

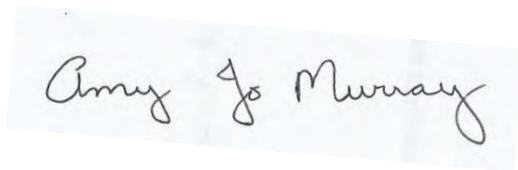
**Maintaining inequality through ‘being silent about’:  
A dyadic daily diary study establishing the presence of  
absence in domestic labour relationships**

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Unless specifically indicated to the contrary, this thesis is the result of my own work.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy Jo Murray". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored, slightly textured paper background.

Signed: 22 July 2015

## **Acknowledgements**

I am a stay-at-home-mom who moonlights as an academic (literally during moonlight hours). God has given me the work of caring for my 3 little girls and the work of this thesis, both of which I am grateful for. However, my thesis work could not happen without considerable help from others in the work of caring for my children. I am incredibly grateful for my wonderful team of babysitters, especially Grandpa and Grandma Schladenhauffen and Nana and Oupa Murray. I also deeply appreciate the communities that have supported, encouraged and shown interest in both of these works, specifically my church family at Church on the Ridge, the staff within the psychology department and the extended Murray family clan. Of special note among my caring friends are Jane, Sarah, Donné, Karmini and Debbie.

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“Seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God” Micah 6:8

## **Abstract**

Domestic labour relationships are structured by entanglement issues of gender, class, race and informal labour, producing profound inequality. This daily diary study accessed five domestic labour pairs, comprised of white employers and black live-in workers, to discursively establish and examine the presence of absence regarding inequality in their talk. However, because „being silent about“ is an atypical form of silence, it was necessary to first establish the empirical status of this absence. Absence can be conceptualised and analysed both as a topic and as an accomplishment of conversation. Generalisations across the data inform a social psychological approach to understanding the dynamics of the unsaid, which also contributes to the empirical status of this silence. The topicalisation and accomplishment of „being silent about“ essentially keeps troubling topics invisible through collaborative, polite talk, allowing the ideology of inequality to remain unchallenged and intact between speakers and within social life.

## Table of Contents

1. The domestic labour relationship.....	6
1.1 The importance of domestic labour .....	6
1.2 Domestic labour as a site of inequality .....	9
1.3 Domestic labour as troubling .....	21
1.4 Silent troubles and troubling silences .....	26
2. „Being silent about“.....	30
2.1 Speaking of silence – definitions and boundaries .....	30
2.2 „Being silent“ – An established silence .....	33
2.3 „Being silent about“ – A different type of silence .....	37
2.4 Challenges and gaps in applied studies of „being silent about“.....	43
2.5 Discursive contributions to an understanding of silence.....	48
2.6 Maintaining inequality through silence.....	58
2.7 The present study .....	60
3. Methodology.....	62
3.1 The personal context.....	62
3.2 Reasons for research design.....	63
3.3 Developing methods through trial and error .....	68
3.4 Methodological lessons to be learned .....	79
4 Making silence empirically evident: Scenes from domestic labour relationships .....	87
4.1 Analysing silence as activity.....	87
4.2 Identifying silence through analysis .....	91
4.3 The benefits of layered dyadic data .....	100
5 A social psychological understanding of silence .....	108
5.1 Violation of expectations .....	108
5.2 Uncertain and unequal levels of shared knowledge.....	118
5.3 Interpersonal impact of silence .....	123
5.4 Strategies of unsilencing.....	127
5.5 Role of third parties in reflection and unsilencing .....	134
5.6 The impossibility of „being unsilent about“ .....	138
6 Silence and the maintenance of inequality.....	142
6.1 Silence about hierarchical roles .....	142
6.2 Silence about being silent .....	151
6.3 Silence about the nature of domestic labour .....	163
7 Conclusions.....	177

7.1 Contributions.....	177
7.2 Proposed intervention .....	182
7.3 Strengths and limitations.....	183
7.4 Future research.....	185
8 References.....	188
Appendix A – Informed consent contract.....	200
Appendix B – Diary entry guidelines .....	205
Appendix C – Interview schedule.....	207
Appendix D – Transcription conventions .....	210
Appendix E – Research Ethics Committee Approval Letter .....	211
Appendix F – „Turnitin“ Originality Report .....	212

# 1. The domestic labour relationship

## *1.1 The importance of domestic labour*

The need for domestic labour is common to every household. Housework and chores are essential and never-ending. There are dishes to clean, clothes to wash, bathrooms to scrub and meals to prepare. These tasks are even more demanding when there are multiple members of a household, some of whom may require more demanding and labour-intensive care, such as small children, the elderly or those who are sick or face various physical and/or mental challenges. As Grossman (2011, p. 134) argues, “providing care for a range of different people, and the related tasks that make all of that possible, is socially necessary and socially useful work. In many instances, this work is in fact essential.” The work of cleaning and caring for a household is both common and essential across contexts (Romero, 1992).

Recently, paid domestic labour (hereafter, simply referred to as „domestic labour“) has become a salient topic, both globally and nationally. Policy makers, social justice activists and researchers alike have become interested in the history, identity, rights, concerns and mobilisation of domestic workers worldwide. The promotion of the interests, rights and protection of domestic workers has become such a significant issue that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) focused its conference in 2011 on „Decent work for domestic workers“ (ILO, 2011). By dedicating its 100<sup>th</sup> session exclusively to this topic, the ILO positioned paid domestic work as a global issue that demanded attention from all stakeholders. In South Africa in 2009, the Social Law Project initiated the Domestic Workers Research Project, which focused on “researching options for empowering and protecting domestic workers based on recognition of their role in the economy” (Domestic Workers Research Project, n.d.), resulting in the recent publication of a book synthesising the study’s findings (see du Toit, 2013). In the academic arena, the dedication of an entire edition of the South African Review of Sociology (Debating the Domestic, 2011) also testifies to an increasing national interest in the matter. Thus it is clear that the issue of domestic labour is a topic that is worthy of attention and resources.

Domestic labour has been studied from multiple approaches and with various agendas. Yet one may ask the simple question: Why? Why such interest in something as mundane as paid

domestic labour? Why is it attracting so much attention from so many diverse parties? Quite simply, domestic labour crystallises within the private spaces of the household the inequalities that exist within the wider socio-political context (Cock, 1980; Hansen, 1989; Rollins, 1985; Romero, 1992).

Paid domestic labour is a major source of employment for South African women, with the numbers of domestic workers ranging from 861 000 (Statistics South Africa, 2013, p. xi) to 1 150 000 (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2013). The majority of this workforce is comprised of black women, who are employed largely by white households. As a result, domestic labour is an important site of contact between poor, African women and middle- to upper-class white households. This is largely because domestic work is an intersection of race, class, gender and the fundamentally informal nature of the labour (du Toit, 2010; Lutz, 2011), with additional layers of structural elements such as patriarchy and capitalism that create and maintain structures that lead to inequality on macro- and micro-sociopolitical levels (Moras, 2008; Romero, 1992).

Based on these fundamental characteristics, domestic labour relationships are inherently “hierarchical, asymmetric and deeply charged with idiosyncratic factors” (Hansen, 1989, p. 15). These differences in social relations are “not merely additive; instead the experience of one transforms the experience of the others. Taken together, gender, „race”/ethnicity, class and so on form interlocking, relational systems of oppression and privilege within which there are a multiplicity of identities” (Stiell & England, 1997, p. 340). Furthermore, paid domestic labour occurs within the informal sector of the economy and is thus difficult to regulate and monitor through legislation, largely due to the lack of compliance by employers (du Toit, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997). As Hondagneu-Sotelo (1997, p. 152) rightly states, “the face-to-face economic exchanges that occur between employers and domestic workers in private households occur in a particular structural context.” In addition, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2002, in Motsemme, 2002, p. 653) maintains that “it is only an interwoven and context-sensitive account of power that will enable us to understand the experiences of women”’s differentiated positionalities.” As such, domestic labour and studies thereof are intrinsically complex, dynamic and highly contextual, based on how these elements transform each other from context to context.



A comprehensive discussion of the major structural features of domestic labour calls for a review of these fundamental elements, namely: gender, class, race and informal labour dynamics. At this point, a note regarding terminology is necessary. Some writers refer to the „interlocking“ nature of these issues (see Glenn, 1992), while others refer to the „intersection“ of the issues (see Duffy, 2007). However, I will be using the term „entanglement“ (see Nuttall, 2009) because this term gives a better sense of the messiness of these issues and how they cannot be easily separated. Nuttall (2009, p. 1) describes entanglement as:

...a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with. ... It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication.

When speaking about the entanglement of gender, class, race and informal labour, the image of a disorderly pile of yarn is quite apt. Such entanglement is not easily sorted out and it is somewhat difficult to see where one strand ends and the other begins. That is the nature of domestic labour's inequality.

The entangled nature of these factors leads Cock (1980, p. 231) to incisively note that “this relationship is a microcosm of the exploitation and inequality on which the entire social order is based.” These issues will be reviewed and discussed, focusing on commonalities that are found in domestic labour in most contexts globally, with a specific focus on the post-apartheid South African socio-political context that has shaped its paid domestic labour. Although individual features of domestic labour will be reviewed separately, this is largely for the sake of presentation and creates some somewhat artificial boundaries between issues that are closely linked. In reality, as has been argued above, there is a great deal of interplay between these facets. The ways that these issues feed into and transform each other will be discussed in an attempt to understand the unique work of domestic labour.

Examining the structural dynamics between employers and labourers will lead to a deeper understanding of the troubled and troubling nature of domestic labour relationships within post-apartheid South Africa. This notion is reflected by Romero (1992) who rightly argues that “housework provides a fertile area to study inequalities between groups of people

because the act of cleaning up after others is frequently assigned to subordinates” (p. 26), largely based on entangled issues of gender, class, race and informal labour. It will be argued that these dynamics create and even demand particular routines of talk within domestic labour in order for its participants, both employers and workers, to be collaboratively silent about potentially distressing topics. Being silent about particular topics may, in fact, be critical and necessary for the naturalisation of domestic labour norms within South Africa; norms that ultimately maintain inequality.

## ***1.2 Domestic labour as a site of inequality***

### ***1.2.1 Gender***

The study of paid domestic labour has its origins in feminist and Marxist scholarship. Unpaid domestic labour, falling within the Friedrich Engels’ (1884, in Anderson, 2001) categorisation of reproductive labour, was initially “inextricably linked to an analysis of the gendered division of labour and its central role in perpetuating women’s subordination” (Duffy, 2007, p. 315). This analysis grew from the notions of productive and reproductive labour. Productive labour is work that is seen as predominantly belonging to men and takes place outside of the home. This is viewed as „important work“ that is paid and has obvious, public value. Reproductive labour, on the other hand, is largely invisible. It is work that is viewed as generally performed by women within the private spaces of the home. Lutz (2011) states that “within this division, professional employment enjoys high social esteem, whereas the work of caring for the family is regarded as trivial. Thus the gender-specific differentiation also constitutes a hierarchical distinction” (p. 3).

Domestic labour is a critical element within reproductive labour, which is viewed as „women’s work“. Housework involves a great deal of maintenance and management and its processes are largely hidden, often going unnoticed, unless of course the housework is left undone (Anderson, 2001). As Ehrenreich (2002) humourously comments, it is only when domestic work is neglected that it is made visible. Despite the fact that domestic work is essential, it remains undervalued largely because it is viewed as unskilled „women’s work“, it is unpaid and it is seen as a housewife’s „labour of love“ (Romero, 1992). Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie and Unterhalter (1983) argue that domestic labour remains gendered for three

reasons. First, domestic labour is assumed to be a woman's domain. Second, the tasks associated with domestic labour, namely cooking, cleaning and caring for others, are most often performed within households, which is traditionally seen as a woman's space. Third, domestic labour seems to encapsulate the prototypical woman as „wife“, or more accurately, as „housewife“. As such, domestic labour is seen as being almost exclusively within the responsibilities of women and becomes the site of women's oppression by men. This is apparent in much of the early feminist literature on this topic, as is reflected by Ehrenreich (2002, p. 88) who maintains that:

...to make a mess that another person will have to deal with – the dropped socks, the toothpaste sprayed on the bathroom mirror, the dirty dishes left from a late-night snack – is to exert domination in one of its more silent and intimate forms. One person's arrogance – or indifference, or hurry – becomes another person's occasion for toil.

Although there has been a shift in the amount of domestic labour that is outsourced to institutions, such as child care, food preparation and care for the elderly (Duffy, 2007; Glenn, 1992), a great deal of domestic labour continues to be located within the realm of the household and continues to be gendered (Glenn, 1992). The modern sentimentalisation of home, the expanding role of motherhood as essential in nurturing and socialising children, elevated norms regarding cleanliness and larger, more elaborately furnished homes have all contributed to the increasing responsibilities of many middle- and upper-class women (Glenn, 1992; Romero, 1992). Thus womanhood and housewifery have come to include the physical tasks of maintaining the cleanliness and functionality of the household and also caring for and considering the members of that household. At an ideological level, domestic labour is also “concerned with perpetuating culture and society, and the social standing and lifestyle of households” (Anderson, 2001, p. 25). As Romero (1992) and Anderson (2001) point out, what is cleaned, how often and the quantity and quality of the possessions that are cleaned all point to the status of the household.

In addition, *who* is involved in the cleaning can also indicate status and class, which is another important element to be considered within domestic labour as a site of marginalisation. Traditionally within feminist theories, domestic labour was thought to be a “great equaliser of women. Whatever else women did – jobs, school, childcare – we also did

housework” (Ehrenreich, 2002, p. 86). However, the notion of housework as a common, unifying feature of womanhood that could drive the idea of „sisterhood“ among women overlooks the crucial power differentials imposed by structures of class and race.

### ***1.2.2 Class***

According to a study by Milkman, Reese and Roth (1998), class is the most important factor when considering the sustained existence of paid domestic labour on a macroeconomic level and this is despite predictions within modernisation theory that this institution would eventually become obsolete. Milkman et al. (1998, p. 501) state that “the greater the disparity in resources between rich and poor households, the more easily the former can employ members of the latter as domestic labourers.” Therefore, in societies or regions where there is a large gap between the classes, one could expect that domestic labour would be more common. Interestingly, this is also a trend that is increasingly being acknowledged on a global level as the economic gaps between whole nations widens and poor countries are providing domestic labourers to wealthier countries through international migration (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002b).

In emphasising the personal economic interdependence of domestic labour, Hansen (1990) states that “today”s labour process in domestic service turns on the shared need (though for different reasons) for security of employer and servant: the one for the household comfort and protection of material property, the other for economic survival.” (p. 362). However, as Dickey (2000) incisively notes, class is about both economic and symbolic factors. Class is indeed about the material differences between individuals and groups but it is also about access to power, importance and being valued as a person. As members of different classes interact with each other within the relationship of domestic labour, which is situated in the private spaces of middle- and upper-class households, differences in both possessions and power become salient through routine practices. In addition, the interdependence between the privileged lifestyle of the middle- and upper-class woman and her household and the devalued labour of the domestic worker is made profoundly obvious (Glenn, 1992). Furthermore, “rhetoric about class that might appear to be focused solely on domestic interactions in fact reproduces broader class relations and ideologies” (Dickey, 2000, p. 463).

Romero (1992, p. 29) states that “although women are all subject to the imperatives of the market and to sexual domination, their actual experiences reflect their class positions.” This is particularly true when considering domestic labour. While the need for housework and care work remains constant, the resources available to middle- to upper-class women allow them to change their role in domestic labour. For these women, their relationship with domestic work can shift from engaging directly with the „dirty work“ of maintaining a household to managing and supervising a paid domestic worker (Ehrenreich, 2002; Romero, 1992). By hiring someone to maintain the cleanliness and care of a household, middle- and upper-class women can enter the work force to increase the income of their household or engage in community and/or volunteer work outside of the home (Anderson, 2001; Romero, 1992). The work of the domestic labourer allows middle- and upper-class women to engage in these ventures without experiencing the burden of the „double day“, which is the “social expectation that employed women would fulfil their families“ needs through daily activity in the work force and in the home” (Romero, 1992, p. 64).

Palmer (1987, pp. 127-151, in Glenn, 1992) notes that, by hiring a domestic worker to tend to the emotional and manual tasks of domestic work, middle- and upper-class women are able to fulfil contradictory expectations of womanhood, namely domesticity and femininity. By paying someone to take on the physicality required in the mundane tasks of domesticity, such as cleaning, cooking and tending to dependents, the housewife or working woman is free to transcend grungy, routine physical labour and to personify feminine virtues such as being the spiritual and nurturing maternal force within a home, while still accomplishing her domestic obligations through the supervision of a labourer. As Anderson (2002) states, “employing a cleaner enables middle-class women to take on the feminine role of moral and spiritual support to the family, while freeing her of the feminine role of servicer, doer of dirty work” (pp. 105-106). In this way, “hiring a woman from a different class and ethnic background to do the household labour provides white middle-class women with an escape from both the stigma and the drudgery of the work” (Romero, 1992, p. 43). However, from the perspective of identity and relationship, this is not a simplistic transfer of tasks. In her unique and insightful study of the politics of food within domestic labour relationships, Archer (2011, pp. 66-67, emphasis in original) notes that:

...since cooking, keeping a home and caring for children can structure a woman's identity, the delegation of these tasks to other women is problematic for female employers, because it brings nothing less than their identities *as women* into question. Female employers struggle to relinquish domesticity as it affirms them as women, although they are happy to delegate the task so long as they remain in control.

While both the female employer and the female worker are oppressed within patriarchal systems and both are compelled to enter the labour force outside of their homes, their experiences of these forces are incredibly different, largely based on class. For middle- and upper-class women, hiring a domestic worker frees them the burden of housework in order to pursue other ventures while still fulfilling their traditional roles. It is a different picture for the worker. In fact, "simply by hiring a domestic worker, the employer lowers the status of the work that employee does. After all, the employer has better or more lucrative things to do with her time" (Anderson, 2002, p. 106). Thus, by virtue of being employed to do domestic work, these women immediately experience inequality due to class.

Domestic workers must perform the household tasks that their employers find too mundane, disgusting or tedious and then also return to their own households to perform these tasks in the evening or on weekends without being paid (Romero, 1992). In this way, domestic workers experience a „double day“ that includes similar tasks at work and at home, never escaping from the gendered labour of housework. Cleaning tasks can include washing dishes and clothes, cleaning, doing laundry, preparing meals and caring for and cleaning up after pets. In terms of care work, many domestic workers must balance their cleaning along with caring for children, the elderly and the infirmed. Because all of this work is seen as traditionally unpaid, generally unskilled and intrinsically women's work, the labour and value of domestic workers are seen as less important than that of their employers. However, many domestic workers are unable to find alternative employment due to factors such as limited education, limited English-proficiency, which in itself speaks to classist assumptions, and ultimately their need to support their household (Romero, 1992).

Domestic service "provides a setting where class is reproduced and challenged on a daily and intimate basis" (Dickey, 2000, p. 463). It is a face-to-face encounter between people who would not normally come into contact with each other outside of this employment context, largely because of the difference between their economic and symbolic statuses (Dickey,

2000; Moras, 2013). This difference due to class is even further exaggerated when the employer and the worker do not look alike. In other words, when the inequality created through hierarchies of gender and class are interwoven with that of race, it becomes clear why domestic labour is such a site of inequality.

### ***1.2.3 Race***

A great deal of research dealing with the topic of domestic labour focuses specifically on issues of feminism (Fish, 2006; Moras, 2008; Rollins, 1985) and international migration (Anderson, 2001; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002a; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Stiell & England, 1997). While it is crucial that attention is paid to issues of gender and citizenship, the matter of race itself does not seem to have received sufficient emphasis in many such discussions. The importance of the incorporation of race within an analysis of domestic labour is noted by King (2007, p. 24), who states that “the ideologies of racism facilitate the subordination of black domestic workers to the dictates of their employers.” As such, a discussion of race is often fundamental in providing further texture to a clear understanding of inequality in domestic labour. In fact, domestic labour provides a critical perspective of the entangled nature of race with other structural issues, such as class and gender, as employers and workers alike must face the contradictions that their interracial contact gives rise to (Archer, 2011; Glenn, 1992)

#### ***1.2.3.1 International perspectives***

Often it is assumed that the notion of „citizenship“ implicitly includes that of „race“, which could largely be because the majority of research regarding domestic labour is situated in the context of the global North, in regions such as Canada (Cohen, 1991; Pratt, 1997; Stiell & England, 1997), the United States of America (Moras, 2008; Romero, 1992; Zarembka, 2002) and European countries (Anderson, 2001; Lutz, 2011; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2007), all of which are receiving countries for immigrants, some of whom seek employment as domestic labourers. The notion of domestic labourers as international migrants has also been apparent in some Asian countries as well (Constable, 2002; Lan, 2002, 2003a; Muttarak, 2004). There are, however, some exceptions to this trend of combining race and citizenship, namely Glenn

(1992) and Duffy (2007), who have argued for the intersecting nature of race itself with issues such as gender.

Before considering the notion of race as an issue independent of citizenship, it is useful to first discuss what can be learned regarding race from some of the aforementioned literature. Romero (1992, p. 95) states that the issues of domestic labour are “defined by class interests and formed by racial privileges.” Cohen (1991) notes that immigration and labour policies work together to allow white middle- and upper-class households to employ vulnerable groups of women, who are often immigrants and/or non-white based on their marginalised status in society. Katzman (1981, in Romero, 1987) argues that the racial characteristics and distinctions between the employer and the worker have made domestic labour seem to be a suitable occupation for immigrants and non-whites alike. In fact, the vast majority of domestic workers, in both private and institutional settings worldwide, are either non-white and/or immigrants (Duffy, 2007; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002b; Glenn, 1992). In Duffy’s (2007) empirical study regarding the shifts in both private and institutional reproductive labour in terms of gender and race, it is noted that whites are generally in either supervisory and/or more public positions, whereas, non-white workers occupy more invisible positions, indicating the privileging of white workers above those of non-whites.

In addition, relations between employers and workers often still include some of the remnants of the colonial master-servant relationship, such as: the expectation by employers that workers will show appropriate deference (King, 2007, Moras, 2010); patriarchal or maternal attitudes toward workers (Hansen, 1989; King, 2007; Rollins, 1985); the expectation that the worker will tend to the employer’s family’s needs before responding to their own family’s needs (Ally, 2010; Cock, 1980; Romero, 2002); the construction of workers as inherently inferior to the employer and the members of the employer’s household (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2010; Stoler, 2002); and the contradiction between servants as intimate and yet contaminating for the employer’s household (Dickey, 2000; Stoler, 2002).

Romero (1992, p. 94) argues that “racist domination is particularly apparent when the experiences of white and non-white women in domestic service are compared.” Indeed, while domestic labour has traditionally been seen as a transitional or bridging occupation for many white and/or European domestic workers, providing an opportunity to enter the formal labour market at some point, non-white/immigrant domestic workers often experience domestic



work as an “occupational ghetto” (Glenn, 1981, cited in Romero, 1987). Of particular interest is Pratt’s (1997) study, which focuses on the use of stereotypes to create racial hierarchies among domestic workers. European workers are constructed as professionals and nannies that are competent and disciplined, albeit cold, while Filipina workers are constructed as servants or housekeepers who are uncivilised and nurturing, while also being well-educated. While both groups are constructed as child-like, there are differing consequences to this construction, as European workers are incorporated into the family, while Filipina workers are treated with greater degrees of paternalism. In addition, the stereotypes used to distinguish between these two groups also has material consequences such as wage differences and different expectations of workloads. This contrast between European domestic workers and Filipina domestic workers shows how racial hierarchies can be used to marginalise and exploit based on worker race as opposed to worker gender, class or the undervalued nature of domestic work itself.

Similarly, Zarembka (2002) notes that American visa policies regarding domestic workers also allow for the exploitation of women of colour. J-1 visas, largely used for young, middle-class European au pairs, include access to orientation and support programmes that assist in protecting the worker by giving access to community and legal resources. However, A-3, G-5 and B1 visas are used for a wider variety of immigrants, are inadequately documented and monitored and provide very few of the protections and assistance that are made available to J-1 visa holders. This lack of protection can lead to the extreme abuse, isolation and vulnerability of G-5, A-3 and B1 visa holders. Zarembka (2002, p. 149) states that “the different policies governing the temporary workers on these two visa programmes are thick with racist and classist implications.” The comparison between these two programmes indicates how race can be used to create structures of inequality, not only between employers and workers, but even between groups of workers, based largely on race.

Domestic labour is often a site for the most intense and intimate contact between racial groups that many participants will ever experience. Lan argues that “interactions between social groups do not always undermine, but often enhance, the boundaries that divide them” (2003b, p. 526). The racialised nature of domestic labour and its role in reinforcing racial hierarchy are clearly seen in the following striking account by Audre Lorde (cited in Romero (1992, p. 72):

I wheel my two-year old daughter in a shopping cart through a supermarket in Eastchester in 1967, and a little white girl riding past in her mother's cart calls out excitedly, „Oh look, Mommy, a baby maid“.

Clearly, the normalisation of the racialised nature of domestic labour has been reproduced within the private space of the household and is generalised to other, public settings. In this sense, domestic labour, when performed by non-white workers for white employers, serves to maintain racial ideologies that position whites as naturally dominant over other groups.

### ***1.2.3.2 The South African context***

In many contexts, race cannot be separated from the institution of domestic labour and this is especially so in post-colonial contexts. As Lan (2003b, p. 525) has stated, “domestic service, linked to the dark histories of slavery and colonialism, has long indicated class and racial hierarchies in the private domain.” In fact, even in post-colonial contexts where democratic values and systems have been implemented, domestic labourers continue to experience marginalisation and inequality linked to norms of racial servitude (Ally, 2010; Hansen, 1989; Pape, 1993; Stoler, 2002).

Because of South Africa's colonial and racialised history, there is a need for discussion and research that locates the domestic labour relationship within the context of its historical and ongoing structural inequality based on race. As stated by Cock (1980, p. 232), “the system of racial domination is the most conspicuous feature of the extreme inequality existing in South Africa.” Sadly, although this observation occurred during the apartheid era over twenty years ago, it continues to reflect the current reality of post-apartheid South Africa. There is research that focuses on the racialised nature of domestic labour in South Africa, namely Whisson and Weil (1971), the landmark study by Cock (1980), Gaitskell et al. (1983), and, more recently, King (2007), Ally (2010), Archer (2011) and Jacobs, Manicom and Durrheim (2013), du Toit (2013) and Durrheim, Jacobs and Dixon (2014), to name a few.

In understanding domestic labour within the South African context, Cock (1980, p. 181) notes that patriarchal, class-based views of servants that originated from the European context “were transposed to the South African scene and quickly incorporated into a racist ideology that then operated to legitimise a system of domination.” Indeed, Gaitskell et al.

(1983) argue that paid domestic work is largely founded on the demand for domestic labour by white households and the “racist assumption that one or more black servants form/ed an essential component of the „standard of living“ of whites of all classes” (p. 90). This system of racial ideology, combined with gendered hierarchy, has led to black women being the overwhelming majority of domestic workers in South Africa (Cock, 1981; Gaitskell et al., 1983).

Cock (1980) argues that the marginalised and exploited status of domestic workers in South Africa has largely developed as a result of the racial ideology that dominated South African society, creating inequality on a macro-political level, inequalities that continue to be crystallised and mirrored within the micro-politics of this relationship (Ally, 2010; Archer, 2011). Currently, domestic labour continues to be highly racialised within post-apartheid South Africa. The interpersonal interactions between employers and workers continue to be both racialised and racially troubling (Durrheim, Mtose, & Brown, 2011). For example, Archer (2011) notes that employers experience tension between their self-perceptions as liberal, nonracist and intimately connected with their workers, while still needing to exercise particular kinds of control and supervision through ambiguous, unspoken rules and boundaries. For workers, Ally’s (2010) insightful analysis shows how, despite being granted rights, both as citizens and as workers, domestic workers continue to experience their employment as a site of inequality and ambiguity.

As Ally (2010, p. 80) argues, domestic labour is an institution where “the formal power of the law confronted the informal power of the deeply entrenched race and class inequalities between middle-class white „madams“ and their still working-class black „maids“. The result was an institution that remained stubbornly resistant to change.” Thus, while issues of gender, class and race are important within domestic labour, the issue of the informal nature of the labour is also crucial in understanding its inherent inequality.

#### ***1.2.4 Informal labour***

Domestic labour falls within the category of the informal labour sector, which du Toit (2010, p. 208) defines as “work that is done outside the framework of legal regulation, either because it is technically exempt from regulation or (more commonly) because employers do not comply with the applicable legislation.” Indeed, many employers of domestic workers do

not even see themselves as employers at all or their home as a workplace (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1997; Moras, 2008). There is lack of compliance and formalisation of the relationship on the part of employers, largely because paid domestic labour “takes place in private homes and is usually associated with women and unpaid labour, it is often treated as a labour of love rather than „real work“ and is thus devoid of many legal protections that traditional employment offers” (Moras, 2008, p. 378).

In the formal employment sector, organisations and institutions are compelled to comply with labour law. It can be argued that “post-apartheid legal reform reflects a conscious and comprehensive attempt to include domestic workers as workers within the established labour and employment law framework” (le Roux, 2013, p. 34). South Africa’s Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 and Sectoral Determination 7: Domestic Worker Sector of 2002, which deals specifically with the issue of basic employment conditions in domestic labour, all work to regulate domestic labour employment conditions. When combined with an incredibly inclusive Bill of Rights that states the constitutional rights of all citizens, it would appear that, at least on a legislative level, South Africa’s domestic labour sector is well-regulated.

However, as le Roux (2013) notes, “as is nearly always the case with law, there is an obvious gap between the law in the books and the law in action” (p. 34). As Moras (2010) notes, “domestic work positions are often negotiated within the informal labour market, regulated by community norms rather than official labour laws” (p. 239). In a discussion of enforcement and compliance with domestic labour legislation, Bamu (2013, p. 196) puts forward three main criticisms and limitations related to the existing regulation and enforcement frameworks in South Africa, namely: (1) The location of the domestic worker’s place of employment as an employer’s private home introduces significant limitations on the capacities and authority of labour inspectors; (2) The assumption and treatment of domestic labour as a sector that is „like any other“, which does not incorporate the specific and unique conditions of this type of employment that may influence the enforcement of its employment laws; and (3) The introduction of labour rights that are specific to domestic workers may have demobilised and depoliticised domestic workers in individual and collective action in realising their rights. What is clear from these limitations and criticisms is that, while legislation regarding domestic labour is indeed necessary to improve the conditions of domestic workers, they are not by any means sufficient.

When considering the disconnect between the rights of domestic workers and the reality of domestic workers in South Africa, Bamu (2013) points to four main issues, namely: (1) the lack of compliance by employers; (2) the lack of workers' assertion of their rights; (3) the ineffectiveness of enforcement; and (4) the lack of effective collective organisation among domestic workers. These issues all point to the central issue that paid domestic work is not only a form of informal labour, which is already difficult to monitor and regulate, but it is also a unique case because it takes place in private homes of employers and is thus a highly privatised and isolated form of informal labour. While most other labour contexts have a „factory floor“ that allows for collective action when employers are abusing power, unionisation and mass action have been difficult to achieve in the domestic labour sector because of the isolated nature of its workers (Hansen, 1989) and due to state initiatives that have ultimately, if unintentionally, demobilised many collective movements by domestic workers (Ally, 2008, 2010).

As Romero (1992, pp. 30-31) states, “whereas on the factory floor class struggle, and racial and gender conflicts are structured, rule-governed, and collective; between the housewife and the domestic worker, class and race antagonisms are played out at an interpersonal level.” As such, despite the inclusive and specific legislation that attempts to regulate domestic labour, the domestic labour relationship is governed and formed in the idiosyncratic interactions between employers and workers, as their interactions continue to govern the labour relationship. Lutz (2011) argues that, despite modern trends in employment and contract law where contracts are highly formalised and regulated, contracts are largely replaced by a mutual understanding of trust within domestic labour relationships, a trust that can be very difficult to negotiate and maintain (King, 2007). For the employer's part, they have a great deal of power in how they structure the employment conditions for the worker in terms of setting and complying with legislated wages, hours, tasks and leave (Bamu, 2013). As for the workers, their power lies in their agency within the relationship in terms of their coping strategies (Cohen, 1991) and whether they are able to “minimise control and personalism – particularly as these relate to the work process” (Romero, 1992, p. 44). The interplay between the agency of workers and the power of employers creates particular kinds of troubles within domestic labour, making it a site for continued exploitation, resistance and inequality.

In describing the unique nature of domestic labour, Moras (2013, p. 249) states that:

...employer/employee relationships are central to all types of labour exchanges, however in paid domestic work this importance is magnified given both the emotional demands of this labour (including the ways in which it is often structured to replicate unpaid labour) and the informal labour market structure of the occupation.

As will be argued in the following section, the inequalities created by gender, class, race and informal labour make domestic labour a particularly troubling relationship and also silently contribute to its troubles. This is largely based on the (seemingly) intimate relationship between its participants, a troubling intimacy that is used to maintain the inequality of the relationship.

### ***1.3 Domestic labour as troubling***

Based on presentations of her research within academic settings, Romero (1992) notes that, when presenting her research, academic colleagues seemed more comfortable in discussing the macro-politics of gender, class and race rather than considering the micro-politics of the relationship. She argues that “an analysis of the interpersonal interactions between middle-class whites and working class women of colour in the intimate confines of the home creates an enormous amount of discomfort in academic settings” (Romero, p. 164), partly because these same academics are also the middle-class employers of domestic workers. This points to the troubling nature of domestic work relationships for its participants. Decontextualised analyses of domestic labour are much easier to discuss as opposed to a discussion of the intimate, routine practices that take place in this relationship. This notion is echoed by Ehrenreich (2002), who notes that, while there are extreme forms of inequality in domestic labour that can be equated to slavery, many of the troubles and inequalities of domestic labour are often related to “the peculiar intimacy of the employer-employee relationship” (p. 93).

#### ***1.3.1 Roles and responsibilities***

Muttarack (2004, p. 510) states that “relationships between employers and domestic workers are developed at close range and make domestic service a highly personalised and contested

arena in which many inequalities such as gender, race, ethnicity and class are brought to bear.” I would argue that these structural issues operate in the background of the day-to-day interactions of participants in domestic labour. In the mundane, routine encounters between employers and workers, race, gender, class and the unique characteristics of domestic labour as informal labour are not often foregrounded. Instead, there are intense and intimate troubles that are established and maintained as a result of the troubling inequalities inherent in this relationship. The “close range” in which its participants must negotiate their everyday practices give rise to troubles largely associated with roles, responsibilities and relationship, many of which are explicitly couched in language of family and household ties that are structured around hierarchies of gender, class, race and informal labour (Moras, 2013). This interdependency is expressed by Moras (2013, p. 255), who states that:

...how employers and domestics interact is not a side effect of the labour, it is a primary structuring force underlying the labour. Paid domestic work is organised in an asymmetrical manner, which is manifested through the interactions between domestics and employers, likewise the asymmetrical interactions between domestics and employers organises domestic work in an asymmetrical manner. They mutually reinforce one another.

Romero (1992, p. 100) argues that a great deal of the troubles within domestic labour arise because “employers hire persons to replace labour at once considered demeaning and closely identified with family roles of mothers and wives.” This transfer of domestic duties and roles is problematic for both the employer and the worker. Domestic workers are often seen, not as workers, but as an extension of the employer and are expected to perform both physical and emotional labour within the household in the employer’s stead (Moras, 2008; Romero, 1992).

In terms of the physical labour, workers may be expected to perform demeaning tasks or to complete housework based on methods and standards that the employer would not apply to herself (Romero, 1992). Emotional labour is also common in domestic work, as workers are expected to care for the household in the same way that the housewife would or as the worker would care for her own household. This leads domestic work to be seen as „a labour of love“, rather than legitimate paid work (Romero, 1992). Emotional labour may include caring for and raising children, caring for the elderly, caring for the infirmed, acting as a counsellor and

confidante among household members and even to affirm a nonracist identity for the employer (Romero, 1992).

As can be seen from the types of work that can be required of domestic workers, the work frequently exceeds mere tasks and domestic workers are often hired and/or kept based on personality rather than job performance and work history (Moras, 2008, Romero, 1992). Indeed, even when it comes to job performance assessment, many employers are either overly controlling or paternalistic in their style of supervision, based on their expectations that workers need supervision (Hansen, 1990) or they do not explicitly set out their expectations for fear of being seen as controlling and bossy, which leaves the worker with an ambiguous working relationship (Archer, 2011). In fact, King (2007) argues that a fundamental characteristic of the domestic labour relationship is “the contradiction of simultaneously depersonalising domestic workers, by treating them as children, but at the same time demanding their ‚personhood“ in the labour provided” (p. 172).

As is suggested by Anderson (2002, p. 111), “all of these exercises of power, whether through direct abuse, through the insistence that a worker perform degrading tasks, or through acts of maternalism, expose the relationship between worker and employer as something other than a straightforward contractual one.” The relationship often goes beyond a contractual one, if indeed a written contract even exists (see Bamu, 2013 regarding the lack of contracts within domestic labour settings), and much of the relationship revolves around the maintenance of power through the contradictory, complex and covert exercises of power.

### ***1.3.2 Bonds of exploitation***

In considering the nature of the domestic labour relationship, Romero (1992, p. 43) rightly argues that “housewives, whose work is defined as an expression of love, expect a domestic to possess similar emotional attachment to the work and to demonstrate loyalty to her employer.” At the same time, the hierarchical nature of the relationship must be kept from immediate attention in order for the relationship to flow in an untroubled and uninterrupted fashion (Archer, 2011; Durrheim et al., 2014). In order to keep the realities of these inequalities at bay, particular practices become common, if not necessary, within domestic labour to maintain the relationship. Such practices commonly include gift-giving and talk



related to the family-like nature of the relationship. Such seeming acts of kindness and intimacy both bond the worker to the employer and her household and also “opens up that relationship to further exploitation and conceals the power relationships at work” (Moras, 2008, p. 382).

According to Romero (1992, p. 109), “gift giving is domestic workers’ almost universal experience and stands as the most obvious symbol of employers’ maternalism.” Old clothes, leftover food, unwanted furniture and other household items are frequently used to “„buy” and „bond”” (Romero, 1992, p. 109) domestics to their employers, often in place of providing wage increases, leave and other benefits. While payment in kind and gifts are used to create positive bonds between employers and domestics, these can also firmly indicate the inequality of the relationship by positioning the domestic as „needy” (Rollins, 1985) and can prevent the domestic from realising their rights within the relationship due to feeling grateful to the employer for their help (Durrheim et al., 2013). In addition, gift giving can reinforce employer’s ideas of themselves as generous and caring toward their worker (Kaplan, 1987, in Romero, 1992).

Another way in which intimacy is used to create bonds between employers and workers is the common claim that the worker is „part of the family” or „just like one of the family”. Anderson (2001) argues that this familial language is used to negotiate the complex and contradictory nature of the relationship in terms of its intense personal contact and its obvious power differentials by allowing employers to “switch from considering the relationship as contractual or familial, depending on what is most convenient for them” (p. 31). Dickey (2000) notes that the notion of being „one of the family” is a balancing act for employers and workers alike. For employers, workers may become more bonded to the household and may become more invested, trustworthy and dedicated. For workers, employers may improve the way they treat the worker by providing both material and emotional resources. Thus, in some ways, the „part of the family” can be beneficial for both parties as both parties are complicit in the relationship (King, 2007).

However, while „just like one of the family” discourses are incredibly common and robust within domestic labour, the reality is that workers are very rarely actually treated like a legitimate member of the family. In reality, workers are ultimately denied the “privileges and benefits” (Romero, 1992, p. 124) that are afforded the members of middle- and upper-class

households. Instead, certain practices are put in place to effectively distance them from others in the household and to ensure that existing hierarchies and inequalities are maintained (Dickey, 2000). Such practices may include: different eating times, utensils or places; limited worker access to particular areas of the house during her free time, such as the family room; where the worker sleeps and bathes; and whether the worker can invite friends onto the property (Dickey, 2000; Romero, 1992).

As is stated by Lan (2003b, p. 525), “a sense of personal intimacy can make employment relations seem like family ties, but substantial status difference exists between employers and domestic workers.” This is echoed by Moras (2013), who states that even claims of friendship between employers and workers cannot be separated from the labour aspect of the relationship. This is clear from Moras’ (2013) study, where employers considered the potential for friendship with their employee in light of the quality and manner of their job performance. Thus the relationship between employers and workers is clearly hierarchical and interwoven with the labour that has brought participants into relationship in the first place.

Ironically, one of the most obvious and harsh realities of domestic work is the fact that the worker is often separated from her *own* family, specifically when she is employed in a live-in context or when she has migrated to her place of employment (Ally, 2010; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002b; Hochschild, 2002). As Ally (2010, p. 119) states, “while domestic workers are paid to care for the children of others, in doing so, they are constrained in their ability to care for their own.” In fact, Glenn (1992) argues that employers often make demands of workers in terms of physical and emotional labour that hinders those same workers from fulfilling those roles and tasks in their own households. This contradiction is an example of how employers are able to subtly exploit workers.

For their part, workers are not simply passive recipients of the employer’s attempts to bond in particular ways (Cohen, 1991; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Workers can choose to reject, resist or minimise the benefits in kind that are offered by employers in various ways that decrease their dependence within the relationship (Cohen, 1991; King, 2007). According to Cohen (1991), workers can: (1) draw on resources outside of the work situation, which provides connections and relationships apart from their relationship with the employer, although the employer may still be an aspect of the relationship such as when the employer is ridiculed,

mocked or gossiped about with others; (2) develop coping strategies within the working relationship, such as choosing their place of employment, type of employer and the type and quantity of work expected, such as in smaller households or households where the employer is often out of the house, which reduces supervision and monitoring. Other internal strategies may include reducing productivity and by simply receiving gifts without placing any emotional attachment to them; and (3) redefine the relationship in terms that either make the relationship seem more equitable or as a temporary employment situation. Workers can also be manipulative of their employers in an attempt to reap the maximum material and emotional benefits from the relationship (Nyamnjoh, 2005). Many workers attempt to depersonalise the relationship by defining themselves as experts, minimising contact with employers and negotiating the tasks that are expected within the work environment (Romero, 1992). Romero (1992) identifies this as a move from „labour power“ to „labour services“, which she argues as instrumental in domestic worker empowerment and increased control of the relationship by domestic workers.

