



Master's Dissertation

An Intersectional Exploration of The Motherload among Black Mothers in Professional Occupations in South Africa

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14 February 2025

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Abstract

Recent work-family research has begun recognising the most invisible aspects of unpaid care work to be the physical, cognitive and emotional care load placed on women. The concept of the motherload, which describes the “highly gendered, often invisible, and undervalued work that those who perform mothering undertake hindering their economic security, safety and wellbeing”, was explored through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 11 Black mothers in professional occupations in South Africa. The data were analysed through an intersectional analytical lens to understand how motherhood, race and professional occupation shapes the experiences of the motherload. The study’s findings revealed the ways in which the Black working mothers experienced the motherload as they navigated the cultural expectations in the household and community, as well as their professional workplace identity. Three key themes were analysed which underscored the cultural care load placed on Black women and how that shapes the motherload through (1) Jostling between tradition and modernity: Black women navigating the motherload, (2) Black tax and caring beyond the household, and (3) Cultural dissonance and carrying the motherload. Recommendations were presented for improving the retention and attraction of Black working mothers through recognising the motherload within the workplace.

Keywords: motherload, Black working mothers, intersectionality.

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Introduction

Women shoulder disproportionate unpaid care work in the household (Croda & Grossbard, 2021; Del Boca et al., 2020; Goldscheider et al., 2015; Hjalmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Miller, 2018; United Nations, 2021). Globally on average, women spend five times longer on unpaid care work than men, with women spending 18.5% of their time on unpaid care work, and men spending 3.7% (UN, 2022). While the unpaid care work that women shoulder encompasses broader needs such as attending to domestic duties, childcare, and caring for elderly, mothers' unpaid care work is focused around childcare and household responsibilities (Elson, 2017). The unpaid care work that mothers undertake has predominantly been understood as the physical labour, such as household tasks and childcare that must be done (Bach & Arseth, 2016; Christopher, 2021; Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; DeGroot & Vik, 2020; Moore, 2017); however, work-family researchers have begun recognising the mostly invisible aspect of unpaid care work which has been conceptualised as the mental load (Dean et al., 2022). This mental load has contributed to a more complex understanding of the emotional labour (Bass, 2015; Offer, 2012) and the cognitive labour (Daminger, 2019; Hjalmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021) aspects of care that mothers perform that places a load on them.

The Motherload

The vast majority of work-family research on the mental, emotional and cognitive care load has focused on samples of white mothers from the United States and Western Europe (Ahn et al., 2017; Bach & Arseth et al., 2016; Christopher, 2021; Ciciolla & Luther, 2019; Czymara et al., 2021; Daminger et al., 2019; DeGroot & Vik, 2020; Faircloth, 2021; Harrington & Reese-Melancon, 2022; Hjalmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021; Kimport, 2018; Moore, 2017; Schilperoort, 2021). Despite studies noting that the mental load is a task embedded within a social context (Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023; Robertson et al., 2019), very few studies have explored the care load across different socio-cultural contexts (e.g., Desai et al., 2017; Elliot et al., 2015; Gudeta et al., 2018; Hussein, 2017; Islam, 2021; Mendonca et al., 2023; Taylor, 2011). Thus, the conceptualisations of these mostly invisible care loads (such as the mental load) that mothers bear may not reflect the experiences of diverse groups in countries beyond the global North, nor its highly gendered, racialised, or cultural nature.

Although the conceptualisations of the mental load provide valuable understandings of the gendered nature of the cognitive and emotional unpaid care work that mothers do within the household, it tends to neglect the social context that shapes how the mental load is experienced in diverse contexts. These include attention to the economic landscape, colonial

historical impacts on material realities relating to land and resources, weak infrastructures, and kin networks of care that affect care work. The motherload is a new and more nuanced concept, originating from the Global South, and grounded in the socio-cultural, historical, and material realities of the South that describes the “highly gendered, often-invisible, and undervalued work that those who perform mothering undertake that hinders their economic security, safety and wellbeing” (Jaga et al., 2025). The motherload recognises the structural inequalities that persist from a country’s colonial and in South Africa, apartheid histories and deeply entrenched patriarchal cultures, which upholds the motherload especially for black women. Thus the concept seems more context sensitive to exploring the complex care loads that black mothers in South Africa hold. The motherload has been studied among low-income black mothers in South Africa, however acknowledging that social class can affect care work experiences (Jaga et al., 2025), there is a lack of understanding on how black mothers in professional jobs experience it.

Mothers in diverse contexts experience mothering differently based on their social identities of race and gender and this is shaped by their sociocultural contexts (Dow, 2016). For Black mothers in South Africa (SA) and globally, deeply entrenched cultural and gendered norms expect women to bear the load of the physical, emotional and cognitive household responsibilities (Adekoya et al., 2024; Berger et al., 2020). This study focuses exclusively on Black African mothers, rather than the broader South African definition of ‘black’ (which includes Coloured, Indian and Asian individuals) to account for the different experiences of mothering in South Africa. This is to avoid treating black people as a homogenous group, overlooking the rich diversity and distinct identities within this broad population (Agyemang et al., 2005; Dale, 2012; Kruger, 2006).

Treating black working mothers as a homogenous group in research and organisational policy design may conceal the cultural care responsibilities of the motherload. For example, traditional expectations, such as the role of being a ‘makoti’, (a South African Nguni language name referring to a bride or daughter-in law), requires certain Black mothers to take on culturally prescribed caregiving responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning and managing familial obligations often without the support of the fathers (Resane, 2023; Sibiyi, 2011). These caregiving responsibilities are often intensified by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms in African cultures that discourage men from engaging in care work, exacerbating the motherload for women in this racial and cultural group. In contrast to more gender-egalitarian Western contexts, where care work may be more evenly distributed with husbands and fathers sharing the labour (Childress et al. 2023; Petts & Carlson, 2023; Zanhour & Sumpter, 2024), many

Black families rely on kinship-based support systems to share care work. However, formal workplace policies such as parental leave, rarely recognise or accommodate for support from kin caregivers. For example, kin caregivers such as grandmothers or aunts who may step in to support working mothers are seldom recognised in formal parental leave policy frameworks which places the burden onto mothers, exacerbating their motherload especially in single-parent homes (Jaga & Bagraim, 2017; Sandy et al., 2022). Black mothers are also discouraged from outsourcing care due to cultural expectations such as being a makoti which limit their options further (Resane, 2024). Failure to recognise these unique challenges faced by Black working mothers in workplace policies risks undermining Black mothers' wellbeing, career progression, and retention often leading to stress, reduced productivity and fewer leadership opportunities (Ali & Hayes-Burrell, 2023; Manukere et al., 2024; Ruppner et al., 2021; Wreyford et al., 2023). Black African mothers in particular have faced unique and compounded forms of oppression due to systemic racism and policies in the workplace, disproportionately marginalising them compared to Coloured, Indian or Asian mothers.

The legacy of apartheid in South Africa continues to shape the experiences of Black mothers. Apartheid laws such as the Bantu Education Act, No. 47 (1953) and the Group Areas Act No. 41 (1950) discriminated against black people and created a racially stratified workforce. Post democratic legislation such as Employee Equity Act, No. 55 of (1998) and Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill (2013) which focused on attracting Black women into the South African workforce and addressing past injustices has led to greater entry of Black women into the workforce. Despite a steady increase of Black women in South African workplaces, organisational cultures remain dominantly Eurocentric and masculine, making it challenging for black mothers to feel a real sense of belonging (Fapohunda, 2022). In 2024, Black women represented 44.4% of senior management positions in the private sector (Statistics South Africa, 2024), however, they still remain underrepresented in qualified positions and leadership structures (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021). Research shows that Black mothers (both in South Africa and globally) who occupy professional jobs, feel that they need to overperform and spend effort asserting themselves in the workplace (Manukere et al., 2024; Nash & Moore, 2021), negatively affecting their psychological wellbeing (Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2020; Nichols et al., 2015; Ruppner et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2024; Wreyford et al., 2023). Their unrecognised caregiving load contributes to burnout and further limits career advancement opportunities (Neto et al., 2018; Ali & Haynes-Burrell, 2023). This exclusion undermines organisational diversity and retentional goals as women may withdraw from career advancement or leave the workforce (Munsch et al., 2014; Wreyford et al., 2023).

Black mothers access and use of support for the balancing their professional and caregiving responsibilities may be scrutinised more harshly in comparison to white mothers (Callan, 2007; Reid, 2015; Williams, 2000), as their performance may come into question when using these supports, which may jeopardise their career progressions (Ali & Hayes-Burrell, 2023; Munsch et al., 2014). Thus, organisations may need to consider how their workplace policies, career progression opportunities, and wellbeing initiatives are informed by and responsive to the specific realities of Black working mothers and not aimed to cater for working mothers homogenously. By focusing on Black mothers in professional occupations, this study seeks to explore how their identities of being Black, a mother, and a professional intersect. This study therefore adopts intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as a framework to help deepen our understanding on the privileges and oppressions they experience within systems of power in South African organisations, their cultural community, and their families.

Research Aims and Questions

This study seeks to explore how the motherload is experienced amongst Black mothers in professional occupations in SA. While the motherload concept has been studied among low-income black mothers in SA, how it is experienced by black women in professional jobs in SA who share similar gender and race identities, but not social class to low-income, is not yet understood. In efforts to attract and retain Black professional mothers in South African organisations, a deepened understanding of the gendered and cultural nature of unpaid care work and how mothers in professional occupations are able to manage their multiple demands, would benefit workplace and policy makers to create more supportive and equitable policies and practices. For example, organisations may need to engage with the specific realities of Black working mothers, and move beyond homogenised understandings of working motherhood in organisational contexts. To capture the intersecting nuances of being a Black mother in a professional job, this study adopts intersectionality as its theoretical framework while seeking to fulfil the study aims to; (1) expand the conceptualisations of the motherload as a workplace-issue amongst Black professional women in South Africa, and (2) centre the intersections of their racial, motherhood and professional occupational identities in their experiences of this phenomenon. The research is thus directed by the following research questions:

1. How is the motherload experienced amongst mothers in professional occupations in South Africa?

2. How do the intersecting identities of race, motherhood and professional occupations influence how the motherload is experienced among Black mothers in professional occupations in South Africa?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the existing understanding of the mental load, by exploring the conceptualisation of the motherload and how the social context, (such as structural inequalities due to race and gender in SA, and the socio-cultural expectations of being a working mother in the household, workplace and community) influences Black working mothers' experiences in several ways. First, it distinguishes between black and Black working mothers whilst additionally using an intersectional lens to bring forth the differences in experiences of the motherload. Second, the study highlights how the social context influences experiences of working mothers, thereby advancing the conceptualisation of the motherload as a workplace issue. Finally, it offers employers insights into how to create and foster more inclusive and supportive workplace environments for Black working mothers.

Structure of the Dissertation

The first chapter introduced, positioned and argued why the motherload should be explored amongst Black working mothers in South Africa. The second chapter, will provide a review on international and Global South literature on how the motherload is experienced by mothers in professional organisations. The third chapter provides the methodology wherein the research approach, design and procedure are discussed. The fourth and fifth chapter present the findings from the semi-structured interviews of how Black mothers in professional occupations experience the motherload, combined with the discussion using other findings from Global South studies. The final chapter, chapter six, provides knowledge contributions and practical implications for managers, and limitations and recommendations for future researchers.

Literature Review

This chapter presents a review on international and Global South literature on the most invisible aspects of unpaid care work in the household, such as the mental load, cognitive labour and emotional labour. The concept of the motherload, including the cognitive labour, emotional labour and the social context is presented. Furthermore, the consequences of the motherload as per definition and how this relates to Black working mothers is also explored.

Literature Search

On the 15 of March 2024, a Boolean search term, ‘motherload’ was entered into the Web of Science topic field search, generating 10 articles. Of these 10 articles, it was apparent that the term has been used in many different contexts. After reviewing that this search term may be too specific or have different meanings, another search term was created. On 2 July 2024, a Web of Science search was created, where ‘working’ and ‘mothers’ was entered as Boolean search operator keywords under the topic title, generating 29, 668 results. To refine the search and capture the specific aspects of the motherload, ‘working mother*’ and ‘cognitive labour’ OR ‘emotional labour’ OR ‘physical labour’ OR ‘mental labour’ was entered under the topic title, generating 537 results. After narrowing the results to article (512 results), English (495 results), time period (2014-2024) and research areas such as business economics, psychology, sociology, family studies and women studies, 126 results remained. The research areas were chosen based on topics where the researcher believed working mothers would be most applicable. The time period was retained over the past ten years (with the exception of seminal work) to represent the most recent conceptualisation of the mental load and working mother in academic literature.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality

Across literature, feminist theoretical approaches have been used to highlight how gendered expectations and patriarchal structures give rise to roles and behaviours that working mothers take on (Childress et al., 2023; Cooke, 2020). However, in these contexts the complexity of motherhood and working mothers lives have often been explored on the basis of gender alone (Meyer, 2021), which may not capture the experiences, realities and ongoing negotiations that working mothers are faced with due to intersecting identities of race, gender and motherhood. Thus, using feminist theoretical approaches which are designed to understand gender in a majority white racial context, may fail to recognise how unequal power relations shape black mother’s professional lives and create intersecting experiences. For example, Garland McKinney and Meinersmann (2023) argue that as the socio-cultural identities of mothers impacts their experiences, using an intersectionality framework is essential at understanding how the identities of black mothers give rise to the privileges, oppressions and powers they experienced (Crenshaw, 1989). The motherload conceptualisation allows scholars to explore more deeply at how not only gender, but motherhood, race and professional workplace culture shapes the social context of Black mothers in professional jobs. Using a

theoretical framework that emanates from a black context, allows the study to centre on the interlocking identities of motherhood, race and professional occupation. With a specific focus on South African mothers in professional occupations, intersectionality helps understand the lived realities of mothers whose unpaid care work is shaped by systemic and structural barriers (such as apartheid and patriarchy) that often remain invisible in the household and in the workplace (Nash & Moore, 2021). Furthermore, by specifically differentiating the study to look at Black mothers and not the broader characterisation of South African 'black', the study allows for black women to not be seen as monolithic but have unique cultural, religious and traditional expectations.

Conceptualisation of the Motherload

The motherload as a new concept from the South to describe the “highly gendered, often-invisible, and undervalued work that those who perform mothering undertake that hinders their economic security, safety and wellbeing”, is still in its infancy stage. Jaga et al. (2025) explains that the motherload recognises an invisible component of care work which is shaped by that lies historical, social and economic factors that exacerbate the care work that mothers do. Secondly, the motherload recognises the kin networks of care that exists within the Global South which is distinct from many global North conceptualisation (Jaga et al., 2025). Thirdly, the motherload conceptualisation recognises the consequences of the invisible cognitive, emotional and mental aspects of the care load that hinders mothers economic security, safety and wellbeing.

Studies from international literatures encompassing the highly gendered physical, cognitive and emotional aspects of care work will be reviewed to understand the concept. Studies have typically focused on the visible aspects of care work which is the physical dimension (such as household domestic labour of cooking, cleaning, buying groceries, house maintenance and budgeting) (Bach & Arseth, 2016; Christopher, 2021; Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; DeGroot & Vik, 2020; Lee & Waite, 2005; Moore, 2017), while fewer have focused on the invisible aspects of care work such as the cognitive dimension (such as thinking, planning and organising around household labour) (Damingler, 2019; Hjalmsdóttir & Bjarnadóttir, 2021) and even fewer on the emotional dimension (such as managing emotions of oneself and other family members in the household) (Bass, 2015; Offer, 2012; Dean et al., 2022) aspects of unpaid care work. Overall in literature, there is no uniformly accepted definition or concept that encompasses the physical, cognitive and emotional aspects of unpaid care work (Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023); however most recently terms such as mental labour (Reich-Stiebert et

al., 2023) and mental load (Dean et al., 2022) have been used to describe the invisible aspects of care work. The motherload definition contributes to the conceptualisation of unpaid care work in the household by emphasising the mostly invisible unpaid care work, and including a focus on the social dimension to unpaid care work. The social dimension contributes to an understanding that care work is exacerbated by the structural inequalities (such as gender and race inequalities in South Africa) and socio-cultural expectations in the household, workplace and communities in which mothers live. This review therefore, primarily focuses on studies on the cognitive dimension and the emotional dimension as the more invisible and less researched aspects of mother's unpaid care work among employed mothers, and how these are shaped by the social context in which the care work takes place.

