

**Eating Burnt Toast: The Lived Experiences of Female Breadwinners in South Africa**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

In the subject

**PSYCHOLOGY**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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November 2014

## **Acknowledgments:**

Although I am the author of this dissertation, it would not have been possible to complete this academic assignment without the help and support of many different people, who, in many different ways, contributed towards the completion of this paper.

Firstly, it is important that I acknowledge and express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Doctor Puleng Segalo, who by accepting my proposal back in 2012 rendered this research study possible, and without whose guidance, patience and encouragement I would've been lost.

To my family and my significant other, your support, belief and love gave me the confidence to start, and finish this journey. Thank you, I love you and I hope this work makes you proud.

Finally, this Master's Dissertation is dedicated to the courageous women who shared their stories with me. Their absolute dedication, tireless toil and unconditional love inspire me each and every day. It is the intent of this paper to accurately represent and share these women's lived experiences with others, in the hope that the significant role they play in our society will be recognised...

DECLARATION

I declare that Eating Burnt Toast: The Lived Experiences of Female Breadwinners in South Africa 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'P' and 'M' intertwined, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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### **Abstract:**

In modern South African society, many women have overcome traditional notions of gender by becoming breadwinners in their homes and providing primary financial support for their families. Employing a Phenomenological Feminist viewpoint, this dissertation contextualises the meaning that South African female breadwinners (FBW) ascribe to their experiences within their lived environment, utilising data collected from in-depth, unstructured interviews with FBW from the Mpumalanga and Gauteng provinces. While taking into consideration their intersectional experiences of gender, race, as well as cultural and traditional societal pressures, this study represents these women's' voices in order to understand how they make meaning of and negotiate their spaces and roles as breadwinners. In the course of interviews and analysis, the realities faced by FBW revealed experiences, individual and communal, shared and unique, which expose archaic divisions of gender within our society, which have been hiding behind constructions of reform advocating equality among the sexes.

### **Key terms:**

Psychology; Qualitative; Female Breadwinner; South Africa; Phenomenology; Feminism; Gender Roles; Lived Experiences; Women; Unstructured Interviews

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## CHAPTER 1:

### INTRODUCTION

The women of South Africa have consistently played an integral part in the development of the country's democratic social order as it stands today. Mass organisation and mobilisation in the struggle for liberation during the apartheid era was advanced by organisations such as the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) in the 1950s and in more recent times, women have demanded gender specific social reform with regards to the emancipation of women (Patel, 1988). Building on the political and social actions of female activists and women's organisations that opposed the policies and positions of the ruling apartheid government, South Africa has made significant progress within a relatively short space of time regarding the development of a gender-neutral society. In the last twenty years since the birth of the new South Africa, examples abound of actions that have resulted in equal inclusion and involvement of women in society. The country has instated the largest percentage of women in parliament in the world, experienced an increase in the number of women gaining access to education and subsequently a rise in the number of women entering the work force (Ndinda & Okeke-Uzodike, 2012).

These achievements seem to support a feminist ideal of advancement in women's contributions and of gender equality in the 'new' South Africa. Yet, the country has among the highest levels of rape and violence against women in the world, contradictory indicators which highlight possible gender disparities in the advancement of women and the particularity of South Africa's past (Frenkel, 2008). Historically, major differences have shaped the lives of women from various racial backgrounds in South Africa, but a dominant, patriarchal society has always been present as the one constant, non-racial institution that has permeated all communities (Frenkel, 2008). This was most evident through the patriarchal political policies of the apartheid era, such as the migrant labour system, a gendered system where African women were often retained as migrant domestics under white employ in distant urban areas far from their families or else expected to remain home, working in subsistence agriculture while depending on their male migrants to send wages home (Seidman, 1993).



The later industrialisation of the 1970s and commuter employment provided female workers some economic independence, however sex-stereotyping concentrated women in the least-skilled, lowest paying jobs (Jaffee, 1988). Despite, or perhaps conversely as a result of these policies, working women became active economic contributors to society as their domestic responsibilities increased. Paradoxically, these aforementioned systems, along with other governmental policies, increased instances of female headed households and employment, which enabled women to escape patriarchy through “opportunities for increased personal autonomy and mobility at an individual level” (Walker, 1990, p. 168), which challenged the traditional male dominated, unitary household model.

Today, women are still assigned a secondary place by prevailing customs and cultures in South African society, whose sanctioned gender roles are intimately connected with gender based violence (Strebel et al., 2006). Beyond the scope of the mostly superficial changes in the inherent patriarchal structures that pervade their lives, it can be seen that women have always managed to play an important role in public life and contribute as a part of the economically active population. Perhaps unsurprisingly, due to the earlier considered unique idiosyncrasies of South Africa’s past, working women have furthered their domestic, economic and societal influence by becoming primary breadwinners in their homes.

The role of breadwinners has been characterised as encompassing primary financial support roles in the home, as well as being an active member in the labour market and in the past, has been considered a gendered role as a traditional standard for masculine identity (Meisenbach, 2009). However, research reflected in a World Development Report released in 2012 on the status of the male breadwinner role, indicates a decline of this model due to the evolution of gender roles, where men are required to adapt to new demands, new expectations and new roles, but have not been able to adapt as fast as women are changing their views and ways. “While women are gaining power and freedom, men are resisting change.” (World Bank, 2011, p. 194). As a result of the decrease of male breadwinner homes, the instances of female breadwinners (FBW) are on the rise, a phenomenon that has not escaped South African society (World Bank, 2011).

The occurrence and causes of this reformation of traditional gender roles has been noted in many studies, including that of Diekman and Goodfriend (2006) who found that since the mid-20th century women's entry into male-dominated roles in the paid labour force has increased in vast numbers, which is unsurprising if one considers that Winslow-Bowe's study in 2006 found that the majority of college enrollees and degree recipients in the United States of America were women. The cumulative causes listed above have resulted in a situation where the household breadwinner role is shifting away from the traditional sole male breadwinner role, and the numbers of women acting as the primary or sole earners in their families have drastically increased (Meisenbach, 2009). Most studies conducted about this phenomenon have focused on the effects of the declining male breadwinner role on men, addressing issues such as the crisis of masculine identity and challenges faced by men who have assumed the primary care-taking role (Pfau-Effinger, 2004). Of the limited number of researchers who have focused their studies on the experiences of the female partners, who also are engaged in non-traditional roles as primary earners in their families, the majority (such as those conducted by Gcabo, 2003; Burgoyne, 2004; and Meisenbach, 2009) tend to focus on the financial reasons why such a household has come to be and the changes experienced in the home as a result. They do not, however, explore the various unique ways women rise above such circumstances, fight for recognition and come to individually understand their roles as primary breadwinners.

If there is dearth of research within the field of psychology regarding FBW globally, then research on South African FBW within the psychological perspective can be described as lacking. While many women are grappling with how to affirm their identities in the pursuit of transforming societal notions of gender and familial roles, South African women in particular face added barriers related to culture and cultural expectations (Kiamba, 2008). Their point of view needs to be understood within the unique context of the various cultures, races, religions and socio-economic brackets that exist within South African society. While women gain certain freedoms, other freedoms may be lost as they continue to face social and cultural challenges. The lived experiences of FBW require greater research attention as this might assist us in understanding the possible challenges they face as they struggle to find their place within the patriarchal society they live in.

### Theoretical Perspective

With this background in mind, I endeavoured to conduct a study which focused on the everyday experiences of FBW in South Africa using a Phenomenological Feminist perspective. Phenomenology is a person-orientated approach that was conceived by the German philosopher, Husserl, in the early twentieth century, which emphasises the importance of personal perspectives and the meanings that are attached to individual experiences, as this is the only reality that people can truly know (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003). Husserl was critical of the idea that the empirical natural scientific research methods, developed to explain the notion of a single, objective reality impinging stimuli on an individual's perceptions, could account for the multiple, unique interpretations of the world (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003). Rather, he sought to research the human experience with a rigorous descriptive science of consciousness that would reveal the phenomenon to which personal meanings were assigned (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). Phenomenology is considered an appropriate approach when investigating an individual's lived experiences as it emphasises the experiences of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore is able to challenge any structural or normative assumptions that may have replaced the genuine voices of marginalised groups (Meisenbach, 2009). I am utilising the Phenomenological theory and method to explore the meanings of experience that FBW in South Africa attribute to the non-traditional role they play in our society, in order to better understand and explain this phenomenon.

A further strength of the Phenomenological approach is its flexibility which allows for collaboration with other forms of knowledge (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006).

Phenomenology is a descriptive method and its employment in exploring women's experiences is congruent with the important values and principles underpinning Feminist research (Garko, 1999). Both of these approaches share a commitment to validating theory via lived experiences in a way that is methodologically sound, and are critical of naturalistic research assumptions and explanations that state that the subject and object of research are independent of each other (Garko, 1999).

Indeed, Feminist epistemology itself also advocates a multiplicity of methods in a study to propel topics relating to women's interests, concerns and priorities into the foreground. By utilising the Phenomenological approach, combined with Feminist values and research, a platform for the major intents of Feminism will be created.

These objectives include a comprehensive recognition of women's rights and the emancipation of women from patriarchal structures in society (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2004), which would be encouraged by the openness and objectivity that Phenomenology provides through its devotion to description and understanding of human experiences (Garko, 1999).

It can be seen from the basic tenets of these two paradigms that they are complementary, with the realm of day-to-day, lived experiences forming both a fundamental part of Feminism, and similarly crucial component of Phenomenology. The importance of this study is that it addresses the experiences and voices of women, who are underrepresented in research in general, and includes women whose voices have been further silenced and marginalised due to the focus on white, tertiary educated women in previous research on this topic, in particular (Meisenbach, 2009). I strove to understand the individual subjective experiences of FBW in South Africa, from positions of both global (society/work) and local (home/family) influences. Taking into consideration their intersectional experiences of gender, race, as well as cultural and traditional/patriarchal societal pressures, I hope to gain insight into how they make meaning of and negotiate their spaces and roles as breadwinners.

### Research Aims and Methods

In South Africa, the politics of gender is seen as less important than politics pertaining to race (Meer, 2007). Yet gender can be described as one of the most important analytic categories in the academic enterprise of describing the world and of prescribing solutions, with considerable influence on the way we study psychology (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2004). In my quest to understand South African FBW, I sought to offer a space for their experiences and voices to be heard. In so doing, I hope to provide these women space to self-represent their lived experiences with the position in society and academia that these deserve. As stated by Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) "personal phenomena are an important part of psychology's subject-matter, and attempts at their explication are a disciplinary responsibility" (p. 118). As the lived experiences of FBW are a crucial addition to the psychological knowledge base, this study endeavours to explicate the perspective of South African women's lived experiences of being primary or sole breadwinners by asking the following:

- What are the individual subjective experiences of female breadwinners?
- What unique challenges do they believe female breadwinners face?
- What changes have they perceived in the traditional gender role schema?
- How do issues of race, religion and ethnicity uniquely affect individual experiences of South African female breadwinners?

The primary data for my study stemmed from the transcripts of recorded unstructured interviews with participants, where the aforementioned open, non-directing questions were asked to initiate the participants' description of their experiences. This type of in-depth interviewing where the questions merely act as a guide or reminder to ask about certain issues, is based on the fact that the researcher will develop subsequent questions from these starting points and in so doing centres the interview around the Phenomenological tenet of eliciting true responses from the participants to reveal the phenomena (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). By following a Phenomenological approach, this study provides FBW the position to talk about their breadwinning experiences in their own voice in an open and understanding environment and overcome any misconception of women's experiences, which is of great concern to Feminism (Garko, 1999). Once the transcripts of these interviews had been read and re-read, a well-structured analysis reveals the meaning units and commonality of the participants' words, and a plausible theoretical account of these experiences is developed that contextualise and answer the research questions, thusly desegregating these insights into a descriptive structure of meaning (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006).

### Structure of Paper

An account of my intensive literature review is to follow in chapter two, where the global and local pronouncements on this phenomenon are explored and in chapter three, the research methods employed in the implementation, interpretation and invention of a theoretical perspective are discussed.

To summarise, chapter four reveals the outcomes of the explication of the data and the final representations are considered. Chapter five concludes the study by reflecting on possible outcomes and limitations of the research.

## CHAPTER 2:

### LITERATURE REVIEW

During my intensive literature study I discovered that there is a consensus, both in South Africa and abroad, that there have been considerable shifts in the social roles of men and women, with each gender undergoing clear and different patterns of change, more specifically in the distribution of breadwinning and caretaking roles. According to Diekman and Goodfriend (2006) the most prominent trend is women's entry into male-dominated roles in the paid labour force, which has increased in vast numbers since the mid-20th century. This is unsurprising as Winslow-Bowe's study in 2006 found that the majority of college enrollees and degree recipients in the United States of America were women, where dual-earner families are now the norm. The aforementioned study was conducted by Sarah Winslow-Bowe in 2006 at the Department of Sociology at Clemson University and it analysed the findings of The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, a national probability survey of 12,626 American men and women which started in 1979 and was funded by the United States Department of Labour. By analysing the most recent wave of data collected in the longitudinal survey, Winslow-Bowe (2006) found evidence indicating that in recent years there has been an increase in the proportion of wives in the USA who out earn their husbands, resulting in a situation where wives act as the primary or sole earners in the home. In South Africa, although the research on women as primary or sole earners in the home is scarce, studies done in the economic arenas indicate a rapid increase of women involved in the employment sector. According to research conducted by Posel and Muller (2008, p. 469) using the Household Survey data for South Africa from 1995 to 2004, "Total wage employment grew by some 1.3 million jobs over the period, with almost 90% of this increase driving from the change in female employment."

As these and other studies done worldwide prove, in our industrialised society there has been a significant feminisation of the workforce. The occurrence of this phenomenon may be historically attributed to the efforts of feminism to improve the material conditions of women's lives through the attainment of equal rights and by challenging conventions of male dominance and stereotypical gender roles (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2004). The fact that women have the opportunity to become earners in the workplace is a direct result of these feminist struggles, with equal access to education and employment playing major roles in their empowerment (Geldenhuys, 2011).

These equal opportunities for all women presented themselves much later in South Africa. It was only after the abolishment of apartheid and its patriarchal policies that the efforts of women's organisations in the 1990's managed to integrate gender equality concerns into the policy formation of our country's constitution (Hassim, 2005). Unfortunately the legacy of apartheid still infiltrates the lives of women in South Africa today, and due to the lack of educational opportunities and restrictions on the freedom of movement in the past, many women still occupy the lower skilled and lower paid jobs in our economy (Geldenhuys, 2011). Nonetheless, a good proportion of women in South Africa are rising above these challenges to make use of the educational opportunities offered to them and play an important role in society by contributing to the economy. In some cases women take this one step further by becoming primary breadwinners in their homes (Mosoetsa, 2011). The result of such findings is that researchers are now seeking to understand the causes occasioning the household breadwinner role to shift away from the traditional sole male breadwinner role, in favour of a female as primary or sole breadwinner (Meisenbach, 2009) and explore the influences of such a reality on the experiences of FBW.

