Fighting against erasure: The case of the black, childfree and professional woman in South Africa.

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Declaration

I, Sizakele Marutlulle, Student Number N0215264, declare that ‘Fighting Against Erasure: The Case of the Black, Childfree and Professional Woman in South Africa’ is my own work and that all the sources I have used/quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature……
Sizakele Marutlulle

Date……..

Dedication

To Khumbuzile ‘Dal’okuhle’ Marutlulle, who gave me life.

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Abstract

Previous studies have reflected on childfreeness as a growing reproductive choice. What has been lacking in literature is an understanding of childfreeness in Africa in general and among black childfree professional women (BCPW) in particular. This research examined the erasure and lived-experiences of black childfree professional women in South Africa. It also problematised the conflation of woman with mother, and the extent to which such conflation embeds pronatalist cultural imperatives of femininity as well as traditional gender roles. This study investigated the lived-experiences of seven (7) childfree women. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and these were analysed using thematic analysis. The women's upbringing, values, beliefs, and internal locus of control emerged as cornerstones in their decision to reject motherhood and embrace childfreeness. Their resilience anchored this choice and their resistance enabled them to withstand the negative consequence of childfreeness within a culture that valorises motherhood. Their experiences of social exclusion and 'Othering' supported findings of other studies. However, a pointed experience of demonization by black mothers in particular was a key and unique discovery. The findings present childfreeness as agentic decision-making - an activist and feminist stance that challenges as well as broadens the concepts of womanhood, diversity and reproductive freedom. In totality, the study offers new understanding of BCPW and suggests that this unconventional yet legitimate reproductive choice may advance the decoupling of motherhood from feminine identity in ways that are liberatory for all women. The social acceptance of childfreeness as an expression of one of the many diverse feminine experiences accessible to all women, could augur well for the ultimate achievement of reproductive justice.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

'…from infancy, woman is repeatedly told that she is made for childbearing and the splendours of maternity are forever being sung to her – and the household drudgery is justified by this marvellous privilege she has of bringing children into the world.'

Simone de Beauvoir (1949, p. 50)

1.1 Overview

In Western countries, studies have confirmed an increase in the number of women who are voluntarily childless (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008; Letherby, 2002; Pew Research, 2008). At the moment of conducting this research, there were no South African studies addressing the subject of childfreeness, making this study possibly the first foray into this oft-neglected yet critical subject. However, there has been some documented work on increasing childlessness among South African Black women (Masebe & Ramosebudi, 2015). Fertility postponement and increased childlessness are known contributors to overall fertility decline (Kohler, Billari & Ortega, 2002). In spite of this, reinforced and repetitive patriarchy-anchored behaviour in social and political institutions of South Africa presents and endorses social practices that entrench motherhood, not only as a mandate, but also as the most important job in the world women can do. Coupled with this stance is the universalisation and stigmatization of all women without children. Implicit in this view is that child-bearing is central to a woman's identity and it is presented as a performative requirement and criterion to be fulfilled in order to access a valorised form of womanhood. In other words, for women, motherhood is presented as a gateway to adulthood.

These positions produce salient pressures which serve to reinforce gendered body politics. In a social context where conformity is demanded, the body of the childfree woman is considered an abnormality and treated with hostility. Such thinking fails to account for the myriad experiences and expressions of contemporary womanhood. Accordingly, this study problematises the erasure of black childfree women and their embodied experiences. These women reject and resist pronatalist dictates which seek to conflate and equate womanhood with motherhood. Rather than cluster them with those who are childless, this study distinguishes

between these two groups and presents ways in which the childfree could, through their own life histories, express their self-constructed identities and share their lived experiences outside the limited and limiting gender boundaries imposed by patriarchy and pronatalism.

This study was in part prompted by the dearth of discernible research that distinguishes between black women who are voluntarily without children, (located and referenced in this study as childfree), and those who are childless. Female reproduction is often subjected to stigmatisation and should be viewed within the context of its' location at the intersection of multiple -*isms* and forces of identity ranging from sex, gender, race and class. Therefore, instead of presenting the childfree woman as a social phenomenon and stigmatised Other, what is required is a new way of thinking about womanhood in all its diverse complexities.

In a study conducted by Statistics South Africa (2016) titled, 'Childlessness and Delayed Childbearing in South Africa 2001-2011', results show an increase of childlessness in the age group 15-49. This study makes several claims, and the key ones are:

- Post-2001, there has been limited analysis of changes in fertility patterns in South Africa, particularly childlessness.
- In most developed countries, only ten per cent of women have no children, and in South Africa the percentage of childless women in their late forties approaches five per cent.
- Amongst women of childbearing age (15-49 years), childlessness continues to increase over time.
- The prevalence of childlessness among the white and Indian/Asian population groups is higher than among the black African and Coloured population groups.
- Over the preceding decade (2001-2011), childlessness is more apparent among managers and professional women whilst the lowest prevalence of childlessness is found among women employed in elementary occupations.

The 2011 study of childlessness by Statistics South Africa (see Table 1) may have been considered ground-breaking as it was the first traceable and documented body of work to specify women without children. However, its inability to create a distinction between the childless and the childfree as well as its failure to account for the experiences of the childfree in private and professional settings, is the gap this research aims to fill.

Table 1: Childlessness in South Africa

	Age group						
Parity	**15–19**	**20–24**	**25–29**	**30–34**	**35–39**	**40–44**	**45–49**
0	1 527 716	1 017 578	566 391	290 751	188 325	137 200	118 294
1	291 576	898 301	846 408	492 473	300 345	206 532	170 264
2	34 802	296 807	600 123	588 898	498 577	389 005	313 890
3	6 197	59 514	208 317	312 162	359 106	325 900	287 990
4	1 025	14 840	60 334	121 759	182 705	201 407	198 588
5	0	4 284	15 771	41 096	79 329	105 206	117 067
6	0	1 583	7 044	16 581	37 209	56 220	69 561
7	0	0	3 728	6 289	15 229	27 314	37 390
8	0	0	1 312	3 955	8 321	14 838	21 537
9	0	0	0	2 205	3 998	7 537	10 881
10	0	0	0	898	2 328	4 425	6 667
11	0	0	0	211	1 252	2 314	3 296
12	0	0	0	0	687	1 651	2 416
13	0	0	0	0	127	936	1 428
14	0	0	0	0	0	587	969
15	0	0	0	0	0	195	628
16	0	0	0	0	0	0	422
95	582 689	311 077	166 272	91 585	63 123	49 734	49 657
97	6 553	8 798	6 725	3 407	2 061	1 073	686
Total	2 450 558	2 612 782	2 482 425	1 972 270	1 742 722	1 532 074	1 411 631
% parity unstated	23,78	11,91	6,7	4,64	3,62	3,25	3,52
% childless	62,3	38,9	22,8	14,7	10,8	9	8,4

Source: Stats SA, 2015

As pointed out already, studies in Western countries show an increase in the number of women who are voluntarily childless (Letherby, 2002). A 2008 research project conducted by the Pew Research Centre, found that among women of ages 40-44 in the USA, the proportion of women that had never given birth was 18% in 2008 contrasted with 10% in 1976. These statistics suggest that in 2008, nearly one-in-five American women ended her childbearing years without giving birth to a child. Childless rates in the United States are on par with some nations and higher than others. Among women born in 1960, 17% in the USA were childless at approximately age 40, compared with 22% in the United Kingdom, 19% in Finland and the Netherlands, and 17% in Italy and Ireland. Rates ranged from 12% to 14% for Spain, Norway, Denmark, Belgium and Sweden, and from 7% to 11% for several Eastern European countries and Iceland.

Childlessness is not restricted to white middleclass women in developed and developing countries. The 2008 study by the Pew Research Centre in the USA also found that by race and ethnic group, white women were more likely not to have borne a child. But over the decade

following 2008, childless rates had risen more rapidly for black, Hispanic and Asian women, so that the racial gap had narrowed.

1.2 Rationale for this research

This research aims, amongst other things, to suggest a new mode of thinking on the subject of childfreeness. It challenges how the markers of gender, reproduction, sex and race impact the childfree identity as an expression of diversity that should not attract ridicule or 'othering' (Butler, 1990). In this study, the term 'childfree' is deliberately applied to create a distinction from childlessness. Childfreeness is used to denote women who have no desire or plans to have a child or children. The distinction is significant as a communication action; to separate these two states and examine childfreeness through a scholarly critique.

This study departed from the premise that in pronatalist societies, motherhood represents a site of oppression for non-mothers in general, and the childfree in particular. The latter are often rendered invisible, erased in the divide between mothers and the childless. It is this pattern of erasure which this study problematised. Such erasure, I argue, is designed to maintain a pronatalist status quo, wherein 'the nurturance of children has historically been seen to be what women do, and mothers have been seen to be what women are, constituting the central core of normal, healthy feminine identity, women's social role and ultimately the meanings of the term woman' (Gillespie, 2000, p. 225).

South Africa's established pronatalist stance, reinforced through socio-political institutions including the Jacob Zuma Presidency, means the valorisation of motherhood and its naturalisation, comes at the expense of non-mothers. When one of his daughters got married, ex-President Jacob Zuma commented:

> I was happy because I wouldn't want to stay with daughters who are not getting married. Because that in itself is a problem in society […]. You've got to have kids. Kids are important to a woman because they give extra training to a woman, to be a mother. (IOL News, 2012).

Few scholars in South Africa have undertaken research to understand how non-conforming women such as the childfree, make sense of their experiences in professional spaces as well as social life in general.

It is problematic to treat women without children as a homogenous group or to expediently label them as childless. By insisting on the distinction between the childfree and childless, the study presents an additional dimension to womanhood. One that catapults women beyond the limits of their socially defined and enforced biological roles. By so doing, we can extract new meaning and existential dimensions that enrich the female experience.

1.3 Research questions

As already stated, this study problematises the erasure of black, childfree and professional women. It departs from the premise that identity is a contested concept (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 261) with multiple definitions. Accordingly, the research questions posed by this study are:

1. What are the factors that influence a childfree choice for black women?
The sub questions are:
a) What are the motives for childfreeness?
b) How does childfreeness affect the lived experiences of childfree black women?

2. How does the status of being childfree shape one's identity as a woman?
The sub-question is: How does childfreeness challenge the boundaries and definitions of womanhood?
3. Does a childfree identity expose women to discrimination, and if so, in what forms?
The sub questions here are:
a) How do black childfree women experience privilege, stigma, power and difference in their personal and professional lives?
b) How does being childfree affect a woman's sense of belonging?
c) How does factoring in culture (black African), impact the lived experiences of black childfree women?
d) what efforts, if any, are taken by childfree women to secure recognition and social inclusion?

4. How does the workplace, as a node within larger society, regard childfreeness and treat the childfree?

1.4 Aims and objectives

This study is concerned with liberty for women, so they may live in accordance with their own agency, not social dictates. It seeks to validate childfreeness as a choice that can be freely

exercised by black women without fear of reprisal. The project also investigates the extent to which workplaces are also impacted by the gender regime (Butler, 1990). By so doing, the study emphasises the recognition of reproductive choice and advocates for its integration into the suite of life experiences available to all women (Mohanty, 1991; Moore, 1994). It explores the extent to which the erasure of the childfree renders them 'visibly absent' and how their exclusion further fragments women, thereby intensifying discrimination between mothers and the childfree.

The main argument is that present day South Africa, whose constitution is regarded as exemplary in the world, does not challenge those social and cultural practices which view women as complete only through motherhood. This is philosophically and politically problematic. Hence the study's ultimate aim is to proffer a foundational framework upon which a possible future state that respects individual female reproductive choices can be constructed.

The objectives of the study are:

1) To problematise the erasure of black, childfree professional women and explore the forms of disadvantage and exclusion they experience.
2) To reveal the efforts by childfree women to construct their own identities and the mechanisms they adopt to refute, reject and challenge their erasure.

1.5 Anticipated contribution of this Study

The theoretical probe of this study is intended to build a legitimate and alternate case for social change, without demonizing of motherhood or valorising childfreeness. As such, this project explores ways in which childfreeness amongst black professional women might influence, not only the world of work, but various social institutions, and generate a language sensitive to the existence, needs and wishes of the childfree. It advocates for the inclusion of childfreeness as a legitimate reproductive choice available to women, and one they should be able to make without fear of reprisal and/or stigmatisation. Additionally, this study and its findings show the limitations of a social construct that presents difference as a basis to reduce and vilify an 'Other' who then becomes the site upon which perceived risk is projected (Joffe, 2011). The women who were narrators in this study mirrored the women referenced by Florence 'Buchi' Emecheta (1979), struggling to free themselves from the entanglement of patriarchal domination.

These childfree women's voices challenge and reject the 'traditional' and pro-patriarchy notions of womanhood. Such rejection places them in opposition to those women who hold essentialist views of womanhood, as well as those men who have patriarchal and sexist views. Ignoring the differences among Black women, as well as the pretence at homogeneity of black women's experiences encapsulated in the term 'sisterhood,' is problematised. The extent to which these differences are demoted in significance, may underscore the efforts to mobilize Black women's joint power. I borrow from McFadden (2005, p. 5), who in describing the struggles of the women's movement in Zimbabwe, said:

> Faced with the demands and threats of African men that they conform to an outdated notion of womanhood upon which the imaginary authentic African identity is premised; and that they do not disrupt the cultural and social base of male rule in public and private; middle class women are defiantly re-defining themselves as citizens who make choices increasingly as individuals, based on their access to and control over critical social and material resources within their respective societies.

The narrators in this study epitomised this observation by McFadden (2005). They reveal that the cost of being a self-asserting and self-directing black woman is still labelled as either un-African, un-womanly and deviant. Much as that is the case, the narrators insisted upon self-determination, to carve a path towards re-defining womanhood as a construct grounded upon agency and rotating on a multiple axis of experiences and choices.

1.6 My point of entry

I self-identify as a childfree black female professional and have used the microcosm of my own subject-position and experiences in the workplace as a springboard to probe the wider treatment of the black, childfree, female professionals. Since there are several dimensions to my identity, I do not place high importance on childfreeness as a principal marker.

As well as exploring generally how women who are childfree experience 'non-motherhood' (Letherby, 2002), my specific focus is on the challenges, compromises, trade-offs and resistances that form the everyday lives of childfree black women, in professional and private spaces. I can attest to the widely-held belief that female professional excellence seems to be accepted on condition it is later accompanied by the creation of a traditional family, which is the last piece of the puzzle of what patriarchy regards as female 'completion.' (Kaklamanidou,

2018). In the literature review on this subject, the black women's childfreeness is conspicuous by its absence. Investigating this invisibility as well as the consistent and persistent erasure from society, is the anchor of this study. In undertaking this academic pursuit, I was expecting and was open to shifts, internal and external – consequently, my own prejudices and views were tested at times. External rebuttals, which were expected, were accepted in the advancement of academic enquiry and progress.

Childfreeness is more than just about female reproduction. It is neither a women's issue nor is it restricted to the domain of feminism. It is in my view, a human issue and therefore its elevation above mere gender must become a pressing need and scope for scholarly interrogation. Against the backdrop of social pressure to either alter and/or justify their status, the study also examines techniques used by black, childfree professional women to validate and manage their identity in a pronatalist social context. Rather than speak of this reproductive difference as deviance, we could use it to develop tools to drive sustainable social change.

1.7 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical positioning by presenting relevant theories through which the subject of childfreeness is explored and sense-making is derived. It conveys how an interwoven analysis will be applied through the interrogation of identity, gender, feminism and critical diversity literacy theories. There is also a reflection on stigma (Campbell, 1985), othering (Butler, 1998) as well as the concept of marginal existence (hooks, 1989). Previous work on childlessness is also referenced (Gillespie, 2001; 2003; Tanturri & Mencarini, 2008) as well as Ahmed's (2004) transformative theory of affective turn.

Chapter 3 presents a literature review specifically on the subject of childfreeness. The chapter delves into the genesis of childfreeness, its prevalence (Abma & Martinez, 2006), the factors influencing the childfree choice (Burkett 2000; Gillespie, 2000), the aetiology of the names used to refer to women who choose not to have children as well as inherent problematics. It also addresses the practice (by some) of interchanging the terms 'childfree' and 'voluntary childlessness' (Letherby, 2002). An argument is made that a distinction is crucial as it dispenses of the implication that women without children occupy a socially ambiguous status and/or are suffering (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1998; Park, 2002; Pelton & Hertlein, 2011). The term childfree has been reclaimed and embraced by those who emphasise that this can be an active and fulfilling choice (Gillespie, 2003). This term is used to refer to the narrators in this study

in hopes that a paradigm shift will occur once the distinction is repeatedly made – so that eventually childfreeness is no longer pathologised, stigmatised and/or negatively stereotyped. The few studies unearthed during literature review addressing women without children in Africa, found that childlessness was not embraced in Nigeria (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014) and had negative consequences for women in Tanzania (Mariano, 2004), Botswana (Hollos & Larsen, 2008) and Ghana (Sam, Amponsah & Hetland, 2008). The chapter also explores theories and concepts relating to childfreeness, specifically the decision-making processes (Hird & Abshoff, 2000) as well as the motives for childfreeness (Gillespie, 1999; Somers, 1993). Finally, the value of children (Kulish, 2010; Somers, 1993) as well as the impact of religiosity and spirituality on childbearing (Hollos and Larsen 2008; Kulish 2010) are also addressed.

Since the study explores erasure both in the personal and professional realms, Chapter 4 focuses on the workplace and examines how the workplace as a microcosm of society treats childfreeness and childfree women. The chapter explores the experiences of the childfree in the work environment, including the role/experience of envy at work. Additionally, the chapter tests those findings that imply that the pursuit of career is the key motivator for a childfree choice for women (Lang, 2000). Chapter 5 addresses the methodological approach adopted in this study. It outlines the study design, research tools applied and data collection methods. The chapter also provides an account for the choice of life-history approach as the appropriate method of inquiry. Additionally, the sampling strategies applied are addressed and some key characteristics of the narrators are highlighted.

In Chapter 6, I present the discussion with the narrators as well as reflect upon the narrators' reasons for participating in the study. Narrative practice is also contextualised. A theory-centric analysis and interpretation of the narrators' narratives was undertaken to extract findings. Some emergent themes that surfaced in the analysis are presented, such themes have been used merely as organising principles rather than as homogenising tools. They offer a platform from which an exploration of the interrelatedness of ideologies and broader social-political dynamics was undertaken. The chapter also addresses the narrators' identity construction and the extent to which such construct converges with, or diverges from, social expectations. Finally, the coping mechanisms of the childfree in the social and professional realms are also presented.

Chapter 7 synthesises the arguments made in the various chapters and presents a constellation of findings which respond to the research questions posed. This study concludes with recommendations for possible future research to help expand knowledge about black, professional women who are childfree in South Africa and beyond, ever mindful that 'differences between countries and regions regarding social isolation and the rejection of childless women are influenced by specific cultural and social structures' (Mariano, 2004, p. 267). Ultimately, childfreeness is presented as a legitimate expression of feminine diversity, moving away from the theorizations of pronatalism and heteronormativity.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL POSITIONING

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework through which the subject of childfreeness is examined. It combines feminist and critical diversity literacy theories. The focus on feminism and diversity is necessary to understand the social positioning of motherhood in general, and childfreeness in particular. The knowledge and understanding of what it means to be a woman, a mother, childfree and so on, has changed considerably over time, illustrating that meanings are historically, socially and culturally contextualised. Therefore, when conducting exploratory research into the experiences of black female professionals choosing childfreeness over motherhood, the context in which these women are situated and how they collectively identity-construct, derive meaning and sense-make, is of critical importance.

Initially, I provide an overview of relevant theories. I then proceed to focus specifically on how the statuses of motherhood and childfreeness are positioned within feminist theories across the four (4) waves of the feminist movement. Critical diversity literacy theory is presented and its ability and/or limitation to accommodate childfreeness within the parameters of the diversity discourse is examined. Finally, I focus on affect and its impact on the lived experiences of childfree women.

2.2 Feminist Theory

This is a feminist project that insists upon agency and is mindful of subjectivity. It aligns with the assertion that the history of feminism is a series of recognition struggles carried through what is now accepted as 'waves' of feminism (Crawford, 2010; Hewitt, 2010). Given that recognition is paramount for individuals subjected to systematic exclusion and inequality (McQueen, 2016, p. 81), feminist theory is an appropriate lens through which to reflect upon childfree women, who are often an excluded and stigmatised community. Within this context therefore, an assessment of motherhood and/or childfreeness is traced from the various waves of feminism to present-day articulation. Such periodisation is intended to reveal and respond to the perceptual gaps in each wave as well as problematise those social constructs in which women's agency was conceived in terms of motherhood.

To follow the progression of feminism over time is necessary to challenge the monolithic focus on/of white feminist texts and to challenge tendencies that footnote the experiences and realities of black women. Equally important is to contest the manner in which black women are reflected in feminist discourse. Colonialist moves, through reductionist practice, located black women as a monolithic and singular object, (Mohanty, 1988) ignoring the complexity of their lived experiences which emanate from their various personal, historical and political contexts. Integrating this 'politics of location' (Mohanty, 1988) counter-acts white feminist discourse which presented black women as 'Third World' subjects outside of social, historical and cultural relations (Mohanty, 1988).

Feminist research is designed to enhance women's voices and to examine alternative ways of gaining knowledge of the world through their experiences (Gergen, 2008) while fostering their empowerment (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Critically, it highlights the complexity and diversity of women's lives and choices, thereby continuously to challenging and highlighting inflexible traditional discourses of womanhood and motherhood (Hadfield, Rudoe, & Sanderson-Mann, 2007). By challenging gendered narratives that have positioned motherhood as normative, the restrictions that pronatalism (as a gendered narrative) imposes on women's reproduction are exposed and problematised. More generally, multiple feminist perspectives offer insight into the problems of gender inequality, historical exclusion, negative characterisation as well as continued subordination of women. They are applied herein, to challenge claims to knowledge by those who occupy privileged positions, while seeking to produce and advance stronger, more nuanced results through documenting the lives of women who are marginalised and whose experiences have previously been ignored or omitted (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Although there are continuities and convergences, as well as sharp debates, among the different feminisms (Lorber, 1997), their collective strategies have made material impact in remedying problems arising from a gendered, patriarchal social order.

The wave metaphor for the various periods in the feminist movement is attributed to Frances Power Cobbe, who posited that movements 'resemble the tides of the ocean, where each wave obeys one uniform impetus, and carries the waters onward and upward along the shore,' as cited in Hewitt (2010, p. 2). Whilst the concept of waves as progress might be useful in our understanding of feminism's evolution, it assumes a common cultural history of the participants and could therefore be reductionist about experiences unique to various

communities of women. It is equally important not to ignore the diversity and multiplicities of challenges and issues confronted in each wave such as nationality, sexuality, class, gender, etc. as they each present peculiarities for the feminist movement. When the strategies deployed to overcome these various and intersecting categories are consolidated, they may strengthen women's efforts to realise equality.

2.2.1 First-Wave Feminism

The first wave of feminism straddled the late 19th to early 20th centuries and was concerned with the emancipation of women and suffrage (Nehere, 2016, p. 7). The Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, marked the birth of the first wave, thus seeding a movement fuelled by a conscious impetus for women's rights. In addition to Elizabeth Cady Stanton who drafted the Seneca Falls Declaration, Frederick Douglas is presented as an ally who publicly agitated for the political equality of women, insisting that 'in respect of political rights, we hold woman to be justly entitled to all we claim for men… all that distinguishes man as an intelligent and accountable being is equally true of woman' (Davis, 1981, p. 51). This in effect illustrates a quiet solidarity of the 'weak' – a coalition of sorts between the marginalised in society, such as black slaves and white women. Significant as the Seneca Convention was, it had a narrow white-female focussed view. The white middle-class women who led it were 'oblivious to the plight of their Black sisters' (Davis, 1981, p. 59). To avoid the exclusion of the black female experience, the historical contribution of early black feminists such as Sojourner Truth must be taken into account. Through her refrain of *'ain't I woman?'* Sojourner Truth not only refuted the thesis on male supremacy but also 'exposed the class-bias and racism of the new women's movement. All women were not white and all women did not enjoy the material comfort of the middle classes and the bourgeoisie' (Davis, 1981, p. 63). Overall, the first wave was about suffrage and although it had a bias towards middle-class white women, it marked the emergence of an embryonic thrust to reject the subordination and exclusion of women.

2.2.2 Second-Wave Feminism

The second wave of feminism spanned the 1960s and 1990s and gained momentum within the context of socio-political events such as the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movements in the USA. This wave concerned itself with advancing women's rights beyond voting, to sexual freedom, reproductive rights, gender equality as well as workplace equality. By concentrating on the cultural features of female oppression (Nehere, 2016, p. 7), second-wave feminists advocated for women's self-development as well as their visibility and participation in the

'public' space rather than the 'private' space to which patriarchy confined them. Principal proponents include Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Sandra Gilbert, Gloria Steinem, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, and Kimberle Crenshaw among others. The publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1949) was a pivotal moment as she argued against the patriarchy-anchored regard of women as the inferior 'second sex'. In order to reverse women's fate, she directed her attack at social constructs, stressing that women were not born, but were instead, social constructs. The emphasis on sexual liberation enabled women to reject sexual subordination and re-think sexual practice as a construct aimed at personal satisfaction as much as, if not more than, reproduction. Writing in *The Second Sex* (1997), Simone de Beauvoir suggested that 'no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility' (de Beauvoir 1997, p. xxv). The re-framing of sex as an experience that could be just for pleasure, collided with the assumption that such an undertaking is the purview of man.

Writing in the *Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan argued against the lack of opportunity for women to self-develop and advocated for women to manage their lives independently. Even though the emphasis on sexual rights and independence may have appeared 'progressive', it did not translate to sexual equity for all women as some 'pro-birth feminists began to popularise the idea that poor people [*read black*] had a moral obligation to restrict the size of their families…because poor children were less likely to be superior' (Davis, 1981, p. 210). What was regarded as 'a right for the privileged came to be interpreted as a duty for the poor' (Davis, 1981, p. 210). This racist approach exposed the movement to be 'advocating for people of colour not the individual right to birth control, but rather the racist strategy of population control' (Davis, 1981, p. 214). This ideological differentiation revealed the complexity of, and the fault lines within the feminist movement.

Equally important in this wave, is the recognition of Black Feminism. The writings of the Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Michele Russell, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and others, locate the works and voices of black feminists within the intellectual genesis of feminist theory. Black women were barely visible within White feminist discourse, and when they were referenced, their representation constituted a mis-representation. Writing in *Catching a Wave* (2016), Dicker and Piepmeier observe that in responding to the marginalisation of the black feminist cause by the monolithic white feminist movement, black

feminists 'called for a recognition that identity is intersectional …that gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality are interlocking and the oppression is not simply along one axis. These women, who labelled themselves US Third World feminists, questioned the tendency within the second wave to reduce the category of women to its essence' (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2016, p. 9). It is equally important that the integration of black feminism is not positioned in relative terms to white feminism, because a focus and/or an angry attack on white women's movement (Rich, 1985) serves to centralise the feelings of white women.

The recognition, specification and naming of black feminists and feminism is crucial because 'black feminism cannot be marginalised and circumscribed as simply a response to white feminist racism or an augmentation of white feminism' (Rich, 1979, p. 231). In addition to protesting against racial exclusion, black feminists refute white feminists' tendency to read gender (i.e. black female) as a monolithic entity. They also reject the ethnocentric bias which presumes that the practices applied by the white feminists to combat oppression will unlock solutions for all. bell hooks advocates a new approach to radical feminism – one which is 'not anti-male but rather seeks the full development of all individuals' (hooks ,1992, p. 63), where the current gender binary is challenged, 'understanding that both categories are synonymous with selfhood' (hooks, 1992, p. 69). Critics such as hooks, Collins, Sandoval et al, insist that white feminists must recognise the political and intellectual dividends that the white-feminist consciousness-raising movement in the second wave accrued from the Black Civil Rights movement. By including reproductive rights as an area of contestation, the second wave advanced the challenges and complexities unearthed in the first wave. Although the wave espoused more sexual liberation and presented motherhood as a possibility available to women on their own terms, it is silent on the specific subject of childfreeness as a form of *reproductive justice*, i.e. the express view that presents childfreeness as a reproductive possibility for women that can be exercised devoid of systemic repression.

2.2.3 Third-Wave Feminism

The controversy surrounding the origin as well as existence of a third wave of feminism (Evans & Bobel, 2007) notwithstanding, the genesis of this wave is attributed to key authors including Deborah Rosenfelt and Judith Stacey (1987) who asserted that the third wave was already taking shape in the late 80s. The term 'third wave' is also attributed to Rebecca Walker, who declared; 'I am not a postfeminist feminist. I am the Third Wave' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p.

209), as well as Lynn Chancer who advocated for a feminism that demanded 'a revitalized radical feminist offensive that does not wait for the leaders who reigned in the 1960s and 1970s to step forward, but for up-and-coming young feminists to confront anti-feminist backlash, heralding a paradigm shift, rather than a simple cohort formation' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 208). Sara Ahmed (1998), Claire Colebrook (2000), Adrienne Rich (1995), Moraga and Anzaldua (1981) are all key voices in this wave. This feminist wave is characterised mostly by a generation of feminists born between 1963 and 1974 (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 210) who entered the feminist terrain as strong and empowered women.

The third wave is considered 'a movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 210). It is regarded as 'a departure from, (as well as) an improvement upon second wave ideology and practice' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 212). Third-wave feminism adopts a 'dis-identificatory practice' (Henry, 2004, p. 7) which emphasises self-empowerment as well as individual transformation. It focusses on untangling the inequalities that affect women across the spectrum of difference.

The myriad tentacles of this wave's genesis may account for the challenges in attempting to construct 'a coherent definition of the newest expression of feminism' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 209) but does not demote its significance and place in the feminist project. Third wavers claim they are mindful of the difficulties and confrontations which the previous generations of women endured. They are challenged to use these to contextualise [rather than essentialise] current feminist projects, enabling a synergistic power to emerge, focussed on harnessing connections across generations, time and identities (Allen, 2008). The challenges of contextualisation notwithstanding, the wave is revelatory with regard to the second wave's shortcomings. Third-wavers charge the preceding wave of failing to incorporate an understanding of how race, class, and gender are interlocking systems of oppression (Hulko, 2009). The tension may be attributed in part to the practice by third-wavers to, on one hand, blame second wave feminism for mixed messages, and on the other, acknowledge and integrate successes from the second wave. The contention between the second and third wave, gave rise to a backlash (Braithwaite, 2004) and the incongruities remain areas of continuous redress.

Inherent in the third wave is an existential dilemma, one which Henry (2004) articulates as a

paradox; ‘feminist theory produced by women of colour is foundational to third wave feminism, yet third wavers cannot use the very feminists who created this theory to exemplify second wave feminism lest they dilute the argument they make about the limits of the previous generation’ (Henry, 2004, p. 166). In *To Be Real*, Walker (2004), in what could be deemed an act that is both a historical acknowledgement as well as a departure states, ‘we want to be linked with our foremothers and centuries of women’s movement, but we also want to make space for young women to create their own, different brand of revolt, and we choose the name Third Wave’ (2004, p. xvii). In addition to the tenuous linkage to prior generations, Walker (2004) insists that her blackness and feminism do not collide, but are rather integrated in the shaping of her identity.

Third wave feminism allows for mobility, multiplicity and diversity as the means for re-examining feminism, to ultimately produce feminist knowledge which denounces the dominant patriarchal social order. The focus on multiplicity and inclusion is a re-articulation of identities as well as a rejection of boundaries. This therefore compels a migration towards an embrace of differences, diverse identities, multiplicities and ambiguities. By confronting reductionist and exclusionary ideas, third-wavers continue to challenge the dominant discourses which enforce and reinforce women’s exclusion and discrimination. Through enacting personal, everyday resistance, third-wavers argue that their focus ‘on the use of the body as the primary site for resistance’ (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 211) deepens their ‘understanding [of] the intersections of oppression’ (Evans & Bobe, 2007: 211).

Dispensing with a narrative that positions them as victims of male oppression, third wave feminists aggressively re-frame what constitutes victimhood. Accordingly, they insist that ‘feminism isn’t about what choice you make, but the freedom to make that choice’ (Gilley, 2005, p. 188). Choosing to be ‘real’ and ‘visible’ become common threads which work together to situate third wave feminists. Third wavers embrace visibility as a tool to fight exclusion in an effort to render one’s subjectivity and position meaningful in discourse, thereby creating space for social justice. Being real alludes to authenticity; to claiming a feminist identity (in one’s own way) while also finding new language for an inclusive feminist consciousness. They claim not to be a version of the 1960s white women’s feminism, nor the late 1980s and early 1990s’ more conservative power feminism. Instead, they claim that theirs is a multi-cultural, international, and class conscious feminism. This location is said to allow more scope for individuality and difference.

The multiplicity of voices and dimensions in the third wave are important ways to account for evolving centres of power and identity. They not only challenge the oppression presented by those labels that seek to categorise and confine feminism, they also insist that feminism constitutes 'values that are important to you as a woman, not ideals arrived at by forced consensus to which you should adjust your life' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 213). These various voices also reveal that 'potential allies in resistance movements do feminism but do not, intuitively, embrace feminism' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 213), thus accounting for the present-day reticence and refrain where some third-wavers may attest, 'I am not a feminist, but…' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 213). To overcome this dilemma, Evans & Bobel (2007) cite bell hooks, who suggested alternative phraseology, suggesting that people state: 'I advocate feminism' rather than 'I am a feminist' as a means to resolve this tension point. Rebecca Walker in *To Be Real* is more emphatic that definitions do not really matter, what is important is an acceptance that 'the work is being done by women and men from various communities who slowly, step by step, find themselves working alongside those who previously may have been seen only as Other' (Evans and Bobel, p. 217). The resistance to feminism as a term is not to be read as a demise of the cause but could be attributable rather, to a feminist dissonance (Howie & Tauchert, 2004), one whose resolution may enable the emergence of new articulation and definitions of the feminist movement for contemporary relevance.

By utilising narrative practice to explore the multiple ways in which feminism is defined, third-wavers introduced myriad strands to the subject of feminism (Evans & Bobel, 2007). These range from Rebecca Walker's essays in *To Be Real* , which contemplated beauty as an act of resistance (a shift in identity politics), to Daisy Hernandez and Bushra Rehman in *Colonize This*, who insisted upon the inclusion of the voices of women of colour to refute the assumption by some that 'feminism is just a philosophy about white men and women' to Barbara Findlen, who in *Listen Up* addressed the issue of erasure by 'creating a visible, public forum for our experiences as young feminists and to affirm our presence' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 212).

In insisting upon individual definitions and the embrace of feminism, third wave texts are styled like confessions and personal narrative – a source of the consistent criticism of this type of feminist epistemology (Henry, 2004; Heywood & Drake, 1997). The denouncers of story-telling argue that 'storytelling in a vacuum is ineffective…as it must be accompanied by

critique' (Crawford, 2010, p. 236). However, third wavers proffer the counter-argument that the narrative literature they produce and consume is in effect about personal narration and cultural critique and it explicitly incorporates the everyday experiences of women, thereby crystalising their materiality in women's continued oppression. The progress-narrative is positioned as a bridge to explore new theory and an avenue to re-imagine the intersection of practice and theory, as well as the emergence of a vocabulary through which diverse women articulate and evaluate their experiences (Crawford, 2010, p. 237), thus catalysing 'a movement that speaks to and represents the experiences of all women' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 213).

The focus of the third wave is on embracing feminism as an everyday enactment that is pluralistic and liberating rather than narrow and homogenous. Consequently, it rejects fixed definitions, breaks boundaries as well as problematises the gender binary. Differences such as ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation are viewed as a mosaic of perspectives that are contextual and dynamic. It is against the backdrop of this fluid and boundary-testing approach to contemporary feminism, that Evans & Bobel (2007) present their four themes in an attempt to elucidate what feminism means today. These are:

Inclusion, which insists that there is room for all in the feminist project. It presents feminism as a receptacle that holds various perspectives and allows for myriad possibilities and expressions, thus creating a foundation upon which solidarity can be enacted.

Multiplicity, which insists upon women bringing their whole selves to the table. It accommodates the complexities of being human [not just being woman] and embraces difference as a place of power that is crucial to society. This is in essence an acknowledgement of Audre Lorde's assertion that 'there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 215). Writing in *The Bridge called my Back* (1981), Moraga and Anzaldua (1981, p. 213) express a belief that 'we also often find it difficult to separate race from class and sexual oppression because in our lives they are expressed simultaneously'. Therefore, the Black woman, (sometimes problematically called 'Third World') cannot continue to be imagined and/or presented as a monolithic, one-dimensional and singular subject, a point encapsulated and elaborated on by the focus of this study – black professional and childfree women.

Contradiction; an expected outcome from a diverse and inclusive movement such as the third wave. This aspect reveals the complexities that emanate from being human and may play out

in the expression of feminism today. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, writing in *Third Wave Agenda*, *Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* suggest that what may be perceived as contradiction is in fact a reflection 'of the desires and strategies of third wave feminists' not to feed into the 'power of divisiveness that threatens the ability to build a strong and cohesive movement' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 216).

Everyday Feminism; a theme that advocates for a feminist consciousness that 'falls outside the conventional definition of feminism…one that is more about disposition than discourse' (Evans & Bobel, 2007, p. 217). Not only is activism important, but the activist territory is also given prominence. Rather than rejecting efforts of earlier waves, contemporary feminists could benefit from redefining and revisiting the complex history of feminism as well as the values imbedded in prior waves. By so doing, they can attend to the perceived chasms between the present and the past, and recalibrate their mission by focussing on endeavours that will advance and reinvigorate the feminist project, such as diversity and inclusivity.

2.2.4 The Fourth Wave of Feminism

The debate about the analogy of a wave to mark the unfolding and advancement of the feminist movement continues even in contemporary times. For this, Nicola Rivers (2017) offers a possible solution, ' to envisage a wave as allowing for a movement that is constantly in flux, rolling back as often as it rolls forward, gaining strength from what it brings with it rather than losing momentum due to what it leaves behind' (Rivers, 2017, p. 22) In this way, the evolution of the feminist movement can be translated as one with kinetic energy, advancing with momentum and gaining strength from what it brings forth rather than being weakened due to what it is perceived to have left behind. This analogy is helpful as it enables scholars to not only reflect on the undulating movements of feminism, but to explore and examine points where the various stages in the feminist movements and formations diverge, collide and/or overlap.

Even with the real and perceived limitations of prior waves, it would be convenient and *erasion-ist* to then suggest that feminism, before now, had lost its lustre and/or its usefulness. The post-feminism of which some scholars speak (Gill and Scharff, 2013; Gill & Donaghue, 2013) presents, at least for this writer, a contentious implication that the world has advanced and that feminism has lost its necessity, whereas contemporary culture proves that women

equality and gender equity have not been realised; that it is 'not yet Uhuru'[1]. By imagining a world beyond feminism wherein the impositions presented by a white, heteronormative and classist purview had been dispensed of, post-feminism attempted to accelerate what could only progress at the pace of unfolding realities enabled by ongoing discourse about equality, difference, diversity and inclusion. Additionally, despite best intentions, 'post feminism still takes on a distinctly Western and colonial slant, particularly in its foregrounding of notions of 'progress' and reliance on Western readings of agency' (Rivers, 2017, p. 14). Whilst indeed post-feminism is contested, reflecting upon it is useful as part of the ongoing reflection on the evolution and the changing shape and form of feminism over time. Rather than fixate about a post-feminist world, it would be more prudent to analyse the ways in which feminism has evolved over time, more pointedly how 'the third wave developed from within the second-wave feminist movement' and apply this in the interrogation and 'analysis of the arrival [as well as contextualisation] of the fourth wave' (Rivers, 2017, p. 15).

Much like the third wave, there is contestation as to the genesis and the actual existence of the fourth wave of feminism. Whereas the third wave was largely regarded as oppositional to the second wave, the fourth wave is largely considered to be a technology-enabled movement (Henrique & Lang, 2014; Murphy, 2013), focussed on the ongoing revelation of abuses against women and accelerating the unlocking of women's full and un-tempered potential. The fourth wave is often positioned as a rejection of the third, not too dissimilar to how the third wave was also to an extent conceived as 'a backlash against post-feminism' as well as 'a celebration and rejection of the ideals and gains promoted by the feminist 'mothers' of the second wave (Rivers, 2017, p. 16). However, through close analysis, it is evident that the fourth wave of feminism has continued the insistence on an intersectional approach to addressing women's discrimination. The unfolding wave is marked as a phenomenon of the new millennium, one that has built up and broke(n) through (Rivers, 2017) with the increased feminist participation, especially on social media platforms and the wider digital sphere (Gill, 2016). Regardless of the contestations about the form and function of feminism today, 'the voices arguing for an openly pro-feminist identity and a 'revival' of feminist politics have begun to be heard, culminating in a swell of activity that could be conceptualised as the arrival of the fourth wave' (Rivers, 2017, p. 25) and is a reflection of the evolution of the feminist movement (Patil, 2013).

One of the biggest leaps made specifically by this wave, is the amalgamation of successes from

[1] Not yet Uhuru – means freedom has not been realized yet. Uhuru is a kiSwahili word for freedom.

preceding feminist waves (the emphasis on equality, self-defined, sense-making and story-telling, etc.) and infusion into the movement elements unique to contemporary times. It becomes most apparent that the technologically-enabled platforms such as social media, specifically Twitter, have enabled contemporary feminism to connect with larger audiences. As a result, many more women are presenting their own lived experiences and in the process counteract reports and representations that may have reinforced their negative stereotyping and/or previously gone unchallenged.

It would be both expedient and inaccurate to imply a solid transition between one wave and the next, as there are overlapping theories and ideas which trump the obsession with ideological differences within feminist waves. For example, the fourth wave continues to amplify the concept of intersectionality even though this was raised and expounded upon by Crenshaw (1989) in the second-wave. Where a correction is due, is the reported tendency of fourth wave activists to present themselves as originators of new-age feminist thought or revolutionaries with no prior reference points. For example, when Laura Bates, founder of *EverydaySexis*m, a project that encourages women to share how sexism impacts their lives, presents her intervention as one without history she does the feminist movement a disservice, as her action is tantamount to 'erasing the existing and continued work of feminists in academia but also in less well-publicized activism' (Rivers, 2017, p. 67). This is a noted tendency with, and basis for criticism of fourth wave activists. Therefore, Aitkenhead's (2014, as cited in Rivers, 2017, p. 23) fervent correction must stand, that 'other fourth wave feminists tend to be a lot like her, [because they are] not veteran activists steeped in feminist texts and brandishing manifestoes'. The collective identity upon which the *EverdaySexism* rests, is in effect a characterisation of the second wave.