Cognitive Labour in the Household

Origins of cognitive labour. The recognition of cognitive labour as a unique dimension of unpaid care work within the household is a recent development within academic discussion. Early traces in sociology scholarship conceptualised non-physical household labour as 'household management' (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hoschild, 1989); however more recently scholars have further distinguished between the cognitive and emotional labour aspects of unpaid care work in the household (Daminger, 2019; Dean et al., 2022; Reich-Stiebert et al., 2023). Cognitive labour as conceptualised by Daminger (2019, pg. 610) is defined as "anticipating needs, identifying options to meet those needs, deciding among those options and monitoring the results of care responsibilities within the household". Work-family scholars have recognised that the cognitive labour in the household is gendered, invisible, enduring and boundaryless and has an impact on working mothers (Dean et al., 2022).

Cognitive labour is gendered. Existing literature recognises that the type of cognitive labour performed by men and women differs in the household (Aviv et al., 2024; Merderer, 1993). For example Aviv et al. (2024) found that whilst non-child care cognitive tasks (such as finances, garbage, maintenance) are shared more equally between men and women, child-care cognitively demanding tasks (such as homework, healthcare, getting children ready for school) are shouldered disproportionately by mothers. Interestingly, in a study by Daminger (2019) in the US context, among middle- and upper-middle-class couples, she argued that cognitive tasks related to power and influence such as decision-making, is often shared collaboratively between men and women. However even when men and fathers were involved in decision-making, mothers and women were the ones to initiate, manage, and execute the decision (Daminger, 2019). Krishna (2024, pg. 11) who conducted a study among Indian middle-class

families in Kerala to understand the gendered division of labour, attributes this gendered nature of cognitive labour to socio-cultural norms that assign women the responsibility of cognitive labour because they “do it better” than men, explaining that cognitive labour is only shared when women assign it to men. Further, since cognitive labour is deeply engrained within a physical task and otherwise invisible, it is overlooked by both the person performing it and the observer and as a result does not get shared (Daminger, 2019). Dean et al. (2022) argued that the overlooked nature of cognitive labour is a key driver of maintaining gender norms such as the unequal division of labour within the household.

Cognitive labour has hidden costs for mothers. Cognitive labour is enduring and boundaryless work that affects working mothers in particular ways. For working mothers who manage both their household and their professional demands, cognitive labour is both a chronic and anticipatory stressor for them (Petts and Carlson, 2023), which affects their health and wellbeing leading to them being over-worked, stressed, and without sleep (Dean et al., 2022). Dean et al. (2022) who studied the mental load through synthesizing existing literature on cognitive and emotional labour, argued that as cognitive labour is not confined to a location (like physical household labour is), it often occurs at any time and any place. The boundarylessness of cognitive labour poses a challenge to working mothers, as it is a disruptive and a distractive form of labour that often occurs alongside their professional work (Daminger, 2019). Nevertheless, working mothers are still required to move between the continuous demands of both the household and their occupation, often attending to their family and children’s needs whilst simultaneously attending to workplace demands. This often places a load on them and threatens their wellbeing (Dean et al., 2022; Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2020). For example, Ruppner et al. (2021) who explored the emotional and financial health amongst working class men and women aged 18-65 in Australia and America, found that working mothers experience increased anxiety and stress in their daily lives due to there being little time to focus on one task at time, attributing this to the boundarylessness of cognitive labour. Similarly, when Occhiuto (2017) studied the mental load of motherhood amongst White upper-middle class mothers in Quebec, Canada, they found that mothers experienced mental overload when needing to handle any disruptions or changes in their caregiving routine which often left them feeling stressed and fatigued. In addition to the cognitive labour that mothers perform, they are responsible for managing the emotions and quality of the caring experience they provide for their families.

Emotional Labour in the Household

Some authors distinguish emotional labour from cognitive labour (e.g., Daminger et al., 2019; Dean et al., 2022; Reich Stiebert et al., 2023) whilst other authors argue that emotional labour is embedded within cognitive labour (e.g., Offer, 2014; Robertson et al., 2019; Walzer, 1998). Dean et al. (2022)'s conceptualisation of the mental load suggests that cognitive labour becomes a mental load when it has an emotional element to it. Whilst cognitive and emotional labour often occur alongside each other, the following section of this literature review will focus on describing emotional and cognitive labour separately to highlight and describe the conceptualisation of the motherload.

Origins of emotional labour in literature. Hoschild's (1983) model of emotional management explains that people manage and express their emotions in social settings either through emotion work or emotional labour. Whilst emotion work is the act of regulating one's emotions in order to be presented as more agreeable to others in one's private life (Addison, 2017; Bolton, 2005; Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Erikson, 2005; Hoschild, 1979; Mann, 2004), emotional labour is referred to as managing one's emotions in one's professional life where one's paid work requires one to nurture or care for others such as the paid work of nurses or teachers (Addison, 2017; Hoschild, 1979). Dean et al. (2022) extend emotional labour to unpaid care work in the household, to describe the invisible and undervalued care work of managing and regulating the emotions of one's family through anticipating, thinking, and caring for them. For example, the emotional labour that mothers undertake in the household would involve managing and monitoring the emotions of their child as they conduct activities in their daily routine (Dean et al., 2022).

Emotional labour is gendered. The concept of emotional labour was not originally intended to be gendered, however due to social systems and norms such as patriarchy that continue to associate women with the household, women and mothers are expected to take on the responsibility for ensuring that the emotional needs of their family and household are met (Dean et al., 2022; Hoschild, 1983). Even in households where men or fathers may contribute to unpaid care work, scholars have argued that because emotional labour is invisible, undervalued and overlooked, it is not legitimised as work and as a result women and mothers continue to shoulder emotional labour (Occhiuto, 2017; De Groot & Vik, 2020; Krishna et al., 2024). Erikson (2005) explains that emotional labour falls on women because caregiving is seen as something that emanates from 'within' instead of being seen as a combination of tasks that need to be managed, focused, or directed for a purpose. For example, Tayal and Mehta (2023) studied Indian working women in Delhi, and found that although both parents expressed

concern over their children's educational performance and mental health during COVID-19, mothers took more responsibility to fill in the gap by providing them with online resources for learning and initiating recreational activities to alleviate their children's stress.

Emotional labour has hidden costs for working mothers. Emotional labour takes time and energy which has hidden costs for working mothers (Erikson, 2005; Petts & Carlson, 2023; Wreyford et al., 2024). Dean et al. (2022) argues that emotional labour is multiplicative, mothers need to manage the emotional demands of their family members who have different needs and personalities. Further, while mothers provide emotional support to their families and households, in return, they receive limited emotional support which further drains them (Childress et al., 2023). For example, Ruppanner et al. (2021) found that American working mothers suffered from emotional strain during COVID-19 as they were expected to constantly be available for their children's needs. Similarly, Wreyford et al. (2024) conducted a study to explore the impact of COVID-19 among White mothers working in the television industry in the United Kingdom, found that mothers resultantly experienced emotional, physiological symptoms of anxiety, stress, panic attacks, and sleep deprivation as a result of needing to keep up with the emotional demands of attending to their work and children simultaneously. Frey and Alajääskö (2021) argue that the gendered distribution of emotional labour highlights the unequal division of labour in households. That working mothers need to shoulder often without recognition or support. The motherload recognises that emotional labour is one of the invisible forms of unpaid care work that mothers take part in.

Socio-cultural influences on the Motherload

The social context such as the cultural expectations of care work in the household, mothering ideologies and kin networks of care, influences how the motherload is experienced. Cultural expectations in the household and in the workplace exacerbate the motherload among Black mothers and those in professional occupations. The socio-cultural expectation of care work that mothers are expected to bear is often underpinned and motivated by mothering ideologies, however there are a diversity of experiences among mothers based on intersecting identities of oppression and privilege including race, gender and social class.

In individualistic societies which include many Northern countries in Europe, America and New Zealand, motherhood tends to be viewed as an individual enterprise (Güney-Frahm, 2020; Mendonca et al., 2023). Individualistic societies are characterised by cultural values such independence, autonomy and self-reliance where motherhood is focused on child-centred parenting (Gluck & Angell, 2025; Hofstede, 1980). However, in collectivistic cultures, which

are characterised by social harmony and family needs, and include many African, Asian and South American contexts, motherhood is regarded as a collective enterprise (Bian et al., 2022).

Mothering ideologies influence women's work and family decisions. For example, intensive mothering, an ideology rooted in middle-class European and American parenting cultures, is a cultural expectation where mothers are expected to be child-centred experts that devote all financial, emotional, and physical resources to the rearing of their child (Hays, 1996). Dow (2016) argues that several assumptions need to be in place in order for intensive mothering to occur. First, intensive mothering requires mothers to be the primary caregivers of their children with fathers being the breadwinners. Second, intensive mothering needs to occur within a self-sufficient nuclear family. Third, motherhood and employment occurring at the same time are in conflict with one another. However, intensive mothering as a concept has not inclusive of mothers with diverse race and cultural backgrounds (Arendall, 2020). Several scholars argue that it privileges white, middle-class heterosexual married women, and is not inclusive of mothers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Freeman, 2023; Nicholas et al., 2015; Petts & Carlson, 2023; Randles, 2020; Verniers, 2022). Dow (2016) argues that an alternative mothering ideology, integrated mothering is more inclusive of mothers from diverse historical and economic backgrounds. Integrated mothering was conceptualised to reflect how African-American middle-class and upper-class employed mothers negotiate and navigate work and family decisions (Dow, 2016). For a long time, Black African-American mothers have been balancing work and family and as a result have been economically, socially and legally excluded from ideologies such as intensive mothering. Integrated mothering accounts for several assumptions that reflect the economical and historical contexts of African-American mothers, which is first, that mothers will work outside the home, second, mothers ought to be economically self-reliant and third, mothers have access to kin networks of care. Brewster and Padavic (2002) and Uttal (1999) were early scholars who recognised the role that kin networks play in supporting employed Black mothers. Kinship-based care networks are characterised by interconnected social relationships between individuals who rely and provide caregiving and support for one another (Brewster and Padavic, 2002; Fischer, 2023); and often do not feature in white middle class mothering experiences because of value systems being predominantly individualistic and the dominance of the nuclear family system. Brewster and Padavic (2002) argue that the use of kin networks depends on social and economic factors (such as marital status and the cost of caregiving) which affect whether there is a need and resources for care. For example, since the 1970s, Black African-American mothers' increasing participation in the labour force created a necessity for kin networks of care. Black mothers in professional

occupations in South Africa who may share similar racial, gendered, and professional identities to their counterpart African-American mothers, but who have distinct historical contexts because of apartheid and colonialism. Accordingly, integrated mothering better reflects how they may experience work and family decisions.

Consequences of the Motherload

The motherload, hinders mothers' economic security, safety, and wellbeing. The next section of this review focuses on literature findings among black mothers to expand on these relationships from an intersectional lens of race, motherhood and professional occupation.

Limited Economic Freedom among Black Mothers in Professional Occupations

Black mothers in professional occupations may have access to financial resources that are afforded to them by working in a professional occupation. However, gender and racial inequalities in the workplace as well as cultural expectations of motherhood in the home and community make it challenging for mothers to access resources that would allow them to experience economic freedom (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015). Black mothers' economic freedom is threatened at an organisational-level, household-level, and community level.

The Motherhood Pay Gap. Grimshaw and Rubery (2015) argue that mothers in professional occupations that are the primary caregivers in their household experience less career advancement opportunities and income in comparison to working professionals who are not mothers. While professional occupations may provide opportunities for some mothers to use their financial resources to outsource caregiving support services so that they can pursue career growth, this is not the case for all mothers because quality childcare is costly. Scholars have found that in the absence of caregiving support in the workplace, single black mothers in particular who are the primary caregivers for their children, must utilise costly care arrangements (such as babysitting or au pairs) or incur high after-school costs (such as aftercare or extracurricular activities) to ensure that their children are taken care of when they are at work or working after hours (Adekoya et al., 2024; Curenton et al., 2018; Pillay, 2020). For instance, Pillay (2020) found that single Black mothers in professional occupations pay for caregiving support such as crèche or paying a nanny/babysitter, and they often bear this financial burden on their own in the absence of a spouse, the child's father or even supportive workplace caregiving facilities. Moreover, Curenton et al. (2019) found that single Black mothers who cannot afford these costly caregiving services are obliged to find alternative arrangements such as taking care of their child whilst simultaneously working which means that these mothers cannot work late and long hours, hindering their career advancement

opportunities. The disproportionate burden of care that is placed on working mothers and especially single working mothers impedes professional mothers' ability to advance in their career (Fapohunda, 2020; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Peters et al., 2019). Black mothers thus often find themselves working even harder to balance their financial responsibilities, caregiving and their professional role (Petts & Carlson, 2023).

Black Tax. Black tax in South Africa refers to the financial support that a middle-class member of a kinship family network provides to improve the lives of those in the kinship network that are in need (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019). Those who have been privileged to receive a tertiary education and gain a professional status often feel a responsibility to provide for their immediate and extended family households which both allows them to practice values of caring for kin but also can be a burden (Magubane, 2016; Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019; Montle, 2021; Sibiya, 2018). For example, Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley (2019) conducted a study amongst Black South Africans in professional occupations between the ages of 20 and 40 and found that 78.4% of the sample ($N = 118$) set aside monthly contributions between R2737 and R32 847 to support their immediate and extended family members. Furthermore, Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley (2019) found that there was a difference between how professional working Black married mothers and Black married fathers experienced Black tax. The Black married fathers in the study experienced Black tax as responsibility and a way to provide intergenerational kin support and "lighten the load" for their parents (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019 pg. 452). Whereas, a Black married mother in her early 30s working in an audit firm described the expectation of the financial support she was giving her extended and intermediate family as a 'burden' as she needed to financially support her own children and five other family members with school fees costs, transport money, bonds and TV licences (Mangoma and Wilson-Prangley, 2019). Whilst the principle of Black tax which is rooted in addressing generational inequalities among Black people, the responsibility of Black mothers who already experience unequal pay or wage disparities in the workplace and daily costs from caring for their own children, may experience black tax as particularly difficult.

Lack of Psychological Safety

Black mothers in professional occupations experience distinct consequences due to a lack of psychological safety in both the home and in the workplace. Whilst amongst mothers in low-income settings the lack of safety is attributed to structural failures such as unsafe housing and violence (Jaga et al., 2025); for Black mothers in professional occupations, the

lack of safety is a result of systemic inequalities in the workplace and in the household which exacerbate the motherload.

Lack of psychological safety in the workplace. Psychological safety in the workplace which is referred to as the freedom employees feel to express themselves without fearing negative consequences (Edmonson, 1999), remains elusive for Black working mothers. In the workplace, stereotypes labelling Black working mothers as “strong Black women” portraying them as resilient reduces their access to structural support and empathy in their personal and professional identities (Bah & Kagatho, 2023; Raddatz et al., 2024). For instance, Raddatz et al. (2024) found that Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) employees in auditing exert more time and energy to emotional work navigating racial discrimination in the workplace which hinders their psychological safety. Similarly, Bah and Kagatho (2023) found that Black mothers cannot express themselves nor be emotional in the workplace as they fear ascribing to stereotypes that often label them as “angry black women”.

