

The Invisible Shift: The Mental Load of Motherhood

Anna-Maria Occhiuto

A

Thesis

In

The Department of

Sociology and Anthropology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

(Sociology) at Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

July 2021

© Anna-Maria Occhiuto, 2021

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Anna-Maria Occhiuto

Entitled: The Invisible Shift: The Mental Load of Motherhood

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Sociology)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair

Beverley Best

_____ Examiner

Daniel Dagenais

_____ Examiner

Danielle Gauvreau

_____ Thesis Supervisor(s)

Beverley Best

Approved by: _____

Professor Kregg Hetherington. Graduate Program Director

August 2021 _____

Dr. Pascale Sicotte. Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

The invisible shift: the mental load of motherhood

Anna-Maria Occhiuto

“Every minute of every day a mom is negotiating at a round table of time, energy, productivity, kids’ happiness, and family survival.”

– Scary Mommy (A popular mom blog)

Mothers sometimes use the term “mental load” to describe the day-to-day experience of managing a home and family, an invisible workload that has received little attention in social research and in the discourses around the gendered division of labour. The aim of this study is to elaborate the experience of domestic cognitive work of a small sample of mothers from Quebec, Canada, using qualitative in-depth interviews. Through a critical grounded theory analysis, the main findings showed two overarching motivations for the mental load of mothers: (1) to manufacture household and family efficiency, and (2) to cultivate family well-being and happiness. Using social reproduction theory, I suggest a reflection of the mental load as an integral process to late capitalist reproduction, where mothers develop what I call an *internalized manager* to organize, plan, strategize, monitor, worry, forecast, negotiate, and remember information that mediate and protect the household against capital’s rising downward pressure on the time and resources available for workers’ reproduction.

Acknowledgments

To my friends and family, thank you for supporting me throughout this project, for cheering me on and seeing my potential, even in the moments where I could not. To my colleagues, who made the last few years a whole lot easier, whether it was going for beers after class, venting sessions in the lounge, grading parties, or zoom writing sessions, you all know who you are.

To my supervisor and mentor, Dr. Beverley Best, a big thank you for your time, encouragement, and dedication. Your passion for Marx is contagious. Your support has been invaluable, and I will always appreciate the wisdom, confidence, and patience you have shown me.

Thank you to the professors who have had an impact on my studies and who have given me many opportunities for growth: Dr. Daniel Dagenais, Dr. Martin French, Dr. Danielle Gauvreau, and Dr. Meir Amor.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my dear grandmother, who sacrificed most of her life and free labour to see her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren thrive.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| <hr/> | |
| CHAPTER 1: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE | 5 |
| The “Mental Load” | 5 |
| Gender and Labour | 8 |
| Separate Spheres: Drawing the Lines Between the Waged and Unwaged | 10 |
| Women and Reproductive Work | 13 |
| Invisible Labour | 15 |
| The Need For a Fourth Category | 16 |
| Household Mental Labour | 17 |
| The Mental Load of Motherhood | 21 |
| The Gap in the Research | 25 |
| Research Questions | 25 |
| Theoretical Framework | 26 |
| <hr/> | |
| CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY | 29 |
| The Issue of Method | 29 |
| Critical Grounded Theory | 30 |
| Data Collection: Strategy and Process | 31 |
| Ethics | 32 |
| Sampling and Recruitment | 33 |
| Demographic | 33 |
| Checking For Bias | 34 |
| Interviews and Focus Group | 34 |
| Analysis | 35 |
| <hr/> | |
| CHAPTER 3: RESULTS | 36 |
| Overview of the Mental Load | 37 |
| Etymology: A Load Implies a Heavy Weight | 37 |
| “It’s a Woman Thing:” The Gendered Dimension of the Mental Load | 38 |
| “ <i>Un Réajustement Monstre</i> :” Development of the Mental Load | 40 |
| Consequences of Mental <i>Overload</i> | 41 |
| Fatigue and Stress | 41 |
| Relationship Conflicts | 43 |
| Strategies to Alleviate Mental Overload | 44 |
| Manufacturing Efficiency | 45 |
| “ <i>Il Faut Que Ça Roule</i> :” Time, Efficiency and Productivity | 46 |
| “My Calendar Is My Life:” Routines and Schedules | 48 |
| Sundays Are Not For Rest: Organizing and Planning | 49 |
| Knowing How To Do It Better: Remembering and Know-How | 50 |
| Forecasting and Troubleshooting | 52 |
| Cultivating the “Happy Family” | 54 |
| Contemplation and Prioritization | 55 |
| Monitoring and Worrying | 56 |
| Defending and Negotiating | 57 |
| Leisure and Happy Moments | 58 |
| A Theory of the Mental Load | 60 |
| A Breakdown of the Mental Load is a Breakdown of Efficiency and Family Well-being | 60 |
| Identity, Motherhood, and the Mental Load | 63 |
| Historicizing the Mental Load | 66 |
| Social Factors | 68 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| <u>CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS</u> | <u>71</u> |
| The Mental Load of Motherhood | 71 |
| Invisible Labour: Literally and Figuratively | 73 |
| There's No Time | 74 |
| The Internalized Manager | 75 |
| Mental Labour and the Circuit of Reproduction | 79 |
| | |
| <u>CONCLUSION</u> | <u>83</u> |
| Limitations | 83 |
| Contributions | 84 |
| Future Research | 85 |
| | |
| <u>APPENDIX</u> | <u>86</u> |
| Interview Guides | 86 |
| Coding Structure | 89 |
| Participants' Mental Load List/Journal Samples | 96 |
| | |
| <u>REFERENCES</u> | <u>104</u> |

Introduction

In 2017, a feminist cartoonist produced a piece entitled “You Should Have Asked,” an introduction and elaboration of the concept of the “mental load” as a contemporary women’s issue (Emma, 2017, <https://english.emmaclit.com/2017/05/20/you-shouldve-asked/>). The artist transmits what she sees as a familiar household dynamic: women take on the demanding and energy-consuming role of “household manager,” and they must ask, direct, and instruct men as the “underlings” on the chores or child duties to perform (Emma, 2017). Emma also demonstrates how the mental load means “always having to remember” and requires the capacity to hold on to a significant amount of knowledge such as to-do lists, schedules, reminders, and children’s needs and preferences. Domestic cognitive work is often done simultaneously with other activities such as working, shopping, and leisure time. Emma argues that women bear most of the “invisible” and “exhausting” mental load associated with the home and family. Her comic went viral on social media, with millions of likes and shares on various social media platforms, receiving worldwide attention on news and media networks such as NBC, ABC, The Guardian and the Today Show. The comic’s success is a testament to its ability in capturing the feelings and frustrations of women and mothers today, while also giving a name to what has been, until now, unacknowledged and invisible work.

The mental load (ML) concept comes from the cognitive sciences, understood as an individual’s increased cognitive or mental capacity, effort and memory needed to perform any given task or process (Gaillard, 1993). Recently, the question of the ML has been reframed by a critique of gender in which feminists are taking up the concept in the analysis of women’s experiences of work, domestic life and motherhood. Through this lens, the ML has been broadly

defined as the intensification of thinking, strategizing, anticipating, managing, delegating, coordinating, monitoring, decision-making, and maintenance of the knowledge necessary for the day to day unfolding of life required for childrearing, housework, career obligations, maintaining social networks, volunteering, and for the performance of idealized gender roles (Robertson, 2017; Robertson et al., 2019). Judith Warner (2006) calls this a “colonization of the mind” that has had a profound impact on how women engage and experience the so-called work-family dialectic in an age where women are encouraged, if not expected, to “have it all” (p.1).

While the question of women’s labour has been a central pillar of Marxist-feminist analysis, the ML has yet to be understood through this lens. Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) seeks to reveal the processes involved in social reproduction in its totality, i.e. the daily and generational maintenance of the social group or population and to understand how these processes are connected to society’s structures, institutions, and to its mode of production (Bhattacharya, 2017; Gimenez, 2018). When applied to capitalism, SRT seeks to outline and map the processes that are in one way influenced by capitalist social relations while at the same time reproducing and resisting them. My objective for this study was to obtain a comprehensive elaboration of the real-life experiences of the mental load of Quebec mothers and use SRT as a framework in which to historicize and situate cognitive domestic labour within and in relation to global circuits of reproduction and production.

Using Critical Grounded Theory (CGT) as a qualitative method provided a platform for women’s voices themselves to elaborate their subjective experiences of the ML while allowing myself as the researcher to evaluate for “social processes and phenomena pertaining to the problems of power, inequality, and discrimination” (Hadley, 2019, p.3). Inspired by the feminist tradition of the theoretical co-construction of women’s issues, I asked participants to help me

theorize the ML through carefully structured and reflexive questions. As a mother myself and having my own experience of the cognitive dimension of housework and childcare, I sought diligently to limit my personal bias while also using my insights as strategically throughout the research process. Data were collected via in-depth interviews and focus groups and analyzed following systematic procedures including the transcription of the interviews verbatim, followed by a three-step coding process and thematic analysis. Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sample of participants was small (n=6) and the project incurred a brief delay in the analysis of the data. Despite this limitation, I believe the women's narratives are rich and shed important light on a concept still in the foundational phase of research. The findings of this study can provide important insight into future research.

While the descriptions of the ML corroborate with categories found in previous studies of mental labour (Daming, 2019; Robertson et al. 2017), I propose a new definition that synthesizes both ontological and theoretical elements of the ML: The mental load is *the mental effort and processes involved in the optimal daily and generational reproduction of the household, family and the self*. Chapter 3 of this thesis outlines the content of participants' ML, organized into four overarching themes: (1) an outline of participants' knowledge and development of the ML, (2) manufacturing efficiency and (3) cultivating the happy family, and (4) a theory of the mental load, where participants were asked to reflect on what the ML did for society, what impact they felt it has on women's identities, its historicity, and how social factors external to the family interact with the ML. Chapter 4 discusses and analyzes the ML through the lens of Social Reproduction Theory and the role of cognitive domestic labour within the circuit of capitalist social reproduction. The ML can be seen as a reflection of market instrumentality, efficiency, productivity, responsabilization of the self and one's family via what I call the

internalized manager, or what becomes a constant, repetitive, and disciplining inner voice. This internalized manager is a mother's way of reproducing herself and her family on a daily and generational basis and a necessary reaction to the growing demands on workers and families, the waning of free time, and the depletion of public funding and social programs that have helped sustain people's health and well-being.

Chapter 1: A Review of the Literature

The “Mental Load”

The concept of the “mental load” (ML) generates from the field of psychology during the 1950s and later spread to the cognitive, behavioural and performance sciences (Sanders, 1979, p.49). Alternative appellations for the mental load include mental or cognitive effort and mental or cognitive workload. Until today, scholars define and apply the concept differently; its theoretical, analytical, and methodological principles have been a site of much debate and variation (Cain, 2007; Sanders, 1979). In his review of the literature, Brad Cain (2007) shows how the concept is necessarily “multidimensional and multifaceted,” where mental effort in the human operator comes from various demands and stimuli (p.1). A.F. Sanders (1979) finds that some researchers consider the ML a purely physiological response or process in the brain, while others argue that “social and emotional components (leadership, management relations, personal relations)” including the subject’s perceptions of their ML, are just as important as the brain’s functions and processes (p.42). For instance, psychologist Neville Moray (1979) defines the ML as an objective neurological process and “the rate at which information is processed by the human operator, and basically the rate at which decisions are made and the difficulty of making the decisions” (p. 13).

On the other hand, Cain (2007) recognizes the ML more as a “mental construct... reflecting the interaction of mental demands imposed on operators by tasks they attend to” (p.1), highlighting the centrality of one’s subjective experience of mental load. Because the term “load” implies a burden or extra weight, researchers recognize that there is a threshold in how much the brain is capable of computing and that in the event one should reach or go beyond that threshold, there would be some breakdown or failure of the system (i.e. overload or burnout)

(Moray, 1979, p.13). While the ML as a concept is well developed, even today, Cain argues that “a commonly accepted, formal definition of (mental) workload doesn’t exist” (p. 3).

A large proportion of ML research includes how to “determine how hard a person tries to actively process presented information” or the impact of environmental and situational factors on cognitive processes (Kirschner & Kirschner, 2012, p.2182). According to Gaillard (1993), “high task demands” and specific environmental conditions require an increased mobilization of mental effort to complete a task or goal versus other situations, demands or environments (p.992). “Automatic” mental processes typically done in habitual, repetitive or monotonous tasks require minimal “energy mobilization,” versus tasks that are more “dynamic” (i.e. various environmental factors fluctuate constantly) or that require specific attention to knowledge and memory capacity that will need far greater preparation and energy resources (Gaillard, 1993, p.992, p.999).

Finding the most appropriate and precise measures to determine the quantity and quality of ML is still a debated issue due to the multidimensional quality of cognitive processes. The problem first was how to develop a scientific approach to the ML-based on empirical evidence, and second, which tools were appropriate to account for the amount and intensity of ML (Sanders, 1979). A.F. Sanders (1979) found that there are three broad categories of ML measures: 1. behavioural measures (i.e. task performance tests, reaction time, fatigue, and memory tests); 2. psychophysiological measures (i.e. examining pupil dilation, heart rate); and 3. subjective judgments (i.e. individual’s subjective rating of a task and the intensity of mental effort needed) (p.44-48). For Sanders, the pursuit of a purely empirical ML would discount the importance of subjective experience, which could impact its physiology (p.42). While the quantitative versus qualitative research method on the ML is still debated, most scholars agree

that studying ML demands various approaches while yielding various results, depending on the method chosen (Cain, 2007; Moray, 1979; Sanders, 1979).

Due to the concept's flexibility and scope, the ML has been used in various fields such as education and learning environments (Sweller et al., 2003) and performance capabilities in different "safety-critical" professions including "automotive, aviation, air traffic control, space flight, and defense" and industries with high levels of human-machine interaction (Wilson, 2019). According to Gaillard (1993), the main objective of ML research is to determine how to avoid overwork and errors, to develop technologies and project designs that increase efficiency, to adapt and adjust workplace (or educational) environments and training, and to implement better management, teaching and training strategies, and salary protocols (p.997).

The vastness of the research and literature on the ML developed in psychology and the cognitive sciences demonstrate the value of the concept in its ability to study and understand human cognitive behaviour and performance. Despite the scope of the knowledge and applications of ML, it has only ever been framed under the context of the public or productive sphere, such as in workplaces and educational institutions. In this sense, an analysis of gender is not, if seldom, factored into this research and its presence outside of the productive realm and into alternative spaces such as the home is limited (Robertson et al. 2019). In this way sociology is equipped to make a comprehensive socially gendered analysis of the ML. It is helpful to begin with a review of the literature of the concepts of work and gender to understand how the ML can have a gendered dimension and how it can be used in alternate spaces of life such as in the home.

Gender and Labour

A discussion about the gendered division of labour can take various analytical approaches depending on the discipline, including, but not limited to, biological, psychological, and sociological perspectives. While it will be impossible to completely map out a review of the entire history of the literature of gender and work here, I aim to emphasize the importance of acknowledging the gendered division of labour as something *historical* (i.e. continuously transforming and evolving); where certain beliefs, behaviours and practices are made both relevant and irrelevant under various socio-historical circumstances (Bailey, 2002; Gimenez, 2018). In other words, the work assigned or even naturalized to a given gender changes and takes on new meaning depending on its social circumstances.

The definition of labour will be taken in a wider sense, using Marx's (1976) definition of labour-power being "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, the capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind" (p.270). Marxist feminists understand that gender and its various expressions are historical and informed by social structures. Specifically, they show how women, for various reasons, have been subordinated and oppressed in particular ways that serve capital and the reproduction of capitalist relations. Feminists attribute women's economic, political, and cultural subordination to a history of patriarchy, a social structure and system which places economic, political, and cultural power in the hands of and to the benefit of men. In comparison, the critique of women's oppression through a Marxist-feminist analysis moves beyond a critique of patriarchy to an investigation that shows how capital requires these systems that subordinate certain groups with the aims of cheapening labour through the reproduction of class and the expansion and contraction of a reserve army of labour (Federici,

2004; Gimenez, 2018). For Federici, women's subordination within a capitalist system develops through an extended historical process centering on the crisis of the reproduction of the population (i.e. during times of plague or the deplorable working conditions of the 19th century), which for capitalists, results in a crisis of capital if there are no workers available to produce it. Martha Gimenez (2018) states that the analysis of women's oppression and their devalued labour is therefore incomplete without a structural analysis of capitalism:

“It is not a collusion between men, either individually or collectively, which placed propertyless women into the location of domestic unwaged workers, but the structural effects of the laws of capital accumulation, the secular trends towards a relative decline in the demand for labour combined with the universalisation of commodity production and reproduction.” (p.254)

Once an understanding of the structural contradictions imposed upon labour by capital is achieved, an analysis of gendered subjects (i.e. gender identities) and work can proceed. For instance, Gimenez (2018) argues that gender identities that fit within (or beyond) the categories of “woman” or “man” are always embedded to some extent within the social structures, institutions, and power relations of a society, while also setting the stage for gender identity to be a site of struggle and resistance against the limitations of those structures (p.6). In other words, the society or social group one belongs to will determine, at least to a certain degree and range, how gender is embodied and performed. Kathi Weeks (2011) describes how gender informs the labour one does through what she calls “work's subjectification function,” where labour's output isn't limited to goods and services but also the production of “social and political subjects” (p.8). In this sense, gender identity and how one performs gender are based not only on biological and psychological factors but also within broader social and political processes. When it comes to work, Weeks argues that while gender is one aspect of the work one does (i.e. what jobs are typically done/preferred by men and women, where the work takes place and so on), work is also

a site in which one is capable of performing or “doing gender” (p.10). One of the historical developments that has informed a capitalist gendered division of labour is the separation of two realms of activity: production and reproduction.

Separate Spheres: Drawing the Lines Between Waged and Unwaged Work

Part of identifying various categories of work is to bring awareness to *where* the work is taking place. While historically and cross-culturally, gender has factored into a formal-informal division of labour to some degree, Federici (2004) has shown how the evolution of capitalism’s particular patriarchal order emerged through the bifurcation of two realms of work, production and reproduction. Briefly, the productive sphere is where workers gain access to a wage in exchange for their labour-power, while all of the activities and efforts (i.e. food preparation, household maintenance, education, biological reproduction and so on) required to reproduce oneself and family is within the private sphere and is unwaged. Karen Dale (2009) argues that before the separation, *all* activities in the home contributed to the economic inputs and outputs of the family (p.130); in other words, domestic labour was deeply valued and considered to be as necessary as the activities outside the home (i.e. hunting, gathering, small scale food production). It was not until the 18th century and period of widespread industrialization in Europe that work had been “separated from the household” and privatized through a wage (Weeks, 2011, p.3). This historical process or “patriarchy of the wage” is how women’s bodies and reproductive activities in the home were devalued (Federici, 2004, p.68).

Similarly, Monique Haicault (1984) called this bifurcation of realms *la violence tranquille* or the passive violence against women rooted in the social imaginations and ideologies of sex and gender (p.270). Tithi Bhatthacharya (2017), based on a Marxist analysis, shows that

the time required to reproduce the worker (i.e. eat, rest, leisure, having children, education) is always in direct conflict with capital's ability to extend the time and capacity of labour production (and therefore profits). Social reproduction theorists argue that historically, the root of class struggle is the struggle over reproduction (Battharcharya, 2017; Ferguson, 2020). In this way, the unwaged or even low-waged (i.e. care workers, nurses, housekeepers) reproductive work typically done by women serves to reinforce capital accumulation and exploitation through a sustained effort to reduce and offset the cost and time of reproduction to increase the profits from production (Federici, 2004; Ferguson, 2020; Gimenez, 2018).

