In addition, single women were concerned about whether intimate relationships would suit their children (Plank, 2018).

Potential intimate partners were heavily scrutinised (Leslie & Morgan, 2011; McCann & Allen, 2018; Plank, 2018). Plank (2018) and McCann and Allen (2018) maintain that past hurts in intimate relations make single women more cautious in who they date. Intimate relationships were kept secret from their children (Plank, 2018). P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons conceded that they were very cautious and scared about getting into intimate relationships. P2/46years/2F1/D-WC /JuniorDeg was in an intercontinental relationship. The distance allowed an illusion of being in a relationship, yet she controlled her emotional investment into it. Plank (2018) maintains that women broken by traumatic experiences in their previous relationships tend to be cautious, as if safeguarding themselves from further hurt.

The participants in this study were mostly overweight, as I observed them. They blamed travelling. However, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg took her running shoes with her while travelling and woke up at 4 a.m. for morning jogs. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC /Hons used her weekends for playing tennis. They were both within their ideal weight. The weight served as a shield from unwanted sexual advances, due to previous hurts, as noted by Plank (2018). It was also clear that these single women chose partners who best suited their lifestyles, including their role as single mothers. The single women used their resources to dictate terms, similarly to men who traditionally take the upper hand in intimate relationships (Attwood, 2011; Mazibuko & Umejesi, 2015; McRobbie, 2013). Further, single women live independent lives, not being attached to any heterosexual partnership (Budgeon, 2016; Hancock, 2017; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Wilkinson, 2014). Societal pressure to marry is directed more to females than males (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017; Plank, 2018; Wilkinson, 2014).

Single women shunned intimate relationships that compromised their independence, principles and values, and so married men were not an option (Jones, 2011; Plank, 2018; Van Der Walt, 2015). Van Der Walt (2015) points out a patriarchal bigotry in which society denigrates and stigmatises single women while married men, for example, clandestinely approach them for sexual favours (Plank, 2018; Van der Walt, 2015). There are limited studies on single working women (Plank, 2018), especially regarding their sexuality and intimacy. Patriarchal society turns a blind eye to these issues, so as not to disturb the glorification of coupledom, marriage and committed heterosexual intimate relationships (Wilkinson, 2014).

Research shows that society constantly questions women's intimate relationships and sexuality choices thus being single seems like a "problem" (Budgeon, 2016). Female sexual socialisation promotes reactivity towards men's advances and appropriate grooming to attract potential suitors (Budgeon, 2016). Perhaps also single women do not flaunt their intimate relationships, as society puts them under constant surveillance (Budgeon, 2016; Gragnano et al., 2020; Muise, 2011). Single women pursue sexual gratification (Muise, 2011; Van Der Walt, 2015) despite all this. These women defy this script and emerge as demonstrating active sexual desire and taking charge in pursuit of sexual relations (Attwood, 2011; McRobbie, 2013; Plank, 2018). The rising number of never-married and divorced women and female-headed families introduce different dynamics to sexuality and intimacy (Ammar et al., 2014).

It can be concluded that single women's sexuality is a reality society is not ready to confront, hence the lack of research thereon. There was limited research on single women embracing their sexuality. It was also an unexpected theme that entailed reluctance in dating due to pass hurts; societal monitoring of single women; and high scrutiny of potential intimate partners, all of which was supported by the literature. Further, literature supported the use resources in dictating intimate relationships, and shunning relationships that limited single women's freedom.

6.4 HOSTILITY OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE TO SINGLE WOMEN

The research objectives included exploring senior managers' experiences of the public service, as highlighted below.

Mkhize and Msomi (2016) maintain that most studies of women in South Africa concentrate on women in leadership. South Africa is experiencing drastic changes in labour demographics, especially since 1994 (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2015). Legislation and policies such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination (2000), the Employment Equity Act (1998), The Skills Development Act (1998) and the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000), increased access in education and accelerated work opportunities for women (Abe et al., 2017; Jackson & Fransman, 2018; Kahn & Motsoeneng, 2014; Shung-King et al., 2018). Legislation provided access but not a welcoming environment, as the findings revealed that single women experienced the public service as hostile.

Further, women still remain a minority at 40.6% in leadership positions in the public service (Afolabi, 2019; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2015; PMG, 2015). The South African public service is male dominated, especially at higher levels (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Mayer et al., 2018; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018; Vial & Napier, 2018). The public service is depicted as untransformed, with a dominant work culture that is intolerant of family life roles and characterised by long hours (Mayer et al., 2018; Steffens et al., 2019; Vial & Napier, 2018).

In addition, cabinet ministers at the time of data collection were also mostly men, which aggravated male dominance in the public service. The proportion of women in Parliament decreased to 42.7%, even though 51% of registered voters at the May 2019 election were women. However, the cabinet finally achieved 50% gender balance (IEC Elections, 2019) after the time of data collection. The political principals were described as dictatorial, uncaring, unsympathetic to single women's other roles, and demanding work after hours and at weekends. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg shared snide remarks made by a male principal after she excused herself from a meeting because her child was waiting for her. There was no literature to either collaborate or contradict these findings.

The single women experienced receiving cold treatment at work, with their views disregarded by male counterparts (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Mayer et al., 2018). Further, they felt alienated as the environment demanded that they behave and act contrary to their socialisation, such as working in silos and making rapid decisions (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014). Socialisation emphasised teamwork for women (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Onyehuluchukwu, 2014; Sappenfield & Day, 2001). The public service environment and culture therefore allows men to flourish, as they exercise same power at home and work (Kahn & Motsoeneng, 2014; Molotsi, 2016; Naidoo & Khan, 2015; Onyehuluchukwu, 2014).

This finding could be generalised for all women in the public sector, but is confined to single women, as they were the participants in this study. Osituyo (2018) maintains that achievement in numbers in the South African public service brings bitter experiences for women, as any work environment should be conducive for every individual, irrespective of gender. Single women in the study also felt the need to prove themselves, as men are accused of going to extremes in showing women as

incompetent and not worthy of occupying leadership positions (Marais et al., 2014). Molotsi (2016) concluded that women in leadership rise up by emulating male power posturing. But participants in this study emulated femininity in their leadership approach. They showed leniency towards their subordinates, for example setting times for meetings that accommodated family responsibilities. They also coached younger women on personal attributes such as confidence and being vocal. These afore-mentioned reflect their nurturing side.

The public sector, as any other workplace, is a microcosm of the society it is situated in. It therefore reflects the level of appreciation of women receive broadly. It would have been odd if the findings depicted the environment differently. Socialisation crafted a path that produced male dominance in society which was replicated at work. Men felt at ease in demonstrating superiority based on gender as colleagues, peers and political principals. Single women were appointed based on their competence, like men, but find the environment hostile due to prevailing culture. Men, for example, act with prejudice and stereotypes towards single women. These attitudes are brought undiluted to work. Perhaps it would be a fair expectation that the public service plays the role of an equaliser and arbiter between genders. It is fair to expect the rules of engagement to insist on tolerance, acknowledgement and embracing what women bring to the public service. It seems there is more effort in reaching equity targets in the public service than truly levelling the playing fields.

The findings in this study are of single women's experiences. It is imperative to state that the initial research assumption was that single women suffered more in achieving work-family balance. The findings, corroborated by literature, are that work-family balance affect working women regardless of marital status. Single women were less affected, as there is no attachment to a husband or partner, and seem to more easily embrace all their roles than married women. Also, single women are strong, with high intrinsic drive that served them well in managing competing roles.

The literature concurred that public service is a hostile environment for women despite the impressive legislative changes in opening access across gender. Firstly, the public service is male dominated. Women are in minority, especially at senior management levels. The same dominance is experienced at political level. South African cabinet achieved 50% percent gender representation in 2019, after the data collection phase

of this study. Single women experienced public service as dictatorial, uncaring and unsympathetic to women's other roles. Further, participants related receiving cold treatment, feeling alienated and deterred by an environment that promoted working in silos rather than teamwork. They also felt the pressure constantly proving that they are competent to their male counterparts.

6.4.1 Prescribed macho behaviour

Single women struggle with toxic masculine behaviour such as aggression, assuming a harsh attitude and treating women as prey. This was experienced as foreign behaviour by single women, who were disgusted by an expectation that they adopt such behaviour at work. The findings suggest that men ascribe feminine behaviours such as smiling, conciliation and compromising as a sign of weakness. Ellias (2018) and Onyehuluchukwu (2014) observed that women are empathetic listeners, collaborative, operate best in teams, are more organised, build relationships and bring out potential in others. Women bring into leadership positions added advantage such as problem-solving, inclusivity, and participative leadership (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Shung-King et al., 2018).

Further, participants observed that men feel free to play golf or other sport at will, according to P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg. However, participants experienced lack of empathy with family challenges, which seemed only to invite scorn. Men use sport for networking and influencing work decisions (Ngomane, 2017). Women spend less time networking, which is a requisite for career growth and influence (Ellias, 2018). Most of the single women in this study concentrated on their careers, overseeing their households and taking care of family rather than focusing on sport. Those who did play sport ran marathons, swam, or played tennis.

Further, participants bemoaned long meetings called on short notice that were non-productive. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg illustrated her frustrations at a meeting chaired by a male minister while her child waited in the car. Research concurs that male bosses are less tolerant of time off for children and family, and are more likely to make demands outside work time (Marsh, 2015). N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018 maintains that men ascend into political power on the back of female votes, yet fail to bring gender transformation in the public sector.

In addition, participants suffered from poorly scheduled and/or frequent travelling for work purposes between Cape Town and Pretoria (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). This included expectations to work over weekends, with scant regard for family commitments. Their peers, both men and women, expected that they can pack their bags on short notice, as they have no partners to account to (Van der Walt, 2015). P6/33years/1/NM/Hons resorted to switching off her cell phone. This was a way of preventing her boss phoning her over weekends and delegating tasks on short notice that involved travelling.

Participants felt disadvantaged at expectations that they behave outside their core personality and emulate traits foreign to their psychological makeup. Perhaps also alienated from what defines them, areas of strength and fair advantage. Also, single women felt judged unfairly from male viewpoints. There was a sense of anger, betrayal and despondency towards the public service which left single women to fight macho behaviour alone. Perhaps legislation gave a sense of hope in equalising the playing fields, males' macho behaviour was on display with little consequence.

6.4.1.1 Victimisation based on gender

Participants experienced sexual harassment and felt targeted due to their marital status. Further, witnessed and protected younger women from sexual exploitation. However, sexual harassment was engulfed in a veil of silence by women while males protected each other. This was shared as another form of response to male behaviour in the public service (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons was viewed as young and inexperienced at addressing a meeting dominated by male colleagues. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons witnessed males ganging up on a senior female manager, pushing her into an emotional turmoil.

Women who speak up are deemed aggressive, as P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg said, and so they resort to silence during meetings and at work (Ellias, 2018). However, participants in this study displayed assertiveness, being strong in challenging, withstanding and progressing their careers despite such bullying. They stood up against exploitation of younger women and mentored them to prevent such.

Further, single women experienced heavy handedness and mistreatment from political principals. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA was unfairly suspended from work as she failed in

carrying out what she felt were untoward instructions. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons felt victimised and had to drag her child to work over a weekend at the political principal's command, received at 6 a.m. on a Sunday. Existing research confirms male bullying, as men dominate the public service (Osituyo, 2018). There was no literature found on the impact of political principals' bullying, both male and female, on senior managers in the public service.

Single women experiences the public service as lacking a gender-sensitive environment that allows female employees to prosper, despite all enabling legislation and policies (Abe et al., 2016; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). However, single women enjoyed maternity benefits in the public service. They made comparison with the private sector, which lags behind in employing and accommodating women.

The findings confirm singlism at work, where single status makes women vulnerable to exploitation. It might seem that single women being deployed frequently at odd times is an appreciation of their singleness, but is in fact another form of abuse, and it continues until they rise up against it. Further, the findings show this exploitation is practised by both female and male supervisors, including politicians.

The literature confirmed presences of toxic masculinity such as aggression, harshness towards single women, and a prevailing culture attacking women as a group. Feminine personality attributes are treated as weak, leading to a lack of leadership diversity. Further, it confirmed that single women felt excluded from informal influential networking sessions that men used in the public service. The predominance of macho power is assimilated by some women, as an environment adaptation and power emulation strategy.

6.4.1.2 Undefined working hours and travelling

Single women experienced strain at working between Cape Town, Pretoria and across South Africa, as this take them away from their families and homes. P1/40years/2F1 /D-AC/Dip travelled a lot abroad while P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons mentioned once leaving her toddler and new-born baby at home, with limited means to communicate. P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA was a constant traveller in her previous jobs, but not in the current one. Distance from home while attending to work is felt most during family

emergencies (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). It would take two hours of flight time from Cape Town to Johannesburg, for example, for single women to reach their children, hence they rely on a strong support system. However, single women do not fully delegate their nurturing and guardian responsibility, and would urgently leave any work task to attend to a child-related emergency.

The existing research depicts the public service in South Africa as male dominated, unaccommodating of women's family roles, with long working hours and extended absence from home (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018; Shung-King et al., 2018; Suk Ha et al., 2018;). Further, the public sector offers no flexi-time (Oosthuizen & Mostert, 2010). Participants enjoyed flexi-time at the discretion of the immediate supervisor, which depends on the existence of a positive relationship. Separation from family caused bouts of loneliness and guilt for being away (Swartz & Potgieter, 2020). Participants demonstrated hard work and honouring urgent tasks, albeit within certain boundaries.

However, the findings suggest a relationship based on mistrust with their employer and supervisors. Single women constantly have to prove themselves, while also honouring their responsibility towards family. The public service could achieve more results by according single women, and women in general, more credit as professionals with integrity. The Covid-19 pandemic showed that public servants can work from home without skiving.

The literature confirmed that single women suffer from poorly scheduled work assignments and are targeted for weekend assignments at short notice. They are also unfairly suspended and victimised by political principals. There was no literature that confirmed abuse of power by political principals. In general, literature concurred that the public service lacked a gender-sensitive environment that allows women to prosper. That the supervisors' support or lack thereof had an impact on how women coped in the workplace is also proved. This support mitigates the stress of undefined working hours, poorly scheduled absence from family and travelling on work assignments. Participants experienced raising children and working in the public sector as hard. Research shows that single women prioritise work and reduce their

household responsibilities. Further, they do not experience husband or partner envy and consult no one over key decisions, which is an advantage over married women.

That single women are compared favourably on job satisfaction to men was confirmed. The embrace of personal traits such as confidence, high self-esteem, assertiveness and affirmation by single women augur well for their career paths. The impact of socioeconomic improvement link with increased female-headed families was confirmed. Single women's acceptance of their roles' contribution to work-family balance was confirmed. That they developed strength, resilience and sense of independence in carrying these responsibilities was confirmed.

6.4.2 Suffering in silence: prescribed medication, food and shopping

Single women protected each other from sexual and other exploitation at work, as narrated by P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip. Mayer et al. (2018) say that women leaders in a male-dominated environment act as anxiety containers. They go on to say that an organisation defends its employees against tyrants who abuse their power and authority through managing group anxiety. Participants described serving as guardians of younger women. P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg shared how men gave her suggestive looks and tried their luck with her. However, she spoke more from a point of victory than from a position of victimhood. Kiplinger et al. (2019) concluded that sexual harassment links with women who display negative self-views, such as lower self-esteem and doubt. Some younger women are still in doubt on when and how to stand up for themselves, and mature confident ones show them how to do so.

Single women felt bruised in a male-dominated environment, abused by political principals, unappreciated and exposed to sexual harassment with little or no recourse (Foley et al., 2020). Further, single women were subjected to trumped up disciplinary hearings, were pushed to work during weekends and after hours, travelled across South Africa and the world, and felt alone when in hotels or at home (Aldossari & Chaudry, 2020; Swartz & Potgieter, 2017). There was no one to check on their welfare as they go through life's storms, such as divorces or depression. Swartz and Potgieter (2017) propose that the South African public service consider stress management programmes to address the lack of support for women. Nevertheless, the single women put up a fight against male dominance at work, pushing for transformative

power dynamism that is not entrenched in patriarchy and does not reflect typical feminine stereotypes (Mayer et al., 2018).

Single women reacted to treatment that undermines women. P11/39years/1/D-WC /Hons shared how a group of males in a meeting made her feel small, as a young woman. This negative work environment took its toll on single women, who kept working hard regardless and who suffered in silence (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018).

Single women found little support at work through employee assistance programmes (EAP). P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg said that civil servants, especially women, over-relied on a particular prescription drug (name withheld) and other prescription depression medication. This included opting for voluntary admission at a particular psychiatric hospital. P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA admitted themselves to hospital once they felt overcome with mental fatigue. There was an annual hospital admission for P1/40years/2F1/D-AC /Dip to manage her depression and burnout. The medical aid that is subsidised by the public service paid for these hospitalisation. Single women recognise that they are not martyrs, and they use available resource to recoup their mental and physical from fatigue.