Yue et al. (2025) argue that psychological safety is related to employee voice behaviours, which may indicate that for Black working mothers who may not feel psychologically safe may not be able to voice their needs or support structures in the workplace. Motherhood increases women’s needs in requesting to utilise flexible workplace policies and support for their childcare responsibilities. However, in workplace cultures that are not psychological safe, it makes it difficult for mothers to request these benefits. Studies indicate that Black mothers experience scrutiny regarding their commitment and competence within the workplace. For example, Manukere et al. (2024) found that Black employed mothers in Ghana struggled with their work performance when coming back from maternity leave due to not being able to work the same amount of uninterrupted hours as they did before having a child. Similarly, Jaga et al. (2018, pg. 8) found that Black working mothers were unable to request support from their manager to attend to family-related responsibilities because their children were seen as a “distraction”. Unlike their male counterparts or even White mothers, Black mothers are less likely to benefit from flexible workplace policies, leaving them to navigate these dual responsibilities with insufficient support. This undermines Black mothers ability to feel safe in balancing their professional job and the motherload without professional repercussions (Jones et al., 2021)

Lack of psychological safety in the home. In the home, psychological safety is similarly constrained by patriarchal norms that reinforce the unequal division of care work within the household, which discourage women from challenging traditional gender roles. Many Black mothers are unable to ask their husbands for support with childcare, fearing

conflict or being perceived as disrespectful within culturally entrenched expectations of submission (Mkhize, 2020). For example, Berger et al. (2020) found that working mothers had to accept that their husband could not help with childcare because he could not compromise on his job. Instead, working mothers had to silently bear the weight of caregiving and the pressure of performing well both at home and in their workplace. Similarly, Adekoya et al. (2024) found that for many Black mothers, deeply engrained gender roles imposed by cultural expectations that label the mother as “caregiver” and father as “breadwinner” are outdated and do not represent the uptake of black women in professional occupations. Furthermore, these gender roles often frustrate women as they confine them to the household where they either have accept or use physical, cognitive and emotional resources to reject these gender roles.

Lack of Wellbeing among Black Mothers in Professional Occupations

Wellbeing for Black mothers in professional occupations is threatened by the pressures of the motherload both within the household and in the workplace.

Cultural expectations that frame Black mothers as “supermoms” and uphold the “strong Black woman” stereotype, demands mothers to take on multiple roles at work and in their family displaying their physical and emotional strength and ability to manage caregiving and their professional role without support (Woods-Giscombé, 2010; Parnell, 2024). In the household, this looks like mothers needing to do all the caregiving without support from the husband or family because gender roles reinforce the expectation for women to shoulder the caregiving (Zanhour & Sumptur, 2024). For instance, Childress et al. (2023) found that married mothers only receive support from their husbands when they are at their breaking point of exhaustion, indicating that the physical and emotional strain of solely bearing caregiving goes unnoticed. Scholars, Allen et al. (2019) and Parnell (2024) argue that care work in the household that mothers do often goes unnoticed because mothers are expected to suppress any physical or emotional stress as a sign of strength. Petts and Carlson (2023) found that working mothers are more vulnerable to psychological distress because of the hidden emotional and cognitive demands that unpaid care work in the household places on them.

In addition, cultural expectations that expect working mothers to subscribe to the ‘ideal worker norm’ often create an unrelenting nature of workload for them (Ruppanner et al., 2021; Torres et al., 2024; Wreyford et al., 2023). Working mothers workloads are continuous with little to no recovery opportunities often leading them to sacrifice their wellbeing and career aspirations to cope, which results in time poverty and strain (Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2020; Nichols et al., 2015). For instance, Dugan and Barnes-Farrell (2020) found that working

mothers are more susceptible to impaired performance due to stress, fatigue and lack of sleep. Similarly, Nichols et al. (2015) found that whilst mothers may be able to cope with drained energy by replenishing themselves using activities such as self-care, coping with drained time-resources is more challenging as they are unable to recover or replenish time (Ruppanner et al, 2021). Agreeably, Torres et al. (2024) found that working mothers often have to sacrifice personal time and interests to balance both their career aspirations and their family. Consequently, Wreyford et al. (2023) found that mothers psychological wellbeing being at constant threat and strain means that they often move from their occupation to their household stressed, burned out or worried.

Working mothers in professional occupations may have access to flexible work arrangements such as remote work, hybrid work or flexible hours; literature reveals these policies provide temporary relief and in some ways disadvantage these working mothers. For instance, Tayal and Mehta (2023) found that mothers felt disadvantaged by remote work, as the removal of the traditional 9-5 work structure meant that mothers experienced constant mental pressure to respond to work demands, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion. Similarly, Krishna (2024) found that middle-class working mothers in India relied heavily on the availability of domestic care. However, for mothers who are able to outsource care to cope with long working hours, this did not remove the burden from them as when they return home they are expected to take responsibility for the care work. Furthermore, Wreyford et al. (2023) found that in hypercompetitive cultures in professional occupations, mothers need to work even longer hours due to the fear of falling behind or being replaced. Black working mothers in particular overwork to compensate for their absence and need to navigate around promotion and progression opportunities. For instance, after returning from maternity leave, Black working mothers reported feeling pressure to work harder to prove their competence and commitment to avoid facing racial discrimination. Manukere et al. (2024) found that Black working mothers in Ghana experienced pressure to work harder to prove their competence and commitment when returning from maternity leave, illustrating how racial and gender biases influence their performance. The intersectional pressures of race, motherhood, and professional roles create unique and multifaceted challenges for Black mothers' wellbeing. These pressures manifest in both the household and workplace contexts where patriarchal norms, cultural expectations and inadequate structural support converge to intensify the motherload. Addressing these disparities requires targeted interventions such as tailored workplace policies and equitable caregiving dynamics, to alleviate the wellbeing challenges faced by Black mothers.

Literature Review Conclusion

This chapter explored the motherload and discussed how the intersectional identities of motherhood, race and professional occupation influence the experiences among Black working mothers in professional occupations. The literature reviewed provided an overview of the most invisible aspects of unpaid care work, with emphasis on the social context in which mothers care work occurs. Whilst the motherload is a relatively new and unexplored topic in work-family research, this study aims to centre it as a workplace issue by explaining how the organisation may exacerbate the motherload for some mothers. Using intersectionality, this literature review was able to explore the motherload more deeply to understand how inequalities in South Africa influence how Black working mothers in professional occupations experience the motherload.

Method

This chapter provides the research approach, sample, data collection procedure and ethical considerations. Thereafter, the study's data analysis process using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis will be explained. Finally, the rigour of the study is presented discussing the theoretical framework, methodology and reflexivity.

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive research design, with an interpretivist research approach was used as it focuses on attributing meaning and understanding to the phenomenon of 'the motherload'. The interpretivist paradigm is oriented towards understanding that truth and knowledge are subjective and therefore situated in historical and cultural contexts (Ryan, 2018). Thus, the study's qualitative descriptive research design helped accessing subjective truths about Black working mothers that may not be inherent in studies conducted in contexts that are not similar to South Africa's historic, economic, and cultural milieu.

To access subjective truths, I conducted semi-structured interviews to relay the mother's lived experiences (Bonache & Festing, 2020; Fossey et al., 2002). Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis that was guided by the intersectionality, I was able to interpret the mothers experiences and understand how their identities inform the socioeconomic privileges and racial and gendered oppressions they experience. Furthermore, obtaining contextual data from the participants (such as their ethnicity and culture) allowed me to deeply discuss their experiences using applicable literature (Fossey et al., 2002). As the motherload is an underexplored phenomena, the qualitative interpretivist approach served as a way to retain and

reveal the meaning embedded within the experiences of Black mother's in professional occupations (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Sampling

Sampling strategy. A non-probability sampling method using purposive sampling was employed to select mothers according to their parental status, race, and occupation identities (Creswell, 2016; Schreuder et al., 1999), which allowed me to identify and select information-rich cases that aligned with the identity criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). I also employed snowball sampling by allowing participants to refer, recommend and recruit other mothers who may be interested in contributing to the study (Mack, 2005), which gave me access to mothers that were not in my personal network. Together, purposive and snowball sampling was simple, economical, and time-efficient for the study (Gravetter & Forzano, 2015).

Sample. The participants consisted of eleven Black mothers in professional occupations in South Africa. The term 'black' includes a diverse range of African, Coloured, Indian and Asian women, however I chose to focus solely on 'Black' mothers which refer to Black African mothers, because they have a unique set of racial, gendered, and cultural challenges and opportunities in the workplace and home. The mothers in the study were from a diversity of mixed-ethnicities although self-identified as being Pedi (3), Xhosa (1), Lunda (1), Zulu (1), MoSotho (1) and Muvenda (1). By further differentiating between mothers' ethnicities I prevented homogenising Black mother's experiences. A mother was defined as one who performs mothering towards at least one child. Some mothers had young children (0-12 years old), whereas others had children who were teenagers or young adults. The mothers were engaged in a professional occupation in industries ranging from academia ($n = 4$), financial services ($n = 3$), healthcare ($n = 1$), and government ($n = 2$) and mining (1). Mothers occupied middle-class socioeconomic identities, occupying academic qualifications ranging from graduate to PhD level degrees.

Demographics Table

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant	Age	Cultural Group	Mother Tongue	Marital Status	Industry	Highest Qualification
Dineo ^b	36	Pedi	Sepedi	Married	Financial Services	Chartered Accountant
Abongile ^b	27	Xhosa	isiXhosa	Single	Financial Services	Honours Degree
Jendayi ^a	31	Lunda	Lunda	Single	Academia	Master's Degree
Mosetsana ^a	40	MoSotho	Setswana	Married	Academia	Postgraduate Diploma
Mahlatsi ^b	37	Pedi	Sepedi	Married	Mining	Bachelor's Degree
Nomandla ^a	36	Zulu	IsiZulu	Divorced	Academia	PhD
Matlou ^a	37	Pedi	Sepedi	Married	Financial Services	Postgraduate Diploma
Philisiwe ^b	47	Zulu	Zulu	Married	Government	Master's Degree
Mbalenhle ^b	37	Muvenda	Tshivenda	Single	Academia	PhD
Funeka ^a	42	Zulu	isiZulu	Divorced	Healthcare	Bachelor's Degree
Zanele ^b	41	Zulu	isiZulu	Married	Government	Postgraduate Diploma

**Note.* Superscripts *a* and *b* indicate the nature of the researcher's relationship with participants and the sampling pathway. Superscript *a* refers to participants recruited directly through the researcher's personal network (family members were not included in the sample). Superscript *b* refers to participants who were referred by other participants.

Semi-structured Interviews

Primary data through in-depth semi-structured interviews were collected to uncover stories from Black professional mothers (Ratele, 2004). The mothers were seen as experts of their lived experiences and thus interviewing them was an appropriate way of accessing their knowledge and meaning (Driscoll, 2011; Jaga et al., 2024; Meyer, 2024). Further, as a form of qualitative inquiry, semi-structured interviews allowed for mothers to reveal their experiences and the meaning of the motherload in relation to their social-identities (Willig, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations observed in the study included both explicit and subtle ethics. For explicit ethics, all participants were informed about the study's purpose, risks, voluntary nature and their right to withdraw at any time with no consequences. Furthermore, I assigned participants with pseudonyms to protect their identity and securely stored all transcripts on a password protected laptop to which only the researcher and supervisor had access. For subtle ethics, I employed two ethical safeguards during the interviews to ensure that I avoided harm towards participants (Leahy, 2021). First, I set up an interview where I was interviewed in person by a peer, and was asked questions about my experiences as a Black student at UCT with the purpose of mimicking similar conditions that my participants would undergo. This exercise allowed me to understand, reflect and best prepare how to make it more comfortable for the participants. For example, during my interview, I felt uncomfortable by the unwavering eye contact I received, so I ensured that I was aware of if they were uncomfortable and where needed used a combination of gestures such as nodding, affirming replies and eye contact to show my active listening. Second, I developed trust and rapport with the participant before and during the interviews by leaning on my counselling training as a Student Psychologist. For example, if I noticed that a participant shared some information that made them feel uncomfortable, I responded by gently asking if the participant wished to either pause, continue, or suspend the interview (Leahy, 2021).

Procedure

After obtaining ethical approval from the University of Cape Town's Faculty of Commerce Ethics in Research Committee (COM/01018/2024). I distributed an online flyer on LinkedIn and WhatsApp and used word of mouth to recruit study participants. The interviews were conducted in August 2024, in English and either in-person or online, depending on the participant's preference (Creswell, 2016). The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I started the conversation by posing initial questions such as "can you tell me about your job"

and “can you tell me about your family”, as this drew on both their motherhood and professional identities. Thereafter, I allowed the participant to lead the conversation, by inquiring where I felt necessary to gain more insight into how their intersectional identities informed their lived experiences (Willig, 2017) (see Appendix B for Interview Schedule). For example, if a mother was speaking about the expected roles and responsibilities in the household, I probed questions such as “could you tell me a bit more about cultural expectations you may experience from the household or community to take on those roles and responsibilities?” After each interview was conducted, notes were taken by the researcher about the interviews and the original audio files and transcripts were uploaded and saved for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis method was guided by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected as it provided an iterative analytical process of identifying, analysing and interpreting rich detailed patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The iterative approach that thematic analysis offers allowed me to explore the intersectional nature of the motherload by frequently moving back and forward between raw data to gain insights into the participants’ experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Brennan et al., 2024).

To begin, the first step involved transcribing the interviews and noting down any initial notes to interact and emerge myself within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). During the second step, I worked with the original transcripts to systematically organise the raw data extracts in a meaningful way to generate initial codes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). I worked with the original transcripts, paying attention to each data item and identifying what was interesting by highlighting extracts and labelling them as ‘codes’ by linking them to comments within the margin of the page. I recorded these codes in Microsoft Word in the original transcript file so that when reverting to this stage I was able to have an analytical trail of my thought process that could be adapted to shape the narrative throughout the analysis (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). The codes were initially generated using a semantic approach to capture and interpret the explicit and surface meanings from the participants. For example, where a participant mentioned “you were rich because of Ubuntu and abantu around us” I captured this code verbatim from the participant. Thereafter, after labelling all codes within the transcript, I reverted back to the codes and started organising them latently by

placing the above code within a category called “cultural tensions” which uncovered the underlying assumptions and meanings of the data extract (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth step, which involved searching, reviewing and defining themes and writing a report were done simultaneously which allowed for themes to be formed and reformed in an iterative way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Step three focused on searching for themes by re-arranging the codes and their respective data extracts, and categorising them into theme’s and sub-themes. For example, I manually grouped codes from the transcripts that were the same such as; caring for extended family, and financially supporting family members into categories like ‘expectations from the African community’ and represented them in a document. This visual representation allowed for the themes (e.g., navigating between tradition and modernity and Black tax) and sub-themes (e.g., the responsibility of providing) to analytically come from and be presented as an assemblance of the generated codes (see Appendix E). During the fourth step, I reviewed the themes (e.g, navigating between tradition and modernity and Black tax) and made decisions about whether the themes worked for the coded extracts and aligned with the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I reviewed the themes by firstly generating thematic maps, and iteratively moving between the codes and extracts to select the themes that best captured an important element of the research question. After this, the fifth step involved naming and defining themes that communicated a cohesive overall story of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a key researcher instrument, I was aware of my decision-making role in shaping the views of how the data were presented, and where possible was intentional about using similar language to what the participant used to define and name themes (Creswell, 2016). For example, naming a sub-theme “bad-makoti”, which came directly from the dataset, allowed me to take responsibility for favouring the voices of the mothers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the final step, I produced a findings report that was supported by vivid and compelling extracts of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings report, was written in an iterative way where I went back to previous steps of searching, reviewing and defining themes in order to finalise the report. Thereafter, three themes were finalised (1) Jostling between tradition and modernity: Black women navigating the motherload, (2) Black tax and the caring beyond the household, (3) Cultural dissonance and carrying the motherload.