In describing her study of domestic labour, Cock (1980, p. 181) notes that “within this structure of inequality the nature of the relationship between employer and domestic worker varied from kindly paternalism to extreme brutality. Both sets of attitudes and treatment involved a denial of human dignity.” As such, exploitative kindness that bonds workers to their employers can be as troubling as other more overt acts of maltreatment. The difficulty arises in identifying how the more subtle practices and talk in domestic labour contribute to the maintenance of inequality within the relationship.

#### ***1.4 Silent troubles and troubling silences***

Domestic work is a troubled relationship and also raises particular troubles for its participants. Stoler (2002, p. 133) argues that domestic servants are, particularly within a colonial setting, “the subaltern gatekeepers of gender, class and racial distinctions that by their very presence they [transgress].” In fact, the very persistence of domestic labour relationships can be troubling in post-apartheid South Africa because the relationship and its intimate contact between middle- and upper-class white women and working-class black women reminds both parties of the inequalities of apartheid and the ongoing differences between them in terms of access to material, socioeconomic and political resources (Archer,

2011). By its very nature, the relationship “tends to expose uncomfortable contradictions” (Archer, 2011, p. 74) because it reveals inequalities that exist on the macropolitical level, but then situates those inequalities within the private space of the home within the micropolitics between an employer and a worker (Moras, 2008).

The notion of troubles within domestic labour is common within the literature, as has already been discussed. This is clearly seen in Lutz’s (2011, p. 79) emphasis on the delicate and insecure nature of domestic employment relationships, when she notes that “employment relationships in the private more than in any other sphere are reliant on the ability to establish a mutual relationship of trust. If this is disturbed in any way and an imbalance is created, serious problems arise.” The possibilities for imbalances and troubles within domestic labour relationships are countless. Furthermore, the idea of the difficulty participants have in speaking about those troubles, if indeed the troubles are explicitly acknowledged at all, is also common. Hansen (1989, p. 16), likewise, notes that “since the work experience is rife with ambiguities and troubles, it becomes difficult to talk about it objectively.” I would add that it may become difficult to speak about some of these troubles and inequalities at all.

Through particular practices and ways of speaking about and within the relationship, structures of difference, power and hierarchy are concealed from the immediate attention of both the employer and the worker and therefore achieves the maintenance of inequality (Moras, 2008). Glenn (1992) argues that, by drawing on racial ideology, white middle- and upper-class employers are able to naturalise non-white women as suited to demeaning and dirty work, while also nullifying their womanhood, and thereby allowing the worker’s own household’s needs for care to go unacknowledged. Glenn (1992) concludes this thought by noting that “the exploitation of racial-ethnic women’s physical, emotional and mental work for the benefit of white households thus could be *rendered invisible in consciousness if not in reality*” (p. 32, my emphasis). In fact, Cock (2011) states that, through such practices, domestic workers themselves are made invisible. It is only when inequality is rendered invisible within the collective consciousness of society that the inequalities of reality can go on unacknowledged. I suggest that a large part of rendering troubling aspects of the relationship, such as its hierarchical roles and power imbalances, as invisible from awareness occurs within the absence of how such topics are (not) spoken about (Billig, 1997b, 2004, 2014).

A major and practical absence of discussion is related to the giving of clear, explicit communication of job expectations by employers. Many employers, uncomfortable with their more powerful role in the employment relationship, are hesitant to express their expectations and to provide feedback regarding the worker's job performance because such conversations would make power explicit and may lead to awkward and uncomfortable confrontation (Archer, 2011; Moras, 2008). However, working in such ambiguous conditions may be difficult for the worker to know when they have transgressed boundaries or standards (Archer, 2011) and, when such expectations have been violated, a lack of clear communication on the part of the employer deprives the worker of the chance to make the necessary adjustments or to provide explanations regarding perceived inadequacies (Moras, 2008). Thus, the absence of talk about the work-related aspects of domestic labour may further disadvantage workers as they must operate within uncertain conditions.

In her discussion of the absence and invisibility of race and class within the interactions between employers and workers within domestic labour, King (2007) states that "the significance of the social practices has not been recognised by the participants in the relationship as they have become assimilated into the everyday fabric of South Africa" (p. 193). An important part of the „everyday fabric“ is the talk of South Africans about domestic labour. By avoiding particular topics, such as the issuing of expectations or providing feedback when such expectations have not been met, there is another, deeper silence that is occurring. This silence relates to the hierarchical nature of the relationship, structured through issues of gender, class, race and informal labour, a silence that may be crucial in making inequality invisible within this relationship.

By avoiding the embodiment involved in such discussions, the inequalities that exist between the worker and the employer due to their relative privilege (or lack thereof) based on the entangled issues of gender, race, class and informal labour are essentially "rendered invisible" (Glenn, 1992, p. 29). Similarly, the way that the relationship and its details are spoken about may likewise allow for such differences, hierarchies and inequality to remain as absences within talk. Hansen (1990, p. 369) states that "what employers and servants say about each other [...] reflects the practical experience they draw from their conduct at the workplace, and it helps to reproduce that conduct." Thus examining the talk of employers and workers may provide insights into how their conduct and the inequality that structures that conduct are reproduced in their relationship.

This notion of what is and is not spoken about becomes crucial in both understanding domestic labour and in imagining how it could change. There is a great deal that goes unspoken within this relationship, with some important implications as a result of these absences within talk. Indeed, what is or is not spoken about may be crucial in maintaining the inequality that is so inherent within domestic labour. In her study of domestic labour in Zambia, Hansen (1990, p. 369) notes that:

...their day-to-day trials and tribulations are very much part of the domestic service institution. Their efforts to anticipate each other's moods so as not to upset the precarious balance required in their employment relationship mutes the potential for conflict between them, and the work goes on. The tacit rules they set for themselves stem from their knowledge of how to go about doing things, given the circumstances of domestic service and the nature of the broader economic surroundings.

In this thesis, I will argue that, by keeping silent about the practices and inequalities within domestic labour, those micro- and macropolitical inequalities become taken for granted and even naturalised within society, particularly one such as post-apartheid South Africa. This thesis will explore how South Africans, both employers and workers, are being silent about troubling topics within their domestic labour relationships in order to analyse how such talk is crucial in the maintenance of inequality. However, before such an analysis can take place, it is important to understand how „being silent about“ these important topics should be understood and how such absences can be made present within an analysis of talk.

## **2. ‘Being silent about’**

Contemporary silence research has focused both on theoretical aspects of silence and on contextualised accounts of silence within particular settings, events and intergroup interactions. Within the study of silence it seems that many researchers, in their applied research, do not gesture toward any particular theory of silence or include much discussion around their specific conceptualisation of silence, leaving the reader to use their common sense in order to understand the author’s implied position among the many possibilities regarding a theory of silence. This omission will be avoided within this research as the concept of silence will be deliberately discussed, debated and constructed in order to establish the study’s theoretical standpoint regarding silence.

This chapter will review the field of silence research by looking at various approaches to – and understandings of – silence through an examination of pragmatic, communication studies and discursive approaches to silence. Once the present study has been situated within the field of silence, specifically within the notion of „being silent about“, a number of gaps and challenges present within academic publications dealing with this form of silence will be discussed. I will argue that many of those gaps can be addressed by adopting a discursive approach to the study of „being silent about“, with a critical focus on collaboration and politeness as revealing ideology. Finally, the role of this particular silence within the maintenance of inequality will briefly be examined. In closing this section, the unique contribution of this study and its potential merits in impacting the field will be proposed.

### ***2.1 Speaking of silence – definitions and boundaries***

Silence has been conceptualised along many lines and with many labels, including pauses, hesitations, gaps in talk, stillness, acoustic silence, strategic silence, organisational silence and eloquent or communicative silence. While introducing a collection of works on silence Jaworski (1997a, p. 3) notes the range of conceptualisations of silence that are represented therein:

Silence is discussed as an auditory signal (pause) in a linguistic theory, as a pragmatic and discursive strategy, as a realisation of a taboo, as a tool of manipulation, as part of listener's „work“ in interaction, and as an expression of artistic ideas.

The position and importance of silence has developed from one that views silence as largely passive and meaningless to a conceptualisation of silence as active, meaningful and communicative (Acheson, 2008; Dauenhauer, 1980; Jaworski, 1993; Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985). This notion of silence as actively communicating has been labelled as eloquent silence by Ephratt (2008), which differentiates it from “stillness, pauses, or silencing” (Ephratt, 2008, p. 1913). According to Ephratt (2008), stillness as a mere absence of sound and pauses in conversation that are specifically for the purpose of breathing or conversational planning are not considered as eloquent silence. Silencing is also different from eloquent silence in that it is not chosen *by* the speaker but is rather chosen *for* the speaker and therefore, by definition, lacks the agency and communicative elements of Ephratt's eloquent silence.

While silence has been covered in great detail from various perspectives and with particular academic agendas, there is very little agreement within and across disciplines regarding definitions, categories, forms and functions of silence (Ephratt, 2008), which is not an uncommon phenomenon within the social sciences generally (Donald, 2009, in Billig, 2011). Silence is a phenomenon that is difficult to define and yet is something that is generally accepted to be easily recognisable by both its participants and its observers (Ephratt, 2008), especially when its presence is unexpected (Glenn, 2004). Jaworski (1993) argues that silence “can be graded from the most prototypical, (near) total silence of not uttering words to the least prototypical cases of silence perceived as someone's failure to produce *specific* utterances” (p. 73, original emphasis). As is suggested by Saville-Troike (1985, p. 7), “even what is considered „sound“ vs. „silence“ is a relative concept, so that there can be no absolute distinction.”

This may be why Jaworski (1997a, p. 3) avoids an all-encompassing definition of silence, rather arguing that “we can look at different communicative practices and then decide if the label or metaphor of silence is the appropriate one for their description.” However, I would suggest that understanding exactly what form of silence is being studied is crucial in knowing how to go about studying it. Researchers have taken various theoretical positions regarding



silence, which has in turn affected their approach to the study of silence in an applied context, of which there are many. As such, a fundamental understanding of different types and forms of silence is crucial before entering into a discussion regarding a study of silences.

### ***2.1.1 Kurzon's (2007) pragmatic taxonomies of silence***

One of the complications of defining, describing and theorising about „silence“ within the English language is that “the English term for silence is polysemous” (Saville-Troike, 1985, p. 9). Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines silence as: (1) forbearance from speech or noise; (2) absence of sound or noise; and (3) absence of mention. The varied and broad range of interpretations of the term „silence“ is particularly evident when examining taxonomies of silence, such as Kurzon's (2007) „typology of silence“, which is one of the most frequently cited contemporary taxonomies.

Kurzon (2007) identifies some issues that must be considered when understanding the circumstances of meaningful silence within an interaction and that form the background to his actual typology. He lists five considerations within his topology, namely: (1) the number of people who are participating in the interaction, stating that much of the silence literature focuses on dyadic interaction as opposed to silences among a group of people; (2) the „text“ that is unuttered during or because of silence, defining „text“ broadly as ranging from a one-word oral response to an entire topic or discourse; (3) the distinction between intentional and unintentional silences; (4) a person's presence or non-presence within a conversation, as indicated by their silence as opposed to their physical presence; and (5) the distinction between internal silence, where the silent person has chosen to become or remain silent, and external silence, where the silence is imposed upon the silent person. External silence can occur due to either a particular person or group of people or due to a generally accepted norm, as in the case of taboo topics. While these distinctions may seem somewhat dry and abstract, they are important and useful markers when attempting to understand, classify or describe a conceptualisation of silence.

Kurzon's (2007) typology will be covered briefly here, with a particular focus on thematic silence occurring in the next section of this discussion. Kurzon identifies four types of silences. (1) Conversational silence, where “the silence may be considered equivalent to a

speech act. But we do not know what the [silent person] would have said if s/he had spoken; in such a silence the text is often unknown” (Kurzon, 2007, p. 1676). Examples of this type of silence could include when a person is silent even when physically present or when one answers a question with silence. Conversational silence is often studied by conversational and discursive approaches to analysis. (2) Textual silence is a “social interaction in which the [silent person/s] in a given context reads or recites a particular text in silence” (Kurzon, 2007, p. 1679). This type of silence is one where the text is pre-set by someone other than the silent party/parties, the duration of the silence is the same as the time it takes to complete the length of the text and textual silence is specific to particular contexts. Examples of this silence include when an individual silently reads a text, such as a newspaper or book, or when a group of people silently read a text together, such as a class reading a book or poem. (3) Situational silence often occurs in large groups of people where the entire group is silent. However, unlike textual silence, in situational silence the text is unknown or nonspecific. The underlying feature of this silence is that it is institutionalised, often in specific settings or gatherings such as libraries, funeral homes, religious observances and public ceremonial occasions. Both situational silence and textual silence are relatively ordered through accepted sociocultural norms. (4) Thematic silence occurs when “a person *when speaking* does not relate to a particular topic” (Kurzon, 2007, p. 1677, original emphasis). This silence will be discussed further within the topic of „being silent about“.

## ***2.2 ‘Being silent’ – An established silence***

As has already been mentioned, Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines silence as: (1) forbearance from speech or noise; (2) absence of sound or noise; and (3) absence of mention. The first two definitions of silence can be referred to as „being silent“ or the act of being silent. Literature that focuses on „being silent“ often studies the forms, functions and features of the silence of individuals and groups of people. It could be argued that Kurzon’s (2007) typology largely focuses on „being silent“, specifically conversational silence, textual silence and situational silence. Much of the literature relating to silence focuses on these more prototypical, familiar conceptualisations of silence. The less common conceptualisation of silence, absence of mention, or „being silent about“, on the other hand, has received comparatively less attention. Yet one may ask why this is the case. I suggest that this is largely so because of the empirical status of „being silent“, which has allowed it to become a

more common, well-established field of study. Studies of „being silent“ cover a broad range of silences, such as pauses, hesitations, stillness and gaps in conversation.

### ***2.2.1 Conceptualising ‘being silent’***

Jaworski (1997a) notes that the dominant conceptualisation of silence defines it as “absence of sound” (p. 3). Because the absence of a sound is clearly displayed and present within the interaction, whether or not the participants are fully aware of its interactional meaning and presence (Tannen, 1985), analysts are able to attend to and demonstrate its existence in a relatively straightforward manner. The meaning of the pause or hesitation may be open for interpretation but the existence of the pause, gap, hesitation or absence of sound can be empirically shown. This is a key feature of „being silent“ and is largely why it has been studied so widely and has become the prevailing prototypical understanding of silence within academic literature.

A further fundamental feature of „being silent“ is that “it is always a joint production” (Tannen, 1985, p. 100). Although it seems very obvious that it takes all participants within an interaction to achieve a silence, the phenomenon of „being silent“ can carry multiple interpretations. Silence can be seen as blameworthy, as owned by particular speakers or as broken in premature or inappropriate ways. But the fact remains that “at any point that one person is not talking and thereby produces a silence, no one else is talking either – or there wouldn’t be a silence” (Tannen, 1985, p. 100). As such, „being silent“ is, by its very nature, collaborative.

And, finally, it can be argued that silence can and should be viewed within a framework of what is considered as expected according to particular norms (Saville-Troike, 1985). In this sense, silence is very closely linked to notions of politeness. In fact, Brown and Levinson (1987, in Sifianou, 1997, p. 79) argue that silence is “the ultimate expression of politeness.” Sifianou (1997, p. 79) states that:

...like talk, silence enables people to communicate both polite and impolite messages, but it is not talk or silence *per se* which lead to such implications. It is usually the

absence of what is conventionally anticipated which loads both speech and silence with negative meaning and impolite implications.

As such, the occurrence or absence of silence can present a particular speaker or interaction as either polite or impolite, based on whether or not presence and length of the silence was viewed as appropriate and expected (Tannen, 1985). By viewing „being silent“ as a dynamic aspect of social norms such as politeness, many studies have explored the role of silence within interactions and social settings.

Some examples will be briefly mentioned to show the scope in which silence has been studied and conceptualised. These examples demonstrate the well-established empirical status of studies focusing on „being silent“, largely based on their common assumptions of the absence of sound, its collaborative nature and its role in social norms such as politeness. Interestingly, the application of silence studies is particularly wide and varied, largely because of the broad range of labels used for instances of silence.

### ***2.2.2 Studies of ‘being silent’***

Mushin and Gardner (2009) study silence within Australian Aboriginal remote communities, focusing on the length, spread and interactional dynamics of these silences. In addition, Mushin and Gardner compare their findings to previous findings by Jefferson’s (1989, in Mushin & Gardner, 2009) study of American English and Dutch conversations and Scollon and Scollon’s (1981, in Mushin & Gardner, 2009) comparison of Athabaskan and Anglo-Canadian gaps in terms of standard maximum lengths of silence that are tolerated or seen as troubling or worthy of being attended to within conversation. Mushin and Gardner use conversation analysis to explore Australian Aboriginal conversational style and time each pause or gap in conversation, to show the meaning of being comfortable with silence within conversation. They show that, although these silences are longer than what is often tolerable in data such as Jefferson’s, participants did not attend to the gap in conversation as such silence was viewed as normal. This study shows how „being silent“ is empirically evident through the measurement of the length of pauses and to show how ways of „being silent“ become what is considered as normal or ordinary.

Levitt (2001) focuses on the phenomenon of silence within the setting of psychotherapy. Levitt notes how silence has been appraised differently by various empirical studies as either negative or positive. In a negative sense, silence can be seen as an indication of discomfort (Becker, Harrow, Astrachan, Detre & Miller, 1986, in Levitt, 2001). Alternatively, silences can be seen as a site of therapist empathy (Hargrove, 1974). However, Levitt (2001, p. 295) argues that “silence has tended to be viewed empirically as a homogeneous variable” within empirical studies of silence in psychotherapy. This is largely due to the methodological procedures adopted by many such studies, where pauses are timed and tabulated, leading to contradictory and inconclusive findings across studies. Alternatively, Levitt uses a qualitative approach to focus on the interpretation and experience of pauses by therapists and clients in order to develop an inventory of pauses into seven categories. While Levitt’s study produces insight into the dynamic and varied meanings of silence, the study definitely falls within a conceptualisation of silence as „being silent“ because of the feature of viewing silence as a pause or lack of speech.

In Kurzon’s (1995) study in the context of criminal justice, silence is conceptualised as either intentional or unintentional. If it is unintentional, it may be interpreted or glossed as „I cannot speak“, and is therefore linked to psychological characteristics of the silent party, such as shyness (Kurzon, 1995, p. 65). If it is intentional, this could be interpreted as „I will/shall not speak“, which implies a lack of willingness and is therefore internally motivated, or as „I must/may not speak“, which implies some form of outside intimidation or force forbidding speech and is therefore externally motivated (Kurzon, 1995, p. 65). All of these forms of silence must be interpreted by an audience, in this case by police or the courts, in order to decipher the knowledge and intentions of the silent party. This study views silence as situated within the context of the criminal justice system, which is institutionalised, within a sociopragmatic model of interpretation based on the question-answer adjacency pairing. The study ultimately highlights the situated, strategic and complex nature of silence and its interpretation. This is a classic study of „being silent“ as it aims to formulate a model of interpretation of a silent answer. In other words, the silence that is being studied by Kurzon is one where the person has, for whatever reason, refrained from speech.

Tannen (1985) focused on pauses and silences that occurred in conversations between Jewish New Yorkers and non-New Yorkers. The differing conversational styles of these two groups, where New Yorkers spoke faster, had more overlaps between speakers and therefore had

fewer gaps between speakers, shifted topics quickly and, at times did not take up new topics offered by others, was seen as disruptive, inconsiderate and imposing by the non-New Yorkers. However, such conversational styles were viewed as encouraging and displaying involvement by New Yorkers. Thus Tannen shows how silence can be interpreted as different forms of politeness, where politeness can be seen as “the need to show involvement and the need not to impose” (Tannen, 1985, p 106), which can be evaluated in terms of too little or too much silence within conversation. Tannen also attempts to distinguish between the concepts of a pause and a silence, arguing that a pause becomes a silence when it is longer than expected or when it is an unexpected response. In this study, pauses and silence are conceptualised as delayed response that can be timed in terms of „no speech“. This study highlights the contextualised and social nature of what constitutes and is interpreted as silence between speakers, where silence is understood differently by various groups, based on the expected length and timing of the gaps in speech.

Ultimately, each of these studies is able to empirically demonstrate the presence of silence through methods such as timing a gap in the conversation or by identifying a lack of audible participation within an interaction. Each study implicitly notes how silence occurs as a collaboration between speakers, although whether or not that silence is tolerated or troubling by the participants may vary. In addition, these studies view silence as a social force that can be experienced as troubling, inappropriate or rude or, conversely, as acceptable, normal or polite. Specifically, the measurement of time within studies of „being silent“ allows for the clear observation of the presence of silence, allowing this type of silence to become a well-established empirical field of study.

### ***2.3 ‘Being silent about’ – A different type of silence***

This discussion will now shift toward a focus on the less prototypical definition of silence, i.e. „being silent about“, a topic that has comparatively been given much less theoretical and applied attention than that of „being silent“. „Being silent about“ can be thought of as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of meanings and conceptualisations falling within other terms, such as „unsaid“, „unsayable“, „unspeakable“, „absence“, „topic avoidance“, „ineffable“, „information silence“ and „repression“. Because of this complication in terminology and conceptualisation, the following discussion of definitions and topic

boundaries becomes more than an empty, routine academic requirement, but rather is an essential, difficult and dynamic element of researching, analysing and understanding what is being researched in studies of „being silent about“.

### **2.3.1 Conceptualising ‘being silent about’**

The notion of „being silent about“ has mostly been conceptualised and theorised through Kurzon’s (2007) typology of silence, by Jaworski (1993, p. 98-114) within his account of „political strategic silence“, and in Ephratt’s (2011) identification of „the unsaid“ as an extralinguistic dimension of silence. These three explorations of „being silent about“ will be briefly summarised so as to arrive at a more focused understanding of this type of silence.

In his typology of silence, Kurzon (2007) identifies the concept of „being silent about“ in what he calls thematic silence, which occurs when “a person *when speaking* does not relate to a particular topic” (Kurzon, 2007, p. 1677, original emphasis). This type of silence is associated with a theme, topic or discourse in which “the theme or topic of the text is known, and perhaps the contents are also known” (p. Kurzon, 2007, p. 1677). Thematic silence is therefore a deliberate decision to avoid a specific topic within a “dialogical context” (Kurzon, 2007, p. 1677). Because the decision to avoid speaking about a topic is usually intentional, this type of silence can be seen as internally motivated, although Kurzon also notes that factors such as social forces may also make certain topics more externally motivated. In addition, the focus of the topic in question may be “on a wider rather than a strictly personal topic” (Kurzon, 2007, p. 1677), which also links to notions of sociopolitical forces and cultural taboos that lead individuals and groups of people to keep particular topics within the realm of the unsaid, especially in the case where whole topics and their contents are known to the parties who are participating in this silence.

Jaworski’s (1993) influential work around the communicative and pragmatic elements of silence includes the issue of „being silent about“. Due to the difficulties of a clear meaning of the word „silence“ within the English language, Jaworski (1993, pp. 70-84) utilises Polish meanings for silence, which are more specific and varied. In his discussion around silence within communication, Jaworski makes the distinction between *milczec* („to be silent“, „to refrain from speaking“) and *przemilczec* („to fail to say / mention something“). Jaworski

(1993) argues that silence “can be graded from the most prototypical, (near) total silence of not uttering words to the least prototypical cases of silence perceived as someone’s failure to produce *specific* utterances” (p. 73, original emphasis). Within this graded view of silence, „being silent about“ is therefore less prototypical, which may explain the paucity of focused, empirical research related to this phenomenon.

Jaworski (1993, p. 76) notes that “*przemilczec* („to be silent about something“) is transitive, and it implies that one is silent about something specific, often while speaking about something else.” Schlant (1999, p. 1) describes this form of silence as “absence and silence contoured by language.” The omission of certain information while continuing to provide other, unexpected or irrelevant information is identified by Jaworski as a key element within what he terms „political strategic silence“. This is because it is a useful discursive strategy for furthering some socio-political agendas while ignoring or marginalising others, both on personal and societal levels. An important consideration then is that „being silent about“ something does not mean a lack of talk, but rather a lack of relevant, salient or expected talk.

In Ephratt’s (2011) attempt to map the linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic domains of speech and silence, she identifies the „unsaid“ as an iconic silence, defining an icon as something that “ties together form and content” (p. 2303). Ephratt encompasses Jaworski’s (1993) notion of „political strategic silence“, and Kurzon’s (2007) identification of thematic silence within a wider account of „the unsaid“ (Ephratt, 2011, pp. 2303-2304). Ephratt notes that this silence is not related exclusively to function, as with the notion of „being silent“, but instead is primarily concerned with content. Following the lead of Bilmes (1994, in Ephratt, 2011), Ephratt notes that what is considered as being unsaid is strongly linked with what is considered as relevant or salient within a particular context or utterance. The boundaries of the „unsaid“ are then further explicated by distinguishing the „unsaid“ from what is left out because it is “known, irrelevant, not worth mentioning, or could be otherwise implied” (Ephratt, 2011, p. 2304).

Ephratt (2011) states that the unsaid is unique in that it says something by saying nothing, or that it is a present absence, within interaction. According to Ephratt (2011), the unsaid is characteristic of an intentional omission that “intensifies, rather than it normalises, the presence of that absence” (p. 2304), as opposed to simply being a structural omission. Ephratt notes the issue of relevance within the unsaid, quoting Bilmes (1994, p. 82, in Ephratt, 2011,



p. 2304) who states that one can identify the unsaid by recognising “topics or points that the speaker or the author might have mentioned, things that he might have said, but didn’t, and we note his silence.” In this sense, „being silent about“ is also dialogical, but more complexly than „being silent“ because it implies expectations about content of action, not just the action itself.

In summary of these three theorists, the core of „being silent about“ occurs in a dialogical context where the speaker does not mention a particular topic but instead continues speaking about other topics that are unrelated to the topic that has been deliberately avoided.

Therefore, the hallmarks of this silence are that there is not an absence of talk, as is the case in other types of silence, that is related to content saliency and relevance.

However, Kurzon (2007, p. 1687) argues that thematic silence, or „being silent about“, is simply a “metaphorical expansion of the term” „silence“. Kurzon (2007, 2009) argues for this distinction because, unlike the other categories of silence that he discusses, thematic silence cannot be timed because the speaker does not become quiet or cease to talk but rather continues talking without talking about or mentioning a particular topic. In fact, Kurzon (2009) summarises and more forcefully restates his argument regarding thematic silence by maintaining that, based on the use of time as a criterion for what constitutes a silence, as in the case of „being silent“ as an absence of speech, thematic silence should not be considered a type of silence at all. He includes the example of the agentless passive, which is a case of omitted content, as reason for abandoning thematic silence as “an analytical tool” (Kurzon, 2009, p. 263).

Although Kurzon (2007, 2009) rightly raises the issue of timing as a methodological challenge, Ephratt (2011) strongly disagrees with Kurzon’s assertion regarding the metaphorical nature of this silence based purely on the issue of time and its measurement. Ephratt (2011, p. 2304) argues that by “placing the unsaid in the content dimension, namely looking at the content not said rather than its form (time-consuming), the matter of time proves irrelevant. The absence of mention, when mention is definitely expected, makes this absence become present.” In addition, she notes that structural omissions such as the agentless passive are more often used because the omitted information is usually irrelevant or is generally understood through implication. Such an omission is often utilised as linguistic economy rather than to intentionally avoid an entire topic altogether.

Likewise, Jaworski (1997a) notes that silence can be viewed from multiple perspectives and studied using varied approaches, some of which do not include timed absence of sound or speech. In fact, the notion of “silence as metaphor for communication” (Jaworski, 1997a, p. 3) is used to frame silence as a wide-ranging, diverse and rich field of study that can be studied in an interdisciplinary approach and can include, but is not restricted to, an audible lack of sound, as well as other, less prototypical conceptualisations. This more inclusive range of conceptualisations of silence is explicitly argued for in Jaworski’s (1997b) collection of interdisciplinary studies of silence. As such, „being silent about“ a topic can be viewed as a legitimate, albeit unconventional, conceptualisation of silence.

### ***2.3.2 Studies of ‘being silent about’***

Although „being silent about“ is not a prototypical form of silence, it has been studied in a variety of contexts from a number of disciplinary approaches. There are a number of studies that have chosen to concentrate on an application of „being silent about“ as a legitimate occurrence of silence, despite some of its theoretical and analytical challenges, not to mention its uncertain place within the wider field of silence in general.

Specifically, it has gained currency within the fields of education (Jervis, 1996; Mazzei, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2011), organisational management (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2003a), medicine and nursing (Coupland & Coupland, 1997; O’Malley, 2005; Zhang & Siminoff, 2003), communication studies in the context of friend, romantic and familial relationships (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Bisson & Levine, 2009; Dailey & Palomares, 2004; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Oduro-Frimpong, 2011; Wilder, 2012) and studies focusing on race (Billig, 1997a; Crenshaw, 1997; Hippolite & Bruce, 2010; Jervis, 1996; Sheriff, 2000) and gender (Brunner, 2000; Carpenter & Austin, 2007; Skrla, Reyes & Scheurich, 2000; Todorova, 2007; Vass, 2013). In addition, an entire issue of both the *Journal of Management Studies* (Morrison & Milliken, 2003b) and *Memory* (Pasupathi & McLean, 2010) are dedicated to the notion of „being silent about“. These studies deal with „being silent about“ from a variety of approaches and with varying degrees of empirical emphasis. A cursory review of some examples gives a sense of how „being silent about“ has been dealt with within the literature.

Oduro-Frimpong's (2011) study of silence within intimate relationships conceptualises silence not just as related to a lack of speech, but also as a lack of speech about particular topics. This study focused both on the act of being silent, as in the withdrawal of one partner from interaction with the other partner, and on the notion of being silent about a topic, as when a potentially sensitive topic is not spoken about in order to avoid interpersonal conflict. Through the analysis of individual interviews with eight participants, Oduro-Frimpong identified themes within the interview data, namely the forms, uses and topics of silence. Through this thematic analysis, Oduro-Frimpong offers insight into topics that are avoided by partners and the strategies used to avoid such topics, thereby allowing the potentially conflict-inducing issue to remain silent.

Carpenter and Austin (2007) examine silence within interactions between professionals, such as teachers and medical professionals, and the mothers of children diagnosed with ADHD. They define silence as "what remains unsaid and what is drowned out by what *is* being said." (Carpenter & Austin, 2007, p. 662, original emphasis), thereby clearly falling within the boundaries of „being silent about“. They examine three types of silence experienced by these marginalised mothers, namely: being silenced, which they view as an unintentional silence; being silent, which they view as an intentional silence; and silence, where there is an absence of what is desired to be heard, such as a positive appraisal. While Carpenter and Austin (2007) are definitely working within the field of „being silent about“, it is difficult to comment on their methodology or theoretical stance regarding silence because they do not explicitly spell out their methodology and only give a cursory gesture towards silence theory. In addition, although their study highlights the experience of silence by their participants and the problems that such silences can create for mothers of children with ADHD, the authors do not provide a solid proposal or recommendation for how such silences can be changed, managed or broken to empower the population in question.

Guerrero and Afifi's (1995) landmark study within topic avoidance literature investigates „being silent about“ within the family context in terms of correlations between topic avoidance and self-disclosure. This study draws on questionnaire data gathered from high school and university students to examine reasons for topic avoidance within family relationships. The study tested how gender and generation combine to create particular patterns of who speaks about what with whom and, conversely, who is silent about what with

whom. Reasons for topic avoidance included relationship protection, partner unresponsiveness and social inappropriateness. While a great deal is learned from this study regarding what topics are avoided, with whom such topics are avoided and why the avoidance occurs, Guerrero and Afifi (1995) do not go into detail regarding how topic avoidance is collaboratively accomplished within families. Their study is able to show that topic avoidance is definitely occurring in families in particular ways, yet the process of „being silent about“ is somewhat absent. This same tendency can be found in their follow-up study of topic avoidance in friendships (Afifi & Guerrero, 1998).

Skrla et al. (2000) use a qualitative case study with a participatory research design to examine how female school superintendents analyse and explore their experiences of silences related to gender-based inequality and prejudice within their profession. Skrla et al. (2000) focus on the content of what is left unsaid by their participants who reflected on the maintenance of silence about sexual discrimination within the field of educational administration. This was a silence that the participants collaboratively maintained with their superiors, peers and those whom they managed during the course of their careers. However, Skrla et al. (2000) note that their participation in the study allowed these women to speak about the oppressive nature of the silences that had felt “seemed natural, normal and even healthy” (p. 70). The participants proposed various solutions to the silence around sexism that included targeting crucial stakeholders, such as institutions and groups who have historically undermined gender equality in educational administration. Ultimately, Skrla et al. argue that the solution to the problem of silence is for women within the profession to break their own silences within themselves and with each other. While this study has a number of practical implications for policy and practice within educational administration, it does not explicitly draw on a formal theory of silence to situate it within the field. Instead, silence is a taken-for-granted concept that is straightforward and obvious, both to its participants and to the readers of the study.

#### ***2.4 Challenges and gaps in applied studies of ‘being silent about’***

It is clear from the aforementioned list and examples of published research that there is a fair amount of interest into the area of „being silent about“. However, a glaring weakness of many of these studies is their lack of attention to theoretical and analytical aspects related to the study of this phenomenon, some of which will be briefly outlined below. This lack of

empirical and theoretical clarity in many, but not all, cases may explain why „being silent about“ is an area of study that has not been researched as widely as what would be expected, given its potential to develop a better understanding of social interactions. I would argue that some of the weaknesses in much of the research include: a lack of theoretical framework; gaps in methods; and the difficulty of empirically analysing the absence of a topic.

#### ***2.4.1 Lack of theoretical framework***

As has been demonstrated in previous sections, there is a vast range of studies around silence, with a number of theoretical considerations to take into account. One important theoretical task that must be considered is to outline the boundaries in which a particular study falls. Some of the aforementioned studies go to varying lengths to explicate the content and background of their topic (stress and communication among families dealing with cancer; communication strategies within intimate relationships; identity construction in intergroup conflict; etc.), without stating their theoretical position within the field of silence. While some theorists are interested in the notion of „being silent about“ or „the unsaid“, the forms and functions of this type of silence are not adequately addressed. In addition, the wider field of silence is often not even mentioned or is only vaguely suggested through a few basic references. Alternatively, a definition of silence is asserted but without any particular conceptualisation or reference to wider or related theories of silence. Although the definition may fall in line with the formalised theories of „being silent about“, these links are never made explicit.

As a result of this gap in theoretical attention, the studies related to „being silent about“ are relatively isolated and difficult to identify. This was one of the challenges faced by the present study during literature searches, where it was at times difficult to categorise and prioritise research publications because of their vague or absent theoretical position. It therefore becomes difficult to develop a clear understanding of „being silent about“. This form of silence may be a more useful theoretical tool if researchers placed as much emphasis on its conceptual elements as on the application thereof. In addition, many of these studies do not situate or relate their study of silence within a particular approach or paradigm. The applied research project is considered without reference to a wider field of study or theoretical argument that may explain processes, forms, functions and wider implications for

the study of silence. As such, many studies of „being silent about“ seem one-dimensional and lack the dynamic complexity for which this field of silence has great potential.

#### ***2.4.2 Gaps in methods***

Ultimately, the study of „being silent about“ is one of dialogical interaction (Kurzon, 2007) and is a dialogical accomplishment between speakers. Yet much of the published literature regarding „being silent about“ focuses on or accesses only one participant in the silence, thereby losing a great deal of the complexity that is at play within interactions that accomplish „being silent about“. Daily and Palormares (2007, p. 493) openly admit such a limitation within their study, saying that “topic avoidance is an interactive behaviour, and the communicative patterns of both sides of the relationship matter”. Therefore, it seems research that focuses on „being silent about“ should, in most cases, focus on both parties in a dyad or group to explore their shared, uncertain or unequal levels of knowledge, which may lead to the navigation of unspoken topics. This will potentially provide a more layered and comprehensive understanding of which issues participants are collaboratively avoiding and how.

I would suggest that an underlying reason for this gap in the literature is a natural outcome of the methods utilised by many quantitative studies. Almost all of the quantitative studies reviewed generally used questionnaires or surveys, some of which are set within an experimental framework. Many of these studies access readily available populations such as classes of high school and/or university students. Such approaches to studying „being silent about“ are particularly widespread within the topic avoidance literature (see Afifi & Guerrero, 1998; Bisson & Levine, 2007; Dailey & Palormares, 2007; Donovan-Kicken et al., 2013; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995), which seems to be predominantly quantitative in nature. These studies contribute a great deal to our understanding of „being silent about“ by identifying factors related to: the content of the topics that are to be avoided; which topics are avoided with particular parties, such as parents, siblings or friends; reasons for avoiding or being silent about a topic; and relational correlates such as intimacy and relational satisfaction. However, because of particular methodological choices such as sampling and data collection, these studies are somewhat limited in their explorations of the dynamic, complex and fundamentally collaborative processes inherent in „being silent about“.

### ***2.4.3 Difficulty of empirically analysing silence***

The analysis of „being silent about“ is not an easy task. Johnstone (2008, p. 70) states that “noticing silences, things that are not present, is more difficult than noticing things that are present, but it is equally important.” As has been discussed previously, one of the major difficulties related to researching „being silent about“ is that there are no timed silences. Instead, “they are spaces that are inhabited by so much more that could be said” (Carpenter & Austin, 2007, p. 671). In his own taxonomy of textual silences, Huckin (2002, p. 353) notes that such silences are problematic because the analyst “has fewer formal cues to work with and must compensate with more attention to socio-political, cultural and rhetorical factors.” Similarly, Mazzei (2003, p. 355) states that “it is hard to describe silences as such for they have no clear boundaries, no hard analytical edges of definition.” This makes the analysis of „being silent about“ a difficult task that requires high-quality, clear analysis in order to withstand the scrutiny of critics and interested readers alike. This is largely because, within „being silent about“, there are essentially three parties involved: the speaker, the hearer and the analyst. Thus, there is a need to understand the cultural backdrop of expectation in order to understand the interplay of „being silent about“ between speakers within analysis.

Unfortunately, some studies focusing on this silence in particular are somewhat unclear and unconvincing in their analyses. Some refer only vaguely to the texts that are meant to be analysed and make claims that are not necessarily evident in the data that are presented. Other studies are not convincing in terms of demonstrating what is in fact silent within a text. Although there may be an absence, often only a poor case is made for that absence and for the issue towards which the absence gestures. This is often because there are no explicit criteria for what constitutes a presence or an absence within the analysis.

Despite the analytical challenges, these difficulties should not deter analysts from exploring this form of silence as it may produce rich and meaningful insights into human interaction and personhood. The challenge for the analyst lies in first identifying these absences and then in being able to convince the reader of the absence and its significance. Irvine (2011) equates „being silent about“ with ignoring an 800-pound gorilla among a group of people. He argues that “when avoidance is conspicuous, the unmentionable is implicated. The way we tiptoe

around the 800-pound gorilla in the room can be precisely the way we acknowledge, and reveal its presence” (Irvine, 2011, p. 32). It is therefore the work of the analyst to demonstrate „the way we tiptoe“ around issues, how people speak and interact together in particular ways, which can then reveal the issue around which we are tiptoeing. As Billig (2004, p. 216) argues, “absence is not to be equated with insignificance. Quite the reverse, some matters are conspicuous by their lack of presence.”

It is difficult to prove that something is missing and even more difficult to do so convincingly without a strong case based on the data and the wider “socio-political, cultural and rhetorical factors” (Huckin, 2002, p. 353) from which the data are drawn. Mazzei (2011) also argues that “these silences don’t just appear or happen out of nothing. They are produced in response to the dominant reality of our communities and our attempt to maintain that which we wish to preserve” (p. 664). Researchers must look beyond speakers as decontextualised individuals to situate them within their wider context. This would give the analyst a sense of the socio-political terrain that speakers are negotiating and navigating in their talk. Irvine (2011, p. 17) states that this “demands attention to interlocutors, to discursive contexts and histories, and ultimately to the cultural and ideological settings, the regimes of language, truth-telling, and knowledge in which those speakers and their efforts are situated” (Irvine, 2011, p. 17). This also relates to notions of shared knowledge and its accomplishment and uncertainty within talk (Edwards, 2004). By taking wider socio-political contexts into consideration, it is possible to show how absences are present and hearable in particular interactions. This is an essential step toward understanding and analysing when and what speakers are „being silent about“.

In her work to develop a methodology for studying such silences, Mazzei (2003, 2004, 2007) argues that qualitative researchers must also question and challenge the “conventional understanding of the doing of research” in order to avoid being “constrained within the boundaries of what is traditionally considered to count as data” (Mazzei 2003, p. 357). She suggests that researchers listen carefully in new ways to their participants by being particularly attentive to silences or absences as opposed to discounting absences or lack of mention as limitations of what is being said (Mazzei, 2007). Mazzei (2007) proposes the use of Richardson’s (1997, in Mazzei, 2007) notion of „interior monologue“ by the researcher during interviews and repeated listenings to the audio recordings to probe issues that would otherwise remain “unnamed, unnoticed and unspoken” (Mazzei, 2008, p. 1129).



However, there are also a number of analytical dangers and challenges involved in an analysis of „being silent about“. Mazzei (2003, p. 367) rightly states that:

... a real danger in this methodological approach is our forcing silences to say what we want to hear. It is essential that we listen for the meanings that are present (and absent) and the motivations and sources of those meanings – that we let the silence speak.

Therefore, it is essential that the analyst remains rooted in the data and demonstrates the presence and processes of „being silent about“ from within the data. Absences must be hearable and detectable within the data. This is impossible without strong, trustworthy analysis that is firmly rooted in high-quality data and by conducting analysis that is similar to the steps argued for by Antaki et al. (2003). By remaining embedded within the data and closely analysing how „being silent about“ is accomplished collaboratively between speakers, an analyst should be able to show, not only the process of „being silent about“, but also which topics are remaining silent between speakers.

