

Womanhood in Botswana: Meaning and experience

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Abstract

This AHRC-funded research addresses previously neglected issues of womanhood and gender in the Botswana context. According to Connell and Pearse (2015: 83) ‘the study of cultural representations of gender, gendered attitudes, value systems and related problems has been probably the most active area of gender studies in the past two decades – in the rich countries of the global metropole. It is not so central in the developing world, where questions of poverty, power and economic change have higher priority.’ This is the case in Botswana, where there has been little scholarly research into the social and cultural aspects of gender beyond its economic and health impacts over the last 20 years. Prior to that, Schapera’s seminal works (1938, 1940) recorded numerous aspects of gender relations, and Suggs’ 1987 study provided an updated perspective on female status and life stages. This thesis builds on these texts, investigating aspects of the social and cultural construction of womanhood in Botswana today. Drawing on semi-structured qualitative interviews with 30 Botswana women, I thematically analyse the participants’ accounts to understand how womanhood is defined and experienced in Tswana culture. I consider how the rapidly changing economic, political, social and material environment that has characterised Botswana since independence in 1966 shapes attitudes to gender roles, and to what extent traditional expectations persist in this context.

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¹ I have used a pseudonym here to protect the interpreter's anonymity.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Parts of the Methodology chapter of this thesis have been published in a collection edited by Prof. Gabriele Griffin (Routledge 2016).

Chapter one: Introduction and literature review

Botswana gained independence from Britain in 1966. It has since remained politically stable with a functional multi-party democracy, and has flourished economically (UNICEF 2010/11: vi). It was termed an ‘economic miracle’ by the World Bank (2010: viii), one of only 13 countries to be deemed so. The discovery of mineral deposits and the careful management of these resources transformed Botswana from one of the world’s poorest countries to an upper middle-income nation with a consistently high economic growth rate (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 2). The government has reinvested its wealth to the benefit of many of its citizens, with improved education, health, sanitation and infrastructure across the country (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 2-4). However, the impact of these developments on women is limited, and women continue to suffer disproportionately from gender-based violence (GBV), HIV infection, maternal mortality and poverty. Women’s legal status in civil law has improved through a series of reforms, but customary law offers them little protection. Botswana ranks 109 out of 157 in the Gender Development Index, demonstrating that gender inequality is pervasive despite efforts to improve the situation (World Bank 2011: 1).

I wanted to better understand the perspectives of women from a country not my own, with the aim of gaining knowledge that could contribute to women’s empowerment there. I wanted to investigate the challenges and strains of being a woman in Botswana; whether women saw themselves as oppressed and in what ways; how their lives had changed in this regard; and what changes they desired and anticipated in the future.

My initial reading on women’s situation indicated that they were victims of gender inequality in most areas of their lives. However, the women I met on moving there did not seem like victims. They wielded power in a number of areas – many were financially independent, outspoken and strong-minded. A number of women I spoke to were aware of their cultural subjugation and complained of it. Yet, they were compelled to follow repressive social conventions. A beauty therapist at a Gaborone salon I attended in 2011 warned me not to form relationships with Botswana men. She told me that they had ‘many mistresses’ and ‘will give you diseases’. I asked her if she had a partner, and she confirmed yes, she had a boyfriend and yes, he was unfaithful to her. I asked how that made her feel, to which she shrugged and told me, ‘That’s how it is here, men do what they want.’ Perhaps she did not feel comfortable talking about her

feelings with me, but it appeared that she was simply resigned to the status quo. The apparent conflict between her outspoken and negative view of men's behaviour and her quiet acceptance of it surprised me. I came to realise that gender inequality in Botswana was more subtle and complex than I had previously understood. I argue that the social construction of womanhood and its cultural underpinnings are the primary causes of women's continued inequality, hindering the effectiveness of law and policy changes intended to enhance women's situation in Botswana. Through a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with Botswana women, I will investigate how womanhood is constructed and the effect it has on gender equality. In this chapter I shall outline the context of my research by exploring women's status in a range of spheres, including marriage, motherhood, law, economics, work, politics, health, gender-based violence and education.

The beauty therapist's attitude was reminiscent of that of Paulina, a main character in Bessie Head's 1968 novel *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Written at a time when Botswana was still extremely poor, the women in the novel suffer from severe poverty and gender inequality. Paulina is conscious of her gender's subjugation by a society that posits men as superior. Although she resents it, she recognizes that resistance on women's part would only bring turbulence to an already-difficult life: 'things went along smoothly as long as all the women pretended to be inferior to this spineless species' (102). In light of the relative scarcity of academic research on gender inequality in Botswana, it is useful to draw on literary texts as a source of contextual introductory detail. While Head's work is fiction, the inherent truth in her stories has been widely acknowledged. Writing from the 1960s through the 1980s, Head's novels encapsulate the everyday lives and struggles of Botswana women. A South African refugee, Head fled to Botswana in 1964 and gained citizenship there in 1979. She claimed that her fiction was apolitical, yet her work frequently related stories of social injustice, including poverty, oppression, and sexism. The impact of her writing was officially recognised in 2003, when she was posthumously awarded the Order of Ikhamanga in Gold for her 'exceptional contribution to literature and the struggle for social change, freedom and peace' (ZA Gov 2003: 20).

Botswana has officially shown commitment to achieving gender parity through a number of national and international instruments (Datta 2004: 258), including: the formation of the Women's Affairs Division and its later upgrade to Women's Affairs Department, subsequently changing to Gender Affairs Department; the Policy on Women in Development; the National Gender Programme Framework; the Vision 2016

programme; the Platform for Action following the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women; the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the South African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development; the Constitution; and a host of reforms to address gender discrimination in the law (Datta 2004: 258; Government of Botswana 1995). Assisted by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the government has achieved some important successes for gender parity (Bauer 2011: 24). These include statistical equality in education, slightly better employment opportunities for women, their increased political participation and improvements in some aspects of women's healthcare (Bauer 2011: 29-31). However, the social construction of womanhood results in women being labelled as inferior to men, restricting women's opportunities for personal autonomy, financial independence and freedom from violence.

Women were traditionally perceived as subservient and dependent, subject to male control over their labour, bodies, finances, and behaviour (Schapera 1938: 150-155). Head's (1968: 73+142) character Makhaya remarks upon the socialisation of Batswana women as 'docile and inferior', 'inferior in every way to a man'. Upon marriage a woman's guardianship was transferred from her father to her husband, and she became his *motlhanka*, meaning servant (Schapera 1938: 151). Women were responsible for growing and harvesting crops, they were 'the backbone of agriculture' (Head 1968: 33). They were responsible for bearing as many children as possible, childcare and homemaking, care of old or sick community members, the fulfilment of her husband's sexual needs, and a number of other practical and emotional duties as required (Schapera 1938: 150-155). Despite carrying such responsibility, a woman had little influence and was 'in all respects subservient to [the man's] will' (Schapera 1938: 151). Thus, policies and legal reforms that extend women's autonomy might prove difficult to reconcile with the customary view of women as *motlhanka*, still prevalent in Botswana (Phaladze and Tlou 2006: 27).

I draw substantially on the work of white, South-African born social anthropologist Isaac Schapera in this thesis. While I recognise that it could be problematic to utilise so heavily the reports of a white man as historical context for my own research into black women's lives, I argue that the respectful nature of his writings, and positive local reception, confer a certain legitimacy on his work. His ethnographic writings on the Tswana, the first of which was published in 1938, were contemporaneously unique in that they recognised the people he studied as agents of

social change, and focused more on the similarities than the differences between African and western cultures (Thomas 2009: 37-40; La Fontaine 2003). Schapera was optimistic about women's empowerment and spoke out against Apartheid (La Fontaine 2003). Progressive for his era, he encountered legal trouble when he published 'sexually explicit' material, and his *Married Life* was suppressed in South Africa as a result (Thomas 2009: 37-40). He has been honoured by the people he studied; the University of Botswana presented him with an honorary degree and named a street in the capital after him, and his work is used in schools and courtrooms today (La Fontaine 2003).

My MA (by research) on perceptions of abortion in Botswana highlighted broader issues of gender inequality. Qualitative in-depth interviews with Batswana provided insight into common ideas about women's rights:

There are some discussions on the radio, the TV, they usually have these discussions. About why women's rights and whatever, it's just making women bigger than they should be. That's what they say. Bigger than they should be, and they're just trying to make women into men.
(participant cited in Smith 2011: 47)

The participant Michelle's comment suggests that while the issue of women's rights is commonly discussed on public media platforms, people's reactions to such debates are often negative. Her statement implies a perception that allowing gender equality is to turn women into men, suggesting that social, political and economic rights should be reserved for men. The idea that women with rights would be 'bigger than they should be' is indicative of their low social status; that women's symbolic 'smallness' is not only the way things are, but also the way things should stay. Many of the participants' comments supported this idea: 'Women emancipation ideologies, you know. It's just [seen as] women refusing to look after babies, yeah' (participant cited in Smith 2011: 47).

While changes in lifestyle and employment patterns have resulted in some women living free of traditional constraints, they 'continue to negotiate their gender identities against a background of internalised cultural values' (Mookodi 2004: 127). The socialisation of women and girls as inferior is so deeply rooted that recognising it can be problematic, and addressing it even more so (Kinsman 1983: 51; Datta 2004: 261). The high value placed on 'tradition' disguises the realities of gender discrimination, and it has proven difficult to adjust customary attitudes in line with

legislation and policy reforms (Government of Botswana 2000). A recent study revealed that while progressive attitudes are understood and garner broad consensus, they do not translate into reality (Government of Botswana and Gender Links 2012: 71). 83 per cent of women and 82 per cent of men thought that gender equality was important, but expressed contradictory views when questioned about specific contexts, such as marital relations. It is apparent that attitudes towards women's place in society are in flux, changing alongside key developments in employment, law, health, politics, education and family structure. However, the impact of progressive views is hindered by the perseverance of a conservative patriarchy that posits women as inferior.

Exploring how motherhood is perceived is useful for understanding women's lives, as Tswana convention dictates that motherhood is fundamental to womanhood (Mogobe 2005: 29; Upton 2001: 361-362). Women's childbearing role continues to be their primary identity indicator despite increasing opportunities in other areas such as education and employment. Motherhood brings significant social status and is vital for achieving respect in the community (Phaladze and Tlou 2006: 28; Mogobe 2005: 29; Upton 2001: 349-355; Gage-Brandon and Meekers 1993: 15; Schapera 1938: 155). The polite term of address for women is 'Mma' which means 'mother' (Van Allen 2007: 102). Women are given a new name after the birth of their first child, made up of the coupling of 'Mma' with their child's name. For instance, 'Mma Laone' translates as 'mother of Laone'. This becomes their permanent term of address, even if the child should die and after further children are born. Not having children is to 'sort of deny who you are' (participant cited in Smith 2011: 49), 'your children are what you are, and who you are' (participant cited in Smith 2011: 49). The idea that motherhood is fundamental to being a woman is supported in the literature (Phaladze and Tlou 2006: 28; Mogobe 2005: 33; Upton 2001: 361-362; Gage-Brandon and Meekers 1993: 15; Schapera 1938: 155), and will be discussed at length in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Children are an important source of labour and an investment; children who grow up to earn money are expected to provide for their families financially. In a nation where government welfare is minimal such support is often critical, making childbearing all the more important. Marriage is customarily undertaken for the purpose of having children. The bride price given to the woman's family is symbolic of the purchase of her reproductive function (Schapera 1938: 139), which demonstrates the centrality of childbearing to the marriage contract. This exchange is known as *lobola* or

bogadi.³ Children are the basis of family life and sexual and social traditions are planned to enhance childbearing (Schapera 1938: 155-156). Coupled with the construction of motherhood as an indicator of maturity and the foundation of a woman's identity, the significance of children to Tswana community life creates great pressure for women to bear children. This is problematic for Batswana women who are infertile or do not wish to become mothers, and creates difficulties for mothers who prioritise other areas of their life over their parental role.

It was traditionally thought that infertility was caused by a woman's promiscuous behaviour before marriage (Schapera 1938: 155).⁴ While such beliefs are no longer common, it is still not openly accepted that a man can be sterile (Upton 2001: 360).⁵ This belief system is harmful for women, who are held to blame for infertility regardless of their physiological capacity for childbearing. Women who cannot bear children are socially penalised and seen as incomplete (Phaladze and Tlou 2006: 28; Gage-Brandon and Meekers 1993: 15). An infertile woman is derided and disrespected by both men and women in her community; if it is thought that she is incapable of bearing children she faces lasting humiliation (Schapera 1938: 155). Choosing not to have children is somewhat taboo and considered unusual. One of my MA interviewees concluded, 'it's weird. It's strange. How can a human being, a woman, not want children?' (cited in Smith 2011: 49). Another of my MA participants stated, 'when you're a Motswana woman [...] you will have children [...] if you dare mention that you're not interested in having children, whoa! What?!' (cited in Smith 2011: 49). As a 23-year-old childless woman at the time of my MA interviews, women questioned me often about my lack of children. My insistence that I had no desire to become pregnant was met with incredulity. While many women I interviewed at that time wanted to pursue their careers or education and were supported in that by their families, such pursuits were limited to the space around childbearing. For instance, it was considered

³ These terms may be used interchangeably. I have chosen to use *lobola* since that is the term I heard used most commonly during my time in Botswana, but some of the citations I use in this thesis refer to bride price as *bogadi*.

⁴ The blame for being unable to conceive might also be placed on witchcraft, blood or womb abnormalities, or a previous abortion (Schapera 1938: 155).

⁵ While male infertility is rarely acknowledged in the open, it might be accepted in the private sphere and strategies might be employed to preserve the appearance of male fecundity. These include the man allowing a close male relative access to his wife for the purposes of conceiving. The resulting child legally belongs to the husband (Schapera 1938: 156). A woman might take it upon herself to become pregnant by another man to evade being blamed for childlessness in a marriage, and to prevent marital stress (Schapera 1938: 156). Partners might unofficially adopt children from other families who have too many, or who feel that a particular child would benefit from being raised elsewhere (Schapera 1938: 173; Smith 2013: 171-172).

unacceptable to delay childbearing or to end a pregnancy because of career commitments: ‘Nobody should put their career before their child’ (participant cited in Smith 2011: 66).

As a result of migration patterns, disease, decrease in desire for marriage and other factors, the family structure in Botswana is changing (Dintwat 2010; Suggs 1987: 110-115). This has had notable effects on women. Polygyny has been unusual in Botswana since independence; Enge (1985: 37) suggests that this might not be in women’s interest. Men having a number of ‘mistresses’ is culturally acceptable: Yet the decline of polygyny has resulted in fewer women achieving the status and economic security of marriage. As such, impoverished female-headed households (FHHs) are the norm, with 47.5 per cent of all households being headed by women in 2011 (Central Statistics Office 2011a: 84). Single motherhood is widespread, increasing poverty in FFHs (Brown 1983: 372-373).

Botswana operates a dual legal system; pre-colonial customary law operates alongside the Roman-Dutch law imposed by the British colonial administration, referred to locally as ‘common law’ (Statistics Botswana and UNFPA 2014). Unmarried mothers are legally able to demand maintenance payments from the father, but in reality this rarely happens. Customary law dictates that a man pays *marebana*, a one-off seduction payment, if he impregnates a woman but does not marry her. The payment is negligible and it is easy for a man to avoid paying it (Brown 1983: 373). In common law, the Affiliation Proceedings Act of 1970 exists to help women secure regular maintenance payments throughout the child’s life, but it is seldom used. Not all women know about the law or have access to the courts, and many find it difficult to collect the monthly payments even if the court rules in their favour (Enge 1985: 55-56; Brown 1983: 373). Bureaucratic delays often mean that women have difficulty getting a court ruling for child maintenance, and enforcing the ruling is problematic when fathers have left the area or refuse to acknowledge paternity.

However, the 2009 Children’s Act demands both parents’ names are put on a child’s birth certificate to make paternal avoidance of financial responsibility more difficult. While this act has the potential to help single mothers financially, maintenance payments are very small and not enough to cover the basic needs of a child (Datta 2011: 125). In addition, the act could have a negative impact on women who do not wish to state the identity of their child’s biological father or do not know it (Mookodi 2008: 137-138). Having to name the biological father would be particularly difficult in cases where the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest. The Married Persons’ Property Act

of 1971 meant a married woman could execute contracts, sue and be sued, and own property (Qunta 1987: 193). The act effectively gave women recognition as legal entities separate from their husbands. The 2004 Abolition of Marital Power Act gave women and men equal power in community of property marriages, providing each with the capacity to 'a) dispose of the assets of the joint estate; b) contract debts for which the joint estate is liable, and c) administer the joint estate' (University of Pretoria Centre for Human Rights 2016). The 2008 Domestic Violence Act prohibited gender-based violence and provided shelter for abused women. My MA interviewee Barati, an advocate for sex workers, pointed out that the Domestic Violence Act is:

A very good act that protects women from being beaten by boyfriends, husbands and so on and so forth, but Batswana don't *use* it, women don't use it. Why, because it's not disseminated, you know. We [women] still think the law is something that we don't have access to (cited in Smith 2011: 48).

Schapera's (1940: 321) findings reflect Barati's view that the law does not work as it should for women. He writes, 'the *femme sole* has emerged, but there is as yet no place for her in the legal system, or in the political life of the community'.

Legislation such as that discussed above has been limited in its effectiveness, yet it illustrates a positive trend towards gender equality under common law. However, while women have more rights under common law, customary law is usually a woman's first resort for personal disputes (Enge 1985: 55-56). Rural women are not usually aware of their rights in common law, and economic and geographic restraints prevent them from accessing the common courts (Enge 1985: 55-56). Common law is expensive. The NGO *Ditshwanelo* offers free legal help to those earning less than the minimum wage (Ditshwanelo 2007), but its resources are limited and its offices are in urban areas, making it difficult for rural women to access the legal services available. In early 2013 a South African company set up Botswana's first legal aid facility, offering legal insurance from P79 (US\$9.12) per month (Motsela 2013). While this is an important step in making common law more accessible for Batswana women, the lowest monthly cost is still prohibitively high compared with minimum wages in the country. Personal preference and accessibility issues therefore result in an over-reliance on customary law to rule over family and community disputes (Patel 2013). The constitution of Botswana provides for gender equality but ring-fences customary law,

which is exempt from constitutional obligations to avoid discrimination (Fombad 2004: 157). Based on traditional patriarchal values, customary law treats women as minors (Patel 2013).

The practice of *lobola* serves as an example of the denigrating impact of customary laws on women. Since the *lobola* payment functions as a form of compensation for the transfer of a woman's reproductive capacity from her family to her husband's family, the husband has effectively purchased the right to sexual and physical control over his wife (Maharaj 2001: 251; Schapera 1938: 138-147). While custom dictates that a man respects his wife, he is entitled to total sexual decision-making power, and physically reprimanding his wife for 'misdemeanours' is tolerated (Schapera 1938: 151). The *lobola* process has begun to change in urban areas, with cash and goods often given instead of cattle. However, the value system underlying the exchange has proven resilient, and women remain minors under customary law.

The tension between customary and common law was demonstrated in a landmark case, in which a reformist common law judge assisted four sisters in overturning an inheritance ruling set by the customary court. The government challenged the movement of the case into the common law courts, claiming that Botswana was a traditional country that valued its customary legal system (Patel 2013). However, the court dismissed the government's concerns, declaring that 'any customary law or rule which discriminates in any case against a woman unfairly solely on the basis of her gender would not be in accordance with humanity, morality or natural justice' (Laing 2012). This ruling indicates the possibility of a challenge to the discriminatory nature of customary law, which could have a far-reaching positive impact on Botswana women.

Women's political participation has increased since independence, but the extent of this move towards gender equality is limited. At Botswana's first election there were only male representatives, and women were not expected to speak out on political matters as 'cultural etiquette imposed silence on women' (Procek 1993: 39). This has changed in the post-independence era and women are allowed to participate in political decision-making. However, equal participation for men and women has not been achieved. The SADC Declaration on Gender and Development calls for 30 per cent women in decision-making positions in government. The optional SADC Gender Protocol 2008 has increased this target to 50 per cent by 2015, but the government of Botswana has refused to adopt the Gender Protocol (Bauer 2011: 34). The numbers of women in parliament have risen, reaching 9.5 per cent in 2016 (Inter-Parliamentary

Union 2016), but fall far short of the SADC target of 30 per cent. The numbers of women in leadership positions outside of central government have increased, but levels remain low: women constitute 13 per cent of mayors, 19 per cent of local councillors and 33 per cent of cabinet members (Fombad 2004: 158).

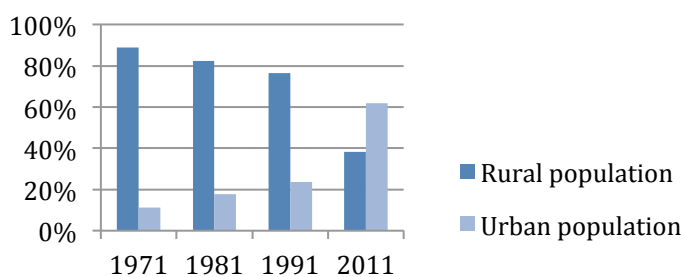
While Botswana is failing to reach equal political participation for women and men, it has been successful in ensuring girls attend school. The colonial government neglected education for Batswana; the only available schools were those few established by missionaries and locals. In Head's 1968 story, older women like Mma Millipede had been 'able to obtain a bit of mission education' if they 'drifted to the church' (73), and girls like young Lorato were 'able for most of the year to attend the village primary school' (83). However, just 100 people had ever completed secondary school by independence in 1966 (Siphambe 2000: 292). The government has since made extensive gains in education. Primary education was made free for all in 1978, and school fees were abolished for secondary schools in 1989 (Siphambe 2000: 293). Significant portions of the budget are allocated to education – 9.6 per cent of GDP in 2009 (CIA 2017). In 2015 there were 1095 schools in Botswana, and a gross enrolment ratio of 119.2 per cent for children aged six to 12 years was recorded in 2012 (Ministry of Education and Skills Development 2015).

In 2012 85.5 per cent of boys and 88.2 per cent of girls attended primary school, while 35.7 per cent of boys and 43.6 per cent of girls attended secondary school (UNICEF 2013). However, quality is an ongoing problem for government schools around the country. Such schools have been unable to attract qualified teachers, particularly at the primary level, where only nine per cent of teachers have an undergraduate degree in education, and 0.5 per cent have a postgraduate degree in education. Quality of teaching and learning practices has been identified as an area for improvement as part of Botswana's Education For All programme (Ministry of Education and Skills Development 2015). Although girls are securing the same levels of education as boys, the jobs they will have after education are strongly affected by internalised cultural definitions of women as inferior. In an interview with Qunta (1987: 202), Deputy Director of the Department of Information and Broadcasting, Margaret Nananyane Nasha, asserted that 'for a long time girls have been conditioned to believe that they cannot become anything except nurses or secretaries'. Many women take low-status jobs, despite being overqualified for such positions (Enge 1985: 73-76).

Migration for work has shaped much of Botswana's modern history, and continues to affect women's lives. Poor soil conditions and low rainfall mean that the

subsistence agriculture practised by most Batswana has always been an unreliable means of providing for a family (Motzafi-Haller 2002: 56). Consequently, men would travel to neighbouring countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe to take on work in the mines. Before independence, women and their children were able to join their husbands in finding paid employment overseas. In the immediate post-colonial era, border restrictions became more pronounced making it difficult for women to migrate (Motzafi-Haller 2002: 36). The unpredictability of agricultural production and the inequitable distribution of cattle ownership has resulted in significant dependence on wage income. This need for formal employment combined with the growth of Botswana's urban and industrial centres led to significant urban-rural migration of both men and women within Botswana (Motzafi-Haller 2002: 36). Table 1 shows the ratio of urban to rural populations from 1971 to 2011.

Table 1: Rural and urban population distribution 1971-2011.



Source: Data for 1971, 1981 and 1991 taken from Motzafi-Haller (2002: 55), data for 2011 from CIA (2016).

Rural-urban migration has had a number of important effects on women, both those who have left their home villages to find work in the towns and cities and those who remain at rural sites. Women who migrate to urban centres are expected to continue to support their rural families. As such, they are required to send money home and to return to their villages when care for relatives is required. These multiple responsibilities are difficult to manage and are a cause of stress for women (Akinsola and Popovich 2002: 770). Living outside of customary restrictions on their social interactions, women urban migrants are vulnerable to the casual, exploitative relationships that often lead to single motherhood (Mookodi 2004: 174-175). Men living in cities, free of community 'oversight' (Solway 2016: 314), are often harder to extract maintenance payments from (Brown 1983: 373).

The impacts of migration on rural women who remained behind in the villages are manifold. As the wage-earning economy transformed society from communal to individualistic, kinship ties weakened and rural women have become increasingly susceptible to poverty (Brown 1983: 375-380). Declining mutual cooperation between rural households has polarised families, separating those with resources from those without and increasing poverty for households that previously relied on community support for survival. Agriculture is traditionally women's work, and most rural women still grow crops. Women can apply for a land grant, but often 'lack the assets, capital or labour to use the land productively' (FAO 2017).

The growth of Botswana's mining sector and expansion of government offices has resulted in an increase in formal employment opportunities for men and women. While there are no official restrictions on the work women can do, customary attitudes often mean that jobs available for women tend to be low-paid and restricted to the retail, administration, education and domestic sectors; the majority of women who earn wages are domestic workers (Phaladze and Tlou 2006: 26), with women workers constituting 70 per cent of the informal sector (Siphambe 2007: 5). Women suffer disproportionately from unemployment at 55.5 per cent (Siphambe 2007: 9), and many women are still economically dependent on their partners or male relatives (Mookodi 2004: 124). There is no national minimum wage, but rather a series of minimum wages according to sector. Retail and domestic service, where most working women find employment, are paid at well below living wages at P4.00 (£0.27) and P2.50 (£0.17) per hour respectively (Selatlhwa 2013). The Employment Act of 1982 made the dismissal of pregnant women illegal, provided for 12 weeks' maternity leave at 25 per cent of salary and allowed for one hour away from work each day to breast-feed the infant. This act has since been amended to make discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or health status illegal.

The number of people living below the poverty line in Botswana has decreased nationally, from 47 per cent in 1993 to 21 per cent in 2009 (UNICEF 2012: 6). However, some 46 per cent of FHHs suffer poverty, compared to 27 per cent of male-headed households (MHHs) (UNICEF 2012: 13). Most female heads are aged between 40 and 91 and care for between one and 12 children, meaning that those with the poorest health and lowest access to material resources have the responsibility for caring for children who have often been left behind by mothers working in urban areas (Akinsola and Popovich 2002: 767). Unmarried mothers usually rely on their parents and brothers for financial support. While women undertake essential work, such as crop

growing and caring, their financial contribution to a family can only be negligible as domestic agricultural production rarely produces more than that required for subsistence (Brown 1983: 384). As a result it is often necessary for them to leave their children with elderly relatives and seek work in the towns.

Gender inequality in Botswana manifests itself notably in the area of women's health. While healthcare for women has improved, significant problems persist. Botswana spends 18 per cent of its total budget on healthcare (World Bank 2010: 1). An outreach system makes healthcare accessible through rural clinics and 95 per cent of the population live within 8km of a clinic (Central Statistics Office 2011b: 4). The family planning programme is free and is incorporated into maternal and child health services (World Bank 2010: 3). This means that women whose husbands do not want them to access family planning can see a nurse under the auspices of maternal or child health during or after their pregnancy. The high take-up of these services suggests that they are effective in reducing the numbers of unwanted pregnancies, and the service has been deemed the best in Africa (World Bank 2010: viii). The Central Statistics Office of Botswana (2012: 3) claims that childbirth has become safer for women, with 99.8 per cent of live births taking place in a healthcare facility in 2011. 94 per cent of women receive antenatal care (World Bank 2011: 1). Botswana's HIV/AIDS programmes are widely commended. Anti-retroviral medication is free and accessible and HIV testing is routine in clinical settings. Condoms are available for free at clinics around the country. There is almost 100 per cent awareness of HIV, and high levels of condom use (76.4 per cent) were reported between non-cohabiting couples in 2005 (National AIDS coordinating Agency 2005, cited in Carter et al. 2007: 822).

Despite these improvements in women's health a number of concerns remain, for which solutions are yet to be found. These include HIV, teenage pregnancy, maternal mortality and unsafe abortion. The gendered effects of HIV hinder women's advancement. Of the 350,000 adults over 15 who are infected with HIV, 54.3 per cent are women (UNAIDS 2015). UNICEF (2012: 16) points to violence against women, exploitative sexual relationships, casual sexual intercourse with more than one partner, and drug and alcohol abuse as factors behind women's greater vulnerability to HIV infection. The socialisation of women as subservient and cultural prohibitions against denying sex or requesting that men use condoms undermine women's bodily autonomy, making it more difficult for them to avoid HIV infection (Urdang 2006: 171; Akinsola and Popovich 2002: 769). Not only are women at higher risk of contracting the virus, but the responsibility of care for those dying from AIDS tends to fall to women too

(Urdang 2006: 171-174). The time, labour and resources required for the care of the sick are a heavy burden, one which falls disproportionately on women, who are customarily defined as caregivers (Urdang 2006: 171-174).

Teenage pregnancy is a serious issue, with an estimated national average ratio of 9.7 per cent (UNFPA 2013b). UNFPA (2013a) has reported that teenage pregnancy continues to rise in Botswana, and UNICEF's All In initiative has identified teen pregnancy as one of eight priority issues in the country (UNICEF 2015).⁷ Botswana's Minister of Education and Skills Development, Pelonomi Venson-Moitoi, has expressed concern that '[a]dolescent pregnancy brings detrimental social and economic consequences for the girl, her family, her community and the nation at large. Many girls who become pregnant drop out of school, drastically limiting their future opportunities' (UNFPA 2013a). The Programs Director at the Botswana Family Welfare Association (BOFWA) claims that under-utilisation of family planning services is a primary factor in the high levels of adolescent pregnancy (UNFPA 2013a). Contraception is free and widely available, and contraceptive prevalence is estimated at 52.8 per cent of women aged 12-49 (CIA 2016). Yet, young girls are often reluctant to access clinics where contraception is provided for fear of being stigmatised by service providers (Meekers, Ahmed and Molatlhegi 2001: 300). In response to this concern BOFWA has set up youth-friendly clinics, however, there are only five of these across the country (UNFPA 2013).

Maternal mortality has decreased from 326/100,000 in 1990 (Government of Botswana and UNDP 2013: 19) to 129/100,000 in 2015 (World Bank 2016), but remains unacceptably high for an upper-middle income country. Botswana's Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of 89/100,000 by 2015 was not reached. The most common causes of maternal deaths are haemorrhage; hypertension; AIDS, and sepsis (Government of Botswana and UNDP 2013: 22). 70 per cent of maternal deaths, regardless of the medical cause, can be attributed to 'sub-standard care and poor decisions in the referral process' (Government of Botswana and UNDP 2013: 22). All figures for maternal mortality come from deaths occurring in healthcare facilities (99 per cent); the other one per cent has not been investigated (Government of Botswana and UNDP 2013: 22).

⁷ The eight points for intervention were as follows: 'HIV testing and counselling; antiretroviral treatment; condom use among sexually active adolescents; comprehensive sexual education; prevention of teenage pregnancy; prevention of gender-based violence; male circumcision; and substance abuse prevention and response.' (UNICEF 2015: 15).

As in many parts of the world, unsafe abortion is a key issue in Botswana, affecting the health and mental wellbeing of thousands of Batswana women each year. Abortion complications officially account for between nine per cent and 16 per cent of maternal deaths (UNICEF 2012; Central Statistics Office 2011b: 5; World Bank 2010: 16). However, underreporting is likely, given that many women will lie about the cause of their symptoms to protect themselves from criminal prosecution for having attempted to commit abortion. The 1991 Penal Code (Amendment) Bill liberalised abortion laws to include the possibility of legal abortion if the pregnancy was a result of rape or incest, if pregnancy endangers the mother's life or if the child would be born with a severe disability. In reality, bureaucratic problems and negative attitudes of healthcare providers prevent the bill from being helpful to women (Mogwe 1992: 42). Unsafe, illegal procedures are routinely carried out (UN n.d.). In *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968: 55) a young woman is discovered to have died from a septic womb, 'due to having procured an abortion with a hooked and unsterilized instrument'. While this 1968 account is fictional, it matches recent incidents reported by the participants in my MA research – including a former obstetrician who had first-hand experience in treating the victims of unsafe abortion – suggesting continuity in the use of dangerous methods.

Violence against women is a serious concern in Botswana. While baseline data are limited, a 2012 government study into GBV has presented some illuminating results. Almost 70 per cent of Batswana women have experienced GBV in their lifetime, and most of this is at the hands of intimate partners. 11 per cent of women in the study disclosed having been raped, although it is likely that incidents were underreported (Government of Botswana and Gender Links 2012: 47-58). Physical beating has long been accepted as a tool with which husbands may discipline their wives for disobedience or settle domestic arguments. Both his family and hers acknowledge this right, as long as it can be shown that she has indeed misbehaved and is thus 'deserving' of physical abuse. Misdemeanours that are reprimanded with physical violence range from committing adultery to neglecting her household chores (Schapera 1938: 158).

Violence against women is a trend that appears to be worsening with modernisation (UNICEF 2012; Mookodi 2004: 119; Silberschmidt 2001: 662). An increase in GBV is indicated by the fact that women aged 45 and above reported the lowest levels of intimate partner violence while women aged 18-29 reported the highest levels. Women's participation in wage labour has resulted in their increasing financial independence, a challenge to male dominance. Modern values have undermined men's traditional authority and their violent behaviour could be a consequence of this change,

as they feel the need to reassert their dominance (Mookodi 2004: 124-126; Silberschmidt 2001: 662).

Women have made significant advances in the post-colonial era. They have achieved educational parity with men, have access to improved healthcare, and have gained full legal capacity and greater rights from a host of legislative reforms. However, key issues remain. Violence against women, decreasing participation levels in politics, restriction to low-paid employment sectors, HIV, household poverty and other concerns all need to be challenged so that women can fully benefit from Botswana's economic development. In this thesis I argue that cultural perceptions of womanhood, and their manifestation in social practice, create and maintain many of the problems that women face. Through in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews with 30 Botswana women I explore aspects of the meaning and experience of womanhood in Botswana. In the first analysis chapter I focus on defining womanhood as a construct in the local context, unpacking the requirements a woman must meet to 'achieve' womanhood status in the community. In the following chapter I investigate the costs of womanhood, considering the day-to-day challenges that women face and the burdens they carry. The final analysis chapter questions the extent to which gender dynamics have changed over time, and how women accommodate the presence of multiple and often contrasting value systems in their lives.

Chapter two: Methodology

Since my concern was to research perceptions of womanhood in Botswana I decided to do fieldwork in the country using qualitative interviewing. I first travelled to Botswana in 2010 to live and work in a culture distinct from my own; thus, my 16-month stay there was not initially designed to be an academic experience. However, observing the difficulties some women faced with unwanted pregnancies led me to conduct research into local perceptions of abortion. My second trip to Botswana in 2013 was specifically to conduct the research for this thesis: I spent six weeks researching the meaning and experience of womanhood in the southern region of the country. During the first project I had conducted 21 interviews in the capital city Gaborone. The second project consisted of 30 interviews, carried out in both rural and urban areas. In this chapter I discuss my theoretical perspective, the research site and the methods I used. I describe my sample and my experiences of working with an interpreter. This is followed by a discussion of issues in the field and ethical considerations, and concluded with a description of my transcription and analysis process.

Theoretical perspective

I wanted to understand how perceptions of womanhood in Botswana affected women's experiences. With these goals and motivations in mind, feminist social constructionism was for me the most appropriate theoretical framework from which to approach my research project. Scholars debate the precise definition of social constructionism (Gergen 2009: 2). I agree with the definition provided by Friedman (2006: 182), who posits, 'Social constructionism is the theoretical approach of accounting for something by construing its nature and existence as the product, in some sense, of social relationships, practices and discourses'. It is from this perspective that I approach my research and data analysis.

Social construction theory refutes the idea that universal facts can be discovered and presented by the objective researcher. Rather, knowledge is considered to be contextually specific and situational, and its presentation subjective. Some authors assert that social constructionism is an optimistic methodology in the research of social problems such as gender inequality (Gergen 2009: 12-13; Friedman 2006: 182). If entities do not have an independent existence, but are merely constructs, then they can be changed through a process of re-construction (Gergen 2009: 12-13; Friedman 2006:

182). This can be applied to the values that are raised in defence of the oppression of women in Botswana, such as culture and tradition (Government of Botswana 2000). Cultural traditions are invoked globally to legitimize the ‘control and oppression of women’ (Yural-Davis 1997: 46). Gergen (2009: 9) theorises that ‘cultural traditions’ can be understood as patterns that ‘follow a rough set of conventions about what is acceptable and what is not’. These patterns can be altered through the exchange of new ideas, particularly from those whose voices are often marginalised. Qualitative interviewing with women in Botswana can contribute to the discussion required to generate new discourses that help to redistribute power. As Friedman (2006: 182) explains, ‘Social constructionism suggests that whatever is oppressive to women is not inevitable or unchanging and can be made better by humans acting differently.’

Social constructionism allows space for the researcher as a subjective participant in the research (O’Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012: 509; Alcoff 1987: 117). In the case of qualitative interviewing, the interviewer and the interviewee construct meaning together, each bringing their own values and interpretations to the process (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). These positions are not: ‘Obstacles to our pursuit of the truth, but in some sense *constituents of truth*’ (Alcoff 1987: 115, emphasis original). By acknowledging that the researcher cannot be objective, recognising their personal and professional bias, and accepting that the participants are not containers of pre-existing knowledge from which data can simply be extracted (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 30-31), such an approach contributes to redistributing power in the research process (O’Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012: 495; Alcoff 1987: 117; Oakley 1981).

My social constructionist perspective was informed by my feminist views. Fundamentally, feminist research seeks to investigate the position of women, locating the researcher within the research as a means to transparency and accountability. By combining the tenets of feminist research with social constructionism, we can explore ‘the concepts, practices, entities and attributes that constitute oppression’ (Friedman 2006: 182). I was committed to a feminist approach to my research throughout the process. For me this meant being aware of my positionality and the power dynamics between the interviewees and myself. Such reflexivity can minimise any potential exploitation of the participants by encouraging acknowledgment of responsibility to them at all times (Acker et al. 1983). Being conscious of the way my identity and actions affected the interviewees and the research process shaped my research methodology. It informed the way I formulated my interview questions, who I included

in my sample, how I interacted with the participants and the interpreter, and my transcription and analysis of the data.

Social constructionism in qualitative interviewing theorises the interview process itself as meaning-making, as two individuals (or three, if using an interpreter) construct an account of the interviewee's reported experience. A social constructionist approach also allows for the interpretation of interviews as part of a wider social discourse, in this case, that of womanhood in Botswana. O'Shaughnessy and Krogman (2012: 515) suggest this is a particularly useful approach for studying 'questions that are not best addressed through the standpoints of the oppressed'. This includes cultures that render 'women's subordination and powerlessness as a "natural" condition of family life and social order so profoundly as often to render women's disadvantage invisible' (Cook and Dickens 2003: 59). While I met many Botswana women who acknowledged their gendered disadvantages, the socialisation of women as inferior is thoroughly entrenched and can thus be difficult for some participants to recognise in their own lives.

Research site

I conducted all of my interviews in Botswana. My fieldwork was located in the southeastern part of the country, both in the capital Gaborone and in rural areas within two hours' drive of the city. There is a significant economic and cultural divide between urban and rural areas in Botswana. Rural communities tend to be more aligned with traditional Tswana attitudes, whereas a westernised form of modern culture has taken a strong hold in urban areas (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 165-167). Poverty is significantly worse in rural locations where there are few formal employment opportunities and farming is usually not profitable (Motzafi-Haller 2002: 56). These differences mean that the experiences of being a woman are likely to differ substantially between women living in urban and rural areas. I interviewed women from both location types to gain a wider understanding of women's lives in Botswana.

Nonetheless, creating a division between 'rural' and 'urban' is not straightforward. Rural-to-urban migration by working-age women is commonplace (Motzafi-Haller 2002: 36). The quick construction of urban centres since independence offers rural women the chance to undertake paid employment, an opportunity rarely available in the villages (Ingstad 2004: 64). Many of these women leave their children with grandparents, dividing the family unit across rural and urban areas (Ingstad 2004: 64; Motzafi-Haller 2002: 36). In addition, seasonal movement between the lands,

cattleposts and villages, typical in the past, continues to be quite common (Izzard 1985). As Ingstad (2004: 64) notes, 'Life in Botswana may be said to take place in two different "worlds"'. Such frequent population movements complicated the categorisation of women in the sample, but served as an interesting complexity in the data. To simplify the sampling categories of urban and rural for the purposes of recruitment, I placed women who were living in a town or city at the time of my research into the urban category. The outermost rural settlements are arguably the least affected by development. Despite 'remarkable developments' in 'urban centres', 'life in the villages and rural areas has gone largely unchanged' (Ingstad 2004: 63). Unfortunately, it was not possible to reach women in these areas due to time and budgetary constraints. Such villages are several days' travel from the suburb where I stayed, and ideally require a four-wheel drive vehicle for access. My experience of travelling in Botswana indicated that there are villages close to the city that have retained customary lifestyles. It is areas such as these where I recruited the rural participants.

Methods

I wanted to investigate the meaning of womanhood in Botswana through asking women to articulate their experiences of womanhood, and talk about what it means to be a woman. I therefore decided to use qualitative, semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research tends to focus on exploring the accounts of individuals and small groups, and 'seeks depth rather than breadth' (Ambert et al. 1995: 880). I did not aim to create a representative profile of Botswana women's lives, but rather to discover and interpret the perceptions of individual women and to construct in-depth analyses of their necessarily subjective accounts. Semi-structured interviewing is useful for exploring accounts of socio-cultural change (Andrews et al. 2008: 1; Rubin and Rubin 1995: 4), and thus appropriate for investigating the transformation of ideas around womanhood and gender relations in Botswana. As Andrews et al. (2008: 1) claim, through such methods 'we are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change.' Qualitative interviewing enabled me to ask for the accounts of women who were otherwise unheard in a society rooted in gender inequality (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007: 113).

While qualitative interviewing was the most appropriate method for my research, there are 'possibilities of misunderstandings, error and bias in every interview

situation' (Shah 2004: 552), potentially more so in the presence of cultural differences between the researcher and the researched. In cross-cultural interviewing there can be problems understanding nuances in language and culture (Ryen 2003: 16), particularly as cultural differences can influence the way one creates meaning through talk (Shah 2004: 552-553). During my initial 16-month period of residence in Botswana (2010-2011), I had learnt about common local cultural norms and etiquette; for example, the significance of acknowledging others through a formally structured exchange of greetings. I came to understand certain linguistic and gestural idiosyncrasies, such as blending Setswana with English in discussion, or taking the hand of the person one is speaking with. This kind of knowledge helped to improve my understanding during the interviews.

Many cultures around the world uphold the traditional practice of storytelling as a means of transmitting their history (Plummer 2000: 2). This is the case in Botswana and in rural areas in particular (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 61-65, 165); asking village residents to tell me their stories therefore did not seem as unusual as might, for example, a written questionnaire. In urban centres of Botswana the telling of one's narrative is familiar not only through Tswana cultural history, but also as a result of the emergence of the modern interview society, as described by Atkinson and Silverman (1997). Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 18) explain that the 'deprivatization' of our personal lives contributes to the increasing popularity of the interview as an 'occasion for articulating experience'. The interview society has been encouraged in Botswana by the global media presence in urban areas, and is keenly taken up by local press and broadcasters (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 72-74). As such, storytelling is an acceptable part of life all over Botswana and interviewing was received as an unexceptional research method by most of my participants.

Structured interviews reinforce the traditionally hierarchical nature of social research because they leave limited space for the participant to talk about what they think is important (Oakley 1981). I wanted to encourage the interviewees to raise issues that mattered to them, while ensuring that my own areas of enquiry, ultimately designed to contribute to women's empowerment, were sufficiently addressed. Conversely, interviewees can find very unstructured interviews confusing, being unsure of what is expected of them. Semi-structured interviews balance these concerns by ensuring the participants are able to choose what they want to talk about within the confines of a given area of interest, meaning the researcher can gather the data required to answer her research questions (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007: 115-116). I utilised an interview

schedule (Appendix III) to outline general ideas, allowing more focused concepts to develop through the course of the interview in response to each participant's narrative (Ambert et al. 1995: 884). I recorded the interviews using a digital dictaphone, from which files can easily be uploaded to a computer or other device. I carried an MP3 player and a mobile telephone as back-up recording devices in case of the dictaphone failing, but these were not required.