It is an inaccuracy then, to present the fourth-wave as a novel and separate ideology, because it borrows heavily from what has come before. Its momentum gains pace precisely because it rides the crest of prior waves. The distinction here is that its prominence is thanks in large part to technological advances such as social media and attendant celebrity culture. The interlinks between past and present, are crucial to show the complexities of understanding and correcting complex feminist histories. In concert with Hemmings (2011) as cited by Rivers (2017), I agree that 'whatever the failings of previous feminist commitments, it was better to have a feminist movement than none at all' Rivers (2017, p. 23). Another objection with merit, is against 'marketplace-feminism,' a brand of feminism fuelled by contemporary celebrities which in

effect translates to a 'rebranding of the feminist movement, but at the cost of presenting a feminism that is 'decoupled from politics' and 'staunchly focused on individual experience' (Rivers, 2017, p. 59).

Therefore, any suggestion by fourth wave activists such as the actress Emma Watson, that the time is ripe to abandon feminism because it is 'too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and unattractive' (Rivers, 2017, p. 67) or the singer Beyoncé rejecting the term because 'it can be too severe' is a function of their ignorance and naiveté about the power and might behind the feminist movement – a potency which cannot be dispensed of just by the sheer and convenient rejection of the term[2]. Additionally, for Emma Watson to imply that her improved subject position (as a white and privileged woman) is universal and a marker of an approaching utopia for women, is emblematic of a provincial outlook, one which utilises one's 'own authorial subject as the implicit referent, that is, the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others' (Rivers, 2017, p. 68).

What is clear is that the fourth wave of feminism is an enactment of the crucial migration of the struggle for gender equity from the somewhat revered and rarefied hallways of academia into public discourse. Even though the label of feminism may remain contested, uncomfortable and/or resisted by some gender activists due to past implications of the movement being either 'women-only' working off a platform of assumptive gender binary, it still remains the most suitable catchment phrase to use to reference the combat against gender inequality and advancing society towards gender equity. The fourth wave has thus successfully deployed technologically-enabled platforms (social media specifically) to reflect increased voices and experiences. Even though this wave has been accused of fostering classism and able-ism (i.e. the cost of data and smart phones are exorbitant in most places), the strides made in enabling and encouraging a diversity of voices must register as advancement and legitimate progression of the feminist cause and its continuous relevance as a critical practice through which to examine intersections with other –isms that disadvantage women. There are mixed blessings with social media enabled feminism as seen for example, in increased reports of feminism bashing[3]. As a result, fourth wave activists are in a bind – if they stay on the platform they are abused, but getting off also has its price. They feel it is more than just a simple act of logging

[2] see : https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/24/when-everyone-is-a-feminist

[3] see : https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/jan/21/mary-beard-suffers-twitter-abuse

off the platforms as this would in effect result in 'muting' their voices. A respondent quoted by (Rivers, 2017) asserted that, 'Getting off Twitter is just not an option for me—it's how I do my activism, how I work' (Rivers, 2017, p. 115). Fourth wave feminists' insistence on the significance of social media as part of their activist arsenal not only asserts the importance of the internet to fourth wave feminism, but also shows that the relationship is not without strife – tense albeit productive.

By exploring other avenues through which economically and socially marginalised women can give voice to their own experiences and pain-points, contemporary feminists can mount a credible resistance against patriarchal forces and efforts to ignore and/or demote the depth, breadth and diversity of feminist thought. Among the many unique traits of the fourth wave, is its open-source approach, creating and embracing males who self-identify as feminists, whether they be significant social figures and/or politicians. In a 2016 interview, the former US President, Barack Obama, was famously quoted as saying

> one thing that makes me optimistic [...] is that this is an extraordinary time to be a woman. The progress we've made in the past 100 years, 50 years, and, yes, even the past eight years has made life significantly better for my daughters than it was for my grandmothers. And I say that not just as President but also as a *feminist* (Rivers, 2017, p. 8).

It would be erroneous to read this as alluding to feminism having reached its destination or to imply that there is a significant world-wide migration of men from the centre of sexism and patriarchy to the mainstream of feminism. President Obama and President Trudeau[4],[5] by example, are products of their times and their views reflect a point in our history, not a world-wide evolution and mass migration of mankind in favour of women's equality.

As the fourth wave unfolds and manifests, the viability and magnitude of feminism must remain central to the debate about the continued oppression and ostracisation of women, because as per Rivers (2017, p. 15) referencing Barrett and Phillips (1992) 'many of the issues posed in the earlier period return to haunt the present'. The interrogation of the conditions of women's lives, the policing of their bodies, as well as the problematisation of the imbalances therein, are ongoing undertakings which illustrate in real terms the validity and necessity of

[4] see : https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-35836279/justin-trudeau-i-ll-keep-saying-i-m-a-feminist
[5] https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/03/canada-trudeau-feminism-wilson-raybauld/584677/

not only feminism but the emergence of new possibilities and social formations to advance the women's movement even today.

The absence of neat categories and segments provides a utilitarian tension, one which presents fertile ground for ongoing contestations that will ensure that feminism advances and thrives. In this wave, intersection is upheld as it contextualises all those *–isms* that continue to entrench and sustain women's suppression, such as sexism, classism, racism and pronatalism. It presents possibilities for expressing diversity through inclusion – the creation of a space for all. In its nascent form, with no predictive model and/or crystal ball at hand, it can be hoped that this wave, like its predecessors, can continue the dismantling of boundaries that limit and constrain women and advocate for a future state where the problematic and patriarchal social hierarchy which demotes and demonises women may be dispensed with.

Fourth wave feminists are mounting a more direct battle in favour of *bodily autonomy*. They, more than their predecessors, regard the body as more than just a site of contestation but an instrument that can advance their feminist causes. Such a rebuttal brings into clear perspective the ongoing objectification and reduction of women's bodies – where women's bodies are still presented as objects to be evaluated (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Borrowing specifically the premise of the third wave that women can reframe their own brand of feminism[6], one which acknowledges that women can have brains and adorned bodies, fourth wave feminists argue that adorning their bodies 'does not make them any less serious' (Mock, 2016). For example, the naked female protester at South Africa's University of Cape Town[7] can also serve as a marker, an insistence by fourth wave activists, including Femen[8], of the disruptive power of baring breasts in protest (Rivers, 2017, p. 24). It is vital to cast particular attention on the role of gender and the prominence of women, especially black women, in the recent social uprisings in South Africa (#FeesMustFall; #MyBodyMyChoice). The analysis of how the black female body was (re)presented in public discourse, during this time, is imperative. Even though the black female body may have gained visual prominence, these images still do not 'change conventional sexist constructions of black female identity' (Rivers, 2017, p 40).[9] Therefore utilisation of the body as instrument must be viewed within the wider context of the ongoing problematisation of socially and culturally (re)produced norms .

[6] see : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OstE7FyEyw&t=1198s
[7] See : https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2017-11-02-naked-woman-arrested-at-uct-feesmustfall-protest/
[8] see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femen
[9] https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/vbekx8/bell-hooks-pens-critique-of-beyonc39s-39lemonade39-and-39fantasy-feminism39-uk-translation

The 2018 #MeToo and #Time's up North American movements are presented as the tipping points for this wave globally. In South Africa, the 2012 mini-skirt march in protest against gender-based violence, the 2015/6 social uprising on #FeesMustFall[10], the 2016 #RememberKhwezi protest to mobilise women to confront rape during ex-President Jacob Zuma's address [11], as well as the 2018 #MyBodyMyChoice[12] which advocated for bodily autonomy for women, could be presented as the most recent public spectacles which exemplify the fourth wave of feminism in South Africa. The demand for bodily integrity is intended to safeguard the social and physical parameters of women's bodies, in ways that keep them safe from harm, judgement and/or ridicule. The overwhelming impact of patriarchy and sexism has meant that the rights of women, the right of South African black women in this case, are balanced against the axes of patriarchy and its inclination to interfere with her body and decisions linked thereto, in furtherance of its own dictates.

A woman's security in her own body is crucial to her psychological, intellectual, and economic advancement. In the absence of a guarantee that her bodily integrity and autonomy will be protected, she is not free to enact the rights outlined in the Constitution. She is not only prevented from achieving personal autonomy, but her rights are also subjected to the vagaries of social forces that may not be in favour of her advancement and evolution. The right to self-determination and self-autonomy is enshrined in Chapter 2, section 12 (2) of the South African Constitution[13] and when threatened, such as is the case with women in general and the childfree in particular, requires a direct rebuttal to advance the legitimate and equitable interests of women in society.

There is a noticeable distinction between what this researcher will term the 'Urban, Classist, North American movements' (such as they are) and the South African expressions, which were also fronted by women, but more specifically black women. These front-line activists, are part of the Millennial generation. Some may have been born and/or raised within the third wave and have evolved their voice to give expression to issues universal to the black experience in South Africa (disproportionate affordability of University fees, for example) as well as the disproportionate exposure of the black female body to abuse and attack. Women in South

[10] see : https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-10-05-feesmustfall-2016-where-to-from-here/
[11] https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2016-08-08-rememberkhwezi-it-worked-like-a-beautiful-theatre-piece/
[12] https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17078304
[13] see http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/chp02.html

Africa and black women in particular, are disproportionately exposed to interpersonal violence and sexual abuse and assault in personal and public spaces.[14] The class divide in South Africa remains characterised by the strong element of racial separation imposed during Apartheid. As a result, black South Africans remain the poorest South Africans. Additionally, the black woman's lived experience has nuances and tensions which compound her ostracisation. She is often under-represented or mis-represented as both newsmaker and source of news[15], and in those few instances where she is made visible, she is typically stereotyped.

The 2012 mini-skirt march was a rebuttal against the constellation of the racial, sexist and economic ostracisation visited upon the black woman. The mini-bus taxi rank experience is largely a black experience borne of the economic imbalances of the past, spatial apartheid, overall discrimination against black lives and the specific violence visited upon the black female body (women and children). The mini-bus taxi industry is dominated by males in both ownership and employment. At its core, the taxi-rank is a stage, a platform and space, where the ongoing and unrelenting objectification of the black female body continues unabated as expressed in discriminatory cultural and patriarchal utterances and actions. Within this setting, men deploy their patriarchy-endorsed cultural capital with sexist attitudes towards women. They assume positions of authority and wield the power it grants them over the female body. At the taxi rank, the socially-legitimized male gaze delegitimises the bodily experience of the black female. This determining male gaze projects itself onto the female figure (Mulvey, 1997, p. 442). In essence, like the male in Mulvey's (1997) narrative cinema analysis, the male taxi driver is in essence the male protagonist, who is 'free to command the stage (i.e. the taxi rank) – a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action' (Mulvey, 1997, p. 443). The taxi rank becomes the environment wherein this unwarranted gaze is deemed a justifiable and appropriate response to how women dress. The women are harassed as a means not only to 'fix' or 'chastise' them but to get them to behave in line with how men see or deem fit. Consequently, women are shamed and threatened into submission to the male-order.

The mini-skirt in this instance becomes a counter-active device, a form of voluntary marking used to dismantle the false meaning attached to clothes. By wearing mini-skirts, which are deemed revealing, and walking through taxi-ranks, these feminist activists were not only

[14] see : http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03-40-05/Report-03-40-05June2018.pdf
[15] see : https://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=5882

claiming back space in society but were also challenging the continued sexist imposition upon their choices and the policing of their bodies, thereby reclaiming agency.[16] This was a demand for the creation of a cultural space within which the woman can express herself without being targeted, harmed or denigrated. The 'marking of the bodies of others has historically been intended to designate bodily inferiority, which in turn justifies the social subordination of those whose bodies are marked as other' (Weiss, 2009, p. 23). The body has physical boundaries which serve as means of distinguishing one person from another. However, these boundaries are either blurred and/or ignored in a patriarchal setting within which societal presupposition demotes and commodifies the female body. This fourth wave, body-centric activism is more than about ownership of the body. It is also about locating the body in space and time, converting it to an instrument with which to legitimise and defend the self. This counter-force challenges the core of the assumption that the female body is socially, culturally and practically the property of others, to be exploited and discarded at will and this idea strongly resonates with childfreeness as will be made clear later in this study.

Women's struggle against patriarchal violence must be comprehended as a demand of bodily autonomy, which is the argument that everyone's right to govern their own body is an unassailable human right. The power to make determinations on how the female body is considered, treated and interpreted sits as a crucial component of the gender struggle. Feminised people are, as a consequence, fuelled by the struggle for bodily autonomy - they brush against an imposed social meaning on their bodies and the resultant treatment they receive. On a metanarrative level, this challenge could be restricted within the gendered female category – where internal challenges for autonomy over the feminised body may occur. However, there are complex machinations and intra-category challenges that exist, as this study has shown. The fault lines between women who are mothers and childfree women reveal the crack within the oft-romanticised notion of 'unified female solidarity' – for, the childfree, who are also women are further labelled, miscategorised and discriminated against based on how they choose to exercise their own bodily autonomy.

In seeking to change the signification of children as a marker of womanhood, the childfree challenge not just the wider gender struggle between women and men but also reject the social impositions (by both men and women who are mothers) of what constitutes womanhood and

[16] see: http://siasaduni.blogspot.com/2008/04/south-african-miniskirt-march-not-to-be.html

how their gender should be performed. Theirs is an additional battle-front, and the process to up-end socially imposed gender meanings is fuelled by a desire to regain control over how their bodies are interpreted. Demanding bodily autonomy entails challenging the socially perpetuated assumption that the female body is the property of another and contesting its exposure to unrelenting vulnerability in society. It is therefore befitting, that the demands for bodily autonomy have infiltrated all spaces where woman's lived experiences are tainted by patriarchy-fuelled disadvantage, from the home, the workspace, the streets, the womb and beyond. The crucial aspect of the female body that must receive continued consideration is the theorisation of the body as a surface for the resistance of external power which not only functions to separate, shame and demote but to present the female body (black in particular) as controllable and submissive.

With regards childfree women, the voluntary marking of the body is achieved through the rejection of motherhood, rather than the 'absence' of children. This is a crucial distinction and choice to validate. Their biological capacity cannot be hierarchically organised to be superior to their capacity for choice - childfreeness is a personal and private decision which is played out in public hence the external impositions of pronatalist ideology. It is a decision which constitutes a fundamental affront to social assumptions and cultural considerations. Even though their bodies are separate and sacrosanct, they are not protected from patriarchal presumptions on what they can and cannot do with/on them nor the demeaning glare of women who are mothers. They exercise agency, choice and bodily autonomy in their childfree state, and confront traditional presuppositions about identity, more specifically, the limited and limiting assumption that womanhood is achieved through motherhood (Bhambhani, 2017; Gammage & Alameen-Shavers, 2019). It must be accepted and recognised that childfree women also have the power of full and final say on the meaning of their gendered bodies, what they do to/with them and what is done to them. As the battle for bodily autonomy continues, it is crucial that the feminist project also reflects on ways in which it is fractured and at times discriminatory. The fight against gender-based discrimination must accommodate interpretations and meanings of the feminised body beyond patriarchal and pronatalist dictates. It must reflect upon the ways in which the retention of the childfree in a state of alienation runs contrary to the ideal of a united female gender fighting socially-constructed gender imbalances. The homogenized narrative of what constitutes woman cannot be allowed to continue without contestation. Even though there are inherited social ways of thinking about women and their

bodies, this monolithic account has become increasingly untenable and can no longer hold without challenge.

Through analysis, it is apparent that the fourth wave is a higher point building upon the momentum enabled by earlier concerted struggles for women's liberties. It affords us a fuller appreciation of progress made thus far, as well as make manifest, in visible and tangible ways, the possibilities that technological advances as well as shifts in culture have made possible. Through the waves, we have witnessed the increased push for and deepening of women's bodily autonomy; whether from the right to contraception, to right to work as a parent and now the right to choose whether to reject or embrace motherhood.

The fourth wave is not utopia. It is not a destination but rather a key marker on the journey to gender equity. It serves as a retrospective vista on the evolution of intellectual and social effort by feminists to dismantle the limiting and limited stereotypes which patriarchy attaches to women. It also shows the fault lines which remain as challenges. Primarily, it enunciates intra-gender challenges (it is mothers who judge the childfree) showing that the concepts of bodily autonomy, selfhood and womanhood must remain debated within the gender in ways that advocate for the acceptance of the multiple and diverse ways available to women to enact and live out their chosen womanhood. There is much work to be done in confronting the continued policing of the female body, particularly when it comes to reproductive choice. Therefore, if autonomy is to be accepted as both an aspect of being a human subject as well as a function of particular choices and acts, then it is imperative that it be correctly located within the ambit of available avenues through which women's oppression and unbalanced gender socialization can be corrected and/or contested.

This project, in and of itself, is an outcome of all unfolding possibilities and advancements rendered possible by technological advancements as well as social (r)evolutions. It reflects and engages with bodily autonomy as a means to highlight and foster women's agency as part of a larger onslaught to challenge women's oppression and the specific discrimination and othering of the childfree. There is a crucial distinction made between the lived experiences of black and other women's lives only because black women specifically are subjected to a plurality of oppressions and intersecting power inequalities which compound their oppression (Hancock, 2019). A deep and revelatory understanding of the nuanced resistance of black women in general and the childfree in particular is crucial to migrating and elevating discussions on

bodily autonomy. For the childfree, agency is therefore more than an evolution from autonomy but rather, a clearer focus on self-direction, self-determination and self-authorship. Such demarcations of self from others must enable them to 'maintain against the claims and incursion of others' (Abrams, 1998, p. 6).

In contrast to the woman who mothers and 'has chosen this role in large part because of an early and comprehensive socialization that defines this role as appropriate and valuable to her because she is a woman' (Abrams, 1998, p. 11), the childfree woman can be regarded within this context, as the autonomous individual who has formed, constructed and enacted 'opinions, ideals, goals, values, and preferences [that] are all authentically [hers]' (Abrams, 1998, p. 7*).* Therefore, for the childfree woman, this self-determination is active decision-making despite multiple influences that are external to her. It dispenses of imposed judgements from others and asserts itself through procedural independence and personal motivational structures which rest on her own internal locus of control. The pervasiveness of pronatalist female-socialisation as well as other gender oppressive forces and the various ways in which they can combine to intensify pressure for the childfree to conform, indicate the convolutions inherent in a childfree choice. By resisting socially-assigned and socially-imposed meanings of what it means to be a woman, the childfree woman publicly displays a process with a private genesis in ways that enact her self-conception and self-direction. Thus, her bodily autonomy, with all its attendant complexities, is made manifest.

It would be expedient and negligent to not highlight experiences that are particular to the black childfree woman specifically, for she, in addition to dispensing of the meta-pressures visited upon her gender, also confronts disempowering conceptions of black women, which are misaligned with her own lived experience and self-conception. As Patricia Hill Collins (1991, p. 95) reminds us, 'unlike white women's images attached to the cult of true womanhood, the controlling images applied to Black women are so uniformly negative that they almost necessitate resistance if Black women are to have any positive self-images. Thus, for the childfree black woman, her bodily autonomy is made manifest within a context of negative social forces, hostile gender-based challenges and unrelenting complexities. Her responses to these, are in effect, manifestations of agency.

2.3 Feminist perspectives on motherhood

The subjects of motherhood and reproduction have been at the core of the women's movement since its emergence and have remained contested issues within the movement. The interrogation of these subjects is a consistent theme in feminist theory, falling as they do under the wider theme of the politics of reproduction. Reflecting upon the concept of motherhood is crucial in untangling historically-constructed, and socially-imposed ideologies that enforce a gendered model of behaviour for women. This enables the interrogation of how the maternal role has been constructed, essentialised and practised.

The perspectives on motherhood differ in each feminist wave as each feminist era focussed on its own key dimensions, resulting in distinct feminist interpretations of motherhood. Generally, motherhood is treated either as a thing to challenge (Friedan, 1963), embrace (Chesler's *With Child: A Diary of Motherhood*, 2018), reframe (Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* 1978; Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self* (1997), to recuperate, revise and reclaim (Rich, 1995; Ruddick, 1995), as a transition (Walker, 2007), as a bonus (McDonnell, 2007) and as a basis for activism (Orenstein, 2008) among others. The ongoing engagement on this subject is concerned with challenging as well as extending earlier thought. Within this reflective space, 'feminists have demanded and gained new attention for the previously ignored problems of motherhood, but they have not arrived at consensus about how to redefine the concept or adjust the system' (Jeremiah, 2006, p. 22). Seen collectively, the gendered and oppressive forces that coalesce to deepen woman's subordination, require a counter-force to challenge the construct that presents the woman's body as 'a terrain on which patriarchy is erected' (Rich, 1976, p. 55).

There is accuracy in Baym's (2003, p. 879) description of women's positions by referencing W.E.B. Du Bois' double consciousness, 'this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.' This statement resonates with the childfree women's experiences of seeing themselves and their communities through the eyes of pronatalist others who judge, vilify and exclude them. The impact of this 'motherhood mandating' gaze, intersecting with social exceptionalism, places childfree women in a position that engenders the development of a hyper- awareness of their embodied selves.

2.3.1 Motherhood Perspectives in the First Wave of Feminism

Mary Wollstonecraft's early 18th century sentiment reflects feminism's wariness of motherhood when she wrote, 'to be a mother, a woman must have independence of mind which few women possess, who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands' (Ford, 2009, p. 189-205). She further displays hostility towards mothers of a certain kind, not an overall disavowal of the mother role. In the 1830s the *American Tract Society* implied that 'mothers have as powerful an influence over the welfare of future generations as all other earthly causes combined…when our land is filled with pious and patriotic mothers, then it will be filled with virtuous and patriotic men' (Rich, 1976, p. 44). Margaret Sanger's *Motherhood* (1928) is referenced by Adrienne Rich (1976, p. 41), reporting on 'the tale of a woman seeking birth-control advice so that she can have intercourse with her husband without fear, and thus carry out her roles both as a mother and a wife'. In this era, the linear relation between womanhood and motherhood was engrained and reinforced through socialisation, wherein '[women] are to live, not in themselves but for their fellow-creatures' (Rich, 1979, p. 45). The institutionalisation of motherhood and the socialisation of women to consider themselves pre-destined to be mothers, is evidently a problematic whose genesis has a long history.

Despite unrelenting bias towards pronatalism, some women questioned this social organisation and their imposed role in it. Reporting on letters published in a 1915 Women's *Cooperative Guild in Britain*, Rich (1976) cites sentiments wherein some women would reflect: 'In my early motherhood I took it for granted that women had to suffer at these times, and it was best to behave and not make a fuss' (Rich, 1976, p. 50). These women would later express more reservations: 'I do not know what is the worst – childbearing with anxiety and strain of mind and body to make ends meet…or getting through the confinement fairly well' (Rich, 1976, p. 50). It is evident that despite their suffering, women complied: 'I dare not let my husband in his precarious condition hear a cry of pain from me '(Rich, 1976, p. 51). Such self-effacing behaviour entrenched the patriarchal order and fortified women's imprisonment within a Mother archetype presented as 'the source of angelic love' (Rich, 1976, p. 52).

The early 20th century White feminist demand for voluntary motherhood which gave rise to the campaign for birth control, advanced the objective of white feminists. It also marked another departure wherein black women were excluded and/or differently treated. To justify black women's exclusion, (white) leaders of the Women's liberation movement suggested that 'black

women had not yet become conscious of the centrality of sexism' (Davis, 1981, p. 204). Additionally, some white feminists advocated for involuntary sterilisation of black women – itself a racist form of mass birth control informed by the racist stereotype of the black woman's sexual promiscuity or matriarchal proclivities (Davis, 1981, p. 3). Against this racist stereotype, there would be 'shock that whole families of [black] women could fail to have children' (Davis, 1981, p. 205). It is evident that even though motherhood may have been challenged and problematised by some, it was engrained as a natural and destined outcome for all women. Within this epoch, childfreeness was not considered a choice some women could freely exercise.

2.3.2 Motherhood perspectives in the Second Wave of Feminism

The promoters of the second-wave carried over the focus from the fist-wave, to 'defend the reproductive rights of all women' (Davis, 1981, p. 207). For them, motherhood was regarded as a crucial issue of contestation because of its fundamental impact on womanhood. By anchoring their activism on sexual liberation, second-wavers insisted upon woman's right to determine what would happen to her body and when. At the time, the call for voluntary motherhood reflected 'a new and genuinely progressive vision of womanhood' (Davis, 1981, p. 209). By arguing for the right 'of woman to decide when she will become mother, how often and under what circumstance' (Davis, 1981, p. 207), this feminist sentiment rejected the position that for women, 'with the child as her happiness and her justification…. through the child, she is supposed to find self-realization sexually and socially' (de Beauvoir, 1997, p. 501). During this second wave of feminism, the discourse that suggests 'woman equals mother' was contested as feminists argued that motherhood was simply a single aspect of a woman's identity rather than critical to her sense of self (Ireland, 1993). However, as highlighted by Snitow (1992), these second-wave feminist scholars were focused on reproductive freedom and were more adept at paying attention to the voices of mothers, than they were capable of conceiving a complete and meaningful childfree life.

Two main strands of thought emerged during this time. One school positioned motherhood as an institution and another viewed motherhood as a social construction. Some feminists regarded motherhood as nature and a unifying experience among women (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011) whereas others viewed motherhood as an instrument used to discriminate against women, to enforce their subordination and demote them to 'the second sex' (de Beauvoir, 1997). Some feminists were divided on the categorisation of motherhood, either as an

institution (Rich, 1976; 1984) or experience (Kaplan, 1990). However, the differences in view did not demote the movement's rejection of patriarchy's dictate that 'women shall assume the major burden of pain and self-denial for the furtherance of the species' (Rich, 1976, p. 43). Firestone (1972) argued that women's oppression lay in her child bearing and child rearing and that the social organisation of family was the primary instrument of female control.

The school of thought that viewed motherhood as a social construction rejects the assumption that the practices and meanings of motherhood are in any way natural instinct, biological, essential or inevitable (Burr, 2003). Rather, it implies that the ways of perceiving and experiencing motherhood in society are the result of processes of social construction, constantly being re-made by members of society. This happens, for example, through everyday interactions, discourses, and social practice (O'Reilly, 2010). Scholars identified motherhood and childrearing as the locus of women's oppression and the 'relegation of motherhood to the ostensibly unproductive sphere of reproduction gave men control over women's lives, their biological and social reproduction…and allowed them to exploit women for their private, economic, demographic, political, nationalistic or other purposes' (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011, p. 166). Ruddick (1995) addresses the consequence of this restriction by highlighting the grim aspects of mothering that are exacerbated by the mother's 'isolation, restricted options and social devaluation' (Ruddick 1995, p. 344).

The socially constructed meaning of motherhood is highlighted by Hays (1996), who declares that it is the 'ideas and practices attached to childbirth and child rearing that constitute the culture of socially appropriate mothering' (Hays, 1996, p. 14). Ideologies of reproduction which describe woman in terms of mother (Rich, 1995) do more than just classify the lives of all women into those who are mothers and those who are not. They also, inadvertently, prioritise mothers over those who are not. Motherhood constitutes multiple strands of discourse embedded within specific contexts, influenced by prevailing social, political, cultural and economic norms (Arendell, 2000; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). It has been distinguished by several dominant constructions which 'exist within the wider society and are recognised by individual women who use them as standards against which to evaluate their own experiences and construct their own ideas' (Phoenix, Woollett, & Lloyd, 1991, p. 42). As Snitow (1992) put forward, the question to be asked by feminist writers attempting to pry mothering away from the patriarchal institution of motherhood should be: 'which construction of motherhood is productive for feminist work?' (Snitow, 1992, p. 39). The notion that all women desired

motherhood was considered not only burdensome but problematic as well. Simone de Beauvoir was an early critic who argued that 'motherhood signalled that women were twice doomed: biologically during pregnancy when they lacked control over their bodies; and socially, when children restricted them to the home' (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 199). Betty Friedan (1963) attacks the social conditioning of women that suggests that their only happiness and fate lay in being good mothers and devoted wives. In referring to 'the problem with no name', Friedan (1963) addresses the unhappiness of white middle class women who were pressured into the maternal role.

Rich (1995) denounces that 'woman's highest and holiest mission is motherhood' (Rich, 1995, p. 40) and instead proffers that the female body 'is now coming into synthesis with new inquiries into the actual power inherent in the female biology, however we choose to use it, and by no means limited to the maternal function' (Rich, 1995, p. 40). Rich (1976) attributes her focus on motherhood to the fact that 'it is a crucial and relatively unexplored area of feminist history' (hooks, 1984, p. 147). Whilst this may be regarded as a good move in returning women with children from the margins, however by implying that women are 'life-affirming nurturers, feminist activists (negatively) reinforce central tenets of male supremacist ideology' (hooks, 1984, p. 135). Through this discourse, the 'experience of maternity and the experience of sexuality have both been channelled to serve male interests, [and consequently] behaviour which threatens the institutions is considered deviant or criminal' (Rich, 1976, p. 42). The duality in the maternal position as well as the conception of woman's agency within motherhood, present cases for ongoing debate in the critical feminist discourse. Rich (1976, p. 214) implores that 'the specific subjugation of women through our location in the female body' should be an ongoing interrogative practice.

The categorisation of motherhood as an institution reveals that 'particular contexts point to the contingency and constructedness of maternal experience' (Jeremiah, 2006, p. 24). Within this purview, motherhood 'creates the prescriptions and the conditions in which choices are made or blocked' and 'demands of women maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than creation of self' (Rich, 1976, p. 42). It is important to elaborate on the woman's implied powerfulness as well as powerlessness within this framework. For, the woman is perceived as powerful in relation to her children yet is powerless within the patriarchal social order. Whilst Rich's (1976) push for the segmentation of motherhood into institution (as oppressive) and experience (as ongoing practice) presented

progress on the subject matter, it is challenged as 'obscuring the interaction between the subject and ideology – it suggests a pristine kind of maternity that lies beneath patriarchy's overlay….and ignores the fragmentary, unfixed nature of institutions and ideologies' (Jeremiah, 2006, p. 23). Alice Rossi (1977) adopts the mothering as practice stance presented by Rich (1976), but also advances a counter-liberatory suggestion that women are predisposed to the mothering role because of their unique ability to birth and lactate. Under patriarchal socialism, 'the institution of motherhood is revised and reformed in certain ways which permit women to serve both as producers and nurturers of children and as full-time workers' (Rich, 1976, p. 55). However, women's lives in commerce do not let them escape the impact of 'the spectacle of women producing new life from their bodies...of being necessity for men' (Rich, 1976, p. 54). The function of the institution of motherhood is to socialise girls to be mothers, with motherhood portrayed as both inevitable and worthy. Within this realm, childfreeness and childlessness is considered a deprivation.

Writing in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich (1976) reflects on motherhood, mothering and mother-daughter relationships. She argues against the institutionalisation of motherhood. As an institution, motherhood is seen as an outcome from patriarchal conceptions of women (Jeremiah, 2006, p. 23). The mainstream feminist discourse up to the mid-80s regarded 'the rejection of motherhood as a pre-requisite for overcoming women's subordination and for gaining equality' (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011, pp. 164-165). In this wave, motherhood is positioned as a political undertaking – a basis for activism. As an institution, it is analysed from a 'pragmatic and material perspective' (Crawford, 2010, p. 234). In the second wave of feminism mothering is contextualised as a form of maternal practice, a mode of thought and reasoning, because 'to be a mother is to be committed to meeting demands by works of preservative love, nurturance and training' (Ruddick, 1995, p. 11). This implication that woman's ultimate fulfilment in life lies in not only birthing but being in a perpetual servile role, embeds the problematic socialisation of motherhood as natural and inevitable and entrenches those repressive patriarchal social behaviours that lock woman into the maternal role.

Second-wave feminists problematise the institutionalisation of motherhood and argue that overcoming *otherness* is possible only through transcendence - that only by rejecting the confines of motherhood can women free themselves (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011, p. 165). By reflecting on the restraints imposed by societal norms and laws, second-wavers were successful

in ensuring that motherhood be evaluated within the context of collective oppressions and by so doing, ensured that motherhood was viewed not just as a woman's issue but a societal issue. By inferring that motherhood is woman's purpose, the proponents of the view that 'woman equals mother' are inadvertently implying that 'women who do not mother…. are doomed to live emotionally unfulfilled lives. Whilst they do not openly attack or denigrate women who do not bear children, they suggest that it is more important than women's other labour and more rewarding' (hooks, 1984, p. 136).

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1997) contests the essentialism of motherhood by exposing its reliance on a patriarchal foundation. She reveals its inherently oppressive nature by arguing that motherhood is an instrument used to oppress women and subsequently demote them to the *'second sex';* presenting that reproductive organs in women are 'peculiarities that imprison her in her subjectivity' (de Beauvoir, 1997, p. 15). In her view, becoming a mother 'is therefore never performed in complete liberty…it is enforced maternity' (Gerda & Bernadi, 2011, p. 165). Within pronatalist domains, 'from infancy woman is repeatedly told that she is made for childbearing and the splendours of maternity are forever sung to her… and that maternity is enough to crown a woman's life' (de Beauvoir 1994, p. 508). De Beauvoir (1994) rebuts the suggestion that 'it is only in maternity that woman fulfils her natural calling' by insisting that 'human society is never abandoned wholly to nature... the reproductive function in particular is no longer at the mercy solely of biological chance, it has come under the voluntary control of human beings' (de Beauvoir 1994, p. 537). By so asserting, de Beauvoir inserts reproductive rights into the fray, although at this juncture this alluded to birth control and abortion rather than childfreeness.

Chodorow (1978, p. 208) cautions that 'the reproduction of women's mothering is the basis for the reproduction of women's location and responsibilities in the domestic sphere. That women mother is a fundamental organizational feature of the sex-gender system. It generates a psychology and ideology of male dominance as well as an ideology about women's capacities and nature'. Uncontested, this practice becomes reiterative, working to 'produce women who turn their energies toward nurturing and caring for children…thus contributing to the perpetuation of their own social roles and position in the hierarchy of gender' (Chodorow, 1978, p. 209). In light of these articulations, it becomes priority that the liberation of women is used to 'open out structures of resistance, unbind the imagination, connect what's been disconnected' (Rich, 1985, p. 214). However, illuminating Chodorow's challenge to the

construct of motherhood might be, she at times appears contradictory and/or fatalistic as she suggests that 'women mother daughters who, when they become women, mother' (Chodorow, 1978, p. 209). Doane and Hodges (1992) challenged Chodorow that her view propagates the myth of women's role as primarily maternal (Doane & Hodges, 1992). Equally important is the recognition that Chodorow's (1978) singular view of woman as mother implies that reproductive choice is not an option available to women to exercise.

The radical feminist movement blames the constraints imposed by motherhood on women as the principal cause for their oppression and subjugation. For these feminists, the task of bearing and rearing children is considered as instrumental in reducing women to dependent states, thus rendering them powerless. They contested the politics of reproduction, the politics of pregnability and motherhood (Rich, 1985) and the pronatalist assertions that motherhood was the primary purpose of woman. Of motherhood, Rich (1976) argues 'motherhood as an institution has ghettoised and degraded female potentialities' (Crawford, 2010, p. 235). Radical feminism problematises childbearing and rearing as vehicles that entrench woman's marginalisation and oppression. The two strands of motherhood reflected above, demonstrate the continued need for the interrogation of the motherhood concept and ongoing problematisation of its positioning is something that is central to, and demonstrative of, womanhood.

2.3.3 Motherhood perspectives in The Third Wave of Feminism

Motherhood is dissected from various angles: as a natural instinct and an unquestioned and unrelenting biological drive (Garwood, 2014), as the result of strong societal pressure (Maher & Saugeres, 2007), as a construct that essentialises women, rendering them passive actors and suppressing their agency in the decision to have children (Malacrida & Boulton, 2012), and as an avenue to undaughter (Walker, 2007). Social psychologists argue that the desire and ability to be a mother is not so much a woman's innate tendency, but rather, a learned social role, whereby girls are socialised to understand motherhood as a normal, integral part of being a suitably feminine woman (Bimha & Chadwick, 2016; Gillespie, 2000; Kelly, 2009; O'Reilly, 2010; Shapiro, 2014). Some feminists submit that by embracing motherhood, women are 'complying with systems which deny women the right to self-determination' (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011, p. 166). The physical and psychic weight of responsibility on the woman with children is by far the heaviest of social burdens.

The restriction of the female to the home domain is challenged by Ann Kaplan (1990), who when writing in *Sex, Work and Motherhood: The Impossible Triangle*, alludes to the repositioning of the nuclear family with the woman safely within it as part of a larger societal need to control female sexuality (Kaplan, 1990, p. 409). Writing in *Maternal Thinking* (1995), Sara Ruddick also expands upon this aspect of mothering as a practice shaped by one's social group and the demands inherent in caring for another. To speak of mothering, directs focus to the 'active nature of maternity' (Jeremiah, 2006, p. 21) challenging the traditional view where the 'mother is passive and powerless'.

Applying Judith Butler's (1988) performativity to mothering in the third wave requires that mothering be conceived of as an active practice within which subjectivity – one which concerns itself with 'the reiterative and citational practice …. [thus, allowing for] the possibility of interrupting and disrupting [a] discursive production to effect transformation' (Jeremiah, 2006, p. 25). The consequence of infusing the subject into the practice, in and of itself then catalyses the need to 'speak of maternal subjectivities' as well as 'make room for the idea of maternal agency' (Jeremiah, 2006, p. 25). Feminist activists argue that it is equally important to note that adopting maternal performativity 'is not to ignore the material; it is rather to pave the way for a discursive reassessment of the material operations of motherhood and maternity' (Jeremiah, 2006, p. 29).

In the third wave of feminism**,** there was a tangible shift in feminist thought regarding motherhood, with a migration away from past eras wherein motherhood was considered bothersome, activist and oppressive (Crawford, 2010, p. 233). Third-wave research reveals how the dominant meanings of motherhood have developed, evolved, and are constantly being (re)produced by members of society (O'Reilly, 2010). Unlike the second-wavers for whom motherhood was a political undertaking, third-wavers regard motherhood as a cultural practice (Crawford, 2010, p. 234). Early third-wave writings address the subject of motherhood 'from the perspective of the perpetual daughter' (Crawford, 2010, p. 228), an inevitable outcome embraced by third-wavers seeking to distinguish themselves from 'their political, intellectual and actual mothers' (Crawford, 2010, p. 228). Some scholars regard motherhood as a patriarchal construct, emphasising the oppressive abilities of motherhood in women's lives (Ichou, 2006), while others highlight the idealisation of the practice of motherhood through a discourse of 'women-as-different' (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, cited in Mamabolo et al., 2006). The texts by Rebecca Walker, *Baby love* (2008), Evelyn McDonnell's (2008) *Mamarama* and

Peggy Orenstein's (2007) *Waiting for Daisy*, while not a total reflection of third-wave sentiment on the subject of motherhood, are useful indicators of the sentiments of this wave.

Third wave feminists reject the postulation that motherhood is innate to women, arguing that 'the association of maternity with woman's nature conflates biological and social motherhood' (Gerda & Bernardi, 2011, p. 165) and is at its core, a social, legal, political and philosophical construction. They argue that the hypothesis that there is a universal desire on the part of all women to mother, 'may result in a normative situation, in which women find themselves questioned at any stage in their life if they abstain from motherhood' (Gerda & Bernadi, 2011, p. 170). The romanticisation of motherhood and other roles that have been gendered female comes in for contestation in this wave. Writing in *The Price of Motherhood,* Press (2012) posits that 'gendered dimension of the labor of motherhood stubbornly persists… the erosion of our commitment to reproductive rights – has weakened women's ability to make entering motherhood and taking on the labour, a conscious choice' (Press, 2012, p. 123).

The positioning of motherhood as a legitimising transition from daughter to mother (Walker, 2007) deserves to be challenged. This view not only infantilises women who are not mothers, but has the corollary consequence of rendering the childfree, child-like, thus reinforcing a stigma that retards female equality. Additionally, this reading of motherhood as the end to daughterhood, presents motherhood 'as the key to women's personal fulfilment' (Crawford, 2010, p. 230). By going so far as to endorse it as a worthwhile pursuit for all because 'being pregnant is the best and I recommend it for all women' (Crawford, 2010, p. 233), Walker creates a fracture between those who adopt and those who reject her 'recommendation', thus reinforcing the 'othering' of non-adopters. Walker's (2007) generalisations about motherhood, aligning fulfilment to motherhood as well as her assessment of a mother's impact that 'with a few power plays, a sceptical comment, the withholding of approval or praise, a mother can devastate a daughter' (Crawford, 2010, p. 229) draws from her own relationship with her mother and should therefore be extrapolated with caution.

Evelyn McDonnell (2007) presents motherhood as an enjoyable [albeit anticipated] undertaking which augments life, something she 'had hoped for […] as a bonus' (Crawford, 2010, p. 230). Even though McDonnell does not essentialise motherhood, by presenting personal fulfilment as synonymous with motherhood and an inevitability for women, she contradicts herself. Peggy Orestein (2010) in *Waiting for Daisy*, draws from her own

experience with her mother to inform her outlook on motherhood. Whilst she does not directly contest the implication that motherhood is inevitable, she addresses how she is challenged by the 'impact of motherhood'. The pursuit of motherhood consumed her, to the extent that she was 'taken over by my longing for a child, by my inability to become a mother' (Crawford, 2010, p. 231). There is a discernible reticence in Orenstein to admit enjoying motherhood 'as it turns out, I adore being a mom, though am a little uneasy saying so' (Crawford, 2010, p. 233). Herein lies a fault-line, some key thinkers in the third wavers imply that motherhood trumps selfhood – and by deduction therefore, failure to mother equates to failing of the self. Such positionality renders women inconsequential to the self, unless and until they mother. Although these third wavers are insistent about problematising socialisation, recognising intersectionality and self-authorship, they have centralised motherhood in their personal identities. By presenting motherhood as inevitable, biologically-driven and rooted in femaleness itself (Crawford, 2010)), they essentialise it in ways that could create barriers between those who mother and those who do not.

Matricentric feminism gave voice to women's motherhood experiences and perspectives, yet obscured the voices of childfree women (Morell, 2000). The recent detectable focus on childfreeness from a feminist approach must continue, as it provides crucial representation of those women who embrace voluntary childlessness (Gillespie, 2003; Hird, 2003; Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Maher & Saugeres, 2007). Snitow (1992) argued that a feminist agenda that serves all women must acknowledge and support women who choose to mother as well as those who do not. Childfree women constitute a profound divergence from the dominant patriarchal articulation that womanhood and motherhood are inseparable (Gillespie, 2003). By resisting and challenging the pronatalist mandates of femininity that fuse womanhood with motherhood, the childfree emphasise the development of a positive female identity that is separate from motherhood. This challenge to pronatalism need not just reject motherhood but should also seek to distance female identity from mothering in a way that benefits all women (Kelly, 2009).