Rigour

Trustworthiness forms the basis of whether science or research that is produced is warranted (Patton, 1999). For a long time, the scientific method using an often hypo-deductive approach which requires truth to be proved or disproved has guided the process on how

research is conducted and ultimately trusted. Qualitative research, however often enquires about unquantifiable, unknown and underexplored subjective truths that often do not exist in a dichotomy but a multiplicity of experiences (Adler, 2022; Moalusi, 2024). To address issues of trust within this type of research, scholars such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest criteria to evaluate trustworthiness of qualitative research which include transferability, dependability, credibility, and confirmability. Whilst their criteria are valuable, Adler's (2022) approach which comprises theory, methodology and reflexivity will be utilised. In their approach trustworthiness is based on transparency in one's theoretical approach and methodology implored. Theory and methodology play a critical role in creating knowledge, as these are underpinned by assumptions.

Theory

Intersectionality as an analytical tool, captures and engages with the contextual dynamics of power (Crenshaw, 1989). As Black working mothers in South African inherited a history in which their voices have been largely invisible, unrecognised, and undervalued, intersectionality allows me to engage with the contextual conditions that shape and influence how knowledge is produced and disseminated (Cho et al., 2013). Despite intersectionality's wide applicability, it has not been used typically in organisational studies, to explore structures of discrimination and systems of power and inequality (Ibokessien, 2020). However, in countries such as South Africa where organisations often are places where structural inequalities are created and demonstrated (Acker, 2006), intersectionality can be a way to uncover, and address inequalities that prohibited Black working mothers from being recognised. By using intersectionality as a framework, it has influenced the (1) the research question, and (2) how data is analysed such that patterns were more likely to occur because of the interlocking identities (of motherhood, race, and profession) and thus have led to conclusions being drawn in the form of themes (Adler, 2022). However, although theories are generally presented as truths based on 'theoretically-derived concepts and unquestionable facts', in this research, I recognise that the theory of intersectionality is not an absolute truth, but instead has been used as a way to make sense of the world and is legitimate because of the evidence that has been created in support of the theory (Adler, 2022, p. 600). It is through this lens that the research is presented, where I take the decision to allow this research to be guided by the intersectional framework, whilst allowing the participants as experts to craft the knowledge and attribute meaning.

Methodology

The second aspect of establishing trustworthiness is to be transparent about methods by laying out procedures and justifying decision making for these procedures (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Methodology transparency was observed through (1) taking an analytical approach to data analysis which involved providing justifications and presenting raw data in the form of tables, (2) participating in triangulation through member-checking of the initial phase of the analysis and (3) engaging in reflexivity throughout initially and throughout the data analysis process. First, thematic analysis was used as it is an analytical way of analysing themes and patterns within raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is supplemented with providing raw data and tables to illustrate the generating of codes and themes iteratively to demonstrate the thinking behind each decision (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021). Second, for triangulation, I participated in investigator-triangulation with my supervisor where the codes generated were compared and cross-checked to demonstrate that they were credibly drawn from the data source (Patton, 1999; Stahl & King, 2020). Third, for reflexivity, my positionality influences my views and it is important that I am honest about how this affects my research. Through the data analysis process, reflexivity was engaged with routinely, as I allowed myself to constantly check biases by asking the participants to clarify their views instead of making assumptions, evaluate my approach of interviewing by taking notes throughout the process, and making decisions about how to improve going forward. In addition to the reflexivity section below, I kept a reflexivity journal and wrote in it after each interview to document my thoughts, and possible areas and ways in which I can be aware of how my views shape how knowledge is produced.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity is referred to as a process of ‘critical-self search’ where the researcher engages in reflection throughout the research process to be aware of the ways in which they connected or are far removed from the perspectives revealed in the interpretations formed (Adeagbo, 2021 pg. 182). From the beginning of the research process I kept a journal and noted my thoughts, questions, perspectives, and experiences of the research process, which allowed me to be aware of my positionality and how this shapes the experiences and perspectives I share from the participants’ stories.

My identity as a 23-year-old Black South African who is a full-time student influences how I engage in my work. Throughout my university undergraduate and postgraduate career, every decision about my programme and courses was pre-selected. Thus for my Master’s degree, I was excited about the opportunity to make a decision about what I wanted to do. I felt drawn to my supervisor, because of her field of work-family research and her transdisciplinary

approach to research. I knew that I would be able to learn from her, and not just write a dissertation that is cognisant of how to do research in the Global South but also thinks critically about how research can create social impact. I decided to work within her current research about 'the motherload' for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to be part of her research with low-income mothers and see how it can translate easily to my research. Secondly, I was raised by a Black mother and I was interested in gaining insight into her world. This naturally led to my decision about the demographic of the study, my mother is a Black African mother in a professional occupation in South Africa. Furthermore, after researching the topic of unpaid care work in the household, I realised that the voices of Black South African mothers in professional occupations are often studied homogenously. I wanted to centre the voices of Black mothers in professional occupations and understand their experiences and contribute to work-family research. After conducting an honours research study that quantitatively explored employee voice within South African organisations, I knew I wanted to understand how Black mothers' experience of the motherload, a phenomenon that is highly gendered, undervalued and invisible in the workplace and household. My decision to use intersectionality as my theoretical framework felt intuitive yet challenging, as I had never been exposed to it before I knew that this framework would allow me to understand how the mother's identities influence their experiences.

Throughout my literature review process, methodology and data collection and analysis, I engaged in reflexive journaling to allow me to reflect and grow as a researcher. This process has informed the research and also has encouraged me to see visible evidence of how I have evolved as a researcher over time. For example, during the interview process I felt like an outsider to the mothers experiences. As a 23-year-old Black South African woman who is not a mother, and who is not in a professional occupation, I struggled to see how I could relate which influences how I conducted the research. For the first interview, I allowed the participant to share their story and was hesitant to guide the interview with the questions I had prepared. After reflecting and writing, I realised that I viewed the participant as the expert, and my questions would serve as 'interruptions' to their dialogue would influence their story. However, doing so I was neglecting my responsibility as a researcher to co-create this knowledge. For the next interview, I decided to take ownership of my role as a researcher to listen and guide the interview process. At other times, I felt like an 'insider' to the mothers experiences. I have been raised by a Black mother in a professional occupation, thus I felt as though I already had insight into the mothers experience. Whilst this may be true, I had to take a step back and be intentional about interpreting the mothers experiences during data analysis carefully, constantly

cross checking and ensuring that my interpretations were closely tied to the mother's experiences. For example, during the data analysis process my decisions to use the participants words verbatim as codes, was a preventative measure to ensure that my own assumptions did not lead the interpretation of the results. As I reflect on my interviews, I realise how careful I was in ensuring that the voices of my participants were centred, whilst my own biases naturally would come out, reflexive journalling allowed me to critically engage my own assumptions and interpret the mothers experiences.

Findings and Discussion

The fourth chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews of how Black mothers in professional occupations experience the motherload, combined with the discussion using other findings from Global South studies.

The intersectional exploration of the experiences of the motherload among Black professionals in South Africa revealed how they are caught between two cultures and how this shapes their identities as mothers, workers, and community members. The mothers in the study are well-educated, middle-class women who, in a context such as South Africa with such high inequality, hold economic privileges. However they find themselves constantly jostling between their identities as modern mothers and still upholding the traditional cultures that are embedded in their identities. Three themes were identified through the data analysis to explore the motherload amongst Black mothers in professional occupations: (1) Jostling between tradition and modernity: Black women navigating the motherload, (2) Black tax and caring beyond the household, and (3) Cultural dissonance and carrying the motherload.

1. Jostling between tradition and modernity: Black women navigating the motherload.

As Black middle-class mothers navigating the professional world of work while still embedded in traditional cultural practices that shape their racial and gendered identities, the participants' experiences highlight how they constantly dance between their identities as modern Western women and Black mothers. They present complex webs of privilege and oppression that shape their experience of the motherload as Black middle-class working mothers, which are presented in the following sub-themes: 1.1) "A bad makoti": Navigating patriarchy's structural barriers, and 1.2) the servility of black women.

1.1 “A bad makoti”: Navigating patriarchy’s structural barriers

The mothers in the study commonly spoke about how traditional cultural norms and patriarchal systems shaped their performance of black femininity and the expectations cast upon them by family and community members. They explained that requesting caregiving support in the household such as outsourcing or asking help from their partners was frowned upon because culturally, caregiving is the mother’s responsibility, leading to their labels such as “bad” and “lazy” makoti’s. A makoti, is a South African Nguni language name referring to a bride, newly married women or daughter-in law.

So that, that's also been a clash. They don't understand. They think, like, I'm lazy, my god, because I've got an auntie. But it's not that the auntie is a maid. Like, I do my, I clean my own room. She doesn't clean my room. Yeah. So according to my in-laws, I'm a bad makoti because I have someone who helps me in the house. (Zanele, archivist)

Zanele is regarded as an independent professional in her world of work, although she explains how her personal life involves the close monitoring of her behaviours by her in-laws. While Zanele resists conforming completely to her expected cultural role as a ‘makoti’, she expressed a lack of agency and pressure to abide by norms that determine her as a ‘respectable’ black wife and mother. Although her quote suggests that she is attempting to resist and be critical of these gendered ‘laws’ (i.e., “They don't understand. They think, like, I'm lazy, my god”), she simultaneously reports having found ways to conform while minimising the cultural backlash by family members, as she explained: “I clean my own room”. In doing so, Zanele bears an additional burden that adds to her experiences of the motherload of managing and meeting makoti expectations to ensure her respectability as a black woman, while simultaneously functioning in a more liberal, individualised setting of working as a professional.

Similar findings were highlighted in scholarship produced in the Global South noting how black women and mothers are experience subjugation at the intersection of their race and gendered identities (Adekoya, 2024; Adisa et al., 2023; Jung & Moon, 2024, Resane, 2024, Nganase & Basson, 2019; Sibiya, 2011). For example, Resane’s (2024) study outlines the expectations of a makoti among South African Black women and how this shapes how women experience being wives and mothers confined to the patriarchal system that holds them accountable for the care work in the household. Resane (2024) explains how a makoti is expected to bring joy to her husband’s family by cooking, cleaning and bearing children for

her husband's family, and failure to do so they are labelled as "lazy". However, Adekoya's (2024) study among Nigerian middle-class working mothers shows how Black mothers with professional occupations often need to acquire financial resources to comply with the gender traditional norms of care work, however experience being disciplined or ostracised in their communities for doing so (Adekoya, 2024). While this study's findings align with Resane's study (2024), it additionally shows the ways in which Black professional mothers may draw on their financial resources (such as paying for caregiving support) to resist these oppressive structures in small ways to reduce their wife- and mother-loads, showing how professional identity intersects with mothering.

Philisiwe expands on her inability to seek help to redistribute mothering responsibilities that come with cultural expectations. She shares how she navigates the patriarchal structural barriers that inhibit her from asking and receiving help from her husband with housework. Although she notes her understanding of traditionally assigned roles to men and women, she also expresses how she requires assistance from him and does not want to be shouldering the housework alone.

So, because I've shown him that I can be superwoman, he leaves me to it, but only for me to realise that I don't want to be doing this alone. [...] You see, he himself was taught he cannot enter the kitchen. He's not man enough [if he does]. There are proverbs. There are all those things that prove to him how not man enough [he is] if he enters the kitchen. But now I'm here measuring him and judging him, because he's not entering the kitchen. I cannot change that. (Philisiwe, government district manager)

Philisiwe's professional identity transcends the traditional expectations of Black women confined to the household and kitchen. Nevertheless, she still finds herself subscribing to the traditional ways of being solely responsible for care work, to protect her husband's masculinity as "he cannot enter the kitchen". While Philisiwe conforms to the expected cultural role as a Black mother and wife, she expressed her dissatisfaction with the unequal division of labour stating, "I don't want to be doing this alone" which is met by her realisation that she is unable to "change that" in the future.

Philisiwe echo's existing literature that links the acceptability of Black women to handle all the caregiving based on the stereotypical idea of being a 'strong black woman', which in the modern day justifies that Black women have the emotional and physical capacity to hold both traditional roles in the household and professional jobs (Moodley & Meintjes,

2024; Nganase & Basson, 2019; Woods-Giscombe, 2010). Similar to the findings of Adisa et al. (2023), this study reaffirmed how mothers are constantly negotiating the challenges and consequences posed by patriarchal norms that do not accommodate their dual roles as mothers and professionals, whilst additionally showing the ways in which mothers have to act as passive agents of the patriarchal barriers that disadvantage them. Philiswe's motherload involves physically shouldering household labour alone and the emotional labour of protecting her husband from facing judgement because he 'cannot' be involved.

One mother shared an experience that shows some progress in the shifting of gender norms in Black dual-earner couples, however the effort required to initiate such shifts and the mental planning and emotional work that accompanies it (i.e., the invisible load) still falls on the woman. Matlou, remarked on how her husband's involvement in the household has challenged the boundaries of traditionally assigned roles for men and women. Although she talks about her co-parent 'beating society', she notes that she still carries the majority of the work in the household and the responsibility falls on her to do the housework and progressively rewire the patriarchy in her home.

My co-parent is beating society because fathers used to do the bare minimum before. He does a lot, but he's still not carrying, I can say half, because it still falls on me. [...] I have worked intentionally on trying to, um, skew it, you know, so that I do less and less and less and less. But I've just accepted that. (Matlou, chartered accountant)

Matlou, a married mother of two children, shares how she navigates managing the unequal division of labour in her household through attempting to transform traditional gender norms. Matlou performs this transformation through resistance and performing "less and less" of her expected household duties, offering up some to her husband to do. Although Matlou's extract reflects her desire to reshape cultural perceptions in her household, she expresses "it still falls on me" indicating that while the task may be delegated, the responsibility still remains on her as the mother in the household. In response she expresses how she has "just accepted that" [resistance] showing that she is aware that resisting a patriarchal system with traditional and cultural roots that run deep and strong. For Matlou, the motherload involves shouldering the responsibility of housework in addition to rewiring the patriarchy in her home.

In tandem with other scholars' findings, the participants in this study highlighted the challenges faced by Black working mothers navigating consequences of them being held to patriarchal structural barriers governing unequal division of household labour from their

traditional expectations placed on women. Women often bear the burden of needing to undo deeply engrained gender roles by encouraging their partners/husbands to participate (Childress et al., 2023; Dugan et al., 2023; Moodley & Meintjes, 2023), which often involves emotional and cognitive labour to either accept the rigidity of established cultural norms or manage their partner's/husband's involvement (Coltrane, 1989) whilst actively managing the resistance when doing so (Adekoya, 2024; Adisa et al., 2023). In addition to navigating patriarchal barriers of being fulfil the roles of a 'makoti', the mothers expressed the ways in which they undertake responsibility and providing within their household and the broader community. This active work to shift gender norms in her household contributes to their motherload because of the specific cognitive and emotional labour that this involves.

