The Metis Effect: The Subjective Career Crafting of Working Mothers

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Abstract. By using the metaphor of Metis, this paper explores – through a feminist standpoint theory lens – how women's work identity may be overshadowed by their motherhood identity in the ubiquitous patriarchal neoliberal context, and how women seek to overcome the constraints imposed on them in their paradoxical roles as mother-workers by career crafting. Drawing on the whole-life conceptualization of careers where a career includes the work and nonwork domains within which jobs and paid work experiences unfold, this paper explores the subjective career crafting of mothers (supported via the *Metis* metaphor) in their lived performance of the societally conflicting roles of a good employee and a good mother, moving within and between work and nonwork social spaces. Career crafting considers the cognitive, task, and relational activities that can be agentially tailored to best fit one's career within the demands of one's different roles. Mothers' complex, paradoxical, and boundary-crossing positions in the work–nonwork domain are considered in light of career crafting literature and the *Metis* metaphor.

Keywords: Career crafting, mothers, feminist standpoint theory, work, Metis.

Introduction

In contemporary neoliberal Western society, the past forty years have produced conflicting socio-cultural 'advice' for working women and mothers, ranging from 'having it all' (Gurley Brown, 1982), to 'opting out' (Belkin, 2003), to 'leaning in' (Sandberg, 2013), all the while ignoring the patriarchal structural barriers and simultaneously blaming women for failing to take ownership of their role and status as mother-workers. The complex nature of an individual's career within a social context is contingent on a number of elements, with the context and structures playing an important part in the individual's (agency) decision processes. Giddens' (1979; 1993a) structuration theory stresses the interdependence between human agency (the actors) and the underlying social structure

shaping society (structure) in the accepted ways of doing things. Giddens argues that a social system can be understood by its structure (formed by the rules and resources in force and available to agents), modality (the means of translating structures into action), and interaction (between the agents acting within the social system). "Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do" (Giddens & Pierson, 1998: 77).

The problematization of motherhood and work combinations in this paper, while incorporating structure and agency interactions in mothers' career system, follows Foucault's (1984) usage of the term problematization to describe "thinking as a practice" (Bacchi, 2012: 1) or a "strategy for developing a critical consciousness" (Montero & Sonn, 2009: 80); a means of disrupting widely accepted truths (Freire, 1972). Following Foucault's analytical method of "thinking problematically" (1977: 185–186) and described by Bacchi (2012: 1), "where the point of analysis is not to look for the one correct response to an issue but to examine how it is "questioned, analyzed, classified and regulated" at "specific times and under specific circumstances" (Deacon, 2000: 127), the aim is not to generalize or advise but rather to consider and to encourage broader problematizations in relation to the combination of motherhood and paid work roles.

This paper conceptually considers mother-workers' individual career crafting (Tims & Akkermans, 2020) amidst patriarchal structures and cultural expectations that present underlying implicit norms of acceptable behaviors for mother-workers on women. It considers the renegotiation of their careers that mothers undertake in light of their parallel and blended role identities. In problematizing practices that confer conceptualizations of a good mother/good worker, the focus is on the elements of the career crafting theory that come to the forefront for mothers when navigating mother-worker identities. This is in keeping with Foucault's (1988: 257) description of problematization as "the set of discursive and non-discursive practices that makes something enter into the play of the true and the false and constitutes it as an object for thought (whether under the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge)".

Next, the ontological, epistemological and methodological positioning of this study is shared, explicating the author's positionality in the research (the feminist standpoint theory), and the metaphor of Metis[1]. The Metis conceptualization is presented with the implications of the research question, specifically, "*How do women negotiate combining working careers and motherhood in a foreign culture?*" Then, this paper sets about presenting the theoretical underpinning of the whole-life description of careers (Litano & Major, 2016), and the corresponding relevance of career crafting (Tims & Akkermans, 2020) as a reflexive, subjective process combining task and relationship dimensions in order to better live the competing roles of a good mother – a good worker within the

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[1] Metis was a Greek goddess and the first wife of Zeus. She was known for her wisdom and cleverness. However, she was devoured by Zeus due to her condition of impending motherhood since it had been foretold that she would yield an heir more powerful than Zeus. However, Metis prevailed despite adversity when her child Athena was birthed as a fully armored warrior.

confines of competing social spaces (work versus nonwork). Finally, suggestions for further research are shared.