The study proves that single women crack under pressure, and in this instance found comfort at hospitals rather than support from their workplace or communities. P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip said that someone should have warned her that the superwoman ideal is a myth. Further, single women also longed for a partner to share with and comfort them as the load got heavy. Murthy (2020) maintains that loneliness is a taboo topic associated with perceptions of low self-esteem and self-worth. Single women added shopping as another instant therapy from the crazy demands of work and family. Food binging came out also as another coping mechanism which perhaps contributed to most of the participants being overweight, except for P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons, P9/43years/1/NM/JuniorDeg and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA. The former two played tennis and ran ultra-marathons, respectively. Overweight could result from poor diet, over indulgence and lack of exercise due to lifestyle imbalance (Oosthuizen & Mostert, 2010).

This finding also paints the public service as an uncaring and hostile environment. This is despite some supervisors giving support such as to P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA, while P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA experienced the worst abuse but also a caring relationship with her current supervisor. The lack of support by supervisors presents hardship for women, and a constraining work environment (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010). Supportive supervisors contribute positively to work-to-family enrichment (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010; Marais et al., 2014; Muasya, 2016; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). Research showed a positive association between caring supervision and job satisfaction, including life satisfaction (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014).

A study by Khan and Motsoeneng (2014) concluded that 55% of participants experienced their line managers in the public service as not having their best interests at heart. Single women painted the public service as hostile and abusive, yet remained in it and rose through its ranks. They remain committed to serve the public, through thick and thin.

Single women in the public service felt vulnerable, abused, unappreciated, and exposed to sexual harassment. Loneliness, lack of flexi-time, and guilt about leaving family were noted. These take a toll on women, as confirmed by existing literature. That the lack of institutionalised Employee Awareness Programmes exacerbates the toll on women is confirmed. However, the coping strategies of over-reliance on prescribed medicine and regular self-admission admission to psychiatric hospitals was not confirmed. There was no literature showing that single women suffered in silence thus resorted to drugs, food and shopping. However, the fact of loneliness, and that it is treated as taboo, was confirmed in the existing literature.

Further, literature confirmed that women served as anxiety containers in the workplace. Workplace sexual harassment is disregarded, the literature confirmed. There were proven linkages between men's position of power in relation to harassed women. Lastly, food binging as a coping mechanism and unhealthy lifestyles were confirmed.

6.4.3 Enablers for single working women

This section discusses enablers, as shared by the single women in this study. The findings do not preclude application of these support mechanism to working women in general. This study also examined how single women coped with multiple roles, as senior managers and heading families on their own. The findings showed that single women develop a strong support structure, thus enable them to enjoy social life while also progressing in their careers (Lues et al., 2013; Suk Ha, et al., 2018). However, these support mechanisms required clear prioritisation of duties; establishing mutual beneficial relationships with family and colleagues; maximising flexible work arrangements; and engaging in physical exercise, meditation and religious practices (Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018).

The findings showed that being conscientious (able to plan, organise and execute tasks) was heavily reliant on personality attributes such as self-discipline, control, order, dutifulness, effort, prudence and need for achievement, as entrenched in these single women (Marais et al., 2014; Opie & Henn, 2013; Van der Berg & Martins, 2013). Single women possess attributes such as diligence, strong will and discipline (Van der Berg & Martins, 2013) which contribute to decrease of stress. Lastly, participants in this study demonstrated that they possess emotional stability, i.e. low neuroticism, and suffer less from work-family conflict. These show the critical role of personality and its effect on work-family balance (Opie & Henn, 2013).

Single women encountered a hostile public service while raising children alone. They were working away from their immediate families and communities where they were raised. They were on their own due to migration to Gauteng to work, and thus outside of a large circle of communal support. The migration from the traditional home setup, from parents and from extended families is a move from traditional African values to a more cosmopolitan outlook. Single women devised means of cushioning their roles, alleviating pressure and trusting through delegating their nurturing role. It is at a cost that is paid for through the public service salary. Perhaps single women stay in their careers in the public service because it offers security, a good lifestyle and means of taking care of their households.

Single women limited their household responsibilities to be available for work commitments; they prioritised their careers and engineered strong support

mechanisms. The use of executive perks and remuneration earned in the public service to afford children and overall lifestyles was confirmed. So was personal attributes to plan and execute tasks, self-discipline, control, order, dutifulness, prudence and need for achievement, which contributed tow better stress management, plus internal control.

6.4.3.1 Families lending a hand

The lack of immediate family support exacerbated their stress (Muasya, 2016). Distance between single women and their families is due to migration from rural to urban areas that is prevalent in the Southern African region (Muasya, 2016), as the highest female employment was 63% in Gauteng (Stats SA, 2015) where the study was conducted.

P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg and P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons were originally from Gauteng, although they also lived far from their parents, who thus were of little help with looking after their grandchildren. Immediate families were not available for these single women, save for P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip, P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA, who at times imported their family members for support. This left single women on their own devices, with little support from the fathers of their children and the workplace (Steffens et al., 2019).

Family members came in from time to time, as in the case of P8/37years/2F2/D-WC/Dip and P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA. Alternatively, single women sent children during school holidays to spend time with their grandparents or aunts. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons, P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons children were living with their grandmothers during the time of conducting research, due mainly to their hectic travelling and work schedules. (Akuma, 2015; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018; Poggenpoel et al., 2016).

P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons sent her daughter to live with her grandmother after divorce, while P6/33years/1/NM/Hons' mother offered to take care of the child, immediately after birth. This caused lots of pain and guilt for P6/33years/1/NM/Hons. When the child was about to start school, she demanded to live with her mother. P6/33years/1/NM/Hons felt it would be difficult for her ageing mother to take care of a school-going child. However, she was apprehensive about breaking the grandmother

and granddaughter bond that had been cemented. She suffered internal turmoil at having a hand in loosening the ties. Grandparents enjoy bonds with their grandchildren as it delays onset of their empty nest syndrome (Gordon, 2016; Leinaweaver, 2014).

Families were physically removed from participants but were key in helping with children and managing the households. It seems that the physical separation did not dilute the emotional connection between daughters and family members. The intergeneration nurturing role of extended families continues with participants' children. The role played by mothers, grandparents and aunts was acknowledged, but little was said about male figures. Support was multifold, as it was both to participants as mothers and cemented bonds with the younger generation. The description of family offering support included older siblings, aunts and uncles. P4/42years/3F2/D-WC/Hons' eldest son was much older than his younger brothers and looked after them when their mother was not around. There is a positive influence in development of empathy for older siblings taking care of younger one and vice versa (Jabon et al., 2018; Wikle et al., 2018). The literature confirmed the prevalence of this phenomenon not only in female-headed households but across all types of families, income levels and racial groups (Wikle et al., 2018).

6.4.3.2 Mothers nurturing their daughters' career ambitions

The study shows that mothers of single women stepped in to care for grandchildren while their daughters concentrated on their careers. This ranged from relief during weekends and school holidays, to caring for grandchildren fulltime. A study by Mkhize and Msomi (2016) showed similar findings. The single women resided in Gauteng away from their places of origins due migration and urbanisation (Akuma, 2015; Hall & Mokomane, 2018). This is with the exception of P2/46years/2F1/D-WC/JuniorDeg and P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons who lived an hour away from their parents. Single women are left to raise children on their own in cities without extended family support (Akuma, 2015; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018).

The physical distance between single women's houses and their home of origin limits the traditional role played by grandparents (Poggenpoel et al., 2017). This separation from family puts a role strain on women as they build their careers (Akuma, 2015; Poggenpoel et al., 2017). However, the study shows that mothers' commitment in supporting their daughters defies geographical distance, and they reached out

regardless. Mothers supporting their daughters was reciprocated from one generation to the next in the case of P6/33years/1/NM/Hons and P11/39years/1/D-WC/Hons. They were raised by their grandparents while their mothers pursued their careers after divorce. The afore-mentioned mothers did same for their own daughters. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons' mother lived with her grandchildren while she pursued her career and independence.

The extended family, in particularly grandparents, who step in and raise grandchildren is common across the globe, and especially with Africans in South Africa (Choi et al., 2016; Dolbin-MacNab & Yancura, 2017). The literature showed family support and does not concentrate on what motivates mothers support to single women (Abd Hamid & Salleh, 2013; Baral & Bhargava, 2011; Zhang et al., 2018). There are concerns on the negative impact that this arrangement has on ageing grandparents (Choi et al., 2016; Hayslip et al., 2019; Sampson & Hertlein, 2015).

Supporting single women becomes heavy due to lack of psycho-social networks for ageing parents entrusted with nurturing young children (Dolbin-MacNab & Yancura, 2017; Hayslip et al., 2019). But grandparents also find joy in taking care of grandchildren, as this delay their empty nest syndrome (Gordon, 2017; Leinaweaver, 2014). Additionally, this intergenerational arrangement gives grandparents an opportunity of passing down cultural knowledge, values and language (Lewis et al., 2018). Perhaps the last part augurs well for single women, as these were the same hands that nurtured them. The grandparents' taking care of their grandchildren is an African traditional practice. This responsibility moves from one generation to the next. This is done mostly for eldest children, when parents are assumed to be novices, or to allow young parents latitude to work and settle in their careers. Children born of single parents are embraced as belonging to the grandparents and raised as such traditionally.

6.4.3.3 Hired help and au pairs

Domestic helpers came in as foster parents, tutors and au pairs. Single working women opted for hired help in closing the nurturing role gaps created by their absence due to work commitments. The domestic helpers assumed surrogate mother role, especially while children were still young. P5/36years/2F2/NM/Hons and P6/33years/1/NM/Hons sent their children to live with their mothers. Single women still

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engaged in domestic chores and child care responsibilities whenever possible, and/or as demanded by their children (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Oosthuizen, 2010).

Expense was not an issue for these single women who bought these services with ease in exchange for buying themselves out of childcare (Groves & Lui, 2012). There is evidence correlating working mothers' job satisfaction and comfort with child care arrangements (Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2015). Further, research supports the notion that women achieve a semblance of work-family balance when they manage their personal lives and are in control of their work responsibilities (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011). However, single women experience anxiety if children experience crises while they are away at work (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2010). The presence of domestic helpers and au pairs mitigates such anxieties, as this arrangement offers comfort that all is under control at the home front (Oosthuizen & Mostert, 2010).

Moreover, the absence of hired help was experienced as hard, as P10/47years/2F2/NM/MA said. The single women appreciated domestic helpers for easing the burden and bonds created with their children (Abd Hamid & Salleh, 2013; Ajayi et al., 2020). The single women nurtured the relationship with the hired helpers, adding to compensation with gifts apart from just paying them salaries, as Ajayi et al. (2020) also observed. Single women attracted females as hired help. This is also additional proof that nurturing is designated strictly for women. The single women received reprieve from competing family roles, invest resources from work and in turn create tertiary employment for other women. Domestic helpers in turn earned salaries that feed and educate their children. Perhaps women lift up other women as they climb their career ladders. The findings suggest an unconscious bond between single women and domestic helpers who support each other through nurturing challenges. This bond extends to most working women as well. The existing literature highlights the inequalities and power relations between domestic helpers and their employers (Danielsen, 2021; Murray & Durrheim, 2021).

6.4.3.4 Boarding school as a convenient alternative

Fifty-four percent of participants had sent their children to boarding school due to limited family support. There was literature on the impact of boarding school on children and their academic performance. There is a long history of upper class

families sending children to boarding school (Behaghel et al., 2017). This is convenient for parents, as it offers a safe space and it also grounds children in discipline. Children receive high quality education and longer study time (Behaghel et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2014). There was no research on parents' decision to opt for boarding school. The existing research found both advantages and disadvantages for children at boarding school (Behaghel et al., 2017; Martin et al., 2014). It is a choice that also filled mothers with guilt, as it impacted negatively on their relationship with their children.

6.4.3.5 Technology to the rescue

Single women relied on technology to keep in touch with their children and household activities while away at work and or travelling. These were technologies and applications such as smart phones, computers, Uber, Mr Delivery, etc. Single working women appreciated immediate access to their family and children through cell phone, email and internet (Alessondra, 2013; Romero-Ruiz et al., 2017). The working women tracked their children through cell phones and telephones on arriving at school on time, catching transport home or extra-murals, proceeding with homework and other activities, which immensely contained anxiety (Tengimfene, 2009). Further, mothers keep in touch with their children using text messages, email, social networking sites and Skype (Rudi et al., 2015).

Technology closes geographic distance by ensuring on-time exchange of information, facilitate distant communication, exchange of photos and video calls (Huisman et al., 2012). Romero-Ruiz et al. (2017) list several advantages of technology, such as access to information for school projects and homework and being updated on family matters. In addition, working women consider technology as a trusted babysitter (Villegas, 2013). Single women used technology applications such as Facetime and video calls to monitor if children were at home and safe. Further, they used such applications in assisting with homework.

The use of technology was in addition to other support mechanism such as families, boarding school, domestic helpers and au pairs. It was not a stand-alone, as it works best with other supportive mechanisms in place. It is a useful human monitoring tool. However, it gave most solace to single women as it connected them directly with their children, households and caregivers. It makes them more settled emotionally, by live engagement with their children.

6.4.4 Literature overview on enablers for single women

Single women proving resilient in their commitment to serve the public, despite the hostile environment of the public service was alluded to in the literature but not directly confirmed. It did not help that single women continued being associated with poor perceptions of public servants as lazy and lacking resources and in return offered poor employee wellbeing, especially for senior management. That single women remain highly committed and loyal to the public service was also confirmed. There is a proven link between single women being well paid and improved performance. That single women tapped into support systems such as family, hired help, tutors, au pairs, use of technology and boarding schools was confirmed.

6.5 SHAPING A BETTER FUTURE FOR WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

The hostile environment did not dissuade single women from their commitment to the public service. On the contrary, single women devised means to accommodate and mentor young women in their teams and other younger subordinates (Ncube, 2018). P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA avoids 7 a.m. meetings, while P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip directs interns towards hard core skills rather than serving beverages, for example. It is evident that the single women endured hardship at work yet also ploughed back through affirming the younger generation. However, the challenges left emotional scars in single women that required attention in one way or other.

This study is confined to single women, but it is safe to conclude that women in general are affected. The South African public service is failing to create a gender-sensitive environment that allows female employees to prosper, despite putting in place all enabling legislation and policies (Baral & Bhargwa, 2011; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). This was contrary to N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018, who shared how the late Minister Zola Skweyiya ensured reasonable accommodation of her child. This gave an impression that there was a desire to support women in their childcare responsibilities. Parliament ran a childcare facility for its members and staff during the early years of democracy, but it was later shut down, leaving women parliamentarians and staff to their own devices. Single women expressed also a lack of training, mentoring and support to assist with their development and ability to cope with work demands

(Ncube, 2018; Stats SA, 2015). Participants felt thrown in at the deep end and left to sink or swim. There was lack of psychosocial support.

The participants viewed working as an opportunity for career growth and to acquire resources, but they still remain largely responsible for household chores like cooking and cleaning (Gehrke & Hassard, 2015;Marais et al., 2014; Ncube, 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014), as instilled through socialisation (Ncube, 2018). The domestic helpers and au pairs carried out these tasks, and were paid from participants' relatively high salaries. The public service that is the source of their income, is equally their greatest challenge as it remains male dominated with a prevailing culture that favours men, according to the findings.

Single women feel resentful, guilty and frustrated (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014) at abandoning their children or families. They closed the gap between work and home through dragging their children with, where feasible. N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018 appreciated that the late Minister Zola Skweyiya recruited her to a commission in the early 1990s knowing very well that she had just given birth. The difference between what N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018 accounted about her reasonable accommodation of her child is that the single women in the study defied the odds, as they were currently neither child facilities nor expectations that they would be introduced in the workplace. P3/39years/2F2/NM/Hons expressed with pride that she took her child with to work, and encouraged her subordinates to do the same, while challenging her bosses for alternative solutions to the problem.

6.5.1 Serving the nation: when patriotic duty calls

Participants demonstrated commitment to serve at the public service despite the hostile environment, swimming against the stream due to male dominance and with heavy responsibilities from their other roles. Public services worldwide are associated with low work commitment, late coming, leaving work early, absence without permission and bribery as prevalent in Africa (Mafini & Pooe, 2013; Marais et al., 2014; Ojedokon et al., 2015). The South African media and public depict the public service as offering poor service and treating citizens with a bad attitude (Luddy, 2005; Mafini & Pooe, 2013; Marais et al., 2014). This work environment is also characterised by political instability and red tape, thus denying the poor their human rights to housing,

healthcare, etc. (Mafini & Pooe, 2013), with possible negative effect on public servants. The resources in the public sector and conditions are incomparable to the private sector, and thus could be blamed for poor motivation and lack of job satisfaction (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014; Marais et al., 2014). Mafini and Pooe (2013) further depict the public service as paralysed by internal wrangles, financial mismanagement, corruption and lack of proper governance.

This environment does not augur well for its employees' wellbeing, reputation and integrity, especially for senior management. However, the determination to serve was evident among the participants and declared outright by P7/43years/2F2/NM/MA. Single women spent hours in offices, away from home, and sacrificed their weekends when duty called without hesitation. This illustrated high work commitment and loyalty to the public service and not eying the private sector, as an alternative, as Ojedokon et al. (2015) concluded. It was evident in many illustrations how participants valued their jobs and contribution towards the welfare of others.

