

Intensive Mothering Beliefs: Cultural Responsivity in the Treatment of Maternal Burnout

By

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

**Master of Counselling
in the
Division of Arts and Sciences**

**City University
of Seattle
2025**

This paper is accepted as conforming to the required standard.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the people and systems that have supported the process of this research. Firstly, my capstone supervisor Dr. Brittany Thaxter was highly influential in the development of this investigation. I am very grateful for Dr. Thaxter's role in helping me apply my passions to a meaningful area of research and for her valuable feedback throughout the drafting of this document. I would also like to acknowledge my professors at City University of Seattle for their role in broadening my understanding of culturally responsive care and extend gratitude to the authors and participants of the literature I synthesized. It is their dedication to this field of research that allowed this literature review to be possible. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and my family for the many ways in which they supported and encouraged my development throughout my schooling.

Abstract

Intensive mothering ideology is a prominent and impactful belief system that influences the experience of motherhood and maternal burnout. Maternal burnout is defined as the experience of emotional detachment, reduced engagement with parenting responsibilities, and perceived parental effectiveness. There is currently a lack of therapeutic approaches that are culturally responsive in treating maternal burnout. This literature review addressed this lack of understanding by synthesizing the findings of research investigating the interplay between intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and culturally responsive therapeutic treatment. This research will explore the question: how might exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs improve the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout. A variety of databases and literature repositories were queried for peer-reviewed literature published on the topic within the last 5 years. This research determined that intensive mothering ideology impacts maternal burnout through the mechanisms of socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behaviors. The investigation suggests that there is therapeutic value in exploring and deconstructing the cultural and personal significance of intensive mothering beliefs in the context of maternal burnout treatment. This literature review provides novel considerations in the treatment of maternal burnout that serve to support cultural responsiveness in maternal burnout treatment.

Keywords: Maternal burnout, intensive mothering beliefs, socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, cultural responsiveness

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Intensive Mothering Beliefs: Cultural Responsivity in the Treatment of Maternal Burnout

Becoming a mother is a life-altering experience that influences an individual's personal identity and ways of being (Blount et al., 2021). The impact of the mothering role on an individual's life spans many developmental stages both for the mother and for their children (Orchard et al., 2023). The immediate and long-term demands of motherhood can negatively influence maternal mental health and contribute to the development of maternal burnout (Lebert-Charron et al., 2021a). Maternal burnout is defined as a sense of maternal ineffectiveness, emotional detachment from one's children, and reduced engagement with the responsibilities of motherhood (Lebert-Charron et al., 2018, 2021a). Intensive mothering beliefs are a cultural system of conceptualizing ideal motherhood as involving immense emotional investment and laborious child rearing (Hays, 1996; Verniers et al., 2022). The cultural influence of intensive mothering beliefs has been described in the literature as contributing to the experience of maternal burnout. However, the potential benefits of exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in the treatment of maternal burnout has yet to be well articulated in the literature (Kim & Kerr, 2024; Verniers et al., 2022). In this paper, a literature review will be used to critically analyze and synthesize the current information related to maternal burnout, intensive mothering beliefs, and culturally responsive therapeutic burnout treatment. This investigation will explore how intensive mothering beliefs contribute to maternal burnout and whether this belief system may be therapeutically deconstructed to improve the cultural responsivity of therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout.

Background of the Problem

The roles and responsibilities associated with parenting can influence an individual's biopsychosocial well-being (Kuipers et al., 2021). The literature suggests maternal burnout is a

threat to maternal mental well-being as it includes experiences of exhaustion in the context of one's parenting role (Lebert-Charron et al., 2021a). This exhaustion results in emotional detachment, reduced engagement with parenting responsibilities, and a sense of maternal ineffectiveness (Lebert-Charron et al., 2018, 2021a). Poor parental mental health has been shown to negatively impact child development, further illustrating the importance of maternal burnout in the family system (Phua et al., 2020).

Statistics Canada (2019) reports that 60% of mothers who were surveyed within 5-13 months post-birth stated that their mental health was either excellent or very good. This suggests that while most new mothers in Canada have the systems and supports in place to ensure their mental health is maintained, 40% of those new mothers surveyed experienced poorer mental health outcomes (Statistics Canada, 2019). Furthermore, Roskam et al. (2021) demonstrated that 6-7% of parents in Canada experience parental burnout. The Canadian Women's Foundation (2021) suggests that up to 46% of mothers may be experiencing some degree of maternal burnout symptoms. Collectively this data suggests that there are individuals whose mental well-being is negatively impacted by parental burnout that may be supported via meaningful therapeutic treatment interventions.

The factors that contribute to the development of maternal burnout have been established in the literature. These factors appear to reflect nuanced cultural values that influence belief systems about ideal motherhood (Roskam et al., 2021; Roskam et al., 2022). In their global investigation, Roskam et al. (2021) suggest that parental burnout was most often experienced by those individuals who lived in primarily individualistic cultural settings. This finding may be related to the notion that parents within individualistic cultures are more likely to parent in

isolation and hold the belief that they, as individuals, are essential to the child's development (Roskam et al., 2021).

In a subsequent global study, Roskam et al. (2022) further illustrated that cultural expectations regarding gender roles in parenting influenced the risk of developing maternal burnout. The authors indicate that those mothers who lived in cultures where gender equality was valued, and who held personal beliefs regarding gender egalitarianism were more likely to experience maternal burnout. The authors suggest that these mothers experience a disconnect between their cultural gender equality expectations and the reality of their mothering experiences that remain highly gendered. Collectively these findings suggest that maternal burnout symptoms arise in the context of cultural belief systems that inform ideals about motherhood.

Intensive mothering ideology is a belief system first described by Hays (1996). Intensive mothering ideology outlines specific tenets that delineate what constitutes ideal mothering practices and has been linked to the experience of maternal burnout (Sorkkila & Aunuola, 2020). Verniers et al. (2022) describe intensive mothering as an assertion that the ideal mother is one who sacrifices their own well-being to heavily invest in the development of their child. Verniers et al. (2022) deconstruct intensive mothering into the following three core tenets. The first tenet is that children must be protected and nurtured to the highest degree in the context of a corrupt and dangerous world. The second tenet is that mothering should be a highly emotional experience filled with ongoing attention and unconditional love from the mother. This involves an expectation that childrearing should be time consuming, laborious, and guided by expert advice that the mother must adapt to the child. The third tenet is that childrearing responsibilities fall primarily to the mother as they are believed to hold the proper parenting instincts that fathers do not innately have. Collectively the tenets of the intensive mothering belief system create a

framework for what the ideal mother should be in some cultures that contributes to maternal burnout (Hays, 1996; Sorkkila & Aunuola, 2020; Verniers et al., 2022)

Verniers et al. (2022) suggest that social media has been a major force in perpetuating intensive mothering beliefs. The authors also suggest that such a belief system only serves to further the division of parenting labour between mothers and fathers. The authors propose that the more frequently a mother is presented with intensive mothering ideals the greater the chance these ideals become internalized and influence personal well-being. Kim and Kerr (2024) found that mothers who held strong and comprehensive intensive mothering beliefs were more likely to experience maternal burnout than those who selectively believed in some tenets and not others, or only moderately endorsed all tenets. The literature therefore suggests that cultural intensive mothering beliefs do contribute to maternal burnout.

It is important to note that maternal burnout is not entirely sourced from cultural influences and societal belief systems. Additional contributing factors in the literature include financial status, age of the parent, age of the child, perceived partner support, and the behavioral or medical needs of the child (Sorkkila & Aunuola, 2020; Lebert-Charron et al., 2021b). The literature also suggests that a mother's personality, particularly the level of neuroticism, also influences the likelihood of developing maternal burnout. The investigation by Polizzi et al. (2022) showed that mothers who demonstrated greater neuroticism in their personality were more likely to report lower perceived maternal competence, reduced stress management abilities, and higher rates of maternal burnout.

Research findings demonstrate that there are a multitude of factors, both personal and environmental, that influence the development of maternal burnout. Contributing factors to the development of maternal burnout are better articulated in the literature than treatment

approaches. Bayot et al. (2024) investigated the utility of mindfulness and compassion-based approaches in treating parental burnout. The authors found that though some participants experienced an improvement in their parental burnout symptoms, others demonstrated an increase in parental burnout. In their study, Urbanowicz et al. (2023) determined that cognitive behavioral therapy approaches were helpful in reducing parental burnout symptoms. It should be noted that while there is some evidence that treatment approaches exist both Bayot et al. (2024) and Urbanowicz et al. (2023) investigated parental burnout, not maternal burnout specifically. The literature has yet to comprehensively describe therapeutic interventions that are culturally responsive to the factors that influence maternal burnout specifically.

While the literature does suggest that cultural intensive mothering beliefs contribute to maternal burnout, there is a lack of synthesis of the information known about maternal burnout, intensive mothering beliefs, and maternal burnout treatment. The present research is positioned to address this gap in the current literature by synthesizing the information known about maternal burnout, intensive mothering beliefs, and culturally responsive therapeutic approaches to burnout treatment. The aim of this research synthesis is to describe intensive mothering beliefs as a novel and meaningful therapeutic consideration that will improve the cultural responsiveness of treatment for maternal burnout.

Statement of the Problem

The problem this investigation will address is the lack of culturally responsive therapeutic approaches for the treatment of maternal burnout. The literature suggests that cultural belief systems play an important role in the development of maternal burnout (Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020; Roskam et al., 2021; Roskam et al., 2022; Verniers et al., 2022). While treatment approaches for work related burnout and parental burnout have been described, there is limited

literature that discusses culturally responsive therapeutic treatment of maternal burnout specifically (Bayot et al., 2023; Urbanowicz et al., 2024; van Dam, 2021). Though intensive mothering beliefs appear to be important cultural contributors to maternal burnout, the utility of exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment has yet to be determined. This research project aims to uncover whether exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs may improve the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout. This synthesis of the literature offers a nuanced therapeutic consideration for practitioners treating maternal burnout. Therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout may be negatively impacted if this research is not conducted, as intensive mothering beliefs may not be effectively addressed in treatment.

Justification of the Study

This literature review will answer the following question: how might exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs improve the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout? Statistics Canada (2019) reports that 53% of surveyed new mothers experiencing challenges with their mental health spoke with a mental health professional about their concerns. This suggests that mental health practitioners are a resource that are frequently used by mothers, and that mothers may be seeking therapeutic support with maternal burnout concerns. It is concerning that mental health practitioners may be attempting to treat such clients with minimal supporting literature regarding culturally responsive practice. This research project aims to analyze and synthesize the current literature regarding intensive mothering beliefs and maternal burnout with the intention of uncovering a meaningful cultural consideration for maternal burnout treatment.