The existing research on this global trend can be focused on four central discourses, namely the effect of this phenomenon on the evolution of traditional gender roles of both men and women, and more specifically relating to the FBW themselves, the challenges these women face at home, subcategorised into experiences of unpaid labour and violence. Afterwards, literature pertaining to their experiences of discrimination and gendered division of labour in the workplace will then be considered, and finally the impact of misinformation postulated by the western media concerning FBW will be examined.

### Evolution of Traditional Gender Roles

A breadwinner is defined as the primary source of financial income in the household and was considered previously as an exclusively male role in the familial structure (Meisenbach, 2009). Unsurprisingly, the effects of the declining male breadwinner role on men makes up the majority of the literature concerned with the phenomenon of increasing instances of FBW homes, addressing issues such as the crisis of masculine identity and challenges faced by men who have assumed the primary care-taking role (Pfau-Effinger, 2004).

In 2005, a study conducted by Brescoll and Uhlmann in the USA reported that there has been a steady increase of 18% since 1994 in the number of stay at home fathers who care for the children while their wives fulfil the breadwinning role.

The espousal of non-traditional characteristics by certain men who have embraced the primary care-taking role has been met with mixed results, as reported by Diekman and Goodfriend (2006). Often these men are perceived as lacking masculine attributes and are intensely censured for the progressive role they play in their family's lives. Denigration from both men and women against male homemakers for violating prescriptive gender stereotypes may contribute to reluctance of men to adopt the primary care-giver role and represents a major barrier to the career opportunities and advancements of FBW (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005). This gender identity incongruity was unearthed by Brescoll and Uhlmann during their study's investigation of attitudes towards non-traditional parents among adult men and women in 2005. One would expect women to be less likely than their male counterparts to endorse traditional stereotypes of gender and that they would feel more positively toward employed mothers and stay-at-home fathers as this could further their own life opportunities (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005). However, this is not the case as discovered by Brescoll and Uhlmann (2005) where both male and female participants in their study endorsed ideologies that good women fulfil their traditional roles as mothers and negatively evaluated employed mothers and stay at home fathers.

This is surprising as it appears as though women would rather adopt opinions which ensure that traditional social order remains un-disrupted, but which limit their personal opportunities and other opportunities of women as a whole (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005). It would seem that traditional patterns of gender which insist that the maternal instinct is specifically female and that motherhood is self-sacrificing, are well embedded in our social culture, so that this social construction of gender, along with the culturally induced concept of caring tasks being uniquely feminine tasks, instil institutionalised patterns of self-denial and economic dependence in women (Grbich, 1994).

### Challenges faced at Home

As indicated by the preceding discourse, FBW are resourceful individuals who have gone beyond traditional expectations of gender to reconceptualise and create their own identities and realities that directly contrast those of society. This dominant influence of traditional gender norms challenges the existence of women who are primary or sole breadwinners in their homes, and is a pervasive and an ever-present reality of their daily experiences.



While the restructuring of FBW gendered identities often results in an increase of their individual autonomy, it inversely results in imbalanced demands on their capabilities and threats to their physical wellbeing, as elucidated below.

### *Unpaid Labour*

According to the South African Board for People Practices Women's Report compiled in 2011, "women do more unpaid work than men in all countries across the globe" (Geldenhuys, 2011, p. 19). The responsibilities that unpaid labour includes are those associated with household and care giving tasks, with the average woman in South Africa devoting 180 minutes of her day to these tasks versus the 80 minutes men spend daily on these tasks (Geldenhuys, 2011). The implications of this use of FBW time means that energy that they could have employed on paid work or leisure, that would improve their living circumstances, is lost. The unpaid reproduction of human resources that include housework, care for the children, the sick and the elderly, and in some cases, non-wage income generating activities such as subsistence farming to provide food security for their families is often unrecorded in research (Lambert & Webster, 2010).

In South Africa, this gendered notion of caring tasks as singularly women's work transcends the responsibilities of motherhood to include caring for the sick members of their family, a duty that has increased as the HIV/AIDS infection rates in South African reach pandemic proportions (Hassim, 2005). Caring for elderly relatives is also more common place in South African society, where family households tend to be large, consisting not only of nuclear members but extended family as well (Lambert & Webster, 2010). The diminished importance of these unpaid contributions to the household is not an oversight unique to the positions of FBW in South Africa. Studies overseas that focus on the discursive management of money and housework in FBW households, such as those conducted by Yodanis and Lauer in 2007 and the earlier mentioned research by Winslow-Bowe in 2006, endeavoured to ascertain the effect earnings have on the division of household labour in the home. The consensus reached in these studies is that although there appears to be some support for the bargaining perspective where money translates into power and couples relationships are more equal when both contribute equal resources, FBW experience a much different reality (Winslow-Bowe, 2006). In her study of FBW in Australia, Carol Grbich found that "women in the paid work force carry the burden of home tasks whether their men are at home or have paid work." (Grbich, 1994, p. 113).

Grbich's exploration of the experiences of married women who are primary breadwinners, involved a group of twenty five families living in Melbourne, where the mother worked full time and the father took on the primary care giving role. In tasks pertaining to unpaid labour, Grbich (1994) found a traditional gender division in relation to these tasks, even though the primary responsibility of the men was the home, the children and the care thereof. For FBW, gender trumps finances in the amount of housework a woman does once their wages exceed those of their husbands, with evidence that the division of household labour becomes increasingly divided along traditional gender lines with men reducing their housework contributions (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003).

A similar study by Meisenbach in 2009, also found that men who are financially dependent on their wives contribute less to domestic chores and child rearing responsibilities, while Yodanis and Lauer's (2007) study found that FBW who do manage the family finances, do so when resources are tight and when said responsibility incurs more challenges and fewer financial rewards. This uneven distribution of unpaid labour in the home and in the provision of basic needs means that many FBW are subjugated workers, bearing the double load of household and economic responsibilities. As demonstrated by the aforementioned research studies, it would seem that although some women have been able to transcend traditional cultural barriers and rise to the challenges presented by primary breadwinners' positions, true gender role reversal is relatively rare.

### *Violence*

In her phenomenological study of the experiences of fifteen American FBW in 2009, Meisenbach found that the position of primary breadwinner as the major provider of economic stability in the home does not necessarily secure FBW autonomy within this familial structure. As FBW income increases, and the man earns less than woman, it violates traditional gender norms, implying that the changing reality that FBW and their families face have direct consequences on their own identities, as well as the identities and actions of their family members and partners, and may explain why incidents of physical violence and abuse against women are more common in homes with FBW, than homes with a traditional breadwinner model (Meisenbach, 2009).

These findings are of significant importance for FBW in South Africa, as the country has the highest number of instances of rape and violence against women in the world (Frenkel, 2008).

This is reinforced by Boonzaier's research conducted in 2005 concerning abuse perpetrated against women in South Africa, where she references the changing gender climate as contributor to the alarming statistic mentioned earlier. During interviews with 15 men and their female partners, who were members of two programmes concerned with victims and perpetrators of intimate violence, Boonzaier (2005) stated that it became apparent that it was challenging for the men to relinquish the role of breadwinner in the home and that this led them to feel emasculated. "Men attempted to maintain these forms of identity through the exertion of power in the relationship, through violence as well as sexual coercion and marital infidelity." (p. 102). The men's justifications of their behaviour, coupled with the declining marital rates among women in South Africa (Posel & Casale, 2003) may be further explained through explorations of these situations pertaining to FBW in South Africa.

### Challenges faced in Workplace

The prevalence of papers in Economics research that concern the financial implications of FBW has resulted in an extensive body of research literature that pertains to women's financial and career development. Many of these can be used to advance knowledge of the interpersonal relations experienced by FBW, such as how the work-family arrangement influences a woman's career and family dynamics. Research has found that FBW value the opportunity to work for pay, thus increasing their perceptions that they are effective workers within the public domain (Cunningham, 2008). According to Cunningham's 2008 study on the changing attitudes towards the traditional family model, most FBW find employment empowering, ameliorating their attitudes to adopt a less supportive opinion of gender-specialised marital roles. This then releases them of expectations of total responsibility within the domestic sphere and alters their perceptions of men's participation in household duties, reducing the FBW workload (Cunningham, 2008). However, this positive assessment of a reevaluation of gender roles in the lives of FBW is contradicted in the discussion of the gendered division of labour that follows.

### *Gendered division of Labour*

As mentioned earlier, women in South Africa make up a large percentage of the working population, 42% of our workforce according to the statistics of the 2003 South African Labour Force study (as cited in Hassim, 2005).

Interestingly, the SABPP Women's Report in 2011 found that despite the current global economic downturn and the high levels of unemployment in South Africa, there was still a 1.3% increase in female employment from 2010 to 2011 (Geldenhuys, 2011). In spite of these encouraging statistics, the majority of these women are employed in the poorest paid sector of the labour market, namely the social or service sector, as domestic and retail workers which are traditionally defined by gender as women's work (Fakier & Cock, 2009). What is even more disturbing is the significant increase of women employed in the informal sector, which unlike the formal labour sector, shows a high representation of work that has low skills requirements (Geldenhuys, 2011). This over representation of women in informal work, and formal work mostly in social or service industries, indicates that the majority of women are poorly paid due to a lack formal training, and are engaging in forms of income earning that can accommodate their obligatory family and care-taking responsibilities (Geldenhuys, 2011). The fact that most women still occupy the lower skilled and lower paid jobs in the South Africa economy, relates to the discriminatory nature of these positions and their perpetuation and maintenance of the gendered division of unpaid labour in the home.

### *Discrimination*

Another obstacle for FBW to overcome is the negative attitudes toward working mothers. During their study conducted with multi-cultural male and female participants in America, Brescoll and Uhlmann (2005) discovered that there is an unfair double standard in society where working mothers are required to have a socially acceptable reason for working outside the home while fathers do not. The participants in Brescoll and Uhlmann's (2005) study had more of a negative attitude toward mothers who worked out of personal fulfilment than toward mothers who worked out of financial necessity. The pressures to live up to ideal worker norms and to home and family responsibilities, which include the expectations from traditional society that they will be primary caregiver to their children, trap FBW between the pressure to earn money and the pressure to personally raise their children, a phenomenon known as the double shift (Kiamba, 2008). This conflict between the conventional notion of the home as a woman's situation and the dissatisfaction many women suffer there is a dilemma FBW face as they establish their employment role, coupled with the guilt experienced as they forgo involvement in their children's upbringing (Grbich, 1994).

These cultural and societal tensions between employment and mothering expectations have serious consequences for FBW successes in the labour force as the standards of being a good mother are inherently at odds with participation in the labour force, resulting in repercussions where FBW do not advance in their careers as they are more likely to forego promotions, travel and overtime (Johnston & Swanson, 2007).

### Media Myth

Contrary to popular images in the western media that depict women who earn more than their husbands as high status, generally white, career women, most FBW positions are a result of economic vulnerability and marginalisation (Winslow-Bowe, 2006). This statement is validated by research conducted by Meisenbach in 2009 and Dunn, Rochlen, and O'Brien in 2011, both of whom state that the majority of the cited reasons for the creation of FBW households were due to economic limitations and opportunities, rather than a desire for equity among both partners.

Of the few studies I discovered that included a diverse sample of women, Winslow-Bowe's 2006 longitudinal study examined the long term earnings advantages of FBW and included the experiences of Black, Hispanic and Caucasian women in the US. Winslow-Bowe (2006) found that African American women are more likely than White American women to earn more than their husbands for a period of five consecutive years. "These results suggest that many women earn more than their husbands not because their earnings are high in an absolute sense, as is suggested in popular discourse, but because their husbands' earnings are low." (Winslow-Bowe, 2006, p. 838). Placed in the South African context where the unemployment level of the economically active population is a staggering 32 per cent, "the vast majority of households remain poverty stricken" (Mosoetsa, 2011, p. 1). In these circumstances, economic independence for women often comes in the form of social grants offered by the government, such as the child care grant, which subsidise their wages and elevate them to positions of primary breadwinner within the family (Mosoetsa, 2011).

The commonalities in these situations faced by FBW both in South Africa and overseas, where these working women assume the role of primary earner for their family due to poverty, are unmistakable, and the responsibilities created by their economic importance, numerous and oppressive.

## Conclusion

As I discovered during my literature review, studies done that focus specifically on the intrapersonal experiences of FBW are uncommon. Those that did highlighted the challenges and triumphs women experience in their role as married, working mothers, but one of their major shortcomings is that very little research seems to have been done on the subjective, individual experiences of FBW, especially in the South African context. The studies that did explore the intrapersonal experiences of FBW were done overseas and highlighted the experiences of white, tertiary educated, middle class FBW (Meisenbach, 2009) and married European, American and Australian women who worked in white collar professions. Very little is known of the experiences of culturally diverse women and how they perceive their transitions into the FBW role, in ways that reflect, and are shaped by their social identities (Buzzanell, Waymer, Tagle & Liu, 2007). Understanding the role that varying ethnicities can play in the lives of FBW from around the globe should be among the most important future directions in the study of this phenomenon and comprehending how their individual experiences differ from, and are similar to, those depicted in mainstream research is a vital addition to the literature regarding FBW. South African FBW may have many unique experiences that have not previously been accounted for in studies conducted in other countries, such as inimitable experiences of guilt due to attainment of affluence in Post-Apartheid South African society and their personal perception of obligation and pressure to help out previously disadvantaged communities. Then again, many variables that may be considered unique to the South African context may prove to share a communal link with FBW overseas.

This study samples FBW from a variety of ethnic, racial, and socio-economic populations within South African society and considers the unique challenges these imbue on the personal breadwinning experience. Using a Phenomenological Feminist viewpoint I hope to contextualise the culturally-given and experientially-acquired meanings that South African FBW ascribe to their experiences within their lived environment, and then attempt to provide a platform where their explanations of 'person' and 'world' can be understood.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### METHODOLOGY

Considering that the research study discussed is concerned with lived experiences, it needed a methodology that would accurately represent the participants' voices and perspectives, in an understanding and descriptive manner, rather than one that assumed objectivity and control. The selection of Phenomenology as a research method allowed for insight into the perspectives and perceptions of the study's participants, while contextualising their behaviour, motivations and actions within their cultural and physical environment, all the while aiming to describe rather than explain these actions (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). Phenomenology's anti-positivistic orientation and flexibility were also imperative in the study's comprehension of the life experiences of FBW in South Africa, as it recognises the importance of the employment of multiple methodologies and paradigms in research (Stead & Struwig, 2001). This adaptable interpretive range exemplified in Phenomenological research meant that the most important aspect of the participants' experience, that of being a breadwinner, who was a woman, could be properly acknowledged within the study.

