

**PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF PREMARITAL PREGNANCY ON
WOMEN'S IDENTITY: A STUDY OF YOUNG ADULT WOMEN IN
RURAL OWAMBO COMMUNITIES.**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was threefold. Firstly, it aimed to find out how single, young adult women in rural Owambo communities appraised their premarital pregnancy at that time when they found out they were pregnant and subsequent reappraisals thereof. Secondly, it intended to investigate whether these women feel stigmatized, isolated and marginalized. Thirdly, the study also aimed at examining how the past and present perceptions of their premarital pregnancy have contributed to how they understand themselves today. The general research question for this study was: ‘Does premarital pregnancy impact on/affect a woman’s identity?’. In an attempt to answer this question and the above objectives, 5 women were recruited and interviewed. Only 2 of the interviews were translated, transcribed and used in the data presentation, analysis and discussion stages. In recruiting these women, the snowball technique was applied. The criteria for this sample was that women should have been aged between 22 and 40 years at the time they became pregnant, are employed and should have been working at the time they became pregnant, should still be single and have only one child aged from 2 years. Whitbourne’s (1985) model of the Psychological Construction of the Life-Span formed the basis for the theoretical conceptualization of this study. The study used the qualitative paradigm and employed the discourse analysis methodology as proposed by Ian Parker (1992) in its data analysis and data discussion phases. Since the study was an exploratory one in nature, it was not possible to draw definite conclusions from the data. However, indications are that immediate appraisals of a premarital pregnancy could range from being regrettable to being catastrophic. The data also seem to indicate that the more a “*never-married-woman-with-children*” identifies with the universal

expectations of motherhood as tied to wifehood, the more she might feel stigmatized, isolated and marginalized in the event that she cannot meet this norm. The data also seem to indicate that competing discourses in present day Namibian society in general and Owambo communities in particular might lead to “*never-married-women-with-children*” in these communities expressing a self-identity that is torn in different directions. Overall, the study demonstrates how language reproduces and maintains culture and power in changing Owambo communities.

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Dedication

To my son John Taapopi, for giving me a reason to live, the courage to seek more knowledge and for being the source of my inspirations.

Declarations

I, Lea O. N. Haidula, hereby declare that this is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or any part thereof, has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher learning.

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1. Introduction

The current research project is undertaken against the background of the high rate of premarital pregnancy and ‘illegitimate’ births in Namibia. Single mothers, who have never been married, are characteristic of many households in Namibia, irrespective of whether the households are in urban or rural areas. The interest of this study thus, emanates from the observation of this phenomenon of non-marital child bearing, specifically among young adult women.

1.1 Historical importance of ‘efundula/ohango’

In most Owambo communities, premarital pregnancy has always been, and is still a taboo. During the period before the advent of Christianity, the ‘traditional wedding’ [**efundula/ohango**], which is a girl’s initiation into womanhood, was practiced in these communities. To enter this initiation ceremony, a girl did not necessarily need to have a prospective husband or suitor. The rules governing the ceremony assured that girls who took part without suitors were of the same status as those who had suitors (Becker, 1998).

If for instance, girl A was to get a husband immediately after the initiation [the traditional wedding], and another, girl B, who also underwent the initiation was to become pregnant without becoming somebody’s wife, their status was usually considered equal. They had both been initiated into womanhood. The difference was only in the fact that girl A had a husband, while girl B, did not have a husband,

but in the eyes of the society, girl B was as 'clean', so to speak, as girl A. If however, girl C, who did not take part in the initiation ceremony, were to become pregnant, then she would become an outcast. She would be regarded as of lower status and a second-class citizen. She would not have much say in a lot of things. In fact, in Oshiwambo, these women who became pregnant before the initiation process [and later, when Christianity took over, before the white wedding], were called **omisimba kadhona**, literally meaning, 'a girl, but pregnant'. This is a derogatory term that is still widely used to this day. It locates a never married pregnant woman between motherhood and girlhood. This term has the same negative connotations as another term, **oshikumbu**, which will be used most widely in this project.

These pregnant, un-initiated women resorted to various strategies in order to escape the fate that customs meted out for them. Abortions were frequently induced. Another way was for the young woman to flee to another Owambo community where she could give birth and return home after childbirth. Becker (1998) states that, "indicators are that some times the illegitimate child was killed immediately after birth, while in others, the baby was given to a foster family. There are also reports of suicides among uninitiated young women who fell pregnant" (1998:228). These killings of the illegitimate child immediately after birth may cast an interesting light on the infanticides of today, which appear to be committed especially by young, unmarried, Owambo women.

The advent of Christianity brought battles and conflicts concerning **efundula or ohango**, which reached a climax in the 1930s and 1940s. There are reports of young Christian women from Uukwambi and Ongandjera (two ethnic groups of the Owambo people) who were forced by their tribal chiefs to take part in the ohango ceremonies during these years. On the other hand, Hayes (1992 in Becker 1998) contends that some young Christian women escaped missions to observe or participate in the ceremonies secretly.

A living example of this conflict is princess Nangombe GwaMwaala, aged eighty-five years, daughter of late king Mwaala GwaNashilongo of the Uukwaluudhi tribe (personal communications, January, 2002). During her father's reign, those who became Christians were usually banned from the tribe. She was converted and baptized, against her father's will, but as a daughter of the king, she could not be banned from the kingdom because she is also the custodian of her people's customs and traditions. Her father then had only one request that she should at least participate in the ohango ceremony. The missionaries could also not refuse or stop her from taking part because she was a very important person to them. Since the king did not ban her from the kingdom, it meant that large numbers of people, who could not become Christians for fear of being chased out of their communities, could now be converted. Thus princess GwaMwaala ended up participating in the ohango ceremony and then later had a Christian wedding.

One can thus argue that these battles about whether young women should or should not take part in ohango or efundula ceremonies represented conflicting views on

gender and sexuality, issues that are closely related to identity. These (**efundula or ohango**) ceremonies were the cornerstones of the definition of the norms relating to female sexuality and reproduction. “In the different Owambo communities, the central trait of the ceremony was to admit the initiates into a group of adult women who could legitimately give birth. The ceremony involved pregnancy tests such as pounding of omahangu, and continuous dancing”(Becker, 1998: 227).

While in many Western societies a woman’s identity may be defined in relation to men, in many Namibian societies and probably in most African societies, a woman’s identity is not only defined in relation to men, but also tied to her ability to bear children, whether or not she is married. Most Owambo communities placed high value on **efundula/ohango** as well as the ability of a woman to bear children regardless, as mentioned earlier, of her marital status, in the Christian sense of the term. As Becker (1998) argues, the traditional wedding in a way defined a woman’s identity, and safeguarded her womanhood and dignity. Becker (1998) further argues that, missionaries brought with them a whole package of gender images, which they meticulously enacted. When missionaries took in young girls and boys, they educated them in ways that entailed gender differentiation according to notions, norms and values of 19th century Europeans. This education into proper femininity and masculinity also related directly to sexuality. Included in this education were notions of morality, which came with the puritan notion about virginity. This notion attached shame and sin to any premarital sexual behavior. This however contrasted with the traditional notions where certain forms of premarital sexual relationships were accepted as part of young people’s lives unless they resulted in pregnancy.

While in the pre-Christian era the initiation ceremony had provided the transition to legitimate female adulthood and the right to have children, the advent of Christianity brought with it, as mentioned earlier, a new set of ideas about legitimate sexuality and pregnancy. In Becker's words, "it tied sexuality and motherhood down within the framework of a monogamous, preferably Christian marriage" (1998: 231).

Evidently, the early decades of colonialism in 'Owamboland' were marked by a battle over patriarchal control of women. In this battle, the 'male triad', mainly the administrative/colonial government, the traditional leader and the church with its then only male pastors, joined forces to restrict women's sexuality and reproductive freedoms. This was possible because the colonial discourse fitted well into traditionalists' efforts to tighten control over women as those members of the Owambo tribe who were assigned to be the bearers of (traditional) culture but who, in the opinions of some can allegedly, become easily detribalized. Obviously, this must have sent out double bind messages and confusion to the young women. Tradition demands that they undergo the initiation ceremony for them to be accepted members in their communities, yet Christianity condemns these ceremonies.

Of course this was not a situation that was unique only among the Owambo people. Writing on the control of women's sexuality and group identity in Naples, Goddard (1987:173) argues that "it can be seen that women are bearers, or perhaps the bearers of group identity and they thus have a very important part to play in the process of demarcation of group boundaries". The only way to prevent the infusion

and contamination of a group's identity is by means of controlling the sexuality of its women. This way its identity remains pure, uncontaminated.

Christianity did not change the fate of women who conceived before marriage for the better, but in fact, continued the degrading of these women by emphasizing the "white wedding" and by introducing the school of penitence for those who conceived before the "white wedding". The school of penitence is a religious principle particularly among the Catholics and the Lutheran churches. The rationale behind the school of penitence is that, every time a person breaks one of the Ten Commandments, he/she has to remorsefully confess to a pastor/priest and the church elders and ask for God's forgiveness. However, both the Catholic and the Lutheran churches especially in Owambo seem to put more emphasis on the sixth commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'.

This school of penitence is only compulsory for women and not for men. A child of an unmarried woman may not be baptized until its mother has attended this school, which usually takes about three months and is attended three days per week. It usually starts at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and goes on for about two to three hours. In many cases this has resulted in many problems, especially for women who are employed because it means they have to ask permission from their employers to be off work for six hours a week. If the woman absents herself from the school for four days, she is usually disqualified and has to start all over again. Of course there are also other conditions that may lead to her disqualification. During this time, she is not allowed to see or make contact with her "lover" in any way. If it is as much as

rumored that he was at her house, then she is removed from the school until she is ready to commit herself. Thus, for as long as she remains unmarried and conceives, an unmarried woman would have to attend this school as many times as the number of her pregnancies. This is regardless of whether the pregnancies or the children are by the same man or different men. Even if the pregnancy was not carried to full term, she would still have to attend the school. It is not only important for their children to be baptized, but also, these women cannot receive holy communion unless they have attended the school and are “forgiven” by the church and are declared pure again.

One wonders, to what extent this contributes to, and/or encourages the breaking up of relationships as a woman is actually faced with a no-win situation. If she continues to see her lover, the church will punish not only her, but also her baby. If she stops seeing her lover for three consecutive months, he might not be prepared for that and might leave her. In a way, the woman really does pay for becoming pregnant without a husband.

By prohibiting the ‘traditional wedding’, the missionaries made room for more and more women to become pregnant, before marriage. Yet, the negative connotation and attitudes that the society, including the church, had about these women, **aasimba kadhona/iikumbu**, did not change. Now the initiation ceremonies have been abandoned and prominence is given to the Christian wedding. At the same time, the church (and the communities as such) condemns premarital conception. As MacIntyre (1977: 19) states, “much popular social science and medical literature

tends to be based on the assumption that pregnancy in single women constitutes a problem and that single women will respond to it as such". It is also true that in many societies in general and among most Owambo communities in particular, conception while single is usually depicted and viewed as a crisis by the woman concerned and as a shame to her family and society. How would this affect the identities of women who might become pregnant before marriage?

1.2 Research question and objectives

This study was concerned with the question 'Does premarital pregnancy impact on/affect a woman's identity? From this question arise the three aims of this study. **Firstly**, it intended to investigate how single, young adult women appraised their premarital pregnancy at that time when they became pregnant and subsequent reappraisals. In other words, the study was intended to examine what these single women perceived their pregnancy to have meant to them, their significant others, (family and friends) and the society at large. **Secondly**, the study aimed at finding out whether these women feel stigmatized, isolated and marginalized. **Thirdly**, it was also the purpose of this study to find out how their premarital pregnancy has impacted on who they are today, in other words, how the past and present perceptions of their premarital pregnancy have contributed to the understanding of themselves now.

1.3 Contents of chapters: A summary

Chapter 2 deals with the theoretical conceptualization of the study. In this chapter, Whitbourne's (1985) Psychological Construction of the Life Span is described and elaborated on. The concepts of the self and identity as conceptualized by numerous authors are discussed and recurrent themes emanating from discussions of Whitbourne's (1985) model and concepts of self and identity are also addressed. The chapter concludes with stating how identity is to be conceptualized in the present study.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the literature review. It starts off by giving a general overview of the Owambo people and their culture, discussing how they have been impacted on by other cultures, Christianity, colonialism, the migrant labor system, capitalism and the war for Namibia's independence. The chapter then goes on to consider how women's identities are defined and how female sexuality is conceptualized and regulated. Furthermore, a discussion of how motherhood is equated to wifehood and womanhood to motherhood, the entanglement of which makes premarital conception as well as non-conception among adult women problematic and questionable is presented. The author further problematizes the 'single woman' category, bringing forth the ambivalence and ambiguities that surround its conceptualization, and arguing that despite the similarities between women without husbands, 'oshikumbu' cannot be defined as a 'single woman'. The issue of premarital pregnancy in relation to teenage pregnancy and the increase in premarital pregnancy among women beyond their teenage years is discussed. The

final aspect of the chapter discusses premarital pregnancy as an economic and racial issue.

Chapter 4 is about the empirical conceptualization of the study. It discusses the research methodology and methods that were applied in conducting this study. A qualitative research paradigm based on a retrospective method of collecting data was employed using a semi-structured interview. Discourse analysis, which was the method used for data analysis and interpretation is also discussed. The chapter also discusses the interview guideline and describes the criteria for the sample group.

In chapter 5, data presentation and analysis are carried out. The biographical information of the two interviewees whose texts were transcribed and used in both this and the next chapter are presented. Parker's (1992) seven criteria for distinguishing discourses and the three auxiliary criteria are described, followed by supporting data from the interview when possible.

In chapter 6, the author reads the data in relation to the theoretical framework, the literature review and the data analysis in an effort to answer the research question and the objectives of the study.

2. Theoretical Conceptualization of the Study

This chapter consists of two sections. The first section discusses the theoretical framework upon which this study is based. This includes a discussion of Whitbourne's (1985) model of the Psychological Construction of the Life-Span, in which the two concepts, the scenario and the life story, which are central to her model, are discussed. There is a reciprocal relationship between the scenario, the life story and identity in the sense that the hopes, desires and aspirations that we hold influence how we react to and evaluate events in our lives. This in turn influences how we narrate our stories in constructing who we become, which further influences the development of new desires, hopes and aspirations. Life stories are the means by which identities are formed. Due to the entanglement of the concept of the 'self' with that of 'identity', the 'self' as conceptualized by various authors is also discussed in this section. Since identity is a central concept to this study, the second section, contains a discussion of various conceptualizations of 'identity' by different authors. It also includes a discussion of recurrent themes from the theoretical framework, and from discussions about the self and identity. These are the themes of the past, present, and future; the themes of coherency and plausibility; the themes of relationships and discourses, and their implications for the formation of identity. The chapter concludes with stating how identity is conceptualized in the present study.

2.1. The Psychological Construction of the Life-Span

As already stated above, this study is conducted within the framework of Life-Span Developmental Psychology and is based on Susan Krauss Whitbourne's model of the Psychological Construction of the Life Span (Whitbourne, 1985). According to Whitbourne (1985), the individual's construction of the Life-span develops transitionally with identity. This means that, as an event occurs, adaptation to it would require changes within the life-span construct, which in turn influences changes in identity. Whitbourne further contends that social context influences the life-span construct through mechanisms that influence identity.

Whitbourne contends that, "The life-span construct is viewed as a unified sense of the past, present and future events linked by their common occurrence to the individual" (1985: 595). It is cognitive in the sense of being an organizer of experience, a prototype against which all events are measured. In other words, the life-span construct refers to how an individual interprets and organizes events that have [or have not] happened to her in the past, those that are happening [or not] to her now and those that she expects to [or not] happen to her in the future into a coherent, plausible and meaningful story.

Two poles hold together the life-span construct. First there is what Whitbourne calls the '**scenario**', and this consists of expectations about the future. It is the channel through which the life-span construct is put into plans, wishes, dreams and hopes for the future in the areas that are identified as important by the individual.

Of particular interest in this model is the assumption that the “scenario” is strongly influenced by age norms that define the transition points associated with “acceptable” ages for making these transitions (Whitbourne, 1985). The society also puts mechanisms in place that regulate and ensure that such norms are adhered to. For example, to conceive while still a teenager is not acceptable because one is not yet at the age where the transition into adulthood/motherhood could be made. One would therefore be expected to plan about having children when she is beyond her teenage years. The scenario is not a stable entity. It is constantly reworked and it also constantly changes as a result of either planned/unplanned or expected/unexpected life events during a person’s life. Since the scenario and identity are interrelated, the continuous rewriting of the scenario leads to constant changes in identity.

The second pole is the **‘life story’**, which incorporates past events into an organized, coherent story, giving these events a personal meaning and a sense of continuity. As a result of retelling it to self and others, the life story is continually altered. One can thus argue that the life-story involves the attempts made by the individual to present the various self-attributions to self and others in an organized and coherent manner. The contents of the life story, like those of the scenario, change continuously as a result of either how the individual views past events and experiences from the present, or as a result of which past events and experiences she decides to include in the life story as she tells it now. Again, continual changes in the life story contribute to changes in identity. For example, let us assume that having a child out of wedlock was not part of a particular woman’s scenario.

To deal with premarital pregnancy as a life event, this individual woman may for instance have to adjust certain future expectations and aspirations either by lowering them or putting them off for a while. Meanwhile, in telling her “life story” she might omit the fact that the pregnancy was not planned and thus recite her life in such a way that it is coherent and plausible.

Continual changes in both the scenario and life story make the life-span construct fluid. This capacity allows the life-span construct to facilitate adaptation to life events, mediate the cognitive appraisals of stress and the way an individual copes with stress. In other words, the life-span construct, which consists of the scenario and the life story, would determine how an individual appraises events and how she would cope with the stress associated with those events that are appraised as stressful or threatening (Whitbourne, 1985). Without the continual reworking of both the scenario and the life story, the individual would lack a feeling of continuity and may feel stuck and as if living in the past.

Whitbourne (1985: 595) further argues that, “the life-span construct possessed by the individual is shaped by identity in that self-attributions of physical, psychological and social qualities serve to determine its content”. Because the contents of the life-span construct are influenced by the individual’s values, they determine the content, level and timing of the aspirations that the individual has. It is these aspirations that determine whether events are appraised as significant or not. Through the life-span construct, the individual’s sense of *self* is defined and the greatest commitment of identity is made towards the life-span construct (Whitbourne, 1985).

Since Whitbourne (1985) did not elaborate on what the *self* is or on how it is different from or similar to identity, it becomes necessary to draw on the works of other authors, such as, amongst others, Jerkins (1996); Weir, (1996); Griffiths, (1995) & Freeman, (1993). Though they might not necessarily be life-span developmentalists, they have nevertheless meaningfully contributed to the understanding of this concept, the *self* [own italics].

According to Freeman (1993: 26), the self has come “to be understood as an elusive, capricious, and in some cases opaque being, which requires painstaking and deep attention to psychological details for its secrets to be revealed”. Given its illusive and capricious nature, it becomes easier to say what the self is not. The self is not to be understood as what Geertz (1979: 229, quoted by Freeman, 1993: 27) refers to as “The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures”.

Although the responsibility to bring this selfhood into being is most often seen to fall upon the individual, Freeman (1993) argues that the self should not be seen as a primary source of meaning but rather, as being already enmeshed in meaning, in language, and as situated in the essence of discourse. Discourse involves the construction of both objects and subjects. Discourses imply social relationships in

that through discourses, “we experience ourselves when we speak, when we hear others speak about us and how we still use that talk when we think without speech” (Burman & Parker, 1993: 7). A working definition of a discourse according to Parker (1992: 5) should be that, “it is a system of statements which constructs and object” [or subject]. He however went on to argue that this definition needs to be supported by a number of conditions, which he then stated in the form of the seven criteria and three auxiliaries that the author described and applied during the data analysis phase of this study.

On the same wave as Freeman, Flax (1993: 109) contends that, “the unitary self is an effect of many kinds of relations of domination. It can only sustain its unity by splitting off or repressing other parts of its own and others’ subjectivity”. In the process of splitting or repressing of other parts of its own or others’ subjectivity, this self might then claim uniqueness, purity in the sense of being “uncontaminated” by the social world. This would consequently produce a self that is asocial, and isolated in character, rather than a self that has qualities of sustained, intimate relations with others. This notion of a unique, isolated individual, Sampson (1988, in Kvale, 1992) argues, should therefore be replaced by one with connections, relationships and interdependence, and this latter notion is the kind of self that this study is in favor of.

Jerkins (1996:29), defines the *self* “as each individual’s reflexive sense of her/his own particular identity, constituted vis-a-vis others in terms of similarity and difference without which we would not know who we are and hence would not be able to act”. The individually unique [self] which is the personal, and the collectively

shared [identity] which is the social, can be understood as similar, if not exactly the same in important respects. Each is routinely entangled with the other, and the processes by which they are produced, reproduced and changed are equivalent in that both are intrinsically social. The difference between the two may lie in the fact that individual identities [self] emphasize difference, while collective social identities emphasize similarities. However, every self, the 'I', is to be understood as a fragment of several 'we' (Jerkins, 1996; Griffiths, 1995). This entanglement of the self with the social is shown in how it becomes difficult to talk of the 'self' and/or 'identity' without somehow talking about the other. The sociality of the self thus has not only to do with the individual's social participation, but also with the 'reflexivity' of the self. On the same note, Giddens (1991) argues that self-identity is a distinctively modern project within which individuals can reflexively construct a personal narrative, which allows them to understand themselves as in control of their lives now and in the future.

Individual identity, embodied in selfhood according to Jerkins (1996) is not meaningful in isolation from the social world of other people. Although individuals are unique and variable, selfhood is a socially constructed phenomenon. It is a phenomenon that occurs predominantly during the process of socialization within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives. We cannot see ourselves at all without also seeing ourselves as other people see us. What people think about us is as important as what we think about ourselves. As such, it is not only important to assert an identity, but it is also important for that identity to be authenticated by those with whom we have dealings.

Gilligan (1982, in Weir, 1996) states that one can form a self that is either defined in terms of submission or in terms of detachment. By this, Gilligan is implying that the self can develop either by means of submitting to the 'other' or by means of detaching from the 'other'. However, Weir argues that the self need not be defined in binary or oppositional terms, maintaining that, "my identity as this specific individual is constructed through my participation in communities, institutions, and systems of meaning, which organize my interactions with, and through which I interpret my interactions with, the world, my self, and others" (1996: 185). The self can therefore only be understood as constituted inter-subjectively, as influenced by our interactions with other people and always in the process of becoming. As Griffiths (1995: 79) states, "If the self is constructed, then.....the self is more than its core".

In as far as the authors cited above understand the self to be social, contextual and time bound, they are therefore not that far removed from Whitbourne's conceptualization of the life-span construct as "a unified sense of the past, present and future events" (1985: 595).

Coming back to the life-span construct of Whitbourne (1985), the impact that premarital pregnancy would have on any individual woman at a particular time, is assumed to be influenced by the content, level and timing of the aspirations that the individual has. It is therefore the content, level, and timing of these aspirations that would determine whether the individual evaluates the event as positive or negative, threatening or challenging. Appraisal of an event may result in an altered life story

and a modified scenario as a means of coping, whereby the meaning of an event is distorted so as to maintain one's self-esteem. This would then lead to the restructuring of identity. However, the motivation for the restructuring of one's identity is not merely to maintain one's self-esteem, but should be understood as a desire to effectively solve the problems of everyday living (1985).

The life-span developmental framework enables us to understand how an individual evaluates an event, and how it's evaluation affects and is affected by, the individual's changing view of self and the environment throughout adulthood. How the individual adapts to the event would depend on whether the event is consistent or inconsistent with the individual's scenario. An event that is consistent with the scenario, though not positive, would be appraised favorably and readily integrated into the individual's life story. For instance, becoming pregnant before marriage is socially unacceptable among Owambo communities and is therefore more likely to be perceived as a negative event than a positive one. However, if an individual has planned on having children even if not married at some point in the future, a premarital pregnancy would be evaluated favorably. Moreover, because it fits in with desired goals and expectations, it is incorporated into the individual's identity in confirmatory terms (Whitbourne, 1985).

Adapting to an event that does not comply with the scenario is said to be more complex and may result in alternative outcomes. According to Whitbourne (1985), an inconsistent event may yield three possible outcomes.

The first may be that the individual may incorporate the event in the life story in an adequately accurate form, in that when describing the event, the individual would do it in a way that is closely related to the details of how and why it happened as well as the precise outcomes of its occurrence. In this outcome, the individual does not alter the event to make it congruent with identity, but rather, changes her identity, thereby modifying the life-span construct, which in turn leads to a revised scenario. This revised scenario takes into account the fact that original goals cannot be realized according to the original scenario. Subsequent events are then given meaning according to their fit with the altered scenario.