The literature suggests that maternal burnout is an important problem impacting maternal mental health (Lebert-Charron, 2018). While culturally responsive treatment frameworks for maternal burnout are not well articulated, the literature has proposed that therapeutically exploring issues related to gender inequality may be important in providing culturally responsive care (Bozkur et al., 2022; Roskam et al., 2022). The present investigation will utilize a literature review process that synthesizes the information known about maternal burnout, intensive mothering beliefs, and culturally responsive treatment of maternal burnout. This research aims to determine if intensive mothering beliefs may be a novel and culturally responsive therapeutic consideration that serves to explore and deconstruct gender inequality.

Significance of the Research

Culturally responsive therapeutic treatment considerations for maternal burnout have yet to be well established in the literature. This research project supports counselling practice in providing a novel and evidence-based synthesis of the current literature regarding intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and culturally responsive therapeutic treatment. The results of this investigation are intended to increase mental health professionals' understanding of the influence of intensive mothering beliefs on maternal burnout and provide considerations that increase the cultural responsiveness of the treatment they provide. This research directly benefits mothers who are experiencing maternal burnout and their children who are impacted by maternal mental health (Phua et al., 2020).

Culture has been shown to have an important influence on parenting behaviors and the experience of parenthood (Degue et al., 2024; Sehic et al., 2024). The current study places specific emphasis on this finding and aims to further explore the nuances of intensive mothering beliefs as a cultural factor influencing maternal burnout treatment. Additionally, this study

adheres to the conceptualization of intensive mothering beliefs as a cognitive schema. This recognition increases the applicability of this target to multiple counselling modalities that centre therapeutic practice on the revaluation and alteration of cognitive frameworks and beliefs (Nakao et al., 2021; Gloster et al., 2020; Gómez et al., 2020). This study will expand the current understanding of culturally responsive and evidence-based treatment frameworks for maternal burnout through the exploration of intensive mothering beliefs as a meaningful therapeutic treatment consideration.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is guided by two theoretical frameworks: feminist theory and Maslach's burnout theory. Feminist theory is utilized to frame the conceptualization of gendered social constructs that influence maternal burnout. Maslach's burnout theory provides a definition for burnout as a psychological syndrome that negatively impacts individuals. Collectively these theoretical frameworks provide structure and context for this analysis. The two frameworks intersect to guide the exploration of intensive mothering beliefs as a gendered social construct that influences the development and experience of maternal burnout symptoms.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory explores the social construction of gender expectations and the ways in which women are influenced and marginalized by societal dualistic gender narratives (Ferguson, 2017). Feminist theory rejects patriarchal hierarchies and essentialism, favouring the representation of the intersectional contextual factors related to female experiences (Ferguson, 2017). This framework also aims to deconstruct gender roles that are oppressive to women (Ferguson, 2017; Matsick et al., 2021). Mollard (2015) argues that feminist theory is an important framework in studying issues related to motherhood in that this positionality prioritizes

the exploration of female narratives and recognizes the importance of cultural gender expectations on the daily lives of mothers.

The current literature regarding intensive mothering beliefs and maternal burnout is largely in support of feminist theory tenets. The literature presently suggests that gender roles influence the experience of maternal burnout and the internalization of intensive mothering beliefs (Roskam et al., 2022; Verniers et al., 2022; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020). Peters et al. (2025) demonstrated in their meta-analysis of 246 studies that a large body of research related to midwifery, maternity, and maternal health is guided by feminist theory. Enlander et al. (2022) were guided by feminist theory in their study, which investigated mothers' experiences of emotional distress and recovery during pregnancy. Enlander et al. further state that maternal research and mental health practice that fails to consider feminist theory tenets is more likely to over pathologize the experiences of mothers rather than consider the cultural and social factors that influence their experience.

The present study will utilize feminist theory to frame the synthesis of the current literature. Feminist theory will support the exploration of the role of cultural gender expectations in contributing to intensive mothering beliefs and the development and treatment of maternal burnout. Feminist theory will position the researcher's thematic analysis that will be generated through the literature synthesis to consider the sociocultural gender influences that may impact intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and culturally responsive therapeutic interventions. While feminist theory guides this investigation, it does not negate the recognition of other intersectional cultural identities or environmental factors that influence maternal burnout, intensive mothering beliefs, and culturally responsive therapeutic treatment.

Maslach's Burnout Theory

This research is also guided by Maslach's burnout theory. This theory presents burnout as an occupational psychological syndrome that occurs when individuals face immense stress within their working role (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022; Maslach, 1998). Though Maslach developed their theory in the context of the workplace, literature suggests that burnout can occur in a variety of occupational settings including the parenting role (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022; Maslach, 1998; Roskam et al., 2021). Maslach's burnout theory posits that burnout results in psychological distress at the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral level (Maslach, 1998). This distress is theorized to involve emotional exhaustion, reduced commitment to the working role, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of occupational efficacy (Maslach, 1998). Maslach's burnout theory also suggests that burnout is a syndrome that is responsive to treatment through intervention both at the individual and organizational level (Edu-Valsania et al., 2022).

In alignment with their theory Maslach developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) an assessment tool that is widely used in both research and public healthcare settings to quantify burnout in individuals (Soares et al., 2022). In their meta-analysis, Soares et al. (2022) suggest that the MBI is the most used instrument to assess burnout. Soares et al. also note that the MBI is a valuable tool that has aided the identification of individuals experiencing burnout who may benefit from therapeutic intervention. Dall'Ora et al. (2020) utilized Maslach's theory of burnout to frame their literature review regarding burnout in the nursing occupation. Dall'Ora et al. found that many of the theoretical tenets of Maslach's burnout theory were supported by the nursing burnout literature. Similarly, Baugh et al. (2020) applied the tenets of Maslach's burnout theory to conceptualize experiences of burnout in emergency physicians.

Collectively these studies show there is utility in using Maslach's burnout theory to frame the experiences of burnout in care-related occupations. The present study utilizes Maslach's

burnout theory to conceptualize the elements of burnout for mothers within their occupational role. This theory is applied to the consideration of the detrimental impacts of burnout on mothers and their families. Maslach's burnout theory is also reflected within the definition of maternal burnout in the literature that is utilized in this study. This theory is also utilized to frame the utility of both systemic and individual therapeutic interventions proposed in the literature related to intensive mothering.

Definition of Terms

Cultural Responsivity

The integration of factors related to the client's cultural background into the therapeutic process (Asaani & Hofmann, 2012).

Feminist Theory

A theoretical framework that explores the social construction of gender and the influence of gender expectations on women. Feminist theory rejects dualistic gender narratives and explores intersectionality, equality, and societal change in relation to the lives of women (Ferguson, 2017).

Intensive Mothering Beliefs

A belief system that proposes ideal mothering includes intensely nurturing and emotional experiences as well as ongoing attention and unconditional love for the child. The belief system also proposes child rearing responsibilities lie primarily with the mother for the betterment of the child (Hays, 1996; Verniers et al., 2022).

Maslach's Theory of Burnout

A theoretical conceptualization of burnout as a psychological syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of efficacy within the working

role. This theory posits that burnout can be alleviated through therapeutic intervention at both the organizational and individual level (Maslach, 1998).

Maternal Burnout

Exhaustion within the mothering role that leads to a sense of maternal ineffectiveness, emotional detachment from the child, and reduced engagement with the responsibilities of motherhood (Lebert-Charron et al., 2018, 2021a).

Researcher Positioning Statement

I personally believe that mothers play an important role in supporting the development of future generations. I think it is therefore important that mothers have access to resources that support their well-being as they care for the needs of others, including meaningful therapeutic and social support. I am motivated to undertake this research project as I hope to improve the mental health supports that are available for mothers who are experiencing maternal burnout. Professionally, I have worked with many female caregivers, and I have heard personal narratives regarding the disproportionate stress they carry due in part to internalized gender roles. My academic studies have also encouraged the consideration of underlying cultural mechanisms that influence psychological challenges. I recognize that my lived experiences have biased my research positionality to value the exploration of cultural gender roles in the context of mental health and therapeutic treatment.

I identify as a heterosexual female, and while I currently do not have children of my own, I am emotionally influenced by the gender discourse related to the mothering role. I hold a personal bias that intensive mothering beliefs may be more harmful than beneficial. Further, I stand in favour of gender equality, in all environments including the home and the workplace. To mitigate my biases, I will explore literature that describes the benefits of highly involved

mothering and continue to reflect upon my motivations behind why I believe in the importance of this topic. I also intend to reflect upon my perception of the influence of cultural values on mothering as I proceed through this research and strive to find sources that are reflective of diverse cultural perspectives regarding gender and mothering roles. I also intend to consider other influential factors beyond cultural gender identities that contribute to the experience of motherhood and the development of maternal burnout.

Overview

The present chapter has provided the contextual information about the research that informs the research problem, purpose, and significance, and included a discussion of the theoretical frameworks and researcher positionality that pertain to the investigation. Chapter two will discuss the methodology used for the literature search process. Chapter three will present a review of the literature and will discuss emergent themes, gaps in the current literature, and ethical considerations related to the research area. Chapter four will describe the clinical applications of the literature review and will provide recommendations for clinical practice. Chapter five will provide conclusions and recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Methods of Literature Search

This research is a literature review and synthesis. A specific and methodologically sound approach to the literature search process is important to ensure that the literature reviewed is diverse, accurate, and valid. It is also important that the literature search methodology supports a comprehensive representation of the current literature related to the topic. The research question: how might exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs improve the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout, is explored by synthesizing the ideas presented in peer-reviewed literature. The process of peer-review is conducted to improve the trustworthiness, accuracy, and validity of reported research findings (Steer & Ernst, 2021). The peer-review process also supports the clear presentation of experimentally sound data that is ethically produced (Steer & Ernst, 2021). The advantages of the peer-review process are leveraged in this investigation to allow for the presentation of highly accurate and trustworthy data from which valid conclusions may be drawn.

Description of the Literature Search Process

Databases and search engines that were queried for peer-reviewed literature included City University of Seattle Library, PsyInfo and PsyArticles, the National Institute of Health PubMed Central database, and Google Scholar. The City University of Seattle Library is a repository that includes full-text journal articles, dissertations and theses, newspaper articles, and books. PsyInfo and PsyArticles are databases that contain published journal articles, dissertations and theses, and books that pertain to the topics of psychology and counselling. The National Institute of Health PubMed Central database is an open access database that contains full-text journal articles pertaining to personal health, including psychological health and well-being. Google Scholar is an open access search engine that locates scholarly journal articles, books, and theses.

This broad selection of databases and search engines ensured access to a variety of repositories that contain literature relevant to the psychological nature of this research were queried.

