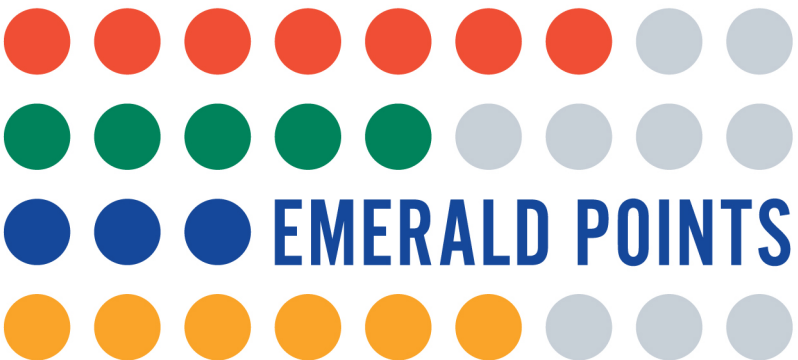


DOES THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS EXIST AND ARE WE MEMBERS?

Reflections From A Research Team

Grace Khunou, Kris Marsh, Polite Chauke,
Lesego Plank, Leo Igbanoi and Mabone Kgosiemang



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BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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E. Khosa-Shangase, K. & Canham, H. (2019). *Black Academics' Voices: The South African Experience* (2019). Her creative work includes the short story *Mama's Walk* in the 2012 Caine Prize for African Writers, and a children's book titled *Khumo's Airport Bag* (2015) published in Setswana and English. She is passionate about mentorship and has successfully supervised over 30 research projects. She has also presented more than 60 papers in international and local conferences.

Kris Marsh, PhD: Professor Kris Marsh received her PhD from the University of Southern California in 2005. She was a Postdoctoral Scholar at the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina before joining the faculty of Maryland where she has been tenured since 2014. Professor Marsh's general areas of expertise are the Black middle class, demography, racial residential segregation and education. She has combined these interests to develop a research agenda that is divided into two broad areas: avenues into the Black middle class and consequences of being in the Black middle class. Currently, she is writing a book for Cambridge University Press on the wealth, health, residential choices and dating practices of members of an emerging Black middle class who are single and living alone. She also teaches courses on Research Methods, Race Relations and Racial Residential Segregation. She has been a visiting scholar at the University of Southern California, the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and the UJ. She has served as a contributor to CNN in America, the Associated Press, NBC Washington and Al Jazeera America and is frequently asked to contribute to the Washington Post. She serves as the secretary of the District of Columbia Sociological Society and the managing editor of *Issues in Race & Society*. She was awarded the Jacquelyn Johnson Jackson Early Career Award from the Association of Black Sociologists in 2015 and received

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If we forgot to mention you, please charge it to our heads and not to our hearts!

PREFACE: IMPLICATING OUR BODIES IN RESEARCHING THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS

Blackness is as open and as complex as the wide turbulent seas. This openness is a challenge and opportunity for those of us who work in black studies to trace and unfurl the contours and untangle the knots of the multiple ways of being black in the world. The black middle class is one of the strands of blackness that the academy has taken a keen interest in. This curiosity has been driven by multiple agendas which span from narrow consumerism which sees black people as not just workers but as eaters with increasingly refined and expensive tastes. This research has been about critically engaging with processes that cultivate a capitalist market for growing profits in an increasingly unequal world. At the other end of the spectrum are researchers committed to the nuances in identity that have emerged as a consequence of class transitions. Here, there is an increased concern with the ethics of class and self-reflexivity on the part of those doing this research. This book falls within the latter category of work. Grace Khunou has been on the edge of the black middle class wave of research over the past decade. Ever ahead of the wave, in this collection she is joined by African American scholar Kris Marsh and together they turn around to think about the process and meanings associated with researching the black middle class. But they take it a step further to think together with students for a communal

reflection of what it means to do this research. This is a crucial turn because it centres reflections of graduate students in the cusp of their own class transition. In South Africa and elsewhere, it is still fair to say that the more education one has, the greater the likelihood they have to enter into a new class position if they and their families had previously been working class as has been the case for the majority of black South Africans. But class movement is complex and does not occur in a straight line. These reflections point to these movements and the nuances in the lives of the researchers.

Class scholarship in South Africa has long needed a truly intersectional lens. The strength of this work is the positionality of the contributors. They are mostly women, they are black, and they inhabit class jauntily as largely first generation black middle class persons or in the liminal spaces between classes. Their reflections about their work on this topic are inflected with their own positioning and negotiations of intersecting identities. In this volume, we have the opportunity to see novice scholars cut their teeth in the academy under the sisterly guidance of experienced editors. This is not a trite undertaking. It is an important political intervention for both class scholarship and mentorship of the next generation of researchers. Khunou and Marsh do not just bemoan the marginalization of black women in the South African and global academy – they intervene decisively. This project bears witness to this. I frame this intervention as decolonial because decolonization is a process of doing. It not only challenges coloniality but leads to discernible change.

Our scholarship is better for this intervention. We now have a perspective of what it means to do this research in an ethical and embodied way from black peoples varying positionalities. With the publication of this volume, we no longer have to rely only on ‘objective’ accounts that do not implicate the bodies of those who produce scholarship about others.

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