Collaborating Phenomenology with a Feminist research approach, which is primarily concerned with guiding research topics that relate to women's interests (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 2004), allowed for an extensive understanding of the lives and experiences of FBW in South Africa. This co-operative empowered the study with an open perception of the phenomenon and the women whose perspectives shape it. Both Phenomenology and Feminism critique positivistic research for dismissing the voices of women and other marginalised groups for their 'failure' to conform to statistically simplified research standards (Bell, 2002). This study sought to attend to these silenced voices by using personal narratives to understand the social and psychological experiences of FBW in South Africa from the perspectives of the participants involved (Groenewald, 2004). By conducting the study using the qualitative research approaches of Phenomenology and Feminism, I made every effort to involve the participants at all levels of the research process as I believe they are most aware of their own realities. Furthermore, these approaches provided a flexibility that allowed me to relate to the participants in subjective ways, on their own terms. This ensured accuracy and authenticity in depicting the participants' personal experiences and described how they gave meaning to these experiences.

The primary data for the study stemmed from transcripts of recorded unstructured interviews with open, non-directing questions, conducted with permanent, primary FBW from the Gauteng and Mpumalanga provinces respectively. Unstructured in-depth interviews are preferred in Phenomenology in order to gain accurate meanings of “the participants’ experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 12). As researcher and initiator of the unstructured interviews, I explained the topic to be discussed to the participants but did not provide leading questions that may have guided the participants to conclusions that would favour the study. A few pertinent open, non-directing questions were asked to commence the participants’ description of their experiences but not all the questions that arose from their accounts were known in advance. The interview was directed, however, by the research questions mentioned earlier and was conducted in English.

### Selection

Initially, Purposive sampling was utilised to select the South African FBW who participated in the research study. This form of sampling selects participants who meet the preselected criteria relevant to the particular research study, in this case FBW from the Mpumalanga and Gauteng provinces in South Africa (Mack, Woodson, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). This method of sampling is useful in Phenomenological research as the phenomenon to be researched dictates the purpose of the study and determines the suitability of the participants to the study (Groenewald, 2004). The major prerequisite participants had to fulfil is that they needed to be female, with dependants (either their biological/adopted children or grandchildren or any other family members), and been the primary source of income in their households for at least two years, as well as be able to converse in English.

Convenience sampling was also used in the beginning phases of research. By selecting participants pertinent to the research subject, who were already established contacts that were available and able to assist in the research study, convenience sampling saved time and finances, while allowing me to select participants that were central to the proposed study. This approach is valuable in a Phenomenological study as it allows for a selection of cases with richly-detailed expositions, which is important with such in-depth collaboration with participants (Bell, 2002). The already established sample of participants grew as I asked each of the women if they were aware of others who may have experiences that were pertinent to the study that they wished to share.



This form of sampling, known as Snowball or Chain sampling, identifies further relevant cases of interest via research participants who are aware of other individuals with information rich and relevant experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Furthermore, these sampling methods complimented the guidelines of Feminist research where the participants are seen as co-researchers and the real experts of the topic being researched (Garko, 1999), an outlook that I exercised while conducting each of the interviews. The sampling unit consisted of 10 women in total, all from various backgrounds and ethnicities. This number was deemed the most feasible due to the length of time it would take to conduct such in-depth research and analysis, while realistically meeting the allocated deadline. In his study of Phenomenology as a research design, Groenewald (2004) considers long interviews with ten research participants as sufficient to reach saturation. Indeed, I found this to be accurate as many aspects of the participants shared stories correlated and no new themes emerged during data analysis, indicating descriptive saturation had been reached. The participants who made up the sample stemmed from the Mpumalanga and Gauteng provincial areas in South Africa, with both of which I am familiar, allowing my knowledge of these areas to grant ease of access to the participants. The participants' ages range from 20 to 55 years, and the sample includes women from various races, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. I included not only married, but unmarried and/or single primary FBW in my sampling unit, as the study did not focus on interpersonal relations between husband, wife and family, but rather on female experiences of their breadwinner role.

**Table 1: Biographical Composition of Sample Unit**

Pseudonym:	Linda	Caroline	Sarah	Martha	Aaminah	Rose	Sunette	Ela	Ronel	Nombuso
<b>Race:</b>	White English	White English	White English	White English	Indian, Hindi	African, Zulu	White Afrikaans	African, Sotho	White Afrikaans	African, Xhosa
<b>Marital Status:</b>	Divorced, Co-Habiting	Separated, Co-Habiting	Married	Divorced, Single	Divorced, Single	Divorced, Single	Married	Single	Co-Habiting	Single
<b>Religion:</b>	Not Specified	Not Specified	Not Specified	Not Specified	Hindu	Christian	Christian	Jehovah's Witness	Christian	Christian
<b>Education Level:</b>	Matric	Tertiary	Tertiary	Tertiary	Matric	Matric	Tertiary	Matric	Tertiary	Matric
<b>Employment Sector:</b>	Formal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Unemployed	Formal	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
<b>Dependants:</b>	Two children	Two children	One child	Two children	Two children	Three children	One child	One child	Partner's child	One child

## Data Collection

Appointments for interviews were secured in a setting that was comfortable for participants, allowing them to feel confident to talk freely, such as in their homes, which I travelled to, at my own expense and with their consent. The purpose of the study was explained at the beginning of the interview, and ended with a debriefing in which the participants could pose further questions. All interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis, with signed consent forms explaining the process and ensuring anonymity, and each participant agreeing to be interviewed and recorded, with the duration of interviews varying from between forty five minutes to an hour. Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the narrative nature of the unstructured interview process, I recognised the participants need to talk freely while I actively listened to their experiences and asked them probing and interpretive follow-up questions, the number of which differed from one participant to the other.

Although the unstructured interviews were reciprocal and both the participants and myself were engaged in dialogue, in order to keep the flow of the interview going, my questions were kept as brief and simple as possible, while allowing the participants' time to pause, reflect and break the silence themselves with information they deemed significant. Each interview was audio-taped (with the permission of the participants) and transcribed verbatim, by me. This offered me an opportunity to access the women's experiences in their own words, rather than in the form of the researcher's (my) words and to envision their experiences by hearing multiple voices in their speech, including family, societal and cultural influences. Feminist research recognises that participants involved in the study are the authorities on their own experiences and as such it is important that these voices are heard, a view that is supported by Phenomenology which acknowledges that the participants form the primary unit of data within any research study (Groenewald, 2004). It was essential however, to keep steering and defining the interview situation to formulate a clear purpose for the interview and outcome for the research, and although I did not offer opinions on the study or the participants' responses, I encouraged them to provide as much detailed information as possible.

During my role as facilitator of the interviews, it was also important to take cognisance of the fact that the researcher affects the interview process and that as a researcher, I was part of the interview process.

By noting my feelings, observations and on site experiences of the interviews as part of the research process, I endeavoured to be aware of my own location in the social world, in order to minimise any internal biases on my part and improve the interactive process between myself and the participants (Stead & Struwig, 2001). These field notes not only enabled me to bracket any preconceptions I had with regard to breadwinners so that I could fully enter into each participants unique lived experiences, but also provided a secondary method of data collection. Noting any unique gestures or behaviours exhibited by the participants during the interview meant that these could be used during the explication of data at a later stage of the research process. Groenewald (2004, p. 15) states that as “the human mind tends to forget quickly, field notes by the researcher are crucial in qualitative research to retain data gathered.”

### Explication of Data

During the process of organising data collected, I repeatedly listened to and read the recorded interviews and observation notes, transcribing them verbatim and trying to get a holistic sense of the data. As stated by Marshall and Rossman (2011), transcription is the first and important step in Phenomenological explication of interviews and is a time consuming and laborious task, which is one of the reasons I transcribed the interviews as soon as possible after they had been conducted. Another reason for the researcher to perform the transcription themselves, besides saving on time and the costs of hiring an individual to carry out the task, is that the individual who then compares the recording against the transcribed text would also have conducted the interviews. This means that the researcher is the most capable of making informed interpretive decisions about the text and can accurately decide on the representativeness of the transcription (Tilley, 2003).

Each of the interviews were conducted in English and although I was concerned that because some of the participants did not communicate in their first language certain subtleties of meanings may be missed, the extra expense and time incurred by using a translator were not warranted by the extra benefit it would bring to a Master’s dissertation. The inclusion of translators involves the insertion of their understandings of the participants meaning of experiences, creating a secondary concept of meaning before the information even reaches the researcher. As stated by Temple and Young (2004) “No one can be sure of which concepts or words differ in meaning across languages” (p. 165).

That alone is a complex conundrum that plagues qualitative research, but as the researcher in this study concerning a diversity of South African FBW, I saw myself as responsible for the way in which these women were represented, and I want to make it clear that any repercussions that may occur due to a certain number of the interviews being conducted in a secondary language, will be recognised as a limitation of my own restrictions.

To give a precise account of the experiences and stories of the women, the explication of the data involved eliciting the essence of meaning in these lived experiences. Feminist research methods subscribe to this endeavour as they support the process of the researcher transforming the description of meaning units into an understanding of the meaning units (Garko, 1999). This involved a judgment call on my part, as researcher, as to what constituted meaningful data. For this, I needed to be intimately aware of the meaning of the words used by the participants, in effect entering the world of the participant, while consciously bracketing my own presumptions of the phenomenon so as to avoid imparting my world view as that of the participants (Groenewald, 2004). Once I had committed to bracketing my own interpretations and meanings of the phenomena, as so far as it was possible, I re-read and listened to the transcribed interviews numerous times. By listening to and recalling instances of both verbal and non-verbal communication by the participants, I formed a holistic view of the interviews which helped to form the context for the specific units of meaning that began to emerge (Hycner, 1985). This meaning condensation of the transcribed data is a rigorous process where the words spoken (and unspoken) by the participants during their interviews are placed under scrutiny in order to glean any identifying topics, or units of significance (Groenewald, 2004). At this stage however, it is still just general meanings that are sought out by using the literal words of the participant and their impact on the set of research questions is not yet addressed (Hycner, 1985).

Once these units of general meaning were identified, the data was further reduced by manually categorising and coding the units communicated that dealt with the study's research questions about the experiences of FBW and assigning categories to those words and/or phrases. The nature of phenomenological data collected via interviews of lived experience is textual, non-numerical and unstructured, and analysis thereof is an intellectual exercise, whether done manually or electronically (Basit, 2003). Due to the size of the proposed study and intimate immersion necessary to organise and make sense of the data, not to mention the expense and time needed to understand electronic coding software, the data analysis was done manually.

Meaning condensation of the data, as a result of the researcher's interpretation and organisation of the transcriptions, condensed the meanings expressed by the participants into briefer statements, creating a more manageable body of data to move the analysis forward efficiently without compromising the exploratory nature of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I categorised the meaning condensed data into significant units, so that the body of text I was faced with was reduced into visual, easily analysable mind maps, providing the study with new perspectives on the lived experiences of FBW.

Significant units of meaning were then identified using the Feminist research method of intuiting, where the dominant meanings reveal themselves to the researcher, who then concludes whether these meanings are supported by the data, deeming them significant (Garko, 1999). I then studied these significant units to uncover common themes that united them to form natural clusters of meaning, and all the while I made an effort to bracket my presuppositions to remain true to the experiences of the FBW interviewed (Hycner, 1985). By considering the commonality amongst the identified meaning units, prevalent themes emerged that allowed me to complete a summary of each interview, presenting not only these singular themes, but the context thereof, providing an all-inclusive sense of the lived experiences explored.

Throughout the explication process, I made use of my first-hand encounters with the participants and their stories by revisiting the transcriptions and my field notes in order to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences. I continually strived to refine my interpretations thereof, to ensure the soundness, transparency and credibility of the categories and relationships, ascertained from the South African FBW view of their world, used to inform the study. As the research is dependent on truthfully representing the experiences of the participants, accuracy depended on confirmation from the participants that the study had correctly understood their explanations. Validation of the findings thusly occurred through in-depth member checking. This method involved me, as researcher, asking for feedback on how the results of the primary interview transcriptions may or may not have reflected the participants' perceptions (Meisenbach, 2009). These secondary dialogues, where the participants read through the above mentioned compiled summary of their interviews and the resulting themes, provided the participants the opportunity to share their viewpoints with me. Thick description was also utilised in chapter four's results section, with in depth quotes from the participants, using their words and descriptions to validate the results, allowing readers to evaluate the validity of the findings themselves (Meisenbach, 2009).

As a result of this validity check, any new data collected was applied to modify the discussed summary and themes and allowed me to move ahead and categorise the general and unique themes common to all or most of the interviews (Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenological research recognises that each individual is unique, but aims for understanding of patterns that cohere among particular individuals and note how these lived experiences resonate communally (Josselson, 2006). Through this discovery of related themes and contextualising these themes, the experiences of the FBW become socially distinct.

The commonality in the data collected from FBW was sought out in order to provide a platform for these women's experiences to participate in constructing a knowledge base in academia and though I sought out common themes that occur in most, if not all, of the interviews, the individual variations were also important as counterpoints in the phenomenon being researched (Groenewald, 2004). So although many of South African FBW experiences are similar, each of their accounts are unique, and any variations were not dismissed as exceptions, but are rather discussed as increased understandings and a potential source of strengthening the study.

The explication of data was concluded by writing a composite summary of the study's findings, which reflected the context from which these themes emerged, transforming the everyday experiences of FBW in South Africa into qualitative expressions that accurately capture the essence of the phenomenon being investigated while noting any significant individual differences. The summary of these findings is outlined further in Chapter Four.

### Ethical Considerations

In any study, the researcher is required to consider the needs and concerns of the people contributing to the study, as well as develop a relationship of trust between researcher and study participants (Mack et al., 2005). As this research study was directly related to the experiences of South African FBW, the well-being of the participants was of the utmost importance. This required a pledge from me, the researcher, that I would ensure that the dignity of all the participants was respected, and a commitment that they would not be used simply as a way for me to achieve the study's objectives. Explicitly valuing the participants' contributions and recognising the potential interpersonal impact of the study on them, was of paramount importance as they took on the burden of contributing their time and their experiences to the research.

As such, all participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and were made aware of the fact that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time with no negative ramifications. The purpose of the research, their role to be played in the study as well as the reasons and usage of the personal and demographic details they provided was explained, both verbally and in the written consent form. The anonymity of all involved was described and ensured by assigning each participant a pseudonym, removing any identifying information from the transcripts before they were analysed and fictionalising identifiable details in the study's final report. Complete confidentiality of the interview recordings and transcripts thereof, was safeguarded by myself and saved in protected files on my own personal computer and external hard drive. In addition participants were provided with details of professionals in their area that they could contact to discuss any emerging personal insights or concerns that arose from discussing their lived experiences, as well as my contact information for further queries related to the research study. Participants were informed about the research in a way they understood and at an educational level that they could comprehend to prevent undue inducement or coercion of involvement in the study (Mack et al., 2005).

Deception did not play a role in the study and participants were well informed of the motivations of the study, with the outcome of the research eager to aid the interests of the participants by enabling societal change. The researcher's role in the study was also clarified as phenomenological research can pose the danger of the researcher imposing their meaning on the participants' lived experiences (Bell, 2002). By utilising field notes of my experiences during the study and introspectively applying self-critique and self-reflexivity of my own role and positionality within the proposed study and society, I attempted to be mindful of the issues surrounding the representation of the collaborative knowledge of South African FBW, and tried to prevent my voice overshadowing theirs in the final results (Bhattacharya, 2007).