All queries within all databases and search engines were conducted with specific filters to ensure that the results are exclusively peer-reviewed journal articles that were published within the last five years. These publication dates were selected to ensure that the synthesis is comprised of the most current findings. Keywords and phrases utilized for searches include the following: “maternal burnout”, “parental burnout”, “maternal perfectionism”, “maternal socially prescribed perfectionism”, “maternal gender equality”, “intensive mothering”, “maternal mental health treatment”, “maternal burnout treatment”, and “burnout treatment”. Combinations of keywords and phrases that were queried include: “maternal burnout and intensive mothering”, “maternal burnout and perfectionism”, and “maternal burnout and gender equality”. Additional combinations of queried keywords and phrases are “intensive mothering and maternal perfectionism”, “intensive mothering and gender equality”, “intensive mothering and maternal mental health treatment”, and “intensive mothering and maternal burnout treatment”. Queries were repeated with the words mother and motherhood in place of the word maternal to more directly include articles that used the synonyms.

Each article utilized in the synthesis was read in its entirety and critically analyzed. Factors that contributed to critical analysis included: population sampling, research methodology, validity of measurement tools, accuracy of the discussion of findings, and applicability in answering the present research question. Articles were excluded if the population sampled did not reflect mothers with children actively in their care under the age of 18 years old. Articles were also excluded if the data collection and sampling methods appeared unreliable or invalid. Articles that contained internally inconsistent discussions of research findings were also

excluded. Inclusion criteria for this investigation were as follows: participants were mothers with children actively in their care under the age of 18 years old and the investigation assessed intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and/or maternal burnout therapeutic treatment. Literature found through the query process described was included if it passed the exclusion criteria and met the inclusion criteria.

A combination of studies that utilized quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method approaches were included to increase the breadth of information synthesized to draw conclusions. Literature was not excluded based upon personal biases of the researcher or due to the presentation of disconfirming or contradictory information to other sources included in the investigation. Inductive thematic analysis was conducted to uncover themes within the included literature. These themes are described and utilized to formulate conclusions regarding the potential utility of exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in improving culturally responsive therapeutic treatment of maternal burnout.

This methodology has generated a significant base of peer-reviewed literature published within the last five years that pertains to intensive mothering beliefs and the treatment of maternal burnout. Significant studies that have emerged from the literature review process include the descriptive studies of maternal burnout by Lebert-Charron et al. (2021a, 2021b), and the descriptive articles regarding the prominence and influence of intensive mothering beliefs by Hays (1996), Kim and Kerr (2024), Sorkkilla and Aunuola (2020), and Verniers et al. (2022). Additional literature regarding the utility of exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment include articles by Ren et al. (2024) and Montano et al. (2024). These studies were evaluated to ensure they are peer-reviewed journal articles, published no earlier than 2020, and that they followed rigorous research methodologies

as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings of these articles were synthesized to explore the influence of cultural intensive mothering beliefs on the experience of maternal burnout and the utility of deconstructing and exploring this ideology in improving culturally responsive therapeutic practice.

The literature search process was largely successful in generating a meaningful collection of literature but was not completed without challenges. The initial search of the City University of Seattle Library generated limited articles pertaining to the topic. This required the inclusion of additional and more diverse search engines and databases. The keyword maternal was found to be limiting as articles published using the word mother or motherhood as synonyms were not directly retrieved. This required the inclusion of the synonyms in the queries. The current methodology reflects a literature search process designed to overcome these challenges and mitigate limitations in methodology.

Though the present literature search process strives to mitigate limitations within the design, it must be noted that some limitations do remain. This research is guided by a feminist theoretical framework which positions the research to value the exploration of female gender narratives as they relate to maternal burnout, intensive mothering beliefs, and maternal burnout treatment. This framework emphasizes the cultural influences of gender on the research problem and does not comprehensively address other factors that may contribute to intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, or maternal burnout treatment. Though these factors are briefly discussed, this literature review is centred around data related to the influence of gender roles. The present investigation also utilized articles that were published within the years of 2020-2025. Though this element of the methodology ensures the research synthesized is the most current, it excluded articles that may have meaningfully contributed to the analysis that were published just

outside of the accepted range of publication dates. These articles outside the publication date ranges are not entirely invaluable or invalid and may be argued as being supportive in a more comprehensive synthesis of the data. It should be noted however that a significant base of research has been published within the selected publication date range so the review of the findings may still be considered as comprehensive and meaningful.

Chapter Three: Review of the Literature

This literature review synthesizes the current understanding of intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and culturally responsive therapeutic treatment. Inductive thematic analysis conducted during the literature review process resulted in emergent themes that will organize the presented research findings as they relate to the research question. The first theme that emerged demonstrates the cultural prevalence of intensive mothering beliefs and the impact of this ideology on mothering experiences. This exploration further elucidates the notion that intensive mothering beliefs are an important cultural consideration for the improvement of cultural responsiveness in the therapeutic treatment of maternal burnout. The second theme that emerged is that the exploration and deconstruction of the systems within intensive mothering ideology is valuable in understanding the influence of the ideology on the individual. The third emergent theme connects the deconstructed subsystems within intensive mothering ideology to the specific experience of maternal burnout. The final theme that emerged demonstrates that exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs at both a personal and cultural level support the integration of culture into therapeutic treatment. These themes collectively address how exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs may improve the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout. Throughout this literature review critiques of the current literature will be provided and areas requiring further investigation will be highlighted.

Cultural Intensive Mothering Beliefs are Common and Influential

The pervasive and influential nature of intensive mothering beliefs was first described in the literature by Hays (1996). Since the publication of this seminal work several other authors have investigated the prominence of intensive mothering beliefs within different cultural and

mothering contexts. These authors have also contributed to the idea that intensive mothering beliefs significantly influence the attitudes, emotions, and behaviors of mothers. These research findings suggest that intensive mothering beliefs are common and influential which illustrates the potential impact this ideology may have on maternal burnout experiences and therapeutic treatment. This literature also suggests that exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs may improve the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout therapy as this ideology appears to be impactful for many individuals. The literature that describes cultural intensive mothering beliefs as prominent and powerful in shaping maternal experiences will be explored and synthesized in the following subsections.

Prevalence in Individualistic Cultures

The literature suggests that intensive mothering beliefs are commonly held by mothers in individualistic Western cultures (Budds, 2021; Forbes et al., 2020; Lamar & Forbes, 2020; Roskam et al., 2021; Verniers et al., 2022). The high prevalence of intensive mothering beliefs observed in the literature regarding motherhood in individualistic cultures suggests that it may be an important cultural factor to explore and deconstruct in maternal burnout treatment. Responding to the influences of intensive mothering beliefs on the experience of motherhood appears to be an important component of engaging in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout.

In their literature review Budds (2021) outlines intensive mothering as the dominant mothering ideology in Western cultures. Budds synthesizes the findings of various publications to comment on the impacts of the intensive mothering ideology and the factors that may contribute to the perpetuation of these beliefs. Budds suggests that Westernized developmental psychology continues to emphasize the importance of mother-child dyadic interactions in a

manner that reinforces maternal essentialism. It is important to note that Budds states there are other ways of conceptualizing the mothering role that are more considerate of the demands placed on mothers and the influence of intersectional cultural identities. Though Budds presents these nuances they also state these alternatives do not negate the dominant discourse: the intensive mothering belief system. This article suggests that intensive mothering beliefs are common in Western cultures which serves to further the notion that exploring the influence of this ideology may improve the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic treatment for mothers experiencing maternal burnout.

Additional literature supports the idea that intensive mothering beliefs are common in individualistic Western cultures. Verniers et al. (2022) utilized a mixed-method approach to demonstrate that intensive mothering beliefs are commonly discussed within the dominant discourse about mothering in France. The authors conducted qualitative thematic analysis on the content posted on blogs that discussed motherhood. The authors found that the content on the mothering blog posts was largely promoting intensive mothering beliefs and that comments left by readers largely supported the intensive mothering ideology. This suggests that intensive mothering beliefs are prominent in the mothering discourse in the Western mothering culture of France. The prominence of intensive mothering beliefs observed in this study supports the notion that this ideology is an important cultural contextual factor that if explored and deconstructed in maternal burnout therapeutic treatment may increase cultural responsiveness.

The literature also suggests intensive mothering beliefs are prominent in other individualistic Western cultures. In their qualitative study Forbes et al. (2020) provide evidence to suggest intensive mothering beliefs are prominent for working mothers in the United States of America. The authors demonstrate that when mothers were asked to describe their

conceptualization of the ideal mother spontaneous descriptions that aligned with intensive mothering ideology were produced. The authors stated that the participants saw themselves as a departure from the ideal mother due to the competing demands of mothering and their occupation. Lamar and Forbes (2020) also present qualitative data that suggests working mothers in the United States of America feel judged by others regarding their inability to meet the societal standards of intensive mothering. Lamar and Forbes suggest that the participants were influenced not only by their personal beliefs regarding intensive mothering, but also by the systems within their workplace that perpetuate intensive mothering gender inequality. These systems were noted to include a lack of work-life flexibility and restrictive maternity leave policies. The findings of Forbes et al. and Lamar and Forbes suggest that intensive mothering ideology is prominent in the individualistic culture of the United States of America and influences the experience of motherhood at both personal and systemic levels. These articles further support the notion that intensive mothering beliefs are a highly prevalent cultural belief system that is important to consider in maternal burnout therapeutic treatment.

The literature articulates that intensive mothering beliefs are pervasive in the dominant discourse related to ideal mothering in individualistic and Western cultures. This dominant mothering discourse takes the form of self-talk, interpersonal communication, and systemic policy (Budds, 2021; Forbes et al., 2020; Lamar & Forbes, 2020; Verniers et al., 2022). This finding suggests that the deconstructing the cultural influence of intensive mothering in maternal burnout treatment may elucidate unique systems that are influencing maternal wellbeing. It should be noted that while the literature discussed focuses on the intersection between individualistic culture and intensive mothering there are other cultural and personal factors that influence the experience of motherhood and intensive mothering beliefs (Roskam et al., 2021;

Roskam et al., 2022). The literature has yet to comprehensively address the complexities of these intersections. It is important to consider how these intersectional factors interact with prominent intensive mothering beliefs and influence this ideology may have on maternal emotions, attitudes, and behaviors as these elements of life relate to personal well-being and the treatment of maternal burnout.

Influencing Emotions, Attitudes, and Behaviors

It is suggested in the literature that intensive mothering beliefs influence maternal emotional experiences, attitudes towards the mothering role, and parenting behaviors (Egami, 2024; Landrum & Halpern-Meehin, 2025; Lankes, 2022). Emotions, attitudes, and behaviors can reflect an individual's well-being and are therefore important considerations in therapeutic treatment. An individual's emotional experiences, attitudes about parenting, and parenting behaviors related to intensive mothering beliefs interplay with the experienced symptoms of maternal burnout. It is therefore important to consider and respond to the cultural factors that surround intensive mothering beliefs that influence an individual's emotions, attitudes, and behaviors to ensure therapeutic practice is culturally responsive (Asaani & Hoffman, 2012).