Approach, Method and Analysis

This conceptual paper and its reflections are grounded in the interpretivist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) and founded on a relativistic ontological perspective, which acknowledges the existence of diverse and multiple viewpoints on the world that cannot be reduced to a single, universal truth (Willig, 2013). In the interpretivist paradigm, idiographic methodologies (Burrell & Morgan, 1979: 6) are analyzed holistically in the social context. The subjectivism of the research, whereby the investigator empathizes with the research subjects and takes account of the environment – of "subjects' meaning and interpretational systems in order to gain explanation by understanding" (Gill & Johnson, 1991: 37) – is paramount. Understanding the individual perspective is integral to better understanding of their respective career crafting (Tims & Akkermans, 2020); that is, to better understand the behaviors and actions that are undertaken by mothers to idiosyncratically craft their careers to best accommodate and fit their lives and roles.

For the purposes of this conceptual paper, the focus is on working mothers' career crafting within the distinct but overlapping social spaces of work and nonwork, where support structures and agential behaviors that may best accommodate the navigation of both paid work responsibilities and mothering responsibilities are considered. A qualitative empirical research approach is recommended to further explore the conceptualization that is presented, given the richness and strengths of that approach for exploring complex individual subjectivities (see O'Brien, Kačkutė, & Crowley-Henry, 2025).

According to the principles of the feminist standpoint, our meaning-making is influenced by our social situatedness (Karam & Afiouni, 2021). Following a feminist standpoint epistemology (Smith, 2005; Smythe, 2009), the lived, experiential knowledge which has determined the world perspective of the researcher is an integral component when interpreting and making sense of data, particularly data in relation to minorities (see also Crowley-Henry, Almeida, Bertone, & Gunasekara, 2025). It is therefore important for the researcher as an academic conceptualizer in this paper to profess her own standpoint, as a mother-worker within the academic patriarchal structure, which implicitly colors her conceptualization of mothers' career crafting across work–nonwork domains. Furthermore, the feminist standpoint epistemology maintains that minorities and marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that allow them to often have a deeper or clearer awareness of certain issues because of their position in society, which allows them to see things that the dominant groups might overlook. As a female mother-worker, the author of this paper has worked through her own social situatedness in the conceptualization of mother-worker career crafting supports and behaviors, drawing on her own mother-worker experiences. Her standpoint is also colored by her past research undertakings in this

area (Crowley-Henry, Almeida, Bertone, & Gunasekara, 2025; Crowley-Henry & Weir, 2007; O'Brien, Kačkutė, & Crowley-Henry, 2025).

Finally, feminist standpoint theorists also posit that research on power relations should begin with the lived experiences of the marginalized in order to present phenomena from the insider, marginalized position. Sandra Harding's (1993) concept of 'strong objectivity' suggests that research that draws from marginalized standpoints can provide more rigorous knowledge than that from privileged, patriarchal, hetero-normative positions when examining power relations. Similarly, it follows that mothers' positions would best be interpreted by fellow mothers, also grappling with combining motherhood and paid employment. This positionality is at the center of the interpretations put forward here to problematize the self-imposed role perceptions and culturally informed role expectations of mothers in paid employment. Moreover, feminist standpoint theory highlights the power imbalance that results from patriarchal structures that have been developed and nurtured to subvert female progression in senior levels of work responsibilities and authorities. Feminist standpoint theory calls feminists to spotlight inequalities and inequities in order to break down patriarchal impediments to women's equal rights and equitable employment opportunities.