Although there is no discernible endorsement of pronatalism in third wave texts, caution must be exercised in reviewing those normative strains that portray motherhood as desirable for all women (Crawford, 2010, p. 238). The greater focus placed upon self-definition, self-authorship and the heterogeneity among women is a welcome progression. These expanded boundaries and contestations must provide scope to insert and position childfreeness as an activist pursuit,

one through which the utilisation of the body unravels a redefinition of feminine identity. Therefore, the experiences of the childfree, like the diverse experiences of other women, require not only insertion into the present-day narrative but acknowledgement and omnipresence in the feminist ideology and discourse. The challenges the childfree present to what constitutes womanhood are in effect crucial disruptors that could infuse vibrancy and debate into the feminist movement and thus drive its evolution towards the embrace of more and other diverse and accommodative identities.

2.3.4 Black feminist perspective on Motherhood

Patricia Hill Collins (1994), writing in *'Shifting the Center: Race, Class and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood'*, maintains the significance of applying intersectionality in the analysis of motherhood; an important interjection of class and race in order to present a more comprehensive picture. She builds upon the proclamation by the 1977 Combahee River Collective that 'we often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously' (Rich, 1985, p. 218). This injected into the discourse the 'uncompromising Black-feminist naming to the experience of simultaneity of oppressions' (Rich, 1985, p. 218). Writing in *Revolutionary Parenting, in Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, bell hooks (1984) urged the recognition of *prioritisation between the Black and the White feminist experiences* because 'during the early stages of contemporary women's liberation movement, feminist analyses of motherhood reflected the race and class biases of participants'. hooks (1984) at once acknowledges the oppressive aspect of motherhood and laments that the (white) feminist movement not only essentialised motherhood for women, but also failed to pay significance and value to the black woman's experience of parenting and motherhood. She suggests that the consequential romanticisation of motherhood 'by bourgeois women is an attempt to repair the damage done by past feminist critiques and give women who mother the respect they deserve' (hooks, 1984, p. 136). She further argues that 'had black women voiced their views on motherhood, it would not have been named a serious obstacle to our freedom as women. Racism, availability of jobs, lack of skills or education and a number of other issues would have been at the top of the list – but not motherhood. Black women would not have said motherhood prevented us from entering the world of paid work because we have always worked' (hooks, 1984, p. 133). I understand hooks not to implying that motherhood is not restrictive, but rather, as suggesting that in order of priority, motherhood may be found not to present the biggest challenge for black women nor their greatest obstacle.

2.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality has emerged as a crucial paradigm of research and arose out of a need to address the failings of gender and race based research to 'account for the lived experience at neglected points of intersection – ones that tended to reflect multiple subordinate locations' (McCall, 2005, p. 1780). It addresses

> two types of relationships: the interconnectedness of ideas and the social structures in which they occur, and the intersecting hierarchies of social power; viewing gender within a logic of intersectionality redefines it as a constellation of ideas and social practices that are historically situated within and that mutually construct multiple systems of oppression (Collins, 1999, p. 263).

Davis (2008) describes intersectionality as a concept that 'refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power' (Davis, 2008, p. 68). McCall (2005) references intersectionality as the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations. All these interpretations are substantially applicable to this research. In order to avert the emerging debate about the exactness of the definition of intersectionality, some scholars suggest a migration from intersectionality as a single concept to intersectionality as a 'field of intersectionality studies' (Hancock, 2016, p. 7). By so doing, this dispenses of the need for accuracy without demoting the material contribution inherent in intersectionality.

In embracing intersectionality as a concept that provides an additional lens to analysis, it is imperative to problematise some underlying practices that either seek to impose a narrow, positivistic understanding of intersectionality, the erasure of black women as quintessential subjects of intersectionality, as well as the whitening of intersectionality (Hancock, 2016, p. 3). To deepen one's comprehension of challenges inherent in the social order, one must grapple with the implications of intersectionality (Hancock, 2016, p. 4). Intersectionality is a construct specifically created with the experiences of multiple forms of subordination in mind (i.e. Black women), cognisant of the multiple dimensions of identity which might include multiple forms of subordination (queer, woman) as well as forms of dominance (whiteness) (Abes, Jones & McEwen, 2007; Crenshaw, 1989).

Whilst the subject enjoys increased attention in contemporary times, 'intersectionality-like thought' (Hancock, 2016, p. 24) is traced as far back as Maria Stewart in 1830 and Harriet Jacobs in 1860 with these early thinkers writing critically about the 'political ideal of self-determination …grounded in the life experiences of Black women' (Hancock, 2016, p. 30). Audre Lorde (1980) is credited as one of the early scholars in contemporary time to introduce the concept of intersectionality into feminist discourse, presenting it as one possible tool to counter-act interlocking oppressions and therefore 'to dismantle the Master's house' (Nayak, 2014). Kimberley Williams Crenshaw (1989; 1991), using the metaphor of intersecting streets, elaborated upon the concept by presenting it as an approach and a way of framing interactions (Hancock, 2016, p. 32). Additionally, she emphasised the inadequacy of approaches that tended to separate systems of oppression, isolating and focusing on one, while excluding the others (Carastathis, 2014, p. 304). Patricia Hill Collins (1999) applied intersectionality as an approach in analysis, to critique dominant conceptions of discrimination as well as to advance the argument that women's oppression is a condition influenced by myriad factors beyond just gender. Although earlier references used terms such as 'multiple jeopardies' and 'double-bind' (Hancock 2016, p. 30), they were accurate in their description of challenges facing Black women in the USA. By insisting that the 'personal is political' (Thornham, 2004; Whelehan, 1995) second-wave feminists initiated a concentrated effort to rid society of systemic discrimination by transcending the narrow defines of gender discrimination.

In recent time, intersectionality has been defined as an analytical framework for social justice as well as 'a political orientation, epistemological practice and ontological framework' (Hancock, 2016, p. 32). Other scholars frame it as either social literacy, an idea, and a field of study (Hancock, 2016). In addition to these various definitions are the various 'brands' of intersectionality that are also worthy of attention. These range from representational intersection, strategic intersectionality, intersectional stigma as well as intersectional political consciousness (Hancock, 2016). These various vantage points reveal the robustness of intersectionality as well as its ability to unlock understanding of the marginalised dimensions of varying identities within the social order.

Intersectionality enables a new way of conceptualising 'the relation between systems of oppression which construct our multiple identities and our social locations in hierarchies of privilege and power' (Carastathis, 2014) This intersectional adoption is transformative as it introduces multidimensionalism to feminism and women's experiences specifically. By so

doing, gender is retained as a crucial element in the complex, but parameters expand to integrate emerging social hierarchies in the evolving world. Intersectionality is embraced herein as a critical theoretical contribution to understanding and unlocking women's inequality (McCall, 2015). It presents that all intersection streams are everyday practices that are simultaneously structural, subjective and impacted by social positioning. Davis (2008) presents that 'intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power' (Davis, 2008, p. 68). It therefore is an apt analytical instrument to reveal the cumulative effect of interlocking oppressions which foster the continued oppression of women in society.

I concur with Hancock (2016) regarding the positioning of intersectionality as a two-fold intellectual project – to provide understanding of the relationship between categories and crucially, as a project to render visible and remediable previously invisible, unaddressed material effects of the socio-political location of Black women. Intersectionality is applied in this study as an analytical tool to theorise oppression and discrimination as it applies to childfree women, whose erasure is at the core of this research. Acknowledging that it pivots on the three axes of complexity, identity and power, intersectionality permits a multi-layered interrogation of the subject matter. It is applied in two ways. Firstly, to refer to the social structures that privilege some groups (mothers) and disadvantage others (e.g. black, childfree) and secondly, to refer to the ways that identities come together within one's lived experiences with privilege and oppression (e.g. middle classness and being childfree).

By addressing the oppression and discrimination of black professional women who are childfree, this study conceptualises and presents their multiple and complex identities in intersecting ways. Analysing the structural relationship between the childfree and other women, inevitably leads to categorisation. This is a useful outcome as 'the categorical approach focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups [wherein] the subject is multi-group, and the method is systematically comparative' (McCall, 2005, p. 1786). In this instance, the Black Childfree Professional (BCFP) who belongs to the various groups based on race, gender, class and parental status is compared and contrasted with others in ways that *problematically* stigmatise and antagonise her. The complexity that emerges from this comparative, multi-pronged and categorical study, is managed by 'what at first appears to be a reductionist process— reducing the analysis to one or two between-group relationships at

a time—but what in the end is a synthetic and holistic process that brings the various pieces of the analysis together' (McCall, 2005, p. 1787). The final analysis presents a crucial and integrated vision which intends to advance reproductive justice as well as expansion of social formations that transcend differences.

The terms complex, complexity, and complexities are central in key texts on intersectionality, although no single text focuses on complexity as such. For example, the back cover of bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) records that; 'Feminists have not succeeded in creating a mass movement against sexual oppression because the very foundation of women's liberation has, until now, not accounted for the complexity and diversity of female experience.' In an effort to address and demystify complexity, McCall (2005) offers three approaches for consideration: *anticategorical* complexity because it is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories; *intercategorical* complexity which requires the documentation of relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions; *intracategorical* complexity which falls conceptually in the middle of the continuum between the first approach, which rejects categories, and the third approach, which uses them strategically McCall (2005, p. 1773). McCall's (2005, p. 1780) intracategorical approach to complexity 'successfully integrates both theoretical and empirical studies …. [therefore] inaugurating the study of intersectionality'.

The specification of feminists of colour is crucial for embracing various perspectives and experiences of women across categories, as well as responding to the critique that 'gender-based and race-based research [fails] to account for lived experiences at neglected points of intersection' (McCall, 2005, p. 1780), as is often the case with the exclusion of the black female experience. By attacking the material inequalities rooted in relationships that are defined by race, class, sexuality and gender, intersectionality deconstructs the antagonistic assumptions inherent in these categories in ways that contribute to the possibility of positive social change. Citing Scott (1986), McCall (2005, p. 1775-76) upholds that 'the introduction of gender as an analytical category, feminism as a theoretical perspective, and male dominance as a major social institution [is] necessary to counter the tendency toward neglecting and misrepresenting women's experiences'.

By drawing on intersectionality, this project considers ways in which narrative can reveal previously-ignored complexities and avoid generalisations and essentialisms. This project

deploys life-history narrative as both methodology and phenomenon. It combines the potential of intersectionality with narrative interpretation to problematise the erasure of black women who are childfree. Underlining the usefulness of narratives, McCall (2005) posits that they help deconstruct complexity by taking as their subject an individual or an individual's experience and extrapolating illustratively to the broader social location embodied by that individual. By so doing, narratives integrate new groups, such as the childfree, for they are 'named and defined in the process of deconstructing the original dimensions of the master category' (McCall, 2005, p. 1781). In this instance, mother may be considered as such a master category. The narrative approach is accommodated within the paradigm of intersectionality and presents an opportunity to not only specify, identify and name the childfree but challenge their erasure as well.

The intersection of identities takes place through the articulation of a single dimension of each category (McCall, 2005, p. 1781). Therefore, a black female professional who is childfree is placed at the intersection of various identities – race, class, gender, maternal, sexual, etc. and her lived experience must be examined with a multiple lens. McCall (2005, p. 1785) cites Nakano (2002) as 'advocating for a greater emphasis on relationality in studies of intersectionality, [so that] scholars can treat race and gender categories as 'anchor' points—though these points are not static'. Whilst the suggestion of a focus on racism and sexism may have been cogent at the time, it does not accommodate all other categories, as referenced above and has the possibility of falling into the single-category gap which Audre Lorde refuted, that there is no single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives (Olson, 1998). It is clear that 'no single dimension of overall inequality can adequately describe the full structure of intersecting and conflicting dimensions of inequality' (McCall, 2005, p. 1791) therefore an approach that derives from complexity-deconstruction may deliver greater analytical impact. Hancock (2016, p. 196) suggests there is a second intellectual project of intersectionality, one that focusses on 'reshaping the relationships among and between categories of difference'. In tandem with this suggestion, the construct of intersectionality may benefit from an expansion of its definitions to integrate pronatalism as another axis of oppression and subordination for women in society. This integration may expand upon what I term the 'micro-tributaries of exclusion' which run into the wider ocean of discrimination and exclusion of the childfree. Rather than viewing the experiences of Black women as racism plus sexism, an expanded view on intersectionality will enrich the analysis of how a convergence of myriad social exclusionary forces shapes the unique lived experiences of Black women who are childfree.

2.5 Identity Theory

Identity theory posits that the salience of identity shapes individual behaviour and experience (Stryker, 1980). Therefore, identity cannot be viewed in isolation from its relationship with power (McQueen, 2016, p. 84). Identities have a depth and durability that are crucial to social beings and can advance the feminist goal of radical social change. Consequently, some key questions arise, such as: How then does the self-identifying childfree woman behave in society? How does she integrate her childfree status into other role-vignettes as daughter, worker, woman, and so on?

Examining the experiences of the black, childfree and professional women in selected South African workplaces, constitutes an active challenge to the socially constructed centrality of motherhood in feminine identity. The equating of motherhood to womanhood is problematic as it erases those who, like the childfree, choose outside these constructed norms. Motherhood as experienced in black culture[17] especially, remains complicit with a certain brand of sexism that views femaleness as irrevocably coupled with motherhood. It is problematic that motherhood is enmeshed with ideas of feminine identity (Chodorow cited in Arendell, 2000) because not all women are mothers (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008; Gillespie, 2000; 2003; Rovi, 1994; Somers, 1993).

The present study was undertaken to investigate the erasure of black female professionals who are childfree, a community of individuals who embrace the term childfree as an identity marker for themselves. I establish that childfreeness is an intricate construction informed by a complex choice architecture that is neither linear nor uncontested. It is a conscious, communicative vocalisation of identity - an identity that is culturally sited as a resistance to pronatalism. Therefore, this project unravels how the childfree identity is constituted through discourse and how the lived-practice of the childfree occurs within the auspices of discriminatory intersectional forces. It acknowledges how identity politics, that mode of organizing which is intimately linked to one's identity (as a woman, as childfree, or black person, for example), could render individuals peculiarly vulnerable to various *–isms* including unfair practices, injustices, stereotyping, erasure and/or (mis)appropriation of one's identity. A stable and

[17] The author acknowledges this as a generic term used for convenience. Black culture is very diverse even within a single linguistic or ethnic group.

recognisable identity is crucial for social subjects, such as the childfree, who must resist marginalisation and oppression.

This research challenges the dominant pronatalist narrative that presents women as purely reproductive entities, and problematises the practice that labels as deviant, those behaviours that do not conform to a view of womanhood-as-motherhood. An unreflective politic is confining, and thus through an instructive examination of identity theory, this work challenges why women who do not mother are subjected to discriminatory ideologies and dominant discourses of motherhood. It is improper to simply apply a child-referent narrative to evaluate all women. Due to unrelenting intolerance, the lives of the childfree are oriented to negotiating a world hostile to their basic sense of self (McQueen, 2016, p. 81). These women are regarded as 'other' to an accepted/expected female norm (Letherby, 2002) and are therefore subsequently denied a recognisable position in the world (McQueen, 2016, p. 81). However possible the choice, forgoing motherhood remains a freedom which women cannot exercise without being deemed as either irresponsible towards themselves and towards society (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011). One argues that women have agency, (which includes and spreads beyond their reproductive choices) and therefore alternative identity constructs are required, ones that expand the existent narrow child-centric parameters and disentangle femininity from motherhood.

Gillespie (2000) argues that part of the hegemonic pronatalism is a dominant motherhood discourse which, in Western culture, has come to be understood as an inherent, natural, fulfilling practice which is central to feminine identity. Women are socialised by prevailing discourses produced through psychological, medical, social, political and religious institutions, to believe that only through motherhood can they be truly fulfilled, and gain purpose and meaning in their lives (Gillespie, 2000; Gotlib, 2016) in opposition to constructions of motherhood.

Dominant constructions of motherhood situated within society are recognised by women who adopt them as standards against which to understand, assess and measure their own experiences and to construct their own ideas (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). In pronatalist settings, womanhood and femininity are so strongly associated with motherhood and maternity that the meanings associated with childfree women are often constructed in opposition to constructions of femininity. The pervasive political and social climate of pronatalism and emphasis on

motherhood often prevents voluntary childlessness from emerging as an alternative cultural discourse and practice (Carey, Graham, Shelley & Taket, 2009). Within this setting, childfree women, by not subscribing or succumbing to the motherhood mandate, pose a challenge to the dominant perceptions of female identity and femininity and are resultantly viewed as deviant.

Motherhood is associated with mature adulthood, implying that women who reject motherhood have not reached full maturity and are viewed as infantile, immature and childlike (Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Letherby, 2002; Letherby & Williams, 1999). Park (2002) and Letherby (2002) argue that the stigma and negative perceptions of the voluntarily childless are derived from social contexts that continue to be strongly pronatalist. According to the essentialist view, women have a natural, universal instinct to reproduce, which childless women, by implication, lack. This suggests that women who are not mothers are not 'real' women (Hird & Abshoff, 2000). Voluntarily childless women are stigmatised as morally deviant (Letherby, 2002; Park, 2002) as their lack of desire to mother contravenes constructions of femininity, nurturing and self-sacrifice associated with motherhood (Carey et al., 2009).

Motherhood and non-motherhood are carried out in both private and public spheres. Dominant discourses, therefore, profoundly affect women's experiences in both a public and private sense, affecting their social interactions and experiences, as well as their individual attitudes, experiences and emotional responses (Carey et al., 2009). Feminist approaches to childless women accept that 'women' are socially constructed, but also insist that, before socialisation, there is a body, which would seem to direct socialisation in distinct directions. Which is why, when women's identity is located in their ability to procreate, childless women are frequently represented as unnatural deviants (Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Moore, 2014). By committing to other pursuits and rejecting motherhood, childfree women are often constructed as unfeminine and/or suffering from a psychopathology (Hird & Abshoff, 2000). Women without children are still outsiders in pronatalist societies, resulting in their ongoing negative stereotyping as selfish and deviant, and their portrayal as aberrant, immature, and unfeminine (Basten, 2009; Gillespie, 2000; Letherby, 2002; Mamabolo et al., 2006).

By extracting the childfree from the un-stratified grouping of non-mothers, this study is as purposive as it is political; purposive in order to draw attention to the fallacy of homogeneity of non-mothers and political by placing under scrutiny definitions of female identity and expected gender performativity (Butler, 1988). The fallacy that a woman who performs her femininity within the parameters set for a, 'good woman' will reap benefits, unlike those who

step outside those parameters (Steyn, 2014) must continue to be contradicted. I argue there is a plethora of existential forms for woman to assume to express her woman-ness and converge with her feminine identity. Choosing to be childfree is another expression which should not only be acknowledged but integrated into the realms of possibilities through which women can exercise agency. The childfree occupy a space that is not only contested in the realm of female identity but is politicised as well. Going against the grain is in essence a protest action – it contests prevailing hegemonies as well as imposed narratives that do not truly reflect the lived experiences of the black female professional who is childfree. Boundaries of identity must be tested and to the extent required, or demanded by the times, be re-defined as well. The 'storying' of lived experiences of the childfree is a means of challenging dominant discourses with alternative constructs in relation to many aspects of gender and femininity. By promoting reproductive consciousness for everyone, childfreeness can be re-positioned as a positive force for society (Moore, 2014), thus challenging the dominant understandings of gender, reproduction and femininity.

2.6 Gender Theory

West and Zimmerman (1987) are credited with developing the theory of doing gender, firmly locating gender as an outcome of social interaction. Jurik and Siemsen (2009) advanced upon this by presenting the sociology of gender. Feminist gender theory posits that sex and gender are distinct concepts (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015). Gender is accepted as socially constructed (Foster 1999) and emerging through a process of differentiation (Kulish, 2010), whereas sex is linked to biology. Some gender theorists such as Judith Butler among others, contend that categories of male/female and masculinity/femininity have no fixed meaning as they are impacted by context and culture, because at the 'heart of gender is not masculinity or femininity but the difference between them' (Kulish, 2010, p. 233). Therefore, to advance the feminist cause and challenge gender hierarchy, 'we must rely on a feminine voice and a feminine reality that is in some way correlated with the lives of actual women' (Foster, 1999, p. 435). There needs to be recognition that females function within context and it is within such social context that they experience discrimination and inequality. Therefore, any liberatory pursuit should contend with the pressures and intolerances inherent in society

Contemporary gender theory challenges the historical acceptance of a binary relationship as it relates to gender – i.e. male and female – as well as the social practice wherein anyone who does not clearly fit one mould or the other is instantly perceived as an outsider (Johnson, 2006).

There are instances where other cultures such as the Native American Navaho, account for a third category – nadle – which refers to those born with characteristics that could not be clearly marked male or female (Johnson, 2006). Present-day gender theory insists upon the recognition that how people self-identify in terms of sex and gender may not mirror how they are perceived and classified by others. This perspective accommodates gender diversity within both cisgender and transgender categories (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015) and supports the new sub-discipline of the history of sexuality which argues that physiological and anatomical differences between the sexes, once thought to be matters of objective knowledge, are always interpreted (Kulish, 2010). Therefore, in order to be in synch with existing and evolving gender theory, scholars are encouraged to consider the fluidity and complexity inherent in gender identity, as well as, distinguish between sex and gender by expressly measuring 'both self-identified gender and how others perceive the respondent' (Westbrook and Saperstein, 2015, p. 544).

This viewpoint is critical as it challenges the binary categories of gender and normality (Kulish, 2010, p. 237) by acknowledging sex and gender fluidity as well as diversity beyond traditional categories. It also problematises cisnormativity; the assumption that everyone is cisgender (i.e. that the sex they are born with matches their gender and stays fixed over time). Within the realm of contemporary gender theory, identities and sexual practices are not always congruent; one's sexed body does not necessarily determine one's identity or sexual identity as much as one's gendered identity might not match one's gendered practices (Foster, 1999, p. 437). Failure to develop such sensibilities may constitute erasure of the lived experiences of those individuals for whom there is 'misalignment' between their sex and their gender. If social structures of gender are inseparable from other axes of domination and subordination (Foster, 1999) it becomes even more pressing to cognitively engage with how feminism can catalyse the emergence of a new social order, one that accommodates gender variance in ways that are inclusive and celebratory of diversity.

Contemporary feminists have expanded the concept of gender beyond the male-female dichotomy by problematising the reinforcement of patriarchal gender relations and advocating for a feminist liberation that promotes a vision of social change that takes into account intersectionality of various oppressions women experience. Judith Butler (1990) suggests a migration away from gender altogether to the adoption of a 'strategy to denaturalize and resignify bodily categories…. [through] a set of parodic practices based in a performative

theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame' (Butler, 1990, p. xii). By so proposing, Butler suggests this may liberate women from traditional constraints.

Patricia Hill Collins (1999, p. 263) explains that 'viewing gender within a logic of intersectionality redefines it as a constellation of ideas and social practices that are historically situated within and that mutually construct multiple systems of oppression'. Therefore, an assessment of the lived experiences of black childfree women therefore must reveal how childfree women self-identify as well as reflect on the convergence and impact of other intersectional elements beyond gender and maternity.

2.7 Critical Diversity Theory

> 'A society which makes provision for participation in its good for all members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is insofar democratic.'
> -John Dewey, Education & Democracy, 1916

Critical Diversity Theory serves as a crucible for Critical Diversity Literacy. It focuses on multiple axes of difference where power dynamics operate to create the centres and margins of gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, age, etc. as well as their varying intersections (Steyn, 2010). Applying intersectionality to diversity reveals not only the constructions of difference that impact individuals, organisations and society, it also 'moves beyond merely tolerating or assimilating differences into dominant practices' (Steyn, 2010, pp. 18-19). This premise insists upon transformation at a profound, foundational level so as to unlock truly substantive change rather than superficial adjustments.

Diversity is a recent domain of research emanating mainly from the United States, wherein demographic developments prompted business leaders to go beyond a passive tolerance for diversity and to actively support and stimulate heterogeneity instead (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003). There are several definitions of the concept of diversity, ranging from 'people with different ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, age, religion and social class' (Carter, Kepner, Shaw & Woodson, 1982, p. 49) to referring to practically all categories of difference. There is tension in anchoring such definition, with some scholars advocating a narrow definition restricted to cultural categories such as gender and race, whereas those in favour of a broad

definition argue that diversity encompasses all the possible ways people can differ (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003). Consequently, in addition to race and gender, new dimensions of difference, such as age, body size, value orientation, etc. are included, so that diversity now serves as 'an umbrella concept under which any individual characteristic could be subsumed, diminishing the risk of inter-group conflict between the majority and minorities' (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop & Nkomo, 2010, p. 12). Equally important is to contest what is perceived as normal because it is actually the Other that becomes the object of study and that is discursively constituted as marginal, from the vantage point of a dominant identity (Zanoni et al., 2010) Whilst the narrow definition (based on race and gender) is indeed limited, the broader definition also falls short of including reproductive difference by accommodating the childfree – who are indeed *different* (not inferior nor superior) from other women on account of their reproductive choice.

As diversity scholarship became entrenched, several approaches to inquiry emerged, ranging from post-structuralism, postcolonial, through to cultural and institutional theory as well as labour process theory. Despite these disparate focal points, the examinations converge upon a shared understanding that 'diversity, as well as the socio-demographic identities subsumed under the term [are] socially-produced in on-going, context specific processes. Whereas early studies on diversity referenced a sociological paradigm to deepen understanding of how gender and race/ethnicity operated as principles of organizing, later studies 'mostly drew on a social psychological paradigm to understand the specific constraints faced by women and ethnic/racial minorities in the workplace' (Zanoni et al., 2010, p. 11).

Many studies of diversity are focussed on organisations, and have examined the working experiences of minority groups of phenomena such as the glass-ceiling effect (e.g. Cox Jr & Nkomo, 1990; Wirth, 2001), wage differences (Blau & Beller, 1988), and segregation (e.g. Anker, 1998; Ibarra, 1995). Literature examining the impact of pronatalist/maternalistic discourses on the childfree in the workplace (who are in reality a diverse constituency) was not found. It is important that focus is extended to include workplace experiences of the childfree so as to assess the extent to which organisational discourses and structures are amenable or inimical to diversity in its widest form.

Two strands of inquiry into diversity are noted. Some scholars study it from a moral-ethical perspective dimension, and others are interested in the effect of diversity on organisations from

a more economic perspective (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003). The moral-ethical school of thought adheres to three categories – *primary and secondary characteristics* (gender and race would be primary and elements such as education, religion, marital status would be secondary); *variable and invariable characteristics* (gender, ethnicity and race would be invariable and religion, socio-economic background, marital status would be variable), as well as *visible and invisible characteristics* (race, ethnicity, gender and age are considered visible sources of diversity, and education, function, experience in the organisation would be classified as invisible) (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003).

Diversity viewed from the economic perspective focuses on the economic impact of this phenomenon (positive or negative) on an organisation's success. This perspective focuses on understanding the impact of diversity as a characteristic of social systems and to identify the conditions under which the potential advantages of diversity can best be exploited while at the same time minimising its negative effects (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003). However progressive these categorisations and characterisations are, they are mute on the experiences of black professional women who are childfree and their impact within organisations.

This project adopts Critical Diversity Theory as the organising discipline through which to examine the subject of childfreeness. Steyn (2010, p. 53) writes that Critical Diversity Theory,

> focuses on multiple axes of difference where power dynamics operate to create the centres and margins of gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, age etc., as well as their varying intersections…. Such an orientation entails a radical look at the constructions of difference which underpin institutional culture and interpersonal interactions, and moves beyond merely tolerating, or assimilating differences into dominant practices, which is the case for some approaches to diversity.

This theory enables the radical questioning of some of South Africa's cherished practices and institutions such as childbearing, marriage, organisations and the nuclear family. It explores the structural impediments to progress and suggests that concerted and determined effort be applied at multiple levels in society to migrate diversity from the periphery to the centre. By so doing, there could be increased impetus to dispensing of the embedded and disabling exclusions which currently prevail (Lumby & Morrison, 2010). By synthesising key social theory tenets as they relate to otherness, difference and, 'outsider' status (Steyn, 2015), critical

diversity literacy offers new dimensions that enrich the discourse as well as advance scholarship on diversity. This expansion enables the *situating* of childfreeness, not as an undesirable condition, but as one of many diverse life experiences open to women. By reflecting the intersectional challenges and multiple oppressions that black female childfree professionals contend with on the basis of their gender, race and reproductive status, one is able to theorise co-existence and identity beyond the staples of race, maternity and sexuality.

South Africa as a nation in transition and South Africans as evolving citizens have acknowledged differences and diversity in race, in sexuality, in gender, but not so much on reproductive choices or identities that stem from reproductive choices. The following observation by former Constitutional Judge, Pius Langa, is pertinent in explaining the choice of Critical Diversity Theory as the purview through which other theories such as feminist theories for example, are located:

> The acknowledgment and acceptance of difference is particularly important in our country where for centuries group membership based on supposed biological characteristics such as skin colour has been the express basis of advantage and disadvantage. South Africans come in all shapes and sizes. The development of an active rather than a purely formal sense of enjoying a common citizenship depends on recognising and accepting people with all their differences, as they are. The Constitution thus acknowledges the variability of human beings (genetic and socio-cultural), affirms the right to be different, and celebrates the diversity of the nation (Steyn, 2010, p. 51).

It is difficult to ascertain if one of the rights, 'to be different' alluded to by the former Constitutional Judge, includes childfreeness, but it is reasonable to assume that it does not. The comment highlights not only diversity, but also suggests intersectionalities of and in diversity. The observation also calls for vigilance in naming, celebrating and practising diverse forms of citizenship. Michel Foucault (1975) challenged what he called 'regimes of truth' that are upheld and perpetuated within the context of power relations in society, which by extension have an impact on one's subjectivity, as well as access to citizenship or inclusion as a citizen. In his view, power is everywhere and comes from anywhere (Foucault, 1998) and is an active process constantly at work in ways that impact how knowledge creation and sense-making is made manifest in the world. Foucault (1976) cautions against the status of those who are charged with saying what is true and also calls attention to how 'newly revealed subjectivities

can surface from social oppression once a concerted move is made to narrate and negotiate them into discourse' (Davies, 2018, p. 5). Implied herein is an inherent optimism – that subordinated subjects can escape marginalisation through a concerted effort that coalesces their resistance.

If we understand citizenship as 'full membership of a community' it is critical to expand our interrogation to include those 'subjective experiences of participation and belonging' (Roseneil, 2013, p. 3). Ongoing diversity scholarship must concern itself with the empowerment of those who are culturally marginalised and advance a politically emancipatory and humanising culture of participation and social action. Therefore, the pursuit of citizenship within a feminist realm, should be evaluated within an analytical context alive to the exclusionary practices of dominant discourses, as well as the 'practices of marginalisation, misrecognition and oppression that continue to condition lives' (Roseneil, 2013, p. 1). This will set the stage for a head-on confrontation with social structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). Additionally, this will not only acknowledge but embed agency for those who are considered 'different' and advance their pursuit of a future state wherein their belonging is not predicated on their maternal/parental status.

This study's interrogation of the social situating of the childfree and related practices was enabled by Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL), 'a way of perceiving and responding to the social climate and prevalent structures of oppression' (Steyn, 2010, p. 55). CDL is a multi-pronged tool used to assess the presence of diversity literacy through the following evaluative criteria 1) a recognition of the symbolic and material value of hegemonic identities, such as whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, ablebodiedness, middle-classness, etc.; 2) analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other; 3) the definition of oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems rather than a historical legacy; 4) an understanding that social identities are learned and an outcome of social practices; 5) the possession of a diversity grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of race, racism, and antiracism, and the parallel concepts employed in the analysis of other forms of oppression; 6) the ability to translate (interpret) coded hegemonic practices; 7) an analysis of the ways that diversity hierarchies and institutionalised oppressions are mediated by class inequality and inflected in specific social contexts; and 8) an engagement with issues of transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening democracy/social

justice in all levels of social organisation (Steyn, 2010, p. 20). By simultaneously interrogating various and privileged structures of oppression, Critical Diversity Literacy offers not just a critique on mono-dimensional examination of difference, but also advocates for an intersectional approach to the study of difference and privilege, thus setting a new agenda for grappling with, and integrating difference in everyday life. For this particular study, the criteria for diversity literacy as outlined above have been deployed not only in the analysis of oppression experienced by black, female professionals who are childfree but also to surface the debilitating impact of motherhood discourse.

CDL argues for the possession of skills and capacities specific to deal with difference. Such capacities for engaging difference could advance South Africa's ability to live up to the dictates in our Constitution as it relates to diversity. Stated therein is a commitment to the creation of a non-racial, non-sexist, non-discriminatory society where all people can acknowledge each other's differences, while at the same time live in peace and harmony (Naidoo & De Beer, 2016). This assertion may be challenged in that the recognition of difference does not necessarily equate to the embrace of difference, much as upholding diversity does not necessarily translate to inclusivity. Nonetheless, CDL is the most suitable instrument to help reveal and study the underlying causes and methods of the oppression visited upon childfree women as well as contextualising those experiences in ways that not only challenge the purveyors of pronatalism but also empower the childfree. The oppressive abilities of the motherhood discourses, discriminatory social practices and stigmatisation must be taken into account. The compatibility of the concept of CDL is also informed by its embrace of a broad social context that includes institutional/structural arrangements, recognition of the intersection of multiple identities and integration of an explicit social justice orientation. Even though, as already stated, the studies of diversity in South Africa tend to show a bias towards organisational formations (i.e. the workplace) this does not limit nor diminish their usefulness for scholarship of oppression and the intolerance of difference in society as a whole.

The intersectional identities that are inherent in the topic understudy – blackness, femaleness, childfreeness, professionalism – can best be investigated through a theory and reading practice that acknowledges the complexity of oppressions and how subverting those same oppressions requires a complex reading. The call that people at all levels of society must, 'become literate to the issues of oppression and discrimination in all guises, become intolerant of injustice in the status quo, [particularly] for those who hold positional power' (Steyn, 2014, p. 52)

resonates with the ultimate objective of locating childfreeness as more than about reproductive choice but ultimately reproductive justice and human dignity.

Rather than reward sameness and demonise difference, this study aligns itself with the creation of diverse epistemological communities. Alison Assiter (1996) defines such communities as constructed upon common values rather than membership in collectives. There must be sustained engagement in discourse on difference to make visible the hidden power dynamics that produce oppression, subjugation and domination based on a politics of identity or difference (Naidoo & De Beer, 2016). Likewise, the embrace of the childfree, especially by other women should be premised on a shared understanding, as well as collective rejection of inequality. As Johnson (2006, p. 16) notes, 'the trouble around diversity isn't just that people differ from one another. The trouble is produced by a world organized in ways that encourage people to use difference to include or exclude, reward or punish, credit or discredit, elevate or oppress, value or devalue, leave alone or harass'. Deliberately locating this study in the realm of diversity is thus, a 'defiant political gesture [which] confronts the realities of choice and location' (hooks, 1989, p. 203). It presents the choice and experiences of the childfree not as isolated acts, but rather as acts aimed at up-ending a dogma and expressing differential power and positional relations. The childfree live out experiences that constitute subversion at the margins. A more inclusive and potentially emancipatory premise is required for the (re)presentation of broader identities, roles, motivations, hopes and dreams for all women, the childfree included.

South Africa is a racialised society whose frictions often default to race as the reason for any unequal treatment and emerging social tensions. Within such an environment, race becomes a significant concept in relation to other issues of diversity. Writing in *Diversity: Negotiating difference in Christian communities*, Naidoo and De Beer (2016) reference Sourdine (2010) who asserts that race represents 'the generative mechanism through which other forms of difference are constituted, reconstituted, reinforced or gain expression' (Naidoo and De Beer, 2016, p. 2). This assertion whilst it advances other nodes of diversity beyond race, its parameters exclude reproductive status. Childfreeness is not just another aspect of diversity, but is also a magnet for hostility towards the childfree by those who have a tendency for homogeneity or intolerance for difference. It is important that definitions of diversity, embrace this as well. Given South Africa's racialized past, there is a need to develop a critical theory of diversity wherein diversity is reframed within the context of the on-going social and

institutional transformation in the country (Naidoo and De Beer, 2016). The social divisions in South Africa not with-standing, engaging issues of difference in mutually affirming ways is necessary if we are to have a future together (Steyn, 2010).

A focus on the childfree highlights not only the differences between women but also reveals the cracks in the community of women, showing how mothers tend to 'Other' the childfree more naturally than embracing them. It is problematic to locate difference outside identity or in the chasms between identities, because this fosters fragmentation of the self-identity. What is required is to reverse separation and categorisation by embracing the 'traditional metaphysical understanding of identity as unity' (McCall, 2005, p. 8). This may foster a community of women not fractured by separateness and singularity but united in shared experiences of subordination, power and diversity. As the scholarship of diversity evolves, it must foster inclusion. Therefore, the image of women must extend beyond mothers and include those who are childfree as well, so that the latter may take their place in 'the rainbow spectrum of women' (Steinem, 1998, p. 166). By fighting the erasure of the childfree, this project propositions an expansion of the definition dimensions of diversity as well as a re-conceptualisation of diversity within society at large. By engaging with reproductive status as well its difference and diverse manifestations, the intention is to bring childfreeness into dialogue with critical diversity theory and ultimately reproductive justice.

2.8 The Question of Affect

This project integrates theories of affect which suggest that through comprehending the performance of emotions, we deepen our understanding of social life in history. Secondly, this approach helped me reflexively explore my position given the close link between what I feel about being a black childfree professional woman and how I cognitively process this identity. This approach is in essence, an expression of a view highlighted by Sarah Ahmed (2004), that felt or affective dimensions contribute towards understanding meanings of individual lives as well as how those lives are positioned in wider society. I put forward my affective experiences as a black childfree professional woman with the understanding that there is nothing like 'dispassionate engagement' (Cromby, 2012, p. 89).

The concept of 'affect' was hardly used in social studies until the early 1990s. It has since become a powerful tool for increased personal and political accountability. To one set of

scholars, it institutes the recasting of relations between the social and subjective, whilst for another set, the concept presents an opportunity for inter-disciplinarity between the natural sciences and social sciences. Affect, as a concept, can be traced back to early theorists such as Descartes, Rousseau, Deleuze and Spinoza (Clough, 2007). In the Descartian era, the mind was initially seen as a field of forces with desires impinging upon one another (Koivunen, 2010). Spinoza then offered a counterpoint to Descartes by challenging the traditional polarisation between reason and affect, and more importantly, he did not gender such distinction. For Spinoza, affect was different and distinct from emotions (Brown & Stenner, 2001). Contemporary theorists such as Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (2001, p. 3) have shown the pointlessness and impossibility of thinking of the body and mind as separate entities. The two scholars write, 'the practices of thinking are not separate from the realms of the body, but are implicated in the passions, emotions and materiality that are associated with lived embodiment' (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001, p. 3).

Learning from Barbara Rosenwien's concept of 'emotional communities' (Athanasiou et al., 2008, p. 9) and understanding how feelings govern such formations was a crucial tool in this research. Expressions, affective bonds, practices of various forms of sociability and sensibility are key characteristics of such communities. On account of such understanding, key questions arise such as: Do black, female childfree professionals constitute a community and if so, which kind? Are they, like a nation, solidified, imaged and imagined through the normativity of emotional bonds? How do such emotional bonds configure their identity and affect their subjectivity, etc.? In response to these questions, analysis is anticipated to advance society.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the treatment of motherhood/childfreeness through various theoretical positions as well as (where evident), revealed the tensions within each theoretical articulation. It spanned the genesis and evolution of feminism, motherhood perspectives within each feminist wave, the concept of intersectionality and gender theory – all of which reveal unique perspectives towards motherhood and non-motherhood. CDL as a reading practice enables the reflection on motherhood/childfreeness in an intersectional manner. Cumulatively, these theoretical perspectives reinforce the reality of interlocking oppressions as well as specifically highlight the pervasiveness of the motherhood mandate and the consequential erasure of the childfree.

It is apparent that the pronatalist social order remains problematic and that the childfree have not escaped stigma and discrimination over time. In order to advance our understanding of the community of black, professional women who are childfree in South Africa, it is crucial that they are extricated from oppressive motherhood discourses and discriminatory social structures. They must be reflected as a diverse, but no-less important sector of the community of women. The childfree provide a unique window into historical, social and cultural examination and accordingly, scholarship should integrate their experiences and amplify their voices. This vantage point can also provide a useful framework for the creation of a society within which the BCFP may have extended to them, constitutional and legal protection from discrimination and stigmatisation. New knowledge may be achieved through paying attention to the different and unique aspects of the experiences of childfree women.

CHAPTER 3
THE CHILDFREE CHOICE: GENESIS, EVOLUTION AND MEANING

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical framework through which the concept of childfreeness is examined. The social positioning of motherhood in general, and childfreeness in particular, was analysed through the prisms of feminism and diversity. The aim of this chapter is to provide a closer examination of the subject of childfreeness. To explore the origin, evolution, complexity as well as social meaning attached to this reproductive choice.

3.2 The childfree choice: attitudes and trends

This chapter examines the genesis of childfreeness (Ireland, 1993; Morell, 1994; Somers, 1993; Veevers, 1973), its prevalence (Abma & Martinez, 2006; Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Houseknecht, 1987), the choice and related motives (Burkett, 2000; Carmichael & Whittaker, 2007; Gillespie, 1999, 2000, 2003; Griffin, 1996; Hird & Abshoff, 2000; Hollos & Larsen 2008; Jacobson, 2001; Jacobson & Heaton, 1991; Kulish, 2010; Landa, 1990; Lee & Zvonkovic, 2014; Somers, 1993), 'the pull' of, and 'the push' away from motherhood (Gillespie, 1999; Somers, 1993), the value of children, the stigmatisation and stereotyping of the childfree (Kaklamanidou, 2018; Morell, 1994; Veevers, 1980) as well as the etymology of the names used to refer to those who have chosen lives without children.

Motherhood is entrenched in society as the anchor of female gender identity (Gillespie, 2003). Despite this pronatalist view that equates child-bearing with womanhood, maturity and normality, some women are forgoing reproduction (Evenson & Simon, 2005; Hagestad & McCall, 2007; Miettinen & Szalma, 2014; Morell, 1994; Portanti & Whitworth, 2009). Emerging studies indicate that more women in Europe and North America are rejecting motherhood (Bartlett, 1995; Baker, 2012; Campbell, 1985; Morell, 1994). Even though some researchers assert that women who do not wish to have children can now freely articulate their preferences, leading to higher levels of voluntary childlessness (Avison & Furnham, 2015; Hakim, 2000; Miettinen & Szalma, 2014; Moore, 2014), there are no studies in South Africa to support or refute this assertion. Some studies in the United States of America insinuate that public attitudes toward childlessness have become somewhat more accepting. In a 2007 Pew

Research Centre survey, 41% of adults said children were very important for a successful marriage, a decline from 65% who had said so in 1990.
Studies focussing on the childfree in South Africa could not be found. However, a report by Statistics South Africa, entitled Exploring childlessness and delayed childbearing in South Africa, 2001-2011, provided useful insight on childbirth and childlessness in South Africa. Be that as it may, it would not be overreaching to infer that a higher prevalence of traditional family values in a country such as South Africa is related to a lower likelihood of individuals considering childfreeness to be their ideal family form (Miettinen & Szalma, 2014).