I used two supplementary instruments for data collection alongside qualitative semi-structured interviews. The first was a research diary kept during my fieldwork. Diary entries included information such as where and when interviews had taken place; how long they lasted; who was present; any significant comments made before or after the recording, and notes on how any questions that did not seem to translate well or elicit useful responses. I used the diary to revise my interview schedule, adding, changing or withdrawing questions as necessary during the research process. I also requested that participants fill out a brief questionnaire at the start of the interview (Appendix IV) to provide me with basic demographic information to inform my data analysis. The questions concerned age; marital status; number of children; religious affiliation; profession; place of residence; educational background, and family background. The questions were brief, mostly requiring one-word answers. My field diary was helpful for revising my approach on-the-go, and the demographic questionnaires helped to contextualise the interview data to some extent. However, during the analysis stage I found that I was lacking in demographic and biographical detail that would have been useful in interpreting the meaning of some of the responses. As mentioned above, I did not always push for detail about the interviewees' experiences, usually out of concern for propriety. Had I collected more information in the questionnaires I might have been able to fill some of the informational gaps I was left with. For example, collecting a basic relationship history and factual information about paternal support might have elucidated some of the participants' complaints about male behaviour, issues that the interviewees repeatedly raised and which consequently became significant to this thesis.

I used a variety of methods to recruit participants for my study, including online advertising, snowballing, and direct approach as well as utilising personal contacts. 13 interviewees were recruited by direct approach, ten via snowballing, three were personal friends, and four were recruited online. I used the popular social networking website Facebook to recruit a small number of participants several months prior to the beginning of my fieldwork, and again during my fieldwork. Drawing on social networking sites

such as Facebook can increase the representativeness of a sample by broadening it beyond a researcher's personal contacts (Baltar and Brunet 2012: 58). Unlike other online research methods, such as online surveys, Facebook allows for personal communication between the researcher and the researched. This is appropriate to feminist methodology, in which acknowledgement of the individual is a crucial element. However, the personal aspect of Facebook connections is limited by the selective nature of people's online profiles, and the performative nature of social networking sites. While using social networking sites as a recruitment tool allowed me to expand my initial sample, the participants sourced in this way represent a very small minority of Batswana. Internet sampling creates an inevitable 'selection bias', in which age and other factors must be considered (Baltar and Brunet 2012: 63). Internet access is expensive and limited in Botswana, with an estimated 120,000 internet users in 2009 out of a population of 2,127,825 (CIA 2016), a mere 5.6 per cent. However, I did not expect this bias in the online-sourced section of my initial sample to affect all my interviews, as snowballing once in the country would broaden the spectrum of people who participated in my study, particularly as it took me into the rural areas where internet access is rare.

In November 2013, before leaving York (England) to begin my fieldwork, I created an advertisement (Appendix V) to post in a number of Facebook groups based in Botswana, with details of my study and requirements for participants, and included my email address. Some of these were closed groups, meaning that I had to request permission from the administrators to join as a member and to submit my post. This caused no problems, and I was able to display my advertisement in 4 different groups. To locate the groups I searched for 'Botswana' using the Facebook group search tool. I selected the groups I would use based on whether my advertisement would be appropriate to the nature of the group and appealing to its members. The groups I posted in were: *Botswana Young Women's Association*; *Botswana Red Cross Society*,⁸ *University of Botswana Young Women's Leadership Club* and *Botswana*.

In the advertisement I provided my contact details and suggested that interested parties got in touch for further details. 11 women did this. I told them about myself and described my research, explaining what participation would involve. All 11 women were very keen to take part, and many said that they had family members who they thought would also be interested in being interviewed. I took contact details for each

⁸ The Red Cross is one of the oldest organisations in Botswana, and has volunteer groups and committees all over the country (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 179-180).

person and explained that I would get in touch closer to the time of the fieldwork. In hindsight, posting my advertisement in November 2013 was too early, given that my fieldwork was not due to start until June 2014. Between advertising my project and beginning the fieldwork I had altered my selection criteria. Initially I had planned to interview women of all ages, but after some consideration decided that narrowing the age range would give a clearer sense of how particular generations experience being a woman in Botswana. Unfortunately, after emailing the contacts I made as a result of my initial advertisement I discovered they were all too young to be included and they were not interviewed (Appendix V). However, noting how effective online recruiting could be, I placed updated advertisements in a large number of Botswana related groups, such as *Botswana Musicians*, *Teachers in Botswana*, *Botswana Nurses Association* and any other general purpose groups I came across. This method was successful in that I was able to interview four women identified via Facebook, who then introduced me to six further participants between them. The interviews I conducted with people identified through Facebook were successful and data-rich, suggesting it was a worthwhile approach.

When interviewing women from rural areas I usually approached them directly with my interpreter present. This was made possible by the high numbers of unemployed or part-time employed women in rural areas, who spend time in their yards cleaning, looking after children or relaxing. As such, they often had free time there and then, and were visible and accessible. In the busy working capital of Gaborone the direct approach might have been unsuccessful. Thus, snowball sampling was key in recruiting urban participants. I began this process by interviewing an initial sample made up of personal contacts and responders to my online advertisements. I identified the broadest initial sample possible.⁹ After each interview I asked if the participant could suggest people who she thought would be interested in taking part. In this manner, many interviews led to at least one additional participant, and some interviewees introduced me to several others.

Snowball sampling is an ideal method for accessing difficult-to-reach groups (Browne 2005: 49-51), such as rural populations or oppressed women. Even a limited personal connection with a participant can encourage more effective communication by

⁹ While I aspired to breadth across my initial sample, I did not aim for random selection as this was not required for the type of research I conducted. Personal networks are necessarily biased, online recruitment requires forwardness on the part of the participants in order to respond to my advertisements, and when approaching strangers I was considerably more likely to speak to women who appeared confident and approachable. These are just examples of the multiple factors that impact on the interviewee selection, all of which are to be expected as part of this type of qualitative research.

creating a level of empathy on which subsequent interaction can be based (Ambert et al. 1995: 884). Snowball sampling also encourages trust between the researcher and the researched, because both parties can ask questions of mutual acquaintances in order to dispel any misgivings about the process (Browne 2005: 50). This is particularly useful for the interviewees who might require reassurance from somebody other than the researcher in order to feel safe and comfortable in their participation. I was aware of the risk of exploitation when using the snowball sampling method. Although the participants might have the best intentions when offering names, the people put forward might not wish to take part; when contacting the suggested women, I therefore clarified that they were not obligated to be interviewed.

The sample

I interviewed 30 Batswana women. The criteria for selection were that the participants must be women and of Tswana ethnicity. I decided to concentrate my research on the majority ethnic group in order to gain an understanding of issues that potentially affect the largest group of people in the country. 79 per cent of people living in Botswana are of Tswana ethnicity (CIA 2016). Tswana women are usually black and speak Setswana, the national language of Botswana. Within the Batswana population exist groups of different tribal heritage, often demarcated by geographic location. Across the villages I visited to conduct interviews, I spoke to Bahurutse, Bakwena, Balete, Batlokwa, and Bakgatla women.¹⁰

While I aimed to interview women aged between 30 and 40, I did not enforce this strictly (see below). There were no other criteria for inclusion in the sample because I wished to speak with women from a broad lifestyle spectrum in order to explore the widest possible range of views. Bias in qualitative interviewing is unavoidable (Cohen et al. 2011: 180-181), but by including women with diverse backgrounds and varying relationships to myself I hoped to balance the type and level of bias present across the interviews as a whole. However, to say that just 30 people can speak for the whole is incongruous; my sample was not representative, but rather reflected the articulated personal experiences of a small number of individuals. Speaking of slave stories, Bold (2011: 16) points out that while one story cannot represent an entire group of people, ‘many overlapping stories generate a convincing set of evidence to support understanding.’

¹⁰ The prefix ‘Ba’ means ‘people of’. For example, ‘Bakwena’ means people of the Kwena.

One aim of my research was to investigate how Batswana women talk about their lives in the context of the rapidly changing economic, political, social and material environment that has characterised Botswana since independence in 1966. In light of this, interviewing women who were in a position to reflect on their personal experience of development through Botswana's recent post-colonial history was critical. The age of the sample was thus a significant factor and within this, I considered two key elements: first, which age group would be best situated in a historical sense, second, what age group would be least problematic in terms of cultural and practical constraints. Age and maturity are significant factors in social interaction in Botswana (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 169-171; Suggs 1987: 107; Schapera 1938: 29). The qualitative interview is a dynamic form of social interaction. It is thus necessary to assess the potential impact of the interviewees' ages relative to my own on the interview process, in order to appreciate age-related cultural influences on the exchange.

To contextualise age in Botswana I shall briefly outline the relationship between perceptions of seniority, life expectancy, and my sample choice. Life expectancy for women in Botswana is 52.6 (CIA 2016). Thus the social categories of 'youth' and 'old age' differ from those usually applied in many western countries where life expectancy is higher, 83 for women in the United Kingdom, for example (CIA 2016). In Botswana a woman's life stages are defined primarily by her success in the roles of 'household manager, mother and provider', chronological age as holding less importance by comparison (Suggs 1987: 114). Nonetheless, physical age is meaningful. Suggs (1987: 115) purports that old age status can be reached at any age from 40 upwards, depending on the achievement of women's expected roles. For the practical purposes of my research, it is reasonable to take 40 as a general point of demarcation between old and young.

Women younger than 30 at the time of my research (2014) had not been alive long enough to have experienced many of the most significant changes in Botswana's recent post-colonial history. Thus it was useful to interview women older than 30. Participants aged between 30 and 40 would have been born between 1974 and 1984. As such, they would have witnessed many of the changes that happened in their country between their birthdate and 2014 when I conducted the interviews. They were mostly mothers, able to reflect on motherhood and on what they wanted for their female children. I expected that they would be in a position to recall what their mothers' and grandmothers' lives had been like, and to outline hopes and plans for their own futures. As such, 30-40 seemed an appropriate age range for those I wanted to interview.

While women older than 40 would potentially have had a greater breadth of experience of womanhood in chronological terms, there are cultural restrictions on younger people asking personal questions of their elders that would have made sampling older women difficult. I was 27 at the time of my research, and unmarried. As such, I was considered immature, and requesting an interview might have been perceived as impertinent.¹¹ Additionally, I could have encountered interviewee reluctance during the interview as a result of the perceived indelicacy of questioning an older woman, finding myself unable to generate rich data. While these risks were not negated by interviewing younger people, and reluctant respondents were certainly an issue, lack of detail in responses did not happen as a result of contrasting expectations of cross-generational interaction. I might have appeared somewhat ‘young’ to the 30-40 age group, but the age gap between us was not perceived as large enough to warrant the traditional courtesy of not asking questions of one’s elders. Thus, restricting the sample to women aged between 30 and 40 seemed appropriate. However, I struggled to recruit enough women of this age. In addition, I often found myself in a position where a person outside of the age range was keen to be interviewed, and did not wish to turn away a participant who might provide in-depth data as a result of their eagerness to talk to me. In total, 19 of the interviewees fit the 30-40 age group.

I interviewed a total of 30 participants. All were women and Batswana by birth. All were black. 15 resided in rural areas and 15 in the capital city, Gaborone. The total age range spanned 25-45. Of the sample, five were aged 25-29, 12 aged 30-34, eight aged 35-39 and five aged 40-45. Educational attainment varied from junior school level to PhD level: two had junior school education, eight had completed secondary school, six had diplomas or certificates, seven had BA degrees and seven had postgraduate degrees. Of the 30 women sampled, seven had no children and 23 had children. Of those who had children, six were married and 17 were single. No participants were married without children. The number of siblings ranged from one to eight. 20 of the sample were employed, seven unemployed, one self-employed and two were students. Of those employed, seven were teachers and three had other roles in educational institutions. Of the remaining ten, jobs ranged widely and included a magistrate, a

¹¹ It is uncertain whether or not this cultural norm would definitely have affected my interactions with older Batswana women. As an outsider I might have been exempted from these cultural restrictions. I shall discuss the insider/outsider dichotomy later in this chapter. Nevertheless, personal experience from my period of residence in the country indicated that I would be expected to act with due deference to my elders, which includes refraining from asking questions. I found the etiquette of maintaining polite, impersonal conversation to be essential for preserving positive relationships with older colleagues, for example.

radiographer, a postmaster, a researcher, a designer, two cashiers, a driver, a customer services assistant and an auditor. 27 of the 30 participants identified themselves as Christian, one as a Muslim, one as atheist and one as agnostic.

Working with an interpreter

It is important to work around language barriers in order to access the accounts of marginalised communities (Murray and Wynne 2001: 4). I did not use an interpreter during my MA (by research) project and this restricted my sample to the educated urban elite, as fluent English is mostly limited to this group (Bagwasi 2003: 212). Thus, I decided to hire an interpreter for my second research project. Although many of my participants did speak English as an additional language, research has shown that speakers can find talking in a second language tiring, and might have difficulties expressing themselves (Murray and Wynne 2001: 4-5). Even between comfortably fluent English speakers, Setswana is often used in family life and is drawn upon to discuss the cultural and the personal (Bagwasi 2003: 213), aspects of talk that I anticipated would arise during my interviews. As such, I wanted to offer the option of an interpreter to all the participants. I hired a female interpreter, as a male presence in an interview might have been a constraint on the female participants' openness. The interviews suggested this concern to be accurate, as women immediately stopped talking about personal or cultural issues if a male relative approached.

Identifying an interpreter was more difficult than I had anticipated. Having been unable to source one through online agencies and personal contacts, I decided instead to work with a non-professional interpreter who was a bilingual resident of the country. I came across Tumi, a young female Motswana graduate with prior experience in conducting research interviews, using the social networking site Facebook. This was a chance online encounter. I had been advertising my accommodation requirements. I received an email from Tumi, offering me a room in her home. By this stage I had already confirmed accommodation elsewhere. However, Tumi was polite, articulate and fluent in English, and I decided it would be worth speaking to her about working as an interpreter during my fieldwork. Her response was positive and she seemed eager to fill the position. Tumi told me that she was familiar with several villages that she could accompany me to, and would be able to assist in approaching people for participation in addition to translating documents and interpreting the interviews. Tumi had previously worked on a project as part of a team of students who had conducted interviews with rural women on the behalf of their professor. From my point of view such experience

was useful. She was an educated bilingual woman of Tswana origin, and appeared to be a suitable candidate.

Tumi's written English was very good, and her manner professional. We agreed terms of employment and discussed travel arrangements. Our terms of employment included an hourly rate of pay, to begin on our meeting and to end at our parting each day. We would complete a record of her hours together and I would pay her in cash at the end of the day. I was also to be responsible for her travel costs between our initial meeting point and the locations of the interviews. I decided the hourly rate of P65 (approximately £4.42) based on the recommendations of a Motswana friend with experience of local salary structures. Tumi stated that the rate was more than enough and that she was pleased to be receiving that amount for her services. We decided to remain in contact up until the fieldwork began, with me notifying her of any updates to my research design.

To ensure that interviewees were able to participate in their language of choice I offered the option of an interpreter at the recruitment stage. I was aware of the risk of problems arising if the interpreter I used was not sympathetic to my research, particularly in the context of the culturally controversial aspects of my research questions. Working with the right interpreter can eliminate some of these issues (Wallin and Ahlström 2006: 724), and it is essential to prepare the interpreter adequately for her role (Williamson et al. 2011: 383). When hiring Tumi I ascertained that she understood the nature of my research by describing what it was, how I would conduct it, and for what purpose. We exchanged a series of emails in advance of my arrival in which I outlined my research design and the purpose behind it, and explained how I intended to approach the ethical concerns of my project. She also saw my research questions, interview schedule, consent form and information sheet in advance of our employment agreement. Tumi expressed her interest in the research and pleasure in my respect for Setswana culture.

Murray and Wynne (2001: 10) suggest discussing the research subject with the interpreter, in order to gauge how their perspective might impact on what they choose to interpret and the ways in which they convey meaning. Tumi showed enthusiasm for the underlying principle of my research – empowering marginalized women. Nonetheless, our viewpoints differed in some important ways. For example, Tumi held a biological determinist viewpoint, insisting that men and women were different by nature and fixed gender roles were thus logical. This was at odds with my feminist perspective on gender. In another example, she claimed that female rural poverty was a result of

individual laziness, yet I saw it as a feature of structural inequality. While Murray and Wynne (2001: 23) warn that the interpreter's opinions might have a significant effect on their interpretation, I did not find any evidence of this when examining the interview data. However, there were a number of other issues that affected my working relationship with the interpreter and the interviews that we conducted together.

Although I thought that I had discussed all of the relevant issues with Tumi prior to beginning the fieldwork, in hindsight I realised that we had not addressed the question of her level of autonomy in the interviews. The independence of her approach in certain interviews came as a surprise to me. Tumi occasionally challenged the participants in their responses, for example, 'but doesn't that contradict what you just said?' I explicitly preferred not to confront the interviewees, not to lead them, and not to make them feel judged; I was concerned that comments such as these would put the participants in an uncomfortable position. However, they were not put off and Tumi's pushing often elicited more data as they went on to defend or explain their views. I repeatedly witnessed women challenging each other in everyday conversation during my visits to the country, and came to realise that such confrontation did not carry the tension that it would have in equivalent situations in the UK; it seemed that the discomfort was all my own.

Ultimately I think Tumi's input helped to build rapport between herself and the interviewee. Tumi would sometimes ask additional questions of her own, waiting until the end of the interview and asking both myself and the participant if she might pose a question. I was happy with this, as it allowed me to maintain my position as project leader while letting Tumi follow her own lines of enquiry based on participants' answers during the interview. Edwards (1998: 204) suggests, 'The basis on which we make decisions to pursue or abandon particular issues interviewees raise during interviews is not necessarily more informed than that of the interpreter'. While Tumi's questioning did not draw particularly useful data, her proactive input had the positive effect of showing the interviewees that she was interested and invested in what they had to say.

A second issue that we had not discussed prior to conducting the interviews was whether she would translate verbatim, or summarise the participants' responses. Whether an interpreter ought to speak in the third or first person has been debated (Wallin and Ahlström 2006: 724-725). While first-person interpretation seems to offer opportunities for greater immediacy between the researcher and the participant, many languages cannot be translated directly (Murray and Wynne 2001: 17). Setswana and

English are not comparable languages; Setswana is primarily a spoken, not a written language, and is steeped in symbolism. As such, attempting verbatim interpretation might have skewed the meaning of the dialogue, and it became Tumi's responsibility to prioritise the translation of meaning rather than of specific word-use. Allowing her so much control over the process was challenging. She would often begin a translation with, 'she is basically saying...' when I wanted to know *exactly* what the participant was saying. However, I came to accept the necessity of Tumi's approach. The reflexive turn in social research dictates that the researcher should not be 'removed' from the research. Rather, their subjectivity must be explored and their impact on the research acknowledged (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Oakley 1981). Several researchers (Williamson et al. 2011; Murray and Wynne 2001: 23; Edwards 1998: 202-203) point out that this approach ought to apply to the interpreter too. Using the third person in translation recognises, a) the presence of a subjective third person in the interview procedure and, b) that the participant is not able to communicate directly with the researcher. Thus, the validity of their interview must be considered in this context (Edwards 1998: 203).

Williamson et al. (2011: 383) highlight the usefulness of matching certain 'sociodemographic characteristics' between the interpreter and the participants, as a means of encouraging trust and building rapport. However, they recognise that overfamiliarity can restrict the level of detail an interpreter might seek in a participant's responses. My interpreter was a black Motswana woman from a rural background, and in those ways, matched the rural participants whose interviews she interpreted. Some interviewees seemed to recognise her as an insider and they developed a fruitful rapport. However, Tumi was a highly educated English speaker and considerably younger than many of the interviewees, characteristics that differentiated her from them. Being a Motswana who speaks English is considered a sign of social and economic status (Bagwasi 2003: 214). This language hierarchy could have affected the interview by placing class divisions between the local participant and the local interpreter.

Interestingly, in most cases the interviews I conducted through an interpreter were less successful and data-rich than those I conducted myself in English. The former were considerably shorter in length and answers were often brief and superficial, and lacking in emotional content. Murray and Wynne (2001: 16) report similar findings, and point out that cultural differences could not account for the lack of depth in their interpreter-facilitated interviews, as they did not have the same problem when interviewing one-to-one on the same topic. Williamson et al. (2011: 389) also concede

that while their interpreter-facilitated interviews were generally worthwhile, the data they generated were simpler and less nuanced than those conducted without the need for translation. Murray and Wynne (2001: 17) point to the weakness of rapport between the interviewer and the participant, necessitated by the lack of a shared language, as an explanation for the relative hollowness of interpreter-facilitated interviews. This seemed to be the case in my experience. I was unable to build a relationship with the participants I could not speak with directly at all; their body language felt distancing to me, and I got a sense that they were resisting me at some level. Although they consented to being interviewed, they did not seem interested or invested in the process. Where a participant spoke even minimal English this helped us to foster rapport, demonstrating the significance of some shared language in connecting and communicating with others across a cultural barrier.

The table below shows the number of interviews that I conducted with an interpreter, without, and with her present but used minimally. It also demonstrates how many of each set of interviews I thought were productive. While the relative success of an interview is mostly subjective, I have used certain criteria for this: I considered interview transcripts that were under eight pages in total length to be ‘unproductive’ (the most successful interviews produced transcripts which varied between 15 and 25 pages in length). Short interviews such as these were generally superficial, lacked detailed answers, and were uncomfortable or difficult to conduct.

Table 2: Use of an interpreter during interviews vs. productiveness of interviews.

Interpreter use	‘Productive’ interview	‘Unproductive’ interview	Total
Yes	0	6	6
No	18	1	19
Present but not used	4	1	5

I didn’t consider many of the interviews that I conducted entirely through an interpreter to be successful in terms of data richness. The interviews where the interpreter was present but played a minor role were generally productive. Those I conducted entirely in English were almost all fruitful. The single interview in this category that I have marked as unproductive was one in which the participant declined

the use of an interpreter, but in fact her English was weak and we struggled to communicate. After approximately 25 minutes I brought the interview to a close as we were both becoming frustrated. Despite the limited success of many of the interviews I conducted through an interpreter, I was able to access women who would have been left out of the study entirely had I not been able to offer the option of an interpreter.

The interpersonal dynamics between myself, the interviewee and the interpreter varied across the interviews. It is possible that the participants would have been more willing to disclose their personal experiences and culturally sensitive information to me as an outsider, feeling that they were protected from judgment by their peers. Involving a local interpreter in the interview might have negated this advantage, and could partially explain the high number of reluctant respondents that I had when using an interpreter, a problem that rarely occurred when interviewing without one.

Misunderstandings can arise when an interviewer fails to phrase a question in a way that is culturally suitable when translated, and abstract concepts do not always translate across a language barrier (Ryen 2003: 16). In a handful of the rural interpreter-facilitated interviews it seemed that the participants simply did not understand what I was trying to ask. The interpreter and I rephrased and simplified questions several times, but were unable to get our meaning across. On such occasions we eventually abandoned our line of enquiry and moved on to the next question. This problem appeared to result from a combination of interviewee uninterest and our struggle to phrase the questions in an understandable manner. There were some instances where different participants seemed to misinterpret the same question, which suggested that it had not translated well; 'is there anything else I should know?' sometimes received answers to 'do you have any questions?' When translated some questions might appear irrelevant or overly basic to an interviewee; often when I asked 'can you describe a typical day?' the participants hesitated, and seemed unsure of what I wanted.

Another factor in some participants' apparent difficulty in understanding and answering the questions might have been that women in Botswana society are not expected to speak out or to acknowledge their own experiences. As one of the participants from my first Botswana-based research project stated, 'Women [are] not supposed to have any words' (Smith 2013: 170). Women's voices have historically been silenced (Reinharz and Chase 2003: 77). By asking women to tell me about their lives and opinions, I could have been placing them in an unfamiliar position, one that they did not feel secure in navigating. The women who I had difficulty communicating with were primarily uneducated single mothers, giving credence to Reinhartz and

Chase's (2003: 77) suggestion that girls are commonly socialized as 'fecund reproducers whose intellect is devalued'. Some of the interviewees seemed to struggle with questions that required them to talk about themselves. For instance, Kesegofetse often answered personal questions with a general answer, and responded to 'let's talk about you' with 'let's talk about other women! [laughter]' when I tried to address this tendency. These problematic interviews were not particularly useful in terms of content. However, I did not reject 'unsuccessful' interviews entirely, as they highlighted specific sociocultural issues and were useful as supplementary and contextual material.

Putsch (1985: 3344) holds, 'a language barrier disarms a communicant's ability to assess meanings, intent, emotions, and reactions'. During my cross-cultural research projects I realised that the advantages of a shared language could not be overestimated. 'The connotative meanings of words, pronunciation problems or problems with specific sounds, and challenges associated with linguistic styles in different contexts' were all issues that affected the interviews I conducted through an interpreter (Ryen 2003: 438). My perception of this was based on general difficulties during these interviews that I did not experience during the interviews conducted in English. However, without understanding Setswana I am unable to know the full extent of the impact of translation issues on my research. While using an interpreter allowed me to grasp the basic meaning of what the participants were saying, I was rarely able to get a sense of the feelings behind their responses. The nuances of speech were lost to me. The time-delay necessary to translation also prevented me from connecting a particular sentence to an accompanying physical reaction. Thus I could not always rely on a participant's body language or facial expression to contextualise their responses.

However, while non-verbal cues might have been helpful in place of spoken language, the language of the body was not as universal as I had previously thought. For instance, I noticed Batswana seem to smile less frequently than the English. In my own culture, a smile is used broadly to signify acknowledgment, greeting, gratitude, humour, and even nervousness or uncertainty. Not to smile in particular social circumstances, in greeting, for example, may signal hostility, discontent, or acknowledgement of the unpleasantness of a situation. As such, it was alarming when people I met did not return my smiles, and I expected a negative outcome of some sort. This was particularly unsettling during recruitment and interviewing. If I, smiling, asked a person if they would participate in my research, and they responded yes (either directly or through the interpreter) but did not return my smile, I was left uncertain of their perception of me and of the research. I was sometimes unsure of how to proceed, because their body

language suggested to me that they had reservations about the process, despite having agreed to be interviewed. In cases where we shared no common language, I either relied on the interpreter for assurance of their consent or waited until their reaction became clear in other ways; for example, if they went into the house and returned with a set of chairs for us to use. Even though I had come to understand that non-smiling is not usually a negative cue in during my first few months of residence in Botswana, it was difficult to overcome my culturally-embedded response to non-smiling in situations where I was invested in a person's response to me, i.e. during my interviews. It was also challenging to reduce the frequency of my own smiling in line with cultural norms; my smiling perhaps seemed odd to some of the interviewees. Thus, difficulty in communicating without verbal language can be compounded by culturally distinct non-verbal language.

In addition to her role as language-switcher, Tumi was an effective cultural mediator. Tumi's local knowledge was useful in a number of circumstances. For example, she was able to navigate the central city bus station with ease, something I would have struggled with. It is vast in size and not signposted; functioning also as a street market, the footfall is high and the crowds dense. Each bus has a hawker, which is difficult to deal with if one is unsure which vehicle goes to which destination. The pressure these hawkers apply can easily lead a visitor to the wrong bus. Tumi's understanding of the routes and her effective dismissal of hawkers was useful. When on any long-distance bus, the vendor walks down the aisle taking payment. If he does not have change he continues on and comes back to you with it later, a norm I was not aware of. If it weren't for Tumi I would have embarrassed myself by following him the vendor up the aisle and reminding him that I needed change. I also would not have known the fare. The fares are set and known by locals, but are not stated anywhere. Had I needed to ask the price I would have opened myself up to exploitation, but Tumi explained the cost and procedures. The discomfort of travelling alone in unknown areas without these kinds of knowledge would have hindered me in conducting interviews in certain rural villages. Thus, Tumi's role as a guide was useful from the beginning of our work together.

On arrival in the villages Tumi's role as cultural mediator continued. She was aware of the proper etiquette for approaching people; she knew how to enter a person's yard, how to greet and introduce. The cultural expectations of approaching a person vary considerably between Botswana and the UK, so having Tumi with me probably helped me to avoid awkward social situations, or missing opportunities to interview

because I did not recognise when I would be welcome. On one occasion we noticed a woman whom we wished to approach standing around the back of her house. Had I been alone, I would have walked around the side of the property to reach the yard. Tumi told me it was always proper to enter through the house, despite the woman being just feet from us outside. Because of this procedure we were unable to approach the woman for an interview, as she couldn't hear us calling at the front door. Still, to have walked to her yard without going through the house would have been viewed as invasive, and might have caused offence.

During a trip to Ramotswa a potential interviewee misinterpreted our intentions, grew angry, and told us to leave her property. Such a negative response happened only once during the fieldwork, and was a result of the woman perceiving our greeting as improper. Tumi had followed the appropriate procedure, asking the women in the yard how they were, and naming both of us individually before explaining the research. However, one of the women we were addressing did not hear Tumi give her own name, and interrupted her explanation of the research to reprimand her for this apparent oversight. This experience demonstrated the importance of social etiquette. Tumi's assistance in navigating the cultural requirements of approaching strangers was invaluable when approaching the rural participants for the first time. I would suggest that the interpreter was perhaps more valuable as a cultural mediator than as a translator.

There were a number of occasions in which my expectations of Tumi's role and of our relationship differed from hers. Such situations arose from an early stage in the research. I had requested that she and I reschedule a meeting between us because a participant had asked to be interviewed at the same time. Tumi reacted with confusion, and seemed insulted that I would be conducting an interview without her services. I had explained in our initial email conversations that I would only require her to be present during interviews with participants who preferred to speak in Setswana, and reminded her of this agreement. However, she had perhaps misunderstood or forgotten, and this created some tension between us. I felt frustrated at the situation, concerned that if she had misunderstood this particular term of our agreement, potentially other issues might arise in her understanding of terms we had negotiated.

Tumi's mobile phone rang out loud several times during interviews, sometimes more than once in a single interview. She apologised profusely each time, but declined to turn off her phone because she was working on a number of entrepreneurial ventures and did not want to miss any important calls. I struggled to deal with this. I was aware that my employment of Tumi was casual, intermittent, and short-term, and did not wish

to feel responsible should she lose out on her other ventures as a result of working for me. However, I had expected her to turn off her phone as a matter of professionalism and respect for the participants. On the other hand, the participants seemed unfazed, and a number of them answered phone calls during their own interviews too, offering no apology. This approach to mobile calls suggested that such interruptions are not the cultural faux pas that they would be in the UK, where answering a phone during a conversation is considered rude under most circumstances. Again, my own socialisation caused discomfort that was not experienced in the same way by either the participants or the interpreter.

Tumi introduced me to her mother, who became a participant, as did some of their family friends, all of whom were fluent in English. Notwithstanding Edwards' (1998: 200) assertion that interpreters should not be related to participants, all of these interviews were more productive, interesting, and comfortable than the interviews we conducted together with unknown people. Strangers that we approached in the villages often seemed at least mildly suspicious, and I think their mistrust limited the depth of their responses. Tumi's connections were thus useful. I was welcomed as a friend by her family, and by her mother in particular. She cooked us a traditional meal, showed me family photo albums, and gave me a pair of traditional goatskin sandals to take home with me.

It was humbling to be welcomed in this way. However, while this combining of the personal with the professional led to successful interviews, it also created challenges that I was not able to find solutions for. Tumi and I developed a friendly relationship which initially made our work together pleasant. After some time she began to act in ways that made me feel uncomfortable, but which to her were signs of friendship. These included playing with my hair, asking me personal questions and expecting us to spend extra time together in a social context. While I liked Tumi and appreciated her as a reliable and helpful employee, her expectations of our relationship differed from mine and I often felt awkward as a result. Wary of confrontation and aware of the short-term nature of our working relationship, I decided not to address the issue with her.

Respondent issues

There was a clear divide in the success of interviews that I conducted with rural women and with urban women. Urban women tended to welcome the interview and were focused on the process. They seemed invested in what they were saying, giving the questions thought, offering rich answers and providing illustrative examples. In

contrast, many of the rural interviewees were withholding and distracted, looking around and seeming impatient for the interview to end. On many occasions I intentionally did not ask follow-up questions because I sensed the participant was uninterested in the interview and I did not want to impose on her time for longer than necessary. This lack of interest was confusing and frustrating, because I did not understand why they had agreed to be interviewed in the first place. The information sheet (Appendix I), translated by the interpreter, described the nature of the interview and what was expected of all parties. As such, I do not think the interpreter and I had misrepresented what we wanted. While I did explain the nature of the questions I would be asking, the participants did not know my specific areas of enquiry before agreeing to take part. Phoenix (2010: 90) points out that ‘in everyday interaction narratives only become “tellable” if they are new, reportable, unusual, funny, or shared stories’, thus, questions about the mundane might seem boring to participants.

The urban women I interviewed were usually busy people and our meetings required scheduling. For these participants to meet with me they had to make arrangements. As such, a certain level of commitment and interest was a prerequisite to these interviews. In contrast, most of the rural women were approached at random as they sat in their yards. I only approached them if they did not appear to be busy. Thus, they might have agreed simply because they were free at the time, rather than because they were interested. While the urban/rural binary regarding interview success was not comprehensive, with both successful and non-successful interviews in both categories, it applied as a general rule.

While the majority of the urban interviews were data-rich and enjoyable, arranging them in the first place was problematic. A relaxed approach to scheduling is common in Botswana; appointments were frequently forgotten altogether, or interviewees turned up several hours late. I had expected this, having experienced the same issues during my MA fieldwork. However, with a tight schedule for this fieldwork it did create problems. Some recruits were not interviewed at all as a result of not being able to fit them in after they cancelled or forgot a meeting. On one occasion I arrived at a woman’s workplace to conduct a pre-arranged interview, and she behaved as if she did not know what I was there for. I reminded her of our discussion the previous day, but she acted strangely and seemed nervous around her senior colleagues, trying to speak quietly so that they couldn’t hear her. They demanded to know who I was and why I was there, and I decided to leave, suggesting I had made an error so as not to cause problems for the (non)participant. It appeared that while she had been willing to

be interviewed, her senior colleagues were unhappy about it and this compelled her to deny agreeing to be interviewed at all. Despite these issues I was able to interview the full sample I had intended (30 people) within the time scale, and taking a flexible and relaxed approach to scheduling myself helped to make the fieldwork run more smoothly.

Issues in the field

My overall fieldwork experience was positive and enjoyable. However, there were some key issues, of which I shall discuss the most interesting below: i) internet trolling, ii) researcher shyness in interviewing, iii) street harassment in the field, and iv) insider/outsider dynamics and positional bias.

i. Internet trolling

While online sampling was relatively successful, I experienced one problem that was harmful enough to result in me closing down my online search for participants for several months (between November 2013 and June 2014, when my fieldwork began). In the Facebook group *Botswana Red Cross Society* one woman posted questions in the public comments section of my advertisement. I had requested in the original post that interested parties contact me privately. For the sake of anonymity, I did not wish to conduct public conversations with any potential participants. The member's question initially seemed genuine and relevant: she asked who I was and why I was researching Botswana women's lives. In the public comments section I answered that she should feel free to contact me through the private messaging tool, or by email, for further information. She responded publicly, repeating herself along the lines of, 'why are you doing this research?'¹² I had written a brief summary of my reasons for doing the research in the advertisement, as well as a description of myself. I paraphrased this information in the public forum and repeated that she was welcome to contact me privately to let me know the specific information that she required, and that I would be able to answer more fully once I understood her concerns.

Again, she responded publicly. She did not respond directly to my previous answer, but repeated, 'But why are you doing this? Who are you? Why do you want to interview Botswana women? It doesn't make sense'. I was confused by her approach. Out of respect for transparency and acknowledgement of individuals in the research

¹² As the advertisement and comments were removed from the group page without notice, I was unable to record the conversation. In these examples I have paraphrased the member's comments.

process I wanted to answer her questions, but I was unable to secure her cooperation in communicating effectively. I wrote a highly detailed response to her question and sent this to her through the private messaging tool. I thought that I had covered every possible angle in this message, and that she would surely understand my reasons for doing the research upon reading it. Still, she refused to communicate privately, and bombarded the public forum with comments such as ‘I don’t get it, who are you? Why are you doing this?’ After sending the detailed private message to the member, I refrained from further attempts to communicate. I did not know what more I could say, and her comments were appearing too quickly for me to keep up with. All of this communication happened within approximately one hour. Her posts were spaced out by only one or two minutes.

The online harassment did not come to a ‘natural’ end, but was stopped by the group administrator. I received a notification that I had several comments from this member to read, but when attempting to view these, received the error message, ‘This post and its comments have been removed by the administrator.’ My advertisement was removed, along with all of the attached comments in the public forum. It was unclear whether the administrator removed the post because they sympathised with the member or with me, or no longer wanted the post and comments on their group page for other reasons. I experienced the member’s barrage of comments as intrusive online bullying, and no longer wished to continue with online sampling. I contacted all of the women I had been discussing the project with and informed them that I would be removing my advertisements on the various group pages where I had posted them, but would remain in contact on an individual basis.

The nature of this particular group member’s comments on my online advertisement can be described as ‘trolling’, defined in a BBC News Magazine article as a ‘bombard[ment] of insults, provocations or threats’ on sites that enable user comments (de Castella and Brown 2011). Herring et al.’s (2002: 371-372) description of trolling describes the behaviour of the woman in the *Botswana Red Cross Society* Facebook group: they explain that trolling consists of ‘luring others into pointless and time-consuming discussions’ by pretending to be interested in the subject and then ‘actively seeking to disrupt and undermine’. By asking questions about myself and the research, the member presented herself as a sincere contributor. Once she had drawn me in, it became apparent to me that she was not interested in my research, but intended only to confuse and embarrass me in public. Herring et al. (2002: 372) point out that the victims of trolling are often inexperienced internet users, who do not recognise the true

motivation of the troll and mistakenly attempt to engage earnestly with them. Although I am an experienced user of the internet for activities such as research, shopping, and private emailing, I had not previously attempted to engage with strangers on public forums prior to conducting online sampling for this research project. Thus, Herring et al.'s (2002: 371-372) description of both trolls and their targets provides an accurate summary of my experience. The authors suggest education and awareness of trolling as a partial solution to the problem, recommend using filters to block the responses of particular contributors, and suggest not engaging with somebody whom you suspect to be trolling. They point out that understanding the social-psychological motivations behind trolling would be useful and that more research needs to be done in this area 'so as to be better able to predict its occurrence and limit its harmful effects' (Herring et al. 2002: 381).

ii. *Researcher silence in interviews*

Phoenix (2010: 167) describes an experience she had while interviewing, in which she caused 'a violent breach of rapport' when she asked a white participant whether she experienced racism on account of having a black baby. To Phoenix, who is black herself, the baby's appearance was irrefutably black. Phoenix did not consider that referring to the baby as black would be problematic, particularly since the mother had previously explained that she had no recollection of the infant's conception and did not know who the father was, and so there was every chance that the father had been black. However, the participant indignantly denied that the infant was black, putting her dark skin down to an Italian great-grandmother. The interviewee cut the interview short and subsequently withdrew from the longitudinal study without giving a reason, and refused to answer Phoenix's calls. By unwittingly challenging the family's narrative surrounding the baby's heritage, Phoenix suspected that she had caused the participant distress by forcing her to recognize that her child had a black parent.

Phoenix's transgression stemmed from saying the 'wrong' thing, yet remaining silent to avoid saying the 'wrong' thing can also be problematic. Scharff (2010) recounts instants in the interview process where she did not speak out of concern for offending, insulting, or patronizing the participants. Having debated whether to reveal to six of her interviewees that they were selected because of their low socioeconomic status, she ultimately chose not to reveal this information because she thought it would offend them. However, her decision raised ethical questions about transparency in the research process. In another example, she decided not to challenge a participant's

xenophobic remark to avoid appearing to take the moral high ground and damaging their rapport. She later felt 'guilty and ashamed' at having failed to speak for other oppressed groups in that moment (Scharff 2010: 88).

When planning my interviews I underestimated the silencing impact that my culturally inherited anxiety around being transgressing the boundaries of propriety, would have on my experience of asking questions. While in everyday life I consciously act to break taboos, particularly where women's issues are concealed by a social reluctance to discuss them, in a context where I felt exposed and uncertain I reverted to my 'polite' approach to sensitive issues. Raised not to ask personal questions and to be acutely aware of sociocultural taboos, I frequently did not ask questions that could have generated rich data out of concern for offending or insulting the participants, or causing them distress by asking them to talk about uncomfortable circumstances. I avoided challenging discrepancies within their accounts, wishing to prevent the interviewees from feeling judged or interrogated, and keen to maintain a good rapport. The nature of my research required the participants to offer information on their personal experiences, but I often felt uncomfortable asking for this and tended to frame questions in a passive or general manner, or omit questions altogether. I overcame much of this reticence as my interviews progressed, and with interviewees who were forthcoming this was not an issue. However, I might have missed out on interesting data as a consequence of my shyness in probing for information.

What constitutes a taboo varies across different societies. I was aware of many local taboos in Botswana as a result of my previous residence and research there, and handled such topics with appropriate sensitivity during my PhD interviews. I thought that this was a suitable approach. However, to my list of 'difficult' topics I added all those relevant to my own culture, not all of which are sensitive in the Botswana context. For example, the majority of the participants had children, and talked about absentee fathers in a general way, but I often felt uncomfortable asking about their own children's fathers. This was because the culture in which I was raised prohibits asking questions about non-conventional family structures, particularly where one party has been abused, abandoned, or been otherwise poorly treated. However, I noticed that my interpreter was comfortable asking such questions, and once I had tentatively explored this area of enquiry myself, realised that it was not a sensitive issue for participants to discuss. Had I been a cultural insider, I would have been more at ease navigating conversational taboos; when interviewing participants from a similar sociocultural and

educational background to myself I did not have any problems with asking sensitive questions, and I felt confident in my ability to negotiate conversational delicacies.

iii. *Street harassment in the field*

Harassment and sexual violence in fieldwork have been reported by a number of female researchers (Sharp and Kremer 2006: 318-319). Street harassment from men was a key problem throughout my residences in Botswana, and affected me mentally and practically as I carried out my interviews. Here I am defining street harassment as, 'Any action or comment between strangers in public places that is disrespectful, unwelcome, threatening and/or harassing and is motivated by gender or sexual orientation or gender expression' (Stop Street Harassment 2015). Such harassment was relentless whenever I was in outdoor public spaces, on public transport or in taxis. In one instance, a taxi driver told me, 'I will put a baby in you and you will take me to the UK'. Men would stare at me, lick their lips, make kissing noises or sounds that one would use to call an animal, intentionally stand in my personal space, follow me, and make comments such as 'I love you baby', 'can I have your number?' and 'I want to be your boyfriend'. Men would say things to me in Setswana that I did not understand, but which I knew from their accompanying lewd gestures to be of a sexual nature.

The level of harassment I received was almost certainly a result of my position as a racial and cultural outsider; the areas where I experienced harassment tended to be locations that white people did not frequent, such as at bus stops, or certain residential areas that I had to walk through because I did not have my own transport, thus I drew attention. When out in public with a Motswana man whom I dated for several months during my first period of residence in Botswana in 2010-11, other local men would ask him questions such as, 'what is it like to fuck a white vagina?' and 'what does white meat taste like?' The emphasis on white sexuality suggested a racial element to this pestering, although I experienced it predominantly as a form of gender denigration, which I attracted partially because I was highly visible as a white woman. Using the example of Cairo, Peoples (2008: 3) claims that structural and economic changes in the modernisation process such as women moving into the workforce, have served to undermine masculinity, which in turn has created an increase in street harassment as men attempt to reassert their dominance. Peoples (2008: 15-16) points out that street harassment in Cairo primarily comes from men who are unemployed; not only has their socioeconomic status been undercut, but they also have time on their hands and tend to wander the streets in groups, emphasizing their masculinity to one another by violating

women passers-by. Botswana has seen similar structural and economic changes over recent decades. As women are becoming financially independent and cultural values are shifting from the patriarchal tradition, a crisis of masculinity is apparent among men, illustrated by a rapid increase in violence against women (Mookodi 2004: 124-126). As a noticeable and autonomous young woman, I seemed to appeal to those men who felt the need to express masculine dominance.

The street harassment was most intense at the bus/taxi station where the crowds were dense. As I often had to walk through this area on my way to and from interviews, I began these days with negative feelings and became irritable and closed-off, avoiding interaction where possible, even with known persons such as my interpreter. It was difficult to put such feelings aside once out of an uncomfortable situation. When harassed I wished to defend myself and act aggressively, but resisted these impulses due to concern over my safety. As a result, I carried a sense of frustration and helplessness, having had my sense of autonomy undermined. This caused me to rush my way through interviews in some instances, eager to get back to my accommodation where I felt secure. A small number of my interviews were too short for this reason, and during the transcription phase I discovered certain occasions where I missed out on interesting data because I had been too distracted to follow up an answer thoroughly.

Although most of the street harassment I experienced was on the way to and from participants' homes, it once took place during an interview. A group of men walking past came to stand around us, directing lewd comments at me and harassing the participant and my interpreter, and playing loud music on their mobile phones. I initially tried to ignore them, but when this became impossible I asked them firmly to leave. My interpreter repeated my request in Setswana, but they ignored both of us. The participant did not acknowledge the group of men at all, and continued speaking. It became difficult to listen to her with my full attention, and I missed some of what she said. I knew that the noise the group of men were making would compromise the digital recording, meaning that sections of the interview would be lost. I became increasingly frustrated and distracted, forgetting to ask some of my questions. The harassment ultimately compromised this interview, and had limiting, practical effects on my fieldwork as a whole; I chose public transport over taxis where possible, avoided travelling after dark, dressed to conceal my skin tone and body shape, and travelled with my interpreter regardless of whether or not I required her services. On a number of occasions my interpreter dismissed the sexual comments of local men on my behalf, which was usually effective in sending those men away.

iv. Insider/outsider dynamics and positional bias

Ryen (2003: 434) suggests, 'To liberate ethnography from the domination linked to its colonial past self/other distinctions need to be dissolved, or at least critically reappraised', and researcher bias must be addressed. Below I shall explore the bias that I brought to my research and consider the impact of my positionality on the interview process. My role status as insider/outsider was fluid and changeable according to the dynamics of the qualitative interview, which is social in nature, and subject to the subtleties of interaction present in all social encounters (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Key identity indicators are likely to have an impact on whether the participants perceive the interviewer as an insider or an outsider. Having lived and worked in Botswana for 16 months, I was familiar with Tswana culture, language and models of social interaction. However, a short-term stay such as that was unlikely to grant me insider status in the view of the interviewees, particularly as not all of the participants knew that I had once been a resident.