This is despite studies showing that the private sector pays higher salaries than the public service (Ojedokon et al., 2015). There was also a positive correlation found between increased remuneration and job satisfaction, which translated into improved quality of work (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014; Marais et al., 2014). Perhaps this explains the high motivation levels observed from single women who occupied leadership positions within the public service. Marais et al. (2014) concluded that the skills gained from work are used to improve performance in other roles, such as family. This transference of skills is referred to as work-family enrichment, also observed in other roles such as sports engagement (Kendelen & Carmiré, 2020).

In conclusion, the public service attracts a certain calibre of employees, based on the findings discussed thus far. Committed single women such as these raise the flag and serve the nation, transforming the public sector and holding the highest of work ethics.

6.5.2 Coaching and mentoring young women

Participants experienced lack of training, coaching and mentoring. They felt they were expected to sink or swim. The lack of mentoring and coaching is common for women in a male-dominated environment (Ngomane, 2017). Participants described how they took younger women under their wing for coaching and mentoring. These included on

hard and soft skills such as assertiveness, negotiating themselves through bullying and sexual harassment, being fearless and voicing their opinions at meetings. Coaching and mentoring are essential in addressing gender imbalances and preparing the next layer of leadership to climb through the ranks more easily (Ngomane, 2017).

Participants who had supportive supervisors saw this as returning a favour to the next generation. Further, they used their leadership positions to empower others. This is contrary to the "queen bee syndrome" (Staines et al., 1974). A study by Johnson and Marthur-Helm (2011) confirmed the prevalence of such female senior managers behaving badly and eliminating other women as threats. Women in leadership cherish their rise through rough work terrains, and thus expected younger women to feel similar pain (Ncube, 2018). However, findings suggest that single women saw others not as adversaries and embraced sisterhood and solidarity (Ngomane, 2017). This emanates from African society's emphasis on communalism, and also shared struggles against patriarchal subjugation (Byrne, 2020; Cherekar, 2020).

6.5.3 Advocating for aftercare service at work

Participants shared stories of waking up their children early, dropping them off and bringing them to work after school, or when domestic helpers were absent. Public service offers no childcare facilities. Parliament established and ran a childcare facility during the early years of democracy, but no longer does so. As mentioned, the late Minister Zola Skweyiya afforded reasonable accommodation for Dr Gwagwa's daughter, ensuring she travelled and continue breastfeeding during commission activities (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). Working women send their children to day-care and after care centres (Ajala, 2017; Reddy, 2015). These are situated far from work thus working women form syndicates taking turns fetching them (Akinnusi et al., 2018). Childcare facilities matter, as closeness to working women serves them best (ILO, 2012). Ninety percent of research respondents wished that employers provided aftercare facilities (Akinnusi et al., 2018). The issue of aftercare shows how little the public cared for women's nurturing role. It came through as rallying point across all ages and levels across the public service, yet there was no movement towards addressing it. The researcher could not assess the extent to which it was being motivated for.

6.6 INTEGRATED GRAPHICAL FINDINGS REPRESENTATION

Figure 6.1 overleaf is an integrated graphical presentation of the findings, as discussed in Chapters 4 to 6, including analysis with existing literature. It is important that further abstraction of the findings is done that gives an overview of factors that shape single women from childhood within their families, communities and society. Further, what influences single women's adult choices, experiences as household heads, relationship with significant others, and leadership roles in the public service.
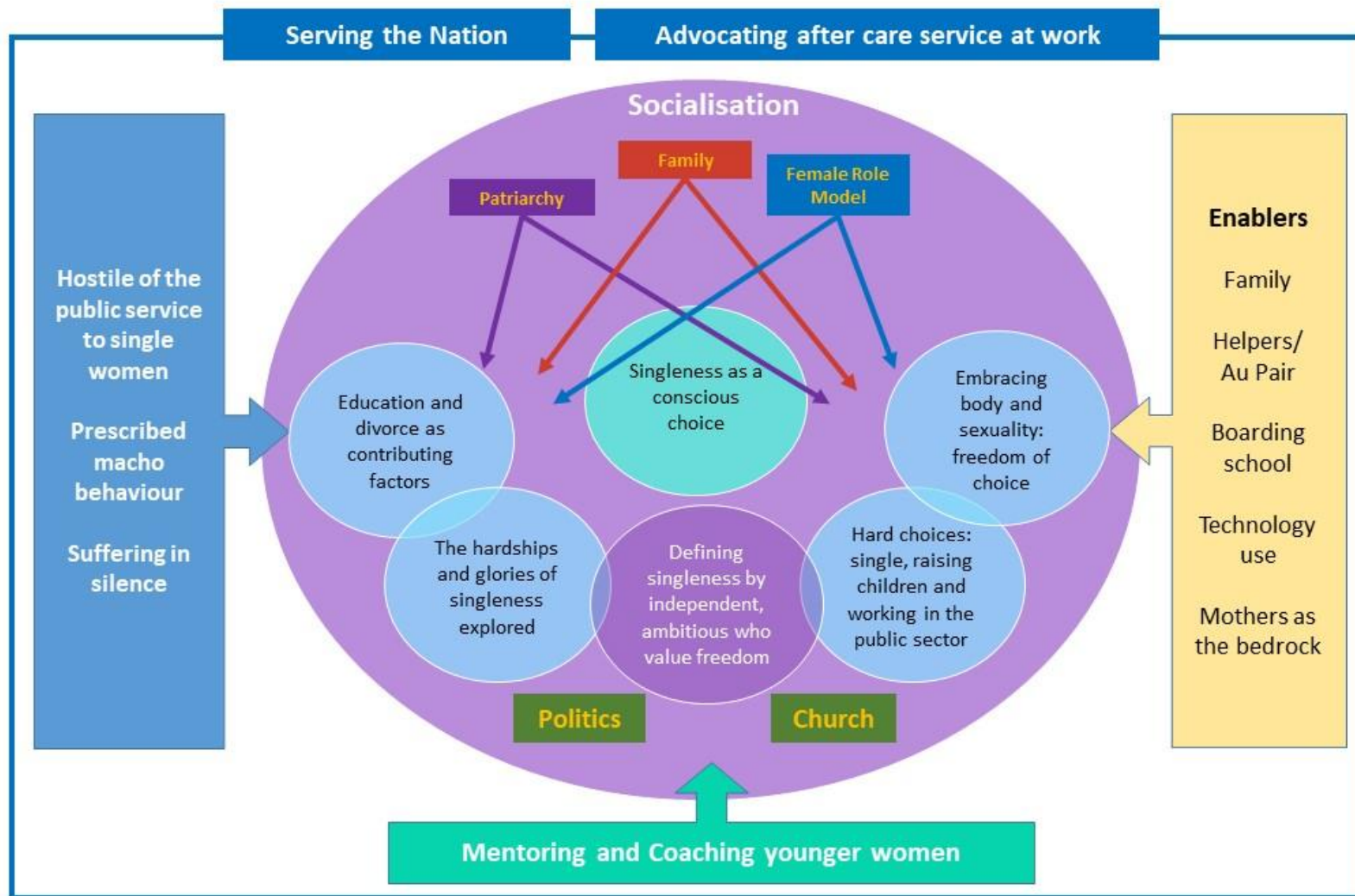
Figure 6.1: Integrated findings on singleness defined and experiences of single senior women managers in the public sector.

6.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter integrated the research key findings under the following themes and subthemes: singleness as a conscious choice, with subthemes of socialisation's influence on marital status choice; family composition and impact on choices in adulthood; presence of influential female role models; mothers as the bedrock in nurturing their daughters' career ambitions; and the Afrocentric disposition. The second theme was defining singleness as independent, ambitious women who value their freedom, including subthemes of socio-economic factors contributing towards the increasing number of single women; singlehood defined with its hardships and glorious moments; solo parenting; and embracing body and sexuality: freedom of choice.

CHAPTER 7: REFLECTIONS - THE THESIS JOURNEY RETROSPECTIVELY

This chapter gives reflections of the researcher through the genesis of how this thesis unfolded. It was journey with lessons that could be of good use to other students and peers. I feel that I am currently sharing these within the confines of my network and not documenting any.

7.1 RETROSPECTIVITY

Dodgson (2019) maintains that the qualitative research process involves interacting from a particular context, time, place and involving two or more people thus critical for the researcher to acknowledge areas of interests in the study. This process is reflexivity which ensures credibility of findings; acknowledge potential bias (Dogson, 2019). Reflexivity "is the process of exploring the ways in which researchers and their subjectivities affect what is and can be designed, gathered, interpreted, analysed, and investigated in an investigation" (Gemignani, 2017, p.1). It embodies acknowledgement that researchers are part of the world that they research on (Lenberg et al., 2017). Finefter-Rosenbluh (2017) adds that reflexivity provides an insider's perspective thus clarifies methodological uncertainties and gives an illuminated reflection of how the research unfolded.

The thesis, as an example, commences with an upfront ethics clearance approval however certain decisions require clarity on what motivated the researcher to make such choices (Reid et al., 2018). Qualitative research could unearth uncharted methodological choices deemed pertinent in answering research questions that the research is required to share experiences broadly (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017). It means that alignment on ethics is a continuous decision not a once off occurrence (Reid et al., 2018). This begins with researcher's openness on the topic itself, clarity on dilemmas encountered during each phase and how they were resolved in order to ensure credibility and reliability (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017; Reid et al., 2018).

Reflexivity also involves growth and learning experienced by the researcher during interaction with participants, context, challenges encountered and resolution thereof (Palaganas et al., 2017). Gemignani (2017) adds that reflexivity assumptions include

realism, humanism and linguistic representation which puts the researcher at the centre of how the research is positioned (Palaganas et al., 2017). Gemignani (2017) and Palaganas (2017) underscore centrality of the researcher in unfolding of the research. In essence, firstly the researcher unveils existing meaning of reality and does not create one. Secondly, the findings emanate out of human interactions. Lastly, researcher's use of language should closely reflect what exists.

7.1.1 Researcher constructed social identity

There is interconnectedness between what piques the researchers' interest coupled with forming part of the world being investigated (Lenberg et al., 2017). I found myself reaching out and asking how customary marriage is solemnised within the African culture. Further, how was or is divorce handled between the families, rights of women and children. These are issues I related to at an anecdotal level and were not experienced within my immediate family. My paternal and maternal grandparents were married with death as the arbiter to the end of their unions. I also was not sure of how the interconnected between cultural issues intersected with my field of study which is Industrial and Organisational Psychology. In the end of it all, I pulled through with my findings. I dug deep within my feminine ancestral lineage experiences I witnessed as a child, family anecdotes and what made sense for me as an adult.

My maternal grandmother was Lasiwe Dalasile, eldest daughter born within a royal family. However, it was her younger brother that ascended into the crown after my great-grandfather died solely based on gender. I heard little of this and I am unable to make further assumptions on how she felt about this discrimination. She was a force to be reckoned with, ran the household with ten children and many extended family members accommodated. My grandparents were farmers and my mother narrates many stories of how they never saw my grandmother sitting down as she was busy working in her fields and other household chores.

She was courageous and never afraid to make her views known. Let me share one anecdote as narrated by one of my late aunts. There was a certain large delegation of men in horses that came unannounced to their homestead. They sat next to the kraal and my grandfather went and checked what they came for. He quickly called for his brothers to join him. It turned out these were the beginning of lobola negotiations for my mother. The groom was from a certain royal family. This was going to be an

arranged marriage as my mother was not aware of the groom thus her opinion was not considered.

My grandmother slowly approached the congregation around the kraal. She was furious and demanded to know what these guests were there for. I guess one of them was brave to declare that they were there to negotiate for my mother's lobola. They could not finish the sentence before she reminded them of how they butchered her cousin who was married to their family. Is that what they wanted to do now with her own daughter, she demanded to know? She chased them out of the yard, as my aunt related while in stiches. They left and never to return again. My grandmother clandestinely organised for my mother to leave the village first thing the following morning. My mother travelled from Cofimvaba to Mount Stewart, around Graaff Reinett where she got a teaching post. It would be years before my mother visited home and she had married my father by then.

Dalasile, as we fondly called my maternal grandmother, in this anecdote, affirms the central role women play within an African family. However, it comes against a structured patriarchy which can be at times a brutal system. She challenged a system that saw nothing wrong in butchering a woman with no consequences. It was clear that she was daring them to dare touch her offspring. I guess my grandfather knew his limits and backed off when my grandmother bulldozed their cosy lobola negotiations. Further, my grandmother supported my mother in raising us. She took care of me as a toddler and did same while I was at primary school. I remember a woman that talked less and yet demanded updates on key family issues. My grandmother lost her sight yet she kept some of her farming stock and had a final say on how things should go.

My paternal grandparents, on the other hand, married in a civil ceremony in 1925, as per their marriage certificate that is safely kept in my mother's kits. We joke about this certificate as my grandmother signed as Elizabeth Mhlobo, in a neat cursive handwriting while my grandfather put an X next to his signature. My grandmother was a teacher before getting married and it is obvious that my grandfather was illiterate. The marriage certificate came from the archives of the Keilands Catholic Mission, way after my grandparents died. Well, my grandfather died within five years of this marriage, followed by their eldest son and leaving my grandmother as a young widow

with my father as a toddler. She went back to her family with my then 3 years old father, as the paternal family took possession of my grandfather's livestock.

Qadidi, as we fondly called my grandmother, went on to re-marry, had six more biological children and two adopted ones. This says a lot about my grandmother as her choices were of an independent and of liberated mind. She worked in the urban areas and retired with my step-grandfather in their sixties. This was unheard off within an African family in the mid-1930s that a woman married twice. She made a choice, followed it through and defied societal stereotypes about women and re-marriages. They were happily married for more than 40 years. I take lessons from her life such as that life choices rest on no one but the individual concerned.

It seems that she lived on a principle that it's her life and so are the rules. This has given me latitude to dare make what I perceive are difficult life choices, in full appreciation of what it took her to live such a life. Qadidi gave us an inheritance of courage, perseverance and leading a life on our own terms. She was an introvert yet a strong woman. She took to task one of my cousin's father. He refused paternity and made derogatory remarks about my aunt as he was getting married. My grandmother stood up at his wedding and raised her concerns. The wedding ceremony stalled and only continued after the two families agreed on the child's customary rights. She stood up for the rights of her daughter and granddaughter. Qadidi may not have known anything about feminism but she instituted a plan of action against a domineering patriarchal system that oppressed women and children. I salute her.

My relationships with my grandmothers may have been short and brief. This relationship expanded my horizon on issues women faced before I was born. I honour this heritage as it gives me insights of what has been fought for me, the gains and what remains elusive for this generation. I took the baton for these stoic grandmothers and continue bringing awareness of what affects women broadly. The eleven women I interviewed became my driving force in soldiering on with the thesis when I lost the courage to continue. I felt they entrusted me with their living experiences and I owed them my word in publishing their stories for the benefit of others.

I reflect on my grandmothers as this offers glimpses of what shaped or influenced my assumptions of African women in this research. Firstly, there is a distortion of women's

power within the household and influence on societal issues from an African perspective. Personally, it has created internal uncertainties as what I read and experience were on different poles. Secondly, both my grandmothers confronted brutality inflicted by men on them and to other women. This further adds on Afrocentrism criticism that it pays little or no attention on women abuse (Asante, 2009; Bangura, 2012; Chawane, 2016). Professor Michelle May, my supervisor, was quick to notice my unconscious leanings towards Afrocentrism and coached that I lift it up in my research. Perhaps, it is through her African lineage that she zoomed into it while scrutinising my thesis.

7.1.2 My mother, my warrior

We call my mother Kwakha, a shortened version of her marital name Nokwakha. The family anecdote is that Mtho, my late elder brother then a toddler coined this name as he could not say her name in full. She is mama that carried me for nine months although she insists I stayed for an extra one. I get to hear of the details surrounding my birth, when labour started, where she was and who accompanied her to the Salvation Army hospital, in Cape Town which since closed, around my birthday from her. There are funny parts as she describes my physical attributes. I laugh as I think she exaggerates much to my amusement and that of my siblings. She is light skinned and I am dark. I am a typical pear shaped while my mother is athletic built.

The only attribute we share or from my maternal family is my silky hair. I listen with wonder each time she shares this as old age also assist in recounting my birth. This gives me a beautiful depiction of how I was received. There are many African story books showing graphics of children attentively listening to their parents or grandparents telling fables. This is one of my heritage as our days ended with my parents or elder brothers dramatizing tales for us. It greatly assisted in developing my language and later on writing skills.

I look back and realise that Kwakha has also been there for me throughout my childhood. She continues to do this so many years since Taben, my father's death in 2002. It takes a particular personality in taking care of at least seven children, as she was also a guardian to many of her nieces and nephews. There were trials in her life that made her live as a single woman. She loves travelling and took us by train for a holiday to Cape Town during the festive season of 1967. My father stayed behind, her,

a domestic helper, Mtho (5), twins Lala and Mla (9 months) and myself (2) travelled to Cape Town. I have no conscious recollection of this holiday. However, it changed the course of the family, as we experienced it previously.