The Metis Effect – Metaphor of Metis for Mother-Workers

This paper proposes that the metaphor of Metis may be an appropriate metaphor to explore the problematization (Foucault, 1984) of motherhood and its association with paid employment. Who is Metis? In Greek mythology (Almog, 2022; Theoi Project, 2023), Metis was a goddess that bore Zeus' (the god of gods) daughter, Athena. Due to a prophesy revealed to Zeus that Metis would bear him a son that would be greater than he was, Zeus devoured/swallowed Metis whole while she was in the metamorphous state of a fly/insect. Metis was, therefore, devoured by Zeus because of her maternal condition that could bring about a challenge to Zeus' powerful position. However, Metis survived and lived inside Zeus' head, giving birth to Athena – the powerful goddess of wisdom and military victory in Greek mythology – whom Metis nurtured and equipped with arms and armor to protect her, before she was released from Zeus' head. Metis' self-endurance and maternal protection of her daughter is noted. Yet, Metis is barely mentioned in Greek mythology as an entity in her own right but is only alluded to as an aspect of Zeus and as the mother of Athena, thereby shadowed by their existence.

The Metis metaphor may be apt for exploring mother-workers' career crafting experiences, as women's subjective negotiation of the competing role perceptions they occupy as mothers engaged in paid employment, and the role expectations they experience from others in their society. As such, following the Metis metaphor, to what extent are mother-workers considered to be (by others/society and by themselves, as interpreted through the structures the working mothers encounter in their day-to-day behaviors and activities) previously productive women that – socio-culturally – are oft perceived to become devoured by motherhood and exponentially overshadowed by patriarchy? However, in

keeping within the vein of feminist standpoint theory which acknowledges the gender power imbalance, mother-workers, like Metis, remain resilient and imperishable despite the challenges imposed on them by the male patriarchy, and ultimately endure in pursuing their combined mother-worker roles through subjective career crafting. They do this while negotiating paradoxical domains, which their male, father-worker counterparts do not navigate or have to manage to the same extent due to the socio-cultural norms placed on mothers to undertake the bulk of the mothering work (Hartsock, 2016).

Whole-Life Career and Career Crafting

Hughes (1937, 413) describes careers as embedded in society; that "a study of careers – of the moving perspective in which persons orient themselves with reference to the social order, and of the typical sequences and concatenations of office – may be expected to reveal the nature and 'working constitution' of a society". His interpretation of careers presents a career as a 'moving perspective' which is influenced by and, in return, impacts upon individual identity ("in which persons orient themselves") and social identity ("social order"). It is this broader, whole-life description of careers (Litano & Major, 2016) that is considered in this research undertaking. In keeping with Hughes' (1937) conceptualization of careers as including personal, life occurrences, nonwork and leisure roles "that form a unique pattern over the individual's lifespan" (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009: 1543), this study focuses on the combination of motherhood and employee roles in relation to individuals' careers. Given the uniqueness of each individual's career under this personal, dynamic description, attempts to generalize career outcomes over time are not attempted, but rather consideration is given to conceptualizing career crafting elements for mother-workers.

Hughes (1937, 413) continues that

> A career consists, objectively, of a series of statuses and clearly defined offices <…> subjectively, a career is the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions, and the things that happen to him <…> Careers in our society are thought very much in terms of jobs, for these are the characteristic and crucial connections of the individual with the institutional structure <…> But the career is by no means exhausted in a series of business and professional achievements. There are other points at which one's life touches the social order <…> it is possible to have a career in an avocation as well as in a vocation.

Both objective (e.g., title, salary) and subjective (e.g., personal development, work-life balance) career success is relevant here (Heslin, 2005), incorporating other life events and learning into understanding careers. Patton and McMahon (1999; 2006a; 2006b) adopt Wolfe and Kolb's (1980: 1–2) definition of career development which aligns with the Hughes' (1937) whole-life career perspective:

> Career development involves one's whole life, not just occupation. As such, it concerns the whole person, needs and wants, capacities and potentials, excitements and anxieties, insights

and blind spots, warts and all. More than that, it concerns his/her life. The environment pressures and constraints, the bonds that tie him/her to significant others, responsibilities to children and aging parents, the total structure of one's circumstances are also factors that must be understood and reckoned with, in these terms, career development and personal development converge. Self and circumstances – evolving, changing, unfolding in mutual interaction – constitute the focus and the drama of career development.