One of the consequences of the division of spheres, according to Arlene Daniels (1987), is that work done outside the sphere of formal employment is invisibilized and devalued to the point where it is no longer legitimized as work. In other words, any physical, emotional, or mental effort not considered value-producing within the context of the market is not perceived as work, even by those that do them. In some instances, this work was culturally romanticizing, such as having and raising children where the reward for one's efforts was their children's love and a sense of life satisfaction (Hays, 1998; Daniels, 1987). But in other ways, many activities of reproduction have remained hidden within the mystified realm of the private sphere and, to this end, Marjorie DeVault (1996) urged researchers of the need to "excavate" this invisibility of women's lives where "the aim of much feminist research has been to 'bring women in,' that is, to find what has been ignored, censored, and suppressed, and to reveal both the diversity of actual women's lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible" (p. 32).

Joe Bailey (2002) shows how the division of space into public and private underwent a process of the "mystification" of the private realm (i.e. the family or home), but has recently seen

a renewal of the private realms' exposure due to a rising emphasis on self-realization and self-responsibilization of the individual in society (p.25). While the analytical framework of the notion of separate realms is still conceptually and practically relevant to gender identity and activities, transformations have nonetheless occurred in and between each realm, including women's increasing involvement in paid work, men's participation at home, along with the changes in work itself with the rise of telework and flex-work. According to Greenhill and Wilson (2006), the internet, along with new technologies that have enabled working from home, has removed what was once a boundary to capital, the line separating work from home. Indeed, this has been a constantly shifting boundary depending on workers' rights and the attempts of capital to retract those rights in its favour. However new technologies have succeeded in dissolving this line. Arlie Hochschild (2009) has also shown that the line dividing both realms is becoming increasingly blurred and 'porous' via what she calls "cultural fissures through which market instrumentality and emotional detachment sometimes seep into life at home" (p.95). With the rise of telework and the commodification of most reproductive work, the line between work and home is increasingly blurred (Hochschild, 2009). These changes have led to new research on gender and work, such as how people manage and experience work-life-family balance or conciliation, but also poses problems for concepts such as Hochschild and Machung's (1989) concept of the "second shift," which accorded that women were not only working an entire day at their paid work but also having to take on most of the work involved in maintaining a home and family. To complicate this idea of two shifts, Haicault (1984) argues that there is a problem with the discourse of the second shift and the way we think about what gets done at work and what is achieved at home as separate entities in that it potentially excludes processes that overlap or move across various domains of life such as the concept she examined of *la gestion*

quotidienne or the management of everyday life (p.269). This blurring of realms makes it difficult to define where work ends and where it begins while at the same time reproducing, obscuring and as I will later argue, *creating* new forms of gendered labour.

Women and Reproductive Work

As discussed above, the work of reproduction within capitalism has been economically, politically and culturally devalued as it takes place outside of the realm of production and therefore does not produce value for capital strictly according to a Marxist analysis¹. One of the major political and academic projects of the feminist movement has been to challenge and dismantle the structures and ideologies that reproduce gendered work and bring awareness to the devalued work of women, such as the wages for housework movement. Part of the feminist project has been to qualify and quantify the work women were doing in and outside the home.

Domestic labour typically includes physical chores (i.e. laundry, washing, tidying, home repair and gardening), childrearing (i.e. pregnancy, birthing, nursing, feeding, socializing and educating children), caring for elderly family members and the labour of preparing and cooking meals for oneself and family (DeVault, 1994; Hochschild, 1989; Oakley, 1974). The objective of research on domestic labour, particularly from second-wave feminism, was to show how this labour was invisibilized, isolating and ultimately the source of women's social subordination to men. Feminists had adopted two strategies for solving this form of women's oppression: the first strategy was for women to fight to gain equal access to waged work and employment, and the

¹ There is an ongoing and heated debate on whether reproductive work is value-producing for capital among the Marxist-feminist community. Some argue that value is only created within the wage-labour relation, staying true to a Marxist analysis, while others see that without the reproduction of the worker, the value-producing wage relation could not take place. Others find the value question irrelevant as it limits the idea of reproductive work strictly within the confines of capitalism without taking it to a broader critique of labour. For a summary of the debate, see Chapter 8 of Sue Ferguson's (2020) *Women and Work: Feminism, Labour and Social Reproduction*.

second was to attempt to re-value and recompense domestic and care work (Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2013; Weeks, 2011). Both strategies, according to Fraser (2013) and Weeks (2011) had flaws. First, they reproduced androcentric or male-centered notions of work and reinforced separate spheres (Fraser, 2013). Second, they subordinated a more radical and utopian feminist vision to dismantle capitalist social relations (Weeks, 2011). Lastly, it caused an internal division within the feminist movement itself by re-positioning women and reproductive labour into having their own social hierarchies (Fraser, 2013; Weeks, 2011). For instance, women who establish careers and families and thus have added time restrictions now depend on external means for their reproduction, such purchasing pre-made foods, cleaning services, and child and elderly care facilities. Most of these industries rely heavily on cheap labour typically done by immigrant and working-class women (Bhattacharya, 2017; Collins & Gimenez, 1990; Fraser, 2013). In other words, the freedom and emancipation of some women, often white and middle-upper class, are now based on the exploitation of others, representing people from particular racialized, immigrant and ethnic differentiated groups (Bhattacharya, 2017).

From the second-wave feminist movement of the 1970's to the present, women's participation in the workforce has not only been normalized, but it has also increased men's involvement at home (Blair et al. 2015; Sullivan, 2010). Despite men's contributions, countless studies have shown that women are still doing most of the work at home despite equal participation in the workforce (Blair et al., 2015; Coltrane, 2000; Houle et al., 2017). According to Blair-Loy et al. (2015), the progress of the second-shift and the "revolution at home" have remained "stalled." Similarly, Daniels (1987) has argued that by entering the workforce, women are the ones that have absorbed the consequences of both working and taking care of the household. Moreover, she notes that while men are contributing more to childcare duties, they

were typically doing what is considered the more “desirable jobs” like playing with their children. In contrast, women were doing more “high-pressure tasks” that have deadlines, such as getting children up and ready in the morning, picking them up from school, and preparing meals (p. 406). Women are also more likely to take on daily chores (i.e. cooking, cleaning and washing), whereas men will be responsible for tasks that are time dispersed (i.e. taking out the trash, yard work and small renovations) (Blair et al. 2015; Hochschild, 1989; Daniels, 1987).

Some critiques of studies on the gendered division of labour at home warn of the risk of overcompensating for the economic identification of women’s labour, arguing that it extracts and possibly omits the cultural and intersectional content of reproductive labour (DeVault, 1994). In addition, much of the research on women’s domestic labour has over-represented heterosexual white middle-class women, ignoring and obscuring the diverse experiences of home life and motherhood among diverse populations (DeVault, 1994). These critiques reveal the ongoing confusion and rigid ideologies around what qualifies as work versus non-work regardless of what emotional or cultural ‘reward’ is offered. The over-representation of white-middle class women also reflects a broader symptom of the fate of the feminist movement in general. Lastly, the inclusiveness of *all* categories of women’s work, like emotional and mental labour, remains an issue especially in nationwide social surveys concerned with work and family policy.

Invisible Labour

Invisible labour is the work that is socially unseen, unpaid and undervalued. Alternatively, in the more literal sense, it can be work that is not objectively visible, such as mental or emotional labour. Invisible labour has been a valuable concept specifically in research looking at the work involved in motherhood. For instance, Daniels (1987) theorizes that even

women may disregard their efforts in tasks such as caring for children or volunteering due to a lack of social validation (p.405), further discounting or invisibilizing women's efforts and activities. DeVault (2014) agrees that women are challenged to find and develop an adequate language for expressing their experiences, highlighting the importance of "excavating" the invisible through attention to language or lack thereof (p.777). Scholars argue that the challenge of analyzing cognitive and affective work performed by women is that they are both objectively invisible (it is hard to see and quantify), and it is subjectively invisible as it is difficult to conceptualize a mental state as work versus a naturalized state of being (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Daminger, 2019; Mederer, 1993; Walzer, 1996).

Postmodern economies, especially in the Global North, are now centered on what Michael Hardt (1999) calls "immaterial labor" or the labour involved in the production of knowledge, information, and affect. Workers that have cognitive and affective capacities are needed for the fast-paced development of technology and artificial intelligence industries, sectors of service, entertainment, marketing, and financial services, and the fields of education and research. Thanks to this increasingly cognitive and creative workforce, the recognition and research on mental labour in the productive realm have now given a theoretical framework and the language necessary for the analysis of mental labour in the reproductive realm. The issue is that until today, most contemporary research on gender and domestic work still excludes mental labour as its own category of analysis.

The Need for a Fourth Category

The bulk of the research that has dealt with domestic labour has systematically narrowed its attention to three dimensions of work undertaken within the home: housework, care work, and

emotion work. Typically, research is focused on the physically observable and quantifiable tasks such as cleaning and childcare while excluding “invisible” labour such as emotional and mental work (Daniels, 1987; DeVault, 2014). Cognitive labour is sometimes mentioned, although this is usually an adjunct to one of the three categories listed above and is rarely analyzed in its full scope and depth (Robertson et al. 2019). Scholars concerned with women’s mental labour argue the need to incorporate it as a fourth category and a necessary measure for understanding its impact on women’s lives (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Daminger, 2019; Lee & Waite, 2005; Mederer, 1993; Robertson et al. 2019; Walzer, 1996).

Household Mental Labour

Women and researchers alike are now recognizing the importance of the mental effort involved in managing a household and family and its impact on the gendered division of labour. Hochschild (1989) in *The Second Shift* was one of the first American scholars to acknowledge mental labour as a necessary process of domestic work. Due to the added burden of taking on the household tasks that working women were doing beyond their regular workday, she recognized that women had to now manage home and family life to ensure everything got done at the end of the day or week (p.276). Other feminist scholars stressed the importance of mental planning that women did outside the workplace, such as meal preparation (DeVault, 1987) and volunteering (Daniels, 1987). Research continued to hint at a varying degree of mental work involved in home and caregiving activities. However, this mental effort was usually understood as an extension to or background preparatory work behind the observable domestic and caretaking work (Robertson et al., 2019).

Analyzing mental labour as a more specific aspect of domestic work begins with studying the notion of household management and the management of everyday life (Robertson, 2017). According to Hancock & Tylor (2009), “the management of everyday life” comes directly from the logics of the free-market economy and discourses of individualization, responsabilization and entrepreneurialism (p.5) and “a historically specific logic of control and coordination” (p.xi). Karen Dale (2009) finds that management is “both a *practice*, a specific way of acting upon the world, and an *ideology*, a particular way of looking at the world” (p.128) that assumes that with the right amount of planning and strategizing, our lives could be better and happier. Framed as the current “opiate of the masses,” Hochschild (2009) says that a perpetual state of busyness and the idealization of management can be interpreted as a widespread cultural reaction to enhancing productivity on multiple levels (i.e. individual, organizational, professional) (p.95). As a result, she argues our personal lives and families have themselves also become sites of management in that we are required to manage our health, finances, and children, to cultivate our hobbies and continuously strive to improve ourselves within the context of our careers, communities, and relationships.

While we tend to associate management as a contemporary phenomenon emerging from the logics of capitalism and strictly as something useful for the realm of production (E.P. Thompson, 1967), Dale (2009) finds that an etymological analysis shows the origins of the term “are in fact not from the debut of a market or capitalist economy, but from household management and a time when the work in the home was directly linked with economic life” (p.131). Contrary to Hochschild’s view that management has infiltrated the home, Dale argues that “it is not that the home has been ‘invaded’ by management but that the home has had an enduring close liaison with management: it has borne and nurtured management practices and

ideology, both historically and today” (p.132). In other words, most contemporary research has analyzed and framed management within the public sphere of work, education, political and community life while neglecting how it has historically evolved in the home.

A growing body of research is now trying to account for the management taking place in the home and women’s primary role as family managers or what Ciciolla and Luthar (2019) call “captains of households.” Kerry Daly (2001) found that women were primarily responsible for “orchestrating family life” (p.228), including the development and organization of family routines and schedules along with the “psychological vigilance” or monitoring which goes into making sure everything gets done (p.240). Helen J. Mederer (1993) argues that the responsibility of household management fell mainly to women for two reasons: first, that management as a form of invisible work is harder to delegate to their partners; and second, that it is in some cases a source of *power* for women in the home and is subjectively valued by women (p.143). She also shows the contradiction embedded within women’s experience of household management. On one side, it is a burden in its pervasiveness and constancy in the mind and in its reduction of women’s leisure time; on the other hand, household management provides women with a sense of power in the home, making up for the lack of power women have held in the public realm (p.143). Based on these results, Mederer argues that to understand the complexity of the division of household labour and gender, researchers need to consider household management as a necessary and unique category of family work (p.143). Other studies have also found a gendered dimension to mental work in the home by looking specifically at various facets of home and family life, such as the cognitive work behind household chores (Lee & Waite, 2005), family scheduling (Daly, 2001; Meier et al. 2006) and mothering (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Robertson, 2017).

Haicault (1984) is the first scholar to appropriate the term “mental load” or *la charge mentale* as a sociological and feminist issue. She suggests that the management of everyday life aims to seek time savings while also functioning as a self-disciplining device for the individual that is both worker and manager at once (1984, p.269). The recognition of the management of daily life serves to destabilize both the ontological and epistemological categories of separate spheres and critique the gendered division of labour based on the idea that there are only *two* places of work (Haicault, 1984). Haicault argues that the ML is not derived in the simple addition of tasks and spaces of women’s work but in their *simultaneity* (p.275). This understanding allows for the theoretical untangling of the notion of separate spheres not as oppositional to each other, but as necessarily mutually inclusive in that one feeds into the other (p.275). Even rethinking the sociological categories of home and work is necessary to avoid what Haicault says is the process of fragmenting social actors (i.e. worker, mother, volunteer) (p.275).

Framed as a materialist analysis of the ML, Haicault shows how the physical body becomes the *mediator* of separate spheres, where the body, including one’s mind, must not only remember specific skills, competencies, and rhythms, but *when* and *where* to activate them (p.270). She argues that the body has taken on a new dimension which requires a ML be superimposed on the body, creating what she calls *le corps gestionnaire* (the manager body) and *le corps médiateur* (the mediator body) (p.272). The manager body takes care of provoking the body to undertake the work at hand, while the mediator body attempts to bridge the gaps between fragmented practices and environments (i.e. having to remember what identity, skills and knowledge is needed under various circumstances) (p.272). Furthermore, due to the fragmentation of spheres of life, time now becomes a precious resource and a core instrument of management itself (p.272). The ML becomes both the manager and mediator of time and

circumstances. It is in this way that the ML can be understood sociologically in its effort to mediate and manage schedules, spaces and distances that are socially and historically constructed (p.272). For example, decisions about the length of the workday and the location and availability of daycares and schools can impact the extent to which one must mediate time and space to 'get through' daily life.

The Mental Load of Motherhood

The feminization of housework is what Michèle Barret and Mary McIntosh (1982) call the "tyranny of motherhood," where the "biological facts of childbearing and lactation" have become synonymous with the work of preparing food, doing laundry, dishes, cleaning and managing family schedules (p.61). The "tyranny of motherhood" resonates with Bonnie Fox's (2007) observation that a greater proportion of housework is taken on by women once they have children (p.185). The surplus of housework is not only the result of having an extra person (the child) enter the household but also from a *decrease* in the male partner's share of domestic responsibilities after a first child. For Fox, the reasons for this shift in labour are both material and symbolic in nature. Material, in the sense that the new mothers find themselves home full time on parental leave and the household tasks are more visible to their attention and symbolic in the sense of "the project of making home and family" as a socialized life course for women when they became mothers (p.185). Like Fox, Suzan Walzer (1996) found that it is during this first transition into motherhood when mental labour becomes a significant point of gender differentiation in heterosexual couples. She finds that household mental labour is not only symbolic in the sense that it reproduces cultural ideals of gender and motherhood, but that it also has a structural and economic impact in the way mothers engage in paid labour and the amount of time they can commit to both work and family.

Modern motherhood is immersed in a culture of “intensive parenting” that Sharon Hays (1996) defines as the “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive” enterprise of rearing children (p.8). The notion of intensive mothering has remained a core concept that most scholars concerned with women, the family, and motherhood have accounted for in feminist and cultural analyses. Hays demonstrates how social and cultural shifts can change how parenting is socially constructed and performed, suggesting the possibility of *new dimensions of gendered work*. Indirectly, Hays’ work begins to reveal how mothers take on additional mental labour at home. The first way in which mothers develop a mental load is that intensive mothering inherently involves a deeply invested pursuit of knowledge from ‘the experts’ on childrearing, which mothers then need to decide whether to use or not (Hays, 1998). In her fieldwork, Hays found that the mothers she interviewed believed that their male partners lacked the necessary parental knowledge and awareness to seek out that knowledge to rear children appropriately. Second, the "cultural contradictions of motherhood" represent what Hays sees as a conflict between a capitalist society and market logic grounded in self-interested gain and rationalization versus mothers who choose to engage in intensive mothering based on unconditional love, giving and nurturing. Hays’ argues that these contradictions force mothers to have to negotiate between their identities in both private and public realms by making choices, doing research, worrying, planning, scheduling, delegating, managing time and efficiency, while also taking on the bulk of housework and childcare compared to their male partners (preface, x). Hays also argues that intensive mothering acts as a form of *resistance* or counter movement to market ideology:

In other words, the ideology of intensive motherhood is clearly not the only way for the powerful to ensure that their interests are met. And beyond this, one still needs to ask, if power actually does allow people to create and manipulate ideologies at will, why would those whose privilege relies on a society dominated by the logic of profit-oriented, competitive, and individualistic relations develop

an ideology (intensive mothering) whose overall logic runs in contradiction to that system? This remains something of a mystery (p.166).

While this argument seems obvious and intuitive in the dichotomy between the concepts of love and nurturing versus the self-interested and rational subject of the market, the type of intensive mothering Hays is characterizing and what type of child it produces is what we would today consider compatible with the neoliberal subject: a “child-centered” (i.e. individual and responsabilized), “emotionally-intensive” (i.e. an emotionally intelligent, creative and high cognitive functioning individual) and “financially expensive” (i.e. childhood/individual as a life-long project) endeavor. The mothers of the 1980s and 1990s that she is speaking to are meeting the market's demand for the now highly cognitive, creative and flexible workforce.

Using a social constructivist lens, Theresa Arendell (2001) argues that household management is a particular consequence of modern motherhood. For Arendell, household management is more than the need to orchestrate space and time, but also a result of the “expansion of maternal care work” that’s aim is to accommodate what she calls “modern childhoods” (p.165). These contemporary childhoods are institutionalized through the structuring, monitoring and coordinating of children’s lives, requiring the *intensification* of parental monitoring, strategizing, navigating, and so on (p.165). Because she sees that children are now “projects of care” (p.166), a so-called ‘good’ childhood is the result of a "deliberate and ongoing orchestration" by parents that are more attuned to their children and what they are doing with their time (p.169).

Another dimension of mental labour is “metaparenting” or “parental-monitoring,” practices of developing a parenting philosophy or model (Holden et.al., 2003; Robertson, 2017).