The second possible outcome to an inconsistent event is that which involves the distortion of the causes and /or nature of the event so as to make it more consistent with the individual's existing identity. When retelling the event, the individual applies motivational biases, transforming the features of and the circumstances surrounding the event, making it difficult for these details to be readily available to memory. As soon as the modified event is incorporated in the life story, the scenario for future events is then revised either by means of extending or shortening the time lines so as to account for the delay or earlier arrival of the event. Whitbourne (1985) further argues that, the interpretation of new events is done in light of the reworked scenario, but there are no new insights about one's identity or a proportional change in the life-span construct.

The third possible outcome according to Whitbourne (1985) is that of the person-environment relationship. If the individual finds the environment to be completely

inconvenient for the attainment of her goals as defined within the current scenario, she might leave it. The individual rarely undertakes to modify the environment until such time when she finds that previous efforts to achieve her goals proved impossible within the context of that environment. Attempts at changing the existing environment can occur if it is not extremely constraining. However, even with the modification of the environment, the scenario might be revised to include those changes that are brought about by the new environmental changes, but the individual's identity would not be altered.

To this end, the scenario in effect then provides a framework for anticipatory coping. The individual might not be prepared for an event even though the same event had been part of the scenario simply because it happened before anticipatory coping had taken place. However, "If the event was not only unprepared for but not even a part of the original scenario, the individual will be forced to incorporate it in the scenario as well as make it part of the life story" (Whitbourne, 1985: 612) and this is where the real challenge lies.

From this perspective, the author hopes to find out and understand how individual women appraised their being pregnant before marriage and how this affected their understanding of their "selves" throughout their life-span.

2.2. What is identity?

Since this study is about identity, it is imperative to see how various authors understand this concept. As mentioned earlier in the introduction to this chapter, this section will not only be about conceptualizations of identity by different authors, but also about the recurrent themes in this chapter, as well as a proposed conceptualization of identity in this study.

According to Whitbourne & Weinstock (1979), identity is the answer to ‘who am I?’ They thus define identity “as the individual’s self-attribution of numerous personal and interpersonal qualities” (1979: 8). Contained in these qualities are the physical appearance, abilities, desires/motives, goals, social beliefs, attitudes, values and the set of roles that one is expected to carry out within the home and in the society as a whole. These qualities, which constitute identity, change continuously, thus rendering identity dynamic (Sarup, 1994). Sometimes these changes occur as a result of swift [expected or unexpected] major life events, such as marriage, a new job, loss of a loved one or, a premarital pregnancy. Whitbourne and Weinstock (1979) further argue that identity serves an organizing function in the life of the adult, thus representing the developmental process of integration. They also view identity as responsible for the maintenance of continuity across situations and over time, arguing that, “Identity allows adults to view their lives as belonging to themselves rather than to others” (1979: 8).

However, as with the concept of the self that the author discussed in the first section of this chapter, the concept of identity is also viewed as an illusive one and the complexity and diversity of dealing with it are elucidated by Breakwell (1986: 11) when she states that, “theorizing about identity is like traversing a battlefield. Though strewn only with the debris of unconsolidated thought rather than unexploded shells, it is no less deadly”. Weeks (1987:49) argues that, “identity may well be a historical fiction, a controlling myth, a limiting burden, but, it is at the same time a necessary means of weaving our way through a hazard-strewn world and a complex web of social relations”. Identities are always *relational* in the general sense that they exist in relation to other potential identities. Identity is always about relationships, either to ourselves, precarious unities of conflicting desires and social commitments and to others who address us and call upon our recognition in diverse ways and through whom our sense of who we are is always negotiated. According to Taylor (1991: 34, quoted by Griffiths, 1995: 81), “Identity is ‘who’ we are, ‘where we’re coming from’. As such, it is the background against which our tastes, and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense. If some of the things I value the most are accessible to me only in relation to the person I love, then she/he becomes internal to my identity”.

Kvale (1992), emphasizing the importance of subjective experience of the past, present and future in the formation of identity, argues that identity is a story that one must construct for her/himself. This is similar to the function of the life story as proposed by Whitbourne (1985), that of organizing past events into a coherent story. It is thus a psychological state that has to be achieved and not something that is to be

taken for granted. The process of constructing an identity is therefore a never ending process of telling stories about ourselves and of discovering normatives which make sense in terms of the internal conversations that we hold inside our individual heads, in our conversations with others and which work pragmatically to fit the prevailing situation in terms of social positions.

Foucault (1977: 137-8 referred to by Freeman, 1993: 67) maintains that questions of authorship, of identity, should be about “under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy and what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse?” Furthermore, Mama (1995) conceptualizes identity as being socially and historically constituted out of collective experience. Like Foucault (1977) and Kvale (1992), she views identity not as a static or fixed entity, but rather, as a dynamic process during which individuals take up and change positions in discourses. Identity is thus about social positions, about how we position ourselves and how others position us.

Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992) argue that the stories we tell about ourselves are not only interesting because of the characters and events that they describe, but there is something interesting about the construction of these stories, stating that, “personal stories are therefore not merely a way of telling ourselves or others about our lives, but they are in effect, the means by which identities are fashioned” (1992:1). They thus contend that all stories are told and all self-understanding is realized within a narrative frame that each culture provides for its members. On the same note,

Widdicombe (1993) argues that the significance of lives, of selves and of experiences is assumedly constructed through culturally available resource and practices. Life stories, in Rosenwald & Ochberg's (1992) view, draw a connection between past and present. The subjective conviction of autobiographic coherence, they argue, is intrinsic to a sense of identity. One might wonder as to what narrative frame for understanding themselves the Owambo culture(s) has provided for the *never-married-woman-with-children* [oshikumbu].

Remarkably, throughout this chapter, both in the discussion of the Psychological Construction of the Life Span as proposed by Whitbourne (1985) and in the discussion of the various conceptualizations of the 'self' and 'identity', particular themes kept reoccurring. These are the themes of the past, present and future, the themes of coherency and plausibility as well as themes of relationships and discourses and their implication for or relevance to identity formation.

There seems to be a consensus among most authors cited in this chapter that the process of identity formation involves gazing back at the past and retrospectively designing an upward trajectory of how one has come into being. For instance, for Whitbourne (1985), the theme of the present is manifested in the life-span construct, which is fed by both the past and the future in terms of the life story and the scenario respectively. The life story in Whitbourne's model represents the past in that it functions as an organizer of past events into a story that is not only coherent but also plausible. However, this coherency and plausibility is only achievable through a process of inclusion, omission and alteration. In sifting through past events, those

parts that are found not to be admirable, either to the self or audience/society, are either altered or left out. It is not as if the occurrence of one event leads logically to the other event, but rather, it is the work of the individual story maker that imposes coherence. It is the implicit assumptions of plausibility that shape the way each story maker weaves the fragmentary episodes of her experience into a story that is coherent (Whitbourne, 1985; Kvale, 1992; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). The scenario is future oriented in that it consists of expectations and aspirations about the future.

Unlike the scenario and the life story, the life-span construct is not only in the present because it has to do with how the individual lives her life now, in relation to what has already passed, and what is yet to come. It can better be understood as an autobiography, a form of linear structure that allows the past, present and future to be bound together in a coherent manner. It is then through this structure that forms of personal and social identity take shape. In so far as it is influenced by social mechanisms and the individual's values, the life-span construct is already suffused by relationships and enmeshed in discourses. According to Macnaghten (1993), all accessible human reality is constructed and bounded in history. He further asserts that since human meanings and experience are produced through discourse, discourse therefore refers not only to linguistic activities that are observable, but also to other human activities such as signs, symbols, and texts. Discourses describe the social world and categorize it in that it is through discourses that a phenomenon is brought into sight. Discourses are constraining and productive forces, they have power (Parker, 1992). All narratives are told within the paradigms that are considered

intelligible within the specific culture in which they are told, and as a result, any story may be viewed predominantly as the instantiation of the norms of discourse (Foucault, 1977; Shotter & Gergen, 1989; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; Mama, 1995). If the self can be understood as a form of expressions about a particular culture, can it then be argued that a culture in a way, speaks itself through the story of each individual?

On a similar note as Whitbourne (1985), Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992) thus contend that a life story is more than a recital of events. It is an organization of experience, in which the elements of experience are related to each other, and through this present telling, the teller asserts the meaning of these stories. In telling our stories, we make claims about the coherence of our lives, and what we decide to include and omit from the account renders plausible the anticipated future. A life story is not only considered to be 'good' if it works for the person who tells it. It must also be considered 'good' by those who hear it and it is in this that the relational aspect in the weaving of the self and identity is most pronounced.

Taking into consideration the conceptualizations of the concepts of 'the self' and 'identity' in this chapter, these two terms, 'the self' and 'identity', will be used interchangeably in this study. As Jerkins (1996:4) contends, "All human identities are in a stronger sense social identities. ... identity is about meanings. Meanings are always the outcome of agreement or disagreement, always a matter of convention and innovation, always to some extent shared, always to some extent negotiable".

Our social identities are never a settled matter. In fact, identity can only be understood as a process since one never becomes but is constantly becoming.

Against such a background, the concept of **identity** in this project is to be understood as a process, in which an individual constructs meaning of her existence from significant past and present experiences as well as from experiences that are yet to come.

Considering all the definitions looked at thus far, it then makes sense for identity in this project to be viewed as *dynamic, multiple and relational*. It is **dynamic** in that identities are continuously changing and are not static and fixed. It is **multiple** in that having self-identified or having been identified as **oshikumbu** does not mean this assertion excludes other identities. A “*never-married-woman-with-children*” [**oshikumbu**] can for instance also identify herself as ‘mother’ although ‘mother’ as such is normatively assumed to be ‘married’. In other words, asserting a particular identity does not preclude any other possible identities or prevent individual innovations. Identity is **also** but **not only relational** in that a certain identity exist in relation to other potential identities.

In this study, identity is viewed as having to do with how one implicitly and explicitly thinks about oneself. It has to do with her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relationship to the world. Identity cannot only be articulated in differential/oppositional terms, as in defining “*never-married-women-with-children*” as different or opposed to “*married-women-with-children*” or “*never-married-*

women-without-children". Since there are common ways of talking about and defining women, there is sameness within this difference, and there is togetherness within this polarity.

3. Literature Review

From the previous discussion, it is discerned that identity is collectively and relationally produced and emanates from the histories and cultures of the people concerned. By looking at the impact of premarital pregnancy on the identities of young Owambo women, their individual histories have to be considered since they are individuals, each with her own her/story. However, their histories have to be grounded in their culture, that is, the Owambo culture, as it has been impacted on by Christianity, colonialism and the migrant labor system, and as Rosenwald & Ochberg (1992) contends, look at what narrative frame this culture has provided for these individuals for understanding themselves.

3.1. The Owambo people

Since this project is about Owambo women, it would be worthwhile to present to the reader a condensed picture of the Owambo people. Geographically, 'Owamboland' as it was formally known during the apartheid time, is situated in northern Namibia, covering an area of approximately 42 km². In present day Namibia, the former 'Owamboland' is made up of four regions, Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena and part of the Oshikoto region. Although it is quite difficult to say with precision the accurate number of the Owambo population, it has been estimated at about 50 percent of the total Namibian population (Hishongwa, 1992).

Most records indicate that Owambo is divided into seven districts: Oukwanyama, Ondonga, Uukwambi, Ongandjera, Uukwaluudhi, Ombalantu and Uukolonkadhi. Although every district has its own dialect, the dialects spoken by Owambo people are interintelligible. However, there are the Ovambandja people who, even though they have a unique dialect, which can also be understood by other Owambo people, are usually left out of these recordings. The legitimate existence of this group is however not of particular interest to the present project other than to elucidate the diversity that constitutes the Owambo people. Thus, every time the terms ‘Owambo people’, ‘Owambo culture’ or ‘Owambo societies or communities’ are referred to in this project, it is not meant to imply that the Owambo people and cultures are a uniform entity. Of these eight dialects mentioned, only three are written. These are the Oshikwanyama and Oshindonga, which are taught in schools even in other districts. Then there is Oshikwambi, which is only used by the Catholic Church in writing their bible and hymns, but is not taught in schools. Being the largest population group or tribe in the country, the Owambo people can be found in every corner of the country. This means that they are exposed to other cultural groups in the country and at some level, have incorporated some aspects of other cultures into theirs.

Owambo society has always been male dominated, with activities being divided according to gender. The men are usually the heads of the family with the responsibility of providing for and protecting the family, and responsible for decision making and cattle rearing. Women on the other hand are considered as homemakers, responsible for working in the field and for the rearing of children.

The Owambo society has been impacted on by the colonial rule and the genesis of the migrant/contract labour system, a system that left the community without able-bodied men and many women/wives without husbands. The important role that an Owambo man as husband played and still plays in the life of his wife was clearly captured by how a woman in Owambo expressed her feelings about her husband's absence on contract, by saying that "He leaves us like a sheep without a shepherd" (Hishongwa, 1992: 103).

However, there might have been women who derived some benefit from being without a husband, especially considering the domination of women by men. Having been forced by the circumstances imposed by the system to operate autonomously in the absence of men, to bring up children alone, to take own decisions, women might not wish to give up this power upon return of husbands. The combined effects of the contract labor system, and the exodus of many young Owambo people to participate in the war for the liberation struggle has for instance, made it possible for women to be appointed to positions that were usually reserved for men, such as school principals (Allison, 1988; SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign, 1988). Nevertheless, this system has left women over-taxed with responsibilities, yet unable to make decisions without worrying whether their husbands would approve of them. As well articulated by the SWAPO women's council (1988: 348), "In this system, men are forced to leave their families alone for long periods of about 12-18 months and spent about 30 years of their able and married years away from home". Since husbands were not allowed to take their families to their places of work, rural women experienced more hardship than before.

During the apartheid era, the presence of the South African army in the region gave a young Owambo man four options concerning his livelihood. He could either go into exile and join the liberation struggle, join the South African army, join the contract labour system, or stay on at home and risk the chance of being harassed, abused and violated by the South African army since he had now become a subject of suspicion. In fact, opting to stay at home was not a viable option for able-bodied Owambo men because according to First (1988: 324), “If a Reserve does not supply enough labor (said one Ovambo), it is looked upon as a bad Reserve. A message comes from the commissioner to the Welfare officer. The Welfare Officer calls the headman and the Reserve board members. The Welfare Officer reads the letter to the board members, and tells them that they want a certain number of laborers to work on the farms, or the roads and this number must be supplied. If the number is not supplied, the headman and board members are scolded”. This ‘scolding’ usually took the form of dethroning the headmen and the board members, stripping them of their powers and replacing them with those who are more cooperative.

These were clearly difficult choices for any individual. Being the protector and the provider of the family, it would be a heartbreaking decision for the man to leave his family and go into exile without knowing whether he would ever come back alive to see them again. Yet, it was also his responsibility as a man to fight for the liberation of his country and to protect his family from the invaders. If he joined the South African army, he would put his family and himself in a position where not only would they become outcasts in their own community, but he could be killed by or be killing his own brothers and sisters, the very people he was supposed to protect.

Joining the South African army would in any case also take him away from his home, from his immediate family.

Arguing that for many, doing contract labour was regarded as a kind of rite of passage, which they *chose* to engage in, would be questionable if not misleading. The system was a degradation of human dignity, in which men were called 'boys', stripped off their pride as men, who are capable of making own decisions. The stories told by contract labourers were horrific, their working conditions inhumane and their wages too little to alleviate the poverty of their families back home or their own poverty for that matter. Thus, the choices that were available to these men placed them in a very complex position (United Nation institute for Namibia, 1986; SWAPO women's solidarity campaigns, 1988; SWAPO women's council, 1988). However, within this system, many men, with the help of their women, were able to use these meagre salaries they earned through contract labour to acquire goods, which in many cases increased the owner's status in the society.

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the Owambo culture has also been impacted on by Christianity in that it brought with it its own norms and values of what a family or matrimony should be about. The matrimonial life of the Owambo people was in the past based on a polygamous principle, but this changed with the introduction of Christianity and modern ways of living.

Traditionally, the domestic economic life of the Owambo people was and still is predominantly characterized by subsistence agriculture, which mainly consists of

crop production and pastoral farming. According to Hishongwa (1992), the Owambo people fall into the category of middle-class peasants. This means that they are independent small householders who own as much land as they can cultivate themselves. However, the Owambo society was transformed tremendously as a result of the advent of mercantile capitalism, which many Owambo people especially men, embraced even before the independence of the country. Although their economy is still predominantly characterized by subsistence agriculture, the Owambo people have the largest number of business people especially at entrepreneurial level in the country. The region has also produced some of the well off businessmen and women in the country.

The independence of Namibia in 1990 has brought about many benefits and economic opportunities for the Namibian people. Introduction of new laws such as the laws of inheritance has for instance brought about changes in the people's traditional ways of living, allowing women access to the properties of their husbands.

Looking at Owambo culture twelve years after independence, it would be inappropriate not to consider the impact that those who returned from exile, "the returnees", have had on the traditional ways of living. Those who were in exile spent many years mixing with and getting exposed to different cultures in other parts of Africa, as well as the rest of the world. Some of these people spent their formative years in these foreign lands and have come to adopt some of the beliefs and values from these cultures. These would not just have gone away upon their return home, but rather, would have impacted on national and local beliefs and values and have

been translated in a traditional local context (Becker, 1998). In other words, these beliefs and values would have become part of who they are today, part of their identity.

At some levels then, one can say that the Owambo culture has been suffused with aspects of other cultures and modern ways of living. On other levels however, this culture remains unshaken and strong in its own right. For instance, independence has made it possible for women to acquire land and accumulate wealth in their own right, and education has made their opportunities limitless. However, marriage is still highly valued in this society to a point where an unmarried woman, no matter how successful she might be in other spheres of her life, could be looked down upon.

3.2. Women's identities defined

In her book *'Sacrificial logics'* Weir (1996), problematizes the concept of 'woman'. For instance, she analytically looked at the work of Butler (1990) who argues that to enforce "women" as a category is to implement an identity and that every identity is based on a logic of exclusion or sacrifice. Butler further asserts that "woman" or "man", as such is a cultural construct and a product of the technologies of power. Weir further brings to the fore questions about whether in articulating 'what' or 'who' women are, we might risk the danger of "repressing the differences of race, class, culture, sexual orientation and so on, which divides them, [as well as] denying the wide historical and cultural variation of what the concept of woman mean"

(Weir, 1996: 1). In considering the various definitions of 'woman', the author acknowledges and takes cognizance of Weir's questions.

Hall (1990: 197) defines women's identity as "the essence of being, an affinity with one's most sacred values. Our deepest beliefs about human nature and the human conditions are sources of identity." She argues that, identity results from choices and that for our identity to be clear and effective, women [and men] must be aware of the choices they make. To her, identity is our closest personal link to social norms. She also argues that connectedness is an essential part of women's identity. As women, we gain strength in deliberately constructing identities that acknowledge our connectedness with other people. She further argues that ".....Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (1990: 225). Identity is about differentiation as it is about affinities based on selection, self-actualization as well as choice. However, identity can only become satisfactorily achieved by adjustment to a pre-selected normality. Women's identities are characterized by relativity rather than absoluteness. This is in line with relational feminists who argue that the concept of a self that is autonomous and independent represses the reality of our embeddedness in and dependence upon relationships (Gordon, 1994; Griffiths, 1995; Weir, 1996).

McDowell, & Pringle (1990: 1), argue that, "women are constantly defined in relation to men. They are most obviously, defined in familial terms as carers and nurturers. A woman's identity and status are derived from her relation to the

implicitly gendered categories of mothers, daughters and wives. Thus, defining her, not only in relation to men, but as dependent on men and subordinate to them”.

If a woman thus ‘chooses’ to become pregnant before marriage, she would have made a choice, a choice to have sex, to be sexually active. With this choice, a woman would have meddled with pre-selected norms and sacred values of the society (at least in some societies, most Owambo societies included) and is likely to find the adjustment to a pre-selected normality difficult. This choice could turn out to be against societal norms and values (of some societies, including most Owambo societies) and could thus very well implicate her identity.

3.2.1. Women’s sexuality

Sexuality is an integral part of our identity. Since this study is about premarital pregnancy, it explicitly touches on sex, which is one way of expressing sexuality. Because power relations between women and men are usually expressed through the control of women’s sexuality it necessitates a discussion of this issue. According to Ussher & Baker (1993), sexuality cannot be separated from the self or conceived of in a vacuum. We need to understand relationships and individual identity in order to understand it.

Traditionally, women have been under the control of men, first, their fathers and then their husbands. For instance, among the Nnobi people of Nigeria, “daughters as virgins were under the control and protection of their lineage men in relation to non-

lineage men with whom the rules of incest did not forbid sexual intercourse. Through marriage exchange, daughters stepped into wifhood and motherhood and control over them passed from their natal to their marital lineage men” (Amadiume, 1987: 70). Mothers usually worried that their daughters might have sexual relationships with men, or conceive before marriage. For a girl to become pregnant before a marriage payment had been made was shameful and the mother was usually blamed for this because it was her duty to warn her daughter against men (Amadiume, 1987).

As O’Connell (1994: 19) argues, “women’s sexuality is most often seen as the property of her family and valued as her marriage price”. In marriage, a woman’s sexuality is still not her own but it is to be guarded for use by others. For instance, among the Nnobi people, full adult maturity for a female meant self-restraint in sexual matters and less adventurousness in the pursuit of pleasure (Amadiume, 1987).

Ussher & Baker (1993: 1) argue that, “sexuality has always been conceptualized as a potential problem”. Consequently, an almost universal system of double standards for female and male sexuality exists. Female sexuality has usually been subject to stricter regulations than male sexuality. Even in societies where sexual relations outside marriage are explicitly forbidden, the proscription is usually only enforced and monitored with respect to women, and where rules governing sexual behavior are assumed to be indulgent, they are still enforced more strictly on women (Gordon, 1994; O’Connell, 1994). “Women are widely regarded as sexually alluring, and a potential danger to every man. It is therefore women’s sexuality [not men’s], which

must be controlled and repressed by social norms, restrictions on their mobility and violence if deemed necessary. A woman must be asexual in public while always available to her husband [or lover] in private” (O’Connell, 1994: 19). Sex is thus seen as a man’s right and a woman’s obligation. As such, a man’s sexual actions are legitimized while a woman’s pleasure is denied.

As Gordon (1994) argues, a sexually active woman who does not express her sexuality in the context of institutionalized marriage is still judged and feared. These arguments are further echoed by Chandler (1991: 11) when she states that “in traditional Christian thinking good women were praised for their modesty and their lack of sexuality, and bad women were castigated as the temptresses of men”. Within the boundaries of theology, sexuality was understood as a moral construct. It was seen as a biological and instinctive drive that was innately male, directed at a passive, even though seductive female. It was deemed necessary to control man’s unholy desires for the fatally attractive female, and the achievement could only be made successfully through castigating female sexuality (Ussher, 1993). This double bind is further expressed by Ussher (1993), when she contends that although to be a woman is to be sexual, paradoxically, she is also asexual in that her sexuality is a lack, invisible, a liability and always understood within the patriarchal framework. However, this framework not only confines but also distorts experience. The double bind is found in how a woman’s sexual identity is valued most often by her abstinence from sexual activity [virginity] or by her fertility and her ability to bear children [especially male children], especially in marriage, neither of which indicates woman’s individual fulfillment. This sexual double standard divides women into

those with a flawless virtue and those with an easy virtue, those who would be cherished for their modesty and those who would be sexually pursued, overcome and then despised (Chandler, 1991).

In many cultures, male sexual activity before [and after] marriage is less circumscribed than that of woman. Among the Owambo tribes for instance, it was and probably still is usually considered a source of pride if a man has fathered many children even before he marries. While he is praised and considered to be a man, the woman on the other hand is shunned and considered cheap, if not useless. Iipingene and LeBeau (1997: 47-48) state that, "There is a strong tendency to control female sexuality among all Namibian cultures. Many women in Namibia do not have the right to control their sexuality nor their own fertility". This statement echoes that of the Department of Women Affairs (1995), in Namibia, when it reported that it is becoming common for men to insist on a woman to prove her fertility by becoming pregnant before marriage. The implications of this attitude or practice is that the woman usually experiences rejection by the baby's father, resulting in children born out of wedlock and widespread single motherhood. In many Namibian cultures, power relations between women and men are based on the belief that the man is somehow superior to woman, and should be the head of the house and have marital powers over his wife. This became evident during the 1995-1996 debate on the 'Married Persons Equality Act'. Amongst other members of the National Assembly of Namibia, the late Honorable Nathaniel Maxuilili made this very clear when he stated that, "we are not allowed to change the status of men and women, not at all. That is what God said. The women must be subject to their husbands as the

head.....we must be very careful of women....that women want to take over power....we must not allow it!” (Becker, 1996: 7-8). In light of all these, could Khaxas (1997:6) then be right that “Sexuality for many Namibian women is mainly about pain, violence, rape, abuse, unwanted pregnancies, exploitation, STDs and Aids”? As Ussher (1993: 9) states “The construction of femininity is closely tied to the construction of sexuality, and as sexuality is regulated so are women”.