When exercising this reproductive choice to be childfree, women's actions are however viewed, evaluated and legitimised differently from that of men. This disparity in treatment entrenches gender performativity (Butler, 1990; Kelan, 2009; Kimmel, 2008) revealing the embedded and biased belief that reproduction is a performative requirement of women only, one that occurs under the unrelenting male gaze (Berger, 1972). Lunneborg (2000) and Veevers (1980) are often accused of endorsing the childfree lifestyle. This study aims not to elevate this choice nor denigrate motherhood, but to offer a fresh perspective on the experiences of the black female professional who chooses a life without children. Consequently, the population of the black, childfree and professional women under study is intended to offer a unique point of entry that denounces the oft-lauded view that motherhood is the only legitimate gateway to womanhood.

Similar to Gillespie's (2003) study which looked at childfree women regardless of whether they were couples or not, I also disregarded the relationship status of my studied narrators. Marriage has been found to be an inappropriate criterion for voluntary childlessness, as it anchors a heteronormative understanding of reproductive choice. Marriage is also not a reality for all childfree people, as only 53% of the childfree were found to be married in previous studies (Abma & Martinez, 2006; Houseknecht, 1987; Moore, 2014).

3.2.1 Choice and practice

Childlessness has remained an understudied topic (Keizer, 2011). References to voluntary childlessness and its undesirability can be traced back to as early as 1915, when it was cited as the root cause of divorce alongside alcoholism and non-ownership of homes (Moore, 2014). This view later morphed into the eugenics era during which voluntary childlessness was either admonished or openly discouraged and presented as a threat to population growth (Moore,

2014). Prior to 1968, childlessness in literature was referenced as synonymous with sterility (Somers, 1993). Earlier research suggests that the zero-population growth (ZPG) movement helped legitimise the choice never to have children as an environmental imperative (Moore, 2014). In 1972, the National Organization for Non-Parents (NON) in the US was formed and the first use of the term, 'childfree,' to describe a person with no desire or plans to have children is traced back to this organisation. 'None is fun', was the slogan of NON, intended to promote non-parenthood as a respectable option. All of the members were committed to childfreeness as a way of creating a de-stigmatised and non-oppressive social space.

The term childfree was intended to contrast 'childfree' and 'childless' as well as connect people who chose childlessness (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008; Moore, 2014). Over time, the terms used to refer to those without children have evolved, ranging from voluntarily childless (Houseknetch, 1987; Gillespie, 2000; Jeffries & Konnert, 2002), childless by choice (Stewart & Robinson, 1989) to childfree (Jamison, Franzini & Kaplan, 1979; Koropeckyj-Cox, Romano and Moras, 2007). The work of Letherby in *Variations of Childlessness* (2002) interchanges the terms, 'childfree' and 'voluntarily childless' as though they hold the same meaning in society. I argue that the inherent distinction between these terms be upheld. Childfreeness is a reproductive choice made freely and must therefore be decoupled from the 'lack' often implied by the term childless. The act of demarcating the childfree from the childless attacks their erasure as well as discrediting the notion that adults without children occupy a socially ambiguous status and/or are suffering (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1998; Park, 2002; Pelton & Hertlein, 2011). For ideological reasons and consistency, I have, like Pelton and Hertlein (2011) elected to use the term, 'childfree,' in this study to refer to those who are voluntarily without children, and 'childless' will refer to those who desire children but cannot have them (Tessarolo, 2006). The term 'childfree' has been reclaimed and embraced by those who emphasise that childfreeness is, and can be, an active and fulfilling choice (Gillespie, 2003).

The growing childfree female population has been attributed to social changes (Campbell, 1985) such as increased access to contraceptive methods, women's greater role outside the home as well as women's wider participation in the workforce. Additionally, rising feminist consciousness has impacted how women define and practise reproductive freedom (Moore, 2014). Nonetheless, such social changes do not fully account for why in some societies, South Africa included, only a small proportion of women make this childfree choice while the majority continue to become mothers and reject childlessness as an ideal family form

(Miettinen & Szalma 2014). This chapter, in particular, seeks to delve beneath this veneer of social change, to unveil the intersecting, 'isms' (i.e. racism, sexism, pronatalism, classism) that have a bearing on this complex choice, so as to avoid its confinement within the limiting and limited boundaries of heteronormativity, social practice and pronatalist ideology (Oswald, Blume & Marks, 2005).

Socialisation and pronatalist ideologies exert pressure on women to conform to the notion that mothering is central to what it means to be a woman (Russo, 1976). Much as that is the case, it also cannot be negated that 'women exercise agency in deciding to be mothers' (Gillespie, 2003, p. 124). Childfree individuals and couples challenge traditional constructions of 'family' and are indicators of new possibilities of what constitutes 'woman' and 'family'. Scholars, myself included, are still unlocking the reasons why some women reject motherhood and are instead drawn to the appeal of a childfree lifestyle. Being childfree is a complex and conscious choice, one that is a communicative articulation of identity (Moore, 2014), an identity rooted in the disavowal of pronatalism. Those who choose life without children and communicate this choice are often subjected to negative stereotyping and stigmatization, as well as being regarded as psychologically flawed, selfish and deviant, for having adopted an unnatural, unhealthy and unfeminine lifestyle (Gillespie, 2000; Moore, 2014; Veveers, 1980; 2003).

3.2.2 Characteristics of the Childfree

In exploring the relationship between choice and other factors, a 2008 USA study by the Pew Research Centre upheld findings of previous studies that showed a link between higher levels of education and the choice to be childfree, as indicated below.

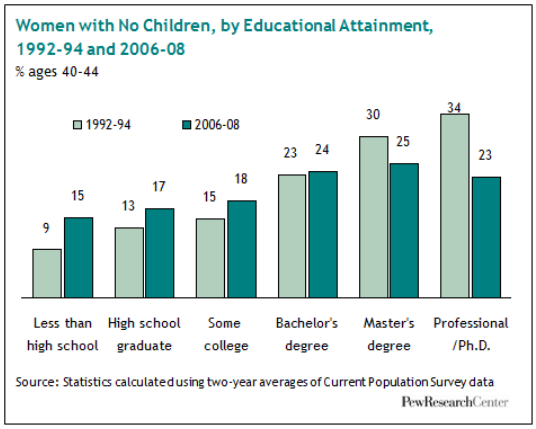

Figure 1: Link between educational attainment and not having children

The table above shows that childlessness was most common among highly educated women. In 2008, 24% of American women in the 40-44 age range with a bachelor's degree had not had a child. Rates were similar for women with a master's degree (25%) and those with a doctorate or a professional degree, such as a medical or legal degree (23%). Among women with some college education, but no degree, 18% were childless compared with 17% for high school graduates and 15% of women without a high school diploma. Thus, the childfree tend to be more educated, and it is perhaps because of this, that they are more likely to be employed in professional and management occupations; more likely to earn relatively high incomes and to live in urban areas. Some scholars have also established that 'childless individuals who have voluntarily opted for a life without children have less traditional values compared to parents and involuntarily childless individuals' (Keizer, 2011, p. 422).

In 2010, research conducted by the Joseph Roundtree Foundation in the United Kingdom, found that highly qualified women were more likely to remain childless. However, career identity did not emerge as central to personal identity or personal fulfilment for the majority of voluntarily childless people. Childfree people were also not found to be self-centred individuals. The absence of children did not necessarily mean the absence of other caring responsibilities. Additionally, the same study by the Joseph Roundtree Foundation found rejection of parenthood was not matched by a rejection of children's place in society.

3.2.3 Different forms of childlessness

It is important to discount an assumed homogeneity among the childless (Umberson & Montez, 2010) because 'taking the diversity among the childless into account not only does justice to social reality, but also advances our understanding of why the childless [and childfree] differ from parents (Keizer, 2011, p. 422). In a 2006 study in the USA, Abma and Martinez (2006) reported that among non-mothers, 42% in the 35-44 age bracket were childfree, 28% involuntarily childless and 30% were postponing child birth. I concede that highlighting this difference is useful. Nonetheless, it is equally important to be mindful that comparing the childfree to parents could have the unintended consequence of entrenching parenthood as the yardstick, whereas it has been established that, 'the intentionally childless are a different group of individuals from the start' (Rovi, 1994, p. 343). Rather than focus on how the childfree differ from parents, we should focus on how the childfree choice, in and of itself, renders the childfree unique.

As stated elsewhere, this study reveals the professional, private and social terrains the childfree negotiate daily. Such contextualisation is important because the politics of location require those who participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces to re-vision (hooks, 1989). In addition to fighting against rendering the 'offending self' invisible (Steyn, 2014) the childfree, I argue, can also be considered agents of a re-imagined black female representation who carry the identity of the group, as well as express and experience social solidarity (Hall, 1997).

3.2.4 Decision- making, motives and the continuum of childfreeness

McAllister and Clarke (1998) point out that few women make an early and final decision about remaining childfree. Past studies suggest there is 'active' and 'passive' decision making, where the active often decide in early childhood that they will be childfree (Gillespie, 2000; Hakim, 2000). Some women may arrive at a childfree choice through ambivalence about motherhood or a clear objective to avoid the motherhood penalty (Baker, 2012; Gillespie, 2003), whilst others become clearer with the passage of time about their wish not to become mothers (Campbell, 1985; Hakim, 2003; Park, 2005). Lunneborg's (2000) study of 30 voluntarily childfree men in USA and Britain found there were two primary types of deciders: the 'early articulator' – the man who was sure he did not want children and the 'postponer' – the man who kept putting off the decision until it was too late to have children.

Whilst some researchers have conceptualised childlessness in terms of a binary distinction between voluntary and involuntary childlessness, others have suggested that ambiguity occurs in many states of being childless and therefore the idea of a continuum is helpful. Given that the intentions of those without children may alter and shift over time, Monach (1993) presents a 'continuum of childlessness' as an organising principle which accommodates the ambivalence in this choice (Campbell, 1985; Gillespie, 2000; 2003). McAllister and Clarke (1998) suggested that such a continuum spans the ranks of those who are certain they do not want children; those who are certain at a point in time having been potential parents; those who accept childlessness having been potential parents; those who are ambivalent; those who have not decided through to those who felt the decision had been taken away from them (Letherby, 2002). The continuum is an advantageous framework as it proves the complexity of the choice and accommodates issues of status, the significance of age, and changes to the experience of non-motherhood (Letherby, 2002).

In addition to the continuum of choice (Monarch, 1993), the paths taken to childfreeness can vary considerably. A focus on voluntarily childless couples by Miettinen and Szalma (2014) presented a dyadic perspective that stitched together a cohesive childless pathway and captured the fluid nature of the process. The work also introduced the notion of childless intentions and ideals (Miettinen & Szalma, 2014). By including men, who tend to be ignored in fertility research or studies of the childfree, Lunneborg (2000) and Lee and Zvonkovic (2014) delivered an additional perspective as many previous studies had focalised women's experience for whom matters of stigmatisation as well as discrimination are well documented (Carroll, 2018; Houseknecht, 1987; Gillespie, 2000; Veevers, 1980). The dedicated focus on the woman (Gillespie, 2003; Hakim, 2000; Tanturri & Mencarini, 2008) is further demonstration of the deep entrenchment of motherhood as an expected deliverable for women in society (Hird & Abshoff, 2000).

A unique feature of Lunnenborg's (2014) study was its focus on how spouses interacted in the decision-making journey, as opposed to previous studies that focused on who had more influence in the decision-making process (Smith & Moen, 2004). Although Lunnenborg's (2014) work is at times challenged because the sample size consisted only of men who already belonged to advocacy groups, the findings are nonetheless significant in increasing our collective knowledge about the community of the childfree, as well as contributing to narrative literature on the childfree. If there is a fault to be found, it is Lunnenborg's (2014) use of the term 'childless' to refer to what this researcher terms 'childfree.'

In a study of 20 married couples, Lee and Zvonkovic (2014) identified three decision-making types prevalent among married couples who are voluntarily childless (i.e. childfree).
These were:

- Mutual early articulator couples: these are people who make up their minds very early on in their lives before coupling, and seldom alter their respective views. In this setting, a partner's desire to have children would be considered 'a deal breaker'.
- Mutual postponer couples: this referred to couples who had assumed they would have children at some future date and when this did not come to pass, they were then consequently childfree. They were often marked by a lack of conviction and adopted a wait and see approach.

- Non-mutual couples: this referred to a mismatch between an early articulator individual and another who has strong convictions to parent. The process is reported as complicated and arduous as each individual had to assess their own position.

Lee and Zvonkovic (2014) also identified 3 phases in the decision-making pathway, which were:

- Agreement: this is the first phase of the decision-making process and most couples are reported as staying in this phase a while before migrating to the other two phases.
- Acceptance: this is the second phase and is marked by acceptance of the decision which then fosters a sense of peace in the couple.
- Closing of the door: this is the third and final stage and is marked by closure, wherein the subject of children fades into the background.

In the same study, Lee and Zvonkovic (2014) also isolated two driving forces that also impact the decision-making process, which are:

- Strength of conviction: couples were found to have various levels of conviction about remaining childfree throughout the decision-making process.
- Importance of relationship: this refers to the couple's desire to remain in relationship with one another as a key factor in their childfreeness.

These types, phases and forces as presented, serve to enrich our understanding of the childfree choice as a pathway rather than an event.

3.2.5 The pull and push of motherhood

Some researchers have established that there is 'pull' and 'push' tension regarding decisions about motherhood. Gillespie (2003) refers to a rejection or push away from motherhood that is, 'a radical departure from hegemonic understandings that to be a woman is linked to motherhood… [the childfree] resist pronatalist cultural imperatives of femininity that conflate woman with mother' (Gillespie, 2003, p. 133).

i) The Pull

Women who actively choose not to have children forgo motherhood in favour of what they regard to be 'the pull or advantages associated with a childfree lifestyle, such as career and enhanced financial position' (Gillespie, 2003, p. 123). Other factors in favour of the pull

towards a childfree lifestyle are increased opportunity and greater autonomy. A 1997/8 study with 269 participants is reported by Gillespie (2003) as citing the following key 'pull' factors for those adamant they would not have children:

- Freedom: this is often associated with wider choices and greater opportunities. Houseknetch (1987) in 29 studies spread over a decade found that freedom from childcare responsibilities as well as greater self-fulfilment and spontaneous mobility were the most frequently cited motives.
- Rewards: Agrillo and Nelini (2008, p. 351) report some women as being motivated by a desire to enjoy the rewards of childlessness.
- Relationship with partner and others: increased intimacy with partners was cited as a driver wherein a 'pure relationship' was based on choice and companionship, rather than the 'ties that bind' such as children and community (Gillespie, 2003, p. 123).
- Trauma: Hird and Abshoff (2000) reported that some childfree couples cited trauma associated with childbirth as a disincentive.
- Change of values: specifically, for Italy, Ongaro (2007) reported a variation of values between regions – the North and wealthier region considered parenting as costly for women.
- Parenting models of partners: Park's (2005) study reported women were also influenced by the parenting models of their partners.

i) Maternal instinct: Park (2005) cites women claiming a lack of maternal instinct and/or disinterest in children.

ii) The Push

There is empirical evidence showing an increasing number of women reject and resist pronatalist cultural imperatives of femininity that conflate woman with mother, highlighting the emergence of a positive female identity separate from motherhood (Gillespie, 2003).
Some women reject not just the conflation of motherhood with feminine identity, but also its association with 'hegemonic notions of femininity' (Gillespie, 2003, p. 123). Voluntary childlessness has arisen as the final female taboo and the increasing rejection of, and push against motherhood is a personal, complex as well as political decision (Kaklamanidou, 2018). As evidenced by the statistics and empirical research quoted so far, this growing presence of women rejecting motherhood presents an opportunity for scholars to re-frame our

understanding of feminine identity. It will also enable us to understand lives without children outside the confines of 'normative motherhood discourses' (Gillespie, 2003, p. 123).

Prevalent factors cited by Gillespie (2003, pp. 130-133) in the rejection or push away from motherhood include:

- Rejection of activities associated with motherhood: such as hard-work, nurturing and caring, which were perceived as unfulfilling and repulsive.
- A sense of loss: loss of independence, free time, energy and most of all, one's identity.
- Gender difference: according to Agrillo and Nelini (2008, p. 350), men reject parenthood because of its perceived sacrifices as well as financial expense involved.

3.3 Pronatalist Views

Pronatalism is presented as an ideology that implies encouragement of all births as conducive to individual, family and social well-being (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008; Park, 2005). Pronatalism operates on several levels: culturally, wherein childbearing and motherhood are perceived as 'natural' and central to a woman's identity; ideologically, when the motherhood mandate becomes a patriotic, ethnic or eugenic obligation; psychologically, when childbearing is identified with the micro level of personal aspirations, emotions and rational (or irrational) decision-making (by women or couples); as well as on the level of population policy, when the state intervenes, directly or indirectly, in an attempt to regulate the dynamics of fertility and to influence its causes and consequences..

Negative attitudes and social evaluations of the childfree emanate from a social environment that continues to be strongly pronatalist. Within this context, childfreeness is regarded as a problematic issue at a personal and social level. In pronatalist societies, there are normative barriers for women to express a desire for zero children (Letherby, 1999; Miettinen et al., 2014). Women who decide to remain childfree form a social group that flows against an established and powerful social norm. As a consequence, they are judged and negatively stereotyped.

Pronatalist cultural discourses establish a template of femininity that perceives motherhood as the cornerstone of adult femininity, placing the role of mothering central to what it means to

be a woman (Russo, 1976; Stavrianos, 2014). Those who choose not to become parents are considered to be behaving in a counter-social manner and to be transgressing traditional constructs of femininity (Gillespie, 2000; Somers, 1993). Even though those choosing a childfree life are still in the minority, this unconventional option places them on a collision path with life-course theorists, who insist upon parenthood as a crucial rite of passage, a symbolic attainment of adult status, a pivotal point in adult development as well as a key life stage (Lunneborg, 2000; Morgan & King, 2001).

The prominence and depth of pronatalist ideologies remain strong. Jamison et al. (1979) conducted a study determining attributes of childfree men and women using hypothetical childfree couples as a basis. That study found that childfree couples were perceived to be less sensitive, less loving and not as well-adjusted as couples with children. Another study by Callan (1985) using 45 participants, who were asked to rank 16 fictitious people assigned different fertility conditions, also proved the embeddedness of pronatalism. The results indicated individuals were perceived differently based on parenthood. Those with one child or childfree, were judged least favourably. Although the 2010's have witnessed an increase in sociological research regarding childfree women, relevant mainstream representations of the childfree remain limited, further fuelling the importance of scholarly examination to 'understand how voluntary childlessness is framed in popular, contemporary media' (Kaklamanidou, 2018). Pronatalism emerges as a powerful discourse not only at the level of official politics but also as a dominant 'theme' in media and celebrity culture. Citing Laura Carroll, Kaklamanidou (2018, p. 275) reflects that 'now more than ever before, parents can use their children as a tool for status achievement and recognition'.

3.3.1 The Value of Children (VOC)

The work of Hoffman and Hoffman (1973) introduces the value of children (VOC) concept. This refers to the functions children serve, or the needs they fulfil for parents. An expansion on this concept by Lee and Bulatao (1983) resulted in a cross-cultural comparative study which took cultural and psychological factors into fertility decisions. Originally, three (3) main values were earlier presented as reasons for having children and these were later expanded to four (4):

- Economic/utilitarian value, which refers to the child's material benefit and links to several economic advantages (Hollos & Larsen, 2008).

- Psychological value, which addresses the emotional feelings of joy and parents' sense of accomplishment from having children.
- Social/normative value refers to the social acceptance people enjoy when they have children as well as the status bestowed upon a man for being a father and a woman for being a mother. The continuation of the family name and traditions are also examples of traditional social values of children.
- Spiritual value surfaced in a 2008 study of childlessness in Ghanaian women. This refers to the belief that 'children (are) a divine blessing and God's gift given with approval of ancestral spirits' (Sam, Amponsah & Hetland, 2008, p. 523).

Recent studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa, specifically in Ghana by Sam, Amponsah and Hetland (2008); Tanzania by Hollos and Larsen (2008) as well as in Nigeria by Ibisomi and Mudege (2014) on the subject of childlessness, proved useful for comparative basis. They shed light by surfacing important findings regarding the value of children in African society.

Where pronatalist culture is dominant, such as in Nigeria, childlessness is stigmatised. In this culture, a high premium is placed on having children (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014, p. 67). The childless are stereotyped as, 'deviant, psychologically disturbed, ungodly and/or bewitched' (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014, p. 69). On account of this 'deviant' behaviour, the childless are therefore deemed 'worthy of harassment, ridicule or ostracisation' (Ibisomi & Mudege , 2014, p. 69). Women's social and economic reliance on men in such societies means not having children, whether voluntarily or not, leads to invisibility and poverty for the women concerned.

A 2008 study in Northern Tanzania by Hollos and Larsen (2008) found that parenthood was upheld as a pre-requisite achievement for the attainment of full development as a complete person, a fulfilment of fundamental obligations including the continuation of family in physical and religious terms. People without children were regarded as shirking their religious duties and the childless woman was viewed as 'going against the will of God. God said increase and multiply' (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014, p. 66). It is thus clear from these studies that the fertility choices of individuals and couples, 'are still not made freely without interference, or at least being mindful, of societal or communal views and perceptions' (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014, p. 70).

3.3.2 The child and manhood

Lunneborg (2000) offered rare insights into the lives of childfree men. In a sample of 30 men without children, results indicated that there were early articulators as well as postponers. The early articulator is the man who was sure that he did not want children (and would be childfree for life) and the postponer is the man who kept putting off the decision until it was too late. For these narrators, their chosen lives without children was the highest form of freedom. In pronatalist societies, the burden of procreation is often heavier on the woman as her primary function is perceived to be childbearing (Ireland, 1993). Men, however, may also be pressured to behave in certain ways with regards to having children, such as arranging for their partners to be impregnated by relatives or claiming children born out of wedlock (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014). Such pressures stem from the dominant ideology of children being synonymous with masculinity and valorised manhood being intricately tied to the ability to have children (Harris, 2012; Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014). In some African cultures, men with no children may suffer ridicule and stigma (Harris, 2012), have less status in community and may be excluded from certain societal discussions. In one of the studies that they conducted in Ghana, Tabong and Adongo (2013) were told by one of their informants that when a bachelor died without having fathered children, his kin would shove a burning log up the anus of his corpse to show their contempt of his status.

3.4 Stereotypes of the childfree

3.4.1 Stigma

This study reflects the existence of black childfree professional women (BCPW) and contextualises their experiences of, and responses to, stigma and 'Othering' within the broader social norms and gender power relations. Using a feminist discursive framework, this work shows how the BCPW resist stigmatised identities. By insisting on the ''childfree-by-choice' narrative, they construct and project a positive identity of themselves as self-authoring, self-defining and self-directing women with agency.

Several studies of women without children have documented their experiences of stigma, largely because of the dominant pronatalist view that all women are supposed, or want, to become mothers (Calhoun & Selby, 1980; Ireland, 1993; Jamison, Franzini & Kaplan, 1979). There are more reported negative ratings of childless women compared to childless men (Polit, 1978). Calhoun and Selby (1980) found that childless husbands were viewed as less

psychologically healthy than fathers, regardless of the reason for their childlessness. Although there are records elsewhere of an improving tolerance for the childless (Koropeckyj-Cox & Pendell, 2007), those who voluntarily choose not to have children remain stereotyped as 'individualistic' people who avoid responsibility (Keizer, 2011). Little research has actually addressed whether the childfree feel less responsible for others, compared to those people who have children (Keizer, 2011).

3.4.2 Stereotypes

Early researchers recorded negative perceptions of not just individuals, but childfree couples as well. Such judgement is premised upon the normative belief that individuals should endeavour to make some kind of meaningful contribution to the world, and the best way to make such a contribution is to have children. In order to correctly reflect as well as accurately position those who choose not to have children, attention should be paid to the inconsistency with regards the description of, and labels for women who are not mothers. The terms range from 'voluntary' to? 'involuntary childlessness' where the former is generally still representative of the Other (Letherby, 2002) and treated as childlike rather than fully adult (Letherby & Williams, 1999) in societies that value motherhood. Each term, though useful in referential ways, also poses some challenges, where one group is either problematized (childless) or phenomenalised (childfree). In a world-context where the voluntarily childless, (i.e. childfree) are viewed as selfish and deviant, and portrayed in ways that emphasize this – as aberrant, immature, child-like and unfeminine (Letherby, 2002) questions must be asked about how such stereotyping and (re)presentation impacts their success in the professional realm.

3.5 Privilege and Power

The expressions and experiences of power and privilege are contextual. These are elements with which most people have had an encounter, whether negative or positive. Johnson (2006) contends that talking about power and privilege is not easy, which is why people rarely do. Steinem (1998) offers a reading and description of power, that resonates with this study when she states that, '…women often explain with care, that we mean power to control our lives, but not to dominate others' (Steinem, 1998, p. 156). This distinction is important as it delineates women's desire for power-over-the-self from those socialised into positions of relative privilege, as they tend to have less insight into the social dynamics that have created their advantage (Steyn, 2014). Furthermore, to locate childfreeness as an expression of

diversity on the human continuum of difference is an understanding of how difference is constructed and enforced, and how categories for thinking about difference are socially constructed within unequal power relations (Steyn, 2014).

Privilege succeeds because the system that acts as anchor has three key nodes. It is, 'dominated by the privileged group, identified with the privileged group and centred on the privileged groups' (Johnson, 1997, p. 96). Power also tends to be identified with privileged people in ways that make it seem normal and natural in their hands. Privilege is sustained and reproduced over time. Consequently, privilege grants some groups the cultural authority to make judgements about others and to have those judgements stick (Johnson, 2006). Similar to the pronatalist construct where the dominant group has the cultural authority to define boundaries around womanhood as it chooses, the advocates of pronatalism and deniers of reproductive freedom elevate motherhood and disparage non-mothers. The intolerance towards the childfree is intense, with labels ranging from 'selfish, unhappy and poorly adjusted' (Jamison, Franzini & Kaplan, 1979). Therefore, for as long as mothers are used as reference groups (Johnson, 1997) for femininity and womanhood, they will remain the privileged group around whom the system revolves and society organises. The more central their role in the system, the deeper the ostracism of non-mothers in general and the childfree, in particular.

By focussing attention on the evolution of childfreeness, as well as the factors that influence and impact a childfree choice, this chapter revealed the complexities of this reproductive choice. The next chapter advances upon these explorations, and concentrates on the study design and methodological approaches adopted to best respond to the complexity of this subject matter.

CHAPTER 4
THE WORKPLACE

4.1 Introduction

The chapter explores and examines the lived experiences of black childfree professional women in the world of work. More specifically, it calls attention to how, if at all, their reproductive choice impacts their experiences within organised work places. By confronting the stigma and stereotype attached to a childfree choice, the chapter reflects on how the childfree resist the pressures exerted upon them to conform and how by so doing, they mount a resistance from their oppressed positions. More pressingly, the chapter also explores how gender role expectations and cultural performance impact the experiences of the childfree in the context of the workplace.

4.2 The importance of the workplace

A specific area such as the workplace offers an apt setting for exploration as it presents the opportunity to unravel the knotted intersections of the childfree woman's identities. I explore issues of stigma, envy, affect, erasure at work, as well as test those findings that imply it is the pursuit of career that drives a childfree choice (Wager, 2000).

Burkett (2000), points to the economic impact of the exclusion of, and discrimination against the childfree. She highlights that 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' is one of the foundations of modern American work life, but it appears that workers without children do not reap the same rewards as their colleagues who are parents. Burkett specifically asserts that 'violating the principle of equal pay for equal work, American employers increasingly compensate workers according to family status…offering parents health insurance, childcare centres and leave packages worth thousands that the benefits offered to the childless (Burkett 2000, p. 8-9). In a related issue, a Human Resource consultancy, the Jim Harris Group (2004), found that an increasing number of childless [read childfree] employees complain that work-life initiatives are unfair, since they can cause those without children to do more work on weekends, off-hours, and holidays than co-workers with families. South Africa, like much of the rest of the world, has been deliberate in its drive to have more women, not just in the workplace, but in leadership and management positions as well. Within this context, a key question emerges: how does the specification of women representation in the Black Economic Empowerment

(BEE) Codes of Good Practice advance diversity, (childfreeness being one such aspect) and inclusivity in the workplace?

According to research from the 2013 Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) that surveyed trends in privately held businesses in 40 economies in the world, South Africa compared favourably to the rest of the world with 28% of senior management positions held by women.

Figure 2: Women in Business - Grant Thornton International Business Report (2013)

In a 2015 report, the Grant Thornton study on Women in Business showed that since 2013, although there was an increase in middle management, there had been a decline on the representation of women in top and senior management in South Africa. This finding is important in as far as it points to a growing need for workplace policies, to not only accommodate women in terms of gender, but to also begin to attend to ensuring that they also accommodate and are supportive of the complete continuum of reproductive choices available to women.

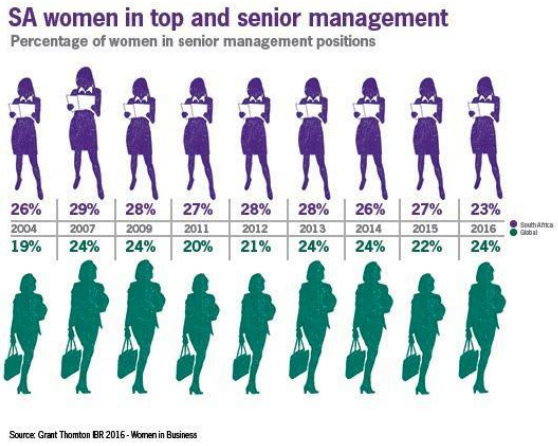

Figure 3: Women in Business - Grant Thornton International Business Report (2015)

This report reflected that diversity in the South African workplace is still restricted to gender and racial diversity and representivity and is silent on the elements of reproductive diversity. There is an emerging impatience reported in the same study, 'Today, more than ever, SA requires diverse leadership teams for businesses to compete and grow. Businesses have talked the talk on diversity in leadership for long enough – it's time to take action and deliver results' (Thornton, 2015, p. 10). It is worth noting however, that progressive as the tone of the 2015 Grant Thornton report is, it also inadvertently advances a maternalistic viewpoint by proclaiming, 'The proper mechanisms to ensure that leadership is compatible with family commitments also need to be in place…women pull back from the workforce when they become parents (Thornton, 2015, p. 10).' It subtly advances a case for those with 'family' with the (unintended) consequence that the childfree, for example, are excluded from the considered set.

Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) and Chovwen (2012) state that the culture of an organisation can present subtle barriers to the advancement of women. The culture of being present, where the focus is on employees being at work for a certain number of hours rather than a focus on certain outputs may also have a negative impact on those with family responsibilities and or those who lack family support structures (Chovwen, 2012; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Whilst these may be valid claims for the wider population of female professionals, the emphasis on 'family responsibility' endorses pronatalism and conversely excludes those who don't fit the main discourse (i.e. the childfree).

Writing in *Woman and Power*, Nancy Klein's (1993) thinking about women at work presents a problem when she addresses motherhood. Although she recognises the right of choice – 'motherhood is one of the many roles women can choose to develop in their lifetime' (Klein, 1993, p. 56), she is silent about the presence and/or treatment of the childfree at work. Rather than being acknowledged and viewed as women who express their reproductive agency unconventionally, the childfree at work are considered as an 'absent-presence'. Their marginality, to borrow from hooks (1989) renders them 'part of the whole, but outside the main body' (hooks, 1989, p. 206). The childfree must reject such marginalisation and as hooks (1989) advocates, re-work their marginality not as 'a site of deprivation,' but rather, 'a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance' (hooks 1989, p. 206).

4.3 Envy in the Workplace

The workplace 'is an institution where people compete for finite resources – money, time, etc.' – thus creating the 'potential for envious feelings among workplace colleagues' (Bedeian, 1995, p. 50). Understanding the role of separateness and interpersonal comparison (Colman, 1991) enriches our insight into the lived experiences of the childfree in the workplace, as well as pointing to the possible impact of envy in that setting.

Emotions are often defined as specific feelings that enter conscious awareness and have a particular focus and a relatively short duration. They are also subject to change with changing life and work circumstance (James et al., 2004). Emphasising the distinction between types of affect improves understanding of this concept. James et al. (2004) present a categorisation of Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA) as an organising principle. Positive emotions are linked to an employee's ability to feel confident and a likeliness of adopting a more risk-prone approach to problem-solving, whereas those with negative emotions tend to be more uncertain and risk-averse (James et al., 2004).

The study of envy is credited to Melanie Klein's ground-breaking work, *Envy and Gratitude Revisited* (2008). In theorizing envy, two strands emerge: gender development (which is strongly linked to Freudian psychoanalysis) as well as the destructiveness of envy. Until recently, envy received little attention in organizational behaviour and scholars have taken diverse theoretical approaches to locate and contextualize envy in the work environment. Literature consulted for this study is silent on how envy in the workplace manifests between the childfree and parents in general and mothers in particular.

Envy has both benign and malicious forms (Spillius, 1993). It is a human emotion that can catalyse negative behaviour in social and organizational contexts. It tends to be conflated with jealousy although the two are different. Envy 'emanates from seeing another gain an advantage, jealousy stems from a fear of personal rejection or loss' (Bedeian, 1995, p. 50). From a psychoanalytical perspective, envy is described as, 'the angry feeling that another possesses or enjoys something desirable – the envious impulse being to take it away or spoil it' (West, 2010, p. 465). Some pertinent questions emerge, such as: who possesses 'the something desirable'? and what would that 'something desirable' be?

Laverde-Rubio (2004, p. 736) reads envy as emanating from 'registered asymmetry with a peer, due to a biased action and/or an omnipotent other'. One must ask, who would be considered the omnipotent other between parents and the childfree? In an effort to elucidate the extent of envy, it was important to reflect upon some emerging questions, such as:

- If envy is regarded as a hostile emotion associated with a sense of entitlement that may be irrational in many circumstances (Bedeian, 1995), which aspects of the childfree professional's life and identity-construct are held up for comparison to justify any resentment by parents?
- Is the childfree professional's lifestyle an aspect that could fuel the envy of professional mothers?

In Robert Caper's (2008) view, it is not envy but the defences against envy that prove problematic. How we each deal with envy is linked, as Marcus West (2010) argues, to the state of our ego-functioning as well as 'ego distortion… where sameness is preferred and separation is avoided' (West, 2010, p. 473). When difference is detected, West (2010) suggests the following possibilities may unfold:

- an individual may envy the other;
- the individual may turn the recognition inward;
- the individual may admire the other or compete with them, and
- the 'envied' individual may fear being envied and then limit themselves rather than being exposed to another's envy.

As has been established, the workplace is a microcosm of larger society, the treatment of childfree women at work, in a pronatalist society such as South Africa, becomes important to

explore alongside the prisms of power, stigma and social dictates. If the childfree is regarded as the unfathomable and deviant other, to what extent would her rebuttal of discrimination be 'a desperate effort to preserve one's unique sense of self'? (Anderson, 1997, p. 363). This obsession with sameness is at odds with the key construct of diversity, which permits and celebrates difference.

4.4 Why diversity matters in the workplace

Diversity management as a term, whilst sounding progressive, has in effect been found wanting. Whilst it may imply a positive and empowering perspective, some scholars conclude that it is, in essence, a replication of hegemonic discourses that fail to recognize the politics of difference and the struggle for recognition in the organisational and public spheres (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). In western societies, gender has been recognized as an important aspect of diversity and a source of potential prejudice and discrimination (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). By concerning itself with the childfree, and working through the specific purview of reproductive freedom, this project intends to extend the boundaries of diversity-definition whilst exposing its complexities in the workplace.

In a 2015 report titled 'Women Matter' conducted by McKinsey Consulting, it was established that women leaders have had limited success in experiencing workplace gender diversity. There is recorded evidence of the value of diversity in corporations. The report also established that in several Western European Countries, there was a discernible relationship between corporate performance and the elevated presence of women in the workplace.

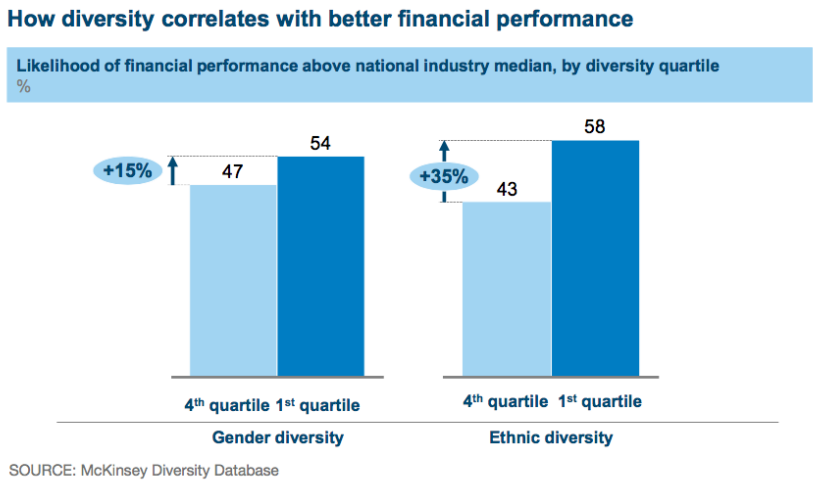

Figure 4: Diversity and performance: McKinsey Diversity Database (2015)

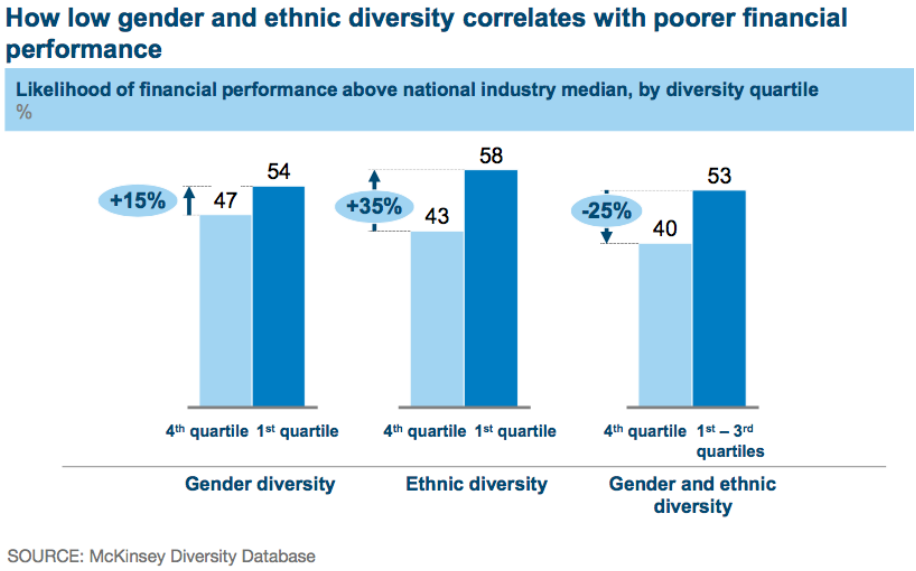

Figure 5: Diversity and performance: McKinsey Diversity Database (2015)

A significant finding in the report, one with a direct relationship to this study, shows that the approach of many companies has been to adopt a single diversity programme to cover all action groups: racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation. Yet the data suggests such an approach is insufficient, resulting in a focus on a particular category rather than the issue as a whole. Tailored programmes and dedicated efforts are needed to ensure relevance to business and to make progress on any dimension (McKinsey Diversity Matters Report, 2015, p. 12). It can be hypothesised that there may be more additional benefits to accrue to businesses should they expand their definition of diversity to include reproductive choice.

Cox (2001) defines diversity in the workplace as a reflection of the variation in social and cultural identities among people existing together in an employment setting. However, this multiplicity of identity does not integrate reproductive choice and is silent on how such reproductive difference is integrated into organisational practice to ensure the progress of all. Diversity management however, can also have detrimental organizational outcomes. Specific negative outcomes may include, but are not restricted to, social identity faultiness which may be activated by triggers that catalyse stereotyping, identity conflict and negative affect (Gotsis et al., 2015).

Referencing Gordon Allport's contact-hypothesis, Gotsis et al. (2015) observe that contact between people of different races, ethnicity, cultural backgrounds, religion, etc. can challenge

stereotypes, thus resulting in the development of accepting attitudes. However, such friendly development has prerequisite conditions, and these are:

- Contact should be effected under conditions of equal status of the group members;
- Group members should be brought together under circumstances where stereotypes are likely to be challenged and contradicted;
- Prioritisation of intergroup cooperation;
- Group members must know each other properly, and
- Wider social norms must support equality.

Additionally, the way in which an organization approaches diversity is associated with the perceived costs and benefits of diversity at organisational, group and intra-group level. Gotsis et al. (2015) identify five (5) perspectives organizations may explore in their migration towards diversity. These are:

- Reinforcing homogeneity perspective (an active push by the organisation for similarity among employees);
- Colour-blind perspective (equal treatment of employees irrespective of cultural background);
- Fairness perspective (emphasizes equitable treatment and provides support for disadvantaged groups in order to reduce social inequalities);
- Access perspective (refers to the competitive advantage that accrues to the organisation due to its diverse workforce), and
- Integration and learning perspective (the advantages accrued from heterogeneity can be accessed by all employees).

What is lacking in these diversity perspectives as presented, is an account for the diversity of women's reproductive experiences. Organisational silence on reproductive diversity, as well as their tacit endorsement of norm-congruency (Gotsis et al., 2015, p. 26) means the childfree labour under the weight of negative stereotypes, even though they remain to a large degree, unaccounted for, nor acknowledged in the workplace.

Rather than placing women on a binary spectrum of mother and childfree, some scholars suggest that discarding such sharp dichotomies of sameness or difference may be more influential in fostering workplace inclusivity (Gotsis et al., 2015, p. 23). What is required are

organisational practices that promote undistorted dialogue on difference, give voice to marginalized discourses and avoid the duplication of existing social hierarchies that discriminate against social identity groups (a sub-set of which would be the BCPW).

As long as organisational diversity programs succumb to political correctness and submit to ideological comfort, they will fail to enact liberatory practices and/or reveal embedded discriminatory behaviours in the workplace, especially against groups that are marginalised, such as the childfree. When differences are objectified and consolidated in ways that preclude agency, members of ostracized groups remain constrained by convention and those dominant discourses that prevent their equitable treatment. Therefore, viewing diversity through fixed social categorizations, 'fails to consider not only the fluidity and intersectionality of various categories, but also how such discourses are articulated and regulated,' consequently strengthen 'the binary opposition between emancipated selves, and un-emancipated others' as well as erode, 'possibilities for human agency' (Gotsis et al., 2015, p. 33). It would not be incongruent to deduce that childfree professionals experience the workplace as a site of resistance in which they, as a marginalized group with divergent values, challenge dominant discourses of otherness, question structural positions of privilege and debunk consolidated constructs of power (Gotsis et al., 2015). Their process of individuation is complicated by the material and inherent biases writ in favour of the mainstream groupings.

