Socio-cultural influences on the mother-and-daughter-in-law relationship within a South African context

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Abstract

This study explored the socio-cultural influences on the black mothers- and daughters-in-law within Pretoria North, South Africa. The two theoretical paradigms that provided perspectives on the influence of socio-cultural aspects were Family Systems Theory and Social Constructionism. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to attain data from interviews with 40 participants who had been involved in a mother-daughter-in-law relationship for at least six months. Phenomenological design was employed to guide the research process. Textual data was analysed through interpretative phenomenological analysis. Eight themes emerged from the analysis; cultural influences, traditional practices of marrying a makoti, influence of ethnicity, influence of societal ideologies, influence of religion, influence of education, impact of geographical distance, as well as influence of finance. Recommendations are also provided in order to further assist in exploring the impact of socio-cultural aspects on the mother-daughter-in-law relationship. Therefore, the study is valuable as it paves the way for further studies relating to the topic within the South African context.

Keywords: family systems theory, in-law, interpretative phenomenological analysis, makoti, mamazala, phenomenology, social constructionism

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Introduction

Socio-cultural aspects refer to the combination of social and cultural factors that influence the mother-daughter-in-law relationship (Rittenour, 2012). Social factors include religion, education, finance, geographical distance. Cultural factors include a set of beliefs, customs, practices that exists within a population.

Cultures across the world differ in their expectations of the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Though studies on relationships emphasise American, European and Asian (Kim, 2001; Lee, 2002; Yoo & Kim, 2000) cultural views and experience, research that has been conducted around the world has shown the importance of culture in shaping in-law relationships and interactions (Morr-Serewicz & Hosmer, 2011). One of the most predominant themes of the research from cultures around the world regarding in-law relationships relates to the changing ideologies of different countries. In many countries where modernisation, industrialisation and social movements are changing the cultural landscape, the in-law relationship is also facing a revolution of sorts.

In-law relationships remain among the vaguest and most challenging of family relationships (Horsley, 1996; Merrill, 2007; Morr-Serewicz, 2006; Prentice, 2009; Rittenour, 2009). The term *in-laws* refer to distinct relationships that are formed through marriage (Horsely, 1996; Rittenour & Soliz, 2009). Horsley (1996) points out that in-law relationship constantly, directly or indirectly, influence newly formed families. The in-laws show the couple where they came from and create a preview of where the couple may be going. In-law relationships become an arena for the (re)negotiation and (re)establishment of different traditions, rituals and values that come from the families of the in-laws (Horsley, 1996; Walsh, 1999). As Meyerstein (1996) argues, the challenge of balancing different

relational norms and standards of families-in-law creates a major backdrop for the emergence of in-law relationship challenges.

Extended family relationships are an important feature of Black South African families (Jackson & Berg-Cross, 1988). After marriage, in-laws become significant as the extended family. Within the South African Black culture, the husband's family becomes the dominant in-law family (Mashishi, 1998). Mashele (2003) explains that the female's in-laws are only seen as the provider of economic and emotional support for the married couple. The essence of the in-laws lies in the bond between its members. Mashele highlights that Black South African daughters-in-law are expected to reside with their husband's family to learn the newly adopted family culture of the in-laws. Failure to follow the expected practices of the in-laws can result in a negative effect on the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship.

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of makotis (daughters-in-law) and mamazalas (mothers-in-law) regarding the influence of socio-cultural aspects on their relationship.

Research Methodology

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted in the Pretoria North area. The population included mothers- and daughters-in-law that lived in Mabopane, Soshanguve, Ga-Rankuwa, Madidi, Mmakau, Theresa Park and Hestea Park. The sample consisted of forty participants. Half of the participants were *makotis* and the other half were *mamazalas*. All participants had had an in-law relationship for at least six months and resided in the Pretoria North vicinity.

Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling was employed to locate possible participants. The researcher first identified one possible participant who was married and in contact with other married women. A word of mouth approach was employed to invite other possible participants. The researcher asked the first participant to recommend other possible participants who met the inclusion criteria.