Robertson (2017) states:

Metaparenting refers to the development of a comprehensive understanding of the parental role and parenting practices, or a philosophy of parenting. It is a reflective form of thinking about parenting that produces a premeditated model for parenting that is held in mind and which guides parenting behaviors. Thus, the concept of metaparenting captures the intentional, aspiration-directed thoughtfulness that occurs in the parent's mind and is part of family work for some mothers and fathers (p.22).

Parental monitoring and knowledge is associated with parents' cognitive effort to monitor and survey what their children are doing and knowing what they need for their optimal wellness (Robertson, 2017, p.18). Lindsay Robertson's (2017) dissertation research forwards one of the first comprehensive and systematic phenomenological accounts of the mental labour involved in the production of home and family life. Using focus groups conducted with mothers of young children, the study is informed by a hermeneutic and interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA) that encouraged collaborative analyzing of the concept of mental labour and its associated experiences with her participants. Her research contributes to the distinction between six types of mental labour related to the home and family: (1) planning and strategizing; (2) monitoring and anticipating needs; (3) metaparenting; (4) knowing; (5) managerial thinking; (6) self-regulating. The discourse from the mothers' interviews captured many of the concepts explored in previous research, such as anticipating the needs of the family and household (p.9), household management or the "orchestration" of daily life, including task delegation and instruction/training (Robertson et al. 2019, p.11), obtaining, managing and maintaining a body of knowledge necessary for the facilitation of the unfolding of daily life, routines, and for the performance of idealized motherhood practices such as meta-parenting and parental monitoring (p.10). All the participants felt that the mental labour associated with the home and family was a task that was primarily their responsibility, and this was seen regardless of employment status or the number of paid work hours (Robertson, 2017). Finally, when women were asked to predict or reflect on what would happen should they not 'take on' the mental load, they foresaw a complete

breakdown of tasks, routines, and the family's general well-being (Robertson, 2017, p. 73). This statement reveals the value and importance mothers place on their mental load as playing an essential role in the general well-functioning of everyday life of the household and family.

The Gap in the Literature

Until now, the corpus of research on the ML of mothers has remained at a developmental stage, defining its meaning and lived experience while its theorization has been underwhelming. Critical sociology is equipped to investigate how the ML is a social process and a feminist issue embedded within social structures and institutions. The ML has yet to be historicized and theorized through the lenses of Social Reproduction Theory and Marxist Feminism.

Research Questions

Based on my review of the literature and the gaps identified, I formulated two main research questions to guide this study: (1) How are Quebec mothers experiencing the mental load? And (2) As a newly recognized form of women's invisible labour, how can the mental load of mothers be historicized and situated within late-capitalist social reproduction? Some corollary questions are also considered: (a) how do various structural, institutional, relational, and emotional factors contribute to the increase or decrease of mothers' mental load? (b) how do mothers themselves historicize and situate their mental labour? (c) how does the mental load impact other areas of their life (i.e. health, work, leisure, relationships)? (d) how does the ML contribute to the circuits of capitalist reproduction and production?

Theoretical Framework

One way to sociologically theorize the mental load of mothers is through the lens of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), a branch of Marxist-feminist scholarship and critique. As Lise Vogel (1983) states, at the core of Marxist-feminist scholarship is the understanding that at the base of the “social, psychological and ideological phenomena of women’s oppression lies a material root” (p.29). The mental load of mothers has yet to be understood through this lens. Laslett & Brenner’s (1989) define social reproduction as:

The activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and inter-generationally. It involves various kinds of socially necessary work- mental, physical, and emotional- aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined means for maintaining and reproducing population. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, how the maintenance and socialization of children is accomplished, how care of the elderly and infirm is provided, and how sexuality is socially constructed. (p.382)

Bhattacharya (2017) argues that SRT “attempts to answer the questions related to all of the processes that are needed to reproduce and maintain the workers of capitalism” (p.2). This attempt goes beyond the home and nuclear family and considers various sites of reproduction, such as communities, hospitals, schools, and even prisons (Collins & Gimenez, 1990; Bhattacharya, 2017; Vogel, 1983). Because SRT takes process as its object of analysis, it has the built-in capacity to capture more than singular points of observable facts, but to venture beyond what is visible into what is invisible in the “hidden forms of social reproductive labor” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p.2). For this reason, I argue that SRT is a valuable analytical tool for studying the ML of mothers considering that the consensus among researchers on this subject agrees that it is a central and necessary process in the daily and long-term maintenance of the home and family.

In their book *Social Reproduction*, Kate Bezanson & Meg Luxton (2006) demonstrate how the economy and external markets impact the family, particularly women, children and marginalized groups, through the inherent “tensions between social reproduction and capital accumulation” (p.7). In a Canadian context, they compiled several essays from various scholars that sought to understand the impact of years of neoliberal policies, discourse and welfare cutbacks on social reproduction in Canada. Neoliberalism is a political project that functions both in theory and practice; it refers to a set of political and economic arrangements and encompasses the ideologies and beliefs that support those arrangements. Bonnie Fox’s (2006) essay on the class dynamic of intensive mothering, exploring more explicitly how neoliberal constructions of motherhood have contributed to the reproduction of class. She argues that the market’s “colonization of time” on people’s lives has allowed some families, primarily upper and upper-middle class, to engage in more intensive parenting practices, while working-class families’ time is stretched through having to contribute more hours of paid labour (p.256). At the same time, the Canadian government and corporations have systematically reduced spending on social reproduction, such as healthcare, childcare, and community development, putting more pressure on families to fulfill these needs and services at their own cost (Fox, 2006). Fox provides a framework for connecting the ML with its particular historical moment, along with a structural and materialist analysis capable of identifying how these empirical or ‘surface’ realities fuel capital accumulation and class struggle.

SRT uses Marxist categories of analysis that understands the fundamental dynamics of capitalism and its social relations while expanding them beyond the capitalist-worker wage relation (Bhattacharya, 2017, Gimenez, 2018). It goes outside the workplace, to other sites of oppression, and allows for the consideration of “dimensions of gender, race and sexuality as vital

to the economic process” as a whole (p.3). Essentially, SRT understands the historicity and materiality of social reproduction. For Gimenez (2018), feminist issues, women’s exploitation, oppression, and inequality between the sexes must be examined historically, and “in the context of the capitalist mode of production, one must identify the capitalist processes that place men and women in unequal relationships” (p.10).

One critique or gap that I have uncovered in the literature on SRT is the general assumptions made of the quality and content of the labour involved in social reproduction, particularly related to the labour done by women in the home and for the family. While the mission of SRT is to uncover the processes of capitalist social reproduction, motherhood and the work involved at home have been limited to the three categories: housework/chores, childrearing, and emotion work. While these are still relevant categories of analysis of social reproductive labour, a critical component is lacking: the historical. This lack would require researchers to recognize that social reproductive processes *can and do change*, that *new* processes are created or made obsolete as the dynamics and expansion of capital also change. As the methodology of SRT is still in its development, it will be important for Marxist-feminists and SR theorists to bring awareness to the history of invisibilizing certain forms of work and to ensure that the empirical reality they seek to theorize, is what is objectively and subjectively experienced by those affected. As part of this project, I took great care to choose a methodology that would support the aims of SRT.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The Issue of Method

The purpose of this study is to examine the mental load of Quebec mothers and to begin to historicize and situate this cognitive work within the context of both reproductive and productive circuits of the current capitalist formation using a Marxist-feminist analysis and social reproduction theory. Social reproduction theory (SRT) works with Marx's analysis and categories, while also prioritizing its union with feminist critique. One issue or critique of SRT is that it still requires developing a substantial methodological toolkit that can disclose and understand reproductive labour within a capitalist society (Bhattacharya, 2017). Bhattacharya offers two suggestions for the methodological development of SRT: first, that it provides a "rich and variegated map" of capitalist social relations and its various forms of labour and labour-power, and second, that the methodology focuses centrally on processes rather than on isolated empirical facts (p.4). A focus on process allows the researcher to account for both productive and reproductive circuits as a totality, and those that are also shifting and revolutionizing. SRT literature does not elaborate specifically on what methods are optimal for exposing reproductive processes, which is left up to the researcher to decide. Following Bhattacharya's suggestions, I address my research questions in this study using a qualitative methodology due to its ability to provide rich data and emphasizes the mental load as an ongoing and interactive process rather than a single event that occurs only in isolated instances. The data was collected and analyzed using a critical grounded theory (CGT) approach (Hadley, 2019), where theory emerges from the data as in grounded theory, however, is then evaluated for structural and systemic dimensions of power and oppression. The data for this research comes from conducting in-depth interviews and

a focus group with Quebec mothers. The choice to conduct interviews and focus groups was inspired by sociologists Marjorie DeVault and Arlene Daniels, who developed a feminist methodology for “excavating” and “mapping” the invisible dimensions of women’s worlds (Devault, 1999, 2014). Careful consideration of DeVault’s strategies for interviewing women played a role in this study’s execution and analysis processes with the knowledge that language and limited vocabulary can create barriers for women to express new or unknown concepts, as is the case with the mental load. This methodology also requires researchers to take special care to have women’s voices and experiences themselves play a central role in developing theory.

Critical Grounded Theory

Critical grounded theory is a newer branch of grounded theory that, according to Hadley (2019), is an abductive methodology that “systematically constructs small-scale to mid-range social theories from empirical data” and then evaluates and “highlights social processes and phenomena pertaining to the problems of power, inequality, and discrimination” (p.3). There are concerns and debates as to whether a critical standpoint weakens grounded theory’s acclaim to minimizing or even ensuring that the results of research are without bias and in fact grounded in the data without prior assumptions about the social relationships involved. However, Hadley finds that “historically, objective neutrality is a socially and epistemologically contested concept” and that “letting the data speak for itself” may be a way that reproduces power structures and oppression (p.5). Critical grounded theorists follow the same methodological trajectory as grounded theorists, beginning with an “open exploratory” phase, moving to a more “focused investigation” and then at last, the “theoretical construction” phase (p.16). Throughout this process, critical grounded theorists will ask questions that work to uncover power relations or structures embedded in the data and discourses, such as ‘who is gaining and losing in this

situation? How are gender dynamics playing a role? Or who is gaining value in this situation?’

As with critical studies, critical grounded theory’s final objective is to “expose oppressive social processes” with the hopes of contributing to emancipation (p.25).

Data Collection: Strategy and Process

I conducted one focus group and three in-depth interviews with six (6) mothers, the majority being from Montreal and one from Sherbrooke. The original method plan was to conduct only focus groups, however, getting participants together at the same time proved more difficult than anticipated. I chose to offer the option of focus groups and one-on-one in-depth interviews. My focus group consisted of Anglophone mothers, and the individual interviews were conducted with the French-speaking mothers. While this change was not planned for, the two distinct methods provided a nuanced and rich body of data to work with. With the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic and confinement measures, I had to stop recruitment, and one interview was done over video chat. Despite the obstacles faced in completing the fieldwork, I was reminded of DeVault’s (1990) statement that “feminist methodology will not prescribe a single model or formula” in the strategies needed to undertake research that dives into the lives of women (p.96).

The focus group consisted of three participants, allowing each of them the time to develop their answers while providing a structure and framework for constructing meaning together. Sue Wilkinson (1998) finds that focus groups are valuable for feminist research for three reasons: (1) focus groups alleviate feminist’s concerns “about the power and imposition of meaning” within research; (2) they offer high-quality data; and (3) due to its social dimension, it replicates the “co-construction of realities between people, the dynamic negotiation of meaning

in context” (p.112). This method also acts as a consciousness-raising device, giving women a voice in research and offering a space for solidarity and activism through the reflections of shared experiences. The individual one-on-one interviews provided the extensive elaboration of the participant’s experiences of the mental load while also facilitating meeting times for busy mothers that could not attend the focus group. Both focus group and individual interviews resulted in rich data and descriptions of the participants’ experiences of the ML.

I asked participants to prepare a list of reflections and notes on the things they thought about as part of the mental labour they accomplish on a daily and weekly basis. Andrea Phillips (2014) finds that the list as a research tool has great potential to convey “distillations of the maps of activity, accumulation, sociability, enterprise, aspiration that motivate action in the widest sense” (p.96). The list as an “inventive method” (Lury & Wakeford, 2014) acts as a tool for helping with the difficulty of mapping out the mental load, which is invisible, fleeting, random and diverse. Three out of the six participants completed a list, and one participant kept a daily journal for a week. Once I completed the analysis, participants were sent the core findings for confirmation and feedback. None of the participants had further feedback or interjections on the findings.

Ethics

Permission to conduct the study with human subjects was approved by Concordia University’s Human Research Ethics Committee before beginning recruitment and maintained until no further contact with participants was needed. The women were fully informed of the risks and benefits of their participation prior to giving their consent. Participants were allowed to withdraw their participation, data, and consent at any time before the publication of results.

Participants were given pseudonyms during the transcription of the audio recordings to protect their identities. I offered a \$20 gift card of their choice to coffee shop or bookstore as compensation for their time.

Sampling & Recruitment

I used purposeful sampling to ensure participants met the following criteria and to answer the research questions— (1) they were a mother of at least one or more children under the age of 18; and (2) they are residents of Quebec. I found participants using a mix of convenience and snowball sampling; I am personally a mother of two young children and have access to other mothers through my social networks and word of mouth. I recruited a total of ten mothers and I organized a brief meeting ahead of the focus groups and interviews to answer their questions and concerns and review and sign the consent form. Of the ten recruited, six completed their participation in the project. Due to the time constraints of doing a Masters degree in conjunction with the Covid-19 pandemic, no further recruitment was possible.

Demographic

All participants are mothers to children under the age of 12 and Quebec residents. One participant was not born in Quebec, having emigrated from Europe a few years ago, but has her Quebec residency. Three participants were Anglophone Quebecers, two of them Francophone and one Allophone. All of the women were Caucasian and categorized as upper-middle class. The participants had some level of post-secondary education (2 Masters, 2 Bachelors, 1 College Diploma, 1 Technical Diploma). Two participants worked part-time (less than 30 hours/week), two worked full-time (35 hours+/week), one was a stay-at-home mother, and one was on maternity leave and was self-employed. Five participants are married, and one had been

previously separated and with a new common-law partner. All participants identified themselves as heterosexual. Two of the mothers had one child, three had two children, and one participant had three children. The age range of their children was from 8 months to 12 years old. Five participants reported a household income above \$125,000, and one participant between \$80,000-\$124,999.

Checking for Bias

Being a mother myself and having my own experience of the mental load, I ensured that extra measures were used to reduce bias as much as possible. Before beginning the study, I journaled on my own experience of the ML to bring awareness to the meanings that I had given the concept. Following a suggestion from Gregory Hadley (2019), I also answered and coded my own interview questions to use as a point of comparison for checking for bias when analyzing the data.

Interviews and Focus Group

An interview guide (see Appendix) was used in the focus group and interviews consisting of 19 open-ended questions divided into two parts: part I included questions about the participants' own knowledge and experience of the mental load and part II consisted of questions that asked the mothers to help theorize the ML within the broader context of society and historically. The interview guide was inspired by a research project undertaken during the final year of my bachelor's degree and formulated to answer each research question.

I scheduled the interviews at a time and place that was convenient for the participants and myself. I also provided the participants with refreshments and some informal discussion at the beginning allowed the participants and I to form a foundational level of comfort and openness.

All the interviews were audio-recorded on devices that required passwords to protect the data. The mothers in the focus group were asked to respect and protect the identity of the other participants to the best of their abilities. The focus group lasted two hours, whereas individual interviews averaged one hour each. I asked participants to fill out a short survey for demographic information asking their age, citizenship, ethnic or cultural background, relationship status, number of children and their ages, sexuality, employment status, number of hours worked, and level of education. I then collected the participants' lists and journals at the end of the interviews; a couple of mothers sent them later by email. Field notes and summaries were also completed during and immediately after the interview process.

Analysis

Individual interviews and the focus group discussion were transcribed verbatim as separate documents based on the audio recordings. The participants' demographic information, lists and journals were added to the transcriptions. I then transferred the data to a software system (MAXQDA) for the three phases of the coding process consistent with a grounded theory approach. Phase I is the open coding process which, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), is "the process by which data are broken down analytically" into conceptual units and compared with others (p.12). In phase II or the axial coding phase, all unique codes were categorized, combined, and conceptualized to expose patterns and relationships of interaction, context, and origin (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The data was revised until theoretical saturation was achieved. In the final phase, or the selective coding process, I selected three core categories, and sub-categories were unified in accordance with these core themes. A coding system or structure (see Appendix) was finalized, and a storyline was developed as a way of unifying the concepts and themes.

Chapter 3: Results

The results of this study are based on the data gathered via the methods outlined in the previous chapter, consisting of in-depth interviews and one focus group, full transcriptions, a three-stage coding process, and a thematic analysis. Based on previous research and the results of this study, I propose a definition of the mental load as the mental effort and processes involved in the optimal daily and generational reproduction of the household, family, and the self. The ML is not confined to the walls of the home but extends beyond and across various domains and activities of life. As a result, the ML is not simply about the orchestration of household tasks and childrearing, but about their *optimization*. In other words, the ML's primary goal is to think about how something can be achieved in the most efficient way possible. In terms of the content and quality of the ML, the narratives of Quebec mothers reaffirm Robertson et al. (2017, 2019) phenomenological study of the ML and the categories of monitoring and anticipating needs, meta-parenting (i.e. the meta-reflection involved in developing and applying a parenting philosophy), knowing (i.e. information processing, learning, remembering), managerial thinking (i.e. coordinating, evaluating, delegating, instructing) and self-regulating. However, to develop a theory of the ML within the context of a Marxist feminist analysis, the results of this study are organized into the following themes (1) An overview of the ML; (2) consequences of mental overload; (3) manufacturing efficiency; (4) cultivating the “happy” family; (5) a theory of the ML. Each of the themes consist of sub-categories that are contextualized through direct quotes from the participants. Since the interviews were conducted with Quebec mothers, a portion of the quotes are written in French. To protect the participants' identities, their names have been changed, and the names of people and places removed.

Overview of the Mental Load

Etymology: A Load Implies a Heavy Weight

The expression “mental load” used in recent feminist discourses as the cognitive labour that women do for the home and family is relatively new and some of the participants had not heard of the specific designation before this study. A broad definition was given to the mothers to help them prepare for the interview. While this definition is based on prior research and popular public discourse, the participants were cautioned that it was up for interpretation and contestation if it did not reflect their own experience. The mothers in this sample did not object to name given to the ML, nor its definition. The participants all agreed it was appropriate for describing their ML. The two participants who had been aware of the ML prior to this study had discussed it with other mothers, seen it on social media, in newspapers and heard about it on the radio. Elise found it to be an intuitive concept, but that had not until recently had an appropriate name: “...people talk about mental health...mental load...mental this...It's very open now mental load. It's ok to say, 'I'm mentally exhausted.' Like everyone understands, you know?”

The participants understood that mental *load* implies a weight which must be carried in the mind. Elena says: “...*penser à ça et s'occuper de ça, c'est le mot 'charge'...ça me pèse.*” The ML was an unexpected element of motherhood for Elena. Others had warned her about the physical changes, the lack of sleep with a newborn and having to prioritize her child, however, no one had warned her how her mental processes would change significantly. She admits that the ML had an important impact on her, yet she did not have the adequate language to describe what she was experiencing: “...*je pense que c'est la chose la plus importante à date.*”

“It’s a Woman Thing:” The Gendered Dimension of the Mental Load

Ça devient une charge mentale parce que c’est moi la responsable de toutes ces tâches.