### ***2.5 Discursive contributions to an understanding of silence***

The aforementioned list of publications represent a wide range of approaches to, conceptualisations of and methodologies for the study of „being silent about“. Each of these studies has brought something to the field of research, each with benefits and limitations. One of the major gaps in the literature is that there is little attention paid to how „being silent about“ occurs. In other words, while many studies have aimed to categorise and theorise the various elements of this silence, few (if any) have studied the interactions and processes that take place when speakers are collaboratively „being silent about“ something. When one considers the nature of „being silent about“ and some of the difficulties in studying this form of silence, I would argue that a focus on collaborative processes from a social psychological stance is a potentially fruitful one, specifically from a discursive approach to the understanding of such processes. It should be noted that, when using the term „discourse“, I am more specifically meaning what has been termed as „interpretive repertoires“, which Wetherell & Potter (1992, p. 90) describe as:

...broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images. In more structuralist language we can talk of these things as systems of signification and as building blocks used for manufacturing versions of actions, self and social structures in talk. They are some of the resources for making evaluations, constructing factual versions and performing particular actions.

At first glance, the use of discursive psychology as an approach to the study of „being silent about“ may seem an inappropriate choice, since discourse psychology is largely known for studying what is said, as opposed to what is left unsaid. Billig (1997b) deals with the limitations of using discursive approaches to the study of absences in his paper that explores links between psychoanalysis and discursive psychology when dealing with the unconscious and repression. He argues that “discursive psychology“s routine procedures of theory and methodology combine to inhibit discussion of the unconscious” (Billig, 1997b, p. 145).

Billig (1997b) argues that some of the accepted methodologies and theories are largely responsible for making the discussion of the unconscious, and also what is being left unsaid, an unlikely topic within discursive psychology. He outlines the two primary assumptions of conversation analysis that limit discursive studies of absences and repression, which can also be understood as a form of „being silent about“, which are that “(a) analysts should try to conduct their analyses from the participants“ perspectives, as revealed in what the participant says; (b) analysts should use what participants say in order to reveal the structural organisation of conversation” (Billig, 1997b, p. 145). These principles assume that speakers are always knowledgeable of the reasons for their actions and the accounts thereof and that what is said in conversational turns is seen as complete as each turn makes sense of the next in terms of what is present within the conversation (Billig, 1997b).

However, Billig (1997b, p. 146) argues that, by “using the text as a sign of something else, which is itself absent in the text, but which leaves traces” and by abandoning the assumption that speakers are always aware of why they act, speak and interact in particular ways, analysts open up possibilities of studying a topic such as „being silent about“ from a discursive approach. Similarly, Wetherell and Potter (1998, p. 385) note that “one of the features of considering variability in discourse is that it enables the researcher to make claims

about both things which are said and those which are not said (sometimes not said with silence, sometimes without).” As Edwards (2006, p. 42) states, “there is a word for everything and a word for nothing.” Within this wider discursive approach to „being silent about“, “what is not said, but could easily have been, and, indeed, on occasions is almost said but then removed from the conversation, becomes of prime significance” (Billig, 1997b, p. 152). Therefore, the following discussion will explore the possibilities offered to studying „being silent about“ by examining previous discursive contributions within the field.

### ***2.5.1 Discursive studies of ‘being silent about’***

As has already been discussed, the study of „being silent about“ has a number of challenges and gaps that have prevented it from becoming a well-established, legitimate, widely accepted field of empirical enquiry. The main challenges that have been identified in the previous section included: lack of theoretical framework; gaps in methods; and the difficulty of empirical analysis. However, many of these gaps have been avoided within the discursive approach by: making explicit, intentional theoretical links, either within notions of silence or with other fields of study; producing convincing and robust arguments through detailed discursive analysis of data; and providing practical recommendations for intervention based on insightful readings of data. Some discursive examples will be presented briefly in order to demonstrate the potential contributions that a discursive approach can provide to the study of „being silent about“.

O’Malley (2005) discursively analyses conversational interactions between women and midwives. Her analysis shows how these interactions keep particular topics from entering or dominating conversation, thereby maintaining the *status quo* of antenatal care in Ireland. Likewise, in their qualitative study analysing talk and interaction, Coupland and Coupland (1997) demonstrate how medical practitioners and the elderly dialogically accomplish particular kinds of conversations that allow for the avoidance of the topics of death and aging. These studies are able to go beyond the categorisations and characteristics of quantitative studies of „being silent about“ to produce interesting and complex understandings of the interactional processes involved when people collaborate to keep particular, troubling topics from entering their conversations.

Sheriff (2000) reviews a number of approaches to the study of silence, critiques such approaches and then explores the concept of silence as a form of cultural censorship. By reviewing other dominant and relevant approaches and theoretical frameworks, Sheriff (2000) successfully situates and argues for cultural censorship within the wider field of silence. This therefore legitimates its study within the field and potentially sparks sound academic interest in future related research. It also succeeds in avoiding vague claims about „being silent about“ that are not supported by existing literature.

Some studies also made interesting theoretical connections between the study of „being silent about“ and other paradigms or theoretical schools of thought. For example, Coupland and Coupland (1997) link what is unsayable within conversations about death and aging and Woodward's (1991, in Coupland & Coupland, 1997) notion of the repression of aging. This link between silence and repression makes their study both interesting and theoretically fruitful. Hall, Sarangi and Slembrouck (1997) draw on Foucault (1961, 1972, in Hall et al., 1997) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986, in Hall et al., 1997) in order to theorise around voice, silencing and exclusion within social work talk. This situates the concept of silence within a broader framework and creates possibilities for understanding the processes that make silence significant and effective. By linking the concept of silence with other theories, the study of „being silent about“ can become richer theoretically and may have more scope in terms of areas to which silence may be meaningfully applied.

In terms of making silence empirically apparent through careful, detailed and robust analysis, Crenshaw (1997) is able to persuasively demonstrate how issues of race and whiteness are topics that are avoided and not mentioned, and yet are hearable, within the discourses of public officials during a political debate. Likewise, by using high-quality extracts and by analysing them in detail by exploring the interactions and discursive achievements of speakers, Coupland and Coupland (1997) are able to convincingly show how the topics of aging and death are either avoided or addressed by medical professionals and elderly patients. Similarly, by stating a theoretically sound position and supporting it empirically with high-quality data analysis, future research within the area can potentially be both legitimated and fruitful.

In terms of interventions based on research, based on a well-executed analysis, Crenshaw (1997) makes specific and practical suggestions for how white academics can be self-

reflexive regarding their advantaged positions through ideological enactment, thereby resisting the rhetorical silence of whiteness and its implicit dominance. Based on the analysis of dominant and silent voices within antenatal consultation, O'Malley's (2005) research is able to comment on the lack of actual change in antenatal practice. Despite various policy changes that attempt to move away from the dominant medical model, O'Malley's research is able to demonstrate how the *status quo* is maintained, even by midwives. This can therefore inform the evaluation and monitoring of future policies regarding women's rights and freedoms in engaging with antenatal care. Through practical and specific recommendations that are based firmly in high-quality data analysis and findings, research around silence can make useful and beneficial contributions in the areas of social change and justice.

From this brief review of discursive studies of „being silent about“, it is clear that the discursive approach has a great deal of potential in meeting some of the challenges inherent in empirically establishing „being silent about“. However, it is also important to draw on a specific theoretical stand within the discursive approach and, for this, I will draw on Billig's (1997b, 2004, 2014) theory of dialogic repression.

### ***2.5.2 Billig's notion of dialogic repression***

Billig (1997b, 2004, 2014) provides a useful framework for conceptualising, analysing and understanding what is sayable and what is unsayable, what can be uttered and how and what must remain silent, within forms of social life. This framework ultimately deals with „being silent about“ as it links topic avoidance with the notion of repression. Billig develops a theory of repression that simultaneously acknowledges the contributions of Freud, while also addressing gaps within Freud's theory of repression. While Freud focused on repression as linked to the biological factors of sexuality and aggression with little focus on *how* repression occurs, Billig views repression as fundamentally social in its nature. He focuses on repression as being linked with language in order for dialogic repression to be established and maintained both within and between individuals. It can be argued that Billig's account of dialogic repression falls within the conceptualisation of „being silent about“ that has already been discussed. It is similar to Jaworski's (1993, p. 76) clarification that “the mere presence of words does not warrant perceiving someone as nonsilent. By the same token, speaking does not always imply saying anything or everything.”

### ***2.5.3 How does dialogic repression occur?***

While many psychoanalysts study „being silent about“ in the form of repression, it is commonly discussed in terms of mysterious occurrences that happen inside of the mind of the person who is experiencing repression (Billig, 1997b). Billig (2004) notes that these metapsychological approaches to the study of people and their social interactions are often theorised in terms of structures such as the id, ego and super-ego and their interplay. However, in conventional theories of repression, this causes two problems.

First, the use of nominalised terminology can lead to a lack of clarity as the nominalised word is given agency within psychological theory (Billig, 2011). Johnstone (2008, p. 56) describes nominalisation as “using as nouns words that can also be used as verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.” The term itself becomes the active agent (i.e. „repression is able to...“) as opposed to the person or people who are being described (i.e. „by repressing, he/she was able to...“). In this way, “instead of describing what people do, Freud presents repression as an object that somehow emerges mysteriously and takes control of the person” (Billig, 2011, p. 11). This may explain why Freud never presented his thoughts on how repression takes place. While Freud argued strongly for the role and force of repression within psychoanalysis, he was much less clear on the process of repression (Billig, 1997b, 2004). Second, by using the classical structural elements of psychoanalysis, namely the id, ego and super-ego, these imaginary entities become real forces within the theory of psychoanalysis and repression, real forces that are active in repressing troubling issues, rather than showing how people actively go about repressing such issues (Billig, 2004).

Billig’s solutions to these gaps in the literature are to focus on language and conversation in order to study how people collaboratively are silent about topics, or how they „dialogically repress“ troubling topics (Billig, 1997b, 2004, 2014) and to write clearly about the processes of repression in terms of the activities of people as opposed to the activities of „repression“ (Billig, 2011). Therefore, Billig (2004, p. 54) argues that:

...repression [and, by implication, „being silent about“] might be considered as a form of changing the subject. It is a way of saying to oneself „talk, or think, of this, not

that“. One then becomes engrossed in „this“ topic, so „that“ topic becomes forgotten, as do the words one has said to oneself in order to produce the shift of topic”.

He therefore states that, ultimately, „being silent about“ occurs through language (Billig, 1997b, 2004, 2014). This occurs both through inner speech, such as in thought, and in forms of ordinary social life between people.

Billig draws on conventions of discursive psychology, such as turn-taking, shifts in topic and discontinuity markers in order to explain how repression occurs through language. Billig (2004) argues that two rhetorical elements are at play in order to successfully accomplish dialogic repression. First, the use of discontinuity markers indicates that a shift in topic is occurring. Second, the troubling topic must be seamlessly replaced with a different topic in order to shift attention away from the troublesome topic. It is in this way that a noticeable silence can be avoided. Without the shift toward a new topic, the shift away from the former topic is noticeable and can be troubling both for the speaker and for the conversation in which the speaker is engaging (Billig, 2004). Such shifts in topic can become so habitual and routine that the silenced topic is kept completely beyond the speakers“ immediate attention.

In this sense, „being silent about“ is conceptualised as dialogical accomplishments within and between people that involves the collaborative silencing of certain troubling topics by replacing them with other, more acceptable ones and through socially acceptable conventions such as politeness (Billig, 2004). This can be seen in O‘Malley“s (2005, p. 52) study of the role of „being silent about“ within antenatal care, where “occasionally the unspoken becomes the spoken, and topics which usually dwell in the realms of the unspoken enter the discourse.” However, O‘Malley (2008) notes that such challenges are “short-lived and the *status quo* quickly re-established so that the „harmony“ of the interaction is preserved” (pp. 52-53). In this way, O‘Malley shows how silence keeps challenges to the *status quo* from being discussed in conversation between people, thereby keeping troubling topics at bay. As Billig (2004, p. 56) argues, “repression stands a better chance of success if it involves outer dialogue. That way, other people can be enrolled into its accomplishment. It is even better still if the repression becomes sedimented into habits of life, so that repression becomes a repeated, habitual dialogic activity.”

#### ***2.5.4 Ideology seen through collaboration and politeness***

While a study of „being silent about“ within specific interactions is in itself interesting, it does not seem enough to simply remain within the context of isolated instances of conversation if a discursive approach to „being silent about“ is to make a meaningful contribution to the field of social psychology and the society it seeks to understand. Instead, a critical understanding of „being silent about“ should also draw on and consider how wider ideological forces are at play within interactions by aiming “to discover how shared patterns of action might be preventing other patterns from occurring” (Billig, 2014, p. 152).

From the aforementioned conception of „being silent about“ as topics that are being avoided, I propose that there are two important elements that should be highlighted in order to come to a more focused, critical understanding of silence, namely the importance of collaboration and politeness. Through collaboration and politeness, particularly troubling topics and ways of interacting are kept from the immediate conversational context and thereby remain unsaid, allowing significant absences to be maintained. Such absences can gesture towards the taken-for-granted common sense of participants, thereby revealing the ideology that underpins such interactions (Billig, 2014).

First, as competent members of society, speakers routinely engage with each other in appropriate, polite ways by adhering to established norms of what is sayable and how such topics should be spoken about. Conversely, politeness may also provide the tools to avoid certain topics between speakers (Billig, 2004). The topics and the tools may vary from culture to culture or society to society, but the routines of conversation, as can be seen in politeness, allow for particular topics to remain unsaid. In Billig’s (1997a) analysis regarding talk about the British Royal Family and prospective marriage partners, British participants spoke in particular ways about race. Because race is a troubling topic that is difficult to speak about in relation to the Royal Family, which can be seen as a representation and reflection of what is central to a white British identity, participants politely steered away from or pushed aside explicit references to whiteness. Such avoidance was largely seamless as participants drew on routine ways of speaking to politely navigate around the troubling topic, keeping it within the realms of silence. Through the use of a discursive approach to the study of „being silent about“, one is able to “investigate how routines of talk can prevent the utterance of themes /



accounts / questionings, which might seem reasonable to outsiders but which are collaboratively avoided by the particular speakers as a localised form of politeness” (Billig, 1997b, p. 152).

Second, because politeness can be viewed as shared codes for speaking (Billig, 2004), “speakers might share patterns of talk which permit the accomplishment of repression. By avoiding certain topics or lines of questioning, they can collaborate to keep disturbing thoughts from being uttered” (Billig, 2004, p. 100). Silence is the result of collaboration between speakers (Billig, 1997b, 2004; Irvine, 2011). A silence can only remain so if all participants collaboratively maintain that silence. As soon as one person speaks about the topic that is being collectively avoided, the collaboration and the silence have simultaneously been broken. This notion of collaboration as crucial to the seamless maintenance of silence was particularly clear to Schlant (1999) in her analysis of West German literature’s silences regarding Jews and the Holocaust. She notes that “this silence was pervasive; it rested on unstated shared thinking, established unconscious bonds of complicity, and relied on code words for communication” (Schlant, 1999, p. 25). Through such collaboration the society represented by West German writers was able to push aside the horrors of the Holocaust, which was a particularly troubling topic for perpetrators and subsequent generations, and instead focus on other topics, such as the rebuilding of German society or memorials to the Holocaust where Jewish presences were conspicuously absent.

Such absences are, again, only possible when all participants, whether on a micro-level such as in dyadic interactions or on a macro-level such as within whole societies, collaborate under the duress of societal forces, such as politeness, to keep troubling topics from rising to the surface of conversation (Billig, 2004). Indeed, collaborative dyadic interactions can reveal the ideology that has become the common sense of a culture or society, allowing even simple conversations to provide clues to what is remaining collectively unsaid.

It may seem as though the focus on collaboration and politeness has been overemphasised. However, as Johnstone (2008, p. 72) argues, “learning to notice silence means learning to „de-familiarise“. It requires learning to imagine alternative worlds and alternative ways of being, thinking and talking.” Rhodes’ (2005) study of supermaximum prisons provides a unique opportunity to imagine and examine interactions where conversational conventions such as collaboration and politeness may be absent or dysfunctional. As Rhodes (2005, p.

396) notes, the architectural and social constraints of supermax provides an opportunity for speakers to engage in “talk that transgresses the rules of ordinary conversation both in its content and in its disregard for the feelings of those nearby.”

In Rhodes’ (2005) study, some prisoners call out to or shout at one another from their cells, whether other prisoners enter into conversation with them or not. Some of these prisoners purposefully provoke others on the tiers from the safety of their cells without the possibility of “being interrupted or stopped” (p. 376). Such provocation may include reminding inmates of their crimes or openly targeting inmates who have committed crimes against children. Other prisoners, including child molesters and their neighbours, are unable to stop the speaker, distract the speaker or remove themselves from the conversation, thus making a collaborative, polite shift in topic impossible. Thus topic changes, which would allow for distractions and shifts of focus from troubling topics to safer, more comfortably navigated topics, become impossible. Rhodes (2005) argues that what is said and unsaid within the supermax context “surfaces and exaggerates a discourse of excluded citizenship centered on the victimised child” (p. 403), which gestures towards the underlying ideology that those who show compassion for vulnerable citizens such as children are, themselves, legitimated as citizens.

By examining how participants collaboratively and seamlessly push aside troubling topics through social, discursive forces such as politeness, a critical analysis of „being silent about“ holds the potential to expose dominant, naturalised ideologies related to power and privilege and its maintenance within society (Billig, 2014). At the same time, such lessons from a study of „being silent about“ can also be applied to other types of silence. As has already been argued, „being silent“ is fundamentally about instances where measurable gaps in conversation are collaboratively produced based on perceptions of what is socially acceptable or expected. Therefore, studies of „being silent“ and „being silent about“ both involve the acknowledgment that silence is “always a joint production” (Tannen, 1985, p. 100) based on social forces, such as politeness. These are common threads that point to the dynamic and fundamentally socially situated nature of communicative silence, whether it is „being silent“ or „being silent about“ (Saville-Troike, 1985). Because both types of silence are based on collaboration and are situated within social interaction, studies of silence are uniquely useful in revealing and understanding the presence and maintenance of ideology within society. Such ideology can be instrumental in maintaining power and in the continued oppression of

marginalised groups. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how silence is closely linked with the maintenance of inequality.

## ***2.6 Maintaining inequality through silence***

Within society, there are always topics that are troubling for its citizens and therefore avoided. During Freud's years of working and conducting research, he found that the main issues that were silenced were sex and aggression. Billig (2004) argues that the primary troubling issue for contemporary society is the notion of race and racism, a topic that must be repressed and avoided. For such topics to be kept from our (collective) dialogical attention, „being silent about“ must occur, not only at the level of the individual or even between individuals, but can also occur within the larger, wider society. However, I would argue that this collusion is not neutral. Instead, as Sheriff (2000, p. 114) states:

...although it is contractual in nature, a critical feature of this type of silence is that it is both a consequence and an index of an unequal distribution of power, if not of actual knowledge. Through it, various forms of power may be partly, although often incompletely, concealed, denied, or naturalised.

This is why Billig (1997b, p. 152) argues that “analysts not only have to stand back from what the particular speakers are saying; analysts must also attempt to distance themselves from, and reflect upon the social conventions and ideological assumptions that enable such accounts to be given.” Within the talk of competent members of society, there exists “unspoken silences that speak „volumes“” (Mazzei, 2004, p. 1130) about inequalities that are produced and maintained. It is possible that the powerful and the marginalised within society work together to accomplish silence around notions of inequality. Such silence may accomplish the reproduction of dominant ideology and the maintenance of the *status quo* within particular institutions or the wider society, as is seen in O'Malley's (2005) study of antenatal care.

For the powerful, such silences are used to maintain power structures that allow those who enjoy disproportionate privilege and power to persist in an unquestioned and unchallenged manner (Mazzei, 2004). This is particularly clear within studies of whiteness, where the

privileges and advantages of being white are rhetorically concealed as whiteness itself is left unsaid within conversation (Crenshaw, 1997; Mazzei, 2004; 2008; 2011). This is accomplished as speakers rhetorically construct whiteness, which remains as an absence, as the norm against which nonwhiteness, which is present, is viewed as different, problematic or Other (Billig, 1997a). The effects of these discursive practices can be powerful. By allowing the implications of being white to remain unspoken within popular discourse, the privilege and taken-for-granted norms of society remain unchallenged and unacknowledged. It also allows the position of blacks to be produced as lacking or deviant on multiple levels (Mazzei, 2008), thereby justifying their lack of access to resources, both material and socio-political.

As such, one would expect that only the privileged and powerful remain silent about such inequalities. However, if only one party is silent about an issue while the other party is not, silence is impossible. Billig (1997a, p. 151) argues that “speakers *combine* to move talk away from tabooed topics, jointly protecting what cannot be uttered. In this way, the unsayable will be present, even if marked by its absence” (my emphasis). Yet, while the marginalised may remain silent about inequality, the reasons behind such silence are not the same as for the powerful. As Sheriff (2000, p. 114) notes, “while silence tends to penetrate social boundaries it is not seamless; different groups, whether constituted by class, ethnicity, racialized identities, gender, or language, have markedly divergent interests at stake in the suppression of discourse.”

It is difficult to understand the silence of the marginalised as there are many different interpretations thereof. This challenge is expressed by Carpenter and Austin (2007, p. 669) who describe their participants’ silences as “both strategies and impositions.” Some have suggested that the voices of the marginalised are silenced by the powerful. This is when theorists often speak of „silencing“, which falls within the notion of silence being imposed upon the marginalised by those who are more powerful. Such studies are often focused on issues of gender and race/ethnicity. An excellent example of this type of work is Julé (2004), who analyses how teachers and language classroom teaching methods prevent girls from speaking in class discussions by leaving their contributions unacknowledged or by not valuing what they say, especially when compared to the more dynamic and attentive interactions between boys and teachers. This study shows how ethnicity and gender combine to create particular practices that ultimately silence girls within classroom settings.

Other theorists have noted how silence can be used to adapt to particular socio-political imbalances. Sheriff (2000, p. 125) describes this as “an accommodation that is determined, obviously, by the seeming intractability of the structural and cultural force of racism and the social, political, and economic vulnerabilities that it produces for people [who are marginalised].” For the marginalised, such silences may work to keep their disempowered position in society from being intentionally acknowledged and therefore protects oneself and similarly marginalised others from experiencing the emotional and psychological burdens that are implied by such acknowledgments (Sheriff, 2000). Sheriff (2000, p. 124) found this to be particularly true of the informants of the study regarding cultural censorship in Brazil, noting that “if concrete amelioration cannot be expected, they seem to suggest, then there is no point in discussing the issue. Talking about it, in fact, only magnifies feelings of anger, humiliation, and sadness.” There is also the perspective that the silence of the less powerful may be a form of refusing or resisting the addresses of the powerful by withholding information that is being expected of them, as in the case of suspects in police custody (Kurzon, 1992). This may be an instance where silence may be a form of power in itself.

Therefore, it is possible that both sides, for different reasons and with different outcomes, continue to be silent about inequality and injustice, specifically their relative position in the socio-political hierarchy that has been established through structural inequalities. Such silence may be instrumental as the ongoing talk (or lack thereof) and practices that do not acknowledge socio-political inequality, which can largely be based on race, may allow such inequalities to continue. As Billig (2014, p. 165) states, “power is typically reproduced within interaction without the participants explicitly discussing it.” This makes the study of „being silent about“ an important one when understanding the dialogical dynamics that are at play within the maintenance of inequality and oppressive ideology.

## ***2.7 The present study***

As has already been argued in the previous chapter, domestic labour is a site of deep inequality, both globally and within post-apartheid South Africa specifically. Yet, it would seem, there have been very few studies that examine „being silent about“ within the context of domestic labour. Some studies have looked at the concepts of deference (King, 2007), while others have explored silence as a coping strategy (Cohen, 1991) or a form of power or

rebellion in the face of systematic inequality (Cock, 1980). To my knowledge, only Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2007) has looked with any real depth at the issue of the unsaid specifically within domestic labour relationships. Therefore, the present study aims to connect previously unconnected areas of study, namely domestic labour and „being silent about“ within the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

This topic is of particular significance because domestic labour is already a topic that South Africans are often „being silent about“ (Cock, 2011). When a nation has systematic blind spots and fails to acknowledge the presence of inequality, there can be extreme consequences for all involved. The saliency of that which is absent and its consequences are eloquently revealed by Schlant (1999, p. 1):

In Berlin, outside the Grunewald train station where the trains left for Auschwitz, there is a monument to those who were deported and killed. It is a long straight wall of exposed concrete, perhaps 15 feet high, which appears to hold back the earth rising up behind it. Cut into the wall are the outline of human figures moving in the direction of the station. The figures themselves are non-existent; it is the surrounding cement that makes their absence visible. This monument, in which presence is stated as absence, and in which the solidity of the wall serves to make this absence visible, has its analogue in [West German literature regarding the Holocaust].”

I argue that, just as Schlant has detected within West German literature absences that gesture towards profound and disturbing socio-political and moral issues, similar absences can be seen in the way that South Africans (do not) speak about inequality within domestic labour. However, whereas Schlant’s work shows how West German literature has attempted to “circumvent, repress, or deny knowledge” (1999, p. 2) of the past, the current work will demonstrate how talk-in-interaction is „being silent about“ the present, where the discursive practices of post-apartheid South Africans work to maintain and produce inequalities that are particularly troubling for both its white employers and its black workers.

### **3. Methodology**

Methodology is boring! Or at least methodology chapters are often boring. However, I would like this methodology chapter to reflect the unique, dynamic and interesting nature of the methodology of this study. To that end, I have chosen to structure this chapter according to the suggestions of Silverman (2005), who argues for a more informal style that reflects the “natural history” (p. 306) of the research methodology. As such, this chapter will be “a methodological discussion in which [I] explain the actual course of [my] decision making rather than a series of blunt assertions in the passive voice” (Silverman, 2005, p. 306).

In addition, Billig’s (2011) recommendations regarding writing social psychology have also been incorporated into the style of the entire write-up of this study. In short, Billig’s (2011, pp. 17-18) recommendations are: (1) to write simply and avoid unnecessary technical language; (2) to reduce the number of passive sentences; (3) to write clausally rather than nominally; (4) to aspire towards, rather than tightly follow, Billig’s recommendations where necessary; (5) to populate texts by writing about the actions of people rather than things; and (6) to avoid being too attached to technical terminology and to rather attempt to write within the realm of common sense.

By following the suggestions of both Silverman (2005) and Billig (2011), I hope to increase the precision and clarity with which I describe, explain and argue for the methodological decisions that I have made during the course of this research. The discussion begins by providing a personal context for my decision to examine the core aspects of this study, followed by an explanation of the reasoning that informs the basic research design, which is then expanded upon by describing the finer details of the development of the design. The final section of this chapter is comprised of some critical reflections and lessons that I have noted in developing this methodology.

#### ***3.1 The personal context***

Although I am an American citizen, I was born and raised in South Africa. Throughout my life, my family has hosted international visitors who have come to see and learn about this country. Among all of the noteworthy and unique things that they see, domestic labour is

often an aspect of post-apartheid South Africa that outsiders find both interesting and troubling. It is something they comment on and ask questions about. These conversations that forced me to notice and make the implicit explicit, along with my own awareness of social (in)justice in this context, have made the issue of domestic labour one that I feel holds great potential to understand post-apartheid South Africa in a unique way and to be a site where it is possible to imagine how things can be different.

These aspirations were given an academic outlet during a qualitative research course during my Masters of Arts degree, where I conducted a small scale study regarding domestic labour relationships. That small, intensive study raised a number of troubling questions and uncomfortable realisations that have prompted me to continue working within this area. The most significant issue for me was the difference between how candidly those international visitors had spoken of what they noticed about domestic labour compared to the silences, gaps and absences within the talk of South Africans, both black and white. Surely this discrepancy gestures toward something about domestic labour that is troubling within post-apartheid South Africa, something that we are „being silent about“.

This project started off as one that explores domestic labour, with a special focus on silences. However, as the study developed, it became clear that „being silent about“ is a difficult phenomenon to study and there is a striking paucity of literature on this type of silence, especially when compared to the depth and breadth of research focusing on the other types of more prototypical silences. Therefore, this project has become more about „being silent about“, where domestic labour is a case in point. My hope and aim is that this research will say something significant and useful about both a social psychological theory of „being silent about“ and about how such silences operate to produce and maintain inequality within relationships such as domestic labour in post-apartheid South Africa.

### ***3.2 Reasons for research design***

As I have argued in the previous section, studies of „being silent about“ have some significant gaps that must be addressed and amended if future research, the present study included, is to provide appropriate and useful understandings of this issue. In essence, I suggest that there is great value in gaining an in-depth understanding of *how* „being silent about“ is accomplished



by speakers. By aiming to focus on the *processes* of „being silent about“, certain methodological and theoretical decisions must be made. This section will deal with decisions and reasoning that underpin the finer details of the methodology for this study, while the following section will outline the actual methodology itself.

Much of the success of this project will hinge on how the aforementioned challenges will be dealt with, namely: (1) by working within an explicit theory of silence (specifically „being silent about“, which has been outlined in the literature review); (2) by choosing aims and methods that are appropriate for the study of „being silent about“ (which will be discussed in the present chapter); (3) by convincingly and systematically analysing a presence through absence within discursive practices of South Africans (which will be the task of the analysis chapter); and (4) by using the findings of this study to make appropriate and meaningful suggestions for intervention and application based on a solid findings (which will be attempted in the final chapter). Through such intentional and deliberate measures, it is my hope that this study will make a meaningful contribution to the social psychological understanding of „being silent about“, specifically within the context of domestic labour.

### ***3.2.1 Studying dyads***

In terms of the sample for this research, I opted for a dyadic research design. Kashy and Kenny (2000) argue for increased use of dyadic and group research designs within the field of social psychology, stating that “before we can have a genuinely *social* psychology, our theories, research methods and data analyses will have to take into account the truly interpersonal nature of the phenomena under study” (p. 451, original emphasis). Despite the fact that primary domestic labour relationships are overwhelmingly dyadic in nature, a large majority of the research has focused either solely on the employer (Archer, 2011; Moras, 2008), solely on the worker (Lan, 2003a; Romero, 1992; Stiell & England, 1997) or solely on a third party, such as labour broker agencies (Pratt, 1997).

In some cases, researchers have accessed both employers and workers, as well as other stakeholders, but chose not to access pairs that were linked through employment for various reasons, such as ethics, building trust and confidentiality (Dickey, 2000; Fish, 2006, Lan, 2003b). In fact, apart from Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2007) and Mutarak (2004), I am not aware

of any other studies that have accessed both the worker and employer from a common employment pair. While these ethical concerns are indeed important and must be carefully considered by any researcher, I propose that the study of disconnected workers and employers loses a great deal of the unique and interdependent nature of each relationship. The existence of ethically complex dyads should not exclude them from study, but instead should make the researcher more deliberate in protecting the members of such dyads during the course of the research. Therefore, the sample for this study is comprised of workers and employers who are connected through their employment relationship. It is a dyadic study where ethics have been carefully considered, as will be shown in a subsequent section that deals exclusively with ethics.

### ***3.2.2 Using diaries***

It seemed crucial to study „being silent about“ as it occurred within the daily experiences of domestic labour counterparts. A once-off interview was too disconnected or removed from the actual interactions of employers and workers if this study is truly able to better understand how the process of „being silent about“ is established and achieved. As such, I decided to use “everyday experience methods” (Reis & Gable, 2000, p.190). Such methods “permit researchers not only to understand the relevance of social processes within everyday, self-selected situations but also to characterise those contexts in some detail” (Reis & Gable, 2000, p. 191). Therefore, I decided to use a daily diary as an integral component of the data collection strategy. Reis and Gable (2000, p. 190) state that diaries are:

...a tool for „structured contemporaneous self-observation“, by which we mean that participants are asked to monitor and describe ongoing activity according to schedules and formats designed and regulated by the investigator. As such, the method is akin to unobtrusively following participants through their day, observing and questioning them at relevant points.

Diary studies have a number of clear advantages that made the choice seem well-suited for this research. Diaries allow one to gather data in the people’s natural life context that can be collected on a daily basis as opposed to at one point in time, as in the case of surveys, or with significant lags in time, as is the case with longitudinal studies (Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen

and Zapf, 2010). Eckenrode and Bolger (1995, p. 80) argue that “by recording the details of human thoughts, feelings and actions, diaries have a resolving power that cannot easily be achieved through the use of standard interviews or questionnaires.” Daily diaries also allow participants to complete an entry soon after the event and relatively regularly so that the diary keeping can be incorporated into the routine of the day (Day & Thatcher, 2009). This prevents the collection of data that are dependent on global assessments or exemplary behaviours, but instead allows for the exploration of ongoing experience where processes can be examined within their routine, everyday existence (Reis & Gable, 2000).

The majority of diary studies are largely quantitative in nature. Indeed, much of the instructive literature regarding reviews and procedures for the use of diaries assumes that the approach will be quantitative (see Bolger et al., 2003; Eckenrode & Bolger, 1995; Reis & Gable, 2000). This is equally true for dyadic diary studies, both in theory (Kashy & Kenny, 2000) and in applied studies (see Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2007; Sanz-Vergel & Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2013; Sherry, et al., 2014). Yet, many of the limitations and advantages to diaries studies are similar across quantitative and qualitative approaches. There are also useful reviews and applied studies that are instructive for qualitative diaries (see Day & Thatcher, 2009; Jacelon & Imperio, 2005; Nicholl, 2010; Radcliffe, 2013; Sá, 2002).

There are, as with any data collection strategy, a number of limitations to daily diary keeping. A minor limitation relates to the format of the diary. While a range of types of diary keeping formats exist, it has been shown that paper-and-pencil methods, whilst less high-tech, are equally valuable when compared to electronic formats (Bolger, Shrout, Green, Rafaeli, & Reis, 2006; Green, Rafaeli, Bolger, Shrout, & Reis, 2006), although Day and Thatcher (2009) do warn about practical limitations such as handwriting legibility levels. Another possible limitation is that participants have a fair level of literacy (Day and Thatcher, 2009), a limitation that can be avoided by providing alternative means of recording the diary through audio recordings.

A primary limitation is that the quality of the data is heavily reliant on the commitment of the participant to the diary keeping process (Day & Thatcher, 2009; Välimäki, Vehviläinen-Julkunen & Pietilä, 2007). Välimäki et al. (2007) also note that the types of diary entries within unstructured diaries also greatly affects the quality of the data, with meagre and reporting types being the least useful and detailed, and descriptive and reflective styles being

the most in-depth and rich with detail. In addition, diary keeping is a much more demanding form of data collection for the participants because it carries a great deal more responsibility and work than other, more conventional data collection strategies such as surveys or standard interviews (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). As a result, there is potentially a greater possibility of participant fatigue, noncompliance with instructions or participant dropout (Gable & Reis, 1999).

In order to address some of these limitations, both Day and Thatcher (2009) and Välimäki et al. (2007) argue strongly for regular and supportive contact between the researcher and participants in order to encourage consistent diary keeping and to ensure that diaries are being recorded as per the specifications of the researcher. Regular contact also allows any concerns or misunderstandings to be promptly identified and addressed. While diary methods are more demanding for both participants and researchers than are conventional data collection techniques (Nicholl, 2010), “the payoff is a detailed, accurate and multifaceted portrait of social behaviour embedded in its natural context” (Reis and Gable, 2000, p. 190).

While dyadic diary studies have been used to explore dynamics related to various contexts and situations, most dyadic diary studies explore issues related to romantic couples, especially related to the work-family interface (see Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2007; Radcliffe, 2013; Roberts, Leonard, Butler, Levenson, & Kanter, 2013; Sanz-Vergel & Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2013), family and couple processes and closeness (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005; Lavy, Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013; Zhaoyang & Cooper, 2013) and also how health and illness factors can influence couple processes (see Rock, Steiner, Rand, & Bigatti, 2014). To my knowledge, there are no dyadic diary studies that focus on employment pairs, especially domestic labour employment pairs, possibly because of the inherent power imbalances within this particular relationship.

Thus the present study represents a combination of decisions that lead to a rather unique research design (dyadic daily diary study) within a challenging theoretical framework (a social psychological understanding of „being silent about“) within a problematic and troubling relationship (domestic labour). The details and process of this multifaceted methodology will be outlined in the following section.

### ***3.3 Developing methods through trial and error***

Although many researchers present their research processes as uncomplicated and smooth from start to finish, research is often not quite as clean as what is presented (Silverman, 2005). I propose that such dynamics can, and indeed should, be openly discussed within the methodology chapter, allowing the reader to follow the train of thought and decision making process in order to have a clearer understanding of why the research developed in the way that it has. This idea is supported by writers such as Alasuutari (1995, p. 192), who argues that:

...the writer also has to discuss other possibilities, for instance those that he or she first invented but then rejected during the research process. They must also be discussed, and one must show the readers why they are not fruitful after all.

#### ***3.3.1 Sample***

From the outset, I had intended to study silences that exist within domestic labour relationships, specifically within their talk and interactions. I was convinced that a dyadic study would be more interesting and beneficial to the study of interactions and talk, especially since a large majority of both domestic labour and silence literature do not access both participants.

Criterion sampling, which is defined as “cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 1990, p. 176) was used as a starting point for the sampling strategy. The criteria were namely: a white employer with a black worker in a live-in context, where the worker had a reasonable level of English proficiency. Potential participants were identified within my social network. The sample was set at five pairs because diary studies are particularly demanding, making the successful recruitment of numerous pairs a difficult task. Because the data would be quite rich and in-depth, I decided that five pairs should provide ample data for this study. The population from which the sample was drawn were live-in employment contexts. These dyads have more frequent contact with each other than do contractual, once-a-week employment pairs. The dyads in this sample have more interactions

with each other and a more complex relationship, making it ideal for a study of silences as they are likely to be “information-rich” (Patton, 1990, p. 177).

Studies that have looked at domestic labour relationships have generally avoided studying linked pairs due to ethical concerns related to issues of voluntariness, confidentiality and other such risks (Fish, 2006, Lan, 2003b). While these are serious concerns that must be dealt with, as will be discussed in the section regarding ethical considerations, there were some surprises when recruiting the sample for this study. In all, I contacted representatives from eight pairs. The employer was the initial contact for six of the pairs, one initial contact was an employee and, for one pair, there was no primary contact as both counterparts were contacted concurrently. While questions of voluntariness may be raised because most of the pairs were recruited through the employers, this did not necessarily cause the worker to agree to participate. In two cases, workers declined participation, despite the fact that the employer had agreed to participate. In such cases, the pair was excluded from participation in the study because both parties were not willing. In another pair, the worker was not black, which served as an exclusion criteria.

The final sample for this study consisted of five employment pairs, comprised of black female workers and white female employers. The average age of the employers was 33 years, with a range of 27 to 38 years. All of the employers were married, had at least 2 children (many of whom were home all day as they were too young to be in primary school) and had some level of tertiary education, ranging from technical diplomas to post-graduate studies. Two of the employers were full-time, stay-at-home moms; two worked on a full-time basis and one employer worked on a contractual basis. None of the employers were the primary breadwinners in their household. The average age of the workers was 46 years, with a range of 35 to 60 years. None of the workers had an education level beyond that of grade 8, all but one had at least one dependent and as many as five (some were financially supporting family above and beyond their own children, such as grandchildren or other extended family). All of the workers were the primary, and in some cases the only, breadwinner in their household. Two of the workers had been widowed, two were currently in a relationship and one worker was single.

### ***3.3.2 Data collection***

Although I wanted to use employment pairs as the sample, I was not certain how to practically and ethically go about studying such a pair and so began considering a number of different options for data collection.

First, I considered asking both members of the pair to take photographs of the domestic spaces where interactions were common, uncomfortable, rare, intimate, mundane, etc. These images would then act as a starting point around which an interview could focus, similar to the methods used in participatory action research (Johnson & Mayoux, 1997; Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004) and that could potentially lead to interesting information related to the embodied and spatial nature of „being silent about“. However, this data collection method was abandoned early on because of the ethical and legal ramifications as the images would reflect a participant’s private space and could thereby compromise anonymity as the space could potentially be linked to a particular person.

Next, I considered asking participants to complete daily diaries that reflected on conversations that occurred during the day with their counterpart. These reflections could focus on issues that were present or absent within conversations that may have taken place and whether such issues were commonly discussed with varying levels of relational ease. However, the completion of diaries alone did not seem sufficient, a limitation of relying solely on the written text, largely because “it is not possible to ask a diary further clarifying questions if a certain topic is unclear or is particularly interesting” (Välimäki et al., 2007, p. 75). Instead, the incorporation of a debriefing interview before and after the diary keeping process seemed more dynamic and useful in gaining access to the dynamics of „being silent about“ within the relationship’s talk and interactions. As such, data collection for this study happened in two phases for each employment pair, according to the diary-interview method described by Alaszewski (2006), beginning with diary keeping to observe and record interactions and silences within the relationship and then an interview to explore participants’ accounts and perceptions of those silences through language and representation and to debrief regarding the diary keeping process.

The first phase involved the completion of an unstructured daily diary. Once both parties of the employment pair had agreed to participate in the study and had meaningfully engaged in the process of informed consent and had signed an informed consent contract (see Appendix A), I met with each pair to explain the process of keeping a diary. In most cases, I preferred to meet with the pair together so that each participant knew that their counterpart was being given similar instructions and support. During these initial meetings, I provided their customised diaries, following the suggestions in the literature regarding the process and directions for diary recordings, adapted from Elliott (1997, in Alaszewski, 2006, p. 76) (see Appendix B), and the design and structure of the diary itself (Alaszewski, 2006; Day & Thatcher, 2009; Nicholl, 2010). Each page of the diary included an allocated day, with a space to provide the date and included a heading with a summary of the research topic to provide a focused reminder of what the diary entry should include. The date also allowed for the matching of diary entries between participants, in cases where participants may have skipped or forgotten days to record their diary.

The diary entries were recorded according to an interval-contingent recording schedule, where “participants report on their experiences at some regular, predetermined interval” (Wheeler & Reis, 1991, p. 345). Participants were asked to record their interactions with each other at the end of each day for 20-30 minutes for 21 consecutive days using paper-and-pencil diaries. Participants were asked to focus specifically on: conversations; things that they felt were left unsaid, things that they wish they could have said; topics that seemed salient but were not spoken about; and understandings of and feelings regarding such interactions. The option of an audio diary was also made available in the event of a participant feeling a lack of confidence regarding their levels of literacy. Despite this option being made available, all of the participants chose the paper-and-pencil method of diary keeping. Furthermore, if participants were not confident with their English proficiency, they also had the option of recording their diary in their first language. All of the workers accepted this offer, with four of the workers writing in *isiZulu* and one recording in *isiXhosa*.