1.2 Responsibility and providing: The servility of black women

In narrating about their identities as black women and mothers, the participants often drew upon the cultural practice and expectation of servility. Mothers referred to servility as an expected practice of women to be in service and provide for others in their household and broader communities. Being in and of service to others shaped how they experienced the motherload, with some viewing the practice as feeding into patriarchal systems that oppress women, and others noting how their provider identities empower and disrupt traditional cultural norms. For example, Funeka and Abongile expressed how being a "provider" and the "responsibility" that comes with this deeply shapes their experience of servility:

As a single parent when it comes to really being a provider, the provision part of the responsibility, it's quite a hectic one [...] there's someone who's not playing their role or responsibility. (Funeka, professional nurse)

I pay lots of fees. I have to buy winter clothing. I have a lot of responsibilities, responsibilities that just need to happen, right? I need fuel to take someone to school every day. I need to pay for swim school. I need to, you know, those kinds of things. Someone needs new shoes. Yeah. And then there hasn't been help this year from the dad. And I think, in a way, to compensate and to keep their relationship going, I would like, take a few minutes in the morning to have my son video call his dad.

(Abongile, chartered accountant trainee)

Funeka and Abongile who are both single Black mothers and primary caregivers, remark about the unequal division of labour and the responsibility attached to servility and being the provider. Although Funeka talks in the interview about valuing the part she plays in providing for her child, she also notes that the motherload and responsibility largely falls on her as the primary parent, as she says, “there’s someone who’s not playing their role or responsibility”, implying that the child’s father does not play his role. Funeka’s expression of “hectic” displays how whilst there is more to the story, she may be hesitating to express the full extent of the responsibility to provide as a single mother. Abongile’s extract showed how her “responsibility” and the motherload go beyond care work and financial support to “compensating” for her child’s relationship with his father. Her language implies that her servility as a single black mother is endless, constantly ensuring that all emotional, physiological, and physical needs of her child are met.

For both mothers, their experiences highlight other literature and scholarship such as Daley (2023) and Hill (1973) which portray how an act of servility such as providing and responsibility becomes a duty and necessity, often result in a silencing and inability for mothers to speak up about the unequal responsibility of being a primary caregiver. For Black isiXhosa single mothers who have had a child out of wedlock, there are several barriers, such as *intlawulo*, that limit the mother’s access to paternal support resulting in the expectation for women to provide for their children. *Intlawulo* is a customary practice which involves a man paying a fine to a woman’s family whom he has impregnated out of wedlock (Makusha & Richter, 2016; Lubbe, 2020; Samukimba, 2020). This practice is additionally a rite of passage that permits the child’s father to have access to the child, participate in raising them and be recognised as the ‘father’ by having the child inherit their surname and be welcomed by the in-laws family (Makusha & Richter, 2016). Without paying *intlawulo*, culturally the father should not have access to the child or be recognised as the father, however Abongile finds herself putting in effort to “to keep their relationship going” as an act of service to her child and to not exclude her child’s father on the basis of the lack of financial support and fulfilling cultural obligation. As Abongile noted, “there has not been help this year from the dad” on the basis of his lack of financial support and fulfilling cultural obligations. Furthermore, she “compensates” for the father’s departure from these traditional cultural practices in favour of ensuring that her child is emotionally and psychologically cared for. Through acts of servility, she draws on modern parenting ideals such as providing her child an opportunity to know the father even though he is not consistently involved (East et al., 2020); whilst simultaneously being constrained by traditional expectations like *intlawulo* not being met.

For some mothers, like Mbalenhle, the traditional concept of servility is disrupted and reclaimed as an empowering practice. She describes serving and providing for her family as placing her in a position of power, control, and independence.

So I love being a working mom. I would not *not* be a working mom. I can't imagine asking a man if I can buy my kids ice-cream or if they can eat three strawberries instead of one because, I don't know, we are only allowed one packet of strawberries a week. I just can't imagine what that would look like? So I should be in a position to give them more, whether it's financially or emotionally or otherwise, I should be able to, to give them more...and working allows me to do that.

(Mbalenhle, academic)

Mbalenhle – a divorced mom of three who is actively co-parenting – expresses how her identity as a working mom in a professional occupation allows her to provide financially and emotionally for her children and, importantly, be financially independent. In rewriting the cultural story of what it means to be in service to others, Mbalenhle talks about the importance of being able to serve her family while maintaining her independence as a black woman, by referring to purchasing ice cream and strawberries for her children without requiring her husband's permission. Mbalenhle's has fully embraced the opportunity to provide for her children given the financial privilege her professional occupation affords her with. Furthermore, this opportunity to provide for her children reduces the motherload as it empowers her to make decisions freely and be able to afford to do so.

Akin to Moodley and Meintjes' (2023) study, access to educational and professional occupations is a transformative way of reshaping cultural perceptions that label men as the 'providers' and women as the 'nurturers'. This study revealed how mothers with professional occupations afforded them with the role of 'providing', allowing them to reclaim decision-making power to mother freely. Although Mbalenhle and a few other mothers in the study were not fully emancipated from traditional roles assigned to them as they were still somewhat held to expectations of being in the household, this reflects a way in which traditional servility is disrupted. The next theme traces how the mothers perform Black tax and experience the responsibility of caring and supporting extended family as professional working women.

2. Black tax and caring beyond the household

As Black middle-class mothers navigating the professional world of work while still embedded in the cultural practices that shape their racial and gendered identities, the

participants' experiences highlight how their identity as Black mothers assumes that they are expected to provide financial resources, social capital, and emotional resources to actively care and support for those beyond their nuclear families. They present complex webs of how their privileges and simultaneous oppression's shape their experience of the motherload as Black middle-class working mothers as they fulfil the requirements of 'Black tax' and the expectation associated with caring for their family members:

We are providing, of course [...], my mom passed on and my father married a second wife. On the other side also, I still have my mother in law, who is 80+ . She's taken on some of the children from her line who are studying at the university. So we are looking after my mother in law, the home, and also responsible for some of those children whom she's taken on without even consulting us. (Philisiwe, government district manager)

Philisiwe expresses how there is an expectation for her as a professional to provide for those with close ties to her family network. Her experience of providing for her family resonates with other mothers in the study who articulate this as 'Black Tax', which is understood as the financial support that a middle-class member of a kinship family network provides to improve the lives of those in the kinship network that are in need (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019). Philisiwe's extract highlights how as a Black mother who is part of a kinship family network, she takes on an extra family load as part of her motherload as she is expected to provide for her "mother in law, [her mom's] home, and also responsible for some of those children." This family responsibility that goes beyond caring for her household adds to Philisiwe's motherload.

Wayne et al. (2023) defines the 'family load' as the managerial, cognitive and emotional labour required to take care of a household. They further explain how women and mothers are the ones who bear the burden of the family load as it is a gendered division of labour in the household. For Black working mothers who are part of kinship networks, this expansion of the motherload is not restricted to their household, but to those in their extended family and even those with close kinship ties (Pillay, 2020). This is because the commonly used concepts of a nuclear family and an extended family which are used to create visible boundaries of care, are not as clear within established kinship networks like those within collective cultures that are particularly salient in the global South, and in this study referring to African culture (Dow, 2016; Pillay, 2020). The mothers in the study described the responsibilities to care for family outside of the household, however they never used the term "extended family" or "nuclear

family” but instead used the term “family” to describe everyone who is in their kinship network (including grandparents, sisters, cousins and family in-law). This finding highlights how the northern imposition of family members outside the household being regarded as “extended family”, however the motherload as a concept originating in the Southern context recognises family as not only biological but to children, parents and family members across generations who lie within the extended kin network. Thus, Black mothers find themselves taking on this family load as part of their motherload, to care for their those in their kinship network financially, cognitively, and emotionally.

In contrast to Philisiwe’s experience as a Zulu Black mother, where the motherload involves providing and caring for extended family, Matlou, a Sepedi Black mother expresses how there is no expectation for her to incur Black Tax and use her financial resources to care for extended family.

We don't have what we term ‘black tax’. Maybe it's also because we are just so far away. Maybe that's also why we probably might have black tax if we were in Joburg. But we don't have that simply in their minds. They just think Cape Town is so expensive and we have just so much on our hands with children, so we've not needed to take on any dependents besides the kids we've birthed. And yeah, I think I'm grateful for that.

(Matlou, chartered accountant)

Matlou draws on ‘Black tax’ and shares that there is no expectation for her to use her financial resources to support her family members routinely because her family recognise the expensive cost of living. Matlou talks about how there is an acknowledgement from her family of the challenges of managing one’s own family and looking after others within the kinship network on the basis of being geographically distant, cost of living and number of children. She mentions how she is grateful that there is no expectation to perform Black tax, highlighting how whilst the absence of Black tax may reduce her motherload, she recognises that the absence of Black tax in her case is more of an exception to the cultural norm that is often applied across every family.

Black Tax is a currency within the African community which represents a legacy of historical intergenerational support that provides opportunities not just for those in need but allows benefits to circulate within the kinship network for many generations (Magubane, 2016; Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019; Montle, 2021; Sibiyi, 2018). For many Black middle-

class professionals who live geographically distant from their kinship networks, Black tax is one of the ways to provide, remain connected and uphold culture and tradition (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangle, 2019). However, for mothers who remain geographically distant, they cannot benefit from the support provided from their kinship network, which means that their financial contributions may disadvantage their own children. Matlou talks about how her family acknowledges the financial responsibilities she has to provide for her children, and thus do not expect her to provide further than her household. Hence, the absence of Black tax in families such as Matlou's may be a representation of the 'modern' middle-class black family where the traditional norms of Black tax are not practiced because of how expensive it is for them to look after their own family (Dube, 2022; Montle, 2021).

For mothers who live closer to their kinship network they provide other resources in the form of social capital adding another dimension to the motherload. For example, Zanele, a mother of three, shares how there is an expectation for her to use her social capital to provide for her family:

I'm the unofficial admin person in the family [...] people just think, okay, you've got a degree or you're a post grad and you work for government. Like, you must know. Like, if there's a thing that needs to be applied for, they ask you. They ask you, please go onto the Internet, apply for this one's [university application], help this one. Anything that needs to be verified. "Is it true that you can get money for this?", they'll phone me.

(Zanele, archivist)

Zanele's experience illuminates the invisible and overlooked form of using one's social capital to help family members. She is the "unofficial admin person in the family" and is expected to perform tasks for her family using her skills, qualification and resources that her professional job affords with, ultimately positioning her as a gatekeeper for her family's success. By saying, "they'll phone me" illustrates how this may add to Zanele's load as she is the only person holding that responsibility to provide social capital. Hence even though she is not the biological mother, because of her access to resources and knowledge she would take on the responsibilities that the biological mother would typically do if they had such resources, such as helping with university applications. Zanele's motherload thus includes providing social capital and drawing on her time, intellectual and physical resources to close an inequality gap that has roots of systemic injustice that run far and wide

For Black middle-class men and women, one's tertiary educational attainment is often celebrated within the kinship network as it is not seen as an individual attainment but a collective attainment (Magubane, 2016). The collective understanding creates an awareness that those who have preceded you have paved the way for you to gain the professional qualification, which is why many Black middle-class professionals may feel it necessary to do assist others (Magubane, 2016; Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019; Marginson, 2016). Pillay (2020) explains how social capital is embedded within kinship networks to provide members with an opportunity to access and share intellectual and informational resources.

Nomandla, a single divorced mother illustrates the extent of the motherload even further by showing how she took on the responsibility of being a mother after her sister passed on, by adopting four of both her sister's children permanently.

I mean, in IsiZulu, I would be *umamncane*, right? But they call me mom. [...] I had a plan for my life. And there are ways or there are decisions that I would make that would be very different if I didn't have this responsibility of being a mother.[...] And I'm very intentional about creating happy memories for them because my one child lost their mother, their biological mother, my sister passed away, and my other sister is just not available to her kids at all. (Nomandla, academic)

Initially, Nomandla was 'umamncane' to both her sister's children, which translates to younger aunt in isiZulu, however because of kin ties and her financial privilege it positioned her as the only one to adopt her sister's children. Her language, "I had a plan for my life" speaks about how being a mother was not a choice for her, however Nomandla has responded to and accepted the traditional cultural norms of caring for those beyond her one's family. In the interview, Nomandla spoke about how there is no support from her adopted children's father except for the help she receives from her own mother who lives in with them. Nomandla's identity as a divorced single black mother who is the primary care giver of her household shows how the responsibility continues to fall upon mothers to provide and care for children within their household even though they themselves are not supported nor recognised (Edwards, 2022; Fongwa, 2021). Nomandla decision to take care of her family extends to creating happy memories for her children which illustrates how she has embraced this responsibility. Nomandla's experience speaks to the strength of kin networks of care among Black mothers

and the opportunity this creates to provide for children whose parents are not available to support them (Gilson et al., 2025).

This theme explored the expectation for mothers to perform Black tax and take on extended family care as their mothering which exacerbated their motherload as they provide for their families and communities in ways they did not anticipate nor are supported in. Interestingly, although Black tax in literature is spoken about in a transaction and financial way, the findings of this study reflected a diversity of interpretations. The mothers' intentional and instinctive care created a pathway for them to embody their identities as Black women in professional occupations and provide for their family. The next theme explores cultural dissonance that mothers experience residing in a cultural context that fails to recognise nor validate them as mothers.

3. Cultural dissonance and the motherload

Black middle-class mothers who live in communities far from their extended family tend to be separated from their traditional cultural practices. This may shape their livelihoods and meaning as mothers as they practice motherhood in communities that differ from their upbringing. The participants' experiences highlight how navigating connections between community cultural practices and western workplace cultures creates experiences of cultural dissonance. The above is presented in the following sub-themes: 3.1) Black mothers are socially and culturally isolated, and 3.2) Building community and reclaiming space for Black working mothers.

3.1 Black mothers are socially and culturally isolated

In building professional lives (in urban areas) that are either geographically or ideologically set apart from their traditional cultural upbringings (typically in rural or peri-urban areas), the participants spoke about how their identities as black mothers were shaped by the dearth of their rich cultural connections to their community. They explained how living in urban areas that their professional careers have afforded them, has meant living away from their families and kin networks of support. This often leads to a sense of being isolated where there is no help from family members and cousins to play with, requiring them to use their own financial, physical, and mental resources to create support.

So we must ourselves create, imagine, we must create the resources in terms of people who will play with our children, people who love our child. How is that our

responsibility in the other culture? We're born into that. You're born into the family of cousins and endless resources. You can be the nastiest of mother's, but your children will never have no one to play with because they already surrounded, they are born into a family. But here you have to be nice, have to invite your child's friend over. You must do this. And also, what are you doing? You're trying now to create a network. So it works on you as a mother it can affect you. It's not healthy mentally [...]

Motherhood impoverishes you if I can use that. But the other time, it used to enrich you. It used to enrich everyone around. So you go home, everybody will bring gifts, resources will be unending. People will come bringing you, washing you, doing this and that. You were enriched by motherhood. Now, we are impoverished by motherhood.

(Philisiwe, government district manager)

Philisiwe describes what it was like to have lived geographically and ideologically within the African community where one is born into a family that has resources that enrich their experiences of motherhood. She mentions how this experience is starkly set apart from the community she currently lives in which requires her to initiative and create resources to support her family, which impoverishes her as a mother. Philisiwe adds how because she was brought up with rich cultural connections to her community, being isolated from her community's values and practices makes carrying the motherload mentally challenging.

Philisiwe's experience echo's literature on how Black mothers who experience upward mobility are often geographically distanced from their kinship networks, and consequently isolated from the resources that come with it (Bryant et al., 2024; Pillay, 2020; Stewart, 2015;). For example, Pillay (2020)'s study revealed that "kinship capital" which is a culmination of the resources and support mothers require, shapes how particularly young mothers in South Africa can distribute caregiving. While Pillay's (2020) study found that kinship capital is not geographically fixed and can operate across different households and locations, some supports are geographically fixed, such as forming connections with neighbours for your children to play with.