It is in this vein of the 'whole-life' connotation of career (Litano & Major, 2016) that this present research focuses (see also Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023). Career crafting, in relation to the 'whole-life' career, focuses on the proactive, agential career reflections and related career constructions (Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) over a person's life (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; De Vos, et al., 2017; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023; Tims & Akkermans, 2020; van Leeuwen et al., 2021). Developing Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001: 179) 'job crafting', where "employees craft their jobs by changing cognitive, task, and/or relational boundaries to shape interactions and relationships with others at work, <…> which, in turn, alters work meanings and work identity", 'career crafting' may be construed as the subjective, proactive reconstruction of one's whole-life career following proactive career reflections (Janssen et al., 2021; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023; Tims & Akkermans, 2020).

Tims and Akkermans (2020: 175–176) define career crafting as the "proactive behaviors that individuals perform to self-manage their career and are aimed at attaining optimal person-career fit". It requires the individual to proactively seek out opportunities and experiences that correspond with their whole-life career priorities (Lee et al., 2021), thereby shaping the broader trajectory and direction of their career over time (De Vos et al., 2019; Tims & Akkermans, 2020). Career crafting includes proactive career reflection (questioning one's motives and priorities with regard to the whole-life description of careers) and proactive career construction (the actual behaviors that are put in motion in response to one's career reflections) (Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023; Tims & Akkermans, 2020).

In the context of this conceptual paper, career crafting refers to the subjective, reflexive meaning-making and identity refocusing of working mothers to best combine the roles of a good mother/good worker. Career crafting, in alignment with 'job crafting' (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), considers the three areas that can be crafted and reshaped – the cognitive, task and relational boundaries – across work and nonwork domains in order to facilitate the individual's best career-work fit for their particular circumstances. Here, mothers adapt the cognitive (career reflections), task (work focus/parenting focus combination), and relational boundaries (to their partners, extended family members, work colleagues and others) in their life contexts in order to better service the role conflicts of a good worker/good mother. Career crafting is the agential process that mothers undertake over time, continuously, to shape and influence the content and modus operandi of their jobs/work to better facilitate their mothering role. How mothers may seek to do this – craft their careers – is conceptually explored next in this paper.

Mother-Worker Career Crafting – Discussion

In this conceptual paper, the cognitive, task and relational career crafting processes are considered in light of the Metis metaphor. Metis, the Greek goddess who was the king of Gods, Zeus' first wife, is little known of in Greek mythology. However, it is known that when she became pregnant, she threatened Zeus' power since it had been foretold that she would bear a son that would be more powerful than Zeus. To prevent this, Zeus swallowed Metis when she was in the morphed state of an insect. However, despite having been devoured by Zeus, Metis proceeded to give birth to their daughter, Athena, who burst from Zeus' head fully armored. To bring the Metis metaphor to the context of this paper, Metis may be symbolized as a female mother-worker, trapped (when devoured) in the male patriarchal system of socio-cultural norms and expectations in relation to mother-workers. However, she remains agile (her ability to morph into an insect previously) and adaptable to her circumstances. She realigns herself to her circumstances and becomes a mother of a powerful female warrior. She draws upon the career crafting a triad of cognitive, task and relational dimensions to best carve (craft) a new role, albeit in an undesirable social context. Similarly to mother-workers, somewhat trapped in the inequitable male-developed and male-prioritized employment structures still in today's modern society, Metis was trapped in her husband's brain after being swallowed by him in her morphed state. Mother-workers however do not remain inactive, but rather craft and recraft dynamically their mother-worker activities continuously so that they can best combine both roles given their particular circumstances. To do this, they may alter the cognitive focus of their work and mothering roles. This may be through a renegotiation of where they find meaning. For some, this may be to focus on motherhood for a period; for others this may be to combine work and motherhood; and for others again, this may be to continue prioritizing their working roles. It all depends on what best fits their specific circumstances. It depends on the tasks that are involved in their mother-worker roles, and how these may be better facilitated. For instance, those in job roles that allow flexibility such as working from home may support mother-workers combining roles. It also depends on the relational dimension that the individual mother-worker has. For instance, those with supportive partners or family members or childcare arrangements may have more control over this dimension when crafting their combined mother-worker roles.