Kwakha recounts that we came back to a very untidy house. Well, she did not think much about it as my father and housework were not great friends. We were staying in a cottage as my father was a principal, at Mkhubiso village, on the outskirts of King William's Town. She saw a group of men approaching the house. They broke news that Taben, as we referred to my father, was apprehended by the security police during December 1967 holidays. There were no further details beyond that. It was a time of great distress for her as my father was a breadwinner. Let me elaborate further. My mother was still nursing the twins and perhaps it is easy in assuming that she was on maternity leave. However, married women were not allowed to teach, as was legislated through apartheid legislation.

The School Governing Body (SGB) offered her a teaching post at the same school. This meant that she had a roof over her head and an income to put food on the table. She worked at this school for a year until my maternal grandmother called for her. Dalasile did not think it was a good idea for her to be far from her family, as she navigates her life with my father at Robben Island. Bhuti Monde, a nephew she had brought up before meeting my father, came to assist with the relocation in December 1968. We packed all the movable property and took another journey to her village at Mtshanyane, Cofimvaba. The supportive role of extended families within the African families is well documented (Akuma, 2015; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018). I experienced it in my formative years during this period.

My maternal family played various roles and we assimilated into a broad family structure with love. Kwakha had no job waiting for her, that side of the country. She had a stream of relatives that opened avenues for her. The teaching posts were mostly temporal and at the mercy of SGBs. She had many battles with these SGBs as they at times interrogated about her husband. It was a taboo for her being "single" with so many children and a husband who was in jail for political activism. They referred to my father as "Poqo". TaBen's incarceration coincided with the Pan African National Congress (PAC) armed wing called Poqo, violent revolt, mostly in the Western Cape. It seems being unattached to a male opened Kwakha to stereotypes and

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discrimination, which DePaulo and Morris (2005) coined singlism. Perhaps, also considered her as a "returned soldier"- divorcee thus "suffered" for disgracing her family name. Kwakha became single and headed the family during Taben's incarceration at Robben Island. This scene occurred in the rural SA where almost all other males worked at urban areas thus women took charge of the households, children and elderly family members. This supports notion of gender and African family structure destruction from the socio-economic and political contexts.

There were brutal killings, death sentences and arrests of these Poqo members mostly to Robben Island. There were other political party member arrests such as the Azanian People Organisation and African National Congress. Taben was a member of the latter. The migrant labour system was in full force in the Transkei hence Poqo's reverence and popularity. However, it equally created fear and scepticism in association with any person with direct links to this liberation movement activism. Kwakha fought off prejudices and stereotypes as she asserted her right to work.

My siblings and I alternated staying with my grandmother, aunts or uncles. She took us with her around the numerous places she worked at. It was strenuous for her with fears about Taben, thinly stretched resources and raising children on her own. I marvel at her grit though. She even tells a story of going to school with a stick ready to fight off either bullying SGBs or school inspectors. This was a personal war for survival yet she taught these men lessons about women independence. My maternal grandmother, aunts and certain sisters-in-law were her life supporters. She kept in touch with Qadidi but they were far removed geographically for constant engagement. There are stories of police harassment, brutalities and injustices inflicted on children and families of political activists still to be told.

I guess my parents reunited five years as different human beings. Kwakha independently ran the household. Taben remained an outsider for the longest time. I remember the twins and I asked loudly about when he was going back to Robben Island. This was after a scolding he gave us. Kwakha never treated us like that. We told her that we cannot wait to be just with her again. Well, this did not go well with Taben. We plotted and clubbed against him especially with his enforcement that we sleep on our own.

This was unthinkable in our small minds, as Kwakha, twins and I had slept in the same bed during Taben's incarceration. We continued jumping into Kwakha's bed, each time Taben was not around. It did not matter that she was nursing our youngest sister, Nko. I do not know how my mother coped being squeezed the whole night. Perhaps, the fight over bed was more about keeping Kwakha close to us, as she remained constant during our young lives. Perhaps, Taben on the other hand wanted reassurance from his wife and we questioned his loyalty to us as the family perhaps. Sometimes, I draw scenarios of how my parents' careers and livelihood could have turned out if they were not disrupted by the apartheid regime. It seemed that they spent best of their lives catching up on time lost in getting their first house, re-establishing bond with us and finding themselves as a couple.

Taben found many ways to win us over with time. Kwakha gave him space to do so. Well, there was nothing sweets and other goodies could not iron out between an estranged father and his children. It took a very grounded, solid and confident mother to step back and allow this bond to repair and strengthen. It was Kwakha who steered the ship afloat during the family difficult periods. This was most evident when Taben got suspended as the Director-General of Education at the former Ciskei government. We were mostly at tertiary, save for the youngest two sisters. There was food through her salary and we generally well cared for.

Kwakha laid a foundation of who I am. She challenged that I pursue my dreams and pushed me further as I was reluctant in studying further for a PhD. I am gratefully that she carried herself with greatness that she expects from me as her daughter. She turned 88 years in May 2022. It is her dwindling memory that betrays her young looking physical attributes. She lives at peace with herself, outlives all her siblings and a pleasurable company, especially for her grandchildren.

7.2 REFLECTIONS ON OTHER INFLUENTIAL WOMEN

My earliest childhood memories are shaped by numerous women who are my paternal and maternal aunts by blood and marriage. The households at Mtshanyane village, where my maternal side of the family leaves, were ran mostly by women. My grandfather and his two brothers were neighbours thus making almost three quarters of the village part of the extended family. My uncles, like most men in the village were migrant labourers. It was only two uncles who worked locally. I hardly saw these uncles

that they stayed best of the year at urban areas, even years away from their families. The wives and children would visit them from time to time. However, this family arrangement had its own downsides.

The separation resulted in duplicate family arrangements at the urban areas. These parallel family arrangements caused divorces, estrangements or open acknowledgement of mistresses. However, the children from these relationships were free to visit the paternal side of the family in the rural areas and vice versa. It was during funerals of the husbands that these parallel families collided, as both women laid claim. The funeral planning dynamics became tense and tricky, especially as there were children involved.

The men were not entirely alone in seeking solace outside of marriage. Some married women got involved in intimate relationships in the rural areas. The treatment or acceptance of such was viewed differently compared with children born out of wedlock by the husbands. The married women bore the brunt for getting involved or having children outside of marriage, leading to divorce or permanent estrangements. However, there were cases where the couples pull all the children together and stayed happily married until the end of their lives.

The nuclear family composition was rare; absent fathers was a norm, with females running households on their own. Married women were prized for taking care of their in-laws, children, animal stock, fields and all other related family resources. It was common for the husbands to stay away permanently and disown the rural family. Alternatively, send meagre portion of their salaries. The women fend for themselves through farming and or lived in poverty.

I reflect on these family dynamics as it is my lived experiences of the impact of apartheid segregation and labour policies on families. The married women got the short end of the stick as they lived as single yet also within the confines of their marital vows (Maqubela, 2016). Secondly, the separate family arrangement seems like it suits men best as the patriarchy protects philandering as their birth right. The women are shunned and scorned for breaking their marital vows while the same is tolerated for men. It takes a researcher exposed to socio-economic and political impact on women and families to be drawn to a study of this nature.

7.3 MASCULINE LINEAGE

I never physically met Velaphi (paternal) and July (maternal) grandparents. Tatomkhulu, the latter died two years before I was born. He was a successful farmer for the best of his life but had briefly worked in urban areas when family fortunes took a dip. My mother was his youngest daughter and the ninth out of ten children. He took care of many other extended family relatives with their children thus ran a massive homestead. My maternal side lineage is clear and dates back to many generations.

My paternal lineage is filled with many grey areas. Taben was a toddler when my grandfather passed thus it shaped the trajectory of his life. Qadidi took Taben with after mourning for a year for her husband and another son who had also died during the same year. She soon went to seek for work in Cape Town and Taben was raised by his maternal grandmother. This is another re-enactment of extended family role within the African culture system (Akuma, 2015; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018). It became a lifelong mission in tracing and reuniting with his paternal family. Let me add that Qadidi was of little assistance, as she was re-married and held resentment of how she was treated as a widow. I guess there was bitterness that her family raised and educated Taben and the in-laws that treated her badly were re-claiming my father. She let her sharp tongue convey what she thought of all of this, on rare occasions that she found my paternal great-aunts and uncles at my home.

The longing for the paternal heritage defined the large part of my father's existence. There was jubilation at each encounter with his paternal aunts and uncles. Velaphi was the eldest son and Taben the only male in his generation. This put a patriarchal expectation of taking responsibility over the lineage and overseeing family cultural rites. There was missing knowledge as the family relocated and settled at different locations immediately after my grandfather's death. Taben accepted and lived with a sketchy family history, including mystery of his father's grave.

Taben got a firm education foundation as he grew up at Keilands Catholic Mission with a reputable school attached to it. It was an advantage that he was intelligent and also caught an eye of a local school inspector. He enquired about Taben's academic progress, assuming that he was in high school that particular year. The school inspector was so shocked that the family could not raise funds to take him further. This prompted a local priest, Father Gross to sponsor his tuition at Mariazelle High School.

The role of missionaries and church in education is well documented in SA (Chisholm, 2017; Glaser, 2019; Sundkler, 2018). Perhaps, it goes beyond confines of Christianity but also the role it played in families, poverty alleviation and health.

TaBen worked part time through high school and during his teacher training school vacations. He registered for his Bachelor of Arts degree at Unisa while at Robben Island. Let me digress and appreciate the role Unisa played in opening its doors regardless of race and political persuasions during the apartheid years. A cursory scan shows most of former political prisoners like President Nelson Mandela pursued their degrees through the same university. Its historical beginnings as a distance learning institution worked well for those incarcerated or working individuals, like me.

I remember spending a June school holiday without him at home, as he was attending contact classes in Pretoria. My elder brothers and I were studying away from home. It was odd that we spent time only with my mother during holiday. However, there was an arrangement to briefly meet and greet my father at a particular railway station on his way back to East London and as we proceeded to our respective schools. We barely spent five minutes before Taben's train pulled off the station. I cried buckets of tears as he waved to us until the train faded off sight. It became my brothers' responsibility to calm me down. Perhaps, the pain was not different for them but I gave myself permission to fully express it.

On a lighter note, I remember packing lunch boxes full of meat as he spent other school holidays at the library. I would offer to wash these, in case there were left overs. There was a big fuss around his graduation which my mother also attended. They got so lost getting into the Unisa main campus in Pretoria, as they were all unfamiliar with the city and languages spoken. There was a huge graduation party at home later on. We all came home from the various boarding schools on this particular weekend. It was a joyous occasion although I do not remember a single speech.

Lala, my younger sister, and I had anticipated spending the whole weekend away from boarding school. However, my parents organised a lift back on a Saturday. Our tantrums did not absolve us from leaving that evening while our home was buzzing with festivities, I guess from a child's perspective. We sulked right through the journey. Our revenge was keeping silent and not offering help as the adults struggled navigating

out of Mdantsane Township to the Transkei and getting so lost that they ended on some dirt roads. Taben could not wait to call us out on this trickery. We probably thought they would go back home and the journey would continue the following day.

Taben later obtained a Batchelor of Education as his post graduate degree. He attempted Masters Degree twice at Rhodes University and University of the Western Cape and the former awarded him a post graduate diploma in honour of the academic progress he had achieved in the absence of submitting a dissertation. Taben would argue that it became hard following his research through and I guessed it competed greatly with his other priorities, such as his career. I reflect on Taben's academic journey through it all and impact on me as an adult. Perhaps, it motivated me to continue with my education through my adulthood, with children, working, divorce, separations and other life challenges.

My parents were both educators, with Kwakha obtaining a Diploma in Specialised Teaching (sic) that catered for learners with hearing, oral and physical disabilities. We had both parents that were extremely dedicated to channelling us through the education schools. They researched each school, academic record, student discipline and teachers. The school reports at home were a time of anxiety or jubilation depending on how one fared. They would analyse reports and to our greatest relieve the teachers got their share of responsibility. The latter put us in a prickle as one of them would share their observation with the principal. In one instance, a teacher passed a snide remark that I was being disruptive in class as I had parents that reported teachers to the principal. Well, my parents were not fazed and remarked that she must just do her job.

Further, my parents set a standard for us that a three year post matric qualification was a non-negotiable. However, my parents were also keen to finance for post degrees on condition that one stayed at home. I guess some of us were too eager to start our independent lives that we were off after our junior degree. My parents still followed up on our academic advancement although we were staying on our own and starting careers. I learnt from the best that learning is continuous and it is possible for it to last for a lifetime. The life of Taben reflects of someone that climbed out of poverty with aid of opportunities that education opened for him. He was also defined through his gender and respective masculine family and community responsibilities. My parents were

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amongst trailblazers on insisting in educating their girls, as these were limited for Africans during my childhood. This enabled me at joining the public service when policies such as Affirmative Actions were enacted (Khan & Motsoeng, 2014).

7.4 THESIS: IN THE BEGINNING

The reflections on my maternal, paternal and other women in my life are mainly through a childhood perspective. These are individuals that influenced my thoughts and being beyond this lifetime. I may not have met my grandfathers but I carried their blood and psyche through those that encountered with them on this earth. There are decisions and choices that they made which impacted my parents lived experiences and indirectly mine. This was the same with Taben and Kwakha choices at taking teaching posts in the Karoo, getting married and staying married till death did them apart. My identity construction as woman was a shared communal responsibility (Cater, 2014; Musetha & Musehane, 2012). The family plays are central role in creating my social identity (Helman & Ratele, 2016).

I am a product of a couple that shared love for travelling, storytelling, reading and learning. They were strict yet I was allowed to make mistakes and received counsel under their loving guidance. It has taken this thesis to ask myself why this degree matters so much for me. This is a question I pondered over and over again. I dare not answer it. However, what I know for sure that this is a question that drove me further towards completion of the thesis.

I was definite that the Masters' degree was my lifetime highest qualification. This was it and nothing was going to convince me otherwise. The first seeds were planted by Dr David Levey, retired Associate Professor at Unisa Department of English Studies, after he finished editing my dissertation. I hardly allowed him to finish before making an emphatic no to his suggestion. I thanked him for the compliment. All I wanted at that point was to submit and get my life back. I was exhausted. My youngest daughter was three weeks old when I wrote my first year Master's exams. The years that followed were full of personal challenges. I sat down on my bedroom floor one night and asked myself what was holding me in finishing this dissertation. I had everything before me except dedicated time to pull things together.

The dissertation became my focus for the next few months. It became my escape from everything else around me. This was the only thing under my control. I reconnected with one lost love, studies, that had been with me through the darkest moments in my life. Studying keeps me sane and dare I say out of mischief. However, I had set my horizon not further than the Masters' degree. I let Dr Levey's vision be and submitted my dissertation to everyone's relief. My family was surprised when I announced that I was graduating as I had kept quiet for the longest time. They assumed that I had dropped out. I would have followed the family tradition as TaBen, my late father and two siblings (I dare not mention names here) did before me.

My MA graduation party took place a year after President Thabo Mbeki was recalled from office and post the 2009 national and provincial elections. I was working at a political office at time and I later learnt that my phone had been ringing off the hook as I listened to all the congratulatory speeches. This was a milestone for me that was worth marking in style. Kwakha, my then 75 year old mother said categorically during her speech that I was not done with studying. I thought poor mama was either dreaming too big or old age has finally caught up with her.

My guests were overflowing at my house and I was at a happy space. I was nagged to return the incessant caller from the office on a Saturday evening. I found a quiet spot outside and I took three deep breaths after being summoned to a meeting the following day at 8h00. I made a choice there and then that nothing was going to dampen my party mood. This was my party and I would sleep after the last guest left. They dully left as the sun threatened to rise the following day.

I made it for the early morning meeting, although still not clear of the agenda. My head was dizzy and heavy from lack of sleep. However, I called my staff members who happened to be working, to compile few documents for me. The meeting started around lunch and my notes came handy as I was able to give clear update. I left the office after 16h00, rushed home to bed and slept right though until the next day. My MA was in the bag and I needed time to relax and reconnect with the spheres of my life. Perhaps, this is where I resonated with participants experiences of a hostile public and over handedness by supervisors and politicians. This is a bias I discovered during research discuss (Dogson, 2019; Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017; Reid et al., 2018).

It took Professor Michelle May and me three years to reconnect after my MA graduation. I was working in Pretoria by then and she asked that we have coffee. Why not, I thought. We had bonded a lot since she became my supervisor. We made a poster presentation at the 11th European, in Oslo from 7-9 July, 2009, soon after my graduation. It was my first travelling on my own abroad. I found my way from the airport to the hotel and the conference venue where Michelle and I had arranged to meet. Our relationship transcended from the supervisor-student formalities with time. I was looking forward to reminisce about our good old days, my MA peers, her work and family. We laughed and everything was jolly until she mentioned the word Doctorate. I thought not this issue again.

Well, I had a perfect excuse which is that I was hardly a year in a new job. I added rather enthusiastically, that this was a demanding job with lots of traveling. I gave a convincing act and felt that I had killed her persuasion skills forever as far as this Doctorate invitation was concerned. She called a year later and proposed that I consider a year-long course on Doctorate Research Proposal. I read it but I remained non-committal at first. The bug hit me and I am the one that asked Michelle out for coffee. I registered for the Research Proposal course and defended the thesis in November 2014.