Data Collection

The researcher first called or went to possible participants' homes to explain the study. Appointments were scheduled with each participant at a time and venue that was suitable for them (their homes, work places, as well as the researcher's home or work place). Interviews were conducted in English and Setswana. Individual interviews allowed participants to express themselves in detail, without being concerned about being judged by other participants. The researcher further asked permission from participants to audio-record the interviews. A semi-structured interview question guide was used to facilitate the interviews. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and an hour.

Phenomenological Data Analysis

Interviews conducted in Setswana were translated into English by a professional company that transcribed the audio data to textual data. The following steps as described by Smith and Osborn (2003) were followed to analyse the data:

The researcher read and re-read all the transcripts, which included immersing herself in the descriptions of the experiences of both the mothers- and the daughters-in-law. The researcher further made notes of what was interesting or significant regarding what the participants had said. While extracting significant statements from the transcripts, the researcher began to document emerging themes by highlighting similar information in the different transcripts. At this stage, the researcher

found recurring statements, which allowed for theoretical connections within and across the data. However, these statements remained grounded in the context in which they were said.

The emerging themes were listed on paper and the researcher searched for links between the themes. Some of the themes were clustered together, while others emerged as superordinate concepts. As the clustering of themes emerged, the researcher checked the transcripts to confirm that there were in fact connections between clustered themes and to determine the verbatim words of the participants. In doing so, the researcher identified clusters of themes that captured the participants' concerns regarding their relationships with their in-laws. The researcher then compiled a systematic table of the themes for each transcript. The different clusters of the themes were provided with a heading that represented the superordinate themes. However, the researcher also explored recurring patterns and acknowledged new aspects that emerged as she worked through the clustered themes.

Results and Discussion

Eight themes were identified. The themes that the researcher identified are supported by references to the literature review and theoretical orientation of this study to establish the discussion (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). The identified eight themes are discussed next.

Theme 1: Cultural influences

Both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law acknowledged that culture plays a role in in-law relationships. However, they emphasised that the role of culture is no longer as strong as it used to be due to the Western influence. Daughters-in-law articulated that culture plays a negative and positive role regarding the in-law relationships. Daughters-in-law were expected to do all the house chores for

the in-laws when she is married because of cultural customs. One of the daughters-in-law articulated that:

…it has a negative role because… there was that thing of when you get married and become a makoti, somehow you must… leave…your life must be channelled by your in-laws, you understand…and anything is about your in-laws…anything is about your in-laws…you're your mother-in-law says something you must listen. So I think culture has a negative role though there are positive things…but there are negative things are more.

In terms of the role of culture at the present time and how it has influenced their mother-daughter-in-law relationship, some of the daughters-in-law said that it has not necessarily influenced their relationship. Daughters-in-law emphasised that culture has evolved. One daughter-in-law reported that:

I think culture did not influence our cul….our relationship because, as I said my mother-in-law grew up here so she's not a cultural person, she's not into that much…

Interestingly, mothers-in-law who participated in this study also expressed that though culture influences in-law relationship, the customs are no longer practiced as before. Even though the mothers-in-law viewed the customs as diminishing in importance, they still acknowledged their importance. One mother-in-law commented that:

It helped set boundaries in…in a way because of you know this days there are so many blur…blurring of ages that sometimes people would... no even attire that is another challenge…of attire.