Landrum and Halpern-Meehins (2025) utilized a qualitative approach to characterize how mothers engaged in emotional regulation within the context of the intensive mothering ideology. The authors found that mothers reported making decisions regarding their emotional management based upon their intensive mothering beliefs. The authors found that mothers who strongly aligned with intensive mothering beliefs were more likely to repress their own emotions and sacrifice their well-being for the perceived betterment of the child. This research also determined that the emotionally absorbing parts of intensive mothering beliefs increased some mother's desire for connection with their children. This phenomenon resulted in participants

stating they spent time with their children to experience positive emotions. Collectively these results indicate the intensive mothering beliefs can influence maternal emotional experiences in both positive and negative ways. This finding supports the idea that exploring the influence of intensive mothering beliefs on maternal emotional wellbeing in maternal burnout treatment is culturally responsive.

In addition to emotional influences, intensive mothering beliefs have been determined to be influential in informing maternal attitudes towards the mothering role. Lankes (2022) utilized a mixed-method approach to assess maternal attitudes that are influenced by intensive mothering beliefs. This research determined that maternal attitudes towards the mothering role are influenced by intensive mothering beliefs in a nuanced way. Lankes reported that mothers were selectively intensive in which beliefs related to intensive mothering they ascribed to, which further influenced their attitude towards motherhood and the mothering behaviors they engaged in. This finding suggests that in the context of prominent intensive mothering ideology mothers internalize specific components of the belief system which influences their attitudes and approach to engaging with their children. This finding suggests that intensive mothering beliefs may be uniquely internalized by each individual and therefore there is value in therapeutically exploring the cultural underpinnings of parenting attitudes that may be contributing to maternal burnout.

In further support of the notion that intensive mothering beliefs influence maternal behaviors, Egami (2024) demonstrated that intensive mothering beliefs inform parenting behavior choices and consequent child outcomes. Egami utilized a quantitative approach to determine correlations between positive and negative parenting behaviors and internalized intensive mothering belief tenets. The author found that believing in intensive mothering

essentialism correlated with negative parenting behaviors. Negative parenting behaviors were found to be associated with poor child social skill development. Egami also found that ascribing to the intensive mothering belief that one's mothering role should be emotionally fulfilling and joyful was correlated with positive parenting behaviors. Positive parenting behaviors were associated with greater child social skill development. This demonstrates that intensive mothering beliefs influence maternal behaviors and parenting approaches which have important impacts on both the mother and the child. These important behavioral impacts that result in the context of intensive mothering beliefs may be explored more deeply through the deconstruction and exploration of the influence of the ideology on the individual in maternal burnout therapeutic treatment.

The literature suggests that intensive mothering beliefs influence how mothers experience their emotions, care for themselves, behave towards their children, and conceptualize the mothering role (Egami, 2024; Landrum & Halpern-Meehin, 2025; Lankes, 2022). These findings suggest that the impact of the intensive mothering ideology is far reaching and influences many elements of the motherhood experience. It must be noted that the literature suggests there are important nuances to how individuals may internalize intensive mothering beliefs (Lankes, 2022). Consideration must also be given to the disproportionate attention in the literature to the negative impacts of intensive mothering beliefs. The potential positive impacts of intensive mothering on maternal emotions, attitudes, and behaviors are not explored to the same depth as the negative outcomes. In consideration of these nuances, it may still be argued that the pervasive and highly influential nature of this ideology may be harmful to maternal well-being. The literature indicates that cultural intensive mothering ideology is prominent and influential and important to consider in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment.

Deconstructing Intensive Mothering Beliefs Elucidates Their Influence

The literature suggests that intensive mothering beliefs can negatively impact maternal emotions, specifically via the mechanism of socially prescribed perfectionism (Tate, 2023; Verniers et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2024). The current understanding of intensive mothering beliefs also suggests that the ideology increases feelings of maternal guilt which may consequently increase child rearing labour in a compensatory fashion (Collins, 2021; Fielding-Singh & Cooper, 2024; Kim & Kerr, 2024). These proposed subsystems within intensive mothering beliefs may lay the foundations for maternal burnout. The following subsections will explore the ideas presented in the literature that deconstruct intensive mothering beliefs as they relate to socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behavior. This exploration further supports the notion that the deconstruction and exploration of intensive mothering beliefs improves the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout therapeutic treatment in that this process more comprehensively considers cultural factors influencing the individual.

Exploring and Deconstructing Socially Prescribed Perfectionism

Intensive mothering beliefs have been shown to negatively influence maternal emotional well-being through the mechanism of socially prescribed perfectionism. Socially prescribed perfectionism is a subsystem that exists within intensive mothering ideology that represents the perception one has regarding what others expect of their performance as a mother (Sorkkila & Aunuola, 2020; Tate, 2023; Verniers et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2024). It is culturally responsive to consider, explore, and therapeutically deconstruct how intensive mothering beliefs lay the foundations for the effects of socially prescribed perfectionism in maternal burnout treatment (Assani & Hoffman, 2012).

In their article, Wagstaff et al. (2024) employed a quantitative approach to determine how mothers' internalization of intensive mothering beliefs correlated with their levels of social comparison and emotional well-being. The authors surveyed 242 Australian mothers regarding their levels of parenting stress, intensive mothering beliefs, social comparison behaviors, and competitiveness. The authors found that mothers who were more competitive ascribed more heavily to intensive mothering beliefs and were more likely to make social comparisons between their parenting performance and the parenting approaches of other mothers. Wagstaff et al. also stated that those mothers who made more social comparisons and held stronger intensive mothering beliefs also displayed poorer emotional well-being and less satisfaction in their parenting role. The authors also determined that these processes were facilitated by higher levels of participant social media investment in online mothering discourse. The findings of Wagstaff et al. suggest that intensive mothering beliefs represent a social ideal for the mothering role and create an environment for social comparison amongst mothers. This environment of socially prescribed perfectionism is thought by the authors to negatively impact maternal emotional well-being as mothers perceive discrepancies between their performance and unattainable perfectionistic ideals. This article supports the idea that deconstructing cultural intensive mothering beliefs in maternal burnout treatment may elucidate subsystems and potential origins of emotional discomfort observed in maternal burnout. These findings suggest that the exploration and deconstruction of socially prescribed perfectionism as it relates to intensive mothering beliefs and maternal burnout may be therapeutically useful as these systems are directly tied to maternal emotional well-being.

In their study, Verniers et al. (2022) also present evidence that intensive mothering beliefs are a form of socially prescribed perfectionism that negatively impacts maternal emotional well-

being. The authors frame social media as an important platform for intensive mothering discourse and the perpetuation of socially prescribed perfectionism. Verniers et al. suggest that striving to meet the standards of socially prescribed perfectionism within intensive mothering may be an attempt to relieve the emotional discomfort mothers feel existing within systems that promote mothering perfection. This article supports the notion that exploring and deconstructing the effects of intensive mothering beliefs and socially prescribed perfectionism may improve the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout treatment as the effects of these systems on the individual may become clearer through this process.

In their study Tate (2023) synthesized the findings of 9 publications to comment on the effects of socially prescribed perfectionism within the intensive mothering ideology. Tate's synthesis was guided by social comparison theory which posits that an individual's well-being is influenced by their perception of how they compare to their peers. The author argues that the literature regarding social comparison and intensive mothering beliefs aligns with social comparison theory in that those mothers who engaged more heavily with intensive mothering beliefs made more social comparisons and experienced poorer emotional well-being. Similar to Wagstaff et al. (2024) and Verniers et al. (2022), Tate found that mothers often engage with intensive mothering ideology and the mechanisms of socially prescribed perfectionism via social media. Tate further argues that social media acts as a catalyst for the perpetuation of intensive mothering beliefs and socially prescribed perfectionism. The author suggests that content creators can choose to post only the most idyllic versions of their mothering performance, further promoting that intensive mothering perfection can be attained. This finding suggests that it may be therapeutically valuable to deconstruct the cultural influences of intensive mothering beliefs and socially prescribed perfectionism in the treatment of maternal burnout. This deconstruction

may include the exploration of the meaning of social media and idyllic versions of motherhood and how this intersects with the symptoms of maternal burnout.

Collectively, these sources suggest that intensive mothering beliefs are a form of socially prescribed perfectionism. The literature also presents socially prescribed perfectionism as harmful towards maternal emotional well-being. The concept of social media as a platform for perpetuating socially prescribed perfectionism within intensive mothering may also be an important consideration to explore and deconstruct in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment. Other forms of social communication that may influence the perpetuation of intensive mothering beliefs and socially prescribed perfectionism have not been comprehensively explored in the recent literature. However, it is apparent in the current literature that intensive mothering beliefs can negatively impact maternal emotional well-being through the mechanisms associated with socially prescribed perfectionism. These articles draw attention to the importance of the deconstruction and exploration of cultural belief systems in aiding the understanding of the systems influence on the individual's well-being. The findings of this research support the idea that exploring and deconstructing the systems within intensive mothering beliefs may be therapeutically meaningful and culturally responsive.

Exploring and Deconstructing Maternal Guilt and Compensatory Behavior

Socially prescribed perfectionism within intensive mothering ideology creates an environment for maternal guilt related to personal inability to meet unattainable perfectionistic standards (Collins, 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024). Maternal guilt can increase the likelihood that an individual engages in labour intensive compensatory behaviors to overcome their emotional distress (Fielding-Singh & Cooper, 2023). Deconstructing the effects of these subsystems within intensive mothering ideology may serve to improve the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout

treatment and in turn draw attention to important cultural influences on the individual that may need to be explored in treatment.

In their quantitative study Kim and Kerr (2024) assessed how intensive mothering beliefs influenced experiences of maternal guilt. The authors utilized questionnaires to assess mothers' level of intensive mothering beliefs and the amount of parenting guilt they experienced. Kim and Kerr found that mothers who held strong intensive mothering beliefs across all intensive mothering tenets experienced statistically significant higher levels of maternal guilt compared to those mothers who did not endorse any intensive mothering beliefs. The authors suggest that mothers who did not endorse any intensive mothering belief tenets may experience less maternal guilt as they do not perceive their performance as discrepant from mothering expectations. These findings support the notion that intensive mothering beliefs create an environment for maternal guilt that is rooted in socially prescribed perfectionism. The elucidation of the interplay between these subsystems of intensive mothering ideology supports the notion that deconstruction of intensive mothering beliefs may be therapeutically valuable and culturally responsive in uncovering the effects of this system on the individual.

In their qualitative study, Collins (2021) sought to determine what factors influence maternal guilt for mothers who live in Western cultures that promote intensive mothering. Collins interviewed one working mother from the following four countries: Italy, Germany, Sweden, and the United States of America. Collins proposed that each of these countries engage different levels of social support services and therefore mothers may experience maternal guilt differently despite existing in intensive mothering ideological standards. Collins presents evidence that states intensive mothering beliefs set mothers up for experiences of maternal guilt as the tenets of this ideology are largely unattainable. Collins also found that mothers who are

influenced by intensive mothering beliefs reported less maternal guilt when child rearing was decentralized from the mother, both at a personal and societal policy level. These findings suggest that maternal guilt exists in the context of intensive mothering which can negatively impact maternal well-being. The deconstruction of the effects of intensive mothering ideology within this article reinforces the importance of cultural responsiveness as it was determined that social policy greatly impacted maternal burnout and wellbeing. This deconstruction may be therapeutically meaningful for mothers who are experiencing high levels of maternal guilt as it uncovers the social and cultural systems that are influencing their personal wellbeing.