The thesis journey had begun in earnest. What I did not anticipate was that this was the beginning of my own personal growth, development and a healing process. I felt a great affinity with the participants' lived experiences, their reflections on who they are and what makes sense in their worldview (Finefter-Rosenbluh, 2017; Lenberg et al., 2017). It took me time to realise what was unfolding within me. I guess I had compartmentalised academic growth as separate from the emotional and spiritual ones. The greatest awakening for me started with realising that I needed to let the research flow in its intended pathway. This began with the pilot interview and noticing that each participant interview had its own rhythm. I quickly learnt to let go and reign in my control freak tendencies.

Also, it dawned upon me that I created a platform for the participants to share their stories. My role was that of a facilitator and I did not dictate rules of the game, in line with feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism (Freeman, 2018; Levitt et al., 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Oksala, 2016; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). I merely provided

a framework for the research and participants shaped it up. I was in for big lessons as these remain a mystery until participants shared their stories and I extrapolated meaning to it. Letting go of how the research process unfolded and living on hope that the path lead me to credible outcomes was fearful, filled with doubts and anxiety.

I beefed up my support structure as my energy and motivation depleted as time went by. This took in form of people I called upon for morale booster such as Dr Daphney Conco. The conversations ranged from general lethargy in relation to the thesis, clearing issues as they came up and general navigating through the various thesis stages. My famous wisdom nuggets included that thesis journey happened every moment included when one is busy with other things, as shared by Dr Conco. This was shared as I was worried that I was neglecting writing. I later concurred with her as an idea would come through or pieces of information gel during odd times. I could be taking a shower or in a conversation that something comes up that completes an idea for me that I had left lingering.

I took time off from the thesis, especially when overwhelmed by a feedback. I read Michelle's comments, dealt with all emotions, tender my garden sometimes or travel before I attempted to integrate her comments, as an example. This played a big role in managing my ego and better acceptance of other viewpoints. Put mildly, this was the beginning of my acceptance that I am not a Miss-know-it-all. The creation of knowledge is not a solo mission. It takes critics and listening to opposing thoughts in solidifying new inputs.

7.4.1 Thesis orientation

I set out to study about the public service in South Africa and how it accommodated single female working senior managers in as far as work-family balance is concerned. The topic was influenced by my lived experiences as a single mother and being a senior manager in the government. I experienced a lot of travelling, on short notice, heavy workload and long meetings which disrupted managing family roles. I felt that there was no support that public service offered to single female senior managers. This was what the selection committee approved that I research on. I guess I made a strong case that there was a need for such a study and a contribution I could make towards knowledge. Michelle and I were thrilled. We sat up plans, timelines and deadlines. I

started a new job at a State Owned Entity in 2015 but submitted in accordance to our plan.

These were exciting times for me as the thesis progressed towards data collection. It was hard pinning the participants for interviews. I ended up pursuing them over weekends and after hours. There is something overwhelming about the pilot interviews. This was when the tyre hit the road. I asked myself if my topic was relevant. Will the participant resonate with it? Was it far-fetched or was it their lived experience as well? It did not take long before I was challenged on who defined singleness by the first participant. This was during filling of the biographical form. In retrospect she altered the course of the topic.

I knew at that moment that the first research question opened an avenue for single women to voice out on how they defined themselves. It was more about who they were and the other roles fitted within that prism. I realised that these women were not in a mode of fitting within any particular stereotypes. They were about to seize the moment and say exactly what their lived experiences growing up, and choices made in adulthood. I went home dazed about what came out of the pilot interview. This turn of events altered any lingering feelings about who and what role I played in the research process. I shared my experiences with Michelle and she advised that I continue with the research questions as they were.

I guess there was a temptation of pre-empting responses to the research questions. Perhaps, an underlying quest on how the themes would emerge. I moved from each interview bewildered on where the process was leading. It was no longer in my hands and I allowed the women to tell their stories, in their voices and also free will in dictating the terms of how their story should unfold. These interviews were unique on many levels yet they were emotional cliff-hangers for me. I guess these women mirrored my lived experiences. It became difficult to conduct them one after the other. I took time out, got busy with the transcripts and above all recovered mentally and physically before attempting the next one.

Further, I was shocked and concerned that the data was venturing off from the topic. This was most evident from the pilot interview. I was shaken by this realisation as I was concerned whether it was evidence that I chose a wrong topic. The data was

growing into uncharted terrains. I enjoyed reading it up but a large part of me was eager to see the complete picture. This was something about the data that made sense and reflected a world I know. There was excitement yet fear of the unknown. This was like entering in an unfamiliar territory.

Michelle seemed less perturbed and encouraged me to forge on. I did although I moved at a slower pace than that I started with. Perhaps, my mind was pre-occupied with conflicted thoughts. I wondered what do I shared with family and friends about the thesis as it did not make sense to me. The bits and pieces of the puzzle were everywhere and I was less wise about how I was going to put them together. Patience is virtue and I tasted it brewing beneath this journey.

There was a disjuncture on my expectations of what research topic matters for single women. The research, through flowing with what the data came up, dictated the nature of the research. It was the women voices that I listened and through which interpreted the findings. My role became that of a facilitator while the single women were the main actors and advocates of their lived experiences, as per feminist phenomenology and Afrocentrism (Asante, 1987; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Fairfax, 2017; Husain et al., 2020; Morgan & Sklar, 2012).

7.5 MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

I ended up with a 251 pages bounded transcript booklet (See Annexure I). Let me give credit where it's due, this was curtesy of Veronica Wentzel, my well organised secretary. She does such with such ease while I battle. I would look at the booklet and get overwhelmed. I was not sure where to start. The beauty of what came out of this process thus far, including data collection was an acknowledgement that I was a novice researcher and in unfamiliar territories. This was a humbling process. I felt like an onion peeling off its skin which revealed a brighter softer layer. I asked why I put myself through all this torture.

I spent days on end crying as I read the transcripts. There was a deep seated hurt that had found a permanent spot within my inner being. The ghosts of what it took being single, physical and emotional abuse came crawling out of my skin. I had internalised the experiences that the single women went through. It was a torture to read and engage with the data as their stories resonated with mine. I chose a topic that provoked

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pain and hurt I endured through work but also challenges with raising children on my own (Lenberg et al., 2017). It was never my plan but this was a result of choice made in light of complete relationship breakdown. These women went through rejection, making hard decision regarding divorce and or surviving abandonment by the fathers of their children.

I chose to put it aside which thrown me into deep feelings of guilty, inadequacy, sense of failure and being good enough. I poured my heart to my friend Lynette Magasa. She listened, laughed, empathised and advised that this a journey best travelled with a psychologist or coach on 24/7. Michelle advised that I take time out and rather journal what I was going through. I listened to the advice and took a break for a month or so.

Reading the transcripts took another twist. I laughed and reminisced about each of the participants. There was so much of their personality that tickled my inner child. They were unapologetic about their lives, including intimacy. Michelle's cheeks went ruby red when I first discussed some of my findings about sexuality and intimacy that participants candidly shared. She would later blush and give me feedback on what she thought I needed to unpack more. There were words like "returned soldiers" that I threw in and Michelle would say what does that mean. My first reaction was who does not know such lingua in South Africa. I had to reflect on what is known about African culture if there was little research documented from this worldview (Asante, 1987; Chawane, 2016). This is how Afrocentrism resonates well with me.

7.5.1 Writers block

I set off in search of literature to review. My files were overflowing with articles about this and that related to my research topic, in all its transformation. I reached a point of information saturation but I could not type a single word. I would switch on my computer, get distracted with work emails after hours, made long phone calls and or scrolled through Facebook posts and switched off my computer. There were weeks when I would not touch my thesis. I thought that this was the end of it all. I read all books and articles as part of the Literature Review. Also, I got articles on how to crack the writer's block. These did not offer any help. I entertain certain ideas and thoughts about how to take the thesis further but I was all thoughts and no action. I had energy and time for everything else except concentrating on my studies.

It did not help that this block occurred during the first six months of living alone, as my youngest daughter started at a boarding school in January 2019. I had envisaged that when I no longer did the parenting errands, I would have all the time in the world to concentrate on finishing my thesis. There is something liberating about being at tertiary and an adult student. There is no one chasing you around. The responsibility rests squarely with the student so does the honours to stay focused and meeting deadlines. In retrospect, I was not on firm ground emotionally and psychologically. There were multiple personal issues that cropped up that distracted my attention. Secondly, I was living a reality that the Literature Review chapter is the most difficult one of all others. This fear of the Literature Review chapter paralysed me. I neither phone nor emailed Michelle, except for New Year greeting exchanges earlier that year.

This non-submission of academic work meant that there was nothing I submitted thus Michelle issued an ultimatum that I should do so by 30 September 2019 or consider myself deregistered. I had fortunately slowly started writing towards the end of July and managed to present something credible on good time to that deadline. There was another chapter by mid-December of the same year. Michelle was pleasantly surprised. She was not ready for this sudden burst of energy.

7.6 FINDING MYSELF

I look at where I started as a person with this thesis and realised how much I have grown. What I found amazing is that I grew emotionally and spiritually as I moved through challenges and hurdles. There was a greater force that guided me through it all. I once asked myself why I decided to pursue this journey. What is my purpose? It was as I answered this questions that I relied upon prayers and in embracing African spirituality that I found source of unlimited energy, guidance and focus. I said a prayer before I started with typing or reading up on any material. There was a bigger driving force in making the stories of these women known and this became a greater driving force.

There were times I called upon my late father and grandmothers for guidance. I do not know how I chose these souls for guidance. Perhaps, it is my appreciation of what education and learning meant for them in their lifetime. They demonstrated great intellectual capacity in various ways. I am indebted to the footprints they left during

their lifetimes. I believe that they shine their guiding lights during my time of greatest vulnerability and anxiousness over this period.

As I conclude, my elder brother Mtho died after 50 and 49 days in hospital and on ventilation, respectively, due to Covid-19 on June 30, 2021. He was 58 years and it hurts deeply. This was the same day I received feedback on my thesis draft from Michelle and I was preparing to browse through her comments for an hour or so on that fateful evening. Mla, the youngest brother, came through to my house as I settled in the study. My world stood still for a moment until I heard a faint voice saying he was at my house to fetch me as the rest of the family were not aware of Mtho's passing.

I was quite aware that Mtho's death re-organises the family set-up, roles and responsibilities. Our extended family ordinary called him as the second eldest sibling and would make the death announcements to all of us. We were not always chaffed with how he relayed such but on that day I wished I could ask him to do honours to his wife, kids, Kwakha (mama) and siblings. It is true that "tough times don't last, tough people do".

My family and I have been through red coals since Mtho's prolonged illness, death, funeral and moving forward without his gentle smile and wisdom. He is buried on top of Taben, who died in December, 2002 and this is next to Kwakha's still empty grave. There is solace in knowing that in death my dad and brother lie side by side. My visit to their grave jointly pays homage to two people that loved, protected and supported me throughout my life. Mtho admired my dedication and diligence in pursuit of this degree. It took me a month to find mental strength to peruse my thesis after his death. My mind, body and soul went heavy. I wailed uncontrollable on a public road a month after his death, walked 10 000 steps mostly along the beach and gazed at the sea to finally release pain that numbed me for a while. Yes, a part of me died with you Mtho. I am pushing against all odds to finish what you admired in me, applauded and encouraged that I reach my ultimate goals in life.

Lala ngoxolo Chizama!

END

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents conclusions in relation to the general and specific aims of the research. The conclusions of the general and specific aims are made bearing in mind the assumptions outlined in Chapter 1. I further describe how each general and specific aim of the research was dealt with. Also, I draw conclusions pertaining to findings that were discussed and integrated with the literature in Chapter 6. This chapter also details the limitations of the study. Lastly, it makes recommendations for further studies on the same or similar subject.

8.1 CONCLUSIONS PERTAINING TO THE GENERAL AND SPECIFIC AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The research questions of the study were:

1. How is gender identity constructed during childhood and impact thereof in shaping adulthood choices?
2. What are single women's experiences of singlism?
3. What are the single women experiences of singlism in the public service?

The general aim of the study was to explore the above topics. Chapter 1 described the general aim of the study. The various concepts related to the topics, from a domestic and global worldview, were covered in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 detailed the methodology followed in the research, which produced the findings discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. These findings were integrated with existing literature in Chapter 6. This chapter elaborates on the conclusions of the general aim.

The specific aims of the research were:

1. To explore how the intersection of gender based socialisation within the African cultural value system, patriarchy, masculinity and femininity contributes on how single women construct their gender identity.
2. To explore lived experiences of singlism.
3. To explore lived experiences of single senior women managers on singlism in the public service.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 contextualised the study. An in-depth understanding of existing knowledge outlined the scope for the study. Section 8.1.1 offers concluding thoughts on how the findings added new knowledge, or extended and/or confirmed existing knowledge. The following were themes that provided context for the study and formed basis for interpretation of findings:

- Femininity and masculinity: a historical perspective;
- Singlism;
- Afrocentric disposition including on gender;
- Gender (in) equality: A South African perspective;
- Flying solo, with its advantages at work; and
- Grooming the next generation of women leadership for the public service.

1. To make recommendations to practitioners on singlism from an African perspective and describe how single female senior managers experienced the public service. Section 8.2.2 addresses conclusions derived from the findings of this study, and existing literature.
2. To make recommendations to industrial and organisational psychologists and other relevant practitioners on interventions necessary for single women as a defined identity, for women raising children on their own, and for creating a more gender-sensitive public service workplace.

The social impact of the increasing number of single women, never-married women and female-headed households (Stats SA, 2020) has been observed in the past 25 years, especially among African families. The same report notes the increase of employed women due to access to education and work opportunities, with the public service drawing them into its ranks. These developments are social issues that redefine concepts such as family and what being single means in a society that still glorifies coupledom and heterosexual relationships. It is important that industrial and organisational psychologists are well versed in the developing trends in relation to singlism discussed in 2.1.1.

8.1.1 Conclusions pertaining to the literature reviewed

The main themes identified were: singleness as a conscious choice; defining singleness as independent, ambitious women who value their freedom; the public service being hostile to single women; suffering in silence: prescribed medication, food and shopping to the rescue; hard choices: single, raising children and working in the public sector; enablers for single working women; and shaping a better future for women in the public service.

8.1.1.1 Femininity and masculinity: A historical perspective

The participants in this study are products of socialisation that instilled gender-appropriate behaviours and actions according to femininity and masculinity (Brossa, 2017). This grooming begins in their families through gender-specific division of labour, nurturing skills transferred, names given to boy and girl children, clothing and language (Brossa, 2017; Motsa & Morojele, 2019). Men are accorded higher status than women, with this differentiation emphasised from childhood (Anderson, 2018; Motsa & Morojele, 2019). Women are considered as weak, unintelligent and unambitious (Anderson, 2018; Archip, 2014; Brossa, 2017; Ngulube, 2018). The question arises if the growing number of single women is a consequence of socialisation and the patriarchy failing to indoctrinate strict adherence to gender norms.

The findings show that some families do not adhere to gender-based chores and roles. In addition, South Africa has a history of strong African women due to the harsh socio-economic factors of colonisation, apartheid labour laws and migrant labour policies. Perhaps the generations of strong black African single women were reinforced by the survival instincts ingrained in each human. Women rose up against the brutal force of patriarchy in their families and society, joined wars against colonialism and apartheid, and survived estrangement from their partners to emerge as forces in their own right. Further, the literature confirmed an intergenerational phenomenon of disrupted African family composition projecting concept of black matriarchy, female-headed households, even among married women (Budlender & Lund, 2011; Maqubela, 2016; Smith, 2013; Willoughby et al., 2021).

Family composition and female role models have had lasting effects on the participants in this study. I conclude from the literature and the findings that after all the wars fought

against oppressive and discriminatory regimes, African men came home and preserved another form of institutionalised dominance: patriarchy. Also, it is through the lens of patriarchy that single women are seen as an anomaly, yet the statistics reveal that in South Africa 37.9% of families are headed by women (Stats SA, 2018).

8.1.1.2 Singlism

The study confirmed existence of singlism in South Africa, as also documented in Annexure H. Single women experience abuse through labelling and stereotypes. The notion of coupledom and heterosexual intimate relationships remain entrenched (Mfono & Mfono, 2008). Singlism, a term coined by DePaulo and Morris (2005), perpetuates tha these stereotypes and undermines single women's virtues and gains as independent, economically active beings who raise children on their own.

This study's findings add to our knowledge of a little-researched topic regarding single women. It also raises awareness of their issues from their lived experiences. The silence of Afrocentrism on gender discrimination deserves further interrogation by women, as they stride for equality (Bangura, 2012; Chawane, 2016). Single women's success is an indictment on men: their absence allows attainment of prosperity. The impact of singlism on women has not achieved what the proponents of patriarchy hoped. It has not discouraged women or made them despondent. Single women embraced being single with all its negative and positive aspects. The impact of singlism seems to depend very much on how women react to singlism

There was limited literature on single women and intimacy. One can deduce that society disregards relationships outside of nuclear families, or those that defy commitment to heterosexual relationships. Single women emerged as determining the forms of their intimate relationships, bolstered by their empowerment and financial position. It seems that this proactiveness on intimacy emulates male behaviour, traditionally also anchored on access to resources. It is easy to categorise men's behaviour as abusive, given South Africa's statistics for gender-based violence. I may be blinded that single women are escaping from male dominance, and shielding themselves from traumatic past experiences, and hence choosing when, how and with who they will allow themselves to be vulnerable in intimate relationships.