A woman who becomes pregnant before marriage could be seen as representing the failure of the patriarchy to control her sexuality. Since she is without a husband, she might be seen to have defied popular cultural values and her premarital pregnancy could very well be termed as a deviation from the norm. To define such a woman in relation to man could prove problematic, if not impossible. Having defied the norm, the question then arises as to how they are perceived and perceive themselves. It also brings questions about the significance of premarital pregnancy to the fore.

3.2.2. Womanhood; motherhood equated to wifhood

In addition to defining women in relation to men and as subordinate to them, there seems to be a tendency among writers and laypersons alike, to equate motherhood to wifhood, just as there is a tendency to equate womanhood with motherhood. Motherhood is crucial for a woman to achieve full status. There is a sense, it seems, in which being a ‘woman’ is different from being a ‘person’ in that, regardless of her achievements, including marriage, a woman is not fulfilled, is not a proper woman

until she bears a child. A woman's identity as already mentioned, is therefore closely bound up with her caring, nurturing role as a mother.

Motherhood, according to O'Connell (1994: 20) "has been described as every woman's true destiny, her primary goal in life and her sole means of achieving fulfillment as a human being". Motherhood is now usually considered to be an essential task or stage of women's development as well as a critical part of their identity. Women continue to be defined in terms of their biological functions. Ussher (1990) argues that motherhood and particularly childbearing, continue to be defined as the supreme route to physical and emotional fulfillment and as important for all women. There are symbolic values attached to motherhood, which include amongst others, the expansion of the self in that parenting is seen as growth, as adding to meaning of life and as ensuring the continuity of parents. Because parenthood is valued as an integral part of one's self-definition, allowing people to be accepted as responsible and mature members of their community, it therefore validates adult status and identity (Phoenix, Woollett & Lloyd, 1991; O'Connell, 1994).

The importance of motherhood, according to Phoenix, et al. (1991: 7) lies in the fact that even "childless women are defined in relation to childbearing either as potential bearers of children, as failed bearers or as selfish individuals who have chosen to remain childless". The importance of motherhood for a woman also lies in the fact that it is an important path to social status and personal achievement for her. Since in all societies, children are a source of prestige, they bring a new positioning for women within the home, and the society at large (O'Connell, 1994). This conception

is difficult to ignore because as Gittins (1993: 95) argues, “For women raised from the earliest age to perceive womanhood as equivalent to motherhood, bearing a child brings a dramatic change in a status of a woman. It is more than marriage even, the principal way in which a woman becomes socially recognized as being a ‘real’ woman, one who has fulfilled her true destiny and role in life”. Thus, the birth of a child is virtually the only means available to her of showing the world she is a real woman. On the contrary, a man retains his full status even if he is childless.

Gittins (1993: 96), further argues that, “this perception of motherhood as a woman’s only way of achieving social status is as powerful a force today as it was in the past, it is the bedrock of patriarchal ideology”. Even though motherhood is socially constructed as valued and important, there are prescribed ‘right’ circumstances and a ‘right’ age range at which women are supposed to become mothers. To become a mother while in the ‘wrong’ age group or under ‘wrong’ circumstances places these women in the contradictory position of being devalued although they have entered a status category that in theory is valued (Phoenix, Woollett & Lloyd, 1991). As much as this ideology defines motherhood as a woman’s natural destiny, it is ironic that the same natural destiny rarely applies to women who have children before marriage. Dominant ideologies of motherhood thus still require mothers to be married when they give birth and despite the fact that cohabitation is increasingly becoming common this has not led to a comparable accommodation of the dominant ideologies (Busfield 1987). Although this conviction might be different today, the data and conclusions from this study seem to indicate that it is far from been totally outdated.

The implications of becoming a mother under the ‘wrong’ circumstances may clearly be illustrated by what a certain single university professor in her late thirties in 1984, who decided to have her child out of wedlock, had to say about the meaning other people assigned to her decision:

“To my mind, I was attempting to fulfill a purely personal need, not to encroach on somebody else’s political philosophy. I now know from experience that whatever the motivation of a voluntary single parent, the interpretation others will place on her behavior is that she is making a statement about the value of the nuclear family, about the importance of men as fathers, and about her personal need for companionship” (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1988: 219).

While a majority of people might no longer assert categorically as they did before that premarital sex and premarital conception is immoral, there is no consensus about the circumstances in which premarital sex and conception are condoned. Furthermore, Melville (1988: 125) argues that “In a society where nine out of ten people marry at least once, the decision to marry requires no explanation, but the decision to remain single does.”

However, although womanhood and motherhood have been perceived as binding women to marriage and to men, this integrative traditional view is undermined by both single women, and “*never-married-women-with-children*”. They socially fragment its dimensions by means of disconnecting womanhood from motherhood and maternity from wifedom respectively (Chandler, 1991).

3.2.3. 'Single woman' 'Oshikumbu'

The notion of the 'single women' category is problematic because it seems to give precedence to the absence of a man in a woman's life. The author is also of the opinion that the use of the category 'single women' is too encompassing and therefore does not allow for expression of difference within itself. Despite the similarities between 'single women', there is a crucial difference between them in that divorced, separated and widowed 'singles' have achieved an initial rite of passage by getting married. For instance, authors such as Gordon, (1994); Chandler, (1991); and Allen, (1989) argue that, traditionally, the only route for a woman to realize the transition from childhood to adulthood is through marriage. Gordon (1994: 155) further states that, "women who have been married have confirmed societal expectations and have acquired their rightful place in society", although there is a sense, especially for the divorced and separated, of not having fulfilled those expectations successfully. For "*never-married-women-without-children*" and "*never-married-women-with-children*", the transition from childhood to adult status has not been accomplished and is therefore problematic because it might not involve marriage. The latter has experienced maternity without experiencing wifehood and the former has defied the 'normal' role and identity of woman as mother and wife. To cluster them together in the 'single women' category would blur such differences, which are particularly important to this study.

There seems to exist ambiguity about the conceptualization of 'single women', with authors usually not knowing whether or not to include "*never-married-women-with-*

children” in their studies of ‘single women’, although they would include them in the category. For instance, in her book *‘Single women’*, Gordon (1994) states that, she initially had decided not to include women with children in her study because she believes that motherhood locates women within the patriarchal structures and familial ideologies. The difficulty or ambiguity about the category of ‘single women’ can be traced back to the 1960s, when authors such as Baker (1968), separated “singleness” from motherhood, as if it is in fact inconceivable for a never-married woman to experience motherhood. Of course this might be understood in relation to a society that seems to believe that a woman can only develop her humanity to the fullest extent if she fuses with a male personality. As Baker (1968: 473) clearly states, “it is primarily through marriage and motherhood that a woman must fulfill herself as a person”. Baker’s choice and usage of words in his article brings out this ambivalence or ambiguity especially when he states that, “It is concluded [from the study] that, through creative contribution to society, a *never-married woman* may achieve a satisfactory adjustment to life and that, *though denied a husband and children*, she may nonetheless experience adequate personality fulfillment” (Baker, 1968: 473) [own emphasis]. Baker used those words without conceptualizing the possibility that a never-married woman can also experience motherhood. By using the word *‘denied’* Baker made it almost impossible to think of a woman who might choose to have children though without wanting to choose a husband.

This view is to a certain extent supported by Chandler’s assertion that “...an overview of contemporary changes in the patterns of marriage.....draws largely on a conventional classification of women by marital status which divides them into the

single, the married, the widowed, the separated and the divorced. These latter groups are important examples of women without husbands....” (1991: 14). Clearly, ‘the single’ is not in the ‘latter’ examples and therefore does not, in Chandler’s view, fall under the category of women without husbands, yet she did include them.

One may be wondering about the rationale for distinguishing different categories of ‘single women’ in this way. To elucidate and highlight the difference between separated, divorced, widowed and “*never-married-women-without-children*” on the one hand and “*never-married-women-with-children* [**iikumbu**]” on the other, a simple example of a form may suffice. When filling in a form, there are usually five ‘normal’ categories under the ‘marital status’ heading: married, separated, divorced, widowed or single.

The author argues that, for the purpose of this study, “*never-married-women-with-children* [**iikumbu**]” do not fit into the ‘single’ category because, historically, this category was primarily for those persons, men and women who are not, as yet married and as a result are therefore still single, alone. Although not married, **oshikumbu** cannot be represented in singular terms, since she has children and is therefore not alone. Furthermore, the “single’ category could not have been made to include “*never-married-women-with-children*” because the category of “*never-married-women-with-children* [**iikumbu**]” is a deviation from the norm; they have ‘chosen’ not to follow the normal route of achieving womanhood, adulthood. In other words, they have explicitly expressed their sexuality outside marriage, rendering them uncontrollable. With free availability of contraceptive, no one can

prove that 'single' women as in "*never-married-women-without-children*" are sexually active. They are more likely to be perceived as not having deviated from societal norms or rendered their sexuality uncontrollable. They can therefore be perceived as still having a sense of innocence about them.

People are born single, with the expectation in most societies, including that of Owambo people, that they will be married at some point in their lives and then have children. The ages at which this happens may vary from individual to individual and from society to society. Whereas many of these societies have provided normal acceptable channels through which a woman or man may remain single (such as becoming a nun, priestess or priest) there are usually no accepted circumstances under which a woman is expected to bear children without ever having a husband and be accepted as such.

'Single' women, in the sense of "*never-married-women-without-children*" therefore still ooze an aura of purity and chastity. On the other hand, "*never-married-women-with-children*" especially among Owambo communities, have an aura of sin and shame. While the status of "*never-married-women-without-children*" may be questioned, that of "*never-married-women-with-children*" is almost always condemned. To become pregnant before marriage is as if one has made a statement about belonging and about a specific stance in relation to the dominant sexual codes.

It might be that it is very difficult to define 'single women', and there is an ambivalence towards 'single' women with children. These difficulties are

comparable to those brought forward by Chandler (1991: 56), when she states that, “There are conceptual problems and fieldwork difficulties when non-marital terminology is sought for other forms of heterosexual and residential partnership. ‘Cohabitee’ appears too formal, ‘partner’ appears too business-like or uncommitted, ‘girl/boyfriend’ appears too juvenile and ‘lover’ too sexual”. The ambivalence towards *never-married-women-with-children* among Owambo communities is implicitly shown through the terms used to refer to them. Originally, the word **oshikumbu** meant ‘the one without a man to take care of her’, thereby defining her in relation to man or his absence. The synonym of **oshikumbu** is ‘**omusimba kadhona**’. ‘Omusimba’ means ‘pregnant’ while ‘kadhona’ means ‘girl’. So a “*never-married-woman-with-children*” is located between motherhood and girlhood, she is neither mother, nor girl. The concept (omusimba kadhona), in a way describes a state of non-existence, which perhaps merits no examination.

It is thus against the background of the above arguments that the term ‘single women’ in this project will only be used to refer to “*never-married-women-without-children*”, unless quoted from a source. The terms ‘**oshikumbu**’ is used simultaneously with “*never-married-women-with-children*”.

3.3. The issue of premarital pregnancy

Sexual intercourse before marriage or premarital pregnancy for that matter is not a new phenomenon. If one looks at it from a historical perspective, one could see that before modernization and the rise of the dominant puritan ethic regarding sex as we

know it today, premarital sex was very widespread among the masses as well as among much of the upper class. However, with the rise of the middle classes and the influence of Lutheranism, especially Calvinism in which the puritan sex ethic is rooted, sexual permissiveness came to be less acceptable (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1988).

Most studies and attention seems to be focused on teenage pregnancy, concentrating on the impact that this would have on their health and the state. Teenage pregnancy is therefore perceived as a social and health problem. Studies on teenage pregnancy usually concentrate on the economic implications that a teenager, who is also economically dependent on her parents, would encounter when she becomes pregnant. The literature also argues along the lines of a teenager not being emotionally mature as yet to handle pregnancy and child-rearing. The interest in teenage pregnancy could be attributed to the fact that, pregnancy before the age of eighteen brings along a considerable risk to the health of the mother (Maynard, 1996; Santrock, 2002).

A study done by the Ministry of Health and Social Services in Namibia indicated that girls aged fifteen or younger are ten times more likely to die from complications related to pregnancy than those women aged between 20 - 29 years (Ministry of Health and Social Services, 1992). A pregnancy usually brings the schooling of a teenage girl to an immediate end. This is because one of the policies of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture is that a teenager who conceives while at school should breastfeed the baby for at least two years, after which she may resume her

schooling. The implication of this is that if for instance, the girl was 15 years old at the time she became pregnant, she would have been in grade 9. Two years from there, she would be seventeen and is supposed to be in grade 11. Her chances of completing her education through the normal channels also become slim since another policy of the same Ministry is that a child must be 16 years old by the time he/she is grade 10. By the time she reaches grade 10, she would be forced out of the formal system because of her age, and would have to complete her education through informal systems such as The Namibian College of Open Learning, [NAMCOL].

Since premarital sexuality is socially disapproved, a teenage girl who finds herself pregnant is bound to experience psychological problems including guilt and shame. Because they are very young and still children themselves, teenage mothers are said to be more likely to have negative feelings towards their babies, which can lead to child neglect, abuse and sometimes to alcoholism (Voeten, 1995; Goerge & Lee, 1996). Since the pregnancy has put an immediate stop to the girl's education it would thus be extremely difficult for her to find a job. Consequently, she and her baby would have to be dependent on the mother's parents for financial support. This is not only because of the matrilineal setup of the Owambo culture, but also because fathers and their families are usually absent.

Voeten (1995) did a study in Namibia in the Okavango region, in which she explored several issues relating to teenage pregnancy. Some of the problems of teenage pregnancy were also looked at. She identified four problems of teenage pregnancy, namely:

- 1) Health problems
- 2) Psychological problems
- 3) Social problems and
- 4) Financial problems.

Of the problems of teenage pregnancy outlined by Voeten (1995) above, the psychological and the social problems are considered relevant to the present study. As mentioned earlier, Voeten (1995) states that among the psychological problems experienced by a pregnant teenage girl are: shame, fear and loneliness/isolation. Socially, the pregnant girl would no longer have the comfort and security of peers with whom to socialize, because the other girls would not want to be associated with someone who has broken the societal norm. This social isolation usually can have devastating consequences like, as stated above, resorting to alcohol abuse (Voeten, 1995).

However, there appears to be a growing trend of premarital births among women who are beyond their teenage years. In their study of 'Economical correlates of nonmarital childbearing among adult women' in the USA, Hoffman and Foster (1997) found that women aged twenty and older now account for a greater percentage of premarital births in the United States. Reports from the National Center for Health Statistics in the USA suggest that non-marital birth rate is more than 50% higher among women aged 20 - 24, and approximated about 30% higher among women aged 25 - 29 than among teenagers. Women aged 30 - 34 have a non-marital birth rate that is only 15% lower than the rate among teenagers. This trend

has led to non-marital births among women aged 20 -34 to account for about 76% of all births (Hoffman & Foster. 1997). It could be argued that the USA is a developed nation with a different culture. However, with globalization and western influence in Africa, this trend is not irrelevant to Namibia.

Despite this increase in the number of premarital births among women who are not teenagers, it has been very difficult to find literature on this particular group of women. One wonders if the attitude of ambivalence and indifference towards the “*never-married-with-children*” as mentioned earlier has anything to do with the neglect or omission of the young, never married, pregnant woman from academic research.

In her book ‘*Single and Pregnant*’, MacIntyre (1977) attempts to bring this group of women to academic attention by focusing her study on how never married women in the British society at that time reached outcomes of pregnancy. She found that there were four outcomes that were mostly reached by single women who become pregnant in that society. These are; (a) induced abortion, (b) going through with the pregnancy but giving up the baby for adoption, (c) keeping the baby but staying single and (d) keeping the pregnancy and marrying the punitive father.

Of these four outcomes, a, and b are actually almost impossible in Namibia. Though some women do get involved in back street abortions, abortion in Namibia is only legal under a few circumstances such as when the pregnancy is as a result of rape or when the life of the mother is endangered. A woman can go to prison for having an

abortion. Those who can afford it, who are a small minority, can have their abortions done in South Africa where abortion is legal (Frank, 1999). As a result, this is an outcome that is fairly unreachable by most Namibian women.

Outcome (b) is also not reachable to many Namibian women, as the mechanisms for adoption are not well established. The culture also is such that a woman or man for that matter is made to feel incomplete if she or he were to adopt when they cannot have children of their own. What normally happens then is that the woman would adopt within the 'family', adopting children of relatives who would jump at the chance of reminding her that she cannot have children of her own and should actually be grateful that they have offered her theirs. As a result, in many instances, babies are either kept or abandoned, but rarely adopted.

Outcome (d) occurs in very rare occasions, and in many cases, marriage to the punitive father can occur even years after the baby was born. However, traditional laws among most Owambo communities require that a man should pay "damage" fine for impregnating a 'girl'. Most men therefore would not feel inclined to marry the woman. In the end, whether it is a matter of choice or absence of choice, Namibian women who conceive before marriage are more likely to reach outcome (c), that of going through with the pregnancy, keeping the baby and staying single.

A considerable number of the 36 cases MacIntyre (1977) presented however refuted the assumption in popular literature that conception in single women necessarily constitutes a problem. Some of the women did find pregnancy to be problematic, but

not in terms of being “single”, but rather, because “a first pregnancy may bring with it a disruption of life activities, a rapid role transition, economic and housing problems and a fear of childbirth and motherhood” (MacIntyre, 1977: 62). These disruptions are not only specific to *never-married-women-with-children*, but married women can experience the same.

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, premarital pregnancy among most Owambo communities was and is still not condoned. For instance, Mair (1969), writing on marriages in Southern African in the 1960s states that, among most tribes in this region, a limit was set on the premarital relations that an unmarried couple could have by the rule that the girl must not be deflowered.

If a girl “was found to be a virgin when she joins her husband, a special present was made to her mother or something to herself; if not, the news was conveyed to her family by some specially recognized token” (Mair, 1969: 11). If an unmarried girl was to become pregnant, she was subject to every kind of humiliation, stripped of her ornaments, shunned by the other girls and publicly mocked by the singing of obscene songs outside her home at night. The newborn child was usually killed (Mair, 1969). Among most South African communities, attitudes towards an unmarried pregnant girl varied, from extreme disgust, particularly among the Christians and older people, to indifference among the rest of the community.

As it was in the 1960s, attitudes of the church towards premarital pregnancy are still those of disgust and sin. The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Catholic Church,

which are by far the biggest denominations in Owambo, offer the school of repentance, which everyone who has sinned must attend before being accepted back into the church. As mentioned earlier, the school is more enforced when the sixth commandment is broken and is especially strict towards women. Babies of unmarried mothers are not baptized unless the mother has attended the course (McKittrick, 1994). Exclusion or school penitence is not unique to denominations in ‘Owamboland’ or Namibia for that matter. De la Rey and Carolissen (1997) argue that studies in Mamre, South Africa, found that the Moravian Church to which 90% of the people in this community belong “adopted negative attitudes towards premarital and teenage pregnancy through a system of exclusionary practices in the church” (1997: 29). Those who sinned, more specifically women, were required to repent by attending church during their exclusion period but were separated from other members of the church. Interestingly, “unmarried mothers had to occupy a prominent place in church known as ‘die skandebank’ (pew of shame)” (de la Rey & Carolissen, 1997: 29). They were further obliged to marry if they were to be readmitted into the church. Similar to the wedding of **oshikumbu** that is discussed in chapters five and six, unmarried mothers in Mamre were also not allowed to wear white or a veil. Furthermore, since they were not considered clean enough to stand at the alter, they were married at the conservatory (de la Rey & Carolissen, 1997).

Given such negative attitudes, it is not surprising that one would still find young women in northern Owambo, committing suicide because of a premarital pregnancy or abandoning or killing a child born before marriage. Becker (1998), speaking on premarital female sexuality and pregnancy in present-day Owamboland, states that,

“single motherhood clearly carries a stigma of shame and sin in present-day Ovambo society. An unwed mother is called *oshikumbu*, a highly derogatory term denoting a ‘loose woman’” (1998: 221). **Oshikumbu** is as strong a term today as it was 30 to 40 years ago. No one would willingly want to be associated with a loose woman or a sinner for that matter. Thus it would be safe to assume that young adult women who get pregnant before marriage in most Ovambo communities, and are as a result regarded as **ikumbu**, would experience guilt and shame, and will be both marginalized and isolated.

The significance of **oshikumbu** and therefore of premarital pregnancy lies in the fact that, **oshikumbu** is a social categorization and premarital pregnancy a social taboo. As with all other social categorizations, an individual’s self-definitions within this social category are bound to be affected by the negative connotations attached to it. Wetherell (1996: 212) argues that “the minute a categorization is effected and you are identified as belonging to one group rather than another, you take up an identity in your own eyes and in the eyes of others” (1996: 212). Social identification is thus the knowledge that we belong to a group along with the emotional and value significance attached to that membership. In an important sense then, a person’s social identity or group membership determines her/his value or status as a person. Thus, social identity is an essential basis of self-esteem and very important for self-evaluation. Categorization and self-categorization, which is involved in the process of identity formation, may control, restrict and inhibit, though at the same time, it may offer comfort, security and assuredness.

Among most Owambo communities, being **oshikumbu** is a negative category, which a woman takes on for conceiving before marriage. It takes precedence over other identities. The sexual identity of **oshikumbu** seems to be more important than class or professional loyalties. As Goddard (1987:186) argues, “There is a conflation of the various facets of woman’s identity so that failure in one aspect is likely to bring about the collapse of her total identity”. Being **oshikumbu** for an Owambo woman seems to become what Goffman (1963) refers to as a “master status”, the main prism through which many of these women define themselves and are judged by others. This means that all other merits and achievements of **oshikumbu** are ignored (sometimes by both self and others) or they diminish in the face of her basic “flaw”.

3.4. Premarital pregnancy: An economic and racial issue

Since family is formally mediated by class and ethnicity one has to assume that being on the margins of marriage would have different implications for the poor and the black as opposed to the better-off and the white. It is therefore expected that there would be variability in the lives of *never-married-women-with-children*, which may not stem only from their differences in their domestic relations with men (Chandler, 1991). These variations could be because of their ethnic background, their economic positions or social contexts.

Historically, bearing children while not married has been seen in economic terms and in societies where race has been the issue [such as in Namibia and the United States of America], it has also been racialized. According to Scanzoni & Scanzoni (1988),

the stigmatization of illegitimacy in Western Europe has historically been economical, in that neither the parish nor the state ever wanted to be financially responsible for children without social fathers and this resulted in the harsh treatment of unmarried mothers. This may be due to the fact that “The patriarchal notion of the father as the head of the household and responsible for dependents, makes it a woman’s responsibility to ensure that she ‘has’ a man before she bears children” (Gittins, 1993: 106).

The explanations and solutions of pregnancy amongst black women have been [and probably still are] different from those given for their white counterparts. While the causes of premarital pregnancy among blacks were attributed to cultural and biological factors, with the solution being to sterilize them, the causes of premarital pregnancy among white women were attributed to psychological issues. Thus, the solution would be psychiatric treatment, relinquishing of the baby and reintegration into the community (van der Vliet: 1984, Solinger, 1992).

Solinger (1992), in her historical study of single pregnancy in the USA found that an unwed white mother who was generally middle class was perceived as having valuable resources to her credit. This is because she has parents who could and would negotiate with helping institutions and underwrite their daughter’s care on her behalf. Her premarital conception was usually perceived as an unfortunate sexual mistake, but she has the potential of becoming a wife and mother in the aftermath of this event. What was most important though, was the fact that this white unmarried mother was in the process of producing a white baby, which was very valuable to the

adoption market of postwar America. On the other hand, a black unmarried mother was generally poor and on welfare. She was either perceived and depicted as an unrestrained, loose breeder, or as a scheming breeder (Solinger, 1992).

Since the black unmarried mother was perceived and portrayed as being wild, only punitive responses to black single pregnancy could be an effective means of behavior alteration. "As socially unproductive breeders, they [blacks] should be constrained by means of punitive sanctions including enforced sterilization.....white unwed mothers in contrast were viewed as socially productive breeders whose babies, unfortunately conceived out of wedlock, could offer infertile couples their only chance to construct proper families" (Solinger, 1992: 24).