As a woman interviewing women about womanhood, my gender identity was the primary shared factor between the interviewees and myself. Being perceived as an insider can improve openness and trust in the interview, and contributes to the quality of the interaction and the effective construction of meaning (Mullings 1999). In Botswana there are a number of topics that are considered inappropriate for discussion between men and women. As a woman I was therefore better placed to conduct meaningful interviews than if I had been male, and my gender was crucial to the success of my study. Feminist researchers warn against a superficial intimacy that can be created through an assumption of shared experience (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009: 282-283; Kvale 2006: 482-483; Stacey 1991), claiming that this can mask profound inequalities, 'for in a world divided by race, ethnicity, and class, the purported solidarity of female identity is in many ways a fraud' (Patai 1991: 144). Stacey (1991: 117) points to being 'rigorously self-aware' and acknowledging the partiality of the research as ways in which to address delusions of equality, concluding that the benefits of feminist research outweigh the 'moral costs'.

While my gender and prior experiences of Tswana culture lent me a certain insider status, other aspects of my identity aligned me more closely with being an outsider in the research process. These included being a white British citizen by birth, an academic, and young. Since being an observer of a culture is inherently an external position, my researcher role posited me as an outsider by default. As a PhD candidate

affiliated with a university, my educational attainment was a significant identity indicator. The education level of my participants was varied.¹³ Three had attended junior school only, eight had reached secondary school, five had completed secondary school, seven had an undergraduate degree and five had a postgraduate degree. I had more formal education than many of my participants. When asked what participants wanted for their children, the majority stated that giving them a good education was their primary concern. Education was highly valued by the interviewees, and my undertaking of research for educational purposes seemed to be respected. However, being educated perhaps contributed to being perceived as an outsider, particularly by those who had not attained further or higher education.

27 of the 30 women I interviewed were older than me. Being unmarried and childless, I had not completed either of the two most important life stages for women and thus could be perceived as a juvenile (Suggs 1987). I certainly felt a larger gap in experience with the women who had children, and very much an outsider. While interviewees considering me young or immature could have resulted in a lack of respect towards me, such a standpoint offers ‘advantages of naïveté’ and easier acceptance in terms of the ‘investigatory advances of the novice’ (Ryen 2003: 433). This advantage was applicable in some of my interviews, where I was able to ask basic questions about such things as childcare and daily routine without seeming to belie a knowledge base that would have appeared obvious had I been older or more ‘experienced’. Interviewees might experience ‘role confusion’ if asked to describe things that the interviewer is expected to understand (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009: 58); as an outsider this problem did not apply to most of my interviews. However, when interviewing women with whom I shared a similar cultural and educational background, certain questions caused confusion where it was assumed that I ought to know the answer already.

As an outsider, I was perceived as disconnected from certain value systems and taboos. It is possible that research participants might discuss culturally sensitive issues more readily with somebody who functions outside of local social judgement patterns. As discussed above, my own cultural restrictions on certain topics hindered my questioning in areas that are considered taboo in the UK. However, my outsider status encouraged some of the participants to feel more comfortable talking to me about topics that are sensitive locally, in particular matters relating to menstruation or sexual experience. For instance, when asking the question, ‘when does a girl become a

¹³ In Botswana the average school life expectancy is 12 years (CIA 2016).

woman?', some interviewees laughed nervously, since the answer was often associated with sex or the start of periods. They seemed self-conscious and were reluctant to answer, but eventually continued with an explanation once they felt assured that I was not judging their response nor did I feel embarrassed by the question.

Being an insider can blind the researcher to the ordinary, the 'obvious'. Familiarity can cause them to overlook important data (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009: 59). In awareness of this I made efforts to ask questions that I thought I already knew the answer to, and this was useful in terms of generating unexpected data. However, in certain interviews I neglected to follow up on an answer because I assumed I understood the participant's experience. In one instance, as part of a larger explanation of another issue an interviewee told me she had left school because she fell pregnant. Interested in pursuing the wider story, I failed to ask what it was like to be forced to end her education early as a result of unplanned pregnancy. To me, this was not an important question to ask because I assumed that I already knew the answer, based on my knowledge of similar circumstances taking place in schools where I had worked. In another example, a participant answered the question 'how does your life differ from that of your grandparents?' with 'my grandparents were farmers'. Having read extensively on the lifestyle of that generation of farming people, I assumed I knew what their lives had been like and did not enquire further. In these instances, my familiarity with particular circumstances led me to overlook potentially interesting areas of enquiry.

Ethical considerations

This research project was approved by the Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology Ethics Committee (ELMPS) of the University of York. It was also informed by the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice. The primary ethical concerns for my research project were as follows: 1) working with human subjects 2) my personal safety and 3) data use and analysis.

To ensure that my participants were protected from harm and their privacy was safeguarded at all stages of the research, I provided information about myself, my research, and what the interviews would involve on initial contact with each participant (Appendix I). I explained how I would use the data, including the potential for publication, and provided an information sheet containing this information along with my contact details. I also provided a consent form for each participant to sign. All documents were made available in both Setswana and English. I informed the

participants that they could withdraw their participation at any time up until the end of the transcription period (31st October 2014). Setting a final withdrawal date was necessary, as the interviews were to be the data that formed the basis of my thesis. I explained that they had the right to decline answering any of my questions and to stop the interview at any time. In the interests of transparency and reciprocity, interviewees were welcomed to ask questions about myself and the research. I requested permission to record the interviews using a digital recording device, and assured the participants that their anonymity would be protected. In order to protect their identities, all names were changed to pseudonyms unless requested otherwise, and I did not use any information that could be used to identify a person in my data analysis unless the interviewee had explicitly stated that they did not mind being identifiable. I transcribed the interviews myself, and moved the original recordings from the recording device to a password-protected computer and the University of York server.

I took measures to protect my personal safety throughout my fieldwork. These included informing my host and friends of where I was going and how long I expected to be, and carrying a mobile telephone at all times. All of my interviews were with women, which minimises any potential threat of physical or sexual assault (Ryen 2003: 7). Pickpockets and thieves are common in Gaborone (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 167). To help avoid being stolen from, I carried no valuables and very little cash on my person, and did not dress in a way that might have indicated wealth.

I transcribed the interview recordings faithfully, listening to unclear sections several times to minimise the risk of error. To ensure ethical data analysis I was careful not to misrepresent the participants' words, making sure that I studied phrases within their full context. I quoted the interviews at length in order to make the interviewees' original words visible to the reader alongside my own analysis. To provide balance to my interpretations I presented any contradictory evidence alongside that which I used to illustrate a point of analysis. In my reading of the transcripts I took care not to discount the views and experiences the participants expressed during the interviews.

The political dynamics of cross-cultural research

In her discussion of the ethical concerns inherent in U.S. academics researching 'third world' women, Patai (1991: 139) claims that the risk of exploitation is always present in research with human subjects. She attributes this to the fundamentally objectifying nature of such research, in which human beings are used for the benefit of others. She points out that this risk is intensified when the participants are of a lower social,

political or economic stratum than the researcher. Inequality in these factors creates an imbalance of power. The more powerful are able to manipulate the less powerful, even at a subconscious level. In some cases, the participants might feel obliged to take part when they do not want to, or to reveal information that they would otherwise keep private in order to please the researcher. As such, it is important to be aware of the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched so that subconscious exploitation can be avoided.

While Botswana is officially an upper-middle-income country, just under one third of the population still live in poverty, with low social status and minimal political representation (CIA 2016). As such, I often found myself ‘interviewing down’ the economic scale (Patai 1991: 137). As a white British woman interviewing black women from a former British protectorate, I was researching within the framework of ‘systemic inequality’ (Patai 1991: 137). The participants’ perception of the researcher in the context of ‘historically loaded socio-political divides’ can present obstacles to the data gathering process, such as participant reluctance (Shah 2004: 565).

Botswana has a relatively peaceful colonial history. The three ruling chiefs requested that Britain accept Botswana as a protectorate, and this entreaty was finally accepted in 1885. Independence was granted in 1966 without conflict. The colonial period can be characterised as neglectful, but violence and exploitation were avoided (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 30-33). White settlement during the colonial era was minimal, at fewer than 3000 individuals (Trudgill and Hannah 2008: 125). As such, there is notably less racial tension in Botswana than one would find in neighbouring countries with aggressive colonial histories, such as Zimbabwe or South Africa. Botswana prides itself on ‘peaceful racial harmony’ and its lack of ethnic hostility (Makgala 2004: 11). During the Apartheid era in South Africa Botswana ‘was a haven for refugees and anti-apartheid activists’ (BBC 2014). Fewer than 7 per cent of the population are white (CIA 2016). During my residence in Gaborone I observed that interracial marriages were fairly common. As a schoolteacher there I noticed that biracial children seemed to be easily accepted by their black and white peers. While I came across no white people living in the rural areas, I discovered that racial differences were usually approached with a sense of humour and novelty in the villages.

However, it would be wrong to assume that my whiteness did not contribute to the power imbalance present in my cross-cultural research between different race groups. There is an underlying perception of racial hierarchy, characterised by the view that white people have better access to economic and political resources. Some

participants might expect financial gains or other rewards in exchange for being interviewed. In studies of economically disadvantaged respondents, difficulties with participants requesting gifts and money have been reported (Ryen 2003: 9). The assumption of white people as wealthy is pervasive. This could partially be a result of Botswana's post-independence history in terms of white settlement. Government-sponsored European expatriates received financial rewards for their work in Botswana in the first decades of independence, such as a salary addition of up to 10 per cent, and state-funded places for expatriates' children in English-medium schools (Campbell 2003: 84). Often highly educated, expatriates tended to take on higher-paying senior roles. As such, whites living in Botswana were usually wealthy and privileged (Campbell 2003: 84). Some of these benefits have since been removed and there are preferential policies in place for the employment of citizens over expatriates in the skilled sector (Campbell 2003: 84). However, it appears that the view of whites as economically advantaged remains. During my fieldwork trip I was asked for money on many occasions, both explicitly and implicitly. While strangers in the street would ask me for cash, my interviewees were often more subtle, hinting at needing money, clothing and toiletries. However, it could have been that I was oversensitive to their mentioning of financial difficulties, as I was acutely aware of the wealth gap between myself and some of the participants.

I had decided prior to beginning the fieldwork that I would not give cash for interviews, as paying for information can bias the interviews and put pressure on participants to divulge more than they otherwise might do, out of obligation to fulfil their requirements as paid participants. However, where appropriate I would share food that I brought with me, spend money in tuck shops run by the participants' families, or give small gifts to their children as a gesture of appreciation. When meeting participants in cafés I paid for any refreshments they ordered. On rare occasions requests for material assistance were more explicit. A few potential participants refused to be interviewed unless they were paid. One woman repeated throughout the interview that she felt it important that women from different countries help one another, even where it had no relevance to the interview questions. Once the interview had finished, she asked that I act as her legal and financial sponsor for immigration to the UK. I explained that moving to the UK was a difficult process with or without a sponsor, and that I was not in a position to assist her. My time spent with this participant was uncomfortable as a result of our unequal expectations of each other.

I addressed the structural imbalance of power at the interview stage by encouraging transparency and reciprocity, and with active acknowledgment of my responsibility to the participants (Oakley 1981). I was open to answering personal questions and sharing experiences. The participants were fully informed of the nature of the research, and of the benefit I was to receive from their participation. I made their rights as participants clear both verbally and in writing, briefing the interpreter to ensure that non-English speakers understood.

Participants have negotiating-power during the data collection stage, when they can choose whether or not to be interviewed, where and when and for how long, as well as how co-operative they wish to be during the interview itself (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009: 282-283). However, the interviewees' control dissipates at the point of the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the data (Mullings 1999: 348-349). As such, it is important to 'show a genuine respect for individual perceptions and experiences' through 'non-judgemental analysis and writing' (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009: 286). I regarded the participants as the experts on their own lives and represented their views and experiences as accurately as I was able to, acknowledging my representational responsibility to the interviewees.

However, I faced ethical dilemmas at points where their accounts had inherent discrepancies, contradicted other sources of information, or where my understanding of their words was 'not only different but potentially threatening and disruptive to the subject's view of the world' (Acker et al. 1983: 428). Challenging the interviewee's accounts seemed problematic in light of my intention to treat individuals' reported experiences as valid in their own right. I sought to treat the participant's words as an authentic form of knowledge, not to be held against an external 'reality' in order to be validated (Hesse-Biber 2012). Feminist researchers have critiqued traditional triangulation processes, whereby mixed methods are employed to validate findings, as valuing 'objectivity over subjectivity' (Hesse-Biber 2012: 138). The emphasis on objectivity is problematic in researching oppressed groups since it undermines individual experience and difference (Hesse-Biber 2012: 128). However, feminist researchers have developed a form of triangulation that allows the researcher to investigate the contradictions within qualitative data without silencing the participants, or positing their accounts as erroneous or even dishonest (Hesse-Biber 2012). Such an approach requires 'flexible' and treatment of additional sources, utilised reflexively in accordance with the research objectives (Hesse-Biber 2012: 139). Flexible triangulation allows researchers to explore the meaning behind inconsistencies, thus opening a

dialogue between sources in a way that enriches our understanding of the data without discounting the participants' accounts (Hesse-Biber 2012).

There are numerous reasons why participants' accounts might contradict other findings, particularly in non-representative samples (such as my own). Internal and external discrepancies are to be expected in interviews, as like all encounters, each contributor has their own set of conscious and unconscious investments, interests, and agendas. Conducting research into the widespread practice of male infidelity in Nigeria, Jordan Smith (2009) interviewed women and their husbands separately. He discovered that many of the men he spoke to admitted to having affairs, and said that their wives knew about their transgressions. However, when he spoke to their wives, the women denied the affairs. Since Nigerian women gained social standing through their roles as wives, and male infidelity was attributed to failings on women's part, they were subject to negative social consequences should it be known that their husbands were unfaithful. As such, denying the affairs was a way of limiting the fallout of their husband's behaviour, a form of self-protection (Jordan Smith 2009: 171-173). Jordan Smith's analysis of the discrepancies between the husbands' and wives' accounts was productive in enlightening the social and cultural construction of womanhood, masculinity, and family, without discounting the agency of the women participants or questioning the validity of their accounts.

In my own analysis I was faced with the dilemma of how to manage my participants' complaints. I had the impression that some of my interviewees were intentionally focusing on the adversity in their lives. This was surely in part a result of my interview questions; my goal of contributing to social equality meant that I needed to ask about the challenges women face, which may have set a negative tone for questions about women's lives that were intended to be more neutral. However, the participants often went down long tangents that were unrelated to my questions, and these were uniformly negative. LeVine (1979: 364) notes that in complaining, women take on a level of power despite their 'structurally subordinate' position in society. By asking interviewees to talk about their lives, the interviewer is positioning themselves as a 'sounding board' for the participants, an opportunity that LeVine found her own participants were quick to take. She recalls, 'women concealed information about their advantages' and represented themselves as victims (LeVine 1979: 364). This is not to say that my interviewees' complaints were exaggerated or lacked legitimacy. Rather, that the interview setting provided a space for women to explore and communicate the aspects of their lives that they experienced as difficult. I did not view the tendency to

complain as a problem, since I considered understanding the interviewees' problems to be more relevant to the empowerment goals of the research than hearing about the brighter parts of their lives. However, it raised some concerns at the analysis stage. I was met with difficulty when the women's complaints were inconsistent with other things they reported during the interviews, for example, many were intensely critical of men, but asserted that they were desperate to marry. In these moments I sought to explore the meaning behind these discrepancies, offering considered possibilities while taking care not to discount the participants' experiences.

Taking a social constructionist approach to my interviews could result in a conflict between my understanding of the data as social discourse and the participants' understandings of their reported experiences. While a social constructionist view of interviewees' stories might problematise the validation of individual accounts, 'Collectively, they make important theoretical and empirical contributions to the understanding of important feminist issues' (O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012: 515). In her ethnography of the !Kung San women of Botswana, Shostak (1990) presents full passages from her interviews alongside her own analyses. In doing so, she reconciles any differing viewpoints by offering the reader both accounts in full so that her own voice and that of her participants are heard (Bernick 1991: 126). When presenting alternative viewpoints Shostak writes 'tentatively rather than authoritatively' (Bernick 1991: 126). While word limits prevent me from presenting fully unabridged passages from my interviews, I include lengthy sections where appropriate, providing the question that elicited that response where I think it helps to clarify the participant's response. I have followed Shostak's lead when approaching my analyses, avoiding discounting the participants' views and treating their accounts respectfully.

The above methods allow for more comprehensive data analysis while preserving the integrity of the participants' accounts and protecting their voices, addressing a power imbalance that favours the researcher at the analysis stage. However, questions remain as to whether white, western academics can ever truly 'give voice' to postcolonial women. In Spivak's (1988: 92) essay she problematizes the British colonial administration's abolition of the Hindu practice of *sati*¹⁴ in India in a single sentence: 'white men are saving brown women from brown men'. She warns that by attempting to give voice to the subaltern, one is unavoidably speaking *for* the

¹⁴ Widow sacrifice, a Hindu rite in which a widow burns to death on her husband's pyre.

subaltern,¹⁵ since those ‘voices’ are invariably given within the framework of imperial western interests. Spivak (1988: 93) cites the ‘grotesquely mistranscribed names’ of the sacrificed widows given in the ‘skeletal and ignorant account’ of the police reports in the East India Company records as just one example of the voicelessness of the subaltern in the context of western imperialism. Spivak asserts, ‘when you say cannot speak, it means that if speaking involves speaking and listening, this possibility of response, responsibility, does not exist in the subaltern’s sphere’; thus, the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak interview in de Kock 1992: 45). She acknowledges the importance of ‘antisexist work among women of color or women in class oppression in the First World or the Third World’, yet concludes that the imperialist underpinning of such work will inevitably render the subaltern woman ‘as mute as ever’ (Spivak 1988: 90). Spivak’s critique of western research in postcolonial locations is difficult to square with the goal of ‘bringing women’s voices in from the margins’ (Ryan-Flood and Gill 2010: 2), a fundamental facet of emancipatory feminist research, and raises questions about how to write about women from a ‘different – implicitly less powerful – social location’ (Ryan-Flood and Gill 2010: 5), without patronizing, causing offence, silencing or exploiting the participants.

The main advantage of this study for myself as a researcher is that of achieving an academic degree, and potentially publishing work that will benefit my career. This benefit is concrete and relatively immediate. Advantages of participation for the interviewees were not as easily definable. My research aims to contribute to a better understanding of women’s position in Tswana society, in order to recognise what needs to be done to establish greater gender equality in Botswana. This ultimate advantage was probably not immediately appealing to the interviewees, given the abstract nature of the research goal and its long-term trajectory. However, being listened to is often reported as an ‘intrinsically valuable experience’ (Patai 1991: 142) that makes participants feel ‘affirmed and validated’ (Patai 1991: 147). Finch (2004: 168) notes that her female participants experienced their interviews as, ‘A welcome experience, in contrast with the lack of opportunities to talk about themselves in this way in other circumstances’. Similarly, Opie (1992: 85, cited in Scharff 2010: 85) argues that some interviewees find the process ‘empowering’. While some respondents were reticent throughout, many thanked me after the interview, and stayed longer to chat informally, suggesting they had enjoyed the process.

¹⁵ Spivak defined ‘subaltern’ as ‘everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern – a space of difference’ (Spivak interview in de Kock 1992: 45)

Transcribing and analysis

I transcribed all of my interviews using Microsoft Word 2007. I played the digital recordings of the interviews on the dictaphone I used, and typed out what I heard. If an interpreter was used, I did not attempt to transcribe parts of the interview spoken in Setswana, since I could not use these sections in my analysis.

Speech varies considerably from written communication. Spoken sentences are not clearly defined and punctuated, speech can trail off and words can be left out while leaving the meaning intact. Repetition of words and utterances are common in speech, and tone of voice, hesitation, facial expressions and gestures contribute to creating meaning. As such, translating an audio recording into a written document raises a number of issues about interpretation and representation (Poland 2003). Transcripts of speech may appear grammatically incorrect and sometimes nonsensical if they are written verbatim. I inserted punctuation and entered missing words in square brackets in order to facilitate interpretive accuracy. The correct placing of commas, full stops, exclamation marks, question marks and ellipses can contribute significantly to the preservation of meaning from speech to text (Poland 2003: 270). I noted any laughter, long pauses, and repeated words. If a participant was prone to stuttering I did not type each instance of a stuttered word. For example, if a participant said 'I I I I don't know', I would simply write 'I don't know', unless I thought doing so would affect the meaning. I did include hesitations and stuttering that were not consistent throughout the interview, and therefore seemed to be a result of a particular strain of thought. In order to save time, I recorded only my questions and the participants' responses, leaving out my own verbal acknowledgements where they were irrelevant to what was being said, for example, 'oh okay', or 'I see'.

Problems with transcribing can occur when words are misunderstood or misheard, potentially leading to a misrepresentation of the speaker. They might speak with a heavy regional or foreign dialect, or use words with local connotations that differ from the standard meaning. This is a risk when transcribing interviews with participants who do not share a first language with the transcriber. Under these circumstances it is important to be aware of the 'cultural and interpretive circumstances to which respondents might orient', and to familiarise oneself with localised vocabulary and forms of expression (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 77).

Botswana English can sound somewhat unusual to a British English speaker. The syntax used is often different from that of British English. Local linguistic

idiosyncrasies ought not be dismissed because they do not align with the grammatical rules of British English. As such, I did not re-write sentences to comply with those language rules when transcribing the interviews. I had become familiar with Botswana English during my previous residence and was able to understand the meaning implied even where a sentence might be phrased differently from the British English to which I am most accustomed. My experience of conversing with Botswana also helped me to understand local turns of phrase that I might otherwise have struggled with during the interviews, such as ‘running up and down’, which is often used during to describe the concept of a person having sex with multiple partners, or ‘they sit at the small tables’, referring to women operating tuck shops from tables along the roadside. Such expressions could be confusing without prior contextual knowledge, but my acquaintance with Botswana English prevented any such issues during my interviews or transcription.

Practical issues can present problems when transcribing, such as poor audio quality, battery death, and background noise. During my fieldwork, unwanted noise was a prominent concern, and made it difficult to hear the interviewees clearly when transcribing from the audio file. Sounds that were unnoticeable during the interviews created disproportionate noise disturbance on the audio recordings, such as a slight breeze or the rustling of paper. Simply moving the recording device from one surface to another caused loud and distracting sounds on the recording. A key issue was the noise created by children and infants. A majority of the participants were taking care of their own or others’ children at the time of their interview. Babies would cry, grab at papers or the dictaphone, or bang toys on the ground. Children would kick footballs or scream for attention. These disturbances were mostly unproblematic during the interview itself, as I was able to focus on the participant. However, such sounds were unexpectedly loud on the audio recording, making it difficult to hear the interviewee. After repeated playbacks I was usually able to transcribe the noisier sections of the recording, but in some instances I was forced to type ‘[unclear]’. Fortunately, this did not happen very often.

I approached my data using thematic analysis. Working from the interview transcripts, I coded all of my data by theme using ATLAS: ti software. I identified themes in the transcripts, deploying an inductive method. While my theoretical perspective affected my interpretation of the data, the interviewees dictated the content, and themes emerged from what they said. However, what was discussed was within the framework of my general areas of enquiry as set out in my interview schedule. My

approach to the analysis was informed by Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic networks method. In my initial reading of the transcripts I noted themes as they materialised. In my secondary readings I coded the data using basic and sub-themes, which brought forward key topics. I began to examine this data, drawing illustrated conclusions within the context of my research questions.

Thematic analysis 'can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data' (Braun and Clarke 2006: 78). It is useful from a social constructionist perspective because it allows the researcher to explore social discourses (Braun and Clarke 2006: 81). Certain kinds of discourse analysis of oral interviews focus primarily on language use, and thus would be inappropriate for interviews conducted through an interpreter or in the participants' second language. Identifying social discourses through thematic analysis means interpreting what is said as being part of 'broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings' (Braun and Clarke 2006: 85). My understanding of the social nature of the interview and of the wider sociocultural context of Botswana informed my analysis.

Alongside outlining my methods and describing my sample and research site, this chapter has presented some of the key issues that arose during my experiences of cross-cultural interviewing in Botswana. I have discussed the ethical considerations of conducting research in a postcolonial country, demonstrating how systemic inequalities can present challenges, and pointing out the difficulty of achieving the appropriate level of sensitivity under such circumstances. My experience of online trolling and street harassment are offered as examples of the ways in which the dynamics of the wider field can impact the research process. I have explored the complexities of working with an interpreter, concluding that while using a translator allows access to otherwise hidden populations, the interviews were ultimately more effective when conducted in a mutual language. I have suggested that sharing common ground with the participants encourages positive and fruitful interviews. Where I had little in common with an interviewee, a sense of detachment often limited the depth and detail of those interviews. On the other hand, interviews with participants who I shared common ground with were comfortable, nuanced, and data-rich. Overall, I experienced cross-cultural interviewing a complex process to navigate, but one that yielded illuminating and significant data.

Chapter three: Achieving womanhood

'When you are married you have dignity.' (Tshepiso)

In her discussion of a woman's formative years, de Beauvoir (1949/2011: 293) famously writes, 'one is not born, but rather becomes, woman'. In this she explains femininity as a social construct, a situational reality that is formed and maintained through external social and cultural pressures (de Beauvoir 1949/2011). In Botswana, as elsewhere, 'womanhood', i.e. mature femininity, is achieved through motherhood and marriage, which have long been perceived as crucial life stages for women, marking their social and cultural transition from girlhood to adulthood (Schapera 1938: 150-156). Butler (1988: 520) theorises gender identity as a 'performative accomplishment' constructed and maintained through the repetition of acts. She clarifies that such acts are not expressive of a gendered inner self, but actually *constitute* gender, while promoting the 'social fiction' that gender is an internal reality (Butler 1988: 528). For the participants, marriage and motherhood presented a stage for gender-conforming acts that would allow their womanhood to be affirmed and rewarded. Women in sub-Saharan Africa have 'tightly controlled roles as biological and social reproducers' (Harrison and Montgomery 2001: 328). As such, marriage, 'both as an institution and as a means of sanctioning fertility – confers social status and allows women to meet societal expectations' (Harrison and Montgomery 2001: 39). Women have internalised this view; Harrison and Montgomery (2001: 325; emphasis in original) contribute that marriage and childbearing dominate women's narratives of their lives: 'In many cases, women's life histories *were* their reproductive histories'. In this chapter I shall discuss the meaning my own participants ascribed to marriage and childbearing, the extent to which they associated those life stages with womanhood, and the challenges that their culturally defined roles as wives and mothers presented.

Marriage

Within my sample of 30 women aged 25 to 45, only five were married – Lenah, Pono, Thato, Tsala, and Elizabeth. Akhu was the sole divorcee, and Tumelo was engaged. The majority of the women I spoke to desired marriage, and some positioned marriage as their primary life goal. Schapera (1938: 150) wrote, 'Marriage effects changes in the legal and social status of both husband and wife. They form a separate family in the

tribe, and in general play the part of full adult members of the community'. However, more recent literature (Upton 2001: 354; Suggs 1987) points to a decreased emphasis on marriage as a 'definitional characteristic of women' (Suggs 1987: 111) as a result of an overall decline in marriage rates. While 42.9 per cent of women and 47.1 per cent of men reported being married in the 1971 census, the 2011 census showed only 17.9 per cent of women and 18.9 per cent of men to be married (Solway 2016: 313). The family structures traditionally found in Botswana – both nuclear and extended forms – have become increasingly uncommon (Gaisie 2000: 138). Alternative family forms, including various types of cohabitation, are gaining popularity (Solway 2016: 313), and single-parent households constituted 71 per cent per cent of all households at the 1991 census (Gaisie 2000: 138).

Researchers have posited various theories for the decline of marriage since the 1970s, including: women's improved access to education and employment, and their resulting financial independence (Garenne et al. 2001: 277-278); men leaning away from marriage following the decline of polygyny (Suggs 1987: 111; Brown 1983: 372); higher numbers of women than men of marriageable age (Brown 1983: 373); weakening of men's control over women and a more liberal approach to relationships (Izzard 1985: 268); the sheer expense of marriage (Solway 2016: 313),¹⁶ women's perception of marriage as limiting to their autonomy (Solway 2016: 313-314; Hunter 2009: 145; Mookodi 2004: 123), and women's perception of men as incompetent providers (Solway 2016: 313-314; Hunter 2009: 145). Despite this reported resistance to marriage in the general population, my participants presented marriage as highly desirable.

For Reneilwe marriage was the highest goal; she suggested that for women it could not be any other way: 'I'm a woman, I can't wait for that. Being married [...] that is the meaning of my life'. Reneilwe's phrasing underpins the assumption that by definition a woman would want to be married. Similarly, when I asked Lesedi what she wanted for her life, she reported that she wished only 'to be a married woman'. 17 of my participants spoke of marriage as a guaranteed way for women to be conferred adult status, transforming them from girls to women in the eyes of their community. Akhu explained, 'When you are not married you'll be treated like a girl'. Womanhood status

¹⁶ Weddings are vast and expensive affairs in Botswana. First of all the man must pay *lobola*, usually amounting to eight or ten cows, which are valuable livestock. The wedding ceremony often takes place twice, once in each of the couple's home villages. The entire village attends, and all must be fed. Solway (2016: 313) claims that the expense of marriage is rendering the institution a 'middle-class and elite phenomenon'.

could be achieved on marriage, regardless of age. Basadi pointed out that at age 16, ‘You can get married, and so that’s when you’re a woman’, while older unmarried women were not considered fully adult. Tshiamo reported being disrespected and ridiculed as an unmarried woman in her village, despite having had the same male partner for over 20 years with whom she shared a home. Although Tshiamo was the only cohabitee in my sample, cohabitation in various forms has increased in recent decades among the wider population, from 12 per cent at the 1991 census to 16.6 per cent in 2001 (Solway 2016: 313; Mookodi 2004: 123). Cohabitation is not legally recognised in either general or customary law (Mokomane 2005: 21). If cohabitation is constructed as an alternative to marriage, then it poses a theoretical and practical challenge to the institution (Mokomane 2005: 20). This is significant because marriage in Botswana represents a union in which husbands have ultimate control over their wives’ bodies, labour, and finances (Mokomane 2005: 20); thus, to undermine marriage is to undermine a fundamental tenet of patriarchy. For community members to humiliate cohabitees like Tshiamo was perhaps a means through which to dampen such a threat. From this perspective, the individual shame she suffered appeared all the more unfair given that she was in fact desperate to marry but did not have the financial means to do so.

Naledi, Lesedi, and Maatla spoke of the ‘dignity’ that they thought being married would confer upon a woman, which would result in a her being ‘valued as somebody of integrity’ (Lesedi). For some of the participants, the respect accompanying marriage stemmed from a relational identity that was perceived as more valuable than being an unattached woman. The Setswana term given to older unmarried people is ‘*mafetwa*’, meaning ‘those who have been passed by’ (Schapera 1940: 32). ‘*Mafetwa*’ is a term of disrespect that implies worthlessness. Tshepiso explained that upon marriage, ‘People respect you. You have an image that is appealing to certain people. Unlike when you’re not married, you’re just another woman. Tshepiso’s phrase, ‘just another woman’ highlights a gendered disregard for unmarried women, and suggests that the status of married women was perceived as rare and exclusive, raising her above the level of single women. She held, ‘When you have a husband it says a lot about you’. Tshepiso did not clarify what she meant in her statement; nonetheless, it further suggested that married women were constructed as in some way special or unique.

Tumelo, who was engaged and who complained of her discontentment in her relationship, seemed underwhelmed by the prospect of her impending marriage: ‘Marriage, I think, for me, marriage is not going to change anything [...] I know what to

expect from him and he knows what to expect from me'. Yet, she held the institution of marriage in high regard, claiming, 'It's important for a woman to get married. God created marriage'. Likewise, Lenah stated, 'Marriage is something very wonderful created by God'. Mabedi claimed that she was 'very pro-marriage' because of 'what it says in the Bible, it got so Adam was lonely so [God] brought him a wife'. She used the character Adam's name, but objectified the figure of Eve as 'a wife', perhaps indicating Mabedi's alignment with the conservative Christian conceptualisation of women as inferior, existing to serve the needs of men. The emphasis on marriage as a religious pursuit might stem from the promotion of marriage by powerful Christian churches in Botswana; the Catholic Church and the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) in particular have large followings (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 39), and all but three of my participants defined themselves as Christian.¹⁷

The interviewees explained that once ceremonially attached to a man a woman becomes "Mrs Somebody", [which] is a thing of status, even if it is the crappiest of marriages, just the fact that I can put his last name on and I'm a *Mrs*' (Neo). It appears that a culturally sanctioned attachment to a man – the most powerful figure in a patriarchal system – was seen as providing women with a proud new identity, one with increased social power. As Malisa summarised, 'you become a different person altogether'. Both rural and urban women presented this view. Malisa for example, spoke of being 'transformed into somebody else, you are *somebody's* wife', and Akhu, now divorced, recalled becoming 'Mrs-so-and-so' when she was married. Elizabeth took this sense of pride in being a wife a step further, equating it with nationhood and patriotic belonging; when I asked Elizabeth whether getting married had changed anything for her, she proudly stated, 'I am now a woman of the nation'. Marriage had functioned as her initiation as a citizen, and more precisely, a woman citizen. Mayer (1999: 1-10) writes that the social and cultural constructions of nationalism, sexuality and gender work together to define and defend national identity by delineating 'proper behaviours' for men and women. Women 'reproduce nations, biologically, culturally, and symbolically' (Yuval Davis 1997: 2), primarily by conforming to 'strict cultural codes of what it is to be a "proper woman"' (Yuval Davis 1997: 47). In this case, by participating in the heteronormative ideal of marriage, Elizabeth was playing a part in the continued definition of both nation and gender, a performance that she seemed to be conscious of. Achieving womanhood status was a significant life stage for Elizabeth. It

¹⁷ Of those three, one self-defined as atheist, one agnostic, and one as Muslim. The Muslim woman had converted from Christianity.

was a transition she spoke of emotionally in comparison to her somewhat flat response to the question, ‘How do you feel about marriage?’, to which she answered only, ‘It’s okay. It’s nice’. The contrast between Elizabeth’s grand account of becoming a wife and her impassive description of married life suggests that the participants placed greater depth of meaning on concept of marriage than on the marital relationship and experience.

The interviewees explained that the respect accorded to married women manifested itself visibly in the public sphere, particularly at community gatherings such as weddings, funerals, and baby-showers. At such events married and unmarried women were demarcated along the lines of labour and inclusion in certain activities. For example, Shera explained that while all women were expected to cook, clean, and serve at social events, married women were ‘management [...] there’s usually a married aunt or whatever, who likes to boss people around and manage. But it means just that, managing. You know, “You need more salt”, “Why are the tables here?” and marshalling the forces to do x, y, z’. Unmarried women were given more servile work, demonstrating their lack of status in the community.

Tebby, Malisa, and Neo reported that married women in the community instruct brides on how to be ‘good wives’ in ritualistic pre-marital meetings. Maundeni (2002: 258) notes that in such meetings, brides are told that they must obey their husbands in all matters, and must persevere under any abuse or discomfort. However, Solway (2016: 314-315) reports that while these rituals did once involve the bride-to-be ‘passively’ taking instruction from her ‘maternal seniors’, they have since been adapted among the urban middle class to function as more of an open discussion about married life. Tebby reported, ‘As a non-married woman, you’re not attending that meeting because at that point you don’t really have much that you can contribute, or they don’t feel like you have much that you can contribute. You’re not somebody’s wife’. Once married, a woman ‘can enter more adult conversations that maybe you couldn’t enter before’.

Tebby expressed discomfort at the exclusive nature of this tradition, particularly as it related to older unmarried women whose life experience was discounted: ‘The thing is you could be 18 and get married and you would be with the married women. Basically on the big boys’ table. But a woman who is 45 and unmarried, who obviously lived longer and has more opinions than you, is not going to be in those meetings. Because she’s not married’. Like Tebby, Neo voiced her distaste at the impact of barring older women from ceremonial meetings:

Researcher: What does a woman need to know to function well in this society?

Neo: [...] A married woman does get valued more in society because there are lots of um, sort of traditional ceremonies where, for example, when they are doing the traditional marriage and they are paying the bridal price and so forth, the only people who can attend are married women. [...] So sometimes I feel like that's really unfair. You'll have a fifty-year-old spinster, who never got married, and she can never attend any of these [meetings], she never feels like a woman because she's not married, and I don't think that's right. Yeah, so I think things like that bother me. I think it shouldn't be because you are married that you are allowed certain privileges.

Both Tebby and Neo were young, urban, university-educated women. Malisa, who was 43 and rural, accepted the status quo. She described the explicit nature of exclusion that unmarried women, herself included, faced at such meetings: 'We always have these traditional come-togethers. When I'm not married I cannot be allowed into that group [...] People will always tease you, say, "Ah she's not married"'. Yet, she did not question it or complain. The difference in approach between Tebby and Neo on one hand and Malisa on the other suggests a generational and locational disconnect between traditional beliefs and progressive ideals regarding women's social status, as is discussed further in Chapter Five of this thesis.

The interviews suggested that these exclusionary rules apply not only to never-married women, but also to the divorced: 'If you get divorced or whatever then you are pushed back into the single women, and it doesn't matter how old you are' (Neo). Divorced women reportedly lose their social standing, suggesting that it is not the experience of marriage that counts towards gaining womanhood status; but rather, the continued attachment to a man through an official union. Thus, knowledge is appreciated less than the relational identity gained through being married. Given that divorced women revert to 'girlhood' in social terms, they have a great deal to lose should they choose to leave a marriage, adding to the inherent difficulty of escaping abusive or dysfunctional unions.

Just as the demarcation of married from unmarried women affects their level of participation in community events and gatherings, a woman's marital status might have an impact on whom she is allowed to approach should she wish to address a sensitive

family concern. Lesedi spoke of her struggle in challenging her brother-in-law as he abused her sister. Having seen her sister physically and emotionally mistreated over several years she considered approaching her brother-in-law directly, yet faced problems as a result of her marital status: ‘As an unmarried woman I’m not supposed to go in those kind of discussions, because I’m not married. And if I was married then maybe I will have to go and inform the in-laws to my sister that, “Your children, your child is abusing my sister”, and I want this to [stop].’ Frustrated at being unable to intervene on behalf of her sister through the traditional conflict-resolution channels, she chose to approach her brother-in-law directly: ‘But I didn’t have that long route, I went straight to him [...] he was like, “How could somebody who is not married come to me?” I said, “I’m coming to you, that one is my sister, and you are abusing [her]”’.

The husband’s reaction reportedly focused on Lesedi’s right to approach him rather than on her accusations, illustrating the significance of the restrictions placed on unmarried women in their attempts to resolve family conflicts. Lesedi claimed that observing her sister’s abusive marriage did not make marriage less desirable, despite her anticipation of inequality within any traditional union. Rather, she was ‘waiting for being married’. She did not ‘have any problem with [inequality] because’ she knew ‘how to handle all those issues’. That Lesedi desired marriage despite expecting to be treated badly by any husband exemplifies the draw of the status-conferring nature of marriage.

The ideal and the reality

Perhaps as a result of the social status marriage confers upon a woman, most of the participants explicitly expressed the desire to get married. They seemed to idealise the institution of marriage; they did not talk about the nature of the marital relationship, the characteristics of an ideal partner, the increased economic security that marriage might offer. Rather, their emphasis was on factors external to the marital relationship, specifically the social perception of married women as mature adults, superior to their unmarried inferiors, and the benefits of such standing. The construction of marriage as a ‘social’ and ‘reputational project’ (Jordan Smith 2009: 171) contrasts with research suggesting that romantic marriage has gained appeal over more utilitarian unions in many African countries, where unions ‘rooted in complementary spheres of action’ have long been construed as the regional norm (Thomas and Cole 2009). The participants’ preoccupation with marriage as a means to greater respect within the community does not necessarily imply that they were not interested in companionate

relationships. The enhanced reputation that they desired might be achieved only through marriage, whereas marriage was not a requirement for emotional and sexual connection. Yet, their near-total omission of romantic love from discussions of marriage does suggest that the interviewees did not expect to find such connection with a potential husband. In fact, many of the participants perceived married life as repressive, and gave accounts of infidelity and abuse in the married lives of people they knew.

Denbow and Thebe (2002: 152) found that women often struggle with gendered expectations within marriage that they had been free of beforehand, a transition that is especially difficult for highly educated women and those with successful careers, who tend to be accustomed to a level of autonomy. Harrison and Montgomery (2001: 317) report that many of their participants noted negative changes in their husband's behaviour upon marriage.¹⁹ Shera described the experience of a 'brilliant' friend, who had recently married a 'brilliant' and 'progressive' man. Recounting the difficulties that her friend had been surprised to face since her recent wedding, she explained, 'There's just this constant barrage of a reminder that "you are a wife, you are a woman"'. Conferred adult status through marriage, as a woman she was now expected to submit to her husband, a man with whom she had shared an equal partnership prior to their wedding: 'Even if it didn't mean that before you were married, when you still dating it didn't mean that. You weren't a woman, and now you are a woman, you are a wife. And somehow there comes all these things that nobody sort of told you'. Now a 'wife', this accomplished career woman was under pressure from her husband, his friends, and his friends' wives to serve and submit to her husband. Her story speaks to the transformative power of marriage in gender relations, which brings conservative values into otherwise liberal relationships. For women and men, 'Along with their new status comes new codes of behaviour' (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 152).

Keatletse had high expectations of marriage as an ideal setting for raising children, defining it as: 'A proper family where there is a husband and a wife [...] that's the most important thing'. For Keatletse, the heteronormative nuclear group consisting of a married couple and their children living in the same home represented a 'proper' family. She reported that marriage was 'very important, I think, for your children to perform better in life in any way [...] keeping kids in a stable home, seeing

¹⁹ Their research was with rural Zulu women in South Africa, who share a similar familial culture with the Tswana. Such similarities include the payment of *lobola* on marriage, after which the bride moves into the home of her husband's parents, where she assumes a caring role for her in-laws. This trajectory resembles that of a Tswana bride. Women's perceptions of marriage and childbearing are also reportedly analogous (Harrison and Montgomery 2001: 316-319).

two people who love and take care of each other just makes a big difference in their lives'.²⁰

Keatlaretse was the only participant to mention emotional support between the wife and husband within marriage. A single mother, she expressed longing for marriage despite negative experiences in her relationships with men, including the father of her child, and with her own father who she said had abandoned his wife and children to marry somebody else. She reported that her father did not extend emotional or financial support to her after he left the family, 'Even the woman he's married to' did not know she existed. Keatlaretse 'was so angry', she 'wanted to tell her [...] but his brother said, "No, don't do it, it will ruin his marriage"'. In this case it appeared that Keatlaretse's family considered that protecting her father's second marriage was ultimately more important than her desire to be part of her father's life. Such a situation would suggest that the institution of marriage was valued above her emotional and financial wellbeing. Keatlaretse upheld the perception of marriage as sanctified and chose not to approach her unknowing stepmother,²¹ despite her wish for a relationship with her father. She continued to hope for marriage for herself as soon as possible. Her story illustrates the appeal of marriage in the face of only negative experiences, indicating that the institution of marriage was perceived as separate from its reported reality.

Women are commonly abused physically, sexually, emotionally and economically within marriage and relationships (Government of Botswana 2014: 55-60; Phorano et al. 2005: 198-200; Mookodi 2004: 124-126; Maundeni 2002; Schapera 1938: 158). In 1938 (158), Schapera wrote, 'Wife beating is common and is considered quite justifiable if the woman is unfaithful, stays out at night, or neglects any of her ordinary domestic duties'. Little seems to have changed in this regard since Schapera's time; in fact, domestic violence is reportedly increasing (Government of Botswana 2014: 55-60).²² A study of perceptions of violence among a sample of 735 women stated that three out of every five participants reported having been victims of violence (Government of Botswana and Gender Links 2012: 11). Supporting these findings, 18

²⁰ It is noteworthy that Keatlaretse described a 'proper' family as a nuclear unit sharing a single residence. Spatial separation of men from their wives and children has been commonplace in Botswana since the advent of cattle farming, a practice that continues today. Livestock are kept at cattle posts – which may be hundreds of kilometers from the familial homestead – and are attended by men for much of the year. I discuss men's absence from their families in Chapter Five of this thesis.