Metis, as a metaphor, cognitively found meaning, although rendered part of Zeus' head, to focus on birthing a capable and powerful daughter. In relation to the task focus, she was able to draw on her resources to instill her insights into her daughter. Regarding the relational dimension, Metis did not receive support from her partner, and her choices were limited, and thus she had to rely on her own agential and constricted abilities.

Individually, these three dimensions of career crafting, where individuals fit and mold aspects of their work and nonwork domains and responsibilities relative to their particular circumstances – cognitive, task and relational – are important dimensions for mother-workers to dynamically tailor to their life motivations, abilities and opportunities. Together, they demonstrate the supports (structures) and behaviors (agency) that facilitate

career crafting to optimally combine mother-worker roles and responsibilities. Each of these are unpacked, next.

Mothers engage in proactive self-reflection in relation to their identity as mothers and workers (Dean et al., 2021). There is pragmatism and continuous rationalizing of career choices, while holding out and striving toward attaining a balance with regard to successfully fulfilling a passion or interest that mother-workers have in their working lives, combined with their caring identity as mothers (Gatrell, 2007; Gatrell, 2013; Gatrell et al., 2017). This may be framed this positively although the challenging renegotiation of the mother-worker identity cannot be ignored. Mothers' engagement in self-development through trainings and qualifications in order to build their career work identity exemplify the cognitive dimension of their subjective career crafting. Here, the focus is on pursuing a direction which has meaning related to their work/life that sustains their involvement in work/employment. In this way, they engage in cognitive career crafting activities. Like the Metis metaphor, mother-workers refuse to give up seeking to find fulfilment in combining motherhood and work identities simultaneously. They engage in cognitive rationalization on why working is essential for their own wellbeing and sense of self (see O'Brien, Kačkutė, & Crowley-Henry, 2025).

Secondly, in relation to the task dimension of job crafting, mother-workers focus on adaptability and flexibility so that to combine their mother-worker roles. Here, they may seek out part-time and/or other flexible work arrangements to better combine their mother-work roles. This may involve active reconstruction of their work role to accommodate their mother role. This could involve scheduling their paid work responsibilities around periods when the children are in childcare. However, this renders their work roles often as secondary to the paid work roles of their male spouses and raises questions about the nature of 'balance' (Gregory & Milner, 2009; Stone, 2008).

Thirdly, concerning the relational dimension of career crafting, the external support that is available to mother-workers impacts on their career outcomes and opportunities. Under this theme, the main support agent in mother-workers' career crafting would include their respective spouses/relational partners. While there are variations in the extent to which spouses/partners act as supporters of their respective wives' careers, it is evident that, without that spousal support, mother-workers would not be able to embrace their work interests as well as their mothering responsibilities to the same extent. Other external support could be extended family members, such as the children's grandparents or aunts/uncles as well as formal childcare arrangements (e.g., childcare institutions, schools).

This discussion, connecting career crafting concepts from the careers and human resource management domain (Tims & Akkermans, 2020) to the metaphor of Metis in the context of mother-workers navigating across social spaces, suggests that the lived experiences of working mothers are deeply entangled in a set of paradoxical expectations – to be both the 'ideal worker' and the 'good mother' – within institutional and socio-cultural structures that are inherently gendered. These experiences require ongoing negotiation, adaptation, and resilience. To better understand these dynamics, the Metis metaphor exemplifies the challenging patriarchal structures that restrict mother-workers'

career development. However, Metis also represents intelligence, foresight, and adaptability. Within the context of feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 1993; Hartsock, 2016), Metis becomes an emblematic figure for how women, particularly mothers engaged in paid employment, navigate structures not designed with their needs or identities in mind. Just as Metis was devoured by Zeus, yet persisted from within, mother-workers are often perceived by society to be 'consumed' by motherhood with their prior identities as professionally productive and independent individuals rendered invisible. Nevertheless, like Metis, they endure. They act to self-define through career crafting their mother-worker roles to best accommodate both.