–Elena

Every relationship has its complications. But clearly...he does not...he never even thought of mental load. No...no. Maybe in relation to work? I think it's a woman thing. At least in my relationship. – Cara

Regardless of the division of housework and childcare, the participants felt that they took on the bulk of the mental labour involved in the maintenance of the home and family. The two full-time working mothers had established an almost equal division of household chores with their spouse. In contrast, the women who worked part-time hours or stayed at home, had more traditional gender roles and were primarily responsible for household chores and childcare. At the same time, the men took care of the exterior of the home and bringing in the family’s main income. Their male partners also spent time with their children and offered their assistance with household tasks. Susie feels that while this shows good intentions from her partner, even when jobs are delegated, her ML is not alleviated and in fact, sometimes requires her to engage in *more* ML because she feels like she must monitor his execution of the task: “*Je délègue...il y a des tâches que je ne regarde pas qu’est-ce qu’il fait, mais il a des tâches que je sais que je dois repasser derrière pour vérifier. Donc ça me ne l’enlève pas vraiment de la tête.*” Susie also shares custody of her older child with an ex-partner yet notes that even when her child is with his father, the ML for that child is still present: “*J’ai un enfant et demi physiquement avec moi. Mais j’ai deux enfants...mentalement, j’ai deux enfants dans ma tête.*”

Efforts to offload some of their ML seemed impossible for participants as they found it difficult to explain the concept to their partners and have them understand. Noémie describes having multiple conversations with her husband about her ML:

Je pense que la première fois qu'on qu'en ait parlé, je pense qu'il n'a pas compris, puis il s'objectait là! Il disait, "ben voyons, j'en fait plein d'affaires"...ben non, c'est pas les tâches! C'est juste de pas l'avoir en tête...

After a few discussions, Noémie said that her partner finally began to understand and that they were trying to find ways to divide the ML equally. The participants suggested that future studies examine the mental load of men, single fathers, and widowers to see if it was a gender issue or if it so happened that in heteronormative relationships, the mother becomes the default mental labourer. A few participants offered to defend their partners at the beginning of the interview to acknowledge that their husbands did contribute significantly to the household and family. They assumed that their partners had a ML but could not know to what extent it was similar to their own. Some speculated that their partner's ML catered to the family's finances, automobile maintenance and household exterior chores and repairs.

Participants, including Jane, Susie and Cara, believed that women are more biologically and socially pre-destined to take on the mental work of caring for their families, especially as they transition to motherhood. Susie gives an evolutionary account of how women throughout human history have been responsible for thinking about the home and family. She also recognizes that today's society still reinforces traditional gender roles despite women's equal participation in the workplace, causing more stress and pressure on women.

Un Réajustement Monstre: The Development of the Mental Load

For most mothers, the mental load began sometime during their transition to motherhood, either during their pregnancy or soon after the birth of their first child. Susie describes a shift after the birth of her child and what she perceived to be an inability to accomplish daily tasks: *“Le fait d’être ralenti dans l’application des tâches que d’habitude ça va super vite...Entre le avant et après bébé, c’est un réajustement monstre!”*

This readjustment process involves learning how to manage added responsibilities and concerns involved with the care of a child on top of one’s previous activities before children, such as work, family, friendships, and so on. Elena also felt this readjustment period, and despite having always considered herself a planner-type person, realized after the birth of her child that her planning skills were no longer sufficient for accomplishing all her daily tasks. This post-partum period is when she admits feeling her ML develop.

Noémie’s ML began during pregnancy, at the stage of planning for the birth and aftercare of her baby. She remembers being given books, pamphlets and lists at her prenatal visits containing the information she needed to prepare. Jane enjoyed the ML during her pregnancy: *“The mental load really, I think for me started when I was pregnant? But it was fun! I enjoyed it. I love the mental load of planning and just shopping for my daughter that was going to be born. I just loved it! But then reality hit.”*

Elise’s ML began as a teenager, due to having to become a caregiver to her siblings and needing to take care of herself.

Consequences of Mental *OverLoad*

Participants outlined two primary ways the ML has a negative impact on them: stress and fatigue as a physical consequence and conflict in their relationships, usually with their partner. The intensity and severity of mental overload and its consequences vary according to participants, although all admitted to feeling moments where they had an increase of adverse effects or a mental *overload*. Elena describes how she feels when the ML becomes overwhelming:

Je pense que je dois faire de la sélection, mon cerveau n'arrive pas à élaborer tout, à maintenir tout. Et donc au niveau mental, c'est comme avoir une montagne de neige que j'arrive pas à pelleter. Que je continue à pelleter, pelleter, pelleter, mais au fond, je pèle pas, je suis devant la montagne avec la pelle, mais je pelle pas, je n'arrive pas...j'ai pas le temps à pelleter. – Elena

Elena describes the experience of not having the adequate tools to tackle what seems like a self-replenishing mountain of tasks, leaving her feeling frustrated and drained.

Fatigue and Stress

“C'est fatiguant d'avoir ces connaissances.” – Noémie

Noémie finds that being the main person responsible for retaining information related to the home and family can be tiring. The ML is a source of fatigue and stress for the participants. It can vary in severity depending on their life circumstances, such as workload and division of labour at home or disruptions to family routines (i.e. a sick child). For instance, Susie felt drained entirely at the end of her day and wished she could “unplug” her brain to have some reprieve.

On dirait que...il faut toujours éteindre des feux...Puis ben là nous autres en tant que mères, j'ai l'impression qu'on est à la dernière priorité, fait qu'on passe après tout le monde...rendu là. J'ai le cerveau complètement mort. Je trouve que je suis fatiguée de toujours penser à tout. Des fois je voudrais me débrancher le cerveau. – Susie

Susie describes having to constantly extinguish little fires, to solve problems for the family that can bring her to the point of exhaustion. Jane explains why the ML is exhausting:

It's just exhausting! You know you just want to go relax and stop thinking about everything. That's a *big* part. And then also the feeling like things are never getting done. It's like, you're finishing something, but there's always something else that's waiting for you. So it's like, there's always something in line to do. – Jane

Elena describes a similar experience of the ML, experiencing high stress, frustration and self-questioning. Her adjustment to motherhood has been hard for her as she did not expect the ML and yet it would come to be the most critical change in her identity.

S'accumule, s'accumule, s'accumule. Je cherche de droite à gauche mais quand je le mets à dormir le soir. Pour moi, c'est une charge mentale. C'est à dire que j'écris qu'est-ce que j'ai à faire et j'arrive pas à finir la liste. Il me porte du stress, il me porte du ralentissement. – Elena

Elise experienced an increase in mental stress when she encountered unexpected delays or breakdowns in her routines, such as being late for school drop-off or a babysitter cancelling at the last minute. These disruptions require her to troubleshoot and think quickly to find a solution, worry and self-discipline in such a way as questioning how she coped with these situations.

Relationship Conflicts

The ML is a source of tension and conflict in the participants' relationships with their partners and extended family. With partners, the participants felt frustrated about being the only person responsible for the ML and how their partners failed to "see" what needed to be done and had to be given instructions. The dynamic at home was that mothers became the household manager, and their husbands or partners are the "helpers" that need instruction and management. A similar narrative as what the artist, Emma, had illustrated in her famous comic.

Mais je lui incite...ou au moins je lui demande de l'aide. Donc je dois lui demander de l'aide. Ça...j'ai un conjoint fantastique...il me demande toujours "qu'est-ce que je peux te faire pour t'aider?" Mais ça reste qu'est-ce que je peux te faire pour t'aider. Il n'y a pas d'initiative et il ne voit pas le travail à faire. – Susie

Whereas my mental load is at maximum capacity, for him everything is just fine and dandy, you know? But if he sees socks, he'll fold them, like he'll do the laundry. But sometimes I'll get upset with him. I've told him so many times "let's sit down..." I need to manage him! – Cara

Delegating as a category of ML was often associated and contextualized by participants as a source of relationship conflict. Surprisingly, delegating was one of the concepts that came up the most frequently in connection to mental overload and strain. In having to delegate work rather than do the task themselves, the mothers felt that while this deducted a physical task from their list, it added *more* mental labour to the process. This added ML came from having to monitor, remind, instruct, and supervise the task.

Je pourrais le déléguer, mais après: "est-ce que tu l'as fait? Est-ce que tu l'as fait?" Donc ça libère aussi...ça c'est un peu contradictoire parce qu'avant je m'occupais moi, c'était fait, mais maintenant je peux pas. – Elena

Surprisingly, participants admitted to secretly feeling pleased when the work delegated to their partners was not done as efficiently or as well. For example, when Susie's partner would take care of putting their child to bed, it would take him double or triple the time than when she did it. Despite Susie's frustration at her child not getting enough sleep, she admits she enjoys seeing her partner struggle. When probing further as to why she might feel this way, she says that his failure, oversight and delays expose the mental effort she does and the value it contributes to the family.

Noémie was one of the participants that was the most actively trying to redistribute some of the ML to her partner, or at least to educate him of its role in the household and family. She found it difficult to make her partner understand what it was and how she felt it was disproportionately her responsibility, highlighting the fact that the ML is invisible and difficult to quantify.

Strategies Used to Alleviate Mental Overload

The participants were asked if they had any solutions or strategies to alleviate the ML. Most admitted that this was not an easy task and, in some cases, required extra mental work to be able to develop a strategy and to have to remember to commit a time every week to self-care.

Elise took one morning a week to herself to disconnect mentally:

I go to yoga Wednesday mornings. That's *me* time. I put my phone on silent, I leave it outside of the room, whatever happens in that one hour...they have an emergency contact. So it's like you have to somehow mentally get out of it.

Elise also tries to be realistic about the impossible ideals of the "perfect mother" or "ideal woman" by cultural standards and has learned to put less pressure on herself. She also asks for

help and accepts it without interfering too much in how the person decides to do the task or take care of the children.

Noémie finds that time spent with her friends or other adults helps, but she still struggles with ways to alleviate her ML. Susie finds taking walks, going to fitness classes, and being on vacation help her feel less ML. In another way, the ML of the household is given a break when she goes to work. When Susie had separated from her first partner, she felt her ML was alleviated because the conflict with her partner concerning household priorities was no longer an issue. She had full control over the prioritization and execution of tasks while reducing the mental labour associated with negotiating and arguing with her partner. As a long-term suggestion, Susie believes that having equal parental leave requires both parents to develop a ML and are more likely to share it once they go back to work. Similarly, Elena believes the socialization of young children and the gendered division of labour within the home needs to be addressed at school. At the same time, Elena was aware of how her situation at home could be reproducing gender stereotypes for her child. Noémie argues that school correspondence should emphasize communication with both parents, never assuming that it is always the mother that takes the responsibility.

Manufacturing Efficiency

“La charge mentale, je vois ça aussi comme le fait d’essayer de trouver toujours le chemin pour être le plus efficace. Parce que si on parle d’efficacité, on est capable de faire plus de choses.” – Susie

One of the important themes was the narrative of efficiency and how the ML attempts to resolve issues that stem from time constraints and ensure the strategic orchestration of daily

routines and schedules. Participants' descriptions of the ML highlighted the concepts of time, efficiency and productivity, routines and schedules, organization and planning, remembering and know-how, and the ability to anticipate and troubleshoot should problems related to the smooth functioning of routines arise. A breakdown of the ML meant a breakdown in efficiency — things would not get done as quickly or effectively, and this would ultimately compromise the family's short-term and good long-term outcomes.

“Il faut que ça roule:” Time, Efficiency and Productivity

The mothers' spent a significant amount of mental effort on establishing efficient and productive daily routines. This effort meant that household tasks and daily activities like work, school and chores could advance with as slight delay as possible. For the participants, a “great day” was a productive day: everyone was on time, and everything got done. Participants framed the purpose of the ML as the ability to advance (*avancer*) and run (*faire rouler*) their family's lives and that this was explicitly a mental process: *“La charge mentale...ce n'est pas physique. Donc c'est dans la tête...toutes les informations qui doivent se trouver dans ma tête, pour bien faire rouler la maison.”* – Susie

The narrative of efficiency is a necessary reaction against what seems like a never-ending continuum of tasks to complete within the limited time given in a day or week. Jane explains: “Always planning...that's like a big part...And then also the feeling like things are never being done. It's like, you're finishing something, but there's always something else that's there waiting for you...there's always something in line to do.” To this effect, the ML is about planning enough to ensure that tasks are executed at the right time, for the appropriate amount of time and with the proper knowledge and know-how to ensure it is done effectively. The ML is also about

mentally holding on to a list of tasks and reminders so that one knows and can prioritize what needs to be done.

The participants perceived time constraints as the source of the need for efficiency and the mental effort involved in its production. Time constraints come from the culmination of navigating multiple spheres of life, including work, school, partners, parenting, volunteering and trying to make time for one's self-realization (i.e. interests, friends, health and so on). One of the frustrations in the transition to motherhood was that simple tasks that had taken no time or thought prior to having children, required more time and the need to mentally hold onto more reminders as the tasks accumulated. This was particularly felt by Elena: "*Je vois que ma vie n'avance pas. Et la liste me rappelle constamment.*" To describe her experience, Elena uses the analogy of being given a cart pulled by an ox (having a child) when you live in a world that requires you to move at jet speed. Because she wasn't completing everything on her to-do list, she began to hold onto more and more information in her head, constantly reminding herself not to forget.

The participants felt they were more efficient than their partners when it came to household and childcare responsibilities. For example, when the mothers would delegate a task to their partner, the job got done; however, it took significantly longer to do and was not done as well because the know-how was missing.

"Une routine que moi ça prend cinq minutes à faire avec (nom de l'enfant), ça y en a pris 35." –Susie

“My Calendar Is My Life:” Routines and Schedules

When managing various domains of life such as work, home, children and a personal life, routines help alleviate some of the thinking work involved (Robertson, 2017). Routines also help structure the family’s week, where the members’ schedules must be synchronized so that any planning required ahead of time also becomes habitual.

Sometimes a routine does not necessarily mean the ML is reduced but becomes part of it:

Fait qu’au quotidien, le matin, dans la routine folle du matin, je dois m’assurer que (child’s name) a mangé, qu’il a brossé ses dents. Je dois m’assurer que son sac à dos est prêt pour la garderie, que tous ses effets dans son sac à dos sont vraiment là, qu’il ne les a pas sortis trois à quatre fois...c’est de gérer son comportement le matin puis m’assurer que tout est correct pour lui. – Susie

Susie finds her morning routines stressful and is often late to work because she is responsible for preparing herself and her children. Susie and Jane both find that when they could get out of the daily routine, such as being on vacation or taking days off, they experienced a reduction of ML.

The calendar plays an essential role in managing family schedules. It a tool for reducing the ML by transferring important information such as events, appointments, lists, and reminders onto the calendar.

“I look at my schedule...my calendar is my life. I see what's ahead of me. I work week by week. I have a calendar at home. So we're all on the same page.” –Elise

The calendar becomes essential for managing a high volume of incoming information and avoiding feelings of guilt that could be related to forgetting. For Jane, Elise and Susie, it is vital to keep up to date with the constant flow of emails and letters sent home from school and

daycare so that children do not miss out on special events or activities and avoid having their children feel left out.

“You have to put it on the calendar. You have to read all the emails, everything's paperless so you have to make sure...you don't want to overlook anything.” – Jane

It was a priority for the mothers to make sure routines went according to plan, that calendars were up to date and that adequate resources were available to feed, clothe, educate and take care of their family's needs.

Sundays Are Not a Rest Day: Organizing and Planning

Organization and planning are core activities of mental labour. When asked if there were moments when the mental load was the most intense, participants agreed that this was typically on Sundays. The workweek was too busy to have time to get everything done, and so mothers spent all or part of their Sunday planning and preparing for the week ahead. For example, participants thought about what food to prepare, groceries to pick up, appointments to remember, homework to review, and clothes to have washed and ready.

“I start my mental load on Sunday.” – Elise

“Sundays I like to meal prep. All day...and I plan the week.” – Cara

Weeknights were also an essential time for organization and planning as mornings were often busy:

“J'ose bien aussi préparer bien des affaires la veille au soir. Alors la veille au soir je vais avoir fait un travail de préparation pour que ma matinée soit plus agréable.” – Susie

Finally, some mothers made it a point to plan for the weekends to maximize quality time spent with the family. Being organized increases efficiency throughout the week and helps avoid having to “catch up” on the weekend.

Knowing How to Do It Better: Remembering and Know-How

The capacity to develop and remember practical guides or know-how also contributes to household and family efficiency. Remembering involves the mental effort of retaining important information, such as children’s likes and dislikes, family birthdays and anniversaries, and the dates to register for school and day camps. Remembering helps avoid future delays, issues, and disappointment. Noémie describes a situation where her husband was preparing their children’s lunches. She felt frustrated about explaining to her partner that what he had prepared would not be enough and that their child did not like the food. It was frustrating for Noémie because she became aware of the extent of the mental effort she undertook to please her family.

“C’est de connaître les préférences de tout le monde puis tout ça. Puis j’ai l’impression que mon chum, il en tient moins compte. Il ne se casse pas la tête à essayer de faire autant plaisir peut-être.” – Noémie

Elise was also mentally tired of monitoring her eldest child’s forgotten school items and was actively trying to teach her daughter to start remembering things herself by using post-it notes in her agenda.

Having to remember was a daily, weekly, monthly, seasonally, and yearly task—preparation for holidays, birthdays, school entry, and summer vacations. The mothers were responsible for changing out seasonal clothing, doing a triage of what the children had available

to wear and purchasing what was missing. In Noémie's case, she made it a point to buy at the end of the season for the following year to save the family money:

Qu'est-ce qui n'est pas dans les vêtements usagés...qu'est-ce qu'il faut acheter. Les vêtements d'hiver...là je suis allée la semaine passée faire les achats des manteaux parce qu'ils sont moins chers puis tout ça. Oui c'est ça des mois d'avance que mon chum, il ne va pas penser à ça! Mais il trouve que c'est une super bonne idée là!

Susie was responsible for registering their children for school and taking care of all of the supplies. The end of summer was also a stressful time:

“Oui, la rentrée scolaire...parce que j'ai presque tout géré. J'ai pas mal organisé tout pour la rentrée scolaire en maternelle.”

Having to remember all the time caused Elena mental fatigue. She found what once were simple tasks, such as making a doctor's appointment, more difficult now due to a lack of time. Despite writing the reminder her calendar, Elena would mentally remind herself until the task was done. Similarly, Cara would not be able to sleep at night if she had not written down her reminders before going to bed, sometimes even waking in the middle of the night to write something down so that she could go back to sleep.

Another aspect of remembering is developing a repertoire of knowledge or know-how in the maintenance of the home and family. The mothers spoke of knowing special techniques and strategies they had developed while being the primary caretakers of young children and doing most indoor housework while on parental leave. Susie explains why she has gotten so good at knowing how to deal with her children and their caretaking needs:

“Oui. Parce que là je me suis retrouvée...en congé de maternité on se retrouve toute seule à la maison...Le conjoint est au travail, donc on passe beaucoup de temps avec l’enfant.”