Rather than diversity management, what is required is a paradigm shift (Orman, 2016, p. 47) to diversity acceptance. Such acceptance must aim not to defend and uphold prevalent discourse, but to reconcile competing agendas as well as create space for differences and uniqueness to be integrated into the mainstream. By enhancing the creation of equitable community, diversity acceptance (rather than tolerance) must enable diverse employees, including the childfree, to offer their own responses to the threat of ongoing inequality. Gotsis et al. (2015) assert that elevating diversity to a societal value, through active participation in a civic space, is more likely to yield not segregated or divided, but cohesive and equitable societies (Gotsis et al., p. 37).

Whilst a core of similarity may help foster positivity, awareness and acceptance of ways in which we are different together remains paramount if organizations aim to enact and sustain positive heterogeneity and diversity acceptance. If a lasting change is to be effected and sustained, it is imperative that organisations undergo a paradigm shift. Rather than focus on

the opportunity- oriented aspects (de Aquino, & Robertson, 2018) that accrue to meeting social expectations and legal compliance, organisations need to commit to transforming the foundational belief systems which direct and inform employment policies and practices. It is crucial that the role of the CEO is placed at the head of this organisational overhaul and that they clearly communicate their beliefs about diversity. Although many CEOs have been reported to be supportive of diversity management, these beliefs often do not translate into tangible organizational policies and practices because HR managers face multiple and competing organizational demands in addition to managing diversity (Ng & Sears, 2018). An overhaul of the complete organisational ecosystem may be the best way to dismantle the discrimination, disrespect and hostility experienced by people from diverse backgrounds.

It is equally important that organisations transcend the present-day definition of workplace diversity which alludes to the complex physical, sociological or psychological attributes such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs (Cletus, Mahmood, Umar and Ibrahim, 2018) – that they expand this construct to include reproductive orientation and choice as well. Such a construct of diversity, coupled with ongoing engagement with critical diversity literature may accelerate the pace towards the achievement of social justice within the workplace and beyond. The scrutiny of differences in environments that are fully embracing of individuals' uniqueness along understanding, tolerance and embracing diversity is critical to the future of humanity (Cletus et al., 2018:37).

This interrogation of the workplace is important in enriching collective understanding of its impact on the lived experiences of the childfree. Through this alternate reading, the work environment is revealed as not just the site of production but rather a terrain upon which excluded communities (such as BCPW) mount their resistance, against exclusionary practices through action and ideological challenge. It therefore behoves HR managers in particular, to become agents of change – as research shows that they are crucial for the reinforcement of the CEO's message on diversity (Guillaume, Dawson, Priola, Sacramento, Woods, Higson & West, 2014; Shen, Chanda, D'netto & Monga, 2009;) and they can influence the recruitment process by including minorities and women (Ng & Sears, 2010). The CEOs must (through action and words) prioritise diversity, implement transformational policies alongside deep organisational structural reform, so that a culture of inclusivity may be imbedded as everyday organisational practice.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES.

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a closer examination of the subject of childfreeness. It explored the origin, evolution, complexity as well as social meaning attached to this reproductive choice. As stated elsewhere, there is ample research on the subject of motherhood as well as evidence of pronatalist biases that impact reproductive processes. However, these studies have tended to describe all women without children as either infertile or childless. Additionally, of the few studies conducted in Africa on the subject of motherhood, there is a void when it comes to the subject of childfreeness. In these studies, reproduction in Africa is usually (re)presented either as an irresponsibility, as when Africans are seen to be 'overproducing' and contributing to overpopulation, or a problem, as in cases of infertility (Dyer, Abrahams, Hoffman & van der Spuy, 2004; Hollos, & Larsen, 2008). There is no reference to the existence of black professional women who have made the conscious reproductive choice to be childfree.

This chapter presents an outline of research methods that were adopted for this study. It provides information about the participants, specifically, the criteria for inclusion in the study, some demographic information as well as how they were sampled. It addresses the process of data collection method as well as present the research design chosen and the motivations for its suitability for the study.

5.2 The Study Design

I obtained institutional authorisation to proceed with this study in May 2016, and quickly thereafter, I commenced with the design of this research. As little research exists on the specific topic, the research is designed as exploratory (Patton, 2002), seeking to tentatively map out the range of experiences of the black childfree women I was able to interview, and thereby provide an entry point for further studies (Sprague, 2005; Hesse-Biber, 2012).

This study locates and surfaces a community of black, childfree and professional women and through their narratives intends to surface new insights that will enrich scholarly understanding

of their lives. Being black, female and childfree in a pronatalist South Africa presents peculiar dynamics not experienced by black mothers in particular and black women in general. The childfree women deal with gender-wide discrimination as well as cultural expectations. Such externalities compound their ostracisation and their experiences are, resultantly, marked by constant shifts and everyday negotiations (Khunou, 2015).

5.2.1 Methodological Approaches

5.2.1.1 Research Methodology

I adopted a qualitative research methodology as my primary research method as the most suitable method to respond to the nature and scope of research questions posed. The goal of research is to describe an understanding, rather than an explanation and prediction of human behaviour (Ellis, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Mertens, 2014) therefore, qualitative probing was in keeping with my aim of understanding the behaviour and lived experiences of black, childfree professional women as well as the attitudes of others regarding such choice. As Patton (2002), also points out, qualitative research methods are particularly useful in identifying divergent beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. In this case, it proved most suitable to contextualise the experiences of the black childfree women in this study. Within this context, the collection of data was for the sole purpose of recovering or discovering meaning, so that eventually understanding their reality was enabled by knowing the content, nature and effect of their interaction and words (Durrheim, 1997).

5.2.1.2 Life-History Approach

Given the focus on meaning-making in the context of individual lives, the life-history technique was considered most appropriate for this study. I anticipated that it would enable the contextualisation of the narrators by helping to locate their sources of influence, belief-systems, as well as the social relations that shaped their subjectivities (Gluck & Patai, 2016). By engaging with, and sharing their life histories, the narrators were positioned not just as subjects in the study, but experts in their own lives and experiences (Smith, 2005). Hence my decision, in subsequent chapters, to refer to the participants in this study as narrators, rather than mere narrators. Although life-history methods have been challenged for being unquestionably accepting of narrators' accounts (Holloway & Jefferson, 2008), the insights that are inherent in, and gleaned from this method, as well as the biographical-interpretive characteristic of the

life-history approach (Morgan, 2007) strengthened my resolve to adopt it as a suitable method for this study.

Even though remembering could be highly selective and revealing of one's character (Middleton, Anderson & Banning, 2009), the life-history approach enables access into how each woman created a complete view of her life, with identity as a sub-set thereof. Working from these women's perspectives (Khunou, 2015, p. 92), a largely subjective vantage-point, their narratives integrated their life histories and actions into the broader socio-economic and political context, making them relevant in the examination of social structure (Hubbard, 2000, p. 4). By allowing narrators to share their life stories - a unifying picture could emerge, weaving together the patterns of social relations (Khunou, 2015), the relational systems as well as the workplace experiences that influenced them. In the end, a composite yet custom picture of each woman emerged.

5.3 Recruitment

The recruitment process commenced in May 2016. Taking into account the sensitive nature of the study, it was imperative to devise a multi-pronged recruitment process, in addition to conventional recruitment methods outlined below. Due to the stigmatisation and negative stereotyping of the childfree, I anticipated (and then experienced) some challenges in recruiting narrators. Using my professional experience as a brand-builder and marketer, I decided to treat the recruitment process for this study much like one would launch a new brand campaign and set about creating awareness of the project on media platforms that were consumed by the identified target.

The expanded recruitment process followed these channels:

1. Institutions of higher learning were targeted, specifically the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and The Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS).
2. Email recruitment was also used where email contact was established with 'leads' provided by peers and colleagues.
3. I created a WhatsApp group with my associates and friends, asking for their help in identifying and/or referring women they knew, whom they believed fit the selection criteria.

4. All the radio stations on which I was featured were English-format stations and was used to great effect, particularly the Redi Tlhabi show (at the time the most popular programme) on Radio 702. Additional stations included Radio 2000, Kaya FM and SAFM.

Radio provided the most opportunity for dialogue across the airwaves between myself and the general public. Some calls received were in favour of the study stating, 'it is about time' (female caller, Radio 702) that, 'men must know that women are allowed to have agency over their bodies' (female caller, Radio 702). A few men rang in favour and others dialled in to accuse the researcher of, 'having succumbed to white tendencies' (male caller, Radio 702) and, 'being un-African' (male caller Radio 2000). This veiled attack not only expressed racist and misogynist tendencies, but also showed the ways we present ourselves to others and how they interpret, ignore, resist or reinforce our actions (Butler, 1990) is an ongoing and contested reality. Rather than feel stung by these attacks, they served to fortify my resolve to lift the lid, on this taboo subject, as well as to locate the existence of these black women who have chosen differently. After each media engagement, there was an avalanche of responses. I viewed these as confirmation not only of the importance of the work but also of its timeliness. Increased reporting on this subject in women-targeted magazines in South Africa (Elle Magazine[18], Fair Lady[19], Marie Claire[20] and True Love[21]) also served to underline the growing focus on this subject.

Given its focus on women who, with free will, rejected the discourse of motherhood and mothering (Park, 2005), the study excluded all women who were childless, were ambivalent, as well as those, 'in waiting'. The research was initially intended to engage as subjects, only those black childfree professional women still within the range of fertility, who had resolved not to procreate. Several evolutions, which are accounted for later, occurred in the recruitment process which resulted in the inclusion of some exceptions. In the early stages of the recruitment process over twenty-five (25) individuals responded and expressed interest. Many of the narrators fell in the mid-30's age range, echoing the 2009 research by Ola (2009, p. 206) in Southwest Nigeria which also found, 'the greatest percentage of narrators who were

[18] 'Children None' by Sizakele Marutlule, July 2012, pp. 14-15.
[19] 'Flying Solo' by Biddi Rorke, November 2016, p. 19
[20] 'The sweet life' by Kimberly Cutter, January 2017, p.35
[21] 'Sitting like a girl' by Pumla Gqola, August 2016, p. 106.

knowledgeable about the social-cultural perception and implications of childlessness fall between 20-50 years.'

Some black women, professional and otherwise, wrote in to express support to the researcher, for example: 'you are brave' (email from black female) and, 'be strong, as you'll be attacked' (email from black female). Other women wrote in to lament how they had, 'painfully navigated stigmatization,' (email from black female) and wished there had been, 'support structures when [they] were coming up,' (email from black female). Others wrote in to volunteer services such as transcription, driving, etc. A 70-year-old white woman wrote in to offer congratulations and to express, 'although I am not in your target I want you to know you are doing brave work,' (email from white female).

I encountered individuals who were uncomfortable to come forth to share their stories and restricted their interaction with me to email correspondence, as we as individuals who, after initially agreeing to the study, then absconded. As a result, the study is restricted to a limited sample size. Once found, those childfree women who were suitable, willing and available for the study, were not concentrated in one geographical area. Instead, they were spread across the Gauteng Province.

5.4 Sampling Strategies

Two sampling strategies were applied in this study, namely purposive and snowball sampling. This sampling method was deemed suitable as it supports qualitative studies, such as this one, and helps achieve breadth of understanding (Patton, 2002). In this approach, particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be attained as well from other choices (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena & Nigam, 2013). Although some research has highlighted the dangers of the purposive method, such as the researcher exercising judgment on the respondent's reliability and competency (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011), in this case the specificity of the study as well as respondent selection by an 'inner-circle' via snowball sampling obviated this concern.

Purposive sampling was coupled with snowball sampling as described above. Colleagues, peers and friends helped with referrals. This sampling methodology was suited as the focus of study was on a sensitive issue and therefore required the knowledge of insiders to locate people for study (Baltar & Brunet, 2012).

5.4.1 Sample Size

Initially, I received interest from a potential twenty-five (25) individuals. During the preliminary design phase of the study, I had envisaged recruiting a final sample of eight (8) black, professional and childfree women in total. At the early stage of the interview process, one (1) respondent abandoned the process, resulting in a final sample of seven (7) narrators. This number was manageable, it also enabled immersive engagement and deeper interrogation with each respondent. All women had a tertiary qualification, were professional, their marital status unspecified and were definitely middle class, in alignment with established findings, 'highly educated women with full-time careers are less likely than their male counterparts to reproduce' (Baker, 2005, p. 9).

The final sample consisted of seven (7) participants who were:

- Childfree;
- Professionals;
- Middle-Class;
- Of an educational mix with a post-Matric qualification or University degree as a basic requirement, because a correlation between women's education and fertility has been established (Johnson-Hanks, 2006), and
- Stayed or lived in urban areas.

The participants' relationship status was not relevant as marriage has been found to be an inappropriate criterion for voluntary childlessness (Houseknetch, 1987; Shaw, 2011), as the reliance on marriage ultimately privileges a heteronormative construct of reproductive choice where only heterosexual couples/individuals are assumed to be able to make childbearing choices.

One participant needs to be mentioned specifically. 'The Outlier,' a black childfree woman heard me on Radio 702 and subsequently responded to the call for participation. When I conducted our first telephonic interview, as I captured her demographic details I asked for her age and she responded with '71'. I assumed that was her birth-year, but she corrected me to state she was in fact 71 years of age. She expressed that she had initially hesitated but eventually chose to make contact because my call for participation did not indicate a cut-off age, a point on which she was correct. She further mentioned she was a retired social worker. Her age presented a challenge as I had intended to engage women who were considered, 'still

in their fertile years'. That she was retired also presented a challenge as I had used the term, 'professional' synonymously with, 'employed'. I shared my confusion with her and committed to consult with my supervisor and revert to her.

My confusion was on two points. As a female researcher, I was drawn to her compelling story even though she was outside the age range I had set for participants. Two key issues emerged:

1. Although she appeared not to 'fit', I believed her story was compelling and would give insight to life in the 1960s and what confronting the motherhood mandate may have entailed. I feared excluding her on the basis of age would in essence mean this research was compounding 'her erasure' – which would present an ethical and moral dilemma, as the thesis is precisely to fight against erasure.
2. She was not, 'working' or gainfully employed. Nonetheless, this did not mean she was not a professional or without profession. She held a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree and had practiced as a social worker. This made me realize the use of the term professional should be much clearer, so that it is not equated to 'practitioner' – for it is a fallacy to construct the platform of professional to relate only to those who are 'gainfully employed'. Thus, professional as used in this thesis is not used narrowly to mean employed in a profession, but rather, having a professional qualification.

After consultation with my supervisor, it was agreed that The Outlier be included in the study.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of sample

Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Gender Identity	Current Occupation	Education
Mosia	59	Black	Female	Entrepreneur	University Graduate
KayJee	40	Black	Female	Entrepreneur	University Graduate
Susan	33	Black	Female	Career Change	University Graduate
Thabsy	72	Black	Female	Retired Social Worker Part-Time Research	University Graduate
D	29	Black	Female	Engineer	University Graduate
Palesa	37	Black	Female	Manager & Post-Grad Student	University Graduate
Masego	40	Black	Female	Entrepreneur	University Graduate

My treatment of the participants in this research is informed by Morell (1994) who when conducting a study among the intentionally childless, realised that her narrators were in fact, 'telling' life stories and would therefore be better categorized as narrators – for they were in fact, narrating their histories rather than responding per se. Consequently, I have decided to refer to the participants in this study as narrators. These narrators recounted tales of being raised well as reflected through childhood memories filled with happy reflections. However, the stories of their adult lives were punctuated by experiences of prejudice, self-defence and rejection among other reactions. They reported stigmatization and the pain of being miscategorised as one-dimensional (Letherby, 2002), deviant, lacking, irresponsible and unfulfilled.

Collectively, the histories of my narrators constitute an attack on pronatalism (Veevers, 1980). By not conforming to this social imposition, these black, childfree, professional women (BCPW) were providing an entry point into a sociological understanding of childfreeness. This valid, yet little-reported reproductive choice, is presented in ways intended to demystify, educate, enlighten and hopefully advance further and future studies on this segment of women in South Africa and beyond.

5.4.2 Reasons for participating in this project

It was important to understand the reasons the BCPW agreed to participate in a study on a subject that remains contentious and divisive in present day South Africa. Overall, their participation was fuelled by indignation and unhappiness emanating from being stigmatised

and judged on account of their reproductive choice. By telling their own stories, therefore, they were not only correcting the misrepresentation but also exercising agency.

The desire to be heard, to account for their own lives as well as an insistence on self-determination (Morell, 1994) was a common thread. According to Thabsy, 'For the first time in my life I was able to discuss this life choice. I want to be accepted as whole. I have lived my life being spoken about so it was important that I now speak. I wanted to tell my story' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). For Susan, her participation was about 'taking a stand, giving voice to my choice… I am committed to this choice it is not a phase' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). For D, she felt she had a 'story to share' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). Masego commented, 'this is important work, this childfree thing is problematic. Being childfree is not something that happens to you, it is something one chooses. You know, I am very deliberate about my life. So being 44 and with no child is no accident, it is by design and choice' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). The subject matter had deep resonance for Palesa, who concluded, 'This is me. I felt it would be empowering to participate in such important work. I wanted to get people thinking, to explore and reflect deeply about whatever choices they make' (Palesa, personal communication, February 9, 2017).

Mosia and I were introduced by a common friend and we became fast friends. In passing, I once mentioned to her I would be pursuing a PhD on the subject of childfreeness. I was aware she had no children but was unsure whether she was childless or childfree. At some point during the recruitment phase she said, 'If you'd like me to be part of the study I'd be happy to' (Mosia, personal communication, August 13, 2016). I met KayJee through her husband, who is my friend. There were no children in their marriage, but I could not ascertain if it was a deliberate and/or permanent decision. When I mentioned the study to her she immediately wanted to participate because, 'talking about choosing not to have children is truly important not just for women, but for the men we marry as well' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

The stories of childfree women, 'while neither idealizing nor denigrating a life without children of their own, can widen the parameters of possible selves that women can morally claim.' Morell (1994, p. 76). Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to deduce that this shared

reproductive choice therefore homogenises these women as my findings show that BCPW are heterogeneous, unique and multi-dimensional.

5.4.3 Some Key Characteristics of the Narrators

5.4.3.1 Age

The narrators were of various ages ranging from late 20s to early 70s, as shown in the table above. Initially, I was conflicted over the inclusion of two narrators over 50, who would, 'normally,' be considered, 'outside their reproductive years.' I included them as their experiences enriched the study with reference to social and generational context, as it reflects multi-generational views (i.e. Baby-boomers, Generation X and Millennials). More pointedly, I felt it important to include them as they would have made this unpopular decision long before the onset of relatively liberatory practices and narratives that we experience today. In addition, their inclusion dispels the notion held by some that childfreeness is a new development, a consequence of rising feminism and greater gender consciousness.

5.4.3.2 Siblings

Birth order did not present as an important marker, except where narrators specified it had impacted how they were parented. In the case of Thabsy, she indicated that she was a middle child, in a family of five (5) siblings. The first born was a brother, then a sister, herself next, followed by a younger sister and finally a last-born brother. She commented:

> 'I am a middle child that was born into [a] middle-child situation. I was not spoiled and learned very quickly to be independent as there was no time for me to be babied.' (Thabsy, personal communication, September 23, 2016).

Thabsy attributed her sense of independence and self-reliance to the experience of not, 'being babied'.

Palesa was the third daughter out of four (4) siblings. She had two older sisters and a younger brother. Her first-born sister was deceased, her second sister had two boy-children and her younger brother was gay with no children. She was quick to point out that this birth order did not affect her, 'I don't have middle child issues' (Palesa, personal communication, September 28, 2016) as she put it. Susan was the first-born daughter and had a younger brother, about

whom she said; ‘My brother and I are not close. From a young age, I’ve always felt he was the favourite child’ (Susan, personal communication, September 2016).

With regard to D, she was the eldest of five (5) siblings, with a younger brother, twin-sisters and a last-born sister. She recalls being told she was a forceps delivery, at which point she chortled saying, ‘I had to force my way into the world and I feel like I’ve been forcing my way through life ever since, fighting to be an individual’. Mosia was the last born of three (3) siblings, there was a first-born brother who was 10 years older and sister who was nine years older. She referred to herself as a ‘laat lammetjie’ [22]. She remembered, ‘growing up alone’ because by the time she had a sense of self-awareness, her older siblings were already in school.

At the time of the study, Masego was 44 years old. She was born in New York when her parents lived in the USA. Her father, a graduate, was posted there as the Diplomatic Representative of a Southern African government. Her mother was a qualified teacher, although she did not teach during their time in the USA. Masego was the second of four (4) children. Her older sister (47) had three children (two (2) daughters and a boy), the third born was a brother (42) without children. The last born was a girl (39) and had a daughter.

KayJee was turning 40 years old at the time of the study. She was also a ‘laat lammetjie’ in a family of girls only, with three older siblings. The first born was 50, the second 48, and the third 46. She recalls being ‘the only child at home’ as her older siblings were already in school when she was born. She found this to be significant: ‘Because I was the only child at home, I have no experience of growing up around other children or another child’ (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). She remembered her older sisters being a ‘close knit unit’, a reality she ascribed to the fact that they had narrow age gaps and ‘could therefore bond over shared experiences’ (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). Consequently, as she grew older, she felt ‘distant’ from them, and became a ‘loner’. However, as soon as she reached her 20s, the relationship changed as they all began to relate as ‘young women’ (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

[22] An Afrikaans term used to refer to a child born much later than anticipated or after an assumption was made that reproduction was over.

5.4.3.3 Parents

Most of the narrators spoke about comfortable homes, and upbringings with both a mother and father (except in Palesa's case, whose parents were unmarried and her father was absent). What is most revelatory is the extent to which these fathers were the key drivers to these narrators' pursuit of lives of significance and excellence. Thabsy said her father had great respect for her mother and through that, it became clear for her that 'someone needed to respect my decisions and what I was thinking.' (Thabsy, personal communication, January 28, 2017). This egalitarian approach in her parents' relationship would be the template Thabsy would use as reference in her own romantic liaisons. Palesa was raised by a mother she described as hard-working and loving. She regarded her mother as a single-parent because even though her father was alive, he was absent in her and her siblings' lives. She is very close to her siblings, 'My siblings are my relatives' (Palesa, personal communication, February 9, 2017).

Susan's parents were married. Her mother was a pharmacist and her father an entrepreneur. She was born when her mother was still studying, so she was, in her words, 'my grandmother's child' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). When her mother completed her studies, Susan went to live with her parents for the first time. She found this integration into the family difficult, as she had to, 'learn to know them' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). She attributed this early life experience to the difficult relationship she has with her mother. She pointed out she had not been completely open with her mother and therefore her mother did not know her fully. She elaborated, 'For example, my sex life – I think she would be judgemental if she learned I have one-night stands, yet to me it's a normal growing up process' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). Although fully grown, professional and successful, Susan's return home (during the interview process she was in a career transition) was also a return to the tensions left over from her childhood years. She said her father presented in public, an image of a man in charge when in fact, he was hardly in charge at home. She desired to make it known to him, 'to show weakness does not mean one is weak and that he can demand space to express so he can live an authentic life' (Susan, personal communication, January 2017).

In D's case, both her parents were still alive and had post-Matric qualifications. She had a cordial relationship with her father, which, in D's words, 'was only enriched by my performance at school' (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016). She characterised her

father as a, ‘tyrant that could not be crossed’ (D, personal communication, 12 August, 2016). D had considered her parents’ relationship the, ‘forever kind of situation’ (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016) and assumed it would last their lifetime. However, when their marriage started unravelling, (during her participation in this research it would end in divorce) she was very disappointed. She also expressed an element of abandonment, saying, ‘in leaving, he just did not leave mom, he left all of us, including me.’ (D, personal communication, October 4, 2016). It was also during this transition period that her mother revealed she had not wanted children herself. As D put it, ‘She didn’t know she could choose not to have, so she had children’ (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016).

Mosia was born to middle class parents in a Township, east of Johannesburg. Her mother was a Nursing Sister and her father a Principal at the local school she attended. She recalled her parents had, ‘a deep love for one another’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016), so deep in fact one day when asked at school what her parents’ names were, she had answered, ‘My mother is honey and my father is also honey,’ owing to her parents’ constant use of this term of endearment (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). She was proud her parents, ‘never sucked up to anyone and they were not big friend people’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). Instead they were, ‘each other’s best friend’. From this, she had learnt to be her ‘own bestie’, as well as assertiveness, self-sufficiency and, ‘being private’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). She spoke fondly of her father, recalling ‘he was a dresser and never walked anywhere [but] drove’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). When her father died, she recounted that her mother was ‘devastated and inconsolable’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). Mosia’s recalled that one day in school someone knocked her bookcase over and her bottle tops (she used these for counting) fell out and spread across the floor. When she tried gathering them, her teacher said, ‘Hey, you black thing you are making noise’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). From this incident two things stood out for her. Firstly, she started hating her complexion and often asked her mother, ‘Why am I so dark?’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). Secondly, she recalled witnessing her mother’s feistiness and assertiveness. Her mother had confronted the teacher who had called her, ‘black thing’ to tell her, ‘never to treat my daughter like that again’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). According to Mosia, her mother, ‘never liked children… she wasn’t crazy about kids, she had had them because her husband wanted them’ (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016).

Masego's parents were the eldest siblings in their own families and were therefore, 'the bosses in their families' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She believed and cherished that they were, 'a strange family' because her parents were 'not traditional' (Masego October 2016). Her parents focused on 'giving [their children] as much world exposure as possible' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Given her world exposure, she was 'challenged by a Jozi[23] obsessed with shiny things' (Masego, personal communication, October 2016). She knew 'life matters more than stuff' and was grateful her parents, 'filled [their] lives with experiences instead of stuff'. As a consequence of her peripatetic upbringing, she had a 'sense of place everywhere' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Masego felt equally close to both her parents. Upon reflection, as an adult, she realised, 'wonderful' as he was, her father still, 'had some traditional parts' (Masego personal communication, October 2016). To prove this assertion, she referenced he engaged his children equally without the gender bias, yet he also capitulated to gendered prejudices by leaving their mother 'to raise' them and 'do the heavy lifting' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Masego said her father grew her 'thinking muscle' as they were 'strongly encouraged' to 'make a case for any choice they made' as children. She regarded her mother as a 'feminist who was big on choice and not compromising just because you are female' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

KayJee remembered her father, who was in banking when she was young, as 'always working' and her mother as 'ever present' for a while. She recalls her early years marked by a period where her mother 'was alone and my only parent' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016) later followed by a spell with only her father as her mother pursued her tertiary studies. KayJee described her family as a 'solid family, where the children were 'grounded in Church and were all involved' in church-related activities. KayJee thought her parents were a shining example of a 'loving couple… with a decent family' in their community. As a result, they were 'consulted by many for guidance and advice'. She described her mother as the 'ultimate lady', a graduate and 'trail blazer in her day' as she made very unconventional choices. She said, 'Mom had great strength and a fierce sense of independence. She encouraged

[23] Slang word for Johannesburg

me to challenge convention and do what I wanted' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

KayJee constantly referred to her parents as 'Mom' and 'Dad', a form of address different from the regular references to mother and father in black South African culture, such as, 'Ma', 'Mama' or 'Mme' for mother and 'Baba', or 'Papa' for father. This form of address harped on the middle-classness of her family, which she said was modelled along the lines of 'The Huxtables' in the Cosby show. Much as KayJee respected and adored her mother, she regarded her parenting style as 'pragmatic' and one she did not consider necessarily warm. By way of example she recalled:

> 'Mom had never spoken to me about periods and what I knew I had gleaned from other girls at school. She had never spoken to me about this. I remember her distinctly saying that now I had my period, if I slept with boys, I'd be pregnant. End of story' (Kayjee, November, personal communication, 2016).

From her father, KayJee said she learned 'how a woman should be treated' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). She described him as expressive and an extrovert: 'When Dad has an opinion, you will hear it' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). She also presented him as a man of principle who did not tolerate lies. As a result, she said she too could not 'deal with people who lie' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

The demographics and psychographic content of the narrators, alongside their characterisation as presented above, began to form a preliminary pathway which enables a deeper exploration of how the subjects were making sense and meaning of their social and personal worlds.

5.5 Research Tools

As part of the research process, the following instruments were utilised:

- A participant information sheet was circulated to those who expressed interest to participate in the study. It included information about the research project and outlined the terms of participation as well as key self-assessment questions. These questions were direct, such as: Is your current status as a non-parent deliberate or situational? Do you intend to change your parenting status soon, in the future, never? Have you made the conscious choice to never have children of your own?

These questions also aimed at excluding those women who became childless by circumstance.

- Certificate from the University - to confirm institutional authorisation for me to conduct the study and proof of the legitimacy of my enrolment as a PhD scholar.
- Once the participant sheet was fully completed and the candidate qualified, I then sent a consent form for each person's signature. This confirmed that they, through own free will, would partake in the study and were giving their consent for the findings to be published as an outcome of the research. They also were giving their consent to partake without compensation. I did, however, add a clause that all participants would be compensated for their petrol costs in instances where we met at venues that were not their homes.
- Once my final sample was selected, I compiled an interview schedule which captured the dates and times for interviews with each of the final narrators. This was a crucial part of project planning.
- Once I had finalised my sample, I created a table of narrators – to offer a single-glance view of the participants reflecting key characteristics.
- I also designed a discussion guide as well as roadmap, for use during the interview process.

I applied these tools to deepen my comprehension of my narrators' histories, they also helped me uncover patterns of social relations, as well as to explore meaning-making and other processes that influenced them (Khunou, 2015, p. 93).

5.6 Data Collection

I worked with a single data-set from the narratives that I collected. A comprehensive literature review was augmented by empirical data and some archival references. I also undertook an analysis of relevant theories on pertinent subjects such as gender, feminism, motherhood, diversity, privilege and status. I collected data through the narrative interview style, which was a blend between face-to-face and telephonic interviews. As a result, some narrators had more face-time with me whereas others, specifically those who lived outside the Johannesburg node, had a 50-50 split between face-to-face and telephonic dialogues. Observing non-verbal communication enabled by face-to-face interviews also enriched the dialogues. These interviews unfolded insightful histories of being a black woman and the influence of a middle-class upbringing in pre- and post-Apartheid South Africa.

All interviews were conducted in the Gauteng province, specifically in Sandton, Midrand, Springs and Pretoria. They were all conducted between August 2016 and March 2017 - at venues selected by each respondent. I scheduled four (4) face-to-face semi-structured interviews with each respondent, each one lasting between sixty (60) minutes and ninety (90) minutes. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were best suited to solicit their experiences (Babbie, 2012). The interviews were voice-recorded, as agreed with the narrators and then later transcribed.

Many of the narrators were in effect economic migrants as they had left their birth places (outside of Johannesburg), and came to the city for work or schooling. Even though they had migrated to urban Johannesburg, it remained their reality that modernisation had not weakened the deep-rooted tradition of having a child (Ebigbola, 2000), and these childfree women remained on the receiving end of stigmatization. As childfree women, they negotiate those boundaries which render them outsiders, as they attempt to, 'minimize conflict or build coalition' (Proudford, 1999, p. 10). The fact that the study occurred only in the Gauteng Province is not considered a limitation, as several of the narrators had migrated from other parts of South Africa for reasons of work or study - their geographical mobility reflected diverse views that were in part informed by their places of origin as well as by their current locations and experiences.

The interviews were facilitated by means of a discussion guide and an outlined roadmap. The guide was designed to offer structure to the engagement. The roadmap was intended to present a holistic picture of these narrators - it segmented the following topics:

- Relational system (birth, early home life, parents, siblings, relatives);
- The learning years (experiences at school, tertiary and beyond);
- Relationships (romance, social, professional, friends);
- The choice to be childfree (the decision-making, the disclosure, its impact, influence, limitations, costs);
- The workplace, and,
- Self-Identity (how they see themselves in absolute and relative terms).

These themes were intended to keep the interviews focussed yet were fluid enough to provide scope for deeper scrutiny. In the life-history approach, interviews are useful for 'constructing

dialogue focused on a creative search for mutual personal understanding of a research topic' (Crabtree & Miller, 2004, p. 196) as well as for getting a participant's version of their social world and to encourage them to reflect on their experiences (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

When the participant and researcher are both women during the research process, differences in race, class, ethnicity and age may have some bearing on how the interview progresses (Charmaz, 2010). Therefore, these interviews presented me with pause for reflexivity as I paid attention to how participants perceived me, as well as how my past and present identities may shape our interaction. In this case, given the focus on black women, racial affinity helped create some rapport, but one cannot discount the importance of other identity markers which may have impacted the interview process.

My gender served as a leveller with some narrators saying, for example, 'It's so good to find another woman who shares my experience' (Respondent Interview, October 2016) and 'it feels good to offload to you because you as a childfree black woman you get it,' (Respondent Interview, November 2016). Such comments served to intensify my sense of responsibility and duty towards protecting and preserving their histories whilst amplifying their voices. I engaged as openly as possible. The honest exchange of experiences, the familiar and unfamiliar, served as an organising tool which knit together disparate events in our lives to form a whole that gave meaning and import to these events (Frank, 1995; Halualani, 2010). It was comforting that a circle of trust was established.

As Ellis (2004, p. 66) observes:

> One person's disclosure and self-probing invite another's disclosure and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into one another's feelings and thoughts; where listening to and asking questions about another's plight lead to greater understanding of one's own; and where the examination and comparison of experience offer new insight into both lives.

In-depth interviews of the sort applied in this study are effective for collecting a history from below (Bretell, 1998). Rather than explore the life- accounts of the narrators in an effort to recover historical themes (Minkley & Rassool, 1999), my approach had a single-minded focus of collecting and then interrogating these life-histories to deepen understanding as well as extract meaning.

The initial interviews with each respondent were, as can be expected, a bit odd as we were attempting to establish some rapport. I had, in the lead-up conversation, asked that each respondent choose a venue at which to meet, one that was easy for them to get to and presented the least disruption in their lives. I was mindful not to inconvenience them or issue any further demands on their time as they were volunteers in this research.

With each respondent, I commenced the interview by mapping out a general process as well as outlining questions uppermost in my mind. I did, however, impress upon each respondent that they were able to answer my probes in any way they felt comfortable. It was my intention to reduce the often-recorded power differential between researcher and respondent, as quickly as possible, by letting each respondent direct and lead the direction of the interaction. This empowerment served as a key aspect, as with each interaction the narrators took the lead and offered rich responses to my line of questioning. The nature of having a series of interviews with each narrator allowed me to check that they were not experiencing any emotional difficulties as a result of the research.

The life-stories of these narrators are in effect, a construction of their lives (Babbie & Mouton, 2012). It is for this reason that I was vigilant (on my part as a researcher) to not, 'speak into' their words nor impose deductions on the lives of the narrators. I was also mindful to be 'present' without imposing an on-going interpretation of their accounts through theoretical definitions. I focussed on careful listening as this served to validate the interviewee's experience (Hallway & Jefferson, 2000) and the flexibility enabled the narrators to narrate as they saw fit. I was rewarded by this permissive style as it produced unsolicited key thoughts and ideas I would not have otherwise known or been comfortable interrogating. The outcome was an outline of each respondent's life with coherence and sequential progress, thus enabling the use of meaningful experiences as data (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008).

5.7 Data Analysis

This study was qualitative as explained elsewhere and intended to unlock new understanding grounded in human experience (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017), in this case, the experiences of black professional childfree women. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) was adopted as one of the appropriate tools to utilise. This method of analysis concerns itself with the examination of a participant's

external and internal worlds, therefore granting the researcher an 'insider's perspective' without necessarily demoting the participants' agency nor diminishing their experiences with the researcher's imposed interpretations.

My role as researcher remained active as I observed participants narrating their experiences and social practices. I treated the narrators' accounts of their life stories as narrative and situated them at the centre of my investigation. Through narrative analysis (Tomassini, Font & Thomas, 2019), I was able to extract insights from the narrators' attempts to make sense of their worlds. This deepened my understanding of their lived experiences, as well as the manner in which they constructed meaning in their lives.

Further enabled by thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017), I extracted new knowledge from the data. By adhering to the established six (6) phases of the Thematic Analysis (TA) Method) (Braun & Clarke 2006), I identified, described, named, organised and analysed the themes that emerged from the collected data. This method presented a useful means to navigate through the similarities and differences in the narratives and ultimately surface a summary of key features and convergences, in a structured manner.

5.8 Narrative Practice

In a study of men living with spinal injury, Smith and Sparkes (2002) applied a reflexive analytical approach which emphasised context and categorical-content. I adopted the same approach in examining the thematic similarities and differences between the narratives of the BCPW in this project. Such analytical diversity was appropriate because, 'the more we examine our data from different viewpoints, the more we may reveal – or indeed construct – their complexity' (Smith & Sparkes, 2002, p. 145). Narrative practice enabled me to, 'alternatively focus on the 'what' and the constitutive flows of the 'how' of social life, allowing [me] to shift attention from the substantive or the contextual to the artful components of reality construction and back again' (Smith & Sparkes, 2002, p. 160). Seen together, these 'what' and 'how' present a cohesive story and integrated picture.

As mentioned elsewhere, this study is somewhat biographical, as it stems from my own subject position as a BCPW. The connection between a chosen area of study and one's life is not anathema. In fact, Letherby (2002) upholds that it is important, 'to learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine it and interpret it. In this sense,

craftsmanship is the centre of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product on which you work' (Letherby, 2002, p. 9). This vantage point, I believe, enriched my social analysis. The narrators' stories unfolded in ways that affirm the assertion that 'women's personal narratives are, among other things, stories of how women negotiate their exceptional gender status both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime' (Morell, 1994, p. 30). I was able to capture (emerging) core themes from the content of the stories collected in an interview context (Smith & Sparkes, 2002), and by weaving their origins, relational systems, support structures, social experiences as well as workplace experience, a composite yet custom picture of each woman emerged.

By challenging ideology and language biased towards the perpetuation of maternalism – these narrators present a unique form of gender activism, one anchored upon the premise that power is indeed, 'the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter' (Morell, 1994, p. xvii). By insisting on the label childfree, rather than childless, they show that naming is a critical act because 'members of marginalised groups must struggle to name their own experiences for themselves in order to claim the subjectivity, the possibility of historical agency' (Moore, 2014, p. 167). By articulating a childfree reproductive choice as legitimate, the BCPW present this reproductive freedom as an alternative to more reductive conceptions of ideology or culture and dominant discourses (Clarke, 2015).

5.9 Ethics

To ensure the quality and integrity of this research project (Ho, 2010; Jacob, 2013; Resnik & Shamoo, 2017), as well as satisfy the requisite professional and methodological standards, ethics were central to the undertaking of the research. Given the social context of this inquiry, I was mindful of my obligation to advance the contribution of new knowledge and preserve public trust, without causing harm to the narrators and wider society. In this subsection, I reflect on ethical aspects of this research. I deliberate on the micro-ethical concerns I was confronted with during the inquiry, after fulfilling institutional ethical approval processes. I also reflect upon key ethical principles (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009; Resnik, 2017) and contextualise the issues associated with each one. I focus particularly on confidentiality in light of South Africa's Protection of Private Information Act (POPI), Act 4 of 2013. In concluding, I consider my own reflexivity and evolution during this study and offer some thoughts for future consideration.

Research that involves human subjects or participants raises unique and complex ethical, legal, social and political issues[24]. There are several definitions of ethics (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000; Bulmer 2001; González-López, 2011; Emmerich, 2016; Ryen 2016). I have adopted the version presented by Resnik & Shamoo (2017) which views ethics as a standard of conduct that distinguishes between right and wrong, good and bad.

Shamoo & Resnik (2015), offer 16 principles for ethical conduct. Listed below are 16 which were applicable to this study and to which I adhered. These are:

Honesty

I was honest not just in the relationship with the narrators but and also with myself. This honestly also extends to how I have reported the data, methodology and results. There was no conflict of interest. No part of this study is fabricated, falsified or misrepresents the narrators and their contribution.

Objectivity

This was an ongoing awareness not to manipulate the experiences of the narrators by imposing my assumptions. I was careful not to distort the study design, data capture, data analysis, interpretation and findings with my perspective. The constant questions I asked myself were : "Is this what they said or this is what I am interpreting ?" "Is this what they meant or is this what I am assuming?" The ongoing interrogation of the self, through journaling as well as note-taking helped me to retain a level of objectivity that does justice to the stories of my narrators. Where my views were disputed, I remained open-minded. An example is when one respondent questioned whether in emphasising my childfree status I was not diminishing other aspects of my womanhood. This was an important challenge that forced me to think carefully about those identity markers that I emphasise. I challenged myself to remain as impartial as possible, guarding against any pre-conceived expectations of how BCPWs should behave and communicate with me. As I was forming an impression of the data I was gathering and information that was shared with me, I was mindful of how my interpretation and impression of the information could be affected by my sensory perception of the situation (Resnik 2017). It was important therefore to detach my beliefs and emotional reaction from the situation and present the findings as objectively as possible.

Openness

[24] https://researchethics.ca/what-is-research-ethics/

I remained open to the process and deliberately created space for novel approaches and new perspectives to emerge. For example, the inclusion of 'The Outlier' (a respondent in her 70s) enriched the study immensely. Her history presented a historical perspective that provided background for the evaluation of progress, or lack thereof, as it relates to social tolerance of reproductive diversity in South Africa.

Carefulness

I was thorough throughout this study, from research design, fieldwork to the presentation of results. I kept complete and accurate records of all relevant documentations, such as ethical approvals from the Institution, consent forms, research activities as well as correspondence with related parties. I was careful with the examination of my own work as well as with the integration of guidance from my supervisor along the way.

Legality

In addition to observing and upholding the rules of the Institution, I functioned within the wider ambit of the governing laws of South Africa, especially with regards to the stipulations and requirements of the Protection of Personal Information Act[25], whose purpose is to " protect personal information, to strike a balance between the right to privacy and the need for the free flow of, and access to information, and to regulate how personal information is processed"[26]. As a researcher who gathered and stored the personal information of the narrators, I was careful of how I collected the data (recorded to digital device as well as notes) and was clear to the narrators that all collected data would be safely stored in my personal safe (in case of notebooks and forms) and that all digital information would be kept in encrypted files with back up on Cloud. I gave assurance that the information received would be utilised only for the purpose of this research study and the publication of the thesis.