The Metis metaphor gains further traction when considered alongside the concept of career crafting – a subjective, continuous, and adaptive process akin to 'job crafting' (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) – in which mother-workers actively reshape the cognitive, task, and relational dimensions of their work and personal lives. For instance, cognitively, mother-workers redefine what success means to them, moving away from traditional linear career models to other definitions of achievement where their passion for particular work and nonwork activities takes the center stage. Task-wise, work priorities and schedules are often reorganized to accommodate caregiving responsibilities. Relationally, mothers often have to recalibrate interactions with partners, extended family, and colleagues to construct sustainable ecosystems of support.

Through this lens, career crafting becomes the modern expression of Metis-like resourcefulness – a survival and flourishing strategy in a landscape that too often punishes women for attempting to combine motherhood with professional ambition. Importantly, this process is deeply situated: it is shaped by each woman's social location, disciplinary context, institutional culture, and access to resources. Feminist standpoint theory reminds us that these adaptations are not merely personal choices but responses to structural power imbalances that demand continuous negotiation. The very fact that mother-workers must 'craft' careers in the first place, rather than step into secure, inclusive, and accommodating systems, speaks to the persistence of patriarchal norms that frame caregiving as incompatible with professional legitimacy

Moreover, this study contributes to literature by showing how agency and structure intersect in the everyday decisions of mother-workers. While high levels of reflexivity and resilience are required – wherein mothers are expected to carry the emotional and practical burden of care – this still persists, as does the perception that seeking accommodations reflects a lack of commitment to one's career. In this way, mother-workers are both resisting and reinforcing systemic norms. Their career crafting represents acts of quiet resistance to idealized notions of professional success, but they are still operating within a system that requires them to constantly prove their worth. Unlike their father-worker counterparts, who are rarely asked to justify their parenting commitments in professional settings, mother-workers move between domains that frequently conflict rather than complement.

This study calls for greater recognition of the invisible strategic labour that mother-workers engage in – a modern embodiment of Metis's wisdom and adaptability – and

the urgent need for institutions to acknowledge, support, and structurally accommodate these realities. In doing so, not only can we promote more equitable and inclusive workplaces, but we can also challenge the very norms that construct caregiving as a barrier to professional achievement.

This research paper proposes that mother-workers engage in proactive, agential career crafting through self-reflections and active career (re-)construction/reconfiguration in order to maintain their sense of self in the face of their role identity pre-motherhood being depleted after motherhood. From a feminist standpoint perspective, as a female researcher who is also a mother, I argue that mother-workers require resilience and perseverance in order to develop and/or retain a professional identity to which they could align their passion and values. In doing this, they engage in self-reflection and rationalization of their decision to continue to work or to develop their work competencies in order to achieve their individual goals of working in paid employment in a field where they find passion and interest. While the societal expectation that mothers should focus on childcare responsibilities and reduce their emotional, cognitive and behavioral interest in paid employment, from a feminist standpoint perspective, this is problematic. Mother-workers may have an inherent need to pursue their own intellectual interests in order to satisfy their non-mother role identity, despite the challenges of being away from family support, of childcare demands, and of being the main decision-maker with regard to the care of their children.