Within diary studies, support and contact between a researcher and the participants are crucial elements to a successful diary study (Välämäki et al., 2007). Developing rapport creates a sense among participants of being cared for by and interesting to the researcher as participants and as legitimised people (Day & Thatcher, 2009). To avoid dropout and



response fatigue, I kept regular contact with participants throughout the data collection period.

After the initial meeting to deliver the diaries, initiate the process of informed consent and begin the diary keeping period, I called each participant on the third day of their diary keeping, to ensure that they understood what to do and to provide general support and assistance in the case of any uncertainty. Thereafter, I called them every week at a time that they indicated would be convenient for them to speak with me. In total, I called each participant four times throughout their process. In some cases, if I could not reach the participant, I left an additional text message to inform them that I had called to ensure that all was well with their diary process and to emphasise that they were welcome to contact me if they needed any additional assistance or support. These calls encouraged participants to continue their diary entries by providing a level of accountability and to address difficulties in the process as they arose (Day & Thatcher, 2009).

Most of these telephone conversations were roughly 2-4 minutes long in cases where there were no problems or questions. When participants had concerns or questions, these were addressed until the participant felt satisfied. Such conversations ranged from asking about how to proceed with the diary if the worker was going on leave, clarifying the content of the diary or admitting to having skipped some days and speaking about how to proceed. In some cases, participants spoke about the difficulties they were having or challenges that they faced with their diaries. In such instances, I reminded them that they were free to withdraw from the study if it was too demanding or if they were feeling uncomfortable in any way. In some cases, the conversations also moved toward topics that had nothing to do with the research at all, such as wishing a participant well on their birthday or the participant enquiring after my health, since I was constantly sick throughout the data collection process. These points of contact were also recorded to gain further analysable data, with the participants' consent.

Once the diary phase of data collection had been completed, I collected the diaries from the participants and made appointments for their individual interviews, which were always within a week of their last diary entry. I delivered the diaries that had been written in *isiZulu* to a competent translator working in the *isiZulu* department of the university, who took 3-4 days to translate the workers' diaries. I read each diary for interesting moments where silence had been mentioned, especially where common moments had been diarised by both participants

within the pair. These common moments were used to structure questions for follow-up interviews. However, I was careful to limit my questions to what was presented in the relevant diary during the individual interviews. If there were inconsistencies between the diaries, these were not explored in the interviews because this would have represented a violation of confidentiality.

The follow-up interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 and a half hours and were all recorded, with the participant's consent. Each interview took place on the employer's property. For the employers, the interviews either took place in their sitting rooms or at the dining room tables. The workers were each asked where they would like to conduct the interview and all of them chose to stay on the employer's property, either in a private space within the employer's house (either while the employer was off of the property or elsewhere on the property) or in the worker's living space. At the conclusion of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and effort in participating and were given a small token of appreciation in the form of a monetary gift of R500, which I did not view as undue inducement because of the demands of participating in this study.

This final stage of the data collection was considered within the context of „the interview“, where the “self is a process, ever negotiated and accomplished in the interaction” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 664). Thus in this study, “interviews are treated not so much as techniques for getting at information [...] but more as in-their-own-right-analysable instances of talk-in-interaction” (Baker, 2003, p. 396). Therefore, the data collection and analysis viewed the interview as a form of social interaction that both the interviewer and the interviewee participate in and co-construct (Baker, 2003; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Silverman, 2005).

### ***3.3.3 Construction of the semi-structured interview schedule***

The interview schedule (see Appendix C) was divided into four sections: (1) general information; (2) questions focused on the diary process; (3) questions focused on the diary content; and (4) questions that aimed to make race and inequality explicit.

Section 1 entailed basic demographic information. This section also includes general questions regarding information about the beginnings of the employment relationship and how the relationship was formalised. This is often a difficult topic to negotiate in domestic

labour and can indicate a significant silence in the relationship that can lead to exploitation (Fish, 2006). Section 2 aimed to explore how the participant experienced and dealt with the diary process. This allowed for any inconsistencies, difficulties and gaps to be identified in order to assess the levels of consistency in the diary keeping process, such as those issues linked with response fatigue (Day & Thatcher, 2009) or a lack of compliance with diary instructions (Stone, Shiffman, Schwartz, Broderick, & Hufford, 2002). Section 3 aimed to explore the content of the diary kept by the participant. Questions in this section probed issues and events raised in the diary in order to elicit an account of silence and presence within the interactions that had been recorded. Due to the individualised nature of this portion of the interview, it was difficult to create questions that were to be used across all of the participants. This portion of the interview was, out of necessity, less structured than the previous sections. Section 4 aimed to make issues of race explicit in order to establish the participants' understanding and account of their domestic labour relationship as a racialised form of life. Many of the questions were normative, asking the participants to compare their relationship or their counterpart to others. This section aimed to challenge the silencing and repression of race and inequality within the context of domestic labour relationships.

### ***3.3.4 Data analysis***

Analysis was conducted throughout the data collection and transcription processes, as argued for by Silverman (2005), through various methods suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), such as contact summary sheets, coding and memoing, which allowed for points of interest and themes to emerge early on in the research process. I personally transcribed the audio recordings of each interview verbatim using conventions adapted from Silverman (2005) (see Appendix D). I made memos and noted interesting sections of interviews in order to begin thinking theoretically about the data from as early as possible within the process.

The diary data were initially analysed using a technique similar to that of Day and Thatcher (2009) by splitting the transcripts each time a new event or theme arises, thereby forming "a series of events or theme changes" (p. 253), forming a content analysis of the diaries (Alaszewski, 2006). These emergent themes and events were then noted so as to explore them with participants in the subsequent interview. After the interviews were conducted, the dyads

and events were matched to map the events and accounts that had been expressed both in the diaries and the individual interviews.

The diaries were also analysed using conversational analysis, as suggested by Alaszewski (2006), to explore “the social conventions which underpin and shape social interaction” (p. 88). The interview data were analysed using an ethnomethodological approach, as explained by Baker (2003) and Potter (1996), underpinned by Billig’s (2004) theoretical framework of dialogical repression. The interview data were also examined through the conventions of conversation and discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), attending to the critiques of Antaki, Billig, Edwards and Potter (2003), which relate to what constitutes poor discourse analysis.

The analysis and discussion has a number of aims. Chapter 4 aims to present a methodology for the study of silence by defining what silence is and how it can be identified. This occurs within the context of scenes that will be presented from domestic labour relationships. Chapter 4 raises some of the challenges of studying domestic labour and offers methods to address those challenges. Chapter 5 moves beyond the isolated moments that have been presented in chapter 4 in order to make a number of generalisations about silence in the interpersonal context. Such generalisations are used to form a coherent and meaningful social psychology of silence, which is a potentially significant contribution to the study of silence. Chapter 6 addresses how a social psychology of silence operates in the maintenance of inequality, a discussion that is contextualised within domestic labour relationships. This analysis focuses on the use of „being silent about“ to silence the political and institutional inequalities that exist within domestic labour. .

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 address various aspects of analysis and are meant to substantiate and bolster the thesis that the development of a social psychology of silence is necessary in forming an understanding of how silence operates in the maintenance of interpersonal and institutional inequality, specifically within the context of domestic labour.

### ***3.3.5 Ethical considerations***

Due to the power imbalances that are present in domestic labour relationships, there are a number of ethical considerations that must be attended to in some detail. This study used

eight elements of ethical research, as suggested by Wassenaar (2006) to guide the research design with ethical practice in mind.

### *Collaborative partnership*

This research design did not include any real collaborative partnership with the target community. This is partially because of the isolated and private nature of domestic labour relationships.

### *Social value*

This study has great social value for a number of reasons. First, an understanding of how the process of „being silent about“ occurs between people gives major insight into social psychological dynamics that are at play within everyday conversations. Furthermore, by contextualising „being silent about“ within the context of an unequal relationship, this study will contribute to understandings of how „being silent about“ may be instrumental in maintaining inequalities within relationships in general and in domestic labour relationships in particular.

Second, as has already been discussed, paid domestic labour is one of the largest informal labour sectors in South Africa and is the largest employment sector for black females (Fish, 2006). Because of South Africa’s racialised and colonial history that has set up particular structural inequalities, this relationship continues to echo the asymmetrical, racialised and potentially exploitative interactions that existed during the apartheid era (Gaitskell et al., 1983). A greater understanding of how „being silent about“ is accomplished within this relationship and an attempt to bring domestic labour into academic and public discourse may assist in initiating change in this labour sector and may give greater insight into wider race relations in South Africa.

This study sought to promote justice on micro and macro levels. On a micro level, the study values domestic labourers in terms of their intrinsic worth as people by giving them an opportunity to voice their experiences along with those of their employers. On a macro level, this research values domestic labourers as legitimate workers and values their contribution to the South African economy (Grossman, 2011). In an attempt to raise awareness of the dynamics within domestic labour interactions, the findings and conclusions of this research will be disseminated in popular news media that will reach audiences that includes both

employers and workers. Examples of such media includes: The Natal Witness, the Sunday Times, *Isolezwe* and *Ilanga*. The disseminated findings and conclusions will be generalised, anonymised and delinked in order to protect the identities and confidentiality of the participants. This dissemination will take place after the thesis has been duly reviewed and assessed to ensure that the dissemination reflects the finalised document. By disseminating this study beyond the university library and the wider academic community, it is hoped that the topic of domestic labour will gain further currency and lead to conversations that will facilitate a change in this sector.

### Scientific validity

The diary-interview method has been recommended by Alaszewski (2006) and has been used in various contexts. The diary method in general has received a great deal of academic attention recently and is growing in popularity within qualitative research because diary studies “permit examination of relationship events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context and often reduce the likelihood of retrospection by minimizing the amount of time between the experience of an event and the account of the event” (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005, p. 86). The utilisation of conversation and discourse analysis is also a widely accepted and rigorous form of data analysis within qualitative research.

### Fair selection of participants

The research question applies to the population from which the sample has been drawn.

### Favourable risk/benefit ratio

In terms of beneficence, it has been argued that a great deal of qualitative research has positive therapeutic benefits as it allows one to express one’s beliefs, experiences and concerns to someone who is willing to listen (Clarke, 2006; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2006; Peel, Parry, Douglas, & Lawton, 2006). Conversely, it could also be difficult or distressing for participants to confront their position within an unequal relationship or their position in society in general in relation to their counterpart. These possibilities echo those expressed by Bailey (2001, p. 108) who speaks about qualitative interviews that may unearth “„forgotten and well hidden resentments“, past „half truths“.” Bailey (2001) therefore argues that researchers must be “morally responsible for being honest about the unknown” (p. 109). Such honesty is hopefully evident in the informed consent contract.

Each participant was given a R500 incentive on completion of their individual interviews. This incentive was framed as a sign of appreciation for the time and effort required for participation in the study, which was relatively demanding in terms of the time commitment necessary in keeping a daily diary. R500 seemed to be a fair amount as it was not enough to qualify as undue inducement for the workers, but it was sufficient to represent an adequate token of appreciation for both the employer and the worker. All of the participants were very grateful for this incentive and indicated that it was a useful and helpful incentive.

#### *Independent ethical review*

The protocol for this research was subject to the UKZN Research Ethics Committee and did not proceed without such approval (see Appendix E).

#### *Informed consent*

Prior to participation, participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the study. Issues around participation, such as voluntariness, the risks and benefits of the study and other matters related to informed consent were discussed and all participants were asked to sign informed consent contracts, based on Wassenaar (2006, pp. 74-75) (see Appendix A). Participants were invited to address any concerns about the study with either the UKZN Human Social Science Research Ethics Committee, the supervising member of staff from UKZN or myself directly.

#### *Ongoing respect for participants and study communities*

There has been a growing argument for the emergence of a new research paradigm that moves away from research based on individuals toward the recruitment of dyads and social networks (Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Ott, 2008). Ott (2008) also notes that, while there are many ethical considerations when dealing within this paradigm, especially with sensitive topics and vulnerable populations, such research can go forward if researchers have made participants aware of any risks. Tecimer et al. (2011, p. 42) suggest that researchers practice ongoing respect for participants, especially those who are particularly vulnerable by:

...repeatedly ensuring confidentiality, building trust, understanding the specific cultural considerations of people who may join a study, presenting the study in a clear

manner that will help potential participants and their families understand how they can benefit from participating, and reinforcing participants' altruistic intents.

A salient ethical consideration in a dyadic study of this nature is that of confidentiality. To this end, I ensured that confidential information shared by one party was not inadvertently disclosed to the other. As a formalisation of confidentiality, I entered into a formal agreement with both parties, giving them full assurance that all information will remain strictly confidential. Published findings will adopt pseudonyms and generalised, delinked demographic data for participants so as to protect their identity and to decrease the chances of self-identification.

An extension of this assurance is related to the issue of feedback. In the informed consent form, participants were given the option of receiving feedback once the research had been completed. The feedback provided to participants was generalised, anonymised and delinked (i.e. no longer matched according to dyads) and was tailored for the participants so that the chances of self-identification (possibly leading to the identification of their counterpart) was kept to a minimum. Furthermore, part of the informed consent process was an explicit agreement that prevented both parties from reading their counterpart's diary, thereby protecting confidentiality as much as possible.

### ***3.4 Methodological lessons to be learned***

There are a number of methodological lessons that I have learned during the course of this study. Some of these will be discussed within the analysis section, specifically those that contribute toward methods for analysing „being silent about“. However, there were also other methodological issues that surfaced during the research that should be mentioned before continuing. These critical reflections revolve mainly around: (1) the impact of researching sensitive topics and (2) the inescapable nature of my embodied self and how it featured within my interactions with participants.

#### ***3.4.1 Researching sensitive topics***



Lee and Renzietti (1990, p. 512) describe sensitive research as research that “potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding and/or the dissemination of research data.” The impact of involvement in qualitative research focusing on sensitive topics upon participants has been widely studied and much of the ethical review process emphasises the protection of participants within such studies (Clarke, 2006; Wassenaar, 2006). However, Lee and Renzetti’s (1990) definition also explicitly acknowledges that the researcher also may be affected by their participation in research that deals with sensitive topics.

Dickson-Swift et al. (2006) maintain that, because of the particularly sensitive quality of certain research topics, researchers may experience a particularly conflicting relationship with their data and their participants. Because of some of the assumptions and methodologies inherent in qualitative research, such as the development of rapport through self-disclosure and reciprocity, it may be difficult to rigidly maintain boundaries with participants (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007). Dickson-Swift et al. (2006) identify three specific boundaries that may become blurred in such cases, namely: being a professional researcher; between being a researcher or a therapist; and between being a researcher and a friend. Some of the effects of poor boundary management may lead to emotional and physical exhaustion or harm being experienced on the part of the researcher (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006).

From my doctoral research experience, which is relevant to dyadic research, I would also add the precarious boundary between being a researcher and being an advocate and mediator within the participants of the dyad, especially in the case of dyads where there are significant power differentials. In some cases, employers were clearly not being fair to their workers, especially in terms of annual increases, leave and work load, which was often expressed by the worker but not the employer. This was an ethical dilemma because addressing these injustices with the employer would mean breaking the confidentiality with the worker. As such, I could not raise the worker’s concerns directly with the employer. Instead, at the completion of the study, when I debriefed participants regarding the findings of the research, I also included pamphlets and literature relating to the legal rights and responsibilities of employers and workers in domestic labour relationships. In this way, employers could become aware of their employment responsibilities and possibly make the necessary

adjustments and workers would become aware of legal options available to them if they were being treated unjustly.

In one specific pair, both the employer and the worker were unhappy with their relationship, expressing frustration and bewilderment about each other in their diaries and their individual interviews. Both of them requested that I facilitate some form of mediation so that they might speak with each other about their concerns. While I did indeed want to assist this pair in resolving their relational difficulties, I felt that it would be a definite blurring of boundaries if I were to fulfil this role for them. Instead, I referred them to an experienced mediator who would be able to assist them whilst I exited from the research relationship that I had established with them. This is clearly a case where boundaries had become blurred for the participants and in which I had to refer them onto an appropriate professional in order to protect myself from becoming inappropriately involved in their relationship that was fraught with sensitive topics such as wages, leave, interpersonal tensions, job dissatisfaction and cultural misunderstandings.

Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong (2009) argue that, when conducting qualitative research on sensitive topics, researchers are engaging in both intellectual and emotional work. Dickson-Swift et al. (2009, p. 66) argue that the acknowledgement and demonstration of emotions is often seen as inappropriate within academia, stating that:

...as students, researchers and professionals, we are products of a long process of socialisation into academic life, often heavily reliant on the value of science and objectivity above all else. The difficulties that researchers have in speaking about their own emotions in their research may be borne from this.

This may explain why, as a novice researcher, I had anticipated, to some degree, the intellectual burden of carrying out doctoral research, but had completely underestimated the emotional aspect of engaging with the participants. Also, it may contribute to some of my dis-ease with including some of these reflections on my emotions anywhere within my dissertation. Yet, it is my opinion that the presentation of this study's methodology would be incomplete without at least briefly acknowledging the emotional toll that is part of researching sensitive topics such as domestic labour in post-apartheid South Africa.

Dickson-Swift et al. (2007, p. 334) state that “qualitative researchers attempt to access the „human story“ and in order to do this it is important to remember the human side of the work.” This „human side“, for me, involved the development of care for many of the participants and also feeling outraged and upset by the inequalities that existed among some of the employment pairs or, on the other hand, feeling encouraged by relationships where there was a strong sense of warmth and care within pairs. I had intended to engage with the participants as more than simply subjects, but also as legitimate people. The result of this emotional engagement was clear when I would feel extremely drained, both physically and emotionally, after having read through diaries or conducted interviews, a tendency that is common among researchers dealing with sensitive topics (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006, 2007).

However, the emotional weight of dealing with the sensitive and affective content of the participants“ stories, specifically those of the workers“, was particularly present during the transcription process. Dickson-Swift et al. (2007, p. 337) recognise that “the process of transcription is often thought of as purely a technical task involving the transcription of the spoken word into data” and yet “transcribing a research interview on a sensitive topic can be an emotional experience.” This is especially so if the transcriber is also the one who had originally conducted the interviews because the interviewer/transcriber must relive the experience of hearing emotionally powerful stories repeatedly and with great attention to detail during the transcription process (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2008).

During the process of transcribing the interviews, I experienced a variety of emotions, ranging from irritation and outrage with unjust employers to amusement during particular anecdotes to deep sadness when participants shared some of their personal tragedies and hardships. While transcribing the interview with a worker of whom I was particularly fond, I spent the duration of a morning of transcribing in tears because of the sheer emotional weight of her story, which included multiple family deaths, the adoption of orphaned nieces and nephews, unfair treatment by the employer and fears of HIV/AIDS within her romantic relationships. Listening to these sensitive topics repeatedly and in detail during transcription and linking them with this particular worker was a very difficult experience for me.

Based on his own experiences of sensitive doctoral research, Fahie (2014) provides a number of recommendations to novice researchers regarding the protection of the researcher by being

proactive and in anticipating and mitigating risks or problems that may be harmful to the researcher; the utilisation of supportive and sensitive mentoring, supervision and peer support; and the recognition of the importance of reflexivity that is “key to the development of a level of self-awareness of the impact of such stories on the researcher” (Fahie, 2014, p. 29), through media such as journaling, which provides opportunities for “regular, structured, critical reflection” (p. 29). Likewise, Dickson-Swift et al. (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009) emphasise the importance of supportive, responsive and regular supervision and mentorship, either from within one’s university or from an outside source. Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) also acknowledge the useful role that informal networks, such as family and friends can play in supporting and allowing the researcher to debrief to some degree, which may assist in providing emotional support (Mitchell & Irvine, 2008).

Fortunately in my case, I was able to benefit from excellent guidance, support and mentorship from my doctoral research supervisor. I felt free to contact my supervisor via phone or spur-of-the-moment office visits when I felt overwhelmed by the emotional strains of hearing sensitive and powerful participant stories, when I was unsure how to proceed in cases of ethical dilemmas or when I felt frustrated and drained by the process of interviewing and transcription. The supervision I received helped to contain my experiences and reactions, to orientate my thinking and feeling in terms of my professional and personal boundaries and to feel empowered to persevere with my participants as legitimated people.

### ***3.4.2 My embodied self and my research***

During the early phases of designing my research, I was faced with a difficult decision, namely whether or not to include a black research assistant who would deal with the domestic workers. My research design explicitly samples white employers and black workers. Being a white woman, I had to carefully consider how the presentation of my racialised, embodied self would impact my interactions with the black participants, especially since we would be speaking about their white employers and issues of race and inequality.

The pros of utilising an assistant were that the workers may be able to relate better to someone who did not resemble „the Other“ and who could possibly relate on a different level from what I would be able to. In addition, for participants who had poor English proficiency,

they would be able to speak in their first language. The major con of this decision would have been that I would lose the opportunity to engage with half of the research participants. Ultimately, I decided against this strategy and chose rather to conduct all of the research myself.

This decision resulted in a number of trade-offs. One was that the interviews were all conducted in English, largely because I am not sufficiently fluent in *isiZulu* to speak coherently about the topics of this research. I assumed that, because all of the workers were live-in employees, their English would need to be adequate to understand and communicate with their employers. As a result, I anticipated that most live-in domestic workers would have an adequate level of English fluency to participate in an English interview. I also made this restriction known during the informed consent process and none of the workers indicated their English to be problematic. However, the issue of language did seem to hamper the flow of conversation with the worker from pair 4 and we often seemed to miscommunicate and misunderstand each other.

While interacting with participants, both employers and workers, I was very aware of my own racialised identity and how, as the researcher, this would have pros and cons with each participant. For example, among the workers, my race would be a salient marker of my difference from them. This was made explicit when workers assumed that I was friends of or knew either their present or past employers, simply by virtue of my whiteness. I had to emphasise that my relationship with both the employers and the workers was similar, where I was getting to know each of them through the research process and relationship. My embodied self was also made explicit when the worker from pair 2 qualified her positive assessment of white people, as can be seen in the following extract.

#### Methodology Extract 1 – Worker Interview

- 1 Wker2 That's what I like about (.) the white people. I I'm not talking this
- 2 because you are white.
- 3 AJM Hahaha
- 4 Wker2 There's lots of people. They will know me. I always say (.) hmm-mm.
- 5 These people are good.

Here, the worker makes a positive statement about whites and denies that this statement is in any way connected to the fact that I am also white. She then goes on to state that “lots of people” (line 4) who “know [her]” (line 4) would be able to corroborate that she “always say” (line 4) that white people are good. Perhaps if the interviewer had not been white, this act of justification would not have been necessary. However, despite the racial differences between myself and the workers, varying levels of engagement were possible, largely, I believe, through humour and empathy. We would laugh about their funny stories and allow for long silences during the difficult stories. By engaging with each other, I believe that we were able to create sufficient rapport for the workers to share their experiences with me, despite my differentness.

With the employers, there was a different dynamic based on our common race. There were moments in each interview where the employer would try to distinguish themselves from the stereotypical white middle-class employer by displaying how they were kind, generous, not controlling and, in particular, not racist. At times, employers used phrases such as „you know“ or inclusive pronouns such as „we“ or „us“, assuming that, because of our shared racial category, that we would align on other issues as well. In some instances, I would challenge this assumption. In other instances, I became a participant in a sort of „white collusion“ as I either allowed particular kinds of talk to occur unchallenged or I commended them for being a particular kind of employer, for having a particular kind of relationship with the worker or for holding particular views on race. Sometimes I was aware of using this strategy as I did not want to offend the participant and close down the communication between us. At other times, I only noticed the collusion during the transcription process. My interviews with employers involved walking a fine line between being an insider based on race and an outsider based on my role as a researcher.

The inescapability of my racialised self was a difficult thing to navigate within the research process. However, in retrospect, I feel confident that my decision to conduct all of the research myself was the right decision. I was able to interact with both the employers and the workers and was able to establish relationships and develop insights during both the diary and interview phases of the research that may not have been possible had my involvement in the study been limited or mediated by a research assistant. The experience did, however, remind me of how South Africans, even in the present post-apartheid era, automatically orientate towards notions of race in interactions with each other and how such interactions can become

troubling as a result (Durrheim et al., 2011). It is something that serves as a background to so much of what happens between people, both black and white, as it permeates the way we see ourselves and each other. This, I would argue, is also part of what makes domestic labour such a troubling relationship for South Africans.

## **4 Making silence empirically evident: Scenes from domestic labour relationships**

One of the clear difficulties with a study focusing on „being silent about“ is knowing when there is a silence present within an utterance and how that silence can be analysed in a robust, clear and valid manner (Irvine, 2011; Mazzei, 2003). How does one know that a silence has occurred or that a silence is present within any particular utterance? How can one know that there are particular tendencies toward avoiding particular topics within a relationship? How can one empirically show when „being silent about“ has occurred? These are some fundamental challenges in any analysis of silence and this study is not an exception. However, instead of glossing over such challenges, pretending that silence is an unproblematic phenomenon, the present chapter will discuss challenges in identifying instances of silence that will be contextualised within moments from domestic labour relationships. Scenes from domestic labour will be presented and analysed in order to both define „being silent about“ and to offer and discuss a methodology for the study of silence.

### ***4.1 Analysing silence as activity***

There are a number of elements of silence and a number of ways one can conceptualise „being silent about“. Silence can be analysed as two different phenomena. First, silence can be something that is spoken about or reflected on. It is something that can be objectified, topicalised, accounted for and justified. In this research, the study explicitly set out to study silence and requested that participants become aware of and reflect on silences within their domestic labour relationship. As such, it is something that is talked about by the participants of this study. In this sense, silence becomes a research artefact, where it can be topicalised and studied according to how participants construct, justify and account for silences; their own silence, the silence of their counterpart or silences that are present within their relationship.

For the participants, this research gave them an opportunity to intentionally reflect on issues and topics that are silent within their domestic labour relationship. The silences that emerged within both the daily diary and the interview data showed that one or both participants were aware to varying degrees of these silences relating to a variety of topics. This awareness of



the necessity of silence as contrasted to open communication was mentioned in Kerry<sup>1</sup>'s last entry in her daily diary (see Diary Extract 1).

#### Diary Extract 1 – Employer Diary

1 I feel this journaling experience has caused me to really think a lot about my  
2 interactions with Mandisa. I have become so aware of how our ways and words really  
3 affect one another. I have realised that there are matters and things that are difficult to  
4 talk about but at the same time it may sometimes be better to leave things unsaid. [...]  
5 I understand now the benefits and growth that come with encouraging open  
6 communication. It's helpful to have clarity on how you are coping around each other  
7 etc, as well as to clarify misconceptions and misunderstandings. I have also realised  
8 it's better to ask or show rather than to expect or anticipate.

Kerry expresses and constructs a number of reflections in this diary entry that are applicable to silence and an awareness thereof, specifically in the domestic labour context. She notes that the diary has “caused [her] to really think about [her] interactions with Mandisa” (lines 1-2). As a result of intentionally thinking about their interactions, she is now “aware of how our ways and words really affect one another” (lines 2-3). A complementary implication may also be how a lack of “words” (i.e. silence) may also affect the relationship.

Kerry notes two elements of communication in this extract: (1) “open communication” (lines 5-6); and (2) “things unsaid” (line 4). Open communication is mostly discussed, with a focus on its benefits, such as interpersonal “clarity on how you are coping around each other” (lines 6), “to clarify misconceptions and misunderstandings” (lines 7) and the advantage of open discussion rather than making assumptions (line 8). Open communication is associated with “benefits and growth” (line 5).

Alternatively, Kerry also notes that “it may sometimes be better to leave things unsaid” (line 4). These are “things that are difficult to talk about” (lines 3-4). Interestingly, Kerry spends much more of this extract writing about open communication. She does not mention why it may be “better” for an issue to remain in silence and which “things” specifically are difficult

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<sup>1</sup> All of the names used for participants are pseudonyms in order to protect their own identity and confidentiality and, due to the dyadic nature of this research, also that of their counterpart.

to speak about. An implication of “leaving things unsaid” is that it ultimately linked to silently “[expecting] or [anticipating]” (line 8), both of which require actively making observations and assumptions about one’s counterpart. Yet Kerry does not mention what “matters and things are difficult to talk about” (lines 7-8) or why it is better to “leave things unsaid” (line 8) or how one knows when to allow a topic to remain silent. These are all details that Kerry does not address. She is silent about some of the implications of topic avoidance, such as avoiding confrontation or maintaining a polite relationship. Along with the ability to topicalise silence comes activity regarding the maintenance of particular silences. One actively works to be silent about some issues.

This relates to the second aspect of „being silent about“. Silence is also something that participants actively engaged in, something that is accomplished in their talk and interaction with each other and, in the case of the present study, in the data collection process as well. Participants actively „do“ silence within their relationships and in their interactions with the research process. In this sense, silence becomes an activity that can be analysed, an activity that is part of social life as people engage with each other. This relates to Billig’s (1997b, 2004, 2014) notion of silence as a routine part of talk among speakers where troubling topics are regularly pushed aside within conversation. Within this analysis, the conversation is ultimately between the participant and myself as a researcher. Thus the analysis will show how, even when speaking about a topicalised silence, other silences can be maintained within interaction. Many of these silences, it will be argued, are related to the background forces of race, gender, class and the unique nature of domestic labour that work to maintain hierarchy and inequality within this relationship.

In addition, there are some silences that participants are consciously aware of. They know that they are avoiding a topic and they can explain their silence. They can talk about it. Being consciously silent about a topic means being aware of it and yet keeping it from becoming shared knowledge, or treating it as if it is already shared knowledge that should not be spoken about, as in the case of social taboos. In other cases, participants are silent about topics in an unconscious manner. These are topics that have been and continue to remain silent within and between people (Billig, 2004). These are silences that are difficult to articulate and uncomfortable realities of social life that are, at times, not sayable.

However, the distinction between conscious and unconscious silences will not be the focus of this analysis. That is a topic for another study. Instead, for the purposes of this analysis, I will use Billig's notion of how speakers collaboratively keep troubling topics from entering into a conversation, which is, as I will attempt to demonstrate, clearly equivalent to accomplishing „being silent about“. Thus, the term repression will not be used in this analysis, instead opting to embrace Billig's understanding of the unsaid while not necessarily using his specific terminology. The distinction between conscious and unconscious silence will not be attempted, instead focusing on how silences are maintained through discursive accomplishment. As a result, the focus of this analysis will be on how to empirically demonstrate that an absence is present in the first place.

I suggest that the two aspects of silence, talking about silence and doing silence, are not necessarily separate activities. Even when speaking about a silence, it is possible to create and maintain particular silences at the same time. Even when breaking a silence, where what was once unspoken becomes topicalised, some silences remain while new silences are produced through doing silence. This dynamic was noted by Carpenter and Austin (2007), who remarked on how, even when mothers of children with ADHD attempted to speak about the challenges of their motherhood or to voice their stories, their utterances reproduced many of the discourses that had marginalised their voice in the first place. Thus, paradoxically, even in attempting to speak about silence, ideology can be reproduced and thus reveal and reinforce existing silences. In this sense, topicalisation and accomplishment can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Therefore, to speak of one side, one must also speak of the other because they are so interdependent. Otherwise, one would have to „split the coin in half“, thereby losing the value of the coin and rendering it meaningless and, ultimately, useless.

So, to avoid a meaningless and useless discussion, the following analysis will attempt to demonstrate how to conduct thorough analysis that examines talk about silence (topicalisation) and doing silence (accomplishment) and the interconnections between these activities. While the analysis will necessarily demand that content is discussed, the focus of this chapter is methodological. Therefore, the implications and nuances of „being silent about“ in terms of the maintenance of inequality in domestic labour will not be the focus, but will rather be the work of chapter 6. The present chapter will first focus on how to go about identifying and analysing instances of „being silent about“. Next, the particular strengths of

the type of data that were collected in this study will also be highlighted here, arguing for dyadic and multi-layered data that allows for a more dynamic analysis.

#### ***4.2 Identifying silence through analysis***

Having argued for a conceptualisation of silence as both something that can be topicalised and something that can be accomplished, I will now attempt to show how to identify and analyse instances of „being silent about“ within the data. This will take place within an in-depth analysis of a particular moment in the data.

In the case of silence as topicalisation, there are, I believe, fewer challenges. Silence is being spoken about as a subject of conversation. It is being accounted for, justified, excused or confessed. In terms of topicalisation, a discursive analysis of silence can potentially follow many of the accepted conventions of this discipline, such as the analysis of constructions of identity, descriptions, accountability, collusion, consensus and ideology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In this sense, the topicalisation of silence is yet another site where discursive psychology can see how silence works to accomplish particular identities and constructions.

The analysis of silence as an accomplishment in itself is, I would think, a slightly more problematic issue. This has been highlighted in the discussion regarding the difficulties in making an absence demonstrably present within analysis, a challenge that is particularly difficult in the case of „being silent about“. I would like to suggest a number of tools and strategies that can be used in making silence evident, largely based on Billig's (1997b, 2004, 2014) conceptualisation of dialogic repression and Mazzei's (2004, 2007) suggestions for listening to silence in a way that makes it a present absence. Mazzei (2007) suggests that Richardson's (1997) notion of „interior monologue“ can probe where different absences or omissions may have occurred. These can largely be seen as questions that the researcher can use to interrogate the text that is being analysed. These questions include: What is the speaker attending to and potentially avoiding within this utterance?; What is hearable within this conversation?; What has been allowed to pass within this conversation?; How could this conversation have been different?; What else could have been said and yet was not spoken about?

These questions draw attention to how the participants are collaboratively avoiding troubling topics by not probing or pursuing a particular line of conversation. This absence can be identified by using Mazzei's (2004, 2007) notion of listening for absences within utterances and questioning why those absences were allowed to exist without being challenged, or as Mazzei (2007, p. 637) states "what we fail to voice in the form of our silent questions or assumptions, the silences that we fail to challenge on the part of our participants, or an absence of the probing of their silent questions." Similarly, Billig (1997b, p. 152) argues that, in a study of a phenomenon such as the unaid, "what is not said, but could easily have been, and, indeed, on occasions is almost said but then removed from the conversation, becomes of prime significance." These may have been seen as interruptions or rude interpretations of an utterance, where more information is called for. By allowing it to pass by collaboratively maintaining the politeness and flow of the conversation, troubling topics continue to go unspoken (Billig, 2004).

#### ***4.2.1 A worked example***

For pair 5, negative feelings, reactions and impressions often go unsaid between Kerry and Mandisa. Their relationship is particularly complex due to Mandisa's history with the family. Mandisa worked for Kerry's husband's family for 20 years from the time of his childhood. She has ongoing contact with Kerry's in-laws, who consider her as part of their family. When Kerry discovered that she was pregnant with twins, while already having two small children, she and her husband decided to hire Mandisa, who had retired at that point. Kerry feels that she is compared to her mother-in-law and the relationship that she had with Mandisa, feeling pressure to make their relationship work because of Mandisa's position within the extended family, while Mandisa feels that Kerry does not treat her well the way that her previous employer did. However, both women state that they need each other. Mandisa has multiple dependents that she cannot support on her pension funds alone and Kerry anticipates needing more domestic help when her twins are born.

Both Kerry and Mandisa experience situations where, within the ordinariness of daily tasks, misunderstandings and unmet expectations result in reactions that are not spoken about.

Within the context of a live-in situation, there is daily contact between the employer and the

worker that can be difficult to manage and negotiate. The following analysis shows how silence is topicalised and accomplished within this pair, a demonstration that is largely due to the layered and dyadic nature of the data that will be presented. This is clearly seen in the following moment regarding childcare, which was diarised by both Kerry (see Diary Extract 2) and Mandisa (Diary Extract 3).

### Diary Extract 2 – Employer Diary

1 A rather frustrating day with Mandisa today. There was much that went unspoken and  
2 I suppose perhaps I am to blame for this.

3 It started this morning at 8am when I went to shower + asked Mandisa if she would  
4 please put Annie down for an earlier-than-usual nap, as I had to take her + Ben out at  
5 9am. When I emerged from the room at about 8:30, Mandisa was in the garden with  
6 Annie + had made no effort to get Annie to sleep. At 9am, just as I was about to  
7 leave, Annie was becoming very irritable + Mandisa said „She“s tired, she must sleep  
8 now“. I felt so annoyed, as I had to leave the house with an irritable + tired toddler. I  
9 asked Mandisa in quite an abrupt tone, if she had tried to put Annie down + she said  
10 quite plainly „No“. She could clearly sense my irritation in that moment.  
11 Unfortunately, for the rest of the day, she remained very grumpy. I am not sure  
12 whether her grumpiness was a result of being „hurt“ by me or just a passive aggressive  
13 manner.

14 I realise now, that I should have discussed this issue through with Mandisa, as it  
15 really did have an impact on our interactions throughout the day. I felt that we weren‘t  
16 seeing eye to eye.

Kerry begins her diary record of the day by labeling the day as “frustrating” (line 1) and linking the frustration with reflection that “there was much that went unspoken” (line 1). It is unclear whether the unspoken caused the frustration or vice versa, yet Kerry accepts the “blame” (line 2) for the unsaid nature of the day.

Much of the diary entry gives details around a childcare task that was given to Mandisa. This task was not completed as was expected (lines 5-6). In addition, Mandisa evaluates Annie“s

irritability just before they are about to leave and comments that “she must sleep now” (line 7-8). This unfulfilled task, along with Mandisa’s commentary, leaves Kerry feeling “so annoyed” (line 8). Kerry uses “quite an abrupt tone” (line 9) with Mandisa when she calls her to account for her lack of effort at putting Annie down for a nap, to which Mandisa gives a short response (lines 9-10). However, Kerry does not give direct, spoken feedback regarding her assessment of Mandisa’s performance. Instead she displays irritation that she says Mandisa could “clearly sense” (line 10). According to this diary extract, Kerry’s evaluation of and reaction to her performance remain unspoken and are instead topics that Mandisa are to interpret within Kerry’s silence.

This incident sets the tone for their interactions for the rest of the day. Interestingly, despite using descriptions of herself such as “annoyed” (line 7), using an “abrupt tone” (line 9) and “irritation” (line 10), Kerry then focuses on her interpretations of Mandisa’s displays of emotion. She speaks of Mandisa as “very grumpy” (line 11) and attempts to decipher its cause, which is either due to being “„hurt“ by [Kerry] or just a passive aggressive manner” (lines 12-13). Kerry ends the diary entry with a reflection that “[she] should have discussed this issue through with Mandisa” (line 14) because of the lasting impact of the incident (and how it was silently handled) on the rest of the day’s interactions. Their lack of communication and the amount that went unsaid had the effect of both parties not “seeing eye to eye” (line 16).

Within this extract, silence is clearly topicalised. It is seen as having “an impact” (line 15), as being blameworthy (lines 2 and 18) and as causing ongoing friction within their relationship as they are not “seeing eye to eye” (line 16). Although Kerry begins and ends this diary entry by claiming blame for the unspoken and unsaid issues that occurred between herself and Mandisa and although she describes her emotions and reactions quite negatively, her account of the incident still implicitly lays much blame with Mandisa as silently insubordinate and emotional. She also characterises her silence as displays of emotion in place of forthright communication, thereby mirroring Mandisa’s „passive aggressive“ reaction. This extract constructs „being silent about“ as a negative element within the pair’s interactions.

This mutual silence is also described by Mandisa in her diary account of the situation (see Diary Extract 3). Yet her emphasis is somewhat different to that of Kerry.

### Diary Extract 3 – Worker Diary

1 God I thank you for this day even though it was not a good day. She told me to put the  
2 baby to sleep; it was still as early as 07:00. She told me she was going out. She had  
3 left me with the baby yesterday and I could not do ironing. She asked me if the baby  
4 was asleep and I told her no. She said she will take the baby with her. I then started  
5 with ironing. [...] She returned home at 10:00 and fed the children and went to sleep.  
6 She didn't say a word to me and I kept quiet.

Mandisa begins the account by noting that “it was not a good day” (line 1). Some of the details regarding the childcare task are somewhat unclear in Mandisa’s diary when compared with Kerry’s diary record. It is unclear if she understood that Kerry intended to take the baby with her when she was going out (line 2), thus making it unclear whether Mandisa disobeyed or misunderstood the original instruction. It also seems that Mandisa disagrees with putting the baby to sleep so early in the morning (line 2). Mandisa records the interaction when Kerry asks her to account for the baby’s sleep situation. However, she does not mention any emotional displays or interpretations on the part of either party. The day is then described as both parties go about their tasks for the day, Kerry tending to children and Mandisa tending to household chores.

The diary entry ends with a description of their mutual silence: “She didn’t say a word to me and I kept quiet” (line 6). The silence described by Mandisa is not accompanied by descriptions or interpretations of either party’s emotions or reactions. Blame is not clearly allocated. Mandisa does not record or reflect on her own feelings or on any possible assessments of Kerry’s reaction. These elements are not mentioned at all in her diary. Instead, there is simply silence between them.

#### ***4.1.5.2 Talking about and doing silence in talk***

Both Kerry and Mandisa are aware of the silence between them, as is reflected in their diary entries above. The laying of blame for silence and the agency in breaking silence are constructed differently by Kerry (Interview Extract 1) and Mandisa (Interview Extract 2).



In Kerry's individual interview, she begins her account by responding to my reflection that there is a great deal that goes unsaid between them, especially related to displays and interpretations of each other's „grumpiness“ toward each other.

#### Interview Extract 1 – Employer Interview

- 1 Emp5 So difficult because (.) I almost feel like for her sake, it's better if we  
2 don't talk about it.
- 3 AJM Mm:::. (.) [Okay.
- 4 Emp5 [She doesn't (.) want to or like to::  
5 (.)
- 6 AJM Mm.
- 7 Emp5 talk about these things, I find. (.) So.
- 8 AJM When you say these things, what do you mean, like?
- 9 Emp5 Like if I said to her, Mandisa you seem unhappy to me.
- 10 AJM Mm.
- 11 Emp5 Like I can feel, she just doesn't wanna go there.
- 12 AJM Okay.
- 13 Emp5 So she'll say no I'm happy, I'm fine.