²¹ Although Keatlaretse agreed that it would be inappropriate to disturb her father's marriage, her reluctance to do so might have also stemmed from her relative powerlessness as an unmarried woman in her family, having been advised by her uncle to refrain from contacting her father's wife.

²² While I recognise that men can be victims of domestic violence, when using the terms 'abuse' and 'violence' in this thesis I am referring intimate heterosexual partner violence inflicted on women by men.

of my participants raised the issue of abuse within relationships when I asked what they thought were the main problems facing women and girls. Some reported being abused themselves, or that close friends or family members were victims. Others talked about the phenomenon more generally. All of these interviewees mentioned the high prevalence of abuse.

Reneilwe's account indicated the perception of GBV as common, 'Most of the time you will hear husband is beating up women, wife is being raped, you see'. Elizabeth also raised the issue of marital rape, explaining that 'when [she] does not want to be having sex, he just says "no, let's have sex"'. As Laone described, 'There is a lot of abuse, women are forced to do things they don't want to do'. Phorano et al. (2005: 198) claim that the practice of *lobola* is often misunderstood as meaning the husband has paid for total physical rights to his wife, thus facilitating sexual violence within marriage. Marital rape is not acknowledged by either general or customary law in Botswana, further enabling sexual violence within marriage by implicitly offering impunity to the perpetrator (Ditshwanelo 2003).

Speaking of the abuse her sister faced in her marriage, Lesedi explained that the husband became violent when her sister complained about his affairs. Similarly, Taemane reported that men turn to violence against women who question their poor behaviour in relationships, such as infidelity. As women are told not to challenge their husbands should they have affairs (Jordan Smith 2009: 167; Denbow and Thebe 2006: 154-155), it is difficult for them to gain the support of their families should abuse arise out of their complaints.²³ Pamela recalled reported instances of murder, known locally as 'passion killings', in which women are thought to have been killed for leaving their husband or partner: 'You know like, they're abused. And they say, "You know what, I don't want to be with you anymore because you abuse me, you beat me up" [...] Yeah. That happens a lot. Like, when the girl doesn't want the relationship anymore. The passion killing is like that. Yeah.' Pamela's reports are substantiated by research into the phenomenon, which was first reported in a local newspaper in 2003 (Mookodi 2004: 124), and is defined as 'intimate partner homicide' (Exner and Thurston 2009: 1). There were 46 reported cases in Botswana in 2003, 54 in 2004 and 62 in 2005 (Ditshwanelo 2007).

For disempowered women who do not have access to education or employment, dependent relationships with men are often their only option for survival. In Mookodi's

²³ I shall discuss infidelity within marriage later in this chapter.

2004 (128-129) study, many of the participants desired marriage for the purpose of economic support. As a result of high unemployment rates among women, such relationships are common and women's dependency makes them vulnerable to intimate partner violence (Mookodi 2004: 124-125). Some of my interviewees attributed violence against women to economic factors. Sefela thought that women were vulnerable to abuse because high levels of female poverty make them desperate, willing to attach themselves to violent men 'who could either abuse her physically, or even infect her with [sexually transmitted] diseases'. Emelda, Lenah, and Kesegofetse supported this view. They suggested that increasing economic uncertainty was leading women to enter into abusive and exploitative relationships with men who could provide financial rewards, 'Because some of them, they are not financially capable to live alone' (Kesegofetse).

Conversely, women who are financially independent are also at risk of abuse if their partner perceives their success as a threat to his masculine authority (Mookodi 2004: 124-126). Since the 1970s women have had access to formal employment and increased educational opportunities. Thus, they are 'making inroads into previously male-dominated areas', and undermining men's grasp on their established roles as breadwinners and decision-makers (Mookodi 2004: 127). Simultaneously, men suffer from high rates of unemployment and many have no role to play. As men struggle to adjust to transforming gender identities, they might resort to intimate partner violence as a way of re-establishing their dominance in the household (Mookodi 2004: 124-126). Some of my participants had recognised this trend; Taemane attributed abuse to 'the fact that woman are now working [...] he thinks you've got a better job. Or he wants you to do certain chores at home because he undermines your job'. Keatlaretse reported that a family member was being abused by her husband, who appeared to struggle with the fact that his wife earned a higher salary than he did. Silberschmidt (2001: 660-664) reports a comparable phenomenon in Kenya, which has experienced similar socioeconomic change to that of Botswana. In the pre-colonial era, gender roles were clearly defined; women produced food and while men fought, herded cattle, and engaged in politics. When the colonial government introduced taxation, men migrated to urban areas to earn cash to pay their taxes, establishing a new role as breadwinners. Following World War Two mass unskilled labour was replaced with smaller numbers of skilled workers. Combined with population increase male unemployment grew, and women took on their own enterprises, undermining men's role as economic providers and weakening male authority. As a result, large proportions of men have become

frustrated and report feeling 'destitute'; their masculinity undermined, they 'resort to aggressive and violent behavior to assert their authority' Silberschmidt (2001: 664).

Keatlaetse explained that the father of her child was emotionally abusive towards her, yet she was unable to leave the relationship without her family's sanction: 'And right now I'm waiting for my parents to act. I've told them my situation and I'm just sitting here. I don't know what is going on'. Her options for acting to protect herself were limited by the cultural norm that dictates conflict resolution within marriages or serious long-term relationships where children are involved must be directed by elders and kept within the family: 'If I want to end this relationship I can't just do it between me and him, because we have a child. It will have to go through my parents as well, and also through his parents'. The influence of parents is a significant factor in keeping women in abusive or unhappy marriages or serious relationships; girls are taught to be passive and obedient, and their parents often encourage them to persevere (Maundeni 2002). Speaking of her sister's abuse, Lesedi reported a similar problem: 'In our culture, they try to, let's say, be secretive. She will be abused, she will go to the in-laws and tell them, and then they will say, "Yeah yeah yeah, we will just tell him [to stop]"'. Lenah explained that a woman complaining openly about a dysfunctional or abusive marriage would risk being judged as a lesser woman, a fear that prevents her from asking for help: 'You'll be staying home when your husband drinks, there is no food for your children, there is little, there isn't a place to get help from because culturally you know you can't go around saying, "My man is beating me", [they will say], "What kind of a woman are you?"' Likewise, Pono put women's reluctance to speak out down to shame:

Researcher: What do you think stops people going to get help?

Pono: Shame. You feel embarrassed. You feel like it's your fault that you are going through that. Because we have that thing that, you know what, I need to be seen as a strong person and, you know, pulling my family together. Now if you go out and start telling people that things are not ok, you feel like you are maybe betraying the family, or exposing things that are happening in your house. Sometimes, you know, there are other elders that will poorly advise, 'When you are married, let the things that happen in your house remain there, don't tell people what's going on', and sometimes I guess that's what makes people stay in abusive relationships or abusive marriages.

Women's self-blame for abuse in relationships is not culturally specific, but common in the west, too (Cascardi and Daniel O'Leary 1992: 250). However, where observers ordinarily expect western women to leave abusive relationships (Herbert et al. 1991: 312), women in Botswana are encouraged to endure and are blamed for failed marriages should they choose to walk away from violent partners (Maundeni 2002: 258). The idea that Botswana women are expected to remain in the marriage illustrates the social construction of womanhood as a submissive identity, particularly for wives, who are explicitly instructed not to defend themselves against abusive husbands. Marriage for women is thus perceived as a site of devotion to others, of abrogation of the self. While marriage affords status, it restricts women's opportunities for autonomy and self-preservation.

The abuse common within marriage reportedly extends to girl children of the family, who are vulnerable to rape, molestation, and emotional abuse from their fathers, stepfathers and uncles. There is no reliable statistical data about the prevalence of child abuse in Botswana, but it is known to be common (Ditshwanelo 2007; Mathoma et al. 2006: 69). Seven of the participants expressed concern over child sexual abuse within families when asked, 'What are the main problems facing girls and women right now?' Tumelo told me that mother's brother was caught 'molesting' his baby niece, who was later discovered to have contracted HIV. When I asked her how this was dealt with, she said, 'It's an issue that is just kept in the family', and asserted that 'Botswana in general [...] we face a lot of this statutory rape, there will be incest'. While it is possible that she sought to justify her uncle's behaviour by claiming child sexual abuse is the norm, other interviews supported the view that it happens often.

Keatletse was raising her sister's two young daughters at the time of our interview:

Researcher: We've talked a bit over the different questions about the main challenges for women and girls in Botswana, but is there anything else you want to add more specifically on that point?

Keatletse: I have these two girls, and I have brothers who drink and all that. I still feel uncomfortable when I'm not around, if they are safe. We are at a point where you are even afraid of the uncles if they are with the girls. I mean when I was growing up, it was okay for my uncle to bath me and all that. But now, I don't feel comfortable with them doing that, you know.

Keatlaletse expressed the same fears in relation to a potential future husband: 'If for instance they were my kids and I get married to somebody who is not their father, the fear of him not being a good father to them, the fear of him maybe wanting to do certain things to them'. It appeared that sexual abuse of girls by men in the family was so common as to be a factor for consideration in women's choosing of a husband. Maatla, the mother of a teenage girl, articulated similar concerns: '[The mother] has a relationship with this man, and the man then ends up making the child his woman as well. Having intercourse, or maybe even abusing the child behind her back'. Her fear for her daughter's safety had made her hesitant to marry. Tsala, who was married, reported her anxiety for the 'girl child being abused by the father, sexually abused'. Although Tsala did not clarify whether she suspected her own husband of abusing her children, she was clear that many girls face such a risk in other families. The participants who raised the issue of familial child abuse considered it a widespread issue, part of the reality of marriage.

The reported realities of marriage also included chronic infidelity on the part of the husband; 14 of the women I interviewed raised this issue unprompted, all with the view that 'most women have gone through it' (Mabedi), or as Emelda put it, 'cheating is [men's] hobby'. Infidelity in men has long been culturally sanctioned, illustrated by the popular phrase, 'A man, like a bull, cannot be confined in a kraal' (Schapera 1938: 156). The phrase is used to suggest that male libido is an untamable natural force that cannot be controlled by one woman alone. Similarly in Nigeria, the common saying 'man no be wood' is employed to claim that, unlike wood, men have strong sexual urges that can only be satisfied by sex with multiple women (Jordan Smith 2009: 166-7), and women are expected to be able 'to bend', meaning to tolerate infidelity (Jordan Smith 2009: 124). Polygyny was prevalent in the pre-colonial era, but decreased during British rule and was ultimately made illegal under common law (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 139-140). Yet, the perceived legitimacy of men requiring more than one woman has remained (Upton and Myers Dolan 2011: 99). In fact, 'If a man does not cheat on his wife or whatever, he's seen as abnormal' (Neo). Conversely, in Botswana and Nigeria, married women may not have relations with any man other than their husbands, and even single women are expected to remain relatively chaste (Upton and Myers Dolan 2011: 99; Jordan Smith 2009: 167).

Some of the participants reported that they or their friends had been cheated on by their partners, but although they were unhappy about it, they did not leave the

relationship. Shera told the story of a friend, who had discovered that her partner of over ten years had a two-year-old child with another woman. Despite being distraught over his infidelity and concealment, 'she was begging him' to marry her and did go through with their wedding. It appeared that marriage itself was more important to this woman than her own emotional wellbeing, suggesting that for her the ideal of being a married woman took precedence over the reportedly unpleasant reality of her relationship. Similarly, Basadi described a friend's experience. She had confronted her partner upon discovering he was unfaithful, but eventually accepted his promiscuous behaviour and stayed in the relationship: 'She accepts it, you know she, at this point knows that he cheats, knows that he's done it multiple times, and has no real intention of stopping. He barely apologised. You know what I mean. His apology was sort of, "Well, this is who I am, either deal with it or don't"'. This man's alleged reaction to being accused of infidelity illustrates his expectation of impunity in the matter, a belief that ultimately proved valid when he faced no consequences. Researchers in other sub-Saharan African countries have similarly reported that women are aware of their husbands' and boyfriends' infidelity yet rarely sought to challenge it, accepting men's cheating as inevitable (Cole 2009; Jordan Smith 2009).

Khana's interview further supported the view that men who were promiscuous in relationships were immune to the consequences of their behaviour. She explained that wives and/or girlfriends suffer costs ranging from emotional distress to life-threatening illness: 'Imagine the man is fooling around, running around. Sometimes he's going to take HIV from me and come to give it to the wife. And the wife can't say anything. She is just going to wait for her death.' Botswana has the second highest HIV prevalence rate in the world, at 22.21 per cent (CIA 2016). It is broadly understood that the majority of HIV positive women in Africa are infected by their spouses or partners, who are usually thought to have contracted it through casual sex with other women (Jordan Smith 2009: 158). When I asked Khana why 'the wife can't say anything', she elaborated with an example from her most recent relationship: 'Even if he's gone for two days, it's so hard for me to ask him where he was. [...] You are not supposed to ask the man this. The men here in Botswana they know they [can] hurt you. [...] you are supposed to accept it.' Likewise in Nigeria, women are prevented by custom from asking their husbands or partners about their sexual behaviour outside of the relationship (Jordan Smith 2009: 167). With cultural sanctions preventing women from questioning their partner's whereabouts or asking who he has been with, men are

potentially more likely to engage in risk-taking sexual behavior since they are unlikely to be held accountable.

Keatlaretse claimed that she had been ‘happy’ with a previous boyfriend, a man she described as a ‘good guy’, a ‘nice guy’, despite having known all along that ‘he had a[nother] girlfriend’. It appeared that Keatlaretse did not view his unfaithfulness as a negative personal trait; rather, him being in multiple relationships was simply a situational reality. Akhu attributed her marriage breakdown to her choice to study overseas, rather than to her husband’s cheating, explaining, ‘Men will not just sit alone and wait’. In this scenario, Akhu blamed herself for not being present to fulfill her husband’s sexual and companionship needs, illustrating the cultural perception that men are incapable of controlling their sexuality and ought not be expected to. Tebby commented on women’s helplessness in the face of infidelity, stemming from the perception that it was probably their fault:

Researcher: Is there anything else you’d like to see change for women?

What would make your life better or easier?

Tebby: [...] Women are made to feel that, you know you can’t ask about it. You can’t say anything. He’s providing for you. [...] [women will] go home and try to talk to their mothers, and you know their mothers are even just like, ‘You need to go back, and you need to, you know, either fix it, or’, you know somehow it’s still the woman’s fault that her man is going out and cheating on her. You know it’s either, ‘Oh it’s because I told you, you work so many hours, so you know, what else do you expect?’ or, ‘You refuse to cook, the helper does it all the time’, so he doesn’t know what a real woman is because you’re not cooking at home. So it’s, it’s always things that, it’s the woman’s fault.

Tebby’s statement implies that women are not only expected to satisfy their husband’s sexual needs or expect adultery, but to fulfill their servile gender role within the household or find him looking elsewhere for a ‘real woman’. In Nigeria too, women are blamed for their husband’s infidelity, often by other women. Wives are ‘complicit in enabling men’s extramarital sexual behaviour’ by concealing their husbands’ affairs; since their perceived success as wives would be undermined by knowledge of a cheating husband, it is socially pragmatic to cover up their husband’s indiscretions (Jordan Smith 2009: 171-179).

Mabedi agreed with the view that male infidelity was culturally acceptable, based on the perception that 'it's in their DNA [...] men can't help it'. She asserted that she would be hurt if she discovered that her partner (whom she expected to marry soon) had an affair, yet, she was comfortable with the possibility of it as long as she did not find out: 'I always tell my boyfriend, "Just be semi-ly faithful as you are, and we are good." You know what semi-ly is? Semi-ly is [that] according to me you are faithful, I don't know what other people know [...] I don't really know what he does when I'm not there. So it's sort of if I never find out it's good.' Mabedi accepted that her partner would have affairs even after they married, but as long as he kept it to himself and continued to behave as a good husband in other ways, she would not complain. Her view echo Schapera's (1938: 156) finding that 'if the husband is unfaithful to his wife, she appears in general to be fairly complaisant about it'. Speaking of Nigerian women who remain in their marriages in the face of their husbands' adultery, Jordan Smith (2009: 173) posits that their decision to stay 'is powerful testimony to the importance of wifhood and motherhood as social identities.' My interviews suggested that such an interpretation applies in Botswana, where the social status conferred on married women (and particularly married mothers, as discussed below) would be too great an advantage to sacrifice by leaving an unhappy marriage.

My participants presented a view of discontented marriages as the norm. Khana explained that because of men's depraved behaviour in relationships, 'There is no woman who is not crying'. In 1940, Schapera (189) reported similar findings, suggesting stagnation in this regard over the past eight decades:

If I appear to have stressed the unhappy marriages too much, and to have paid little attention to the happy ones that do also exist, it is because the latter, as far as I could judge, are comparatively rare [...] almost always there were complaints of sexual ill-treatment or of infidelity, and the characteristic female attitude was one of resignation rather than happiness.

Getting married and staying married

Notwithstanding the negative perceptions of married life discussed above, a number of the participants reported experiencing external pressure to get married and stay married. They described such pressure as being either explicitly applied by friends and family, as an implicit cultural expectation, or both. Pono recalled feeling the expectation to marry

from a young age, reporting, 'If that doesn't happen, the society looks at you as if you are now a failure [...] and sometimes it's a bit discouraging, the comments that you get from the elders'. The married women in Pono's community participated in a form of cultural collusion, reproducing a social order in which women were disempowered. Shera complained, 'Everybody is [saying], "Where's the husband? [...] Why isn't he marrying you?"', speaking of her aunts and other relatives. The latter question situates Shera as the passive recipient of her partner's behaviour, in spite of her highly independent lifestyle, discounting her agency as a woman. Yural-Davis (1997: 63) theorises that 'women collude, seek comfort and even gain at times a sense of empowerment within the spaces allocated to them by fundamentalist movements', including cultural fundamentalism. As reproducers of tradition, women protect national culture by ensuring other women adhere to gendered cultural expectations. In this safeguarding role women are empowered, albeit through maintaining a system that defines them as inferior (Yural-Davis 1997: 61-63). Such a concept might apply in the Botswana case – my participants regularly spoke of other women policing their behaviour.

Tebby reported that her mother's expectations put a strain on their relationship: 'I feel like a lot of things my mom says to me and comments she makes that make me upset are about marriage or kids. You know, they're about how I should act as a woman, which means you know, basically marriage'. She explained, 'As you get older you're supposed to exhibit this person, this woman, you're supposed to be showing that you're a woman who is there for marriage [...] there's a certain age where women just become marriage material'. Such a view demonstrates the perception that a woman becomes less valued as an individual once she surpasses an age by which she is expected to marry. From that point onwards her worth decreases the longer she remains unmarried. Mabedi also struggled with her mother's views of her independent lifestyle and single status: 'My mum is always telling me, you know, "You need to start acting like a woman so a man can see you and marry you [...] nobody is gonna marry you if you're like this"'. Mabedi's mother reportedly thought that her high level of education and independence of thought would be unattractive to a potential husband, and encouraged her to speak and behave in a quiet and submissive manner so that a man might want to marry her. Women who were raised under a more strictly patriarchal system than their daughters sought to regulate their daughters' behaviour, imposing values that undermined the autonomy their daughters had gained through a changing developmental and economic landscape.

Similarly for Neo, it appeared that her independent lifestyle was a concern not only because she had not been prioritising marriage, but because such a lifestyle might actually limit her marriage options:

Researcher: Does that, do you think being a woman is any part of that, that experience [of people not understanding your independent lifestyle]?
Neo: When I went to do my PhD a lot of my aunts said to me, ‘When are you gonna get married? When are you gonna have children?’ Even my mother, who I think she would have liked me to choose a more orthodox path in life, perhaps stop studying maybe at Masters level, get married, have children, and I think that makes her nervous sometimes [...] So I think as a female my mum was a bit scared that, um, because men will say to me: ‘No one is ever gonna marry you, no one wants somebody who is smart, who will challenge them’, yeah [laughter]. It’s like I’ve decreased my chances of being married by becoming educated.

Although Tebby, Mabedi and Neo led successful independent lives,²⁴ their female relatives struggled to accept that they had thus far chosen not to marry, and had prioritised their education and careers instead. Conversely, all three participants reported that their fathers applied no such pressure. In a society where the cornerstone of patriarchy is the marital home (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 141), women who are not married challenge the social order by demonstrating the possibility of their autonomous survival. The participants’ accounts suggest that such a challenge is met with reverse discrimination – married women counteract what they perceive to be the wrong choice by responding with personalised attacks. Unmarried women experience this directly, and struggle to defend their single status because in doing so, they implicitly reject the life choices of those who criticise them. In a culture where community cohesion is vital, particularly in rural areas, it is perhaps wiser to be seen as supportive of the institution. Under such circumstances staying single, expressing no desire to marry, or getting divorced become problematic options for women.

Emelda provided an example of the harsh judgement meted out by married women: ‘If you are getting older and you’re not married they think that you are stupid or something. Some of them think that you are very stupid, that you better get married.

²⁴ I am aware that definitions of ‘successful’ are culturally specific; I am defining it here in terms of factors such as education, career, social mobility, and mental and physical health, a definition shaped by my position as a western academic.

Maybe you are a bully or maybe you are something else, you are not married’.

Likewise, Kesegofetse, a passionate and ambitious magistrate who had chosen to marry only once her career was established, realised that her colleagues thought there was ‘something she [was] doing wrong to men’. According to this view, a single woman must be unmarried because of her unpleasant character or behaviour and men’s resulting distaste for her; she was allowed no power over her relationship choices for this would perhaps present a challenge to those women for whom such agency had not been an option, as well as to male authority.

Once married a woman is expected to stay married, with divorce bringing difficult social consequences. This, as already indicated, applies even in abusive unions. (Maundeni 2002). Speaking of her sister, who was in a physically and emotionally abusive marriage, Lesedi reported: ‘Long I’ve told her, divorce this person and come back home’, but her sister wanted to avoid divorce at all costs, which Lesedi attributed to the fear that ‘if you can divorce you will be rejected somehow’. Similarly, Khana explained, ‘Here in Botswana, even if they are being abused in their marriage, to get out, for them, they don’t believe in that’. Women are expected to stay in and take responsibility for abusive marriages, demonstrating a broad acceptance of gender-based violence, and a prioritising of the institution of marriage over women’s wellbeing.

Given that marriage brings a woman status, it becomes imperative for her to maintain her union to protect her social standing. Khana pointed out, ‘Here in Botswana when you are married you are being respected. The problem is that, if that married man lets you down, and you run away, that’s when they say: “Ah, we were expecting that”, but if you just cry and you hide your tears, they’ll say: “This is a woman”’. Thus, married women are expected to suffer and to do so quietly, for ‘even when you are not happy, if you divorce, you tend to be an outcast. Like in the family they will say: “Ah this one left her husband”’ (Malisa). Magistrate Kesegofetse reported that she sees numerous women through her court who wish to leave unhappy marriages, but cannot bring themselves to file for divorce out of concern for the social consequences. Likewise, Pono spoke of ‘the shame of being a divorcee’.

Motherhood makes a woman

While many of the participants considered marriage to be important for their standing in the community, achieving womanhood did not depend on just one mechanism. If marriage was unavailable, bearing children could bring adult status. In fact, much of the literature points to childbearing as the single most significant event(s) in a woman’s life.

Schapera (1938: 155), in his early twentieth-century study, discovered, 'Marriage according to the Tswana is designed primarily for bearing children'. Such an emphasis on childbearing has continued to the present day, where, 'Womanhood is generally considered to be synonymous with motherhood. Motherhood is rather a mandate and not an option' (Mogobe 2005: 33). Datta's (2011: 130) focus-group participants 'overwhelmingly defined [women] in relation to motherhood'. In a country where government welfare is minimal, children are viewed as a future source of both practical and economic support (Upton and Myers Dolan 2011: 99; Mogobe 2005: 29; Suggs 1987: 12). Suggs (1987: 12) revealed that children were valued as 'objects of love, as continuation of family, as extra hands while one is working, and as security in old age'.

Total fertility in Botswana has seen a steady decline in recent decades, from 7.1 live births per woman in 1981 to 2.3 in 2015 (World Bank 2010: 5; CIA 2016). Although my sample was not representative, the numbers of children my participants had reflected the fertility rate for Botswana at the time of research (2014). 23 per cent of the participants had no children at all; 37 per cent had one child; 27 per cent had two children, ten per cent had three children, none had four children, and only three per cent had five children. None had more than five children. Total fertility rates are higher for rural women than urban women, and there is a negative correlation between education level and fertility (World Bank 2010: 5). This pattern is reflected in my sample; five of the seven participants who had no children were highly educated urban women. The only participant with five children was rural and had secondary education. The World Bank (2010: viii) states that women's increased education and formal employment contribute to fertility decline, alongside urbanisation and lower infant mortality rates. Despite relatively low fertility rates, the desire for children was almost uniform across my sample, with just one participant stating that she did not want to become a mother. It appeared that while the number of births per woman has declined, the desire for children has not. In this section I shall discuss the meaning my participants attributed to motherhood, and the significance of childbearing in achieving womanhood status.

In his interviews with women living in Mochudi, one of the villages in which I conducted my own interviews, Suggs (1987: 112) states that 90 per cent of his sample claimed that a woman without children was not a complete woman. Mogobe (2005: 33) asserts that girls are told they must bear children once they reach adulthood, a view that is embodied in the behaviour and attitudes of the women they grow up with. As such, a girl, 'Consciously and unconsciously internalizes what it means to be a woman in Botswana' in response to what she is told and what she sees; that bearing children will

make her a woman (Mogobe 2005: 33). 18 of the participants said that a person could achieve womanhood status upon becoming a mother; that is when ‘it is thought that now you are a *real* woman’ (Pono). Taemane emphasised the perceived connection between motherhood and womanhood: ‘A woman is supposed to have children. That is what it means. Motherhood [...] if you look at a woman you see a mother. That’s what it means’. For Taemane, the very meaning of ‘woman’ was ‘mother’. Reneilwe asserted that ‘women should start having babies’ because it is ‘the natural thing’ for them to do. De Beauvoir writes (1949: 537), ‘It is through motherhood that woman fully achieved her physiological destiny; that is her “natural” vocation’. For many of the participants it was not only her physiological destiny, but her private and public gender identity that depended on bearing children.

Pono offered an explanation for the perception of motherhood as necessary for achieving womanhood: ‘When you have a child, you start to love in a different way, you know, that unconditional love. The focus is not always on you, now it goes to the children [...] and that makes you a woman’. Her view implies that self-sacrifice is not only preferred in women, but is fundamental to their recognition *as* women.²⁵ In the west, too, self-sacrifice is embodied in the construction of motherhood, which ‘emerges as a significant moral enterprise’ (Park 2002: 25). Harrison and Montgomery (2001: 328) point out that every married participant of theirs spoke of having children as, ‘Establishing a woman’s social status and self-worth’, a common perception among my interviewees. One celebrated motherhood, ‘Because people respect somebody who has children, it makes you a woman, it makes people take you a certain way’, and Akhu reported that as ‘a mother you tend to get a little bit more respect’. Emelda described similar views: ‘Motherhood is a good thing. To other people [...] If they see and they know that you are a mother, they respect that.’

Tshiamo’s anecdote about becoming a mother illustrated her shift to adulthood in the eyes of her church community: ‘In our church when you had a child you are not allowed to take sacrament. And I was cut from taking the sacrament, and I was excluded from the choir of the, the youth choir. I was supposed to carry out adult activities only. Going to Thursday churches of the ladies, you know.’ Having borne a child, it was no longer appropriate for Tshiamo to continue taking part in youth activities within the church. Rather, she had to worship separately with the ‘ladies’ – adult women who attended a service apart from the ‘girls’. Tshiamo found this shift challenging; having

²⁵ I examine the self-sacrificing feminine ideal in the next chapter.

struggled with the upheaval of an unplanned pregnancy, she was then separated from her peers and prevented from taking part in an activity she enjoyed. Upon becoming pregnant Tshiamo was immediately, definitively, and visibly re-categorised as an adult by her church, a significant organising institution in rural areas. When I asked her how her life had changed upon having children this social repositioning was the only thing she spoke of, implying that it had a profound effect on her, and was perhaps her most powerful memory of the experience of becoming a mother for the first time. Tshiamo's story illustrated the effect that bearing children had on others' perceptions of women, and the ways in which active measures were taken to situate women in spaces appropriate to their status.

Some participants implied that while having children was considered a marker of adulthood, extending the mothering role to the children of others could increase one's value as a woman. Laone said she would identify a woman by the fact that she has children: 'Being a woman is when you have a child', but that a particularly noteworthy woman would be one who 'mother[s] every child out there'. Likewise, Naledi described women as the ones who 'raise children', and Pono defined a woman's role as 'help[ing] to raise, you know, our young people, the children'. The construction of women as mothers to all children supports the finding that Botswana rely on extended kin networks for childrearing (Smith 2013: 171), a pattern reported among black communities elsewhere in the world (Uttal 1999: 846). While women might not achieve adulthood status through the delegated mothering of others' children alone, such behaviour can enhance their standing in the community, especially once they have become mothers themselves. The expectation of women to take part in communal mothering could create problems for women who did not want to be mothers; even if they chose not to have children of their own, they were pressurised to take care of other children as part of their gendered role ascription.

Pamela equated the emphasis on motherhood as an indicator of womanhood with the connection between sex and childbirth: 'Um, in Botswana when you have a child that's when they say you are a woman. Before then you can be treated as a child. As soon as you get pregnant they'll be like, "Oh, she grown now! She be having sex!", yeah...so that's when they say, "Oh, she's a woman now, she's having sex"'. Pamela's view is difficult to frame because none of the other participants mentioned sex as an indicator of maturity. However, it might be that sex was considered a function of adulthood because it facilitates childbearing. In a similar vein, six of the participants said that a girl becomes a woman once she starts puberty. Lesedi pointed out, 'Now you

have your periods you are a woman, because you can mother a kid'. Although the other five participants did not make this connection explicit, the context of what they said gave me the impression that puberty was regarded as a significant life-stage because it marks the beginning of potential fertility. For these participants, it was not having a child alone that turned a girl into a woman, but the ability to become pregnant. The ages of the six interviewees ranged from 25 to 43, suggesting that the concept of puberty marking womanhood was a cross-generational view. Sedireng said that she hadn't considered when womanhood begins prior to the interview, but would 'take my mother's opinion. And for my mother, when she told me I was a woman was when I had my period'. Sedireng's adoption of her mother's view supports the idea that menstruation representing the beginning of adulthood was long-standing. Suggs (1987: 108) notes that some of his participants considered that a girl became a woman on menstruation, but would not be bestowed adulthood status until she had given birth, and could manage her own household. Upon their first period, girls were told they must act differently – keep clean, play less, and focus on their responsibilities in the home.

While most of the participants reported that one would be treated as a woman upon becoming a mother, two said that their own mothers continued to treat them as minors within their joint households. Mabedi, a 26-year-old rural mother of one, explained that in her mother's house where she lived, she was 'a girl [...] still sent to do whatever it is that needs to be done in the house'. Malisa was not treated as an adult by her own mother once she had a child, suggesting that for some mothers, the line between girl and woman is experienced as fluid and situational, dependent on their relationship to those defining their status. It seemed that a woman's position as a minor within the household was more fixed than others' perception of her outside the home. Supporting this notion, Malisa stated that 'if you are a child, even if you are 50 years [old], if you are a child to somebody you are still a child', motioning towards her mother who was seated nearby. However, she claimed that upon bearing a child, others 'will just tend to respect you as an elderly person, not like the small girl you used to be'. Thus, while a mother might remain a 'child' in the eyes of her own mother, she could achieve adult social standing outside of her mother's home.

The participants all had the view that motherhood is tied to respect, and has a significant impact on community perception of one's identity. A woman's family, community and colleagues traditionally adopt the new name and title conferred on her when she becomes a mother. The practice of calling a woman by her child's name is a sign of respect; 'Mma' is a title bearing status (Mogobe 2005: 29). Although I did not

ask directly about this change in name and title, six of the participants talked about such experiences in response to being questioned about how their lives had been different since becoming mothers.

Considering the meaning of being called by her child's name, Thato explained, 'They realise that I have grown up. I have grown up, I am Mma Kaelo, when I get home my child is home.' Thato's statement suggests that others bestowed her new title upon her as recognition of her adult status. Here, the home plays a central role in the construction of female adulthood; she is now a mother, a person who returns to a home in which she raises her child. In fact, 'woman' translates to *Mosadi* in Setswana, meaning 'the one who stays' (Suggs 1987: 110). Naledi spoke of the respect a woman can expect to receive once she has given birth, and how her new name reflects this: 'I think when we have a child they respect you more than when you don't have [a child].' She ascribed such regard to a perceived shift in identity: 'They will think, "This one now is Mma of, the mother of..." We mean the mother of, or somebody's mother'. Likewise, Sefela spoke of her pride when 'people see you out there and they know that you are the mother of whoever'. The repeated phrase, 'mother of' demonstrates the significance of this relational identity in earning community respect. While waiting to conceive, Lesedi had 'wanted to be called "auntie" at least, because' she 'didn't have a kid by then'. For her, this meant, 'Even if you don't know me, you'll never know I don't have a kid because I will be "auntie"'. Although Lesedi could not yet use the 'Mma' title, she was able to substitute it with an alternative term that also implies a role in familial caregiving. While not as desirable as 'Mma', Lesedi still considered the title 'auntie' preferable to being called by her own name. Upon bearing a child Lesedi was delighted to be renamed in reference to her motherhood status because of the impact it had on others' perception of her. She recalled: 'After I gave birth they know I'm called "Mma Tshwanelo". I was happy of that.' Lesedi's story implies that prior to becoming a mother she had felt the need to conceal her childlessness, which is suggestive of the shame surrounding women who are not mothers.

The participants who talked about their names changing upon motherhood expressed mixed feelings about the transition. Lesedi recalled with laughter: 'The very first time when I got home from the hospital my father just said, "Mma Tshwanelo", since then he called me Mma Tshwanelo until the day he died. And you know, what's funny about it was, I even forget that I'm Mma Tshwanelo! You know, when you call, "Mma Tshwanelo!", huh, who?' Lesedi received her new title immediately upon having her first child, and although she was happy about the change, she initially struggled to

get used to it. Tumelo's tone of voice suggested she had been less positive about being retitled. She explained: 'They will call you by your child's name, and then they address you as if, with a little bit of respect'. However, she found it difficult to adjust: 'Sometimes when they say, "Ah, Mma Karabo, this and this and that" I will just ignore the person until they repeat themselves, "Mma Karabo, I said this and this and that" and I'll be, "oh, she is talking to me"'. When I asked Tumelo how it felt to have others change her name, she said she had not considered her feelings on the matter because 'it's just what you do'. While Tumelo had felt uncertain about others' shifting perception of her, symbolised in the new name, she had not acknowledged her own discomfort. Rather, she had accepted the status quo.

Thato took a similar approach. She reported discontent over being renamed; when I asked how she felt about it, she responded in a resigned tone: 'At first hey, I never used to like it, because they used to call me by my name. I don't know, I think it's fine now. It's fine.' Tsala expressed stronger resentment to the custom: 'I have lost my name, you know? I'm Tsala! You know? I have lost that. Now I am identified as Mma Anele, and though it's cultural, and a way of showing respect, I kind of differ, to say that I'm Anele's mother, but I'm Tsala, I'm myself. Identify me as who I am, not whose mother am I'. For Tsala it was challenging to be identified primarily by her relation to another, and she expressed a sense of loss in having others define her as a mother rather than as a person in her own right. Yet, while continuing to present herself as Tsala, she had come to accept others' characterisation of her as 'Anele's mother'. The participants' accounts suggest a lack of control over the way their identity was circumscribed by others. Although the 'Mma' prefix and new name conferred respect, the definitional nature of such a change was experienced as limiting by some women, who might have preferred recognition beyond their role as mothers.

Pressure to bear children

Some of my participants reported feeling under pressure to have children as a result of the emphasis placed on women fulfilling their prescribed social role through motherhood. Neo explained that although many women were encouraged to get an education and to pursue a career, they were expected to prioritise motherhood: 'People are like, "When are you gonna have a child?" [...] because the priority is your biological clock, and you need to have a child'. The statistics suggest that girls and women are encouraged to go to school and even university, given that 'Botswana is one of the few countries where more females are educated than males' (World Bank 2010:

17); literacy is higher for women than for men, and more women enrol in university (World Bank 2010: 17). Yet ultimately, as Neo pointed out, women are expected to bear children regardless of their educational or career priorities. Sedireng agreed that for many, the view was ‘if you’re a woman, you have kids.’ Conversely, Basadi felt ‘no real pressure from anyone’ to become a mother, but she was unique among the participants in this respect.

Shera had spent time studying in Europe prior to our interview.²⁶ Reflecting upon the pressures she was experiencing upon her return to Botswana, she exclaimed, ‘Even the last two weeks, the number of people who have asked me, “When are you having children?” [...] In the last two weeks more people have asked than in the last year in Europe’. Shera’s story demonstrates the significance of local culture in constructing the view of women as mothers; she noticed a marked difference in attitudes between her birth country and her country of residence. Shera concluded, ‘I don’t think women feel like they can self-determine’ having children, a view supported by Lesedi’s story: ‘I had my first-born when I was 30, and honestly speaking I’ll say it was the pressure of the society, the societal pressure, you see. Being this age without having a kid, I had no choice but to [have a child]’. The social pressure to bear children was powerful enough to compel Lesedi to conceive. She explained that once she became a mother people would say to her that despite being unmarried, ‘At least you have a kid’, implying that now she had completed one of the two fundamental requirements for women she could ‘relax’ somewhat.

Kesegofetse explained that if a woman does not ‘follow the defined channel’, aiming at marriage and children, ‘Society starts judging you, and sees you as a lesser woman than what you are’. Kesegofetse’s statement demonstrates that not bearing children was detrimental to a woman’s community standing. A woman must find ways to become pregnant within limiting cultural restrictions (Upton and Myers Dolan 2011: 99), otherwise she might face a different kind of judgement. Told that motherhood is not optional if they wish to be respected as adults, women must reproduce while living within socially approved boundaries that potentially limit their options for conception. For example, they must not live alone, have sex with multiple partners, and in some families, must not have sex before or outside of marriage (Upton and Myers Dolan 2011: 99).

²⁶ I have omitted details of the country Shera visited to protect her anonymity.

Given that womanhood was viewed as a status achieved primarily through marriage or bearing children, not wanting or not being able to have children was problematic. Emelda reported that she struggled to understand women who did not want children, attributing such a view to ‘those ones who are lesbians’. For her, not wanting children did not fit within the heteronormative family structure that she was familiar with. She claimed, ‘It’s rare, it’s very rare [...] for a woman to say, “I don’t want a child”’. All but one of my participants either had children or said that they wanted to become mothers eventually. Sedireng however, explained that she had ‘never really had that sort of maternal thing where you want to like, have kids’. She reported that she was comfortable with her choice, but that others were not: “A lot of people ask me [...] those things don’t weigh down on me at all, but other people are like, “Oh no””. While she did not feel personally affected by the external pressure she was subjected to, she recognised the difficulties such a burden might cause for other women: ‘It would be nice if women could, you know, have more of a say in regards to just not wanting kids at all, because you know, Botswana is still the place where if you’re a woman you should have children’. Thus, not to want to bear children was to threaten the fundamental ideology upon which gendered social relations have been constructed — that women are biological reproducers. As Sedireng’s story illustrates, such a challenge can create tension between a woman and her community. The social difficulties faced by women who do not want to be mothers are not unique to Botswana; it is often problematic to be childless by choice in the face of a globally pervasive pronatalist culture (Park 2002).

For those who cannot have children for biological reasons, or who are perceived by others to be infertile, the social consequences can be even more challenging (Upton and Myers Dolan 2011: 99-100; Mogobe 2005: 29-30; Upton 2001: 349-355; Schapera 1938:155-156). Upton and Myers Dolan (2011: 97) found that women’s concerns about possible infertility did not necessarily stem from not being able to bear children, but from fear of the accompanying stigma. Their study showed that infertile people were considered: ‘Dried up, as useless, sterile and even as having transgressed some boundaries of normal Tswana behaviour, as mentally and physically ill and disabled’ (2011: 97). Taemane reported that she had always wanted to have children and did not know why this had not happened for her. In addition to her disappointment at not having experienced motherhood, she was subjected to local gossip and questions about her fertility: ‘They talk about it, they ask her [...] why she doesn’t have children [...] assuming she can’t conceive or something’. Keatletse explained that before she had

had her son, her community thought she ‘couldn’t have kids [...] a big taboo’. She was ridiculed: ‘They, you turn out to be a laughing stock [...] yeah so it was, it’s not a good space.’ Keatletse’s humiliation in the community follows Schapera’s (1938: 155) findings on infertility, ‘If a woman fails in this important duty her lot is hard. She receives little sympathy as a rule; her husband neglects or ill-treats her; she is scorned by other men and ridiculed by her own sex’. Indeed, Keatletse recalled problems forming relationships with men, who, ‘Don’t get attracted to you. Come to him and say I don’t have a child, they think you can’t [conceive]. So they run away.’ That my participants reported experiencing the same consequences of perceived infertility as the women Schapera wrote of almost 80 years ago demonstrates the persistence of this harmful view.

In addition to suffering rejection and embarrassment, Keatletse reported that her femininity was undermined: ‘They believe that you are not a woman if you don’t have a child, you know’. Upton (2001: 349, 354) holds that in Botswana, ‘Individuals who are perceived as infertile run the risk of becoming culturally invisible and challenge the very concept of personhood and social identity’, for, ‘In a country where childbearing has long been a central aspect of gender identity, the perception that one is infertile can be devastating for social status’. Similarly in Nigeria, while ‘nominal womanhood’ may be realized through age or marriage, childbearing brings full adult status and ‘represents normative fulfilment of what is considered to be female destiny’ (Hollos et al. 2009: 2068). In Butler’s (1988: 520) conceptualisation of gender performance as an ‘accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo’, ‘those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished’ (522). Framed in this way, it follows that women who cannot have children are socially penalised in a culture where womanhood is largely defined by a person’s ability to give birth.

Conventionally the perceived reasons for female infertility were damaging to a woman’s standing in community. Klaitz (1997: 328) reports, ‘Bodily suffering is seen as an aspect of diseased social relations’. Schapera (1938: 155) found that infertility might be ascribed to: ‘Sorcery, to some deficiency in the woman’s “blood”, to some abnormality of her womb, to some former abortion, and, above all, to the fact that before marriage she had led a very promiscuous life’. More recently, Upton and Myers Dolan (2011: 97) reported similar findings. In addition to the perceived causes presented by Schapera, beliefs still held, they added: the use of modern contraception; jealousy; drugs and alcohol; breaking sexual taboos; God’s will; and women having sex before marriage. With the supposed grounds for infertility centring primarily on social

and sexual taboos, it follows that a woman who cannot conceive, 'Risk[s] characterisation as an individual who is not seen as a Motswana, who is invisible in social life' (Upton 2001: 354).

Speaking of a childless friend who was 'bereft without a kid', Emelda told me: 'When you are 40 without a child, right now, people are trying to, they treat you in a bad way. They say, "Oh, maybe she was doing many abortions, that's why she doesn't have a child." They won't even look at other reasons why you don't have a child. It's just unnatural'. In Emelda's story, a childless woman was charged with having had multiple abortions. Abortions are restricted by law in Botswana and are highly taboo, with women who terminate their pregnancies being condemned as murderous and godless (Smith 2013: 172-173; Mogwe 1992: 43). Emelda points to childless women being considered 'unnatural', which supports the above-cited research on the superstition surrounding infertility. As such, a woman like Emelda's friend who was struggling to conceive might face a double burden: the grief of unwanted childlessness coupled with harsh social judgement. Mogobe (2005: 29) contends that seemingly infertile women suffer reprimand and abuse from in-laws, and are encouraged to allow their husbands access to another woman, perhaps a family member, so that children can be brought into the home. While this brings emotional distress, some women might consider it preferable to desertion by her husband or partner.

It is traditionally considered that men cannot be infertile (Upton and Myers Dolan 2011: 360). Keatletse explained, 'This thing of checking at the clinic if it's because of the man, you know, they don't believe in that. Yeah so most of the time they just rush into pointing the finger at the woman'. Likewise in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and other patriarchal societies, women are usually blamed for a couple's inability to conceive and are often ostracised and humiliated (Hollos et al. 2009: 2062; Folkvord, Odegaard and Sundby 2005: 239; Lori 2002: 200-204; Ties and Zaida 2001: 214-215). Keatletse reported that it would be difficult for a woman to suggest that her male partner might be infertile: 'Most of the time you can't say that [...] it's more like you are being disrespectful [...] it doesn't sit well. Somehow it can be taken as, that they are not men'. This suggests that just as female infertility undermines a woman's femininity, male infertility presents a challenge to masculinity. Yet, the consequences of such a view are gendered; women are expected to take responsibility for problems conceiving while men escape blame, regardless of which partner might be sterile. Given that childless women suffer social condemnation, they are placed in a particularly unjust position if their male partner is infertile. Reneilwe conceded that 'they will always

blame women', that women are defined by being 'able to bear kids'. Thus, being perceived as infertile means that a woman is denied a gendered identity (Mogobe 2005: 33). Upton (2001: 359) discovered that some women demonstrate creative agency in remedying the problem of male infertility within their relationship, constructing a narrative around their actions that works to make their 'solution' culturally acceptable. She gives the example of a married woman who seemingly had sex with another man in order to become pregnant once she realised her husband was infertile. As her husband had been away around the time of conception, she explained that she had in fact been pregnant for 14 months, but that the foetus had been sleeping because it was not ready to leave the womb. This story allowed her to avoid being perceived as infertile while protecting her from accusations of censured sexual behaviour.