Integrity

I believe that if we have integrity, our actions reflect our beliefs and attitudes (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009). I was consistent and sincere throughout and ensured alignment between my words and actions. This was expressed through keeping my promises (Fassin, 2014), communicating fully and openly with my narrators and supervisor. I ensured that there was

[25] The POPI Act, Act No.4 of 2013

[26] See: https://www.miltons.law.za/a-summary-of-popi-the-protection-of-personal-information-act-act-no-4-of-2013/

always a shared understanding of the objectives of the study and intended use of the outcomes of the research project.

Respect for intellectual property

I have honoured copyrights and duly cited all sources referenced in the study. I have given proper acknowledgment for all contributors to this research. I am grateful towards the narrators through whose lived experiences I was able to bring new knowledge to the fore and thus advance scholarship on the subject of childfreeness and the wider landscape of reproductive diversity. No aspect of this work has been plagiarized.

Confidentiality

This subject matter under investigation is both emotive and divisive with the potential of placing the BCPWs in harm's way, especially in a society such as South Africa which is patriarchal and pronatalist. The information shared by the narrators was treated with the highest level of discretion and respect. To ensure protection of personal information, the data collected was securely filed and backed up on cloud, accessible only to myself. To further protect the narrators and their narratives, a joint agreement was reached that the narrators would be reflected in the study through the use of pseudonyms of their choice to avoid detection or revelation at any point in the public consumption of this research study.

Social Responsibility

Through this study, my intention is to deepen society's understanding of diversity as it relates to reproductive choice and by extension, promote reproductive justice and social good.

Respect for colleagues

Although this study was to a large extent a solo undertaking, the input of my supervisor and colleagues in the faculty was well received and appreciated.

Non-Discrimination

The study was specifically focussed on a sample of black, childfree, professional women. Other social groups were excluded not as an act of discrimination, but rather because they were not

the focus of my inquiry. The desire to fight erasure of this specific group was the central focus of my work.

Competence

I continue to enrich and grow my understanding of critical diversity literacy and stay abreast of new developments in the field.

Human Subject Protection

I treated the narrators as autonomous individuals with inherent rights and the capability to make informed decisions, overcome challenges and exercise choices (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Even though my line of inquiry was investigative, I was mindful not to cross boundaries, cause embarrassment or any form of harm. I sought and received informed consent from all narrators. No coercion was used to retain them in the study as I reminded them at various points, of their right to terminate participation if their decision changed at any point. To protect and advocate for the autonomy of all, the narrators were free to make choices about what to share or not. Even though the questionnaire guide framed the scope of this research, the narrators made the ultimate decision on what to contribute. The decision to not refer to participants as 'subjects' but rather narrators is another manifestation of my respect. Ultimately, it is their narratives that have provided the platform upon which I conducted this inquiry. They were not only the basic data-generating parts of the study, they were human beings whose dignity I had a responsibility to uphold. Their shared histories allowed and enabled me to gain access into the lived experiences of black, childfree professional women.

My reflections

I come to this study from multiple vantage points; a black, childfree, professional woman for whom childfreeness is a crucial identity marker , a first-generation college student, a creative practitioner where my reproductive choice is not essentialised nor judged, as the only girl-child born to a woman with a traditional view of womanhood and motherhood and raised in a social circle that shared these pronatalist views, and also as a mentor to young black girls/women. My choice of issues to address is influenced by these multiple streams of experience and identity. There was ongoing reflexivity during this project and constant self-awareness enabled me to create a space for mutual reciprocity and respect with the women whose histories I utilise as data for this scholarly pursuit. I upheld the importance and requirements of research ethics (Hedgecoe, 2016; Palaskar, 2018), throughout the project. My conduct and decision-making

was informed by ethics and the moral standards I uphold as a person for whom integrity, respect, compassion, social justice, and honour are paramount.

There are specific events that were pivotal in this project and I present them here, as a reflection on my experience and also as a suggestion for future scholarship.

I. Non-Discrimination

At the genesis of this study, I had determined who to include and exclude in the research sample and prioritised reproductive status, gender and occupation. I was confronted with an unanticipated challenge when a woman in her 70s responded to my call for participants. My initial thought was to exclude her on account of her 'being too old' and 'not employed'. When I reflected upon this, I noticed a being narrow-mindedness on my part. I revised my definition of a 'professional woman', admitting that that this was not necessarily someone who was permanently and gainfully employed, but rather someone with a profession. The outlier was a social worker by profession and although 'retired,' she continued to work as a commissioned freelancer on social research projects and served her church community as a counsellor as well. I finally realised that excluding her based on my narrow definition was tantamount to additional traumatization and erasure. I consulted with my supervisor who encouraged me to speak openly to the respondent about this 'dilemma'. After an intense conversation – listening to snippets of her story she was willing to divulge, I made the decision to include her story. By so doing, I was able to exercise mindful inclusion and ensure that she was not silenced. Her story was included to enrich our understanding of long-standing social biases and discrimination against women who forgo maternity. I am proud to have brought her story forward and included her narrative in wider intellectual history.

II. Objectivity

The subject of objectivity is a challenging topic and one in which I am emotionally invested. I was aware that the extent to which I could remain objective as a researcher of this qualitative study (Tufford & Newman, 2012) would be tested. Recognising the profound difficulty to report 'what is' and 'as it is' I borrowed heavily from the practice of bracketing (Drew, 2004) especially as defined by Starks

& Trinidad (2007) who encourage the researcher to be "vigilant about her own perspective, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs, and developing hypotheses…engage in the self-reflective process of bracketing and thereby recognise and set aside (but not abandon) their a priori knowledge and assumptions, with the analytical goal of attending to the participants' account with an open mind (Starks & Trinidad, 2017: 1376). Whilst other scholars may contest this concept (Tufford et al., 2012: 3), it provided useful knowledge and tactic for me so I could, to the extent possible, present the histories of BCPWs without diluting them with my own. The ongoing engagement with my supervisor was also a useful bracketing intercept. Her ongoing assessment of the project was tempered with questions aimed at keeping my bias in check and elevating objectivity. There was a consistent tension between cognitive engagement and emotional sensitivity. Any perceived leakages of my own sensibilities, emotions and experiences must be evaluated against this valiant effort and intention.

III. Openness

I was at times moved to share some secrets (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2010) of my own during this study. This was not a pre-mediated move, but occurred in-the-moment. I was careful to offer this information exchange within context. For example, when one respondent spoke of her challenging relationship with a parent, I shared that I had a similar experience. Still, questions can be asked: Was my sharing an undue influence on the respondent? Was the emotional proximity creating a false sense of friendship? I believe not. This reciprocity was about a shared experience rather than a manipulative ploy to extract more information from her. It was important for me that ultimately, there was a balanced risk/benefit outcome (Resnik, 2017) in the establishment of rapport.

IV. Respect

Before their inclusion in this study, none of the narrators had heard or used the term childfree in relation to themselves. I, on the other hand, had and continue to fully embrace the term, as I believe it locates my reproductive choice from a position of agency rather than lack. I presented the term as a possibility – an affirming description - and let the narrators decide for themselves. Even though I feltslight

disappointment when not all were receptive, I had to remember that my role was to present an alternative rather than to convert them into adoptees.

V. Consent

Even though I had secured informed and written consent from the narrators, I think there is scope for consent forms to be customised for each individual's unique circumstances and specific needs.

VI. Causing no harm

There were instances of social overlap as two of the narrators were social friends. It was therefore important that we demarcate conversations between our friendship and their inclusion in the study. I gave and kept my word about observing this demarcation as well as keeping their participation secret, not because it was clandestine but to protect their privacy. Maintaining some form of 'academic distancing' when I knew I would meet them socially, was a persistent worry. An additional concern was the potential of causing emotional harm. I felt somewhat conflicted and ill-equipped. Conflicted because in the sharing of their stories, they had to dig into some suppressed memories as well as reveal deeply held secrets, yet it was this deep excavation that gave the inquiry its richness and depth. Ill-equipped because I wondered whether this sharing would result in some triggering and emotional upheaval that I was not equipped to handle. I repeatedly checked in on the narrators for such. However, beyond asking how they were feeling about sharing , I did not know which other questions to ask to ascertain their true emotional state so I could offer them support or direct them to a professional should the need have arisen. A future consideration for this line of inquiry would be to have the services of a mental health professional at hand to support narrators who may need help.

VII. Financial Influence

There was no financial incentive offered to the narrators. I only offered compensation for travel and/or petrol costs incurred in the instances where an individual had to travel from her home to meet me. This was the case with two of the narrators.

VIII. Social Good

The narrators' experiences are a productive starting point in challenging patriarchy and prevailing social hegemony. As the subject of women without children rose in popular culture, I was invited to, and accepted, several media interviews (print, radio and television). I shared deeply about my own motivation and experience as a BCPW and was careful not to divulge the stories/experiences shared by my narrators on these platforms. Although it may have assisted in proving that these BCPW do exist, it was more paramount for me to uphold their dignity, knowing that once published, their stories would then have proper context and platform to take part in conversations intended for social transformation, the goal of the research.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter concentrated on the methodology that was applied in this study. An explanation of qualitative research as a method for data collection and analysis was provided. Information about the sample was also provided, Additionally, the suitability of the life-history approach was also given. Lastly, ethical considerations were also discussed.

CHAPTER 6
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect upon the life narratives of the seven (7) narrators in this study. The section highlights the ways they differ as well as the shared and recurrent themes that emerged from their lived experiences. The analysis shows how various discourses and ideological underpinnings frame their experiences. Their narratives are interpreted and located within the theoretical framework of childfreeness and how it relates to gender, identity and diversity.

The discussion that follows presents current findings from engagement with these narrators and makes explicit the patterns of participants' social relations and the processes that shaped them (Khunou, 2015). To the extent possible, I have used their collective narratives to weave a coherent understanding that reflects their experiences and sets these at the centre of new feminist inquiry. Their stories, like many, did not come neatly organised. Coherence is not an inherent feature of narratives but is both artfully crafted in the telling and drawn from the available meanings, structures and linkages that comprise stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2002).

6.2 Themes

The narrators' life-histories, as presented, show that the childfree reproductive choice transcends the boundaries imposed by politics and society, yet is also a response to and rejection of same. Their lives bear witness to the fact that, 'remaining childless is a constant test of perseverance' (Morell, 1994, p. xvi). The women in this study reflect a diversity of life histories. Without diminishing their uniqueness nor inflating their similarities, some themes began to emerge during analysis, which I then wove together to aid coherence. I am mindful that, 'core themes can often be emphasised at the expense of variation and difference, leading the researcher to under-appreciate the heterogeneity of experience and the storied quality of data' (Sparkes & Smith, 2002, p. 147). With great care, I have used these emergent themes merely as organising principles rather than as homogenising tools.

These themes offer a window into underlying issues, constructs and ideas relating to childfreeness, motherhood, and confronting pronatalism in social and professional settings. These themes are in essence, a platform from which to explore the interrelatedness of ideologies and broader social-political dynamics. As a collective, they provide the backdrop on which power, privilege and stigma are exercised, contested and confronted. In the final

analysis, it is pertinent to ask, 'how can interested feminists undermine the symbolic distinctions that frame mothers as somehow superior and childless women as inherently flawed?' (Morell, 1994, p. 76). Identified themes were: *development phase* (illustrating the attitudes towards education and career), the *lived experience* (these include owning the choice to be childfree and its impact on intimate relationships, social discrimination, support network, self-determination as well as the workplace experience), *dimensions that intersect with childfreeness* (these include gender, class, culture as well as patriarchy) and *diversity* (including self-identity)

6.2.1 Theme 1: Development Phase

6.2.1.1 Subtheme 1) Attitudes Towards Education

After graduating from a private high-school, Susan left her home province to pursue a BA in Journalism and Arts Degree in the Eastern Cape. She also held a post-graduate diploma in brand management. She chose the Arts because, in her words, 'they help me to question myself' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). D graduated high-school and under the direction of her mother, was accepted at University to study BSc Civil Engineering. She commented that university was challenging for her as seen through the fact that it took her 6 years to complete a 4-year degree. Mosia's high-school years were split between two schools. She acquired her Junior Certificate in her home-township and her Matric at a training college in Pretoria. She called herself, 'a product of '76' (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016), referring to the 1976 Soweto student uprisings which interrupted schooling for many students at the time. She was the first in her family and the only one among her siblings to go to University, graduating with a BA in Social Work. In addition, she had a Diploma in Public Relations (PR), and a recently earned Certificate in Business and Arts from Sotheby's of London.

Masego's world-wide family movements meant her education occurred across various countries. She graduated high school in Swaziland, briefly attended University in the Eastern Cape for half a year, after which she went to New York, USA to study and graduate with a Liberal Arts degree. KayJee started school at a very young age and graduated high school at 14 years. She then attended a post-Matric year at a private school in Johannesburg, after which she was accepted at a university far away from home because, in her words, 'I wanted to live my life' (KayJee, personal communication, October 19, 2016). She graduated with a BA

Degree majoring in Economics and Marketing. Palesa was a BA Graduate, and during the research project, was in the process of registering for an Honours Degree. Thabsy was a graduate in BA Social Work and had gone into this field because she 'wanted to help advance [her] community' (Thabsy, personal communication, September 23, 2016).

6.2.1.2 Subtheme 2: Attitudes Towards Career

The narrators were at various stages of development in their careers and all had carved their own career-paths in unique ways, thus presenting a challenge to the definition of 'professional'. They were in fact, women with professions even when they were self- or under-employed. This was a germane distinction as to date, and in most instances, the definition of a professional person (including my own) almost always refers to an individual who is employed full-time by another or enterprise in a specific profession. For example, Thabsy was a retired Social Worker with a BA degree in Social Work, who at the time of interviews was, 'freelancing as a research project leader for several Research Houses and making a penny on the side' (Thabsy, personal communication, September 23, 2016). She may not have been employed full-time, but was gainfully employed, even if it was peripatetic. After graduating with a BA Degree in Social Work, Thabsy worked as a social worker for a short period before going into the world of advertising in the mid-1970s because she felt 'social work was confining' (Thabsy, personal communication, September 23, 2016). She spent almost a decade in advertising, and in a bid to 'widen her career path', became a consultant project manager before eventually working in a government department until her retirement.

Palesa had been running an independent business for several years, but due to a change in family circumstances in 2013, she returned to formal employment as a consultant in the medical industry, a job she hated. She was due to register for a post-graduate degree and work her way back to self-employment. I met Susan when she had recently quit a successful career in advertising and was embarking on a career change. She was a trained dancer, who had started her work life in dance and choreography. After dance, she earned a post-graduate qualification in brand management and joined the advertising sector. Much as she had enjoyed her advertising career, Susan started thinking of change when 'the pain points exceeded the pleasure points' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). When probed she explained, 'it [had] stopped being fun' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016) and she felt she was 'giving more than [she] was getting' (Susan, personal communication,

September 2016). It later emerged the decision to resign was prompted by the fact that she had also sunk 'into a deep and horrible depression' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016).

At the time of study, D had recently changed jobs, and moved to a small engineering firm, which was different from the parastatal at which she had previously worked. She moved in order to 'gain marketplace knowledge and took a pay cut in order to get close to the coal face' (D, personal communication, October 4, 2016). The decision to move and change jobs was 'the first real decision' she had made. Her career choice, up until that point, had been influenced by her mother who had previously said to her, 'you are black, female and are good in the sciences, if you became an engineer you'd make a killing as there is a great shortage [of engineers in general and female ones in particular]' (D, personal communication, October 4, 2016). At her new job, D was one of 4 engineers and the only Black female engineer, a situation that bothered her, as she felt she had been hired to 'bring the gender and colour thing to the party' (D, personal communication, October 4, 2016). When I asked her to clarify, she said she was very aware of her 'aloneness' as a childfree, black woman. D said another reason for her job change was because she felt her husband was advancing faster than she was and she wanted to 'play catch up' (D, personal communication, October 4, 2016). With her husband, they had a dream to open an engineering practice in Tanzania, his country of birth.

In 2001, Masego founded her own Creative Services company with another female partner and their company was, she said with great pride, 'still going strong 15 years later' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She said she loved her job 'completely' and her childfreeness suited her 'perfectly' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She was very proud of her success and added, 'my business success with another woman as partner, flies in the face of all the vitriol spread about women not working together' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

After graduating university, KayJee went straight into marketing, working for a multi-national petroleum company, then a personal/homecare company and eventually joined a leading alcoholic beverages company. This was her last full-time corporate job, after which she joined her husband in running their company in which she was Managing Director. In between, she also served as a marketing consultant for her previous employer and other marketing outfits.

Mosia had over 30 years in the fields of Marketing and Public Relations. She was a ground-breaker in the haircare sector in the early 1980s, when multinational hair care brands entered South Africa. She later changed to a long career as a Public Relations professional. At the time of study, she had formed her own Art Advisory Consultancy.

6.2.2 Theme 2: Lived Experience

6.2.2.1 Subtheme 1: Becoming Childfree

Letherby (2002) presents voluntary childlessness (i.e. childfreeness) as a continuum which includes people who are certain they do not want children; those who are certain of being potential parents; people who accept childlessness having been potential parents; those who are ambivalent, through to people who feel the decision was taken away from them (Letherby 2002, p. 12). The diversity of motivators for the childfree choice among the narrators in this research, also reflected the myriad ways through which they had arrived at their respective childfree state. They were active deciders about childfreeness, with some going to great lengths to ensure that they had no children (for example, D and KayJee had terminated pregnancies), while others were overtaken by events (for example, Mosia and Palesa suffered miscarriages).

It is crucial to register the narrators' active voices so they do not appear as dormant beings. Their insistence upon self-authorship serves as the anchor for their decision to become and/or remain childfree. Despite a social structure that propagates the ideology of motherhood, and one within which the childfree 'may be treated as outsiders and experience symbolic gesture and have their lives not taken seriously' (Morell 1994, p. 133), the BCPW were not vacillating. They stood firm as active deciders (Gillespie, 2003) who challenged the positioning of motherhood as a powerful signifier of a woman's normality (Morell, 1994), as they were rooted in their reproductive choice and used their 'outsider' position as a place from which to launch a counter-message, one that presents childfreeness as a legitimate choice and one of many possibilities open to women.

Different from previous research which identified other childfree people as either, 'early articulators' 'postponers' or 'left-behinds' (Daum 2015; Houseknecht 1987; McQuillan, Greil, Shreffler, Wonch-Hill & Gentzler, 2012; Veevers, 1980), these narrators outlined experiences that were more nuanced and intricate, than a linear and simple decision-point. These BCPW's

choices were influenced by multiple as well as complex structural, situational and social issues. As Thabsy stated, 'For me, being childfree was a process and not a decision; it was the end result of deep reflection and how life played out' (Thabsy, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Letherby (2002) records that stories told by the voluntarily childless, make manifest the complexity of the choice. Being childfree is an ongoing practice or outcome determined by various personal and social circumstances (Letherby, 2002). This is evidenced by Thabsy who had earlier in life decided not to have children out of wedlock and when marriage 'didn't happen' (Thabsy, personal communication, October 12, 2016), it cemented her decision not to have children. Being educated, she believed, enabled her to 'develop a deeper view of life and cultivate different aspects of [her] life' which spanned wider than the role of mother. Thabsy and Mosia were consistent throughout the study about their decision never to be single, unwed mothers. Not living or being in a union decreased their childbearing intentions, hence they presented themselves as being voluntarily childfree (Gillespie, 2003; Zonkovic et al., 2014).

Thabsy's parents were part of an educated class and her father especially, impressed upon her the importance of 'getting ahead and making a success of one's life' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). She considered herself a product of her generation (early 1960s), as she put it, 'In my days, getting pregnant while at school meant one was finished' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). Consequently, she made sure not to fall into that trap. When she started work, the detrimental effect of a child out of wedlock never left Thabsy's consciousness. When she finally made the decision to be childfree, she was able to do so without the need 'to consult another' and she relished the self-reliance because 'the authority rested on me' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016).

Palesa's decision to be childfree evolved over time and through circumstance. She had initially expected to have children just as she had been socialised. When she fell pregnant in her late 20s, she decided to keep the child as a means of healing a childhood wound, for she remembered what it was like growing up without a father. In keeping the child, she had also assumed her partner at the time would be a life partner, as well as a present and fully involved father to their child. However, she suffered a miscarriage. Ever mindful of her painful experience in losing N[27], she conceded that in the beginning, the thought of being childfree was mainly out of fear: 'what if I lose another child?' (Palesa, personal communication,

[27] This is the name she has given her late daughter.

October 10, 2016). As an outcome of her healing process after the miscarriage, this thought evolved into a decision: 'it was no longer about fear of loss, but rather a positive choice' (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Palesa's friends and siblings knew of her decision, but she was reticent to inform her mother because, as she said, 'My mother is very traditional, she is a subject of her own upbringing and I am afraid of how she'll react…I fear that telling her about my choice will devastate her' (Palesa, personal communication, September 28, 2016).

As early as her teens, Susan said, she knew she did not want to have children out of wedlock as she had ambitions of going to university and 'making a success of my life' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). She grew up with female cousins many of whom became unwed teenage mothers and she resolved she would not 'wreck her flow and stifle her freedom by becoming an unwed teenage mother. In my view kids are baggage' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). When Susan started work, her chosen career paths also pointed to children as a 'stumbling block to further success' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). As her career progressed, this perceived career stumbling block evolved into a 'definitive choice' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). In dance, for example, she recalled, 'our bodies were policed and even a little weight gain was frowned upon. So, pregnancy was definitely a no-go area' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). Her career change from dance to advertising cemented her view of the 'unsuitability' of children to her life (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). She feared parenting would conflict with her life goals, a theme that emerges in other studies about the decision not to have children (Park, 2005; Zonkovic et al., 2014). The childfree life then became a conscious and permanent decision. Instead of having a Damascene conversion, Susan evolved into this reproductive choice:

> My decision to be childfree was not a definitive moment. Instead, there have been a series of little moments and unfolding affirmations that got me to this choice. Since this decision became concrete and real, I have directed my life in ways that focused on my needs and pleasing myself, a situation about which I am content. (Susan, personal communication, October 2016).

Susan shared an experience she had with her obstetrician gynaecologist during which the subject of children had come up. When she told her doctor that her decision to remain childfree was still unchanged, she received what she felt was 'unwarranted counsel' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016) when her doctor advised her to 'think about freezing [her] eggs'

since they would not retain their great quality forever'. Freezing her eggs, the doctor had said, would be an 'insurance policy' in case Susan 'changed [her] mind in the future' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). Susan regarded this comment as intrusion and felt it demonstrated the extent to which pronatalism dominated society. This interaction alludes to what may be a systemic and ideological chasm between pronatalist medical practitioners and the un-traditional, childfree women they treat.

In Grade 6, D recalled they were given a school assignment to look after a teddy bear as a baby, an experience that she 'hated' (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016). This experience coupled with her own big-sister role in baby-sitting her twin sisters, made her realise that 'kids are no fun and not [her] cup of tea' (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016). These then, were early factors in her decision-making journey. As such, D can be considered an early articulator because for her, a preference for a child-free lifestyle or intention to remain childless was consistent and originated in early childhood (Gillespie, 2003; Zonkovic et al., 2014). She was also fascinated by the distinction this researcher drew between childfree and childless. As she said, 'calling this choice childfree made sense to me and made me very happy because the term affirmed my choice' (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016). Her overall decision-making was a process: 'It is not like I had an exact moment of saying I will never have children. However, I've had cumulative experiences which have strengthened my resolve' (D, personal communication, September 7, 2016). She also expressed no pressure from her family, saying, 'At no point in my life did my mom and I discuss children and I said I didn't want. She never once said no, no, you'll not be happy without children. Instead, she was like, 'It's you, make your own choice. You know, as in 'do your thing boo'.' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017).

D's child-free decision preceded her meeting and marrying her husband, H. When H demonstrated no keenness to have children, it galvanised her childfree decision. Early in her relationship with H, she had a 'scare' which she later disclosed was in fact, a pregnancy: 'I had an abortion. This happened before we got married and I was clear I didn't want a child. I told him and he was supportive. So, I got it done' (D, personal communication, September 7, 2016). She did not consult H about whether he wanted to keep the child or not; her childfree conviction determined the path she chose. As a couple, they presented a united front and, in her words, 'We've kept this as our secret. After all, we cleaned up together' (D, personal communication,

September 7, 2016). She maintained a rejection of motherhood stating: 'I had and still have no desire to be a mother.' (D, personal communication, September 7, 2016).
Lost on her was the appeal of motherhood as promulgated by society. When asked how she would react if her husband changed his mind about having children, she said it would be a 'deal breaker' (D, personal communication, September 7, 2016). The strength of her childfree conviction trumped her relationship.

Masego was engaged at age 30, but her fiancé was tragically killed. The idea of marriage had been a 'surprise' to her and others as she 'was not the marriage type' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Before her fiancé's death, the topic of having children had come up and there had been an implied agreement they were going to have them. When fate interrupted, she resigned herself to a new existence: 'Life turned out this way and it suits me just fine' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). During the grieving process, she recalled thinking her life 'would be ok' without children. Even though Masego was not an early articulator, she was by no means a passive childfree person. When she turned 38, she experienced a momentary vacillation and found herself seriously thinking of children. However, 'getting pregnant was not appealing, as it is the most horrid thing' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016) and those who praise it do so because, in her view, they feel an obligation to. She referred to it as 'PR-ing this thing' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). When asked to explain what she meant, she replied, 'I am annoyed at people who mythologize pregnancy because it is a lot of work, there is no fun and games all the way' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She went so far as to say, 'pregnancy is horrible because it changes everything, not just a woman's body' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She expanded by saying 'it alters the woman's path forever, because she can never, ever again be a non-mother' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

During her vacillation period, Masego had considered 'adoption'. She was contemplating 'adopting' in a manner common in African settings, where she would 'take on a cousin or niece to raise'. After deep reflection on her circumstance and lifestyle, she later 'tossed that idea' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). The idea of being a mother was 'not central' in her life and unlike the rest of the 'Jozi[28] crowd', for Masego, marriage and children

[28] Jozi is a slang word for Johannesburg.

were ‘not accomplishments’ (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Instead, she considered her 15-year-old business a real and big triumph that came first before marriage and children. Being childfree suited her wanderlust spirit. In contrast to some of her girlfriends whom she deduced had succumbed to social pressure to have children, she said, ‘I am not bound by these falsehoods and therefore have time and space to be myself and make choices that work for me’ (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She loved the ‘spontaneity gained from owning [her] time’ (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). In a moment of deep reflection, she commented, ‘We, who are childfree take personal time for granted’ (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Here, Masego was contrasting her unencumbered life to those of her friends who were mothers and were always ‘frazzled, tired and without any time for themselves’ (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

KayJee recalls that in her 20s she reflected briefly on why she should have children rather than not. She had mapped out her life goals, and it became apparent that children ‘would not fit the plans’ she had (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). Her ambivalence later turned into an active decision when she learnt her partner did not want children: ‘he was the clearer one about not wanting kids and had structured a life in which children did not feature’ (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). Once decided, a childfree life became one they both upheld. When KayJee later had a hysterectomy as a permanent solution to bothersome fibroids, the childfree decision was already in full effect. KayJee said her reproductive choice was not something worthy of praise: ‘It’s just a choice, it’s not better or worse’ (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). Nonetheless, she was aware of the benefits that accrued from being childfree: ‘I have maintained control of my life and do not feel the pressure to get a corporate job due to fears of not having money to pay school fees. Also, I do not have to plan holidays to align with school holidays nor am I subjected to incessant worrying, like my friends who are parents’ (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017).

From her teens to adulthood, the idea of being an unwed mother was anathema to Mosia. As a result, she focused on her university education to the total exclusion of thoughts about children. As an adult, she imagined children only within a marriage. When life interrupted (she suffered two miscarriages), as well as the dissolution of love relations she cherished deeply, she decided on a life without children. So, when her doctor recommended a hysterectomy to dispense of

her troublesome fibroids in her late 30s, she was comfortable with it. She was adamant to present as childfree, insisting: 'I don't miss not having a child' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). For Mosia the benefits of her childfree life were clear: 'Without a doubt, I've gained independence, doing whatever I like with whatever I have…I gained self-reliance' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016).

Like the contributors in Meghan Daum's (2015) anthology of the childfree, *Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed*, the narrators in this project also felt the pressures inherent in society, in which 'we measure the value of our lives within the brackets of our births and deaths' (Daum, 2015, p. 83). For these narrators, the benefits that accrued from the pull of a childfree life (Gillespie, 2003) far outweighed perceived losses. Benefits such as greater freedom, self-determination, independence, improved financial positions and closer intimate relationships are prominent in this and other studies, particularly for married couples in my sample).

6.2.2.2 Subtheme 2: Intimate Relations

Some research found that a partner's support when a woman chooses to be childfree was paramount (Baker, 2010; Campbell, 1985; Cain, 2013; Gillespie 2,003; Morell, 1994; Mynarska & Rytel, 2019; Shaw, 2011). Such was the case for D and her husband H. KayJee arrived in her marriage ambivalent about having children. However, meeting a man (her husband R), who was an early decider about not wanting children, as well as enjoying a lifestyle that supported their shared sense of adventure, served to convert her ambivalence into a firm decision about being childfree. Masego had suffered the tragic loss of her fiancé and she imagined had he been alive and they had married, she might have had children.

For Susan, the childfree choice was a personal matter she did not 'broadcast unduly' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). With regard to intimate relations, she evaluated the depth of her commitment to a lover prior to disclosing her choice: 'There should be long-term intentions before I divulge, you know, like in relationships with promise' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). She had 'no shame in divulging [the] choice should the topic come up sooner' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). She cited a previous long-term relationship, during which she had experienced some vacillation because 'baby talk naturally came up' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). In hindsight, she was grateful she did not procreate because she realised that having a baby would have been 'just

ticking the box' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016), an exercise in social compliance.

Thabsy was of a generation that condemned children born outside marriage. Therefore, when male romantic partners applied pressure for her to have children, she had a stern rebuttal: 'How can you expect children from me when I am not your wife?' (Thabsy, personal communication, October 12, 2016). For her, it was important not to have children out of wedlock or not living in a union. When Thabsy's romantic relationships did not result in marriage, she made the conscious decision to live life as a childfree woman. This is an important distinction in that she did not register as a childless woman. When health conditions compelled her to undergo a medical procedure that would make child-bearing an impossibility, she had already assumed a childfree life. At the time of interview, she was open to finding a romantic partner to share the remainder of her life with. She enjoyed her single life because, in her words, 'I do not have to convince anyone or defend my choices to anybody' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). The term, 'defend' was used consistently by several narrators to describe their reactions to social provocation and scrutiny. While it may be considered a hostile reaction, it appears fair in light of society's antagonistic stance towards the childfree. This language of war illustrates the everyday battles these women experienced, as society waged a pronatalist war against them.

Palesa was in a happy relationship with J who came into their relationship clear he did not want (nor could he have) more children, due to a vasectomy he had after the collapse of his first marriage. However, before her happiness with J, she had experienced heart-break with a man she chose to call Mr. Oops, alluding to an unplanned pregnancy. They decided to keep the baby and together they named the baby N. Tragically, at eight and a half months, Palesa miscarried. The strain of the loss as well as their own different styles of grieving, led to the end of that relationship. After the loss of the child and relationship, she took to 'flying solo' in order to 'find' herself (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). She used this time to pray as well as define her ideal partner, whom she finally resolved should be 'a God-fearing man, with no children or grown [up] children who have a relationship with their mother' (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). In her current partner J, she believed she had found such a man. She met J through a mutual friend and she recalled that they immediately 'got on like a house on fire' (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). As they got to know each other, Palesa learned J had been previously married with two children in that

union. After his divorce, he had a vasectomy as he did not want to have more children. The relationship he had before meeting Palesa had ended because his then partner wanted children. Although J was apprehensive about entering a relationship with Palesa assuming she would want children, she told him of her childfree decision. Palesa considered it a 'blessing' to be in a relationship with J: 'It is a blessing to get someone who already has kids, who really does not want to have more. It works out for both us and it's not like someone is being short-changed by being in this relationship' (Palesa, personal communication, November 20, 2016).

At the time of conducting this research, D had been married to H for four years. He was a civil engineer and they had met while studying at university. The unconventional nature of their marriage was a situation D made light of by saying, 'Home Affairs happened to us'[29] (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016). She described H as kind, smart and compassionate. The dissolution of her parents' marriage had an impact on D's own relationship. Even though she asserted she did not 'romanticise marriage at all and [had] seen how marriage can be a prison' (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016), she wanted hers to be a success. Knowing how her mother was not valued in her relationship with her Father, D had adopted a hardened stance in her own marriage, as she put it, 'I approach things with… aggression and I am very defensive' (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016). She was grateful for her mother's counsel to hold on to her decisions and not let anyone take over her life.

D was resolute about being childfree and presented this at the early stages of any romantic relationship – 'so we would not waste each other's time' (D, personal communication, September 7, 2016). As such, she had disclosed early to H. Said D, 'I liked him a lot, so I wanted to start on an open slate and ensure we were both on the same wavelength' (D, personal communication, September 7, 2016). I asked D whether she had verified why H was childfree and she conceded she had not asked him. Nonetheless, she said, 'it would be sad if he changed his mind about being childfree as this would be a deal breaker. It would mean the end of H and I' (D, personal communication, September 7, 2016). This position shows that for D, the strength of her childfree conviction superseded the importance of her relationship with H (Lee & Zvonkovic, 2014). Although D and H did not practise checking-in (Lee & Zvonkovic, 2014), as in ensuring they each were still committed to a childfree life, D was adamant they were still

[29] As a foreign student, his study visa had expired and they were advised that the only way he could stay in the country was through marriage and so they married.

aligned on being childfree, ‘We are still on the same wavelength about children’ (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017).

Much as D appeared confident with her marriage, she conceded to thoughts of H being unfaithful, and remarked, ‘if H cheated and had a child, I’d have to leave him’ (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). I probed why infidelity had been on her mind. She confessed to a fear that if her mother-in-law pushed H to give her a grandchild, infidelity would be the avenue he would take to obey his mother. Although this worried her, she believed that ‘He’s faithful to, and supportive of me’ (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). H, like her, enjoyed the company of children and when he wanted a dose of being around children he visited friends and their families to ‘get his fill and then get back to [their] childfree life’ (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017).

With regards to intimate relations, Mosia recalled and shared about two significant relationships. For an ideal relationship, she specified mutual respect as well as friendship, saying, ‘I was always looking for a friend in a boyfriend’ (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016), as it was important to her that they be able to ‘speak about everything’ much like her parents had done:

> My parents were friends who enjoyed each other’s company and did everything together. I remember a picture of the two of them, with my mom reading Drum magazine and my dad sitting alongside her sipping his tea. That picture captures friendship in love for me, and that’s what I wanted and still want for myself (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016).

At university, she found her ‘first true love’. Although there was a liking, it was not what she termed, ‘a connection’ (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). She requested to protect his privacy and decided to refer to him as Mr Shangaan in this study.

After an extended absence from South Africa, Mr Shangaan returned for a visit. A common friend reunited him with Mosia. In him, she found that crucial ingredient: ‘We were the best of friends, and even called each other by pet names. It was then I realised I was falling in love with him’ (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). There was an unplanned pregnancy about which she was not pleased. She knew that her parents would be disappointed if they discovered this. She also had not disclosed to her love interest, recalling her mother’s warning: ‘Mom said having a child with a man does not necessarily increase the man’s love

for you. So, all these things were ringing in my head, coupled with my determination not to be a single mother. This was a tough patch for me.' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Then life as Mosia knew it changed: 'One morning I passed a bloody blob when I was in the bathroom…. It took me a while to … realise that it was a foetus. I wrapped it up' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). She admitted crying for a long while although not certain about her exact emotions. She also admitted to feeling relieved because she was not ready to have a baby, 'as having a baby would have ruined [her] ambitions' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). She was also relieved because she did not have to face her mother to report the pregnancy. This overriding feeling of relief was greater than the actual loss. It should also be noted Mosia did not refer to 'loss', she spoke instead, of 'when the incident happened' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). When probed, she proffered: 'It was a foetus - and I had not formed any relations with it' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). The unplanned pregnancy, coupled with her determination not to be a single mother, created an emotional distance between herself and the foetus.

When Mr Shangaan returned to South Africa permanently, their relationship continued to develop. She recalled being devastated the day he told her that he had fathered a son with someone else. As she clarified, 'I had somehow imagined him in my life as a partner with whatever else would follow' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). As their relationship evolved, she and Mr. Shangaan ended up co-habiting, a situation her mother was understanding of, but not necessarily approving. Their relationship became strained due to the presence of the mother of the child. Mr Shangaan later returned to England, and not long after he was gone, she got a long letter saying their relationship was over as his family needed him. She recalled being totally shattered, in fact, in her words, 'I was so broken, I cried for days on end, I was inconsolable' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). As time passed, she moved on. Mr Shangaan married the mother of the child, but that marriage ended in divorce, after which he attempted to rekindle relations with Mosia. However, Mosia was not interested as she was 'truly over him' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016).

Mosia's other significant relationship was with Mr. O, a man she met through friends involved in the Johannesburg art scene at the time. He was industrious and knowledgeable about her passion point – the Arts, but the emotional distance and their cultural differences between

them concerned her. When Mr. O returned to America, where he lived, the relationship continued. He invited her to visit him, which she did. Being the house-proud and tidy person that she was, she said:

> I couldn't believe he lived in a house in such a poor state. I couldn't sleep the first night. So, the next morning I went shopping for household cleaning stuff and scrubbed that house down from sunrise until sunset. So, when he came home that evening he couldn't believe I had done all that. Somehow the care I had shown gave way to a tender moment between us and that holiday we fell in love. We truly connected (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016).

At some point in this relationship, Mosia found out she was pregnant. Of this she said: 'I felt so angry with myself for letting this happen a second time. I cried and cried and felt this was the end of my life. I truly had never envisioned myself as a mother, never mind a single one at that '(Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). She maintained that 'single motherhood would have been a great inconvenience and a personal let down' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Once more, she found herself in a lonely place going through personal trauma and also did not disclose to Mr O. She suffered a second miscarriage. After dealing with this second trauma of loss, she decided to have her fibroids removed and firmly closed the chapter on children. Mosia's health, loss and restoration are all processes that occurred at the level of her body, to a point where it can be said that for her, 'order [began] with the body' (Smith & Sparks, 2002, p. 148). Her telling and the memories related to these disruptive events shows that 'bodies are realized – not just presented but created – in the stories they tell' (Smith & Sparkes, 2002, p. 151).

Mosia's relationship continued to grow and she would often travel overseas to be with Mr O. On one such occasion, she had gone to Europe to meet him but unbeknown to her, things had changed on his part. He told Mosia he was going to be a father, and the mother was someone she knew. Once more, she found herself on painfully familiar territory, where a romantic partner with whom she had imagined a long partnership, had chosen someone else to create a family with. She was devastated and remembered she 'cried deeply and over an extended period' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). After some time, Mr. O re-emerged and they re-kindled their romance, because 'for as long as there was love, there was hope things would improve' (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Their romantic connection eventually ended and of their present relationship status, she commented:

‘Now we are friends. I find that I admire him more than love him, so I have moved on from him’ (Mosia, personal communication, November 14, 2016).

Masego’s approach to romantic relationships can be best described as cautious. When asked, if and how her childfree choice affected her romantic relationships, she said, ‘It does and it does not’ (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). She said in those select instances where she had disclosed, she was not taken seriously, adding, ‘I find it annoying that men think they can change my mind….as though I don’t have the ability to decide for myself’ (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). She attributed such behaviour to patriarchy saying, ‘The sense of omniscience men feel is linked to how society is organized around their needs and wants’ (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). She was convinced that ‘It feels fantastic being childfree and I won’t change that for anything or anyone’ (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Masego deduced that by belittling her childfree choice, these men were in fact infantilizing her. Apart from patriarchal entitlement, she believed this was also pure arrogance: ‘It’s as though he is suggesting I have not been exposed to a real man, you know, one who knows what to do with my body to get me pregnant’ (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). She detested that some men upon hearing she had no children, treated her ‘as a challenge, something to be fixed’ (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). Another behavioural pattern she observed was with single fathers who approached her with an open invitation of: ‘I’ll give you a child because I know how to make them’ (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). Despite these intolerances, Masego remained open to a specific type of men: ‘[those] who are smart enough not to use my childfree choice as a reason to prove something to me’ (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

KayJee said university marked her first foray into romance, adding: ‘the guys I dated were pleasant, but I didn’t go in with marriage in mind. I was also clear I didn’t want to date guys with kids’. She also said, ‘I also learnt this trick how on Tryphasil[30] you could skip your period by not taking certain pills. So, I became a master at this game’ (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). She kept up with this trick post-University. During one of these skip-a-pill times post-university, she missed her period and feared she might be

[30] A contraceptive pill

pregnant. To her horror, the doctor confirmed she was indeed pregnant. In her words, 'I was horrified and started shaking. I felt blood drain from my face and I suspect the doctor could tell this was not what I wanted. I felt really disappointed in myself and was clear I did not want the baby' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). She added, 'I think the Doctor saw my negative reaction because she then said to me, your reaction tells me you don't want to be pregnant, we can remove this safely. I think in her heart she could sense I was going to get rid of this by any means' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

She confirmed with the doctor that indeed she did not 'want to stay pregnant' and quickly made arrangements for the termination procedure. By then she had her own medical insurance, and, 'thankfully did not rely on anyone for medical bills' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016) which might have given away the fact that she was terminating a pregnancy. With single-minded resolve, she undertook this journey on her own, telling neither her sisters nor the man she was involved with. With hindsight, she remembered this as a very lonely period and her recovery was equally 'a solo journey.' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). When I probed how she felt about this period in retrospect, she responded: 'I have heard some people who have had abortions talk about regret and longing, my feelings were of relief rather than regret. A weight had been lifted off me and I could move on with my life. I had big plans for myself and a child would have been a great hindrance' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). She believed she had gained something from the experience since in terminating the pregnancy, she was taking back control and reverting to her chosen path.

Her second significant relationship was with R, a man she met in her late 20s who was at the moment of the interview, her husband. Speaking of their first meeting, she said:

> We were introduced by a common friend. I truly was not looking because I was in a relationship already. At our first meeting, R just gravitated towards me and in no time, was sharing how unhappily married he was. Over time, I found myself growing to like him. However, my principled side kicked in and I became conflicted. My Catholic side was telling me this was wrong; he was a married man. Yet on the other hand my heart was growing and I knew this was the first time I'd felt this way about a man compared to all the other guys I'd known (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

Her guilt tarnished her enjoyment of getting to know him and she therefore 'made it clear nothing would happen for as long as he was married' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). News of her liaison with R reached her social circles and she was shunned. In order to restore her own sense of dignity, she issued R with an ultimatum, that he either gets a divorce or she would terminate their relationship. She reports that they spent eight (8) months without contact after that, during which time she began seeing a therapist to, 'decode' her feelings. This act of decoding was a lesson from her mother of whom KayJee said, 'Mom understood her own feelings' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

She attributed her next meeting with R to serendipity, because they crossed paths on the day his divorce had been finalised. Even though he had delivered on his 'promise' she still had grave doubts, because:

> …a relationship that started as ours had, could only follow the same path later, so I insisted he come into therapy with me. I wanted us to deal with issues of trust, denial and truth. It was not easy, but he came to therapy with me. I regarded that as a sign of his commitment to me (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016).