The literature also suggests that maternal guilt may drive some mothers to engage in compensatory behaviors and increase their engagement with their children and attempt to overcome their perceived discrepancies. Fielding-Singh and Cooper (2023) utilized a quantitative approach to explore how mothers responded to feelings of maternal guilt in the context of intensive mothering. The authors determined that mothers reported feeling guilt when they perceived they were not meeting the expectations of the intensive mothering ideology. The research also demonstrated that when mothers experienced guilt they worked to manage their feelings by increasing the time and energy dedicated to child monitoring and parenting engagement. Specifically, the authors state that mothers report raising their personal mothering standards, attempting to gain more control over their parenting, and comparing themselves to other mothers. The authors argue that this approach resulted in a paradoxical increase in maternal guilt as mothers continue to strive to meet unattainable intensive mothering ideological standards while placing more strain on their cognitive and physical resources. Fielding-Singh and Cooper demonstrate that maternal guilt is sourced from intensive mothering beliefs and socially prescribed perfectionism. This article further supports the notion that deconstruction and

exploration of the subsystems of intensive mothering ideology may help clients make meaning out of their personal experiences and improve the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic treatment.

Collectively, this research demonstrates that intensive mothering beliefs create an environment for maternal guilt through the mechanisms of socially prescribed perfectionism (Collins, 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Tate, 2023; Verniers et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2024). The literature also suggests that maternal guilt born out of socially prescribed perfectionism may lead some mothers to engage in compensatory behaviors. The compensatory behaviors may further perpetuate intensive mothering beliefs and paradoxically increase mothering stress and drain maternal resources (Fielding-Singh & Cooper, 2023). It is important to note that the literature reviewed considers just two mechanisms within intensive mothering beliefs that influence maternal wellbeing. It is likely that there are additional contributing factors within intensive mothering beliefs, and unique to the individual's personality and lived experience that could be deconstructed and explored to determine how they influence maternal experiences. These additional factors have not been widely explored in the recent literature and would be of value in conceptualizing a more comprehensive conceptualization of maternal experiences. Though maternal guilt and compensatory behavior are likely more complex than what is presented here it may be argued that the mechanisms of intensive mothering beliefs negatively influence maternal perceptions of self and emotional well-being. In this way it may be argued that these subsystems of intensive mothering ideology are contributing factors to maternal burnout. It is therefore important to explore and deconstruct the intensive mothering ideology that may be influencing individual experiences of maternal burnout in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment.

Systems Within Intensive Mothering Beliefs and Maternal Burnout

The literature suggests that intensive mothering beliefs negatively influence maternal emotional well-being (Collins, 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Tate, 2023; Verniers et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2024). Poor emotional well-being is an important component of maternal burnout experiences (Lebert-Charron et al., 2018; 2021). Recent literature demonstrates intensive mothering beliefs contribute to the experience of maternal burnout. Specifically, the literature suggests that the subsystems within the intensive mothering ideology lay the foundation for maternal burnout (Constantinou et al., 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Li, 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Song et al., 2023; Venard et al., 2024). In the following subsections the findings of these articles will be synthesized to support the argument that the mechanisms of socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behavior that exist within intensive mothering beliefs are important contributors to maternal burnout. This argument furthers the notion that exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs are important components of culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment.

Socially Prescribed Perfectionism and Maternal Burnout

Intensive mothering beliefs create a system of socially prescribed perfectionism in which mothers develop unattainable expectations for their mothering role (Wagstaff et al., 2024; Tate, 2023). When a mother is unable to meet these unattainable standards, maternal guilt may arise (Collins 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024). Maternal guilt may be conceptualized as a form of perceived maternal ineffectiveness that is born out of socially prescribed perfectionism. This experience is highly related to maternal burnout as an important component of this concern is a sense of maternal inefficacy in the parenting role. Recent literature suggests that socially prescribed perfectionism is connected to the experience of maternal burnout through intensive mothering

ideology. These findings support the notion that exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs improve the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout treatment.

Sorkkila and Aunola (2024) demonstrate in their quantitative study that socially prescribed perfectionism is an important contributing factor to parental burnout. The authors surveyed 1725 Finnish parents, 91% of whom were mothers, regarding their level of parental burnout and perfectionism. The authors found that higher levels of socially prescribed perfectionism were associated with parental burnout, while higher levels of self-oriented perfectionism were not directly correlated with parental burnout. Importantly, the authors also determined that mothers exhibited higher levels of socially prescribed perfectionism than fathers did. Though the authors did speak on the influence of intensive mothering beliefs specifically, the broader range of sources referenced here suggest that intensive mothering beliefs present in the individualistic Finnish culture may be the system that disproportionately impacts mothers. Intensive mothering beliefs may be contributing to higher levels of socially prescribed perfectionism and maternal burnout in this population. This finding suggests that the incorporation of exploration and deconstruction of intensive mothering beliefs may support culturally responsive treatment for maternal burnout.

Venard et al. (2024) also provide evidence to suggest that mothers are disproportionately impacted by socially prescribed perfectionism and that this system influences parenting behavior choices. The authors assessed the perfectionistic beliefs and parenting behaviors of 146 parent dyads from Sweden, a country that adopts intensive mothering as the prominent mothering ideology. Venard et al. found that mothers reported disproportionate social pressures to perform perfectly as a mother compared to fathers. The authors note that socially prescribed perfectionism had variable effects on parental behaviors. The study concluded that holding

perfectionistic beliefs about parenting can result in variable effects on parenting behavior.

Maternal perfectionism was shown to create an environment where mothers are overprotective and over evaluative which can be draining on parental resources and potentially contribute to the emotional exhaustion components of maternal burnout. Maternal perfectionism was also found to be motivating for mothers and increased their responsiveness to their children in a positive way.

Though Venard et al. provide evidence to suggest socially prescribed perfectionism may have both positive and negative impacts on maternal behavior, it may still be argued that the research supports the notion that socially prescribed perfectionism can contribute to maternal burnout.

This article further demonstrates that socially prescribed perfectionism arises in the context of intensive mothering beliefs and supports the notion that the exploration and deconstruction of this ideology supports culturally responsive therapeutic treatment.

Lin et al. (2023) also provide evidence to support the notion that socially prescribed perfectionism embedded in intensive mothering contributes to maternal burnout. The authors surveyed mothers from France and Belgium, two countries that ascribe to prominent intensive mothering ideology. The participant levels of maternal burnout and perceived emotional labour were assessed as were participant beliefs regarding appropriate emotional expression. The authors determined that participants believed positive emotions should be displayed in front of children and negative emotions should be controlled. It was determined in the study that these expectations of maternal emotional control were rooted in intensive mothering tenets and necessitated high levels of emotional labour on the part of the mother. The research determined that high levels of emotional labour correlated with higher levels of maternal burnout. These findings suggest that intensive mothering beliefs create a social perfectionistic standard regarding emotional control that may drain mothers' emotional resources and contribute to

maternal burnout. These findings support the idea that intensive mothering beliefs are a cultural factor that is influencing the experience of maternal burnout in manner that should be responded to in therapeutic treatment.

The article by Song et al. (2023) suggests that the effects of perfectionism on maternal burnout are potentially more nuanced than what other articles have proposed. Song et al. surveyed 507 mothers regarding their perfectionism, parenting behavior, parenting stress, and parental burnout. The authors found that individuals who hold perfectionistic values are not always more likely to experience parental burnout or stress. The authors also determined that mothers who held negative perfectionistic views that focused on negative self-appraisal and a lack of success experienced higher levels of maternal burnout. Song et al. also stated that positive perfectionistic views that focused on doing one's personal best are protective against maternal burnout. The impact of socially prescribed perfectionism on maternal burnout may therefore be influenced by how the individual internalizes their self-judgement relative to the social standard. It is therefore culturally responsive to deconstruct and explore individual differences in how intensive mothering ideology, and socially prescribed perfectionism, may influence maternal burnout.

Collectively, these articles suggest that socially prescribed perfectionism embedded in intensive mothering beliefs influence experiences of maternal burnout. The research demonstrates that the physical and emotional labour involved in attempting to meet the perfectionistic standards within intensive mothering beliefs is detrimental to maternal well-being and may encompass the various experiences that define maternal burnout. As intensive mothering beliefs are a prominent cultural ideology, and highly influential on the experience of

maternal burnout, deconstructing and exploring this belief system improves the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout treatment.

Though intensive mothering beliefs were not directly cited in each article reviewed, the participants were sampled from individualistic cultures in which it has been determined that intensive mothering is the prominent ideology (Budds, 2021; Verniers et al., 2022). An investigation in which intensive mothering belief adherence was also quantified in addition to socially prescribed perfectionism and maternal burnout was not found in the literature. This research would strengthen the current synthesis of the literature that presently suggests intensive mothering beliefs and socially prescribed perfectionism contribute to maternal burnout and should be explored in culturally responsive therapeutic practice.

Maternal Guilt, Compensatory Behavior, and Maternal Burnout

The literature suggests that maternal guilt arises in the context of socially prescribed perfectionism embedded in intensive mothering beliefs (Collins, 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024). Compensatory behaviors that result from attempts to mitigate maternal guilt could be argued as contributing to emotional exhaustion in the maternal role. Collectively, maternal guilt and compensatory behaviors can be conceptualized as contributing to the emotional exhaustion and sense of maternal ineffectiveness that characterizes maternal burnout. The literature suggests that there is a strong link between cultural intensive mothering ideology, maternal burnout, and maternal guilt. This finding supports the notion that intensive mothering beliefs should be explored and deconstructed in culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment.

In their study, Kim and Kerr (2024) demonstrated that those mothers who endorse intensive mothering beliefs experienced higher levels of guilt. The authors also assessed participants experiences of maternal burnout and found that mothers with higher levels of

maternal guilt experienced high levels of maternal burnout. This finding suggests that intensive mothering beliefs may initiate feelings of guilt which could contribute to maternal burnout. This article supports the notion that deconstructing and exploring intensive mothering ideology may be beneficial in providing culturally responsive maternal burnout therapeutic treatment in that this process may uncover important influences on emotional experiences.