The emphasis on fertility as fundamental to a woman's recognition in the community has meant that while childbearing before marriage once brought social penalties for both parties (Schapera 1938: 171), by the 1980s it had become somewhat acceptable (Suggs 1987: 115; Izzard 1985). Lesedi described people's reluctant acceptance of her single motherhood. She reported, 'Some people will have an eye on you, you see, "She have kids without being married"', but anyway, it's just the normal thing [...] somebody of my age is expected to be married and having all the kids at their own house, but I don't have that, but it is normal, it is common among most of us Batswana [to be single mothers]'. Lesedi's story implies that while a single mother might face a level of social judgement, her position was so common that people ultimately became accustomed to it.²⁷ Neo said, 'The acceptance of single mothers is much better now' because 'once you get past 30 there's an unspoken rule where it would be okay just to have a child out of wedlock'. Thus, while it would be ideal to have children within marriage, bearing a child under any circumstances was preferable to having no children at all.

While the perception of marriage as the most appropriate site for childbearing remains, the reality is that 'marriage and childbearing have become increasingly separate domains of life', in fact, 'One need not be married to have a child. On the other hand, one may need to have a child *in order to get married*' (Suggs 1987: 354). A man's kin often prefer his future wife to have had at least one child prior to marriage, either by him or another man, thereby demonstrating her fertility before they commit to taking her into the family (Upton 2001: 354, Suggs 1987: 115). Reneilwe's comment

²⁷ I shall discuss the implications of single motherhood for women in the next chapter.

supported this concept. She explained that a man's family might put him under pressure to end a relationship with a childless woman: 'They will say, "Ah my son, can't you look for someone who can [have children], I want grandchildren"'. The preference for brides who have proven their fertility is common in sub-Saharan Africa (Mokomane 2005: 21)

Conclusion

The participants presented marriage and/or childbearing as routes to achieving recognition as an adult in the community through the relational identities of wife and mother. Thus, status and maturity for women were closely tied to their relationships with men and to cultural values informed by patriarchy, notions that some women continued to support despite the negative consequences. The requirement to become a married mother in order to gain access to community benefits related to adult status are problematic for women, for it limits them to a set of relational identities and restricts their ability to self-define as individuals. It also means that if they are unwilling or unable to enter into marriage or motherhood, they suffer from a range of consequences ranging from familial pestering to humiliation and outright social exclusion. In accordance with Denbow and Thebe's (2006: 165-166) findings, often the rural participants tended to embody conservative attitudes, while the urban women held more liberal views about society and their place in it. However, this distinction was not always straightforward. A number of the interviewees reported feeling conflicted within themselves regarding their values and principles. Others struggled against persistent expectations of them to behave in accordance with restrictive cultural attitudes towards women, which were at odds with their own autonomous lifestyles. The traditional view of women as subservient and dependent wives and mothers lags behind the actual realities of day-to-day life, in which women have good access to education, opportunities for formal employment and political participation, and a broad spectrum of legal rights. Such a view also undermines the substantial responsibility that womanhood brings, and the creative and independent approach women take to managing their multiple obligations. The burdens placed on women and the effects on their wellbeing are considered in the next chapter.

Chapter four: The costs of womanhood

'I keep on feeling like they take advantage. And I'm at a stage where I really, really wish I was somewhere else.' (Keatlareitse)

For many of the women I interviewed, achieving womanhood status required them to bear at least one child, and ideally to be married. The participants explained that creating a heteronormative nuclear family of their own was viewed as a marker of maturity and femininity, affording them status in their communities. However, whether or not a woman was deemed to be a respectable adult, the burdens of her gender were multiple. In addition to the obligation to marry and have children, women were expected to look a certain way; demonstrate particular personal characteristics; take part in formal or informal waged labour; get an education; work as homemakers; raise their children; fulfil their male partners' sexual demands and other needs; and act as service providers for relatives and the wider community. A woman's character and her fulfilment of certain duties were considered crucial for her continued acceptance. Women were expected to complete their tasks with humility and compassion while managing culturally mandated male dominance.

Domestic burdens

My interviews suggested that the successful performance of womanhood in Botswana relied on women's culturally ascribed role as homemakers. The participants reported that women were primarily expected to create and maintain a home, a duty that included childbearing, child-rearing, household labour, financial management, and tending to the practical needs of husbands, boyfriends, uncles, brothers, and grandparents, and the sexual and emotional needs of husbands or intimate partners. Schapera (1938: 151) discovered: '[A man] is the official head of the household, while she is regarded as his *motlhanka* (servant)'. Thus, 'She must be in all respects subservient to his will'. Schapera's 1938 account seemed to hold true for my participants in 2014, who described their household duties as an endless cycle of unassisted, unpaid labour.

The topic of household labour was raised by almost all of the participants, suggesting that domestic work was a prominent feature of their lives, required 'every day, all day' (Sefela). The nature of such work varied slightly between the urban and rural participants. Women from both urban and rural areas reported the duties of

‘cleaning, washing, cooking’ (One), ‘sweeping outside and inside’ (Elizabeth), ‘ironing’ (Tumelo), and ‘laundry’ (Mabedi), feeding and ‘bathing the kids’ (Thato), preparing them for school, helping with ‘the homework’ (Tsala) and putting them to bed. For rural women, who had access to fewer facilities, additional jobs included ‘making a fire with firewood’ for warmth, cooking, and heating water (Sefela), and ‘get[ting] the water’ for drinking, cooking, cleaning and washing clothes (Laone). Women living in traditional mud-built homes were also responsible for resurfacing floors and fortifying walls and roofs as required.

Tumelo expressed a sense of women’s chores as a litany:

Researcher: What is expected of a Motswana woman today?

Tumelo: [...] The duties are things like to sweep, to clean, to cook, to bath babies, take them to school, find school for them, pay the school fees, make sure the bills are paid, make sure there is food in the house, the man will just be giving you money, you go buy the food [...] man the house, that’s all.

That Tumelo used the expression ‘man the house’ to denote housework and childcare was interesting; in the context of a patriarchal culture the phrase suggested a leadership role for women in the home sphere. Yet, the compulsory nature of her domestic obligations undermined any real power she might find in the role. Although in the above scenario the man was the breadwinner, it was the woman who managed the household and spent the money as required for the family’s needs. However, the finances ultimately remained in the man’s control, with him meting out funds as and when he agreed they were needed. Thus, while women might achieve a level of influence within the household, their lack of autonomy and basic economic dependence on men rendered their authority superficial. However, Tumelo was unusual in that she was one of only six participants who were married or engaged. Thus, her monetary arrangements with her fiancé, although described by some participants as typical of married couples, were in fact not the norm in my sample.

Despite the number of participants who were married being the minority, and the overall decline in marriage rates in the country, several women described their domestic burdens as part of a wifely role. They portrayed the completion of domestic tasks as a crucial part of keeping an existing or potential husband or boyfriend contented. The participants’ construction of domestic labour as wifely, whether they were married or

not, suggests that the notion of marriage, or rather, the anticipation of becoming a wife, was at the forefront of much thought and behaviour. While marriage was relatively scarce within my sample and in society at large, its social significance did not appear to have waned alongside the marriage rates.

For the interviewees, being a 'good wife' meant ensuring that a husband always found his home clean and his meals prepared. Tebby commented on the advice that married women gave to unmarried woman in a traditional pre-wedding gathering:

Tebby: You're basically told how to be a good wife. Yeah. And what to do to make him happy.

Researcher: What kinds of things are you supposed to do to make him happy?

Tebby: Well, you know, cooking and cleaning. As soon as he comes in the door you should have his food ready.

Tebby, a young urban woman with a BA degree and a demanding full-time administration job, anticipated receiving similar counsel herself once she became engaged. Older women expected her to take on a servile role upon marriage regardless of her pre-marital independence, demonstrating the perceived transformative power of the institution. Reneilwe, a young rural woman with formal employment in the capital, spoke of similar advice she thought she would receive: 'You get married, they tell you, "Men should be prepared food"'. The participants' accounts reflect Schapera's (1940) findings. He revealed that women on the cusp of marriage were told to 'pay formal deference' to their new husbands, 'Speaking to him respectfully, waiting on him, serving him first with food'. Women were encouraged to practise their marital duties in advance of any union through the domestic service of their male relatives and older female relatives (Schapera 1940: 95). My participants, too, reported having to serve members of the community. It appears that the nature of the pre-wedding advice customarily offered to women had changed little since Schapera's time, indicating the persistence of patriarchal notions of marriage.

While the participants near-universally reported that they were expected to be successful homemakers, whether or not they were married, their views on the role varied. A small number of the women I interviewed accepted their domestic responsibilities. Taemane expressed delight at the thought of taking care of a future husband, explaining she 'would give her love, respect him, and do everything that needs

to be done as the woman for her husband. Clothe him, feed him, cook for him’.

Taemane was desperate to get married, and idealised the position of subservient wife.

Reneilwe, despite being almost two decades younger, shared Taemane’s view. When I asked Reneilwe if she would prefer her future husband to help with the housework, she struggled to answer at first, and appeared to find the concept incredible:

Researcher: Do any of those traditional expectations still apply to you today? Do you feel the pressure of those expectations?

Reneilwe: [...] What is it going to look like? [...] it’s going to kill the family. That man won’t have trust in the woman. Won’t have faith in the family. He’s always complaining: ‘Ah, this woman, she doesn’t know what is right for women, she doesn’t know how to take care of me as her husband’ [...] Obviously, if it’s a man with a heart, if it’s a woman with heart, it won’t be fine.

Reneilwe connected the sharing of household labour with the destruction of the family, and implied that a man or woman who did not subscribe to traditional labour divisions was heartless. She connected gender-exclusive positions in the home with the human centre of the family unit, an extreme view in comparison with other participants.

Reneilwe and Taemane were in the minority within my sample. Most of the participants who discussed the gendered division of labour in the home resented the expectation that women do all of the work. Solway (2016: 314-315) also found that many women ‘now chafe at the idea of joining their husband’s family as subordinates’.

Thato lamented that as a woman, ‘You have to do everything [...] the husband just sits there and expects you to do everything [...] it should change, it should be 50/50 because we are all human beings’. Like Thato, the majority of the participants who discussed household labour reported that men do not, or should not, assist with domestic work or childcare. I asked Thato if she would prefer her husband to do more in the house. She explained that while she would appreciate his assistance, ‘According to my culture I wouldn’t allow that. Like yeah, he can help washing dishes when I’m not feeling well, or bath the child when I’m not feeling well, but when I’m okay I do things myself.’ For Thato, help from her husband was a last resort, only to be accepted in the case of her physical incapacity for household labour and childcare. She justified her decision not to insist on her husband sharing the work by referencing her culture, suggesting she prioritised others’ perceptions over her own contentment; the status quo

held her in a position of subservience. Tumelo expressed her frustration with her fiancé, who refused to help at home on the grounds that domestic labour was women's work: 'What I want is I want to see a situation whereby my husband will understand that I'm also a human being [...] If I cleaned the house, he should at least do the laundry. If I iron, he should at least cook'. Her husband disagreed, asserting that the gendered division of labour was 'how things are supposed to be done'. Both Tumelo and Thato expressed frustration that by refusing to contribute to household labour their partners were not treating them as 'human being[s]', indicating that their disproportionate domestic obligations caused them to feel degraded, not fully human.

Datta's (2011) focus group and interview-based research into fatherhood in urban Botswana highlighted men's perspectives on labour in the home. The men she spoke to rejected housework, preferring to 'just go out and get drunk' instead (Datta 2011: 131). Those who would consider assisting with domestic tasks were limited by pressure from family members, particularly from older generations (Datta 2011: 131). Comparably, my interviews indicated that a man who helped with the chores would be subject to community judgement of his masculinity. Lenah said that people would question: 'Who is that man? What kind of a husband is he?' A man assisting with housework was seen to be undermining his dominant status in the home. Lesedi's account supported this view:

Researcher: Are there any changes that you would still like to see happening for women?

Lesedi: [...] A woman is expected to go to the kitchen to do the household chores [...] And there is this belief that if a man is seen doing the household chores it's like, they could even say, they will say it in Setswana, 'You are not man enough, why are you doing all those things? Why can you do such a thing? Where is the woman? You are not a real man.'

While the cultural construction of womanhood dictated a woman's position as homemaker, it also explicitly excluded men from this role. Lesedi indicated that there were derogatory Setswana proverbs for men who contribute to household labour. Since Setswana proverbs tend to have long histories, the existence of such phrases illustrated the time-honoured and thus pervasive nature of gendered roles. Kesegofetse explained, 'As a woman you cook, you do household chores. Like when I grew up it was me and

my elder brother [...] so it was me doing the household chores. [They] were saying my brother is a boy, he doesn't belong in a kitchen [...] So boys grow up knowing that a woman's place is in the kitchen and their place is outside'. Kesegofetse's story illustrates the socialisation of children into rigid gender roles; she was told as a child that it would always be her, and not her brother, cooking and cleaning. Likewise, Emelda explained that her son could not help with the washing 'because he is a boy [...] he cannot do it properly so I do it for him'. She pointed out that because he did not know how to wash clothes by hand he might ruin them. However, she had not contemplated teaching him how to wash clothes correctly. It was not considered an option for a boy to learn these skills, and was perhaps seen as unnecessary, given that boys were expected to have their domestic needs met by future wives. Emelda was thus reproducing and maintaining the gendered structures that oppress women through her treatment of her son.

Kandiyoti (1988: 282-284) offers an analysis of such 'female conservatism'. In the phenomenon she refers to as the 'patriarchal bargain', she explains that some women resist challenges to the patriarchal structure in order to avoid 'the normative order slipping away from them without any empowering alternatives'. According to the traditional gender order women receive various forms of compensation in return for their submission, such as economic security and physical protection (Kandiyoti 1988: 282-284). Since Botswana women gain respect through a combination of marriage, childbearing and age, older married mothers are compensated for a lifetime of patriarchal obedience with social standing and influence. As such, they might view changes in gender relations as threatening to their immediate interests (Kandiyoti 1988: 282-284), and choose to prioritise a known status quo over unknown possibilities.

Mabedi, living at home with her parents and siblings, complained, 'You're expected to clean, to cook, to make, yeah, to cook for everybody in the house. Like my brother can wake up and make his own breakfast and it's fine, but if I wake up and do the same my mother is like, "What? We haven't eaten", I'm like, "But he did it first" [...] So I'm expected to cook, I'm also expected to clean, do laundry'. Mabedi had her own young child to look after, and was studying for an MA degree. Yet, her mother expected her to serve the family while her brother was free to do as he pleased. Mabedi felt pressure from her mother to fulfil her obligations, but not from her father or brother. Again, as theorised by Kandiyoti (1988: 282-284), the dominant woman in the family colluded to regulate her daughter's behaviour in ways that served a repressive patriarchal system.

Shera expressed her struggle with the gendered division of labour in the home. She explained that she had recently moved in with her partner on a temporary basis, to trial living together before possibly getting married and starting a family. I spoke to her within the first few weeks of this trial period, and she reported the challenges she was facing at the time:

Researcher: What kinds of things do his female relatives say about this whole situation?

Shera: [...] So when I get [to his house] the sister is asking me if I brought any food [...] and I said, 'Well, I think you should call your brother, why are you asking me?' [...] So anyway, in the morning I was up [...] she's busy with a mop. She's cleaning the house [...] she's telling me, 'Oh, you know, [he] really didn't have any food yesterday', and I said, 'Your brother is an adult, who works' [...] she's like, 'No, you need to take care of him, and he's even getting thin.'

Shera's story demonstrates the view of women as men's caregivers, a concept she did not agree with. Yet, in resisting this role she was challenged by her potential future sister-in-law, who blamed Shera for the lack of food in her brother's house. Shera considered that she and her partner would have been capable of dividing housework evenly between them, had they been left to make their own arrangements. Nonetheless, her efforts to readdress their gendered roles were continually undermined by his teenaged younger sister, who lived with him and acted as his servant, expecting Shera to do the same. Previous examples of women colluding with the patriarchy featured older women, who perhaps had more to lose from changing gender relations, having accrued certain benefits from a lifetime of obedience (Kandiyoti 1988: 282-284). However, in this case a teenaged girl sought to pressure Shera into subservience to her older brother, suggesting younger women may also perceive some benefit to maintaining the status quo, perhaps in the form of financial or physical protection.

Those participants in relationships with men who expressed resentment toward the unbalanced division of household labour nonetheless accepted it as inevitable, and did not report that they had sought to challenge their role at any stage. Shera was the exception in this; she resisted pressure from her partner, his sister and his friends. In another example, Shera had returned from studying in Europe, and her partner's male

friend had invited himself to lunch to welcome her home, which he expected Shera to cook:

Researcher: This is one of my questions, when does a girl become a woman?

Shera: Yeah, I don't know, when does a girl become a woman? When you get married. And apparently we are not ready for that journey, that's all I can tell you. [...] I said wait a minute, this man is gonna welcome *me* back by *my* cooking lunch for *him*. [...] And then my boyfriend says to me: 'Well, I told them that um, my woman is not um, your ordinary type of woman, so you may come here and starve'. [...] Later, we had a discussion and he said he was managing expectations, but he was also managing the fallout, the judgement, of my being a woman. Or if I'm a suitable woman, you know. [...] And he said: 'Oh but, you should want to cook'. I said, 'No no no, I should *not* want to cook, and I *don't* want to cook. And what should *you* want to do?' And he said: 'Well I shouldn't want to *cook*' and I said, 'Well, ok, well in that case then I guess we are gonna have a problem'.

Shera recognised that her performance as a homemaker was associated with her suitability as a woman and as a wife, and resented the expectation that she would change who she was to win approval. In the situation described, her partner appeared conflicted. He acknowledged to his friends that Shera was not an 'ordinary' subservient woman, but seemed embarrassed by the fact and felt the need to manage their perception of her womanhood, suggesting that social pressure plays a role in maintaining restrictive gender arrangements. Supporting this analysis, his reference to Shera as 'my woman' indicated a need to demonstrate possessive masculine dominance in the public sphere, a trait he reportedly did not express in private.

While Shera's partner did not assert that she must cook regardless of whether or not she wanted to, he was frustrated that she did not want to cook in the first place. When his assumption that women 'should want to cook' was challenged with a query about what men 'should want' to contribute to domestic labour, he faltered, seeming unable to imagine household tasks that he would take responsibility for. Despite her long-term intellectual and emotional connection with her partner, Shera acknowledged that their disparate views of gender roles in the home might undermine the success of their relationship as it progressed, and was not willing to commit further until such

issues had been resolved. Shera was the only participant to place such emphasis on her need to be respected as an equal partner in a relationship. The majority of the participants who experienced gendered division of labour at home were disinclined to challenge it, illustrating the continued strength of women's roles in the domestic sphere and the compromises women were willing to make for the sake of having a relationship.

Three of the participants offered similar reasoning for the expectation that women complete a litany of chores in the home while men rested. Tsala explained that historically, women and men had mutually beneficial roles to play. However, the domestic work undertaken by men had become obsolete and had not been replaced with alternatives, nor had it become acceptable for them to assume 'women's work':

Researcher: What sorts of changes would you like to see for women?

Tsala: I would like to see men getting more involved in the household chores. Because nowadays, really, there is no job for men. Men used to cut wood at home, make fire, fix this and that, build houses, but nowadays we employ people to do all those things, and cook using stoves, there is no cutting firewood and everything. So men literally don't have anything to do at home. All they do is just watch news, watch soccer, and read newspapers.

As Connell and Pearse (2015: 87) note, the transformation of gender relations in the sphere of production stemming from industrialisation in developing countries 'does not mean that women do less work than men'. Rather, women have taken on paid work in addition to their disproportionate domestic duties. Tebby remarked that it was reasonable for women to do 'women's work' in the home while they were not in paid employment, but as they moved into the formal sector their traditional roles remained alongside the need to work outside of the home: 'Women do the cooking, the cleaning, they take care of the kids. Which is how it was when men were working. But now women also work. But they are still doing the cooking, cleaning, taking care of the kids and running the household, but men are still just only working.'

Emelda agreed, reporting that problems began when women undertook formal employment, whereas in the past, 'The husband was supposed to be the one who is taking care of the woman' so that she could focus solely on the household. Thus, while some of the domestic jobs traditionally reserved for the men in the family had become redundant, 'women's work' remained. As such, women have retained their traditional

obligations while taking on additional labour in the form of paid employment. Men's historic domestic duties were no longer required; therefore they continued to benefit from women's unpaid labour while not contributing to household work as they might have done in the past.

Just three of the interviewees reported that their husbands participated in household labour. Pono explained that she received help from her husband, but 'only when he is not tired'. Thus, it appeared that housework might be an option for men, although only on their own terms. Tsala remarked that her husband didn't help her in the house because 'he likes to sleep', and complained that when she was at home she was responsible for everything. Low energy levels were thus perceived as a valid — albeit resented — reason for men to avoid assisting with domestic tasks. The same excuse was not considered valid for women, demonstrating inequality in the significance afforded the physical wellbeing of men versus that of women.

Lenah reported that her husband helped with the cooking and childcare when there was nobody to witness it, but reverted to a workless role in sight of others. Her account indicated that individual men might agree to help with housework and childcare, but the perceptions of society at large could undermine a couple's attempts at equitable labour division. Connell (2005: 79) contends, 'Masculinities constructed in ways that realise the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit' in maintaining repressive social structures. In Tsala's case, her husband benefitted from a companionable relationship, avoiding the strain of resentment that might stem from unbalanced division of labour. In outwardly supporting customs that maintained masculine dominance, he also continued to benefit from the patriarchal dividend.

Tshiamo stated: 'I have a partner here, he is not like other partners. He's a person who is willing to help me doing household chores. Sometimes I just stay in the house and rest without doing anything. But in other households you are expected to do everything by yourself. You do the washing, you are alone. But he is able to help me do the washing'. Tshiamo was proud that her partner assisted her in their home. Yet, her mother undermined his masculinity by saying he was 'a woman' for doing so. Thus, it seemed that men might be subject to ridicule should they choose to take on a fair proportion of household labour. In Silberschmidt's (2001: 662) study of the disempowerment of men in East Africa, a small proportion of men in the sample assisted their wives with household tasks, and were excluded and ridiculed by other men as a result. My own participants reported that other women, not men, deride men

who take on 'female' tasks. The suggestion that women humiliate men for challenging traditional gender roles implies collusion with the patriarchal tradition, and raises questions about the attitudes of men themselves, such as whether individual men would choose to divide labour along non-gendered lines if they were not subject to social pressure to uphold oppressive customs.

The participants demonstrated that as part of women's role as homemakers they were responsible for childcare, whether or not the father of the child(ren) was still in their lives. As Thato explained, 'The wife should be responsible for the kids [...] I know they are both 50/50 per cent responsible [for the conception], but a woman, she takes care of her own kids, and society expects a woman to be responsible'. It appeared that society did not expect men to be responsible, although it is not clear whether this was because they failed to act responsibly, or were considered exempt. Emelda shared her perception of male parenting: 'It's different because men are not like us, they don't think like us, most of them don't care about their families. We, we cannot eat while your kid is not eating. A man can just eat'. For Emelda, men's retreat from the role of parent stemmed from a lack of caring. Given that women were obligated to take on childcare while men were not, women frequently parented singlehandedly; Naledi remarked upon the difficulties of being 'a mother and father at the same time'. However, while Tsala's husband did not look after his children when she was around, he did take full responsibility for childcare when her career as an interpreter took her away from home: 'When I had to leave my child, my daughter when she was six months, to go to France for a month's course, he stayed with the child. And then when the child was four years old, I had to leave her for one year, to go and study in Reunion Island. He stayed with the kids'. It is common and considered healthy for babies and children to stay with female relatives for long periods (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 37-40). Thus, that the husband chose to remain with his children implies that some families view paternal childcare as a possibility, albeit only when the mother is unavailable.

The interviews demonstrated that being a good homemaker was essential in being deemed successful as a woman, and she was expected to perform domestic duties whether or not she was married. However, a wife had the additional obligation of being sexually available to her husband. By custom, 'She must always be ready to gratify his sexual desires' (Schapera 1940: 94). Since the presentation of *lobola* formerly transferred a woman's reproductive function from her biological family to her husband's family, many men contended, 'These women can't stop us', for, 'We have given *bogadi* for them, and so we are entitled to make use of their bodies' (Schapera

1940: 63). The perception of married women's bodies as sexual objects has persevered despite significant advancements in women's empowerment since Schapera published his research. The practice of bride price continues to be interpreted as giving the husband total physical control over his wife (Phorano et al. 2005: 198), and marital rape is not recognised as a crime in either of Botswana's dual legal systems (Ditshwanelo 2003).

The women I interviewed appeared resigned to expectations of them to provide sex on demand. Thato shrugged as she told me, 'The man will be wanting whatever he wants'. In discussing women in the workplace, Maatla justified her belief that women ought not undertake manual labour, 'Because if she has a man at home, he wants to be satisfied, he wants bedroom work to be done, and if you're tired then how else are you going to deliver?'. While 'bedroom work' might merely be a local euphemism for sexual activity, it is telling that Maatla used the term 'work' to express sex from a woman's perspective. The construction of sex as work undermines women's own sexuality and enjoyment of sex.

None of the participants indicated that a woman might enjoy sex. Rather, those who did mention it emphasized sex as one chore in a list of many. There were further indications of such a viewpoint in other areas of the interviews, particularly in discussions of appropriate attire and the shame of the female body, discussed below. Tebby described the advice she had heard married women offering to women who are about to become wives: 'You know, as soon as he um, whatever he wants to do you should do, when he wants to make love you should make love.' Again, this follows from Schapera's historic finding that upon marriage, female relatives would advise the new wife 'to submit to her husband's attentions whenever he wants her', for 'it is her duty to afford him carnal satisfaction' (Schapera 1940: 162), suggesting that little has changed in this respect. Should a husband insist on regular sex without contraception, the wife is vulnerable to numerous unwanted pregnancies.

Formal employment

Despite the pervasive cultural construction of women as wives and mothers, every one of the participants either worked outside of the home or reported that they wanted to, suggesting combining the roles of homemaker and worker was necessary and/or desirable. For a number of the rural participants the value placed on formal employment stemmed primarily from financial concerns: 'Here women are working [...] we work because we know that life is expensive'. Naledi considered the very fact that women

were working noteworthy, suggesting the notion that women do not belong in the workplace remained on some level. She explained that women work only because they need money, implying that women would not choose to work if they were otherwise supported financially. Likewise, Elizabeth explained, 'Being a working mother is good because [...] if you are not working you suffer, you don't know where to find the money.' Perhaps the emphasis on work for money was a result of need taking precedence over secondary considerations, such as career interest, personal satisfaction, or gaining the respect of others.

Rural women in Botswana suffer disproportionately from poverty (Akinsola and Popovich 2002: 762), and this was reflected in my sample; of the seven who were unemployed, five were rural women, and all five women of my sample who worked low-income jobs in the service industry were from rural areas. Of those ten women, only one was married and thus potentially had access to her husband's income. None of them were financially stable through alternative means, such as family wealth. Single mother Khana's story supports the view that economic need was the primary factor in rural women seeking work. She described the extent of her search for business across Africa to raise money for her daughter's school fees, and the emotional strain it caused her:

Researcher: What sorts of changes have happened for women in your lifetime?

Khana: In Botswana I don't know whether to explain even having a child, in Botswana we are struggling as ladies. [...] That's the struggle I had most, the bad times that I had. Because imagine when you leave a child of 11 years old. You go as far as Zambia, maybe 1000 km from home. Not knowing what can happen to your child when you're not there. Maybe the house can be burnt and your daughter can be burnt [...] maybe people can get inside the house and rape her.

Despite serious concerns about her young daughter's safety, Khana left her at home alone while she travelled for work so that she could fund her education. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, free education is available in Botswana. However, aware of the poor quality of teaching in government schools, many families prefer to send their children to private schools, which meet international standards of education. Several of my participants with children of their own, and those who took care of others' children,

preferred to sacrifice basic requirements in order to pay for private education than to send the children to government schools. Khana's story is indicative of the lengths some women feel required to take to provide quality education for their children. For Khana, paying for her daughter's private education was an investment in her own future. She was aware that as a highly educated woman, her daughter would have a better chance of attaining financial security through work, and thus would be able to offer Khana economic support in her old age.

Traditionally, men were expected to provide for women while women undertook unpaid work in the home. Yet, women's trust in this form of support appeared to be breaking down. Reneilwe, pointed out, '[In] modern days they say women also have to work. Of which, long ago, women were not allowed to work. They trusted the men. Of which, as youngsters we don't trust. I won't say: "Ah, okay, I have this boyfriend, I trust that he will take care of me". I don't trust he'll continue taking care of me'. Reneilwe expressed conservative views throughout her interview, and reported that she thought a woman's place was in the home, serving her husband and children. Yet, she did not feel secure in the financial support of her partner, and had chosen to find formal employment to protect herself from economic hardship. Kandiyoti (1988: 277) reveals that in sub-Saharan Africa women often find themselves lacking financial assistance from their husbands; as such, they 'have very little to gain and a lot to lose by becoming totally dependent' on them. While Reneilwe found the position of submissive wife appealing, she did not want to rely solely on her husband to meet her material needs, and resented the idea of 'always asking for five *Pula*, toiletries'.²⁸ Thus, while Reneilwe was comfortable with the idea of living to serve a husband, she resisted total dependence.

Thato linked formal employment with personal freedom more explicitly than Reneilwe, claiming, 'working gives [a woman] freedom to do whatever she wants [...] she doesn't have to depend on her husband or on the boyfriend [...] when she wants to buy something she goes out and buys'. Although Thato was married, she preferred to have a separate income that she was free to spend as she wished. Thato expressed the belief that women should have 'much more freedom', that men and women should have equal access to platforms that enable them to express their needs. It seemed that Thato thought financial independence for women, married or not, was the route to equality. For the rural participants mentioned above the need for an individual income was

²⁸ *Pula* is Botswana's currency. Five *Pula* is equivalent to approximately 50 British pence. *Pula* translates as 'rain'.

expressed in terms of financial need. For city-dwelling Thato, economic self-sufficiency was an important element in the wider context of gender equality concerns. This distinction lay along the rural/urban divide, demonstrating that the rural and urban women had divergent priorities. The significant difference in economic opportunity between cities and villages could account for the gap in priorities between the two groups. Economic development in Botswana has been uneven, with more than ‘twice as many’ rural families than urban families living under the poverty line (Hope and Edge 1996: 55), and the general standard of living being considerably higher in cities. In addition, people in rural areas face barriers to accessing education,²⁹ and illiteracy rates are higher than those in urban areas (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 17). Thus, women living in cities are more likely to be financially stable and better educated, which could account for their awareness of the broader political implications of paid female labour as well as their ability to prioritise issues that go beyond economic survival.

Only one of the rural participants articulated a passion for a particular career. When I asked rural magistrate Kesegofetse what she wanted for her life, she exclaimed unhesitatingly, ‘To be a judge!’ This was at odds with the majority of the participants, who framed their answer in terms of interpersonal relationship goals. Kesegofetse was the only rural participant to express an interest in her career beyond financial gain. The urban participants more frequently reported satisfaction in their work than those from rural areas. Neo described her dedication to her work in Botswana’s economic development, and Pono maintained, ‘We want to be up there in the offices, holding high positions’. Akhu, a saxophone performer, had left a steady job as a teacher to begin her own music school, a financial risk that she chose to take because she wanted to pursue a career she was passionate about. Likewise, Basadi, a design researcher, prioritised creative autonomy in her search for a new job. The urban participants expressing interest in the benefits of work beyond the need to earn money perhaps resulted from more progressive attitudes towards women in the urban workplace, and increased opportunities for employment as a result of newly emergent industries in cities and large towns.

Labour division across Botswana is heavily gendered. Women account for 61 per cent of those engaged in informal labour. In the formal sector, women are disproportionately employed in retail, factory work, catering, service, education, and

²⁹ There are few primary schools in remote areas. As such, parents often have to send their children to expensive boarding schools in the cities. This challenge to access is compounded by the need to keep children at home where their labour in the rural subsistence economy is invaluable (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 17-18).

administration (van Klaveren et al. 2009: 14-15). The fact that six of my participants had alternative careers was thus unrepresentative, illustrating the various biases in my sampling.³⁰ Lenah suggested that the gendered division of labour stemmed from the perception of women as caregivers, 'Women are expected to be home taking care of kids [...] most of the teachers here are women. Because of what? Of babysitting [...] Because of that perception of a woman taking care of the kids'. The limiting concept of women as 'natural' mother figures is not unique to Botswana, but pervades women's experience worldwide (Nicolson 1997: 375-376; Richardson 1993: ix-xiii).

Some interviewees provided a physical explanation for the gendered division of labour. These participants argued that women's bodies render them unsuitable for manual labour, that 'women need lighter jobs because they are fragile'. Maatla explained that women tend to become 'nurses, teachers, cleaners [...] jobs that are much lighter to handle than [those] men have'. Five of the participants perceived women as physically weak, thus requiring 'lighter' jobs. Reneilwe pointed to the discomfort of menstruation as a factor in the gendering of work: 'When you are on your cycle, menstrual cycle. You know when, there are some times when you feel like, just moody. And you know that when you bend too much it's going to hurt, it's going to be painful.' The perception of women as physically weak and thus unsuitable for certain positions adds to the difficulty they face in finding permanent paid work. Such a view of women's incapacity is peculiar in the context of Botswana's traditional subsistence economy, in which women conventionally undertook heavy manual work such as ploughing fields: 'Our mothers used to plough and do everything', pounding grain, and carrying water (Schapera, 1938: 152-153).

Two interviewees invoked Christianity to support the view of women as physically incapable of certain types of work: 'Men are the stronger people. Yeah. And women, even the Bible does say that, you know, women are a weaker vessel'. Reneilwe stated that 'God knew what he was building, as far as putting men and women [to work]'. Their comments emphasise the influence of conservative branches of Christianity on Botswana's gender arrangements.

While gender at work was not an area that I covered explicitly in my interviews, most of the participants' accounts offered unprompted examples of sexism in the workplace, manifested in job types, pay gaps, lack of respect, and the predominance of men in senior positions. However, Kesegofetse pointed out, 'Some [women] have even

³⁰ I elaborate on sample bias in Chapter Two of this thesis.

taken senior positions where they are working' and at her own workplace there were more female magistrates than when she joined. Lesedi reported that at the school where she taught there was equality in treatment and pay: 'The male people, I am just at par with them, regardless of me being a woman, we are just the same. We get the same pay for as long as we are having the same job'. Nevertheless, her positive view was tempered by her assertion that women are 'not penetrating as far as the job world is concerned. You will find very few women in high positions.' Neo agreed, 'When you look at, say, the amount of women that are in positions of leadership, CEOs, that's still really a small percentage.' Tumelo described the hierarchy of positions at the land board where she worked: 'The sub land boards, they are all headed by men. And then their deputies are men except for two. And then middle management, let me see, we are nearly equally balanced there'. While women occupied a number of land board jobs, these were reported to be mostly at the lower end of the company scale. Tsala reported a similar structure in private sector jobs, where, 'The higher you go in the work market, you will find that the society will prefer a man over a woman. And also if there is a woman for that post, women are normally paid less than their male counterparts'.

Many interviewees expressed resentment that senior positions were male-dominated, their awareness and frustration indicating discontentment with gendered hierarchy in the formal labour environment. Reneilwe claimed, 'Men rule everything. Wherever you go you will find that man is on the top. Women in an organisation they have to follow that man. That man is the boss [...] maybe 90 per cent of men in Botswana, they are the boss, top leaders in everything.' Sefela agreed, 'Men are always above women, and women come after'. The cultural construction of men as leaders makes it difficult for women to penetrate senior positions: just 11 per cent of chiefs and seven per cent of MPs are women in Botswana (UNDP 2012: 12). Setswana proverbs not only support the superiority of men, but also explicitly undermine women's leadership capabilities. For example, the common phrase 'ga di nke ke etelelwa ke manamagadi pele, di ka wela selomo – banna ke baeteledipele ka tholego' translates to 'a team of oxen is never led by females, otherwise the oxen will fall into a ditch – men are natural leaders' (UNDP 2012: 11). In this popular analogy, women who attempt to lead are portrayed as a liability. That such views are embedded in longstanding proverbs illustrates their significance. Proverbs like this are damaging in two respects; they maintain the notion that women are weak, which results in their exclusion from senior positions, and they damage women's own self-confidence, discouraging them from attempting to penetrate leadership roles (UNDP 2012: 11).

When a woman was able to achieve a senior position within a company, it reportedly presented a challenge to those around her, both at home and in the workplace. Basadi faced problems at work as a result of her successes at work:

Researcher: What do you think a woman needs to know to be successful in this society?

Basadi: You have to be respectful. You have to be, you have to show a lot of humility. [...] ok one of the reasons I don't want to work here. I interned here for a while before studying my master's degree. And one of the big issues in the office was that if you're very serious about your work, if you try to do your work well and on time and you care about the quality, and you, you know you put a lot of effort into it, it's seen as being very competitive [...] And our society, I think Setswana culture for sure, doesn't appreciate that. And so when you're seen to be competitive, especially if you're a woman, that's seen as a negative thing.

In a culture that is expressed through communal social structures (Denbow and Thebe 2006: 161-190; Schapera 1938), it is perhaps to be expected that individual competitiveness would create tension. Yet, such tension undermines women's career advancement to a greater extent than it does men's, since career success is perceived as contradictory to the feminine humility expected from women. Akhu explained that at schools she has worked in, if 'the school head is a woman, or the deputy school head is a woman, usually some male teachers will not really give her the respect she deserves'. Therefore even in education, a sector considered appropriate for women, women in higher positions might face challenges to their authority.

Taemane lamented that women joining the workforce can cause 'fights or conflicts' with their male partners, who 'want to challenge you [because] he thinks you've got a better job'. Tebby agreed that there was 'tension, of she's bringing more money into the situation than he is'. She explained, 'There's still a stigma that you know, a woman, you can work but [...] once you get a man you have to sort of be on par, or just below par, or way below par.' Tebby elaborated that many women felt compelled to leave formal employment on marriage, whether they wanted to or not. It was sometimes deemed inappropriate for a married woman to earn money, particularly if she earned more than her husband, thus undermining his position as breadwinner. Shera explained that a married woman was perceived as less threatening than a single

woman in the workplace, because it was widely accepted that she would not compete for higher positions; married women were a 'stable entity'. Such a view reveals the assumption that women will minimise their career ambitions so as not to undermine their husbands' authority in the home and in society. In a similar vein, Denbow and Thebe (2006: 153) suggest that men prefer to couple with a woman who has less 'education, status, salary, or power' than they, 'thus keeping the relative relations of power within the family intact'.

Pamela reported that she was sexually propositioned in her search for work, much to her irritation and disappointment:

Researcher: You mentioned that another problem facing girls and women is that they are not taken seriously by anybody, why do you think that is?

Pamela: [...] I went for an interview for a job. Accounts assistant. [...] and I'm told, 'Come tomorrow to sign the contract papers and start work'. And then the boss, the big boss, calls me to the office. When I get there, he offers me sex. He's like, 'If you sleep with me I'll bump up your salary' [...] And then I didn't get hired because I didn't sleep with the boss man. He didn't take me seriously. He didn't take my education seriously. I mean I went to school for years for that degree, and he didn't take that into account [...] I didn't like that. I didn't like being objectified like that, and it made me angry.

Pamela's account suggested that it was difficult for a young woman to be taken seriously in the jobs market, regardless of her qualifications and level of education. While girls and women have equal access to education in Botswana, their attempts to break into their chosen career might be thwarted by the construction of women as subservient to men, be it sexually subservient or otherwise. Thus, while most of the women I interviewed wanted or needed to work, whether primarily for economic stability or for personal satisfaction, they faced obstacles in gaining the jobs they desired and in achieving respect in their positions.

Serving kin and the community

The accounts I heard illustrated that in addition to the dual roles of homemaker and breadwinner, women felt obligated to provide aid to extended family members and others in the community. Kinship networks have long been a source of support for

individuals across much of Africa, where the impact of financial, emotional, and practical difficulties can be alleviated through various forms of assistance from members of the extended kin group (Harper and Seekings 2010: 2). In Botswana, such support manifests in numerous ways. For example, urban kin send cash to rural family members in times of need, and rural kin might send food they have produced to urban individuals struggling in the towns, or take them back into the village homestead; communities pull together to assist members with tasks such as thatching roofs, building, and farming; and households who do not have the financial or practical resources to care for their offspring often send one or more children to live with other family members, either permanently or on a temporary basis (Mupedziswa and Ntseane 2013: 88-89). Reciprocity is a fundamental principle of kin support networks (Harper and Seekings 2010). However, for the most part, my participants described this customary support system as a great burden, speaking little about how the benefits it might offer them.

Several interviewees recounted the experience of taking care of other women's children. For some women this meant bringing children to live with them on a permanent basis – often younger siblings, nieces, or nephews. Others made regular financial contributions to cover food, school fees, and transport. Malisa lamented the sacrifices she had to make in order to take care of her younger sister:

Researcher: Can you give me an example of when you've had to compromise?

Malisa: [...] When things were not going well at home I took her in and stayed with her. I paid for her school fees until she finished, then she went to varsity. I had no choice, it was not my responsibility, but I had no choice but to do it. And, you know you, you tend to really put some of your plans on hold, you know, because you have to help somebody else.

Malisa said that going to such lengths to ensure her sister's wellbeing and education was not her responsibility, yet reported that she had no choice, suggesting she experienced social pressure to sacrifice her own needs for others. Her facial expressions and tone emphasized the resentment in her words as she described the things she had had to give up so that she could care for her sister and pay her school fees. Such resentment would seem to belie the culture of 'acknowledging responsibilities toward

one's kin' that functions as a basic organizing principle of many African societies (Harper and Seekings 2010: 27).

Like Malisa, Lenah assisted her brother's family by bringing two of his children to live with her. Her brother and his wife were struggling under the strain of multiple children, and Lenah was concerned that some of those children would end up 'living with, you know how extended our families are, usually an aunt of an aunt', far from their parents, if she did not step in to help. Despite her own limited resources, Lenah assumed full financial and caregiving responsibility for two of her nieces. Lenah could barely afford two additional children and the extra bodies overcrowded an already cramped home, yet, like Malisa, she reportedly felt she had no choice. Thato also commented on the sacrifices she made to support her nephews. Once she had covered her own children's financial needs, her remaining funds went towards 'transporting my sister's kid to school. Then there will be nothing left for me'. In a similarly regretful tone, Naledi spoke of spending all of her time caring for her sister's baby; she described a typical day: 'First I prepare his porridge, and then make sure the milk is ready, then clean the house and wait for him to wake up. Then I will be sitting with him the whole day'.

These participants appeared to struggle with their social obligations to their wider families, experiencing the role of caregiver and provider as a drain on their limited financial and emotional resources, in addition to reducing the time available to them for their own pursuits. The nature of their complaints about their obligations to their kin reflect the findings of Aboderin (2003), researching the decline of material support for older family members in Ghana. Ghana is comparable with Botswana in a number of ways. Like Botswana, traditional Ghanaian society was structured on kinship and rooted in subsistence agriculture. It gained independence from Britain in 1957 and is now a democratic nation state, its people predominantly Christian. The advent of colonial rule, formal education, and the cash economy has all altered aspects of Ghanaian life, and Ghanaians are experiencing widespread unemployment and rising living costs (Aboderin 2003: 128). Aboderin (2003) posits two reasons for the decline of kin support. The first, emerging individualism and the weakening of the traditional family undermining belief in the value and necessity of supporting one's kin. The second, new standards of living and increased materialism have made everyday life more expensive. As such, people no longer feel that they can spare enough for their elders' upkeep (Aboderin 2003). She notes that while both factors play a role, the latter is more significant in the declining support for kin. While Aboderin's study is focused

on material assistance for the elderly, I argue that her findings apply across all generations in the case of my participants. Many of my interviewees' complaints were rooted in the economic hardship or material sacrifices that resulted from supporting their kin, and a minority expressed resentment at the principle of being expected to assist their extended families with material and practical support.

Pamela, as the only girl in the family, found that the duty of caring for her siblings fell to her in the absence of her parents: 'Well, I'm the only girl. And I have, you know, my Mum died. As you know. Four years ago. And then when she died my Dad was in jail. So I had to take care of my brothers.' It is commonly expected that women of the family or community raise children whose parents have died or left (Malinga and Ntshwarang 2011: n.p.). For Pamela, this was a great challenge. Her brothers did not accept her parental authority and treated her poorly. Tshiamo explained that as the first-born female child it was her duty to act 'like a mother' to her siblings, 'Washing nappies [...] cook for them, bath them, do anything that a mother could do for a child'. As she got older these obligations continued; she recounted having to pay school fees for her youngest sibling.