Participants were also provided the opportunity to voice their perceptions on the findings of the study. Throughout the process of in-depth member checking, conducted during secondary discussions, participants gave feedback on the results of the transcripts of their primary interviews and the analysis thereof, and shared their feelings on the process of their involvement. Their reactions and/or corrections provided deeper insights into the lived experiences of South African FBW. Due to the in depth nature and considerable amount of data that is collected in Phenomenological research, it was this exploratory study's aim to elucidate the experiences of the small sample of FBW I interviewed and not to generalise these experiences to all FBW in South Africa.

The focus here was on qualitative issues rather than quantitative ones (Hycner, 1985), and by sharing their experiences these women have the potential to be both personally empowered and provide a platform for invested understanding of, and change for, women in South Africa.

In Chapter four, the results of the Phenomenological and Feminist methodological explication of data gathered will be considered and discussed, within both a global and local context, as the participants unique and shared lived experiences are revealed.



## CHAPTER 4:

### EXPLICATION OF DATA

As stated in Bhattacharya's (2007) study of female Indian graduate students in the U.S, the task facing Third World feminists is not simply to represent oppressed women, but rather, as pointed out by Milner IV (2007), to provide multiple and varied perspectives about phenomena affecting those women, in order to bring about understandings that advance research literature and give a voice to women, who, in the past, have been silenced, misinterpreted and placed on the margins of society. In this respect, I wanted to provide a platform for the stories of the FBW that I spoke with, and conducted the phenomenological analysis using reflexivity as a methodological tool to question my interpretations of their experiences. Wanda S. Pillow (2003) asserts that reflexivity is not only about the researcher investigating the power embedded in their research and their position as researcher, but also involves them taking cognisance of the ethical and political questions raised when using traditional research methods for analysis. My aim for this study and its participants was to constantly question its usefulness and empowerment of women. I felt obligated to use my words and paradigm to as accurately as possible represent these women's stories and experiences, and bring their voices to the forefront rather than "to situate the researchers own need and desire for truth as primary" (Pillow 2003, p. 186).

This critical reflection of my position as researcher, and a desire to abandon restriction of the participants stories to rather work mutually with them instead, resulted in a rich divergence of themes revealed that went beyond the scope of the research questions that arose at the beginning of this masters dissertation journey. These new themes are elaborated on and discussed further, along with the responses to the initial set of research questions.

*What are the individual subjective experiences of female breadwinners?*

Every dialogue began with each woman explaining what it meant to her personally, to be a breadwinner. There were many similarities of meaning expressed by the group of FBW, such as the feeling of independence that the role of primary breadwinner brings, as well as a sense of security in being able to provide for yourself and your family. Nombuso, an attendant in a restaurant and single mother of one who also helps to support her mother and four siblings, expressed how important those experiences are to her:

“You know, all these people, I mean like my brothers, when they need something they can just come to me. They don’t go out, looking for help from the outside, they know that they must come to me. It makes me feel special...”

Sunette, a general physician who is married to an auto-repairman, said that she was thankful for her role, as it was her independent nature that attracted her husband to her in the first place and stated how much she enjoys spoiling her husband:

“I think for him, if we didn’t get married... he would have been worse off... Because I bought him his [car model], I bought him his motor bike... so, all those things he never had as a child, um... I could buy for him, so that makes me very happy.”

Other women were grateful for the opportunity their role provided them in terms of being a better parent. Martha, a divorcee, mother of two and accountant, asserted her belief that her role as breadwinner had allowed her to grow as a person and parent, and that she had lived a fuller life as a result. As a creative writer, artist and single mom, Ela, also expressed fulfilment in providing for herself and her child, the sense that she was doing “something worthy with her life”.

The duality of the feeling of control that the role of breadwinner affords was also discussed, with all ten of the women experiencing feelings of pressure and responsibility for others in their care. In some instances, as with Ela, these responsibilities imparted a notion of pride and strength of character, a feeling echoed by Rose, a divorced mother of two and executive administrative assistant:

“For me... I would put the word tough...raise the kids, being a mom alone, you need a lot of strength... I wanted to take care of my kids, I wanted to give them a good education and so I wanted to work.”

At the same time, the pressures and responsibilities of being the provider can be overwhelming. Nombuso said that at times she felt “like running away”, but that her religious faith kept her strong. Others have had to sacrifice their own aspirations, like Rose, who has had to put her studies on hold. At times, the boundaries of responsibilities associated with the role of primary breadwinner are extended, as in the case of Caroline, a small business owner and mother of two, who is separated from her husband. Both have lived apart for a number of years, and have chosen to live with new partners, but Caroline still supports her husband financially, while taking care of her own household. She explains her reasons for doing so:

“I do, because my children go there. And although my children are grown up, I do feel a sense of responsibility towards what their home is like when they’re with... [Him]...so, um, and I get a lot of criticism for this, but it is the only way that I feel comfortable, knowing that my children are comfortable”

The conscious expression of meaning that these women attach to their identities and experiences, while realising the non-traditional role of primary breadwinner, seem, at first to endorse a sense of personal achievement and autonomy in their day to day lives. However, by focussing on further communication by the FBW in regards to their lived experiences, these meanings are revealed to be more complex, and at times contradictory.

*What unique challenges do they believe female breadwinners face?*

Insight into the conflicting meanings associated with the unconventional and multifaceted role that these women realise, was revealed during discussion concerning the challenges they face in their daily lives. Certain of these commonalities were shared amongst the women, and included, foremost, a lack of time, financial difficulties, gender discrimination and violence. During my literature review I found that for the most part, these challenges parallel the experiences of FBW overseas, however unique circumstances particular to South Africa that influenced the FBW experiences were revealed and are discussed in subsections below.

### Challenges in the Home

The majority of the challenges that were discussed by the FBW during our discussion centred on personal and interpersonal challenges in the home environment. All of them mentioned the difficulties involved with regard to the duality of their responsibilities as homemaker and provider, which often made them feel overwhelmed and exhausted. Aaminah, a divorced mother of two who works as an accountant, verbalised the experience as though “you are one person pulled [apart]”.

#### *-Unpaid labour*

As discussed in Chapter Two during the review of literature regarding FBW, the responsibilities associated with unpaid labour include housework, care for the children and in certain cases for sick and/or elderly family members, all of which are time consuming duties. The South African Board for People Practices Women’s Report released in 2011 stated that in South Africa, the average woman devotes 180 minutes of her day to tasks involved in unpaid labour, while on average, men spend less than half of that time on the same tasks (Geldenhuys, 2011). The responsibilities of housework and caregiving are also most often performed by women, a prevalence that is the standard globally (Geldenhuys, 2011).

This study concurred with these findings, as eight of the ten women were responsible for all tasks related to the home and care giving, even though three of these women had partners.

Aaminah attributed this to cultural traditions:

“Like they boys, at home, you know it’s still those orthodox ways. The boys at home mustn’t pick up a cup and go leave it in the sink, the woman or the girl in the house must do it. And supper must be laid out for them and all these things... and I feel it’s mainly in the Indian culture.”

For Linda, a divorced mother of two who holds an upper management position in a male dominated industry, these responsibilities extended beyond the realm of housework and childcare, to caring for her then husband, and his sister, who both suffered from a chronic illness. After her sister in law succumbed to the disease, Linda took care of her two nephews as well, and all the while was the sole provider financially. After the divorce, Linda met a new partner, but has found herself again in a position of breadwinner, and although her caregiving responsibilities have lessened since then, she is still in the same boat in regards to the amount of unpaid labour she has to perform. This has caused major conflict in the home, especially in regards to her partner’s lack of involvement in his biological daughter’s life and the amount of pressure it places on Linda, as well as the restrictions it places on her mobility in travelling for work:

“...I tried not to go away [for work] ‘cause I used to worry about [their daughter] at home, ‘cause I know [her partner] doesn’t cope with it... The teacher used to say to me “Aw, I can see you’ve been away” because [their daughter] used to just cry, cry, cry at school all the time...”

The conflict that arises due to the surplus of home and childcare duties in addition to primary breadwinner responsibilities was also an issue in the marriages of divorcees, Martha and Caroline. Both women commented that a lack of time due to numerous responsibilities, and an absence of support from their partners in regards to the home environment and childcare led to an imbalance in their lives and relationships with their husbands. Each woman felt that it was impossible to strike a perfect balance between home, childcare, work and romantic relationships, and as their husbands participated so little, their marriages collapsed under the pressure. As Caroline said:

“He developed a lifestyle that went in a direction that was completely opposing mine. We didn’t pull together, although we managed to work as a team with regard to the children, our lives developed completely separately”

For Martha, her husband's lack of involvement and support at home resulted in the breakdown of her marriage:

“My husband didn't really get involved with the children... He was very hands off...the less he became involved, the more I compensated, and the more I compensated, the more pushed out he felt and less interested, perhaps, he became.”

In contrast, Sunette and Ronel, who is a clinical nurse manager of a hospital emergency ward, deemed this absence of support from their partners to be perfectly normal, as home tasks are traditionally a woman's responsibility. Although both are in the medical field and describe their jobs as having long hours and being “exhausting and demanding”, they both believe that the household and caregiver duties are a woman's domain. For Ronel, these tasks involved taking care of her partner's child from a previous relationship:

“You know, um, actually for me I felt that I spent more time with her than he did...when I come home at night, and there was stuff that she had to get done, then I still have to do assignments at seven o'clock at night...”

Ronel associated her belief in the division of labour along the lines of traditional gender roles to her and her family's “conservative outlook”, while Sunette explained her situation further:

“I don't know – it's just – I think, also not everything has to do with the fact that I am the breadwinner. I think some things is just being female and male, because being male – him being the husband, he focuses more on his own needs, and I think that's also normal...”

For these two FBW, the responsibilities of the primary breadwinner role that are amplified by unpaid labour in the home are not a source of conflict with their partners, but rather an accepted position.

Incongruously for the single FBW, the demands on their time attributed to unpaid labour, and the absence of support from the fathers of their children, directly threatened their ability to fulfil their primary role as breadwinners. Not one of the five single women received financial support from their children's fathers, making them wholly dependent on their jobs to support themselves and their families. Care giving and household responsibilities limited their abilities to advance their employment prospects, as seen in Ela's case, where she was unable to go to interviews to get work to improve her financial situation:

“I've lost countless job opportunities because I didn't have someone to leave my child with...”

The pressure to lessen the financial difficulties that result from trying to support their families on one salary meant FBW had to increase the time spent on paid work, which, coupled with time spent on home and care giver responsibilities meant that they had to give up on opportunities for furthering their careers. Nombuso explained that she was unable to go for her driver's licence:

“...I've got my learners [licence] already, its expiring in November – so I must fight to get that license. It's not easy, every time I plan of doing that, something comes up.”

For Rose, these imbalanced demands on her capabilities meant that she had to give up on advancing her education:

“...at this stage I don't know if I will be able to change careers, though I am studying, but I've chosen to put those studies on hold due to my finances and taking care of the kids.”

The extra contributions that FBW have to make, in the form of unpaid labour in the home, places additional encumbrances on the already demanding role of primary, and often sole, breadwinner that these women realise.

#### *-Violence*

A FBW position of primary financial provider does not necessarily secure her a dominant standing within the familial structure. The violation of traditional gender norms that occurs within the homes of these women often results in violence. Boonzaier's 2005 study concerning violence perpetrated against women in South Africa found that changes to the masculine identity concerning perceived positions of power could result in the exertion of violent acts and infidelity by male partners of FBW to regain that power. This crisis of masculine identity was an issue that the FBW brought up as a concern for those who were single and in relationships.

Caroline, who worked in a male dominated industry before separating from her husband, and has since opened her own business in what is considered a masculine field, agrees that men in South Africa are struggling to deal with the evolving male identity and confesses that she would not choose to fulfil the role of breadwinner again if she could:

“Umm, it's still not something I would choose, because I don't think that the majority of South African men are emotionally ready to handle a wife who earns a lot more money...”

Sunette expressed concern regarding the impact her role had on her husband's emotional state and those of other men in South Africa:

“We see so many white male suicides because they don't feel any worth, they don't feel worth it anymore. So I think we need to realise that we have a very important psychological role in not taking their power away... still trying to be the humble one, the supportive one...”

Nombuso, who had left her father's child due to his adulterous behaviour, felt it was better to be a FBW if you were single because if you were married, your husband may become frustrated and violent or indulged in “some funny stuff” like alcohol and extramarital affairs.

As discussed in Boonzaier's (2005) study, sometimes these violent and abusive acts perpetrated by men in relationships with FBW do not result in violence towards themselves in the form of suicide or against their partners as incidences of infidelity, but rather become physical, with abuse exacted on their female partners. Three of the ten women admitted to experiencing physical abuse at the hands of their partners, however only Rose ascribed the violence to the role she played as breadwinner. Aaminah maintained that her now ex-husband wanted her to work and bring in her income, but explained the resulting violence she experienced at his hands in this way:

“It was about the small things, minor things, maybe... I didn't put enough sugar in his tea or something like that, and he says one, I'll say two and it blows out of proportion.”

Similarly, Ronel described a previous partner's behaviour as “he was a little bit rough on me”, but for Rose, the violent abuse is directly attributed to her role as FBW and the frustration her now ex-husband and other men in the same situation feel:

“...but then, being a black man, it's different for them. They feel that insecurity and unfortunately there is no medicine for that. So hence the abuse, he started beating me up...you know, that insecurity he had, I couldn't take it anymore. I was gonna stay if he was not abusive, but he was physically fighting...”

Like Nombuso, Rose felt it was better to be single as a FBW than to be married, a sentiment echoed by the other women which may explain why eight of the ten FBW were single. This decision to be single is not limited to FBW however. In their 2003 study of labour migration trends, Posel and Casale found that marital rates in South Africa are declining rapidly, with the rate of African women aged 15 years and older, who have never been married increasing from 38.4% in 1993 to 51.5% in 1999.

They suggest that it is more likely that a woman's mobility to find work may be subject to the will of a male partner and that the freedom of movement afforded to women who are not married has resulted in changes to the household composition (Posel & Casale, 2003).

Certainly, not being subjected to the will of a male partner increases a woman's freedom of movement to find employment, but what other freedoms are afforded? For Nombuso, the freedoms are numerous:

"I'm very happy being single...I need my time, my me time...I will have to focus on him...it's too much time... you have to think of what he is going to eat tonight, you have to think what are you gonna use to like, get him, um, cleaned and to get him dressed...it's not easy."

Aaminah also explained how her freedoms were subjugated while she was married:

"My husband was like more of a spender...living extravagant...he wasn't that responsible. As long as I was working, he was happy because in case something happened to the business, then he had a backup...he was in control of the budget, because my salary would go into my account and then he used to pay all the debts with it...payday wasn't a happy day for me."

It would seem that the developing changes in society in regards to gender have had far reaching effects on the relationships between men and women, which can transcend the limitations of traditional boundaries resulting in the improvement the lives of many women. Paradoxically, in certain instances, these same advances can result in dire consequences for the personal wellbeing and safety of women as well.