For Kerry, the situation is immediately labeled as “difficult” (line 10). She accounts for why they “don't talk about [the grumpiness]” (line 2) as being for Mandisa's “sake” (line 1). Kerry makes the argument that Mandisa does not “want to or like to” (line 4) talk about her emotions. This assessment is based on times when Kerry has approached Mandisa regarding her unhappiness (line 9), to which Mandisa responds by saying “[she's] happy, [she's] fine” (line 13). Mandisa's imagined response to Kerry's enquiry is constructed as a „dead end“ to the conversation. It is also implied that Mandisa's displays of silent grumpiness contradict her spoken claims of happiness. These factors combine to allow Kerry to construct a conversation focused on Mandisa's feelings as ultimately fruitless and frustrating. As a result, allowing such things to remain unspoken is constructed as preferable, albeit difficult.

There is a great deal of interpretation and anticipation that Kerry is engaging in within this account of the topicalisation of silence. Mandisa has not said that she does not want to discuss her feelings with Kerry. Instead it is something that Kerry can “feel” (line 11). It is

something that has not been explicitly spoken of but something that is tangible for Kerry. Mandisa's closed answers contribute toward Kerry's perception that Mandisa is not willing to discuss her emotional state and reactions. Although grumpiness and other negative feelings have been constructed as things that are pertinent and often need to or should be addressed, they are often allowed to blow over from day to day without being spoken about, apart from previous discussions that have proven to be fruitless. The blame for this silence is clearly constructed as being found with Mandisa.

There is a moment where the details of the imagined conversation may have been allowed to pass. In lines 4-7, Kerry states that Mandisa would not "want to or like to talk about these things." However, instead of allowing the flow of interview to continue untroubled, I ask Kerry to elaborate, probing for an explanation of her statement, which she provides.

Ironically, Kerry's own grumpiness is not mentioned in this account. Instead, the focus is on Mandisa's emotions and inner states as inaccessible. Kerry remains silent about whether she would be willing to discuss the topic of her emotions and the nature of her reactions in relation to Mandisa. Perhaps if, in my probe for additional information, I had asked about her perspective about or willingness to participate in a conversation with Mandisa, she may have had to draw on a different set of interpretive repertoires. However, her part in the maintenance of the silence between her and Mandisa is allowed to pass. I do not invite her to account for her own part in the interaction or for how she may be influencing Mandisa's silence. Instead, Mandisa's unhappiness is allowed to be constructed as independent of her interactions with Kerry and as something that can be discussed in isolation from Kerry's own emotions and reactions and how they may be contributing to Mandisa's state. Thus, even within the topicalisation of Mandisa's silence, Kerry is accomplishing being silent about her own silence. Kerry's part in the silence is an absence that is conspicuous within this extract.

Mandisa's account focuses much more on her own emotions and justifications for her own silence. She constructs an account of when she would like to speak to Kerry and the contents of that discussion (see Interview Extract 2).

#### Interview Extract 2 – Worker Interview

- 1     Wkr5    And I can sit down with her. One day, I can choose the day, sitting  
2                    down and talk.

- 3     AJM     Mm. Mm.
- 4     Wkr5    Yes. I need the love.
- 5     AJM     Mm.
- 6     Wkr5    If you stay with the people, you must can feel it at home.
- 7     AJM     Mm.
- 8     Wkr5    Mustn't treat like a (.) I was thinking the other day, I said I can tell her,
- 9            you, you treat me like a (.) I don't like use that word, but it's coming to
- 10          I can use (.) like a slave. I like to tell that.
- 11    AJM     Mm.
- 12    Wkr5    Because sometimes I'm very angry.

Mandisa first asserts her agency in this process. She accomplishes this by stating that she will initiate the discussion (line 1), that she will “choose the day” (line 1) and that she will set the agenda and focus of the discussion, namely discussing her needs (line 4). One may expect a disgruntled worker to focus primarily on issues such as wages, leave, unreasonable employer expectations or working conditions. Yet Mandisa’s primary concern is that she “[needs] the love” (line 4) and that one must “feel it at home” (line 6) in a live-in context. The topics that Mandisa would choose to speak about are not necessarily work-related, but are rather emotional and relational issues that affect her working relationship with Kerry, making her feel unwelcome and unloved in Kerry’s home.

It is based on these emotional and interpersonal issues that Mandisa then raises the issue of the manner in which Kerry interacts with her. Mandisa begins to state her grievance but does so haltingly and with much hesitation and preparation work before she comes to her point. She begins her statement about Kerry’s treatment twice (line 8 and 9) without finishing the sentence with the label she intends to use. She frames the label by noting that she has considered it (she was “thinking the other day” (line 8)); that it is not a conclusion she has come to easily, lightly or even eagerly (“I don’t like use that word” (line 9)); and that the circumstances and interactions have become so disagreeable that it is now appropriate to use the label (“but it’s coming to I can use” (lines 9-10)). She then states the label that she has been building toward: “like a slave” (line 10), a situation that leaves her “very angry” (line 12). Mandisa then notes that her treatment as a slave due to a lack of warmth and love from Kerry is what she would “like to tell” (line 10) Kerry. Thus, Mandisa’s silence is topicalised

as a direct result of the treatment she experiences in Kerry's home and her anger about that treatment.

Within this topicalisation of Mandisa's silence is another silence that is being accomplished. It is something that is allowed to pass within the interview. It is the contradiction between the agency and power with which Mandisa constructs herself within lines 1-2 and her slave-like status that is described in the rest of the extract. How, if Mandisa is so marginalised and mistreated, will she be able to assert such authority with a conversation with Kerry? And why has that conversation not taken place yet? In addition, what would the outcome of such a conversation be, in Mandisa's view? Would she see the outcome as improved working conditions, as the end of her employment with Kerry or where nothing changes at all? These are all questions that are allowed to go unasked. I would argue that this may be because it would have been potentially troubling for me to ask such questions and it may have been troubling for Mandisa to have answered them. Thus, to allow the interview to continue without further tension and discomfort, questions of Mandisa's power are allowed to slip through the cracks of the conversation.

The development of the example of pair 5 has hopefully accomplished two things. First, it has demonstrated how the conceptualisations of silence as both a topic and an accomplishment can be analysed through a discursive approach. This is largely achieved, in the case of topicalisation, through the use of the concept of interpretive repertoires where talk around silence is used to achieve particular "versions of actions, self and social structures in talk" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 90). In the case of silence as an accomplishment, asking particular questions of the text allows one to explore where topics have been allowed to go unaddressed or to pass without being explored further. These questions reveal where there is interactional trouble that is being collaboratively avoided in order to keep the conversation flowing comfortably and easily.

The second thing that has been established is how important silence can be in the study of social issues. Within this pair, it is clear that silence, both as a topicalisation and an accomplishment, can be interesting and fruitful in exploring how relationships are created through silence and how relationships can also create silence. This positions a study of „being silent about“ as a potentially powerful area to understand issues such as inequality as we learn what goes unsaid, between whom and to what end.

While this section has focused on the analytical elements of the topicalisation and accomplishment of silence, the following section will demonstrate how a layered approach to data and units of analysis is beneficial to allow for such an analysis to take place. I suggest that the notions of both the topicalisation and the accomplishment of „being silent about“ are best observed through dyadic and layered data. This is apparent within all of the pairs in this study, where the diary and interview data work together to provide a fuller understanding of the dynamics, strategies and discourses surrounding silence, an understanding that would not be realised within conventional datasets that offer a once-off account by one participant within the silence.

### ***4.3 The benefits of layered dyadic data***

I would like to propose that the research design for this study covers some important issues that assists in potentially filling the gaps that previous studies have had in the study of „being silent about“. I suggest that this study has produced rich, textured data in the form of diaries and interviews that allows for fine-grained analysis, with the acknowledgement of the inherently social and collaborative nature of silence through the inclusion of dyads as the unit of analysis.

First, a great deal of social science research loses some of its fundamentally social characteristics because it studies social and interactional processes by predominantly using a single individual as the unit of analysis. In cases where a phenomenon is inherently collaborative, such as „being silent about“, I would argue that such a collaboration is best understood by accessing both of the collaborators. Through a dyadic study, both participants in the silence can be invited to account for the phenomenon. Their strategies, perspectives and discourses can be seen in light of each other to develop a deeper, more detailed and more nuanced appreciation for its complexities and dynamics.

Through a layered data collection technique, such as the diary-interview method, the analysis can cover a range of accounts of silence, both the embodied moment of the silence as presented in the diary keeping and topicalisations and accomplishments around the silence in the interview context. Obviously, another interesting possibility would be to analyse actual

spoken interactions between participants. However, because of ethical limitations, that was not possible in the present study. Yet the analysis of the written diary and the spoken interview allows many opportunities to see how silence can be both topicalised and accomplished by speakers. By using both sources of data, contradictions, justifications and confessions can be seen to produce and achieve particular kinds of silences, some of which are essential in the maintenance of existing power differentials, as will be the focus of chapter 6. For now, the present section will continue to assess the merits of analysing dyadic, layered data in order to better understand the phenomenon of „being silent about“.

#### ***4.3.1 A worked example***

The participants of pair 3 seemed to have a relatively open and warm relationship. Tracy had first employed Lindiwe’s sister, until she died from HIV/AIDS a number of years ago. Tracy then employed Lindiwe, who now supports her sister’s four children and her own child as well. Lindiwe’s responsibilities include cleaning, as well as caring for Tracy’s youngest child on mornings when he is not at playschool and caring for both of Tracy’s children in the afternoon. Tracy and Lindiwe joke with each other often about their relationship, their children and their work. The methodology that is used in this study gives a great deal of insight into the interactional management in this dyad and the related dynamics of silence by using the diary to record the embodied moment of the silence and the interviews to provide a conversation where an account of that moment may (or may not) be given. Again, the challenges of analysing silence will be highlighted and some strategies to address those challenges will be suggested.

During my visits to the property, I observed how Lindiwe and Tracy flowed in and out of each other’s living quarters when Lindiwe was not working, chatting about the day’s events, plans for the weekend and giving each other advice about issues such as breastfeeding and weight loss. One such moment was recorded by both participants (see Diary Extracts 4 and 5), focusing on a moment where Tracy and Lindiwe speak about Lindiwe’s fears of becoming *mafutha* (fat) and Tracy’s suggestion that Lindiwe begin to exercise.

#### **Diary Extract 4 – Employer 3**

1 When I got home from work Lindiwe was in her room preparing to go home for the  
2 weekend. When she came inside I commented about her nice new denim jeans.  
3 Lindiwe complained that although they're new, they are already tight on her. She said  
4 she didn't want to be „*mafutha*“.

5 I said that with the type of food that she is accustomed to, it is easy to pick up a bit of  
6 weight here and there. She commented on how she loves samp and beans and *phuthu*.  
7 She said that even though she goes walking, her tummy is still „fat“. I said she should  
8 try sit-ups which she didn't know anything about.

9 I showed Lindiwe how to do sit-ups and then she left to go home to her family.

This interaction is initiated by a compliment by Tracy regarding Lindiwe's new jeans (line 2). This is somewhat noteworthy because it shows that Tracy is aware of Lindiwe's normal wardrobe contents and is able to notice when she is wearing something new. Second, the offer of a compliment regarding clothes can be seen as a common female topic of conversation, which also has elements of politeness. Interestingly, Lindiwe's complaint about her body and her weight (lines 3-4) emerge from Tracy's compliment.

Tracy responds to Lindiwe's complaint by commenting on the type of food that she eats and its implications for weight gain (lines 5-6), which can also be viewed as a sort of cultural critique as such foods are typically eaten by Africans. However, after Lindiwe expresses her love for foods such as samp, beans and phuthu (line 6), Tracy does not advise Lindiwe to stop or even limit her intake of those foods. Rather Tracy offers advice regarding how to improve her figure through exercises such as sit-ups (line 8), which Tracy demonstrates for Lindiwe (line 9).

This interaction is complex. On one level, it is situated in the context of one woman giving advice to help another woman with her figure after having expressed dissatisfaction with her figure. It is an interaction that implies care and intimacy in order to problem-solve together as women. An alternate reading of the moment could be that it is a paternalistic interaction where a white employer expresses a sort of cultural critique of the stereotypical eating and exercise habits of blacks. Perhaps it is both.

Lindiwe also recorded this interaction in her diary. However, she focused less on Tracy's advice to her, instead showing how advice is being sought, offered and traded within their relationship about a variety of subjects.

### Diary Extract 5 – Worker 3

1 She returned home that afternoon; I was ready to leave because I usually go home on  
2 Fridays. She then complimented my denim pants. She advised me how I can lose  
3 weight around my stomach. She then asked me how long did I breast feed my child  
4 and how did I manage to make her stop, I told her I breastfed until my child was 2  
5 years old and I used aloe to make her stop. After I gave birth to my child I gained  
6 weight. She asked me to bring her my picture when I had gained weight. I told her I  
7 would bring it, but I no longer want to gain weight. I like myself the way I am now.

In Lindiwe's account of this interaction, she shows how Tracy compliments her on her jeans and then offers some advice about weight loss (lines 2-3). Lindiwe then immediately shows how Tracy requests advice from her regarding breastfeeding and weaning (lines 3-4). These are both highly gendered topics, situating this conversation as occurring between two women who have helpful knowledge to share with each other. Again, the interaction has many elements that are present in relationships that include some level of commonality and shared sisterhood relating to issues of motherhood and female body image. The two extracts also show a form of silence that demonstrates and encompasses the absence of common ground or shared perspective. It is the silence of being alone within one's own point-of-view.

These diary extracts provided by the participants serve as situated, embodied activities and interactions from which the interview accounts and talk emerge. In the interview, participants reflect on the action that took place and construct and reconstruct it in order to accomplish a particular sense of self and other.

Within Tracy's interview (see Interview Extract 3), she accounts for and reflects on the interaction around sit-ups in terms of racial differences and deficits relating to caring for and maintaining one's body. The extract begins as I introduce the diary account of the sit-ups, which ends with the exclamation of "yo" (line 1). This exclamation is not explicitly positive



or negative but it marks the event as exceptional and thus invites commentary by Tracy to explain her actions and interactions with Lindiwe.

### Interview Extract 3 – Employer 3

- 1     AJM     And then you teaching her how to do a sit-up. And I thought y:::o.  
2     Emp3     Because ugh well, I think (.) ((sighs)) I hate all this like white man and  
3             black man and what have you but I, in in like the white environment  
4             there's more emphasis on diet and gym and the whole lifestyle that we  
5             should be leading. And (.) when you're in the more rural communities  
6             you're not exposed to all that.  
7     AJM     Mm.  
8     Emp3     I mean I've been to Virgin Active. I've been a member of it. Given it  
9             up. But um.  
10    AJM     Hehehe  
11    Emp3     ((inaudible)) But I know about (.) the right things to do. And they:::  
12             don't know about it. They walk to the taxi and that's their exercise. So.  
13    AJM     Mm.  
14    Emp3     Ja that's why I said, oh let me show you. Hahaha.

Tracy begins her account of the sit-ups lesson with a combination of hesitations and pauses (“ugh well, I think (.) ((sighs))”, line 2), indicating that what she is about to say may be difficult to negotiate or that I may hear it in a particular way. She then introduces a disclaimer, stating that she “[hates] all this like white man and black man and what have you” (lines 2-3), implying that she is not in favour of nor in a habit of viewing the world in racialised terms. Tracy goes on to explain the benefits of “the white environment” (line 3), such as diet and exercise, which she promotes as the “lifestyle that we should be leading” (lines 4-5). These are all things that Tracy argues that “rural communities”, which could also be read as “less Westernised African communities”, have not benefited from due to lack of exposure (lines 5-6).

Tracy then contrasts herself with the ignorance or inexperience of such communities. Her credentials include having attended and been a member at Virgin Active health club (line 13) and also that she knows the “right things to do” (line 11). However, “they” (line 11) are

ignorant of these best practices. Instead, “they walk to the taxi and that’s their exercise” (line 12), which in itself indicates both a lack of knowledge and a lack of experience and exposure in “the white environment” (line 8). Tracy positions herself as a knowledgeable other who can instruct and demonstrate for Lindiwe regarding how to care for her body in the right/white way, where the interaction is framed as friendly and mutually beneficial where both women can share advice.

Read on its own, this extract can be read as highly racist and paternalistic. It is a white woman speaking of the inferiority of blacks and the way that they (do not know how to) care for themselves. However, her talk must be linked back to the original activity, which was helping her domestic worker learn how to do sit-ups after Lindiwe had complained about her figure and weight. The activity and the account cannot necessarily be viewed in isolation as they inform and contextualise each other. In addition, Lindiwe’s diary account does not flag the event as problematic or demeaning, but instead accepts the advice about eating and exercise from Tracy as she dispenses advice in return. Tracy is able to share advice with Lindiwe in a way that is not constructed as particularly troubling to Lindiwe, according to her diary, while also expressing a great deal of superiority and racism in her interview. These accounts must be seen in relation to each other in order to understand the complexity of the relationship.

For Lindiwe, the conversation about weight loss and the sit-ups lesson from her employer is not constructed as particularly demeaning or troubling. However, this moment is used to introduce talk about other topics that would be troubling because of the power that Tracy holds as Lindiwe’s employer (see Interview Extract 4).

#### Interview Extract 4 – Worker 3

- 1     AJM     And many employers wouldn’t feel comfortable (.) telling
- 2             someone how to lose weight.
- 3     Wkr3     [Hahahaha
- 4     AJM     [Telling their domestic worker how to lose weight. So it sounds like
- 5             sometimes you and Tracy are like friends (.) but then there are other
- 6             times when (.) there are things that you don’t feel comfortable
- 7             speaking about.

8 Wkr3 Yes:::.

9 (.)

10 Yes. I agree about that. There's too (.) to me there's lots of things I

11 never (.) speak to Tracy. Uh um (.) uh uh like I said, I was uh scared to

12 lo::se

13 AJM Ja.

14 Wkr3 my job.

After I introduce the topic of easy and difficult conversations, Lindiwe laughs (line 3) at the scenario of her employer telling her how to lose weight. She agrees with my assessment that interactions such as advice from Tracy about weight loss are friendly, while other topics are less so. Lindiwe gives an initial agreement with this statement (line 8), followed by a pregnant pause and then explicitly says, "I agree about that" (line 10). Lindiwe notes that there are "lots of things" (line 10) about which she would "never speak to Tracy" (line 11). Lindiwe then uses a number of hesitations and hedges before stating that she would be "scared to lose [her] job" (lines 11-14). Thus, within a topicalisation of silence, Lindiwe uses Tracy's position of power as her employer to explain why some topics would be troubling or even risky for Lindiwe to raise with Tracy. Some topics are better left unspoken.

Lindiwe's diary extract is in sharp contrast to her interview extract. If analysed in isolation, the diary extract does not seem to indicate any power differences at all. In fact, if read with no reference to context, the diary extract may seem more like an interaction between friends who are trading advice and compliments. The employment relationship is not referenced at all in the diary extract. Yet in the interview extract, the relationship, its interactions and its flow of information are firmly situated within the context of an employment relationship where there are incredible power and status differences between Tracy and Lindiwe. I would argue that the domestic relationship is so complex that both extracts must be seen as interrelated, as Lindiwe is able to relate to draw on discourses of common womanhood and relational ease and yet flag the relationship as troubled and precarious. This confirms Glenn's (1992) argument that domestic labour cannot simply be analysed exclusively as a feminist arena, but instead is comprised of entangled issues, such as race and class, that contribute to the unequal and troubling nature of domestic labour.

Interestingly, while both Tracy and Lindiwe record the conversation about weight loss and exercise within their diaries as somewhat comfortable and easy, both women draw on discourses of inequality and difference within their interview accounts of the moment. Tracy does not speak to Lindiwe about the benefits of white lifestyles over black lifestyles, critiquing black norms of food and exercise. Neither does Lindiwe speak about her employment relationship with Tracy within her diary. Yet these are present in the interviews. Could it be that they are troubling for the participants or difficult to raise within conversations together? Would it be difficult for Tracy to explicitly criticise Lindiwe's lifestyle by framing it as „black“? How does Lindiwe know when to raise a topic and when to be silent about a topic, based on her employment relationship with Tracy? These are questions that are not addressed in the interviews, but hang in the silent spaces between the diaries and the interviews.

The analysis is made possible through the multilayered data that shows different perspectives and justifications for „being silent about“. Through this dyadic and layered data set, the complexities of accounts and justifications given by Lindiwe and Tracy are allowed to emerge as the diary and interview data are seen in relation to each other. The diary data alone do not allow for the event to be accounted for and the interview data alone do not allow for a full contextualisation of the embodied event. Looking purely at the diary data, one is unsure of the social psychological mechanisms that allow for the establishment and maintenance of silence. Looking purely at the interview data, the recorded event becomes abstracted and loses its immediacy. To simply access the diaries or the interviews would, in my opinion, lose a great deal of the dynamics that are at play within the interpretive repertoires used by both of the participants as they account for what is spoken about and also some of the information that is not conveyed in such moments. However, the combination of these methods allows for the dynamic, perspectival and social psychological complexities of both the topicalisation and the accomplishment of „being silent about“ to become more fully apparent and demonstrable, making a study of silence more robust and valid.

## **5 A social psychological understanding of silence**

The previous chapter has shown some of the methodological challenges of studying silence and how such difficulties can be addressed within analysis and data collection by conceptualising silence as activity. Having empirically shown what constitutes „being silent about“ by differentiating instances of talking about silence and actually doing silence in talk and interaction, the next logical step is to develop generalisations about „being silent about“. These generalisations will be based on notions of silence as interactionally powerful, as having extreme social force and as being individually and interpersonally troubling. This calls for the development of a social psychological understanding of silence. This section will draw on a range of extracts to demonstrate how silence functions in relationship, as it will be argued that silence primarily occurs through and within interpersonal spaces.

The following analysis is an opportunity to make generalisations across the data by examining how silence is occasioned, manifested and addressed on an interpersonal level, as can be seen through the data drawn from domestic labour relationships. While specific, detailed moments will be analysed comprehensively, other instances across cases may also be surveyed by simply presenting quotations from the data or without presenting extracts at all. Such cases may simply be listed or referred to briefly. This is ultimately an attempt to move beyond the specifics of each moment to establish the social function and functioning of „being silent about“ within relationships across the data.

### ***5.1 Violation of expectations***

An interesting starting point for a social psychological understanding of „being silent about“ is the question: What occasions a silence? I suggest that, ultimately, „being silent about“ is occasioned by the violation of some form of expectation, namely through the violation of: (1) an explicit rule; (2) an understood norm; (3) or a moral code. These are situations or events where an explanation may be required or where a judgement can be passed. However, instead of open communication where there is an explanation or the call for an explanation, the violation of the expectation may occasion silence within the relationship and, alternatively, may be occasioned by „being silent about“.

The violation of an expectation carries some important implications for coming to terms with silence within a social psychological framework. First, the violation of expectations creates interpersonal trouble. An expectation has not been met and thus there is the potential for a troubling and possibly awkward conversation where the violation is addressed directly. However, the violation of expectations also allows for power to become evident, especially where there are power imbalances that are usually not acknowledged or seem troubling to its participants. This is particularly important in a relationship such as domestic labour where the power imbalances are not often explicitly discussed and yet may serve as a background to interactions between participants. In addition, the violation of an expectation raises the possibility of shame by one party, which is also an implication of the power imbalances that exist within the relationship. These dynamics combine to create a situation where it may be preferable to keep the expectation violation as a silent topic within the relationship rather than to engage in an uncomfortable and troubling conversation where power dynamics are made explicit and shame may be experienced by one or both parties.

Domestic labour relationships are an interesting context in which to observe the violation of expectations as there are multiple possibilities and multiple perspectives regarding expectations and their violation, as well as the inherent power imbalances that fundamentally characterise the relationship. The following analysis will draw on data to support and justify these statements.

### ***5.1.1 The violation of an explicit rule***

In relationships, there are instances where explicit rules or instructions have been issued by a certain party with an expectation that the other party will respond with compliance or obedience. This occurs in friendships (“I don’t like sugar in my tea.” or “Please let me know before you borrow my clothes.”); in romantic relationships (“Don’t spend more than R500 without checking with me first.” or “Never mention divorce during an argument.”); and in work relationships (“Don’t contact me if I’m on leave.” or “Make sure you refill the paper tray in the copier.”).

Domestic labour relationships also involve a number and variety of rules and instructions that are largely issued by employers and are expected to be followed by workers. The instance of

the use of the wrong vacuum cleaner in pair 2 shows how the violation of an expectation can occasion silence from both parties, as was recorded in Judith and Olivia’s diaries (see Diary Extracts 6 and 7 below).

#### Diary Extract 6 – Worker Diary

1 [Olivia] brought back Hannah. At that time I was busy vacuuming with the other  
2 machine, although madam had warned me not to use this one because a piece of paper  
3 got stuck in it. But I managed to get rid of it and it works perfectly. I don’t know if  
4 she had noticed that I was still using it but if she asks I will explain to her because I  
5 wouldn’t want to argue with her.

Here it is clear that Judith has violated a rule. Olivia “had warned” (line 2) Judith against using this vacuum, making it a rule that she is expected to obey. Yet Judith admits that she “was busy vacuuming” (line 1) with the forbidden machine when Olivia returns home, an offense that Judith is aware that she has committed. It is interesting to note that Judith also uses the label of “madam” (line 2) when referring to the rule, indicating Olivia’s power and position. Because Olivia is the employer, she is entitled to set certain rules and to expect them to be complied with. The violation of this rule leads to Judith’s silence. In the event that “[Olivia] asks [Judith] will explain to her” (line 4), possibly giving reasons for her disobedience. Until then, Judith will remain silent about her use of the vacuum cleaner, which is a case of breaking an explicit rule.

Olivia also mentions this case of the violation of the rule (see Diary Extract 7), which also resulted in her silence with Judith.

#### Diary Extract 7 – Employer Diary

1 Dropped Hannah at lunch time. Greeted. Saw she was vacuuming with the wrong  
2 vacuum cleaner. Felt a bit annoyed but didn’t say anything. Asked her to play some  
3 puzzles with Hannah. She said no problem.

In her diary, Olivia notes that she “saw [Judith] was using the wrong vacuum cleaner” (lines 1-2). Olivia clearly had set a rule that Judith did not comply with. However, interestingly,

Olivia does not respond by addressing the issue but instead “[does not] say anything” (line 2). This notion of not saying anything does not mean that Olivia is completely silent. She is simply silent about Judith’s disobedience. She does not mention the violation of the rule or her feelings about it. Instead, Olivia chooses to issue instructions regarding a child care activity.

There are multiple other instances across the data where there has been the violation of a rule, largely related to the disobedience of a worker regarding an employer’s rules. All of these rule violations occasion silence. Some of these cases are listed below:

- Judith does not speak about whether or not she can take food from Olivia’s kitchen but says that it is something that she would explain if she was asked to. This relates to the violation of rules about stealing.
- Instead of speaking with Judith repeatedly about how to put Olivia’s shoes from the previous day away in the morning, Olivia empties her entire shoe closet and asks Judith to tidy it up. This relates to Judith not complying with Olivia’s instructions, a topic that Olivia is silent about and addresses in a nonverbal manner.
- While both participants are aware that Lindiwe is bringing her boyfriend onto the property, which is against the rules, neither Tracy nor Lindiwe address the topic until their participation in this study. Previously, it was a topic that they were silent about.
- Lindiwe leaves early without asking for permission, yet, despite Tracy’s irritation, she does not speak to Lindiwe about this violation.
- Eunice’s brings her partner onto the property, despite an explicit rule forbidding male visitors. Although Tania’s husband addresses this topic with Eunice, Tania remains silent about the issue in her interactions with Eunice.
- Kerry instructs Mandisa to take only particular foods from the main kitchen, but observes that Mandisa continues to eat the forbidden foods. Kerry does not speak to Mandisa about his topic.

### ***5.1.2 The violation of an understood norm***

The violation of an understood norm can also occasion being silent about something within a relationship. These are norms that are present in relationships in general, as opposed to being



explicit rules that are specific to particular contexts or relationships. These norms are expected of any competent member of society who is engaging with others who are also competent members of society or culture (Billig, 2004). Ultimately, norms, such as politeness, allow people to exist with each other without the flow of social life being interrupted. When a norm is violated, it can potentially occasion a silence as people cope with the interruption in acceptable interaction.

Domestic labour relationships involve a number of norms, which include the cultural norms of employers and workers, as well as the norms that are viewed as expected or acceptable within the average domestic labour relationship. One such norm involved the ending of a social interaction that occurred within pair 1, where they had watched a boxing match together (see Diary Extract 8).

#### Diary Extract 8 – Employer Diary

- 1 Anyway, Yoliswa heard me shouting at the TV and came through and next thing you
- 2 know we are watching the whole fight together, both yelling at the TV!!
  
- 3 Must have looked quite hilarious, but I am SO glad that we have this relationship.
- 4 Weird though, as soon as the fight was over, I go back to my computer and she goes
- 5 back to ironing my clothes...

In a similar situation where two people watch a sporting event together, the end of the event would not necessarily mark the end of their interaction. The interaction would possibly continue by sharing a meal or coffee together to discuss and analyse the match, reliving highlights or controversial moments. Or perhaps the interaction would shift to speaking about things that have little to do with the sporting event, such as personal events or plans. However, it is counter normative for the end of a sporting match to strictly and fully mark the end of an interaction. Yet, in the case of Yoliswa and Rachel, “as soon as the fight was over” (line 9), they silently separate and each returns to their work. Rachel marks this as “weird” (line 9), indicating that it was an odd, or noteworthy, way for the moment between them to end. The end of this interaction was ultimately a violation of the norm regarding what would be expected to happen after the end of a match. This violation of understood or expected norms occasions their silence as they separate. This is possibly because of the conflict

between norms between friends, as has been described above, and norms within domestic labour, where it would be rare for a worker to join an employer to watch television, especially during working hours.

Another norm violation that occasioned a great deal of silence was poor treatment of the worker by the employer. It can be argued that it is a generally expected norm that workers should be treated fairly by their employers in any employment context. However, the violation of this norm often led to silence among workers. This related to both how employers related to or treated their workers, as in the case of pair 5 (see Interview Extract 5).

#### Interview Extract 5 – Worker Interview

- 1 Wkr5 And I can sit down with her. One day, I can choose the day, sitting  
2 down and talk.
- 3 AJM Mm. Mm.
- 4 Wkr5 Yes. I need the love.
- 5 AJM Mm.
- 6 Wkr5 If you stay with the people, you must can feel it at home.
- 7 AJM Mm.
- 8 Wkr5 Mustn't treat like a (.) I was thinking the other day, I said I can tell her,  
9 you, you treat me like a (.) I don't like use that word, but it's coming to  
10 I can use (.) like a slave. I like to tell that.

In Interview Extract 5, Mandisa explains norms that she views as generally understood or expected. As a person, she “need the love” (line 4) and that “if you stay with the people, you must can feel it at home” (line 6). Because Mandisa constructs these things as absent from her relationship with Kerry, she says that she is being treated “like a slave” (line 10), which is the ultimate violation of what is normal treatment by an employer. The violation of norms regarding how Mandisa expects to be treated by her employer, in terms of being cared for and loved, has occasioned Mandisa’s silence. She does not speak about a variety of topics with Kerry, most specifically she does not speak about herself, her work and her relationship with Kerry. These are all topics that are absent in their interactions, largely because of their troubled relationship and the norms that are being violated.

There were multiple silences that were occasioned by the violation of understood norms within each of the participant pairs. Many of these were occasioned by norms that are generally expected within society, while some were also norms that were specific to the context of the domestic labour relationship. Many cases related to issues of culture, cultural misunderstandings and being culturally sensitive. Some of these instances are listed below and are drawn from across the data:

- At the beginning of the new year, Yoliswa's salary increase was not what she had expected and yet she does not mention this topic to her employer. This relates to expectations of what a normal or adequate increase should be.
- Rachel does not speak about Yoliswa's deceased husband because she does not know if it is appropriate or troubling within their relationship. This relates to what Rachel perceives as polite conversation.
- Olivia does not express her concerns regarding how Judith continually spends money on a struggling family member. This relates to Olivia's expectations of what a normal or expected amount of help and interactions with family should look like.
- Judith expects that particular products and quantities of household cleaning items should be bought and yet this expectation is not fulfilled by Olivia. Judith does not speak to Olivia about this but instead uses the items that are provided, which makes her job more difficult at times. This relates to Judith's understanding of the types and quantities of materials that are needed to clean a house.
- Lindiwe's silence around feeling she did not get enough leave when her mother died (Pair 3). Lindiwe and Tracy both lost their mothers within days of each other. Lindiwe expected more time off of work so that she could organise a new person to care for her children but Tracy asked Lindiwe to return to work to help with Tracy's mother's funeral preparation.
- Eunice's silence regarding her working hours, specifically working on weekends (Pair 4). Eunice is often called upon to work during weekends, despite feeling this is an unfair expectation. Yet she does not speak about this with Tania.
- Tania's silence regarding the manner in which Eunice asked if she could have one of Tania's cushions (Pair 4). Eunice noticed a cushion that was not being used in Tania's house and asked to have it. While Tania did give her the cushion, she felt that

Eunice's request was rude and rudely carried about. This relates to Tania's expectations of how to politely make requests and which requests should not be made in the first place.

- Mandisa's silence about how rarely Kerry smiles at her (Pair 5). Mandisa felt that Kerry did not make adequate eye contact or have positive interactions with her, such as smiling, yet did not address this issue with Kerry. This relates to Mandisa's expectations of how warm and positive interactions take place.
- Kerry's silence about Mandisa taking too much food (Pair 5). Mandisa was allowed to take food from Kerry's kitchen, yet Kerry felt that the amount was often inappropriate and excessive. This relates to Kerry's expectation of what an acceptable and normal amount of food would be.

### ***5.1.3 The violation of a moral code***

The violation of a moral code, injunction or taboo is another instance that can occasion silence within a relationship. These are cases where one party has acted outside of what would be considered as morally acceptable or upright. Such instances are also directly linked to shame. When one has either acted immorally or one's actions may be interpreted by others as being immoral or has observed another acting immorally, there is the possibility of being shamed or experiencing shame. Therefore, the violation of moral codes can be actions that occasion weighty silences within a relationship.

Within domestic labour relationships, much of the expected morality is related to the worker's sexuality and the expression thereof. This is clearly evident in Lindiwe's justification for her silence regarding her boyfriend (see Interview Extract 6).

#### Interview Extract 6 – Worker Interview

- 1     AJM     And you didn't say anything becau:::se?
- 2     Wkr3     I was so scared that maybe she gonna look me like I'm (.) I'm not a (.)
- 3             a good girl. Maybe I'm a::: (.) slu::t.

Lindiwe's reasons for keeping silent about her boyfriend are related to issues of morality and her perceptions of her moral uprightness. Lindiwe notes that she may be viewed as "not a good girl" (lines 2-3) or possibly labelled as a "slut" (line 3). Both of these issues are related to her womanhood and her sexuality and the expression thereof. Having a boyfriend visit her implies a sexual relationship between them, which can be interpreted by Tracy as immoral or morally deviant. This is also indicated when Lindiwe mentions that "[Tracy] gonna look [at her]" (line 2), implying that the gaze of the Other brings the possibility of moral judgement or classification. Lindiwe begins her justification for her silence by stating that she was "so scared" (line 1), which indicates the possibility of shame or fear of being shamed.

Interestingly, Lindiwe and Tracy are both silent about the boyfriend but with different expectations that have been violated by the same activity. While Tracy's silence is largely based on the violation of a rule, Lindiwe does not mention the rules prohibiting her boyfriend from visiting her. Instead, her silence is based on her potential shame regarding the possibility of being viewed as immoral. Her silence is occasioned by the violation of a moral code.

There were other instances of either the violation of a moral code or the potential perception of such violation. Many of these instances across the data were related to the sexuality of the worker, specifically about access to or contact with a sexual partner. These issues around the violation of moral codes are occasions for silence. Examples from across the data are provided below:

- Yoliswa, who is a widow, being with a younger man (Pair 1)
- Rachel's suspicion that Yoliswa is HIV positive, which involves Yoliswa's sex life and safe sex practices (Pair 1)
- Tania's doubts about whether Eunice's partner is actually her husband (Pair 4)
- Eunice's silence regarding her marital status (Pair 4)

#### ***5.1.4 Deviant cases***

In order to generalise about what occasions a silence, and thereby develop a robust and valid social psychological understanding of silence, it is important to consider cases that may be

deviant from the evidence that has been provided above (Silverman, 2005). The data were surveyed in order to find instances where a violation of an expectation, namely that of rules, norms and moral codes, did not occasion silence, or where a silence was occasioned by something other than the violation of expectations.

A deviant case that is present within the data relates specifically to the violation of explicit rules as occasioning silence. This was where an explicit rule was violated and was openly addressed by the employer's husband, as opposed to becoming a silence between the employer and the worker. This was the case in pair 4, when Tania discovered that Eunice's partner had spent the night, despite the explicit rule that male visitors were not allowed on the property (see Interview Extract 7)

#### Interview Extract 7 – Employer Interview

- 1     AJM     And did you say something immediately or?  
2     Emp4    Well I asked her who he was and she said it was her husband and then  
3            I just (.) I didn't say anything else because I thought well Mark must  
4            deal with it.  
5     AJM     Okay.  
6     Emp4    And then he did. He spoke to her very nicely that night. He just said to  
7            her you know the rule. We gave you a rule and we'd like you to stick  
8            by that.

Ultimately, there are two responses to Eunice's violation of rules regarding bringing a partner onto the property. First, Tania calls for an account regarding the visitor's identity, openly "ask[ing]" (line 2) about the visitor. However, after Eunice responds that the visitor is her husband, Tania "didn't say anything else" (line 3), refraining from pursuing the topic any further with Eunice and thereby allowing it to be a silence between them. Tania's silence is in part occasioned by the violation of a rule but is also occasioned because she assumes her husband would "deal with it" (line 4).

Tania is ultimately allowed to remain silent about the issue because her husband will address it openly and immediately, as "he spoke to her very nicely that night" (line 6). Tania's report of her husband's talk with Eunice is very focused on the rule that had been issued previously.

It is stated that Eunice “[knew] the rule” (line 7), and was therefore not ignorant in her actions. He also is reported to have reinstated his right and authority in setting rules for Eunice and their expectations that she should “stick by that” (lines 7-8). Interestingly, although Tania does not address Eunice directly regarding the setting and enforcement of rules, she is included in the “we” (line 7) who set the rule and the “we” (line 7) who expect the rule to be followed. Therefore, although Tania remained silent regarding the violation of the rule, her husband acts as her representative who speaks on her behalf. The issue has been openly addressed without directly involving Tania in breaking the silence around the issue. Tania is both silent in the interaction and yet is also spoken for by her husband.

An interesting element within this extract relates to how the discussion between Mark and Eunice is presented. Tania notes that Mark spoke to Eunice “very nicely” (line 6), stressing these words in her account. This indicates why rule violation occasions silence. When a rule has been violated, it creates a difficult, awkward or troubling interaction. Tania and Mark are aware that Eunice is breaking a rule and decide to address it. While Mark is given the role of speaking about the topic with her, Tania ensures that this interaction is presented as being handled with the care and delicacy and also the immediacy that it deserves. Meanwhile, Tania is allowed to avoid confronting the topic by rather being silent about it in her interactions with Eunice.

### ***5.2 Uncertain and unequal levels of shared knowledge***

Part of the development of a social psychological understanding of silence relates to notions of shared knowledge. If one accepts that silence is largely occasioned by a violation of expectations by one or both parties, then such a violation would prompt questions about the mind of the Other. When one has violated an expectation or is aware of the other’s violation, questions arise regarding whether that violation is known to by the Other and whether the expectation was shared in the first place. This relates to questions of shared knowledge. Did she see what I did? Does she know about my boyfriend? Does she think I have taken advantage of her? Do we have the same ideas of what is fair in our relationship? Expectations and their violation raise uncertainty regarding who knows what in a relationship, uncertainty that could be addressed or could contribute to the dynamics of topics that remain unspoken within a relationship.

While shared knowledge is often established through talk (Edwards, 2004), in this case the shared knowledge must be established in silence. This may be accomplished by the speakers collaboratively avoiding a particular topic, although this in itself can be problematic, as is noted by Irvine (2011, p. 34), who states that “knowing what one’s interlocutor has knowledge of – prerequisite for gorilla-avoiding [topic avoidance] – can be difficult” (p. 34). This may be particularly salient in the case of the violation of expectations, where the „800-pound gorilla in the room“ is one that can bring a great deal of interpersonal tension and trouble. As a result, there is a great deal of interpersonal work that must take place in order to establish what is known by each party and, by extension, which topics should be avoided. Questions regarding the uncertain status of their shared knowledge can take many forms, such as surveillance of the Other or a particular framing of the silence.

This notion of deciphering what one’s counterpart knows is exactly what Judith describes as she attempts to establish whether Olivia is aware that she has used the wrong vacuum (see Interview Extract 8).

#### Interview Extract 8 – Worker Interview

- 1 Wker2 She found me (.) using the red [vacuum]. She didn’t see me. If I, I  
2 don’t know if she see me or what because I saw she’s not saying  
3 anything.  
4 AJM Mm.  
5 Wker2 I was think (.) I was saw late oh I used the red one.  
6 AJM Mm.  
7 Wker2 Maybe she’s gonna talk or what. And I look at her face but she didn’t,  
8 I didn’t see anything.  
9 AJM Hahaha  
10 Wker2 Like she’s getting upset or what. But she was okay. Judith, you can  
11 pick Bethy for me at school.  
12 AJM Mm.  
13 Wker2 You see. I saw that nice voice. Just oh I said oh maybe she’s not  
14 bothering about that.  
15 AJM So either she didn’t notice.



- 16 Wker2 I don't know if she noticed or not.
- 17 AJM Mm.
- 18 Wker2 Because she's not saying anything to me. I said maybe she's (.) maybe
- 19 she saw or not. I don't know.