One of Tshiamo's children lived with her paternal grandmother, whom she also supported financially. While Tshiamo did not confirm the reason for her child living with her grandmother, the context suggested that the child was offered as practical support for an ageing woman. Thus, the support Tshiamo provided for her family took numerous forms – when she was younger she offered practical assistance, later financial support, and eventually provided a child of her own to help the family. Whether or not Tshiamo benefitted from having her child live with her grandmother was unclear. Sending a child to live with close relatives or extended kin is often to the benefit of the child's parent(s), since it is usually done in cases where the parent(s) cannot afford the child's upkeep (Mupedziswa and Ntseane 2013: 88-89; Harper and Seekings 2010: 2; Aboderin 2003). However, in this case Tshiamo was providing for her grandmother, seemingly negating any financial benefit for Tshiamo. Certainly Tshiamo did not give the impression that the aid she extended to her kin had been reciprocated at any stage in her life.

Most of the participants who spoke about kin support constructed their stories so as to imply a lack of reciprocity to their efforts, focusing instead on the burdens of their kinship obligations. Such a complaint could result from the tendency for women to use interviews as an outlet for grievances that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to express (LeVine 1979). However, other research suggests that young black adults

experience their kinship ties as obligations more frequently than as sources of support (Harper and Seekings 2010). Harper and Seekings (2010: 24) explain this phenomenon as a result of ‘a persistent ideology of extended obligations (one *should* support one’s kin, including more distant kin) despite the reality of restricted claims (in practice, one can only make claims on immediate kin)’ (Harper and Seekings 2010: 24). While Harper and Seeking’s research focuses on young South African adults (up to the age of 22), I suggest that a similar reality might apply to some of my participants and their families; kin support is customarily expected in all directions, but in reality, perhaps family members who are in receipt of support do not have the resources to reciprocate.

Unlike the participants discussed above, Emelda had been both giver and beneficiary of the familial support provided by women. As such, she welcomed the custom. Emelda explained how her sister helped her to send her son to school when Emelda was not earning enough: ‘She said, “No, you bring the kid here [...] I will go in with the kid in the morning”. And I said, “And what about the food?” [...] she said, “No, this kid is my kid, so he’s going to eat what I eat, I’m going to help you with the transport money” [...] so my sister is the one who made my life easier’. Once Emelda began earning money, she was able to return the favour: ‘I just call and say this month I’m the one who is buying some chips for the kids for school, I’ll be taking care of the lunchbox’. For Emelda, the kinship support network was continuous and cyclical, each sister helping the other as and when they were able to.

Tumelo and Lesedi also reported benefitting from the support of family members. Tumelo’s child lived with her mother who was viewed as a more reliable source of childcare than a nanny and was thus charged with raising the boy, with Tumelo and her partner visiting him ‘at month end’. This system was effective for Tumelo who was able to pursue her career without the burden of childcare. However, I was not able to determine Tumelo’s mother’s experience of the situation. Similarly, Lesedi’s youngest daughter lived with Lesedi’s mother, a situation that appeared to be unexceptional in Lesedi’s view: ‘I have never thought of taking my kid for as long as my mother is still there, I have no problem just, I just leave them at home’. Although Lesedi’s mother was looking after her child full-time, Lesedi was not without care duties of her own: ‘I’m just doing my duty as a daughter to buy her some things [...] so I’ll buy clothes for my mum, for my daughter, even for my sister’s kids if I have money [...] the one is using a bus to go to school, so sometimes if I have money [...] I will pay for [their] bus fair’. Lesedi’s situation further illustrated the multi-directional approach to familial support described by some the interviewees.

The participants' accounts indicated that the practical and financial care of others' children was a primary obligation for women who support their extended families. However, care was also required for adults within the family and community. Keatlaretse explained that in addition to caring for her sister's children, she was obligated to deliver a great deal of support to her mother and aunt:

Researcher: What relationships have been the most important for you at different stages of your life?

Keatlaretse: [...] It was expected for us to, when you start working and all that, give your mum money [...] And those things are a setback for a lot of us. [...] when I started working I started to be more like the father now, helping her [...] And if not for those things, maybe, I believe I would be having my own place now. That's the life I would have wanted [...] My sisters left their kids here, I also make sure the kids are okay, eat, if they are not well take them to the doctor and all those things, for their sake [...] So I think other than that I think by now my life would be different and better as well.

Keatlaretse's story points to some of the challenges that women might face as a result of their multiple responsibilities. She stated that in assisting her family financially she was 'like the father', suggesting that the view of men as breadwinners persists despite the high numbers of financially independent women supporting themselves and others. She resented the multiple burdens her family had placed on her – providing for her mother and sister and raising her sisters' children, as well as practical support for her aunt with cancer – because she thought that such responsibilities had prevented her from leading the life she wanted. Keatlaretse aspired to buy a house, but was never able to put her earnings towards her goal because of her familial obligations. Had she not been required to finance and care for so many people she would have been able to afford accommodation of her own. Her exhaustion led to illness, and coupled with her time-consuming care duties her performance at work suffered. She lost her job, leaving her and her numerous dependants with no source of income at all. The system of support Keatlaretse's family had created was not only detrimental to the health and contentment of one of its members, but was ultimately unsustainable. Khana lamented that although she would have liked to build her own home, like Keatlaretse, her disposable income was reserved for her mother. Thus, at 43, a considerable age given the average female

life expectancy of 52 (CIA 2016), she had been unable to fulfil her primary ambition of becoming a homeowner as a direct result of her obligation to support her mother financially.

While being the family member with the resources to help could result in one's own pursuits being limited, the custom of familial support between women provided for the basic needs of those without. Laone commented that she was being supported by a female friend, who would 'come to her house with bags of groceries' if she was struggling for money. Elizabeth received similar help from her aunts: 'Sometimes when I say I don't have something to eat, they say, "No, you don't have money, just come and take meat, come and take something"'. Thus, the cultural expectation that those with resources, however limited, ought to help those in need, offered a safety net that some of my participants benefitted from. Laone and Elizabeth, both rural dwellers, were given food by other women when they could not afford to buy any. This female support network was vital for some women and their children, although it put a great strain on other women's resources and limited their life choices.

In addition to long-term childcare and economic assistance, women were obligated to run day-to-day errands for their family and the wider community. Neo described feeling overextended by her family's demands: 'So this person calls, "Can you pick up the kids for me?" Okay I'll do it. "Can you do this?" Okay I'll do it. It was just yes yes yes to everything. And then I was giving from the wrong place and yeah, then it felt like a sacrifice'. Tebby described the culture of support for extended family: 'I think here because of the way family structure is, its okay for, you know, an aunt or a second uncle to call you and be like, "Can you do this?" As long as you know, you're younger than them, you have to do it.' Tebby's explanation implied that deference to age was a significant factor in familial support systems, with older members able to call on younger members to carry out tasks on their behalf. Tsala summarised a woman's gendered responsibilities: 'A woman here in Botswana should take care of her family. Should clean, be hard working, have a clean house, have a clean home. Take care of the children, take care of the husband. Yeah. So to get involved with the community, take care of the neighbours, take care of people in the society, share the little that you have'.

The interviews indicated that women were not only compelled to fulfil their multiple duties, but to do so in a particular way. They could expect to be judged on how they managed the demands on their time and resources. Tebby resented the unreasonably high standards women were held to:

Researcher: What kind of things would a woman need to know to function well in this society? To be successful?

Tebby: I feel like women's work is just never done. Just constantly, it's kids, it's work, it's family, I think a lot of women are successful at that. And that's what society would judge as successful. But it's also a very very harsh judgement. So if you're not doing it well enough, or to their standards, you know, God forbid if you, I don't know, are working all day, and then you have a family function in the evening, so you just decide to buy cakes, instead of make cakes. You know that's a judgement. You provided the cakes but you're being judged because you didn't make them. And a woman, you know, should cook. Or you've hired a caterer instead of making [food], and you know everybody's like, 'Oh, you're so lazy, that woman is so lazy'. But you know, when you think of all the things she's doing from day-to-day, you know the fact that she even had the time to call somebody to cater is you know, is a lot.

Tebby's story illustrates how women's performance of certain tasks was judged according to an elevated standard of traditional femininity, a standard that preceded them in all areas of the private and public spheres, and demanded vast amounts of time and energy.

Character and appearance

The personal traits that the interviewees associated with the successful performance of womanhood were complex and seemingly contradictory. The women in my sample were strong and autonomous in their own lives, and 15 of them explicitly expressed that they valued independence and courage in women. However, the cultural construction of women as the obedient, submissive, respectful, emotional and responsible gender came through in my interviews. As Schapera claimed, '[Women] must ideally be hard-working and obedient, modest, chaste, and generally well behaved' (1938: 128), 'industrious, meek and modest' (1940: 34). Some of the participants claimed that they themselves thought women ought to display such characteristics; others reported that this expectation came from society at large.

When asked how a woman should be, the participants painted an image of somebody 'who is humble, who is diligent' (Tshepiso), who is 'obedient' (Lesedi), 'somebody who has got good morals and principles' (One), who is 'accommodating'

and ‘easy to talk to, able to comfort you’ (Taemane), ‘able to advise, who is humble’ (Sefela), ‘giving’ and ‘compassionate’ (Laone), ‘emotional’ (Sedireng), ‘disciplined’, ‘patient’ and ‘caring’ (Beth), able to ‘know other people’s needs’ (Naledi), and be ‘responsible’ (Thato) and ‘loving’ (Maatla). The illustration of a ‘good woman’ as somebody who primarily gives rather than receives, and follows rather than leads, is limiting for women in that it creates a standard for social acceptance that she would struggle to meet should she follow an independent lifestyle. Thus, she might be faced with choosing between her personal needs and maintaining a good reputation in her community.

The interviews made it clear that women were expected to be obedient. Lesedi reported, ‘A good Motswana woman, I will say they want somebody who is obedient, and yeah, I think obedience is the key thing [...] obedience is an ideal woman.’ Most of the participants did not explicitly state who women were expected to obey, but contextual details from their stories suggested that women were obliged to submit to cultural tropes that posited them as inferior first of all to men, and secondly to their elders, male or female. Sefela and Tshepiso also spoke of obedience to a patriarchal Christian God as a virtuous trait: ‘Somebody who follows the rules of God, who is aligned to Christianity and listens and obeys’ (Sefela), ‘who knows the Word and follows’ (Tshepiso).

The concept of respect was raised numerous times in answer to my questions, ‘what qualities do you value in a woman?’ and ‘what is expected of a Motswana woman?’ Malisa asserted that women must be respectful, otherwise ‘people will label you’ as behaving inappropriately. She reported that when her son marries, his wife will come to live in her home, and, ‘If the wife does not have respect, was not brought up properly, I don’t think there will be peace in the house’. In this statement it was apparent that a younger woman was expected to be respectful to her female elders, as well as to the men in the household. The importance of being respectful extended to the workplace, where ‘when it comes to issues of promotion people say, “Oh, not this one, she doesn’t [show] respect”’. Malisa pointed out that while women are expected to give respect, they should not expect to receive it: ‘Society they will just undermine you because you are a woman. Men generally have respect, they are respected [...] a man is a man, and if you are a woman you are a woman.’ She drew a simple line between the sexes and appeared to be resigned to being disrespected as a result of her gender. Generalised lack of respect for women, and particularly young, unmarried women, is

problematic in that it hinders their advancement by undermining their individual aptitude and achievements.

The lack of respect shown to women increased the difficulties inherent in asserting their personal needs. Keatlaretse reported that standing by her principles was a problem because ‘sometimes people say those things chase men away’. She said that she had tried to be assertive with her ideas, ‘But it’s more like they end up thinking that you are now trying to be the man’. She elaborated: ‘They believe that, I don’t know, this belief of a woman, you know, demanding this and that. In our culture it’s more like a man is supposed to be giving [the ideas]’. Assertiveness was thus considered as a fundamentally male quality; if displayed by a woman, assertiveness indicated her desire to be male and rendered a woman less attractive.

Such a notion was also raised by Neo, who reported that she would dislike a woman who ‘tried to be like a man. Yeah, sort of um, over-powering’. It appeared that women were not welcome to express their ideas, particularly if their views were not in line with the majority. Malisa explained, ‘No matter how good you do, there will always be that clause to say, “After all, she’s just a woman, what can she tell you?”’, suggesting that women’s opinions were seen as inherently less valuable than men’s. Sedireng explained that women were expected to be:

Wishy-washy kind of. Because you must be pleasant and you must be liked and you must just, don’t ruffle feathers. Just, you know, whatever’s going on, just see how you can fit yourself in there nicely. And you know, in a home, if your husband wants things a certain way just, you know, just comply and make him happy, don’t be too assertive.

The expectation of women to be ‘pleasant’ and ‘liked’ renders it problematic to assert a view that does not ‘comply’ with the prevailing culture. Sedireng reported that she felt conflicted between wanting to be true to herself, and feeling pressured to be self-sacrificing. She admired women who knew who they were and ‘stand by that’, but she found it difficult to do so in her own life because women were ‘supposed to be the flexible ones’, and so she had a ‘fear of asserting’ herself, a ‘fear of saying no’.

Tebby spoke of the difficulties faced by women who asserted their needs in relationships with men, and the judgement they faced from men and from other women in doing so:

Researcher: I: You said that [men's behaviour] comes partly from the idea that men are the breadwinners, the powerful ones, they can do whatever they like?

Tebby: Yeah.

Researcher: What about if in a particular situation it's the woman who is the breadwinner?

Tebby: I think, men in our society have always been like, 'You are the king, you are the lion [...] and your woman, no matter what, is, you know, submissive to you' [...] like if a woman is strong and stands up to her man and says, 'I'm not gonna quit my job [on marriage], I'm not gonna do that', you know, she's hearing twitter from women who are saying, you know, 'She's such a horrible wife', and you know, and then men would be saying that, 'You can't have a wife you can't control'.

Thus, the ideal woman should behave in ways that served to bolster the masculinity of their male partners, or else face criticism from both women and men in the community. Tebby's vignette illustrated that a wife asserting her needs was seen to be undermining her husband, which speaks to the fragility of male dominance; holding the 'horrible' wife culpable circumvented any potential challenge to the husband's authority and protected the appearance of male power within the marriage.

Tebby admitted that despite valuing independent women on a personal level, and living an autonomous lifestyle of her own, she often joined with other women in judging those who did not confirm to the submissive ideal: 'We've caught ourselves being like, "Oh what is she gonna do when she gets married" [...] because, you know, nobody wants a bride who doesn't know her customs, who doesn't know how to be a Motswana woman.' Such conflicting perceptions suggest the dominance of cultural mores in the face of independent thought. The urge of women in social groupings to regulate another's behaviour demonstrates their role in maintaining and reproducing patriarchy.

Mabedi struggled with others' expectation that she be emotional and feminine, and conform to essentialist notions of womanhood. She discussed her socially problematic reaction to children:

Researcher: Do you get um, pressure or antagonism from people for acting like a man?

Mabedi: [...] When you're a woman and you're not very emotional, they call you a man. It's like, 'You're such a man', because they expect you to act in a certain way [...] When you see a baby, you know women [...] they go 'Awww'. And I don't get that reaction, so they're always like, 'What's wrong with you?' [...] Because I have my own child, but I don't feel like that [...] When I'm with my friends who I know they like that kind of 'awww' thing, I wait for their reaction and then after they reacted then I react the way they reacted.

Mabedi expressed the view that an unemotional person was not considered fully a woman. Her friends thought it particularly unusual that she was never overwhelmed with nurturing feelings in reaction to children, including her own. Given that motherhood and mothering was seen to underpin what it meant to be female, her lack of emotional response to babies positioned her as 'a man'. Since she identified as a woman and wished others to acknowledge her womanhood, she dealt with the issue by copying the reactions of her more emotionally expressive friends, thus concealing her own character in order to avoid judgement.

Mabedi described her urge to compete with men as a means to achieving their dominant status, a desire she had manifested in a number of ways. She spoke of her competitive driving and the problems it caused:

Researcher: What kind of things are you competing for with men?

Mabedi: [...] My friends say I'm always trying to drive like a man [...] I don't wanna drive like a woman. Because people tell you, driving like a woman, there is something wrong with it, so then I drive fast and I get into trouble [...] I feel like there's something wrong with the way I am, so I try to emulate [men] [...] So we, I think women then, we end up being under a lot of pressure.

The participants reported that women are expected to be responsible. Yet, according to Mabedi's account, behaving responsibly, such as when driving, had adverse effects. Women drivers were portrayed negatively as 'slow', when 'there's somebody that's causing traffic [...] it's like, "that woman!"' (Mabedi). In the context of driving, Mabedi found herself in a paradoxical situation whereby driving 'like a man' earned her criticism on the basis that women were not supposed to behave in a masculine fashion;

yet, driving ‘like a woman’ suggested irksome timidity on the road, unappreciated by other drivers. As Mabedi illustrated in the two examples she provided, simply behaving ‘the way I am’ was problematic in a society where heavily gendered cultural expectations prevail; rather, one was expected to take on the characteristics associated with one’s sex, even where such qualities were undervalued or unappreciated.

The interviews created an image of the ‘good Motswana woman’ as malleable and gentle. Conversely, they also demonstrated a preference for women who were wilful and independent. The participants reported that they valued ‘a woman who knows what she wants, who is not afraid to voice out her opinion, no matter how different it is from other people’ (Kesegofetse) who has a ‘strong character’ (Malisa), is ‘independent’ and ‘stands up for themselves’ (Tumelo), who is ‘resilient’ (Pono), who will ‘get up and do [...] who is unshaken’ (Beth), will ‘stand up and fight for their rights’ (Emelda), have ‘confidence [...] believing in themselves’ (Khana), does not ‘rely on men’ (Thato), and ‘has a dream, yeah. I want a woman who doesn’t give in to the situation at hand. I want a woman who would stand up and fight’ (Tsala).

While many of the interviewees claimed to value strength and independence, they gave the impression that society at large finds such qualities distasteful in a woman. When describing the ‘ideal Motswana woman’, the participants tended to employ terms such as ‘they expect’ or ‘you are supposed to be’ when talking about submissive qualities, indicating wider social expectations that they did not necessarily agree with. Yet, when asked what qualities they valued in a woman, the participants focused on characteristics related to independence, fearlessness and resilience. There was a sense that they not only preferred such qualities, but thought them necessary for a woman’s survival, referring often to the need to fight, stand up for themselves, and endure hardships. Such traits contradicted those considered ideal for women in Tswana culture. As touched upon earlier, Mabedi reported her mother’s concern over her strong-mindedness:

Researcher: Do you get um, pressure or antagonism from people for acting like a man?

Mabedi: [...] My mum is always telling me, you know, ‘You need to start acting like a woman so a man can see you and marry you’ [...] my mum was like, ‘Nobody is gonna marry you if you’re like this’. She feels like I’m too independent. Yes, this is the other thing also, when you are too independent and when you don’t take nonsense, they call it being a

man. So my mum is like, 'You're gonna have to learn to compromise, you're gonna have to learn to be a woman.'

Mabedi's mother advising her to behave submissively in order to be acknowledged as a woman indicates the pervasive construction of women as inferior. The mother's fear that Mabedi's wilfulness would prevent men from considering Mabedi for a wife implied that independent women were thought unsuitable for marriage. Given the emphasis on marriage as a prerequisite for womanhood, being labelled as unmarriageable effectively rendered a woman culturally invisible. Her mother's concern that Mabedi would remain unmarried perhaps also stemmed from the notion that she would need a husband to survive financially.

Lesedi stated that she valued 'somebody who could be firm, regardless of being a woman', further illustrating the perceived incompatibility of women with personal strength. While Lesedi seemed to think that womanhood and resolve were contradictory, she appreciated determination in women that she knew, signifying divergence from the common conceptualisation of women. Similarly, Basadi described her family as being full of 'strong independent women', both in her mother's generation and her own. She reported that in her experience, women 'have always had a very big role to play in villages, in households, in families'. She depicted Botswana as a 'matriarchal society', although she conceded that 'women defer to men culturally'.

Thus, it appeared that while women were ultimately expected to be deferential to men, some held influence in their homes and communities. Akhu and Thato considered women to be more resilient than men in the face of adversity, as a result of the pressure on women to handle difficult financial and care obligations for the family and wider community. However, they reported that such acknowledgement was not widespread, perhaps suggesting that such efforts were generally undervalued. Overall the interviews offered a complex view of women's character; the participants perceived that traditionally a woman was expected to be compassionate, humble, and submissive, and some of the participants agreed these traits to be necessary in the presentation of womanhood. However, many of the interviewees valued strong, self-determining women, and were in fact autonomous in thought and action themselves.

While I did not question the participants explicitly about women's appearance, 13 interviewees raised the issue of appropriate clothing, and several more discussed the importance of the way a woman carries herself. Suitable appearance was constructed as an essential element of womanhood by many of the rural interviewees:

Researcher: Culturally, what is expected of a Motswana woman?

Khana: [...] I have to have respect, being a woman, behaving like a woman. Wearing like a woman. Not, in Botswana we don't prefer to be seen in a mini-mini-skirt as a woman. You are supposed to be wearing something that covers your knees. So that you can be recognised as a woman.

Khana suggested that wearing revealing clothing was not womanly, and was demonstrative of a lack of respect, a sentiment shared by participants of various ages. Reneilwe expressed concern about social judgement over her clothing choices, but considered such judgment a means to self-improvement: 'What are they going to say when I walk outside with just [mini-]skirts? [...] But that is a way of helping us grow, as responsible people.' Speaking of the appropriate attire for culturally significant events such as weddings and funerals, Malisa stated that while 'you will still find one or two with the mini-skirts [...] trousers are not allowed, you should cover your head, and just dressing properly as a woman'. The preference for conservative clothing was associated with the expectation of women to be obedient; 'Culturally you are supposed to cover up. You're supposed to be humble, to have respect and to be diligent' (Tshepiso). In this analysis, a woman revealing parts of her body was disrespectful, shameful: 'But deep down I knew, you see I have that shame as a woman, my body shouldn't be seen. Just imagine if I would say, "I don't care, I do what I like", no one is going to respect me. Honestly, no one' (Reneilwe). Whether the expectation to 'cover up' was an expression of male possession of women's bodies, or a paternalistic approach to protecting women from the male gaze, both could be said to stem from a patriarchal social structure; a woman's clothing was an aspect of her life in which her autonomy was restricted.

Two urban participants reported feeling challenged by the expectation to dress conservatively. Tebby, an internationally schooled and highly educated young woman, gave the following example of a disconnect between her own clothing choices and the opinions of those around her:

Researcher: What sorts of changes would you like to see for women?

Tebby: [...] It was summer and I was wearing a summer dress [...] And this man behind me [...] he was muttering about how inappropriately I

was dressed. Which, it was funny to me because I was like, I don't think it's inappropriate and I don't think anybody that I know would have thought it was inappropriate [...] he was just like, shocked.

Mayer (1999: 17-18) posits that 'when men (and sometimes older women) control the "proper behaviour" of women, in effect they control women's bodies and sexuality'. Tebby's anecdote offers an explicit example of such control – the man appeared to think it was his right to police Tebby's clothing, and by extension, her body and expression of self. However, Tebby's inherent resistance to patriarchal control was suggested in her reported amusement that a man would judge her clothing in such a way; her light-hearted approach to the incident indicated that she did not consider his views worthy of concern. The rural participants, however, expressed considerable care for the opinions of others regarding their attire. Basadi, who had a similar education level and international experience to Tebby, reported that she felt 'stifled' around 'very conservative people [...] who care too much about what other people think or what other people will say, what other people are wearing'. Both Tebby and Basadi gave the impression that their exposure to alternative lifestyles through higher education and travel minimised the impact of certain conservative norms on their lives, particularly in relation to rules around gendered clothing.

Managing male dominance

For the women in my sample a crucial part of performing womanhood successfully was managing male authority in their everyday lives. The participants' accounts implied that patriarchy was visible on many levels – at home, at work, and in the community. They reported that men were revered as the superior sex regardless of their individual attributes: 'I really feel men are, I don't know, they are spoon-fed [...] we really give them a whole lot of respect, yet some of them they don't even deserve that respect' (Tumelo). Tumelo elaborated on her view:

Researcher: How do you see men as being treated differently from women?

Tumelo: [...] And I don't know if this is because it's biblical, there is a lot of respect for men in my culture. Even when the man is useless, I can tell them he is useless, and all he does is go to the bar and come back, go to sleep, then go to the bar in the morning, come back and sleep. You

will be respecting this uncle of yours, you know, you will be washing his laundry, cleaning up after him [...] Men are treated with a lot of respect, they don't do much, they are favoured.

Tumelo considered that the high regard for men stemmed from biblical notions of patriarchal authority, in which man 'is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man' (Corinthians verse 11). Since Christianity is widespread in Botswana with 79.1 per cent of the population identifying as Christian (CIA 2016),³¹ the biblical view of women as inferior to men might exert considerable influence. Tumelo lamented that women were obligated to serve their uncles and other men in the community, regardless of their deservedness. Like many of the other participants she expressed a poor view of men, describing them as lazy and 'useless', acting irresponsibly while failing to provide. Similarly, the Kenyan women in Silberschmidt's (2001: 661-662) study complained of men drinking heavily and failing to contribute positively to the lives of their families or girlfriends. While the women 'generally recognized and accepted certain formal rights and privileges that were reserved for men, they had no illusions about men as conscientious providers'. The men in the study admitted that they drank to escape the uncertainty presented by a changing socioeconomic landscape Silberschmidt's (2001: 661-662). Since I did not interview men I cannot offer their perspective, however, Mookodi's (2004) research indicates that like Kenyan men, Botswana men are struggling with the changes described by Silberschmidt – economic uncertainty and changing gender relations. During my own time spent in Botswana I noticed that the bars were full throughout the day and night, and in my own experience it was rare to see women there, particularly during the day.

The interviews indicated that men were the primary decision-makers in the family. While women might be consulted about major decisions, 'Whatever a man says, it's law and that's it [...] if he doesn't want to sell a car [...] renovate that house, you can't say anything [...] that is that' (Keatlaretse); '[Men have] always been the ones who decide for the family. Who decide for women' (Tebby). Women's lack of authority in decision-making was further illustrated by the likening of wives to children: 'Men are head of the house, and sometimes the women can be referred to as the children to the husband' (Pono). In this analysis women are treated as minors, not mature or wise enough to be entrusted with decision-making.

³¹ The remaining 20.9 per cent are divided as follows – Badimo: 4.1 per cent, other (including Baha'i, Hindu, Muslim, Rastafarian): 1.4 per cent, none: 15.2 per cent, and unspecified: 0.3 per cent (CIA 2016).

Men's authority in decision-making extended beyond finance and household matters; they exercised control over women's bodies, too. While I did not cover family planning in my interview questions, some of the participants revealed that men usually decide the number and timing of children born: 'Sometimes [women] do not always have the final say in defining how many children they should have' (Kesegofetse). Thato agreed, 'The man will be wanting whatever he wants, and for sure you are going to become pregnant'. Thato and Kesegofetse's assertions suggest that women have marginal control over the size of their families, despite their major role in raising and providing for their children. Likewise, Emelda seemed certain that men controlled women's reproductive function, 'The man. He would say, "I want two kids, I want a boy, these are girls only, I want a boy". So he is deciding for you.' Lenah ascribed this attitude to the practice of *lobola*: 'After paying that, the men kind of own you.' Customarily, 'The main function of *lobola* is to transfer the reproductive power of a woman from her own family into that of her husband' (Schapera 1938: 139). The cultural perception of women as dependent inferiors, whose bodies exist for male-controlled reproduction, presents challenges in achieving self-determination in relation to sex and family planning.

Reverence for men was demonstrated in the participants' reports of male-to-female interactions at public gatherings: 'Women have to give [men] food, women have to eat last, after feeding the men' and, 'A man can't stand up while a woman is sitting down. She has to stand [...] they sit on the chair, then the women sit on the floor or lie on the mat' (Reneilwe). I observed these traditions myself when I attended weddings and funerals in Botswana. Women were expected to fulfil a servile role, visually underscored by the seating arrangements of women and men in social gatherings. Keatletse described what she considered to be a typical village scene:

Researcher: Are things different for women who live in the cities than for women who live in the villages?

Keatletse: You see a woman carrying a child on her back and a bag on her head, and then the husband is just carrying a jacket [...] You ask her, 'Why are you doing that? Why can't the man carry the bag instead? Or the kid?' And they say, 'No, you don't say that to a man'.

In this situation the wife bore a physical burden significantly greater than her husband's; to request that her husband share the burden would be to undermine his superior status

and to challenge his masculinity through supposing that he would assist in 'women's work', such as childcare or laundry.

While many of the participants appeared to willingly accept male authority, ten explicitly resented it. Some fought openly against it while others subtly undermined it through their behaviour. In this manner some of the interviewees were able to live relatively unrestricted lives, while maintaining the appearance of patriarchal power at a level deemed acceptable in Tswana culture. Shera's account demonstrated how her autonomous behaviour while in a relationship was problematic. Advised that her independence of action would cause problems between her and her partner, as well as bring judgement from the wider community, she felt compelled to manipulate aspects of her situation to give the impression that her partner had control over her behaviour.

In one instance, she had bought a truck, to the surprise and distaste of her community: "You're driving a truck?! What are you doing with a truck?!" [...] And my aunt was like, "Yes, you should really get a man who has a truck" [...] whatever, I bought the truck.' Others appeared to find it difficult to reconcile the idea of a woman owning a vehicle traditionally perceived as masculine, to the extent that an aunt suggested Shera date a man who owned a truck as an alternative to owning one herself. This was one of many examples given throughout the interviews of women regulating one another's behaviour in-line with Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal bargain theory. A male staff member at the garage she purchased the truck from also considered Shera's purchase problematic, advising her, "Ah, you know my sister, I need to give you advice [...] do you have a man?" and I said yes, he's like, "Well, I don't know if you should be buying all these trucks, because you know, how is he handling it? You know, you really don't want to make them feel inferior." This man seemed to be willing to risk losing a sale in order to maintain the gendered norms of vehicle ownership, indicating the perceived importance of such boundaries in Tswana society.

In other example, Shera faced criticism from others when she wanted to commission the building of a house on a plot of land she owned. She was told by friends and family, "You need to involve him" [...] "Where is your man in this?" Not only was it tricky for Shera to begin such a project without the involvement of her partner, but completing the project would create problems, too:

Researcher: In your relationships with your partner and previously, what kinds of stresses or challenges have you experienced, other than what we talked about with the housework?

Shera: [...] I knew he needed to get a house because if I finish my house before he had a house, it would be an issue. Not necessarily for him, okay maybe it would become an issue for him, but definitely his friends, his community, whatever, would think this was an issue [...] I'm looking for houses for him because I need this man to have a house. [...] But we all know behind the scenes we are negotiating some very serious ego-stroking bullshit.

For Shera to have her own home before her partner had achieved the same would possibly be difficult for him to accept, and would certainly be of concern to the wider community – perhaps because of the implication that Shera was more independent or successful than her partner. To address this imbalance Shera made significant attempts to find a house suitable for her partner to purchase prior to her completing the build of her own home. Shera expressed disbelief at discovering she was required to handle expectations in such a way, but conceded, ‘Apparently it matters [...] now I have to manage these things’. Thus, her views were at odds with those of her community, but she felt compelled to manipulate her circumstances so as to protect the perceived status quo while achieving her own goals. Such a tactic was effective in appeasing her friends, family, and her partner while allowing her to pursue her ambitions, yet it demanded emotional labour and took up extra time in an already-busy schedule, consuming resources that Shera would have preferred to direct elsewhere.

Other participants openly rejected male control, and acted upon their convictions. Lesedi broke ties with a boyfriend ‘because his word was final’, and while she had hoped for the longevity of the relationship, she could not live with his assumed dominance. Autonomy was important enough for Lesedi to sacrifice an otherwise pleasant match in order to protect it. She also challenged male privilege in matters of inheritance. One of five siblings, she fought against a family decision that favoured her single male sibling over the four sisters: ‘They said [...] “the four of you [women], you have to share this 25 hectares, and this one [man] is having 25 hectares.’ The argument had continued for years, and since Lesedi’s sisters did not wish to challenge their brother, she lacked support in the conflict. As was the case for Shera, refusing to be passive in the face of male authority demanded considerable time and emotional resources. Given that women already carried large burdens of responsibility in most areas of their lives, choosing to add to the load by resisting culturally mandated gender arrangements demonstrated how important autonomy was to these participants.

Some of the accounts I heard gave the impression that it wasn't always individual husbands, fathers, and uncles who chose to exert control over the women in their lives. Rather, social convention dictated that if they did not take up such a role the family might face judgement. Connell (2011: 74) points out that social convention is not disembodied. Rather, it operates through human behaviour to 'define possibilities for action'. Some of the participants' husbands were unfavourably restricted by customary expectations on their behaviour, despite their inherent authority as men in a patriarchal society. These men took on an alternative public persona in which they presented themselves as dominant, or made unwanted choices in order to retain respect for their masculinity:

Researcher: What sorts of changes would you still like to see for women?

What things would help improve your situation?

Lenah: [...] The only problem is our society is still male-orientated [...]

Maybe that's where we can try change a bit. Yeah.

Researcher: What kinds of problems does that attitude cause?

Lenah: I come from Kgalagadi, my husband comes from Serowe. So we can't say we are settling in Kgalagadi, you know. We can't settle in Kgalagadi [...] We can't, everybody would be laughing at us, even if there were opportunities in Kgalagadi [...] He says, 'Ah, people are going to laugh at me! They will say I'm the one married! (Lenah)

Lenah and her husband had agreed that they could make use of a financial opportunity by building a house in her home region; yet, they were unable to take this option for fear of public ridicule. Patriarchal tradition dictates that a wife must relocate to her husband's home village. For a couple to build property in the wife's village would undermine the husband's standing. The final line of the quotation highlighted an important view of marriage, that the man was the active subject, he *marries*, while the woman is passively *married*. The concept of the woman as the one who is married was also apparent in Tshiamo's account. Tshiamo explained that to the dismay of her parents, she was the primary breadwinner in her family. As such, they labelled her male and refused to accept her partner as a man:

Researcher: What sorts of changes would you like to see for women?

Tshiamo: Changes I would like to see.

Researcher: Mmm, what things would help improve your situation?

Tshiamo: For women in general?

Researcher: For you personally, and for women in general.

Tshiamo: In my case, my partner is willing us to get married, and my mother is complaining and saying that I'm the one who is going to pay lobola. Eh. He is operating the tuck shop. We are saving money. And my mother is not taking that as his money. She says this tuck shop, for it to be established it was my initiative. [...] My mum says when we get we get married it will be me paying lobola, because he is not a man. Because I make the money, it means I am the man. He works in the tuck shop but it is my idea. [...] When he pays lobola my mum says I will be the one paying lobola for myself.

Tshiamo's mother insisted that Tshiamo's higher economic status meant that in case of her marriage, she would be taking the active male role, i.e. paying *lobola*. In comparison with Shera's story above, Tshiamo felt compelled to manage her parents' expectations by manipulating the situation so that it had the appearance of being aligned with traditional gender roles. She set up a small shop for her partner to run, to give the impression that he was earning money for the family. However, this plan did not have the effect Tshiamo hoped for, as the initiative she showed in starting the business undermined her partner's authority in the view of her parents. Thus, some women might face a dual struggle should they wish to act autonomously; they risk social judgement against their partner's masculinity as well as against their own femininity.

Conclusion

The cost of womanhood for the participants was high as a result of the multiple burdens on their time and resources, and the limitations they faced in both the private and public spheres. Faced with demanding obligations to their extended families and wider community, in addition to attending to the needs of their husbands and children, women were often so encumbered that they experienced most aspects of their lives as labour. Their labour functioned as support for the structures of patriarchy, freeing men to pursue their careers or independent projects and participate in leisure activities, while limiting women's opportunities for personal gain. Certain irreconcilabilities stemmed from the requirement of women to meet culturally sanctioned standards of femininity, while doing what was necessary for economic survival and autonomous living. While

the gender myth of the fragile, gentle, and submissive woman remained, the reality was that women had to be resourceful and resilient in order to live up to competing expectations. The more conservative, traditional way of life existed alongside an increasingly progressive paradigm, each generating their own set of demands on women.

Chapter five: The changing experience of womanhood

'The life of women has changed very, very much.' (Thato)

Having explored the participants' perceptions of social expectations surrounding womanhood and its performance, I shall turn to examining changes they reported in the experience of womanhood over time. The participants broached gender relations, political engagement, education, employment, and financial autonomy as areas in which women had experienced notable shifts as a result of modernising forces.³² Yet, traditional practices persisted alongside or within many of these changes. Jackson et al. (2013: 669) argue that the values and behaviours that constitute tradition are not inflexible, nor do modern social and economic conditions necessarily preclude their practice. Rather, tradition can be 'reshaped in new historical circumstances, whether through deliberate revival or simply adaptations of everyday mores and practices' (Jackson et al. 2013: 669). In a similar vein, Phillips (2004: 6) rejects the notion of tradition as 'static or reactionary, never adaptive, constructive, or creative'. In accordance with Phillips as well as Jackson et al., I argue that tradition is not necessarily eroded by modernity, but can and does function within it. My interviews illustrated that some of the participants modified even the most persistent traditions to better suit contemporary settings and shape their lives according to their priorities and preferences. For others, changes in conditions created stress as participants struggled with tensions between old and new ways of life. The transformations discussed differed or were articulated in varying ways between diverse locations, cultural settings, and across generations.

Perceived changes in women's lives

In 1986, six educated professional Batswana women set up Emang Basadi,³³ a women's rights NGO that initially focused on pressuring the government to revise laws that discriminated against women. They faced numerous challenges. Viewed by women and men as western-influenced troublemakers, 'The women's challenge was seen as an unwelcome attack on the peace and stability of the country' (Ngoma Leslie 2006: 58). These lobbyists were to find that references to 'inequality' and 'discrimination' had

³² While there have been significant changes in other areas, such as religion and health, here I discuss only the shifts raised by the participants when asked about changes in women's lives.

³³ Emang Basadi translates as 'stand up, women' in Setswana. This name was chosen in reference to the national anthem, which encourages women to 'stand up beside your men' while men 'stand up and defend the nation' (Van Allen 2001: 43).

little purchase with local women, who did not understand or accept that discriminatory legislation affected them personally (Ngoma Leslie 2006: 82). In response to the difficulties of getting women involved in politics, Emang Basadi set up the Political Education Project, which held educational workshops for the public. They taught women why their vote mattered and why it was important that they voted for candidates who represented them. The NGO also offered training and support to potential women candidates. As a result of Emang Basadi's work, the president nominated two women to parliament after the 1994 elections, and a further two were elected by the public. In 1999, two women were nominated and six elected, bringing the total proportion of women MPs to 18 per cent, up from five per cent prior to the NGO's activism (Ngoma Leslie 2006: 83).

Schapera reported in 1940 (302), 'Women took no part in the government of the tribe; they did not attend the tribal assemblies, and all the political offices were kept exclusively in the hands of men'. The efforts of Emang Basadi helped to counter women's historical exclusion from politics. For a number of participants, political engagement was the most significant change for women since their mothers' or grandmothers' generations. Tsala pointed out that although the number of women in parliament was small, 'we have broken the ground', suggesting she recognised the potential for women in positions of power, and demonstrating the political consciousness shown by many of the participants throughout the interviews. Women's entry into government politics created widespread optimism about their chance at having powerful careers. In a study into the role-model impact of women politicians in the United States, Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006: 244) note, 'Female role models change the political socialization of young girls', making girls more likely to take an interest in politics and to embark on political careers. Women's political participation was also seen as advancing women's progress, since women MPs were thought likely to 'empower other women' (Emelda) through legislation.

It is salient that only participants over the age of 35 spoke of women's participation in government as a meaningful shift in gender politics. The women's movement was at its height in Botswana in the 1980s and 1990s (Bauer 2011: 24). Partly as a result of the weakening of the women's movement from the early 2000s, women elected to the National Assembly decreased from 15 per cent in 1999 to 3.5 per cent in 2009 (Bauer 2011: 25). In May 2016 the proportion had increased to 9.5 per cent, still comparatively low when compared with Botswana's sub-Saharan neighbours:

in the same month, women constituted 42.4 per cent of MPs in South Africa;³⁴ 41.3 per cent in Namibia, 31.5 per cent in Zimbabwe; 25 per cent in Lesotho; and 12.7 per cent in Zambia (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016).³⁵ By comparison with western states, in the UK and the US the percentage of women MPs stood at 29.4 per cent and 19.4 per cent respectively (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016). Thus, despite Botswana's democratic record, it has failed to sustain significant numbers of women in parliament following the initial peak in 1999. Perhaps the overall decline of women MPs over the life course of the younger generation of participants explains why they did not raise government politics as a noteworthy area of change in women's role and status. For the older participants however, seeing any woman enter the political leadership was momentous.

Women's engagement in high-level politics was not restricted to central government and its local branches; it had become possible for a woman to be village chief or *dikgosi*, ruling through the *kgotla* assembly. Despite some local resistance, elders in Ramotswa selected Botswana's first female paramount chief, Mosadi Seboko, in 2001. She was also appointed chairwoman of the House of Chiefs, which advises the government on customary matters (BBC 2003). Lesedi recognised the significance of this milestone, recalling that in the past, 'A girl child would not be a *dikgosi*, but now we can see that change'. For Lesedi, this was a meaningful marker of progress in women's empowerment and a source of optimism for her personally. The nineteenth-century *kgotla* system has continued to function in rural areas to the present day, working with the state government to administer the rural population. Although the *kgotla* assembly is supposed to resemble a democratic system, women have traditionally been excluded from discussions (Ngoma Leslie 2006: 2; Denbow and Thebe 2006: 22). Women had gained real political power in rural sites where patriarchal laws and customs maintained their stranglehold. This suggested that progressive values had permeated particular villages.³⁶ Nevertheless, Ngoma Leslie (2006: 5) maintains, 'While modern Botswana has, in theory, embraced a democratic political climate and

³⁴ In the case of South Africa, the figure is exceptionally high even by global standards. Geisler (2000: 605-607) reveals that women's role in the national resistance against apartheid, and their campaign for recognition during the transition period, earned them uniquely high representation in the new parliament.

³⁵ The Inter-Parliamentary Union figures represent women in the 'lower or single house', since statistics for 'upper house or senate' were not available for comparison from all of the countries mentioned here.

³⁶ The shift in customary norms illustrated by the inauguration of a woman as paramount chief was highlighted by the official gifts Mosadi Seboko was presented with upon her appointment. Rather than the traditional gift of cattle, she was given a Toyota truck filled with functional household items, such as a computer and a washing machine (BBC 2003). Her name, 'Mosadi', translates as 'woman'.

universalistic bureaucracy, in practice traditional patriarchal *Tswana* cultural values have prevailed’.

Shifts in the construction of gender and, more specifically, womanhood, were reported by many of the participants. Women’s increasing autonomy was a common theme, with 20 participants stating that young women today have more independence than their grandmothers. The dominance of this narrative not only supports its legitimacy, but demonstrates a level of collective consciousness. Most of the participants were aware that women had more opportunities than they had traditionally been allowed, and some conceptualised this change in terms of rights and social justice. Speaking of men’s superiority over women, Malisa stated, ‘It is not as bad as it used to be in the past [but] one way or the other, they will still see that you are a woman. [...] [T]hings are better than before’. Malisa noted an improvement in women’s status that was nonetheless tempered by the recognition of women *as* women, and thus, inherently inferior. Still, she hoped for continued change for the better, suggesting that for Malisa gender equality was a possibility.

Others agreed that women had seen a shift away from the conservative gender roles fundamental to traditional *Tswana* culture. Where women conventionally ‘relied mostly on men, now they get up and do stuff for themselves’ (Beth). Whether avoiding dependence on men stemmed from choice or necessity, the fact that self-reliance was an option at all demonstrated expanding opportunities for women. Beth pointed out, ‘Nowadays people know their rights, so women are no longer, their rights are no longer violated like before, they stand for themselves and speak out’. Those who employed a political framework for their answers tended to have the highest levels of education among the participants. However, Beth had left school in Form Three,³⁷ and spoke little English, yet she utilised a rights framework to communicate through the interpreter her understanding of changes in gender equality.

One’s education had ended a year earlier, but she was confident in articulating that women were ‘not just the shadows of men anymore. In politics, in work, they have their own say’. Thus, while socio-political consciousness was strongest among the most educated of my sample, it had also penetrated elsewhere. The majority of my participants were aware of the disadvantages women faced, and of the changes Botswana had begun to see in this respect. Ngoma Leslie (2006: 65) attributes the spread of consciousness to the women’s movement in Botswana, arguing that the

³⁷ Form Three is the equivalent of Year Nine in the English education system.

movement's rights discourse permeated ordinary homes and families. Mabedi pointed to increasing socio-political consciousness as a factor in women gaining autonomy:

Researcher: How are things different for you than they were for your mother's and grandmothers' generations?

Mabedi: [...] We are still fighting to be equal to men. I think for my grandmother, during their time, they weren't even bothered. Like they didn't realise there was the need to be. It's like, 'Why do you wanna be equal to a man? Let him be a man'. Yeah, so I think um, that's what's different between me and my grandmother. And I think the transition period was during my mum's [generation].