The findings of the study additionally showed how the creation of kinship networks with those who are ideologically distant from one's own values and practices and motherhood stands in the way from receiving support. For example, Philisiwe openly expresses the struggle to create kinship networks in her current urban community where she is expected to do create

networks and care for her children without support from other mothers or her community. Mbalenhle, also remarked: “I feel like the community at large and most of what I'm surrounded by, children and motherhood isn't a valued experience to the extent that it should be.” Both Mbalenhle and Philisiwe highlight how their experiences of motherhood in their current community are distant from the cultural practices they had been taught that govern motherhood which create cultural dissonance. For example, Philisiwe mentions how in her upbringing, she witnessed mothers being enriched and showered with gifts, whereas now these practices are not observed in their current community in the same way. Adekoya et al. (2024)’s study amongst Black women in professional occupations show that mothers often live within competing discourses of upholding tradition that values motherhood whilst also being symbols of modernity which does not value motherhood. Whilst the findings of this study align with Adekoya’s study it additionally shows the ways in which cultural dissonance adds to the motherload. In addition to being socially and culturally distanced from their communities; Jendayi, explains how her exclusion from state-driven care support systems that would assist her with school fees, food and clothing for her child isolates her, which contribute to her experiences of the motherload.

Now, single motherhood is very expensive, especially if you don't have a support network or family. Everything falls on my shoulders. So I get to like, you know, take care of food, clothes, school fees, every single thing. But if you're using, if you're taking care of your children through other systems, there are some things that you can overlook, and that system will take care for you. If I had a system that met me halfway, it might not feel as expensive, but right now, because there's no that, it is very, very expensive. (Jendayi, academic)

Jendayi is a single mother who has relocated from a different country to make South Africa her home. As her child’s father is not present in their lives, the responsibility of caregiving falls solely on her. Jendayi expresses how “single motherhood is very expensive” and she wishes that there was a system in place by the government that assisted and supported her financially as she raises her son.

For Jendayi, as a foreign national who has a professional occupation, she may be excluded from these care support services and not recognised thereby challenging assumptions that black middle-class women who have economic capital face less oppression in comparison to low-income black women (Adekoya, 2024). Consequently, Jendayi has to support her son

on her own without family nor support from the state, which forces her to bear the motherload of needing to cover expensive child care costs (Curenton et al., 2018). Jendayi's experience echoes literature on how Black mothers in professional occupations are often not recognised by the state because; either they are viewed as privileged enough to be exempt from requiring financial and structural support from community, or they are viewed as oppressed in which their community will take care of them as they are guided by principles such as 'Ubuntu'. However, living in South African communities that are predominately White and individualistic such that mothers do not receive support from their neighbours, the care support is out of reach for Jendayi, which can be both a physical and emotional battle for her (Adekoya, 2024). For Jendayi and many other Black mothers who find themselves distanced from their communities and kin ties that would support them, the motherload is heavier as they remain isolated from support and their communities. Instead of motherhood being seen as a shared activity, Jendayi is left feeling isolated and expected to bear the burden of having to carry the motherload on her own (Dow, 2016). The state not providing for these mothers reinforces the identity of a 'strong black woman' (Dow, 2016; Woods-Giscombé, 2010), that they are resilient caregivers who do not need help which works to silence the subjective struggles experienced by Black mothers. The next theme traces how mothers express ways in which the ways in which they themselves build community and reclaim space within organisations.

3.2 Building community and reclaiming space for Black working mothers

As Black women navigating predominantly white and Westernised spaces in their professional lives, they spoke about their experiences of being marginalised and lacking voice as minority identities in their workplaces. Their experiences highlighted the importance of reclaiming space in contexts largely created by and for their white counterparts, and for building community and legacies for the future of black working mothers. For instance, Philisiwe shares how she was committed to creating a safe space for other black mothers in the workplace and the benefit this had for her to 'live out your motherhood':

So as demanding as it is, it is also an opportunity to live out your motherhood. As a black woman, we need these opportunities because we need to sit at certain tables. That's what I also like, is, you know what, some tables I sit on where there is no black woman – and I realize that, you know what? I needed to be on this table to make an influence and to be a voice for somebody else. (Philisiwe, government district manager)

Philisiwe sits in a managerial role at her organisation. She expresses the need for black women to “sit at certain tables” as they remain underrepresented in the professional workplace. South African black women’s careers and professional identities were restricted due to apartheid (Boykins, 2022; Fapohunda, 2022) which may offer insight into how mothers in this study experienced climbing their respective career ladders to attain “opportunities” and to occupy marginalised spaces “where there is no black woman”, as expressed by Philisiwe. Using her position of leadership to listen to other Black mothers, Philisiwe’s journey of reclaiming space in her workplace – which she describes as white and male-dominated – is a transformative process that lightens her burden instead of adding to the motherload. Philisiwe adds to share on the organisational benefits attached to listening to mothers:

I think I'm very happy because I have finally got a seat at the table where I can make a life of another mother better. [...] when they needed that ear, sometimes it's just to be listened and they get that they are able to perform better in their roles.

(Philisiwe, government district manager)

I think because I'm moving with more intention now, I am conscious of taking along the good of those experiences on my journey and making sure to change the bad for the next woman. [...] It doesn't have to be this heavy for the next woman to still benefit from being a black corporate mom, you know?

(Matlou, chartered accountant)

Philisiwe and Matlou who are both in positions of leadership in their organisation, remark about the importance of reclaiming space and building a legacy for future Black working mothers. Although both mothers seem to willingly take on the responsibility to advocate for other mothers and reclaim space for them to feel more represented and heard, it is their organisation’s responsibility to proactively address the systemic need for representation and support for Black working mothers (Boykins, 2022; Fapohunda, 2022). Like Philisiwe shared, this can be initiated by listening to Black mothers’ concerns and requirements to thrive professionally and personally. Matlou added on how her experience as a Black working mother has been “heavy” as she has had bad experiences as a mother in her professional role, hence she hopes to create a legacy that would lighten the load and assist future Black working mothers to navigate the challenges in the workplace.

For other mothers like Mahlatsi, who are in a position where their voice is not recognised in their organisation or given “a seat at the table”, she suffers consequences such as not being available for her children and her husband because of the lack of psychological safety in the workplace. She describes the way in which she feels marginalised and how not having a reclaimed space within the organisation negatively affects her sense of psychological safety, her career and her family.

So when psychological safety isn't there, it plays a huge factor in one, one's career. Being a mom, working mom expected to work long hours because you are no longer a person. Now. You just output. I want this. I want that. It affects the home environment because kids are being neglected. You are married, you have a partner, but they getting neglected.

(Mahlatsi, financial planner)

Mahlatsi, a wife and mother of three, shares how she is expected to work long hours often at the expense of her wellbeing and her family. Mahlatsi’s experience may be explained through the ‘ideal worker’ concept which is an expectation placed on employees to put work first and be consistently available, work long hours, be competitive, hide any weaknesses and refrain from asking for help (Acker, 1990; Zanhour & Sumpter, 2024). Mahlatsi shares further on how the expectation to always be available to her workplace demands, reduces her to being seen as “output” and her dissatisfaction with this mistreatment. She remarked later in the interview on how “you’re trying to prove yourself”, which resonates with many other participants sentiments of needing to constantly working harder to disprove stereotypes that denigrate black women in professional occupations as incompetent (Nash & Moore, 2021; Thomas, 2023). Mahlatsi’s experience of the motherload is exacerbated as she has to navigate mistreatment in the workplace, and manage the guilt of being unavailable for her children. She highlights how – in the absence of occupying space “at the table” – her voice and needs are not met, and her network of support is diminished, thereby shaping her lived experience of bridging her professional and personal worlds.

A few other mothers in the study, like Mosetsana, a married mother of three, shared how she is expected to comply to practices in the workplace even when they are discriminatory and not inclusive. She describes the ways in which she is silenced from voicing her needs and accessing readily available resources and how this affects her motherload.

I have to keep the peace. And I'm also finding that the additional burden with that is that you don't have the mental capacity to even ask because, I mean, I already know that if somebody told me, no, you can't work from home, and there's no valid reason, it will completely change my journey with the institution.

(Mosetsana, academic administrative officer).

Mosetsana's workplace has a work-from home (WFH) policy, however to access these resource you must ask your manager for support. She mentions how often forfeits the opportunity to ask to access this support in an effort to keep the peace and avoid the burden of being denied her request.

The cultural norm within many African cultures where obedience to authority is necessary to avoid punishment or disrespect (Karekwaivanane, 2011; van Zyl-Hermann, 2014), contrasts with the more common practice in professional settings where employees are encouraged to ask for accommodations like work-from-home policies. Thus, for Black mothers, the act of asking for help in a workplace setting may feel culturally conflicting, accustomed to roles and respect within their culture. This explains why Mosetsana, and a few other Black mothers in the study, practiced restraint from expressing their needs and concerns in their organisation, because of the cultural dissonance, which disadvantages them even further. Mosetsana highlights how – as a Black working mother, one's cultural upbringing informs how you navigate organisational spaces – and in the absence of representation and support or a “seat at the table” Black working mothers voices remain silenced, unheard, and unable to access support that is provided. Mosetsana's experience is similar to findings from Munsch et al. (2014) study amongst working men and women in the United States indicating that even when formal policies are offered the extent, the support for employee's utilising these policies often depends on managerial support.

In contrast, Dineo's experience of how a black women in a leadership position gave her the opportunity to learn new skills in the workplace.

And when I said to you, black women will always pull through for you, my friend was doing the due diligence on that deal, and she was like, no, come help me. I need help. So we did that due diligence. And we had to be a two woman team that did not know how to do due diligence. We just learned together. And at least there, I managed to get the experience.

(Dineo, chartered accountant)

Dineo offers an experience on the benefits of building community and a legacy for future Black working mothers. In the interview, she described the ways in which she was discriminated against by her boss, and how a Black woman in a leadership position counteracted that by reclaiming space and including Dineo. Dineo's experience may be explained through Crowder's (2023) theory of intersectional solidarity which is a set of beliefs that is based on an awareness about the oppression that marginalised groups such as Black women face. Furthermore, Crowder (2023) argues that the identities of individuals who are in a position of power to create policies matter as experience discrimination from policies matter. Crowder's (2023) theory aligns with Dineo's experience because her colleague who was a Black woman was sensitized and aware the policies that disproportionately affected Dineo and thus was able to counteract that given her power within the organisation as a manager (Ciccio & Roggeband, 2021; Crowder, 2023; Lee et al., 2023). This shows how for policies to be fair, Black women require representation, and in Dineo's experience a form of feminist alliance afforded her with that (Crowder, 2023). The findings illustrate how reclaiming space in the workplace require representation of Black mothers in the senior management, and through this a pathway for the recognition of the motherload may take place.

Chapter summary

This chapter explored the motherload amongst Black mothers in professional occupations, highlighting how their social identities of race, motherhood and professional occupation intersect and present experiences of being caught between two cultures as they navigate their identities in both personal and professional worlds in their current communities. The three themes traced how Black mothers experienced jostling between tradition and modernity, caring beyond the household and the cultural dissonance experiences of carrying the motherload. The next chapter presents the knowledge contributions, managerial implications, limitations and recommendations of the study.

Knowledge Contributions, Managerial Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations

This study explored how the motherload was experienced among Black mothers, occupying various positions in organisations across different industries in South Africa. The findings highlighted that participants in the study experienced being caught between two different cultures, exacerbating their motherload as they navigated their identities in both their

personal and professional worlds. This chapter discusses the study's contribution to knowledge, practical implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

Contribution to Knowledge

Work-family scholarship on the mental load has focused mostly on white middle-class women from the North, with limited literature in the South (Jaga et al., 2025), with the exception of research on the motherload which focuses on the experiences of black mothers in low-income settings. Scholars such as Tayal and Mehta (2023), and Ajayi et al. (2024) have focused on Black working mothers in India and the United States, highlighting the interplay between the oppression and privileges experienced amongst this specific population. In this study, the motherload is considered as a workplace issue, enriching the concept by understanding how mothers with privileges (such as professional identity and financial privilege) simultaneously experience oppressions from their race and gender identity (due to systemic inequalities such as patriarchy and cultural expectations in the household and workplace). The study's findings demonstrated that Black mothers experiences of the motherload were uniquely shaped by the interlocking motherhood, professional, and gendered identities.

This study contributed knowledge advancement through using intersectionality. This study was able to understand how the intersecting identities of motherhood, race, and profession influence how the motherload is experienced by Black mothers. While research typically considers 'black' people in research as monolithic and homogenous given the way they are typically studied, the study highlighted the complexity of cultural identity and how this influences Black people's social identities in their professional and personal lives. The findings demonstrated how intersectionality as a theoretical framework in this study, reflected a deeper understanding of the experiences of the motherload, and how mothers experience the cognitive, emotional and mental labour of specific tasks. Furthermore, by understanding the socio-cultural context in which care work takes place, this contextualises the cognitive and emotional labour that is manifested in the motherload. The motherload was experienced in the context of socio-cultural expectations that made it challenging for Black mothers to bear the motherload in a cultural context characterised by individualistic and predominately White communities. For example, the study explained how carrying the motherload in a community that does not value kin networks of care (such as individualistic communities) exacerbates the motherload. Thus, intersectionality revealed how the experiences of the motherload is shaped by cultural expectations in the workplace (such as the ideal worker) and the home (such as

shouldering care work), their family structure (being a single mother or married), and expected mothering practices in their community (such as reliance on outsourcing or kin networks of care to share the care load). Furthermore, intersectionality allowed the for nuance of how the motherload is experienced.

Managerial Implications

The study findings reveal that Black working mothers were not recognised in the workplace and as a result they actively sought recognition through building and reclaiming space in their respective organisation's leadership structures. Existing research reveals that providing workplace policies for groups that were previously disadvantaged in the workplace, requires an intersectional approach that includes the voices of these employees in the decision-making process (Brescoll et al., 2013; Crowder, 2023; Munsch et al., 2014). Building on this foundation, organisations need to create a supportive culture where mothers are seen, recognised and are given room to voice their needs. We suggest interventions that managers can decide to take on that will allow the motherload to be recognised in the workplace so that mothers are retained and attracted.

Firstly, organisations can create formalised mentorship programmes where mothers are paired up with other moms that can support them with their professional and personal development (Gomez, 2020). Our findings suggest that the lack of recognition of the motherload in both the mother's households and their workplace exacerbates the motherload for them. Organisations could implement peer-to-peer mentorship programs where the pairs have similar identities, such as for example Black mothers are paired up with other Black mothers who share experiences to enrich the learning and value attained from mentoring. This peer-to-peer recognition and mentorship could create solidarity amongst the mothers as it may allow for the most invisible aspects of the motherload to be recognised as they share experiences. This could lead to mothers feeling seen, heard, and valued within the workplace thereby reducing the motherload (Garcia et al., 2023; Johnson & Patel, 2024; Wayne et al., 2023).

Second, organisations can create ongoing learning and development programmes that promote the inclusion of employees within the organisation (Beharry, 2024). The mothers in the study expressed how they are often held to stereotypes within the organisations. Diversity training can equip employees with cultural awareness that can work to erase misconceptions about minority populations, promoting interpersonal harmony and removing barriers to inclusivity. For example, organisations can equip managers with diversity management

competencies (Jaga et al., 2018), which can serve to transform traditional gender norms such as “the ideal worker” and can help dismantle gender stereotypes affecting Black working mothers (Tayal & Mehta, 2024). Alongside this, organisations can serve to encourage and normalise the participation of men in care work by implementing policies that allow them to work-from-home or leave the office early to attend to their children. To recruit and attract Black mothers, organisations must be intentional about creating an inclusive organisation where leadership and fellow co-workers have insight into the motherload (Garland McKinney and Meinersmann, 2022).