Social constructionism emphasise that people's reality are subjective to their cultural, religious and societal contexts (Gergen, 1992). Hsu (2005) highlights that within these contexts, multiple

perspectives exists which results in multiple realities. Participants emphasised that people's views have changed and that culture is no longer as important as it used to be. However, the researcher takes into account the setting of the study as it comprises mostly of townships, informal settlements and suburbs. Most of the people that live in this area tend to be more modernised than people that live in rural areas, which could have an impact on how they view the role of culture. Kim (2001), Lee (2002), Morr Serewicz and Hosmer (2011), as well as Yoo and Kim (2000), also support this notion by stating that in many countries where modernisation, industrialisation and social movements are changing the cultural landscape, the in-law relationship is also facing a revolution of sorts. This also seems to be indicative for South Africa as the cultural landscape is changing, causing changes in the in-law relationships as well. Manqele (2000) supports this notion as she states that in South Africa urbanisation and globalisation have resulted in a shift away from a traditional life to a modem way of life. Traditional customs are often eroded by the norms and needs of technology and the contact with other societies. This seems to contribute to the current modifications to the role and duties of the *makoti.*

Theme 2: Traditional practices of marrying a makoti

Daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law described the process that has to occur when marrying a makoti into the family. Daughters-in-law shared that the process begins with lobola negotiations; uncles and aunts being sent to negotiate the bride-price with the woman's family. One daughter-in-law shared that:

> *Let me talk about my wedding. They paid lobola…when they came to finish then they*
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> *did 'go tlhabisa'…it's culture is in it!…both sides…they are bring ancestors together…you*
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> *clothe each other…they do everything. When I left my home to go to hers, she then welcomed*

me…she speaks to the ancestors and says "makoti is here". She speaks to the ancestors…she introduces you into the family…she presents you to the family so that they should not be surprised that we see a stranger…we know you being four, who is the fifth one. 'Go tlhabisa' means you exchange gifts and then you bring ancestors together… it's to bring ancestors together. If at home they have bought a sheep, his family must also buy a sheep…Half of the sheep from my family goes to his family…and the half of the sheep from his family comes to my family…this things are brought together. In our culture it means you have brought ancestors together and then there is nothing that will separate you when it is like that.

There seems to be a contrast in what participants indicated regarding culture fading and practices of some cultural customs. Even though the participants remarked on how customs are fading and no longer being practiced, they also shared their experiences of the cultural processes that are followed when they marry a *makoti*. They shared the symbolisms of all the cultural customs that were followed when marrying into a certain family. The participants spoke about the process of *lobola*, starting with negotiations until the conclusion thereof. According to Chambers (2000), members of the groom's family enter into negotiations with the bride's parents and agree on the amount of the bride's price. Mothers-in-law also indicated that according to their cultures, marriage for them is when these processes are fulfilled. Most of the participants spoke about the last process of *lobola* negotiation, which is '*go tlhabisa*' or '*go tlhabisana*', which means to bring together the ancestors of the two families. When asked why they have to follow all these processes, participants said that it is their culture and that is how things are done. Participants also mentioned that there are duties that *makoti* must do after she gets married.

Some participants mentioned that after *lobola*, the *makoti* has to go through a process called '*go kotisa*'. This process basically means the *makoti* has to stay with her mother-in-law for a certain period of time. When asked what happens in this time, participants share that the *makoti* has to prove herself to her in-laws. She is expected to clean, cook, do laundry and any other house chores for the in-laws. It is also the mother-in-law's duty to teach and guide the daughter-in-law during this period. A study by Huffman (2004) indicated that in South Africa, within most black cultures, when the makoti enters her new family, she is observed and given lessons regarding the culture of the family into which she marries. Mchunu (2005) further states that because the *makoti* (refers to the daughter-in-law) is a newcomer to her husband's family, it often takes years before the *makoti* is completely integrated.

Theme 3: Influence of ethnicity

Participants in this study indicated that ethnicity does not play a major influence on their relationship with the in-laws. Most daughters-in-law mentioned that their in-laws are not traditionally-minded people; therefore being of a different ethnic group does not influence how they relate with their mothers-in-law. The few daughters-in-law that alluded to ethnicity said that:

> *So where I got married they are Ndebeles…but they don't practice it….they don't practice it at all…so they like that…a person becomes free because the first time they saw me I was wearing a trouser, they didn't even say "…she is wearing a trouser!*

In the same manner, the mothers-in-law viewed the influence of ethnicity as of less importance. Mothers-in-law conveyed that the most important aspects of the relationship is love, respect and the willingness to learn and understand each other. However, they also added that if the daughters-in-law

is of different ethnic group and speaks a different language, she is expected to learn the husband's culture and/or language. One of the mothers-in-law expressed that:

It is love... like me I'm Tswana…my other makoti is Ndebele and she's very raw. Yes! They are not the same…that one is Tswana….another one is a different kind of Tswana. But the biggest thing in all this is love and understanding.