8.1.1.3 Africanist perspectives on gender

Gender in an African perspective is steeped in patriarchy which celebrates the domination of men over women (Burnett & Adom-Aboagye, 2019). There is a recognition of the role that women play, but there is resistance by men sharing power, resources and opportunities with women (Stryodana, 2015). The existing literature on African gender depicts women in poverty, or as victims of disasters – all that which is associated with deficit. The study shows that single women are capable, can stand on their own and achieve success using their own strengths. The study celebrates single women as trailblazers capable of achieving anything. The findings contradict the notion that women should be nurturers only as instilled during socialisation.

8.1.1.4 Gender (in) equality: A South African perspective

The public service is a microcosm of a male-dominated and macho cultural environment with single women in a minority within leadership positions (Afolabi, 2019; Mayer et al., 2018; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2015; Vial & Napier, 2018). Hostility to women, gender discrimination, stereotypes and silence reflect prevailing societal treatment of single women. The workplace also presents a challenge to single women due to the relative fewness of women, the prevailing culture and expectations, and the silo mentality that runs against their socialisation (i.e., discourages teamwork and displaces women from their nurturing role, as a consequence of hectic work schedule), (Akuma, 2015; Ganiyu et al., 2017; Gehrke & Hassard, 2015; Ncube, 2018). This study explored how women were encouraged to enter the workplace through affirmative action policy and laws, and yet were allowed to stagnate once they got there. Likewise, the diversity which is what women bring was not made use of (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018; Shung-King et al., 2018; Suk Ha et al., 2018). I was interested at how single women defied the patriarchal social order, earning status as heads of households and defined themselves as ambitious who demand their rightful space in the public service.

I was also curious on how displacement from their nurturing role would affect them. What is fascinating was confirmation of the heaviness of the wife role on women. The absence thereof in single women lightened their responsibilities, helping them pursue their careers to the fullest (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). I conclude

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that single women enter the public service with a strong mental and psychosocial fortitude in finding their space and making the service a better space for women (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Vial & Napier, 2018).

8.1.1.5 Flying solo and its advantages at work

The literature and findings showed that single women spend more time at work, travelling and spending less time at home, as this allows for more social networks. Further, that they delegated nurturing and household responsibilities using their hard earned resources. The Covid-19 lockdown closed this preferred space for single women, who mostly found themselves working at home with no household support (Alon et al., 2020; Hertz et al., 2021; Kalenkoski & Panilonia, 2020). Loneliness engulfed single women, as confirmed by the literature (Dube, 2021; Nduna & Oyama, 2020; Nduna & Tshona, 2021; Odeku, 2021; Tisane, 2020). In the case of some participants their intimate partners were unavailable, as they reside elsewhere and travel restrictions were in force. The participants felt the negative impacts of isolation with no reprieve or any coping mechanism. The question is how single women can cushion themselves from such isolation while maintaining their independence.

8.1.1.6 Coaching and mentoring

The literature and findings both showed that the hostility and toxicity of the public service did not dissuade single women from grooming younger women and sharing their wisdom with them. The Afrocentric perspective and deeper understanding of single women based on African value systems explain this as the traditional older women role. Perhaps the participants did this of their own accord, without thinking of coaching and mentoring as a generational obligation. It is rooted in the oral passage of wisdom, and single women incorporated it from acculturated ways at work and in boardrooms.

8.2 CONCLUSIONS PERTAINING TO EMPIRICAL STUDY

The research findings were discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, graphically presented in Figures 4.1 and 5.1 and integrated with existing literature in Chapter 6. This section discusses conclusions drawn from the research findings, and highlights whether the findings support, extend and or add new knowledge.

8.2.1 Singleness as a conscious choice

This study traced the journey leading to the adult choices to being single starting from socialisation, with the family playing an instrumental role (Carter, 2014; Ngulube, 2018; Stead, 2013). Socialisation emphasises gender roles and develops young girls' nurturing skills, for example (Akuma, 2015; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Musetha & Musehane, 2012). Some families exposed girls to similar chores as boys, which instilled confidence, a sense of independence and a belief that they can achieve anything in life. Single women recounted how their formative years shaped their identity and who they are as adults (Helman & Ratele, 2016).

The family composition and presence of influential female role models made lasting impressions on them as children. The parents instilled the African value system and ensured that children are equipped with survival kills for adulthood (Akuma, 2015). The immediate extended families and communities reinforced and provided role models that showed the pros and cons of singleness (Bonthuys, 2018; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014). Further, institutions such as schools, churches and organisations that fine-tuned tools that made being single a choice worth pursuing.

Single women are an intergenerational phenomenon in the African population due to historical socio-economic factors such as apartheid, and migrant labour and restricted urbanisation policies (Hall & Mokomane, 2018). The rise in the numbers of single women is also attributed to favourable education and work opportunities in the democratic era (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Stats SA, 2015). In the same period South Africa also witnessed a rising divorce rate, and an increasing number of female-headed families and independent women (Marais et al., 2014; Stats SA, 2015). Singleness was a conscious choice as they are determined to raise children on their own, to head households and persevere with education. Most participants possess postgraduate qualifications and all occupy senior positions.

The family, as a unit of socialisation, taught the young girls an African value system (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2018). However, the single women did not undergo female rite of passage as teenagers, while boys overwhelmingly do (Padmanabhanunni et al., 2018). The literature did not offer an explanation for this decline, but did confirm that these rituals prepared girls for marriage, being mothers and wives (Hoza, 2010; Sotewu, 2016). Perhaps the family and societal de-emphasis on young girls for

marriage grooming, for example, channelled more resources towards independence and self-sustainability. Also, there is less emphasis on girls as means for attracting wealth through lobola, and more on the family gaining through women's employment. Women and men emerge from socialisation with divergent perspectives on their roles in a household, for example. Men are indoctrinated on how to be male within a patriarchal world view while women are discouraged due to lack of girls' rites of passage.

Women in general gained freedom of choice of partners due to decrease in forced marriages and abductions in African culture (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Maluleke, 2012). Further, also gained freedom to choose whether to marry or not, as the African gendered marital grooming practices decreased. The study is embedded in the Afrocentrism paradigm, which advocates for Africans to reclaim their power usurped through colonisation (Asante, 2009) and apartheid in South Africa. Afrocentrism is criticised for not challenging discrimination and abuse of women in a patriarchal society (Chawane, 2016; Van der Walt, 2015). The study allows single women to define themselves, and treats them as active participants in creating knowledge about their lived experiences (Mkabela, 2005).

As previously mentioned, there is little written about single women. Women in South Africa constitute 51% of the population (Stats SA, 2011). If Afrocentrism is truly about emancipation then it cannot leave behind the majority of its constituency (Asante, 2009; Bangura, 2012; Chawane, 2016). Women suffer atrocities through Afrocentrism's silence and lack of conviction in advocating for equality. Perhaps studies such as this one contribute through adding voices on gender matters within Afrocentrism.

It is worth noting that there was sufficient South African-based literature on women. This was encouraging, as it shows growing interest in domestic issues. However, this enthusiasm was not evident in investigating single women. This resulted in over-reliance on reports from Stats SA, which conducts periodic studies on demographic and socio-economic trends including the rising number of female-headed families and the impact thereof on poverty, employment and family composition. The literature search revealed useful research conducted in Africa on domestic socio-economic conditions.

8.2.2 Defining singleness as independent, ambitious women who value their freedom

Let me be clear that single women firstly defined singleness within the confines of their nurturing role. There is much literature supporting this gendered role socialisation (Akuma, 2015; Helman & Ratele, 2016; Musetha & Musehane, 2012). There was no literature that corroborated single women inclination on defining themselves firstly through their nurturing role. One can attribute this to single women wholly embracing of this parenting responsibility rather than glorification of the nurturing role. Single women are seen as martyrs for assuming this role of preserving future generations in the African family context.

The single women unambiguously enjoyed their freedom of choice in their lives (Budgeon, 2016; Hancock, 2017; Lahad, 2012; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Van Der Walt, 2015). Single women moved from defining singleness from the nurturing role to all traits that are positive, and included non-attachment to any intimate relationships (Budgeon, 2016; Sharp & Ganong, 2011; Van Der Walt, 2015). The definition of singleness laid buried within themselves yet they were shy to express it at first. It seems that their grooming discouraged self-praise.

It should be borne in mind that there is a cultural lag in embracing singleness, due to continued celebration of heterosexual coupledom and nuclear families (Budgeon, 2016; DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Plank, 2018; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). This cultural lag was shown in the study on recognition of African marriage rites, ambiguities on children born out of wedlock, dispute resolution, and welfare of women and children (Archip, 2014; Motsa & Morojele, 2019). Single women gained no settlement during divorce if they married customarily, as P1/40years/2F1/D-AC/Dip shared from her experiences. Perhaps this is why African women are married both customarily and in accordance with civil law. It can be concluded that women enter into marriage aware that it could end in divorce, and prepare for that by also marrying under Roman Dutch law (Yarbrough, 2020).

In African society women are treated as property of their fathers, brothers or husbands (Moshi, 2017). Single women who are independent, ambitious and financially secure disrupt this notion of ownership by anyone. Single women's experiences are that

African society is slow in redefining societal power arrangement. It could also be the sheer audacity of patriarchy ignoring single women strides towards gender equality, including their stake on power. Single women rise in numbers is credited to improved education and work opportunity access in recent decades in South Africa (Afolabi, 2019; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2020).

Single women described the juggling of careers and head-of-household responsibilities as hard and difficult, and they also experience loneliness (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Gehrke & Hassard, 2015; Ncube, 2018). It seems that society takes revenge on single women for defying coupledom by imposing all child rearing responsibilities on them, while also piling on stereotypes labelling (Carter, 2014; Helman & Ratele, 2016). The study enlarged knowledge of South African single women's experiences of labelling words and stereotypes (see Annexure H). The labelling and stereotypes depicted single women as sexually loose, discarded, or having reached their "sell by date" to find a partner (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; Hancock, 2017; Plank, 2018). Yet this study shows single women reluctant to engage in intimate relationships, and choosing potential partners carefully (Khunou, 2012; Plank, 2018). Single women are conscious of being under scrutiny in their sexual conduct (Leslie & Morgan, 2011; McCann & Allen, 2018; Plank, 2018), unlike bachelors, who are praised (Van Der Walt, 2015). Plank (2018) and Van der Walt (2015) concluded that the aspect of single women and sexuality is under-researched and I reach the same conclusion on this topic.

8.2.3 Hostile public service for single women

Single women experienced the public service as hostile, bullying, stereotyping, male dominated and as having a macho workplace culture (Mayer et al., 2018; Osituyo, 2018; Steffens et al., 2019; Vial & Napier, 2018). Political principals' heavy-handedness came out strongly in participants' testimony, but with no support in the literature. Sexual harassment in the public service was mentioned in relation to younger women, as perhaps the participants were confident in tackling such (N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). The public service is a microcosm within a patriarchal society, and therefore reflects negative stereotypes of, and discrimination against, single women.

On the other side, the public service hostility could be ascribed more to single women's inability to exerting similar power as men who are dominant. Participants described the

cold treatment received and being shunned from informal influential decision-making in the workplace such as sport events or drinking hook-ups (Mayer et al., 2018; Stats SA, 2015; Vial & Napier, 2018). Further, single women like working in teams and collaborating rather than working in silos, another source of alienation in the public service (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014).

Also, there is pressure to prove themselves as capable (Kahn & Motsoeneng, 2014; Molotsi, 2016; Onyehuluchukwu, 2014). In addition single women were at odds with an expectation that they should emulate masculine power posturing for better "fit" and easy career advancement (Marais et al., 2014; Molotsi, 2016). Socialisation ingrained certain values and behavioural traits along feminine and masculine lines. Public service is experienced as emulating masculine and a macho work environment which single women find hostile and alienating to how they function and organise themselves (Ngomane, 2017). The single women, although in the minority at leadership levels, displayed femininity in their approach to leadership, such as problem-solving, inclusivity and a more participatory style (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Shung-King, 2018). In conclusion on this matter, the public service is not a gender-sensitive environment (Abe et al., 2016; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018) and thus constraints optimum diversity value from single women in leadership.

The public service is known for poorly scheduled travelling, long hours and frequent absence from family (Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014; Marais et al., 2014; N.N. Gwagwa, personal communication, May 10, 2018). But single women especially experienced being targeted for last-minute travelling and weekend deployment, on the assumption that they do not account to anyone at home (Van der Walt, 2015). Single women resorted to switching off their phones over weekends, as means of creating boundaries between themselves and colleagues and supervisors. This extends existing knowledge on how single women create boundaries from work, thus protecting time with their families. Participants were firstly hesitant at defining themselves outside their nurturing roles, so on the surface it is tempting to assume non estrangement from the nurturing role. But single women used their salaries to escape the nurturing and household roles.

8.2.4 Suffering in silence: prescribed medication, food and shopping to the rescue

The findings show that participants acted as anxiety containers for younger women in the male-dominated public service (Mayer et al., 2018), as shown by their protecting younger women from sexual harassment. Single women were in turn abused by political principals. Some suffered under hostile relationships with their supervisors, and worked hard, long hours and felt lonely (Aldossari & Chaudry, 2020; Foley et al., 2020; Swartz & Potgieter, 2017). Single women admitted suffering from loneliness, a taboo topic which is hardly spoken about (Murthy, 2020; Utoft, 2020). However, there was a positive correlation between a supportive supervisor and job satisfaction (Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014). It is an indictment on society that single women resort to abuse of prescribed medication, routinely self-admit to psychiatric hospitals, and use food and shopping as escapes.

Overindulgence as a coping mechanism is supported in literature (Oosthuizen & Mostert, 2010), while prescribed medication abuse extends this knowledge. Participants choose using prescribed medication and extended hospitalisation based on affordability and/or using medical aid, which is one of their work benefits. They can also afford other self-care options, such as pampering retreats, for example, and the afore-mentioned choices are destructive to their well-being. Perhaps single women are cognisant of their power, stretch it or dare society to call them out. Alternatively this could point to the strain that these single women experience given the different choices they have made for themselves in a traditional African society nested in a multicultural South African context.

8.2.5 Hard choices: single, raising children and working in the public sector

Participants in the study attended to work assignments after making sure their children were asleep, while existing knowledge portrays them as shy in negotiating openly for this arrangement (Ellias, 2018). It is an advantage that single women do not negotiate time away for their husbands nor experience envy for their career progression (Ganiyu et al., 2017; Stats SA, 2015; Suk Ha et al., 2018; Vermeulen & Sonubi, 2014). Single women suffer from strain as they face challenges alone. However, singleness balances their options, with freedom to make decisions without consulting. Further, there is less

interference on their careers in the absence of husbands or partners coupled with a sense of resilience and independence in managing all their responsibilities (McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Suk Ha et al., 2018).

Single women prioritise their careers and minimise involvement in their family responsibilities (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; McNulty & Moeller, 2018). Maximising their career ambition might signify a posture that extends their ability to attain financial security and career fulfilment. Affording a comfortable lifestyle for the family is traditional a male preserve. In a sense, single women emulate masculine behaviour, which delegate family responsibilities to their wives or mother of their children. In this case, single women use their financial security at buying themselves out of family responsibilities and compensate for their absence with luxuries that their salaries afford for their children (Suk Ha et al., 2018).

It is concluded that single women remain in the public service despite its hostility, coldness, poor public perceptions and macho environment (Mafini & Pooe, 2013; Marais et al., 2014; Ojedokon et al., 2015), as it affords an opportunity to serve, and also as they are well paid (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010; Mafini & Dlodlo, 2014; Marais et al., 2014). There are benefits for single women in sacrificing their lives and spending time with family as it pays off through career development and occupying influential leadership positions in the public service.

8.2.6 Enablers for single working women

This study's findings and literature make little differentiation between single and married women in the support structures that they developed. This was a study of single women and the researcher therefore cannot exclude that married women in senior management may well have similar support structures. Let me also state that I had a preconceived idea that single women buckled under pressure due to work and family role strain. This idea was challenged during the pilot interview and I reviewed existing literature on how single women generally fare with multiple responsibilities on their own. It is demonstrated that single women developed a strong support structure (Lues et al., 2013; Marais et al., 2014; Suk Ha et al., 2018). In addition, single women prioritise their careers, and non-attachment to husbands or partners allow them time to take care of what matters most and to strengthen mutually beneficial relationships for extended support (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Koekemoer & Mostert, 2010).

Intra-personal skills such as being conscientious, self-discipline and drive propel single women forward against all odds (Marais et al., 2014; Opie & Henn, 2013; Van der Berg & Martins, 2013). Single women achieved great acceptance of what matters most in their lives, namely themselves, careers and children and I dare say in that order. What matters most and gives fulfilment is pushing all these frontiers as far as they can (Opie & Henn, 2013). The literature on single women in South Africa is limited, as discussed in section 2.1.

Participants relied on their families for support, despite living far apart due to South African migration patterns (Muasya, 2016). Families cited in the literature included single women mothers, aunts, sisters and their eldest children (Akuma, 2015; Maqubela, 2016; Ngulube, 2018; Poggenpoel et al., 2017). The absence of the males is glaring. It starts with the fathers of the children concerned, their grandfathers and uncles. This study also added a dimension of mothers nurturing their grandchildren to allow their daughters' careers to flourish.