After their reconnection and during therapy, she said, 'we came out as a couple and developed our own new circle of friends' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). They had a shared love of adventure, travel and discovery – all of which were made possible by a shared commitment to a childfree life.

Susan had had some romantic partners in her past, who had 'tried to push the issue' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016) of having children but she had remained resolute in her decision to remain childfree. She acknowledged she did once consider having a child with a past love and the 'moment passed, thank God' because in her words, 'he turned out to be a cheating bastard' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). Thus, her conviction to remain childfree overrode the desire to be in a relationship. This is a theme found in other research findings where one childfree woman is quoted as saying, 'having children was never so important to me as to compromise on a man' (Daum, 2015, p. 46). Susan shared that 'men still express shock I am childfree and I educate them there is nothing wrong with my choice… after all, it is about me owning my destiny' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016).

6.2.2.3 Subtheme 3: Social Discrimination

When it became known to her in-laws that D was childfree, she experienced prejudicial judgement. In an attempt to shield her, her husband (H), suggested that she use him as a scapegoat when asked why they had no children. She was grateful he offered this strategy, but was adamant she would not 'hide' behind him because that would be equivalent to 'hiding behind a man' (D, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Additionally, she insisted, 'the social judgments are not correct' and above all, she was 'not going to be told what to do with [her] body and how' (D, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Expanding on her experiences, she shared: 'I have even been told it is un-African, for a woman not to want children' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). She believed women should be granted space to live as they chose without suffering any social backlash. The childfree are considered to have violated the pronatalist message that childbearing is the mandate for all women, hence the moral outrage and other punitive treatments that are directed at them (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017).

D had what she termed a 'complex' relationship with her mother-in-law, further elaborating that her mother-in-law's judgements stretched from labelling D 'selfish' for not giving H children, to being 'superficial' in worrying about losing her figure after pregnancy (D, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Like some of the women in Gillespie's (2003) study, D believed her mother-in-law would value her more if she produced a child. Therefore, knowing this was the one thing she did not want for herself, and would not happen, she resigned herself to accepting that the nature of her relationship with her in-law would never change. She had since adopted several engagement strategies with regards to her mother-in-law. These ranged from avoiding the older woman 'like the plague' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017), or calling upon her husband for reinforcement. In other circles, when subjected to social discrimination on account of her childfreeness, D had several coping strategies, depending 'on the mood of the day' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). For the moment, her coping strategy included: 1) shrugging it off, 2) being surprised and therefore lacking appropriate response, and 3) mulling over it in her head afterwards and wishing she had handled it differently, and 4) ignoring.

When I challenged her that some would think her responses one and four could be considered 'passing', she countered by saying, 'passing is letting them believe I have children.' She

believed her reaction was, by contrast, ‘an act of self-preservation’ (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017) and kept her ‘bubble of privacy’ unpierced (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). She expressed that she disliked defending her childfree choice: ‘I fight the feeling I need to provide mothering evidence’ (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). The expectation of explanation was presented by other narrators as well, and it was especially experienced in the company of Black mothers; a sentiment, I argue, that emanates from the perceived normalcy of women bearing children and the subsequent social privilege bestowed upon mothers. D shared that she was the only one lambasted for not wanting children yet ‘it is H and I in this relationship… and this is a decision we made together.’ (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). Despite this shared view and decision, D, as the woman, was the one subjected to social stigmatisation and discrimination.

KayJee had withheld her childfree choice from her family, largely because, as she said, ‘Mom always wanted children for me, therefore I could never tell her’. Of her father she said: ‘He is very traditional and I believe he expects me to have children’ (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). She presented to her father the problem of her fibroids as the reason she had no children, because she felt sparing him the truth would ‘save him from hurt’ (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). Upon deeper probing she said, ‘It’s important to me what he thinks of me. I would truly feel like I’ve disappointed him’ (Kayjee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). Of her husband’s family, she said, ‘R’s parents never ask about children’ although at times, she said, she could spot her mother-in-law ‘giving me the eye of hope’ (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). In his family, R’s childfree position was clear: ‘In R’s family it was no surprise he didn’t want children… they had always treated him as one with peculiar choices’ (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017).

KayJee regarded social scrutiny about her childfreeness as intrusive, insisting, ‘I actually don’t care what they think, because frankly it’s none of their business’ (KayJee, personal communication, October 19, 2016). There were some exceptions though: ‘In those few positive minded settings, then I do own up and say I do not have children. However, if I get a sense the crowd is not open-minded, then I choose not to declare… after all being a mother is not an accomplishment, so is being childfree by the way. It is just a choice’ (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). KayJee, like the other narrators, reported experiencing judgement from other women, and it was harshest from other Black women who were mothers.

She also conceded to instances where her older siblings had also insinuated she should straighten out her life: 'They think I must get my life together you know… and have children. They think we are an odd couple and somehow that my life is disorganised' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017).

Masego said her decision not to have children had never come up as a 'topic for discussion' with her family (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). When she lost her fiancé to death, her family just focused on her recovery. She had also deduced that because her parents were already grandparents by way of her other siblings, there was no pressure on her. However, she singled out a particular 'matchmaker aunt' who was 'always on her case', pressing her about having children and Masego had learnt to ignore her. She reported having an accepting group of friends who did not stigmatise her for her childfree choice. In fact, her being childfree served as an advantage for those same friends, as she tended to be a reliable support when they needed an extra pair of hands to help with some children-related errands.

When I asked Masego if she had ever been asked about her motherhood status in social settings and how she responded, she said she was not often asked. However, the few instances when she had been asked she often 'steered clear' as explaining that she was childfree 'often invite[d] unwanted attention.' She added, 'it is an intrusion that is most annoying because I've never asked mothers why they breed' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She thought it was unfair that mothers felt they were 'licensed to interrogate [her]' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She had received the 'most severe judgements from other women, especially black mothers' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017) and was confused and disappointed by this reality; confused because she could not fathom why or how her childfreeness was an inconvenience to mothers; disappointed because it also served to 'sow divisions amongst us black women' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). In her experience, mothers had made her feel as though she was 'missing out on something fabulous' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). Alongside this was the unending chatter of those who regaled her with such statements as, 'You'd make such a great mom' and 'the love of a child is a super unique love' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). She further explained, 'Of late, if I want to shut-down the children inquisition, I just say it didn't happen for me, which often turns the judgment to compassion or maybe its pity, I don't know' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). When I suggested

others could accuse her of ‘passing,’ she retorted: ‘I have to do what works for my life’ (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

Palesa’s experience of social stigma was slightly nuanced. She admitted that whenever asked about children she was conflicted because she had to decide whether or not to acknowledge her late daughter N. In the instances where she shared, it would ‘get awkward really fast’ (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016) and it also took her ‘back to a pained place’ as she ended up ‘re-telling the story of the loss’ (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). She had since decided against sharing this information. Palesa said she had recently shared her childfree choice with an Indian colleague at work and noticed that her colleague was ‘struggling to understand’ (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). When she disclosed her being childfree without the subtext, she was subjected to interrogation or warned that she would ‘regret’ her decision. In spite of this, Palesa asserted, ‘I believe I have lost nothing. I mean I’ve been pregnant… I’ve given birth, I’ve co-parented my niece. I have been to orthodontists and paediatricians, and all that, so I don’t feel like I have or am missing out on anything’ (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). The implication that childfree women will at some future date regret not having mothered is also captured by Morell (1994, p. 97) who reflects that this threat ‘acts as a powerful reproducer of the ideology and practice of motherhood. Indeed, the threat of regret is one way pronatalism is promoted.’

Palesa was also frustrated by the negative treatment she received from some black mothers, who felt ‘entitled to an explanation’ (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Therefore, in demanding the childfree to account for their choice, without any concern about having to do the same, black mothers of the ilk cited by Palesa are proof that ‘privilege is often invisible to those who benefit from it’ (Morell 1994, p. 133). Palesa had adopted a new response when asked about children. She would volunteer that she had ‘inherited a daughter’, meaning caring for her late sister’s child. However, this too got drawn out as people expected her to then narrate her late sister’s tale. Research shows that not only are the childfree on the receiving end of stigmatisation, but on the whole, women are bound to suffer social pressure and stigmatisation more than childless men (Lee & Zvonkovic., 2014). Palesa said she was not comfortable with being called selfish because she knew she was not and that ‘you can nurture without having a child of your own’ (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016).

In Susan's experience, her parents were the greatest source of pressure 'as they really want to be grandparents' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). Her mother had even suggested to Susan that she would raise her children because in black culture, the daughter's children tend to spend more time with the maternal grandmother. Susan was disturbed that her brother was 'spared from it[31] all' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). Even though she wished for her parents to, in her words, 'let me have my journey' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016), she suspected her parents would 'never make peace' with her reproductive choice. This was based on the fact that, for instance, her father had gone as far as directing her to 'get on social media to find a sperm donor' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). She thought her parents were being hypocritical because when she was growing up, and some girl-cousins became unwed mothers, Susan had been praised for 'being a good girl'. Yet that same decision, now applied in her adult years, was attracting scorn from the same quarters that had praised her earlier.

As expected, Susan felt empowered and affirmed when in a circle of other childfree people. After all, 'the process of taking power is empowerment in itself' (Steinem 1983: 355). When confronted by those with a negative reaction to her reproductive choice, she said she made a joke of it and brushed it off so that 'the conversation can move on' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). This reaction was not an act of passing; she was deflecting attention from the inconsequential (i.e. reproduction) to the substantive (i.e. larger issues of her personhood). Like other childfree women, Susan said she had been called selfish for her reproductive choice. As she commented, 'Somehow it feels as though people think by my choosing not to have children, I am somehow trying to prove something' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). Stigmatisation was exacerbated by extended members of the family, especially when there was occasion to come together: 'Weddings and funerals are my worst, I get grilled about why I don't have a man and why no kids. In fact, the man part is small, it is the child part that is a big deal' (Susan, personal communication, November 2016). As she put it, 'I can't recall being judged so harshly elsewhere except by my family' (Susan, personal communication, November 2016). She elaborated, 'I am disturbed that society views a woman as only useful for having children. So, when you don't have children you are dismissed and the rest of your being is ignored' (Susan, personal communication, February 2017). These reflections support Letherby's (1997) assertion that mothers are indeed given a

[31] The pressure to pro-create.

more favourable treatment by society, for they are loved not just for aspects of their personality, but mostly for their reproductive function.

Thabsy said she felt family pressure to excel academically and in life in general, but not concerning procreation. As she put it, 'no one tried to convince me to have children' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). Due to a medical condition, Thabsy had a complete hysterectomy in her mid-20s. This made the matter of a life without children final. She was, as per Lee and Zvonkovic (2014) closing the door on this chapter. As she said, 'I could no longer be ambivalent, I knew that from that point on I would permanently live my life as a woman with no children' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). When it came to disclosing her childfree status, Thabsy expressed reticence: 'If you really go about telling people that you don't have children, it seems to me that you have a guilt, a certain guilt.' (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017). Resultantly, Thabsy rarely disclosed her childfree status, insisting she was more than her reproductive choice. She preferred to be viewed through the lens of what I term the full currency of her personhood, instead of being restricted to a biological role.

Thabsy recalled that when she was younger, she was made to feel inadequate, 'as though without children, one was losing out and was without enrichment' (Thabsy, personal communication, September 23, 2016). She also remembered being asked: 'Who will look after you when you get old?' She considered this a fallacy as she had seen many mothers 'who [were] not looked after, but rather burdened by their children' (Thabsy, personal communication, September 23, 2016). As Thabsy grew into her agency, she developed 'an attitude' and when asked about children, would retort: 'Do you ask someone with no legs why they don't have legs?' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). This rebuttal brought Thabsy 'much peace' because 'eventually they stopped asking.' She was hardly ever asked by strangers whether she had children or not and admitted to passing in the few instances where she had been asked:

> During the school holidays, I would take my nephews to work to give them exposure to the work environment. Many of my colleagues assumed those were my children. I did not correct them because it was their assumption and my life choices were none of their business. This was not about pretending, it was about keeping my private matters private (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016).

She did, however, concede that ‘women, especially mothers, expect you to explain’ (Thabsy, personal communication, October 12, 2016) but she refused to do so, even as she suspected such refusal intensified their negative attitude towards her. It disturbed Thabsy that ‘society does not make it easy to be a woman without children who is considered normal’ (Thabsy, personal communication, October 12, 2016).

The experiences of narrators in this study introduce a new intersectionality, which brings to the fore the dimension of the black cultural value of child-bearing (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014; Makiwane and Udjo, 2015; Mbilinyi, 2018; Naidoo, Muthukrishna & Nkabinde, 2019). These narrators also revealed the discrimination that they suffer particularly at the hands of black women who are mothers. This friction I believe, surfaces the intra-racial and intra-gender fault-lines. I have termed this hostility ‘afromommygression’- the unique grain of aggression narrators reported as emanating from Black mothers upon disclosure of the formers’ childfree choice. By going against the dominant ideology, which paints motherhood as the destination for all women, the childfree are pushing boundaries and testing the assumed bond of sisterhood (all women) and sistahood (a special strand which is an assumed bond of affinity among Black women specifically). Their reproductive choice disrupts what has been hitherto assumed as female conventionality, and by so doing, their childfreeness is seen as a betrayal of other women, especially black women.

These narrators had devised various coping mechanisms to deal with discrimination, stigmatisation and social pressure. I acknowledge the responses identified in Lee and Zvonkovic (2014), ranging from pat answers, changing subjects or blaming the spouse. Listed below are the prominent responses I found, which can help to expand our understanding of the various responses available to, and adopted by childfree women:

- First, is defensiveness. This was a response mechanism they unleashed when feeling under attack. Noting the war-like language (i.e. to defend oneself) also serves to demonstrate in part the negative intensity of the scrutiny and the veracity of the push-back by BCPW.
- Second is the use of sarcasm. This reaction was cynical and dismissive. For example, one narrator told a relative, ‘I will become a mother the day you become a stripper’ (Susan, personal communication, September 2016).

- Third, was rebuttal. Thabsy's remark, 'Do you ask someone with no legs why they don't have legs?' (Thabsy, personal communication, October 12, 2016) typifies this and displays an emotional exhaustion from being constantly 'phenomenalised'.
    - Fourth and last, there was the use of pat responses. These were responses offered to deflect long discussions, careful not to hurt the feelings of parents or the inquirer.

6.2.2.4 Subtheme 4: Support Network

It was important to ascertain from my narrators who constituted their support network(s). This was significant particularly because an abiding stereotype of the childfree is that they are 'lonely'. Thabsy viewed a network in terms of emotional connection. She singled out an inner circle consisting of 'close relatives' in the form of her siblings, about whom she said, 'They are more than just about support; they are about providing an emotional structure as well. These are people who don't judge me. They are faithful to me no matter what. They accept me with flaws and all, and are there all the time for me' (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017). It was evident this 'inner circle' gave her comfort as well as armour against the world. As she said in her words, 'I don't care what society thinks, I know what those who love me think of me' (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017). She also relied on friends, whom she described as 'people who have a positive influence on my life and are with me through the valleys and the mountains' (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017). She then referred to 'the others' – people with whom 'there [was] no emotional connection', such as distant relatives, people she met in church and some people she had grown up with (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017).

Regarding her support network Palesa's response was detailed. Her network included specific individuals such as Ms J., with whom she had maintained a friendship over a long period. She also included Ms P whom she had met through her partner J, and Ms T whom she had known since 2004. Ms K was another long-term friend who was also childfree. She said the defining characteristics about her network was that they made her laugh through their 'weird sense of humour' (Palesa, personal communication, February 9, 2017). Like Thabsy, Palesa also relied on her siblings because 'they provide[d] a safe and protective space' and would 'take a bullet for me' (Palesa, personal communication, February 9, 2017).

Susan described her social group as 'super-tight' and constituting a diversity of individuals. As she put it, 'I am surrounded by mothers, or the childfree or white people. This is my normal'

(Susan, personal communication, November 2016). She identified the following attributes of the people she felt a positive resonance with: 'My people are people with whom I have a shared history… with whom I have a new level of intimacy in our friendship [and] who create safe spaces to be silly and stupid without judgment' (Susan, personal communication, November 2016). She also spoke of a break-up with a girlfriend she had known since university on account of her childfree decision. Susan's experience was the only one in this study that alluded to a rift in friendship. Wedges in friendship (Morell, 1994) sometimes resulted when women who were friends exercised their reproductive rights differently, when others mothered and others did not. As a consequence of 'growing into' herself, Susan's relationship with her brother had transformed from the tension they had growing up. She commented, 'The dynamic with my brother has changed. Today, he is my closest friend. He gets me and so I find I can talk to him about any and all things' (Susan, personal communication, November 2016).

D self-identified as a person who enjoyed her own company and was therefore 'not for everyone '(D, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Making friends was not her comfort zone and therefore she tended to 'accrue friends through [her] people' (D, personal communication, November 14, 2016). Although she 'inherited them,' it remained important that these friends create community with her and 'be part of (her) family'. These had mostly been her husband's or brother's friends first. Her best friend, Ms P, whom she met through her husband H, was a key figure in her life. D said she relished instances where 'conversations can be deep as there is a level of honesty and truthfulness that is crucial' (D, personal communication, November 14, 2016). She elaborated, 'I feel freer with guy friends because I can say whatever, but feel safer with women friends' (D, personal communication, November 14, 2016). At university, she had kept a 'diverse bunch' of people as friends. D also described her social network as a group bound by a collective 'craziness', people who were 'not adulting' – meaning they were not rigid and conservative. Her uppermost criterion in selecting friends was whether one 'could hang' – that is to say, was one able to be truly herself with unguarded engagement. Her greatest sense of belonging was however, with her husband H, as he was the source of her happiness. She regarded her brother as a close friend, one she smothered in a loving way.

Masego's network of support constituted her 'chosen family', that is, her friends who had 'become family over time' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). This included childhood friends as well as 'Jo'burg people' – people she had met when she got to

Johannesburg in the early 1990s. Of this group, she was proud and deeply supportive so much that the girlfriends in her network called her first before they called their spouses/partners for sporadic help. She said this was because she was reliable and supportive to members of her 'network, especially mothers' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). She had a 'very loose connection' with relatives outside her nuclear family.

6.2.2.5 Subtheme 5: Self-Determination

D found great confidence in her husband's acceptance of her childfree decision. Even though it annoyed her to be 'challenged and judged constantly', she commented, 'I don't care because I don't seek acceptance elsewhere' (D, personal communication, November 14, 2017). Rather than spending time attempting to be accepted by others, she had 'abandoned this ship completely' and instead gravitated to those who accepted her and saw 'value and beauty' in her.

Even though KayJee was adamant about her decision not to have children, she said since her hysterectomy, she had been thinking about 'What if?' She had asked her husband, 'What if we later regret not having children?' to which he had responded, 'If we change our minds, then we will adopt' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). She said this response proved adequate to calm her momentary fears and they had since moved on from that place of questioning. She said, 'I cringe every time I think about having a child. Where would I be? It would not have this life. There's no ways. I am convinced I made the right choice. There's a lot we've accomplished because we are without children' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). It was clear KayJee, in social parlance, did not suffer from FOMO (the fear of missing out) but rather, revelled in JOMO (the joy of missing out). The loss of freedom and the burden of care that come with motherhood, were key determinants of her choice not to have children.

Thabsy had a dim view of the milieu she grew up in, wherein children out of wedlock were frowned upon. As she put it, 'If you didn't marry in my day it was scandalous' (Thabsy, personal communication, September 23, 2016). However, as part of an educated class, she felt somewhat insulated and felt society's expectations, although palpable, did not dictate her life nor overly affect her. Thabsy argued that society had 'fixed expectations of certain things and people, especially … us women' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). She attributed this situation to social organisation: 'People tend to accept without questioning. I

think it is more cultural and traditional set-up, but those set-ups started long before our parents and their parents. These have been handed down the generations without questioning. But we can't just go on conforming without questioning (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016).

6.2.2.6 Subtheme 6: Workplace Experience

The implication that the childfree make this reproductive choice in order to accelerate career growth was not supported by my findings. The narrators in this study were more focused on advancing themselves in life, rather than a narrow focus on career advancement. Their professional success was a by-product, not the catalyst, of their being childfree. Their seniority when they had been in formal employment, also bucked the sex-role expectations in the realm of the workplace. It reinforced the view that the occupancy of a powerful role by a woman is seen as a deviation from expected role behaviour (Ehigie & Idemudia, 2000). In this instance, the BCPW were behaving in ways which countered stereotyping. They tended to define themselves in life-terms rather than in terms of socially expected roles (Dickerson & Taylor, 2000; Kulik, Shilo-Levin & Liberman, 2016).

All of the narrators in this study were evidently driven by strong internal locus of control (Chapman, 2018) and alternative view of the world. These traits also informed how they made choices, even in terms of work. It is notable that all but two of the narrators were in formal employment, even though Palesa was clear she was 'hating her job' and longed to return to independent consultancy. For the rest, the workspaces they had initially chosen were in the creative industries (public relations, marketing, advertising, research, etc.) and at time of this study, they were successfully self-employed or independent work practitioners. The structure of organisation was found repulsive, as exemplified by Thabsy's comment that she hated 'groups and anything that requires a uniform'. D found her bosses, 'intrusive'. Palesa 'hated' her job and longed for independence. KayJee, Mosia and Masego were self-employed and thriving. Susan was making a career change. Thabsy, who was a retiree, remained actively involved as a part-time researcher.

The workspaces as experienced by these BCPW were restrictive and also compelled proximity to other people who tended to be judgemental when reproductive difference was discussed. As D recalled 'So why am I wanting to be accepted by the very people who don't want to

even try to understand the basis of why I don't want to have children' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). As a microcosm of society, the workplace is therefore not shielded from the impact of the larger social discourse on what constitutes female normativity. Therefore, for these women, working outside of organised work is a marked rejection of the current status quo of the world of work, and an embrace of a work-life structure congruent with one's life-stage and need-state.

Recalling past work experiences, Thabsy in hindsight thought, 'in fact being childfree sometimes would be an advantage to the employer because we could work until late rather than someone who had to rush to prepare supper or fetch a child from wherever'. When I asked her whether she thought there was equal treatment of mothers and non-mothers, she responded: 'The fact that you worked yourself to death, but you are expected to behave the same way as the rest of the people, and be at work at 8am sharp, somehow that is unfair. They maybe could have offered the late workers to come in say 2 hours later or some other concession' (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017). Thabsy reflected an acute awareness of the difference in treatment between mothers and non-mothers. She recounted this without resentment, but a 'small twinge of bitterness' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016).

Palesa mentioned 'struggling to understand' a work-colleague who 'still [could] not wrap her head around the fact I have chosen to be childfree' (Palesa, personal communication, February 9, 2017). This colleague indicated to Palesa that she 'found it odd that a perfectly capable, sane and healthy woman, with a job and a car would not want children' (Palesa, personal communication, February 9, 2017). The assumption that one's mental state as well as material conditions were the only pre-requisites to child-rearing is telling, as it disregards the presence and/or absence of the desire and will to procreate.

Susan said she had not felt the need to disclose her childfreeness at work, even though for most of her professional life in advertising, she was surrounded by other women without children. She was not able to confirm whether these colleagues were childless or childfree, but she recognised that there was a 'community of women without children' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). She recalled working at a particular advertising agency where she said her boss 'was a gay man who hated straight guys and loved the childless'. As she recounted how much harder she and her 'community' worked, she realised in hindsight that

the treatment they had received was in effect, 'both unfair and prejudicial' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). She recounted incidents where if she left work at the official knock off time of 5.30pm like 'mothers regularly do,' she would get jeers from people accusing her of slacking off. In her words, 'mothers could just leave' and they were left alone yet she was 'guilted into staying' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). When I asked why she tolerated this way of working, she said, 'Well you know, they spun it around…and made those without children feel and think they were the trusted [and] reliable ones' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). This praise and manipulation, however, did not translate into material advantage for the non-mothers even though they 'delivered [and] affected the bottom line' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). Her use of collectivising terms such as 'community' and 'crew', allude to her sense of belonging with this wider group of childfree women.

Of her overall career choices, Susan commented:

> I think my jobs were suited to me precisely because I was childfree. In ballet, our bodies were policed so the idea of putting on weight, never mind pregnancy, was considered a death knell. In advertising, as a childfree person I would grind harder. So, there were no negative feelings in my chosen industries about my childfree choice (Susan, personal communication, October 2016).

In KayJee's instance, in the few cases where within a work setting she had been asked if she had children, she recalled giving a 'curt no' and 'walk[ing] away to make it clear I would not engage because I do not owe anyone an explanation' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). This assertion is in accord with Morell's (1994) findings that the childfree adopt certain stances when dealing with social scrutiny. KayJee adopted silence as a response in order to protect herself from 'people digging in my business' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). Morell (1994, p. 57) asserts that 'it was physically dangerous for a woman to come out openly against motherhood on principle. She can get away with it only if she adds that she is neurotic, abnormal, child-hating and therefore unfit'. As my findings show, these childfree women increasingly adopted a hostile stance by refusing to justify their reproductive choice as well as rejecting their (mis)characterisation.

D shared that her reproductive choice once came up for discussion during a work interview:

> It came up because during the discussion I was telling one of the bosses how badly I wanted to join his company. And then he said, 'Let's cut to the chase, what about

> children?' So, I told him I didn't want children and then he didn't believe me, saying things like I will change my mind. What annoys me most is the 'you'll change your mind' claim. I find it slightly demeaning and condescending (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017).

D was the youngest member of her team at work, the only black woman and childfree. When I asked if she felt these identity markers affected how she was seen and/or treated, she offered the following explanation:

> On some level, I think the old men, my bosses that is, may think somehow that because I am without children, I am therefore somehow immature and I do not know how to take responsibility for big things. I mean, I will continue to suss this out because I am still new but I will definitely fight for growth as time passes. What does having children have to do with engineering? (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017).

D's experience shows the entrenchment of the negative stereotyping of the childfree which implies that women who have no children have no responsibilities and thus are like children themselves (Letherby, 2002). Within this context, the word childfree is used to imply a childlike state.

6.2.3 Theme 3: Dimensions that intersect with reproduction

In this section, I report on ways in which other key dimensions such as gender, class, culture, religion, and patriarchy impact on reproduction as evidenced in the life experiences of my narrators. The grouping of these dimensions magnified, as well as exposed the complexities of life experiences of BCPW. An examination of this intersectionality is useful to help analyse the social structure in which these experiences take place (Collins, 2000). In response to discriminatory experiences, the childfree in my study adopted ways to navigate social space and deployed defensive gestures to protect themselves against their ongoing reproductive victimization.

As a distinct grouping, these BCPW experienced intersectionality in ways that simultaneously made them feel a part of and separate from the social groups to which they belonged, as described by Fryberg and Townsend (2008). For example, the BCPW share a history of racism with black men, the pain of sexism with other black women, yet are separated from them by their reproductive choice. The unique constellation of sexism, racism and pronatalism adds a

dimension for the childfree, which impacts their behaviour, worldview and identity, as expanded on below.

6.2.3.1 Subtheme 1: Gender and Childfreeness

Gender is accepted as a social construct (Butler, 1990). It is not something one is born with. Instead, one becomes gendered through socialisation (Young, 2004). When people incorporate these meanings into their own psyches, gender informs their respective identities as either man or woman with associated orientations. For instance, some gender theorists present the masculine as 'thing-oriented' and the feminine as 'people-oriented' (Wood & Eagly, 2015, p. 464). Self-categorisation as either a man or a woman produces self-stereotyping, through which an individual may ascribe typical gender attributes to him/herself. For example, when D declared her husband, H should be the 'woman in the relationship because he was nurturing and a home-maker', she was using social attributes to exclude herself (momentarily) from the category of woman.

These narrators rejected the motherhood mandate (Gardner, 2016; Hayfield, Terry, Clarke and Ellis, 2019; Phoenix et al., 1991; Russo, 1976) and insisted on the de-coupling of motherhood and womanhood. By exercising such reproductive autonomy, they reject imposed expectations of gender performativity. However, due to the intolerance shown by society towards the childfree, they are deemed a threat to cultural hegemony, gender and pronatalism, and are consequently vilified. The ostracism they experience shows that 'all women may currently occupy the position of woman…but they do not occupy it in the same way' (Morell, 1994, p. 111). Rather than adopt a pacifist stance, they defend, fight back and protect (Gotlib, 2016). The pointedness of language used, belligerent in tone, shows that for the childfree, language is indeed a site of struggle and words are not without meaning; they are an action, a resistance (hooks, 1989; Kelman, 2018).

In terms of body politics, the childfree in this study own their bodies and are resolute that what happens to/with their bodies is theirs to choose and determine. Their bodies do not represent reproductive capabilities. They are not a physical means to a socially-sanctioned and insisted upon reproductive outcomes. The BCPW have in effect become political actors – battling not so much internal but external constraints as well. They are fighting a battle of positionality, migrating from the margins to which they have been relegated and assuming a centrality in present and future societies. For these narrators, 'othering' (Butler, 1990; Said, 1978) is an

everyday reality for them – an omnipresent discrimination which demotes the childfree whilst simultaneously attributing a superior identity to mothers. Yet even under all this weight of negativity, they are determined to resist and reverse the injustice of their discrimination.

6.2.3.2 Subtheme 2: Class and Childfreeness

As the BCPW narrated their stories, class emerged as an influential element. The majority were brought up in middle-class families and the class aspirations of their parents propelled them to unconventional paths. Most of their parents behaved in ways that challenged gender-roles; they had egalitarian relationships as well as aspirational views of life. The pursuit of the highest levels of education was encouraged, not just as a vehicle to avoid poverty but also as an escape from ordinariness, as well as a step to increasing social power (Morell, 1994). For example, Thabsy described her parents as 'elite' and this description refutes claims that posit the black middle class as a post-apartheid outcome (Khunuo, 2014). An attribute of Thabsy's educated parents was their focus on academic success: 'My mother consistently told me to get an education first and not to become a statistic. Children were therefore not discussed except in warning. They were presented as something to avoid at all costs' (Thabsy, personal communication, October 12, 2016). When I probed what she meant by statistic, she explained that in her day many black girls were having children out of wedlock. Even though it was frowned upon, it was nevertheless a common occurrence. So, in being admonished 'not to become a statistic' she understood that teenage pregnancy was a 'no-no' that would derail her from a successful life.

KayJee's parents were also middle-class. They owned a home, had cars, a housekeeper and other class-associated comforts. She expatiated: 'At home, we were the Cosby family, we looked to them as an example. Dad bought those nasty Dr. Huxtable sweaters. I was even called Rudy. So, we were all heartbroken when we heard the scandal about Bill Cosby. It was a sad day in our household' (Kayjee, personal communication, November 30, 2016). It is evident that her family emulated the fictitious Huxtable family to mark their class difference, model their behaviour and inform their middle-class choices. Kayjee's father's devotion to his daughters' development may have been considered unconventional by the then society but felt normal to KayJee and her sisters. Her mother, who came from a more privileged financial and educational background than her father, also served as a torch bearer. Her parents' class ambition, as Morell (194, p. 35) also found elsewhere, 'played into providing support for their daughters' nonconventional pursuits.'

Similarly, Masego, Mosia and Susan's parents were middle-class and they too emphasised the pursuit of education. They warned of the dangers of unwed motherhood/teenage pregnancy and encouraged their daughters' ambitions. What my findings present is a nascent understanding of how middle-classness, coupled with a non-traditional upbringing, can impact personality and individual development in girls especially. This may play a crucial role in the decision-making process for those women who later choose to be 'unconventional', with childfreeness as one expression of this. Their comparatively higher levels of education, middle class orientation, higher income, and world-wide purview, located them outside the 'norm'. The majority, except Palesa, were women raised within nuclear families, in homes with values and attitudes that would not be considered traditional (i.e. egalitarian parental relationships, daughter-affirming fathers and go-getter mothers, etc.) As a result of these early developments, gender re-evaluative processes and later life experiences, they migrated towards feminist thinking and insisted on egalitarian values within their own romantic relationships (Baber & Dreyer, 1986; Benensonet al., 2019).

6.2.3.3 Subtheme 3: Culture and Childfreeness

If it is accepted that liberal democracy places choice at the heart of freedom, then South Africa specifically, is found wanting in the area of reproductive justice. I suggest this reproductive-diversity intolerance is exacerbated by the dearth of studies on this subject, in South Africa specifically and the African continent at large. In cultures that perpetuate pronatalism, such as South Africa, it is crucial to deconstruct practices which embed the stigmatisation of the childfree as well as the intolerance of reproductive diversity. Such culture is not only intolerant of non-conformists, but also complicit in their ill-treatment. These 'patriarchal authorities, whether tribal or imperial, have always considered as central to their freedom and power, the right to define what is done with 'their' women' (Faulkner, 2019; Gilligan & Snider, 2018; Steinem, 1983). Consequently, the BCPW threaten this assumptive position by choosing for themselves what happens to their bodies and by living out this choice in unconfined and public spaces (Olusegun-Joseph, 2018).

Most studies present the African woman's reproduction as a 'thing to be fixed'– either for infertility or over-population (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2018). Such reprocentricity, (a term I am coining to refer to a practice of identity-labelling which places reproduction at the centre), intensifies the animosity that BCPW reported on. The erasure and denouncement of the childfree keeps childfreeness a 'hidden' practice. This suggests that childfreeness is not only

wrong but is a social taboo. The rarity of this childfree choice, (it is under-reported and under-represented in popular culture) does not justify the 'othering' of the childfree. Through their presence, they show the tension and double standards of the public and private, testing and erasing boundaries informed by patriarchy, inequity and discriminatory gender role expectations.

The work of Ashburn-Nardo (2017) is instructive in unearthing how moral outrage is applied as a mechanism to lash out at those who pursue this reproductive choice. Such moral outrage is based on perceptions of parenthood as a moral imperative. D and her husband H were both united on the decision to remain childfree, yet her mother-in-law's wrath was only reserved and directed at her. She countered, 'It is H and I who don't want children, but they only attack me'. This biased treatment shows that the penalties for not having children are greater for women than for men (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017).

Gender socialization is a powerful tool through which girls and boys learn to engage in behaviours that are socially rewarded and to avoid behaviours that are socially punished (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017). Based on cultural stereotypes in circulation, the BCPW are considered to have violated social role expectations by not fulfilling their expected roles. In accordance with the backlash theory (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004), cultural stereotypes serve as injunctive norms, specifying which behaviours others will approve or disapprove and justifying punishment of people who violate these norms (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017). It follows because the childfree are considered to have violated the pronatalist dictate, they are duly stigmatized and attacked by others who feel justified in negatively evaluating those who violate their expected parental roles by choosing not to have children (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017).

6.2.3.4 Subtheme 4: Religion and childfreeness

Previous research has identified a spiritual value attached to children (Collins, 2005; Kagitcibasi & Ataca, 2015; Oliveira, 2016; Rofrano, 2010). It was therefore crucial to examine the intersection of religion and reproduction in this study. D mentioned she was respectful of those who believe children are a blessing. However, she offered this challenge: 'I don't understand how people can just put a veil over having children, and say it's a blessing from God....Yeah, it may be a blessing to a certain point, but let's also talk about the 80% of the sacrifice and the hard work it actually takes to raise a child' (D, personal communication,

January 22, 2017). In order to provide context and frame the intersection between religion and reproduction, I read the following quote to the narrators and asked for their opinion:

> A society with a greedy generation, that doesn't want to surround itself with children, that considers them above all worrisome, a weight, a risk, is a depressed society. Not to have children is a selfish choice. Life rejuvenates and acquires energy when it multiplies. It is enriched, not impoverished (Pope Francis, February 2015)[32].

Pope Francis' characterisation of the childfree as selfish is emblematic of how religion is associated with lower acceptance of childlessness (Koropeckyj-Cox, Romano, & Moras, 2007; McQuillan et al., 2012). He is implying that the childfree are in violation of societal norms and cultural worldviews and therefore pose a threat to 'the fabric of society'. What is required in these challenging and changing times, is for the Pope (and the religion he represents) to investigate ways for the church to refresh its view which is currently not only intolerant but may also be in violation of women's rights to choose how they live.

Palesa who self-identified as a religious person said of the Pope's view, 'Considering his level of authority, it is deeply ignorant'. She emphasized that 'choices are different' and that there was a spectrum of reasons for being childfree. She added: 'Yes it may be considered a blessing [to have a child], but we are all different and therefore can be expected to want different things' (Palesa, personal communication, September 28, 2016). She believed the statement was not only 'damaging and divisive' but also a poor reflection on the church, which is supposed to be a unifying entity.

Responding to the quote, Thabsy said, 'This is dangerous given his role in the church. People choose, they have a right to choose, so why should that person be ostracised for that?' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2017). Masego's response was, 'I mean, why does he not have children? The Pope is chastising others for a condition he shares with them' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She considered the Pope's view as hypocritical and added that it was 'statements such as these' that made her walk away from religion. About religion in general she said, 'Although I was raised Methodist, I find religion not compelling' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Susan said she was not a 'practicing

[32] http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/557994/Pope-Francis-attacks-childless-couples-selfish-greedy-in-weekly-Vatican-address

anything' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016) meaning she did not follow any faith even though her mother had grown increasingly religious in her old age. She was contemptuous of the Pope's view and it intensified her rejection of religion.

KayJee's reaction to the statement was deepened by her own self-identification as a practicing Catholic: 'I have a tense relationship with the Catholic Church. It tries to regulate people's lives' (KayJee, personal communication, September 2016). To illustrate, she shared that during pre-marital counselling, the priest who led the counselling had asked if they intended to have children, to which they, according to KayJee, 'instinctively lied by answering yes' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). When I probed why they lied, she confessed, 'somehow if felt easier to give him what he expected to hear' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017).

6.2.3.5 Subtheme 5: Patriarchy and Childfreeness

Childfree relationships have been described as egalitarian in nature (Veevers, 1980) and my findings in this research support that. My narrators had a gender-role orientation which emphasised gender equity and egalitarianism. These BCPW rejected the motherhood mandate, insisting that the 'mothering role' was not an obligation; it was also not a role they imagined nor desired for themselves. Unlike the suggestion of a pull or push towards motherhood, these women were instead pulled into life and they pushed against what they considered traditional, restricting and limiting discourses.

For Thabsy, it was problematic that the order of society revolved around 'what men think' and that 'the decisions men make about women are the ones that society implements' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). She felt such societal organisation negatively impacted women and should be 'challenged through discussion and dialogue' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). She believed for gender equity to prevail, society would first have to adjust its treatment of black women in general, before embracing the childfree in particular, especially since the childfree were regarded as 'behaving in ways outside of culture' (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017), and therefore a cultural affront. Of black women in particular, she commented, 'society has a static and frozen view of the black woman' (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017). Such fixed societal views, she expanded, 'belonged to yester-year' and were a 'deliberate denial of how far women have come and how things have changed' (Thabsy, personal communication,

February 23, 2017). She went further to state: 'We are not the women our mothers were and society should adjust accordingly. We must challenge and reject what is going on. If there is no challenge, I don't think we can advance as a society. And yes, with this challenge we must expect resistance' (Thabsy, personal communication, February 23, 2017). She suggested society lacked the dynamism and forward-thinking required to embrace and engage with today's progressive black women.

Palesa (personal communication, February 2017) believed society was 'dismissive of women' and she added that just because 'women have boobs and get periods sometimes, does not diminish their value'. Susan challenged the use of the term, 'society' as an organising principle. She believed the term was an inaccurate short-hand, because in her view 'there is no society, just men's interpretation of the world' (Susan, personal communication, January 2017). She considered it a problematic construct, as it located 'women as objects to be moulded and owned,' as 'beings that are here to serve' (Susan, personal communication, January 2017).

Susan was frustrated by people who thought her childfreeness was 'a phase' that would pass once she 'got the right man' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). This perception also highlights the infantilisation of BCPW's reproductive choice, as though such choice only mattered once verified and/or endorsed by a man. In a similar vein, D's view also reflected on the patriarchal skew in society as she said, 'I feel like society is always trying to box women in, to force them to assume a certain position and fit a certain mould, as though there is a specific one thing that makes you a woman, like having children' (D, personal communication, October 4, 2016). The words of the African revolutionary Thomas Sankara resonate, 'Inequality can be done away with only by establishing a new society, where men and women will enjoy equal rights…thus, the status of women will improve only with the elimination of the system that exploits them' (Burkina Faso Speech, March 8, 1987. The opposition as experienced and recounted by the BCPW serves as reminder that 'resistance to the dominant at the individual level is the first stage in the production of alternative forms of knowledge' (Morell, 1994, p. 58).

6.2.3.6 Subtheme 6: Diversity and Childfreeness

> 'Without relations of difference, no representation could occur. But what is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialized' (Stuart Hall, 1996, p. 215).

The BCPW were aware of their difference from others, (e.g. mothers in particular, women in general) and also of how society reacted to or treated them as a result. They regarded their reproductive choice as a form of uniqueness that expressed diversity. When asked what diversity meant, Thabsy (personal communication, January 2017) proffered the following: 'Different people have different approaches in their lives. When it comes to women, I believe it is incumbent upon each woman to carve her own life the way she sees it. Yes, to create her own path'. She further observed that society is intolerant of difference, stating, 'they will criticise you for doing things your way, for making choices that are not considered normal' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). Despite the pain of this criticism, Thabsy continued to resist. She believed 'it is not incumbent upon every female to have children as each woman must create their own life path' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). Her childfree status did not make her 'different' unless when with mothers, of whom she said, 'It is women who are mothers who think that the childfree are different from them, not the other way around… the childfree are busy contributing to society in other ways' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). It was her view that the childfree had myriad means of making social contributions versus mothers, whose main contribution, she felt, was having children. Additionally, Thabsy believed that 'there will always be people who criticize you for doing things your way. When you do a thing differently from most, people will criticize. So, what is left? What is left is for you to stand firm in your decision' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016).

Palesa believed diversity was lacking in society and such lack was made manifest through intolerance, citing South Africa's xenophobic attacks as an example. She believed the term diversity must be applied widely to mean, 'a broad inclusion' that accommodates 'wide ranging beliefs, preferences, cultures, [and] choices'. She believed in its current form, the term diversity was 'loaded with misperception'. She commented, 'Just because something isn't 'normal' to you does not make it odd' (Palesa, personal communication, February 9, 2017). She expanded on this viewpoint thus: 'Society is wrong in being dismissive of women, just for the fact that you have boobs, you know. That you get periods and are moody sometimes. That makes you a woman, not odd' (Palesa, personal communication, January 23, 2017).