When asked about the influence of ethnicity, most participants indicated that there are differences in ethnic groups and cultural practices, but ethnicity has less impact on the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship. This was in contrast with Sibiya's (2011) study that highlighted that there are problems that Africans face when marrying into another tribe or clan. Sibiya further asserts that when the man has very traditional parents and marries outside the clan, the women suffers abuse. Similarly, Merrill's (2007) study revealed that ethnicity also plays an important role in the relationship. The study further found that the ethnicity of the mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law seems to matter less in some ethnic groups. Mothers-in-law emphasised the importance of their children having their own families and wanting their children to settle down with their own families. Hosley (1996), McGolddrick et al. (2005), as well as Walsh (1999) in their studies found that there are complex ethnic differences among in-laws. This study, however, does not support this notion. Most participants expressed that they don't see ethnicity as a problem as they no longer practiced traditional customs. One of the mothers-in-law mentioned that the most important aspects are love and respect, as long as the *makoti* loves and respects her in-laws. However, it was evident that *makotis* are expected to learn the language of the husband as some of the mothers-in-law mentioned that if the daughters-in-law are from different ethnic groups, they should learn the husband's language.

Theme 4: Influence of societal ideologies

Twelve daughters-in-law expressed that due to the negative views that society has about mother-daughter-in-law relationship, they anticipated to have a bad or challenging relationship with their mothers-in-law. One daughter-in-law expressed that:

> *Well I was expecting it to be really a sour relationship because of all the things I heard from the society, you understand. Those things of "mamazala will make you do this and that…mother-in-law this…".*

Very few mothers-in-law spoke about the influence of societal ideas. They were in agreement that society tends to portray mothers-in-law in a negative manner. They added that society gives the impression that mothers-in-law mistreat their daughters-in-law. One mother-in-law highlighted that:

> *What shall I say? Society is giving us a picture that mother in-laws are bad. They ill-treat their makotis. That they don't treat them like their children…*

Society often portrays negative ideas about the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship. Similarly, Social Constructionism views knowledge as emanating from social interchange (Hoffmann, 1993). Schwandt (2000) and Speed (1991) further articulate that as one interacts with the world around, they also co-create meaning with other people they are interacting with. As a result, participants in this study indicated that these negative portrayals influenced the way they viewed mothers-in-law. They further expressed that because of these ideas, they anticipated experiencing difficult relationships with their own mothers-in-law. This is supported by Morr-Serewicz (2006) when she affirms that media depicts the relationship of mother- and daughter-in-law as a problematic in-law relationships. These portrayals of mothers-in-law often invite negative stereotypes and horror stories (Averick, 2008; Hunt

& Brooks, 2004; Merrill, 2007; Morr-Serewicz, 2006; Prentice, 2005; Sibiya, 2011). One of the daughters-in-law referred to mothers-in-law as monsters-in-law. The participants referred to a movie that has the same title and said it indicated how society views troubling mothers-in-law. When probed further into how society portrays mothers-in-law, participants said that they are depicted as not good, not liking their daughters-in-law and that they mistreat their daughters-in-law.

Theme 5: Influence of religion

Most participants in this study perceived religion as having more of an impact on the mother-daughter-in-law relationship than culture. However, most of the participants in the study indicated that they are Charismatic or Pentecostal Christians and they no longer practiced customs. Like culture, religion has principles that people live by. One of the comments made was:

Religion plays a big role...more than culture.