While the white unwed mother was described and evaluated in psychological terms, the black unwed mother was institutionally defined as a sociological and economic disaster, and evaluated as being a mother- and- child beggar. It therefore appears that contrary to the black unwed mother, the white unwed mother was almost always in a state of potential motherhood (Solinger, 1992). While black women had babies without being married far more often than whites, statistics showed that the illegitimacy rate for white girls and women was rising faster than for blacks. Between 1940 and 1957 the number of illegitimate births among white girls and women had increased by 125% in the USA. Yet, government policies and the agencies charged with carrying them out supported different meanings of black and white motherhood, meanings that justified, even demanded different treatment of black and white single pregnant females. However one looks at the black unwed

mother's situation in the USA in the 1960s, the result of that pregnancy, was in more cases than not, "a child many white taxpayers and politicians defined as an unwanted public expense" (Solinger, 1992: 53).

The moral conditions of black and white illegitimately pregnant women were differentiated as well. White women in this situation were defined as occupying a state of "shame", a condition that admitted rehabilitation and redemption. The pathway was prescribed: casework treatment in a maternity home, relinquishment of the baby for adoption and rededication of the offending woman to the marriage market.

Black women illegitimately pregnant were not just shamed, but simply blamed, blamed for the population explosion, for escalating welfare costs, for the existence of unwanted babies, and blamed for the persistent grip of poverty on blacks in the USA. These women could not be redeemed. The only counteraction against these women would be that of sterilization, harassment by welfare officials, and public policies that threatened to starve them and their babies (Solinger, 1992). This is somehow similar to the apartheid policies, which predominantly racialised views of teenage pregnancy, linking it to the need for population control among black Namibians and South Africans. The incidence of teenage pregnancy among blacks had to be lowered just as the overall birth rate of blacks had to be reduced (de la Rey & Carrollissen, 1997). This view was government sanctioned, and "attempted to link poverty and other socio-economic problems in black communities to population control, rather than to the apartheid system" (1997: 29). Furthermore, the apartheid system policies

“denied [black] women cash income to feed their families, and insulted them by providing ‘free’ contraception injection, while their living babies die” (SWAPO Women’s Solidarity Campaign, 1988: 356).

Thus, while having a baby was a heroic act especially after the 2nd world war, unwed mothers, both black and white, because they were not part of a legal, domestic and subordinate relation to a husband, were usually scorned, punished, shamed and blamed.

Differential treatment of black and white unmarried mothers was not limited to the American society. By 1984, a single black mother with two school going children in South Africa would theoretically be eligible for R 54.50 per month, while a white mother in similar circumstances was entitled to R 243.00 per month. (Van der Vliet, 1984). Furthermore, Allison (1988: 360) states that in Namibia before independence, black “unmarried women who become pregnant in both professions [teaching and nursing], are forced to resign from their jobs,”.

The making of premarital pregnancy into an economic issue is not only limited to state policies. Rather, state policies are fed by academic research, most of which tends to look at this phenomenon from an economic perspective, and usually concluding that premarital births become an economic burden for the state. The author is very much aware that in Namibia where social welfare policies do not give financial assistance to single mothers the argument might be considered irrelevant.

However, these policies are in place elsewhere in the world and Namibia as part of the global village might soon implement them.

Traditionally, marriage has been an economic transaction. Among some African communities for instance, where lobola is practiced, heads of cattle are paid to the family of the girl or woman to be married, by the family of her husband-to-be. Furthermore, Bledsoe and Cohen (1993) maintain that because of the woman's productive and reproductive potential, customary marriage in many African communities require that men and their families pay money or goods to the woman's family. In such communities, a daughter is usually considered an asset because upon marriage, she brings in wealth, whether in terms of money or cattle. Ensuring the purity of a daughter in such cultures is therefore important since no lobola can be paid for a deflowered girl/woman [spoiled good]. It is important to keep in mind that this transaction was and still is male controlled. The money or cattle paid as lobola is never given to the woman who is going to be married, but usually to her father or her maternal uncles depending on the family lineage. Among the Owambo communities of northern Namibia, if a man impregnates a woman while she is still single, he pays a fine of cattle or the equivalent of that in monetary terms. In all these transactions, the woman concerned is usually not consulted and the money or the cattle paid become the property of her father or maternal uncles.

However, in communities where a woman has to have a dowry before getting married, a daughter becomes an economic liability in the sense that she takes wealth out of the maternal home when getting married. For most poor families, a daughter

indeed becomes a burden since society demands that she must be married, but she must pay to be married. This has resulted in the killing of the girl child in communities such as those of India, and China. Because of the advanced technology [which was designed to diagnose genetic disorder in a foetus] parents who can afford it can now discriminate against girls even in the womb. According to O'Connell (1994: 76) "It is estimated that the one child policy in China has resulted in the deaths of more than 1 million first born girl infants." Furthermore, the results of a study by UNICEF (1990) indicates that, of 700 pregnant women in India who received genetic amniocentesis only 20 of the 450 women told they would have a daughter went through with the pregnancy; while all the 250 male infants predicted, even where a genetic disorder was likely, were carried to full term.

The above not only sheds light on the gendered economy that is characteristic of the societies we live in, but also shows the omnipresence of the patriarchal ideology. Patriarchy is not just about the power relations between men and women, which entails the subordination of women to men and their dependence on them. It is about the essence of woman since their being is defined in relation to men. It is about woman's existence and survival since her humanness is secondary to that of man.

4. Empirical Conceptualisation of the Study

4.1. Research methodology and methods

Studies on Namibian women in general and on Owambo women in particular are very scanty. The purpose of this study was to explore what happens to a woman's identity when she conceives before marriage. Since no similar study was ever done in Namibia, this study was to explore the phenomenon in question and it was therefore deemed sensible to use the qualitative research paradigm.

In a nutshell, scientific research today exists on the basis of two paradigms, which are interdependent. These are the quantitative and the qualitative research paradigms. The quantitative research paradigm, which can be traced back to positivism, regards research as scientific in as much as it deals with observable phenomena. It explains all phenomena, including the social in terms of numbers. For this purpose, quantitative research in psychology employs methods such as experimental designs, standardized tests, questionnaires and so on (Neuman, 2000).

Arising as a criticism to positivism and its emphasis on observable behaviour only, advocates of the qualitative research paradigm argue that phenomena can also exist even if they cannot be observed and/or expressed in numbers. Qualitative research includes approaches such as hermeneutics, ethno-methodology, and phenomenology.

Mouton & Marais (1996: 155) describe a quantitative research approach “...as that approach to research in social sciences that is more highly formalized as well as more explicitly controlled, with a range that is more exactly defined, and which in terms of the methods used, is relatively close to the physical sciences”. On the other hand, they describe qualitative research “...as those approaches in which the scope is more likely to be undefined and a more philosophical mode of operation is adopted” (1996: 155/6).

These descriptions of quantitative and qualitative research approaches is further echoed by Babbie (2002: 447) when he describes qualitative analysis as “the non-numerical examination and interpretation of observation, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships” while referring to quantitative analysis as “the numerical representation and manipulation of observations for the purposes of describing and explaining the phenomena that those observations reflect”. On the same note, Neuman (2000) states that quantitative methods express data in numbers while qualitative methods express data in words, pictures or objects.

Kvale (1996) argues that quantitative and qualitative methods are tools whose utility depends on their power to bear upon the research question asked. He asserts that, “as tools, they require different competencies, with differences among researchers in their abilities and interests in carrying out quantitative computations or conducting linguistic or emphatic analysis of qualitative data” (1996: 69). He further argues that in the practice of social science research, qualitative and quantitative approaches

interact. In the content analysis tradition, the content and form of communication mainly in the form of texts, are quantified and made amenable for statistical treatment. Which approach a researcher chooses to emphasize, in Kvale's view, would depend on the type of phenomena investigated and the purpose of the investigation. The interaction of these two approaches is of relevance not just in the analysis phase but also in the research process as a whole.

Some authors are likely to classify all research that does not contain statistics as qualitative research (Mouton & Marais, 1996; Neuman, 2000). Amidst this argument, questions about the meaning, differences and value of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms emanated.

Though it has its disadvantages, the qualitative approach was selected above the quantitative approach in this study because it allows the researcher to remain open to the unexpected. It is open to unanticipated data and constantly allows the researcher to re-evaluate the focus early in the study. It is not only because of this flexibility to change the direction of the research project, but also because of its emphasis on the importance of social context that the qualitative paradigm was chosen. Furthermore, the lack of existing research renders a quantitative approach inappropriate. It is for example difficult to quantify people's experiences of marginality or their understanding of who they are today, as a result of the impact of an event such as a premarital pregnancy. A qualitative approach was seen to be more appropriate in this study because it enables the researcher to read between the lines, to see and consider the grey areas instead of seeing things just in black and white.

A qualitative research method, based on a retrospective method of collecting data was therefore employed, using semi-structured interviews. A qualitative interview is described by Babbie (2002: 298) as “an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked with particular words and in a particular order”.

Kvale (1996: 14) argues that the, “qualitative research interview is a construction site for knowledge. The interview is literally an inter view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest”. The purpose of a qualitative research interview is to acquire qualitative descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to the interpretation of their meaning. Qualitative interviewing design is flexible, and continuous. This continuous nature means that the questioning is redesigned throughout the project (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Kvale, 1996). For the present study, a semi-structured interview was decided upon, so as to give the women who became pregnant before marriage the opportunity to elaborate freely on their experiences of being “*never-married-women-with-children*”.

Analysis and interpretation of data was carried out using discourse analysis as a method of analysing data in the social sciences. Discourse analysis should however not be spoken of as if it were a single unitary entity. There are various approaches that constitute discourse analysis which contribute to specific and different philosophical frameworks. Speaking of discourse analysis as a unitary entity would thus blur together these approaches. According to Burman and Parker (1993), there are three reference points in discourse analytic research in psychology. However, as

mentioned above, these are not coherent, unitary theoretical positions because a researcher or writer can use one reference point to illustrate a particular set of issues while applying another for the rest of the project.

The first of these reference points is concerned with 'repertoires and dilemmas' and is mostly favoured by amongst others, Potter and Wetherell (1987). This reference point in discourse analysis concentrates its emphasis on three aspects of language, which they perceive as crucial. These three aspects are that; (i) there is always a variation in the accounts that people present and that this is more important than the 'consistency' that psychologists are usually obsessed with; (ii) talk functions in various ways than to simply transmit information; and (iii) our talk and writing is constructed out of existing resources (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Burman & Parker, 1993). The latter authors further argue that these resources are the repertoires, which we do not create anew when we speak, but rather only borrow and reframe to fit and serve our own purposes. Since they are borrowed, these repertoires always carry with them more than we think. In other words, these repertoires are not 'neutral' or 'pure', but are already suffused with and enmeshed in social meanings. However, Macnaghten (1993) criticises this reference point for its emphasis on grammar maintaining that discourse is about social relationships and not only about grammatical use.

The second reference point in discourse analytic research is concerned with ‘conversations and the making of sense’ (Burman & Parker, 1993). It is opposed to the notion that ideology is a set of fixed ideas, arguing that the repertoires and dilemmas that discourse analysts sometimes pretend to discover are nothing but creations of the analyst.

The third reference point is that of ‘post-structuralism’ and is concerned with ‘structure and subject’ (Parker, 1990; Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993). It is “suspicious of both the claims to reveal a world outside language and of claims that we can experience any aspect of ourselves as outside language” (Burman & Parker, 1993: 6). Those who promulgate this reference point such as Parker (1989; 1990; 1992); Parker & Shotter (1990), prefer the term ‘discourse’ instead of ‘repertoires’ and focus on the description of the subject positions as are constructed in the talk of each person. It is a reference point, which is deliberately reflexive about its own claims and draws attention to the discursive construction of its own theoretical position.

Despite their variation and differences, these approaches are united by a common attention to the significance and structuring effects of language, and are associated with interpretive and reflexive styles of analysis. They therefore share a common concern with the ways that language produces and constrains meaning. They understand meaning not only as residing within the individual’s head, but also as emanating from social conditions which are understood to give rise to the forms of talks that are available (Burman & Parker, 1993).

Discourse analysis was generally considered appropriate for the data analysis and interpretation of this study because it is able to work with the unsolvable conflicts between different explanations and the contradictory accounts that people give. It was also deemed appropriate because, in the process of drawing attention to its own way of describing the accounts collected, it also attempts to provoke the researcher or writer and the reader to question their own presuppositions, their own discourses (Parker, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993).

This study is particularly in favour of the third reference point because it is more appropriate to the process of conducting a discourse analysis that identifies the analytical unit at the level of social function as opposed to the level of individual grammar. As stated earlier in chapter two, the author applied Parker's 'seven criteria for distinguishing discourses' (1992: 6) in the analysis and interpretation part of this study.

4.2. The interview guideline and interviews

The interview guideline was based on Whitbourne's (1985) Life-span construct, which, as articulated earlier in the chapter on the theoretical framework, relies on two poles, the scenario and the life story. As such, the majority of the questions were aimed at finding out plans, dreams, wishes and hopes that these women might have for the future, especially in areas that they have identified as important to them. The interview guideline was also developed based on the literature review and the conceptualization of identity as stipulated in this project.

The following questions are aimed at finding out something about the life story as well as to meet the first objective of this study, which is, ‘to investigate how single young adult women appraised their premarital pregnancy at that time when they became pregnant and subsequent reappraisals’.

1. What were your plans, wishes, dreams for the future before you became pregnant?
2. Has becoming pregnant changed any of those plans?
Made the realization/attainment of some of your goals impossible?
How, in which ways?
Made it possible to attain certain goals? (New?)
3. How did you react to the pregnancy?
4. Since then, have you ever regretted getting pregnant? Why? Why not?
5. Did you ever think of getting rid of the pregnancy while pregnant?

The following questions are designed to find out about the scenario of the women concerned as well as to determine whether their scenarios have changed as a result of this unplanned/planned, expected/unexpected event.

12. Do you think that being married is important in our society?
13. How do you manage with not being married in a society that values marriage?
14. Do you see marriage as an important aspect of a woman’s life? How so/ why not?
15. How do you see yourself in the future? What are your future plans, dreams, expectations etc.? Do you think they can be realized/ come true?

- 16.** Do you think your life would have been different today had you not become pregnant? How?

The interview guideline was also informed by various conceptualizations of identity. For instance, earlier the author spoke of Whitbourne and Weinstock (1978: 8) defining identity as “the individual’s self-attribution of numerous personal and interpersonal qualities”. These qualities, as mentioned earlier, do not only include desires, goals and social beliefs, but also the roles that one is expected to carry out within the society as a whole. The following questions are thus asked to find out about the roles that these women are expected to carry out in their society, to enquire about the narrative frame that their culture provides for them, as well as to meet the second aim of the study, which is to find out whether these women feel stigmatized, isolated and/or marginalized.

- 17.** Which group(s) do you belong to? Do you feel as though you completely belong to these groups?
- 18.** Do you have friends? How often do you see them?
- 20.** Are there certain things (ceremonies, rituals etc.) that you cannot participate in because you are not married?
- 21.** Do you see yourself as contributing to your society? Do you feel that society appreciates your contribution?

Having conceptualized identity as a dynamic, ongoing and never-ending process, it is expected that how these women saw themselves would have changed through the years. The following question is to cater for the above aspect of identity as well as

the third aim of the study which is, ‘to find out how the past and present perceptions of their premarital pregnancy have contributed to the understanding of themselves now.

19. How do you see yourself today in terms of, work, of being a mother, and in terms of friends?

Since identity in this project is also conceptualized as being relational and constructed in interpersonal relationships, the following questions are asked to evoke this aspect of identity.

6. How did your parents/family react to your pregnancy? Your friends? Neighbors? The church? Place of work?
7. Did their reactions affect you? How did their reactions make you feel?
8. Had you expected them to react differently? How?
9. When you became pregnant before marriage, did people change their behaviors towards you? How? Are they still behaving like that?

Most literature about premarital pregnancy, emphasizes the fact that an unmarried mother usually encounters economical problems in supporting herself and her child. The following questions are aimed at determining whether financial independence on the part of the woman would make any difference in how people react to her getting pregnant before she is married.

- 10.** You were working at the time you became pregnant. How do you think this contributed to or influenced how your family, friends, colleagues, yourself and other people reacted to you?
- 11.** Do you think they would have reacted differently had you not been working?
How?

It is also important to find out the relationship between the woman and the father of her child. In other words, it is imperative to determine the role that the man, as father of the child, plays in the lives of both mother and child. The following questions are thus aimed at exploring this.

- 22.** Does the father of your child see her/him regularly?
- 23.** Are you still together with the father of your baby?
- 24.** Is he married? (If no)
- 25.** Do you think he will marry you?

For demographical purposes, question **26**, which enquired about the respondent's age, level of education, the kind of job she does, her salary scale and her denomination, was asked.

Question **27**, "Do you go to church on a regular basis?" is asked to determine the impact that Christianity might have on how the woman understands herself and the world around her.

The interview guideline was initially developed in English. However, during the first interview, the respondent was not comfortable expressing herself in English and requested to speak in Oshiwambo. The interview guideline was thus translated into Oshiwambo. All the interviews were subsequently done in Oshiwambo and recorded on an audio recorder. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim in Oshiwambo and then translated into English. The transcription of the data was not guided by the interview guideline per se since the respondents did not answer the questions according to the way they appeared in the guideline.

Regarding the actual conducting of the interviews, the interviewer introduced herself to the respondent and informed her that she is doing a research on “*never-married-women-with-children*”, and that she would like to ask the respondent some questions about her experience of the pregnancy and as a “*never-married-woman-with-children*”. After that, the first question was asked. Additional questions in the interview guideline were sometimes used for probing purposes. However, the flow of the interview was such that sometimes, some questions were already answered before the interviewer could ask them, while the answers to some of the questions makes it unnecessary to ask others.

4. 3. Target Group/Sample

The study was targeted at young adult women in rural Owambo communities, who became pregnant before marriage. These women should have been aged between 22 and 40 years at the time they became pregnant. They should have been working by

the time they became pregnant and pregnancy should not have been the cause of the termination of their school career. Another important criterion of this sample is that these women should still be single and should only have one child who should be either two years or older.

The age limit for my sample is based on Levinson' (1968) structure of the Early Adulthood Era. He maintains that ages **22 to 28** as a developmental period, is 'the entry life structure for early adulthood'. It is a time for building and maintaining an initial mode of adult living. The ages **28 to 33** are seen as an opportunity to reappraise and modify the entry structure and to create the basis for the next life structure, which is the culminating life structure for early adulthood. This life structure covers ages **33 to 40**. According to Levinson (1968), this is the vehicle for completing this era and realizing our youthful aspirations.

Due to the depth of the interviews, only 5 women were interviewed. The respondents were recruited through the snowball sampling technique (Neuman, 2000). The author found that although premarital pregnancy is in fact a common phenomenon among the Owambo communities, it has an air of it being an open secret, with a kind of 'I know but I should not know' attitude being displayed. Because of this, respondents had to be requested to "recruit" other women who they know are of similar background as themselves, and who they think might be willing to participate in the study.

Although five women were interviewed, only two cases of the five are used in the data presentation and analysis, as well as in the data interpretation. Different cases have different peculiarities, however, the following two cases not only sum up the others, but also show most of the issues that “*never-married-women-with-children*” are likely to struggle and deal with. The names used in these cases are pseudo names.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1 Biographical information

In **case 1.**, we meet Aloisia, a thirty-eight year old woman, who graduated from the University of Namibia with a Bachelor of Education degree. She is a teacher, with a salary notch of N\$ 79, 000 – N\$ 135, 000. She has now been teaching at secondary school level since 2000. She is the fourth child in a family of six children, the youngest of the four girls. All her sisters are married. She is a mother of a ten year old daughter, born in 1991. During the interview, it came to the author's attention that this is not Aloisia's first child/pregnancy. Aloisia was 26 years old when she first became pregnant in 1989. She was already a qualified teacher and had been teaching at a certain primary school in their village for three years. She belongs to the Catholic denomination and was a very active member of the youth group in their congregation before she became pregnant. Her father is a catechist and her mother a church elder.

In **Case 2.**, we meet Lahja, a thirty-four year old woman. She has a Diploma in nursing and has been a registered nurse since 1991 with salary notch of N\$ 45, 000 – N\$ 60, 000. She is the fifth daughter in a family of seven children, all girls. Four of her sisters are married. She is a mother of a seven year old daughter and was 27 years old when she became pregnant. She had been working for three years by then. She belongs to the Lutheran denomination and has never really been an active member in her congregation, although her father is the pastor of the congregation.

5.2 Data analysis

As mentioned earlier in the previous chapter, Parker (1992) developed a number of steps that guide the analysis of discourse dynamics. These steps were selectively used as a method of data analysis. Where applicable, each step is followed by supporting data from the interviews, which is provided in rectangular boxes. For easy referencing, the responses of the women are numbered, **Case 1.**, and **Case 2.**, written in **bold**. In each instance, an extract starts with capital ‘C’, followed by the number of the case, ‘**1 or 2**’, then the question number, and finally the paragraph number. E.g. **C 2: 12: 2**. Where sentences or words have been excluded, this is indicated by four dots, ‘.....’. Silences are indicated by means of a dot in brackets (.). Anything that appears in square brackets [] within the boxes is the author’s explanation of a statement or issue.

CRITERION 1: DISCOURSES ARE REALIZED IN TEXTS.

Parker (1992) argues that in analyzing a text, the analyst must consider all tissues of meaning as text and then specify which texts will be studied. Having done this, the next step is then to explore the connotations, the allusions and implications, which these texts evoke, through free association. The first two steps according to Parker (1992: 7) are, “treating our objects of study as texts which are described, put into words” (step 1), and “exploring connotations through some sort of free association....” (step 2). The free associations made in relation to the two texts (the two transcribed interviews) under analysis are as follow;

Christianity

In **Case 1**, Christianity is seen as providing guidelines for a woman's behavior if not for life in general.

C 1: 1:1. As a Christian, I believe that a woman should have a proper 'white' wedding. I am a devoted Christian and was an active member in my congregation then.

C 1: 3: 1. When I realized that I was pregnant, I realized that I have sinned and God was punishing me.

C 1: 5: 1. I believe that committing suicide or having an abortion are unforgivable sins, but I think that God might forgive me for becoming pregnant.

Though a pastor's daughter, Christianity does not seem to be of personal value to the woman in **Case 2**.

C 2: 12: 1. I think that marriage maybe was important at a certain point in earlier times but I do not see its importance any more.

C 2: 14: 1. I don't think that marriage is an important aspect of a woman's life.

Marriage

In **Case 1**., marriage is seen as the only means through which a woman can gain status and respect. Marriage is also seen as definitive of a woman's identity.

C 1: 12: 1. Yes I think marriage is very important. The kind of respect that a married woman gets from people is not the same as what people like me receive.

C 1: 13: 1. I hate not been married....

C 1: 14: 1. I believe that marriage is very important for a woman and a woman without a husband is like a sheep without a shepherd.

C 1: 15: 1. It would be so much better if I get married!

C 1: 2: 1. I was at least able to go further my studies....

Case 1 also sees virginity or purity as the proper way to get married, the ultimate gift to give a husband.

C 1: 1: 1. I believe that a woman should have a proper 'white' wedding. She should be married before she can bear children. I always considered myself as one of those people who would have a 'white' wedding.

C 1: 14: 1. A woman should always be a virgin at the time of marriage.

In **Case 2.**, marriage is not seen as an important aspect in a woman's life. Singlehood is associated with a woman's financial independence and control over her own sexuality.

C 2: 12:1. Marriage, hmm, in today's times? Maybe. [laugh] . But I think that marriage maybe was important at a certain point in earlier times but I do not see its importance any more.

C 2: 14: 1. I do not think marriage is an important aspect of a woman's life. One only hears a lot of bad things in marriages such as wife battering and men not respecting their wives.

C 2: 16:1. Maybe I would have been married with....children that I cannot maintain. The husband most probably is very difficult and there is no peace in the house. Maybe I would be divorced or separated. (.) I do not really know, but.... I do not

think my life would have been better than it is now.

Case 2 also sees a husband as a burden and an unreliable source of income.

C 2: 14: 1. you no longer use your money as you see fit (.) sometimes you even get beaten up because of your money. Sometimes even if he does not beat you, he behaves and lives like a child who does not have a job. It would just be your money buying this and that. Oh no!