The cause of the silence between Judith and Olivia is occasioned by a violation of a rule, namely that Olivia “found [Judith] using the red [vacuum]” (line 1). Judith is uncertain as to whether or not Olivia saw or noticed this infraction, largely because Olivia did “not [say] anything” (lines 2-3). This leaves Judith wondering about whether they have shared knowledge about her use of the vacuum cleaner. Judith must then engage in multiple levels of surveillance, watching for signs in Olivia’s face (line 7), her voice (line 13) and her emotional state (line 10). Because Judith is not able to “see anything” (line 8) in Olivia that would indicate her knowledge of Judith’s disobedience, Judith is left not knowing “if she noticed or not” (line 16) or that possibly Olivia did notice and “she’s not bothering about that” (lines 13-14), which still indicates uncertainty regarding the status of their shared knowledge.

There are other instances where levels of shared knowledge are uncertain across the data set. Such uncertain levels of shared knowledge are generally assessed by one or both parties within the boundaries of silence and remains, to this point in the process, as a characteristic of their relationship. This leaves one or both parties guessing and making assumptions regarding the mind of the Other. Some examples from across the data are listed below:

- Rachel is uncertain about whether Yoliswa is happy in her job and whether she is fulfilling Yoliswa’s expectations as a fair employer. Yet she does not raise this topic with Yoliswa.
- Judith is uncertain about whether Olivia sees her as wasteful in terms of the quantity of cleaning materials that she uses within a month, which relates to Olivia’s expectations of what should be consumed within a month. However, Judith does not speak about this issue with Olivia.
- Lindiwe is not certain whether Tracy is satisfied with her as a worker and unsure about whether she is fulfilling Tracy’s expectations. Lindiwe notes that, due to Tracy’s silence about the issue, she must be happy with her work.

- Eunice’s partner has been given permission to visit her on Tania’s property because he is identified by Eunice as her husband. However, Tania is uncertain about whether he is actually her husband or simply a sexual partner or casual boyfriend. She does not pursue this topic with Eunice.

Ultimately shared knowledge is uncertain within the boundaries of silence as it cannot be easily established, as opposed to the demonstration of shared knowledge within talk, as is seen in Edwards (2004). If the uncertainty is constructed as causing too much interpersonal trouble, one party may address the topic that has been silent. If one person raises the issue in discussion, the silence regarding the topic is temporarily broken. It is then a question of whether the other party continues to maintain the silence about the topic or whether the topic is spoken about and both parties share the same levels of knowledge about the topic due to such a discussion. Interview Extract 9 shows how Kerry attempts to share equal levels of knowledge with Mandisa regarding her emotional state. However, despite Kerry’s attempt, their levels of shared knowledge remain unequal and even uncertain.

#### Interview Extract 9 – Employer Interview

- 1 Emp5 Like if I said to her, Mandisa you seem unhappy to me.
- 2 AJM Mm.
- 3 Emp5 Like I can feel, she just doesn’t wanna go there.
- 4 AJM Okay.
- 5 Emp5 So she’ll say no I’m happy, I’m fine.

Kerry and her husband have observed Mandisa’s grumpiness and unhappiness over a period of time but she has not raised any particular issues that would explain the cause for her emotional state. Kerry is uncertain as to whether Mandisa is actually unhappy and whether she is the cause for Mandisa’s unhappiness. It is a silence occasioned by Mandisa violating the norm of „being happy“. However, when Kerry attempts to openly and directly discuss the issue, Kerry constructs Mandisa as unwilling to discuss her emotions, saying that “[she can feel, [Mandisa] just doesn’t wanna go there” (line 11). In addition, Kerry states that Mandisa contradicts Kerry’s assessment by stating that she is “happy” and “fine” (line 13). Although Kerry talks about this situation where she has openly addressed the topic with Mandisa, Mandisa’s emotional state is still constructed as a mystery by Kerry. There is continued

silence between them around the topic of Mandisa's moods and the causes thereof, largely because of the uncertain and unequal levels of shared knowledge between them.

There are other instances where one party attempts to openly and directly address a topic, yet the levels of shared knowledge remain unequal because the other party does not respond with the expected information in the expected manner. Interestingly, most of these cases are initiated by the person who has more power in the relationship, in this case the employers. This also goes to establish the important role that power plays within a social psychological understanding of silence. It is often the more powerful person who will initiate the conversation, which may be because of the socially awkwardness and discomfort that is inherent in such conversations. Yet the less powerful person is not necessarily obliged to engage in the conversation as was expected, as is noted by Kurzon (1992) where the silence of the less powerful may be a strategy to resist cooperating with a more powerful, thereby asserting their own power. In such cases, despite the topic having been partially unsilenced through one party indicating its saliency, the topic continues as a silence between them as the less powerful person exerts some power by keeping a topic silent. Some examples from across the data set are listed below:

- Rachel has attempted to establish if Yoliswa's husband died of HIV/AIDS, a topic that would be particularly troubling because this could implicate Yoliswa as also being ill. Yoliswa does not provide information regarding the nature of her husband's illness, but rather changes the subject.
- Olivia attempts to learn how Judith spends her money, especially how much she gives to her niece. Yet Judith does not divulge this information but instead speaks about other topics.
- Tracy attempts to discuss Lindiwe's home life and children, especially in terms of the role of Lindiwe's boyfriend within the family. Lindiwe responds by speaking about Tracy's son.
- Tania attempts to establish Eunice's relationship status with her partner, specifically whether he is her husband. Eunice does not respond but instead continues with her work.

### ***5.3 Interpersonal impact of silence***

The existence of a silence within a relationship has potentially massive implications for the nature of the relationship. There is interpersonal impact whether the silence continues or whether it is ended through open communication about the topic in question. The silence can either be maintained or be broken. Ultimately, there are social psychological implications in either scenario. In addition, the breaking or maintenance of silence can be viewed as either positive or negative, depending on the costs of the silence. If the silence is allowing social life to flow in an easy and uninterrupted manner, it may be more likely that the silence will continue because the cost of breaking the silence may introduce unwanted awkwardness and discomfort. If the silence is causing a great deal of interpersonal strife, some attempt may be made to break it or to adjust to the social psychological impact of the silence within the interpersonal space of the relationship.

#### ***5.3.1 The maintenance of silence***

When silence regarding a particular topic or event is maintained, there is the inevitable interpersonal impact as one or both parties must engage in speculation regarding the mind of the Other, the state of their relationship and whether the silence will eventually be broken. There is a great deal of relational uncertainty in many such cases.

An interesting dynamic in the maintenance of silence is that the interpersonal impact of silence may be experienced and constructed differently by the parties who are both maintaining the silence. This is most evident in the case of Pair 2, where Olivia constructs the silence as potentially problematic but not distressing (see Interview Extract 10), whereas Judith constructs and experiences the same silence as particularly stressful and intense (see Interview Extract 8).

#### **Interview Extract 10 – Employer Interview**

- 1     AJM     Why do you think that is?
- 2     Emp2    I think time constraints, you know? I just think like I see it. I think to
- 3            myself I must remember it so that I can tell her because I'm rushing

4 out of the door.

5 AJM Mmm.

6 Emp2 Or I'm rushing in and I'm (.) sorting Hannah out before I leave and

7 then it's just not the appropriate ti::me (.) to say hey by the way

8 AJM Mmm.

9 Emp2 You know what I mean. I'd like to do it a little bit more tactfully.

10 AJM Mmm.

11 Emp2 And then it passes. And then I think ah it wasn't, it wasn't actually that

12 important.

13 AJM Mmm.

14 Emp2 But ja. It probably is.

Olivia notes that the silence between them is largely due to “time constraints” (line 2). This is constructed as the inevitable result of her busy lifestyle in which she is constantly “rushing” (lines 3 and 6) in and out of the house or is busy with child care responsibilities (line 6). Hers is the life of a busy working mom who does not have the time to discuss issues with her domestic worker. She may be aware of an issue but requires more time to address it “tactfully” (line 9). After time has passed, issues that may have seemed important are constructed as not being as urgent or important and therefore remain unaddressed. Interestingly, while Olivia states that something may not seem important, she later says that “it probably is” (line 14), implying that there may be an impact or relational consequence to the maintenance of her silence with Judith. However, according to Olivia’s account, the silence is one that is not necessarily intentional and nor is it something that causes her any significant distress. In her busy day, the silence is simply something that happens and is not particularly salient for her in terms of causing any significant interpersonal impact.

However, the maintenance of silence between Olivia and Judith is something that has a weighty impact for Judith. She speaks about the silence around her use of the wrong vacuum cleaner, a clear violation of Olivia’s rule and which has occasioned a silence that has left Judith with uncertainty regarding whether this violation is shared knowledge between them and how it will affect their relationship.

For Judith, the silence between them comes with great interpersonal impact. As has been shown in Judith’s interview (Interview Extract 8), Judith must watch Olivia for signs of

knowledge regarding her disobedience in Olivia's face (line 7), voice (line 13) and emotions (line 10). The silence leaves Judith guessing regarding whether or not Olivia noticed her disobedience (line 16) and whether the disobedience will be addressed (line 18). With such great uncertainty, clear from the repetition of "I don't know" in lines 2, 16 and 19, Judith is unsure about the state of their relationship and whether there will be a conflict in the future that could further impact their relationship. The continued silence by both parties regarding the use of the wrong vacuum keeps Judith in a state of constant surveillance and tension, a massive interpersonal impact for any relationship, but especially so in an unequal relationship such as in the case of domestic labour.

### ***5.3.2 The breaking of silence***

The breaking of silence can cause distress, uncertainty and troubles as the interpersonal implications of an open discussion become salient. Such risks could include open conflict, which may have very concrete outcomes for the relationship, especially in the context of employment relationships. This can be seen when Lindiwe speaks about why she remains silent about particular topics with Tracy (see Interview Extract 11).

#### Interview Extract 11 – Worker 3

- 1     Wkr3     There's too (.) to me there's lots of things I never (.) speak to Tracy.  
                  Uh um (.) uh uh like I said, I was uh scared to lo::se
- 2     AJM     Ja.
- 3     Wkr3     my job.

Lindiwe notes that there are "lots of things" (line 1) that remain silent between herself and Tracy, topics that she would "never speak to Tracy" (line 1) about. Lindiwe then justifies this silence by noting her fear of being fired by Tracy. This positions Lindiwe as particularly vulnerable in her relationship with Tracy and constructs their relationship as unstable, based on how Tracy may or may not react to topics that Lindiwe does or does not raise. This construction draws on discourses of „the powerless worker“ to justify her own silence within her relationship with Tracy. Interestingly, Lindiwe does not elaborate on which specific "things" she would not discuss with Tracy. However, what is hearable in this extract is the



## ***5.4 Strategies of unsilencing***

Although there is a great deal of interpersonal impact that is at stake with regards to silence, the unpredictable dialogical outcome makes unsilencing particularly challenging in terms of its social psychology. Much of what is involved in unsilencing has to do with how the unsilencing is structured interpersonally. How is the silence constructed and how is unsilencing constructed? Generalisations that emerged from across the data allow for identification of four distinct constructions of approaches to speaking about a previously silent topic, namely: confession, concern, confrontation and comedy.

### ***5.4.1 Confession***

A common approach to speaking about a previously silent topic relates to the confession of secrets. This seems logical as many silences are the result of either unshared knowledge or unequal or uncertain levels of shared knowledge. In short, some silent topics are constructed by one or both parties as a „secret“. When a silence is being broken, its unsilencing can be constructed similarly to that of a confession, in which a secret is being revealed. This is the case for Tracy and Lindiwe in the situation regarding the secret of Lindiwe’s boyfriend, as is recorded by Tracy in her daily diary (see Diary Extract 9).

#### Diary Extract 9 – Employer diary

- 1     When I was about to leave again Lindiwe said that she wanted to speak to me
- 2     when I got home in the afternoon. I said she could speak to me there and then.
- 3     She said she was scared and didn’t want to cry. I said that she can talk to me
- 4     about anything.
  
- 5     She then asked me how many boyfriends I had before my husband. I said a few.
- 6     She then continued and said that she had been keeping a secret from me and
- 7     was now ready to talk to me.

In the case of a confession, there is a great deal of preparation work that is involved in unsilencing a topic. In Tracy’s account, she describes numerous strategies and activities that



Lindiwe engages in before she is able to talk with Tracy about her secret. First, Lindiwe prepares herself and Tracy for their coming conversation, for the need to talk at a later point (lines 1-2). This both warns Tracy that a serious conversation will take place and also commits Lindiwe to the conversation by flagging its necessity. In this case, Tracy insists on having the conversation immediately as opposed to waiting until later that day.

Second, Lindiwe communicates the gravity of her confession. She speaks about being “scared” (line 3), communicating that this is a conversation that could have negative interpersonal impact for their relationship and especially for herself. She also is constructed as somewhat emotional and saying that she does not “want to cry” (line 3), showing her levels of vulnerability regarding this topic. These actions indicate to Tracy that this is not an easy conversation for Lindiwe and that it may be related to particularly sensitive topics. Tracy responds by encouraging Lindiwe to continue, saying that Lindiwe can “talk to [Tracy] about anything” (lines 3-4).

Next, Lindiwe attempts to establish a sort of interpersonal norm regarding relationships and boyfriends. She accomplishes this by asking Tracy about her history regarding boyfriends. Interestingly, she frames this in terms of boyfriends that Tracy had before her marriage. Tracy does not give much detail but by stating that she had “a few” (line 5) boyfriends prior to her husband, she gives Lindiwe the interpersonal space to speak about her current boyfriend without being judged since Tracy herself had multiple partners before finding her husband.

Finally, Lindiwe gives a construction of her silence, namely that she has been “keeping a secret from [Tracy]” (line 6). This accomplishes the acknowledgement and revelation that a silence has existed between them. Lindiwe has been silent about something, keeping it hidden from Tracy. This indicates that there is some unshared knowledge between them that will now be shared. By speaking about a secret, Lindiwe now introduces the notion that she will not only tell Tracy she has had a secret but will also speak about the contents of that secret. She will confess what she has been hiding. While this can be difficult and unpredictable, because of the strategy that Lindiwe has utilised in her confession, namely preparing Tracy for her intention to speak, communicating the personal and interpersonal gravity of the topic, establishing an interpersonal norm for the substance of the topic and by announcing the existence of a silence, Lindiwe is prepared to continue with her confession. She is “now

ready to talk to [Tracy]” (line 7) and unsilence the topic of her boyfriend within the context of a confession.

Other instances of unsilencing being constructed as a confession or the unveiling of a secret are also evident across the data. Some of these examples have been listed briefly below:

- Judith speaking to Olivia about using *muthi* for her daughter (a colloquial term used generically to refer to traditional (African) medicines), a secret she wanted to hide because Olivia’s husband had told Judith not to bring *muthi* onto his property.
- Eunice speaking to Tania about taking her previous employers to the labour courts. She had been secretly going to and from town to consult the labour department regarding her previous employers and did not want Tania to know.
- Eunice tells Tania that she belongs to a domestic workers’ union. She had been hiding this from Tania because she did not want Tania to think that she was going to cause trouble.

#### ***5.4.2 Concern and care***

Another construction through which a topic can be unsilenced is one of concern. Such an interaction would mainly entail one party approaching another about a perceived silence by means of voicing concern about the Other’s well-being, state of being or condition. This type of construction of unsilencing is primarily around understanding the perspective, needs and values of the Other. This is seen in Kerry’s attempt to break the silence around the topic of Mandisa’s emotional state (see Interview Extract 13).

#### Interview Extract 13 – Employer Interview

- 8     AJM     When you say these things, what do you mean, like?
- 9     Emp5    Like if I said to her, Mandisa you seem unhappy to me.
- 10    AJM     Mm.
- 11    Emp5    Like I can feel, she just doesn’t wanna go there.
- 12    AJM     Okay.
- 13    Emp5    So she’ll say no I’m happy, I’m fine.

In this extract, Kerry chooses to break the silence regarding Mandisa's negative emotions by framing her question in terms of concern for Mandisa. Kerry approaches the subject somewhat cautiously by using words that perform preparation work, like "seem" (line 9), implying that this may not actually be the case but that it has been interpreted as such. Kerry also adds that it is her perspective of Mandisa's emotions, by adding "to me" (line 9). This allows Kerry to construct her question as one that demonstrates that she personally has been observing, noticing and valuing Mandisa's emotional well-being. She constructs the interpersonal context as one in which she is concerned for Mandisa and cares about her. Her attempt to break the silence regarding Mandisa's unhappiness through the strategy of displays of concern and care is, however, unsuccessful. Mandisa does not agree with Kerry's assessment and does not enter into a conversation regarding how such a perception came about. Instead, Mandisa is constructed as closing down the conversation. As such, her emotions remain a silence within this relationship.

Other examples of displays of concern and care that structure the interpersonal context of an unsilencing are also evident across the data. It is interesting to note that these are mainly employers, perhaps indicating the power that can be involved in who can demonstrate care and about which topics in particular, as can be seen from the brief list presented below:

- Rachel's attempt to speak about Yoliswa's health and HIV status.
- Olivia's conversation about Judith giving money to her niece.
- Tracy's conversation regarding Lindiwe's position as a woman in her culture.

### ***5.4.3 Confrontation***

In other cases, unsilencing is constructed as confronting the counterpart in the silence. This construction of unsilencing is more forceful, with a particular focus on having the other party understand one's own perspective, as opposed to necessarily trying to primarily understand the views of the Other. This unsilencing is not constructed as vulnerable, as in the case of a confession, or as warm and caring, as in the case of concern. Instead, confrontation is constructed as one where a silence will be broken in which the other person needs to hear something that they may not like or welcome, perhaps even something that will offend them.

This is the case in Mandisa's situation where she intends to speak to her employers about a discrepancy in her pay (see Interview Extract 14).

#### Interview Extract 14 – Worker Interview

- 1 Wkr5 Now::: they pay (.) they want to, the end of month (.) and is paid me on  
2 third of:: April. (.) Um (.) just give me one thousand three.  
3 AJM Mm!  
4 Wkr5 With, out of two thousand. Now I was so confused.  
5 AJM Mm.  
6 Wkr5 Now I said, no I can talk afternoon. I working hard. That day I was  
7 (.) my heart was painful.  
8 AJM Mm.  
9 Wkr5 And then (.) I spoke to them. I said guys, why my salary is like that?

Kerry's family went away for a few weeks, leaving Mandisa to tend to the house during their absence. Her wages for that month were lower than usual, paying her R1 300 as opposed to the usual R2 000 of her monthly wages. Instead of remaining silent about this topic, Mandisa notes that she "can talk" (line 6) about this topic with her employers. Her justification for the need to confront her employers about the discrepancy in payment is that she was "working hard" (line 6), work that did not seem to be reflected in her pay. The discussion with Kerry and her husband is constructed as being initiated by Mandisa ("I spoke to them" (line 9)) and as being very direct and focused in terms of the content ("why is my salary is like that?" (line 9)). It is ultimately constructed as a confrontation, one that Mandisa is willing to engage in in order to gain a more acceptable wage.

There were other cases across the data in which unsilencing (or potential unsilencing) of particular topics was constructed through confrontational interaction as well, some of which have been listed below:

- Lindiwe's potential unsilencing of her lack of wage increase and leave.
- Eunice's unsilencing regarding her registration with UIF.
- Tania's husband unsilencing regarding expectations of male visitors.

- Mandisa’s unsilencing of the topic of her poor treatment by Kerry.

#### **5.4.4 Comedy**

Although the constructions of the above unsilencing is largely set within a serious or weighty interpersonal context, this is not always the case. In some relationships, humour is often used in a wide variety of communications and is even described as a characteristic or highlight of the relationship, as in the cases of pairs 1 and 3. In this case, humour may be used to open up conversations about particular topics in a way that is less threatening and allows both parties to laugh about the silence or secret. This would mostly occur in relationships that are more warm or open, as humour is rarely used in cold, difficult or strained relationships. For pair 1, laughing, joking and giggling together was a hallmark of their relationship according to both parties. Humour was used to unsilence the topic of Yoliswa taking sweets from the sweet jar, as was described by Rachel in her diary (see Diary Extract 10).

#### Diary Extract 10 – Employer Diary

- 1 Had many laughs today – firstly because I told her that my husband has now
- 2 hidden his jar of sweets because her and I keep getting into them – we both
- 3 have a sweet tooth!! At first she tried to pretend she hadn’t had any but we both
- 4 know the truth. All very lighthearted and not done in an accusing way.

The unsilencing of the taking of sweets is constructed as something that involves “laughs” (line 1). Rachel informs Yoliswa that her husband has hidden the sweet jar from both of them due to their mutual “sweet tooth” (line 3). It is implied that Yoliswa has been taking sweets without asking first, since she initially “[pretends] she hadn’t had any” (line 3). Rachel does not unsilence Yoliswa’s sweet sneaking in an angry fashion and includes herself in the joke by saying that she also has taken sweets from the jar. This is a silent activity that they have both been engaging in. The playfulness of the unsilencing is also emphasised by constructing Yoliswa as initially denying her offense by pretending she had not taken any sweets, despite their shared knowledge to the contrary that they “both know the truth” (lines 3-4).

Interestingly, Rachel ends the diary record by noting that the interaction was “all very lighthearted and not done in an accusing way” (line 4). By ending the account in this way, Rachel is signaling that she is aware that the encounter and unsilencing could have happened quite differently, namely in a serious and accusatory fashion. This completely reframes how the interpersonal impact of the unsilencing is read and understood, both by the participants and by the diary reader. The topic of theft within domestic labour is a loaded one where workers can potentially be fired when employers feel trust has been broken, boundaries crossed and freedom abused (Lutz, 2011). So the case of sweets being taken without permission could potentially be a site of particular tension or conflict. However, because of the nature of the relationship that is presented by Rachel and Yoliswa, the unsilencing of the theft is constructed within the medium of comedy and laughter. This is a clear case where humour was used to unsilence a topic (i.e. Yoliswa taking sweets from her employer’s personal jar) without the unsilencing being constructed as heavy or serious within their interpersonal context.

Yoliswa also recorded the unsilencing of the taking of the sweets in her daily diary, confirming the lighthearted construction of the interaction (see Diary Extract 11)

#### Diary Extract 11 – Worker Diary

- 1 The fun part is that Jessica and I ate my boss’s sweets and she asked about it,
- 2 we confessed but she did not mind. She just laughed and called me granny.

Yoliswa also constructs the interaction as “fun” (line 1), adding one of Rachel’s children as an accomplice in the theft of the sweets. When Rachel asks about the sweets, Yoliswa simply notes that “[they] confessed” (line 2) in a seemingly easy and unproblematic manner. Rachel’s reaction concludes the lighthearted and humorous construction of this unsilencing because she “just laughed” (line 2) and also uses the affectionate name of “granny” for Yoliswa, simultaneously confirming Yoliswa’s position and relationship within the household and the special allowances that are made for elderly members of a household. This unsilencing is constructed as unproblematic and even characteristic of the relationship that is shared between Yoliswa and Rachel.

Within the warm and open relationships that were part of this study, there were multiple examples of humour being used to construct the context of the breaking of a silence, as can be seen from the brief list provided below:

- Rachel had noticed that Yoliswa was often going outside of the property to sit in her boyfriend's car. Rachel addresses the topic by joking with Yoliswa about being with a man who owns a car.
- Yoliswa and Rachel joked about South African politics, specifically the race of the future president and the inferiority of some of the black presidential candidates. The possibility of a black female president or a white female president were also part of the joke. This was the only pair that discussed these topics, possibly indicating the topics as potentially troubling. Perhaps by framing them within a humorous approach, this pair is able to speak about topics that are often avoided in other domestic labour relationships.
- Tracy and Lindiwe joke together about Tracy's youngest child calling Lindiwe „Mommy“. This joke allows both of the women to address the topic of Lindiwe's position in the household as „one of the family“ and also to speak about the son's particularly strong attachment to Lindiwe, despite the fact that she is not his mother. The notion of Lindiwe being given the label of „Mommy“ along with Tracy may be a troubling and uncomfortable topic, but by framing it as a funny situation, the topic can be addressed.

### ***5.5 Role of third parties in reflection and unsilencing***

A final comment regarding the development of a social psychological approach to understanding „being silent about“ relates to the role of third parties within the process of reflection and unsilencing. Within a psychological context, such third parties could be therapists, researchers or, in this case, the diary itself. For the participants, this research gave them an opportunity to reflect on issues and topics that are silent or dialogically absent within their domestic labour relationship. The silences that emerged within both the daily diary and the interview data showed that one or both participants were aware to varying degrees of these silences relating to a variety of topics. For some participants, becoming aware of silences was a positive experience, which was viewed as helpful or beneficial. For other

participants, becoming aware of silences through a third party, such as the diary or myself as the interviewer, was constructed as a distressing and uncomfortable process.

### ***5.5.1 Conscientisation as welcomed***

There were cases where participants were grateful for the diary keeping process. In her diary, Tracy directly addresses me at the end of the entry where Lindiwe spoke to her regarding the secret of her boyfriend (see Diary Extract 12).

#### Diary Extract 12 – Employer diary

1 [Lindiwe] said this diary got her thinking...Thanks!!

Tracy states that Lindiwe's confession and the unsilencing of the topic are directly linked to their participation in the diary keeping process. The diary caused Lindiwe to think about the silence around the topic of her boyfriend. The research and the researcher are directly thanked for intervening in the situation, despite the fact that the research has no explicit or structured intervention built into it. This demonstrates how the unsilencing of topics can be attributed to outside influences, even when such influences are not meant to bring about any change. It also shows the power of research itself to bring about change through causing one to reflect on one's silences and interactions within particular relationships.

The boundaries between the process of writing the diary and the interactions upon which diary entries were based seemed to blur as the diary process unfolded. In some cases the act of reflecting on the domestic labour relationship and interactions through keeping a diary affected the course and content of that relationship and the silences around events. This can be seen from Lindiwe's reflections regarding the diary's role in unsilencing the secret of her boyfriend (see Interview Extract 15).

#### Interview Extract 15 – Worker Interview

1 Wkr3 It was easy. And it's so: (.) helpful.

2 AJM You found the diary helpful?



- 3 Wkr3 Mm. So helpful.
- 4 AJM What, how was it helpful?
- 5 Wkr3 Because um:: (.) uh uh that story I was telling you about my:::, my  
6 secret.
- 7 AJM Ja.
- 8 Wkr3 Maybe if um the diary um, I was not doing the diary,
- 9 AJM Mm.
- 10 Wkr3 maybe I think uh (.) uh I'll I'll think I'll not um (.) uh::, telling myself  
11 that it's a right time to to tell (.) Tracy that secret. It was so helpful.

Lindiwe repeatedly states that the diary was “so helpful” (lines 1, 3 and 11). She then directly links the helpfulness of the diary with her “secret” (line 6). Lindiwe implies that if she “was not doing the diary” (line 8), perhaps she would not have told Tracy. However, because of her participation in the research process through keeping a diary, she was able to decide that it was “a right time to tell Tracy that secret” (line 11).

Interestingly, her boyfriend was not mentioned in her diary until the day she told Tracy about the secret, which was also the same day that she mentioned the boyfriend to me during a routine support call. In this case, the “secret” in question was spoken about to the employer before it arose in either the diary or in our conversations together. Lindiwe did not use the diary or our relationship as a practice or safe space to „try out“ telling her secret. Instead it would appear that the process itself, reflecting on her relationship with Tracy and its silences, allowed and prompted Lindiwe to speak with Tracy and break the silence around her boyfriend.

### ***5.5.2 Conscientisation as disturbing***

It would be overly simplistic to argue that unsilencing is always welcomed and unproblematic. There are cases where the maintenance of silence and a lack of reflection on silence within a relationship allow that relationship to flow without awkward disruption and dis-ease. There are cases when breaking a silence, if even just within one's self, can cause perceived interpersonal tension, disruption and unforeseen negative impacts.

For pair 5, their relationship was marked by silence and interpersonal tension. Kerry was asked to reflect on the causes for some of the negative emotions that were presented in the diaries and interviews (see Interview Extract 16).

#### Interview Extract 16 – Employer Interview

- 1     Emp5    I can already feel though since we’ve stopped diarising that it’s um (.) I  
2             don’t know if it’s because of the diaries or:: (.) just a matter of time  
3             that’s passing. But we:: are starting to feel a little bit more comfortable  
4             with each other.
- 5     AJM     Okay. When you say because the diaries, do you mean things are better  
6             now because the diaries have stopped?
- 7     Emp5    Because you’re not reflecting so much perhaps.

In this extract, Kerry notes that since having stopped the diarising process that they are “starting to feel a little bit more comfortable with each other” (lines 3-4). The discomfort that Kerry uses to describe their relationship is directly linked to the level of reflection that the diaries required (line 7). According to Kerry’s account here, the diaries are directly to blame for the relational troubles that had been recorded throughout her diary keeping process. There are two possible readings of this account. One is that the troubles of the relationship are constructed as transient and due to the interruption caused by their participation in the study. This also flags the possibility that what I have portrayed as a generally troubled relationship may be seen as a rocky patch in an otherwise good relationship.

The other reading is that the diary brought particular troubling elements of their domestic labour relationship to awareness in a very focused manner, making the easy flow of interactions during this time more difficult as a result. Regardless, Kerry presents the diary keeping process and the reflections that such a process brings about as problematic within her relationship and interactions with Mandisa. She links the ending of the diary keeping with an improvement in their relationship, thereby laying blame for their relational troubles with the diary, as opposed to the troubling nature of domestic labour itself and her part within such a relationship.

The second reading of this diary extract highlights the way that „being silent about“ may be fundamental to the maintenance of inequality within the domestic labour relationship. By „being silent about“ the dynamics of the relationship that contribute to its power imbalances and hierarchical nature, the maintenance of such inequality can continue, allowing for its foundations to silently continue unquestioned. Such absences require attention in order to explore how they may contribute to the ongoing troubles of this troubling relationship.

### ***5.6 The impossibility of ‘being unsilent about’***

A final generalisation that must be made and that is inherent within the study of „being silent about“ is the impossibility of being completely „unsilent about“. As has been noted already in Chapters 1 and 4, there is a deep and inescapable irony about „being silent about“, namely that even when silence is being topicalised or when a silence is being explicitly addressed, even this topicalisation accomplishes further silence (Carpenter & Austin, 2007). In this sense, it is impossible to really escape „being silent about“. Even when it is topicalised, there will still be silences that are being accomplished within that topicalisation. This is not the same as the “pragmatic-logical operations” (Ephratt, 2011, p. 2305) of the implied, where, for the sake of time and economy, some content will always be omitted because it is assumed to be “known, irrelevant, not worth mentioning, or could be otherwise implied” (Ephratt, 2011, p. 2305).

Instead, the notion of something always being left „unsaid“ or absent in conversation relates to the deeply troubling nature of some topics and how they are routinely kept from polite conversation (Billig, 2004), even when the unsaid may be topicalised. Even when conversation about troubling topics is being spoken about, even then certain aspects of those topics or particularly troubling elements of those topics may remain as unspoken issues. This is because our conversations both produce and reproduce ideology (Crenshaw, 1997), keeping subjects that interrupt or challenge the flow of social life from being voiced (Carpenter & Austin, 2007).

During the data collection process, I assumed that participants would experience some degree of distress or vulnerability when faced with the thought of me reading their diary because the diary allowed insight into the participants“ experiences, accounts and reflections. There were

many silences that were topicalised when I asked participants what they were thinking from the time that they handed in their diary until the time of the interviews. Interestingly, most participants were more concerned about the contents of their partner's diary and interview rather than their own. The topicalisation of silences between participants was clearly expressed by Lindiwe (Interview Extract 17), who wished she could know what was in Tracy's diary and interview.

#### Interview Extract 17 – Worker Interview

- 1 Wkr3 I wish I was here the time you were talking with Tracy. [Hehehe  
2 AJM [Hehehe  
3 Really?  
4 Wkr3 Because I ag, I u::m (.) u::m I don't know what what:: uh is at Tracy's  
5 mind about me. I will tell myself I will doing a perfect job but  
6 sometimes to to her maybe I'm not. But maybe (.) she's::: she's scared  
7 to te::ll me::.  
8 AJM Mm.  
9 Wkr3 And the thing I will tell you, the time:: she was left that, the the diary  
10 here. I was taking it, oh what is in here? ((pretends to pick up a diary  
11 and turn it over in her hands))  
12 AJM Hahaha.  
13 Wkr3 What is in here?

This is a clear topicalisation of „being silent about“. In this extract, Lindiwe speaks about the lack of shared knowledge regarding her job performance. It is something that is constructed as an uncertainty for Lindiwe. Because the topic is not being spoken about, she presents herself as not knowing what Tracy is thinking regarding her performance as a worker. Lindiwe's curiosity about Tracy's diary and interview arises from an uncertainty regarding “what uh is at Tracy's mind about [her]” (lines 4-5). Lindiwe describes how it is possible that their assessments of her performance may differ (lines 5-6). Lindiwe notes that if she is not performing adequately, Tracy may be “scared to tell [her]” (lines 6-7), which is surprising as it is often expected that employers constantly supervise and criticise the worker, making the job unpleasant for the worker (Moras, 2008; Romero, 1992). Instead, in this case, what is distressing for Lindiwe is the lack of feedback from Tracy. This lack of knowledge about the

workings of the mind of the Other was embodied when Lindiwe pretended to hold and handle Tracy's diary in a striking manner, repeatedly musing, "What is in here?" (lines 10 and 13).

While the silence between Tracy and Lindiwe regarding job performance is being topicalised, there are other silences that are being accomplished. One is Lindiwe's silence about her own silence within this dynamic. While Lindiwe "will tell [herself]" (line 5) that she is performing "a perfect job" (line 5), she does not raise the possibility that she could initiate a discussion with Tracy about this topic. Instead of pursuing this line of conversation, Lindiwe and I allow the construction of Tracy as being responsible for addressing this issue and that she has not done so because she is potentially "scared to tell [Lindiwe]" (lines 6-7). This construction is allowed to settle as the reason for a lack of communication about this issue. The possibility that Tracy is potentially satisfied with Lindiwe's work is also not raised in the interview. Instead it is assumed that Tracy is probably unsatisfied but keeping silent about it. This may be rooted in the stereotype of „the fussy, supervisory madam“ who is never pleased with the job performance levels of the worker. Regardless of the reason, Lindiwe constructs Tracy as dissatisfied with Lindiwe's work.

Something else that would be troubling in the context of this research would be that Lindiwe is confessing to having handled Tracy's diary, despite having agreed to respecting Tracy's privacy and confidentiality. While Lindiwe only says that she has handled Tracy's diary, as opposed to reading it, the notion that she had access to the diary at all would have been troubling to me. However instead of addressing this topic, a silence is created around the ethics of Lindiwe's statement, as I simply laugh about her story (line 12). Instead of pursuing this troubling topic, the interview continues in a relatively predicable and polite flow, allowing Lindiwe's infraction of the research expectations to be discussed. In this way, I am also being silent about a violation of expectations, especially since I was uncertain about whether Lindiwe had possibly read Tracy's diary at some point.

Because the interview was conducted at the closing of our research relationship, this infraction did not cause much interpersonal tension. However, it may have become a more serious instance of „being silent about“ within our relationship if this conversation had taken place during one of our early routine support phone calls. Perhaps I would have taken an opportunity to try to speak to Lindiwe about this issue at some point or maybe this story would have simply acted as a background to the rest of our interactions, a story that would

raise troubling issues within the research context about which we would remain silent. Perhaps this is something that I should simply remain silent about, even though this has, in some senses, been a confession to the reader about the troubles of dyadic research.

What is clear from across the data is that „being silent about“, as something that can be talked about and as something that can be done in talk, is a layered and dynamic issue. In all cases where silence was spoken of, there were either new silences being created or existing silences being reinforced. Perhaps this is fundamental to how „being silent about“ operates within the maintenance of inequality, largely because the troubling issues that produce, establish and reproduce inequality on micro-political and macro-political levels remain silent, even when being spoken about. This possibility will be demonstrated in the following chapter, where some of the generalisations that have been discussed in this chapter will also be explored.

## **6 Silence and the maintenance of inequality**

The following analysis is an opportunity to examine the role of silence, inequality and power, which is crystallised within relationships such as that of domestic labour. It is an attempt to examine the social psychology of silence within relationships. Such silences are used to keep certain social realities at bay in order to skilfully engage in social life without disrupting assumptions and norms that have become taken for granted, the disruption of which may make social life too uncomfortable to live out.

This chapter will be the outworking of all of the previous chapters of this thesis. It will attempt to use the approach to analysis that has been presented in Chapter 4 in order to make absence convincingly and empirically present. This will be demonstrated through the in-depth and detailed presentation and analysis of the multi-layered dyadic data of scenes from domestic labour. Some of the generalisations that have been suggested within chapter 5 will be highlighted within this present analysis. Ultimately, it will be argued that „being silent about“ particular topics allows for the maintenance of inequality within domestic labour. The issues that will be the particular focus of the analysis will be: (1) silencing hierarchical roles; (2) being silent about „being silent about“; and (3) the absence of difference in domestic labour relationships.

### ***6.1 Silence about hierarchical roles***

Of all of the pairs who participated in this research, the participants of pair 1 were the most positive and warm about each other. Their diaries were filled with moments of joking, giggling and laughing together. Yoliswa is an elderly widow with no children who rarely leaves the property for weekends because she does not have many family members to visit. Yoliswa’s responsibilities are largely focused around cleaning and she is paid extra for caring for Rachel’s children after her working hours. Rachel is a contract lecturer and spends a great deal of her time working from home, increasing the amount of contact that they have together.

While many of their interactions were filled with conversations about a variety of topics, this talk was also paired with what Rachel termed in her diary as “comfortable silence.” It is the

pairing of these loud and chatty interactions with silent understandings of roles that is of interest within this section of analysis. One such moment was when both participants spontaneously watched a boxing match together, which was recorded by both Yoliswa (Diary Extract 13) and Rachel (Diary Extract 14)

#### Diary Extract 13 – Worker Diary

- 1 Today it was a day to watch a boxing match. The fight was between South Africa and
- 2 Australia. I was watching with my boss and Australia won.

Yolisa's account of the boxing match in her daily diary was quite short. She simply notes the basics of the match, such as the participants and the victor. The only clue that there was any level of interaction was that Rachel and Yoliswa watched the match together (line 2). The tone and duration of their time together is not mentioned at all in this account. The only element that draws one's attention to this moment is that it includes a black worker and a white employer watching sport together, which is noteworthy. Rachel's diary (Diary Extract 14) is much more detailed and gives particulars regarding the tone and level of intimacy involved in the interaction.

#### Diary Extract 14 – Employer Diary

- 1 Not a lot of interaction with Yoliswa today – both of us busy with our respective jobs.
- 2 Was funny at one stage though as I took a break from work and was watching a
- 3 boxing match on TV – not something I'm normally into but it was an ex-Aussie rugby
- 4 player against a seasoned heavy-weight boxer and there had been loads of publicity in
- 5 the build up...
- 6 Anyway, Yoliswa heard me shouting at the TV and came through and next thing you
- 7 know we are watching the whole fight together, both yelling at the TV!!
- 8 Must have looked quite hilarious, but I am SO glad that we have this relationship.
- 9 Weird though, as soon as the fight was over, I go back to my computer and she goes
- 10 back to ironing my clothes...



Rachel opens the diary entry by noting that their interactions had been minimal because they were both “busy with [their] respective jobs” (line 1). However, their separation is interrupted by an event that Rachel marks as “funny” (line 2) or out of the ordinary. Rachel begins to watch a boxing match and Yoliswa spontaneously joins her and they watch the remainder of the fight “together, both yelling at the TV” (line 7). Rachel does not imply that Yoliswa’s presence is in any way unwanted or inappropriate.

The final paragraph of the diary entry is of particular interest. Rachel states that this scene “must have looked quite hilarious” (line 8), but does not give details about what particular elements of the scene would be noteworthy or entertaining to observers. Is it about two women watching a masculine sport together? Is it about two women of different race and class sitting together watching TV? Is it about their conduct while watching the match? The cause for the humour of the moment is not specified. It is something that Rachel does not openly address or explain, but instead remains silent about. However it is possible that it would have to do with the nature of what is usually expected in a domestic labour relationship. This particular interpretation is supported because Rachel immediately follows her description of the moment as “hilarious” (line 8) by stating that she is “so glad that [they] have this relationship” (line 8), implying that this type of relationship is rare for domestic labour relationships. It is something that she presents as positive as she constructs herself as “glad” (line 8) about it.

There is a shift in lines 9-10, from being lighthearted to being somewhat reflective and serious in tone. Rachel begins by noting that the end of the scene is “weird” (line 9). When the boxing match finishes, things return to how they were at the beginning of the diary entry, with no more interaction as both participants return to being “busy with [their] respective jobs” (line 1). For Rachel, that is working at her computer (line 9). For Yoliswa, it is “ironing [Rachel’s] clothes” (line 10). Rachel’s diary entry ends with an ellipsis, which is both vague and interesting. It could be that this indicates that this “weird” conclusion to the fight is something she will reflect on outside of her diary writings and the ellipsis gestures that she is aware of it as something that needs reflection. Another interpretation could be drawn from what is indicated grammatically by an ellipsis, which the Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines as “a mark (...) indicating an omission of words.” Possibly, Rachel does not write a conclusion to this moment as she does not currently have words for it. Her evaluations,

reflections and conclusions related to this moment remain silent but hinted at through the ellipsis, although its interpretation and meaning is not completely clear.

### ***6.1.1 Loud interactions, silent differences***

The above diary accounts of watching the boxing match together are very different. Yoliswa gives very little detail of the event, while Rachel constructs it as a striking moment that exemplifies something of the nature of their relationship. Because these accounts were so different in their level of detail, both participants were invited to speak about the event in greater depth in their individual interviews. Yoliswa's account (Interview Extract 18) gives much more detail about the nature of their interactions during the match by giving descriptions of their talk. Rachel's account (Interview Extract 19) is more focused on highlighting her appraisal of the event by marking it as noteworthy and enjoyable.

#### Interview Extract 18 – Worker Interview

- 1 Wker1 We was watching some box like. Then [Rachel] says [she's] favouring  
2 Australia.
- 3 AJM Mmm.
- 4 Wker1 Hahah it's his her country.
- 5 AJM So you watched it together.
- 6 Wker1 Ja we watch together then we laugh.
- 7 AJM Mmmmm.
- 8 Wker1 Sometimes I was just saying South Africa because South Africa is my  
9 country.
- 10 AJM So you were going against each other?
- 11 Wker1 Hahahaha ja.
- 12 AJM And who won?
- 13 Wker1 Eh the Australia won
- 14 AJM Ah shame.
- 15 Wker1 by that day.
- 16 AJM Hahaha
- 17 Wker1 Australia won. Then she was so happy.