Some mothers-in-law also acknowledged that religion plays an integral part in the mother-daughter-in-law relationship. Contrary to daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law viewed religion as being similar to culture. They shared that religion and culture requires respect from every individual. Mothers-in-law conveyed that:

Religion is the same as our culture of respect, is in it…even when you read the bible, respect comes first.

With regard to religion, some participants indicated similarities between culture and religion. Participants also indicated that differences in religious beliefs can result in conflict, whereas common religious beliefs may promote cohesion. The above findings were supported by studies conducted by

Horsley (1996), McGolddrick et al., (2005), as well as Walsh (1999) and Walsh and Pryce (2003), which found that differences in religious beliefs among in-laws result in conflict and challenges. Horsley (1996) also highlighted that religious dissimilarities may affect in-law relationships in a negative manner. The above findings were also supported by a study conducted by Prentice (2005) that found that religion plays one of the major roles in influencing the in-law relationships. Participants indicated that religion helps to build the family by bringing the family together. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of having a common belief system with one's in-laws. This was supported by Merill's (2007) study, which indicated that common religious values can assist in-laws in relating better with each other and inciting less conflict.

Regarding the African context, one study conducted by Pitso (2002) found that marriages may experience many problems as partners face the challenge of overcoming prejudices and negative attitudes towards each other's religious beliefs. Another study conducted by Olutola (2012) which looked at the mother-in-law-daughter-in-law relationship and violence among Yoruba women in South-Western Nigeria also supported Pitso's (2002) findings. His findings revealed that more Christian daughters-in-law faced relationship difficulties with their mothers-in-law than their Muslim counterparts.

Theme 6: Influence of education

Among the daughters-in-law, fifteen felt that education played a role, while the other ten remarked that it did not play a significant role in the mother-daughter-in-law relationship. Some daughters-in-law indicated that, when you are educated, mothers-in-law tend to respect you more than when you are not educated. One daughter-in-law expressed:

> *Well you see when…when you are not schooled much…like I…I can say mother-in-law belittles you…you know. She basically doesn't think you can think on your own. She always thinks you must be thought for, you know.*

Contrary to the daughters-in-law, mothers-in-law commented that education was not the most important factor in their relationships with their daughters-in-law. According to the mothers-in-law, education is an extension of oneself, not the actual self; therefore it cannot impact on the relationship. One mother-in-law explained that:

> *As I have explained it depends on the respect of a person. When you have been brought up respect, even if you are educated…you enter into a family that is poor and uneducated…you will enter with that respect…*

Some felt that education should not define the relationship with the in-laws. Similarly, Merrill (2007) found that the daughters-in-law's education made an important difference in the quality of the relationship with the mothers-in-law. In a study conducted by Chen (2006) in Taiwan, he found that the daughters-in-law with higher educational levels had less harmonious relationships with their mothers-in-law than daughters-in-law with a lower educational level. This is in contrast with this study, as participants felt that Black mothers-in-law tend to respect educated daughters-in-law more than those that are not educated. However, the mothers-in-law expressed that education does not play a role in their relationships with their daughters-in-law. They furthermore shared that respect and love are most important in a person, not their educational status.

Ali, Krantz, Gul, Asad, Johansson and Mogren (2011) study found that education brought change to society. Education brought about a safety and capacity for women to fight for their rights. However, daughters-in-law are still expected to fulfil their traditional female responsibilities with their families and society at large. Similarly, Merrill (2007) that was conducted in London found that the

daughters-in-law's education made a significant difference in the quality of the relationship with the mothers-in-law. Among the daughters-in-law who had a very positive relationship with their mothers-in-law, 71% had an associate degree, college degree or post-graduate degree. Among those with poorer relationships, 60% had an advanced degree, whereas 40% had a high school certificate. Similarly, South and Spitze (1986) also found that more educated women may have more insight and a more rational life approach, which may lead to better marital quality especially in the beginning. This suggests that a tertiary education may provide one with important problem-solving skills and self-confidence.