The intersectionality of mother-workers also requires more scrutiny. For instance, mother-workers that are the main breadwinners and are required to work for financial reasons may prioritize certain dimensions of the career crafting triad, such as the cognitive rationalization of needing to expend more effort and time in paid employment to support their families. Others may wish to combine mother-worker roles in a more balanced fashion and prioritize the task dimension of career crafting. While others again may not be in the position to benefit from formal or informal childcare support which may challenge their work identities. The interaction between the dimensions of cognitive, task and relational aspects of career crafting also warrants closer scrutiny through individual career cases of mother-workers to better develop the conceptualization proposed in this paper. To further explore the propositions forwarded in this paper pertaining to the career crafting of mother-workers and their focus on following their passion, on embracing flexibility and on utilizing their relationships to navigate the working mother paradoxical roles, a qualitative narrative interpretive approach is recommended. Such an approach would gather diverse stories of diverse mothers with varying backgrounds, family status, and relational support in order to forward a more comprehensive understanding of mother workers' agential career crafting behaviors.

It may be, due to power relations in society and societal/cultural norms of behavior and expectations on mothers with regard to prioritizing work and/or childcare, that many women – mothers – are straddled with the unrecognized and exhausting task of ensuring childcare for their children while they are pursuing their work interests. The burden of childcare responsibilities remains with the mothers, irrespective of their employment

circumstances when they are in dual-career or secondary career positions (that is, when their husbands' employment is on par with theirs or is more financially lucrative than theirs). This must be mentally and physically exhausting for the women in question, with their employment role stretched post-motherhood to combining good mother and good worker identities, as well as the planning and administration work involved in ensuring childcare, so that they can continue their personal work interests and passions.

It is apparent that motherhood has a significant impact on mothers' whole-life career constellations, with nuanced differences depending on the women's intersectionalities and individual circumstances. Motherhood, for sure, changes mothers' careers. The extent to which the mothers are 'devoured by motherhood' and 'shadowed by patriarchy' may vary and requires further study. This paper questions the identity threat that motherhood poses on mother-workers across cultural/societal norms as females strive to find meaning and value as mother-workers.

There is a gap here where social service systems and human resource managers within organizations could better support and enable the systems and structures to better enable mother-workers to reconcile their work and caring roles and responsibilities. Intersectionalities across mothers should also be considered, where socio-economic class, originating country background, race, age, language, partner support structures could be better interrogated and assessed in organizational support systems, in order to provide more tailored support for mother-workers with varying support needs. Crowley-Henry, Almeida, Bertone, and Gunasekara's (2025) study delved in-depth into intersectionalities across researchers and the research population, which shapes and colors interpretations and perspectives. Their study found discrepancies across a team of researchers in their interpretation of female migrant academics, based on their own standpoint and experiences. Similarly, it is important to realize that mother-workers are not a homogeneous group, but, rather, they consist of other intersectionalities which render some mother-workers more vulnerable and less privileged than others (see also the special issue on motherhood, subjectivity and work – notably, O'Brien, Kačkutė, & Crowley-Henry, 2025).

Conclusion

This paper initiates an exploration of the career crafting that mothers engage in to construct their whole-life career identity (encompassing their work and mothering roles) in their attempts to find and/or maintain fulfilment across their role identities as good worker and good mother. The metaphor of Metis, introduced in this paper, is proposed as an apt representation of motherhood. In this context, motherhood and its related childcare demands present barriers and slow down work-career fulfilment, trapping women (metaphorically, while for Metis, her entrapment was actual) due, primarily, to socio-cultural structural norms of patriarchal power in the paid employment domain and expectations of women who are mothers to prioritize their children over their own paid-work related roles. While relational support (informal or formal) may help, the cognitive and task support required is less apparent and varies substantially across intersectional characteristics.

Further studies on mother-workers, particularly empirical studies, may elaborate on the metaphor of Metis that has been presented and adopted in this study, to showcase the ambiguity of mother-worker with its challenges and agential progression.

The career crafting conceptualization, encompassing cognitive, task and relational dimensions across work and nonwork domains presents a comprehensive framework for investigating the career development challenges and supports for employees, in this article, for mother-workers. Further studies could extend these investigations with empirical research, interviewing mother-workers to get rich stories of their career crafting efforts. This could be supplemented by survey methods across larger population groupings to compare and decipher career crafting strategies across intersectionalities, and to develop employment supports to encourage career development across populations.

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