### Challenges in the Workplace

The undertaking encountered by FBW within their working environment makes up the majority of the literature concerning the phenomena. Most of this research is conducted from an economic stand point and investigates the financial position of FBW in our society. Studies that have focused on the intrapersonal dynamics experienced by FBW in the workplace have found that most women find employment empowering (Cunningham, 2008), a conclusion that correlates with the opinions of the women I spoke to. Nine of the ten women I spoke with specifically referenced how their employment position made them feel a sense of pride, empowerment and achievement. Linda described how she would still work at her job even if her salary wasn't necessary to support the home:

"I would, Ja, because it's fulfilling... I'm lucky, I'm one of the fortunate that I love my job...I get total satisfaction from my job. But now I still want to [work], if you know what I mean, its like – um- it wouldn't change."



Aaminah felt that the opportunity extended for women to work to support their children meant freedom from cultural restrictions:

“...Indian men, like my ex-husband, they are very dominating and they will dominate a woman wherever they can, you know, whenever they can. And, uh, yes – from like my perspective, Indian women are somewhat finding their way out of it now and they are looking at the other races and saying “Oh, why can’t we also be free”...”

That said, six of the FBW explained how hard they found it to keep the work environment from encroaching on their home life. Linda and Aaminah both felt that they had managed to keep the two settings separated, but then later admitted that they often had to bring work home in the evenings. All six of the women felt that although they tried their best to keep their home life independent from their careers, they admitted that work had to take precedence at times as it is the vehicle that provides for their children’s needs, even if it does mean that they miss out on home life experiences. For Sarah, a small business owner who is married to a stay at home dad, and is a mom of one, missing out on her child’s younger years to provide for the family had left her feeling resentful:

“Um- you know sometimes I feel resentful about it...particularly if I’ve maybe not been able to participate in an activity with [their child], not so much now but, you know, in his younger years, then I – there were times when I did feel resentful...I would think to myself I wish [her husband]... could just go get a job and go work in a corporate place... get a car allowance and I’ll stay at home and cook and clean... But I know that wouldn’t have been a happy reality! [Laughs]”

The experience was bitter sweet for Caroline, who felt that her career had helped her to be a role model to her children, but had kept her away from them. This double shift pressure to provide and be a “perfect” mom also permeated the experience:

“... I know my children recognise my role and um – acknowledge and admire me for the contribution I have made... but I also felt very guilty and I felt sometimes even a hint of embarrassment when I would realise that friends... were far more involved with their children at school and at sport... but I don’t make a very good stay at home mom...”

Caroline did feel that technology such as laptops and the internet, had helped her to juggle her work and home responsibilities, and probably did the same for other working women:

“Well, the workplace is just so much more portable, you know, between your cell phone and your laptop or an iPad, I could do business anywhere... it was very much easier...”

Although all these FBW strive to achieve balance in their lives, this may already be negated by a society where their gender may, to some extent, prescribe the types of careers available for them to pursue.

*-Gendered division of labour*

The gendered division of labour in South Africa was something I encountered during my research into the experiences of working women in general, and that I specifically mentioned during my literature review as I believed that it has a particular significance for FBW in our society. Statistics from the SABPP Women's Report in 2011, which I have referenced earlier, found that despite an increase in female employment in South Africa in recent years, the majority of these women are employed in the poorest paid sector of the labour market that requires the least skills, the social or service industries (Geldenhuys, 2011).

Surprisingly, this was not the case with the ten FBW I spoke with as only four of the women worked in the social or service sector. Rose and Ronel, however, were well remunerated even though their chosen careers would be considered typically female vocations. Of the six remaining FBW, all were well qualified, with a tertiary education, two of whom worked in male dominated industries and a further two owned small businesses. This may be attributed to the stipulation I supplied that chosen participants had to be conversant in English.

Although this was due to a limitation of my own, English being the only language I am proficient in, it may have affected the selection of FBW to include women who had achieved a matric or higher education level, and not been as representative of the South African population of FBW as a whole.

That said, I did inadvertently confirm the findings of Geldenhuys in the SABPP Women's Report of 2011 in regards to the most common employment sector of women in South Africa, by identifying that eight of the ten FBW employed women as domestic workers in their homes. The only two FBW who did not hire domestic help, could not afford to do so, but expressed a desire to in order to reduce their workload. While I did not converse directly with the domestic workers employed, I did receive second-hand verification from the FBW I spoke to in regards to the relationship they shared. The availability of affordable domestic help in South Africa significantly reduces the capacity of responsibilities held by FBW, a form of support that was greatly missed by Sarah when her family emigrated to overseas for a few years and she once again fulfilled the role of sole breadwinner and her husband, that of stay at home dad:

“We didn’t have any help... [It was] obviously very expensive...I would be like the traditional person that like goes to work, when you come home and like the house was a mess and I’d think “what the hell has he been doing all day?!”...we didn’t have any support...”

Each of the eight women relied heavily on the domestic workers they employed as a form of support, to alleviate their household duties like cooking and cleaning, and to take care of their children while they were at work. Martha explained how she would leave her sick children in the care of her domestic worker when she had to work. For Aaminah, the support she received from the woman she employed extended from general cleaning to collecting the children from school and helping with their homework, responsibilities she would have loved to perform herself:

“... if I had an option I would be at home with the kids when they got home from school – I would take them to school in the mornings and sit down with them in the afternoons to do their homework – I would give them their lunch... But I can’t do that, I have to be breadwinner and I have to go out there and work to support them. And I feel like I am missing so much...”

The fact that the reality that these women face is very similar to their own, as FBW, seemed to be overlooked by the women I spoke to, except for Linda, who acknowledged her domestic worker as a fellow breadwinner and expressed her gratitude for the support she received from her:

“She is from the old school... she never had the opportunity... but I’m very privileged because... she has taught [her youngest child] to write her name, her number... She had a drunk husband who she kicked out, and she brought up her kids...so she is the breadwinner...”

The further exploration of gendered division of labour in our society, and the women who perform these tasks, is crucial to better understand and improve their situations encountered.

#### *-Discrimination*

In regards to discrimination at work on the basis of gender, there was a three way division amongst the women, with five of them feeling it was not an issue having never experienced it themselves; and the remaining five divided between the issues of discrimination in general, or specifically on the basis of gender. Two of those five remaining women believed they had experienced discrimination at work on the basis of their gender. The latter three women felt they knew of women who had been discriminated against at work, or had experienced it themselves, first hand, but it was in no way related to their gender.

The first group of FBW said that they had never experienced discrimination at work in regards to their gender, or for any other reason. They also had never encountered other women who believed they had been discriminated against. Nombuso, who was among the FBW who held this opinion, explained that she did not ever feel that the men she worked with were threatened by herself or her female colleagues, and that men were far more accepting of women in various job positions nowadays:

“No, like we do everything [together]... like if they build a house, I can also build a house. And like when they were doing [construction on nearby road], there were lots of women there...like our buses, there are lots of women there. They are driving those buses. And trucks...”

Other FBW I spoke to had experienced discrimination within their chosen profession, due to their gender, at varying levels in the work place. As one of the most qualified and highest paid FBW I spoke with, Sunette, felt discriminated against as she does not receive paid maternity leave from the company she works for. This had caused her to be fearful of the financial situation she and her husband will face when she has to take leave to have their child:

“...its unpaid maternity leave and I mean four months without an income will be disastrous...I’m thirty three weeks pregnant now, so I’m gonna try work until I’m thirty seven weeks...I would have liked to deliver the baby normally, but because of the limited time that I can take off from work, I’ll rather have a caesarean cause then I can plan the date the baby gets born.”

Sunette also noted that the senior positions in her profession were all held by men. This notion of gender specific employment positions created challenges for Sunette, whose patients assumed she was a nurse, not a doctor, due to her gender:

“It’s almost like we are treated like student doctors by the older male specialists... like nurses or sisters. And also, what’s annoying is that most patients call you sister or nurse. They just...they don’t think – their first impression is: where is the big male doctor who is coming to see them?”

Caroline had previously worked in a male dominated industry in Gauteng before she moved down to Mpumalanga to open her own business which is also in a male dominated field. She explained how she had never felt discriminated against in her previous position, but that this had changed since she had moved:

“I’ve never experienced inequality like I have in [Mpumalanga]. I don’t believe that many of us women would ever dare to tell a man, in a particular area of business now, how to do his job but they certainly insist, on a weekly basis, to tell me how to do it.”

The remaining three women had experienced discrimination, but felt gender had nothing to do with it. Aminah admitted that she had experienced discrimination at the hands of male colleagues, so much so that she had left her job and was seeking alternative employment, but attributed to this to their intimidation of her work ethic rather than her gender. This sentiment of colleagues being threatened by their work ethic, not their gender, was echoed by other FBW, such as Martha:

“And I have to say, while I’ve had challenges over the years with men who felt threatened, I don’t think for one second they were threatened, except perhaps for one case, because I was a woman. It’s more a case of their own instability with themselves. So from that point of view, it’s been a relatively easy path, but that said, you know, I do work hard!”

At first, Sarah felt the same way, explaining that working women are threatened by other women in their field, not by other men. She felt that FBW did not offer support for one another, but rather competition. However, during our second dialogue, Sarah said that she had questioned her dismissive reaction towards a friend in her same field of work, who had complained of discrimination. She felt terrible that she had not supported her friend and taken her complaints of discrimination more seriously. Sarah went on to describe how she had become much more aware of subtle forms of discrimination since our first discussion, including incidents of male clients preferring to discuss business matters with her husband, rather than herself, even though it is her company and her husband simply assists in a financial management capacity:

“... on a couple of occasions I’d be in a meeting and there’d be a person, most often male... where you just got the sense that he was talking to [her husband], and it didn’t matter what I said, he would only talk to [her husband].”

The realities of the FBW I spoke with may not include experiences of discrimination in all cases, but certainly instances of challenges faced and overcome by them, that are not encountered in the daily lives of their male colleagues.

#### Media Myth: Necessity vs. Choice

During my review of the literature concerning FBW, I came across evidence that contrary to the stereotypical FBW portrayed by the media, that of successful white female executives in top corporate positions, most FBW households evolve due to economic limitations rather than gender equality.

This finding was substantiated through the shared experiences of the participants, where eight of the ten women apportioned their role as breadwinner due to the necessity to take care of their family, either because they were single with no support from their children's fathers, or because their partner earned too little to sustain the family. In Martha's situation, it was a case of both:

“I'm not saying that necessarily I was entirely the breadwinner but I was certainly the better of the cash or finance managers in the relationship. Um, but that wasn't a choice and it wasn't a necessity, it was simply the way it was, at that time. And then when we got divorced it was a necessity, umm... it's a case of needing to keep the show on the road and even when he was supporting, there were often times when for six months the money just didn't arrive ...”

Some of the women felt that the increase of FBW was due to emancipation of women, but specifically, the enforced emancipation via Employment Equity policies in South Africa, where the government incentivises companies to employ previously disadvantaged groups, and in this case, specifically women. Others, like Martha and Aaminah attributed the new opportunities and roles undertaken by women not to emancipation of their gender, but rather the increased cost of living, our increased standard of living, and society's materialism in general. As Martha described:

“So, insomuch as women have had, um, have more choices, I think lifestyle changes and the way people live these days, necessitates that shift, more than women's [liberation]... there seems to be a lot more pressure for the trappings of success...”

Only Sarah and Caroline felt that they had been afforded the choice to undertake their role as breadwinner, due to their qualifications and support from their partners. Neither felt that they would have been happy as stay at home mothers and had strived from an early age to build successful careers. Sarah expressed her gratitude for her husband's support in enabling her to advance in her career:

“... I've got such huge respect for single moms, I mean I think it's so hard for them to do what they do and most of them do it so well and dedicate so much of themselves... I'm sure my life would have been different without [her husband] taking the role he did. I never really worried about anything at home...”

She also stated that she felt as though she was in a minority group of women who could afford to choose their role as breadwinner:

“I think a lot of women who are breadwinners are breadwinners out of necessity, whether they are single moms or divorcees or their husbands can’t get jobs... And I think a lot of women who are breadwinners aren’t necessarily in senior positions or earning a lot of money... I think it is really hard... I think women who choose to be breadwinners are probably most often privileged...”

It would then seem that similarly to the experiences of FBW overseas, the role of breadwinner that is undertaken by women in South Africa is as a result of economic necessity rather than emancipation of women.

*What changes have they perceived in the traditional gender role schema?*

FBW fulfil a non-traditional role and defy society’s standard idea of the male traditional breadwinner and head of the household, so it would be expected that they would be in support of the revision of the breadwinner stereotype and of gender roles prescribed in general. However in the literature review, I found that FBW overseas preferred to endorse the traditional stereotype of male breadwinner and head of the household, even though it was in reality in direct conflict with the role to which they were fulfilling. These findings abroad where further ratified by the opinions of the FBW involved in this study, the majority of whom were uncomfortable with the evolution of gender roles seen in today’s society in South Africa. As stated by Ela:

“Men are really supposed to be the sole providers. I always go back to that... I think feminists would kill me... [But] I really believe that somehow, in the kind patriarchal society, note kind! I really [believe] it works better!”

Eight of the ten women stated that they had seen changes in the employment sector pertaining to women and that opportunities for them had grown over the last fifty years or so, which was a positive and necessary development. The increased ease of access to, and quality of, education for young women in South Africa was viewed as a major contributor to the intensification of women’s presence in the working population, as Nombuso explained:

“I think it is easier now – cause, like, they didn’t have lots of things on the olden days, like... education, I think it is much better now...there are lots of opportunities out there... I don’t think I can fail to do anything now...”

This positivity towards the advancement of employment opportunities for women in South Africa was seen as a privilege to many of the FBW, and something which need to be advanced further, as stated by Sunette:

“Definitely that has changed a lot, um, so there is improvement, of course – but, um, I think, um, one must never reach a plateau. I think there must be on-going research and on-going improvement in the roles [between men and women] because it is a dynamic process...”

Although the improvement of the educational and employment circumstances for women in our country was seen as a positive progression by most of the FBW, six out of the ten felt discouragingly towards the influences these advancements had had on the role women played in the home environment. Most felt that it would be best if traditional gender roles were abided by in the home, as changes related to the typical gender schemas caused conflict and frustration on their male partners’ behalf. Linda was reluctant to use the term “breadwinner” while describing the non-traditional role she fulfils, so much so that she seemed unable to even verbalise the term. She said that it was best that she kept her role as breadwinner quiet “And never brag or show it or let anybody else know, it’s got to be kept very low key”, and make her partner feel as though he was playing the part of breadwinner in the home to prevent tension in the home. To this end, Linda had never disclosed to her partner her total monthly wages. This circumspect behaviour was also displayed by the remaining FBW, who felt the same way as Linda did in regards to maintaining traditional gender roles in the home. Ela felt that adhering to the traditional gender norms prescribed by her religious following, where men are meant to be the sole providers, may lessen the burdens felt by FBW. This incongruent role was also endorsed by Ronel, who said of her relationship:

“Although I am the one that is making the most money, I still make him feel like he is the breadwinner in the house.”

