

ABSTRACT

The lobola system appears to be an important part of African marriages and continues to be endorsed and applied across generations. The practice has, however, been questioned with regards to the promotion of gender equality and its continuation has cast doubt about the attainment of gender equality within the cultural context in which it is practiced. In light of this socio-political concern regarding gender equality, this study explores perceptions of a South African university sample, self identified as belonging to an African culture, to gain insight into their perspective on the importance of lobola and its role on power negotiation among married couples. The study aims to compare the perceptions of women and men in the study to establish whether gender may play a role in shaping one's perspective. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and audiotaped, transcribed and analysed using thematic content analysis to extract themes. The main themes that emerged are traditional and modern conceptions of gender equality, the relevance of lobola, the impact of lobola, the commoditisation of women and the appeal of culture. The findings indicated a general difference in perspective between women and men. Both women and men expressed the importance of adhering to culture. However, most men were opposed to the practice than women. In spite of this opposition, men expressed willingness to pay lobola if it were expected of them. Women were more in favour of lobola and, while they were aware of women's compromised power positions within the practice, they appeared to have strategies to overcome its shortcomings.