Mabedi's story demonstrates a changing state of consciousness during her mother's generation, a move away from the previously unchallenged assumption that the sexes were fundamentally different. Mabedi noted a 'transition period', during which a shift in attitudes towards gender equality took place. Her phrasing implied a hermetically sealed moment, a movement for change that had since ceased. Similarly, Sedireng considered that for her grandmother, being a housewife was 'not by choice [...] it was the right thing to do. You took care of your family, your home, for everybody, all the time'. Her mother, however, 'Went to school, she studied, she's always worked', and so Sedireng could 'see a big difference between maybe my mum and her mum, myself and my grandmother, but between me and my mother, not so much'. Several other participants claimed that there had been important shifts between their grandmothers' and mothers' generations,³⁸ but comparative stagnation in gender politics since then.

The interviewees' perspective on women's changing role in politics is supported by Bauer's (2011: 24) research in Botswana, discussed earlier, in which she contends that the women's movement peaked in the 1980s and 1990s, tapering off once it had met its primary goals of legislative reform and the initiation of women into parliament. Bauer also recognises that numerous other factors contributed to the movement's decline, including overwhelming social problems, such as rural poverty and the HIV/AIDS epidemic; an uninterested head of state; a constitution that was not explicitly

³⁸ The older participants referred to a shift between their mothers' generation and their own, situating the perceived 'moment' of change at the same historical point. For example, Khana, remarked, 'our mothers, our grandmothers, they were not supposed to be working. But now at least we are saying 50/50. We want to work. We are even also going to school. We have managed to graduate. Things are not like long time back'.

egalitarian; public apathy; lost external funding as a result of Botswana achieving middle-income status; internal divisions and weak organisation; and movement leaders entering government positions (Bauer 2011: 29).

Some participants reported shifts in gender relations within the family unit. Emelda spoke of the decline of men's decision-making power within the home: 'As you grow up, you knew that the man was the head of the family. He is the one that takes decisions. But right now, things are coming good'. A minority of participants noted that certain expressions of male dominance over female members of the family had weakened. Neo recalled that when she was younger her father expected women or girls in the household to bring him water in a bowl and assist in washing his hands before meals. At the time of my research, however, her father would 'go to the bathroom, wash his [own] hands'. Neo explained that expectations of women as men's servants 'were a bit firmer' when she was younger. In another example, she recounted stories of women sitting on the floor at public events so that men could sit in chairs, a common traditional practice that she said had 'gone down' as society had 'become a bit more open-minded over time'. A decline in such markers of women's oppression within the domestic realm is an important expression of women's empowerment at large, since the home is often the last site of social change.

A number of participants reported that as women's increased autonomy within the home potentially translated to their bodies, they might choose to have fewer children. However, fertility rates are consistently higher in rural areas than urban areas (World Bank 2010: 5). This disparity suggests that not all women prefer, or are able to choose smaller families. Thato explained that women were no longer having 'as many children as they used to'. Pono considered that in the past, people were 'more happy with bigger families'. Thato reported: 'Women in rural areas bear more kids' and have no say in family planning, because 'she is depending on her husband'. On the other hand, urban women 'are free economically'. Thus, the interviews suggested that rural women's options for family planning were further undermined by their lack of financial independence. Kesegofetse explained, 'City women [...] they have a say in the number of children that they want to have' whereas in rural areas, 'Sometimes they don't have final say'.³⁹ Tswana custom dictates that men control when and how women had sex, and whether or not they use contraception. Women seeking to limit, space, or terminate

³⁹ That Kesegofetse used 'they' to delineate both rural and urban women suggested that she differentiated herself from both groups. She lived in a village but worked in the capital, and reported that she struggled to balance the contrasting lifestyles common to each site.

their pregnancies face obstacles in law; bodily autonomy; freedom of movement; funds; knowledge; and access to contraception and family planning services.

Several participants pointed out changes in girls' education, claiming, 'We are so fortunate [...] most of our grandmothers are not educated [...] a boy child was given that opportunity to go to school, and then the girl child was left behind. [...] But now we could see some changes' (Lesedi). Contrary to Lesedi's assertion, during her grandmother's generation schooling for all children was 'zealously' encouraged by tribal chiefs and foreign missionaries, and many more girls than boys were able to attend since boys were needed at the cattle posts (Schapera 1940: 235).⁴⁰ A 1977 government review of the education system recommended 'universal education for all' as a national principle (Makwinja-Morara 2009: 441). Education has long been constructed as important in Botswana, and the ratio of girls in school has remained higher than that of boys for several decades. Nonetheless, Lesedi's perception of girls as having less access to education perhaps stems from the notion that 'boys tend to benefit more than girls from the education system', as girls' education is taken less seriously (Makwinja-Morara 2009: 442). Girls face additional barriers to their schooling. They are quick to be kept home should their domestic services be required, and drop-out rates for pregnant girls have long been considered a 'serious national problem' (Makwinja-Morara 2009: 443).

Lesedi's use of the conditional in 'now we could see some changes' suggested that advancements in girl's education have not yet taken place. This is particularly noteworthy given that Lesedi was a teacher. While Botswana has officially reached gender parity in education, Lesedi's uncertainty could imply that in her experience, some girls continue to fall through the net. However, the younger participants said that girls were encouraged to obtain and value an education: 'To get educated over and above, that would be normal' (Neo), 'You can study as much as you want, get the highest levels of education' (Pono). Indeed the number of out-of-school girls has almost halved between 2005 and 2014 (UNESCO 2014). The net enrolment and attendance ratios are uniformly higher for girls across primary, secondary, and tertiary education (UNICEF 2013; UNESCO 2014), and the literacy rate is slightly higher among girls than boys (UNESCO 2014). These figures support the view that the girl child is no longer 'left behind' educationally.

⁴⁰ To give an exemplar, in the village of Mochudi in 1937, 83 per cent of the children attending school were girls (Schapera 1940: 235).

The participants recognised the significance of such changes, with seven of them explicitly crediting education for women's increased independence. Government figures show that educated citizens obtain between 71.9 per cent and 85 per cent of their income through waged employment, whereas those with no training were only able to rely on wages for 52.1 per cent of their income, the rest largely coming from government and kin or community assistance (Central Statistics Office 2013: 16). Lesedi reflected on the link between education and economic autonomy:

Researcher: So what kind of impact has that educational equality had on women?

Lesedi: We are now being educated, yeah it changed our life because it empower us. [...] The girl child was just being put back home, as somebody will marry her and take care of [her]. But now, now we can see we are empowered. Even me, I could be a breadwinner to my family.

While previously girls were viewed as future wives on whom an education would be wasted, the value of education as preparation for a career was being increasingly recognised at the time of my research. As Malisa explained, lack of education meant women 'would spend most of their time in the field, some would be housewives, taking care of the kids [...] Most women work [for wages] now, not like before'. Kevane (2014: 117) points out that in sub-Saharan Africa, it is not usually chiefs, heads of state or authority figures in general who demarcate types of work by gender. Rather, the gendered division of labour 'seems to be sustained by informal norms operating at the level of households and communities'. This is the case in Botswana, where there are no legal restrictions on the work that women (and men) can do. Malisa and others attributed the opening up of new types of employment for women to their improved education.

Women's entrance into the formal workplace was commonly raised in response to the question 'what has changed for women?' Kesegofetse pointed out, 'Some of them have even taken senior positions', a move she said was 'quite a positive change'. Sedireng noted that when she was young, 'Women would be nurses and teachers' only, but 'in that regard a lot has changed'. For several of the participants, the most recent change for women in the workplace was their move into senior positions, or roles previously reserved for men, such as 'CEOs and directors of companies and even starting their own business' (Akhu). Akhu reported that 'people get thrilled' when she

performed on the saxophone, 'Playing instruments that are like, labelled for men, you know'. Tumelo suggested that although men and women did not have equal opportunities in the workplace, there had been enough 'progress' in that area to give women 'that little bit of independence'.

For some participants, the significance of changes in the formal workplace was not in the types of positions women could take up, but in the fact that formal work gave women the opportunity to become breadwinners for the family. Thato reported that because of economic changes such as women moving into formal employment, 'I find I am financially free, I can take care of my kid, I can do whatever I want with my money. Which was not the case with my mother'. For Tshiamo, being able to fund 'school fees, buy food for children, buy clothes' was paramount. Some participants suggested economic needs to be a primary motivation for women moving into the formal workplace, taking precedence over ambition or interest. Women experience poverty more often than men in Botswana; FFHs constitute approximately half of all households, and a higher proportion of FFHs live under the poverty line than MHHs (Akinsola and Popovich 2002: 767). Only 55 per cent of FFHs have at least one wage earner compared with 74 per cent of MHHs (Akinsola and Popovich 2002: 767). High levels of single motherhood among the participants and the accompanying economic strain further supports the suggestion that poverty in FHHs was a key motivation for women to take up formal employment.

21 of the participants raised single motherhood as a major concern for women. While I did not ask them to define 'single motherhood' explicitly, their stories suggested that single motherhood was understood as having children with a man or men with whom they were no longer in a relationship, and, in most cases, who did not contribute materially or practically to their child(ren)'s upbringing. At the time of research 17 were single mothers and many were raised by single mothers themselves. The women attributed the phenomenon to a lack of familial responsibility on men's part, an assertion that is backed by other research in the area. Datta (2011: 124) notes that the research concerning fathers in Botswana collectively suggests they are 'at best, distant and, at worst, absent and irresponsible'. In her own research Datta (2011: 133) discovered that fatherhood in Botswana has been perceived as optional over several generations,⁴¹ with many of the men in her study reporting that their fathers were as neglectful towards them as they were towards their own children. They justified their

⁴¹ Datta (2011) uses the term 'fatherhood' to refer to the socioeconomic responsibilities of being a male parent, rather than as an indicator of biological paternity. I have followed her lead here.

irresponsibility through gendered cultural norms that stipulated, ‘No shame is attached to fathers who are not looking after their children’ (male participant, cited in Datta 2011: 130). Lesedi agreed, ‘If you have fathered a child here in Botswana it is not a must that you should be taking care of them’. The father of Lesedi’s child had visited just once in two years. Emelda concurred, ‘In our culture most of the men don’t want the kid, and if he doesn’t want the kid then he will leave you alone’. Supporting Emelda’s assertion, Datta (2011: 130) found that men wanted to be able to *choose* fatherhood in the event of having a child; taking responsibility for one’s offspring was considered optional. One of her male participants admitted that he would ‘run away’ if he impregnated a woman but did not want a child. Similarly, the East African participants in Silberschmidt’s (2001: 663) research complained that men engaged in irresponsible sexual behaviour and failed to provide for their families. In South Africa too, women have become ‘indignant at men’s unreliability’ (Hunter 2009: 136).

Malisa said that she had received financial help from her son’s father just once in seven years, because he was ‘irresponsible, having multiple partners and having too many children’. Botswana’s total fertility rate (TFR) has averaged at 2.9 for the period 2010 – 2015, a low rate by comparison with sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, where the average TFR is 5.1 for the same period (UN 2015). The low fertility rate appears to challenge my participants’ assertions that men engage in multiple, unprotected, often-concurrent sexual relationships, which result in unwanted pregnancies and single mothers. However, numerous studies report findings that support my participants’ perceptions of men’s sexual behavior. Researchers (see, for example, Datta 2011: 130; Ari Ho-Foster et al. 2010: 1009; Kalichman et al. 2007: 188) note that for Botswana men, frequent casual sex with multiple women was an important marker of masculinity. Such an outlook is not new. Promiscuity on men’s part was noted as far as back as 1940 (243), when Schapera recorded that young men ‘prefer to swagger through the village streets and spend their time with the girls [...] whom they are then able to seduce fairly easily’. A similar phenomenon has been recorded in Kenya, where socioeconomic change has challenged male dominance, and frequent casual sexual partners has become a means to restoring a damaged sense of masculinity (Silberschmidt 2001: 657). The men in Silberschmidt’s (2001: 662) study reported that multiple concurrent sexual intercourse made them ‘feel like a man’.

Kalichman et al. (2007: 188) note that the emphasis on high-risk behaviour as a masculine trait often means men choose to have sex without using condoms, and Marandu, Chamme and Mbaki (2004: 491) suggest that ‘men appear to have a greater

tendency to agree with beliefs that encourage non-use of condoms'. While the Botswana government's HIV/AIDS prevention programme has been relatively successful in encouraging condom use, conservative patriarchal norms, power imbalance, and economic dependency continue to allow men to determine whether or not a condom is used. In Nigeria it was found that for women, 'insisting on condom use is impossible', since the request was seen as implicitly questioning the man's sexual behaviour (Jordan Smith 2009: 180). Weiser et al. (2007: 1593) discovered that women who suffered from food insufficiency were 70 per cent more likely to use condoms inconsistently with casual partners. In a study of 2658 women from Botswana and Kwa-Zulu Natal, it was found that women who were 10 or more years younger than their male partners, were victims of GBV, were not educated beyond primary level, or who were economically dependent on their partners were less likely to request condom use (Kalichman et al. 2007: 193). Those women who did feel able to ask for condom use sometimes had their requests denied – 27.3 per cent of men refused requests from their female sexual partners to use condoms, with a higher proportion of men in Botswana refusing requests than men in Kwa-Zulu Natal (Kalichman et al. 2007: 193). Thus, while the low fertility rate suggests that the proportion of men who behave in the ways described my participants is probably small, the women were certainly aware of the existence of such behaviour, as supported by other research, or had experienced it directly themselves – 17 of the 30 participants were single mothers, many of whom told stories about sexual partners who had abandoned them when they became pregnant, or after the child was born. Of those 17, eight received no financial or other support from the father(s) of their child(ren), who were not involved in their child(ren)'s lives in any form. Five did receive some form of support, and the remaining five did not offer information about their child(ren)'s father(s). Of the 22 participants who talked about their own fathers, 14 had some form of relationship with their father and 8 had no relationship with their father.

Out of concern for losing all contact with her child's father and, thus, losing the ability to claim child maintenance payments, Keatletse hoped to take advantage of legislation that officially connected her child with his father pending proof of paternity. The Affiliation Proceedings (Amendment) Act of 1999 was designed to legitimise mothers' bids for child maintenance. However, in this particular case, the father was not present at the birth and Keatletse struggled to get him to sign the necessary papers. Putting the onus on women to prove the paternity of their children undermines the Act's effectiveness as a tool of support (Datta 2011: 125). Several other participants spoke of

the limitations of the child maintenance system, including difficulties in tracking fathers down, inadequate rulings on payment amounts, and having to travel to the courts on a monthly basis to collect payments that might or might not have materialised (Datta 2011: 125). As such, 'to rely on men is the last option' (Beth). Supporting Beth's assertion, Letamo and Rakgoasi (2000: 179) contribute that only 35 per cent of a sample of 2564 single mothers received any form of child support from the father of the child(ren). In speaking about men's irresponsible sexual conduct and failure to provide for their offspring, none of my participants found such behaviour acceptable. While they recognised that it was a culturally sanctioned norm, they resented men for it, implying a changing state of consciousness toward unfavourable gendered modes of behaviour (Stanley and Wise 1993: 124-133). However, many of them expressed that it was futile to try to hold men accountable. Rather, their approach to the problem was to work towards being financially self-sufficient in order to support their fatherless children.

While most of the participants lamented men's lack of fiscal responsibility toward their families, and resented the burden this put on women to earn money of their own, Pamela viewed formal work as a positive element in her life, providing her with choices she would not have had otherwise. When she found herself in a troubled relationship with her daughter's father, Pamela was able to decide, 'I don't need this kind of person in my life'. She 'chose to be a single mother', whereas, 'In the olden days women were not allowed to do anything, to have a say in how to run their lives'. She attributed her confidence in making such a choice to the fact that she knew she could 'afford to do everything that he could do' for her, that she could 'take care of [herself] and [her] daughter without the help of any man'. Before women had the economic opportunities that Pamela enjoyed, they often feared: 'If I take my child and leave [...] how am I going to survive? How am I going to have food on the table?' As such, in addition to being necessary for survival, financial independence served to open up domestic options for women.

The participants gave the impression that the absent male provider was a relatively new phenomenon, affecting their own generation and possibly their parents'. They implied that in earlier generations a woman could rely on the economic protection she received from a male breadwinner. However, men have historically resided separately from their nuclear families, since cattle posts in isolated areas took them away from their home villages for much of the year (Townsend 1997: 417-418). More recently, the creation of new employment opportunities for men in the mines and farms

of South Africa led to mass labour migration out of Botswana from the 1940s, shifting to internal migration upon the establishment of an independent administration in 1966, and increased prospects for men following the discovery of valuable metals and minerals within Botswana (Brown 1983: 369-373).⁴² Often they were gone for years at a time; money was not always sent home and some men could not be relied upon to return home at all (Brown 1983: 369-373).

While general nostalgia might play a part in the interviewees' apparent romanticizing of the past, their perception of men's absenteeism as a new problem perhaps stems from socioeconomic changes that have increased the impact of men's failure to provide for women. In 1940 Schapera (109-113) commented on 'the growth of new wants' from the late nineteenth century onwards as international trade increased under the British administration. He revealed that the impact of such 'new commodities, and the creation of wants formerly unknown' was felt in 'greater differentiation in standards of living'. With the novel availability of a wide range of goods, 'new criteria of wealth and social status' had emerged, giving social weight to novel possessions and activities. Schapera's observations hold true today; material desires, and the regret felt when they could not be met, were expressed by several of my participants. Tebby explained that people want 'the house, the private schools'. Since so many women were compelled to survive as single mothers, they frequently had to sacrifice their material aspirations. As such, it could be suggested that the ever-expanding availability of goods and services presented to those with disposable income heightened the loss of male financial support, particularly for women with dependants of their own.

Iversen (2005: 53) suggests that desire for luxuries such as clothing, fine dining, and travel motivates a large number of women to engage in transactional relationships, whereby a series of boyfriends provide funds in return for sexual intercourse. While Iversen (2005: 49-54) acknowledges that some women are able to control the decision-making in such relationships, she points out that gendered social customs and economic inequality create an imbalance of power that usually disadvantages the woman. Mabedi expressed concern about transactional relationships, which she thought were increasing alongside the influence of western materialism. She contended, 'Because of globalisation [girls] need to live the fancy life [...] there's a pressure to look good, to show off, and the only way you can get that is from a man [...] because for sure no woman is gonna give it to you'. Her assertion that women will not support one another

⁴² Brown (1983: 370) reports that 10 per cent of the population were absent labour migrants by 1943, a number that increased rapidly in the following years.

in achieving material success is perhaps suggestive of the competition felt between women, particularly rural women like Mabedi. In rural areas there are few opportunities for women to gain financial independence through employment, and due to labour migration and local unemployment there is a shortage of economically established men who could potentially offer financial support. In such a context, women might find themselves competing for the resources that could offer means to material satiety.

Mabedi continued, 'We sort of emulate what is happening in other countries', girls 'idolise Beyoncé and Kim Kardashian', desiring their celebrity lifestyle. Pono had similar concerns, suggesting, 'Young girls just want to see themselves one day on TV, and that's the lifestyle that they tend to desire more than education and helping themselves grow'. Given that Schapera (1940: 13) noted Tswana tribes' aspirations for European commodities almost 80 years ago, it is striking that the participants complained of external materialistic influences as a recent phenomenon, affecting only the youngest generations. In 1940, Schapera (112-13) reported that women 'insist[ed] on having their blankets and dresses', 'young men' had 'acquired tastes in clothing, food and amusement not shared by their elders', and parents wanted to meet their children's demands for 'such extreme local luxuries as bicycles, newspapers and even gramophones'. In parallel with my participants, Schapera's older interviewees complained that the youth were not only unduly enthralled by alien commodities, but were lacking direction, behaving in an unruly manner and asserting their independence as a result of western influences. Speaking of the change perceived amid the young, one man told Schapera (1940: 242), 'We never heard of these things until the white man came'. For my participants, it was not the presence of white people that was to blame for the youth losing their way, but the ubiquitous influence of western media culture. None of the interviewees themselves gave the impression that material luxury or superficial celebrity were statuses they aspired to. However, those who agreed to participate arguably may have had more interest in education and research than in popular media, when compared to the general population.

One participant, Kesegofetse, explained that the construction of certain illnesses as 'western' prevented many uneducated rural women from receiving the treatment they needed. She reported that 'issues like cervical cancer, breast cancer' were thought to impact only white women, and suggestions to the contrary would be treated with suspicion. Mathangwane (2011: 201) acknowledges that HIV/AIDS is culturally constructed as '*bolwetse jwa ko toropong*', or an 'external problem'. Some villagers perceived HIV/AIDS as an illness imported from the west, affecting only city dwellers

in Botswana and thus not a matter of concern for rural people. Mathangwane (2011: 201) argues that this attitude functions as a distancing method; constructing illnesses as external reduces the sense of threat a community might otherwise feel. Such beliefs could limit women's capacity for prevention and treatment of particular health problems.

Many of the participants attributed certain changes in women's lives to international influences. Mabedi reported that movement towards 'women empowerment' in Botswana was a direct result of external influences, particularly from neighbouring South Africa. She explained, 'We are watching what is happening to other people and we are doing it also'. Mabedi's suggestion implies that Tswana culture in itself was not viewed as fertile ground for gender equality, rather, additional or alternative influences were required to instigate and sustain changes that empowered women. Lesedi explained that village women have little choice but to 'rely on that socialisation that we grew up with', limiting them to restrictive gender roles. Those with experience of urban life, however, were exposed to external influences that gave them 'advantage [...] because they can see some things happening differently from typical Tswana culture'. Thus, Tswana culture was seen to disadvantage women in ways that western culture did not, by defining what women could and could not do. Lenah agreed that in rural areas where 'there isn't a lot of western influence' women were more likely to be confined by traditional gender expectations. She explained that village women are 'more respectful' towards men, 'will do everything, carry children, bath them, food for the husband', whereas men will be 'at the cattle post or drinking'. That she posited examples of servile behaviour as signs of respect illustrates the traditional construction of womanhood as humble and self-sacrificing.

Through travel, Neo found support in global alternatives to the gender roles offered by Tswana culture. She prioritised her education, pursuing a PhD despite pressure from her family to put marriage and childbearing first. While such a path was considered 'unorthodox' and prevented her from feeling she 'fit in', she was able to pursue it with confidence because her international friends were also 'global-minded'. She explained, 'they influence me, making me feel like my decisions are fine'. Neo was able to 'feel normal within [her] group of friends' regardless of challenges from conservative friends and family members. She reported that habits she picked up in London, such as drinking 'green smoothies in the morning', doing Pilates and taking up running, caused confusion for others in her Botswana community, who thought her actions unusual and unnecessary. Yet, she remained unaffected by their concerns and

held global influences in a positive light, observing, ‘Globalisation and just the flow of ideas’ generated by Batswana students returning from studying abroad were beginning to have a relaxing effect on social norms that was beneficial to women.

Caveats to change: geographic and generational differences

In 1940 (15) Schapera revealed, ‘Practices discarded by some continue to be observed by others, so that there is apparently much more variation than before’. Such variation continued to be the case in 2014 when I conducted my interviews. The majority of the participants agreed that there had been meaningful and often positive changes to women’s lives over the past two to three generations. However, 29 of them noted significant differences in the extent of those shifts between rural and urban sites. When I asked about variations between village and city life, a small number of participants talked about practical disparities. Elizabeth explained that rural women ‘are just using the firewood to cook, unlike at the town there isn’t a stove, the electricity’, they ‘just use candles to light inside the houses’ and ‘even shelter is not the same’. Tshiamo spoke of the subsistence economy available to rural women, who ‘can go to the field and plant when the rains have fallen’, and ‘grow sorghum and eat mealie meal’. She explained that any surplus can be sold, and ‘after selling beans, you can afford to buy sugar, bread, and meat’. By contrast, ‘In the city you have to go to work and buy everything for survival’. The participants who focused on basic material needs as a point of contrast between urban and rural sites were rural women, and among the poorest and least educated of the sample. Better-off and more educated participants from both rural and urban sites concentrated their answers on sociocultural differences (discussed below). This disparity illustrated changing priorities across the socioeconomic scale. When asked to reflect on how their lives differed from women living in the city, food and shelter was an important point of antithesis for some rural participants.

Rural women had few opportunities to improve their position. Formal employment options were minimal as a result of the concentration of industry at urban sites. As Maatla opined, ‘There’s nothing; you can’t even see an office anywhere’. While some women migrate to the capital for work, the inconsistent quality of education across the villages means many cannot gain the qualifications needed to find employment. Older rural women faced additional challenges in achieving an education when they were of school age. Emelda, who grew up in a village, remarked upon the barriers she faced:

Researcher: How did you end up with children without the father to support, what happened?

Emelda: [...] We were living in a village, it's not like in town. And our mothers were old women who doesn't care if you go to school or don't go to school. If you don't go to school you will be home making domestic jobs, and they are fine with that. [...] She will say, 'You are not going to school today, you will look after your brothers and sisters at home'.

While Emelda was keen on going to school, her mother considered Emelda's labour in the home more useful than her gaining an education, and domestic chores and childcare took precedence. The prioritising of girls' household labour over their schooling is seen in low-income nations worldwide, particularly in rural areas such as that where Emelda grew up. For example, in Latin America, where the gendered division of labour follows a similar pattern to that in Botswana, parents perceive school attendance as detrimental to the completion of necessary domestic chores (Stromquist 2001: 45). However, younger women appeared less constrained by cultural expectations of them to become wives and mothers, and valued their education as a means to get 'up there in the offices, holding high positions' (Pono). Pono asserted, 'Unlike our parents, who were more family-orientated [...] some girls my age, they say they don't even want children. I think that whole mind-set, it has changed a lot'. Moreover, others' expectations of younger women matched their own ambitions: 'She is expected in some parts of society to be ambitious [...] to achieve' (Neo). Thus, while there were marked differences in opportunity between urban and rural areas, the gap was narrower for the younger women in my sample who were less restrained by gendered customs and were to some extent encouraged to achieve on their own terms.

When compared with the lives of urban women, rural women's lives were described as being more restricted by conservative gender roles and the situation was seen as 'still pretty much the same as it was a long time ago' (Neo). The participants explained that in villages, 'Whatever a man says, it's law and that's it' (Keatlaretse), 'Culturally it's okay for women to be victims of men' (Kesegofetse). In contrast, 'City women are empowered, they don't take a lot of rubbish from men' (Kesegofetse). Thus, city living offered a level of freedom from the traditional patriarchal control manifest in rural areas. Reneilwe, a rural woman who works in the city, gave examples of the

expression of such control in villages, where ‘women have to eat last, after feeding the men’ and ‘you can’t see [women and men] in one place; traditionally they will say, man has to sit that side’. Reneilwe claimed that she could not imagine ‘surviving that life’ but suggested that ‘maybe if I was at the village I [would] have no choice’, illustrating the perceived restrictiveness of rural life. Although Reneilwe expressed distaste for certain cultural practices, elsewhere in the interview she articulated conservative viewpoints, talking about how she looked forward to having a husband to serve and did not condone men assisting with household labour. Seemingly contradictory expressions of traditional and modern gender roles were a common feature in my interviews, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Kesegofetse reasoned that urban women were more likely to be ‘financially independent’; without needing to rely on a man for survival, they could choose to live as they pleased. Economic autonomy is vital in assuring women’s empowerment worldwide (Friedan 1995). Women living or working in the city were on average financially better off (UNDP 2005: 7), and indeed their economic independence was perhaps a contributing factor in their relative freedom. However, the majority of the interviewees put the differences in gender relations between urban and rural sites down to cultural factors, demonstrating both the significance of cultural factors and the broad understanding of their impact. Those participants who submitted to traditional gender roles despite their economic independence illustrated that cultural factors had a greater impact than financial self-sufficiency on women’s shifting autonomy between urban and rural areas.

As previously discussed, my interviews indicated that women elders of the communities my participants inhabited could be striking a form of ‘patriarchal bargain’, a term Kandiyoti (1988) employs to illustrate a form of cultural collusion, in which women support practices that oppress them in exchange for the stability and protection provided by a patriarchal system. Tumelo, a rural woman with a stable income from her city job as an auditor, spoke of the restrictions placed on her by older female community members whenever she returned to her village:

Researcher: What is expected of a Motswana woman today?

Tumelo: Our culture has really changed, yeah. But where I come from they still expect me to be *that* woman. [...] They expect me to do those duties that a woman does. [...] A well-behaved woman, I guess.

Researcher: Are expectations different when you're [in the city] to when you're in Serowe?

Tumelo: Eish! They are, they are very different. They are very different. [...] Obviously when I'm at home, with the old women, I have to be living a certain way, you see. Because that's kind of expected of me. But when I'm here in the city, I do things my way. When I'm here I'm on my own so I get to do what I want.

In answer to my question, 'what, if anything, has changed for women here in Botswana?', Tumelo explained that women's position within Tswana culture had improved in many ways, and she felt she could act independently most of the time. Yet, when she returned to her village her freedom was limited by conservative expectations of how a woman should behave. For Tumelo, economic autonomy did not exempt her from the restrictive cultural practices that retained their stranglehold in rural areas. Her reference to 'the old women' suggests that her female elders had as much, if not more of a role to play in maintaining and reproducing the patriarchal system than men themselves. None of the participants claimed that men who knew them sought to restrict their freedom. Rather, it was mothers, aunts, sisters and grandmothers who criticised and discouraged the interviewees' autonomy.

Tsala, a financially stable librarian, spoke of the limitations her mother and the wider community placed on her independence when she returned to her home village. She reported: 'When I am back at home, I don't only belong to my mother, I belong to the society'. She noted her mother as her primary 'owner', further illustrating the authority of older women in conservative communities. However, away from her family at her city residence Tsala reported: 'I can live better than that. I can be something different than what I am'. Her assertion that she belonged to others when she inhabited her rural home indicated a construction of women as property, a bond she felt freed from when she returned to the city. Paradoxically, while she was able to act with more autonomy in an urban setting, her phrasing suggested that she felt more 'herself' when living under traditional restrictions – an increase in her autonomy rendered her 'something different' to who she felt she truly was.

The interviews suggested that mothers and grandmothers, having gained a level of status through childbearing and age, tended to hold more social influence than their daughters and granddaughters. However, unlike many younger women, the grip traditional gender roles had on the older generations maintained their subservience to

men. Pamela explained that even in the capital where many young women were experiencing weakened restrictions, ‘there are still some women who can’t get [out] from under men, especially older women. Because this independence thing is the new generation.’ Thus, while the rural/urban divide impacted the level of autonomy women held, generational differences were also evident, supporting Bourn’s (2008: 49) assertion that social change tends to leave older people behind. Many of the younger participants, on the other hand, were able to reshape gendered traditions that might otherwise have limited them.

Living the contradictions

There were notable differences in women’s role and status between urban and rural sites; gendered performances varied from place to place. Connell (2011: 74) acknowledges the possibility of ‘multiple dimensions in the structure of gender relations’, ‘as if one part of our lives were working on one gender logic, and another part on a different logic’. Connell’s analysis describes the reported experiences of many of my participants. Individual women operated within multiple gendered paradigms, which varied according to context. While a minority of the interviewees maintained their own preferred conduct across all sites, most adapted their behaviour to accommodate situational norms. Jackson et al. (2013: 682-3) reveal that ‘modern and traditional ideas and practices co-exist[ed]’ in the lives of their participants. Jackson et al. (2013: 672) offer low fertility and access to formal employment as examples of changes associated with modernity. Certainly many of my participants were affected by such changes, yet had not discarded traditional practices shaped by restrictive patriarchal and communal structures. While the interweaving of modernity and tradition in the lives of Jackson et al.’s (2013: 682) participants was often a consequence of socioeconomic needs, for my interviewees the sociocultural context was a more significant shaper of practices and behaviours.

Juggling competing expectations often caused strain for the participants. Lesedi’s weekly pattern was typical of a number of my interviewees: ‘I’m working as a teacher, so I come into work to do what is expected from me during the week. But during weekends I be back home in Thama, my home village [...] going to the weddings, going to the funerals.’ Weddings and funerals demand intensive labour from women, and are almost a weekly event for people in Botswana. Women like Lesedi work in formal employment in the city during the week, then travel for additional work in their home villages at weekends. The preparation and management of such events

was traditionally a priority for rural women who did not work outside the home, and would take up a great deal of their time. Yet, the participants reported that the labour required of women in handling these occasions had not diminished even as they moved into formal employment. Village communities expected the same level of work regardless of women's labour schedules outside the home and how far they would have to travel to the event site. Kesegofetse reported that such obligations were exhausting for her. Her village community did not view the work she did as a city magistrate during the week as valid, and she was subject to judgement should she falter in her performance of traditional constructions of gender in the village:

Researcher: I understand that a lot of women kind of split their lives between their home village and Gaborone, where they are maybe working in Gabs and then come home for the weekend, what kind of issues do you think that creates?

Kesegofetse: [...] You do live this kind of life from Monday to Friday, then weekend you go to the village, work, you are tired Sunday, you go back to Gaborone, you start working again, you prepare for the weekend. So, probably you'll find that when you get to the village, [...] they will think that you are lazy, when the whole week you have been working in the town and you are very tired. So to them work is physical, physical and not, you know, when you go to the office, and you tell them, 'Yeah, I am tired'.

Kesegofetse invested all of her energy into fulfilling her obligations in the city and in her home village. Yet, since her work as a magistrate did not fit traditional concepts of labour the fatigue she felt at weekends was not acknowledged. She was condemned as 'lazy' if she was not seen to be contributing to village life at maximum capacity, demonstrating Butler's (1988: 528) suggestion that failure to perform one's gender appropriately is met with a punitive response. Her work as a magistrate was not accepted as exertion in a culture where certain types of physical labour, such as cleaning and ploughing the fields, were valued over mental processing tasks. As a result, it was difficult for her to maintain good relationships with her rural neighbours. She explained that because of the job she does, 'Some of them think that I cannot do what other people do, I cannot sweep the yard'. Thus, Kesegofetse was seen to fail to perform the 'acts' required to maintain the 'illusion of gender essentialism' – in this case, domestic

cleaning tasks – and was socially penalised as a result (Butler 1988: 528). Working in a position of power was seen to undermine her ability to behave in the subservient manner expected of women, and this caused problems with women as much as it did with men.⁴³

Supporting Kandiyoti's (1988) theory of the patriarchal bargain, Kesegofetse's autonomy created tension between her and women in her community, who expressed concern that her independence undermined the patriarchal structure that they found security in. It appeared that her rural neighbours were content to operate within an exploitative system that constrained their opportunities for self-fulfilment, but nonetheless provided a level of financial support and cultural continuity. Kesegofetse's self-sufficiency was perhaps perceived as a challenge to the norm and a threat to the status quo. Despite her reported frustration with trying to fulfil others' gendered expectations of her while maintaining a lifestyle that satisfied her own aspirations, she continued in her attempts to balance the two. While she was unwilling to sacrifice her career and independence, attempting to please her community was also a priority.

Malisa experienced similar problems. She lived and worked in a village. Her skilled professional job as a radiographer set her apart from her community, and local women viewed her with suspicion. Consequently she was unable to connect with the women around her. She reported holding them in disdain for their apparent lack of ambition and inability to adapt to modern conditions that allowed women to participate in formal employment: 'I regard myself as a modern woman, working-class, but most of my neighbours are just village people who don't even have jobs. [...] I live a totally different life from them. In the morning I just wake up and go to work. Most of them just drink chibuku'.⁴⁴ Malisa's employment in an industry usually reserved for men jarred with those in her neighbourhood who considered a woman's place to be in the home, making her feel like an outsider in her own village. Unlike Kesegofetse, Malisa had decided to invest her resources in her career and forgo any attempt to win community acceptance through enacting her traditional female role. However, her interview indicated a degree of resentment as a result of the animosity she experienced that was mentally fatiguing.

Although Neo led an independent modern life and was successful in her role as a research fellow, she was conflicted about the impact of women's empowerment on the

⁴³ I discuss the challenges Kesegofetse has faced in relationships with men as a result of her job in the previous chapter.

⁴⁴ Chibuku is a low-priced commercial brand of sorghum beer that comes in a carton.

family. She remarked that as women have ‘gotten more opportunities [...] there are a lot of career demands on their time, and I think instead of people spending time with their children and nurturing and growing them, what happens is it’s more a material kind of love to make up for the time that you’re not there’. Thus, women’s move into formal employment undermined their culturally mandated role as devoted, self-sacrificing mothers (and wives). Women leaving their customary place in the home in pursuit of a career have historically sparked concern among conservative groups. In 1940 (16) Schapera recognised that ‘the family in Western society is notoriously being weakened by the emergence of new economic and social forces’, and implied that similar shifts were then beginning to take place in Botswana. Neo’s reported anxieties surrounding working mothers indicated that she felt conflicted about the increasing opportunities for women. She was not a mother herself, but her interview implied that she would prioritise motherhood over her career should she bear children in the future, a view expressed by numerous participants and discussed in the previous chapter. The view of women’s movements as a threat to ‘the family’ serves to hinder women’s personal growth. It appeared that motherhood would compromise Neo’s progress in a career that she reportedly gained great satisfaction from, as she struggled to reconcile her own competing expectations of women’s role.

Tebby seemed to have a greater degree of control over the balance of modern and traditional practices in her life than the participants discussed above, although she nonetheless admitted to being affected by others’ expectations. She explained that she felt obligated to live up to competing expectations: ‘You have to fill both the professional side of, the, “Okay, she’s gone to a good school she has a good job now”, you know, “She can take care of herself and yadda yadda”, but on the other side, if you are at a traditional ceremony, “Oh, she can sweep she can cook she can clean, she can work all the domestic duties”’. She was expected to be independent, educated, and successful in her career, yet equally competent in the subservient role typical of long-standing patriarchal customs. Being both willing and able to perform contradictory gender acts was ‘what society would judge as successful’ (Tebby).

Deliberating on this situation, Tebby explained, ‘I feel like women right now in Botswana are straddling between this modern and traditional world’. She realised that when she and her mother returned to her grandmother’s village, they would both transform ‘into that like, perfect daughter and the perfect woman’. She said, ‘Sometimes I’m even just looking at my mom like, she’s you know, she’s like, up early, she’s sweeping, she doesn’t sweep when she’s at our house in the city’. Tebby and her mother

operated on a context-specific gender logic depending on their location and whom they were with. Tebby's mother appeared to struggle with the inherent contradictions of living an independent, modern lifestyle while remaining part of a traditional culture, and would attempt to reconcile such concerns by preserving selected customs and recommending Tebby do the same:

Researcher: Do you have to do chores in the house?

Tebby: I live alone and [my mother] still tells me, 'I know you live alone but you shouldn't be going out and then sleeping in till noon' or whatever. She's like, 'You know you need to get yourself in the habit of being up at six'. I'm like, what am I doing at six!? I live alone, I'm sitting there, it's six o'clock in the morning and I don't know what to do. Yeah but she's like, you know, 'You gotta make your bed and do all of this.'

Rising early to complete domestic chores was a traditional obligation for women living in households with men and/or older women, and indicated both subservience and aptitude for household labour, markers of a 'good woman'. Tebby found her mother's insistence that she fulfil certain duties by a specified time of day nonsensical, since she lived alone and thus had nobody to witness her display of domestic competence. However, she devised ways to maintain her preferred lifestyle while managing others' expectations, including those of her mother: 'If I'm comfortable with these modern ways I do it, if I'm comfortable with these traditional ways I do it'. She gave the example of compromising on traditional clothing for certain events, where it is the custom for women to wear a headscarf to cover the hair and a skirt or dress: 'I don't think every event I'm at I have to have my hair covered with a scarf. I can just be like, this scarf doesn't go with my outfit!' She explained, 'It's not always practical if you knock off work at five and you have to be there by five thirty, and you're already in pants'. Tebby's career created practical difficulties in fulfilling traditional expectations, and her keen interest in fashion rendered certain customary outfit choices unacceptable to her. By prioritising her work schedule and maintaining her personal sense of style she was able to attend traditional events without undermining the things that were important to her.

However, her modification of customary norms opened her up to criticism: 'From men and I would say also older women, like for them it's a very fine line. It's

like a definite, you do this or you don't do this'. For those who rejected modern conditions, there was no room for adaptation. Tebby recalled that at an event: 'One of the [old women] actually said that, you know, "All these young women who are coming, you're coming with pants, you don't have scarfs on your head."' Mayer's (1999: 10) assertion that 'women are figured as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation and as "pure" and "modest"' resonates in this context; women were expected to cover their hair with scarves and to wear long skirts instead of trousers, which were perceived as masculine and thus contradictory to the construction and performance of the 'pure' feminized woman. Tebby reported being frustrated by the older woman's comment, which seemed to compel her to justify her own choice of attire beyond personal taste: 'I wouldn't have had time to go all the way home to change and then come here.' While she was reluctant to wear a scarf that didn't match her outfit, she was not hesitant about going to the event in the first place and performing her duties as a woman of the community. She was keen to state her appreciation for many Tswana customs, and reported that she felt them to be an important link to her heritage and cultural identity. Tebby's confidence in the validity of her behaviour implied that unlike the participants discussed above, she was able to move past any negativity directed at her choices, and successfully adapt selected traditions tailored to her chosen lifestyle.

Sedireng reported a shift in her behaviour when visiting rural areas: 'You interact with people differently [...] even the way you speak to people at the farm, it's different. [...] when I speak to people at the farm my Setswana is more formal. Um, my mannerisms are more formal.' Sedireng performed her gender in varying ways between spaces, adjusting the 'bodily gestures, movements, and enactments' that 'constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self' to fit the cultural context of different locales (Butler 1988: 519). Sedireng did not challenge the requirement for her to alter her conduct in rural settings, nor did she appear to experience it as an unwanted form of control. In contrast, Shera firmly resisted obligations to act differently in situations that demanded customary behaviour:

Researcher: You mentioned a while back that at weekends your mother and your grandmother sometimes have unreasonable demands, what does that mean?

Shera: [...] I told [my grandmother] I'm not going to these things any more [...] because all I am is labour. Until I get married I will be labour,

and I'm sorry, I'm not fetching tea or fetching things for people, why?
[...] What do the men do? A hundred of them kill one cow. And then they
sit. They sit. [...] I came back to my mum I'm like, you know, I am not,
until you guys renegotiate the policy around labour in this family I will
show up when [the men] show up. [...] I'm not doing it. I'm not. And
they said I was kidding. I am not kidding.

Shera was committed to her modern, independent lifestyle, but despite her refusal to take on gendered obligations, the relentless pressure of those responsibilities was draining for her: 'it's just constant things like that where you're, either you keep fighting and you say something every single time, which is exhausting and you wouldn't want to do that, or you just keep quiet'. Even in her relationship with a man she has chosen, whom she cared for deeply and had a strong intellectual bond with, there were issues with his expectations of her as a woman. In a debate over who should be making the bed each day, Shera's partner asserted that if the bed is unmade 'it takes away from [her] womanhood'. She reported being astounded by his reasoning, having always regarded him as a socially progressive man. His seemingly discordant loyalty to cultural tropes around the gendered division of labour was enough for her to doubt the future of their relationship. For Shera, reshaping gendered traditions was not an option. Rather, she rejected them outright. Her approach was unique among my participants, most of whom accepted and/or modified selected patriarchal traditions, with varying degrees of success.

Conclusion

The interviews illustrated that life had changed for many women as parts of Botswana had become increasingly affected by modern conditions, such as urbanisation, industrialisation, and democratic government. Women had greater financial autonomy, were able to engage in politics, had improved access to education and wider employment opportunities. Many of my participants demonstrated considerable agency in choosing their lifestyles, from the careers they followed to where they chose to live, despite pressures and limitations from their immediate circles and the wider community. Most of the interviewees perceived such autonomy to be a break from a past, an observation that is supported by statistics indicating improvements in gender equality. However, my interviews did not give the impression that modern values were fully supplanting patriarchal Tswana traditions.

The gap between the modern and the traditional was not always clear-cut, nor did one or the other define every aspect of a woman's life. Rather, many participants reinterpreted Tswana customs to better suit contemporary circumstances, absorbing some modern influences and rejecting others according to their needs and preferences. In rare cases, adaptations were expressed as an explicit rejection of repressive gendered norms in Tswana culture, but more often they represented an implicit, even unconscious adaptation of customs to meet the requirements of modern life. Women living in rural areas were required to 'perform' gender differently to those living in rural areas; those who occupied dual locations needed to adjust their 'bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds' between settings, modifying their character, their language, their dress, and their behaviour in order to conform to gendered expectations that varied between locales (Butler 1988: 519). In this manner they were able to avoid the 'punitive consequences' of non-conformance (Butler 1988: 522), placate more conservative family members and relieve the strain of familial discord, while remaining in control of the life choices most significant to them.

Such autonomy was however limited for women living in rural areas, where traditional constructions of womanhood and restrictive gender roles were more difficult to escape. Repressive social attitudes appeared to be stricter in the villages. While some of the rural participants were aware that other women avoided the restrictions of conservative patriarchal culture, they did not seem to view such a lifestyle as an option for themselves. Lack of education and opportunity resulted in high unemployment in the villages; many of my rural participants were dependent on others and thus limited in their choices. Generational differences were also apparent, with older women less willing or less able to absorb changing gender relations. Such a pattern is typical of the on-going process of gender equality, where 'change often starts in one sector of society and takes time to seep through into others' (Connell 2011: 73). Bourn (2008: 49) advances the argument that young people are the most affected by social change, and this seemed to be the case with my participants, particularly those who lived in urban areas who were exposed to the modernising influences of industrialisation and globalisation.