Some researchers (Chen, 2006; Willams, Mehta & Lin, 1999) have indicated that the educational level of the woman could change the position in the authority structure of the family. This study also found that education does play somewhat of a role among the daughters-in-law. Some daughters-in-law participants expressed that when you are not educated as a daughter-in-law, you are open to belittlement the mother-in-law.

Theme 7: Impact of geographical distance

All the daughters-in-law participants in this study indicated that it was important for the mother- and daughter-in-law to reside in different homes. Most of the daughters-in-law viewed residing with their mothers-in-law as a disadvantage as it increases the chances for them to meddle and intrude in their affairs with their husbands. One daughter-in-law commented that:

> *Living the with them is a disadvantage too much…as it is now, the way I'm saying she*
>
> *meddles with our business while not living with us, imagine if we were living with her, you*

understand. Like she would dictate everything that we do…she would…I think she would forget

herself, you know…that this is a married couple…these are not kids anymore, you understand.

Remarkably, all the mothers-in-law seemed to agree with the daughters-in-law that geographical distance is important and was beneficial for the mother-daughter-in-law relationship. However, mothers-in-law also shared that even though a mother- and daughter-in-law may reside in different vicinities, it is important for them to communicate with each other. One commented that:

I will do…that of makoti staying there and mamazala also staying there because I have the experience of it…I have never stayed with them…yes…they just came and left…you understand…so when makoti stays there and mamazala also stays there, the most important thing is communication and love…

In relation to mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law residing together or apart from each other, most participants in this study expressed that they prefer it when they live apart from their in-laws. When asked why they prefer to live apart from their in-laws, participants shared that it contributed positively to the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship when they resided in different homes. Mothers-in-law supported daughters-in-law on the notion that living apart contributes positively to their relationship. The participants expressed that not living together with their in-laws promotes better relations, having fewer expectations from each other (which results in disappointments), and the mother-in-law does not intrude too much in the affairs of the couple.

The above finding is also supported by Rittenour and Soliz's (2009) study of the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship from the perspective of daughters-in-law. Similarly, the above researchers found that some daughters-in-law believed that geographic distance was necessary for a positive relationship. When probed about how the geographic distance influences the relationship between mothers- and daughters-in-law positively, the participants indicated that there are fewer fights when

they don't see each other often. Marotz-Baden and Cowanan's (1987) study also indicated that daughters-in-law who live closer to their in-laws may experience more conflict with their mothers-in-law. Van Gaalen et al. (2010) add that distance preludes the continuity that is necessary to maintain relationships as they undergo change and to resolve earlier conflict.

Lawton, Silverstein and Bengtson (1994) highlight that distance may affect the ability to get together with in-laws in person. This was supported by Merrill (2007) study which indicated that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law will have less opportunity to get to know one another and to create a shared history. Moreover, Ortiz (2010) found that when mothers-in-law reside a short distance from their daughters-in-law, stress and conflict can be more pervasive. The above author also added that separation by long distance does not seem to minimise or deter some mothers-in-law's intrusion into the couple's marriage, nor lessen the conflict with their daughters-in-law. In this study, this was highlighted by the daughters-in-law who reported that their mothers-in-law were meddling in their affairs, even though they did not live with them, but lived a short distance from them. The above findings seem to be contrary to Sibiya's (2011) findings that indicated that in Africa, traditionally, the bride is expected to live with her mother-in-law and help her with household duties.