Motherhood

Case 1. defines motherhood in relation to being married. It is defined in terms of being married. The role of mother as part of her identity is either suppressed or denied. There is no pride in being mother. Motherhood seems to be defined in relation to the dead child while the living child disappears from the scene and is mostly ignored. She does not take priority. This is evident in the fact that, her whole story is about the dead child, referring to him as ‘my son’, while when she refers to the living child, she refers to her as ‘the child’, except in one occasion.

C 1: 1: 1. She should be married before she can bear children. I had plans of getting married, establishing my home with my husband and then have children [pause] in marriage.

C 1: 3: 1. I was shocked. I believed that I would have a wedding and then have children.

C 1: 15:1. It would be so much better if I get married! I also want to give *my daughter* a proper family.

C 1: 6: 4. Even when *my child* died [referring to the stillborn son], the church refused to baptize him When I became pregnant with *her* [referring to the living child, the daughter], the church still refused..... *She* was only being able to be baptize last year...

C 1: 7: 1. and so, *my child died* (.) I killed him. *My son* was born stillborn...

C 1: 7: 6. I don't know why *my child* died just like that

C 1: 19: 1. I do not think that I am a good mother though. Sometimes (.) sometimes I wish *that child* was a boy then maybe I would make peace with loosing *my son*.... I do not even stay with her. she is closer to her father than she is to me.

In **Case 2.**, Motherhood is defined in relation to having a child and not in terms of being married. The role of mother is incorporated into how she defines herself now and how she sees herself in the future. In other words, the role of mother is part of her life story and her scenario. This is shown in how her plans clearly seem to revolve around her daughter and their future together.

C 2: 15: 1. I am just planning to further my studies and to give the best education to my daughter. I also plan to build us a house.

C 2: 19: 1. I love my daughter

Plans, Achievements and hopes

These three are clustered together because the author believes that people develop and implement plans, the achievements of which could necessitate the development and implementation of further plans. Based on the plans we have and the achievements we have already secured or expect, we develop hopes for the future.

In **Case 1.**, achievements are either played down or not acknowledged at all. Plans are vaguely defined and there seems to be a sense of hopelessness since everything seems to be defined/ evaluated as could be better if only she were married. This is seen in how she answers question ‘2’, and question ‘15’, which asked what her future plans, dreams and expectations are.

C 1:15: 1. It would be so much better if I get married! I also want to give my daughter a proper family. But I also have to be realistic, I don’t stand a better chance of getting married. Maybe I should just get used to the idea of being single.

C 1: 4: 1. But look at me, I am still not married. There is not hope for me.

In **Case 2.**, achievements are clearly and proudly acknowledged, plans are clearly defined and there is a sense of assertiveness and hopefulness in being able to achieve these even if not married.

C 2: 19: 1. I think my life is quite good now. I am working and I can afford to take care of my daughter. I feel that her life and living standard is much better than that of some children from married families even where both husband and wife are working....

C 2: 1: 1. now, I have to concentrate on bringing up my child. I still have the aim of having my house for me and my baby.

C 2: 15: 1. I am planning to further my studies and to give the best education to my daughter. I also plan to build us a house. These are the most important things to me now and I believe I will achieve them.

Pregnancy/premarital sex

In **Case 1.**, premarital sex is seen as a sin and pregnancy as a punishment for this sin. However, pregnancy is regretted but is much more forgivable than abortion. The ultimate punishment for getting pregnant before marriage is believed to be that of staying/being unmarried since one is deflowered.

C 1: 3: 1. I realized that I have sinned and God was punishing me. I should not have had sex before marriage.

C 1: 5: 1. I believe that committing suicide or having an abortion are unforgivable sins, but God might forgive me for becoming pregnant.

C 1: 4: 1. Yes, I live with it everyday of my life! I can never forget it. If I had not gotten pregnant, or had sex for that matter, I would be married today. But look at me, I am now 40 years old, and thirteen years after I first got pregnant, I am still not married. There is no hope for me.

C 1: 13: 1. no one would marry me, I am not worth marrying.

In **Case 2.**, Pregnancy before marriage, though disappointing, at that particular time, is not seen as catastrophic but as a part of life and thus acceptable. It is also not perceived as a sin or punishment.

C 2: 3: 1. At the very beginning, I felt disappointed.... After a while, I started accepting it as a part of life.

C 2: 1: 1.marriage was no longer part of my plan. ...

C 2: 23: 1. Marriage is no longer something I think about these days, I am not even interested in men. I have not been in a relationship since I had my child.

CRITERION 2: DISCOURSES ARE ABOUT OBJECTS

Under this criterion, the objects talked about in the texts are described (step 3). This entails asking oneself what the discourse is about, what is talked about. Parker argues that a discourse is a representational practice in that the object is made present through the use of discourse and by means of referring to other discourses. The 4th step of the analysis is therefore concerned with how what is talked about is talked about. In other words, how the discourse as object is talked about. The following objects are talked about in the two texts;

The church

It is seen as a powerful institution, having sanctioning power, the power to forgive, and the power to legitimize. Talking about the church brings out the Christian discourse and its values.

C 1: 6: 4. The church refused me to attend the school of repentance....when my child died, [stillborn] the church refused to baptize him or even bless his body.... When I became pregnant with her [the daughter], the church still refused me entry into the school of repentance for the same reasons....

C 2: 6: 4. or maybe it was because I was not near our congregation or the fact my father is the pastor of our congregation (.) I cannot really say why they [the church] did not make a big fuss about it.

The family

The family has the power to accept and to make life easier. It has the power to exclude or include, so a familialist discourse also touches these texts.

C 1: 6: 1. My father? He could not speak to me for months! My sisters were so judging, ...

C 1: 7: 1. At home, I felt ignored....

C 1: 8: 1. not to talk to your child for months and ignoring her, pretending as if she is not there even when she is, is very sad. If people outside the family treat you bad you can handle it if your family accepts you. even my own sisters were ashamed of me! I had expected them to make peace with it and accept me nonetheless. Well, they didn't.

C 2: 8: 1. I thought my parents would be angry, disown me or something, especially my father being a pastor and all my four sisters were married. I was really surprised when they did not say much.

The work place/ work institutions

A woman's capacity is judged in terms of being a woman and not as a worker. Work institutions enforce the norms and values pertaining to woman and her behavior.

C 1: 6: 5. The principal....wanted to have me expelled from teaching, claiming I was a bad example to students.

C 1: 7: 1. My pregnancy, which was supposed to be a personal, private thing, became a discussion topic in school board meeting , and my job became at stake.
People stopped talking and stared, even in the staff-room.

C 2: 6: 4. At work? Oh, up to today, there are still people who would just insult me or use vulgar language towards me for no reason.

C 2: 7:1. I expected some people especially those from work because you think they are educated and are or should be open to many things.

CRITERION 3: DISCOURSES CONTAIN SUBJECTS

According to Parker, (1992), a discourse provides a space into which particular types of self can step and at the same time circumscribes the types of self which may be expressed legitimately. The space provided by the discourse is therefore not limitless. Analysis thus involves the stipulation of the sorts of person that are talked about in the discourse, and then stepping into the shoes of these subjects and imagine what they may or could say in this discourse. The subjects talked about in this text are thus:

Friends, who are talked about as those people who can be counted on for support or the easing of pain. Friends as spoken about in this discourse, as those who can be counted on in times of need, are those who could say friendship is more important to

them than traditional norms and values. They might argue that it could have happened to any of them, and they would not want their friends to desert them.

C 2: 6: 2. About my friends, well, some did not have a problem with my pregnancy,

C 2: 19: 1. I have friends that I now know are true friends, some of them were my friends before I became pregnant and most are now even married But I know for sure that they are my friends. They are friends I can trust.

Friends are also talked about as traitors, the ones who abandon you in times of need.

C 1: 6: 2. I basically lost all the friends I had. People started avoiding me and finding excuses not to be around me. there was this girl that I thought was my best friend. When I became pregnant, I had expected her to be there for me, to at least be supportive.But....she even started making fun of me.with a group of her new friends. I would greet her, they would mumble something and then laugh and I would feel so embarrassed. ...to this day, we are not on speaking terms.

C 2: 6: 2. others do not greet me up to this day, meaning our friendship ended just because they feel that they cannot hang around “oshikumbu”.

Friends as traitors could say that they do not want to be associated with ‘**oshikumbu**’, a loose woman, and as a result, suffer the stigma and social isolation that could come with it.

Men, are on the one hand seen as the protectors.

C 1: 14: 1. a woman without a husband is like a sheep without a shepherd.

....

They are also portrayed as rescuers.

C 1: 6: 7. at least the [school] inspector stood up for

me....

The men may say that their role as men is to protect women.

Men are also talked about as being reliable.

C 1: 6: 4. He [her boyfriend] was very supportive and understanding through all of this.

C 1: 7: 6.He [her boyfriend] has always been there for me....

Men as reliable might say that since she is carrying his baby, she is his woman and as such, she has to rely on him. He could also be acting out of guilt, seeing that he has the power to do something about her situation, to do the right thing, that is, marrying her, but he does not. Alternatively, he is also torn between tradition and modernity, in that on the one hand, he might truly care for this woman but does not wish to marry her or perhaps wishes only to have her as a partner. On the other hand, tradition demands he marries someone who is not deflowered.

Men are also seen as punitive and unforgiving.

C 1: 6: 1. My father? He could not speak to me for months! he was really angry with me.....

C 1: 7: 5. He was calling me all sorts names.... Then he told me to leave his house because he cannot live with “**iikumbu**”.

The man as punitive and unforgiving could say that he is only doing his God given duty, that of heading the family and making sure that his children live by God’s law, the father’s law, and do not go astray.

Another view is that of men as a nuisance, a burden to a woman, a hindrance to her progress and prosperity, an economic liability.

C 1: 25: 1. he feels uncomfortable with me being educated and earning more money than he does.he sometimes does not want to spend any money on the child....still expects me to buy him things....sometimes becomes verbally abusive if I don’t.

C 2: 14: 1.even though I have no one to share my bed with because I am not married, I have a lot of benefits....One only hears of bad things....such as wife battering and men not respecting their wives/women. Plus you no longer use your money as you see fit....you even get beaten up because of your money. He behaves and lives like a child who does not have a job. all men do is sleep around. Oh no!

A man in this position might say that since women are claiming for gender equality, it is only fair that they spend money on men. The men have been doing it for years without complaining.

The men are also seen as emotionally and financially unreliable.

C 2: 22: 1. he had promised to marry me. Then I became pregnant.... he just went and married someone else.

C 2: 16: 1. his marriage is in a mess. What guarantee do I have that he would not have done the same to me? Maybe this was a blessing in disguise.

A man in this position could say that women of today complain when their husbands have mistresses or “small houses” as they are called in Oshiwambo. However, this has been part of tradition and a man is entitled to that.

Other subjects that are spoken about are children, around whom plans are built though of different levels. For **Case 1** the plans revolve around providing a “proper family” for her daughter.

C 1: 15: 1. I also want to give my daughter a proper family....

For **Case 2.**, the plans are more about the betterment of the child’s future and the provision of a secure future that would ensure self-reliance.

C 2: 15: 1. and to give the best education to my daughter. I also plan to build us a house....

Children are also talked about as victims.

C 1: 6: 4.the church refused to baptize him or bless his body. What sin did he commit?.... She [her daughter] was only baptized last year, at the age of nine....

C 2: 22: 1. The father of my child does not see her. In fact, he does not know her....

Children in this position might speak of themselves as unwanted and see themselves as a burden to their parents. They might feel condemned by both ‘man’ in terms of their fathers and God, in relation to the church. They might view their mothers as only putting up with them out of responsibility and not out of love.

Children are also talked about in terms of being legitimate versus illegitimate. If they are legitimate, they bring joy and pride to their parents. If they are illegitimate, they may become a source of meaning and inspiration to their mother, as is evident in **Case 2.**, or they would bring shame and suffering to the mother, as is evident in **Case 1.**

Women as subjects are paradoxically portrayed as victims of traditional norms and values, yet they are the enforcers of those norms and values. As a woman, **Case 1** presents herself as a victim of traditional norms and values.

C 1: 6: 1. I was made to feel like I have committed the most unforgivable sin there is.

C 1: 20: 1. I asked two of my sisters about it and why I was not included [in the committee to arrange a niece’s wedding] then one of them asked me “what would you tell her?” It is as if they are trying to say I am stupid....

C 1: 20: 2. Theceremony....known as ‘etanda’, Never-married-women-with-children are not allowed to take part in this ritual.

Paradoxically, it is women who victimize themselves or other women by reinforcing these traditional norms and values. Referring to how her sisters reacted to her pregnancy, **Case 1** stated that,

C 1: 6: 1. My sisters were so judging, making me feel like a fool. “How can you just become pregnant at your age?”....

They continued to victimize her even decades after her pregnancy especially during family weddings.

C 1: 20: 1.when my elder sister’s first born got married in December, they had this committee for organizing the wedding. It included all three of them, plus some of our cousins, all married. They would have meetings with the girl. Then one day I asked two of my sisters about it and why I was not invited. Then one of them asked me “what would you tell her?” I was hurt

At work, the principal who is also a woman reinforces these norms and values by firing female teachers who become pregnant before marriage.

C 1: 6: 5.when the principal found out that I was pregnant, she wanted to have me expelled from teaching, claiming I was a bad example to the students. she had already succeeded in having another female teacher chased [fired] from the school for becoming pregnant before marriage....

The role of woman as guardian of traditional norms and values is also portrayed in the ‘etanda’ ritual characteristic of the cultural group from which **Case 2** comes from. ‘Etanda’, is performed during a wedding ceremony by married women and officially excludes the unmarried.

As enforcers, women might say they are only trying to uphold the morals of society. Since they are the mothers, they have to set good examples for their daughters. It should thus become the responsibility of every woman to ensure that tradition is followed and ‘womanhood’ as such is not contaminated.

A contrasting view of woman as an independent agent capable of making decisions is also talked about. A woman can decide whether to continue with a relationship or not, whether to get married or not.

C 2: 22: 1. he had promised to marry me. Then I became pregnant.... after the birth of the child, he just went and married someone else. When I decided to break up with him, he seemed to be surprised because he apparently expected me to continue seeing him even though he was married (.) because I have his child.

Other subjects that could have been talked about in this text, especially in **Case 1**, are the brothers. It is interesting that although she has three brothers, she said nothing about them. This is interesting because in Owambo culture, brothers play a very significant role. It is not unusual, for instance for the brothers to gang up against the man responsible for their sister’s pregnancy, sometimes beating him up. If their omission meant that they did not take part in the drama, then the question still remains as to why they did not. It could be because they were younger than her and most probably still in school. Since she was the only one working at the time, she might have been the one paying for their school fees and they most probably did not want to bite the hand that feeds them. On the other hand, it could also mean that they silently colluded with their father in her punishment.

CRITERION 4: DISCOURSE IS A COHERENT SYSTEM OF MEANINGS

The 7th step according to Parker (1992) is that of mapping out the world that the discourse presents. It involves grouping the statements in a discourse and as long as they refer to the same topic, give them some kind coherence. What constitutes a topic or a theme is determined by culturally available understandings.

According to the discourse in **Case 1**, the world is pictured as condemning and punishing, one in which a woman pays for not living up to fundamentalist Christian norms and values. It is a world in which not living up to Christian ideal is seen as lacking. It is pictured as a world in which, in so far as it is not expressed in a matrimonial context, a woman's sexuality is equated to sin.

C 1: 4: 1. I have sinned and God was punishing me. I should not have had sex before marriage. I live with it everyday of my live. I can never forget it. If I had not gotten pregnant, or had sex for that matter, I would be married today. But look at me, I am now 40 years old.... I am still not married. There is no hope for me.

C 1: 6: 4. The church refused me to attend the school of repentance. Even when my child died, the church refused to baptize him. What sin did he commit?

Case 1 thus presents a picture of a world that is highly communal, where the action of the individual is judged by the community and where such judgment actually matters for the individual's survival. Paradoxically, the responsibility of such actions rests with the individual.

Case 1 also presents a picture of the world in which a “*never-married-woman-with-children*” has no status and gets no respect. It is a world in which any other achievement that a “*never-married-woman-with-children*” might have becomes secondary to her status as a “never married” woman. In other words, it is a world in which being married is equal to status and respect and one in which a “*never-married-woman-with-children*” is disabled from living a fulfilling life.

C 1: 12: 1. The kind of respect that a married woman gets from people is not the same as what people like me receive.

C 1: 4: 1. Yes, I live with it everyday of my life. I can never forget it. look at me, I am now 40 years old, and thirteen years after I first got pregnant, I am still not married. There is no hope for me.

In **Case 2** however, the world is pictured as full of opportunities, which a woman, even if not married, can grab and use to her advantage. These opportunities come in terms of education, of deciding to further one’s studies without having to worry about a husband, and of providing one’s child with the best education. It is a world in which a “*never-married-woman-with children*”, is seen to have the financial freedom of spending her money as she sees fit and a world that provides her with the opportunity to be independent and assertive.

C 2: 15: 1. I am just planning to further my studies and to give the best education to my daughter. I also plan to build us a house. These are the most important things to me now and I believe I will achieve them.

The picture of the world presented by **Case 2** is thus highly individualistic. Although the community would pass judgment and limitations on the individual's actions, the individual is seen as capable of finding leeway within these limitations and carve out her own space.

Having looked at the picture of the world presented by the discourse, the analyst has to keep in mind that themes and topics will appear somewhat different depending on the cultural point of view from which they are looked at. With this in mind, the 8th step according to Parker (1992), is that of "Handling objections to the terminology". For instance, the rendering of the world as punitive and condemning might be objected to on the grounds that premarital pregnancy is in fact wide-spread. If the world were in fact that punitive, condemning and rejecting as the discourse portrays it to be, then the number of women becoming pregnant before marriage would surely decrease. However, it is also that knowledge of the consequences does not necessarily change behavior. The high number of women becoming pregnant before marriage can also be attributed to the fact that human beings have sexual urges, which can be acted upon without necessarily thinking about the consequences.

The picture of the world as individualistic might be objected to on the grounds that an African society is centered on the community, and what the individual does must be in the interest of the community at large. However, the existence of an African society per se, is questionable in today's world of globalization.

A picture of the world in which a “*never-married-woman-with-children*” has no status and gets no respect could be objected to on the grounds that there are in fact many “*never-married-women-with-children*” who hold positions with high status in the community and command a lot of respect. The question still remains though as to whether these women are respected as individual persons or whether it is the positions that they hold that are respected.

Claiming that men are protectors, rescuers, and reliable might be objected to as questionable since the violence against women and children is on the increase in the country and the majority of the perpetrators are in fact men.

Marriage as unimportant in a woman’s life might be objected to on the grounds that a never married woman cannot legitimately speak of the advantages and disadvantages of that which she has never experienced. It can be argued that there are women who enjoy being married, and that a woman’s ultimate aim should be to have a husband. It can also be argued that the discourse only serves to benefit the egos of “*never-married-women-with-children*”, who are unable to secure themselves husbands.

CRITERION 5: A DISCOURSE BRINGS UP OTHER DISCOURSES

In so far as the contradictions within the discourse make the analyst aware of what other discourses are at work, it should thus follow that, “A critical reflection on a discourse will involve the use of other discourses” (Parker 1992: 12). Although discourses can confine what can be said, they can also provide the spaces for making new statements within any specific discourse. The ninth and tenth steps in discourse

analysis thus consist of setting contrasting ways of speaking, discourse against discourse and looking at the different objects they constitute. At the same time, the analyst needs to identify points where they overlap, where they merge to form what look like the same ‘objects’ in different ways.

It is important to point out that the two texts dealt with are already to a large extent contrasting. For instance, while **Case 1** uses a predominantly Christian discourse, in **Case 2**, this discourse does not seem to be influential. In **Case 1**, the individual is depicted in communal terms while in **Case 2**, the depiction is more individualist.

However, contradictions can be found within each individual text. In **Case 1**, children seem not to take prominence. Instead of disappearing, they could have taken the center stage. In the same case, children are portrayed as victims, victimized mainly by the church, though to some extent, also by the mother, especially in relation to the living child. Seeing that the Christian discourse dominates in this text, children could have been depicted as a gift or blessing from God. However, the discourse of Christianity also only accepts children as a gift or blessing from God if they are conceived within the prescribed institution, that is, within the marriage institution.

Both texts express their views on the family, either as accepting, or not accepting. They could have chosen not to speak about the family at all.

In both texts, the relationship between a man and a woman is expressed in economical terms, in terms of who is earning how much, who is buying things for whom, and in terms of who is spending more money than the other. One wonders whether this is because the Owambo culture could be inherently a materialistic culture in which one is measured by the number of material possession one owns. Relationships between men and women could otherwise be spoken of as emotionally enriching and therefore of psychological importance. They could also be spoken of in complimentary terms instead of exploitative terms. Relationships could also be spoken of as joining men and women, for the sake of a bigger cause such as the raising of children.

Education is another point where the texts overlap. **Case 2** sees education and a higher salary as enabling, as a way of achieving one's independence especially from men, of being in control. In **Case 1** however, education seems to be regarded as disabling in the sense that although the woman in **Case 1** wants to be married, her partner appears to be threatened by her education and her salary. In a way then, education, which inevitably results in a higher salary, poses a barrier to her ultimate aim of getting married.

Another point where these two texts speak of the same thing though in different ways is when they speak of men as **punitive** and **unforgiving**. In **Case 1**, it is the father to the woman who is punitive and unforgiving towards his daughter's transgression against God and her earthly father. In **Case 2**, it was the man as partner, who is unforgiving towards the mother of his child and in the process, punishing the child

for the sins of her mother. It could also be that he is punishing the mother of his child by means of ignoring her child.

CRITERION 6: A DISCOURSE REFLECTS ON ITS OWN WAY OF SPEAKING

Although it is not possible for every text to contain reflections on the terms chosen and for every speaker to be self-conscious about the language they use, it is imperative to find instances where the chosen terms are commented on. This not only includes reflections on the terms chosen, but also on the denials of a position assumed and the articulations pertaining to the moral implications of a world view (Parker, 1992; Kober, 1997). Furthermore, Billig et al. (1988: 23 referred to by Parker, 1992: 15), argue that, “discourse can contain its own negations, and these are part of its implicit, rather than explicit meaning”. Assuming then that assertions in a discourse also simulate an opposing position, it becomes necessary to pay attention to different layers of meaning. The 11th step is then that of elaborating the discourse. In describing the discourse she is dealing with, the analyst inevitably makes a moral and or political choice on the way she speaks and writes about this discourse. The 12th step is then for the analyst to reflect on how she describes the discourse.

It is difficult to find explicit reflections in these texts or self-reflections on the part of the respondents’ way of speaking. However, these two texts bring about the contradictions that “*never-married-women-with-children*” might be experiencing in their daily lives. On the one hand, there is for instance the feminist discourse that encourages women empowerment. For example, in **Case 2**, we are confronted with

this discourse, in which women are urged to become educated, be assertive, to follow their careers, gain financial freedom and become less dependent on men. On the other hand, this undermines the role of man as provider, who, as can be seen in **Case 1** might end up feeling threatened by a highly educated woman who takes over the role of the provider in the relationship. In effect, it might not be because a woman has a child before marriage that it becomes difficult for her to find a marriage partner, but rather because of her educational level.

In asserting that she does not want to be married, **Case 2** may in effect also be saying that she wants to be married, but needs to find a man who is capable of not being threatened by a career woman. On the other hand, though she appears to be desperate for marriage, **Case 1** made it explicitly clear that she is not going to marry a man who feels threatened by her education and/or salary.

Although both the women in these texts spoke of men as unforgiving and punitive, they can also be perceived as unforgiving themselves. In **Case 1**, Aloisia explicitly states that she cannot forgive her friend for betraying her when she became pregnant, although she is bitter towards her father and sisters for not forgiving her for becoming pregnant.

<p>C 1: 6: 2. I never forgave her for that and to this day, we are not on speaking terms. I could deal with other people's rejection but hers is difficult to accept. How can I ever forgive her?</p>

Implicitly, Lahja might not have forgiven the father of her daughter and is thus punishing him by denying him access to his child. It could also be that the lack of interest in men or relationships with them is because she has not forgiven the father of her child for abandoning her and she might therefore be punishing all men because of it.

Of course the interpretation of and reflection on this discourse is highly influenced by the author's position as an educated, "*never-married-woman-with-children*" who places high value on education. The author strongly feels that it is only through education that a woman would be able to be recognized in the male dominated world that she lives in. Education affords the woman an opportunity to get a well paying job, which in turn would liberate her from financial dependency on the man, which has traditionally been one of the reasons women were so inextricably intertwined with men.