It was Susan's belief that black women were different from 'the group of women' as they are 'made exceptions of and are treated less than other women'. She elaborated by saying, 'We

must work three times as hard to get recognition… not even praise' (Susan, personal communication, January 2017). She believed therefore, that making the choice to be childfree further compounded black women's 'exceptionalisation' by which she meant, 'we [black women] are made exceptions of when we succeed or don't stoop to the stereotypes set for us' (Susan, personal communication, January 2017). That being the case, it did not surprise her that the concept of childfree black women 'would rattle some cages and displace some never-before tested assumptions (Susan, personal communication, January 2017).

D believed her 'being an engineer as well as a woman who does not want children, who hated hosting large groups of people, who jumped out of planes at the slightest provocation and was married to a Muslim man' (D, personal communication, August 19, 2016) made her an outsider. She believed that 'diversity is not a reality for women' because 'society can only tolerate some small ways in which women are allowed to differ but on the whole, there is pressure for black women especially, to conform' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). She was adamant 'it will be so much better for the world if we can just identify that there are ways in which we are different, and that we have different values and see the world differently. One thing that drives me crazy is the fact that women are always supposed to be shy about going against the grain' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). Reflecting upon the rejection of diversity and the societal insistence upon conformity, Masego commented: 'As women, especially black women, we are encouraged not to differ; on the whole, there is pressure for us to conform' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). The reproductive choice of these BCPW, may indeed constitute a departure from the reproductive norm, but it does not render them mal-adjusted or bad women. It was my finding that they did not confirm the prevalent stereotype of being dangerous, unhappy and perhaps even deranged (Morell, 1994, p. 74).

6.2.4 Theme 4: Self - Authorship

6.2.4.1 Subtheme 1: Self-Identity

> 'It ain't what they call you, it's what you answer to.'
> W.C. Fields

With all the narrators, I made a point of probing their understanding of the terms, 'female', 'woman', 'womanhood' and 'mother' and what these labels conjured for them. This inquiry

was important, as much ink had been committed to equating womanhood with motherhood, which is what this project aimed to challenge. The link between womanhood and motherhood cannot remain unchallenged, because it 'risks obscuring the vast possibilities and actualities that exist within and between women and consigns childless women to the borderland of deviancy' (Morell, 1994, p. 47).

For Thabsy, the term female was 'a physical reference [that] had little to do with features such as breasts' and more to do with, 'how one related to males in society and carved a place for herself' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). Regarding the term woman, she felt it was similar to female albeit with 'a lot more freedom'. She felt this term reflected a 'gender nuance' as in her view, 'female is biology and woman is what females are socialised to become'. Susan's relatives insinuated that she was 'not a complete woman without a child' (Susan, personal communication, October 2016). She dismissed these provocations and instead described herself as having, 'an unconventional life …. [that] did not have to follow the traditional route' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016). Childfreeness, she believed, was part of her identity although she added, 'it is not something I wear like a badge, it is just my choice' (Susan, personal communication, September 2016).

According to D, society actually does not care 'what a woman achieves' as it all boils down to her performance in socially prescribed roles. It was her view that woman is judged on 'whether she is woman enough' and that very definition of 'enough' was also 'an elusive target'. She was thankful her mother had allowed her to be herself. D had learnt a sense of self-authorship, as a result of which she identified herself as 'someone with non-traditional ways' (D, personal communication, October 4, 2016).

Masego believed it is 'insanity to suggest that there is only one way of being a woman and that it is by being a mother' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). For her, 'equating womanhood and motherhood is really flawed and problematic' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). She refused to be bound by a patriarchal dictate that suggested 'first be a mother, then you can be those other things' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). The prevalent pronatalist ideology that insists motherhood sits as the centre of woman's prescribed social roles, reinforces the notion that there is neither scope nor room for differentiation, diversity nor tolerance for independent thought. In this arrangement,

Masego believed this perpetuated the divisive falsehood that 'a woman who does not mother is not ok' (Masego, personal communication, 9, March 2017).

Concerning her trouble with fibroids since puberty, Kayjee said, 'I don't like my reproductive bits, but I sure like being a woman' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). She challenged the positioning of motherhood as central by emphasising that 'no one is born a mother' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). By identifying mothering as an action of choice not a biological imperative, she challenges the discourse that locates motherhood as the cornerstone of femininity and positions the role of mothering as central to what it means to be a woman (Russo, 1976; Gillespie, 2003). KayJee insisted on decoupling the mother role from the female person, hence the mention of a 'deep dislike for women who flaunt motherhood as though it's a huge achievement' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). In her view, 'If you really think about it, being childfree is actually a greater accomplishment than being a mother because the childfree have gone against the tide' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). She self-identified as a black woman, not a black woman who was childfree. For her, 'being childfree is not a trophy, it is not a title' (KayJee, personal communication, January 18, 2017). The theory of deviance ultimately constructs tensions and negative hierarchies among women based on reproductive difference. Alongside these constructs are derogatory cultural discourses (Gillespie, 2000). The social exclusion of the childfree is proof of the divisive power of pronatalist discourses as well as society's failure to validate, embrace and celebrate diversity.

It was also important to ascertain whether my narrators had relationships with children, as the childfree are often stereotyped as having no time for, or unable to access, the company of children (Letherby, 2002). Without exception, all my narrators declared they were not child-haters, and provided evidence of time spent with nieces, nephews, children of friends, godchildren, etc. They argued that they were comfortable with and around children. As a socially-maligned group, they alone carried the burden of justification. Hence Moore's (2014, p. 167) observation that the childfree 'live in the negative, in the absence, always on the defensive.' This shared belief that they must always defend themselves resonated with all the women. Even though they had varying responses, defence was a common and constant reality for them.

The incessant assertion, 'I am ok with kids' is what I am terming 'proof of nurture'. This response is two-pronged. First, it shows that even the childfree do express themselves in connection to and relationship with children. Second, this proffering of evidence appears to be an attempt by the childfree to de-stigmatise the self – a subconscious attempt to prove that they too have capacity and ability to nurture. I believe it is designed to fight against their demonization as monsters who would cause harm to children. This idea, if it is true, will need to be tested in further research to understand its motives. Suffice to say for now, this attempt to explain themselves is a manifestation of the uneven power balance which favours mothers and leaves the childfree little option but to engage in activities that 'debunk the stigmatizing explanations which are part of the cultural landscape but which do not correspond with their experiences' (Morell, 1994, p. 55).

In the same vein, Palesa refuted society's stereotype of the childfree as intolerant of children, saying, 'I am an Aunt after all. I have no issues with kids, they just don't have to be mine' (Palesa, personal communication, September 28, 2016). D shared a frustration over the social assumption of binary relations between the childfree and children in general: 'I am hurt and annoyed by the assumption that because I do not want children, I must hate them. I have no problem with children, I especially enjoy the idea of handing them back to their owners at the day's end' (D, personal communication, January 22, 2017). Masego also repeated a by-now familiar refrain: 'I love kids; I mean I am an Aunt who loves the Auntie life. I have no issues with kids, they just don't have to be mine' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She added, 'I do what works best for me, not what is expected. I find that expectations are an imposition not based on what is real, but what is accepted as social norm' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Being childfree, Mosia said, had 'enriched' her life; it was 'an enabler for the lifestyle I have' (Mosia, personal communication, September 29, 2016).

It has been established by previous studies that this reproductive choice places the childfree on a collision course with the convention that valorises mothers and motherhood (Gillespie, 2003). These BCPW were making manifest the truism:

> cautious, careful people always casting about to preserve their reputation or social order can never bring reform. Those who are really in earnest, are willing to be anything or nothing in the world's estimation, and publicly and privately, in season and out, avow

> their sympathies with despised ideas and their advocates, and bear the consequences (Steinem, 1983, p. 353).

Remaining childfree for Mosia and the other women in the study in the face of constant attack, shows this choice is not just 'a personal act, but is rather a social practice which takes place in a highly-politicized arena' (Morell, 1994, p.16). These narrators, through their alternative yet self-constructed realities, 'participate in the redefinition and re-evaluation of what is considered natural for women' (Morell, 1994, p.59).

Palesa insisted she was more than her choice to be childfree (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016). Thabsy also essentialised her identity as a black woman, and did not add the tag childfree in that descriptor, because for her, her identity as a woman superseded her reproductive role: 'This childfree thing isn't my whole life, it is but a part of it' (Thabsy, personal communication, November 1, 2016). She acknowledged that she had previously thought of herself as childless but participating in this research had expanded her view. She embraced the term childfree because, in her words, 'I now believe that childfree is an emancipating term, it has a more positive taste … it just means so much more' (Thabsy, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Thabsy's embracing of the term, 'childfree' shows that language is indeed, as Morell (1994) observes, a meaning-constituting system and an important site for political struggle. This term enabled her and others to define their non-mother status from a position of pro-active choice, power and agency, proof that 'it is language which enables us to think and speak and give meaning to the world' (Morell, 1994, p. 15). Implicit in the statements above is that childfreeness for these narrators was not a key identity. They remind us that 'to see identities only as reflections of objective social positions or circumstances is to see them always retrospectively. It does not make sense of the dynamic potential' (Letherby, 2002, p. 17). These women were multi-faceted and nuanced and therefore, to make their childfreeness a master status, no matter the importance of that identity descriptor, would be simplistic and reductionist.

Although their journeys were varied and specific to each one, these BCPW followed the dictum, 'just because you have a uterus does not mean that you must therefore have a baby' (Mosia, personal communication, September 2016). When I asked Masego if she identified as either childfree or childless, she answered, 'neither', because she was 'more than [her] reproductive choice' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). She said being childfree was not central to her identity, as it was 'one of the many things' she was. She

nonetheless acknowledged its uniqueness. She rather preferred to identify as a 'black female professional' because, 'a black woman is who I am and professional is what I do. I refuse to define myself by what I do not have' (Masego, personal communication, October 12, 2016). Masego, also rejected the notion of lack often attached to being without a child. In her words, 'Why would I describe [myself] from a place of what I don't have, when I have so much more' (Masego, personal communication, March 9, 2017). Palesa also shared the sentiment that just as motherhood was not an achievement, equally, her reproductive choice was not a badge to be brandished: 'I do not advertise the childfree title. Just as I don't say to people, 'Hi, I am Palesa and I am straight'. I think more of myself as a professional black woman' (Palesa, personal communication, October 10, 2016).

The absence of alluring images of the childfree in scholarly articles as well as popular culture, contributes to their erasure. It is therefore not surprising when the subject is ever discussed, non-mothers are 'phenomenalised', that is, turned into phenomena, and spoken of in sensational terms, which intensify their being stereotyped as abnormal. The punitive outcome and social exclusion as experienced by my narrators, may be a social disincentive and something other women are unwilling/unable to bear. The reality that not all women want to be mothers 'remains hidden, reinforcing the 'natural' connection of women and mothering' (Morell, 1994, p. 57). For the narrators in this study, the conflation of motherhood with womanhood, as well as the message that 'for a woman, the central place is reserved for her kids' (Daum, 2015, p.105) did not resonate with them.

Seen through the lens of life course theorists, the choice not to have children is perceived as an act which violates life course norms (McQuillan et al., 2012), a view with which I differ. The social ostracisation of the BCPW, as reflected in this study, was largely due to their having pursued lives that denounced what society considered a requirement for women (Daum, 2015, p. 84). Their exclusion and marginalisation are negative responses to their proclamation of non-normative gender roles. They present as a misnomer because they re-signify qualities typically associated with masculinity, such as being visible and being verbal in public space instead of being reclusive in private space as society dictates. What the childfree are enacting, is 'badass femininity' (Johnson, 2014). By rejecting the confines of the periphery, the childfree migrate their self-constructed identities and reproductive choice into the mainstream, thus creating new possibilities to forge a childfree femininity (Gillespie, 2003).

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

'We are all organisers and no organiser should ever end a meeting or a book or an article without ideas for practical action. After all, a movement depends on people moving'
(Steinem, 1983, p. 354-5)

7.1 Introduction

This thesis problematised the erasure of black childfree professional women whose reproductive choice upends a gender hegemony that privileges motherhood. The existence of a growing community of women who reject motherhood has been studied before (Kelly 2009; Gillespie, 2003; Veevers, 1979). However, the specific experiences of black childfree professional women (BCPW) has remained largely unexplored. Propelled by this theoretical void, this thesis tackled the erasure of the childfree. Such erasure, I argue, maintains a pronatalist status quo, wherein 'the nurturance of children has historically been seen to be what women do, and mothers have been seen to be what women are, constituting the central core of normal, healthy feminine identity, women's social role and ultimately the meanings of the term woman' (Gillespie, 2000, p. 225). By surfacing the childfree, the study contests a social organisation which segregates women based on reproductive choice and challenges the fixed boundaries on what constitutes woman.

The thesis succeeds in exposing the influences of the motherhood mandate (Collett, 2005; Davis, 1997; Russo, 1976) patriarchy, pronatalism and hegemonic gender orders on the lived-experiences of BCPW. The marginalisation of childfree women (Bhambhani & Inbanathan, 2018; Corbett, 2018; Hintz & Brown, 2019), social exclusion (Archetti, 2019; Turnbull, Graham & Taket 2017), stigmatisation (Donkor & Sandall, 2007; Nahar & Van Der Geest, 2014) and derision (Nahar, 2010; Peterson, 2015; Rich, Taket, Graham & Shelley, 2011; Sass, 2004) were also placed under scrutiny.

Instead of presenting the childfree woman as a social phenomenon and stigmatised Other (Said, 1978; Butler, 1993) what is required, which this thesis intended to provide, is a means to counteract the 'political and social climate of pronatalism which prevents voluntary childlessness from emerging as an alternative cultural discourse and practice' (Taket et al.,

2009, p. 129). A final outcome might be the emergence of a new way of thinking about womanhood in all its diverse complexities.

This study challenges the homogenisation of 'women without children' and questions the categorisations specified by past studies. In a study conducted by Statistics South Africa titled, 'Childlessness and Delayed Childbearing in South Africa 2001-2011', results show an increase of childlessness in the age group 15-49. The study may have been pioneering at the time, as it was the first traceable and documented body of work to specify women without children. However, its inability to create a distinction between the childless and the childfree as well as its failure to account for the experiences of the childfree in private and professional settings, is the gap this research aimed to fill. By insisting upon the distinction between the childless and the childfree, it reveals ways in which the childfree uniquely enact and express self-constructed identities that are decoupled from their reproductive choice. This intervention is crucial as it dispenses of the implication that women without children (Agrillo & Nelini, 2008; Blackstone, 2014) occupy a socially ambiguous status and/or are suffering (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1998; Park, 2002; Pelton & Hertlein, 2011). The differentiation is significant as a communication action; to separate these two states and examine childfreeness through a scholarly critique. By giving voice to the perspectives and concerns of black childfree and professional women, the study has contributed to making their experiences visible and central within a growing understanding of feminine diversity, social inclusion and ultimately reproductive justice.

The thesis is a subtle yet radical mission of exposing the chasms in feminist narrative. Feminism may have advanced women's causes with regard to gender equity, representation and access. What it has failed to do, in this researcher's view, is to provide a platform that recognises the myriad options available to women regarding reproductive rights, reproductive justice as well as reproductive consciousness (Moore, 2014). As Letherby (2002, p. 17) notes, 'feminist sociology must begin with real, concrete people and their lives if it is to do more than reaffirm the dominant ideologies about women and their place in the world'. Without refuting Foucault's argument that discourses do change (Letherby, 2002) nor ignoring the suggestion by Gillespie (2003) that late modernity has created new possibilities for being a woman that exclude motherhood (Gillespie, 2003, p. 134), my findings suggest that the censure of the childfree continues (Letherby, 2002, p. 17). By naming, revealing and advocating for the BCPW, this study spotlights their 'outsider-status' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) not as a deviance but rather as a resistance they mount against motherhood-centralising discourse.

This research specifically set out to investigate and respond to the following research questions:

- What are the factors that influence a childfree choice for black women?
- How does the status of being childfree shape one's identity as a woman?
- Does a childfree identity expose women to discrimination, and if so, in what forms?
- How does the workplace, as a node within larger society, regard childfreeness and treat the childfree?

7.2 My point of entry

I self-identify as a black female professional who is childfree and have used the microcosm of my own subject-position and experiences in organised work environments as a springboard to probe the wider treatment of the black, childfree, female professionals. Since there are several dimensions to my identity, I do not place high importance on childfreeness as a principal marker.

To be black and female in South Africa is difficult, given the country's racist historical legacy and strong patriarchy. My reproductive choice further compounds this undue attention. By taking the proverbial 'road less travelled,' I not only constructed a different life, but this difference has made me the recipient of ongoing hostility, which can be most shattering when it comes from other black females. I made the naïve assumption that our blackness and gender would be a unifier. My childfreeness created, and continues to create, a tension with black mothers especially. This 'deviance' and departure from the presumed fecundity of a black female, means that my life is a constant navigation and justification. There is an ongoing and unresolved tension between the dictates of my race, gender and class. By not adhering to the 'black woman' script, I have exacerbated my 'othering'. Since I cannot separate these identity markers, it means I am constantly negotiating them. The intersection of my race, gender, class and now reproductive choice, presents ongoing tensions. For example, being black and female; being black, female and childfree; being black, female childfree and professionally successful – I contradict expectations and buck the trend at every turn – upending sexism, tribalism, classism, racism and now pronatalism. These multiple streams reveal not only the complexities that befall BCPWs – they also show the high price these women pay to live unconventional and agentic lives.

As well as exploring generally how women who are childfree experience 'non-motherhood' (Letherby, 2002), I sought to understand how they thrive under stigma pressure, what challenges, compromises, trade-offs and resistances constituted their everyday lives. I can attest to the widely-held belief that female professional excellence seems to be accepted on

condition it is later accompanied by the creation of a traditional family, which is the last piece of the puzzle of what patriarchy regards as female 'completion.' (Kaklamanidou, 2018). In the literature review on this subject, the black women's childfreeness is conspicuous by its absence. In undertaking this academic pursuit, I was expecting and was open to shifts, internal and external – consequently, my own prejudices and views were tested at times. For example, external rebuttals, which were expected, were accepted in the advancement of academic enquiry and progress.

In the absence of other identifiable studies on black childfree professional women in South Africa, I aimed to not only offer an inaugural exploration but to also deepen and expand scholarly understanding about this community of womxn (Peters, 2016) on a wider scale.

7.3 Summary of chapters

In Chapter 1, I outlined the purpose of the study, its relevance, intended line of inquiry as well as its possible contribution to knowledge about black professional women who choose lives without children. In recognising that it could be the first study of its kind on the African continent, it was important to show the impact of black culture on the current definitions of womanhood, the motherhood mandate and the conflation of womanhood and motherhood. The project espouses women's diversity and locates childfreeness as more than a reproductive choice but a matter of gender justice. The chapter also outlined the study's intended future impact on the academic realm.

Chapter 2 is the literature review, tracing early writings on this subject as well as prominent academic voices. It also reflected upon the changing naming of this life choice as it gained prominence, especially in Westernised societies. Chapter 3 specifically addressed choice. It traced the origins and commonness of childfreeness. In locating this life choice inside the prevalent pro-motherhood narrative, the chapter exposed the inherent problematics and intolerances in pronatalist societies. Chapter 4 addressed the workplace. As a microcosm of society, the workplace has the potential to repeat and/or enact the discriminatory practices that the childfree experience in wider society. Three (3) narrators who were engaged in organised labour and therefore worked in formal workplaces, reported experiences of ridicule, unwelcome probing and belittlement when the subject of reproductive choice and their

childfreeness were discussed. The other narrators who had moved out of organised workplaces also reported corporate incidents of unwelcome intrusion and negative stereotyping.

Chapter 5 focussed on the methodology applied in this study. It outlined the study design, methodological approach, sampling practices, research tools applied as well as the appropriateness of the life-history approach to this study. It also presented key characteristics of the narrators in this study. Chapter 6 presents findings based on narratives of the lived experiences of the BCPW. The chapter shows how various discourses and ideological underpinnings frame their thought patterns and experiences.

7.4 Key Findings

The findings pointed to several core themes including the decision-making process, the lived childfree experience in social and professional settings, the impact of this choice in romantic relations, the childfree choice and identity as well as the intersectionality of childfreeness with other key identity markers such as gender, class, culture, religion and patriarchy. The results reveal the complexity of the decision-making process, the intensity of social retribution as well as the marked characteristics of the BCPW. Secondly, they surface not just the benefits of being childfree but also present the society-propelled punitive costs for rejecting motherhood, as well as the survival mechanisms the BCPW adopt in order to function in society. Lastly, the findings indicate some fault lines within the race and gender, showing the fracture and tension between black women who are mothers and the BCPW. The reports of outrage, overt marginalisation and ridicule from black mothers alludes to points of fracture within the community of black womxn that may be explored in future research.

Cumulatively, the results show that traditional gender roles and hegemonic gender discourses continue to have an impact on private individual choices. The findings convincingly respond to the research questions this thesis aimed to tackle and satisfy the objectives of the study. They move us beyond theorising about social exclusion and immerse us in the punitive machinations as experienced by the black childfree professional women at the hands of motherhood advocates. At this point, it is instructive to revisit the research questions by way of proffering and commenting on findings under each question.

Question 1: What are the factors that influence a childfree choice for black women?

Principally, the findings confirm the existence of black childfree professional women (BCPW), thus succeeding in attacking the nucleus of their erasure and social exclusion and granting a platform to BCPW to articulate their childfreeness with unshakeable agency.

The findings introduce a new dynamic to the established decision-making pathway (Gillespie, 1999), that of the 'situational decision-maker'. Rather than being 'active' or 'passive', some individuals arrived at childfreeness as a response to situational impediments. For example, some narrators decided that they would not raise children in the absence of a supportive spouse and/or outside of wedlock. When these wishes did not materialise, they decided to be childfree. The study also reveals the marked characteristics of the BCPW which may have greatly influenced their choice-architecture. The interaction between a strong internal locus of control and high self-efficacy is revealed and confirmed (Rauch & Frese, 2000). Key factors revealed include resilient consistency among the BCPWs; that they were willing to confront and resist social exclusion (De Haan, 2000) rather than concede to pronatalist pressure. These BCPW also possessed deep psychological capital – and could thus enact a selfhood that trumps a gendered belief system, and one that disentangles womanhood from motherhood. The constellation of their personal attributes, their nurture environments as well as tertiary education appear to have catalysed theses narrators' belief in their own ability to self-author and self-direct.

Reproductive Activism

The decision not to mother is a private one which manifests publicly, 'consequently it affects social interaction and social experiences but also individual attitudes, experiences and emotional responses' (Taket et al., 2009: 129). For the childfree, society is a public realm (Ahmed, 2004), within which they insist on speaking with a freedom unrestricted by, and unrelated to, their reproductive choice. By re-appropriating power for themselves, they participate 'in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice' (hooks, 1989, p. 203). This act mounts a challenge to all women to 'create spaces within [a] culture of domination if we are to survive whole with our souls intact' (hooks, 1989, p. 205). By becoming their own liberators, they extricate themselves from the confines of patriarchal hegemony as well as gendered expectations. The collective impact of such reproductive activism could unlock new imaginations, ideas and identities that may serve as a foundation upon which to construct and mobilise politics of deviance (Cohen, 2004). Ultimately, such practice might advance scholarly

understanding and reveal rich insights into the everyday politics and life experiences of those marginalised within the communities of women and the black race.

Question 2: How does the status of being childfree shape one's identity as a woman?

Attendant to these childfree lives, the thesis makes explicit how the BCPW negotiate debilitating identity contingencies. Their identity construct emerges from a space of resistance. These BCPW do more than live with the tainted consequences of their reproductive choice – they had devised coping and thriving mechanisms to help them navigate hostile spaces. They did not essentialise motherhood but rather identified themselves from a vantage point of womanhood (I am a woman) as opposed to maternity status (I am a childfree woman). By decoupling womanhood from motherhood, they created space within which to anchor a selfhood detached from reproductive performance. By anchoring their identity thus, they dispensed of the phenomenalisation of their reproductive choice and converged all attention to their multi-dimensional, multi-hyphenate lives.

Self-Identity

The childfree choice is not the principal status of the BCPW. It is important to acknowledge their multi-dimensional selves, so that 'their voices while neither idealizing nor denigrating a life without children of their own, can widen the parameters of possible selves that women can morally claim' (Morell, 1994, p. 76). The implication that black women's decisions about reproduction should be subject to social regulation rather than their own will (Threadcraft, 2016) is a denial of their reproductive autonomy, and is a problem. The BCPW construct identities that are not defined in reproductive terms. They insisted on being viewed as whole persons first, because as they articulated 'being childfree is neither a badge nor a trophy'.

Ain't I Woman?

Beyond and above the parenthood construct, the study also confronted and challenged the concept of 'woman' – and problematised its fusion with motherhood, which relegates (by deduction) those who are not mothers into a category that is un-woman or less-woman. After all, 'theories designed to understand women must recognize the ways that women are pushed into motherhood, not only pulled psychologically into that role' (Morell, 1994, p. 46). By decoupling 'woman' from 'mother', the BCPW succeed in broadening the definitions of diversity to include childfreeness as a valid reproductive choice, and an expression of a multi-layered feminine experience.

Through challenging the motherhood-essentialising narrative that implies that by forgoing motherhood the BCPW were less-than-woman, they dared to self-define. By disrupting social expectations, they expose new modes of representation. When the BCPW demand to be recognised as different from, but equal to other women (including mothers), they infuse merit into questioning 'the normative horizons in which recognition takes place' (Butler, 2009, p. 24). They have conceptualised and articulated their own sense of objective womanhood, one that is not stated in relativity to mothers. Much like McQuillan et al. (2012), it was also my finding that the meaning of having no children for women's identity, as indicated by the importance of motherhood, provides a substantial filter for the effects of more objective characteristics.

By rewriting the script of what it means to be a woman and anchoring their identity and meaning independent of their reproductive status, the childfree prove that 'procreation is not the only meaning of life' (Frankl, 1963, p. 189). More than just transcending social dictates and confronting exclusionary practices, the BCPW perfected the act of living their own lives amidst omnipresent stigmatisation and a rhetoric of rejection (Morell, 1994, p. 71). The childfree 'are able to articulate their own claims and perform acts of citizenship in ways that present themselves as lives worthy of public recognition' (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019, p. 30). The more the experiences of the childfree are made visible and more central in culture, the more they will advance our collective understanding of feminine diversity, social inclusion and ultimately reproductive justice.

Corrective Naming

By insisting on the term 'childfree', the BCPW insist on the affirmation of their reproductive choice, devoid of the implied 'lack,' the term childless presents. Naming childfreeness therefore, 'allows [childfree] community members to create counter discourses of reproductive choice' (Moore, 2014, p. 167). By re-anchoring the term and label childfree, we witness that:

> childfree is a contested identity that refers to individuals who have made the choice never to have children and identify as such. This definition is broad enough to avoid reifying simplistic and heteronormative conceptualisations through criteria such as marriage, heterosexuality, and fecundity yet narrow enough to emphasise the permanence of choice from the participants' perspective. This definition, sensitized by

> a critical ethnographic analysis of scholars' definitions, reveals the meanings inscribed in participants' self-definitions (Moore, 2014, p. 176).

The act of using the preferred and accurate term, may very well lay the foundation for the respectful embrace of the BCPW and hopefully dispense of the backlash, social exclusion (De Haan, 2000) and stigmatization (Gillespie, 1997; 2000) they have borne to date. By insisting upon the specificity of their choice (childfree) - they are in effect confronting dominant narratives of motherhood and creating moral, psychological and social spaces for resistance and resilience.

Re-storying the Self

For my narrators, theirs is a quest narrative (Smith & Sparkes, 2002). Although misunderstood and ill-characterised by others in society, they are visible and known to themselves and are on a quest to be seen as they see themselves. The BCPW displayed a masterful awareness of their interiority (Graham & Slee, 2008). These narrators are re-storying themselves (Smith & Sparkes, 2002) – telling wholesome tales of woman whole, for whom the absence of children is not a liability. Rather than being painted as social pariahs, they in fact remain socially connected and are active contributors. One argues that they deserve their 'place in the rainbow spectrum of women… a little natural togetherness would show us, the Family of Women, where each of us is beautiful and no one is the same' (Steinem, 1983, p. 166). The establishment of a space that accommodates and celebrates the plurality of feminine experiences, may enable the childfree to 'speak in their own voice' (Emejulu & Sobande, 2019, p. 41). Ultimately, such agentic participation may provide a new lens that advances solidarity and alliance-formation among all women.

Question 3: Does a childfree identity expose women to discrimination, and if so, in what forms?

The findings confirm the existence of stigmatisation and discrimination against the BCPW on account of their reproductive choice. In fusing power and gendered discourse with social exclusion, 'we are able to better appreciate the processes that underpin stigma, discrimination and social connectedness issues of childless women' (Taket et al., 2009, p. 131). The reproductive choice of BCPW challenges the politics of respectability (Harris, 2012; Pickens, 2015). Reports of hostility directed at the childfree by some black mothers are recorded. More research needs to further probe this animosity and to explore whether the childfree (by choosing differently) are deemed a threat to the social cohesion that binds the 'sistahood' (Obasi, 2019).

The BCPW are part of the female resistance project and their domain is a space within which the fight for freedom and recognition must be maintained.

Survival Toolkit

Due to incessant social inquisitiveness and mischaracterisation, life experience has compelled the BCPW to design means and adopt certain positions to react to social scrutiny and demonisation. A collation of their shared coping mechanisms points to the existence of what I term, 'the childfree survival toolkit'. Through the deployment of various tools from their armoury, from defensiveness, for example, 'my reproduction is none of their business', passing – 'some thought my nephews were my children and I didn't correct them, as it was their assumption', rebuttal – 'do you ask a person with no legs why they have no legs?' to full-on aggression – 'why does this bother you?', they customise their approach to various situations and are able to retain their agency after each pronatally-biased entanglement. In other instances, the responses could either be 'changing the subject' or 'moving along swiftly'. Collectively, these gestures are part of the coping mechanisms adopted to diminish antagonism and avoid interrogation.

Question 4: How does the workplace, as a node within larger society, regard childfreeness and treat the childfree?

In terms of the workplace, we witness the BCPW extending their liberal outlook to deciding how and where they worked, as all but 2 of the narrators were in organised workplaces. It is discernible that their preference for self-direction may have made functioning inside 'created work structures' feel restricting and limiting. Consequently, many demonstrated a preference for fluid work-forms, such as self-employment, consultancy and so on.

Negative workspace experiences reported include: i) Discrimination. Two of the narrators gave reports of being negatively stereotyped and discriminated against based on their reproductive choice. ii) Coercion. The childfree were subjected to forced 'camaraderie' and pressure to conform to group dynamics. iii) Exploitation. As the ones deemed 'always available,' they reported that employers took advantage of their presence but offered no reward or compensation for their extra effort. iv) Limitations posed by stereotype. Due to being negatively stereotyped as immature and irresponsible, they were assumed to be childish and therefore lacking the responsibility to handle large scale projects and high-impact opportunities

in the workplace. More work should be done with a larger sample and compare different workspaces to test and or affirm these early reports.

7.5 Influential factors in the lives of the childfree

I have also identified several factors that appear to have some material impact on the lives of the BCPW, and these were:

7.5.1 Unconventional Parents & Parenting

A common thread that runs through all, but one woman's case, is the defining presence of an unconventional parenting style and egalitarian parental relationships. The majority of these narrators reflected on mothers who were self-defining and independent. In the instances where there was a pair of married parents, the relationship between the mother and father was mutually-respectful, affectionate, supportive and equal. Although their mothers did not identify as feminist, some of the behaviours reported might be labelled as feminist, for example a mother who would leave a father to parent while she travelled the world with friends, another who left a father to parent as she acquired a tertiary education, one who insisted on shared domestic chores, etc.

Their fathers were also reported to behave unconventionally in ways that were not widely accepted or expected for gendered male roles. For example, there are reports of a father who encouraged his daughter to never think of marriage as accomplishment but to rather excel on her own terms, another who would always make his wife tea when she came home from work, another who would always take his daughters for their medical check-up, as well as another who always collected his spouse from work even though her place of work was within walking distance from the family home. There was a detectable influence of fathers who championed their daughters' courses beyond gender confines. This may present territory for future research as the correlation reflected above may require testing with a bigger sample prior to the generalisation of this finding.

7.5.2 Tertiary Education as a Propeller

All narrators had tertiary qualifications as they came from homes where educational excellence beyond high-school was not only encouraged but expected. If we accept that motherhood intentions and practices vary with social class (Ex & Janssens, 2000), it would not be remiss to prioritise the tertiary education of the African girl-child. Past research has indeed

shown females with lower levels of education are more focussed on the mother role (Ex & Janssens, 2000). Therefore, a focus beyond just high school education could help unlock the full spectrum of possibility for young girls and women across the continent. Failure to elevate the education levels of girls in this way would restrict them to weakened positions which make them vulnerable to the normative and simplistic presentation of motherhood as the destination for all girls and women. To be clear, the education intervention one is suggesting, is not to promote childfreeness (an accusation I hear constantly), but as a social disruptor to resist conformity to socially-advocated, pronatalist and patriarchal pressures without inquiry and critical reflection.

7.6 Autobiographical Reflection

My feminist inclination has been cultivated over time and it has made, and kept me, sensitive to matters of female discrimination, inequality and all other -isms that demote the value of women in society. As I evolved as a woman and scholar, my areas of interest and inquiry got channelled towards dismantling those social structures that disadvantage women. My race (in South Africa especially) compounds this disadvantage, leaving one with little option but to go through life with a raging consciousness most the time. The option to 'let one's guard down' does not exist. The genesis of, and pursuit of this project, was therefore an extension of this life-long intension to dismantle the 'Master's house', discount stereotypes and confront biases. [SM1]

My engagement with, and emotional proximity to these narrators have been transformative. The ethical challenges and research dilemmas I overcame have also provided academic growth for which I am grateful. I developed a level of patience that enabled me to work at the pace of their revelations rather than to keep up with my pre-conceived research schedule. I was challenged to accept 'their' version of events without attempting to colour them with my own perspective. Even though we had a shared identity as BCPWs, we were still a heterogenous community of women, whose diversity was important to maintain and reflect. I also had to constantly confront my own biases and assumptions so they did not cloud my judgement or influence my analysis. I was elevated by colleagues, supporters and my supervisor along the way when at times the excavation on my part felt like too big a price to pay for scholarly pursuit. The exposure to new and emergent voices in the fields of feminism, critical diversity

and gender, expanded my understanding and provided a contemporary context within which to locate this project.

7.6 Anticipated Contribution to Literature

The focus of this research is to help enrich scholarly understanding of childfreeness in South Africa. The thesis advances literature on the childfree in several ways. Firstly, the study was deliberate in focussing on the lived experience of BCPW, in this way expanding beyond previous scopes that focussed on white women (Rowland, 2007; Waren & Pals, 2013). Secondly, this exploration is in step with contemporary occurrences – a noticeable increase in the number of women who are embracing life without children (Basten, 2009: Blackstone & Stewart, 2012; Tanturri & Mencarini, 2008). Thirdly, by insisting on the segmentation and differentiation between the childless and the childfree, it will increase the scope and frequency of the usage of the term, which will help accelerate its adoption in the zeitgeist and elevate the visibility of childfree women in society.

Through unpacking the decision-making framework and comparing it to past studies (Gillespie, 2003; Park, 2005), which identified active and passive childfree decision-makers, this study surfaced a new decision node, which this researcher has termed 'situational childfreeness'. This decision-making style affected the two narrators who were over 50 years old (Mosia and Thabsy) as well as Masego (early 40's) who had lost a fiancé shortly after getting engaged. They all indicated having been open to the possibility of children but their preferred and desired situations (to be married and raise children with a present and egalitarian spouse) never arose. As a consequence, they resigned themselves to a childfree life. This, is by no means passive – it is an active and engaged decision.

The theoretical probe of this study was intended to build a legitimate and alternate case for social change, without demonizing motherhood nor promoting childfreeness. As such, this project explored ways in which childfreeness amongst black professional women might influence, not only the world of work, but various social institutions, and generate a language sensitive to the existence, needs and wishes of the childfree. It advocates for the inclusion of childfreeness as a legitimate reproductive choice available to women, and one they should be able to make without fear of reprisal and/or stigmatisation. Additionally, this study shows the limitations of a social construct that presents difference as a basis to reduce and vilify an 'Other' who then becomes the site upon which perceived risk is projected (Joffe, 2011). The

women who were narrators in this study mirrored the women referenced by Florence 'Buchi' Emecheta (1979), struggling to free themselves from the entanglement of patriarchal domination.

Ignoring the differences among Black women, as well as the pretence at homogeneity of black women's experiences encapsulated in the term 'sisterhood,' is problematised. The manner in which these differences are evaluated, may underscore the efforts to mobilize Black women's joint power. I borrow from McFadden (2005, p. 5), who in describing the struggles of the women's movement in Zimbabwe, said:

> Faced with the demands and threats of African men that they conform to an outdated notion of womanhood upon which the imaginary authentic African identity is premised; and that they do not disrupt the cultural and social base of male rule in public and private; middle class women are defiantly re-defining themselves as citizens who make choices increasingly as individuals, based on their access to and control over critical social and material resources within their respective societies.

The narrators in this study epitomised this observation by McFadden (2005). They insisted upon self-determination, carving a path towards re-defining womanhood not as a reproductive precursor, but rather as a construct grounded upon agency and rotating on a multiple axis of experiences and choices.

7.7 A need for new lexicon

There is also scope for developing a new lexicon that relates to the experiences of the BCPW. As I encountered new experiences without prior terminology, I correspondingly created a new glossary of terms. I present this as a contribution to future work in the study of the childfree:

Afromommygression

This is a term I have coined to refer to the aggression the childfree reported experiencing from some black women who are mothers. This aggression puts paid to the notion of a 'sistahood' (the idea that black women band together to fight the discriminatory intersectionalities they navigate daily), as well as 'sisterhood' (in the feminist sense of women banding together to fight sexism). It is recorded that some mothers (as stated) have submitted to the motherhood mandate and promote it yet at its core it is, 'a social institution in a male-dominated society,

[which]continues to be oppressive to women' (Morell, 1994, p. 46). If it is accepted that understanding experience is central to feminist theory, the BCPW then by sheer existence are an affront to a version of feminism that does not reflect on the inter-and intra-gender fault lines. I argue that for as long as women discredit and disempower one another, (for example, mothers against non-mothers), in ways that entrench hegemony, then they are in effect their own enslavers.

Repro-shaming

This term borrows from the term body-shaming, which is a practice prevalent mostly on social media platforms where people (mostly women) are judged on their appearances. It is re-presented herein as repro-shaming because the BCPW are in this instance, judged and shamed based on their reproductive choice and resultantly, negatively stereotyped as defective, selfish, shallow and unfulfilled (Ashburn-Nardo, 2017; Daum, 2005; Gillespie, 1983; Koropeckyj-Cox et al., 2007; Veevers, 1980). Such repro-shaming fractures the strands of social cohesion – often assumed to be the bedrock of women as a united collective. It also brings under focus, the debilitating tensions that exist within the community of black women. These 'fractures' divert attention from the material, structural and ideological impediments that compound the black women's struggle in society. Social cohesion is not imposed, it is (I argue) an outcome of a concerted effort to eliminate what divides and cultivate what connects the community of women in all their diversity.

7.8 Limitations of the study

Life-story research accommodates small samples (Flick, 2018). However, this researcher is mindful that characteristics as well as the urban setting of the sample, may be considered limitations. The narrative practice applied was useful in beginning the excavation process by firstly locating, making visible and then understanding, this never-before studied community of black childfree professional women. This study focussed specifically on BCPW as there were no discernible other studies found to acknowledge their existence let alone seeking to understand their lived experiences and attendant coping mechanisms. By specifying the negative impact of the intersectionalities of race, gender, diversity, class as well as the complications of culture specific to black people, this study intends to contribute to literature from a different and new vantage point. Being the first of its kind (to the researcher's knowledge), it does not claim to have all the answers. What it offers is a basis from which

future work can commence as we deepen our scholarly understanding of this reproductive choice and the community of women who are childfree.

7.9 Possible Future Research

This project presents a directional reflection for what to do now and what can be done next, as we advance our scholarship on childfreeness in particular and the diversity and meaning of black womanhood in general. The erasure of BCPW is more than just a negative pronouncement on their reproductive choice – it constitutes an assault on them as full citizens of the world. Studies of, and literature on, women without children, remain thin on the experiences of black women who exercise this reproductive choice in Africa, pointing to a need for deliberate literary and research focus on this community in the future. The implication that the childfree are, through this reproductive choice, absconding from a moral obligation to parent, must continue to be challenged. There is scope to include rural black women, as well as black women who are not professional. There is additional scope to deep-dive into the world of work and evaluate workplace policies and practices, especially as they relate to recruitment and reward, gender diversity and inclusivity.

Overall, this thesis agitates for theoretical solutions to the problem of reproductive injustice, which shifts the subject of childfreeness from the restrictive parameters of reproduction politics to much wider fields of diversity and reproductive justice. Within these frameworks, being childfree is positioned as a liberty available to all women, which demands the creation of 'institutional conditions necessary to the development and exercise of individual capacities' (Threadcraft, 2016, p. 23). In such a context, the BCPW would then have 'true freedom of action with regard to their intimate lives' (Threadcraft, 2016, p. 24). Speaking against female genital mutilation, Steinem (1983, p. 299) made a plea, with which I agree as it is equally relevant to the childfree: 'I suggest that it is time for society and all structures that limit the freedom and promote the unequal treatment of women, to be challenged and deconstructed'. For me, being a woman presents in a variety of socially significant and relevant ways and 'we won't have diversity at the end unless we nurture it along the way' (Steinem, 1983, p. 352).

In closing, I cite Morell (1994, p. 140) again:

> If we cannot imagine, (or worse, no longer believe in) a culture where the difference between mothers and non-mothers will be meaningless – because parenting will not require martyrdom and woman's humanity will not rise or fall depending on

> reproductive choices – then we have succumbed to the pro-family onslaught…and have allowed sexist anxieties to contaminate our vision of a truly human potential.

What the BCPW require and create for themselves does not diminish their womanhood, nor does it negatively impact mothers and society. Therefore, the hostility they experience and their continued erasure appear misdirected.

The findings cumulatively posit a challenge to motherhood-essentialising discourses by presenting possibilities for alternative and integrative narratives that may serve as a unifier among women in general and black women in particular, regardless of motherhood status. Read alongside Steyn's (2017) criteria of the CDL Framework – this thesis enables the opening up of possibilities and engenders understanding 'for those differently positioned within the unfolding dynamics of specific social contexts' (Reygan & Steyn, 2017, p. 381). There is an urgency for women, black women in particular, to connect as a social collective and focus on the structural and ideological barriers and exclusionary -isms (racism, sexism, ageism, classism) that continue to plague them and limit their progress as individuals and a gendered collective.

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