Other publications suggest that the correlation between intensive mothering beliefs, maternal guilt, and maternal burnout may be facilitated by compensatory behaviors. In their study, Li (2023) utilized a qualitative approach to explore the interconnections of maternal guilt and compensatory behavior. Li interviewed 24 mothers who exist in cultures that promote intensive mothering who migrated away from their children. The participants were asked to describe the guilt they have experienced related to child rearing and the behaviors they engage in to try and compensate for their guilt. In this study mothers reported engaging in increased child support behaviors and sacrificing their own needs to compensate for their maternal guilt. Importantly, while some mothers reported this increase in childcare labour was emotionally straining, others found the resulting closer connection with their children to improve their emotional well-being. This suggests that the relationship between maternal guilt, compensatory behavior, and maternal burnout may be vary for different people. However, the interplay of these factors has been shown to contribute to behavior and emotion patterns that align with maternal burnout. This finding aligns with the idea that intensive mothering beliefs should be explored and deconstructed in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout as they appear to relate to emotional exhaustion.

The connection between intensive mothering beliefs, maternal guilt, and maternal burnout was also explored by Rodriguez et al. (2020). The authors interviewed 14 French

mothers regarding their experiences of maternal burnout. The participants described the social pressures associated with intensive mothering beliefs as guilt inducing. The reported feelings of guilt extended to feeling guilty about experiencing maternal burnout which indicates that the cycle of social pressure and guilt does not cease when a mother is pushed to the point of emotional exhaustion and disconnection. The authors also stated that mothers felt exhausted by their constant attempts to serve their families and meet the perceived social expectations. Collectively, these results indicate that those mothers experiencing maternal burnout perceive maternal guilt embedded in intensive mothering beliefs as a driving force in the development and perpetuation of maternal burnout. This article suggests that mothers identified in conversation with the researchers that there are subsystems within intensive mothering beliefs that impact their experience of maternal burnout. This finding supports the notion that conscious exploration and deconstruction of intensive mothering ideology is important in helping mothers make sense of their experiences and comprehensively consider the cultural systems that are impacting their experience.

Constantinou et al. (2021) synthesized the findings of a variety of qualitative articles that investigated the experiences of guilt and shame in motherhood. The authors state that the current literature supports the notion that intensive mothering beliefs feed the experiences of maternal guilt and shame. Further, Constantinou et al. report that the literature suggests this sense of maternal guilt leads mothers to prioritize the needs of their children above their own. The authors report that the publications enforce that maternal guilt also contributed to a sense of maternal disconnection from their children and emotional depletion in the mothering role. These synthesized findings indicate that intensive mothering beliefs, through the mechanisms of maternal guilt and compensatory behaviors, contribute to the characteristic experiences that

define maternal burnout. This evidence supports the notion that maternal guilt operates as a subsystem within intensive mothering beliefs that is exposed upon deconstruction and exploration of the ideology. The findings of this article align with the idea that intensive mothering beliefs should be deconstructed and explored in culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment.

These articles collectively suggest that socially prescribed perfectionism embedded within intensive mothering beliefs leads mothers to experience guilt and engage in compensatory behaviors. It is these mechanisms within the intensive mothering ideology that lay the foundation for maternal burnout experiences including emotional exhaustion, perceptions of maternal ineffectiveness, and disconnection from the mothering role. It is important to note that elements of intensive mothering beliefs have been shown to be motivating for some mothers. The potential benefits of intensive mothering ideology have not been explored in the current literature to the same extent as the potential harmful components of the ideology.

Though there may be some benefits to intensive mothering beliefs it has been established that this ideology holds the potential to create a harmful cycle of guilt and emotional exhaustion that underlies maternal burnout. This cycle is particularly concerning for mothers as it has been shown that maternal burnout experiences also occur in the context of intensive mothering creating an ongoing cycle of perceived lack of efficacy and continuous emotional exhaustion. It is important to note that the nuanced effects of these subsystems within intensive mothering ideology emerged through the exploration and deconstruction of the ideology. Therefore, it may be argued it is imperative that intensive mothering beliefs be explored and deconstructed in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment of maternal burnout.

Improving Cultural Responsivity of Maternal Burnout Treatment

The systems within intensive mothering beliefs have been shown to lay the foundation for maternal burnout (Constantinou et al., 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Li, 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Song et al., 2023; Venard et al., 2024). The current literature does not explicitly discuss the entire intensive mothering ideology as a therapeutic consideration for culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment. The literature previously synthesized suggests that intensive mothering ideology is an important contextual factor that influences maternal burnout. This research therefore supports the argument that this belief system should be explored and deconstructed in maternal burnout treatment. Articles that assess the utility of addressing intensive mothering beliefs through exploring and deconstructing both personal and cultural elements related to intensive mothering beliefs will be explored. This exploration and synthesis was performed with the intention of demonstrating the utility of exploring intensive mothering beliefs comprehensively in culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment.

Therapeutic Utility of Exploring and Deconstructing Personal Factors

The literature currently suggests that maternal resilience is an important factor that reduces maternal burnout (Bozkur et al., 2022). In their quantitative study, Bozkur et al. surveyed 150 mothers regarding their levels of burnout in their relationships, internalized sexism, and resilience. The authors found that mothers who reported higher levels of resilience, meaning the ability to endure and adapt to challenging life events, experienced less relational burnout and were not as negatively impacted by internalized sexism. Bozkur et al. also state that mothers who reported higher levels of internalized sexism, which the authors related directly to intensive mothering beliefs, experienced higher levels of relational burnout. These findings are important as they relate to the therapeutic utility of working with mothers experiencing maternal burnout to

build personal resilience. Bozkur et al. suggest that most mothers surveyed described internalizing intensive mothering beliefs, yet those mothers who exhibited more personal resilience while existing within systems that support this ideology experienced less burnout. This evidence suggests that therapeutic skill building around personal resilience in the context of intensive mothering is valuable to maternal burnout treatment. This therapeutic intervention may also involve deconstructing and exploring how intensive mothering ideology is influencing the individual's ability to be resilient.

In addition to general personal resilience, the literature suggests that building emotional skills and social support are important in mitigating the effects of parental burnout. In their quantitative study Lin et al. (2022) surveyed 1835 parents from the United States of America, Poland, Peru, Turkey, and Belgium regarding their parental burnout, social supports, and emotional regulation. The authors found that parents who engaged with more emotional regulation strategies experienced less parental burnout. This is of particular interest in the context of intensive mothering beliefs as the literature has shown that this ideology often encourages mothers to disconnect from their emotions or engage in behavior cycles that negatively impact emotional well-being (Landrum & Halpern-Meekins, 2025; Tate, 2023). It may therefore be argued that therapeutically building skills related to emotional regulation in consideration of the impacts of intensive mothering beliefs is important to the therapeutic treatment of maternal burnout. This intervention may be made further culturally responsive by exploring and deconstructing the cultural components of intensive mothering and their impact on beliefs and skills related to emotional regulation.

Lin et al. (2022) also stated that high levels of social support reduced experiences of parental burnout even in the absence of high levels of emotional regulation. This is also an

important consideration for therapeutic maternal burnout treatment as it suggests there is utility in supporting clients in building meaningful, safe, and supportive social supports. Social discourse related to mothering has been shown to be potentially harmful to maternal wellbeing (Tate, 2023; Verniers et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2025). The risk of creating further harm in strengthening the influence of intensive mothering beliefs in certain social settings should be considered when therapeutically supporting the building and maintenance of social supports. This consideration increases the cultural responsivity of treatment for maternal burnout.

In their article, Raudasoja et al. (2023) present self-esteem as an important therapeutic consideration for maternal burnout in the context of socially prescribed perfectionism. The authors surveyed 479 Finnish mothers regarding their levels of self-esteem, maternal burnout, and socially prescribed perfectionism. Raudasoja et al. determined that high levels of self-esteem were correlated with low levels of parental burnout even when individuals reported high levels of socially prescribed perfectionism. The authors also found that low levels of self-esteem resulted in a stronger influence of socially prescribed perfectionism and higher levels of maternal burnout. This finding highlights the importance of therapeutically supporting mothers in building their self-esteem within the context of socially prescribed perfectionism embedded in intensive mothering beliefs. Deconstructing and exploring the influence of intensive mothering beliefs on self-esteem may be one way to improve the cultural responsivity of maternal burnout treatment.

Collectively, these articles suggest that maternal resilience, emotional regulation, social support, and self-esteem are all important personal factors that contribute to the experience of maternal burnout. The literature also suggests these personal factors are influenced by intensive mothering beliefs. These findings support the notion that intensive mothering beliefs are an overarching influential factor that contributes to maternal burnout and that there is value in

therapeutically considering this influence in treatment planning for maternal burnout. It is important to note that these articles describe only a subset of personal factors that may be influenced by maternal burnout and that they do not comprehensively address variations in personal experience related to intersectional cultural identities. Despite this limitation in the literature there is evidence to suggest exploring and deconstructing personal factors related to intensive mothering beliefs will support effective and culturally responsive therapeutic maternal burnout treatment.

Therapeutic Utility of Responding to Cultural Factors

The literature demonstrates that an important interplay occurs between intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and cultural factors. Ren et al. (2024) conducted a meta-analysis of the 2037 publications reporting on factors related to parental burnout. The authors organized the synthesized factors relating to parental burnout into individual, interpersonal, organizational, and systemic cultural systems. Ren et al. specifically note that it is the systemic cultural system under which all other systems related to parental burnout operate. The authors also note that the literature they reviewed emphasized that those parents who attempt to demonstrate competency in parenting by acting in accordance with systemic cultural parenting values were more likely to experience parental burnout. Ren et al. state that the cultural parenting values that were most connected to parental burnout were individualism and ideologies that aligned with intensive mothering. The findings of Ren et al. highlight the importance of responding to the cultural elements of intensive mothering beliefs when considering an individual treatment plan for maternal burnout. This evidence suggests that it is insufficient to focus entirely on personal factors in maternal burnout treatment as there is evidence to suggest

that personal factors are influenced by cultural systems. Integrating the deconstruction and exploration of intensive mothering supports the cultural responsiveness promoted by Ren et al..

The importance of considering cultural factors in making meaning out of mothering experiences is discussed by Sur (2022) in their autoethnography. Sur comments on their internalized socially prescribed perfectionism embedded in intensive mothering ideology and their cultural identity as a South Asian woman. The author discusses their conceptualization of ideal mothering being sourced from their cultural values and gender expectations. Sur also comments on the discomfort they felt in negotiating the ideals they felt matched their true desires and the ideal they wished to be able to disrupt. The author specifically comments on the importance of reflecting on their cultural values in understanding their mothering behaviors and attitudes. These findings support the notion that it is important for mothers receiving treatment for maternal burnout to be given the opportunity to engage in this type of reflection, as it relates to intensive mothering beliefs and other intersectional cultural identities that influence their lived experience and therapeutic treatment. This reflection may include the exploration and deconstruction of intensive mothering ideology.