The role of grandparents in raising children is a global phenomenon (Choi et al., 2016; Dolbin-MacNab & Yancura, 2017). However, participants in this study mentioned grandmothers only, which turned out to be an intergenerational phenomenon (Gordon, 2017; Leinaweaver, 2014; Lewis et al., 2018). The traditional masculine roles are added to the feminine nurturing one. Single women absorbed providing security, materially and as heads of households that is traditionally male responsibilities. Further, fathers of their children escape from parenting with little or no consequences from an African cultural system, and the courts only rule on the financial aspect if single women push for it. Some confessed to giving up chasing fathers for maintenance for their children on obvious paternal responsibility.

Hired helpers, in the form of domestic workers, tutors and au pairs were a common feature in the households as single women contracted out nurturing, especially when the children were younger (Groves & Lui, 2012). However, children still demand food and care directly from their mothers whenever possible (Downes & Koekemoer, 2011; Oosthuizen, 2010). The narrative of women extending their hands in supporting each other remains true for hired help. It seems that the rise of single women in careers and accumulating financial resources contribute in another level of job creation for other

less empowered females. The domestic helpers, in turn use their salaries to take care of their own children and families.

Alternatively, single women used boarding schools, with literature affirming it as an alternative for upper-class children, a safe place, with good education and strict supervision (Behaghel et al., 2017). There was no additional literature supporting single women's experiences that boarding school offered them peace of mind about their children's welfare. Technology played a major role in tracking children, supervising homework and keeping in touch with family while away (Alessondra, 2013; Romero-Ruiz et al., 2017; Rudi et al., 2015; Tengimfene, 2009). In concluding, enablers for single women from family, mothers, hired help, boarding school and technology represent privileges single women afford as they absolve them from their nurturing role, using their hard earned resources to bail themselves out.

8.2.7 Shaping a better future for women in the public service

It is evident from the findings that public service lags behind in creating a gender sensitive environment, despite all the enabling legislation for women (Baral & Bhargwa, 2011; Khan & Motsoeneng, 2014). Single women defined the public service as hostile, with a prevailing macho culture, a toxic environment and victimisation based on gender. However, the single women protect younger women, coach and mentor them (Ncube, 2018). Single women protection and caring for other women flows from their nurturing skills and habits of collaboration instilled from their socialisation. There is also a theme of women's solidarity stretching from grandmothers, mothers, sisters, domestic helpers, interns and younger women at work. I conclude that women unite against injustices inflicted by men.

8.2.8 Final concluding reflections

I conclude that socialisation, in the light of changing composition of the African family, the effects of migration, the role of mothers in promoting their daughters' careers, and various aspects within the single women's domain are worth further investigation. Single women remain grounded in the African values that they were socialised in. Physical distance, broadened knowledge, the effect of mingling with other cultures, amongst others, seem to afford single women a choice on what works or does not work for themselves and families. I deduce that what emerges as their worldview is a

creation of something expressing African traditionalist values and those of the broader South African society. Single women cherry pick from African culture and embrace certain strands from other cultural influences. Participants were attuned to the demands of African traditions, and equally rose up to meet expectations from their careers and as household heads. The underlying goal is to lessen traditional gender expectations while embracing attributes that contributes to their well-being and their roles as heads of households.

DePaulo and Morris (2005) define singlism in negative terms. I concur on existence of stereotypes and discrimination aim at devaluating, if not dehumanising, women. The growing number of female-headed families and children growing up without fathers in South Africa can be read in tones that decry the death of the nuclear family (Akuma, 2015; Little, 2014; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Stats SA, 2015). The single women phenomenon in South Africa is intergenerational, so logically it should no longer raise eyebrows. I did not encounter single women feeling sorry for themselves, scared or bothered by how society views them. I find that these single women ooze power and financial strength, and appeared empowered in who they are and what they stand for. Therefore, let me conclude that singlism is part of their lived experiences but it does not define them. Findings pointed to influence of women role models during socialisation, and I see these women as beacons of what it is to be single and live successfully through their hard work in South African society.

Abuse is hurled at single women, who are given names such as "returned soldiers" or "left overs" (see Annexure H) for choosing to leave marriages and/or opting to live outside of committed heterosexual relationships. Traditionalists resort to insults as a way of shaming and disgracing single women. Participants celebrate the freedom gained in leaving these institutions or relations. Yes, single women confirmed feeling lonely and that it was hard living alone. But single women stare back triumphantly at society as they climb career ladders, embrace their success and watch their children grow. There was something fulfilling in being captains of their households and breaking barriers on what single women can achieve, and not to be thought failures because of their marital status. I view them as trailblazers for the younger generations, as their powerful statures are on public display.

They acknowledge that the patriarchy impact on their lives, including at work. Single women deal with patriarchal negative sentiments through stepping into their power, embracing leadership positions and empowering younger women. There is a strong determination to tackle male dominance, gender abuse and discrimination through sharing nuggets of tactics borne out of wisdom from lived experience. Perhaps this is inherited from African traditional oral history cultural practices that designated older women to inculcate wisdom in younger women for their future roles and responsibilities. Single women seem to continue with this tradition in boardrooms and workplace as their forebears did around fires or gatherings under trees.

One of the fundamental assumptions I had before commencing this research, was that single women suffered mostly in achieving work-family balance due to the magnitude of the responsibilities that they managed on their own. It can be deduced that single women consciously weigh up their responsibilities and prioritise them. Participants in this study seem to have valued their careers above all. Choices demonstrated through their shared experiences indicated that financial empowerment and technology make it possible to delegate household and nurturing roles at a price that they are prepared to pay for. I guess the same could be true for responsibilities that constrain their career pursuits and overall being. So, buying themselves out of certain day-to-day responsibilities allows them time and energy to pursue what matters most for their growth and family sustainability, and thus gain a semblance of life-work balance.

8.3 CONTRIBUTIONS TO INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PRACTICE

The study was undertaken for a doctorate in the field of organisational psychology. There is an emphasis on understanding lived experiences. The emphasis on personal experiences gave single women a voice and allowed them to say who they are in their own words and also to share experiences from their worldview. Further, the study highlighted single women senior managers' views of the public service, thus giving experiences of singlism at work. This exploration of singlism and documented experiences in the South African public service make a contribution to the research and practice of organisational psychology

This research offers possible areas of organisational psychology intervention on single women at individual and group level, and also from an organisational perspective. The study's findings supported existing knowledge in some areas, contradicted in others,

and extended organisational psychology, including its methodology. Afrocentrism is a paradigm applied in this research for its emphasis on African mind-set as central, for advocacy against oppression, and for treating participants as equals during knowledge creation (Asante, 2009; Bangura, 2012; Chawane, 2016; Mkabela, 2005). Its application to this gender study exposes its inadequacies in addressing single women's discrimination, oppression and stereotypes from African cultural and patriarchal perspectives (Chawane, 2016).

8.3.1 Contribution to theory

This study pertains to the lived experiences shared by single women at senior management level in the public service. A sample was taken during single women's productive years. Many studies of women, especially single women, are done in the USA, with South Africa lagging behind. Research on single women concentrates on their old age as widows and/or living alone in retirement (Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Other studies depict single women as an anomaly, and thus examine stigma and stereotypes (Lahad, 2012). This study provided a balanced view on definition of singleness, of productive, career-oriented, independent and ambitious single women, which benchmarks its contribution to the body of knowledge. In essence, this is an attempt to answer Maqubela's (2015) assertion that previous research has side-stepped exploring single women's context and worldview.

Studies of single women mostly compare them to married women, and considers them in terms of non-attachment to heterosexual relations and on socio-economic factors such as poverty (Budgeon, 2016; Hancock, 2017; Maqubela, 2016; Rogan, 2016; Van Der Walt, 2015; Willoughby et al., 2021). The contribution of this study is in how single women experience singlism and the South African public sector. There are few studies concentrating on this gender-specific domain of the public service, not forgetting available studies in general (Gqiza & Ogunnubi, 2019; Maqubela, 2016; Mayer et al., 2018; Mkhize & Msomi, 2016; Steffens et al., 2019; Vial & Napier, 2018).

There was no shortage of books or articles on research theories, which made understanding the various methods and paradigms manageable. Literature was borrowed from several disciplines, such as gender studies, sociology and family studies. Therefore the researcher emerges from this research with capabilities as a practising industrial and organisational psychologist. Let me add that it also exposed

my inherent capabilities such as resilience, focus, patience self-drive, motivation, adaptability, criticism and openness to feedback. These are personality qualities that ensured the thesis was completed.

8.3.2 Contribution to methodology

Afrocentrism, despite the gaps inherent in it, is recommended in future research in organisational psychology. I identified further possible areas for additional research and future areas of focus for its development. This study demonstrated applicability and suitability of feminist-phenomenology in a gender study in an African context. It was balanced well with Afrocentrism, which centres African values and thoughts (Asante, 2009; Bangura, 2012; Chawane, 2016; Mkabela, 2005). The contribution to the field of organisational psychology is using bifocal or multifocal approach in researching gender, firstly analysing participants' background, values and what informs their worldview.

The use of Afrocentrism in a gender study adds women's voices in advocacy for empowerment in this paradigm. Further, I move beyond decrying the fact that some of its proponents pay little regard to women's issues to practically applying it. Further application of Afrocentrism to gender studies should put emancipation at the top of the agenda.

8.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The sampling of only single women in senior management of the public service limited the range of perspectives that could have been achieved if women in middle management were considered. For instance, the researcher relied on the senior managers' experiences of hostility, sexual harassment and mentoring and coaching. This may have resulted in a selection bias as sampling were almost homogeneous. Middle managers could have contradicted or supported these findings. Further, the sample does not represent the South African demographics and it was only Africans. The experiences of white, coloured and Asian single women are absent, and their voices could have added a uniquely South African diversity. They were not deliberately excluded, but neither did the researcher actively search for diversity in this regard. A more inclusive study could have been more valuable, as South Africa lags behind in studies of single women and women in general.

It was an advantage that I am an African single woman and was previously employed as a senior manager for twelve years before I resigned from government. I also worked in provincial government as a junior manager and was later promoted to the Senior Management Service. I was affected by the affirmative action policies and laws that promoted access to education and employment opportunities of women, especially those of African origin (Christensen, 2017). Further, I shared lived experiences as a single African woman, heading a household and occupying an executive position, thus augmenting the depth of the research findings. In retrospect, this presented a selection bias during sampling as I recruited single working women with shared history as mine.

I approached each participant with an open mind, intending to gain information about their lived experiences. This helped in silencing my thoughts and kept my mind in check. However, data analysis was difficult, as perhaps it involved extracting from my lived experiences. I became overwhelmed with emotions, acknowledged this to my supervisor and took a break. The break allowed me to distance my mind from the data, and I resumed when I felt much more in control of my emotions. Therefore, I advise that researchers stay tuned to their emotions and attachment to participants' lived stories. Detachment is another form of limiting bias to the study.

Also, I expanded my horizons and skills as a researcher through this study. It broadened the scope of existing debates on single women, female-headed households, African family composition, Afrocentrism and other related knowledge. Further, I developed an in-depth appreciation of research methodologies, paradigms and industrial and organisational psychology. The topics such as socialisation and different types of families were from sociology, while the public administration and governance contained more on public service structure and dynamics

Another limitation of the study was delay in gathering data, as senior managers' diaries are congested and travelling made it difficult to conduct interviews. The participants proved difficult to pin down for interview appointments. They kept tight schedules due to their heavy workload and family commitments. This resulted in data collection happening far apart. I had to re-familiarise myself with the research procedure and questions. It seemed that I was starting all over again with each interview. There were also pauses in my attempts to reach out to potential participants, so I made a list of them and scheduled phoning each of them in my diary. Conducting of interviews

virtually could have saved time. In retrospect, the use of a research assistant could have also added value during data collection, saved time and presented preliminary findings that I could have further synthesised.

Data collection presented certain doubts and anxiety related to the topic and engaging with participants I was acquainted with. It took three interviews for me to realise that they could be managed, despite my preconceptions. I doubted the value of the research because these single women shared slightly different experiences. They agreed that being single was hard, but also said it was worth it. This called for introspection that allowed me to flow as the process unfolded, as what I had collected was rich in many ways. I then decided to silence my own voice and listened distinctly to what the single women said. In the end, I became a vessel of their experiences. The research evolved in line with their own voices and not mine. I was after all a researcher and not living in their world.

Further, the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown that commenced on 27 March 2020 delayed submission of the thesis. The lockdown was imposed abruptly, but was expected to be brief. I mistakenly thought I would go through my thesis speedily, having ample free time. Instead, I suffered from altered time clock disorientation, resulting in sleeping during the day and scrolling for news and social media during the night. South Africa went into shock due to restrictions and "house arrests" and I suffered loss of human contact, save for my youngest daughter and my domestic helper. The devastating effect of family and friends who passed away during the lockdown, and inability to grieve and commiserate with loved ones took a toll also. There was lost concentration and inability to consolidate further resources needed for this study. This turned into months of actual thesis work lost and delayed supervisor comments, as work backlog caught up as the country slowly picked up pace in the new normal.

Lastly, it became difficult in apportioning experiences as purely affecting single women or applicable to all women. I ended up making a declaration that the experiences are attributed to single women only, as these were their own voices. However, the literature assisted in making distinctions in certain areas.

8.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are made here for future research and for practice.

8.5.1 Recommendations for future research

Singleness as a conscious choice was among the main themes of this study. Stats SA (2015) shows 37.9% of households are headed by women, while 35% of children live with both parents. Single women are an intergenerational phenomenon in African families, and there is a decline in the number of registered marriages and an increase in the number of never-married adults (Stats SA, 2018). There is more room to study singleness, family composition and effects of socialisation, as migration patterns and urbanisation create physical distance between families. In essence, single women are entrusted with socialising their children with less reliance on extended families. There is an avenue to investigate how this impacts gender role grooming and masculinity development in boys. Secondly, single women delegate nurturing of young children to hired helpers. There is another avenue to investigate to what extent family values are transferred if single mothers are absent from home. Further, a study on singlism pertaining to widowed working women would also add value, as they bring different dimensions, especially in African culture.

Singlism is an under-researched concept in South Africa. Stereotypes and prejudices against single women are prevalent (see Annexure H). Exploring this will amplify women's voices. Further, it also brings out the distinctive features of singlism in an African environment.

Also, it would be interesting to explore the impact of Covid-19 on single women in South Africa. Single women were grounded for months at home with no travelling to work, Cape Town and abroad. In some case, they were at home with the children. Home schooling resumed, and so did virtual meetings that invaded the private spaces of employees. Single women assumed household responsibilities with no assistance from family and domestic help. Perhaps spending so much time at home was an adjustment on its own, coupled with feelings of loneliness. These are some of the issues that deserve investigation as single women pushed for flexi-time and working from home. This was permitted, although under difficult conditions. Screaming children, dogs barking and household background noise have become fodder for jokes

during virtual meetings. However, these are coupled with feelings of embarrassment, guilt and distraction from children seeking their mother's attention. How is productivity affected by working from home?

Single women's experiences are not widely studied. This is a window of opportunity to explore all their different facets of their lives. It is time to investigate matters such as sexuality and intimate relationships. Further, case studies could be conducted of the days or weeks of single women's lives. These would track them as they start their days, prepare for work, do the same for their children, carry out work engagements and assignments, and wind up their days.

The public service is lagging behind in realising diversity issues, both in numbers and full integration of women, despite legislation enacted over twenty years ago. There is a need to evaluate the impact of this legislation and to interrogate the prevalence of placing women on the periphery in relation to the dominant culture. The statistics show an increase in female-headed families, due to divorce and fewer marriages. Single women could become more numerous than couples, and become a norm, rather than an outlier. This is significant for policy makers and employers, as they could shift employee demands in future. This is another area for further investigation. Power relations between the sexes deserve further study, as men have been dominant thus far. This could link with how gender socialisation occurs under the tutelage of strong and affirmed women, and how these females in turn shape their leadership skills from a young age.

Some single women's partners care for children irrespective of blood connection. It is worth broadly investigating experiences of single women in this regard. Further, we should find out why the biological father abdicates parenting, yet another male is willing to step in. Does that mean that males link parenting responsibility with emotional connection to the mother of the child? Alternatively, do single women seek out intimate partners who are compatible and who embrace fathering children brought into the relationship?

The sample could be extended to single women in middle management and across other demographics, such as race. There is much to investigate with regard to how single women find the public service hostile. It will also add value if the sample includes

married women, as it became difficult to know what aspects of the public service were applicable only to single women.

Participants bemoaned lack of social support within the public service. They felt alone, even though their challenges were shared by other women. That there is a fear of reaching out and being vulnerable, as the hostile public service environment takes its toll on them. The establishment of formal channels for dialogue and platforms to address their plight is long overdue. A study is proposed on appropriate measures of detecting high stress among single women in the public service, with the aim of recommending steps to overcome it.

The incorporation of focus group sessions in addition to interviews is also recommended for future research. These could have provided more detail on certain issues, and women open up more in group conversations. Further, it would have provided bonding over shared experiences. There is scope to combine feminist-phenomenology and Afrocentrism when conducting gender studies.