Susie finds it both frustrating and amusing that her partner would take double or triple the time to put their son to bed because he did not follow the same routine and approach as she did. She was frustrated because going to bed late would mean her son would be tired and demanding the following day. On the other hand, she enjoys the opportunity to make her partner aware of the mental work she does:

“Parce que ça y fait réaliser...l’énergie et le temps que je mets pour faire des tâches simples.” – Susie

Forecasting and Troubleshooting

While the ability to organize, plan and remember is fundamental to optimizing family routines, unexpected events can easily disrupt them. In this way, the capacity to forecast, anticipate, and troubleshoot are important for reducing the negative impacts on the family and household and restoring routines to normalcy. Forecasting involves thinking about future scenarios that could occur (i.e. having a sick child, doctor visits, car breakdown) and preparing for those events as best as possible. For instance, having a child who is ill and cannot go to school requires thinking about the impact of missing work, knowing what health services are available to you, stocking up on medicine, creating a future backup plan for childcare, and so on. Being the lower earner of the family and the children’s primary caregiver, Elise was usually the parent to miss work when her child was sick. Because Elise had anticipated that having children came with some uncertainty to everyday life, she adapted by finding more flexible work and an employer that was understanding: “Obviously (husband’s name) is not going to call in sick. I

have to call in sick. Thank God I have a great boss that understands, or I have clients that understand.”

As a new mother, Cara is aware of how forecasting has become a central part of her thought processes. Cara feels responsible for preparing her family for anything, and forecasting is a basic element of being organized. She says:

For me, when you first mentioned the study, it was more about forecasting. There's the short-term things, like what is going to get done this week and this is practical. And now, plan...like taking the mental load into forecasting: “how am I going to get my life in order,” you know? When your life isn't in order, and you're single, you don't really feel the consequences, but it's not just *me* now.

Troubleshooting is having to use the resources and strategies from having forecasted, or to come up with solutions on the spot. Elise often depends on family members to pick up her kids from school or to babysit. However, if they need to cancel at the last minute, she is the one to resolve the situation and find alternate arrangements, which she describes as stressful and frustrating. While living in Germany, Noémie found that she was always the default contact parent when any issue would come up at school. She finds the system at her children's current school in Quebec more inclusive of fathers because they will communicate with both parents. Forecasting and troubleshooting act as critical mental processes to stabilize the family and household life when time constraints and external responsibilities (i.e. work, school) demand it.

Cultivating the “Happy” Family

“Une charge mentale peut-être est aussi que tout le monde soit bien.

Que tout le monde se sente heureux.” –Elena

The mental load is significantly linked to the ability to mediate time constraints for busy families through the optimization of household and family routines. To succeed in doing this, the mothers use various cognitive capacities such as organizing, planning, remembering, forecasting, and troubleshooting. For the mothers in this study, a second key theme emerges as the driver of their ML: to strategically ensure and promote their family’s overall happiness and well-being. Optimizing family efficiency is one part of ensuring their family’s short-term and long-term well-being. To this effect, the categories of ML for efficiency also work towards maximizing family leisure time and optimizing children’s development. However, for the participants, there are distinct categories of the ML that deal with family wellness and happiness, including contemplation, prioritization, monitoring, worrying, negotiating, and defending. While most of these categories are associated with children and the development of a parenting ideology (metaparenting), the mothers include themselves and their partners in their family well-being and happiness discourse. Elena describes the connection between family well-being and her ML:

C’est une charge mentale parce qu’il faut que tout le monde se sente bien, moi, jusqu’à date, j’ai parlé d’une charge mentale des tâches...mais une charge mentale peut-être aussi que tout le monde soit bien. Tsé les plaisirs...mais il faut avoir une organisation en arrière que les parents...qu’ils soient bien harmonieux et tout ça. – Elena

Contemplation and Prioritization

Embedded in the mothers' narratives of the ML were the underlying motivations for how they approached their role as mothers and their priorities when it came to raising their children. While this was an ongoing process of contemplation and prioritization for all the participants at various stages of childrearing, the two new mothers had shown how much of their ML currently went to developing a parenting strategy:

How am I gonna raise them in a world where, you know, they might experience bullying and if you'd like a bigger picture too, I find that I'm a bit of a dreamer, so I will spend a lot of time thinking of these other things. So, all this is on my mind, and then I have to prioritize like, what's immediate and not. Being mindful of gender stereotypes...I think about this too. Like, now disciplining is a new thing....so how do I discipline her? I thought I'd be strict, but I'm not. I'm such a pushover, so then I worry, like, she's gonna step over me (laughing). – Cara

Cara is very conscious about minimizing the possible harm her words and actions could cause her child. She often contemplates what the best type of parenting would be for her child, to reduce negative outcomes in the future.

For Jane, being a stay-at-home mother was a decision she made to be more available and present for her children and something she needed to question herself about constantly. Elise and Susie also reduced their work hours to fulfill personal aspirations of motherhood which they felt would ultimately lead to the overall well-being of their families.

Je prends plus de charge sur moi pendant le congé de maternité, pour que les fins de semaine on passe du temps de qualité en famille. C'était mon objectif. C'est pour cette raison là aussi qu'en étant avec mon premier conjoint, j'ai pris le poste à quatre jours par semaine. Pour la qualité du temps en famille. –Susie

Monitoring and Worrying

Monitoring outcomes, such as their children's development and well-being is another source of ML for participants. The mothers were constantly monitoring and worrying about their children's behaviours, emotional state, physical health, educational progress, etc. When they perceive a problem, this causes worry, and they will seek out a correction or remedy when possible.

When they have tests or exams...Did my child understand? Did my child have a hard day at school? What happened? Why does he come up crying? Who's doing what? Then he's not telling the truth or he's not saying anything, or he doesn't know or she doesn't know why she feels sad. So how do you go about finding out what the problem is? So then you set up a meeting with the school...see where they're at, how they deal with this situation? –Jane

Monitoring school progress was important for the other mothers as well. Another common source of monitoring was children's health and nutrition. Mothers worried whether their children were eating enough and getting adequate nutrients, and so would monitor the family's daily habits. Noémie describes her thought process:

“Mais ça a rapport à la planification des repas...manger équilibré...pas toujours manger la même chose...qu'est-ce qu'on pourrait faire? Qu'est-ce que les enfants aimeraient manger? Qu'est-ce qu'on pourrait les faire découvrir? Fait qu'on revient encore à la planif...”

Before going on vacation without her children, Susie was concerned about her children's emotional well-being in her absence, so she decided to prepare them in advance mentally. This involved daily discussions about the departure with her children, making a calendar for her child, contacting the school and daycare, and preparing pre-made meals for her family. Cara and Elena

even worried about how the ML affected their children, especially when it became more of a source of distraction and stress.

Like, I just want to be so *present* ...in the moment, but sometimes I worry that my mental load is taking me away from that. And then there's guilt. It's kind of like it's like, layered, right, then the mental load? – Cara

“Et parfois je pense que la charge mentale affecte mon humeur, affecte ma sérénité et il le ressent.” – Elena

Monitoring and worrying were recurring categories of the participants' daily ML and particularly concerned with children's overall well-being.

Defending and Negotiating

A significant and unexpected narrative that emerged as part of the mothers' ML was one of an internal mental struggle, negotiation and defense of one's mothering practices. The mental work of negotiating and defending was not only based on pressures, judgements or remarks from friends, family, partners, or society, but also experienced as an internal struggle with the self.

People judging you: “How come you're not breastfeeding?” “Don't breastfeed!” Then you try...then emotionally, you're everywhere. I think that's where it (the ML) really started. I think I was taking on a lot of... I was taking on the whole responsibility to myself – Jane

I put more pressure on myself, because of the mom that I had? So that doesn't help with my mental load because I need to make sure this has to be perfect. And I have to be the perfect mom and I have to be the perfect wife...until I come back to real life. –Elise

The more experienced mothers with older children, such as Elise and Jane, often talked about a process of becoming more flexible and realistic with themselves about how they

approached motherhood. The mothers had realized that it was impossible to live up to the standards of others or the one they had envisioned for themselves.

The mothers struggle sometimes having to defend their parenting ideologies, especially with partners and family with whom there might be differences in values and priorities. Cara was afflicted by her and her husband's family's desire to be so involved in their lives, but she sometimes preferred to do it independently. The more people involved, even if they were helping, required more ML on her part. In her journal, Cara writes:

Are they going to be upset because I spend more time with one side of the family than the other and wait a minute, we also need time for the three of us! I prioritize spending time with just my husband, my daughter and I prioritize just spending time with my husband and I want to nurture our relationship. I want that help, but at the same time, I feel like they treat me like a child and I'm like, how can I impact the dynamic of this relationship? So I'm kind of pushing away help because I want to do it myself too.

For Jane, her ML included questioning herself and her decision to be a stay-at-home parent, feeling pressure from her family and society that she was not contributing something of value because she was not officially employed. She constantly had to justify what she did at home and how she occupied her time.

Leisure and Happy Moments

“That's a perfect day...where I can *maximize* that time.” – Cara

Cara is referring to the leisure time she and her family spend together. Her priority is to maximize this “quality” family time, by being efficient at completing household chores and defending this time from external demands (i.e. work, extended family). Two important ML

functions for the mothers in this study were to increase this leisure time and cultivate happy times. Mothers maximized leisure time by being efficient throughout the week. The more tasks that got done during the week, the more free time the family had on the weekends.

“À chaque semaine...c’est toujours organiser la semaine de travail. C’est les repas, c’est le lavage...donc nécessairement on a des tâches à faire le soir la semaine pour se libérer du temps la fin de semaine.” – Susie

Participants use the ML for planning family vacations, which involves researching a destination or activity, making arrangements with the children’s schools or daycares, preparing lists of items to buy and pack for the entire family, preparing food, arranging for pet sitting and so on.

“C’est ça, tu dois faire la recherche sur les hôtels, sur l’endroit où on va...c’est ça, c’est souvent plus moi.” – Noémie

Beyond the logistics of vacations, the mothers also consider their children’s preferences and emotional needs and adjust their plans so that everyone could find enjoyment in the time together. Often, the ML of vacations starts early:

“J’ai pas le goût d’organiser l’été! Je ne me suis pas rendu à l’été là. Donc c’est souvent d’avance, c’est plusieurs mois d’avance.” – Susie

Holidays and birthdays or special events also fit into the category of enhancing family leisure time and happiness.

Non c’est parce que c’est la fête de ma plus jeune...alors c’est une belle charge mentale! C’est de la gâter, c’est un jour spécial. C’est de connaître les préférences de tout le monde puis tout ça. Puis j’ai l’impression que mon chum, il en tient moins compte. Il ne se casse pas la tête à essayer de faire autant plaisir peut-être. – Noémie

Noémie's ML description brought up the role it played in thinking about birthdays, holidays, and vacations and how this is primarily a means of achieving a happy child or family. For instance, she feels responsible for asking their children what they want for Christmas or what theme birthday party. While Noémie delegates tasks to her partner, she still needs to provide detailed instruction and supervision.

Jane enjoys spontaneous leisure time with her family, days where no planning was required, and they just decided what to do on a whim. Elise schedules weekly fun days for her family on Friday evenings that involve no cooking and doing an activity as a family. In this sense, mothers strategically plan unstructured time into the routines.

A Theory of the Mental Load

Researcher: *Qu'est-ce que la charge mentale accomplit pour la société?*

Elena: *Ben, à faire tourner le monde!*

In the spirit of the feminist tradition of the co-construction of theory with women and for women, the participants in this study were asked to co-develop a theory of the mental load. The following section explores the theoretical reflections from the participants themselves and what they think the ML is accomplishing for themselves as mothers, their families, their communities, and society.

A Breakdown of Mental Load is a Breakdown of Efficiency and Well-being

En général...ça fait...l'affaire de la société...que tout roule bien...parce que chaque femme...plusieurs femmes en tout cas, ont la charge qui sait que ça roule à l'école, à la garderie, pis tsé les rendez-vous...ça fait qu'une société roule bien. – Noémie

The ML, as a form of invisible work, has only recently been recognized as an essential category of household labour. As a strategy for exposing the social value and structural implications of the ML, participants were asked what they thought would happen if they would stop the ML, and then more broadly, what would happen if *all* mothers stopped the ML. The mothers' reactions to these questions were layered in that they had an immediate response, followed by another after some more reflection.

To the first question, if they stopped the ML within their own family, participants believed that the household and family would incur some setbacks, but overall, tasks would get done, just not as efficiently. Over the long term, however, their family members' overall physical, mental, and emotional well-being would deteriorate. Jane and Cara elaborate:

Okay, they'll survive, but it's just like, I feel emotionally, and the whole...well-rounded, like from A to Z, the way I take care of them...I feel like they wouldn't have that support anymore. –Jane

Disheveled. Like they'll survive...But they need your love. If you're not there to love them, this is gonna mess them up their whole life...the first thing I thought was hooligans...the household were to become chaotic...and like again, it doesn't mean it has to be like spotless, but let's say...really messy, no...no routine. So if a kid's world is chaotic, it does come out in aggression. It does come out in frustration... like there would be a lot of violence. –Cara

Jane and Cara perceive the value of the ML within their family as a container that protects and promotes their children's emotional well-being. For Susie and Noémie, on the other hand, a breakdown of the ML is a conduit to household disorganization (i.e. missing groceries or toiletries, being late for work and school, children's homework not getting done, children having clothes that do not fit). While they admit that the family would be ok, things would not be done as efficiently:

Je pense que ça irait là. Ça irait... je le vois, ça va bien quand je suis pas là, puis mon chum s'arrange. C'est jusque tout se fait plus lentement...mais les enfants vont se coucher plus tard que quand c'est avec moi. Parce que quand c'est moi, c'est plus planifié, tu sais? J'ai déjà tout pensé avant de commencer. –Noémie

Overall, a breakdown of the ML in their households reinforced participants' narratives that the ML was the mental effort to maximize household efficiency and family well-being. On a larger, more abstract scale, when the participants were asked “what would happen if *all* women around the world would stop the ML?” their reactions were much more emphatic and dystopian:

Le chaos. Ça serait le free for all. Free for all! – Susie

Je pense que ça serait un peu le bordel là. Pour vrai. – Noémie

Ok...le monde s'arrête. Mais encore ça reste que le point, la figure importante de la famille, c'est la maman. Parce qu'elle assume ses rôles d'unificatrice, de communicatrice, et d'organisatrice. – Elena

Haha...What's gonna happen? The whole world's gonna come crashing down. I know it for a fact. OOUF...a horror movie. – Elise

First thing that comes to mind is a lot of depression in kids. Yep. Just depressions in terms of kids acting out, either, like just being worried, crying all the time, sensitive, or just the opposite, physically violent. – Jane

The participants at first imagined a complete breakdown of efficiency and society's well-being, especially children. The discourse was one of chaos, a dismantling and extreme slowdown of daily routines, and that children's well-being would be compromised. The participants said that eventually, men would have no choice but to reduce their hours of paid labour to take care of the home and family. Overall, their answers reveal the magnitude and significance that they attribute to the ML within their own families and for society.

After further contemplation, the mothers agreed that while a complete halt in mothers' ML may not immediately result in chaos and that everyone would survive, the household and family would not run efficiently. This slowdown and disruption of daily life would eventually have corollary effects on realms beyond the household to the arena of public life.

Identity, Motherhood, and the Mental Load

Woven into participants' descriptions of the ML of motherhood are the issues related to struggles of identity, describing difficult transitions between pre-and post-motherhood, having their expectations challenged by the realities of motherhood, the struggle for control and power over the household and family, and having to defend one's choices and practices from social pressures, gender norms, time restraints and having to navigate multiple roles and fields (i.e. worker, mother, spouse, friend, woman).

Susie has a hard time living up to a standard and pace of living that she was able to do before having children, such as having a certain level of organization and cleanliness at home, getting to work on time, and having space to tend to her personal goals and pastimes. Part of her transition into motherhood was learning to be more flexible and accepting of the inability to get it all done in the same amount of time now that she had a child to care for:

“Faut réajuster nos standards, mais ça ça nous prend un couple de mois réajuster nos standards, si ce n'est pas des années.” – Susie

Elena thought she was ready for this readjustment and had prepared to put herself “on standby” for the first two years of childrearing:

J'étais prête à dire "ok, pour les prochains deux ans, Elena va en standby." J'étais prête, j'étais certaine ok? Donc, j'avais pas...je pense beaucoup c'est...les expectations? Et je veux pas non plus que lui soit mon seul projet. Il est un de mes projets.

Even though Elena believes that raising her child is only one project among many in her life, she prepared herself to set aside her career and her personal goals temporarily. She believes that the struggle for women today arises from a contradiction between the effort that went into investing in their education, careers, and personal goals before having children and then realizing that motherhood presents both practical and ideological barriers to sustaining those investments.

Dans le sens que moi, j'ai une maîtrise ok? Et je suis travailleur autonome. Je veux pas me mettre en "standby." Tu sais? Je pense que nous, les femmes maintenant, à niveau professionnel, on ne peut pas faire de compromis. Dans le sens où les mamans actuelles sont des mamans qui sont éduquées. La majorité qui ont étudié. Parce qu'elles veulent faire leurs carrières et tout ça, l'enfant est bien, mais quand même on est en conflit avec nous-mêmes à l'intérieur. Donc c'est pas seulement le facteur de la société, de la communauté, mais aussi un conflit entre nous! À l'intérieur. – Elena

As a new mother, Cara is also experiencing an internal conflict in compromising her career or how she wants to raise her child. She does not want to give up on her career for how much she spent on her education and the economic advantages she has earned. However, she also holds herself to a high standard and quality of parenting. The issue for her and for many mothers that work is not enough time:

"You know, I'm transitioning to being a working mom and I feel like 'Oh my god, I don't have time for my child'...and I'm also studying part time so 'oh my god, I don't even have time for anything.'" – Cara

Managing one's expectations and social ideals are important categories of the participant's ML when confronted with the reality that often does not go according to how they had envisioned it. This led Elena to feel some disappointment with motherhood and the awareness of impossible social ideals:

On a un bon équilibre, mais si je regarde tout ce qui est déroulement de la famille, je suis déçue, parce que j'arrive pas à rester debout. Et on va faire ça, ça, ça et ça et ça n'arrive pas...je suis déçue. Ok? Parce que c'est mon erreur, parce que j'ai mis des attentes ok? Maintenant je pense que de mon côté, c'est la société qui t'impose de retourner au travail, de faire des choses, d'être performante, de voyager, de faire les médias sociaux, de montrer tout ça et que tu avances. – Elena

To confront the contradictions between expectation and reality, the participants used their ML to strategize about finding “balance.” This mental process involves many of the categories described in previous sections, such as prioritizing, planning, strategizing, defending, and negotiating. Nevertheless, as Noémie, Jane, and Elise explain, what you choose to prioritize and how to balance them is a constant source of struggle:

En ayant cette charge mentale, je trouve que ça ne nous permet pas, les femmes de moins en moins, d'avoir accès à des postes plus importants...puis de penser qu'on est meilleures en prenant soin de nos enfants et nos familles au lieu de se réaliser aussi. En tant que personne et professionnelle. – Noémie

It's always struggling with, you know, people questioning me...thinking that I'm home and I have all this time in the world for everything. And then that makes you question yourself, well, if they think that of me, then that means I'm not that important. The role of me being a mother, they don't see it as big. So should I just go back to work and screw everything, and then just have this role that's important financially, I make money? And then I'm a mother too? So it's like always re-questioning myself. – Jane

Sometimes as a mom, you feel like you need to, you need to take care of yourself because the kids and everybody... like they expect so much from us. If I was still downtown working in a hair salon...working all those hours, my clients...I would lose everybody. I would be worse, so I took a step...many steps back to be the mom I am today. – Elise

The ML is also very much a part of the mothers' identities and seen as a personal resource and power that is used to control household and family routines and outcomes:

“Oui ça en vaut la peine parce que moi, je sais avec quoi mon enfant est bien, qu'est-ce qu'il aime manger...tu sais? J'ai un certain contrôle sur ce qui se passe.” – Noémie

“I'm able to work, I'm able to be a volunteer at school... I'm able to do *all* these things cause...that's what I chose for me. So, I feel like the mental health it's actually...it's not a *bad* thing sometimes.” – Elise

All participants admitted that despite some of the adverse effects, they are attached to the ML in that they enjoy having a sense of control and satisfaction in running the home and family.