Chapter six: Conclusion

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Head's character Paulina Sebeso reflects on the labour Batswana women do as she joins with other women to begin a new tobacco-growing project:

No men ever worked harder than Batswana women, for the whole burden of providing food for big families rested with them. It was their sticks that thrashed the corn at harvesting time and their winnowing baskets that filled the air for miles and miles around with the dust of husks, and they often, in addition to broadcasting the seed when the early rains fell, took over the tasks of the men and also ploughed the land with oxen.
(Head 1968/2010: 117)

In the above excerpt Paulina describes the 'hardest, most sustained labour' of rural Batswana women, and elsewhere speaks of the 'small everyday things' they were responsible for, including 'babies', 'pots, food, fires, cups and plates' (Head 1968/2010: 173), and serving 'the men plates of roast chicken' (Head 1968/2010: 108). Paulina is well aware of the injustice of women's disproportionate labour burden, her tone resentful. Almost 50 years later, my research paints a picture different only in the details. Rapid industrialisation and the introduction of a capitalist economy since Head's time has altered the types of labour undertaken by most of my participants, although some did continue to grow crops for their families. Yet, like Head's characters, the women I interviewed reported a litany of jobs that shaped their days and limited their choices.

I have shown that women from all backgrounds are under pressure to contribute their labour and resources freely to their immediate families, wider kin networks, and communities at large. They are expected to complete all of the cooking and cleaning for the household, which for some women also involves fetching water and collecting firewood. Childcare is almost exclusively a female domain, and this extends to the care of others' children, often for prolonged periods of time. Women are the ones called upon to run errands for others, and to provide financial support where needed, often at a cost to their own needs. They must organise and serve at community events such as weddings and funerals. These obligations are held in addition to full-time paid employment. I discovered that such burdens are exhausting for women, many of whom

report resentment and a sense of powerlessness in the face of cultural expectations. A significant finding of this thesis is that women's labour effectively transfers valuable resources, specifically time and money, to men and to married female elders, while the women themselves receive little in recompense. My findings contribute to the understanding of female poverty by illustrating the practical and financial burdens women carry. While a number of studies explore the socioeconomic dynamics of female poverty (Batsalelwang and Dambe 2015; Akinsola and Popovich 2002; Mookodi 2008), my research offers unique analysis of women's reported individual experience, shedding light on the personal impact of the burdens placed upon them.

My participants' accounts suggested that social status would to some extent contribute to easing these burdens, since women who have reached maturity are given less demanding tasks and are able to delegate certain duties to women of a lower standing. Yet to achieve 'womanhood' and be deemed an adult, women must carve out a relational identity through marriage or motherhood, and ideally both. To become 'Mrs so-and-so' or 'Mother of so-and-so' is to accomplish a social status that single childless women cannot reach. While the difficulties of attaining a husband are acknowledged by many women, motherhood is viewed as compulsory and childlessness after a certain age is unacceptable to most. Thus, a woman's route to respect in her community is tied to men through heterosexual marriage and childbearing, which are given more significance as symbols of maturity than age, educational and career achievements, or any other factor. Given that puberty is a prerequisite for biological motherhood, investigating the cultural construction of menstruation would aid in understanding the broader context of the meaning assigned to childbearing. As in many languages worldwide, taboo topics such as sex and menstruation are often steeped in highly localized metaphorical language; the subtleties of meaning are perhaps more at risk of being lost in translation than is ordinary speech. Consequently, scholars who speak Setswana are better placed to conduct such research.

The interviewees' accounts offered a sense of spiritual reverence around the institution of marriage, but their described experience of matrimony contradicted that idealism. Whether talking about their own marriage or their knowledge of other women's, the participants presented an overwhelmingly negative reality of abuse, unfaithfulness, and general discontent. However, once married, women are encouraged to remain married regardless of problems they may face. My interviews suggest that the institution of marriage is held in higher esteem than the wellbeing of the individuals within it. Since female divorcees face humiliation and many wives are financially

dependent on their husbands, it can be difficult for women to escape a bad marriage. Head's character Makhaya describes matrimony from a wife's perspective: 'There was no balance between herself and a man. There was nothing but this quiet, contemptuous, know-all silence between herself, the man and his functioning organs. And everyone called this married life' (1968: 142). As implied in the passage and evidenced in my research, wives are expected to be sexually available to their husbands. The participants appeared resigned to their lack of bodily autonomy, raising questions about women's sexuality and experience of sex.

I have shown that despite cultural norms that posit women as inferior, and social practices that demonstrate male supremacy, women often perceive men as weak and irresponsible. Paulina's reflection in *When Rain Clouds Gather* (Head 1968/2010: 103) suggests that such a view is not unique to my participants: 'she feared [...] the untrustworthiness of men with no strength or moral values. It was as though a whole society had connived at producing a race of degenerate men by stressing their superiority in the law and overlooking how it affected them as individuals'. My research findings suggest a cultural norm in which men are encouraged to have frequent unprotected sex with a number of different women, yet are not expected to be financially, practically, or emotionally responsible for any resulting offspring. Paulina contemplates, 'Batswana men no longer cared. In fact, a love affair resulting in pregnancy was one sure way to of driving a man away, and it was a country of fatherless children' (Head 1968/2010: 133). The participants were acutely aware of this reality and complained of it, yet felt powerless to change it despite the negative impact on their lives. Many of them seemed resigned to men's reckless behaviour, and thought it futile to encourage or hope for change.

While my research indicates that many women have a generally poor view of men, I have presented evidence of various forms of cultural collusion, in which women maintain and reproduce a patriarchal social order that serves to limit women's choices. The interviewees related anecdotes of judging other women, or being judged by other women, for conduct that consciously or unconsciously undermined the patriarchal system. In some cases, the participants were frustrated and confused by their own actions in this respect. Women might discourage other women from nonconformist behaviours, including: remaining unmarried and/or childless; being divorced; failing to provide the expected high standards of service to others; wearing revealing clothes; allowing their husbands to assist with domestic chores; prioritizing personal achievements over familial obligations; and speaking or acting in a non-feminine

manner. Since men often have little involvement in children's upbringing, it is women who socialise children into traditional gender roles, further supporting the replication of restrictive gender arrangements. My interviews indicated that individual men have little direct involvement in the policing of women's behaviour. Further research could investigate the dynamics of women's apparent cultural collusion – under what pressures do women encourage one another to conform, and to what extent does this exemplify the power of the patriarchal structure over individual agency?

Although the above findings indicate that women have limited agency in some aspects of their lives, my participants illustrated their autonomy in selecting and reshaping certain Tswana customs. I extended Jackson et al.'s (2013) reshaping tradition theory to the Botswana context, showing how Botswana women modify traditional mores. I have demonstrated that women often operate along two separate but intersecting sets of gender arrangements. The first is characterized by conservative patriarchal norms with a stronghold in rural areas, the second a more liberal, progressive set of values, often developing in the city. Since many women divide their time across two or three sites; for example, working in the city during the week and spending the weekends in the village assisting their rural families, they are subject to conflicting expectations of their roles as women, and obligated to perform gender-constitutive acts in different ways across different spaces. This was particularly the case for women who worked in contemporary forms of employment not valued or recognised by conservative kin, who would place demands on them on the assumption that they did not work hard in their paid roles and thus had time and energy to spare. My thesis has shown that while few of the women I spoke to openly rejected their obligations, many actively 'managed' their dualistic lifestyles by altering their response to traditional demands. For example, when called upon to cook for an event, women might instead choose to outsource catering; when expected to dress conservatively, they might opt to wear traditional skirts but avoid covering their hair. In this manner they can conserve energy and protect their autonomy while placating those around them who expect women to conform to patriarchal social expectations.

Connell and Pearse (2015: 86) posit that as well as external factors such as 'new technology, urban life, mass communications, secularism [...], gender relations also have internal tendencies towards change'. I have shown that gender arrangements are transforming in Botswana. A number of my participants suggested possible catalysts for these changes, including improved education, exposure to foreign influences, and the efforts of women's rights groups. However, it would be useful to further investigate

these and other external facilitators of change, and to ask questions about internal drivers, too. Botswana is a rich site for such investigations, since, as I have shown, conservative and progressive perceptions of gender exist alongside one another, often in stark contrast. Understanding how transformations in gender relations take place in the local context allows policymakers, educators, and activists to encourage and support changes that bolster women's rights and freedoms more effectively.

Through in-depth examination of the dynamics of cross-cultural research, this thesis contributes to the existing scholarship surrounding cross-cultural qualitative interviewing. In addition to considering the impact of this kind of research on the participants, the data, and the analyses, I offer a uniquely intimate perspective on the impact of such fieldwork on the researcher. Conducting the research for this thesis raised numerous methodological, political, and cultural issues that were to inform the work at every stage, from planning the fieldwork to writing up the results. The significance of these dynamics should not be overlooked, for they shape what questions are asked, how they are answered, and how they are interpreted and presented. While cross-cultural research itself is not uncommon, detailed accounts of the fieldwork and personal reflections on the process are often absent. My participation in cross-cultural interviewing allowed me to contribute methodological findings that compared in significance with the content of the interviews. Methodological factors that had the most perceptible impact, both on my individual experience and on the research itself, included the complex social and political dynamics of cross-cultural interviewing, and street harassment in the field, and working with an interpreter. While I had anticipated these concerns in advance, I was surprised to find that some had more or a different impact than I had expected.

Plummer (2001: 226-230) encourages researchers to share the ethical issues they have faced and reflect upon possible solutions. By providing the academic community with detailed narratives, researchers encourage dialogue about ethical research practice that is based in real situational dilemmas, rather than in universal principles that are often unhelpfully abstract. For me, the greatest ethical concerns of this research were founded in the structural power imbalances between the participants and myself. The inequalities between us had a meaningful impact on the research, although not always in ways I had anticipated. While I did not assume that a shared female identity would overshadow the differences and inequalities between myself and the participants, I had expected our shared gender to be the strongest leveller, and race to place the greatest distance between us. However, I was surprised to find that I felt class differences most

profoundly. In accordance with Patai (1991), I submit that ethical research in the context of 'systemic inequality' is problematic. While I offer no solutions, I would suggest that in my own case, greater sensitivity to the multiple intersections of inequality would have better equipped me to deal with the dilemmas that arose from class differences.

Sexual harassment of women researchers in the field is a real concern. There are a limited number of articles relating the dangers of abuse or harassment directed at female academics by their male subjects (for a review of this literature, see Sharp and Kremer 2006: 318-319). However, the impact of harassment by men who were not participants, on both the researcher and the fieldwork, has scarcely been investigated. While my research was for and about women, and men were not included in my sample, through harassment, individual men had a perceptibly negative impact on my fieldwork. This served to highlight the participants' complaints about the behaviour of Batswana men in general, potentially furthering my own bias against local men in my interpretation of the data. By presenting my own experiences of harassment I raise issues of consideration to women scholars conducting research in similar cultural environments, whose vulnerability to harassment might not have been considered beyond the risk potentially posed by their participants.

Researchers who conduct interviews across a language barrier rarely include reflections on the impact of having an interpreter present in their analysis; in many cases the interpreter is not mentioned beyond acknowledgment of their use. Williamson et al. (2011: 390), Murray and Wynne (2001: 23), and Edwards (1998: 202-203) suggest that the interpreter should not be viewed simply as an objective language-switcher, disconnected from the subjectivity of social interaction. Rather, their impact as active participant in the interview process should be acknowledged. I contribute to the understanding of interpreters as integral to the meaning-making process of the qualitative interview by exploring the dynamics of my own relationship to the interpreter I worked with, and her effect on the research. I would like to suggest that learning the language, using a more experienced interpreter, or working alongside a local researcher who could conduct interviews in Setswana, could offer solutions to the challenges I faced in this area.

The primary goal of this research was to illuminate some of the challenges women face in Botswana today, with the aim of delivering findings that could contribute to furthering gender equality in the country. This research addresses previously neglected issues of the social construction of womanhood and gender in the

Botswana context. According to Connell and Pearse (2015: 83) ‘the study of cultural representations of gender, gendered attitudes, value systems and related problems has been probably the most active area of gender studies in the past two decades – in the rich countries of the global metropole. It is not so central in the developing world, where questions of poverty, power and economic change have higher priority.’ This is the case in Botswana, which has seen little academic research into the social and cultural aspects of gender. Rather, scholars have prioritised issues of poverty, HIV/AIDS, and economic development, particularly in the last 20 years. Prior to that, Schapera’s seminal works (1938, 1940) recorded numerous aspects of gender relations, and Suggs’ 1987 study provided an updated perspective on female status and life stages.

This thesis built on these classic anthropological texts, contributing updated findings to the understanding of women’s position in Botswana society from a women’s studies perspective. I utilized feminist research methods that encourage acknowledgment of the researcher as part of the research process and seek to address structural imbalances of power between the investigator and the investigated. I explored aspects of the social and cultural construction of gender in Botswana today, while also considering how gender concerns intersect with socioeconomic problems. I focused specifically on how womanhood is defined and experienced in Tswana culture, with exciting results. The government’s enactment of extensive legal reforms, national programs, and international instruments has gone a long way towards ensuring ‘official’ gender equality. However, my interviews emphasized that local attitudes and perceptions present major obstacles for women, in a climate where ‘socioeconomic change and breakdown of traditional social institutions in sub-Saharan Africa have left women in a disadvantaged and vulnerable situation with increasing burdens and responsibilities’ (Silberschmidt 2001: 658). Thus, there is a disconnect between gender equality at the national level and the lived experience of individual women in different parts of the country. My research contributes to closing that gap by contributing to the understanding of the sociocultural challenges facing women on a daily basis. A central mission of feminist researchers is to conduct research on behalf of women and other oppressed groups with the goal of uncovering subjugated knowledge—oppressed groups’ voices and ways of thinking that have been devalued by dominant, patriarchal, forms of knowledge—and promoting social change and social justice (Hesse-Biber 2012: 138). This premise, as articulated by Hesse-Biber, was fundamental to my research. While ‘giving voice’ to the subaltern is arguably impossible (Spivak 1988), I intend my research to ‘work *for* the bloody subaltern’ (Spivak interview in deKock

1992: 46). Engaging with active local groups is the next step in ensuring that these findings have impact outside of western academia, and contribute towards the empowerment of women who, in common with many of my participants, experience oppression in various forms. I hope that through discussion and cooperation with local groups I might begin to redistribute the power I have assumed as an inevitable part of the research process (O'Shaughnessy and Krogman 2012; Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009; Kvale 2006; Mullings 1999; Patai 1991; Stacey 1991; Alcoff 1987; Oakley 1981), and to encourage real change at the community level.

Appendices

I. Research Information Sheet

Project Information

- My name is Stephanie Smith. I am a PhD candidate at the University of York, UK. I am conducting research into cultural perceptions of womanhood in Botswana.
- If you agree to participate in the study, I will interview you on one occasion. The interview will be informal and I will only ask a few guiding questions. We will talk about your life and experiences as a woman in your country and I will be guided by what you say in what I ask. I want to know what it is like to be a woman in Botswana. I'd like to hear about your personal experiences, and what you think and feel about events and people in your life.
- During the interview, you may refuse to answer any questions, or stop the interview. If you become uncomfortable with my questioning or note-taking activities, please let me know immediately so that I can change what I'm doing. If you later decide that you do not want to participate in the study, you can withdraw your consent at any time up to and including 31st October 2014 by contacting me via email or any other means available to you. You are not required to give a reason.
- All information will be kept strictly confidential. Information given by you will be made anonymous through the use of a pseudonym. No information that could be used to identify you personally will be made public, and your data will be stored safely in the university.
- I will be taking an audio recording of the interview to enable me to write an accurate transcript of our discussion. The recording will be heard by nobody but myself. It is likely that I will use direct quotations from you in my PhD dissertation and in any subsequent publications, but I will never use your real name.
- The interviews will be conducted either in English, or in Setswana with the use of an interpreter. This will be your choice. The interpreter will keep your participation in the study and the things you say during your interview confidential.
- If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask me. You can also contact my supervisor, Prof Gabriele Griffin, at Gabriele.griffin@york.ac.uk.

My contact details:

Stephanie Smith, Centre for Women's Studies, Grimston House, University of York,
YO10 5DD, United Kingdom. Email: sss504@york.ac.uk

Ka ga thuto e

- Leina lame ke Stephanie Smith. Ke moithuti mogolo kwa sekolong se se golo sa York ko lefatsheng la UK. Ke dira dithuthuntsho mabapi le maitemogelo a bomme mo Botswana.
- Ga o dumela go tsaya karolo mo thuthuntshong e, ke kopa go go botsa dipotso tse di mmalwa mo sebakeng se. Thuthuntsho e, ga se e e tseneletseng, gape ke tla go botsa dipotso di se dintsi. Re tla bua ka botshelo jwa gago le maitemogelo a gago o le mme mo lefatsheng la Botswana mme re thusiwe ke se o tla se buang. Ke batla go itse gape ka maikutlo a gago, ditiragalo le batho ba o tshelang nabo.
- Mo tsamaong ya potsoloso e, ga o sa tseege sentle ka fa ke botsang ka teng o na le tshwanelo ya go sa arabe dipotso dingwe kana go emisa potsoloso e. Tsweetswee, ke kopa o ntsibose gore ke fetole ka fa ke botsang ka teng ga o bona go tlhokafala. Mme ga o batla go se tsewedise kana go se fetse potsoloso e, o ka ikgogela morago mo sebakeng sa nako e go fitlhela ka Phalane a tlhola malatsi a masome a mararo le bongwe. Se o ka se dira ka go ikgolaganya le nna ka maranyane a email kana wa nteletse. Ga o pateletswe go fa mabaka a kgogelo morago e.
- Dikgatiso tsotlhe di tla bewa e le sephiri ka go dirisa leina le eseng la gago. Gape ga gona kgatiso e tla dirisiwang go supa ope mo sechabeng. Mafoko a gago otlhe a tla bewa ka pabalesego ko sekolong sa York.
- Ke tla gatisa mantswe mo potsolosong e go nthusa gore ke kgone go kwala sengwe le sengwe jaaka re se buile. Kgatiso e, e tlaa reetswa ke nna le moranudi wame fela.
- O ka ikgethela go botswa ka puo ya seeng kana ya Setswana, mme go na le moranudi o e leng motsaakarolo mo thuthuntshong e mme se o se buang le ene o tla se tsaya e le sephiri.
- Fa o na le dipotso o seka wa tshaba go botsa. Kana o ka ikgolaganya le mogolwane wame e bong Prof, Gabriele Griffin ko Gabriele.griffin@york.ac.uk
- Nna o ka ikgolaganya le nna ko; Stephanie Smith, Centre for Women's Studies, Grimston House, University of York, YO105DD, United Kingdom. Email ke; sss504@york.ac.uk

II. Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Please ensure that you have read the attached 'Project Information' before completing this consent form.

Please tick to confirm you agree with the points listed below:

- I have been informed of and understand the purpose and procedures of this study and the purpose and procedures of this interview.
- I understand that the interview will be digitally recorded and then transcribed.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation in this interview or study at anytime up to and including the 31st of October 2014 by contacting the researcher via post or email.
- I understand that my anonymity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym.
- I understand that my words may be quoted directly.
- I agree to the use of my words in the researcher's PhD thesis and in any related publications.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Consent form

Tswetswee netefatsa gore o badile se se kwadilweng mo pampering ya Thuthuntso pele o tswelala pele foromo e.

Tsweetswee tsamaya o tshwaya mo mabokosong a fa thoko go supa ga o dumalane le se se kwadilweng.

- Ke boleletswe ebile ke a tlhaloganya maikaelelo, bomosola le ditsamaiso tsa thuthuntsho e gammogo le bomosola jwa potsoloso e e tla dirwang.
- Ke a tlhaloganya gore potsoloso e e ggtasiwa ka sekapa mantswe ebe e kwalwa jaaka e ntse.

- Ke tthaloganya gore ke gololesegile go ikogela morago kana go emisa go tsaya karolo mo potsolosong e nako nngwe le nngwe go fitlhela kgwedi ya Phalane e tlhola malatsi a masome a mararo le bongwe mo ngwageng o, ka go ikgolaganya le moithuti yo ka maranyane a email.
- Ke tthaloganya gore ga go dirisiwe leina lame mo thutong e maikaekelo e le gore ke bolokesege.
- Ke tthaloganya gore mafoko ame a ka nna a dirisiwa fela jaaka ke a buile go sa fetolwe sepe.
- Ka jalo, ke a dumela gore moithuti yo a ka dirisa mafoko ame fela jaaka ke a buile mo ithuthuntshong ya gagwe ya PhD.

Ka go baya monwana mo foromong e, o supa fa o tthalogantse tsotlhe ka botlalo gape o dumalana le go tsaya karolo mo potsolosong e.

Leina la motsayakarolo _____

Sekano sa motsaya karolo _____

Letsatsi _____

III. Interview Guide

I'm here to ask you about what it's like to be a woman in Botswana. I'd like to ask you about your life and your experiences. Could you describe a typical day in your life?

- Is that day typical for many women?
- What has changed for women in your lifetime? How did that change happen?
- What sorts of changes would you like to see for women? What things would help improve your situation?
- What could the government do to make your life better?
- What do you want for your life? What do you want for your female children?
- What are the main problems facing women and girls right now?
- What makes you think well of a woman?
- What does a woman need to know to function in this society? What kinds of things make a successful woman?
- What is the best age for a woman to be? How so?
- How do you see women as being treated differently from men?
- Are things different for city women than for village women?
- What sort of impact do your friends and neighbours have on your life?
- How do you feel about motherhood?
- Can you tell me about how you balance your needs with those of your family?
- How do you feel about the relationships in your life? What kinds of stresses have you experienced in your relationships?
- Which relationships have been the most important for you at different stages of your life?
- Has anybody else made choices for you in your life?

Is there anything else you'd like to talk about or anything that you think I should know?

Thank you for talking to me today.

Weaving throughout:

How is this different from how men experience this?/Do all women think like that? Do you think there are women who might think differently?/Can you tell me of a situation when this happened?/How do you feel/what do you think about that?

Ke fano go tla go go botsa ka botshelo jwa go nna motho wa mme mo lefatsheng la Botswana. Ke kopa go go botsa ka botshelo le maitemogelo a gago. Ntlhalosetsa ka ditiragalo tsa tsatsi la gago le le sa farologaneng thata le malatsi a mangwe.

- A letsatsi le le tshwana le la bomme ba bangwe?
- Ke eng se o bonang se fetogile mo matshelong a bomme ba ba mo botshelong jwa gago? Diphetogo tse di diragetse jang?
- Ke dife diphetogo tse o eletsang di ka diragalela bomme go tokafatsa matshelo a bone? Di tsile go a tokafatsa jang?
- Puso e ka dira eng go tokafatsa botshelo jwa gago?
- O batlela botshelo jwa gago eng? Bana ba gago ba basetsana bone o ba eletsang eng mo matshelong a bone?
- Ka go ya ka wena, ke dikgwetlho difeng tse di tumileng mo matshelong a bomme le bana ba basetsana mo bogompionong?
- Ke eng se o akanyang se siame ka bomme?
- Mosadi o tlhoka go itse go tsaya karolo mo sechabeng? Ke dilo difeng tse di thusang mosadi go atlega mo botshelo?
- Ke dife dingwaga tse wena o dumelang e le tsone tsa bomme tota? Goreng o rialo?
- Ga o lebeletse, a gona le tekatekanyo magareng a bomme le borre?
- Go ya ka wena a o bona bo bomme ba toropo ba farologana le ba motse?
- Ditsala tsa gago le baagisanye bag ago baa ma botshelo jwa gago jang?
- Maikutlo a gago ka botsadi jwa bomme ke afe?
- O kgona jang go lekanya se o se tlhokang le seo se tlhokwang ke ba lelwapa la gago?
- Maikutlo a gago ka botsalano mo botshelong jwa gago ke afe? A gona le kgatelelo nngwe ya maikutlo e o itemogetseng mo botsalanong jo?
- Ke botsalano bofe bo bo nnileng bomosola mo botshelong jwa gago?
- A gona le bangwe ko ntleng ga gago ba ba kileng ba go tseela ditshwetso mo botshelong jwa gago?
- A gona le sengwe sepe fela se o eletsang go ka se tlaleletsa mo posolotsong e? Kana se o akanyang gore ke tshwanetse go se itse?

dipotso tsa tlhaletso:

- Selo se, se farologana yang le maitemogelo a borre? A bomme botlhe ba akanya yalo? A o akanya gore gona le bomme bangwe ba ba akanyang se ka go

farologana? A o ka re bolelela ka tiragalo e e diragetseng mabapi le se?
Maikutlo a gago ke afe?

IV. Demographic Questionnaire

Name (pseudonym) _____

Age _____

Place of residence _____

Marital status _____

Number of children _____

Number of siblings _____

Education _____

Current employment _____

Religious affiliation _____

Date and time of interview _____

V. Facebook Recruitment

I. Original advertisement, posted online November 2013:

My name is Stephanie Smith and I am a PhD candidate at the University of York, England. I'm researching what it's like to be a woman in Botswana these days. I will be coming out there in June for a couple of months, and I'm hoping to interview Botswana women about their lives and experiences.

If you or somebody you know would be interested in speaking to me, please get in touch via Facebook messaging or email, my email address is: sss504@york.ac.uk

I will be happy to answer questions about myself, the research in general, and what the interviews will involve.

Thank you.

II. Follow up message sent to those who had responded to my earlier advertisement, following a change of sample criteria:

Hello,

I am still coming out to Botswana on June 1st (just a couple of weeks now), looking to interview Botswana women about what their lives are like. There has been one key change in the study that might mean you would no longer be eligible to take part. It is now limited to women aged between 30 and 40. This is so that the experiences of one generation can be studied in more detail. I am sorry if you do not fit into this category and were still hoping to take part. However, if this is the case and you know somebody else of that age who might be interested, please do pass on my details.

Thank you for volunteering to be interviewed earlier in the year, but please do not feel obliged to participate unless you would still like to. If you are still interested in being interviewed, please kindly send me your mobile phone number and I will phone you to arrange an appointment as soon as I get a local SIM once I arrive. If you'd rather make an appointment via email or Facebook, that's fine too.

I have found an interpreter and so the interviews can be done in English or Setswana, or both.

Kind regards,
Stephanie Smith

VI. Participant information

Below are brief overviews of the demographic attributes of my participants as given in the pre-interview questionnaire (appendix IV). I have noted how I recruited each interviewee and whether or not an interpreter was used during their interviews.

Where known, I have included additional details about the participants' residence, their relationships with boyfriends, partners, and husbands, and their employment, and I have noted whether or not they had relationships with their own fathers when they were children. I did not explicitly request this information as part of my basic interview guide or my demographic questionnaire. Rather, details have been drawn from the interviews where such information was volunteered as part of other lines of questioning. Hence, the information provided is necessarily incomplete, and is offered only as broad contextual data.

I have provided details that could be used to identify a participant only in cases where they explicitly stated that they did not require anonymity, and refused the use of a pseudonym. I have excluded information that could be used to expose an interviewee in cases where anonymity was requested.

Akhu

Age: 39

Current residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Three

Relationship status: Divorced

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: BA degree

Occupation: Teacher/musician

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Online

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Akhu had lived in Gaborone for most of her life. She spent three years living in Durban, South Africa.

Occupational: Akhu had been a professional musician for many years, and had recently decided to teach part-time to raise the funds for opening her own music school.

Relationship/child support: Akhu explained that she had always had boyfriends, and that she had hoped to marry each one (with the exception of her first – she considered herself too young to marry at that point). Many of her boyfriends had sex with other women while dating Akhu, which was the cause of those relationships breaking down. The man she married cheated on her while she was away for work, and he filed for divorce soon afterwards. She was single at the time of the interview.

Relationship with own father: Yes.

Basadi

Age: 27

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Two

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: None

Highest level of education: MA degree

Occupation: Designer/researcher

Religious affiliation: Atheist

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Basadi grew up in Gaborone. She attended a liberal arts college in the United States for four years before taking her MA degree in London. She had since moved back to Gaborone, and was planning a move to South Africa for work at the time of the interview.

Occupational: Basadi had worked as a freelance design researcher since achieving her MA degree. At the time of the interview she was searching for work that would offer more opportunity for creativity.

Relationship/child support: Basadi had a boyfriend for two and a half years in her late teens. She dated a couple of men briefly between him and her second serious boyfriend, a man she met while living in London. After three years they split up, and in the three years since they have remained close. She has casually dated other men during that time, but hoped that her previous relationship could be rekindled.

Relationship with own father: Yes

Beth

Age: 33

Residence: Tlokweneng (rural)

Number of siblings: Three

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: Two

Highest level of education: Form Three (Year Nine)

Occupation: Cashier

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: n/a

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Beth told us that her child's father got pregnant and left her alone with the child. It is unclear whether this happened with two different men, since she had two children. She stated that the father does not provide for the child(ren). She explained that she could claim maintenance through the courts if she wanted to, but she did not need it.

Relationship with own father: n/a

Elizabeth

Age: 34

Residence: Mogoditsane (rural)

Number of siblings: Six

Relationship status: Married

Number of children: Three

Highest level of education: Form Three (Year Nine)

Occupation: Driver

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Participant rejected the use of an interpreter, but we were unable to communicate effectively in English.

Further details/history where known

Residential: n/a

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Elizabeth and her husband lived together at their home in Mogoditsane, which they shared with Elizabeth's mother-in-law. Elizabeth's husband fathered all three of her children.

Relationship with own father: n/a

Emelda

Age: 42

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Seven

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: Two

Highest level of education: Form Five (Year 11)

Occupation: Self-employed (sales)

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Emelda lived in Gaborone but was from the village of Ramotswa, where she spent her weekends.

Occupational: Emelda began her working life running a poultry farm. After this collapsed, she became a hairdresser. From 2005 onwards, she began buying cheap jewellery wholesale and selling it at profit. This was so successful that she expanded her sales business and started working in distribution.

Relationship/child support: Emelda had a child while she was still at school, followed by a second child three years later. The children had different fathers. Neither saw their child, or provided any financial support.

Relationship with own father: No.

Keatlaretse

Age: 34

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Six

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: Certificate

Occupation: Unemployed

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Online

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Keatlaretse was living with her mother and sister at their home in Gaborone.

Occupational: Keatlaretse left her secretarial job in 2010, after she was given an ultimatum by her employer when her performance began to suffer as a result of having to care for her sick aunt.

Relationship/child support: Keatlaretse was in a relationship with the father of her son, who abused her emotionally. She wished to leave the relationship, but because there was a child involved any separation had to be approved by both sets of parents. At the time of the interview, Keatlaretse was waiting for her parents to act on her request to end the relationship. She was financially supported by the father of her son, who paid for his medical bills, clothing and food. However, he did not spend time with the child.

Relationship with own father: Keatlaretse met her father for the first time when she was 22.

Kesegofetse

Age: 31

Residence: Mochudi (rural)

Number of siblings: Two

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: BA degree

Occupation: Magistrate

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Kesegofetse lived and worked in Mochudi. She attended family functions in Mochudi and other villages at weekends.

Occupational: Kesegofetse formerly worked with the Attorney General in Gaborone, before taking a magistrate position in Mochudi. She hopes to be promoted to judge in the future.

Relationship/child support: The details were unclear, but I ascertained that while Kesegofetse was in a relationship with her son's father, the father took responsibility for the child. However, once the relationship ended he ceased to be involved in the child's life.

Relationship with own father: Yes.

Khana

Age: 43

Residence: Mochudi (rural)

Number of siblings: Five

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: Diploma

Occupation: Customer services

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: Khana lived and worked in Mochudi. She had previously travelled around Africa in search of work.

Occupational: Khana worked for the Land Board at the time of our interview. In previous years she had worked selling goods.

Relationship/child support: Khana has had multiple relationships with men over the years, always hoping to marry. She said that they all ended because the men had sex with other women, drank too much, and abused her emotionally. Her daughter's father left two years after she was born, and is no longer in their lives. Khana had applied for maintenance payments through the courts, but the amount ordered to be paid was P40 per month. Khana deemed collecting such small payments not worth her time.⁴⁵

Relationship with own father: Yes.

⁴⁵ To put this amount into perspective, Khana's daughter's school fees at the time had been P2500 per month.

Laone

Age: 35

Residence: Kumakwane (rural)

Number of siblings: Eight

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: Five

Highest level of education: Form Five (Year 11)

Occupation: Unemployed

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: n/a

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Laone said that most of the men she had been in relationships with were unfaithful. She claimed that she would like to be in a relationship again, but only with somebody kind and trustworthy. She offered no information about the father(s) of her children, but she did note that her parents provided for them.

Relationship with own father: n/a

Lenah

Age: 32

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Five

Relationship status: Married

Number of children: Three

Highest level of education: MA degree

Occupation: Teacher

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Lenah lived in Gaborone at the time of the interview. Her home village was Serowe and her husband's Kgalagadi. They visited Serowe and Kgalagadi at weekends to see family and attend events.

Occupational: Lenah had been in teaching since achieving her postgraduate degree in education.

Relationship/child support detail: Lenah was married, and her three children were all fathered by her husband. She reported that he was unusual in that he took part in childcare.

Relationship with own father: Yes.

Lesedi

Age: 38

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Four

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: Two

Highest level of education: MA degree

Occupation: Teacher

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Lesedi lived in campus accommodation at the school she taught at during the week, returning home to Thama village at weekends.

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Lesedi's three-year-old daughter was living with Lesedi's mother, while her eight-year-old daughter was living with Lesedi. Each child had a different father. The father of the eldest daughter was not Motswana, and he was no longer in their lives. The father of her youngest daughter left Lesedi when she was pregnant, and visited the child once when she was six months old. He did not contribute to the family financially, and Lesedi had not requested maintenance payments through the courts at the time of the interview, stating that she did not wish to force him to show care.

Relationship with own father: Yes.

Maatla

Age: 36

Residence: Mmankgodi (rural)

Number of siblings: Six

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: Form Four (Year Ten)

Occupation: Unemployed

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: Maatla divided her time between her village and the cattle post.

Occupational: While Maatla was not formerly employed, she was able to support herself and her family through a government poverty eradication programme that provided her with livestock.

Relationship/child support: The father of Maatla's daughter left Maatla when she became pregnant. He does not contribute financially, or spend time with the daughter.

Maatla refuses to go through the courts for maintenance on the grounds that assistance from the father should be given willingly, that to chase him for it would be undignified.

Relationship with own father: No.

Mabedi

Age: 26

Residence: Ramotswa (rural)

Number of siblings: One

Relationship status: Single (boyfriend)

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: MA degree

Occupation: Student

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Mabedi lived in the family home in Ramotswa. She was undertaking a degree at a university based in Kenya, which required her to be in Kenya for part of the year.

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Mabedi was in a relationship with a man from Kenya, who was the father of her child. He provided financial support for the family, and took care of the child when they were physically together. She was planning to marry her boyfriend the following year.

Relationship with own father: Yes

Malisa

Age: 43

Residence: Mochudi (rural)

Number of siblings: Three

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: Diploma

Occupation: Radiographer

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: Yes, but used minimally

Further details/history where known

Residential: Malisa lived and worked in Mochudi. She lived in remote parts of Botswana for two years as part of her national service.

Occupational: Malisa began her first job at 25, as an assistant at the local missionary hospital. After five years in that role, she trained as a radiographer. By this time the hospital had been taken over by the government. She hoped to specialise in ultrasound in the future.

Relationship/child support: Malisa was no longer in a relationship with the father of her child. They had a maintenance agreement that he did not honour, however, he provided financial support on a sporadic basis.

Relationship with own father: Yes.

Naledi

Age: 28

Residence: Ramotswa (rural)

Number of siblings: Three

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: Form Five (Year 11)

Occupation: Unemployed

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: Naledi had grown up in Ramotswa.

Occupational: Naledi had always been unemployed, but hoped to build her own business selling jewellery and clothes, or take a secretarial course.

Relationship/child support: Naledi had a boyfriend, although it was unclear whether he was her child's father. She reported that their relationship was quite good, although he did not allow her to have male friends. She anticipated they would marry soon.

Relationship with own father: n/a

Neo

Age: 30

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Four

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: None

Highest level of education: PhD

Occupation: Research Fellow

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Neo was raised in Gaborone. She completed her undergraduate and MA degrees in Cape Town, South Africa, and her PhD in London.

Occupational: As part of her job Neo worked with institutions such as the World Bank and the Southern African development Community (SADC).

Relationship/child support: Neo was in a long-long relationship with an English man during her time in London. At the time of the interview she was in a relationship with the son of a prominent politician in Botswana.

Relationship with own father: Yes.

One

Age: 38

Residence: Kumakwane

Number of siblings: One

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: Two

Highest level of education: Form Two (Year Eight)

Occupation: Unemployed

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: One was born and raised in Kumakwane.

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: One's children were aged 10 and fourteen at the time of the interview. She reported that they had different fathers, both of whom had lost interest in their child. One had requested that each father contribute to clothing, food, and accommodation, but both had refused.

Relationship with own father: n/a

Pamela

Age: 30

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Four

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: BA degree

Occupation: Unemployed

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Personal friend

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Pamela was from Gaborone and lived there at the time of the interview.

Occupational: Pamela was looking for work when we spoke. If she ran short of money she would buy and sell clothing on the street.

Relationship/child support: Pamela had been in a casual relationship with the father of her child when she got pregnant. She claimed that she ended the relationship. The father does not see or support the child in any form.

Relationship with own father: Father in prison.

Pono

Age: 30

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Seven

Relationship status: Married

Number of children: Two

Highest level of education: BA degree

Occupation: Lecturer

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Pono was raised in Mahalapye, a town in the Central District of Botswana, and continues to visit her family there at weekends. She completed her undergraduate degree in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, after which she moved back to the Central District, to Bobonong town. She later moved to Gaborone to live with her husband, who had relocated there from Bobonong for work.

Occupational: Pono was previously employed as a quantity surveyor, a job she resigned from when she became pregnant with her youngest child. On the day of our interview she had secured a new position as a college lecturer. She aspired to run her own business, either a construction company, a clothing boutique, or a restaurant.

Relationship/child support: Pono lived with her husband, who was the father of both of her children. He supported the family financially, and assisted with childcare occasionally.

Relationship with own father: Father deceased.

Reneilwe

Age: 25

Residence: Gabane (rural)

Number of siblings: Two

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: None

Highest level of education: Diploma

Occupation: IT internship at a secondary school

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Reneilwe lived in Gabane at her family home, commuting to Gaborone for work five days a week. She intended to live in Gaborone in future.

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Reneilwe had been with her boyfriend for a year and eight months at the time of the interview. He was ten years older than her. Her previous relationships had been short lived, and some of her past boyfriends had cheated on her.

Relationship with own father: n/a

Sedireng

Age: 36

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: One

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: None

Highest level of education: BA degree

Occupation: Teacher

Religious affiliation: Muslim

Recruitment method: Personal friend

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Sedireng had grown up in Gaborone, living with her mother and father, and had spent time studying and working in the United States before moving back to Gaborone where she lived alone.

Occupational: Sedireng had been a working artist for some years before taking on a teaching role to supplement her income.

Relationship/child support: Sedireng had previously been engaged, but her fiancé passed away unexpectedly. At the time of the interview she had recently begun dating again. She did not, and had not ever wanted to be a mother.

Relationship with own father: Yes.

Sefela

Age: 45

Residence: Mmankgodi

Number of siblings: Five

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: Three

Highest level of education: Standard Seven (Year Six)

Occupation: Unemployed

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: Sefela had never left her mother's home, where she lived with her children, her siblings, and her siblings' children.

Occupational: Sefela struggled at school and did not obtain any qualifications, which has made finding employment difficult for her. She hoped to find work that did not require her to read or make calculations. At the time of the interview she was running a small tuck store from her yard, selling sweets.

Relationship/child support: The father of Sefela's first child asked her to have a baby. She agreed, but when the child was born he abandoned them. Sefela was aware that she could claim maintenance through the courts, but felt uncomfortable with the idea, and said that the amount was not enough to make a difference anyway. She did not disclose details about the father(s) of her second two children, but she was single at the time of the interview.

Relationship with own father: n/a

Shera

Age:

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Two

Relationship status: Single (boyfriend)

Number of children: None

Highest level of education: Working towards an MA degree

Occupation: Student

Religious affiliation: Agnostic

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Shera was raised in Gaborone, but had travelled extensively. At the time of the interview she was spending a year in Europe for her studies, and was back in Gaborone for the summer break. She intended to return to Gaborone upon completing her MA degree.

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Shera was in a complicated long-term relationship, the details of which are discussed extensively in the analysis chapters of this thesis, but are recapped in brief here. Shera and her boyfriend were staying together for the summer, an arrangement Shera described as a trial, during which they were to work on their problems. She was struggling with her boyfriend's traditional conceptualisation of gendered roles, and even more so with the expectations of his family and friends.

Relationship with own father: Yes

Taemane

Age: 43

Residence: Morwa (rural)

Number of siblings: Three

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: None

Highest level of education: Standard Six (Year Seven)

Occupation: Postmaster

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: Taemane had lived at her mother's home in Morwa all her life. For a brief period she commuted to Gaborone each day for work, although she was working in Morwa at the time of the interview.

Occupational: Taemane began her career by volunteering at a post office in Gaborone, after which she had the experience to apply for a job at her local post office.

Relationship/child support: Taemane had been in relationships in the past, which broke down because they tried to control her. She had been trying to conceive for most of her adult life, and did not know why she had never gotten pregnant.

Relationship with own father: No.

Tebby

Age: 28

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Two

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: None

Highest level of education: BA degree

Occupation: School administration

Religious affiliation: Christian ('slight Christianity')

Recruitment method: Personal friend

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Tebby was born in Gaborone but had spent several years in schools overseas, both in Europe North America. At the time of the interview she was living alone in a house owned by her parents in Gaborone. Tebby spent many weekends visiting family in her parents' home village, Mochudi.

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Tebby was casually dating at the time of the interview. She had previously had two serious relationships.

Relationship with own father: Yes

Thato

Age: 30

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Four

Relationship status: Married

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: BSC

Occupation: Teacher

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Thato was born and brought up in Gaborone.

Occupational: Thato had been a contract teacher for several years. She resented not having achieved a permanent position. She had originally wished to become a nurse, but her elder sister, who raised her, decided that she ought to teach instead.

Relationship/child support: Thato's husband was the father of her child. She reported that he had cheated on her in the past.

Relationship with own father: Yes

Tsala

Age: 35

Residence: Gaborone (urban)

Number of siblings: Seven

Relationship status: Married

Number of children: Two

Highest level of education: MA degree

Occupation: Librarian

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Snowballing

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: Tsala lived and worked in Gaborone, but was born and raised in Mahalapye, where she continues to travel often to visit family. She spent a year in Reunion Island studying, and one month in France.

Occupational: Tsala worked as a language teacher for nine years before taking a librarian position at a university one month prior to the interview.

Relationship/child support: Tsala lived with her husband, who was the father of her children. When she had to go abroad for training he remained behind to care for the children.

Relationship with own father: Yes

Tshepiso

Age: 32

Residence: Tlokweng (rural)

Number of siblings: Two

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: Two

Highest level of education: Form Three (Year Nine)

Occupation: Cashier

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: Tshepiso had always lived in the village of Tlokweng.

Occupational: Tshepiso was not content with her job as a cashier because being on her feet all day tired her. She also reported that it did not pay enough.

Relationship/child support: Tshepiso was in a relationship with the father of one of her children. It was unclear whether or not the father of her other child supported the family.

Relationship with own father: n/a

Tshiamo

Age: 39

Residence: Kumakwane (rural)

Number of siblings: Three

Relationship status: Single

Number of children: Two

Highest level of education: Diploma

Occupation: Teacher

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: Yes

Further details/history where known

Residential: Tshiamo grew up in Old Naledi where her grandmother lived, a poverty-stricken village. Her mother moved the family to Kumakwane.

Occupational: Tshiamo had worked as a teacher for many years. She also started a business – a tuck shop – which her partner ran on a day-to-day basis.

Relationship/child support: Tshiamo had a long-term partner, who was the father of both of her children. They wished to marry, but her partner could not afford the *lobola*.

Relationship with own father: Tshiamo grew up thinking that her mother's husband, who treated the family cruelly, was her biological father. However, she had recently discovered that he was her stepfather.

Tumelo

Age: 31

Residence: Mochudi (rural)

Number of siblings: One

Relationship status: Engaged

Number of children: One

Highest level of education: BA degree

Occupation: Auditor

Religious affiliation: Christian

Recruitment method: Direct approach

Interpreter required for interview: No

Further details/history where known

Residential: n/a

Occupational: n/a

Relationship/child support: Tumelo's fiancé was her child's father. Her child was living with Tumelo's mother at the time of the interview, where Tumelo and her fiancé visited him once a month. The decision to leave the child with his grandmother was made on the grounds that the grandmother would otherwise be alone, and that she was more reliable than a hired nanny. In her previous relationships she had problems with the men cheating, and exploiting her for money.

Relationship with father: Tumelo's father abandoned the family when she started school. She did not hear from him again until, as an adult, she started working. At this stage he contacted her to request financial support, which she provides. Tumelo reported that her father was never contented with the amount she provided, and that she found him difficult to talk to.

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