It should be noted that of the four FBW who were in the minority and expressed belief that gender roles should and have evolved, three were single, with two of them having been through a divorce. Each of them expressed a desire to teach their children, especially their sons, to do chores around the home and be independent, so that one day their sons could be men who were capable of taking care of themselves and for their daughters, to become successful and self-sufficient women.

*How do issues of race, religion and ethnicity uniquely affect individual experiences of South African female breadwinners?*

Considering the important and unique role FBW in South Africa fulfil, I felt it was of importance to ask the women to share their experiences, and the experiences of other FBW they knew, within the context of our multi-cultural society.



However, most of the women had never even contemplated their own role as FBW and felt it was very difficult to explain the particularities of their own experiences, never mind experiences of others. In spite of this, those who did share revealed thought-provoking impressions unique to our society. Four out of the ten women, including Sarah, specifically mentioned that they had never contemplated the situations faced by women fulfilling the breadwinner role, and had not considered themselves to be FBW until they were contacted in connection with this study.

“As I’m sitting here, I know I started off saying that I’ve never really thought about it, and as I’m sitting here, so many thoughts are coming into my head about how this issue [being a FBW] can affect so many other things that you never even think about...”

For some, like Caroline and Sarah, this was an eye opening experience that led them to reflect on their own living situation and that of other women in our society who had the same responsibilities to perform as they did, and the differences that characterised those living situations and experiences. Sarah elaborated:

“What makes the difference between the women who start a community project and forgets about making money. I know the obvious things, like how we live and how we grow up and circumstances, but I mean, maybe as women, who are able to generate money, we should be more responsible... we should have some kind of responsibility... to South African society.”

The majority of the women were very cognisant of the previous governmental regime and its policies put in place that were discriminatory, and were mindful of the effects it may have had on FBW, past and present, as well as South African society as a whole. Of this group, Sarah, Linda, Caroline and Martha, felt that they had benefitted under the past regime, even though they opposed its policies, and felt a need to give back to the community. These women felt that they were in a privileged position due to education and opportunities offered to them that were denied to other races under a prejudiced and bigoted administration. Sarah was especially aware of this:

“And the truth is, as white people, women or men, we would never be where we are, most of us... without apartheid. I mean, you and I would never have got the education that we did, we wouldn’t have learnt how to behave in a professional environment because we would never have had access or exposure to it... we wouldn’t have had the confidence to go out there and do a lot of things that we do...”

Martha, Sarah and Caroline, had all used their privileges to give back to others in society, in one way or another. For Martha and Caroline, it took the form of mentoring others in their respective fields, as described by Martha:

“I felt a social need to put some of my learning and maturity in the workplace back into the public sector, to help young people... who perhaps haven’t had the personal background that would allow them to come with the skills that they need...you’ve got a lot of graduates... coming out of university with a lot up here [points to her head], but not a lot of work space skills.”

Sunette also noted the experiences of FBW in our society varied to her own, along the lines of race, with regards to her fellow FBW colleagues and their living arrangements:

“I think it’s much more difficult for them because most of them have two houses. They’ve got their houses in the townships, which is far away...they have flats close by [to workplace]... so then they don’t see their family...”

For Ela, Rose and Nombuso, this living arrangement mimicked their own childhoods where their mothers, who were breadwinners, had to leave them with relatives while she moved closer to her place of employment. Whereas this may have been a result of laws that restricted the movement of certain races under the laws of apartheid, these living situations still existed today, as explained by Ela:

“The [friend] that I mentioned, she lives in [another province]...She actually doesn’t even live with her child, she’s left her child with her mother [here]... personally, I don’t like it...I don’t think it’s fair, the child grows up having two [homes]...”

The other women also recognised that the lived experiences of FBW differed to their own and attributed it to the class structure in South African society, with middle class complacency making those women more submissive and traditional and therefore less likely to become breadwinners, whereas poorer women had no choice but to provide to survive, as Ela explained:

“Look, we are not talking about middle class here, we are talking about...situations where you have people living below the average. So in those situations they are very [poor]...the men...they earn too little money and a lot of women are breadwinners even though they are married.”

The remaining few of the women disagreed with the notion that the experiences of FBW in South Africa differed, and felt that in general, they had similar existences. Nombuso felt that all FBW were united by their similar challenges and that they all “were struggling out there”. Aaminah concurred with this conclusion and elaborated on the shared challenges:

“Any woman...on their own, it is the [same] thought out. The kids - home and work... even if you are a cashier at the store... you focus must be more on that. You have to! As much as you want your focus to be on your kids... you can’t. You cannot neglect that piece of bread coming in.”

Rose had been surprised at how many of her colleagues were also FBW, after discussing our approaching meeting at her work place, and how that role transcended cultural and racial lines:

“We all – you know, at work, you are so mixed, um, as soon as you start talking that’s when you realise “Wow, I thought it was only me” or us, but then you realise it’s actually everybody in this... all those things, you find it is more or less the same.”

The value that lies in these disclosures of the subjective, intra and interpersonal experiences of FBW in South Africa are numerous, in that they reveal, for the first time, the unique challenges faced by a group of individuals in our society, and how those challenges are in actuality shared, not only among the group themselves, but in our country as a whole. This reflexive lens, held up by the strong and resourceful women I spoke with, reflects not only their triumphs, confinements and hardships faced, but those encountered by our society as a whole.

## DISCUSSION

The scarcity of research literature pertaining to the social and personal lives of women in South Africa motivated my exploration of these lived experiences, specifically from the point of view of the women involved. This “presence of an absence”, a concept outlined by Michelle Fine during her 2001 Carolyn Sherif Award Address, is potentially dangerous as the reticence in research in regards to women affords them little opportunity to understand their shared experiences and commonalities with one another and impedes their ability to generate change in their own lives, and the lives of other women in society.

Inspired by the ideas of Feminist Psychology, I purposely focused on a specific group of women in South Africa, FBW, due to the non-traditional role they fulfil and the enlightening insight this atypical gendered role plays in illuminating these women’s personal identities, and the social expectations placed on women in general within our predominately patriarchal society. During the discussion to follow, the shared and unique experiences of the FBW I spoke with, are integrated and linked, from individual to collective, or global to local, in order to understand the absent, encourage their presence and identify the forces within our society that impact them.

### *Intrapersonal Understandings*

A sense of independence and feelings of control were the most prevalent shared personal experience expressed by the women in relation to their breadwinning role.

All of the women inferred positive emotions to the perception of being independent and having control. They did, however, differ in relation to where these positive emotional constructions were encountered in their lives. 50% of the women explained that their experience of independence and control in their lives had stemmed from within themselves, derived from favourable feelings of self-fulfilment, pride, personal achievement and growth, which they attached to their role as breadwinner. It is interesting to note that most of these women (60%) did not believe that they had chosen to adopt the role of breadwinner, but had had it thrust upon them due to circumstances beyond their control. Despite this, they still attributed their lived experiences of being FBW to personal cognitive states. These women internalised their experiences as a breadwinner. For them, it is a state of personal being, a self or identity formed, that extends beyond the necessity of taking care of their loved ones.

For the remaining 50% of the FBW, their sense of independence and control was a result of experiences relational to those around them. None of the women in this group believed that they had been afforded the opportunity to choose the role of breadwinner, but had undertaken the responsibility due to circumstances of necessity and felt that the role had improved their lives. They sanguinely noted how the breadwinning role meant that they could provide financial security for their families, safety from violence for their children and support in general for their dependants. This idea of communal identity and external localisation of personal experiences attributed to the breadwinning role differs significantly from the internalised experiences of the aforementioned FBW and warrants further exploration by future research to increase comprehension of how these women create, and manage, their unique role.

### *Interpersonal Relations*

The progressive and complex undertakings involved in the role espoused by FBW revealed a lack of balance in everyday life that challenged their relationships with others, both at home and in the workplace. During their dialogues it became apparent that all the women faced challenges as a result of their role, the most common of which was attempts to strike a balance between the duality of their homemaker and provider responsibilities, presented to them by their position. At home, the surplus of unpaid labour and tasks traditionally defined as women's responsibilities necessitate much of the FBW time and effort.

While for a few (20%) of the FBW, the division of caregiving and household tasks along gender lines was considered appropriate and acceptable, on the whole (80%) the FBW found this division unbalanced and unreasonable. Whether or not the women agreed to the allocation of these tasks along gender lines, they all experienced these stresses, coupled with the demands made of them in their work environment. The resulting exhaustion and tensions often led to neglect of interpersonal relationships, with the most likely casualty being the intimate relationship with their significant others. These tensions arose as a result of the FBW partners' feeling that their position and contributions were denigrated, and the FBW perception that their partners' did not perform enough tasks of value to the home environment. The latter rationale was the account provided by 90% of the single FBW I spoke with in regard to their marital status. These women represented 80% of the FBW group interviewed. Additional research that delves into the division of unpaid labour prescribed by traditional gender roles, and the acceptability thereof by the members of a household, could do much to advance our understanding of the psychology of gender in the settings of South African homes.

The serious issue of violence perpetrated against women and children in South Africa demands consideration within the discussion of interpersonal relations in FBW homes. The dehumanization and objectification of women that results in violent acts perpetrated against them, including physical violence, sexual coercion and infidelity, is not excluded from homes where women are the primary benefactor. 50% of the FBW I spoke with mention lived-experiences of the above abuses enacted upon them. In Boonzaier's 2005 study on Woman Abuse in South Africa, she specifically mentions the combative position of breadwinner as a prescriber of 'successful masculinity' in regards to male identity, and its justified use by men to commit acts of violence against their partners, whose non-traditional role as FBW leave these men feeling powerless. Considering the seriousness and prevalence of this problem in South Africa, increased research needs to address the local instances of, and possible global causes of, violence against women in relation to traditional norms of gender and sexuality within our society, and the current reformation of these 'norms' by women in their daily lives.

Interpersonal interactions regarding the workplace had far reaching effects on the lives of the FBW, more so than those within the home environment. 90% of the FBW said that they found the opportunity to work to provide for their families was an empowering experience.

Unfortunately, 60% of those women interviewed believed that their employment responsibilities imposed on their home life and expressed feelings of guilt and remorse in regards to the lack of time they were able to spend with their families due to these accountabilities at work. Despite the obvious imbalance their occupations had on their home life, 70% of the women believed that modern workplace shouldn't be altered to accommodate the evolving model of breadwinner in today's society. Even though they readily admitted that they faced challenges not encountered by their male colleagues, these FBW did not feel that the workplace and employment terms in general should be adjusted to suit them specifically, and they did not feel discriminated against in any way at their places of work. For the 30% FBW who did feel discriminated against, or who knew of female co-workers who had experienced discrimination in the workplace, most believed that gender was not the provocation for the inequity, but rather work ethic incongruity between colleagues.

The perspectives of these FBW in relation to their interpersonal relationships, is crucial for the proceeded elucidation about the FBW experience in general. Future research into these interactions will allow women in general to learn from other women's experiences and could benefit them in regards to management of interpersonal challenges and the improvement of interactive communication.

#### *Societal influences on Gender Role Construction*

In general, the women were not cognisant of the unique role their positions as FBW play in South African society today. They were mindful that society in general had changed, in most respects, for the betterment of women, and the largest part of the FBW were very aware of the past political regime in our country and how it may have benefitted or alternatively subjugated their individual existences and subsequent opportunities, but none had considered their individual role played within our societal structure and its possible collective impact on modern society in general. The majority of their experiences shared were intra and interpersonal in nature, and when the question was asked of their non-traditional gender role in relation to our society today, the majority responded with ambivalent answers relating to interpersonal experiences and the roles' impact on their home environment rather than communal environment. Through the experiences shared by the FBW, a conflicting schema was revealed. A schema where the emancipation of the people of South Africa in general, and our women in particular, was endorsed, but emancipation from traditional gender roles in the home was not.

A schema where the improvement of educational and employment opportunities for women is endorsed, but conflictingly, the reconsideration of gendered division of unpaid labour in the home is not. Comprehensive analyses of the FBW shared stories exposes their communicated contradictions as the influence of a patriarchal society on a group of individuals performing non-traditional roles within said society. This paradoxical dominant script of emancipation of women in general, but not individually within the home and work environments, is reflected in the FBW experiences imparted where instances of physical abuse at the hands of their partners and/or discrimination suffered in the workplace is not attributed to the effect on their non-traditional gender role in society, but rather to their own individual attributes. These women internalise the blame for instances of violent and prejudiced behaviour, rather than ascribe it to the parochial community they live in. The instances of women crediting local, intimate justifications to global issues is addressed by Fine (2002), who states in her address that women tend to see denunciation as personal incompetence rather than general discrimination. This conduct is condoned by patriarchal societies who have paradoxical dominant scripts to enforce such behaviour, because a woman, who blames herself for discrimination experienced as a result of her own shortcomings, is less likely to complain. A lack of counter stories to challenge the dominant script means that the status quo, social context and issues, are not recognised and confronted as such, and as a result these issues cannot be rectified.

Unfortunately, this state of play is all too apparent when examining the shared lived experiences of the FBW I spoke with, where gender equality seems to consist of a denial of respective differences in favour of an inconsistent, one-size fits all, view of egalitarianism. This 'new' model of equal opportunity for all genders is based on an idea that differences need not be accommodated and that they are a disadvantage. Rather, women should follow this new dominant script of fairness, which in actuality is still based on the hitherto dominant male breadwinner model of unfair distribution of unpaid labour in the home, and gendered division of labour in the workplace. Cognisance of past models and policies still practised today, under the guise of modernity, are exposed in these women's' discourses, as are the social ills that create the challenges they face in their everyday lives. The understanding of global issues such as gender violence and discrimination can be achieved by analysing intimate experiences, and in the process expose the fallacy that these issues are a result of individual inadequacies.

Hopefully, this presence of an absence, this generated knowledge of the unheard, can bring about revised comprehension of ourselves and our communities and generate new opinions that recognise both male and FBW, their differences and contributions. The consideration and analysis of the experiences of the women involved in this study should be seen as a crucial engine for increased understanding of women in South Africa in general, and to note that what needs to be done in order to bring about social change and equality is not only to pass legislation, but through education, inculcate change in people's attitudes, mind-sets and values, and encourage true equality within our society for all.



## CHAPTER FIVE:

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“Up 'til now, I ate the burnt toast. I learned that from my mother - metaphorically if not literally. As a loving and devoted wife and mother, she always took care of everyone and everything else before herself. This habitual self-sacrifice was well intended, but ultimately it's a mixed message for a child. I learned to accept whatever was in front of me without complaint because I didn't think I deserved good things.”*  
(Hatcher, 2006, p. 1)

Mainstream academic understandings regarding gender, specifically women, and the roles they play in societies around the world impelled the direction taken in this dissertation, as did the dearth of literature in psychology regarding FBW in South Africa and their intrapersonal concerns and lived experiences. A combination of researcher considerations, including solidarity and significance, set this study towards a course that envisioned the possibility of learning more about these experiences through a group of unique women who fulfil the progressive and dichotomous role of breadwinner in their homes, and in so doing, elucidating the disregarded voices and existences of FBW in South Africa by providing an empowering platform of shared knowledge.