Third, organisations can be more intentional about involving employees in decision-making as it can help increase performance in their roles (Albasha & Marsap, 2024). In South Africa, while Black women are the fastest growing segment in organisations, they have one of the highest turnover rates because they are underrepresented in decision-making leadership roles (Fapohunda, 2022). In tandem with literature, the mothers in this study expressed a willingness to reclaim space, and a desire to sit at tables where they can make an influence. Organisations can create and initiate an open dialogue of communication with employees, creating a space for them to voice their opinion. This helps to foster a culture of inclusivity and collaboration (Johnson & Patel, 2024; Patel & Gupta, 2023) where the managers in the organisation are aware of and begin to address the specific challenges affecting Black women (Moodley & Meintjes, 2024). For example, the mothers in the study expressed how workplace flexibility policies (such as working from home) which may be beneficial in reducing their motherload remain inaccessible to them as they fear being penalised for utilising them. To address this need, organisations should allow mothers to self-determination in customising their workplace schedules to align with their needs, supports them and allows employees to be trusted (Brown & Smith, 2024). In doing so, leaders are not just hearing the opinions of Black working mothers but actively apply their suggests and requests within their decisions of policies within the organisation (Homan et al., 2020).

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Like all research the following limitations were identified in this research study. Specifically, they concern research design, including the research approach, sampling, and data collection.

Firstly, the study utilised a qualitative descriptive interpretivist methodology to explore the motherload amongst Black mothers in professional occupations. The study findings illustrated how the context of South African mothers is shaped by racial and gender systemic

and structural barriers (such as apartheid and patriarchy) which exacerbate the motherload, highlighting the need for action to be taken to address and reduce how the motherload is experienced by Black mothers in professional occupations. Whilst using a qualitative interpretivist methodology met the research objectives, it would be beneficial for future researchers to utilise a participatory action methodology to understand how the motherload could be reduced among Black working mothers. For example, Hankivsky et al. (2014) recommends an intersectional-based policy analysis (IBPA) framework which is guided by descriptive and transformative questions in the data collection phase which will ultimately lead to a deeper data analysis and insight into issues facing a particular sample. Whilst Havinsky's framework is guided towards informing policy, in the context of the motherload, this framework may be useful given the questions asked as it could allow for more participation and action to provide managers with action-driven insights about the motherload to retain and attract Black working mothers.

Although the study decided to focus on exploring the motherload using work-family scholarship to understand the motherload as a workplace issue, given the intersecting racial, professional, and motherhood identities, the study could benefit from a more enriched and action-driven discussion of the invisible aspects of care work in the household. Furthermore, the motherload among low-income mothers has previously been studied using a participatory action research (PAR) methodology which reaped insights that led to action in policy (Jaga et al., 2025), it may be useful for further research on the motherload amongst Black mothers in professional occupations to incorporate this approach.

Secondly, the study participants were mothers in professional occupations across South African organisations which meant that the motherload was explored in relation to their various professional industries. The use of non-probability purposive and snowball sampling was appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research which allowed access to a specific and often unrepresented group. However, snowball sampling can lead to networks of participants who share similar socio-cultural or professional characteristics (Gravetter & Forzano, 2015), which may unintentionally narrow the range of perspectives included. Future research could adopt an industry-specific focus to more closely examine how workplace culture and professional expectations intersect with the motherload. Bahu and Sahayam (2025), for example, explored the experiences of Indian working mothers in the Information Technology (IT) industry and identified challenges such as technostress and limited social support, offering tailored recommendations to support these employees. Future research could offer deeper contextual insights by focusing on single-industry cohorts to centre the motherload more

explicitly as a workplace issue shaped by specific cultural care expectations and responsibilities, and help navigate inherent challenges with snowball sampling when seeking to explore and make sense of diverse participant experiences.

Lastly, semi-structured interviews as a data collection method allowed the researcher to guide the mothers into sharing specific experiences. While semi-structured interviews met the present study's objectives, it was slightly challenging as the mothers expressed how they wished there were more spaces where they could share their experiences in the workplace and home. Narrative inquiry is useful as it centres black women's voices by uncovering the invisible aspects of their lives and recreating stories that oppose preconceived ideas or notions about marginalised groups (McGannon et al., 2025; Smith, 2021a, Woodiwiss et al., 2017;) For example, Dillard (2018) used narrative inquiry by collecting stories and to understanding the lived experiences of working mothers of colour (Asian, Latina, Native American and Black Africa mothers) in the United States of America. Dillard (2018) found that narrative analysis was helpful in uncovering new ways of understanding the experiences of working mothers. Given that there is little understanding of the motherload amongst Black mothers in professional occupations in South Africa and the mothers expression of the need for these spaces, it may be useful for future research to utilise narrative inquiry to allow participants to share their experiences and recreate stories about the motherload.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of the motherload amongst Black mothers in professional occupations in South Africa. After the receipt of ethics, the researcher set up and conducted semi-structured interviews with Black mothers in professional occupations and analysed the data using thematic analysis. The researcher and participants co-constructed knowledge that uncovered experiences of the motherload amongst mothers given how their intersecting social identities of motherhood, race, and profession manifested in the home, workplace, and their communities. The findings illustrated how the mothers navigate the most invisible aspects the cognitive and emotional labour of being mothers in professional occupations, and how the challenges of the cultural expectations in the workplace, home and their communities thereof. The study provided knowledge contributions to the field of work-family research, providing recommendations on useful research methodology and utilising intersectionality as a theoretical framework to guide future researchers in deepening their understanding of the motherload.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Summary Table of Literature Review Articles

Author	Theoretical Framework	Method & Design	Sample & Country	Main Finding
Jaga et al., (2018)	Intersectionality	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews	Black South African Mothers in Professional Employment (<i>N</i> =19)	Gender and race prejudices faced by Black professional women.
Reiss et al., (2023)	Intersectionality	Quantitative Longitudinal	European BS graduates (<i>N</i> =534)	Social class and gender lead to income disparities
Pettigrew (2022)	n/a	Review	n/a	UCW in household is physical, emotional, cognitive and gendered and COVID19 exacerbated this.
Beauregard & Adisa (2023)	Border theory	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews	Nigerian women in law (<i>N</i> =32)	Nigerian female legal professionals react to involuntary events that limit agency to negotiate desired work and personal lives.
Banu et al., (2023)	Boundary theory	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews	Indian women in entrepreneurship (<i>N</i> =25)	Women with younger children and entrepreneurs in early stages of business preferred to integrate work and family roles than to set clear boundary roles using what we know as WLB tactics.
Thorpe et al., (2023)	Intersectionality (feminist)	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews	Young women in New Zealand (<i>N</i> =45)	Intersections determine the practices of care that impact young women's capacity for their own educational, social and career development.
Robertson et al., (2019)	n/a	Qualitative Phenomenological Semi-structured interviews	Mothers in Southern California, US (<i>N</i> =25)	Mental labour is conceptualised as planning/strategizing, monitoring and anticipating needs, meta parenting, knowing, managerial thinking and self-regulation.
Fapohunda (2022)	Intersectionality	Review	Women in South Africa	Constitution produces inequitable outcomes for women providing care services which contrast the realities of care workers with legal protection.
Reich-Stiebert (2023)	n/a	Systematic Literature Review	US American or European middle-class married/partnered	Women perform larger proportion of mental labour (childcare and parental decisions)

			women (<i>n</i> =31) articles*	
Mendonca et al., (2023)	Intersectionality	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews	Indian middle-class and upper-middle-class women (<i>N</i> =8)	Remote work is gendered and classed. Working mothers claimed identities that aligned with norms concerning the ideal mother and working professional.
Dean et al., (2023)	Work-family balance	Review	n/a	The mental load is invisible, enduring and boundary-less. It includes cognitive, emotional and physical labour.
Delaney et al., (2023)	Boundary theory	Qualitative Thematic Analysis Semi-structured interviews	Mothers in EU27, Serbia, England, Iceland & Turkiye in two cycles in 2021 and 2022. (<i>N</i> =424)	Mothers making the switch to working from home was challenging given the unpaid care work responsibilities met with always being home. This was not met with support from flexible workplace policies.
Maclean et al., (2021)	Work-family conflict	Quantitative Self-report questionnaire	Mothers working >15 hrs/week with children under 12 years. (<i>N</i> =1375). 91% of sample White	Intensive motherhood ideology contributes to guilt experienced by mothers. However, even mothers with low ideal-self discrepancy are vulnerable to WIF guilt when WIF conflict is high.
Chennangodu and Rajendra (2023)	Boundary theory	Qualitative Place-making Semi-structured interviews and autoethnographic reflections	Indian mothers in rural India (<i>N</i> =5)	Women working from home had to reorganise work boundaries but this was based on the historical hierarchies of gender and understandings of work and paid care work.
Li and Laughlin (2023)	n/a	Quantitative	Working mothers in the US, Canada, England, Germany and the Netherlands (<i>n</i> =837) posts*	Care needs to be seen as infrastructure. Working mothers experience child care crises because of the invisibility of care work such that their support structures (informal) do not support them enough.
Moussié and Alfors (2018)	n/a	Qualitative Action-research-policy	Informal workers (women) in Sub-Saharan Africa	Unpaid care work is a gender equality issue. Women in informal work need child care services thus the governments narrative needs to shift to be inclusive of social protection and economic empowerment through solidarity networks of care.
Nadasen (2017)	n/a	Review		Need to revalue care by considering the laws, policies, family welfare, living wage and a new attitude.

Tripathi et al., (2022)	n/a	Systematic review	Women in South Asia	Care work policies need to incorporate unique cultures, demographics and labour markets in the context it serves for.
Fast et al., (2023)	n/a	Quantitative Regression	Canadian care givers (N=6888)	Monetising the value of family care work makes it more visible and can aid in creating systems of long term care infrastructure.
Ernawati et al., (2022)	n/a	Systematic review (N=8) studies	Articles in PubMed, Embase, Scopus, AgeLine-Medline databases in 2012-2021.	Workplace wellness programs for mothers were alleviating health problems and costs.
Tayal and Mehta (2022)	n/a	Mixed Methods (Survey and Interview)	N = 462 middle-class women working in India (survey) N = 145 (interview) professional women working in India	The challenges faced by women pertaining to work-life balance depended on the occupation, work arrangements, family structure and work stations.
Keldenich (2021)	n/a	Quantitative Survey Time-Use Survey (secondary data)	N = 2365	The relationship between motherhood and affective well-being is moderated by labour market status. Showing that working mothers with more 'time' working in part-time jobs have more affective wellbeing than those in full-time jobs.
Mosseri (2021)	n/a	Quantitative. 500-Family Study Dataset (Secondary data)	N = 500	Culture plays a role in mothers finding a middle-ground between work and family; influencing how much they will adhere to work-devotion schema or family-devotion schema. In both cases, mothers tend to find a middle ground as opposed to quitting one or the other but this is shaped by culture.
Wreyford et al. (2023)	n/a	Quantitative survey	N = 523	COVID-19 exposed the incompatibility between gendered unpaid care work and intensive professional occupations in UK television. WFH is not a solution, and should be approached with caution as it does not alleviate the burden of both home and work on mothers.
Dugan and Barnes-Farrell (2020)	Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)	Quantitative Survey	N = 440 working mothers (87% white)	The second shift that mothers perform is associated with less time and energy resources which leads to decreased wellbeing. Self-care was proposed as a self-enhancing behaviour for mother to cope. Interestingly, time can be retrieved but not energy.
Childress et al. (2023)	Critical Feminist Theory	Qualitative semi-structured interviews	N = 44	Mothers have internalised expectations to shoulder domestic labour and professional work obligations. Despite the opportunity that COVID-19 brought by exposing the gender disparities and norms calling for structures (work) and (men) to do something about it.

Huebener et al. (2023)	n/a	Quantitative survey	<i>N</i> = 3500	Gender role attitudes are responsive to change in institutional factors. COVID-19 led to a change in attitudes towards maternal employment due to the lack of care infrastructure (men were helping more and women were holding them accountable) but these changes returned back to normal after some time.
Randles (2021)	n/a	Qualitative interviews (telephonically)	<i>N</i> = 70	Mothers across different social classes experience and respond to the intensive mothering differently. The central tenet around intensive mothering perpetuates inequalities with poor mothers often struggling to meet needs of childcare and often overlooks the sacrifices and hardships they often need to make.
Sevilla and Smith (2020)	n/a	Quantitative Survey	<i>N</i> = 4,361	COVID-19 exposed the gendered division of childcare and exacerbated it. Sevilla & Smith (2020) found that mothers often took on more childcare in the household and it having consequences on their wellbeing and career progressions in the short term. However, in the medium term, women may continue to face the brunt of childcare needs. In the long term, the re-organisation of work such as with remote work may not foster equal distribution in the household and may require policies that include more men into the household.
Petts and Carlson (2023)	n/a	Quantitative Survey	<i>N</i> = 2 waves 1 st wave – (<i>N</i> = 828) 2 nd wave (<i>N</i> = 1966)	Mothers were disproportionately burdened with cognitive labour during the pandemic leading to lower wellbeing.
Haney & Barber (2021)	n/a	Quantitative Survey	<i>N</i> = 4600	Mothers did not see any change in the distribution of tasks in the household pre-pandemic and during the pandemic suggesting the unequal distribution of care work. They found that generally gender inequality is perpetuated at the individual level, organisational level and institutional level. Mothers continue to face consequences that are detrimental to their mental health.
Krishna (2024)	n/a	Qualitative Online Survey (interviews)	<i>N</i> = 50	Indian women faced time poverty when moving from work to home – this was furthered by the feminised labour that is attributed to women (such as care) and how they felt that gender inequality is something that can be achieved outside the home and not within.
Lee & Waite (2005)	n/a	Mixed methods: Time-Use Surveys (diary writing) and	<i>N</i> = 500	Husbands and wives spend 2-3 hours thinking about housework even when they are not performing it (evidence of cognitive labour). Gender gap between amount of hours spent on housework between husbands and wives. Husbands tend to overestimate time spent and they also tend to underestimate the discrepancy between their time spent and their wives.
Daniels 1987	n/a	Review	n/a	Women's work is devalued, unrecognised. The invisible work they do often exists in the private sphere and seen as a natural outpouring of their abilities.
Walzer (1997)	Constructionist theory	Qualitative interviews	<i>N</i> = 50 US new mothers and fathers	Mothers often left their jobs to look after their children. The reason for this was due to interactional and institutional contexts that influence their employment decisions <i>and</i> how their husbands/fathers construct household arrangements.

Appendix B
Consent Form



An Intersectional Exploration of the Motherload among Black Mothers in Professional Occupations in South Africa

Section of Organisational Psychology
School of Management Studies, University of Cape Town

1. Invitation and purpose

You are invited to take part in my research on Black mothers who are in professional occupations. This research forms part of me obtaining my master's degree in Organisational Psychology at University of Cape Town

2. Procedures

If you decide to take part, I will ask you to have a face-to-face interview with me either in person or on an online meeting platform. The interview will be focused on your experiences of being a mother with a part-time or full-time professional occupation. The interview should take around 60 minutes.

3. Inconveniences

If at any point of the interview you do not feel comfortable to continue, you can choose to withdraw from the study without any consequences. The interviews will be conducted at a convenient meeting place. The most convenient time for you and the researcher will be arranged.