Historicizing the ML

“Mais la société n'est pas faite pour les femmes qui ont des enfants!

Tout n'est pas fait pour avoir des enfants!” – Susie

Susie and the other participants felt that mothering was a role that was undervalued in society and that society was structured in a way that made mothering more difficult for women. The mothers in this study were asked to think about these historical and structural circumstances, including how and if the ML has evolved over generations and how external influences such as workplaces, communities, governments, education and technology play a role in mothers' mental labour at home.

All participants agreed that women have probably always had a mental load associated with the household and the family, however there are differences. For instance, Elena felt that her ML was heavier than her mother's or grandmother's because of various social circumstances:

Moi parfois je sortais pour aider ma mère à faire des choses...tout le monde me checkait. Donc il avait une communauté. Et donc, en vouloir ou ne pas vouloir, ma grand-mère aidait beaucoup ma mère...je pense que la communauté pouvait d'une certaine façon, aider la décharge ou permettre dans une certaine façon de soutenir la charge de ma mère. – Elena

Her mother and grandmother are from a close community in Italy, and they had much more help and did not raise the children alone. Here, Elena has no family and feels like she is missing the support. Elena also attributes women today with being more highly educated and invested in their careers and personal development and considers this as another layer added to the ML experienced by women.

Les attentes de ma mère par rapport au travail...les attentes que la société avait par rapport aux femmes étaient moindres. Aujourd'hui le premier facteur c'est que la société demande à la femme d'être professionnelle, super cool, gymnastique...et on a des exemples maintenant beaucoup plus accessibles par les médias sociaux que tu vois tout le monde "super cool." Et de l'autre côté, le manque de communauté autour de moi. – Elena

The other participants felt that the quality of the ML had perhaps changed over generations because of the changes to childrearing and women's position. However there has not necessarily been a change in the quantity or intensity of the ML.

"Mais la mentalité n'a pas changé. Donc la charge des enfants revient à la femme, traditionnellement, historiquement. Mais c'est parce qu'elle travaille en plus! Donc là il y a un équilibre qui ne se fait pas." – Susie

Cara recalls that her grandmother had immigrated to Canada, and her grandfather had gone to South America to work while she raised all the children. She felt this must have caused an intense ML for her grandmother. She tries to reflect how today's ML might be different from previous generations:

I can't say that my mental load is greater today, but it's just a different culture, a different climate like technology and this idea that we need to be perceived as the Instagram perfect Mom, where you know parent trends are changing so fast now!

Elise feels like there is more pressure on mothers today than in her grandmother's generation in terms of having to bring in an income, do more activities, and spend more time with children:

I feel there's more pressure now than let's say my grandmother. Like my grandmother was able to stay home. They didn't have a car. I feel now it's so hard. Like you have to balance everything. Like make sure you have enough money. Make sure you have this...make sure the kids are in an activity *each*. Make sure that...so I feel like now you do put more pressure. Back then, they used to go open the door and play in the lane. – Elise

Social Factors

Only a couple of external social factors were thought to significantly impact on the participants' ML: work and school (their children's) being the two top contributors. Interestingly, work can help alleviate the ML because while at work, the participants could get relief from the ML of home. In another way, work can accentuate the ML due to time and commitment barriers. For instance, Susie has had to deal with a reduction in funding of the health sector in the past few years and despite reducing her week to a four-day workweek, she still must do the same amount of work that typically would have been done in five days. Susie finds the ML of home and work often overlap:

J'essaie de faire la différence entre les deux sphères mais c'est difficile. L'une gruge nécessairement sur l'autre. On est au travail, on pense aux enfants, "est-ce qu'il est malade"...on est à la maison et "oh là demain au travail, faut que je fasse ça."

She also struggles not to be late for work every day after dropping her children off at school and daycare and carefully planning and organizing childcare for winter and summer breaks. This ML often needs to be done in advance, which she finds very stressful and adds to her ML.

Noémie stresses the importance of having a job and employer that are flexible and understanding of the demands of raising children:

J'ai un horaire flexible, fait que c'est sûr que ça aide beaucoup à ne pas être obligé de toujours prendre des rendez-vous en soirée ou en fin de journée. Ça aide beaucoup de rendre l'employé plus autonome dans son horaire. Ça amène une souplesse parce que je pense que si ton horaire est rigide ça fait que c'est stressant déjà de rentrer ta vie familiale dans ça.

Cara had just returned to work from maternity leave. She felt like her ML was dedicated to navigating the demands of work and a family, trying to think of a way to optimize both while maintaining her values and priorities as a worker and mother. She did not feel supported as a mother because she was the only one in her environment with children. At times she even felt targeted, such that her boss was more critical of the work she did.

To be honest, I like my job, but I don't have time because this mental load for motherhood is like (hand gesture over head to show it's full) so it takes up space. How does this make me be perceived at work? Will I be taken seriously? Do I care? And that's really a question I don't know? Do I care if they think that I'm less capable now that I'm a mom? Because I'm working with non-moms.

Primary schools for the older children became another significant external contributor to the ML for these mothers. Some of the main pressures on the ML included having to prepare healthy lunches (whereas meals are provided for at daycares for children under five), keeping track of school correspondence (i.e. emails, papers), and school events (i.e. special holidays, dress up days, etc.), and monitoring homework.

Alors à l'école, là c'est grave si tu oublies d'y rappeler son linge! Ah c'est grave si t'oublies de l'habiller beau pour la photo d'école! Ah là c'est grave si tu oublies de faire son lunch. Là c'est grave si tu oublies de faire ses devoirs, parce que ce n'est pas l'enfant qui va y penser! C'est le job du parent. – Susie

Noémie keeps a mental note of all the foods her children like and dislike so that she can customize their lunches to be healthy and enjoyable. She also found that the beginning of the school year was a big ML: “*En début de l'année scolaire dans le fond, ben à la fin de l'été...tsé la charge...la liste scolaire...c'est pas...tsé c'est moi qui s'en occupe là.*”

Other external factors I asked about related to how communities, government and technology potentially play a role in the ML of mothers; however, the participants did not feel that they play a significant role.

Chapter 4: Discussion & Analysis

This section summarizes the results of this study and offers an analysis of their theoretical implications through the lens of social reproduction theory, a growing body of work within Marxist Feminist critique. These findings, along with the presented discussion, are bound to the limits of the present study and this sample of Quebec mothers and cannot be generalized to a broader population. The limitations of the research will also be discussed in depth.

The mental load presents itself as an authentic experience for the Quebec mothers sampled in this study, emphasizing the home, family, identity, and social reproduction. The findings corroborate, expand on and dispute findings of previous research and literature on household cognitive labour, validating the need for the recognition of mental labour as a critical yet under-developed category of the labour of social reproduction. Based on the findings in this study, a definition of the mental load of mothers is suggested as *the gendered mental effort and processes involved in the optimal daily and generational reproduction of the household, family, and self*.

The Mental Load of Motherhood

The employment status of participants reflects current trends in the Quebec population where, after having children, women reduce hours of paid work to redirect time to childcare and improve work-family balance (Lavoie, 2016, p.43). Five out of six participants had reduced their paid work after having children. All participants emphasized the need for employment policies that promote work-family balance, such as understanding employers and flexible hours that accommodate children's doctor appointments, and sick days. The mothers sampled in this study also mirror previous findings that show that despite women's involvement in paid work and

men's increased time spent on household tasks and childcare, women are still doing a greater proportion of unpaid domestic tasks and childcare (Blair-Loy et al. 2015; Houle et al. 2017). Studies and population surveys that examine the gendered division of labour at home do not include categories for the mental processes or effort that the participants in this study describe, but that nonetheless are necessary for the day-to-day functioning of home and family life.

The findings show that all the participants feel that they do the bulk of the mental labour that ensures the smooth running of the household and the family, corroborating previous studies showing women take on the bulk of household and family cognitive labour (Daminger, 2019; Roberston et al. 2019; Walzer, 1996) and management (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Mederer, 1993; Treas & Tsui-o Tai, 2012). The mental load consists of the thinking work involved in daily routines and tasks (i.e. organizing, planning, strategizing, remembering, anticipating, troubleshooting) and the assurance of family and children's well-being (monitoring, worrying, and having to contemplate, defend, and negotiate one's own identity as a woman, worker and mother). While their male partners did participate to varying degrees in daily tasks and childcare, they were often monitored, given guidance, instruction, and correction from participants. Otherwise, most participants (5 out of 6) indicated that their male partners took care of the mental work associated with outdoor household tasks (i.e. yard work), family finances, and automobile maintenance. The women were also responsible for the mental labour involved in what Di Leonardo (1987) calls "kin work," the labour that goes into celebrating holidays, birthdays and maintaining family ties and networks.

Invisible Labour, Literally and Figuratively

Participants confirm that their mental labour is very much invisible and unseen, adding to previous studies that highlight the impact of cognitive labour and the "hidden work of planning and orchestrating family time" (Daly, 2001, p.228). The participants themselves required deep reflection and effort to find adequate language to describe the ML. One participant's strategy was to use various analogies to describe how she experienced the ML. In all cases, the mothers best described their ML as a series of quotations from their internal mental dialogue. Elise and Cara had kept a diary of their thought processes before the interview to help them remember important discussion points.

Noémie and Elise had attempted to have conversations about the ML with their husbands. The women found it challenging to explain and to have their partners understand how this household and family work was different or a heavier load than their own.

One way participants described the ML's invisibility is that their partners would always offer their help yet required a list of tasks to be done and detailed instructions. The mothers wondered why their partners did not know what tasks needed to be done, when, and how. They asked themselves why their partners did not see the work to be done or take a moment to think about it? According to previous research, mothers are seen as household managers and therefore are expected to prioritize, delegate, instruct, and monitor (Mederer, 1993; Robertson, 2017). Cara feels like she needs to manage her husband's activities at home, because she sees how he prioritizes certain tasks as inefficient or as not contributing to the family's overall well-being.

There Is No Time

The notion of time or lack thereof is at the center of the descriptions of the mental load. E.P. Thompson (1967) understood that the modern capitalist system “insisted that all time must be consumed, marketed, put to *use*” (p.91), requiring the rise of what Joseph Reagle (2019) calls “time hacking” and “time thrift,” i.e. the strategies people are using to be efficient, productive and purposeful. These strategies emerge out of work that is increasingly “piecemeal” where people are expected to juggle various tasks at once and where the line drawn between work and home or leisure is blurred by telework, technology, and a culture of work (Reagle, 2019). Time becomes a form of worker discipline, and managers become the “experts” at optimizing time (Thompson, 1967). Management thus seems an inevitable part of life as does escaping the “time-bind” (Hochschild, 2009), not only at work, but also as it extends and seeps into various spheres of life. Hochschild (2009) recognizes that the sedimentation of late capitalism’s “market mentality” is causing what she perceives to be “cultural fissures through which market instrumentality and emotional detachment sometimes seep into life at home” (p.95). As a result of these cultural fissures, we see the rise of the management of everyday life both in and across public and private spheres (Hancock & Tylor, 2009).

In a 2016 Quebec study on work-family reconciliation, Amélie Lavoie found that Quebec parents lack time; 50% of parents said they were rushing to get all their daily tasks done, and 56% of parents felt that they never or rarely had time for themselves (p.44). Participants describe the ML as what keeps the home and family “running” by maximizing efficiency.

The ML is mitigated once an effective routine has been established. Routines help automate the family’s daily tasks and schedules, to reduce the ML (Robertson, 2017).

Zucchermarglio & Alby (2014) define household routines as “the temporary arrangements that families adopt at a certain stage of the course of their family life, and they reflect specific preferences, meanings, and values of specific members of the families, the women” (p.22). However, routines do not consistently alleviate the ML. Routines can be oppressive, with heavy workloads, responsibilities, and little free time, leaving mothers like Susie feeling depleted. When there is a higher demand for multitasking involved, this leads to higher rates of fatigue and burnout (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019).

The Internalized Manager

During the transcription and coding process, an unexpected pattern emerged in the way participants described the ML: all of them demonstrated their experience through examples of an inner mental dialogue. Internal dialogue was the most coded theme in all the interviews in this study. Internal mental dialogue was sometimes in the form of a question asked to oneself such as “what do I make for dinner?” or “what do I need to pick up at the grocery store?” Other times, it was thought processes such as worrying about their child at school or planning the next vacation.

“Est-ce que c’est bon pour lui le milieu? Est-ce qu’il y a des bons amis? Qu’est-ce qu’on pourrait faire? Qu’est-ce que les enfants aimeraient manger? Qu’est-ce qu’on pourrait les faire découvrir?” – Noémie

In many circumstances, the inner dialogue was repeating a list of things to do or reminders, even when they had in fact been keeping a physical list or calendar. As "keepers of the calendar," Daly (2001) found that in a nuclear family model, women were responsible for organizing family routines and schedules (p.236). Managing the calendar was not only about making lists and marking the calendar but also taking on the mental activity of being responsible

for making sure that what needs to happen happens (p.237) via "psychological vigilance" (p.240). This vigilance was the case for Elena and Cara, where despite writing tasks and reminders on a list, they would continue to repeat them in their heads until the tasks had been completed. Elena uses the analogy of a manager at work to describe this internal mental process:

C'est automatique et ça rentre puis ça roule, ça roule et ça roule, que ça roule. Et pour moi à la fin de la journée ça m'épuise! Et ça t'épuise comme être au travail, avec les personnes qui te demandent "est-ce que t'as fait ça, as-tu envoyé le email?"

Internal dialogue also manifests as a deep internal conflict or struggle with themselves, having to navigate complex emotions related to their role as mothers, the management of the household, and their relationships with their partners and family. Jane describes constantly questioning herself, her choices as a mother, how this impacted her children and how she was perceived by others. When the participants felt a mental overload, they felt like they needed to manage their emotions and reactions to specific situations, usually involving learning to "let go" of control and the need to micro-manage. For example, when Elise's husband watches their children on his own, she worries about the type of food he gives them and how late they go to bed. It causes her mental stress, so she starts telling herself, "I need to relax, just let go of the control, they need to enjoy their time with their father too and it's ok."

Haicault (1984) sees the ML as a sociological issue embedded in the social construction of time and space. As spaces have become increasingly reclassified into specific activities and roles (i.e. work, home, school, daycare, grocery store), individuals must now manage various spaces and the time we spend on them. Haicault says "*La gestion se caractérise notamment par la chasse aux gains de temps et l'autodiscipline que chacune s'impose pour être à la fois contremaîtresse et exécutante*" (p.269). In other words, she argues that the necessity for the

management of everyday life is the process of internalizing an auto-disciplinary function that enhances efficiency and performance. The body becomes a mediator in transferring and using the appropriate skills and competencies according to the sphere one finds themselves in (Haicault, 1984). The body and time take on new dimensions: the body manager (initiating and completing tasks) and body mediator, deciphering what needs to be done and how between fragmented practices (p.272). She argues that researchers must be wary of categories that analytically divide work and family as it fragments social actors and amputates significant parts of life that, when considered together, unveil essential aspects of human life. Because household and childcare duties are still structurally and culturally embedded in traditional gender roles, mothers are primarily the ones to internalize an automatic, constant and oppressive inner dialogue that manages, delegates, reminds, criticizes, monitors and questions how one runs their home and family. Today, mothers are constantly asked, "how do you manage it all?" implying that one needs a strategy for juggling family, careers, friendships, self-care, and other life circumstances (Arendell, 2001).

According to Moreno and Park (2010) the ML is a cognitive construct that “takes into consideration the demands that certain tasks impose on an individual” (p.10). It is “multidimensional” and defined in the cognitive sciences as the “psychological experience that results from the interaction of subjective individual characteristics and objective task characteristics” (p.10). In this vein, taking from the cognitive sciences and fusing it with feminist uses of the concept, the ML is a cognitive construct that women develop and is intensified during the transition to motherhood (Walzer, 1996). Women typically become primary caregivers and managers of the household and family. The ML is the process of fusing subjective characteristics such as one’s values and life goals with objective tasks within the necessary reproduction of

daily life (i.e. feeding, care work, household tasks). Because it is subjective, the ML can and does vary from person to person. Some mothers may feel it heavier than others or develop a ML that is more concerned about one aspect of domestic life over another (i.e. efficiency versus family leisure).

While mothers experience the ML as a burden at times, consistent with previous research on the subject, the mothers in this study had a hard time letting go of the ML and entrusting it to others. The mothers believed that they were best suited for the task and got the job done more effectively. Participants attributed this capacity to do it better to biological, social or structural (i.e. maternity leave, work policies) reasons and that women were inclined towards care work and thinking about the well-being of others. Noémie theorizes the root of the ML as an issue with how girls and boys are socialized:

On dirait qu'on est obligé de penser aux autres? Tandis que souvent on apprend aux garçons de s'occuper d'eux-mêmes. Tsé de bouger, d'être actif...et nous autres, faut voir si l'autre est bien...si l'autre se sent bien. – Noémie

Women are seen as the “captains of households” and the managers that oversee the good functioning and successful outcomes of the home and family (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019). Despite the impacts of the ML on the participants, they were still hesitant to give up what they saw as a form of “control,” and take some satisfaction in doing this mental work. Mederer (1993) suggests there may be a type of “maternal gatekeeping” happening where women feel a source of power and control in overseeing the management of the home that they are prevented from achieving in the public realm. At the same time, according to Daminger (2019), men do the equivalent amount of cognitive labour when it comes to making household and family choices that yield “power and influence” (p.610).

Mental Labour and The Circuit of Reproduction

The limitations of this study, including having a small and homogenous sample, cannot imply a general theory of the ML or household cognitive labour. However, the findings add to a growing number of women's voices that stress the gravity and value of this invisible work on the lives of women, the gendered division of labour and the reproduction of the home and family. The following is a discussion on the mental load through the lens of social reproduction theory (SRT).

SRT aims to uncover the various processes of reproductive labour that are often hidden, and yet contribute in important ways to create capitalism's most valuable commodity: the worker (Bhattacharya, 2017; Ferguson, 2020). According to Bhattacharya (2017), Marx's theoretical model of the capitalist wage relation can help us understand how the activities, resources and time involved in the production of the worker is fundamentally a "core structural relation" that is linked to relationships of oppression and exploitation along the lines of gender, race, and sexuality (p.3). SRT is valuable to the analysis of the ML because it shines light on labour processes rather than singular points of action or behaviour. As a theoretical framework, SRT understands how these processes subvert and exploit certain groups. Past research on domestic mental labour is often based on time diaries or prompts, pointing only to what is happening in singular moments in time, limiting our ability to see the totality of the ML of mothers.