- 18 AJM Mm.  
19 Wker1 Hehehe.  
20 AJM And (.) did you enjoy sitting with her?  
21 Wker1 Ja it's fine. It's fun sitting with her. Shame it's fine.  
22 AJM Mm:: Mm.  
23 Wker1 No problem at all.

Yoliswa constructs this moment as one in which the boxers are not the only opponents. Rachel, being Australian, supports the Australian boxer because “it’s her country” (line 4), while Yoliswa identifies herself more with the Afrikaans boxer, who is the South African representative “because South Africa is [her] country” (lines 8-9). Rachel and Yoliswa become opponents based on their citizenship. However, this competition between them is constructed by Yoliswa as friendly banter, saying that “[they] watch together then [they] laugh” (line 6). Yoliswa laughs when asked about their rivalry in that moment (line 11) and also when she notes that her employer’s competitor won the match (line 19).

Yoliswa is then asked to account for her experience of the event in terms of how she felt about sitting in that situation with Rachel. She responds in line 21 by characterising the experience of sitting with Rachel twice as “fine” and also as “fun.” Then she ends the appraisal by noting that it is “no problem at all” (line 21), indicating that there was nothing problematic or awkward about the situation from her perspective. Yoliswa’s evaluation of this moment constructs their relationship as one that can entertain banter and friendly rivalry, thereby implying that it is relatively relaxed and warm. In addition, by presenting them as rivals based on their citizenship, all other forms of difference between them fade into the background of the interaction. Their race and class inequalities are not what is highlighted as dividing them, but it is instead their differing citizenship that is what distinguishes them from each other. In this sense, Yoliswa’s construction of this moment accomplishes a „leveling of the playing field“ between her and her employer, a leveling that may not be possible in many other settings.

Rachel also commented on the event of watching the boxing match with Yoliswa. However, instead of focusing on the competitive element that Yoliswa highlights, Rachel constructs the moment as something that typifies their relationship and therefore makes their relationship unique.

### Interview Extract 19 – Employer Interview

- 1 Emp1 It was the most classic thing.  
2 AJM [Hahahaha.  
3 Emp1 [The most classic classic thing ever. And that’s our life.  
4 AJM [Mmm.  
5 Emp1 [It’s so awesome. Because I was sitting here. I mean I never watch  
6 boxing but it was just this classic thing of this Aussie (.) and this (.)  
7 old Afrikaaner hehe  
8 AJM Hehe  
9 Emp1 And it was hysterical. And her and I end up both like shouting at the:  
10 TV.

Rachel begins her account by labeling the event as “the most classic thing” (line 1). This characterisation of the scene is then repeated and emphasised in line 3. Rachel states that such “classic” moments are common in their household by stating that “that’s [their] life” (line 3). Yoliswa and Rachel’s life together is then evaluated by Rachel as being “so awesome” (line 5). Rachel does not proceed to elaborate on their relationship or describe its strengths, characteristics or nature in any attempt to justify her assertion. Instead she speaks about the details of the actual boxing match and how the pitting of “this Aussie and this old Afrikaner” (lines 6-7) against each other was in itself also a “classic thing” (line 6). Rachel’s presentation of the moment also accomplishes being silent about the differences between herself and Yoliswa, but it is accomplished differently from Yoliswa’s account. Rachel does not speak about the competition or rivalry that is seen in Yoliswa’s extract, but instead Rachel constructs the pair as united together as they “end up both like shouting at the TV” (lines 9-10). They are TV viewers who together interact with the TV program rather than against each other because of the program. Rachel’s account present produces equality between them by constructing them as equals.

Their differences and roles are topics that Rachel seems to construct as irrelevant through their absence in her talk. Yet, as has been argued in the analysis of Rachel’s diary extract, by describing the moment as incredibly noteworthy through descriptors such as „classic“ and „awesome“, Rachel could be orienting to the common knowledge that such situations are



Rachel contrasts notions of roles with that of one's work. She implicitly rejects the notion that the moment ended because of their different roles in the relationship. She speaks as and for Yoliswa, saying that Yoliswa was not thinking that "now I have to leave because I have to go back to my role" (lines 1-2). Instead Rachel states that they each had to "go back to work" (line 7), the thing that Yoliswa was doing (line 4) and the thing that Rachel was doing (line 6) before the moment of the boxing match. What each of them return to "just happens" (line 9) to be their work.

Rachel goes to great lengths to construct their work as neutral and independent of each other as people. She rejects the notion that their separation has to do with their respective roles (line 2) but instead has to do with returning to their separate work that is demanding their individual attention. Ironically, it is Yoliswa's work that makes it possible for Rachel to have time to do her work and it is Rachel's work that makes it possible for her to employ Yoliswa to do her work. Yet their work is not equal. While Rachel works on the computer preparing lectures for her classes, Yoliswa irons Rachel's clothes. There is a hierarchy that exists, that is innate to their respective work activities. This hierarchy is negated as Rachel positions them both as returning to work and activity that has nothing to do with their roles as employer and worker. This construction silences the notion that, in many respects, their work defines their roles and their roles define their work.

After having constructed the nature of their respective activities, Rachel continues to construct their relationship as one that lacks explicit hierarchy, status or inequality. Their different activities and types of work "just happen" (line 9) to be so. The underlying structural inequalities and values that are placed on their separate jobs is not mentioned nor questioned. Such elements would make being together uncomfortable or strained, a situation that does not apply to their interactions, according to Rachel's constructions in her diary and interview thus far.

Ultimately, Rachel uses the moment of separation between herself and Yoliswa at the end of the boxing match to achieve two things. First, it allows her to construct them as equals who equally have to return to their work of equal value and importance. Their respective work neither defines them as individuals nor defines the nature of their relationship and its roles. In Rachel's construction, work is work. Second, it allows the separation to be one that is constructed as natural within a „comfortable silence“ where each party understands their work

and boundaries without challenging or questioning its implications for any hierarchy or power imbalance within their relationship. Their different roles are a necessary silence that allows them to enjoy watching a boxing match together. If this silence were to be uncomfortable, it would indicate that one or both parties are aware of the differences between them that are implied by the work that they are returning to.

Alternatively, the absence of this silence, where Rachel perhaps must verbally instruct Yoliswa to return to her work after the “fun time“s over” (line 7), would make their respective roles even more explicit. A „comfortable silence“ allows both parties to engage in their work without acknowledging the implications of their work in relation to each other. Ultimately, Rachel is able to be silent about the “weirdness” of their separation by naturalising it within talk of neutral tasks and comfortable silences and allow the power and roles that are central to domestic labour to remain absent from the account. The potential for the awareness of the troubling nature of domestic labour relationships has been avoided and the unsettling reality of existing within a domestic labour relationship is kept within the realms of silence.

She notes that the end of the match, where both participants had been focused on the TV, did not introduce “this feeling of being uncomfortable” (lines 11-12). From a methodological point of view, it is important to note that there are two types of silence occurring here. First, there is the embodied silence that Rachel and Yoliswa engage in as they separate after the boxing match. They do not speak and decide to separate, they do not comment to each other about their separation, its nature or its causes. Instead, it is something that they do. The end of the boxing match is a cue for them to silently return to their work. This is a case of participants „doing“ silence.

However, in Rachel“s diary, she reflects on their separation and flags it as “weird”, indicating that there is something noteworthy about it. Then, in her individual interview, I invite Rachel to account for the silence of their separation. Now silence is something that is not being done, but is instead something that is being talked about and topicalised. Rachel must account for this moment of silence in her relationship with Yoliswa. Through her construction of the ending of their time together, Rachel is able to emphasise that their relationship is “very easy” (line 20) and that they are comfortable with each other, both in times of relaxation and

in times of work. The silence between them is constructed not as one of tension or distance, but is instead a silence of warmth and intimacy.

At another level, Rachel is also doing silence in her talk about the separation. Through her discussion with me about this moment of silence between herself and Yoliswa, Rachel discursively represses the inequality in their relationship. Despite the fact that Yoliswa and Rachel have different roles and work based on their participation in domestic labour, Rachel represses its implications by constructing these differences as activities that just are, different work that “just happens” to fall to each of them. In this way, Rachel is able to „do“the work of silencing any discomfort regarding the inequality in their relationship by talking in certain ways about their work. In addition, I collude with Rachel, giving the silence a particular label or gloss by stating that the ending of the moment through silence was “natural” (line 19). This allows Rachel’s positive construction of their silence to remain intact and to go unchallenged, allowing troubling questions to be avoided and the maintenance of inequality within their relationship to continue, both within its noise and in its silence.

## ***6.2 Silence about being silent***

There is inherent power and status in domestic labour (Glenn, 1992; Moras, 2013; Romero, 1992). There is an employer who is the boss and dictates the tasks to be completed and the working conditions that will be operated within. There is a worker who must perform tasks adequately, fulfill a service and receive payment for such services. In domestic labour, these basic labour roles are also complicated by the socioeconomic and political inequalities that result from intersections of race, class and gendered identities of the employers and workers of the majority of domestic labour relationships, which also is complicated through the informal nature of the relationship. Such identities can be awkward and uncomfortable to embody when they come into contact with each other in such unequal relationships as in domestic labour. Yet the imbalances in power and status are often successfully kept silent by the participants of this relationship. Furthermore, the silence around issues related to the employment relationship can itself become something that the participants are silent about.

The participants of pair 2 had a particularly interesting relationship. Olivia employed Judith even before they moved cities to their present residence. Olivia gave Judith the option to



move with them and she agreed. A major part of Judith's decision to stay with this family is because Olivia has allowed Judith's child, who suffers from severe cerebral palsy, to live with her. Judith's work as a live-in domestic worker allows her to be close to her daughter throughout the day so that she can care for her specific needs continually. Judith also cleans the house and cares for Olivia's three children in the afternoons, sometimes leaving her own daughter alone at the house while she walks to fetch them from school. Their diaries both presented very little interaction with each other. In fact, Olivia's diary entries would largely be categorised as „reporting“ according to Välimäki et al. (2007), as she often only provided details such as what time they greeted or instructions she gave to Judith before leaving the house. There was not a great deal of interaction between them according to either diary. Even within the contact that they did have, there were many moments when they were both „being silent about“ particular things.

The following analysis will focus on identifying ongoing silences within a dyad where one party is particularly aware of silence while the other seems to trivialise that silence. Within this pair, „being silent about“ seemingly insignificant details has become a routinised practice, a practice that reinforces more silence. The initial incident seems somewhat minor, namely that the wrong cleaning equipment was used by Judith. However, it becomes clear that this moment in an ordinary day captures and crystallises the weighty silence that has become part of their employment relationship. The use of the wrong vacuum cleaner was recorded by both Judith (see Diary Extract 15) and Olivia (see Diary Extract 16) in their daily diaries.

#### Diary Extract 15 – Worker Diary

- 1 [Olivia] brought back Hannah. At that time I was busy vacuuming with the other
- 2 machine, although madam had warned me not to use this one because a piece of paper
- 3 got stuck in it. But I managed to get rid of it and it works perfectly. I don't know if
- 4 she had noticed that I was still using it but if she asks I will explain to her because I
- 5 wouldn't want to argue with her.

At first glance, this moment seems rather incidental and passing. In fact, the embodied interaction seems completely trivial if one ignores the history that Judith provides in the first three lines. Olivia has given instructions that Judith should not use this vacuum machine (line 2). Therefore Judith's use of the machine could be interpreted by Olivia as either rebellious

(i.e. using the machine regardless of instructions) or as unintelligent (i.e. not understanding that the machine is not functioning properly). In either scenario, Judith has not followed Olivia's instructions.

However, Olivia does not react to this incident. Judith is not even sure if the infraction was noticed by her employer (lines 3-4). Olivia does not confront Judith and, likewise, Judith does not offer an explanation for her actions. Instead, she states that "if [Olivia] asks I will explain to her" (line 4). Judith's silence is constructed as being dependent on Olivia's silence. However, the silence ultimately is occasioned by the breaking of a rule. Judith was "warned" (line 2) not to use a specific machine, which she used nonetheless. If Olivia calls Judith to account for her actions, Judith states that she will offer one. But without the call to account, Judith will assumedly remain quiet on the issue. Judith ends the diary entry by noting that she "wouldn't want to argue with [Olivia]" (line 5). One is unsure what the argument would entail or under what conditions it would occur. However, Judith clearly wants to avoid conflict with her employer.

The interesting point to consider from Diary Extract 15 is that Olivia's thoughts are presented as a mystery to Judith. Olivia's silence is difficult to interpret for Judith because she is unsure if the silence is because Olivia has not noticed the infraction, if she will comment later or if she will comment at all. Judith's silence is constructed as a response to Olivia's silence. Olivia also mentions this incident in her own diary entry (see Diary Extract 16).

#### Diary Extract 16 – Employer Diary

- 1 Dropped Hannah at lunch time. Greeted. Saw she was vacuuming with the wrong
- 2 vacuum cleaner. Felt a bit annoyed but didn't say anything. Asked her to play some
- 3 puzzles with Hannah. She said no problem.

In Olivia's diary entry, we learn that she did indeed notice Judith using the wrong vacuum. We see both her appraisal of the situation in terms of an emotional state that she "felt a bit annoyed" (line 2) and her response to the situation, namely that she "didn't say anything" (line 2). Instead of addressing the problem directly and immediately with Judith, Olivia chooses to give a child care-related instruction, which Judith responds to without either of them addressing the vacuum cleaner situation. The silence regarding the vacuum has been

filled through a change of topic (Billig, 2004). Ultimately, Olivia leaves her awareness and appraisal of Judith's use of the vacuum as unsaid topics.

### ***6.2.1 Interpreting silence in routine moments***

Silence as a characteristic of their interactions was evident in both individual interviews, as will be shown in the following extracts. This routinised silence poses different challenges for Judith and Olivia, based on how they account for and interpret their own silence and the silence of their counterpart. In Interview Extract 21, Judith expresses some of the guesswork and surveillance that is part of the task of interpreting her employer's silence regarding the vacuum cleaner, a task that is common in their interactions.

#### Interview Extract 21 – Worker Interview

- 1 Wker2 She found me (.) using the red [vacuum]. She didn't see me. If I, I  
2 don't know if she see me or what because I saw she's not saying  
3 anything.
- 4 AJM Mm.
- 5 Wker2 I was think (.) I was saw late oh I used the red one.
- 6 AJM Mm.
- 7 Wker2 Maybe she's gonna talk or what. And I look at her face but she didn't,  
8 I didn't see anything.
- 9 AJM Hahaha
- 10 Wker2 Like she's getting upset or what. But she was okay. Judith, you can  
11 pick Bethy for me at school.
- 12 AJM Mm.
- 13 Wker2 You see. I saw that nice voice. Just oh I said oh maybe she's not  
14 bothering about that.
- 15 AJM So either she didn't notice.
- 16 Wker2 I don't know if she noticed or not.
- 17 AJM Mm.
- 18 Wker2 Because she's not saying anything to me. I said maybe she's (.) maybe  
19 she saw or not. I don't know.

Judith begins her account by stating her assumption that Olivia “didn’t see” (line 1) her using the forbidden vacuum. She then shows some uncertainty in the same line, saying that she “[doesn’t] know if [Olivia saw her]” (line 2). This uncertainty is based on Olivia’s silence (lines 2-3). Judith is left to anticipate whether or not Olivia will confront her openly on the subject (line 7), a fate that can only be discerned by closely observing Olivia. Judith uses monitoring and surveillance language throughout her account, speaking of whether she can “see” (lines 2, 7, 8, 13) or notice any clues in Olivia’s facial expression (line 7) or tone of voice (line 13) that would imply that Olivia is displeased with her.

Judith constructs understanding and anticipating Olivia as difficult on a number of levels. First, Olivia does not seem to give any clear indication through her facial expressions or actions that she is displeased, which Judith expresses by beginning to describe Olivia’s action (“[Olivia] didn’t” (line 7)) but leaving the sentence incomplete, only to finish by noting that Judith “didn’t see anything” (line 8). Second, Olivia does not initially react or respond to the infraction (line 10) but instead speaks about other issues such as childcare (lines 10-11). Finally, Olivia’s tone of voice seems pleasant as Judith identifies her use of “that nice voice” (line 13), implying that she is not upset with Judith or is able to mask her true negative feelings. All of these signs lead Judith to two possible conclusions. Either Olivia is “not bothering about that” (lines 13-14), meaning that she will not confront Judith about her use of the vacuum, or she has not noticed the infraction at all, something that Judith is still not sure about (line 16).

There is so much unknown in this situation for Judith. Did her employer see her transgression? Is she angry? Will she confront her? Judith repeatedly says “I don’t know” (lines 16 and 19). Olivia is not giving any clues about the meaning of her silence (lines 3 and 18) and Judith is not able to definitively interpret Olivia’s silence (lines 8, 16, 18-19). Because explicit feedback or communication is not forthcoming from her employer, Judith must be vigilant about watching Olivia for signs that may help in anticipating a break in the silence. It is difficult to know when there is a topic to avoid if one is not certain that one’s counterpart is also avoiding that topic or if they are even aware that there is a topic to avoid in the first place (Irvine, 2011). This is another fundamental challenge when understanding the phenomenon of „being silent about“. All of this is evident in Judith’s topicalisation of silence, as has been shown in the analysis above.

However, in this extract, Judith is not only talking about silence. She is also effectively „doing silence“. According to Judith, the cause of all of this guessing, uncertainty and surveillance is ultimately Olivia’s silence (line 18), a construction that completely omits the role of her own rule-breaking within this situation. An interesting element of this account is also that Judith is ultimately silent about her own silence in this relationship. While she constructs herself as constantly watching out for some sign of impending communication from Olivia, she never raises the possibility of breaking the silence between them to speak about the vacuum first. Judith topicalises Olivia’s silence whilst accomplishing silence regarding her own silence in the interaction.

In looking at how this interview may have developed differently, I wonder why I did not ask Judith about her role in the silence. Was I afraid to offend her? Would that indicate that I did not fully understand the constraints of her relationship with Olivia? Would it be impolite? Was it easier to blame an absent party for the silence rather than the woman sitting in front of me? Whatever the reason, our interaction allowed for Judith’s role in the silence to be unaccounted for and remain a topic that we were silent about at this point in the interview. Her account for her own silence will be explored in Interview Extract 23, but at this point it is interesting to note that, in constructing herself as very busy and active in her surveillance of Olivia, she avoids having to acknowledge and account for her own silence. It is something she is able to do as she talks about Olivia’s silence.

In Olivia’s diary, I noticed that she rarely gave Judith feedback on her performance, whether positive or negative. In Interview Extract 22, Olivia was asked to acknowledge and account for that tendency.

#### Interview Extract 22 – Employer Interview

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | AJM  | Why do you think that is?  |
| 2 | Emp2 | I think time constraints, you know? I just think like I see it. I think to |
| 3 |      | myself I must remember it so that I can tell her because I’m rushing       |
| 4 |      | out of the door.   |
| 5 | AJM  | Mmm.   |
| 6 | Emp2 | Or I’m rushing in and I’m (.) sorting Hannah out before I leave and        |

- 7                    then it's just not the appropriate time (.) to say hey by the way
- 8     AJM     Mmm.
- 9     Emp2     You know what I mean. I'd like to do it a little bit more tactfully.
- 10   AJM     Mmm.
- 11   Emp2     And then it passes. And then I think ah it wasn't, it wasn't actually that
- 12                    important.
- 13   AJM     Mmm.
- 14   Emp2     But ja. It probably is.

Olivia's initial explanation for her silence in terms of feedback to Judith is "time constraints" (line 2). While she may notice something that could be spoken about (line 2) or intend to speak to Judith about it (line 3), her life is constructed as busy and full of responsibilities, as she "rushes out the door" (line 3-4), "rushes in" (line 6) or tends to children before once again leaving the house (line 6). Because of all of this hurried busyness, an "appropriate time" (line 7) to talk with Judith is constructed as difficult, if not impossible, to find. Within the busyness, Olivia's concerns "[pass]" (line 11) and, on reflection, issues involving Judith seem unimportant and thus not worthy of being raised at all. Ultimately, Olivia's busy, chaotic lifestyle is used to account for her silence with Judith, both in terms of immediate response and responses that may occur after some time.

Olivia does, however, acknowledge that some of the issues or topics that would be addressed with Judith may be somewhat difficult or sensitive, as is implied by her intention to raise such subjects "tactfully" (line 9). Indeed, her lack of communication with Judith is not viewed as neglectful, but as preferable to simply giving an off-hand comment or quick remark, such as "hey by the way" (line 7). Instead, Olivia states that she would "like to do it a little bit more tactfully" (line 9). In that one statement, Olivia rejects the implication that she is being inattentive by remaining silent about Judith's performance, instead constructing herself as thoughtful in her communication strategies with Judith. In this way, the topicalisation of silence becomes a way of accomplishing a construction of herself as a considerate employer, despite a hectic lifestyle.

After stating that issues with Judith do not seem important after some reflection or time has passed, Olivia ends her account by stating that "it probably is [important]" (line 14). This is an interesting way to end such an account. First, it implies that her routinised silence may be

problematic or need to change in her relationship with Judith. However, she does not go into any lengths regarding the effect of her silence on Judith as a person or a worker or any effects that it may have on their relationship. This remains an unspoken and ambiguous topic. Second, she does not state that she will in fact change this pattern of silence. She does not outline a plan to communicate more with Judith or even an intention to formulate such a plan. The future status of their communication and her silence is a topic that Olivia avoids completely. Finally, collaboratively we remain silent about why communication may be important. We allow the moment to pass without talking about why addressing issues with Judith may be important. As the researcher, I do not probe the issue and I allow her construction of busyness to go unquestioned. Our interaction does not force an uncomfortable topic or account to take place. Instead we continue onto other things, allowing her responsibility as an employer to communicate clearly in terms of expectations and feedback to remain as a conspicuous absence.

It is interesting to note how these two accounts and interpretations of silence may feed into each other. Olivia interprets her silence as being a direct result of her busy lifestyle, where she rushes in and out and does not have the time to address issues with Judith in the way she would like to. Judith interprets her silence as one that is dependent on Olivia's (lack of) reactions and interactions. Ironically these two silent activities, Olivia's embodied routinised busyness and silence combined with Judith's routine of silent, busy surveillance, may create a never-ending cycle of silence or a relationship of silence. Olivia will continue to silently rush around Judith as Judith silently monitors her. They are both waiting for a moment to speak, for the appropriate time to communicate their position, justifications and expectations of each other and themselves. Until then, they remain silent about events such as the use of the wrong vacuum cleaner.

### ***6.2.2 Accomplishing silence while topicalising silence***

Routinised silence was evident in the diaries and individual interviews of both participants. It was a tendency in their relationship and one that both of them commented on. Both were asked to account for their silence. Judith (see Interview Extract 23) used the idea of power imbalances and contested authority, while Olivia (see Interview Extract 24) focused primarily

on comparing their relationship with other types of more authoritative domestic labour relationships.

#### Interview Extract 23 – Worker Interview

- 1     AJM     So you you wouldn't tell Olivia?  
2     Wker2   No. [No no no no.  
3     AJM             [Because she is your (.) [because she is your  
4     Wker2                             [My boss. Yes.  
5     AJM     Okay.  
6     Wker2   Yes. Yeah. [I can't tell that.  
7     AJM             [That's quite difficult  
8     Wker2   Maybe she's gonna, she's gonna like, I want to rule her. Maybe I'm the  
9             one, I'm gonna make (.) like her, I don't know. Or she wants she think  
10            she's gooder than me. I don't know these things. You know. I was  
11            thinking. But she I know she's not that person.

In this extract, Judith emphatically and repeatedly states that she would not raise work-related issues with Olivia, saying “no” five times in line 2. When asked for the reason for this silence about the infraction, she responds by labeling Olivia as “[her] boss” (line 4), a label that I seemed hesitant to use in line 3. Olivia’s character, personality and likeability are not at issue. Instead it is her station as Judith’s employer that Judith uses to justify her own silence.

Judith proceeds to describe what would happen if she were to discuss work-related issues with Olivia. Judith describes a situation where position, authority, power, status, hierarchy and territory are at stake. Judith says that Olivia may interpret Judith’s actions as an attempt to be in charge, as if Judith “[wants] to rule her” (line 8). Next, it may be interpreted as an attempt to be equals as if Judith is “like her” (line 9). Alternatively, Olivia may use the discussion to show that she is superior to Judith because Olivia may think “she’s gooder than [Judith]” based on Judith’s ignorance regarding “these things” (line 10). Judith constructs these possibilities as things that she has considered as she “was thinking” (lines 10-11). In this account, these possibilities exist only as scenarios in Judith’s thoughts and have not actually been played out. Yet the construction of these thoughts and their potential implications for the relationship between Judith and Olivia allow Judith to construct her



silence as preferable to a possible conflict situation. In each of these scenarios, Judith will be belittled by or inadequate compared to Olivia's status and power.

Yet all of these possibilities are completely negated by Judith's final utterance on this subject. Throughout lines 8-10, her relationship with Olivia is constructed as one that is potentially volatile, competitive and intimidating. It is a relationship in which power is at stake between them and any conflict will be a site for the claiming of such power and authority, specifically by Olivia. Then in line 11, Judith says that she knows that "[Olivia is] not that person." In this line, Judith transitions from talking about as she topicalises and justifying her silence, to doing silence as she discursively accomplishes being silent about the possibility of conflict with Olivia. In these few words, the previously negative constructions of Olivia are nullified as she is acquitted of the implications that had been previously uttered, although Judith does not describe what sort of person Olivia is.

The combination of the two perspectives achieves two things. First, Olivia's identity as a good employer for whom it is good to work is maintained. She is not a person who is difficult. She is not "that person" and therefore is not that employer. Second, the construction and hearability of the potential fallout from a confrontation allows Judith to remain silent with Olivia about her job. Any issues around her role as a domestic worker or Olivia's role as an employer must remain in silence. This leaves Judith with very little power as a worker, an implication that is potentially difficult to embody and come to terms with as a black woman in post-apartheid South Africa.

In speaking about the silence between herself and Olivia, Judith works to accomplish silence around the possibility that speaking would be a potential for conflict because "[Olivia is] not that person" (line 11), not the person who would react as Judith had previously described. This is achieved through Billig's (2004) argument that language enables close links between what is said and what is unsaid by allowing mechanisms whereby topics can be approached or avoided. Billig (2004) argues that, "as the conversation seems to lurch towards a topic, which will disturb the speakers, so the speakers might steer around the unspoken obstacle, putting the dialogue safely back on course" (p. 52). In this sense, Judith has successfully repressed, or silenced, the possibility that Olivia is an unkind person or employer. But the effect of these lines on the hearer is that, despite Judith's defense of Olivia here, a

conversation would be a site of potential conflict in their relationship, a conflict that is better avoided through Judith's silence.

While Judith's interview account constructs their relationship as a potentially troubled one, Olivia uses the notion of troubled domestic labour relationships as a construction with which their relationship can be contrasted and compared (see Interview Extract 24).

#### Interview Extract 24 – Employer Interview

- 1     AJM     And then do you think that your relationship with her is similar or  
2             different to other domestic labour relationships?  
3     Emp2    No I think it's different.  
4     AJM     Okay.  
5             (.)  
6             Tell me what you think others are like and then how yours is different.  
7     Emp2    So I think others could be: what you suggested earlier.  
8     AJM     Mm.  
9     Emp2    Where: "I'm the madam. This is what you do."  
10            (.)  
11            That's where it ends.  
12    AJM     Mm.  
13    Emp2    Uh whereas as I said before, I really, we feel like she's part of our  
14            family.

Olivia presents two versions of the domestic labour relationship. In the first version, the employer claims the status and identity of the "madam" (line 9) and then issues commands to the worker by telling her "this is what you do" (line 9). There is no negotiation, no warmth and a very clear pecking order. In the second version, the worker is viewed as "part of our family" (lines 13-14) by the members of the household. The details of the relationship are not made explicit but instead the culture and assumptions of familial relations are called upon to imply warmth, belonging and working toward the common good of the household. The „madam“ scenario is implicitly constructed as one where the employer's power disadvantages and abuses the worker, whereas the „familial“ scenario is one that cares for and includes the worker (Durrheim et al., 2014). This latter construction of the domestic labour context, which

Olivia applies to her relationship with Judith, is meant to provide a space of freedom and belonging for the worker where they are equally part of a household family along with the employer.

Although there are underlying discourses that differ between Olivia's different constructions of the domestic labour relationship, in both cases Olivia's account completely fails to recognise any agency, reciprocity or response on the part of the worker. In the „madam“ scenario, the worker is completely absent from the account. In fact, the worker is not mentioned at all. She is a silent, passive presence who is dictated to by the „madam“ of the house. In the „familial“ scenario, the feelings of the worker are not mentioned. Her response to being considered as part of the family is not mentioned. Her feelings, her appraisal, her thoughts on the relationship are not commented on. All that is mentioned is what “we feel” (line 13), the „we“ assumedly referring to the employer's household members.

Thus, whether the worker is related to purely as an employee or as a family member, their agency and personhood in the relationship are unmentioned topics in Olivia's construction of domestic workers. This silence shows the subtle expectation that domestic workers are themselves to be silent partners within the domestic labour relationship. Their agency, personhood and identity are to be silent and absent. In addition, by neglecting to mention the domestic worker, the differing status between them is also kept silent. In the „madam“ scenario, the domestic worker's identity as an abused and dominated black woman by the hands of a bossy, power-hungry white woman is never acknowledged. In the „familial“ scenario, the awkwardness of the inclusion of a poor black within the family connections of a middle-class white family is not explored. The appraisals and responses by these two identities by the worker are silent because her presence is actually an absence. It is an absence that indicates the presence of troubles and discomfort with the identity, power and status of black domestic workers in relation to their employers and their households.

Despite their differing constructions of each other and their relationship, their accounts leave the hearer within the same conclusion: silence about Judith's work is preferable to talking and that it is better to remain silent about that silence. By both Judith and Olivia avoiding the topic of their own silence about Judith's work and its appraisals, the importance of such silence remains absent, allowing for ongoing inequality between them.

### ***6.3 Silence about the nature of domestic labour***

Domestic labour is a site of obvious and deep inequality. In South Africa, it is often performed by poor, black women for middle- to upper-class white households (Archer, 2011; King, 2007). There are multiple layers of socioeconomic and political inequalities that exist within these relationships. And yet participants in this relationship do not primarily speak about their relationship as one characterised by inequality or difference. In fact, such fundamental features often go unmentioned or are nullified by both parties.

It could be argued that, for the relationship to function without highlighting one's socioeconomic and political identity in relation to someone who has a vastly different identity, such differences must remain silent, thereby reducing discomfort about one's position in society (Archer, 2011). For white employers, this is a position of power and authority over a black worker who maintains the cleanliness and, in many cases, the children in one's household. For black workers, this is a vulnerable position where one exists within a white household, doing, in many cases, unenviable tasks such as cleaning toilets and changing nappies and is dependent on the employer to create positive working conditions and arrangements. Both identities are difficult, awkward and uncomfortable to embody within post-apartheid South Africa, where such inequality clearly echoes the unfair relationships of the apartheid era.

Despite the obvious inequalities of domestic labour relationships, the participants in pair 3 seemed to successfully remain silent about their differences and some of the foundations of their domestic labour relationship. This pair has already been introduced in chapter 4, based around a diarised moment where they discussed weight loss and sit-ups. During the course of the data collection, a topic that had previously been silent between them became salient and spoken about, namely the existence and visitations of Lindiwe's boyfriend. It was a topic that both Lindiwe and Tracy had not spoken about with each other before this point in time, despite both of them being aware of the topic and its implications. This can be seen in Diary Extract 17, where Tracy mentions seeing Lindiwe's boyfriend enter the property.

Diary extract 17 – Employer diary

1 Later on while sitting in my room I noticed Lindiwe walking up the driveway  
2 carrying a bucket and a bag of things. I then saw her boyfriend walk up and go  
3 into her room. This is a topic I find hard to discuss with Lindiwe. My previous  
4 domestic helper (who was Lindiwe's sister) used to have her boyfriend stay  
5 over. She later contracted a disease and subsequently passed away. When  
6 Lindiwe started with us we said we didn't want a repeat of the last situation.  
7 Lindiwe has never asked whether her boyfriend can stay here and I've never  
8 broached the subject since seeing her boyfriend here. I don't want Lindiwe to be  
9 lonely but I also want her to be the one to approach me about her boyfriend  
10 living here.

Both Tracy and Lindiwe are remaining completely silent about this topic (lines 7-8), as both parties have "never" (line 7) raised the issue with each other, despite their shared knowledge regarding the history of Lindiwe's sister (lines 3-5). This is a silence that may have been maintained by both women for some time, since this is not the boyfriend's first visit.

From a methodological viewpoint, if it has never been mentioned, one could ask the question: how would one know that it is indeed an issue between these women? How does one know that it is indeed a silence or a topic that they are being silent about? The answer can largely be found in that both participants are aware that a rule is being broken, namely that boyfriends are not allowed on the property, which would be a "repeat of the last situation" (line 6). Tracy has set a rule regarding male visitors and she knows that Lindiwe is breaking this rule. Likewise, Lindiwe is constructed as knowingly breaking the rule by not asking "whether her boyfriend can stay here" (line 7). Interestingly, the boyfriend's visit is an event that is not mentioned at all in Lindiwe's diary entry for this day.

An implication of „rule breaking“ is that there is also „rule making“. If there is a rule to break, this is evidence that someone has set a rule, which implies the power to do so. The existence of a rule implies power imbalances. Tracy is the employer and has set rules for Lindiwe to follow regarding who is and is not allowed onto Tracy's property. Considering that Tracy has a great deal of authority within the relationship, it is interesting that Lindiwe's boyfriend and the breaking of the boyfriend rule is a "topic [Tracy finds] hard to discuss with Lindiwe" (line 3). It is a silence occasioned by rule breaking because Tracy finds the topic difficult to address, even as Lindiwe's employer, potentially because such a discussion may be awkward

and difficult to navigate and would also cause their various roles to become evident and embodied.

Essentially, Tracy's diary record is one where she talks about and topicalises a silence that exists between herself and Lindiwe. It is both a topic that is "hard to discuss" (line 3) and one that has "never" (line 7) been raised between them. It is a topic that they are collaboratively being silent about. At the same time, within this topicalisation is another silence that is raised and maintained, namely the issue of Lindiwe's sister. In this diary extract, Tracy notes that Lindiwe's sister "contracted a disease" (line 5) that ultimately led to her death. While Tracy does not identify the exact disease, any competent member of South African society would hear this utterance as a reference to HIV/AIDS, especially since Tracy links the disease with a boyfriend's visits, implying the sexual origins of the disease. Yet these details and its implications are not something that Tracy discusses further.

By discouraging visitations by boyfriends with Lindiwe, Tracy says that they would be avoiding a "repeat of the last situation" (line 6). The details of this "situation" are not spelled out for the reader. But again, what is hearable here is that visitations by boyfriends are risky to the health of Tracy's domestic worker because of their potentially risky sexual nature, which could lead to diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Thus, in speaking about the silent topic of the boyfriend, Tracy accomplishes the silencing of taboos around HIV/AIDS and domestic workers. Her talk maintains the silence of this topic though vagueness and ambiguity that gestures towards issues that are hearable for members of South African society.

Three days later a significant conversation occurs between Tracy and Lindiwe, which both parties mention in their diaries on that day (see Diary Extracts 18 and 19). It is interesting to note that, according to both diaries, it is Lindiwe who breaks the silence about her boyfriend. Most importantly, there is a great deal of discrepancy between the accounts, resulting in a slippage between their perspectives on the silence. By „slippage“, I mean that speakers are able to „talk past“ each other as their talk addresses different concerns or different meanings yet continues to collaboratively maintain particular silences, whilst simultaneously allowing both speakers to feel satisfied that a common silence has been broken. Speakers' utterances and their meanings slip past each other within the topic in a way that allows for more silence.

#### Diary Extract 18 – Employer diary

1 When I was about to leave again Lindiwe said that she wanted to speak to me  
2 when I got home in the afternoon. I said she could speak to me there and then.  
3 She said she was scared and didn't want to cry. I said that she can talk to me  
4 about anything.

5 She then asked me how many boyfriends I had before my husband. I said a few.  
6 She then continued and said that she had been keeping a secret from me and  
7 was now ready to talk to me. She said that she wasn't happy with her previous  
8 boyfriend (who had paid *labola*) because he wanted a baby before getting  
9 married. So she had broken up with him. I told her I was proud of her. She then  
10 continued and said that she had a new boyfriend (actually, not so new – he's  
11 been around for over a year).

12 We discussed their relationship and how he is towards her children. He sounds  
13 like a responsible man. I said that she is the only person who can make a  
14 decision regarding her relationship but that a man must respect her and her kids.  
15 I said that I don't mind him visiting her as long as it doesn't interfere with her  
16 job. Lindiwe's biggest fear in a relationship is contracting a disease. I explained  
17 to her that her and her partner can get tested. She also doesn't want me to think  
18 of her as a „slut“. I said that is not the case. I commended her on taking  
19 precautions with her partner and thanked her for being honest.

20 She said this diary got her thinking...Thanks!!

Tracy begins the account by constructing Lindiwe as hesitant and intimidated as Lindiwe was “scared” and would potentially “cry” (line 3) in anticipating their conversation. However, Tracy constructs this as ultimately unnecessary on Lindiwe's part by stating that Lindiwe “can talk to [her] about anything” (lines 3-4). Lindiwe confesses to having “been keeping a secret” (line 6) and that she is “now ready to talk to [Tracy]” (line 7). Tracy's construction of the silence is one of secrecy on Lindiwe's part, a silence that must be admitted to or confessed. Tracy constructs herself as open and supportive of Lindiwe's confession and her choice in partners by saying she is “proud” (line 9) of Lindiwe and that she approves of descriptions of the present partner (lines 12-14). Tracy also mentions that Lindiwe expressed

her fears of contracting a disease from her partner (line 16) and her fears of Tracy's opinion of her, specifically of the danger of Tracy labelling her a "slut" (line 18).

For Tracy, this silence is related to Lindiwe's morality. Lindiwe is described at first as being secretive, but later is commended for her honesty and Tracy highlights Lindiwe's fears of "disease" and being seen as a "slut." Tracy constructs herself as accepting and encouraging toward Lindiwe's decisions as she communicates "pride" (line 9) and commendation (line 18) in Lindiwe's decisions, character and actions, thereby negating Lindiwe's fear of being labelled. She also advises Lindiwe regarding her relationship, including the highly sensitive topic of being "tested" (line 17), which again implies the possibility of HIV/AIDS. While Tracy mentions some of Lindiwe's fears, the interaction is largely focused around the re-establishment of rules and expectations, namely that the boyfriend is allowed "visiting [Lindiwe] as long as it doesn't interfere with her job" (lines 15-16) and on notions of confession as Tracy "thanked her for being honest" (line 19). The extract shows how Tracy constructs Lindiwe's silence as originating from issues of morality.

There is a sense of irony and continued elements of ongoing silence within this diary extract. When Lindiwe describes her present partner as a "new boyfriend" (line 10), Tracy notes as a sort of an aside in brackets that "actually, not so new – he's been around for over a year" (lines 10-11). Although they are both aware of the actual time frame of this relationship, Tracy does not confront Lindiwe about this detail. Tracy allows some of the details of Lindiwe's relationship to remain silent. In concluding the account, Tracy thanks Lindiwe for "being honest" (line 19), despite the fact that this honesty has been preceded by at least a year of hiding her partner from Tracy.

Lindiwe also records their interaction around the unsilencing of the secrecy surrounding the existence of her boyfriend. However, her diary record emphasises different aspects from that of Tracy's account.

#### Diary Extract 19 – Worker diary

- 1 During the day she came to drop off Tim I then ask her if we could talk when
- 2 she returns home. She told me we may as well talk now because in the
- 3 afternoon she will be busy. I began to ask her if she's dated other men before



4 getting married and she replied yes she has. I told her I was asking because my  
5 ex-boyfriend came to visit me while I was at work. He's been asking me to give  
6 us another chance but I refused because I am with someone else now. I told him  
7 I've been dating this guy for a year now and he works at a primary school  
8 and he makes me happy. I told her the reason why am having this conversation  
9 with her is because I don't want to have any secrets with her and I am not  
10 planning to have another child. That is why I am using contraceptives and  
11 condoms to prevent infections. She appreciated my honesty and told me that  
12 she has seen my ex-boyfriend leaving her property and she didn't know how to  
13 confront me. She was happy that I am taking care of myself.

In Lindiwe's account of the discussion, she goes into much more detail regarding her previous boyfriend and also the qualities of her current boyfriend (lines 4-8). Lindiwe explains the motivation for this conversation as not wanting to "have any secrets with [Tracy]" (line 9). However, Lindiwe does not mention the breaking of the boyfriend rule at all as part of her secret. Instead, she mentions that she is "not planning to have another child" (lines 9-10) and that she is using contraceptives to "prevent infections" (line 11). For Lindiwe, this confession is more about proving her levels of responsibility regarding her sexual relationship and how that relationship will not impede her ability to work. She is ultimately addressing anticipated concerns on Tracy's part regarding her health and her ability to perform her duties, as well as possibly constructing herself as moral and responsible in being careful and measured about her relationship decisions. She does not mention the new rule regarding the boyfriend's visitations that is mentioned in Tracy's diary account. Instead, she focuses on Tracy's encouragement regarding how she is "taking care of [herself]" (line 13).

From the diary accounts, it appears that Tracy and Lindiwe address different silences and anticipate different expectations that are being violated. For Tracy, the interaction is about Lindiwe confessing the violation of Tracy's ground rules as she praises her honesty, highlights issues of morality and sets down new rules for the boyfriend's visits, while also presenting herself as a caring and supportive employer. For Lindiwe, the interaction is about showing herself as responsible in her relationship, proving that she is also a diligent worker who is taking care of herself so as to avoid any inability to work. Yet both of them come away satisfied that a silence has been confessed. The natures of both the silence and the



In this extract, Tracy is asked to account for why some things are difficult for her to express within her role as the employer, a challenge that came to light as a direct result of her reflections in her diary keeping. Tracy states that the “whole employer employee relationship is quite difficult” (lines 4-6) because of the similarities between Lindiwe and herself. She lists a number of factors that make them equals. The most frequently cited factor is their similar ages: “if she was a lot younger I think it would be easier” (line 6); “she’s an adult” (line 11); and “she’s similar in age” (line 13). She also notes Lindiwe’s life stage, namely that she is “an adult” (line 11) and has “kids of her own” (line 11). Finally, Tracy draws on their common womanhood, saying that she has “to respect her and as a woman” (line 13). These factors work together to construct Lindiwe and Tracy as equals, making the employment relationship one that is difficult for Tracy to negotiate.