However, the author also sometimes experiences the same ambiguity of being caught between own cultural norms and the exposure to other ways of living. The author left her country of birth, Namibia, to go into exile at the age of eleven, and returned only nine years later. At the time she left, she was entering an important developmental stage, especially in terms of identity formation.

As a child, the author grew up knowing very well that premarital pregnancy in her community is not acceptable. However, she did not fully grasp the intensity and seriousness of the prohibition. Being in Swapo camps during the exile years also did

not enhance the understanding. In exile, teenage pregnancy was vehemently opposed and an adult man found guilty of impregnating a teenage girl was usually punished. In spite of the fact that marriage as an institution did exist in exile and a number of women did get married while in Swapo camps, premarital pregnancy of an adult woman was never an issue. In exile, young children used to address a woman not by her name, or by simple **'meme'** [Oshiwambo word equal to mother], but would rather ask her the name of her child, and then address her as 'mother of John or Maria'. In the case where an adult woman did not have children, they would address her as, 'mother of zero', and they would mercilessly mock her. If anything, an adult woman who did not have a child even if she were not married was found to be lacking. Premarital pregnancy among adult women in exile was therefore not censored and a woman gained pride in the simple fact of having a child. It was thus a shock for the author [and most probably other women in similar position], when she returned home, with a seven months pregnancy, only to be given a lecture of a life time because she is not married.

The ambiguity also has to do with the fact that one constantly asks herself what marriage means for her and whether one should thus marry because she finds marriage to be meaningful in a particular sense to her, or simply because culture and traditions demand it of her. The author for instance, when considering marriage, might look at the costs involved. This means that, she would consider what sacrifices she would make if she were to get married just because tradition expects it of her. On the other hand, she would also consider the consequences of being a "*never-married-woman-with-children*" in her community. Of course the decision is neither easy nor

unilateral as there are other numerous factors and other people involved who could influence the outcome. For instance, it is not up to the woman to propose marriage even if she wants to be married.

As can be deduced from the above, the author's personal history positions her in relation to the texts and the discourses making up these texts. The author has experienced both sides of the story, thus the texts evoke both empathy and contradictions of her own experience.

CRITERION 7: DISCOURSES ARE HISTORICALLY SITUATED

Since the objects that discourse refers to are constituted in history, discourse analysis can therefore not occur without locating the objects in time. This means that one has to explain the way a discourse has come about in order to understand its form and force (Parker, 1992; Kober, 1997). The 13th step in discourse analysis is thus that of looking at how and where a discourse emerged.

Discourses are not static and are transformed over time. A discourse might make 'things' sound as if they have always been the way they are. Nevertheless, over time these 'things' will have evolved. This dynamic nature of a discourse necessitates the 14th step in discourse analysis, that of describing how the discourse has changed. It is thus to these two steps that the author now turns.

The author will be describing the following issues concerning the evolution around the marriage ceremony and the marriage institution as such among the Owambo

communities. These issues are selected based on how they are talked about in the text, and also looking at their possible implication for the identity development of women. These would then include the issue of the ‘white wedding’, which is also referred to as efudula/ohango, the etanda ritual, and then the issue of children conceived before marriage.

Before the introduction of Christianity to what was then known as ‘Owamboland’, most communities in this area practiced an initiation ceremony for ‘girls’, which was known as **efudula/ohango**. This ceremony provided the transition to legitimate female adulthood and the right to have children.

Women who had children without having undergone this rite of passage were at a certain time in history burned, sometimes with the man responsible for the pregnancy, but in most cases alone. Earlier on in the introduction and the literature review, the author described in detail the purpose of **efudula/ohango** among the Owambo communities and the function it served for the women.

The coming of Christianity brought not only the burnings to an end but also the traditional **efudula/ohango**, and in its place, introduced the ‘white wedding’. The ‘white wedding’ is not called such, because it was introduced to the Owambo people by white people, but rather because of the significance of the color white during a Christian wedding.

Before the author goes any further, she should bring it to the reader's attention that the two terms, **efudula/ohango**, were incorporated into the Christian discourse and are still used to refer to the Christian wedding.

In relation to the importance of the color white during a Christian wedding, for instance, when a woman without children [**okakadona**, meaning 'a girl'] is to be married, she is to be dressed in a fancy white wedding gown, which shows her contours, with the veil, flowers and everything else that goes with it. The wedding of a 'girl' in Oshiwambo is called **ohango**. There would also be a white flag flying at her parents' house, which is usually erected immediately after the wedding has been announced in church, normally three weeks before the actual ceremony. The color white here was to signify purity and emphasize the virginity of the girl getting married. The body of a virgin was/is supposedly something beautiful, to be admired, thus the wearing of a gown that shows the contours. The veil denotes something precious behind it, something to be gazed at in admiration, but only by the owner.

On the other hand, if a woman who had conceived before marriage got married, she was not allowed to wear white. Rather, she would wear an ugly cream gown that looked like a float, showing no body contours and not wearing a veil. She was also not allowed to fly the white flag on her parents' house. The cream color was of course to emphasize the fact that she is now tarnished. Since she has conceived before marriage, her body is not something beautiful or to be admired and there is no need for her to wear the veil since she is no longer precious.

Until the late 1970s, her wedding, especially in the then western ‘Owamboland’ communities was usually referred to as ‘**embwambwa**’, a derogatory term implying something lacking in seriousness and playful. By the 1980s to the early 1990s, the above term lost its use, only to be replaced by another term, ‘**etulokumwe**’, which literary means, ‘putting together’. This term is still used though not widely. Although it is less derogatory in comparison to the earlier one, ‘**etulokumwe**’ was never as glamorous as the **ohango**. Her wedding was a form of patchwork.

Depending on how wealthy her lineage is, a ‘girl’ can be offered up to thirty heads of cattle during her wedding. Her wedding would be a big ‘thing’ attended by hundreds of people. On the other hand, ‘**etulokumwe**’ was never a big issue. Maternal uncles usually are not willing or eager to waste their cattle on **oshikumbu**. If she is lucky, one or two heads of cattle could be slaughtered for her or else, she would have to settle for a goat.

A ritual that is characteristic of **efudula/ohango**, a ‘girl’s’ wedding, is what communities in western ‘Owamboland’ call **etanda**. This is a spill-over from the days of traditional **efudula/ohango**. During the night before the wedding in church, the bride is dressed in traditional attire, including the famous **ondjeva/ondjaa** [traditional beads that Owambo girls usually wear, made from ostrich eggshells]. During this particular evening, godmothers of the bride, from both the father’s and the mother’s side, dress up the bride with the **ondjeva/ondjaa**. The **ondjeva/ondjaa** of a girl would be worn very long, stretching from her shoulder to the ground. She would be dragging it along as she passes among her guests handing out head wears

and dresses to her aunts, uncles and their wives. After that, the married women would be given goats or a cow, which they would slaughter and roast the meat, all the while chanting and singing songs that insult *never-married-women-with-children*. During ‘**embwambwa**’ or ‘**etulokumwe**’ such a ritual did not occur since the girl had already broken the beads by becoming pregnant. Even after her ‘**embwambwa**’ or ‘**etulokumwe**’, she was not really welcomed to attend the **etanda** ceremony.

A wedding signifies a transitional period from ‘girlhood’ to womanhood, a forging of new identities and an assumption of new roles (Gordon, 1994). The above-mentioned rituals form a corner stone for the beginning of these identities and roles. Partaking in these rituals not only gives the new initiate the confidence of and pride in the new roles and identities, but also serves as a rite of passage, a way of legitimately welcoming the newcomers. However, although through ‘**embwambwa**’ or ‘**etulokumwe**’ the woman who conceived before marriage has joined the group of married women, denying her participation in the rituals ensures her exclusion. Her identity thus becomes questionable and obscured. Although she can no longer be identified as **oshikumbu**, because she is now married, the married group does not identify her as one of them since she did not partake in the rituals. This woman would thus in a way remain half **oshikumbu**, half married, exiting the one group, yet not fully accepted in the other. In other words, there is still an ambivalent attitude towards who she really is.

Another issue pertaining to premarital pregnancy was that concerning the children. Children became victims of their parents’, more specifically their mother’s actions or

mistakes. For instance, if a woman who has conceived before marriage is to get married to the man who is not the father of her child and take her child with her to her marital home, her child would be called '**omuvongambelela**'. This is a derogatory term, difficult to translate into English, but implies 'the one who messes with the soup', meaning, a bastard. Another term used to describe these children is '**ondjenda nayina**' literally meaning, 'the one who came with his/her mother'. The life of these children in their stepfathers' homes has not always been easy. Women have in many cases, left these children to be brought up by their parents, either because they wanted to spare them the agony of living as '**ondjenda nayina**' or because their husbands are not prepared to raise another man's child.

The effects of being born before marriage did not however end with childhood. For instance, when a prospective husband invites his fiancée to meet his family, the would be in-laws are interested in specific qualities, which include amongst others, the background of her family and coming from a respectable hardworking family. However, as Namhila (1997:20) states, "a girl born out of wedlock did not stand much of a chance". Although the girl child suffered this fate more often, it does not mean that young men did not get disapproved of on the grounds of being born out of wedlock.

The implication of this on the identity of these women was/is that the children are identified on the grounds of being born before marriage, which in turn limits their entry into the marriage institution. Identity as 'never married mother' becomes difficult to be acknowledged and incorporated into one's whole being. The woman

might very well develop an identity that is full of guilt, blame and shame. Consumed with guilt and shame, for having produced a child, which is not valued, the woman may for instance deny the child, not only psychologically but also the physical existence of this child. It is not unheard of among Owambo communities for a husband to discover years after they have been married that his wife had a child before he married her, a child that she and her family usually passed off as her sibling or her other sister's child. She might blame herself for bearing a child who would have limited entry into the marriage institution and might very well feel that she has ruined the child's life.

As Parker (1992) argues, discourses are not static but change over the course of time. The author has already mentioned some of these changes in relation to the terminologies used to refer to a Christian wedding among "*never-married-women-without-children*", 'girls' and "*never-married-women-with-children*", 'iikumbu'.

Although there was a shift from one terminology to another, there was not much change in the practice of the wedding per se. The bride was perhaps no longer required to wear a cream gown, but her '**etulokumwe**' was still not as glamorous as '**ohango**'. By the mid 1990s, things started changing. A wedding of a "*never-married-woman-with-children*" is now called '**ohango**' even though there are some who still do not value it and prefer to call it '**etulokumwe**'. She can now wear the white gown, which she can make as fancy as she can afford, wear the veil and fly the white on her parents' house. The maternal uncles are also now more involved in the

weddings of these “*never-married-women-with-children*” even though they would keep emphasizing that it is because ‘weddings of girls proper are scarce’.

Interestingly, in some areas of western Owambo, “*never-married-women-with-children*” have developed their own version of ‘**etanda**’ called ‘**etanda lyaasimba kadhona**’, meaning, ‘a rite of passage for the pregnant yet still girls’. During this ceremony, which is gaining popularity, the bride is dressed up in her traditional attire by her godmothers just like in the case of a ‘girl’s wedding’. But instead of wearing a long **ondjeva/ondjaa**, she would wear hers very short, implying that she has broken it. The **ondjeva/ondjaa** enables the guests to identify whether the woman getting married is a ‘girl’ or is ‘**oshikumbu**’. While handing over the head wears and dresses to her aunts and uncles and their wives, she would be followed by a group of “*never-married-women-with-children*”, who would be singing songs in her praise as a woman who has conceived before marriage. After this, these women would sit around the fire in a secluded area in the homestead, roasting their meat, singing and dancing. No one is allowed to watch unless one can afford to pay the very high fees that these women normally charge. In many cases, people would pay because the singing and the dancing are tremendously beautiful and very daring.

What seems to be particularly interesting here is the fact that one rich aspect of culture, that of singing and dancing, has been used to undermine another, the isolation of women who conceive before marriage. It is also amazing how this category of women seem to have turned the table around, excluding those who formerly excluded them, using the very same concept. In the process, they have ‘de-

mystified' the ritual making it irrelevant. Some people, especially the elders and the traditionalists, might consider this change to be a mockery and a devaluing of customs and traditions. Others however might find it refreshing and liberating, as instilling a sense of self-worth in women who conceived before marriage and [hopefully] narrowing the gap between these women and those who got married without children.

Concerning the children, the terminologies as described above are no longer used. Men are either becoming more tolerant of other men's children in their homes or women are becoming adamant that their husbands accept their children as part of the package. This is evident in the fact that many households in Namibia consist of, 'my child, your child, and our child'. In that sense, the woman in a way no longer feels like she has to choose between her child and the husband to be, and must relinquish the one in order to be with the other. Identity as mother of this particular child, though conceived before marriage could then be proudly taken on without having a sense of shame. The psychological effects that such a situation might have on the children concerned, is however not within the scope of this project.

Since the country's independence, the law is that one's marriage has to be registered by the magistrate's court before a church wedding. As a result of this, there has been an increase in the number of couples marrying at the magistrate courts, sometimes even before they introduce their spouses to their own family. This trend is especially popular among those working away from home. This has undermined the power of the family to reject a wife or husband-to-be on the grounds of her/him not being born

to a married mother. Of course traditionalists still argue that this practice is responsible for breaking up of marriages and high marriage instability in the country.

In addition to the seven criteria, Parker (1992) also proposed three auxiliary criteria, which constitute the 8th through the 10th criteria.

AUXILIARY CRITERION 8: DISCOURSES SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS

According to Parker (1992: 17), “the most interesting discourses are those which are implicated in some way with the structure of institutions”. The 15th and 16th steps involve the identification of institutions which are supported by the discourse and those that are undermined by it respectively. It is therefore important to see how human beings reproduce institutions through their actions, and how they sustain institutions by being uncritical about the way they speak. An institution can be undermined by a discourse if for instance, an institution is not mentioned or is underplayed when in effect the context was such that the institution should have been talked about, or should have taken prominence.

Institutions that are supported by these two texts are the institutions of the family, the church, marriage and education as an institution. The family as an institution is supported at two different levels. In the first text, **Case 1**, the family institution is supported in terms of expressing the need for the establishment of the conventional family, consisting of the triad, the husband, wife and children. On the other hand, the second text, **Case 2**, supports the family, but in unorthodox ways, such as in terms of the dyad, the mother and her children.

The church as an institution is supported by the way it is talked about. The power that the church is given, the power to forgive and the eagerness of people to for instance, attend the school of penitence reproduces this institution. The emotional investment that especially **Case 1** puts in talking about the church sustains it as an institution. Marriage as an institution is reproduced by assigning importance to it, and by isolating those who are not part of it. It is sustained by talking about it as though it is the only normal and legitimate institution within which children must be born and reared. Education as an institution is supported in the sense that it is for instance through education that a woman can gain some form of freedom and independence.

However, the institutions of the family and marriage have also been undermined especially in the second text, **Case 2**. In this text, marriage as an institution has unequivocally been attacked as unimportant and undesirable. By strongly speaking in support of the mother and child family, **Case 2** has implicitly attacked the conventional family as an institution. Although the definition of ‘family’ could well go beyond that of marriage, it is sometimes difficult to separate marriage and family since traditionally, the ultimate aim of marriage has been that of establishing a family. It could therefore be because of this confusion that **Case 2** experiences difficulty in attacking one without attacking the other. By ignoring the role that Christianity plays in a woman’s [or man’s] life and ‘under-mentioning’ the church, **Case 2** has also subverted this institution and what it represents.

AUXILIARY CRITERION 9: DISCOURSES PERPETUATE POWER RELATIONS

Writing on Parker's (1992) criteria, Kober (1997) states that the limited critical participation of human beings in discourses results in the reproduction of power relations. Efficient participation in a discourse necessitates a degree of familiarity, of expertise and knowledge without which one is subdued. With this in mind, the 17th and 18th steps would thus be those of looking at the categories of people who are likely to benefit or lose from the application of the discourse and those who would want to promote and those who would like to dissolve the discourse.

It can be said that the '**ikumbu**' as a social category would be more likely to benefit from the discourses engaged in by **Case 2**, that of a "*never married woman with children*" as independent of men and capable of making decisions. Looked at from this point of view, the '**ikumbu**' would then be more likely to want to dissolve the familialist discourse that ties motherhood to marriage and women to men. On the other hand, the traditionalists and the familialists would lose from the application and promulgating of such a discourse as the liberating of women, which disentangles women from the conventional family and men. People such as the clergy and the traditionalist would for instance want to promote the familialist and Christian discourses since these are closely linked to cultural norms and Christian values concerning the family and help to shape their power base.

AUXILIARY CRITERION 10: IDEOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF THE DISCOURSE

According to Parker (1992), ideology in discourse analysis should be used as a description of relationships and the effects of such relationships. To this end, it can be argued that the ideology of 'the family' is prominent in these texts.

The "familistic" ideology is based on the idea of the family as a nuclear family, formed around the husband as the breadwinner, the wife as the homemaker and their dependent children. In campaigning for family matters, "familism" has poked fun at odd family circumstances. "Familism" shapes the sexual experiences of women and among the Owambo people, as is most likely elsewhere, it has been strongly influenced by Christianity. "Familism" according to Chandler (1991), promotes the normality of marriage and normal definitions of womanhood rely on its contexts. Duquiem (quoted in Chandler, 1991: 42) argues that, "when women marry, besides placing themselves in a position materially where certain aspects of "femininity" will be difficult to avoid, they have taken one of the major steps towards conforming to the ideology of womanhood". Womanhood is linked to wifehood and motherhood in the sense that qualities of a good wife and a good mother are those qualities that are desirable in all women and are central to the definitions of the 'feminine'. The 'familial' ideology thus renders women incomplete unless they are tied to a man as dependent on them and subordinate to them.

Patriarchy is also an important ideological concept in these texts especially in analyzing women's social relationships and their identities as relational. Patriarchy is

about power and postulates inequalities, subordination and dependence, not only in relations between men and women and in marriage, but saturates the wider society (Chandler, 1991) . It is male interests, which shape sexuality and reproduction, as well as the family and household. As Chandler (1991: 45) argues, patriarchy “is also embedded in culture and the psyche, with masculinity expressing the power of the father, and femininity the subordination of women to it”.

6. Data Discussions

Having discussed the theoretical framework, the literature review and the data analysis, it is now time to consider the data in terms of the above and see what it might tell us about the identities of young adult Owambo women who conceived before marriage. Before doing this, the author would however like to restate the objectives of this study. As mentioned earlier, this study had three aims. **Firstly**, it intended to analyse how single, young adult women appraised their premarital pregnancy at that time when they became pregnant and their subsequent reappraisals. **Secondly** the study aimed at finding out whether these women feel stigmatised, isolated and marginalized. **Thirdly**, the study intended to examine how their premarital pregnancy has impacted on who they are today. As can be deduced from the title of the study and in trying to achieve these aims, the concept of identity is very important to this study. Based on this importance of the concept of identity, the interpretation of data places more emphasis on identity.

In chapter 2, the author considered how Whitbourne and Weinstock (1979: 8) define identity “as the individual’s self-attribution of numerous personal and interpersonal qualities”, which contain the individual’s physical appearance, abilities, desires/motives, goals, social beliefs, attitudes, values and the set of roles that one is expected to play within the private and the public spheres. In the same chapter, the author also explained that Krauss Whitbourne’s (1985) model of the Psychological Construction of the Life Span, on which the study is based, is constructed upon two poles, the scenario and the life story.

The Life Span Construct is understood to be that which unifies past, present and future events linked by their common occurrence to the individual. The scenario is future orientated and serves as the channel through which the individual manifests her Life Span Construct by means of plans, wishes, dreams, and hopes for the future. The scenario is strongly influenced by age norms. The life story is concerned with organizing past events into a coherent, plausible story. Both the scenario and the life story are continually altered and since they are interrelated and linked to identity, their continuous rewriting and alterations lead to constant changes in identity as well.

The author is aware that this model is very western and to rely on it in interpreting data of rural Owambo women can pose a problem. However, as stated in the first section of chapter three, the Owambo people have been influenced by numerous western ideologies, discourses and values, such as Christianity, familism, patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism and so on. The women in this study are also not ordinary rural women. They are educated rural women with university diplomas and degrees and it can be assumed that, through their education, they would have been exposed to more western ways of thinking.

The women in this study were able to tell their stories in accordance with discourses that their culture provides for them. As mentioned earlier under point 3.1, the Owambo people have been impacted on by Christianity. This has resulted in people defining themselves in Christian terms, which involve particular familial values and ideologies.

In **Case 1**, Aloisia constructs her life story in terms of Christian and familial discourses and her scenario is thus greatly influenced by the values of these discourses. From a Christian perspective, she defines herself as sinner, and identity as Christian takes precedence over any other identities such as identity as mother, worker or identity as partner. Her scenario is entangled with the Christian and familial discourses, incorporating these norms and values to the extent that it has become virtually impossible for her to develop any plans, wishes, hopes, or aspirations that are detached from these discourses. Aloisia constructs an identity in terms of aspiring but failing to meet the criteria of a good and proper Christian. Park and Folkman (1997) argue that religion is an example of a ‘Global Meaning’, which refers to people’s basic goals, assumptions, beliefs and expectations about the world, as well as their understanding of the past and present. Global Meaning also influences people’s expectations regarding the future. Park and Folkman (1997) further contend that religious beliefs tend to be relatively stable and people are more likely to change their perceptions of situations to fit their religious beliefs than they are to change those beliefs. For instance, instead of condemning the church or Christian faith for being too strict, discriminating and conservative, Aloisia is more willing to explain her getting pregnant, her exclusion from church groups and the church’s refusal to baptize her son in terms of being punished for her sin.

<p>C 1: 3: 1.I have sinned and God is punishing me. I should not have had sex before marriage.</p>
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<p>C 1: 5: 1.God might forgive me for becoming pregnant.</p>
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She also seems to be adhering to Whitbourne's (1985) argument that the scenario is strongly influenced by age norms that define the transition points, which are associated with acceptable ages for making these transitions. She somehow believes that youth and beauty are needed for one to be married. This is evident when she relates her inability to get married to her age.

C 1: 4: 1.look at me, I am now 40 years old.... I am still not married. There is no hope for me.

Evidently, getting pregnant before marriage was not part of her scenario, and she appraised her premarital pregnancy, as mentioned earlier on in the data analysis, as a punishment for having sex outside of marriage.

C 1: 8: 1. I mean (.) I was not happy about it either. I did not plan it. Every parent expects her or his children to have a wedding before they could have children (.) I expected it of myself too.

Subsequent reappraisals have therefore been those of catastrophe and doom, coupled with a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Whitbourne (1985) proposed three possible outcomes of an event that was not part of the scenario, which the author discussed under point 2.1.

Aloisia seems to have adapted the third of these outcomes as a means of coping with her premarital pregnancy. According to Whitbourne (1985: 612), "the third possible result of the individual's encounter with an unanticipated event or one that conflicts with the scenario is a change in the person-environment relationship". This might

take the form of modifying the environment, or if the environment is found to be totally hostile to the achievement of goals, the individual may abandon it. Alosia seems to have found attempts to change her environment quite straining, if not impossible. She therefore opted to abandon the environment by going to university and by opting to work very far from home. Having physically moved from the environment did not however remove the environment from her. She seems to carry her previous environment within her wherever she goes, making it difficult for her to reappraise the event in a more favourable manner. Since no change has occurred in the environment, her scenario has not been reworked and her identity is not altered.

C 1: 2: 1. Well, [laugh] I was at least able to go to further my studies and I think the motivating factor was the fact that I was very unhappy for many years at the school I was teaching and I really wanted to leave my village.

C 1: 17: 1. Since I finished at UNAM, I have also been working very far from home and only go there every once in a while. In a way, I have also not been in touch with my congregation.

These subsequent negative reappraisals of her premarital pregnancy could be understood in terms of her scenario seeming to lack fluidity, which seems to spill over to her life story and then to her identity. This capacity would enable the life span construct to facilitate adaptation to life events, such as premarital pregnancy. If her scenario were fluid and open to reworking, she might have been able to adapt to her current reality. With this lack of fluidity to her scenario, Aloisia seems to lack a feeling of continuity and appears to be feeling stuck; in telling her life story, she comes across as if she is still living in the past. This feeling of still living in the past

and of being stuck comes across especially when she defines and evaluates everything about her in terms of marriage. Her premarital pregnancy has resulted in her defining herself as lacking.

C 1: 13: 1. I hate not being married and it gets worse when a married man makes a pass at me.... Maybe they have noticed that no one would marry me. (.) That I am not worth marrying.

C 1: 15: 1. It would be so much better if I get married. But.... I don't stand a better chance of getting married.