In the course of interviews and analysis, the realities faced by FBW revealed experiences, individual and communal, shared and unique, which expose archaic divisions and discriminations of gender within our society, which have been hiding behind constructions of reform advocating equality among the sexes. In actuality, the emancipation and empowerment of these women has proffered many opportunities and progressions which are incongruent with the out-dated conventions and policies still practised in various areas of society today. These discrete forms of discrimination masquerade as socially constructed values that are accepted by women with the belief that they emphasize an egalitarian ideal. This intersectionality, revealed via the erudite discourse shared by the FBW in Chapter four, manipulates these women into believing that the challenges that they experience, lack of time, financial difficulties, gender discrimination and violence, are consequential self-sacrifices necessitated by their role, rather than resulting penalties of obsolescent systems used today and based on previous prejudiced and repressive regimes. Readily they eat the burnt toast society tells them they need to, in order to secure their autonomy.

### *Practical Implications*

The findings of this study specifically highlight the experiences of FBW in South Africa, with possible elucidations to the women of the populace in general. Therefore the subsequent practical implications can affect both the local, and global, aspects of our society. For the participants involved, comprehension of essential experiences shared may facilitate personal apperceptions in forming, and grasping, their own identities. Six of the ten participants requested to be informed of the results of the study as they were eager to see what experiences they had in common with other FBW. This communal awareness may provide a platform of support, with reassurances that they are not isolated or abnormal within their circumstances. For Sarah, the discourse helped her to identify instances of discrimination she experienced in her daily life, and subsequently encouraged her to recognise colleagues and friends reports of discrimination, rather than to dismiss them, as she had done previously.

On an interpersonal level, information generated by this study may provide a supportive structure for dialogue between FBW and their significant others about the role they play as FBW and what it entails. Relational confirmation and corroboration could allow for redefinition of the wants, requirements and responsibilities of all those involved, and result in a balance of rights within the home that rectifies certain challenges, such as the division of unpaid labour, confronting FBW. Communication of this nature may help men and women to understand their changing gendered identities and the way these may impact on their relationships, as well as the impact of cultural and traditional assumptions thereon. Of the five divorced/separated FBW I spoke with, three women felt that these types of conversations early on in the relationship may have prevented the dissolution of their marriages.

On a global level, reconsidering FBW roles within the context of our modern economic climate is crucial considering the extensive contributions brought about by their growing presence within the formal and informal sectors. The development of new strategies that acknowledge the importance and value of diversity in the workplace and our economy are necessary to guarantee the constitutional rights of all workers. Restructuring patterns of employment and occupation to readdress issues pertaining to pay gaps, maternity leave and worker identity is vital, as is the implementation of policies that recognise female employees as the primary source of income for their families.

The instances described by the FBW involved in this study of unpaid maternity leave, gendered division of labour and discrimination, demand the focused attention of multidisciplinary research that will elucidate this important area that is in need of social redress. FBW and working women in general should be encouraged by the stories shared in this study to influence their social and workplace doctrines in a manner that their associations can comprehend, and inspire change that accommodates their needs and requirements without sacrificing equality.

### *Limitations*

The limitations encountered within this study were mainly due to the exploratory nature of this research, as well as certain constraints imposed, and can be addressed by future research on this topic. As discussed in Chapter Three, the interviews for this phenomenological study were only conducted in English, as it is the only language I am fluent in, and time and financial constraints meant that the services of a translator could not be employed.

Although a diverse group of women participated in the interviews (as seen in Table 1; Chapter Three), the scope of the study was limited by the selection of participants able to join, all of whom had to be able to converse adequately in English. This multilingualism inadvertently created a requirement that participants had to have completed a certain level of schooling, indeed all the participants have completed a senior high school education, with 50% of those having achieved a tertiary education qualification. Due to the multicultural demographic that constitutes the South African population, this limitation affects the accuracy with which the study's findings can be transferred to the experiences of other FBW in the country.

Correspondingly, the diverse nature of the connubial relationships of the women who participated in this study, ranging from single or co-habiting, to married, divorced or separated, were unintentionally confined to relationships with members of the opposite sex. Though this was not a prerequisite or even a considered focus in participant selection, it is limiting with respects to research regarding FBW experiences, and exploration of the dynamics of FBW households comprising of same sex couples could yield interesting truths in regards to the gendered division of labour in the home. As a final point, the aim of this phenomenological study was to accurately represent the voices of the women involved, and to create a base of understanding.

Being an exploratory study, it provides a basis for, and hopefully encourages, future research on a group of women performing an important, and increasingly common role in contemporary society.

#### *Recommendations for future research*

This research study's phenomenological consideration of the experiences of FBW provides new perspectives that reveal aspects of the realities of women in South Africa in general. Further investigation into the lives of FBW in South Africa may consider broadening the scope of research to include a sample of women who are breadwinners in their families, but are either unemployed, self-employed, working in the informal sector, or those who are living off government grants. Moreover, the gendered division of labour in the home and specifically the vital position that domestic workers, as FBW themselves, fulfil within this sphere of the homes of other FBW and women in general, warrants further research. Understanding the division of labour along the lines of gender will improve insight of the lived situations encountered by women in South Africa, and in turn, the gendered dynamics of power at play within the various socioeconomic and cultural contexts within our diverse society.

The central role that FBW play within their households has not shifted the balance of power in relation to the traditional, patriarchal home model that is the dominant domestic setting. The instances of violence and manipulation described by the FBW in this study, often resulting in the dissolution of their relationships and their wariness of forming new unions, reveals that true role reversal is rare. Explorations of masculine values and norms as the overriding practise in homes that are experiencing counter shifts in economic benefactor dynamics may provide unique explanations of, and solutions for, the monumental crisis of abuse against woman in South Africa.

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**Participant A1:**

Her primary experience of being a female breadwinner was a sense of independence, self-fulfilment and control in her life.

She felt that even if it wasn't necessary for her to work, she still would not change her job as she loved her job and experienced a great deal of job satisfaction.

Despite the non-traditional role that she occupied as a female breadwinner, she still believed that men should fulfil the traditional role as breadwinner in the household.

She attributed this belief due to the feeling of power that the role of breadwinner afforded her, and the money she earned, as it caused problems with her relationship with her partner.

This was confirmed by the statement she made that her role as breadwinner had to be kept quiet and not discussed, as well as her apparent reluctance to use the term breadwinner to describe herself during the interview.

She never divulged to her partner her exact earnings; he had to be made to feel as though he was playing the part of the breadwinner in the home.

He did not contribute to the household responsibilities.

She played both the role of provider and homemaker in the family, a dual responsibility that she found stressful.

The lack of free time and demanding responsibilities meant that she neglected to take care of herself and her relationship with her partner.

Her two children were her first priority, and then her job, which provided for them all.

She relied heavily on her domestic worker and eldest child to support her in taking care of the home and her youngest child.

She had taken on the role of provider and primary caregiver in the past, when she took care of her now ex-husband who was ill during their marriage, as well as his sister who was also ill.

She nursed her sister-in-law until she passed away, after which she took on the responsibility of taking care of her two orphaned nephews, as well as her own child and husband.

A1 worked in a male dominated field, where she had worked her way up to a high ranking position with junior colleagues that she had to manage.

Her career afforded her enough flexibility to take care of her youngest should an emergency arise, but it also took her away from her family for certain periods of time.

During these times she called on the support of her eldest child, domestic worker and female friends.

It was very important to her to keep her home and work life separate, but she mentioned times when her work seemed to invade her home life.

These sacrifices are acknowledged by her, but are seen as a necessary part of why she managed to be so successful at her career.

Her mother was also the primary breadwinner in their family and she recognised the sacrifices her mother had made for her, and her sibling.

She also expressed that there seemed to be more opportunities for women in the workplace in modern society, compared to the days when her mother had been breadwinner.

A1 felt that she was in a privileged position compared to other women in South Africa, who were in similar situations as female breadwinners, due to her education and the opportunities offered to her in the past.

She recognised her domestic worker as a fellow female breadwinner, and expressed feelings of gratitude and guilt at having such a woman work in her home.

Although she shared with other female breadwinners the necessity to perform the role, rather than a choice in selecting her responsibilities, A1 felt fortunate that she had a career that she loved and from which she derived much personal fulfilment and pride.

**Participant A2:**

She had never thought of her role as female breadwinner to be of any significance until I had contacted her.

Her mother was a female breadwinner by necessity, but she had still believed in traditional gender roles.

After considering it, A2 felt that being a female breadwinner gave her sense of independence, she was proud to be a role model to her children, and she felt it made her a more capable person.

Her role had also given her a great sense of satisfaction and achievement.

However, it had caused a lot of competition with her husband, so she would not have chosen that role again if she could.

A2 felt that she was always trying to strike a balance, and was not sure it could ever be achieved as something always had to suffer, in this case her relationship with her husband.

She had wanted to be equal with her husband, as part of a team, but they had developed their lives separately because she couldn't share her professional successes with him as he saw it as her trying to be competitive.

He had felt resentful towards her.

When she travelled for work and he had had to take care of the children, he had felt as though he was doing her a favour.

She often did feel guilt over not being more involved with the her children and their school activities.

A2 admitted she had had most of her support from her domestic worker.

Her current partner was more supportive, he was not threatened by her position as breadwinner and they openly communicated about her role.

She still supported her estranged husband financially, so that their children could experience a nice environment when they visited with him.

A2 had worked in male dominated industry in the past when she lived in Gauteng, and still was in a male dominated industry now, with her own company she opened in Mpumalanga.

She felt that other women did see her as a threat, but she never felt discriminated against by male colleagues in Gauteng until she had had a baby, after that she had felt they took her less seriously due to her family responsibilities.

She didn't feel that her gender had played a role in her success in her career, or hindered it for that matter, but definitely believed it was easier nowadays for women to be female breadwinners as women had the opportunities to be anything they wanted to be.

A2 believed that technology like the internet and laptops helped women juggle their work/home responsibilities.

She definitely thought that men in South Africa could not handle women in non-traditional positions.

She had experienced a lot of discrimination from men in Mpumalanga, who she believed did not like a woman to run a company and tried to tell her how to do her job.

A2 was aware that many women in South Africa were female breadwinners due to necessity and struggle, especially women in differing races.

She felt that they needed support from the communities around them.

She wanted her daughter to be independent, but also wanted her to be aware of the challenges she may face as a self-sufficient woman.

**Participant A3:**

A3 had never really contemplated her role as a female breadwinner before now.

She liked to have time to herself and she didn't ever feel that she would have been a good stay at home mom.

A3 had always wanted to work professionally and she was inspired by her father to be an entrepreneur.

She had chosen to be a female breadwinner and was backed by her husband, who was very supportive and who had given her the finances to start her own business, and now helped her as a financial manager.

She saw her husband as an equal and their non-traditional roles as a natural part of their relationship.

He dealt with the money because he was good at balancing the books, but she had never felt that he controlled the finances.

She felt lucky to have her husband's support and admired women who had to do it all on their own.

Her position of privilege meant that she wanted to give back to the community of South Africa, to all genders and races, not just women, or else she would be as gender biased as men had been in the past.

A3 felt that all empowered women should give back to their communities in some way.

She had enjoyed being a mentor to younger women in her industry.

A3 had felt resentful at times that she missed out on her child's younger years.

When they had lived overseas, she had experienced more discrimination for her role as a female breadwinner than when they lived in South Africa.

There, people had believed that her husband must be retired, rather than that he had chosen to be a caregiver to their child, while she earned the income to support them.

When they had emigrated, it was more of a necessity than choice that she be the breadwinner as she was more qualified than her husband and could get better paying job.



A3 had then felt a lot more pressure to earn and be successful as a result of this.

They had had little social support overseas, unlike the support they had had from family and friends when they lived in South Africa, and it was far too expensive to hire domestic help.

She had felt that they had very little support or a backup plan then.

A3 believed that she had never really experienced discrimination in South Africa for her role as breadwinner, but did comment that she had felt on occasion that male clients rather spoke to her husband than her during business meetings.

She said that she knew of other women in her industry who had experienced discrimination, but she was not sure if it was real or imagined.

After saying this, she questioned why she should think that their claims were not legitimate and she felt bad about this assumption.

A3 believed that perhaps it was because so many women seemed to feel threatened by other women in their industry, rather than being supportive of each other.

She felt that if you are a strong worker, you would be successful, no matter what your gender.

She thought women in South Africa could be more open, and talk more about family responsibilities while in the work place, than they could overseas.

Over there she had felt that you could not talk about your family while at work, as no one else did.

However, she believed that most women in South Africa, who were female breadwinners, were so out of necessity rather than choice.

A3 thought that most female breadwinners were self-employed, rather than in high power employment positions.

She believed that the class and race structure in South Africa played a role in which women could choose to be a female breadwinner, and who did so out of necessity.

She felt that she, and other white people in South Africa, had benefited from apartheid due to their race, although she personally opposed it, and had had a better education and privileges as a result.

**Participant A4:**

A4 and her husband started off as equals financially, at the beginning of their marriage, so at first she was not the breadwinner out of necessity, but as result of a steadier income than her husband's.

She had always wanted to work and thought she would never get married or have children

A4 felt that working gave her a sense of complete security and allowed her to grow as a person, and parent, and gave her a fuller life.

She felt that she had achieved a better balance now and was a good example for her children.

Her husband had been demanding, he had wanted the perfect wife and mother to his children, as well as a successful working wife to take the earning pressure off him.

She had wanted them to play equal roles in the relationship, but as he had wanted traditional roles in the home, he had been very conflicted.

He had also been very hands off as a father, and more she had compensated for that, the more he had withdrew and felt left out.

There was a lack of balance, especially in regards to time for herself, and their relationship had been neglected.

After the divorce, it became necessary to support herself and her children as his maintenance was not a steady source of income.

After he had died, the alimony payments stopped and she had to cover all their living expenses.

A4 believed that the men she worked with in the corporate environment had never been threatened by her gender, but rather by her work ethic.

That said, she still believed that there was a bit of a "Boys Club" in the corporate world who would take advantage if they could.

She felt that women must work harder and fight for working positions because of their gender.

A4 had seen some changes in the South African employment sector for women, for example their choices of employment were much broader now than fifty years ago.

But she believed that it was still dependant on the class structure in our country, to her it seemed that middle class women were more submissive and traditional.

A4 also wondered if the way mothers raised their sons in South Africa could make them expect women to be more traditional.

She felt the expectations of South Africa men about women were not realistic.

She believed that the changes brought about that had created more varied opportunities and roles for women was not due to emancipation, but rather because of the increased cost of living and our increased standard of living, society's materialism.

A4 felt that women seemed more able to keep the home together, and work at same time.

To her, men seemed to struggle to let go of work and to do that.

She also felt that due to current South African employment policies, there were a lot more black women in the working sector.

A4 felt that these women had the necessary education but not necessarily a lot of work place skills.