In their study, Montano et al. (2024) employ a qualitative approach to characterize the intersection between cultural values, intensive mothering, and maternal guilt management. The authors interviewed 12 Latina working mothers from the United States of America regarding the cultural values they hold that influence their experience of mothering. Montano et al. state that the participants reported feeling guilty when they did not meet the cultural expectations of ideal motherhood which were largely aligned with intensive mothering. Importantly, the authors stated that one approach the participants stated they took to managing their maternal guilt was to redefine cultural norms around motherhood. The authors stated that mothers experienced relief

from maternal guilt when they re-imagined what good mothering is, including decentralizing childcare from the mother, encouraging shared family responsibility, and shifting focus to liberating the self and future generations of mothers. This finding suggests that mothers who experience maternal guilt, an important component of maternal burnout, find relief when given the opportunity to re-evaluate their cultural values related to motherhood. This evidence supports the notion that is important to consider and explore maternal cultural values related to parenting in the treatment of maternal burnout.

This literature review has demonstrated that maternal burnout occurs within cultural and societal systems (Ren et al., 2024). In individualistic and western cultures intensive mothering beliefs are an important cultural ideology that influences maternal experiences and contributes to maternal burnout (Budds, 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Lankes, 2022 Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020; Verniers et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2025). A consideration of the personal and cultural factors related to intensive mothering beliefs improves the cultural responsivity of the therapeutic treatment of maternal burnout as the literature suggests this ideology significantly influences maternal burnout and therapeutic experiences (Bozkur et al. 2022, Lin et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2024).

Summary of Themes

The aim of this literature review and synthesis was to determine how exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs may improve the cultural responsivity of maternal burnout therapeutic treatment. This literature review has exposed four major themes that connect cultural intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and opportunities for culturally responsive treatment. Firstly, the literature demonstrates that intensive mothering ideology represents a prominent and highly influential cultural belief system in individualistic Western

cultures (Budds, 2021; Egami, 2024; Forbes et al., 2020; Landrum & Halpern-Meehin, 2025; Lankes, 2022; Lamar & Forbes, 2020; Verniers et al., 2022). This emergent theme that describes the prominence and cultural significance of intensive mothering beliefs strengthens the argument that this ideology is an important component of culturally responsive therapeutic treatment for maternal burnout in individualistic and Western cultures.

The second theme that emerged in the literature review process suggests that intensive mothering beliefs can be explored and deconstructed into subsystems that uniquely impact maternal well-being (Collins, 2021; Fielding-Singh & Cooper, 2024; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Tate, 2023; Verniers et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2024). The literature demonstrates that the exploration and deconstruction of intensive mothering beliefs exposes the subsystems of socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behavior that each have important impacts on the individual. The literature within this theme provides evidence to suggest that these deconstructed subsystems negatively impact maternal well-being. This evidence also suggests that the exploration and deconstruction of intensive mothering beliefs generates a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the systemic factors influencing the individual in therapy.

The third theme that emerged through the literature review and synthesis connects the deconstructed subsystems of intensive mothering beliefs to the experience of maternal burnout (Constantinou et al., 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Li, 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Song et al., 2023; Venard et al., 2024). The literature within this theme demonstrates that the cultural ideology of intensive mothering and the subsystems within this belief system are correlated with the experience of maternal burnout. The literature within this theme demonstrates that the cultural ideology of intensive mothering and the associated

subsystems play an important role in the experience of maternal burnout and therefore support the notion that exploring and deconstructing these cultural beliefs may improve the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout treatment.

The final theme that emerged from the literature review and synthesis suggests that the exploration and deconstruction of intensive mothering beliefs at both a personal and cultural level improves the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout therapeutic treatment (Bozkur et al. 2022, Lin et al., 2022; Montano et al., 2024; Raudasoja et al. 2023; Ren et al., 2024; Sur, 2022). The literature within this theme provides examples for the exploration, deconstruction, and consideration of both personal and cultural factors that may be influenced by intensive mothering beliefs. These articles also discuss how approaches for exploration and deconstruction may be integrated into other therapeutic approaches that are utilized for the treatment of burnout.

Collectively, the literature that is reviewed and synthesized in this work demonstrates that intensive mothering beliefs and the associated subsystems are important to consider in culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment. This finding is aligned with feminist theory and Maslach's burnout theory which were utilized to guide this work. The notion that intensive mothering beliefs uniquely influence women in the context of parental burnout is aligned with the tenets of feminist theory. Feminist theory suggests that women engage with unique social systems that influence their way of life and describes such systems that may be oppressive to their wellbeing. The notion that burnout can be conceptualized, deconstructed, and treated at both personal and cultural levels alignment with the tenets of Maslach's burnout theory that suggest interventions that support the resolution of burnout may come from the personal or organizational level. It is important to note that not all individuals are influenced by or ascribe to intensive mothering ideology in the same way (Lankes 2022). While the themes that emerged

from the literature review and synthesis address the research question for mothers in individualistic and Western cultures, they do not necessarily apply to mothers who have different intersectional cultural identities.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards and principles must be followed both in psychological research and counselling practice (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2017; College of Alberta Psychologists [CAP], 2023). These ethical principles and standards are integral as they are in place to protect the rights and the well-being of the people and groups that researchers and counsellors work with (CPA, 2017). The research presented in this literature review focuses on mothers, specifically mothers who are vulnerable due to reports of maternal burnout symptoms. The specific ethical considerations important to both research and counselling with mothers experiencing maternal burnout will be further explored in the following subsections.

Research Ethics

Ethical research practices are of utmost importance as they protect the population studied from potential adverse outcomes of research participation (CPA, 2017). The research discussed in this literature review highlighted the importance of Internal Review Board approval of ethical study design. Ethical research practices that were utilized in the research presented include the use of aliases to protect confidentiality and voluntary informed consent processes to ensure participants were aware of the nature and purpose of the study (CPA, 2017). The articles presented highlighted the importance of conducting research on diverse populations and the dissemination of this research for the benefit of supporting underserved communities (CPA, 2017).

It is important to note that the research participants in these studies were mothers who may have been particularly vulnerable due to their experiences of maternal burnout and gender inequality. This vulnerability should be considered as it relates to participant well-being throughout the study. Consideration of this vulnerability should involve the avoidance of unnecessary strain or burden of the research procedures on participants (CPA, 2017). Consideration should also be made to the influence of gender inequality and maternal roles. Researcher reflexivity regarding their own biases and positionality should be conducted to ensure that the research design does not pose harm to the participants (CPA, 2017).

The research conducted for this literature review was done with consideration of the author's personal biases. Attempts to mitigate this personal bias included seeking disconfirming information of the author's personal beliefs. The findings of this research were also presented accurately without distortion. Further, peer-reviewed sources were selected for this literature review to increase the trustworthiness of the reported information. The author of this work also reports no conflicts of interest with the authors of the research presented. These efforts were made to align the work with the Principle of Integrity in Relationships and the Principle of Responsibility to Society as per the CPA Code of Ethics (CPA, 2017).

Counselling Ethics

Counsellors have a duty to follow the ethical principles and standards of practice in the work that they do with clients (CAP, 2023; CPA, 2017). Ethical standards of practice reflect the minimum requirements that practitioners must meet to protect the wellbeing of their clients (CAP, 2023). Ethical principles describe the aspirations of the psychological profession in protecting and best serving the individuals and groups that counselling professionals work with. All clients, regardless of their unique needs or intersectional identities are deserving of ethical

care by counsellors that aligns with both the ethical standards of practice and ethical principles. It is important, however, that counsellors consider how the ethical standards of practice and ethical principles apply to the client's unique situation, cultural context, and presenting concern.

When working with mothers with maternal burnout who live in systems that support the intensive mothering ideology several nuanced ethical counselling considerations arise. In considering the cultural and ideological systems in which mothers exist the practitioner is aligning their work with the Principle of Respect for Dignity of Persons and Peoples in the CPA code of ethics and the tenet of Diversity and Cultural Competency in the CAP standards of practice (CAP, 2023; CPA, 2017). This consideration is also proposed in the CPA code of ethics to support the Principle of Responsible Caring (CPA, 2017). This literature review has argued for the importance of considering, exploring, and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in the context of providing meaningful and culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment. This evidence therefore supports the notion that attending to and incorporating mothers' cultural belief systems into maternal burnout treatment is an important part of ethical counselling practice with this population.

Ethical counselling practice also involves practitioner awareness of their own biases related to therapeutic work with clients (CAP, 2023; CPA, 2017). Though this literature review positions intensive mothering beliefs as potentially harmful for maternal well-being it is important to consider how this information will bias therapeutic treatment. Practitioners must therefore remain curious about their clients' cultural beliefs and cognizant of their own biases to ensure that appropriate mutual understanding is achieved (CPA, 2017). The influence of intensive mothering beliefs on maternal burnout experiences is purported in this research as important to meaningful treatment. However, this should not be interpreted as a suggestion for

counsellors to impose their own cultural beliefs onto the client or encourage the client to abandon their cultural beliefs or identity as this would be unethical (CAP, 2023; CPA, 2017). The suggestion is thus the consideration of intensive mothering beliefs in the context of maternal burnout treatment broadens the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic approaches and provides context for meaningful and ethical therapeutic treatment.

Chapter 4: Application to Clinical Practice

This literature review has outlined intensive mothering ideology as an important therapeutic consideration that may improve culturally responsive treatment for maternal burnout. This finding has important clinical applications for practitioners working with individuals experiencing maternal burnout. The literature reviewed suggests that the presence of intensive mothering beliefs shift the experience of maternal burnout and therefore should be considered at both personal and cultural levels in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment (Bozkur et al. 2022, Lin et al., 2022; Montano et al., 2024; Raudasoja et al. 2023; Ren et al., 2024; Sur, 2022). This chapter will discuss specific clinical applications of exploring and deconstructing mothers' beliefs about ideal motherhood, on both personal and cultural levels, as an important part of engaging clients in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment.

Recommendations for Clinical Practice

Exploring and deconstructing the influence of intensive mothering beliefs is a meaningful therapeutic consideration in culturally responsive treatment for maternal burnout (Kim & Kerr, 2024; Raudasoja et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2024). Intensive mothering beliefs are common and influential for mothers in Western and individualistic cultures and therefore should be attended to in culturally responsive treatment (Budds, 2021; Egami, 2024; Forbes et al., 2020; Landrum & Halpern-Meehin, 2025; Lankes, 2022; Lamar & Forbes, 2020; Verniers et al., 2022) Clinicians who are treating maternal burnout should familiarize themselves with the tenets of intensive mothering ideology so they can assess for and better understand this conceptualization in the context of maternal burnout (Hays, 1996; Lamar & Forbes, 2020). When treating maternal burnout, it is important that clinicians also understand theoretical frameworks that conceptualize burnout in other occupations (Maslach, 1998; van Dam, 2021). Clinicians should consider what

may be similar and what may be different in the mothering context (Lamar & Forbes, 2020; Maslach, 1998; van Dam, 2021). This is important as it allows the clinician to better integrate the client's beliefs, emotions, behaviors, and cultural context unique to maternal burnout with treatment structures for occupational burnout. Clinicians should also ensure that they build competency in treating burnout and supporting maternal mental health concerns through appropriate training, supervision, and consultation prior to engaging in maternal burnout treatment (CPA, 2017).