Aloisia appears to be stuck in the identity of a “girl”, which might be connected to her not being ‘wife’, and also to the fact that she identifies herself as mother to the dead child and emotionally and physically withdraws from the living one. To be identified and identify oneself as ‘mother’ in relation to a dead child is also to identify and be identified as ‘not mother’, since the child as such does not exist.

However, Aloisia’s sense of feeling stuck also has to be grounded in the social context that has contributed to the constructing of who she is today. The social world tends to predicate normality on identity, which is understood as the constancy to oneself and others, as a responsible being, who is predictable or at least intelligible, in the sense of a well-constructed history. As such, societies make available all sorts of institutions for the integration and unification of the self. The most evident of these institutions is of course the proper name, certified by the church, which designates the same object in every possible world. Ziff (1960, referred to by Bourdieu, 2000: 299) describes the proper name as “a fixed point in a turning

world,” and argues that the baptismal rite is the required way of ascribing an identity. Through this remarkable Christian ritual, a constant and durable social identity is instituted and this guarantees the identity of the biological individual in all his/her possible life histories.

The proper name, according to Bourdieu (2000), is the support of social identity, of the set of properties such as son, daughter, nationality, sex, and so on. It is the product of the initial rite of the church institution, which marks access to social existence. Among the Owambo communities, people from the side of the child’s father usually name the child before he is baptized, but in many cases the same name would be included in the baptism. It would also be legitimate to argue that upon death, different societies have different ways of marking the end of the existence of both the biological individual and the social identity. By refusing to baptize Aloisia’s stillborn child, the church has in a manner of speaking, refused/denied the social existence of that child. Not only is the child buried outside the graveyard, but also no name is written on his tombstone, because he does not have one, he did not exist.

The question of how the mother would grieve and put him to rest, have closure, then arises. Whom would she be grieving and how and what kind of social support would she be getting from her community if in their eyes the child did not exist? Would this not pose a developmental block for her? How does a woman make peace with carrying a child inside of her for eight months and not be afforded the opportunity to properly grieve the loss of that child? Could it still have been the same were she

married at the time? With the denial of her son's social existence, Aloisia's identity seems to have come to a standstill, as if she too, has stopped existing. It is as though she sees no other possible ways of defining herself. In a sense, she assumes the identity of 'omusimba kadhona', neither mother nor girl, of non-existence.

Many authors (Ussher, 1990; Chandler, 1991; O'Connell, 1994) argue that motherhood is critical for a woman to achieve full status and that her identity is consequently closely bound up with her nurturing and caring role as mother. Motherhood is symbolically understood as an expansion of the self and children as adding meaning to their parents' lives and ensuring continuity of the lineage. Looking back at Aloisia's narrative, motherhood seems to be either suppressed or rejected, if not denied. What is of interest is the fact that, despite the dire consequences she faced during her first pregnancy, she still became pregnant for the second time without being married. There are several possible ways of trying to make sense of this.

The **first** explanation could be that she needed to replace the dead child, but having produced a living child, she rejects her by putting a physical and an emotional distance between them. As such, she is able to explicitly identify herself as a bad mother, the one who lacks the ability to care for and nurture her children. This is not only true in relation to the living child, whom she keeps away from her, but also in relation to the dead child. She blames herself for his death, stating that, it was her selfishness that killed him.

C 1: 19: 1. I don't think that I am a good mother though.

C 1: 7: 1. and so my child died (.) I killed him, because I was too selfish, thinking only of myself, my problems and not his well-being.

She could of course have argued that her family and everybody else who rejected her and the pregnancy were complicit in her child's death, but she does not. This might be attributed to the notion of responsibility and identity, in that a person is seen as being responsible for her actions, their outcomes and for the construction of her identity, even though the circumstances surrounding such a construction might not always be under her control (Griffiths, 1995). It can also be understood in terms of the Global Meaning concept mentioned earlier on in this chapter. Aloisia strongly identifies herself as a Christian and religion is very important to her. Park & Folkman (1997) contend that, amongst others, religion is seen to play a central role in the life meaning and purpose of many people, and that it has a notable explanatory value for understanding occurrences. One of the dimensions of 'Global Meaning' is that of control, whereby people believe they are in control of their destiny and important outcomes. People usually believe that by engaging in the proper behaviors, they could minimize the likelihood of unfavorable outcomes, thereby directly controlling the world (Park & Folkman, 1997). Aloisia seems to believe that had she not been consumed by her own problems, her child would have survived.

Although she has fulfilled the biological function of giving birth to a child, she seems not to have integrated motherhood and parenthood into her self-definition. This might then pose a problem for her since valuing parenthood as an integral part of

one's self-definition allows people to be accepted as responsible and mature members of their community, thereby validating adult status and identity (Phoenix, Woollett & Lloyd, 1991; O'Connell, 1994). For instance, it might not have been because she is not married that her sisters excluded her from the 'committee' during the wedding of her niece, but because she does not assume the role of 'parent', she is not accepted as responsible and mature enough to give any valuable advice to a girl, who was not only about to become a wife but also a mother and therefore a parent, roles that she herself does not appear to take on fully. Perhaps, she is also judged in terms of "what kind of a mother gives away her child just like that even if it is to the child's father?" After all, Owambo communities are mostly matrilineal. However, the refusal of her community to accept her as 'mother' may also make it difficult for her to integrate this role into her identity, contributing to the vagueness in her articulation about it. Therefore, there seems to be an ambivalent treatment from her community, which sends double messages to her. This might be related to the difficulties associated with placing a "*never-married-woman-with-children*" in general, and 'omusimba kadhona' in particular. She is neither mother, nor girl.

The **second** explanation as to why Aloisia produces a child yet rejects it and motherhood in the process could be related to the need to belong. According to Griffiths (1995), the experience of belonging or not belonging is very important to the self-identity of a person. Having become pregnant before marriage, she no longer belongs to the social group or category of "girls". In fact, she gets rejected by this group as is evident in how her closest friend stopped speaking to her and mocked her as soon as she became aware that Aloisia was pregnant.

C 1: 6: 2. I basically lost all the friends I had. People started avoiding me and finding excuses not to be around. this girl....was my best friend. she was the second person I told. I thought she would at least see me maybe at my house but she said she could not do that. ... she even started making fun of me....with a group of her friends. I would greet her, but.... they would mumble something and then laugh and I would feel so embarrassed.

C 1: 18: 1.The old ones [friends] are mostly gone.

However, since she did not have a living child, it made it difficult for her to identify herself as a “*never-married-woman-with-children*” (**oshikumbu**), although others may very well have referred to her as such. Her kind of **oshikumbu** would moreover be considered lower in status than the “*never-married-woman-with-children*” (**oshikumbu**) whose children are alive since the loss of her child would be associated with abortion, another moral and legal issue. Having been rejected by the “girls” group, she might then have felt it necessary to construct a new identity, which accommodates the rejection. The only way she could do this would be by means of recreating that which caused her rejection from the other group, producing a child. Through the birth of a living child, she can now belong to the group of “*never-married-women-with-children*” (**iikumbu**).

The denial of motherhood and ignoring of the living child could also be looked at and understood from a cultural perspective. Earlier on, the author mentioned that among the Owambo cultures, children born out of wedlock, especially girls, find it difficult to get married. This entails that the consequences of getting pregnant before

marriage are negative for a woman and her daughters. With authors such as Phoenix, Woollett & Lloyd, (1991); Chandler, (1991); O'Connell, (1994) arguing that motherhood is understood not only as every woman's destiny but also as an expansion of the self, for a "*never-married-woman-with-children*" (**oshikumbu**), fulfillment of such a destiny becomes a negative expansion of her self especially when she bears a female child. She would have to constantly worry about whether her daughter would gain access to the marriage institution, or whether her daughter would end up suffering the same fate as she had. She also knows that in the event of her daughter finding a man interested in marrying her, she would not be evaluated on her own merit, but on the merits or rather demerits of who her mother is, of being a child of a "*never-married-woman-with-children*" (**oshikumbu**) and this could go on for generation after generation. This may explain why Aloisia places a distance between her and the living child who is a girl, and why she explicitly wishes her daughter were a boy.

C 1: 19: 1.Sometimes I wish (.) sometimes I wish that child was a boy then maybe I would make peace with losing my son.

The mother in a sense becomes a 'curse' for her female children while a male child is not very much affected by this 'curse'. Rather, he stands a better chance of rescuing the mother's dignity and pride with his easy access to the marriage institution. This shows very powerfully as McDowell & Pringle (1990) argued, that woman's identity is defined not only in relation to men, but also as dependent on and subordinate to them.

In **Case 2**, Lahja tells her story within a totally different discourse, one that is influenced by feminist thinking which in turn has an impact on the goals and aspirations that she has. For instance, her understanding of what a family is has dethroned the man as husband, shaking the very foundation upon which conventional family discourse is built. Lahja's identity and role as mother is taken on with pride without any hesitation. This is shown in how she proudly lives with her daughter, when she could have for instance, left her with her parents, as well as in how she plans to build a home for the two of them. It is also shown by her use of language, in that when referring to her daughter, she personalizes the relationship by means of using the possessive adjective 'my'. This is different from Aloisia who seems to objectify her daughter by means of using words such as 'she', 'her' and 'that'.

C 1: 6: 3.When I became pregnant with *her*.... *She* was only being able to be baptized last year....because *her* father....

C 1: 19: 1. Sometimes I wish (.) sometimes I wish *that child* was a boy.... I don't even stay with *her*....

C 2: 1: 1. After the pregnancy and *my baby*.... I felt that now I have to concentrate on bringing up *my child*. I still had the aim of having my house, for me and *my baby*.

C 2: 15: 1.to give the best education to *my daughter*.... I also plan to build *us* a house....

Significantly, getting pregnant even if not married has been part of Lahja's scenario, in that she had set a time limit for herself in which to wait for marriage, after which, she would conceive even if it meant doing so before marriage. However, what had

made it disappointing at the time was because the occurrence was off time and therefore not anticipated.

C 2: 1: 1. As a young person, a teenager, I had always imagined myself getting married and then have my children. However, by the time I was about twenty three, I had also decided that I would have my baby before the age of thirty, whether I was married or not.

C 2: 3: 1. I thought I would become pregnant at the age of twenty-nine even if I was not married by then. Now, I was only twenty-seven....

As explained in the first section of chapter two, this in a way has made it much easier for her to cope with this event and be able to incorporate it into her life story. Since it was planned for, it has made it possible for her to subsequently reappraise the event in a more favorably light, which made it also possible to incorporate it into her identity (Whitbourne, 1985). Lahja then seems to have evaluated her premarital pregnancy not as a negative event, but rather as an event that is consistent with her scenario, although off time. Her scenario seems to be fluid in that she was able to rework it, in the sense that she was able to put off some of her aspirations, such as getting married.

C 2: 1: 1.after the pregnancy and the birth of my baby, marriage was no longer part of my plan. I felt that now I have to concentrate on bringing up my child.

It might be this fluidity of her scenario, which gives her a sense of continuity and a feeling of being in control of her life. This in turn might have enabled her to take on

the identity as and role of mother as well as other roles and identities such as identity as worker and as friend. The fluidity of her scenario therefore seems to allow for multiple possibilities for identity as opposed to the rigidity experienced when reading Aloisia's narrative. However, the formation of identity is also contextual in that the environment we are in contributes to how we come to evaluate and understand ourselves (Griffiths, 1995). For instance, the way in which Lahja's family reacted to her pregnancy gives an impression of a family environment that is more accepting, and less conditional, thus allowing for more possibilities. This might also have contributed to her planning to have a baby before the age of thirty, even if she is not married. Possibly, it is this accepting environment that has made it easier for her to incorporate this event into her identity. This is different from the environment in which Aloisia conceived, which seems to be rigid and more conditional, thus rendering less possibilities for multiple identities.

C 1: 6: 1. My mother....just kept saying, "your father is very disappointed". My father? He could not speak to me for months! My sisters were so judging, making me feel like a fool. (.) they would give comments like "how can you just become pregnant at your age?"

C 1: 8: 1.not to talk to your child for months and ignoring her, pretending as if she is not there even when she is, is very sad. They should be angry, disappointed or whatever, but I had expected them to make peace with it and accept me nonetheless. Well, they didn't....

C 1: 7: 3. I was treated as if I was a burden or a disgrace especially to my family....

C 2: 6: 1. I was afraid of telling my parents....they did not show me any negative reactions, maybe they just accepted what has happened....

C 2: 8: 1. I thought my parents would be very angry, disown me or something.... I was really surprised when they did not say much.

Lahja's story seems coherent and plausible, maybe because that is the kind of story that the current discourse of women's emancipation is promoting. What is meant here is that, Lahja's story seems to capture the audience because it says something about our present society, with its talk about women taking control of their lives and of equality between women and men. Central to Lahja's story are the themes of agency, control and autonomy/independence, aspects, which are also important to the development of self-identity. She tries to attain autonomy/independency by means of expressing her emotional and financial self-sufficiency. Her need for autonomy/independence therefore has to do with the demand to control her own life. Work, especially for Lahja is a financial necessity, crucial in establishing and maintaining her autonomy and independence. Education and paid work is therefore significant in establishing a sense of self that is liberated from its dependence on men. However, women who are independent, financially or otherwise, might be considered as a threat by men and may therefore not find marriage partners easily. Furthermore, for women like Lahja who are used to being in control, taking care of themselves and their children and making their own decisions without needing a man to depend on, close partnership may seem to require them to give up a lot.

C 2: 14: 1.you no longer use your money as you see fit (.) sometimes you even

get beaten because of your money. Sometimes even if he does not beat you, he behaves like a child who does not have a job. It would just be your money buying this and that.Oh no!

C 1: 25: 1.we have quite a number of problems I think he feels uncomfortable with me being educated and earning more money than he does. ...

For Lahja, sexual relations seem to involve unequal power between women and men. Withdrawing from them therefore seems to give her a sense of being in a powerful position. It enables her to be in control of her sexuality, her finance, and allows her more freedom to strive for many goals.

These two women, with almost similar structural positions in terms of marginality seem to have different experiences in relation to their status as “*never-married-women-with-children*”. On the one hand, marginality for Aloisia is felt in terms of being excluded, of being different. For her, marginality is therefore related to social situations of being excluded, forgotten, of being invisible and of being made to feel uncomfortable. This she explained in terms of having been excluded from the church activities because she no longer belongs to any groups, in terms of being excluded from organizing important family events where she would have virtually become invisible had it not being for her powerful financial position. She also feels marginalized when married women talk about their husbands all the time, making her feel lacking, different and therefore uncomfortable. It is perhaps in an effort to control or contain this sense of marginality that Aloisia is selective of the kinds of women she associates with.

C 1: 20: 1. Sometimes, people will make you feel unwelcome or unworthy of being there. For instance, when my elder sister's first born got married in December, they had this 'committee' for organizing the wedding. It included all three of them, plus some of our cousins, all married. I asked two of my sisters about it and why I was not included. Then one of them asked me "what would you tell her?" I was hurt.... It is as if they are trying to say I am stupid. Yet, they expected me to spend a lot of money on a wedding in which I felt left out. I felt like I am only a financial source for them, and beyond that, I am nothing.

C 1: 17: 1. I used to belong to the young women group of our congregation, but that is only for women who are not married and do not have children. Once I became pregnant, I no longer fit in that group and the next group is only for married women. Unmarried mother do not have a group.

C 1: 18: 1. It is difficult to make friends with married women. Even those who were your friends before, once they get married, they find themselves new friends among married women. Married women as friends would forever irritate you with stories of their husbands. My husband this, my husband that....

It also seems that limiting her network of relations to women of her kind allows Aloisia to feel in control of her life, in a sense that she tries not to be reminded of that which she desires the most, yet does not have, marriage. If she keeps a friend who is a 'girl', when such a friend marries, not only does she lose a friend, but is also reminded of her 'inability' to marry. If they were already married, they would still remind her of marriage, though it need not necessarily be their intention. To avoid

the feeling of being ‘incomplete’, of being judged and of being different, she must exercise her sense of control through the friends she keeps.

Unlike Aloisia, there are no cultural rituals or ceremonies from which Lahja is excluded and she feels completely accepted by her family and those who she defines as important to her. The fact that Lahja seems to find it much easier to construct networks and to be sociable than Aloisia might have made it less likely for her to experience loneliness and to consider herself as marginal. Lahja seems to have a network of friendship relations, particularly with women, those who are single, those who are married and those who are *never-married-women-with-children* like her.

C 2: 20: 1. you find a certain person that you considered as a friend but you would just hear a person is married without inviting you. But I think that that is a personal issue, it has nothing to do with culture.

C 2: 19: 2. I have friends that I now know are true friends. Some of them were my friends before I became pregnant, most of who are even married, and those whom I befriended later. Some are single, some married and some like me. But they are friends I can trust.

This is different from Aloisia, who lost most the friends she had before she became pregnant, and now restricts her network only to women of her kind.

C 1: 6: 2. I basically lost all the friends I had. People started avoiding me and finding excuses not to be around me....

C 1: 18:1. Most of my friends now are people like me, women with children who are

not married. It is difficult to make friends with married women. Even those who were you friends before, once they get married they find themselves new friends among married women. Married women forever irritate you with stories of their husbands. they can also make you feel incomplete judged or different.

Lahja has resisted being marginal by for instance, ignoring or externalizing her exclusions in social situations.

C 2: 6: 2. friends, well, others do not greet me up to this day, meaning our friendship ended just because they felt that they cannot hang around 'oshikumbu'. But I am not worried about them because I feel that that is their problem.

Furthermore, if marriage is the center, Lahja has explicitly made her margin her center in that she does not want to get married.

C 2: 12: 1. Marriage, hmm, in today's times?

C 2: 14: 1. I do not think that marriage is an important aspect of a woman's life.

C2: 25: 1. Marriage is no longer something I think about these days, I am not even interested in men. I have not been in a relationship since I had my child.

Interestingly, both Aloisia and Lahja have experiences of other women marginalizing them, excluding them and relating to them as if they are inferior or unimportant. For Aloisia, it was the church elders, the principal, her sisters, her best friend and then the married women. For Lahja, it is the 'friend' who conveniently forgets or ignores to invite her to her wedding, and fellow nurses who look down on her.

Lahja seems to be asserting her identity, to the exclusion and position of 'man' as 'other'. It is as if in order to establish her integrity and oneness, she must emphasize the otherness of men. She seems to be constructing a self that is detached from this 'other' and in a way adhering to Gilligan's (1982, in Weir, 1996) argument of the self as involving either submission or detachment.

In a sense, both Aloisia and Lahja seem to be engaging in the submission - detachment binary of Gilligan (1982), though at different levels and perhaps under different contexts. While for Lahja it is by means of exclusion, rejection and 'othering' of man, for Aloisia, it is by means of exclusion, rejection and making an 'other' of women who are tied to 'man'. While Lahja 'others' men perhaps because she finds the sexual relations between men and women to be unequal and because she sees men as a financial burden, Aloisia 'others' women tied to men or capable of being tied to man because they have something that she lacks, something she desperately desires, marriage or their access to it.

Clearly, Aloisia feels stigmatized and isolated, for instance by the society, in the form of being excluded from rituals. She desires to be married, but believes the stigma of having a child before marriage would not enable her to get this wish. As a result, she hides the source of the stigma, the child, by keeping her far from her, physically and emotionally. On the other hand, if Lahja feels stigmatized at all, she resists the stigma by flaunting the source of the stigma in the face of society. She nurtures her daughter in that she lives with her, and she actively resists or refuses to play the role of wife. Lahja seems to center her live on her child and might therefore

not experience loneliness because according to Chandler (1991), women with children are less likely to be lonely, because they have a source of intimacy in their children, who provide them with enriching experiences.

Interestingly, when responding to the first question on the interview guideline, “what were your plans, wishes, dreams for the future before you became pregnant?” neither of the two women said anything about ambitions or about wanting to get educated and becoming a career woman. Rather, they had expressed their hopes and dreams in terms of wanting to get married.

C 1: 1: 1. I always considered myself as one of those people who would have a ‘white’ wedding. I had plans of getting married, establishing my home with my husband and then have children (.) in marriage.

C 2: 1: 1. As a young person, a teenager, I had always imagined myself getting married and then have my children.

It is also interesting that although both women are educated, Lahja seems to value education, to see it as enabling her to be free of men and the marriage institution, while the other, Aloisia, sees it disabling her access to the marriage institution.

7. Conclusions

Before drawing any conclusions, the author needs to restate that this was an exploratory study and as such, there are no conclusive answers to either the objectives or the research question.

This study had three objectives that needed to be investigated. First, the study aimed to investigate how single, young adult Owambo women who became pregnant before marriage appraised their premarital pregnancy at that time when they became pregnant and what subsequent reappraisals were. From the study, it was found that immediate appraisals of a premarital pregnancy could range from being regrettable to being catastrophic. However, the process of reappraisal as such was not directly measured. It would therefore be recommended that future researchers may for instance, use the Impact of Event Scale, which is conceptualized as a measure of an individual's attempts to integrate a current appraised event with their cognitive schemas (Park & Folkman, 1997) to measure this process.

The second objective of this study was to find out whether these women feel stigmatized, isolated and/or marginalized. These three concepts are however intertwined in that stigma usually leads to isolation and marginalisation. According to Goffman (1963, referred to by Kohler Riessman, 2000: 113), stigma is “a fixed and passive condition whereby its carriers do not try to challenge or resist external definitions of their ‘defects’ and to put forth their “stigma” as a difference rather than a failing”. Stigma understood as a psychological state, is only possible when the

person(s) concerned adopts the mainstream social definition of the norm. In other words, stigma is a psychological corollary of conformity (Remennick, 2000). From the data gathered for this study, it appeared that the more a “*never-married-woman-with-children*” identified with the universal expectation of motherhood, that is, as tied to wifhood, the deeper her perception of stigma in the event that she cannot meet this norm. The problem(s) that such a woman would experience as **oshikumbu** seems to be associated with her inability to proceed with her life according to life course norms that are both reinforced by others and also accepted as valid by herself. However, it may therefore be concluded that their frantic efforts to attend the school of penitence not only maintains the Christian and familial discourses but also reinforces the stigma of **oshikumbu** as incompatible with normal life and self-respect. By desperately striving to become ‘wife’, **oshikumbu** seems to be actively endorsing the ideology that led to her stigmatization in the first place. What this study seems to indicate is in confirmation with what authors such as Miall, 1986; Fine & Asch, 1988; Remennick, 2000 have observed, that stigma is a continuum rather than a dichotomy. “*Never-married-women-with-children*” may live their lives stigma-free if they undermine or reject the external social definitions of their ‘flaw/defect’ or ‘disability/inability’ which seems to be the strategy applied by Lahja in Case 2. However, those who conform with popular views of **oshikumbu** as a ‘flaw/defect’ or ‘disability/inability’, as it seems to be the case with Aloisia (Case 1.), deeply internalize their stigma and would have to develop various coping strategies. Since stigma is a continuum rather than a dichotomy, there are also many cases that would fall in-between these two extremes.

To be able to resist stigma, “*never-married-women-with-children*” among Owambo communities might need to develop the mental ability of disconnecting from the dominant discourses and take a critical stance. This mental resource usually comes with education, which may then mean that those who do not have the privilege of an education might not benefit from this resource. However, the question still remains as to whether those who have the benefit of an education would utilize this resource. The reality of the matter is however that, young adult Owambo women who conceive before marriage would need to actualize themselves in other (non-conjugal) realms and have unquestionable accomplishments to their credit in order to challenge the predominant norms.

The third objective, which was to find out how premarital pregnancy has impacted on how these young adult women understand themselves today, is answered in relation to the research question ‘Does premarital pregnancy impact/effect women’s identity?’ The data seems to indicate that “*never-married-women-with-children*” among Owambo communities might be more likely to express a self-identity that is torn in different directions by competing discourses. For instance, on the one hand, the Christian and familial discourses emphasize marriage with a man as the head, the breadwinner or provider of the family. On the other hand, women emancipation discourse for instance encourages women to be independent. This might consequently lead to the discursive space of “*never-married-women-with-children*” in these communities becoming fragmented, and in the process undermining the hopes of internal coherence that they are attempting to grasp.

A critical look at the notion of ‘construction’, such as in the ‘Life Span Construction’, upon which this study was based is required when summing up this study. The notion of ‘construction’ emphasizes and gives an impression of an effective consequential nature of accounts. Behind this notion is the idea of a masterpiece, of building something that is not only potentially meaningful but also interesting. Coupled with concepts such as the ‘scenario’ and the ‘life story’, it is assumed that the autobiographical narrative is always at least partially motivated by a concern to give meaning, to rationalize, to show the inherent logic, both for the past and for the future. It is also concerned with creating consistent and constant intelligible relationships, for example, constructing successive states in terms of causes and effects which are then turned into steps that are necessary for identity development.