Based on the participants' narratives, mothers perceive the ML as holding significant value within the circuit of reproduction and the processes involved in the daily and generational renewal of the population. The ML, in a broad sense, is the *overseer*, the manager and the strategist of the culmination of reproductive labour. If all mothers stopped doing the ML, as

stated by participants, the world would be in “chaos,” “a horror movie,” where “children would be depressed,” and society would ultimately have to slow its pace. Productivity would decline as workers, fathers specifically, would need to reorient some of their time towards reproductive work no longer being done by women. The participants believe that their mental labour plays a meaningful role in the reproduction of their families, deducing that the culmination of mental labour done by *all* mothers must play a critical role in maintaining society.

One drawback or critique I offer to SRT is the lack of methodological strategy. It also naturalizes the categories of housework down to the physical and emotional elements and fails to acknowledge the mental dimension of reproductive labour as its own category. Scholars that specialize in feminist methods and invisible labour, such as Daniels and DeVault, are valuable to SRT as a means of shedding light on invisible labour processes. It is critical to historicize reproductive labour through the awareness and careful consideration that the quantity and quality of the work of keeping a home and caretaking evolve and transform through time. Martha Gimenez’s (2018) notion of the “domestic mode of reproduction” asserts that domestic labour is a combination of historically specific processes concerning the various elements of production, be it the means of production, labour itself, or capitalist social relations. The conditions of production, i.e. the wage relation and capitalist-worker relation, mediate the material basis for the conditions of reproductive labour, including the time, education, and resources available for individuals to reproduce themselves as workers (Gimenez, 2018).

An important question that Gimenez asks that is useful for thinking about the ML is “does the reproduction of labourers *always* entail the reproduction of labour power?” (p.302). In other words, does mental labour performed by the mothers in this study support or drive the reproduction of labour-power, for themselves and their families? Based on the findings,

including the categories of time, efficiency, productivity, performance and children's development, the ML becomes a necessary reaction to the capitalist mode of reproduction that is constantly attempting to colonize people's free time and free labour (Gimenez, 2018). With women as equal members of the workforce and still taking on the bulk of domestic housework and childcare, time as a scarce resource requires the enhancement of the organization and planning of daily routines and schedules. Furthermore, the investment of the ML into children's happy and healthy development, a modern "intensive mothering" practice is possible thanks to decades of developmental research and neoliberal policies that have defunded important institutions involved in children's development (i.e. schools, daycare, sports programs). In this sense, the ML reveals a form of class struggle, through what Annette Lareau (2003) calls the "concerted cultivation" of childhood, where parents in the middle to upper classes use their cognitive capacities to develop well-intentioned and researched parenting ideologies and practices. In contrast, working class parents must use their mental capacity towards strategies that ensure they can pay the bills and provide for their families each month. These parenting practices, as Lareau argues, are increasingly the basis by which class and racial inequality are reproduced. A "good" childhood leading to what parents hope is a good outcome for their child's future is the result of a "deliberate and ongoing orchestration" that is typically the mother's responsibility (Arendell, 2001, p.169). Arendell finds that:

Modernized, structured childhood(s) occasions an expansion of maternal carework. Coordinating, facilitating, and monitoring children's time adds layers of tasks to mothers' everyday lives. This orchestration of time and activity occurs as part of the web of parental nurturing: children are tended to and cared for across the range of their activities (p.172).

While participants believe that the ML has existed in previous generations, they do recognize that it has transformed based on specific historical circumstances (i.e. technology,

culture, social media). Its primary function today is to keep families and societies “running” smoothly while also enhancing family well-being and happiness. The Mental Load, as part of capitalist reproduction, attempts to mitigate the encroachment of work into all aspects of life. It is an attempt at freedom, yet at the same time takes it away by taken up mothers’ mental space. Lastly, while the data reflects the experiences of a small homogenous sample taken from an upper-middle class group of mothers, making a comprehensive class-based analysis typical in Marxist research impossible, the narratives show how middle-class mothers appeal to their mental load as a defense against a society that is compressing the time and resources people have to reproduce themselves and their families. The ML can be thought of as an attempt to defend one’s life-making, and the continuity or improvement of this status for their children.

Conclusion

My thesis project aimed to elucidate the experience of the mental load of Quebec mothers and historicize and situate the ML using social reproduction theory. After a comprehensive review of the literature, the gap identified required further examination of the experience of the cognitive labour of mothers with reflection on what it does for their families, communities and society and social reproduction. The participants were included in co-constructing a theory of the mental load – a strategy that has been at the core of the feminist tradition of consciousness-raising, research, and activism. The aim of this study was to elevate the women’s voices to carry forward the deeper meanings and reflections of the ML on women’s daily lives, identities and on the broader circuits of reproductive care.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the small and homogenous sample size; therefore, the findings and interpretation of these results cannot be applied to the general population. The sample consisted of all white, middle class educated women, thus the results lack a nuanced understanding of how people from diverse backgrounds experience the ML. Furthermore, a class-based analysis was not possible due to the lack of working-class mothers in the sample and future research is necessary to understand the ML as it is configured across a broad spectrum of class positions. Class, as a category of capitalist social relations, is deeply stratified and racialized in its lived experience, and the ML will inevitably reflect these differences in lived experience in its configuration. The timeline for completing the Master’s thesis, and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, prevented the ability to access a more extensive and diverse group. Despite the small and homogenous sample, the data was consistent across participants and offers

a vision for future research on the subject. The analysis offers itself as a starting point for thinking about mental labour through the lens of social reproduction theory. Being a sole coder limited the ability to compare the coding structure and interpretation with other experts. Finally, another limitation is that half the interviews were done in French. While no translation was involved, variations in meaning and use of language could have influenced how the ML was coded and then interpreted. Despite these limitations, the participants' contributions were rich and detailed and contributed to the study of household cognitive labour.

Contributions

This thesis contributes to a growing corpus of research that examines the gendered dimension of mental labour. While the experiences of the Quebec mothers in this study corroborate previous phenomenological studies in terms of the categories of mental labour and their aims, I identify two overarching themes: the ML as the manufacturer of efficiency and the cultivator of family happiness. These two broad themes connect with the sociology of the ML and how it interacts with historical and social conditions. As Sue Ferguson (2016) says, "theory's task is to comprehend and articulate the *concrete* unity of the diverse" (p.31). I also propose a definition of the mental load that better encompasses its totality and role in social reproduction: the mental effort and processes involved in the optimal daily and generational reproduction of the household, family and the self. Finally, an unexpected and important contribution is the idea that the ML can be understood as an internalized manager, experienced as a constant dialogue in participants' minds that disciplines, monitors, reminds, strategizes and evaluates mothers' thoughts, emotions, actions, performance and priorities in order to maximize efficiency and childhood development.

Future Research

While I am not the first to argue the need to incorporate a fourth category of domestic labour into future studies and the population census, the implications of the mental load on these women's lives were more significant to them than the physical tasks of chores and childcare. The ML plays a role in how women experience motherhood and the contradictions between various identities and roles they perform. The impacts of mental overload include physical exhaustion, stress, marital conflicts, and a general dissatisfaction once they realize the dream of 'having it all' was an illusion. Future research for social reproduction theorists also requires a deeper discussion on method to help guide researchers in the field to know exactly *how* to uncover the processes they seek to theorize. Critical Grounded Theory is an exciting and valuable method worth considering in this regard.

Appendix

Interview Guide (English version)

- *Brief introduction, explanation of the research, and reminder of the right to end or retract participation at any time without consequence until the specified deadline.*
- *Introduce and define the concept of the “mental load” of mothers.*

Please remember that this is a safe space. We acknowledge and respect that each participant has their own experience and opinion. Please speak one at a time, this group interview is being recorded and would facilitate transcription.

Part I

1. Do you experience the “mental load”?
2. Can you describe your mental load? (You may use the items you listed prior to this meeting).
3. How or when did your mental load develop?
4. Are there specific times or periods of time where you feel like the mental load is more/less present or difficult?
5. Was there any specific time in you or your child’s life stage (example infant, school age, teenage, etc.) in which you felt the “mental load” more/less?
6. Do you feel like the mental load is equally shared at home? How so?
7. Are there different mental loads between you and your partner/children? If so, how do you perceive them to be different?
8. Does the “mental load” affect you and how? How does it impact your relationship? Work? Health and well-being?
9. What alleviates the mental load for you?

Part II

10. Do you think mothers have always had the mental load? Do you believe mothers' mental load has increased or decreased over time? Why/why not?
11. Are there factors outside the home and family that contribute to your mental load and if so, how? For example, school, work, community or family services, culture, social pressures, etc.?
12. What do you imagine would happen if you stopped doing the mental load?
13. What do you imagine would happen if *all* mothers stopped doing the mental load?
14. What does the mental load contribute to your family? Your community? Society?
15. What would alleviate the mental load for mothers? What makes it worse?

Would you like to add anything to this discussion that you feel is important?

Guide Entrevue (Version Français)

Partie I

1. Avez-vous entendu parler du concept de la charge mentale avant cette étude? Si oui, comment?
2. Est-ce que vous avez une charge mentale comme mère aujourd'hui?
3. Pourriez-vous décrire votre charge mentale, ça consiste à quoi? (Référez à votre liste.)
4. Est-ce qu'il y a un moment où vous avez aperçu où vous avez développé la charge mentale?
5. Est-ce qu'il y a des moments où la charge mentale est plus ou moins présente et/ou difficile?
6. Pensez-vous que la charge mentale soit divisée équitablement à la maison?
7. Est-ce que votre conjoint a la même charge mentale que vous?
8. Est-ce que la charge mentale impacte la relation avec votre conjoint?

9. Comment est-ce que la charge mentale vous impact personnellement, physiquement, émotionnellement, professionnellement?
10. Est-ce qu'il y avait une période pendant votre maternité ou différents stages de vos enfants où vous avez ressenti plus/moins la charge mentale?
11. Qu'est-ce qui soulage la charge mentale pour vous?

Partie II

12. Est-ce que vous pensez que les mères ont toujours eu la charge mentale? Est-ce que ça a augmenter/diminuer/changer avec le temps?
13. Est-ce qu'il y a des facteurs externes (comme l'école, votre famille, la communauté, vos travailles, le gouvernement) qui contribue ou diminue la charge mentale?
14. Et si vous arrêtiez de faire la charge mentale? Qu'imaginez-vous dans cette situation?
15. Et si toutes les mères arrêtaient la charge mentale?
16. Alors que pensez-vous que la charge mentale contribue à votre famille, votre communauté et la société en général?
17. Est-ce que vous pouvez offrir des idées de solutions?

Code Structure

| Code System | Frequency |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Code System | 1356 |
| HOUSEHOLD | 0 |
| Finances | 16 |
| Meals/Food | 14 |
| Groceries | 5 |
| Meal Planning/Prep | 8 |
| The household | 6 |
| Moving | 2 |
| Outdoor Household Chores | 2 |
| House cleaning | 3 |
| Laundry/wash | 4 |
| DOL @ home (+) | 16 |
| Invisible work | 1 |
| → The balanced couple | 4 |
| Car maintenance | 4 |
| Shopping (+) | 4 |
| WORK/CAREER | 0 |
| Partner's Work | 2 |
| Work/life (+) | |
| Work-family conflict | 8 |
| Separate spheres | 3 |
| Work alleviates ML of home | 2 |
| ML spillover | 7 |
| Opportunities to work | 5 |
| Advancing/moving forward (+) (+) | 10 |
| Status (employed, being home) | 15 |
| PT hours and FT work | 2 |
| Vacation time/Benefits/Pay | 1 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Incentives | 1 |
| Equal pay | 1 |
| unpaid work | 2 |
| Overtime | 1 |
| Work tolerance for fathers | 1 |
| Being productive | 3 |
| TIME | 0 |
| Routines/Daily Life (+) (+) | 11 |
| Leisure/free time (+) | 5 |
| PHYSICAL, MENTAL & EMOTIONAL EFFECTS | 0 |
| Physical/Body | 14 |
| Pregnancy | 4 |
| Illness | 2 |
| Sick kids/partner | 2 |
| fatigue/exhaustion (+) (+) | 17 |
| Stress | 13 |
| Emotions/Feelings | 19 |
| Ability to cope | 1 |
| Feeling judged/pressured | 4 |
| good/bad days (+) | 3 |
| Feeling good | 5 |
| Going crazy | 1 |
| Feeling let down | 2 |
| discomfort | 1 |
| Frustration | 6 |
| Interaction between physical and mental | 3 |
| ML taking up headspace | 3 |
| GENDER CONCEPTS | 0 |
| Social stereotypes (+) (+) | 22 |
| Women | 0 |
| Motherhood | 2 |
| Adjusting to mother role | 2 |
| society does not support mothers | 2 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Stay at home mothers (+) (+) | 4 |
| Mother as most important family figure | 1 |
| Mom guilt | 3 |
| Having more children | 1 |
| Before/After Kids | 10 |
| Her role as a mother | 1 |
| Mothers that put themselves first | 1 |
| Mothers self-sacrifice | 2 |
| Expectations of motherhood (+) | 13 |
| A woman/mother's role (+) | 15 |
| Mother's ML taking care of problems and pleasures | 1 |
| Mother as creating balance | 1 |
| Mother is communicator | 1 |
| A matriarchal society | 3 |
| Women's emancipation/advancement (+) | 4 |
| Today's women | 6 |
| the ideal woman | 4 |
| Men | 0 |
| Educating boys | 1 |
| Widowed/single fathers | 2 |
| Macho men | 2 |
| A father's role | 5 |
| Outsourcing domestic labour | 11 |
| Reproducing gender stereotypes (+) (+) | 11 |
| Emotion work | 9 |
| ML as making everyone feel good | 5 |
| FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS | 0 |
| The ideal family | 2 |
| CHILDREN & CHILDREARING | 0 |
| Childcare (+) (+) | 35 |
| Child's Age/Stage | 7 |
| Child's development & well-being (+) (+) | 20 |

| | |
|---|----------|
| Parental leave (+) | 10 |
| parenting strategies/ideologies (+) (+) (+) (+) (+) | 20 |
| Extended Family | 15 |
| Aging parents | 4 |
| Support (+) (+) | 25 |
| Impact on family | 5 |
| ML concerns all household members | 1 |
| Responsibility/role in creating gender dynamics at home | 2 |
| Partner not seeing the work that needs to done | 6 |
| Partners asking how to help | 4 |
| Asking for help | 1 |
| Partners | 7 |
| time with partner | 3 |
| Partners as help | 2 |
| Training the partner | 1 |
| Father's unable to be as efficient (+) | 5 |
| Conflict with partner | 13 |
| Separation/divorce | 3 |
| ML and shared custody | 3 |
| Communication | 2 |
| Father as mother's assistant | 1 |
| Fathers and the ML | 2 |
| Having to negotiate tasks/prioritize | 7 |
| Discussions with partners | 2 |
| Partner taking ML? | 4 |
| Impact of ML on partner (+) | 5 |
| Partner's ML | 8 |
| Family activities | 3 |
| Quality time spent as a family | 9 |
| When mother is not there | 2 |
| Friends (+) | 7 |
| SOCIAL & EXTERNAL FACTORS | 0 |
| Medical/Healthcare (+) | 6 |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Government | 3 |
| Community & Volunteering (+) (+) | 9 |
| Quebec | 1 |
| Social ties | 1 |
| Mother's Education (+) | 5 |
| External influences on ML | 2 |
| Society & Culture (+) (+) (+) (+) | 11 |
| The economy | 1 |
| Social change | 2 |
| Daycare | 6 |
| school (+) (+) | 11 |
| Technology (+) (+) | 5 |
| Environment/Ecology | 1 |
| ML THEORIZATION | 0 |
| ML DESCRIPTION | 0 |
| Describing ML | 55 |
| ML as the small things | 1 |
| Information/Research | 1 |
| Monitoring health (+) | 3 |
| troubleshooting | 1 |
| Worrying | 4 |
| Stategizing | 3 |
| Forecasting | 3 |
| Checking/supervision | 7 |
| Organising | 9 |
| Vacations/getaways | 5 |
| Holidays/Birthdays | 6 |
| Managing emotions and behaviour | 9 |
| Planning (+) | 21 |
| Checking | 2 |
| ML as continuous/never-ending | 3 |
| Delegating (+) | 24 |
| Getting things done (+) | 9 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Anectodes | 7 |
| Work ML | 1 |
| Lists (+) | 17 |
| Remembering/Memory (+) | 21 |
| Accumulation of things | 2 |
| Having to "catch up" on lost time | 1 |
| Doing it on your own | 7 |
| Inability to complete a task | 3 |
| responsibilities | 3 |
| Incomplete tasks stay in the mind | 3 |
| ML intensity/difficult (+) | 14 |
| ML inside and outside the home | 4 |
| ML inner dialogue | 89 |
| Disconnecting | 1 |
| Recognition of ML | 2 |
| Division of ML @ home | 7 |
| Knowledge of ML | 10 |
| Emma Comic | 2 |
| Has a ML | 7 |
| Analogies/Imagery | 17 |
| Word ML & meaning | 3 |
| Development of ML | 7 |
| ML as imposed | 1 |
| Did not predict ML | 5 |
| Solutions (+) | 3 |
| What alleviates the ML | 16 |
| ML over generations (+) (+) | 9 |
| If she stopped ML | 9 |
| ML varies according to personality and conditions | 2 |
| If all the mothers in the world stopped ML | 10 |
| The world stops | 4 |
| No one would take over the ML | 1 |
| Enjoyment from ML breakdown | 1 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Chaos | 11 |
| Women as managers (+) (+) | 8 |
| Solutions may be difficult to achieve | 1 |
| Solution to alleviating ML for women | 3 |
| The role of ML | 2 |
| ML as maximising efficiency | 5 |
| ML as a "mother's love" | 1 |
| ML to take care of others and think of other's needs | 1 |
| ML as cultivating leisure/pleasure | 3 |
| ML as keeping harmony within the family | 3 |
| ML as taking initiative and taking care | 4 |
| ML as making the world go round | 1 |
| The "good" life (+) | 4 |
| SELF & IDENTITY | 0 |
| self-care | 2 |
| rewarding yourself | 1 |
| Having space/time for oneself (+) | 11 |
| Participant's own needs | 4 |
| Balance | 7 |
| Priorities | 8 |
| Identity | 15 |
| Compromises (+) | 2 |
| Self-questioning | 2 |
| Transforming oneself (+) | 3 |
| Life projects | 3 |
| Internal conflict (+) | 4 |
| Putting the self on hold | 3 |
| Self-reflection (+) (+) | 19 |
| Return to self | 1 |
| Having control (+) | 8 |
| ML addict | 1 |
| Worldview/perception | 1 |
| Comments on the study/questions | 6 |

Susie -Liste des tâches

Famille

conjoint

Enfant 1= 12 ans

Enfant 2 = 3 ½ ans

Liste des tâches à faire Famille

Quotidiennement

- Enfant 2 - matin
 - Bon réveil pour une belle journée,
 - Collés 5 minutes pour une belle journée
 - Pipi du matin
 - Déjeuner soutenant, mange suffisamment
 - Brossage de dents efficace
 - Habillage adéquat pour intérieur et extérieur
 - Trucs pour le motiver à aller à la garderie
 - Négociation ou non pour jouet a la garderie
- Enfant 1 - matin
 - Supervision des tâches à accomplir le matin
 - Mettre la table, préparer lunch, préparer sac a dos avec tous les livres nécessaires + ordi et ses composantes, habillement adéquat, déjeuner soutenant, prise de médication, brossage de dents incluant waterpik et soie dentaire plus entretien de la gouttière invisalign, activation de la minuterie pour un départ à temps et éviter d'arriver en retard à l'école
- Conjoint - matin
 - Bisou bon matin et bisou bonne journée
- Moi – matin
 - Lever, douche, habillage, déjeuner, assembler lunch, cell dans sacoché
 - Ranger vaisselle dans sèche-vaisselle
 - Aller reconduire Léonard à la garderie
 - Arriver à l'heure au travail
- Enfant 2–soir
 - Aller chercher Léonard à la garderie dès que possible
 - Demander un compte rendu de la journée ou lire le cahier
 - Vérifier si vêtements ou autres choses à rapporter à la maison
 - Se souvenir si jour de bain ou non/mettre en branle la préparation du bain
- Enfant 1 – soir
 - Vérifier cell en attente du téléphone qui me dit qu'il est bien revenu de l'école
 - Supervision/rappels verbaux pour les devoirs et leçons, défaire boîte a lunch, laver plats à lunch, mettre la table, douche et dents