8.5.2 Recommendations for practice

Single women are growing in numbers in South Africa, as statistics show. Further, single women are concentrated in urban areas for work opportunities and career advancement. They are isolated from their extended families and raise children alone, with little or no assistance from their ex-husbands or partners. Another issue is how they negotiate the demands of African traditional and acculturated contexts through their careers in the public service.

It is important that attention is given to their overall wellness and sustained productivity in all aspects of their roles. Single women, perhaps women in general, appeared disenfranchised as a gender, despite sharing common experiences, as the findings demonstrated. There is a need for ongoing facilitated conversations that raise awareness of their plight. This could help in two ways. Firstly, this could allow them to exhale all that they bottle up as they confront different challenging situations. Secondly, it would allow them to gain insights through listening to others' experiences and to expand their networks.

In addition, I recommend formal platforms for women and employee awareness programmes, and coaching and mentoring dedicated to single women in senior management in the public service (Ngomane, 2017). There is also ample opportunity for the public service to cultivate an inclusive gender-sensitive environment through setting advisory employee forums that analyse and engineer solutions. These forums could include colloquiums that bring awareness on workplace gender issues. Give single senior women managers platform in sharing how to navigate and become successful despite a hostile toxic work environment. The role of political supervisors and head of departments' gender sensitivity and giving support to women is another angle of bringing positive changes to the public service.

8.6 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This chapter shows the vast scope for more research. Individual experiences open many areas for investigation. Less-examined aspects deserve organisational attention. There is also a sense of relief in offering advice to fellow researchers on the emerging trends, perhaps also tying up loose ends. Here is an anecdote about my Standard 1 (Grade 3) teacher: the researcher was a noise maker of note and was often caught far away from her allocated desk. Our teacher would stand for some time at the door and observe the commotion that we caused. In most cases, the sudden silence of my classmates alerted me to her presence. The teacher would famously remind us that she had finished school a long time ago. It was my dream for years to say this with the same conviction that she had. Well, writing this chapter finally resonated with my teacher. Safe to say that I am done for now.

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ANNEXURES

<div align="center">

ANNEXURE A:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM.

</div>

Title of the research: The experiences of singlism of single female senior managers within the South African public service: An Afrocentric and feminist-phenomenology perspective.

Institute	:	University of South Africa
Department	:	Industrial & Organisational Psychology (CEMS)
Researcher	:	Ms Nikelwa Tengimfene
Email	:	6174477@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Cellphone	:	0825745495
Supervisor	:	Prof Dr Michelle S. May

Letter of consent

I, _____, agree to take part in the research project conducted by Nikelwa Tengimfene as part of the requirements for her PhD degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa (Unisa).

I consent that this data may be used in the analysis required for the publishing of journal articles. I understand that the information that I will supply will be confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone, and that it will only be used in summary form in the research findings. The researcher will protect my identity and hence ensure my privacy and anonymity.

The information that I provide will be held securely until the research has been completed (published), after which it will be destroyed. The information that I provide will not be used for any other purpose.

I have been informed that I may withdraw from this study at any time and that any information that I have supplied will then not be used and any records held relating to my contribution will be destroyed.

Signed on this _____ day of _____, 2015_____

_____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA FORM

Date:

Place:

Name (optional)

Age

Marital Status   **Tick**: Divorced/Widowed/ Never Married

Highest Standard Passed

Name type of job occupied

Length of service

Salary level or bracket

Dependants   How many?

                                  Gender?

                                  Age/s

                                  Educational Level/s

SECTION B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewer   : Thank you for agreeing to be part of this interview.

Interviewee : Response

Interviewer   : Are you ready to start? Shall we begin?

Interviewee : Response

Interviewer   : Describe what it means for you to be a single woman?
- Probe using the following:
- 'What do you mean by that?'
- 'Please tell me more"
- 'Explain that further for me, please'

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- Affirm using 'I see', 'ok', 'umh' and 'really'

(Interviewee gives more in-depth information and clarifications. Interviewer paraphrases the question to get another angle such as Working as senior manager entails heavy responsibility so does raising a child and children single handily. How is your experience thus far?).

Interviewer: Please share with me your experiences of being a single working mother, at senior management within the Public Service?

- Probe using the following:
- 'What do you mean by that?'
- 'Please tell me more"
- 'Explain that further for me, please'
- Affirm using 'I see', 'ok', 'umh' and 'really'

(Interviewee gives more in-depth information and clarifications. Interviewer paraphrases the question to get another angle such as Working as senior manager entails heavy responsibility so does raising a child and children single handily. How is your experience thus far?).

Interviewer: 'Do you find that taking care of children and working fulltime, is fair on you as a single working woman?'

- Probe using the following:
- 'Explain further why you say that?'
- 'Please give me examples to illustrate that further"
- 'I see', 'ok', 'umh' and 'really'

Interviewer: If you were to change anything about your circumstances in this regard, what will it be?

- Probe in between questions using:
- 'Please tell me more';
- 'Please explain that more';
- 'how', 'why is that so', will be used to gather more information.

Interviewer: We have has come to an end of our interview. Is there anything that you wish to add or ask?

Interviewee: Response

Interviewer: How did you find the interview?

Interviewee: Response

Interviewer: Thank you so much for availing herself and sharing her experiencing. I shall share the interview transcript with you within a week.

END

ANNEXURE C:
INTERVIEWER FEEDBACK FORM

Name of participant:

Date and time of interview:

Venue of interview:

Key interview highlights:

Analysis of key issues that came up:

Indicate noticeable emotions:

Nonverbal behaviour noted during the interview.

Language used or preferred.

Additional notes:

END

ANNEXURE D:
TRANSCRIPTION CONFIDENTIALITY

12 August 2016

Attention: Nikelwa Tengimfene

Dear Nikelwa Tengimfene,

Re: Transcription Quotation

Thank you for your request for a quotation.

Herewith our quotation to transcribe your audio recording:

1.   Quote

The quote is based on **47** minutes of English audio/video transcribed at rate of **R9.25/ audio minute excluding VAT.**

The estimated cost of transcribing is therefore **R434.75 excluding VAT**. 14% VAT **R60.87**

The total estimate cost of transcribing including VAT **R495.62**

Note: Our rate includes the **proofreading** of our transcripts by an independent proof-reader.

2.   Deposit

A deposit of **R247.81** (50% of the estimated quotation including VAT) is required before the commencement of work (see banking details below).

3.   Turnaround Times

Our turnaround times are listed in the Terms and Conditions below.

Note: If there are specific requirements for quicker turnaround times, we can discuss with a view to meeting these requirements.

Should you accept our quotation, kindly initial this page and sign the Terms and Conditions below, complete the Transcription Format Details page, and return to the sender.

Thank you for the opportunity to quote and we look forward to being of service to you.

Yours faithfully

Veronique Fallick

Terms and Conditions

1. Rates and delivery – Price excludes VAT

*Standard Rate   R9.25 / audio minute (4 day turnaround time, per 1 hour of audio)

*Rush Rate   R11.80 / audio minute (3 day turnaround time, per 1 hour of audio)

*Express Rate   R20.00 / audio minute (2 day turnaround time, per 1 hour of audio)

*Translation Rate   R40.00 / audio minute (4 day turnaround time, per 1 hour of audio)

***Note on Turnaround Times:**

Where there are a large number of audio hours to be transcribed, we may allocate more than one transcriber to your assignment, thereby reducing the average TAT per hour. Please discuss your deadline with us and we will make every effort to meet it!

2. Our Commitment

We are committed to providing a quality service and delivery on turnaround times. Our transcripts are sent via e-mail to the Client. Should the Client require a hard copy of the transcripts, this can be provided at an additional cost.

3. Estimated Quotation & Deposit

The quotation is based on the estimated audio time supplied by the Client. This estimated quotation will be used solely for the purposes of establishing the 50% deposit which is required by the Client before transcription commences.

Work will only commence and turnaround times will only apply once the deposit has been received.

4. Invoice and Payment

Once the transcript is complete, the final invoice based on the actual hours transcribed will be sent to the Client.

Once the final amount has been paid the complete transcript will be e-mailed to the Client.

5. Information required, to assist with the transcription

The Client will be required to provide a list of the names of the various persons in the audio recording, their roles, dates and any other relevant information, in order to facilitate the quality of the transcript.

6. Submission of audio files

To submit your audio files to us, log onto http://www.toptranscriptions.co.za and click on the "Upload A File" tab and select "Instructions".

7. Accuracy of Transcript

Please note that while every endeavour is made to ensure that the transcript is accurate, sometimes this may not be possible due to the quality of the audio being transcribed. Where the transcriber cannot hear the audio properly she will note "inaudible" with a time stamp in the transcript. In addition, where there are number of people being recorded, it is not always possible to establish the identity of the person talking. In this regard, the client is advised to verify the accuracy of the speaker identities.

8. Cancellation of a transcription.

Should the Client cancel a transcript, it will be liable for any transcription completed up to the point of cancellation. In such an instance the partially completed transcript will be forwarded to the Client with the pro rata invoice.

9. Confidentiality

All our transcribers have signed Confidentiality agreements with us.

Thus agreed to and signed at _____ on the _____ of _____ 2016.
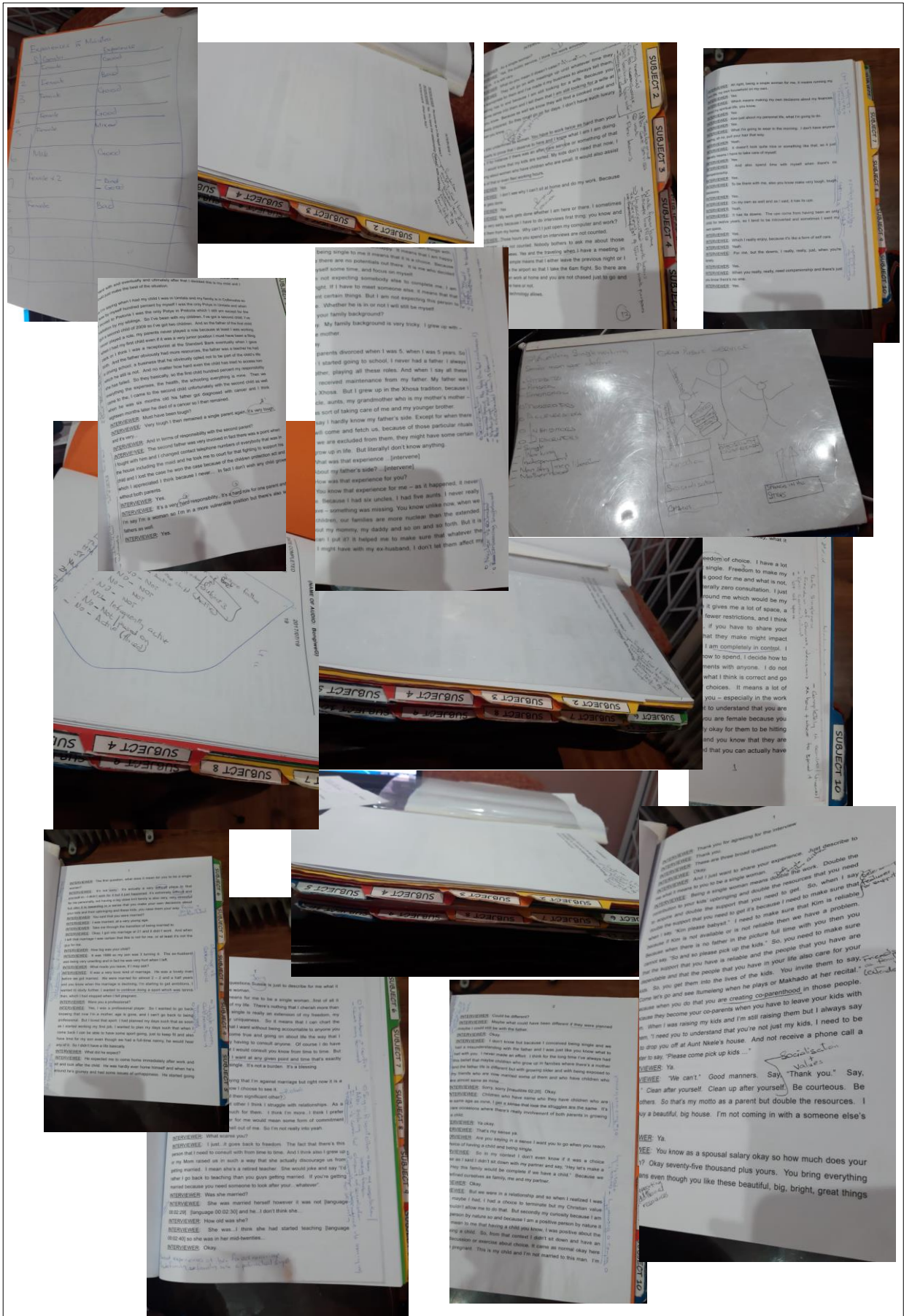
INVOICE DETAILS:

Company Name:

_____

Address:

_____

_____

Contact Person:

_____

Work Number: _____ Cell Number: _____

…………………………………..

 Signature of Client

I cannot believe what a lady Sis' Nikelwa Tengimfene (researcher) is. Jonga (listen here), she takes her work seriously. We had an appointment yesterday for 12. The woman was here at 11:30. Oh no I forgot this part, she wanted to see me 'outside your house'. Huh?

"Andikwazi kaloku ntombi if uyafuna siyenze kwakho lento?" (I did not know, if you're comfortable having the interview at your house) Huh? Uthini ngoku uSis' Nikelwa? (Expressing disbelief; What did Sis Nikelwa just say?) "Tyhini (Oh Well), it works well for me to do it at my place!" I am happier in my space and I really must be dragged out of my house if I am not working.

Did I tell you that she came looking good in a black number with stockings? Engemhle usisi (Big sister was dressed to the nines). I felt respected. I mean I consider them as big sisters and my contact with the Tengimfene's has always been casual and informal. We called their dad TaBen and their mom Kwakha and there she comes to interview me so formal and professional. The conversation was a serious one, her topic was. We spoke about family and what it means to us. We spoke about how to resolve conflict within our families and the spaces we occupy.

Our single status and what that means to us. Our children and the role played by IT in parenting. I have never thought about IT and parenting until yesterday. As she concluded I thanked her for choosing me to speak on the topic. "Hayi maan ndingakulibala njani wena kule into, uyayazi yonke lento nje sisi!" ("How could I forget you, you know what it means being single)". I felt honoured. This is me saying you came to get something from me but I received more from your conduct, your professional look and how you approached the interview. Of course her soft voice and her "ewe," It's a good Monday.

August 2016

There were little events that were happening that kept me going. I was managing a bigger team and the … team spent more time at my new office. The new office was too Government and protocol was observed. They called me Miss (Surname) while the team at (unit) were casual moving from Miss (first letter of her surname) to my first name to Chief when they want to annoy me.

The (unit) team was frustrated by this protocol and I would spend my mornings at my old office and my afternoons at my new office. Just to keep the peace. The new office was delighted to have me. They liked my casual way of doing things. The two office managers would argue about not calling me "my boss". The one (unit) would tell the one at the new office that "she is not your boss. It's temporary!" I'd smile at these little conversations because I felt loved. A lady from Unisa called to say they were doing a project on human settlement since 1994. They had found stories I did at (previous employer) and they wanted to interview me. They had a lot of my stories which I had forgotten. She travelled from EL to see me. My heart smiled again.

Then Sis' Nikelwa Tengimfene was doing some project for her own studies on women and she chose me. She did not know that I was going through a very tough time and her choosing me and letting me to speak to her was another way of exhaling. I invited her to my place but I was in one of those mornings when I was not feeling myself and in bed. I had promised to see her and I could not disappoint her. She was in her Sunday best, stockings and all!!! I was in my t-shirt I snatched from a friend. Like this was serious and the woman was dressed up! We started talking. I could put my life in perspective as I went along. I did not realize I was hurting so much. She had taken me to a place I had not visited in a long time. I was healing. She called later to say she was grateful. She did not know that her assignment helped me to get up and go!!! I went to buy myself my favourite perfume to say to (her name): "it is well!"

SOUTH AFRICAN DEROGATORY NAMES FOR SINGLE WOMEN

Sourced from a Facebook post

	SWEAR WORDS	DEROGATIVE	COMMENTS
1.	Nomokhwe		Names used as insults and refers
2.	Sifebe		to a woman, single women in
3.	Sikhebereshe		particular, judged as possessing
			loose morals. Men, in
			contradiction, receive praises if
			dating more than one female.
4.		Dikazi	
5.		Nomkroyi	These are names given to single
6.		Tikiline	women. Used also as insults.
7.		Jose	Some refer to divorced females.
8.		Putana	
9.		Nontorotyi	
10.		Jezebel	
11.		Nopatazana	
12.		Nontshwaxa	
13.		Ntombifuthi (a girl once more)	
14.		Inkazana	
15.		Nondindwa	
16.		Dudelwe ngu Jambase	
17.		Nomokhwe	
18.		Khuko lamandwendwe	
19.		Merikazi/Merikazana	
20.		Nongendi	

END