A ‘construction’ is rendered plausible and intelligible by discourses that are influential within a particular culture at any given time. Currently, the Namibian society seems to be suffused with the discourses concerning women’s emancipation from man, of women finding other venues to give meaning to their lives other than depending on men to give their lives meaning. Under these current discourses, Aloisia’s ‘construction’ might for instance not appear to be plausible or intelligible, as it might appear outdated. However, it might also appear plausible in that it reveals the predicaments of “*never-married-women-with-children*” within a patriarchal society. It is therefore imperative to realize that reality is discontinuous and that it is formed of elements juxtaposed without reason and that each of these elements is

unique. This makes it even more difficult to grasp because more elements continue to appear, unpredictable, untimely and at random (Bourdieu, 2000).

To a certain extent, this study demonstrates how sets of meanings that maintain “oppression” of “*never-married-women-with-children*” are under contest and in flux within a society in transition and how language reproduces and maintains culture and power.

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APPENDIX: A Data Transcription

As mentioned earlier in chapter four, only two texts were translated and transcribed.

In transcribing, the following rules were followed.

- Each text is allocated a number and a pseudo-name
- Everything has been transcribed
- Pauses are indicated with (.)
- When the interviewee laughs, or cries, it is indicated with square brackets, e.g. [laughs]
- When the author explains something, it is indicated by putting it in { } brackets

Case 1. “Aloisia”

1. What were your plans, wishes, dreams for the future before you became pregnant?

As a Christian, I believe that a woman should have a proper ‘white’ wedding. She should be married before she can bear children. Before I became pregnant, I always considered myself as one of those people who would have a ‘white’ wedding. I had plans of getting married, establishing my home with my husband and then have children (.) in marriage. I am a devoted Christian and was an active member in my congregation then.

2. Has becoming pregnant changed any of those plans?

Made the realization/attainment of some of your goals impossible?

How, in which ways? Made it possible to attain certain goals? (New?)

It is because of becoming pregnant that I am still not married. Well, [laughs] I was at least able to go to further my studies and I think the motivating factor was the fact that I was very unhappy for many years at the school I was teaching and I desperately wanted to leave the school I was teaching and the village.

3. How did you react to the pregnancy?

I was shocked. I did not expect to get pregnant at the time. I was 26 years old at the time, so I knew exactly how pregnancy takes place. But somehow I thought or rather believed that I would not get pregnant. I believed that I would have a wedding and then have children. When I realized that I was pregnant, I realized that I have sinned and God was punishing me. I should not have had sex before marriage.

4. Since then, have you ever regretted getting pregnant?

Yes, I live with it everyday of my live! I can never forget it. If I had not gotten pregnant, or had sex for that matter, I would be married today. But look at me, I am now 40 years old, and thirteen years after I first got pregnant, I am still not married. There is no hope for me.

5. Did you ever think of getting rid of the pregnancy while pregnant?

No, it never even crossed my mind. I believe that committing suicide or having an abortion are unforgivable sins, but I think that God might forgive me for becoming pregnant.

6. How did your parents/family react to your pregnancy? Friends? Church? Place of work?

You have to understand that I am from very a strict catholic home, and my father is a “catechist”, a very important position in the church. My mother is also a church elder. My mother did not say much. She just kept saying, “Your father is very disappointed”. My father? He could not speak to me for months! He did not even want the man responsible for my pregnancy to come into his house, and when he finally came in he could not speak to him either. I think he was really angry with me. My sisters were so judging, making me feel like a fool. (.) They would give comment like “how can you just become pregnant at your age?” I was made to feel like I have committed the most unforgivable sin there is.

I basically lost all the friends I had. People started avoiding me and finding excuses not to be around me. For instance there was this girl that I thought was my best friend. I mean, we went to primary school, secondary school and then college together as friends. When we started working, we even became closer, made plans of what we will do, what kind of cars we will buy, things like that. When I became pregnant, she was the second person I told. I had expected her to be there for me, to at least be supportive.

But I was in for a surprise. Two weeks after I have told her, I went to their house and her mother did not respond when I greeted her. I went to my friend's room and she told me that her parents do not like me coming to visit her anymore. I could not believe it. I thought she would at least try to see me maybe at my house but she said she could not do that. As the months went by, she even started making fun of me. Like I would be passing by, alone, and she would be with a group of her new friends. I would greet her, but instead of greeting me back, they would mumble something and then laugh and I would feel so embarrassed. I never forgave her for that and to this day, we are not on speaking terms. I could deal with other people's rejection but hers is difficult to accept. How can I ever forgive her?

The church refused me to attend the school of repentance because my boyfriend was still coming to visit me. He was very supportive and understanding through all of this. What can I do? He most probably was the only one there for me, even ignoring my father's orders not to enter his house. Even when my child died, {stillborn} the church refused to baptize him or even bless his body. He was buried as a pagan. What sin did he commit? When I became pregnant with her {referring to her daughter}, the church still refused me entry into the school of repentance for the same reasons. She was only being able to be baptized last year, at the age of nine, and only because her father attended the school at his congregation and she was baptized there.

With the first pregnancy, when the principal found out that I was pregnant, she wanted to have me expelled from teaching, claiming I was a bad example to the

students. The principal was a 'never-married-woman-without-children' in 40s, and a lay preacher. She had already succeeded in having another female teacher chased from the school for becoming pregnant before marriage. So I sort of knew what she would do about my situation.

The principal forged some signatures that were supposed to belong to me and some other three teachers who were members of the school board, then sent the signed document alleging/suggesting that the school board have decided to fire me and that I have agreed to the inspector's office. Seeing nothing warrants firing me, the inspector had then come to the school to ask me why I had agreed to sign a document that meant my being fired and asked the other teachers why there was no disciplinary hearing. We were shocked. None of us knew what he was talking about. We told him that we did not sign any document. So, there in the staff room, the inspector asked the principal to tell him what exactly is going on, why she wanted to fire me. Then she told him that I am a disgrace to the community and to the school because I have become pregnant before marriage. The inspector was very upset. He told the principal that, "neither you, nor anyone else has the right to fire Aloisia or control her personal life. If she is pregnant, she is pregnant. Has she been impregnated by a school child?" You should have seen her face! She was so embarrassed. At least the inspector knew the law and stood up for me but the victory was short lived. The conflict between the principal and I was evident. Having realized that her plan to fire me has failed, she set out to make my life at school as miserable as she can. She would not talk to me for months and when she wanted to communicate with me, she would either sent someone or leave a note on my table with instructions. If I greet

her, she would not respond. She would give bad comments about me even in the presence of students.

7. Did their reactions affect you? How did their reactions make you feel?

Of course they did. My pregnancy, which was supposed to be personal, private thing, became a discussion topic in school board meeting, and my job became at stake. At home, I felt ignored and everywhere I went, people stopped talking and stared, even in the staff-room. As time passed, I was becoming sadder and sadder and could not even eat. I was lonely and I blamed myself for getting pregnant. I presented myself as a strong and proud to be pregnant to the world, but deep down, I was crumbling away, decaying from the inside, until there was nothing but emptiness and death [crying] and so, my child died (.) I killed him, because I was too selfish, thinking only of myself, my problems and not his well-being. My son was born stillborn during the eighth month of the pregnancy.

I found myself no longer having the energy to get up to go to work, but there was nothing wrong with me physically. It seemed as if there was no purpose any more and all I wanted to do was sleep, until all is well again. I had no will to face the world. Somehow, I even forgot that I was pregnant. I just stayed at home and did not go to the prenatal check-ups. I just wanted to sleep. My mother would come to my room and urge me to go to work, saying the principal would now find an excuse to fire me.

It was on one of those days that my mother persuaded me to go to school that at around 10h00, I felt like a black sheath was put on my face and I fainted. I thought I was going to die and was not really bothered. I felt that people would be relieved since I was treated as if I was a burden or a disgrace especially to my family. When I came to, I was in a car on the way to the hospital. Our school was far from the hospital and it took about twenty minutes to get there. At the hospital I was told that my child had died. I did not feel anything it was as if I did not understand what that meant.

Only my mother came to see me at the hospital but I do not remember talking to her. The next day, I was released from the hospital. I still felt numb and could not even cry. I did not call anyone; I guess there was no one to call really. My boyfriend was a minibus driver he could be anywhere between Owambo and Windhoek. I just hitchhiked to our village, with nothing but my handbag and when I got home, I just went into my room and slept.

My parents were not at home and when they got home, I remember my father shouting at me, saying was it not enough for me to embarrass him by becoming pregnant before marriage, must I also embarrass them further by having an abortion? He was calling me all sorts of names. I could not believe that he actually think I have had an abortion on the eighth month of the pregnancy! He called me out of the room and was shouting. I could no longer understand what he was saying because I think I was shocked. Then he told me to leave his house because he cannot live with **“iikumbu”**.

For the first time in my life, I saw my mother actually standing up to my father, threatening that if I leave, she will also leave. (.) For the first time in many months, I realized that my mother loves me and feels for me. I started crying uncontrollably. I just kept saying ‘I did not do anything, I did not do anything!’ It was my mother who eventually called my boyfriend to inform him. I felt like I had betrayed him. He had always been there for me but I let his child die. I felt so responsible for his child’s death (.) up to now, I don’t know why my child died just like that. He and my mother arranged for the funeral. The church refused to baptize him or bless his body (.) he was buried outside the graveyard, among pagans (.) without a name.

8. Had you expected them to react differently? How?

Well, I would not expect my parents especially my father to be happy about my pregnancy. I mean (.) I was not happy about it either. I did not plan it. Every parent expects her/his children to have a wedding before they have children (.) I expected it of myself too. But not to talk to your child for months and ignoring her, pretending as if she is not there even when she is, is very sad. If people outside the family treat you bad because you are pregnant before marriage, you can handle it if your family accepts you. But even my own sisters were ashamed of me! They should be angry, disappointed or whatever, but I had expected them to make peace with it and accept me nonetheless. Well, they didn’t. I keep wondering that if they had been a little bit nicer, I would not have been thinking so much and my son would still be alive.

10. You were working at the time you became pregnant. How do you think this contributed to or influenced how your family, friend, colleagues, yourself and other people reacted to you?

Well, it was not as if my child would be a burden to anyone. At the time, I had a teaching certificate and had been teaching for two years. Many parents get upset when their children get pregnant before completing high school for instance because it means they will not be able to finish their school and find a good job. I was 26 years old (.) but then they would say, "If you have come that far why give up now?"

11. Do you think they would have reacted differently had you not been working? How?

It is difficult to say because the way they reacted I expected it to be for someone who is not working. Maybe it would have been worse maybe not. I do not know.

12. Do you think that being married is important in our society?

Yes I think marriage is very important. The kind of respect that a married woman gets from people is not the same as what people like me receive.

13. How do you manage with not being married in a society that values marriage?

It is not easy. I hate not been married and it gets worse especially when a married man makes a pass at me[scratch in the head] (.) which happens a lot these days. Maybe they have noticed that no one would marry me (.) that I am not worth marrying.

14. Do you see marriage as an important aspect of a woman's life? How so/ why not?

I believe that marriage is very important for a woman and a woman without a husband is like a sheep without a shepherd. A woman should always be a virgin at the time of marriage.

15. How do you see yourself in the future? What are your future plans, dreams, expectations etc.? Do you think they can be realized/ come true?

(.) It would be so much better if I get married. I also want to give my daughter a proper family. But I also have to be realistic, I don't stand a better chance of getting married. Maybe I should just get used to the idea of being alone.

16. Do you think your life would have been different today had you not become pregnant?

I am sure it would have been different. I am sure I would be a married woman today, with a number of children I suppose. On the other hand, I do not think I would have gone to university and gotten a degree. Many of the people I know never did. Even the friend I told earlier got married in 1993, of course she did not invite me, now has four children but never went back to further her studies. I am well off than she is and that kind of makes me feel good.

17. Which group do you belong to? Do you feel completely belonging to this group?

Ah, I do not really belong to any particular group other than a political party. I used to belong to the young women group of our congregation, but that is only for women who are not married and do not have children. Once I became pregnant, I no longer fit in that group and the next group is only for married women. Unmarried mothers do not have a group. Since I finished at UNAM, I have also been working very far from home and only go there every once in a while. In a way I have also not been in touch with my congregation.

18. Do you have friends? How often do you see them?

Well, I do have new friends. The old ones are mostly gone. Most of my friends now are people like me, women with children who are not married. It is difficult to make friends with married women. Even those who were your friends before, once they get married they find themselves new friends among married women. Maybe their husbands think that you would be a bad influence to them. Married women as friends would forever irritate you with stories of their husbands. My husband this my husband that, even though most of the time they are lying, they can also make you feel incomplete or something. Amongst ourselves, we tease each other, joke about our situation and one does not feel judged or different. Some of my friends are nearby and we see each other almost everyday, others are far and sometimes they or I would call every once in a while.

19. How do you see yourself today in terms of your work, of being a mother and in relation to friends?

I enjoy my work because I like teaching. I do not think that I am a good mother though. Sometimes I wish (.) sometimes I wish that child was a boy you know, then maybe I would make peace with losing my son. I don't even stay with her, she has been with her father and his parents since the age of two. I do see her every once in a while mostly during school holidays for a few days. I do support her financially but she is closer to her father than she is to me.

20. Are there certain things (ceremonies, rituals etc.) that you cannot participate in because you are not married?

Sometimes people would make you feel unwelcome or unworthy of being there. Say at ceremony. For instance, when my elder sister's first born got married in December, they had this 'committee' for organizing the wedding. It included all three of them, plus some of our cousins, all married. They would have meetings with the girl discussing God knows what. Then one day I asked two of my sisters about it and why I was not included. Then one of them asked me "what would you tell her?" I was hurt because it means that because I am not married, I have nothing meaningful or important to contribute. It is as if they are trying to say I am stupid. Yet they expected me to spend a lot of money on the wedding in which I felt left out. I felt like I am only a financial source for them, and beyond that, I am nothing.

The only ceremony/ritual that in our culture I am not allowed to attend that I know of is when there is a wedding, the night before the wedding, all the married women in

the family hold what is known as ‘**etanda**’ during this time, the godmothers from both side dress up their child and they sing and dance specific songs and dances, competing in making contributions to see who gives the highest contributions. The godmother would have also invited her friends who are married women to help in the contribution. Early the next morning before sun rise and before the bride is dressed to go to church, they again wake her up, pass her through the back of the homestead and while chanting and dancing, they would take her around the homestead. After that, she is then taken to the kraal to be shown the cattle that her relatives, usually her uncles have brought, then, she is usually asked to say which cattle are to be slaughtered. Unmarried women are not allowed to take part or even attend this ritual. If a never married woman’s daughter is getting married, then a married aunt or even the grandmother would have to take the mother’s place at the ritual.

21. Do you see yourself as contributing to your society? Do you feel that society appreciates your contribution?

I see myself as a good teacher and in that sense I believe I do contribute to my society. Parents normally ask me to give extra classes to their children because I teach two of the most problematic subjects; English and mathematics. So I think the society does recognize and perhaps appreciate my value.

22. Does the father of your child see her/him regularly?

Refer to question 19

23. Are you still together with the father?

Yes we are still together. I guess it is a little bit difficult to break up.

24. Is he married?

No, not yet.

25. Do you think he will marry you?

Ah, (.) no, I do not think so. [laughs] Anyway we have quite a number of problems. For instance I think he feels uncomfortable with me being educated and earning more money than he does. You would find that he sometimes does not want to spend any money on the child and would still expect me to buy him things and would really sometimes become verbally abusive if I don't. I just feel that if we are to get married, it will become worse. He has not asked the question yet, but I will definitely not marry him. I want to break up with him.

26. Demographic information

Age: 38.....
Level of education: University Degree
Job: Teacher
Salary scale: N\$ 79000 - 135000
Denomination: Catholic

27. Do you go to church on regularly basis?

I do go every once in a while.

Case 2. “Lahja”

1. What were your plans, wishes, dreams for the future before you became pregnant?

As a young person, a teenager, I had always imagined myself getting married and then have my children. However, by the time I was about twenty-three, I had also decided that I would have my baby before the age of thirty whether I was married or not. After I became pregnant and after the birth of my daughter, a lot of things changed. Ideally, I still wanted to get married of course but after the pregnancy and my baby, marriage was no longer part of my plan. I felt that now I have to concentrate on bringing up my child. I still had the aim of having my house, for me and my baby.

3. How did you react to the pregnancy?

At the very beginning I felt disappointed that I am now pregnant before marriage and I thought I would become pregnant at the age of twenty-nine if I was not married by then. Now I was only twenty-seven. After a while, I started accepting it as a part of life. I am not the first to do it and I will definitely not be the last. I never even thought of having an abortion.

6. How did your parents/family react to your pregnancy? Your friends? Neighbors? The church? Place of work?

I was afraid of telling my parents. I did not know where or how I would start. As a result, I did not go to tell them myself, I sent one elderly woman who is a family

friend, to go and tell them. I was staying at the nursing home at the time, far from home. As to how they reacted at the time, I would not be able to tell because I was not there. When I went to see them, they did not show me any negative reactions, maybe they just accepted what has happened. Perhaps they did feel sad or disappointed, almost every parent would feel like that.

About my friends, well, some did not have a problem with my pregnancy, while others do not greet me up to this day, meaning our friendship ended just because they feel that they cannot hang around 'oshikumbu'. But I am not worried about them because I feel that that is their problem.

It is difficult to really now how the neighbors felt since I was not in contact with them or rather in a position to talk with them in order to know how they really feel. It is only when you hear that people are saying this and that. Like they would say, 'a pastor's daughter getting pregnant before marriage' things like that. But I was not really worried because to me, they were not really important.

I think the church also just accepted it or maybe it was because I was not near our congregation or the fact my father is the pastor of our congregation might have made things easier (.) I cannot really say why they did not make a big fuss about it.

At work, oh, up to today, there are still people who would just insult me or use vulgar language towards me for no reason.

7. Did their reactions affect you? How did their reactions make you feel?

Yes, definitely! Especially at the very beginning I felt like I expected some people especially those from work because you think they are educated and are or should be open to many things. It used to make me feel bad especially when they make me feel like I am less important than them.

8. Had you expected them to react differently? How?

I thought my parents would be very angry, disown me, or something you know, especially my father being a pastor and not to mention that all my four sister were married. I was really surprised when they did not say much.

9. When you became pregnant before marriage, did people change their behaviors towards you? How? Are they still behaving like that?

Some did and they still treat me differently but it is difficult to say how. Sometimes it is like they make you feel you are less important or just give you this attitude. Others did then but had since changed, yet others never changed their behaviors and they are still the same. Some people would treat me differently but perhaps it has nothing to do with the fact that I have a child before marriage.

10. You were working at the time you became pregnant. How do you think this contributed to or influenced how your family, friend, colleagues, yourself and other people reacted to you?

Ah, I do not think that the fact that I was working has anything to do with how people reacted to my pregnancy. I do not think it has anything to do with work. I think it just has to do with people's understanding and feelings. I think their reactions would have been the same even if I was not working.

12. Do you think that being married is important in our society?

Marriage, hmm, in today's times? Maybe [laugh]. But I think that marriage maybe was important at a certain point in earlier times but I do not see its importance any more. Those who get married, they only stay in marriage for at the most, a year and the marriage is over. What is the importance of marriage there?

14. Do you see marriage as an important aspect of a woman's life? How so/ why not?

I do not think that marriage is an important aspect of a woman's life. Even though I have no one to share my bed because I am not married, I have got a lot of benefit than those who are married. One only hears a lot of bad things in marriage such as wife battering and men not respecting their wives. Plus you no longer use your money as you see fit (.) sometimes you even get beaten because of your money. Sometimes even if he does not beat you, he behaves and lives like a child who does not have a job. It would just be your money buying this and that. Nowadays, there is even a disease and all men is sleep around. Oh, no!

15. How do you see yourself in the future? What are your future plans, dreams, expectations etc.? Do you think they can be realized/ come true?

I am just planning to further my studies and to give the best education to my daughter. I also plan to build us a house. These are the most important things to me now and I believe I will achieve them.

16. Do you think your life would have been different today had you not become pregnant?

Maybe I would have been married with three or four children that I cannot maintain. The husband [negative] most probably is very difficult and there is no peace in the house. Maybe I would be divorced or separated (.) I do not really know, but with what is happening around the country, I do not think my life would have been better than it is now. The man who was supposed to marry me, the father of my child, his marriage is in a mess. What guarantee do I have that he would not have done the same to me? Maybe this was a blessing in disguise.

17. Which group do you belong to? Do you feel completely belonging to this group?

There is no specific group that I belong to except political parties and unions. But I do have friends, some are married, some are unmarried and most of them are mostly around here so I see them quite often. Sometimes a group of us would get together, for a braai or just drinks or go to the village.

19. How do you see yourself today in terms of your work, of being a mother and in relation to friends?

I think my life is quite good now. I am working, and I can afford to take care of my daughter. I love my daughter and I feel that her life and living standard is much better than that of some children from married families, even where both the husband and wife are working. Most of the time you find these married people forever having money problems, failing to pay their children's school fees or other necessities. They are always the ones borrowing money. I know because I have close friends who are married you know. I also feel that my life is good because I have friends that I now know are true friends. Some of them were my friends before I became pregnant and some are now even married and those whom I befriended later. But I know for sure that they are true friends, friends that I can trust.

20. Are there certain things (ceremonies, rituals etc.) that you cannot participate in because you are not married?

Not really, unless in situations where you find that a certain person that you considered as a friend but you will just hear a person is married without inviting you. But I think that that is a personal issue, it has nothing to do with culture.

21. Do you see yourself as contributing to your society? Do you feel that society appreciates your contribution?

I feel that I have a lot to give to my community and I feel that the community recognizes that. Sometimes you find that a person that I do not know would bring me gifts saying that I has received and treated them kindly at the hospital on a certain

day, which I possibly would not remember. This in a job where nurses are just seen as rude I take to mean appreciation.

22. Does the father of your child sees her/him regularly?

The father of my child does not see her. In fact, he does not know her but that is a very long story. In short, what happened was, he had promised to marry me. Then I became pregnant, not that I or we had planned to. After the birth of the child, he just went and married someone else. When I decided to break up with him, he seemed to be surprised because he apparently expected me to continue seeing him even though he was married (.) because I have his child. We have not spoken for about six years. Maybe each thinks the other one is at fault even though we might both be wrong.

25. Do you intend to get married in the future?

Marriage is no longer something I think about these days, I am not even interested in men. I have not been in a relationship since I had my child.

26. Demographic information

Age: 35

Level of education: Diploma in Nursing.....

Job: Nurse

Salary scale: N\$ 45000 -60000

Denomination: Lutheran

27. Do you go to church on regularly basis?

Not really.

APPENDIX B Interview Guideline

1. What were your plans, wishes, dreams for the future before you became pregnant?

2. Has becoming pregnant changed any of those plans?

Made the realization/attainment of some of your goals impossible? How, in which ways? Made it possible to attain certain goals? (New?)

3. How did you react to the pregnancy?

4. Since then, have you ever regretted getting pregnant? Why? Why not?

5. Did you ever think of getting rid of the pregnancy while pregnant?

6. How did your parents/family react to your pregnancy?

- Friends
- Neighbors
- Church?
- Other people, institutions/ organizations or place of work?

7. Did their reactions affect you? How did their reactions make you feel?

8. Had you expected them to react differently? How?

9. When you became pregnant before marriage, did people change their behavior towards you? How? Are they still behaving like that?

10. You were working at the time you became pregnant. How do you think this contributed to how people (Family, friends, colleagues, others, and yourself) reacted to you?

11. Do you think they would have reacted differently had you not been working? How?

12. Do you think that being married is important in our society?

13. How do you manage with not being married in a society that values marriage?

14. Do you see marriage as an important aspect of a woman's life? How so/ why not?

15. How do you see yourself in the future? What are your future plans, dreams, expectations etc.? Do you think they can be realized/ come true?

16. Do you think your life would have been different today had you not become pregnant?

17. Which group do you belong to? Do you feel completely belonging to this group?

18. Do you have friends? How often do you see them?

19. How do you see yourself today in relation to your work, as a mother, as a friend?

20. Are there certain things (ceremonies, rituals etc.) that you cannot participate in because you are not married?

21. Do you see yourself as contributing to your society? Do you feel that society appreciates your contribution?

22. Does the father of your child see her/him regularly?

23. Are you still together with the father of your baby?

24. Is he married? (if not) then,

25. Do you think he will marry you? **OR** Do you plan on getting married in the future?

26. Demographic information

Age

Level of education.....

Job

Salary scale.....

Denomination.....

27. Do you go to church on regularly basis?