4. Benefits

You are given an opportunity to share your views and experiences and your information will contribute to the larger purpose of understanding experiences of unpaid care work among Black mothers in professional occupations.

5. Privacy and confidentiality

The interviews will be recorded and will be conducted in a private space to ensure confidentiality and your interview responses will not be used other than for research purposes.

The researcher will ensure that your personal information and interview data is safe and stored on a password protected laptop. For the data analysis stage, your interview data will be stored without your name and other personal identifiers. .

6. Contact details

If you have questions or concerns about the study, please contact the:

Researcher: Moletlo Somo, smxm003@myuct.ac.za

Research Supervisor : Ameeta Jaga, Ameeta.jaga@uct.ac.za

7. Signatures

(Participant's name) _____ has been informed of the nature and purpose of the procedures described above including any risks involved. She/they has been given time to ask any questions and these questions have been answered to the best of the researcher's ability.

Researcher's Signature

Date

I have been informed about the research and understand its purpose, possible benefits, risks, and inconveniences. I agree to take part in this interview as a participant. I know that I am free to withdraw this consent and quit this project at any time, and that doing so will not cause me any penalty.

Participant's Signature

Date

PERMISSION TO RECORD INTERVIEWS

I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and that the researcher will take strict precautions to safeguard my personal information throughout the assignment period.

Participant's Signature

Appendix C
Ethical Clearance Letter



2024/07/09

COM/01018/2024

RE: Research Ethics Committee Project Approval Letter

Dear Moletlo Somo, (Principle Investigator)

Your application for ethics review of your project titled

An Intersectional Exploration of the Motherload among Black Mothers in Professional Occupations in South Africa

has been reviewed and evaluated by the
Faculty of Commerce Research Ethics Committee (REC).

Based on the information supplied your application has been successful and is approved.

You may proceed with your research project.

Please note that should:

- (i) any serious or adverse effects to participants occur and/or,
- (ii) aspect(s) of your current project change and/or
- (iii) any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project occur then you should immediately report this to the approving REC. You may be required to submit an amendment to this application, in order to determine whether the changed aspects increase the ethical risks of your project.

Please note the following additional conditions associated with this approval:

- (i) * Ethics approval granted through 30 June 2025

Regards,

Thomas Moultrie
Chairperson
Commerce Research Ethics Committee

Appendix D

Interview schedule

Opening

This section aims to establish rapport, explain the purpose, motivation, and timeline of the interview. The following text is an example of the conversation I may start with when meeting with the participant.

Hello, my name is Moletlo Somo, and I am a master's student specialising in Organisational Psychology at the University of Cape Town. This year, I am conducting research as part of my dissertation that needs to be completed by the end of the year. I am so thankful that you are here today, I thought it would be lovely to interview you as you fulfil the criteria for candidates.

I would like to understand your experiences of what it is to be a black mother and have a professional job. The interview should take about 60 minutes as mentioned before.

Questions

1. Can you tell me about your job, what position do you hold, what are your roles and responsibilities?
 - a. Probe: how they entered the profession, is the profession male dominated, is it a STEM profession? What is the organisational culture, is it family friendly?
 - b. Probe: What is their experience of working in this role/ profession, as a mother, and as black woman?
2. Could you tell me about your family?
 - a. Probe: marital status, number of children and structure of your immediate family household, extended family care dependents?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities you have as a mother?
 - a. Try to figure out what is mental, physical, emotional, demands without explicitly asking but probe some questions.
 - b. Does their identities of being black influence their mothering role and responsibilities - in what ways?
 - c. Does having a professional job influence your mothering role and responsibilities - in what ways?
(probe social and cultural expectations from both the work and family/community)

- d. What makes their above experienced challenging and what makes it easier (e.g., who supports? What types of supports)
 - i. Probe: in comparison to your children's father, how satisfied are you with the division of care work? How do you feel about that.
 - e. How do these challenges / opportunities of being a black mother with a professional job affect you?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Closing

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me during this interview. As I have the recording, I will listen to it once more to ensure I have everything you have mentioned in the way you have spoken about it. If you have any more questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

Appendix E

Thematic Map

Figure 1

Jostling Between Tradition and Modernity: Black women navigating the motherload

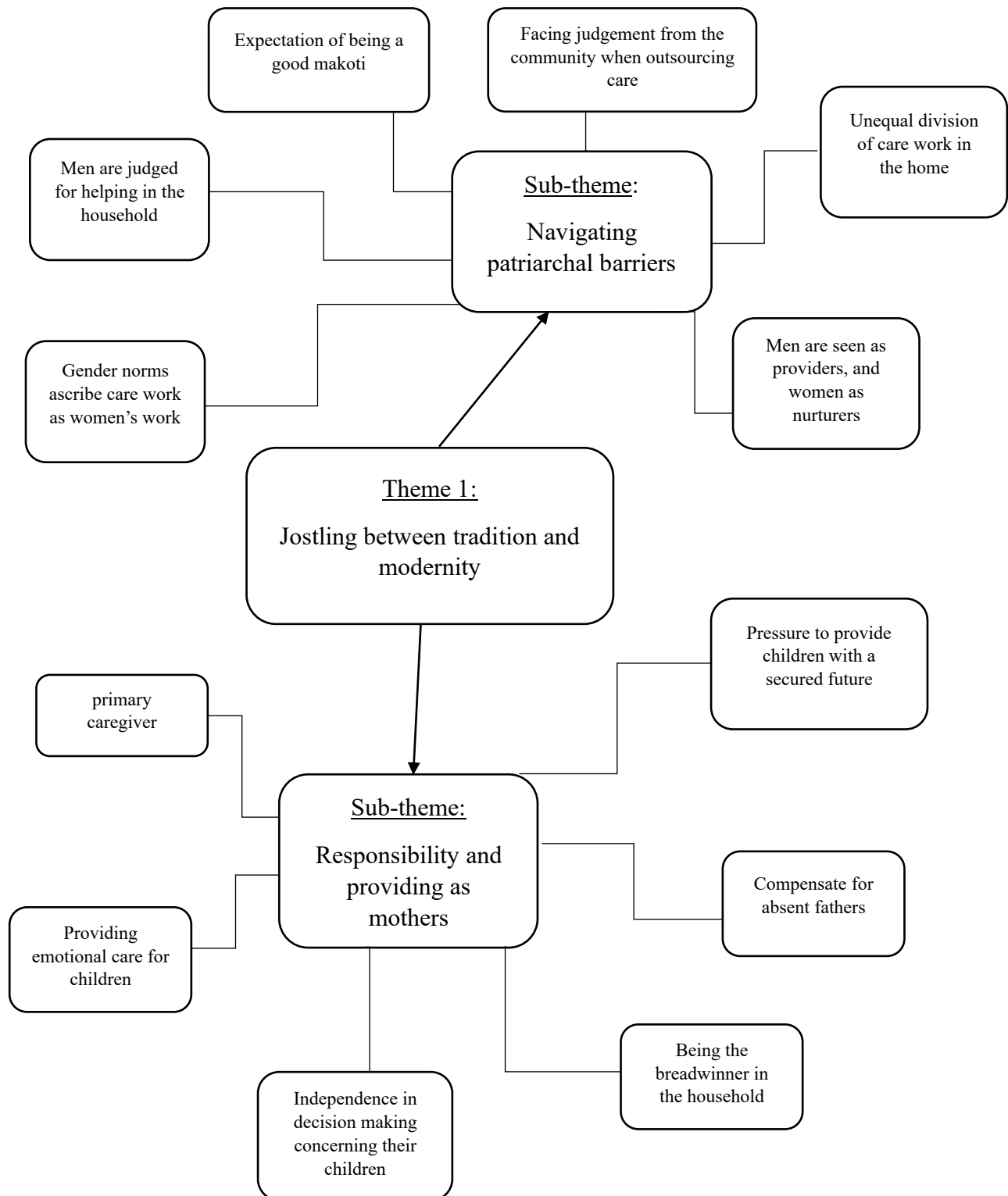


Figure 2

Black Tax and Caring Beyond the Household

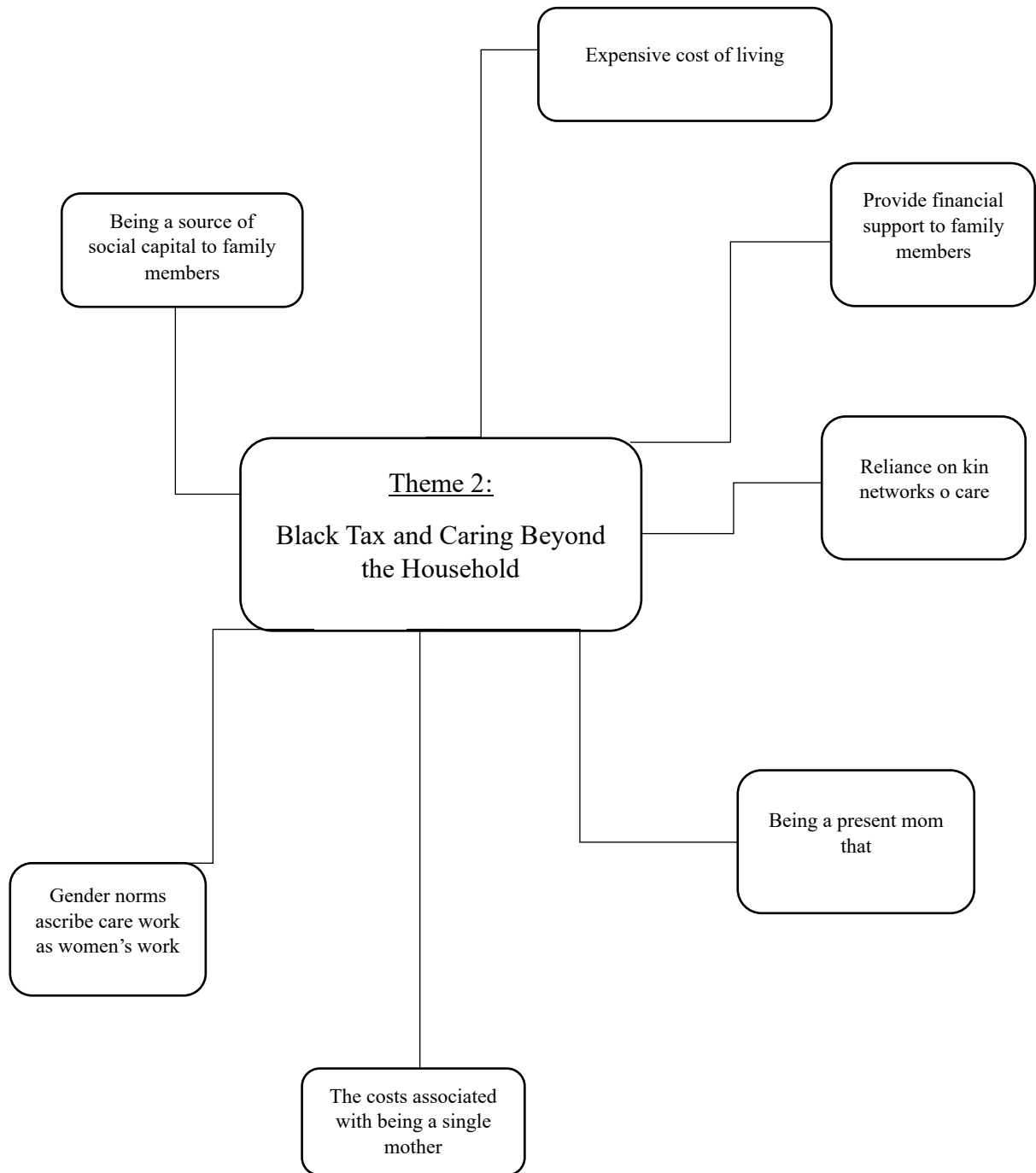
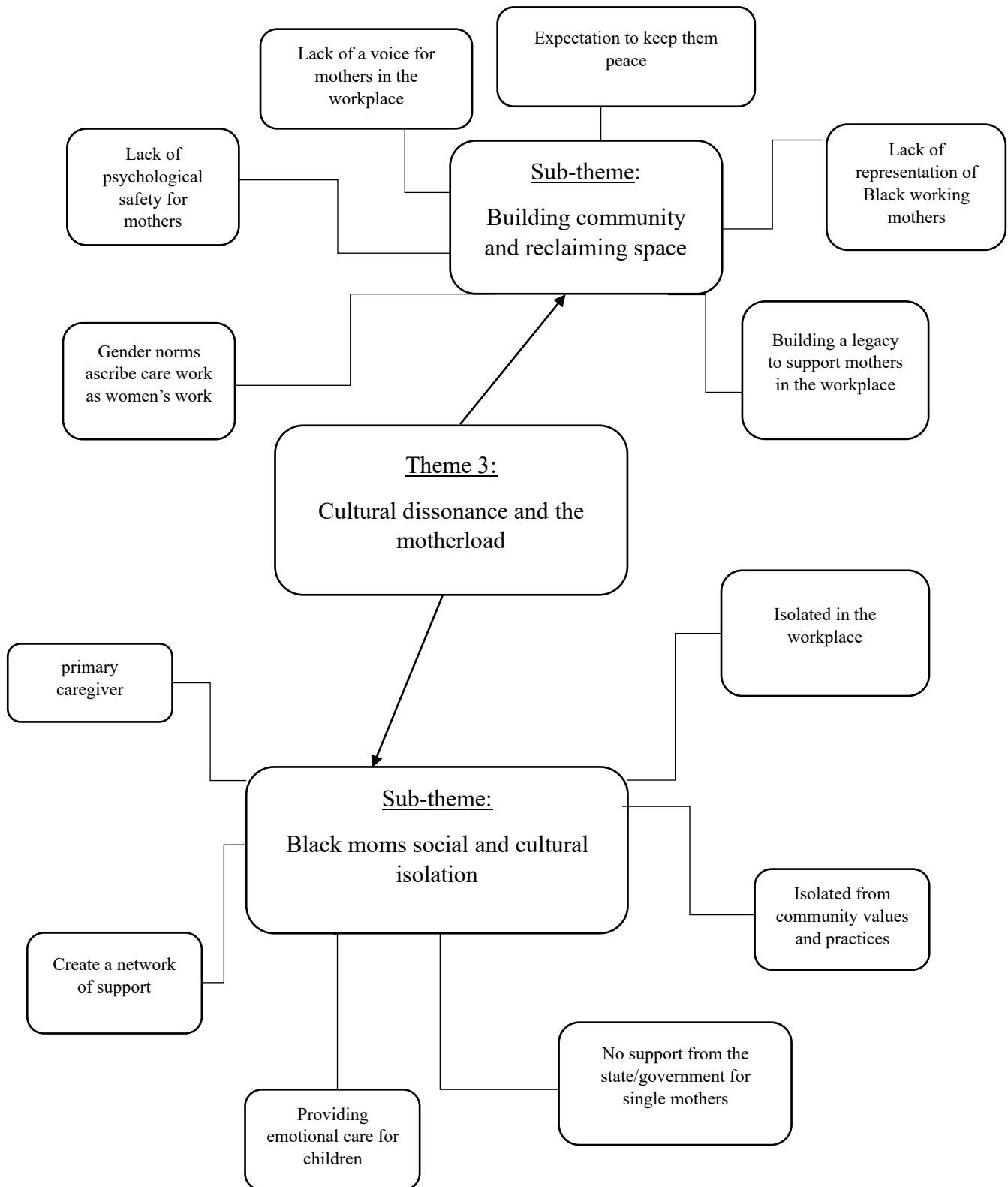


Figure 3

Cultural Dissonance and the Motherload



*I confirm that the dissertation submitted is the dissertation that will be examined.