She expressed a desire to be a mentor to those who needed extra guidance and who would benefit from her experience.

**Participant A5:**

Being a breadwinner gave A5 a sense of independence, and since she was a child she liked to be independent and to buy nice things for herself.

She expressed that she didn't like to ask for money from others.

A5 had married young and had always been the breadwinner in the relationship.

She said that she had chosen that role to earn enough to provide for her children and to give them the best education possible.

She also expressed that she felt very protective of her children and their safety.

She felt that being a breadwinner was a lot of responsibility, and that you needed to be strong as it could be a tough situation at times.

A5 had put her studies on hold due to financial pressures and in order to take care of her children.

She stated that she did not have much time for herself.

A5 had divorced from her husband as there was domestic abuse perpetrated by her husband, she believed it was due to his insecurity over her role, and his excessive drinking aggravated the situation.

She believed that her husband had not trusted her and had believed that she was having an affair and that is why she dressed nicely and bought herself nice things.

He was so insecure that he would search her belongings.

A5 had purchased and paid off the home she lived in with her children from her own pocket, but as she and her husband were married in community of property, he had felt entitled to half of the value of the house.

He had never paid maintenance and no longer saw their children, and as a result they were no longer speaking to each other.

This worried her as she was not sure how it could affect her children.

As an only parent, A5 believed that the children could blame her for things that may go wrong.

She felt that she could not begin a new relationship as she wanted to keep her children safe, be a good example for her daughter and was afraid of the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

She stated that she would have liked to meet a good man to share her life with.

Her religion was very important to her and played a major support role in her life, and had helped her to forgive her husband.

She also was supported emotionally and in care giving tasks by her husband's family, her mother in law in particular.

Her mother had been a breadwinner after her husband (A5's father) had left her, but it had been much harder for A5's mother as in those days the only employment she could find was as a domestic worker.

This meant she had had little time off and a small income so A5 and her siblings had had to live in a foreign home's away from their mother and each other.

A5 felt that because women nowadays could get an education, it was much easier for them to get good jobs, to raise their children and to be independent.

She did feel that some young women in South Africa today took those opportunities for granted, that they rather wanted to marry rich men and be "executive housewives".

A5 also felt that education was very important, but expressed guilt over the fact that her youngest son and daughter could not read or speak Zulu very well, because it was not the medium of instruction at their schools.

She said that she had found out that female breadwinners are more common than she originally thought after I had contacted her about the study.

She had believed that she was the only one but realised that she worked with women who were breadwinners also and through their discussions it seemed as though their experiences were the similar, no matter their race, religion or economic status.

A5 thought that any difference of experience between female breadwinners was more on an individual basis, in differing individual morals and values.

She expressed that she was happy with her life and her role and that she he didn't long for anything.

**Participant A6:**

A6 had always worked to support herself, even before she was married and had children.

As a young girl, she had thought that she would marry a rich man and stay at home with their children.

So being a female breadwinner was not a path A5 would have chosen, but she had done it to support her children and to do the best she could for them.

She felt it was a tough role to fulfil, with a lot of responsibilities, but it allowed her to be in control and do well for herself.

She stated that she was very responsible with her finances.

She did feel at times as though she was being pulled apart in many different directions with work, family and home responsibilities.

A6 stated that she would have liked to be more involved in her children's lives, picking them up from school, making them lunch, but relied on her domestic worker to help her in that regard.

Her children were very independent, as they saw that she had a lot of responsibilities and they tried to help alleviate them, especially her eldest.

When she was first married and working, her ex-husband had earned more than her but then his business had started to fail.

Her ex-husband had always controlled the finances, as men do in her culture, so payday was not a happy day for her because she never saw her salary.

Her husband took all of her salary to pay debts.

A6 said that he had not been very responsible with money though, so he was happy for her to work as her salary was a contingency plan if something happened with his business.

Now that they were divorced, he did not pay maintenance, she believed out of spite, but she did not fight it as she thought going to court would be a waste of energy and money.

She did still allow the children to visit their father over weekends though.

A6 thought that although it was tough being a single parent and female breadwinner, she believed it to be better that she divorced her husband as now her children were no longer exposed to the violence she had experienced at the hands of her ex-husband.

She did not think that he had been abusive because she was the breadwinner, but rather it was as a result of minor incidents that became major arguments, which in turn became physical.

She did not have time for dating and socialising, with all her responsibilities, but believes that it was better that way.

A6 did not want to expose her children to dangers by bringing an outsider into the home; she preferred to safeguard her children than have romantic relationship.

She saw that there were much more women of her ethnicity who were breadwinners nowadays and believed that was because in the past being divorced was not allowed in her culture.

Now that both spouses needed to work to earn enough to support their families, these women could be more independent and question their husbands' traditional dominance in the home.

A6 also felt that women nowadays had more access to education, so they could work in better jobs and support their children on their own if needs be.

She enjoyed her work and liked to mentor others.

She didn't believe that employers should make special considerations for single parents, and felt that if they had to, they may not want to hire single parents.

She believed that if you worked hard, employers would understand if you needed time off to tend to your children.

A6 had experienced discrimination at work from male colleagues, but was not sure if that was because she was a woman or because she was a hard worker.

The discrimination had been so severe that she had chosen to leave her job and was currently seeking a new one.

She believed that other women who were breadwinners' experienced the same challenges as she did, especially in trying to find a balance between work, home and family.

Working was especially important to A6 and she felt it was the same for female breadwinners in general, as it was a means for them to support their family.



**Participant A7:**

A7 had never planned to be a breadwinner, but was thankful that she was one.

It was her sense independence that first attracted her husband to her and she enjoyed being able to buy him the things he could not have had otherwise.

She felt it could be a strain at times though, having so many responsibilities, like caring for the children, controlling the finances and running the home.

She said that she tried every day to be able to strike the balance between home, work and family but thought that generally fulfilling the role of breadwinner simply had to be done, there was no other choice but to cope, it was a matter of survival for the family that she worked.

Her husband was supportive and aware of the “fifty-fifty” nature of their relationship.

He was willing to help her out with the home, but only if she initiated it.

A7 believed that this was normal, as men tended to focus more on their own needs, and felt that this would be the same even if he was the breadwinner.

She did worry that her role as breadwinner might make him feel worthless.

She felt that female breadwinners should consider that their role may affect their husbands’ psychological state and so they should still be humble and supportive of their husbands and not take away all their husbands’ power.

Her and her husband did not get to spend a lot of time together because of her role, but she believed that this was both bad and good as they each needed their space at times.

Her job had long hours and was physically demanding so she did get tired and frustrated sometimes, especially when patients would think that she was the nurse as they expected their doctor to be male.

She also felt discriminated against at her work as she did not receive paid maternity leave from the company she works for.

Because of this she had chosen to have a caesarean instead of natural birth (which she would have preferred) so it could be scheduled on a specific date and she could get back to work quickly.

A7 felt that there should be more equal rights between male and female breadwinners.

Although she had seen major improvements for women in recent years, with more women in management positions, she felt that we couldn't just be satisfied with the progress and leave it there.

She believed that it should be a dynamic, on-going process of improvement as very often women still fulfilled the more menial, less well paid positions.

This said, she did not agree with forced ratios implemented in certain educational and employment organisations and said that acceptance to these organisations should be due to the person's skill, not their gender.

She had also noticed at her work that the more senior positions were fulfilled by men.

A7 saw that there were more women than men in the entry positions though, which may mean that more women were being educated and entering the field.

She was not sure why these women did not move on to the more qualified, senior positions.

She felt that perhaps they stopped working and studying to have children.

A7 thought that perhaps certain policies implemented by government, like employment equity ratios, were encouraging companies to hire women over men and this may be why there are more female breadwinners nowadays.

She believed that her situation was much easier than it was for most other female breadwinners in South Africa.

She had a good support system, but saw that many of her colleagues were not so lucky and had to travel far distances to get to work, meaning that they rarely saw their children who lived with relatives far away.

**Participant A8:**

For A8, the meaning she attributed to being a breadwinner was providing for her child and providing for her own livelihood.

The role made her feel independent and as though she was doing something worthy.

She had fallen pregnant unexpectedly when she was young, and had discovered that the father was already married, so she had become a breadwinner out of necessity.

When she was younger, she didn't want to get married or to have kids, but nowadays she would have liked to be a housewife, and thought she would be good at it.

A8 explained that finances could be problematic at times, but when she had a bit more money available she felt like a more relaxed parent.

Her child's father was currently unemployed so he no longer paid child support.

He did not visit with his child either, which was distressing for her when the child asked about her father.

A8 was very hard on herself and the choices she had made, believing that she was now just another "statistic", a young black woman who had had a child out of wedlock.

The lack of time she had for herself and her child was also very frustrating for her.

She felt that maybe the traditional roles assigned to the genders by her religious beliefs were correct and that men should be the providers.

She also stated that she thought that the housewives she had met seem much fulfilled.

A lack of support was one of the biggest challenges A8 faced.

Even though she lived with her mom and had her around for support, her mother had to travel far to work and was not always around.

A8 expressed that she had even lost job opportunities because she had no one to leave her child with.

She wanted to start a movement that could act as a network for women in similar circumstances, allowing them to share their experiences.

Her mother had been a single parent and breadwinner, but A8 believed that she had had it easier in terms of support.

In her culture, they had had communal parenting, which no longer existed, where your neighbour was considered your relative and could be trusted to take care of your child if needs be.

A8 said that she had often spent afternoons after school at neighbour's houses, waiting for her mom to return home.

She believed that nowadays you could not entrust your child's care to anyone, not even relatives, because of all the stories one heard about child abuse.

She also believed that there were a few commonalities shared among female breadwinners, for example they often had no support system other than relatives and so their children were left with grandmothers, for example, while they travelled to find employment.

A8 felt that this could be problematic if the grandmother felt she could reprimand the parent for disciplining their child.

She also thought it be terrible because you would hardly see your child, and so she had decided to rather miss out on job opportunities than to leave her child with relatives.

Besides these few commonalities shared, which she felt were very much classed based, A8 believed that the experiences of female breadwinners varied from person to person.

She also believed that many men may feel frustrated that they are unable to work or earn very little, and they feel unworthy, which may lead them to drink their money away, rather than provide it as a source of income for their families.

**Participant A9:**

For A9, a breadwinner was someone who looked after everyone, which she believed she did.

Although she was the one who provided for the home, she explained that she still made an effort to make her partner feel like he was the breadwinner in the home and the head of the household.

Her role was not really an issue discussed between them, as they had more of a conservative outlook on gender roles.

A9 said that they did not argue often as she avoided conflict and could play the role of peacemaker on occasion.

She also admitted that she fulfilled the role of homemaker and performed the majority of the responsibilities associated therewith.

A9 owned her own car and the house that her partner and her lived in, which made her feel secure and independent.

She stated that she received a lot of emotional support from her family, who were very close knit and she often liked treated herself and her mother.

Her partner was very grateful for the financial contributions she made, and told her so often.

She believed that they communicated well and she felt appreciated by him.

This was a very different reality from her previous relationship, where her partner had been physically abusive at times.

A9 was grateful for the nature of her current relationship.

Her partner did also help out in the home at times, and they would take turns preparing meals.

Her job was both physically and psychologically demanding, but A9 said that she found it rewarding and viewed it as a calling.

She also believed that her training had helped her to better understand her partner's psychological condition and therefore cope with it.

She did feel frustrated with him and his condition at times, but was able to deal with this emotion on her own, and believed her family and strong religious beliefs helped her to cope.

Her partner had had children from previous relationships and he paid child support for both children to their mothers.

A9 said that this responsibility took up a large amount of his finances, and said that she felt sorry for him but was proud that he fulfilled his fatherly duties.

That said one of his children lived with them until the child recently returned to live with her mom, and A9 felt that she had spent more time with the child than he did, due to his long work hours.

She would collect the child from school, do homework with the child and took them out to the movies.

A9's mother also spent a lot of time with the child babysitting while they were at work.

She felt that there were definitely more female breadwinners nowadays but believed that this had occurred due to a natural progression in society.

She admitted, however, that it was difficult for her to accept these changing, non-traditional roles, but that she believed that it would only get more acceptable in society as time passed.

She also believed that the experiences of female breadwinners must vary quite considerably in regards to their differing races and socio-economic classes.

She did admit though that this was not something that she has ever really thought about.

**Participant A10:**

A10 believed that she was a breadwinner and was proud to be one.

She expressed that it could be a difficult role to fulfil at times but she had always been independent and thought she would be a breadwinner one day, even when she was young.

She thought that may be because when she was a child she saw her mother being a single parent and working hard.

She believed that she was independent by nature and supported the household that included her child, mother and four brothers.

Her mother and one of her brothers helped out with finances and her mother helped with household chores and taking care of her grandson.

A10 also paid for a nanny to take care of her son while she is at work.

She believed that you needed to be strong and brave and to fight for what you want if you are a woman.

She liked the fact that her family members could come to her if they needed anything, they did not need to go outside for financial aid.

Her church was also a great source of support for her, and even though she had very little time over after all her responsibilities, she made time to go to church and do what she loves, which was to sing.

She was not married and her child's father had moved away and they broke up after that because he was not faithful to her.

A10 stated that he only pays child support occasionally, and believed that was only when it suited him.

He hadn't visited his child for a while, but they did sometimes speak to each other on the phone.

Financial security was her biggest challenge, as she couldn't rely on child support from her child's father and sometimes unexpected expenses would crop up and stretch the budget too far.

She did all the household chores herself after she came home from work or on her day off.

Her brothers did help out sometimes, but not very well and especially if they knew she had a day off.

A10 said that she did get tired though and joked that she sometimes thought of running away.

However, she stated that she believed that her life was what God had planned for her and so she accepted its challenges.

A10 wanted to raise her son to respect her, which he did, and felt he would grow up learning from her example.

She did not want to spoil him and wanted him to be able to stand on his own and do things for himself, like household chores.

She believed that things were better for women in South Africa nowadays, that they could get an education [she wants to study further] and there are more job opportunities out there than before.

A10 felt that women can do the jobs that men do, and that most men accepted this, like at her workplace for example.

She believed that a woman can do any job they want if they just try, and that this was proven by the women she had seen working on construction sites and driving busses.

She wanted to improve her situation by getting her driver's licence and had passed her learners licence exam, but had had to help her brother get his license first as his job was farther away.

The father of her child had spoken of buying her a car but then he had left.

A10 thought female breadwinners in South Africa had similar experiences, but saw that some suffered more than she did and felt that maybe it was because they did not have the opportunities that she had had.

She also believed that it was better to be a single female breadwinner than a married one or one in a relationship.

This was because she felt that if your husband was not working, he may get involved in "funny stuff" like other women and alcohol abuse.



A10 also believed that you would be burdened with the extra worry of cooking his meals and washing his clothes.

You would still come home from work and be tired, but you would have to do more chores.

She generalised that men just sit there and do nothing, an example seen in her house where sometimes her brother's would just sit and play on their computers all day and did not help out around the house.

She stated that she preferred being single because then she did not have man that she had to spend all of her time focussing on, and that she would have more time for her son and herself.