Tracy states that, if these similarities were not in play, perhaps “it would be easier to have that more authoritative sort of [AJM: Mm] attitude toward things” (lines 6-9). In this case, it would be easier to “confront” (line 15) Lindiwe in light of the violation of rules and expectations that have been established. This is similar to Archer’s (2011) findings that employers are uncomfortable with their role in the domestic labour relationship. According to Archer (2011), many employers have ambiguous rules or do not confront workers directly when rules have been broken because this confrontation would bring the power imbalances into sharp focus.

It is interesting to note how, in talking about one silence, Tracy is also accomplishing the maintenance of another silence related to race and class that could become deeply troubling for her as a white employer within South Africa. In talking about and accounting for her role in the maintenance of the silence, Tracy is able to draw on demographic similarities between herself and Lindiwe that ironically make it difficult for Tracy to perform her role as the employer. However, in speaking about reasons for her silence, Tracy is also silent about the stark differences between them, such as race and class. These differences and Tracy’s authority are evident in her „voice“ in Interview Extract 3, where she speaks about teaching Lindiwe “the right things to do” (line 11), things that are based on “the white environment” (line 8). By speaking here about the similarities between them, Tracy is able to remain silent about their differences, differences that would make an “authoritative” employment relationship troubling within post-apartheid South Africa. Tracy is a middle-class, well-

educated white who can afford to hire domestic help. Lindiwe is a lower-class black with an eighth grade education who has only ever worked as Tracy's domestic worker. Race, socio-political inequality and power imbalances remain silent topics in this account. This absence is conspicuous in light of the nature of domestic labour in South Africa, where so much of the relationship is marked by clear differences in race and class (Archer, 2011; Cock, 1980; Fish, 2006). Thus, being silent about certain fundamental differences by instead focusing on their similarities allows Tracy to replace a troubling topic with a more acceptable one. The justification of her silence based on common gender as opposed to different race and class allows the inequalities and troubles of this relationship to be kept from becoming topicalised within the conversation.

Another layer of this relationship is the uncomfortable reality that Tracy is a privileged white who has power and a level of control over Lindiwe, an underprivileged and vulnerable black, all within the context of post-apartheid South Africa, where such inequalities and power imbalances seem to echo the country's racialised and unfair past. As an employer, she finds it difficult to "confront" (line 15) Lindiwe about personal matters. This also allows Tracy to construct herself as a liberal, fair and respectful white employer who treats her black employee as a person with a private life, as opposed to a slave or servant who exists only for their master. Her silence is predicated on her respect for Lindiwe's personhood and a rejection of the identity and actions of a stereotypical white employer.

Lindiwe is also asked to account for her silence in her individual interview (see Interview Extract 26). She speaks about her relationship with Tracy in a way that attempts to silence the inequalities between them, although she manufactures their equality in a different way from that of Tracy.

#### Interview Extract 26 – Worker Interview

- 1     AJM     And you didn't say anything becau:::se?
- 2     Wkr3     I was so scared that maybe she gonna look me like I'm (.) I'm not a (.)
- 3             a good girl. Maybe I'm a::: (.) slu::t.
- 4     AJM     Mm.
- 5     Wkr3     You understand what I mean?
- 6     AJM     Ja.

- 7 Wkr3 Mm.
- 8 AJM Ja.
- 9 Wkr3 But that time I was telling, I I was telling (.) I was telling:: Tracy,
- 10 AJM Mm.
- 11 Wkr3 I telling her that, I was taking my time (.) to:: (.) to see if it's a (.) it's a  
 12 right man for me.
- 13 AJM Mm.
- 14 Wkr3 Before I was telling her.

Lindiwe begins her account by noting that she was “scared” (line 2) of her employer’s perceptions of her. She is afraid that, if Tracy is aware of her relationship, she will be looked at as a “slut” (line 3) and someone who is “not a good girl” (lines 2-3). Both of these identities are seen through the gaze of the employer (line 2). Lindiwe’s silence is based on Tracy’s potentially negative perceptions of her as immoral. Lindiwe notes that she wants to ensure that her current boyfriend will be a stable and steady presence in her life before she publically reveals their relationship to Tracy. Lindiwe states that she was “taking [her] time” (line 11) in telling Tracy about this matter to see if her boyfriend is the “right man for [her]” (line 12). While the beginning of the account uses Tracy’s perceptions and gaze as dictating her silence, Lindiwe ends the account by claiming agency as she did what she needed to do for herself, in her own time. Therefore, although Lindiwe acknowledges the importance of Tracy’s opinion and presence in her life, her own freedoms and agency are also a factor playing into her silence.

However, a silence that is not made explicit is what would happen to Lindiwe if Tracy did consider Lindiwe to be a “slut” or not a “good girl”. What would the consequences of Tracy’s negative opinions be? Would it merely be Tracy’s disapproval, whether it be explicit or implicit, or would there be more serious, material consequences for Lindiwe, such as dismissal from her job or harsh restrictions and surveillance of the movements of Lindiwe’s partner on Tracy’s property? There is also the unspoken concern of a „slut“ potentially being left alone with Tracy’s husband when Tracy is away at work in the evenings or on weekends. These consequences are never brought to the surface and so it is not clear. There is a moment where Lindiwe asks “You understand what I mean?” (line 5). That would have been an opportunity for us to explore the implications of Tracy’s potential disapproval and any consequences that Lindiwe would foresee. However, instead of entering this potentially

troubling topic, where the inequalities of domestic labour would be made incredibly obvious, I simply answered “Ja” (line 6), allowing some of the troubles of this relationship to go unspoken. However, it is important to note that Lindiwe’s assessment of Tracy’s level of influence in her life is a topic that is not explicitly explained here. It remains in silence for the time being, a troubling possibility where Lindiwe may experience the consequences of her socioeconomic and political differences and inequalities in relation to Tracy’s power as an employer.

Again, there is a significant slippage between their accounts of their own silence about Lindiwe’s boyfriend. Tracy focuses largely on her (lack of) authority when acting as Lindiwe’s employer in terms of creating rules and confronting Lindiwe when rules have been violated. For Lindiwe, she focuses on Tracy’s perceptions of her as a moral and upright woman. Both women account for their own silence and note how it is ultimately situated within the context of a relationship and both women are collaborating in maintaining the balance of their relationship. This is a fundamental feature of silence, that it occurs between people who must avoid or address particular topics based on social forces and rules. This notion is expressed by Saville-Troike (1985, p. 13, original emphasis) who states that a productive and meaningful analysis of silence must account not only for:

...what can be said, but *what* can be said *when, where, by whom, to whom, in what manner*, and in *what* particular *circumstances*. It follows naturally that this line of inquiry must consider also who may *not* speak about what and in what situations as well.

Here, Saville-Troike is effectively noting the complex and situated nature of silence within particular social norms. For Tracy and Lindiwe, the topic of the boyfriend and its silence is situated within the domestic labour relationship, which is fraught with hierarchies and inequalities on many levels. Thus, speaking about secrets and silences becomes something that must be carefully navigated and negotiated in order for both women to come out on the other side of the secret satisfied that they have conducted themselves in a way that will allow their relationship to continue in a „business as usual“ manner. For this to occur, they must remain silent about some topics, such as power imbalances, their assumptions of each other and their identity in relation to each other, as an accomplishment of their talk about the silence surrounding the boyfriend.

Both accounts neglect, and therefore allow for the silence of, the topic and nature of domestic labour, in which they are not equals in terms of socio-political power and status. By attributing their own silence to their consideration for each other and the rights or perceptions of the other, their own position within the relationship, whether it be one of power or one of vulnerability, remains wrapped in silence, a silence that allows them to avoid the awkwardness and discomfort that their relationship may create due to their differences. These differences are both independent of and due to their part in domestic labour. In other words, although these women are different from each other, their participation together in a domestic labour relationship potentially brings those differences to the fore, highlighting their own position in society in relation to each other. Each woman is potentially a prototype or symbolic representative of their group in the eyes of the other. Their contact with each other could bring realities about their own position and the position of the other's group into an uncomfortable focus, unless they are both silent about such differences and inequalities.

In her individual interview, Lindiwe was asked to compare the silence surrounding her boyfriend and the silence around employment issues such as wages and leave (see Interview Extract 27). For Lindiwe, these are different silences, with different implications for their domestic labour relationship.

#### Interview Extract 27 – Worker Interview

- 1     AJM     Do you think with this is a similar situation? That maybe after you  
2             speak about it (.) it would feel better? Or do you think that this is  
3             different?  
4     Wkr3    I think it um (.) different because (.) uh uh the boyfriend, it (.) it's  
5             m:::  
6     AJM     Mm:::  
7     Wkr3    My uh um my boyfriend.  
8     AJM     Ja.  
9     Wkr3    It not gonna be (.) a problem with, with her.  
10    AJM     Ja.  
11    Wkr3    See?  
12    AJM     Ja.

- 13 Wkr3 Not changing::: (.) uh uh the thing inside here (indicates house).  
14 AJM Ja. It doesn't have to do with her house.  
15 Wkr3 Yes.  
16 AJM Ja.  
17 Wkr3 About the money and the leave (.) it other (.) it's another (.) topic.  
18 AJM Mm. Mm.  
19 Wkr3 It's deeper I think.

The topic of leave and wages is different or, as Lindiwe says, "it's another topic" (line 17). This is a topic that highlights the labour aspect of their relationship. It requires both women to explicitly embody roles that emphasise the power imbalances and inequalities that exist within domestic labour in general and in their relationship in particular. It requires Lindiwe to speak about her dependence on Tracy's role as an employer and for Tracy to speak about her responsibilities toward Lindiwe as her employee. It is an uncomfortable topic to address together. For Lindiwe, this topic is constructed as "deeper" (line 19), implying that it is more difficult to speak about and making it a silence that has serious implications for the justice and fairness of this domestic labour relationship.

While Lindiwe is able to identify leave and wages as a different and deeper topic, she does not speak about what makes it deeper or different. The only element that she does mention is that it is not an issue that has to do with her personal life or private matters. Leave and wages fundamentally involve Tracy. These specific labour-related topics are issues that Lindiwe topicalises as ones that she is silent about. This silence may allow for the maintenance of and accomplishment of silence around the nature of domestic labour itself. Speaking about leave and wages with Tracy brings their relationship into sharp focus, forcing both to explicitly embody and deal with their positions in relation to each other. By silencing the specifics of their labour relationship and the awkwardness or difficulties of such a conversation, the general fundamentals of domestic labour relationships are kept silent.

Accounting for silences related to personal issues gives room to remain silent about socio-political inequalities that are inherent in domestic labour by explaining the silence of oneself and/or the Other in terms that are outside of the employment relationship. When it comes to employment issues such as pay and annual leave, issues of power, inequality and authority cannot remain silent. They are inherent in the conversation. The participants must embody



identities that are uncomfortable in post-apartheid South Africa, namely that of being either a privileged white or a less privileged black. Ultimately, underlying elements of socio-political inequality of domestic labour based on class and race remain in silence in order for the relationship of pair 3 to remain constructed as one where silence is a result of external factors as opposed to the inherent imbalances present in the domestic labour relationship. The nature of domestic labour itself remains largely silent throughout these utterances, although it has the potential to burst through the cracks of awkwardness and discomfort that are present in conversations such as when Lindiwe's silence about her boyfriend is broken.

## 7 Conclusions

Domestic labour is a particularly troubling and troubled relationship (Archer, 2011; Hansen, 1989; Moras, 2008; Romero, 1992). Many of these troubles are as a result of the entangled nature of issues such as gender, class, race and its informal labour (du Toit, 2010; Gaitskell et al., 1983; Romero, 1992). This is particularly so within South Africa, where domestic labour has been called both “a microcosm of the exploitation and inequality on which the entire social order is based” (Cock, 1980, p. 231) and “the last bastion of apartheid” (Fish, 2006, p. 108). In fact, Fish (2006) states that South Africa’s new democracy has “failed to transform the severe race, class and gender inequalities that continue to structure daily life for women in this institution” (p. 108). These factors combine to make domestic labour an area of study that is both necessary in order to fully realise the equality envisioned for post-apartheid South Africa and interesting in order to develop a fruitful understanding of how „being silent about“ may work to maintain inequality within relationships.

### 7.1 Contributions

In this thesis, I have attempted to establish how „being silent about“ the oppressive and hierarchical nature of domestic labour allows for such inequalities to be maintained within this institution and its relationships between employers and workers. However, before that ultimate aim could be pursued, some empirical gaps in the study of „being silent about“ needed to be addressed. While „silence“ has become a more widely studied phenomenon within most social science disciplines, much of this work has focused on cases of „being silent“ (Jaworski, 1997a), where there is an audible and measurable gap in conversation or sound (Kurzon, 2009), making this a more established conceptualisation of silence. However, in the case of „being silent about“ there is no such gap as speakers avoid talking about particular topics whilst speaking about other, more acceptable matters (Ephratt, 2011; Jaworski, 1993; Kurzon, 2007). This poses multiple challenges for research focusing on this less prototypical conceptualisation of silence because the *researcher* must make an absence convincingly become present.

However, it has also been argued that, while there are obvious differences between „being silent“ and „being silent about“, there are also commonalities that are shared between them.

Both „being silent“ and „being silent about“ are fundamentally based on the collaboration of its participants. Silence is a joint, collaborative production (Billig, 1997a; Tannen, 1985). The silence (about a topic) will remain until someone speaks (about that topic). Silence is driven and maintained within social norms and forces, such as politeness. When it is acceptable to speak, about what and with whom are all elements of politeness that contribute to the dynamic and social nature of any silence (Saville-Troike, 1985). To break a silence or create a silence when it is not deemed acceptable or expected would be to interrupt the norms of politeness that allow social interaction to flow easily and unnoticed (Tannen, 1985).

Finally, it is argued that silence, whether it is the more established silence or the less prototypical silence, allows for the exploration and examination of ideology that underlies and informs talk and practice (Billig, 2014; Julé, 2004). However, it should be noted that politeness and ideology are underdeveloped underpinnings of the present work. While the importance of these areas of study has been noted, they remain largely unexplored in this work. Perhaps future research into the discursive practices of „being silent about“ would benefit from further development of the role of ideology and politeness in producing and reproducing silence. By examining silence, one can explore the common sense that speakers draw on that establishes, maintains and justifies particular social practices and discourses, which often have material consequences that have contributed to the marginalisation of particular groups within society (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

As such, a study of silence can be a useful, interesting and beneficial area to focus on when attempting to understand inequality and marginalisation. However, due to the empirical challenges and gaps in studies of „being silent about“, this silence has not been utilised to its full potential. Therefore, it seemed crucial to think through empirical, analytical and theoretical aspects of „being silent about“ in order to allow analysis to make this absence empirically present and convincingly demonstrable.

By analysing diary and interview data from five domestic labour pairs including white employers and black workers through a discursive approach, I attempted to demonstrate the layers of conversational activity that are involved in „being silent about“. First, speakers can talk about, account for or topicalise „being silent about“: their own silence; the silence of their counterpart; and the silences that are involved in their relationship, including silences about silence. At this level of analysis, I suggest that conventional discursive approaches to

analysis, such as those presented by Wetherell and Potter (1992) and Edwards and Potter (1992), are useful to establish how silence is framed and presented through the interpretative repertoires that participants draw on when they speak about themselves, their counterpart and the silence itself.

Second, I suggest that speakers also effectively do, achieve or accomplish „being silent about“ within their talk. This is often where studies of „being silent about“ are less analytically convincing. I propose that Billig’s (1997b, 2004, 2014) notion of dialogical repression and Mazzei’s (2004; 2007) approach for listening to silence provide useful questions and strategies through which to make such absences present. By noticing where there has been a change of topic, where a topic is conspicuously absent or where a potentially troubling topic has been allowed to pass in conversation in favour of more polite and acceptable matters, one is able to make absence empirically present. This is crystallised in Johnstone’s (2008, p. 72) statement that “making a point of noticing silence means making a point of asking questions like [...]: What else could have happened?” By analysing how participants tiptoe around these troubling topics, the topics themselves can become evident (Irvine, 2011).

By imagining how a conversation could have been different, specifically by imagining how the polite flow of conversation could have been interrupted to bring troubling topics to dialogical attention, one is able to identify potentially troubling silences that are present within talk-and-interaction. These imaginings are largely grounded in the expectations, rules and moral codes of both speakers and analysts. Such issues serve as a background and resource against which the topicalisation, accomplishment and analysis of „being silent about“ is made possible because it makes absence salient, present and, ultimately, hearable for speakers and analysts. Thus, a major contribution of this thesis is that it has conceptualised „being silent about“ in terms of topicalisation and accomplishment and demonstrated how an analysis of absence can be conducted.

A further contribution of this research is that it has proposed social psychological dynamics that can be considered in understanding the process of „being silent about“ more generally. These dynamics develop from the occasioning of silence through the violation of particular norms where uncertain and unequal levels of shared knowledge have potentially weighty interpersonal impacts within relationships. However, whether a silence is maintained or addressed through becoming spoken about, I argue that silence produces more silence. Thus,

even while topicalising silence or in breaking a silence, people discursively accomplish and maintain particular silences (Carpenter & Austin, 2007). This was especially evident in the case of Lindiwe and Tracy, where, even in their topicalisation of the unsilencing of the secret about Lindiwe's boyfriend, they both accomplished and maintained silences about the nature of their relationship, keeping the inequalities and differences between them as, I would argue, conspicuous absences. Thus, there can be no pure lack of „being silent about“. Silences will always exist because silence and even the breaking of silence produces and reproduces more silence.

I propose that a fundamental silence that occurs within society is that of inequality. The acknowledgment of inequality, especially within a profoundly unequal society such as that of post-apartheid South Africa, is a troubling topic for all parties involved, but especially for those at opposite ends of the spectrum. For white middle- to upper-class citizens, this topic brings their ongoing relative privilege and power to the fore, despite often advocating values that promote racial equality and their self-perception of being different from previous generations of white South Africans (Archer, 2011). For working class black citizens, inequality raises awareness of one's subordinate position within society and of how some things about South Africa have not really changed, including their relative lack of access to socioeconomic and political resources and power (King, 2007). For both parties, these are difficult realities to acknowledge and to embody.

This is even more so within domestic labour relationships, where the very existence of this relationship has the potential to make inequality visible, unavoidable and uncomfortable (Archer, 2011). However, despite these sources of personal and interpersonal conflict, this institution – and the relationships and identities that are rooted therein – continues to exist without its fundamental inequalities being challenged. In fact, many writers have commented that the rights and freedoms that are legally granted to all South African citizens are not yet being fully realised by domestic workers (Ally, 2010; Bamu, 2013; King, 2007; le Roux, 2013). These are troubling issues to come to terms with. They are uncomfortable realities. They are issues that have the potential to interrupt the flow of the institution of domestic labour on a macro-political level and within micro-politics of individual relationships between employers and workers.

By keeping sources of structural inequality, such as the entanglement of issues of gender, class, race and informal labour, dialogically absent or invisible within talk, the very nature of inequality that is inherent in the identity, roles, work and relationships in domestic labour can be kept from the immediate attention of its participants. As Billig (2004, p. 67) states, “what is customarily said may also routinely create the unsaid, and, thus, may provide ways for accomplishing repression”, repression being reconceptualised within this study as a case of „being silent about“. Through politely and collaboratively keeping such troubling issues from becoming topics of conversation, speakers can keep their existence and implications from their own and their partner’s attention. Instead of speaking about differences and inequality, participants drew on notions of similarities or commonalities between themselves or assigned blame for silence to causes outside of themselves or the nature of domestic labour. These safer topics allowed the spaces created by absences to be filled.

As Billig (2004, p. 100) argues, “by avoiding certain topics or lines of questioning, they can collaborate to keep disturbing thoughts from being uttered. The shared patterns may be common to a general culture or ideology.” As such, it is not only the individual participants of domestic labour that are being silent about these issues, but indeed the entire society may be collaborating to keep domestic labour’s troubling nature and underlying causes from being topics of conversation. „Being silent about“ the inequalities of domestic labour allows for this institution to continue unchanged and unchallenged as both domestic labour and its injustices remain invisible within talk, allowing it to exist as an absence, making it all the more difficult to change.

In my opinion, the most striking conclusion of this study is the layered nature of silence. Talking about silence can produce the accomplishment of silence that can lead to more silences. While this may seem like somewhat of an endless loop, it may also be a fundamental element in the maintenance of inequality. By „being silent about“ being silent about topics such as difference and marginalisation based on issues of gender, class, race and informal labour, the topics and processes involved in the maintenance of inequality can become further naturalised within the way South Africans talk about themselves, each other and the domestic labour relationship. In other words, by making the topic of absences within domestic labour an absence in and of itself, the hierarchies and injustices of domestic labour become invisible within society, to the point where they are taken for granted and even

expected. In this way, „being silent about“ may be crucial for the ongoing maintenance of inequality with any relationship or society, including that of post-apartheid South Africa.

## ***7.2 Proposed intervention***

The implications of absence and invisibility are expressed by the narrator of Ralph Ellison’s book *Invisible Man* (1952, p. 78, as cited in Cock, 2011, p. 132) who states:

I am an invisible man ... I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. But I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

Continuing with the metaphor of domestic labour as Ellison’s „invisible man“, before one can change the nature of domestic labour, one must first see it. The „flesh and bone, fiber and liquids“ and „mind“ of domestic labour must be made visible to others and be acknowledged before one can change how this „man“ exists and operates in society. While it is possible that, like Ellison’s invisible man, the inequalities of domestic labour exist and are maintained because „people refuse to see“ them, it may also be possible that it is less about a thunderous, wilful refusal and more about an uninterrupted, subtle normalisation through talk and practice where people cannot see the inequalities of domestic labour (Billig, 2004). They do not refuse to see as such, but rather are not aware that there is anything to see in the first place. However, they can see some of the effects of „the man“ but not the man himself. They can see that certain topics in domestic labour are troubling, that either their counterpart or they themselves are avoiding certain topics and they may even be aware of why, but yet the underlying structural causes of these troubling topics seem to remain silent between them and in society at large (Billig, 2004).

I suggest that one can work backwards from domestic labour’s troubles, that which is visible and evident to its participants, toward the troubling nature of domestic labour itself, which is more invisible, in order to begin to change its inequalities. As has already been mentioned, collective action in domestic labour has largely been difficult and ineffective (Ally, 2008; Bamu, 2013; Hansen, 1989), partly because of the isolated nature of its participants in the arena of private homes (Hansen, 1989) and partly because of government intervention within

this institution (Ally, 2008; 2010). As such, I would like to propose an alternative strategy that is aimed at working directly with employment pairs who are experiencing relational troubles.

The basic structure of the intervention would begin with pairs who are experiencing troubles in their domestic labour relationship. Mediation materials and tools specific to the context of domestic labour could be developed and used to train counselling interns at local facilities, such as university- or community-based counselling centers. The mediation services would be advertised and promoted at public places such as shopping centers, community centers, the labour department and other sites where employers and workers would visit regularly.

The pairs would engage in a process not unlike the research process that has been described in this study. Participants in the mediation process would keep daily diaries to reflect on their relationship, specifically on troubling topics or conversations. As has been seen in this study, participation in diary keeping can be useful in conscientisation and transformation.

Participants would be guided through the mediation materials that had been developed, with necessary customisation for each pair, based on the collective exploration of challenges and strengths that would be presented through the diaries. The mediation would aim not only to contain and resolve the salient issues of the troubled employment pair, but would also aim to make them aware of the „invisible man“ of domestic labour“s inequalities and how those troubling inequalities often structure the relational troubles that required mediation in the first place. By making the invisible present, there is the possibility that these pairs may experience a change in the way they see each other and their relationship.

### ***7.3 Strengths and limitations***

There are a number of strengths within the design and execution of this study. One of the most prominent of which is the dyadic nature of this research. While this approach created a number of ethical challenges, namely related to confidentiality and voluntariness, by providing both the employers“ and the workers“ perspectives, the study gives a more interesting and insightful understanding of the dynamics that exist in this relationship and how such dynamics are part of the process of „being silent about“. Another strength of the design is the multi-layered data that were collected through both diaries and interviews that



allows for a dynamic analysis of multiple accounts and perspectives. Furthermore, by attempting to develop the empirical status of „being silent about“ and its application to domestic labour, I believe that this thesis makes an important contribution to both domestic labour justice and social psychology.

Whilst this study makes a number of important and fruitful contributions to studies of both domestic labour relationships and to „being silent about“, there are also some limitations. One limitation is that, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, because of my decision to conduct all of the research myself despite my lack of fluency in *isiZulu*, some of the interviews with workers were challenging. There were times when the language barrier caused misunderstandings and frustrations as we both tried to make ourselves understood in the interview. Perhaps if I had used an interpreter or research assistant to conduct the interviews, these misunderstandings and frustrations would not have occurred. However, the use of an interpreter adds its own dynamics and limitations to interviews and the use of a research assistant would have meant that I would have lost contact with half of the sample. Because I hope to continue working in the area of domestic labour, this experience has encouraged me to improve my level of *isiZulu* proficiency in order to better communicate with workers in the future. This would allow me to interview workers in their first language and would assist in building rapport.

Another limitation was caused by my decision to only analyse moments that were mentioned in both the diary and the interview for both participants of each pair. This feels like more of a loss than a limitation because some very interesting moments did not receive much attention because either they were not mentioned in a diary or an interview for one or both participants. This decreased the number of moments that I was able to use in the analysis. However, because there were so many common moments that were raised by both participants in their diaries and interviews, there was not a lack of material to work with. Rather this limitation relates to the exclusion of some potentially interesting moments of „being silent about“ due, ironically, to its lack of mention in one or both diaries or interviews within any given pair.

A final limitation relates to the generalisability of this study (Silverman, 2005). This research is based in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, which is relatively unique due to its history of legalised racial inequality. „Being silent about“ may work to maintain inequality in different forms or work to maintain more salient issues in other contexts or in relationships

other than that of domestic labour. It should be noted that the aim of this study was to make the maintenance of inequality through „being silent about“ “intelligible” (Alasuutari 1995, p. 147) within the context of post-apartheid South African domestic labour relationships. This may transfer to other contexts as well. From the literature that was reviewed in the introduction of this thesis, I believe that there are aspects of domestic labour that seem to be experienced and shared across contexts due to the nature of this relationship. Such possibilities can be explored in future research, as will now be recommended.

#### ***7.4 Future research***

Because this study makes contributions to two fields of study, there are two lines of recommendations for future research. First, in terms of domestic labour relationships, it would be interesting to sample cases where the structure of the relationship is different from that of white employers with live-in black workers who are situated within the private space of the employer’s home. Examples of such contexts include contractual day work arrangements; black employers and black workers; domestic work in institutional settings and issues of sex and sexuality in domestic labour as a silent topic.

Contractual day work employment arrangements, as opposed to the live-in arrangement that has been used in the present study, may involve different ways of „being silent about“ due to the lack of sustained contact between participants. Because there is less contact between the participants and the worker has more control over the relationship than in a live-in context (Archer, 2011; Moras, 2008; Romero, 1992), it would be interesting to compare how employers and workers are „being silent about“ issues in this type of working arrangement and to what end. Another variation would be to focus on black employers with black workers, as opposed to pairs that are not the same race, as was the focus of this research. While domestic labour is still predominantly performed by black women in white households, the growing black middle-class in South Africa means that black households are increasingly hiring domestic help. It is important to study the dynamics of these pairs, including „being silent about“, in order to see how their common race may qualitatively transform their relationship. This would also give further insights into the relationships between white employers and black workers by seeing whether „being silent about“ is topicalised and accomplished differently when race is shared by both participants.

Future research could also explore domestic labour within institutional settings. Many domestic labourers in public settings are employed through a third party, such as a labour broker or an agency that specialises in providing cleaning services. While there has been some research on the similarities and contrasts between the private and the institutional settings for domestic labour (see Duffy, 2007; Glenn, 1992), this particular form of paid domestic labour has not been given adequate attention within the South African context. The lack of personalism and the introduction of a third party who mediates between the employer and the worker would, I suggest, create multiple dynamics and layers of „being silent about“ for all parties involved. The notion of a third party may also contribute to the reproduction of dominant ideology that structures private domestic labour relationships, as has been found by Pratt (1997). This would be a particularly interesting form of domestic labour in which to explore „being silent about“ as maintaining inequality.

A final area of domestic labour that has often remained a silent topic, both within the institution itself and within the study of the institution, is that of sex and sexuality. The ongoing sexual abuse of domestic workers continues to be a troubling feature of domestic labour (Ally, 2010; Hansen, 1989; King, 2007; Whisson & Weil, 1971 ). In fact, when discussing the denial of worker personhood by employers, Ally (2010, p. 178) states that “the pervasive sexual exploitation and assaults of domestic workers remained one of the most brutal manifestations of this denial of personhood.” The sexuality of domestic workers can be seen as threatening to female employers (Hansen, 1989), making contact between the employer’s husband and the worker something that should be avoided (Nyamnjoh, 2005) and any expression of the worker’s sexuality is often constructed as immoral or deviant (Whisson & Weil, 1971). Yet sex and sexuality are topics that are conspicuously absent from much of the work focusing on domestic labour. This is a silence that should be addressed in future research.

There is also a wide range of possibilities for future research specifically in the area of „being silent about“. It would be interesting and beneficial to explore interventions that can develop from an understanding of „being silent about“. Such possibilities are gestured toward in the recent issue of the Journal of Social Issues (Confronting and reducing sexism: Creating interventions that work [Special Issue], 2014), which focuses on exposing, confronting and reducing sexism across various contexts. It would also be useful to explore a variety of

approaches to the analysis of „being silent about“ to gain a fuller understanding of the processes and implications of this silence, specifically in terms of inequality. While this study has attempted to establish the empirical status of „being silent about“, it is by no means a complete venture. Instead it is, hopefully, a useful contribution to a developing area of interest which has great, albeit largely untapped, potential for understanding how absences can be instrumental in structuring human relationships, such as those explored in the context of domestic labour within the present study.

It is my hope that these future directions for research will be able to engage with the present study in any number of ways. This study can provide a platform for methodological possibilities for a study of „being silent about“ within a variety of contexts and relationships, as I have argued for the topicalisation and accomplishment of „being silent about“ within the context of the talk of domestic labour employers and workers, talk that produces and reproduces ideology that maintains deep inequalities that are based on gender, class, race and informal labour. Future research may differ with these findings, critique the establishment of the presence of absences, suggest different ways of thinking through the issues raised here or make a nod of agreement. Ultimately, my hope is that some engagement occurs so that the inequalities maintained through silences that exist in relationships such as domestic labour will no longer be invisible to its participants or the wider social life to which those participants belong.

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## Appendix A – Informed consent contract

Hello, my name is Amy Jo Murray and I am a PhD student at UKZN, Pietermaritzburg campus. I am conducting a study focusing on the topic of *‘talk and interaction in female domestic labour relationships’*. Domestic labour is an important topic in post-apartheid South Africa, largely because it involves so many South Africans, either as employees or employers, and because it is a labour sector that is difficult to evaluate and monitor because it happens in the employer’s private household. In addition, it provides a context of contact between Whites and Blacks where a variety of interactions can take place.

For this study, I am inviting you and your [employer/employee] to both keep diaries over the same **21 consecutive days (including weekends)**. You may choose to write in a diary that will be given to you or to record an audio diary instead. If you are not comfortable writing or speaking in English, you may record your diary in your home language instead. You will be asked to record your interactions with your [employer/employee] at the end of each day for **20-30 minutes**, reflecting specifically on silences or things that were unsaid. This would include: conversations generally; things that you feel were left unsaid; things that you wish you could have said; topics that seemed important or obvious but were not spoken about; issues that were difficult or uncomfortable to address; and understandings of and feelings regarding such interactions. After you have kept the diary for 21 consecutive days, your diary will be collected and read by a researcher who will then interview you about what you have written. The interview will take place at a place and time that is convenient and comfortable for you. If you agree to participate, you will be given further, more detailed instructions about the process of diary keeping.

It is important that you are aware of your rights as a participant in this study, should you choose to be involved. You do not have to become a participant by any means. Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to choose to be involved and, should you become a participant, you are also free to withdraw for any reason at any time during the course of the research without any consequences. If your [employer/employee] decides to participate and you are not willing to participate, you are not in any way compelled to agree to participate. This is your choice.

Your identity will be protected throughout the study and your responses will be treated in a confidential manner. Because you and your [employer/employee] will be writing about interactions with each other, it is important that both of you agree not to read each other's diaries as this would be an invasion of privacy and may cause problems between you. It is in your best interest to avoid discussion with your [employer/employee] about this process so that neither of you feel pressure to talk about what you are writing in your diaries. I will keep in contact with you 3 days after you have begun your diary and then weekly to check that you are coping well with keeping your diary and to provide general support.

There are some risks to participating in this research that you should be aware of. It is possible that being in this study may make you think differently about your domestic labour relationship in ways. This may make you uncomfortable or distressed about yourself, your [employer/employee] or your relationship in general. Although every precaution will be taken to protect your confidentiality, there is a chance that, if your [employer/employee] finds out what you have expressed, they may be offended and this may cause tension in your relationship. However, if both of you honour the agreement to avoid reading each other's diaries and to respect each other's privacy, many of these risks will be avoided. I will also enter into this agreement with both of you and will not share what you have written or said with your [employer/employee].

If you experience any distress as a result of your participation in the study, you are welcome to contact the Child and Family Center (033-260-5166). When you call the CFC, please inform them that you have participated in this study. They have been made aware of the nature of the study and will be prepared to assist you. Your use of these services will also be kept confidential, even from the researcher (Amy Jo Murray).

As a benefit of participating, you will be able to voice your opinion concerning issues within domestic labour interactions, which is a very important topic in South Africa today. You will also be given a gift basket (valued at roughly R500) at the end of your participation, as a token of appreciation for your time and effort. However, you may also receive a similar cash value instead of the gift basket if you would prefer. Apart from this token of appreciation, there are no other direct benefits.

The findings of this research will be published in the form of a thesis, various academic journal articles, popular media (such as isiZulu and English newspapers) and possibly at conference presentations. All information will be anonymised so as to protect your identity and confidentiality. In order to further protect you and your [employer/employee], results of the research (which will be anonymised, generalised and unmatched) will be presented to you so that you can be made aware of the findings of the study without revealing what was said in your specific relationship. Please indicate whether you would be interested in receiving feedback regarding this research on the form below.

This study has received ethical approval from the UKZN Social Science Research Ethics Committee. If you would like to contact their office with any questions or concerns regarding the ethics of this project, please feel free to call Ms Phume Ximba (031-260-3587) or visit their website at <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/Human-Social-Science-Ethics.aspx>

If you have any questions or comments, please contact myself (Amy Jo Murray) or the research supervisor (Prof Kevin Durrheim).

Amy Jo Murray's contact details: 072-326-2403 [205512353@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:205512353@ukzn.ac.za)

Prof Kevin Durrheim's contact details: 033-260-5348 [durrheim@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:durrheim@ukzn.ac.za)

**Thank you for taking your time to consider participating in this study!**

---

By signing the section below, you are indicating that you have understood all of the information that has been presented to you and that you agree to participate in this study.

---

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the information presented to me concerning the nature of this research and I understand my rights and responsibilities as a research participant. I agree to take part as a participant in the diary recording and individual interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I would like to receive feedback after the research has been completed (please tick one):

- Yes
- No

---

In addition to the above, I agree to the audio recording of my interview for the purposes of data capture. I understand that no personally identifying information or recording concerning me will be released in any form. I understand that these recordings will be kept securely in a locked environment and will be destroyed once data capture and analysis are complete.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

---

I also agree to the audio recording of phone calls with the researcher for the purpose of data capture. I understand that no personally identifying information or recording concerning me will be released in any form. I understand that these recordings will be kept securely in a locked environment and will be destroyed once data capture and analysis are complete.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

## Appendix B – Diary entry guidelines

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Here are some points to bear in mind when keeping your diary.

- This study is about the talk and interactions that occur in your relationship with your [employer/employee]. This may include things such as: conversations generally; things that you talk about often; things that you almost never discuss; how often you were in the same room together and whether this led to conversations; things that you feel were left unsaid; things that you wish you could have said; topics that seemed important or obvious but were not spoken about; issues that were difficult or uncomfortable to address; times that you felt conversations flowed easily; things that were said that offended you or that may have offended your [employer/employee] and understandings of and feelings regarding such interactions.
- Remember that this is your diary. I am interested in finding out as much as possible about your interactions with your [employer/employee]. So please write as much as you can about each day – no matter how unimportant it may seem.
- Please feel free to write in the language that you feel the most comfortable expressing yourself in.
- Please don't worry about spelling, grammar or „best“ handwriting but try to write as clearly as you can, using a pen.
- Try to fill in the diary every evening. If you cannot make an entry for a particular day, then you can fill it in the following day. However, do not try to fill the diary in any later than one day after the entry was due – e.g. don't try to fill in Monday's entry on Wednesday. Please aim to write for about 20-30 minutes per day. This will be easier to do if you try to make your diary part of your evening routine.
- It is important that you do your best to write in your diary for **21 consecutive days (including weekends)**. However, if you find that you have missed out several days,

please do not give up the whole week's diary. Just start again on the next day you are able to fill it in, and leave the other pages blank.

- Please fill in the day and date in the space provided on each new diary page.
- If you have any questions about the diary, please phone or sms Amy Jo Murray on 072-326-2403. She will phone you back, so you do not have to pay for the call.
- After you have completed the 21 consecutive days (including weekends) of diary keeping, please contact Amy Jo Murray and she will collect your diary and arrange your interview date and location with you.

**Thank you again for your time and participation!**

## **Appendix C – Interview schedule**

### **1) General information**

Age:

Education level:

Marital status:

Number of children:

How did you first connect/come into contact with your employer/employee and how long have you been together?

- What were your initial impressions of her?
- How would you describe her? What is she like as a person? What is she like as an employer/employee?
- What did you expect your relationship and interactions to be like?
- How much have you learned about her since then?
- How has your relationship changed over time?

What were the original terms of employment (cleaning, caring etc)?

- Have those terms changed?
- Was there a formal contract?
- How was wage decided/negotiated?

### **2) Questions focused on the diary process**

Is there anything you would like to add about your history with your employer/employee before we begin speaking about your diary?

How did you find the experience of writing a diary?

- What were the difficult things about keeping the diary?
- Were you nervous about other people reading it, including myself as the researcher?
- Were there days/interactions that made you want to write more/less in your diary?



Were you consistent in writing in terms of frequency and length? Why?

How did the contact with the researcher help/hinder the process?

Did this process affect your relationship or make you think about it differently?

What kinds of things, events and aspects of your relationship do you think are not in your diary? And not in your employer/employee's diary?

What do you think your employer/employee wrote in her diary?

### **3) Questions focused on the diary content**

*Sample of probes:*

- Why do you think it is difficult to speak about \_\_\_\_\_ with her?
- Are these types of interactions common?
- Has \_\_\_\_\_ happened often in your relationship?
- How do you wish \_\_\_\_\_ had happened differently?
- Why do you think she \_\_\_\_\_?
- Can you tell me how you felt about \_\_\_\_\_ interaction with her?
- How would you have handled \_\_\_\_\_ situation if you had been her?

### **4) Making race and inequality explicit**

Is race important in your relationship with your employer/employee?

Do you think that your employment relationship is similar or different to other domestic labour relationships?

How do you think your relationship would be different if your employer/employee were the same race as you?

Are you a typical employer/employee?

Do you think that your employer/employee is a typical white/black woman?

Is your employer/employee similar to other white/black people that you know?

What do you think it is like being your employer/employee?

## Appendix D – Transcription conventions

Adapted from Silverman (2005, p. 376)

- [ Left brackets indicate the point at which a current speaker's talk is overlapped by another's talk.
- = Equal signs, one at the end of a line and one at the beginning, indicate no gap between the two lines.
- (.) A dot in parentheses within a line indicates a tiny gap, probably no more than one-tenth of a second.  
A dot in parentheses on its own line indicates a relatively „pregnant pause“
- \_\_\_ Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude.
- :: Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound.
- (( )) Double parentheses contain the author's descriptions rather than transcriptions.

# Appendix E – Research Ethics Committee Approval Letter



160 951  
DMM  
11/10/2012

10 October 2012

Mrs Amy Jo Murray 205512353  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Murray

Protocol reference number: HSS/0997/012D  
Project title: Domestic labour relationships between women in post-apartheid South Africa: A Dyadic diary-interview study of silence and presence in talk and interaction

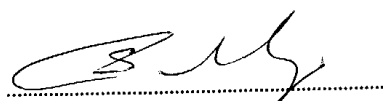
#### EXPEDITED APPROVAL

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



.....  
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)


/pm

cc Supervisor: Professor Kevin Durrheim  
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# Appendix F – ‘Turnitin’ Originality Report



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Maintaining inequality through 'being silent about': A dyadic daily diary study establishing the presence of absence in domestic labour relationships Amy Jo Murray Date of submission: 1 February 2015 Submitted in full fulfilment of the requirements for a Doctorate, in the Discipline of Psychology, School of Human and Applied Sciences University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg Unless specifically indicated to the contrary, this thesis is the result of my own work. Acknowledgements I am a stay-at-home-mom who moonlights as an academic (literally during moonlight hours). God has given me the work of caring for my 3 little girls and the work of this thesis, both of which I am grateful for. However, my thesis work could not happen without considerable help from others in the work of caring for my children. I am incredibly grateful for my wonderful team of babysitters, especially Grandpa and Grandma Schladenhauffen and Nana and Oupa Murray. I also deeply appreciate the communities that have supported, encouraged and shown interest in both of these works, specifically my church family at Church on the Ridge, the staff within the psychology department and the extended Murray family clan. Of special note among my caring friends are Jane, Sarah, Donné, Karmini and Debbie. Of course, this study would not have been possible without the involvement of the 5

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