- conjoint – soir
 - Demander un compte-rendu de sa journée au travail
- Moi – soir
 - Libérer l'entrée des vêtements/bottes et les faire sécher
 - Gestion des temps d'écran
 - Préparation du repas et planification du lunch
 - Fait office de Time Keeper pour démarrer la routine de dodo pour que tout soit dans les temps donc de façon harmonieuse

Hebdomadairement

- Enfant 2
 - Apporter doudou et toutou propres le lundi + souliers de course
 - Rappporter doudou et toutou sales le vendredi + souliers de course
- Enfant 1
 - Supervision pour apporter vêtements d'éducation physique propres le lundi
 - Rappel verbal pour rapporter vêtements sales le vendredi
 - Rappel verbal pour apporter tous les livres pour les devoirs à faire pendant la fin de semaine
- conjoint
 - Discussion sur plan de la semaine et fin de semaine
- Moi
 - Organisation de la gardienne le mardi soir pour aller à mon cours de pilates
 - Organisation d'une activité de fin de semaine avec les enfants
 - Tel à mon Papa pour prendre des nouvelles, invitation à venir voir les enfants
 - Communication avec le papa de enfant 1 pour gestion des activités/école/autres

Mensuellement

- Enfant 2
 - Répondre aux invitations de fête d'amis, trouver l'idée cadeau et magasiner le cadeau en respectant le budget!
 -
- Enfant 1
 - Répondre aux invitations de fête d'amis, trouver l'idée cadeau et magasiner le cadeau en respectant le budget!
- Moi
 - Prendre RV chez l'ostéo
 - Organisation d'une sortie avec enfants
 - Tentative d'organisation d'une sortie en amoureux : trouver la gardienne et planifier la sortie

- Rassembler les frais encourus pour Enfant 1 durant le mois, les noter dans un fichier excel et l'envoyer au papa d'Enfant 1
- Faire un virement ou attendre un virement en conséquence des calculs des frais

Saisons

- Printemps
 - Planification du calendrier de garde partagée pour l'été
- Été
 - Organisation des vacances d'hiver : discussion entre conjoints pour l'organisation des jours de congé versus les jours de fermeture de garderie puis élaboration d'un calendrier
 - Ménage de la garde-robe des enfants pour évaluer les besoins en vêtements d'hiver : bottes, habit de neige, patins, raquettes, lunettes de neige
 - Anticipation et préparation à la rencontre avec le papa de Enfant 1 pour discuter de différents sujets dont le calendrier de garde, activité pour l'été
 - Inscription pour activité d'automne pour les enfants : escrime, musique
 -
- Automne
 - Planification du calendrier de garde partagée pour l'hiver
 - Penser à recommencer la vit D pour la période de l'hiver (moi)
- Hiver
 - Organisation des vacances d'été : discussion entre conjoints pour les semaines visées puis recherche de la sorte de vacances envisagée
 - Ménage de la garde-robe des enfants pour évaluer les besoins en vêtements d'été : maillots, chapeaux, sandales, bottes de pluie, casque de vélo
 - Anticipation et préparation à la rencontre avec le papa d'Enfant 1 pour discuter de différents sujets dont le calendrier de garde, activité pour l'été
 - Inscription pour activité d'été pour les enfants : soccer
 - Inscription au camp de jour

Annuellement

- Pour les deux enfants
 - Rv médicaux annuels, dentiste, optométriste, ostéo
- Pour les 3 gars :
 - Planifier un repas et une activité de fête avec des amis
 - Trouver un cadeau de fête
- Moi
 - Rv médicaux annuels, dentiste, optométriste, ostéo
 - REER et CELI
 - Rapport d'impôts : rassemblement de tous les documents nécessaires
 - Organiser une sortie de fille avec une amie

Liste des taches à faire Maison

Quotidiennement

- Planification des repas
- Préparation des repas
- Gestion des restes
- Planification et préparation des lunches
- Vaisselle : lave-vaisselle et a la main
- 1 brassée de lavage

Hebdomadairement

- Changement de draps des 3 lits
- Touch up dans la salle de bain
- Préparation de l'aire de vie pour le Irobot
- Entretien du Irobot
- Arroser les plantes
- Liste d'épicerie
- Compost le mardi
- Vidanges et recyclage le vendredi

Mensuellement

- Grand ramassage dans toute la maison avant la venue des femmes de ménage
- Nettoyage du filtre de la fournaise
- Entretien du déshumidificateur

Saisons

- Printemps
 - Vérifier si garçon dispo pour tonte de gazon
 - Préparation du terrain : racler gazon, balayer terrasse
 - Sortie des meubles de patio, du boyau d'arrosage et des jeux d'été
 - Tourner terre du jardin
 - Semer et planter dans le jardin
 - Nettoyer sous la rallonge
 - Mettre les flexitubes
 - Nettoyer les gouttières
 - Laver les fenêtres
 - Installer les moustiquaires
 - Laver les rideaux
 - Prendre RV pneus d'été/changement d'huile + se libérer pour y aller (x2)
- Été
 - Entretien des plates-bandes
 - Entretien du jardin
 - Vérification de la sortie de la sécheuse

- Automne
 - Ramassage des feuilles
 - Planches sur carré de sable
 - Arracher plantes dans le jardin
 - Tailler les arbres et les framboisiers
 - Réaménagement du garage
 - Hiverner les meubles de jardin et le boyau d'arrosage
 - Enlever les moustiquaires
 - Prendre RV pneus d'hiver/changement d'huile + se libérer pour y aller (x2)
 -
- Hiver
 - Vérifier descentes de gouttières
 - Déneiger!!!
 - Vérification de la sortie de la sécheuse
 - Planification des rénos pour l'année à venir
 - Mettre des décorations à l'arbre de Maman puis les enlever!

Annuellement

- Visite à l'arbre de Maman le jour de son anniversaire et le jour de son décès

Cara's Journal Notes

Meal prep: healthy but something they will actually eat, what will appease the whole family so that we're all eating the same thing.. prioritizing family dinners early on also aligns with my parenting beliefs .. dinners/ meals together are good time to open lines of communication, to connect, to carve out family time.

Mom guilt: asked husband to do nighttime routine (shower, pjs, book) with daughter so that I can dry and style my hair for work next day.. leads to me asking myself, am I being selfish? Am I a bad mom.. this is just one example of many similar though processes... mom guilt is real and haunts me literally every day

Extra curricular activities: daughter still kind of young for that, but thinking to myself , want her to have an enriching childhood but also, weekends are so short and weeknights are packed already.. if she's in activities on the weekend, when will I get to spend time with her ? When will we get to spend time together as a family

Appeasing extended family: so blessed to have a loving family, 2 sets of loving grandparents for my daughter but sometimes it's overwhelming making time for everyone.. ask myself did she see hr grandparents ? Her aunt and younger cousin? Always managing the family schedule.

Keeping up with doctors appointments and the coordinating with husband regarding who will take personal hours or vacation day from work

Stress about anticipating missing work in event that child is under the weather.. how will I be perceived as work? Will I be considered a less valuable employee as compared to my non-parent (or more specifically non-mom) counterparts?

Worry about aging parents: already adapting to being a working mom, and pregnant so worried about expanding family , also think about aging parents who at the moment are still rather healthy, and independent .. but how will I manage when they need more support?

Housecleaning : want household to be orderly, clean and suitable for child(ren).. find nooks of time for this- when daughter falls asleep at night, in morning before she wakes up, or during weekend. Sometimes husband and I divide and conquer- one will bring daughter to park and other will vacuum and mop

Managing family wardrobe : husband does this sometimes but I am the mastermind for this - thank goodness for online shopping!!

Organizing toys: give away toys daughter no longer plays with, purchase new ones based on her interest, development, and areas to develop/improve

Nurturing relationship with husband: have we been connecting lately? Are we being intimate? Are we communicating? Do we need to check in with each other? Are we making time for each other? Have we been on the same page? I ask myself these questions and try to keep track.. put a lot of effort in our relationship .. because when we're not on the same page, other aspects of my life are impacted.. he's my anchor.

Considering language: I often think about and read about ways to raise my daughter as a decent human, someday contributing member of society - do her books illustrate/demonstrate diversity (e.g., cultural, diff family structures, variability re: inclusion + ppl with disabilities). Am I careful with my language? Not always emphasizing looks (e.g., not always saying things like you're so beautiful /cute but rather, you're intelligent, kind, curious, determined...etc) being mindful of how gender stereotypes impact my parenting - often check in with myself and ask myself, would I have responded differently to her if she were a boy? I'm not extreme with my parenting- I am raising my daughter gender female until/if she tells me otherwise but still want to be mindful of how gender stereotypes impact my parenting .. just something I think of..

Spend time dreaming about her aspirations: what will she be when she grows up? Will she like her parents when she's a teen? Will she like boys or girls? Who will her friends be? As parents, we create hopes and dreams for our children.. can't lie - spend some time daydreaming about this..

Essence of Mental Load: Forecasting; Short-term, long-term, hypothetical, tangible, priorities

Keeping up with vaccines

Appeasing family members that want to see her and reserving time for just her child and her husband and herself

Food and meal prep and planning for week ahead (mentioned twice)

Thinking about the kind of parent I want to be & am I providing a stimulating upbringing for my child.

Constantly organizing her clothes, getting rid of clothes that she has outgrown and buying clothes that fit her.

Parenting styles and communicating this with hubby so he is on the same page. I kind of take the lead with this. Want to be the kind of parent whose actions reflect personal beliefs and values and need to have unified front with hubby.

Maximize weekends, again, want to provide an enriching childhood for her, so check "montreal families" for things to do on the weekend.

Special occasions and holidays (Halloween costume, birthday parties, santa claus)

References

- Arendell, T. (2001). The new care work of middle-class mothers: Managing childrearing, employment, and time. *Minding the time in family experience: Emerging perspectives and issues*, 3, 163-204.
- Bailey, J. (2002). From public to private: the development of the concept of the "private". *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 69(1), 15-31.
- Bezanson, K., & Luxton, M. (2006). *Social reproduction: Feminist political economy challenges neo-liberalism*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP.
- Bhattacharya, T. (Ed.). (2017). *Social reproduction theory: Remapping class, recentering oppression*. Pluto Press.
- Barret, M. & McIntosh, M. (1982). *The Anti-Social Family*.
- Blair-Loy, M., Hochschild, A., Pugh, A. J., Williams, J. C., & Hartmann, H. (2015). Stability and transformation in gender, work, and family: insights from the second shift for the next quarter century. *Community, Work & Family*, 18(4), 435-454.
- Cain, B. (2007). A Review of the Mental Workload Literature. Defence Research and Development Canada. Toronto. Retrieved 04-10-2020 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235159082_A_Review_of_the_Mental_Workload_Literature.
- Ciciolla, L., & Luthar, S. S. (2019). Invisible household labor and ramifications for adjustment: mothers as captains of households. *Sex Roles*, 1-20.

- Collins, J. L., & Gimenez, M. E. (Eds.). (1990). *Work without Wages: Comparative studies of domestic labor and self-employment*. Suny Press.
- Coltrane, S. (2000). Research on household labor: Modeling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 1208-1233.
- Dale, K. (2009). Ideal homes? Management and the domestic dream. In *The Management of Everyday Life*. Edited by P. Hancock & M. Tyler. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Daly, Kerry J. 2001. Controlling Time in Families: Patterns That Sustain Gendered Work in the Home. *American Sociological Review* 84(4) 227–49 in *Minding the Time in Family Experience*, Vol. 3, Emerging Perspectives.
- Daly, K. (2002). Time, gender, and the negotiation of family schedules. *Symbolic Interaction*, 25(3), 323-342.
- Daminger, A. (2019). The cognitive dimension of household labor. *American Sociological Review*, 84(4), 609-633.
- Daniels, A. K. (1987). Invisible work. *Social Problems*, 34(5), 403-415.
- DeVault, M. L. (1990). Talking and listening from women's standpoint: Feminist strategies for interviewing and analysis. *Social problems*, 37(1), 96-116.
- (1994). *Feeding the family: The social organization of caring as gendered work*. University of Chicago Press.
- (1996) *Talking back to sociology: Distinctive Contributions of Feminist Methodology*

(1999). *Liberating method: Feminism and social research*. Temple University Press.

(2014, December). Mapping invisible work: Conceptual tools for social justice projects. In *Sociological forum* (Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 775-790).

Di Leonardo, M. (1987). The female world of cards and holidays: women, families, and the work of kinship. *Signs*, 12(3), 440–453.

Emma. “The Mental Load: A Feminist Comic.” Retrieved from <https://english.emmaclit.com/2017/05/20/you-shouldve-asked/>.

Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the witch: women, The body and primitive accumulation*. Autonomedia. New York.

Ferguson, S. (2016). Intersectionality and social-reproduction feminisms: Toward an integrative ontology. *Historical Materialism*, 24(2), 38-60.

Ferguson, S. (2020). *Women and work: Feminism, labour and social reproduction*. Pluto Press. London.

Fox, B. (2009). *When couples become parents: The creation of gender in the transition to parenthood*. University of Toronto Press.

Fraser, N. (2013). *Fortunes of feminism: From state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*. Verso Books.

Gaillard, A. W. K. (1993). Comparing the concepts of mental load and stress. *Ergonomics*, 36(9), 991-1005.

- Gimenez, M. (2018). *Marx, women, and capitalist social reproduction*. Haymarket Books. Chicago.
- Greenhill, A., & Wilson, M. (2006). Haven or hell? Telework, flexibility and family in the e-society: A Marxist analysis. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 15(4), 379-388.
- Hadley, G. (2019). Critical grounded theory. *The SAGE handbook of current developments in grounded theory*, 564-592.
- Haicault, M. (1984). La gestion ordinaire de la vie en deux. *Sociologie du Travail*, 26(3). Association pour le développement de la sociologie du travail. Pp. 268-277.
- Hancock, P., & Tyler, M. (2009). *The management of everyday life*. Palgrave.
- Hardt, M. (1999). Affective Labor. *boundary 2*. 26 (2). *Summer Issue*, 89-100.
- Hays, S. (1998). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. Yale University Press.
- Hochschild, A. R. (2009). Through the crack of the time bind: From market management to family management. In *The Management of everyday life*. Edited by P.Hancock & M. Tyler. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hochschild, A., & Machung, A. (2012/1989). *The second shift: Working families and the revolution at home*. Penguin.
- Holden, G. W., Hawk, C. K., & Kuczynski, L. (2003). Meta-parenting in the journey of childrearing. *Handbook of dynamics in parent-child relations*, 189-210.

- Houle, P., Turcotte, M., & Wendt, M. (2017). Changes in Parents' Participation in Domestic Tasks and Care for Children from 1986 to 2015. Statistics Canada.
- Kirschner, P. A., & Kirschner, F. (2012). Mental effort. *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*, 2182-2184.
- Lareau, Annette. 2003. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press. LaRossa, Ralph.
- Laslett, B., & Brenner, J. (1989). Gender and social reproduction: Historical perspectives. *Annual review of sociology*, 15(1), 381-404.
- Lavoie, Amélie (2016). Les défis de la conciliation travail-famille chez les parents salariés. Un portrait à partir de l'Enquête québécoise sur l'expérience des parents d'enfants de 0 à 5 ans 2015, Québec, Institut de la statistique du Québec.
- Lee, Y. S., & Waite, L. J. (2005). Husbands' and wives' time spent on housework: A comparison of measures. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(2), 328-336.
- Lury, C., & Wakeford, N. (Eds.). (2012). *Inventive methods: The happening of the social*. Routledge.
- Marx, Karl. (1976/1867). *Capital, Volume I: A Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. Penguin Books.
- Mederer, H. J. (1993). Division of labor in two-earner homes: Task accomplishment versus household management as critical variables in perceptions about family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 133-145.

- Meier, J. A., McNaughton-Cassill, M., & Lynch, M. (2006). The management of household and childcare tasks and relationship satisfaction in dual-earner families. *Marriage & Family Review*, 40(2-3), 61-88.
- Moray, N. (1979) Models and measures of mental workload in *Mental workload: Its theory and measurement*. Edited by Neville Moray. Plenum Press. New York. Pp.13-22.
- Moreno, R. & Park, B. (2010) “Cognitive Load Theory: Historical Development and Relation to Other Theories” in *Cognitive Load Theory* Edited by Plass, Moreno & Brunken. Cambridge University Press. Pp. 9-10.
- Moyser, M., & Burlock, A. (2018). *Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report*. Statistics Canada.
- Oakley, A. (1974). *The Sociology of Housework*. London: Robertson.
- Phillips, A. (2012). 7 List. *Inventive methods: The happening of the social*. Routledge.
- Reagle, J. (2019). Chapter 3: Hacking Time. In *Hacking Life* (1st ed.). Retrieved from <https://hackinglife.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/npc7g21v>
- Robertson, L. G. (2017). *Mothers and mental labor: A phenomenological focus group study of the thinking work involved in parenting and household management*. Biola University.
- Robertson, L. G., Anderson, T. L., Hall, M. E. L., & Kim, C. L. (2019). *Mothers and Mental Labor: A Phenomenological Focus Group Study of Family-Related Thinking Work*. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.

- Sanders, A.F. (1979). Some remarks on mental load in *Mental workload: Its theory and measurement*. Edited by Neville Moray. Plenum Press. New York. Pp.41-78.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. M. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative sociology*, 13(1), 3-21.
- Sullivan, O. (2010). Changing differences by educational attainment in fathers' domestic labour and childcare. *Sociology*, 44(4), 716-733.
- Sweller, J., Ayres, P., Kalyuga, S. (2003). *Cognitive Load Theory*. Springer. New York.
- Thompson, E. P. (1967/2020). *Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism* (pp. 9-39). Routledge.
- Treas, J., & Tai, T. O. (2012). How couples manage the household: Work and power in cross-national perspective. *Journal of Family Issues*, 33(8), 1088-1116.
- Vogel, L. (1983). *Marxism and the oppression of women: Toward a unitary theory*.
- Walzer, S. (1996). Thinking about the baby: Gender and divisions of infant care. *Social Problems*, 43(2), 219-234.
- Warner, J. (2006). *Perfect madness: Motherhood in the age of anxiety*. Penguin.
- Weeks, K. (2011). *The problem with work: Feminism, Marxism, anti-work politics and postwork imaginaries*. Duke University Press. Durham and London.
- Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus group methodology: a review. *International journal of social research methodology*, 1(3), 181-203.

Wilson, J. (2019). What is mental workload? (And how to measure it). Retrieved 04-10-2020
from <https://imotions.com/blog/mental-workload/>

Zucchermaglio, C., & Alby, F. (2014). "It Seems That Things Take Care of Themselves":
Routines in Busy Family Lives. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 21(1), 21-33.