Theme 8: The influence of finance

Most participants indicated that the mother-in-law's financial dependence on the son impacts negatively on the mother-daughter-in-law relationship. Both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law expressed that mothers-in-law that are financially dependent on their sons tend to have difficulty when the son gets married and becomes financially liable towards the wife. Daughters-in-law also indicated that this can create competition among the two women, which may result in conflict. One of the daughters-in-law stated that:

> *I think that influence is bad because the son looking after at the mother, looking after the wife, maybe even the kids. Then everything is on him. You find maybe the mother-in-law when she sees the son maybe having bought the wife something, "...even me ... I want it. It is those that are not good...*

Similarly, mothers-in-law also supported the notion that when a mother-in-law is financially dependent on her son, it can result in conflict with the daughters-in-law. One mother-in-law commented:

> *ML16: First reason is that I realised that mothers-in-law...that are not financially independent have problems with...with their daughters-in-law...because she is looking into getting money from the child...She will want this and that from the child forgetting that this child is no longer hers.*

Finance was also identified by participants as one of the major challenges in the mother- and daughter-in-law relationship. Participants shared that mothers-in-law that are financially dependent on their sons tend to have difficulty when their sons marry and this may result in tension between mother- and daughter-in-law. This was supported by Brehm's (2002) study, which found that a mother who is more dependent on her son for emotional, physical or financial support may perceive any threat to her resources as threatening. As a result, the mother's need to secure these resources may influence her expectations or perceptions of a potential daughter-in-law. Adhikari (2015) adds that the mother-in-law's reluctance and resistance towards financial and administrative control of the family may create difficult situations in their family. In their interviews, mothers-in-law also agreed with daughters-in-law that mothers-in-law that are financially dependent on their sons tend to find it difficult to detach from their son, subsequently viewing the daughter-in-law as a threat to their livelihood. Kung (1999) remarked that a mother-in-law is not pleased if her daughter-in-law spends money earned by her son.

This may contribute to difficulties experienced in the relationship between the mother- and daughter-in-law. Most of the participants further expressed that because of these perceptions, mothers-in-law that are financially dependent are more likely to have a difficult relationship with their daughters-in-law. The reason for this is because mothers-in-law see the daughters-in-law as people who have taken financial support away from them.

However, some of the mothers-in-law indicated that they are the ones that financially support and assist their sons. A study conducted by Prentice (2005) supports this notion as it highlights that parents of the husband often give financial support to strengthen the son's role as a provider. Other participants indicated that they do not want to receive money from their sons. They prefer the daughter-in-law to be the one giving money to the mother-in-law. When asked why they do not want their son to directly give them money, mothers-in-law said that they were avoiding conflict between them and their daughters-in-law. Brehm's (2002) study found that a mother who is financially dependent on her son may perceive the daughter-in-law as a threat to her financial security. Adhikari (2015) adds that the mother-in-law's unwillingness to hand over the financial control and dependence over the son may create difficult situations in their family. However, a study conducted by Cazenave (1983) in America found that Black men and women are socialised to expect mothers to share in providing financial support and making family decisions. According to Watts and Zimmerman (2002) African women are increasingly entering the world of work and contributing to the finances of the family, making them financially independent from their husbands and in-laws.

It should be pointed out here that the study suffered from some limitations inherent to the nature of the design of the study, namely, small sample size and sampling bias because of the use of snow-balling, the first and subsequent participants may have interested people who hold similar views to theirs.

Conclusion

The family systems theory provided an understanding of how in-law family members communicate with one another. Social constructivism provided a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction of individuals with their significant others. According to Burr (1995) social constructivism focuses on everyday interactions between people and sees these interactions as actively contributing to forms of knowledge that are context and time specific. This ties into systems theory as the family system provides the environment within which the person is in interaction with others. Black South African family systems are very broad and are inclusive of all members of the family (parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, grandparents, etc.). Therefore, the role of family systems should be explored further to understand the mother-and-daughter-in-law relationship.

Participants also highlighted the ambiguity of culture and its relevance in modernised Black South African in-law relationships. Participants mentioned that culture seems to be fading; however, they also shared that the traditional processes of marriage is still practised. Therefore, I recommend that more studies be conducted to explore the role of culture in marriage and in-law relationship in the new South African context. Some participants emphasised the role of religion and how common religious beliefs positively impact on the mother-and-daughter-in-law relationship. Other aspects such as ethnicity, societal ideologies, education, geographical distance and finance where also highlighted as having an influence on the mother-daughter-in-law relationship.

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