Though the literature supports the notion that intensive mothering beliefs contribute to maternal burnout, it is important to note that not every individual holds the same beliefs about ideal motherhood (Kim & Kerr, 2024; Lankes, 2022). The synthesized literature directs clinicians to explore conceptualizations of ideal mothering with mothers who are experiencing maternal burnout. It should not be assumed that every mother ascribes to intensive mothering ideology or that every mother with maternal burnout endorses intensive mothering beliefs. It may therefore be helpful to implement screening tools into therapeutic assessment that quantify both parental burnout and intensive mothering beliefs. The Measure of Intensive Mothering Ideology (MIMI) and the Parental Burnout Assessment (PBA) are two tools that have been validated in the literature and utilized in various studies as methods of quantifying these factors (Loyal et al., 2021; Roskam et al., 2018). Implementing screening tools like MIMI and PBA in the therapeutic space may help clinicians understand the extent to which intensive mothering beliefs are influencing maternal burnout experiences.

Though these tools may be helpful in better understanding the influence of intensive mothering beliefs additional factors that must also be considered that influence maternal burnout experiences and therapeutic treatment (Kim & Kerr, 2024; Lebert-Charron, 2018; Sorkkila &

Aunola, 2020). Clinicians should remain open to exploring nuanced presentations of intensive mothering ideology in the context of maternal burnout treatment (Lankes, 2022). Clinicians should also consider their own biases and cultural receiving context when discussing cultural ideals with clients (CPA, 2017). It is important that clinicians remain curious and nonjudgemental regarding client's cultural beliefs (CPA, 2017). The goal of this exploration should not be to immediately change the client's cultural beliefs or impose the beliefs of the practitioner onto the client. Rather, the clinician should seek to understand how the cultural belief systems related to mothering might influence maternal burnout symptoms and inform which therapeutic interventions may be meaningful. The findings of this research encourage clinicians to consider the cultural systems that influence mothers' conceptualization of mothering and recognize when intensive mothering beliefs may be present and influencing maternal burnout.

Intensive mothering beliefs lay the foundation for maternal burnout through socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behaviors (Kim & Kerr, 2024; Li, 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020). If the tenets of intensive mothering beliefs emerge in the therapeutic treatment of maternal burnout there is value in exploring how these systems within this ideology may be influencing the individual (Fielding-Singh & Cooper, 2023; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Wagstaff et al., 2025). Therapeutic discussions that probe the subsystems of socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behavior may facilitate the deconstruction and exploration of this ideology and serve to deepen the comprehensive understanding of the influence of the ideology on the individual. It is important to consider the cultural systems in which clients exist so that therapeutic interventions are appropriate and truly supportive of client well-being (Asaani &

Hofmann, 2012). Considering intensive mothering beliefs in the context of maternal burnout draws clinical attention away from simply focusing on the individual and personal interventions to include an appreciation for systemic frameworks that impact client treatment and wellbeing.

The literature suggests that specific clinical consideration should be given to how intensive mothering beliefs and the systems within the ideology influence maternal resilience, self-esteem, and emotional expression in maternal burnout treatment (Bozkur et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2022; Raudasoja et al., 2023). Though these areas of concern have been demonstrated to be important in this context it is possible that these systems influence other personal and cultural factors that have yet to be explored comprehensively in the literature. Clinicians should therefore remain open minded and explore with each client how socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behavior influence maternal burnout and client wellbeing.

There is value in raising client awareness around the systemic and cultural influences affecting their personal problems (Ren et al., 2024). Exploring the influence of socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behavior in the context of intensive mothering may help clients gain new insight into their maternal burnout experiences. Clinical consideration of cultural beliefs and systems that influence the client also increase the cultural responsiveness of the therapeutic approach and support more meaningful treatment planning (Asaani & Hofmann, 2012). It is important that intensive mothering beliefs be considered in the context so that the larger systems that contribute to personal problems can be meaningfully addressed. The insight gained from this exploration may open new therapeutic pathways for exploring both personal and cultural factors that could be therapeutically explored in a manner that alleviates maternal burnout symptoms (Ren et al., 2024).

The literature suggests that intensive mothering beliefs influence maternal burnout at a cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and systemic level (Budds, 2021; Forbes et al., 2020; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Landrum & Halpern-Meekins, 2025; Ren et al., 2024). Maslach's burnout theory supports the notion that therapeutic intervention at both personal and systemic levels is important in treating burnout (Maslach, 1998). These different levels of influence may be explored through various modalities depending on the practitioners' competencies, the client's needs, and the nuances of the client's situation and goals.

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is one modality suggested in the literature as potentially meaningful in the treatment of burnout (Towey-Swift et al., 2022). ACT may also be a meaningful framework to explore the influence of intensive mothering beliefs in the context of maternal burnout treatment. Though this has yet to be explored in the literature ACT emphasizes the uncovering one's personal values and the shifting of behavior to live in accordance with these values (Gloster et al., 2020). Utilizing ACT frameworks in maternal burnout treatment may be a helpful structure for exploring the influence of intensive mothering beliefs on values, cognitions, emotions, and behaviors and devising meaningful interventions that reduce distress through the realignment with values.

Narrative therapy is another framework suggested in the literature to be supportive of maternal mental health (Farrer et al., 2025). Specific applications of narrative therapy in maternal burnout treatment have yet to be assessed in the literature. However, there is evidence that supports this approach as being meaningful in therapeutically exploring and deconstructing the cultural systems that impact maternal well-being (Farrer et al., 2025). Narrative therapy explores dominant discourse that influence individuals' conceptualizations of their identity and their problems (Farrer et al., 2025). This approach also encourages clients to explore alternative

discourse that may be meaningful in shifting their personal narratives to reframe their experiences (Farrer et al., 2025). Narrative therapy may therefore be helpful in exploring how the dominant discourse of intensive mothering ideology influences maternal burnout and reauthoring the mothering narrative to one that empowers mothers rather than systemically oppresses them.

The literature has yet to articulate specific evidence-based frameworks for treating maternal burnout. There is evidence to suggest that maternal burnout treatment will benefit from the exploration of the intensive mothering ideological influences (Budds, 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Wagstaff et al., 2025). This may be achieved through the application of ACT and narrative therapy theoretical frameworks. The benefits of this exploration are thought to be present at both the personal and systemic level and therefore therapeutic consideration should be given not only to the individual in treatment, but to the systems in which they exist (Ren et al., 2024).

Recommendations for Social Policy Reform

Parental burnout is thought to impact between 6-7% of parents in Canada (Roskam et al., 2021). Mothers are disproportionately affected by parental burnout potentially due to the gendered influences of intensive mothering beliefs (Roskam et al., 2022; Lamar & Forbes, 2020). Mothers may benefit from changes to social policy that increase the awareness and understanding of intensive mothering ideology and maternal burnout. This may take the shape of preventative educational materials and accessible psychoeducation groups for mothers. Instruction related to maternal burnout and intensive mothering beliefs within the training programs for healthcare workers and mental health practitioners may also support elevated levels of care for mothers experiencing burnout. It is also important to consider how social policy may support mothers in managing the challenges of balancing mothering duties, intensive mothering beliefs, workplace demands, and personal care (Collins, 2021). Collins (2021) determined

through their research that policies that support maternity leave and a flexible work life balance result in lower levels of maternal guilt and maternal burnout despite the presence of intensive mothering ideological influences. Maternal burnout may therefore be supported by shifts in social policy that support childcare and work life balance.

Ethical and Cultural Considerations

The integration of research findings into therapeutic practice is an important part of conducting evidence-based treatment that is both ethical and culturally responsive (CPA, 2017). It is important to consider the nature of the research, as well as ethical and cultural implications, when applying research findings to clinical practice (CPA, 2017). The research articles analyzed in this literature review are all peer-reviewed and published within the last five years. The peer review process ensures that conclusions are accurate and that research methodologies are sound and ethically appropriate (Steer & Ernst, 2021). Recent literature typically reflects the most current understanding of concepts. These factors serve to strengthen the synthesized conclusions in this literature review and better support subsequent applications of the research findings to ethical and evidence-based practice.

The research analyzed in this literature review represents the experiences of a subset of different cultural groups. It should be noted that efforts were made to include research that studied mothers from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups to explore how different cultural factors influence maternal experiences. However, this literature review does not comprehensively address all intersectional cultural factors that may shape a mother's experience with intensive mothering ideology and maternal burnout. It is therefore important that clinicians explore the intersectional cultural identities unique to their clients when exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in the context of maternal burnout treatment.

Clinicians should consider how applying research too broadly without considering the factors unique to their client may cause harm and be unethical (CPA, 2017). Doing so may lead the practitioner to misunderstand client experience, impose biased cultural values onto the client, or select treatment approaches that are not supportive for the client (CPA, 2017). Each of these errors could result in harm to the client. It is therefore important that the clinicians apply the research findings synthesized in this review with a clear understanding of their implications, both culturally and ethically. Clinical supervision, consultation, and training should also be considered when incorporating new clinical applications into one's practice to help avoid undue harm (CPA, 2017). Clinicians have an ethical responsibility to learn and actively engage with new developments in the field of psychology (CPA, 2017). Integrating research that is methodologically sound, culturally responsive, and ethically conducted is integral to aligning one's work with this responsibility (CPA, 2017).

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

This literature review has synthesized the current research that investigates the interplay between intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and culturally responsive therapeutic treatment. The aim of this literature review was to answer the question: how might exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs improve the cultural responsiveness of maternal burnout therapeutic treatment. Through an in-depth review and synthesis of the literature this investigation addresses the current gap in the understanding of frameworks for culturally responsive maternal burnout treatment. The evidence synthesized in this review suggests that exploring and deconstructing the influence of intensive mothering beliefs may be a meaningful and culturally responsive therapeutic target in the treatment of maternal burnout. The therapeutic utility of exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering ideology in maternal burnout treatment is a novel conclusion within the context of the current literature. This conclusion reflects the synthesized findings of multiple contributors to the field who have investigated the nuances of intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and culturally responsive therapeutic treatment.

The literature reviewed in this investigation indicates that intensive mothering beliefs are a cultural ideological system that is prominent and influences the experience of motherhood (Budds, 2021; Egami, 2023; Forbes et al., 2020; Lamar & Forbes, 2020; Landrum & Halpern-Meehin, 2025; Lankes, 2022; Verniers et al., 2022). Socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behaviors have been established in the literature as important subsystems within the intensive mothering ideology that influence maternal well-being (Collins, 2021; Fielding-Singh & Cooper, 2024; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Tate, 2023; Verniers et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2024). The literature also indicates that maternal burnout is influenced by

socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behaviors (Constantinou et al., 2021; Kim & Kerr, 2024; Li, 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Song et al., 2023; Venard et al., 2024). The synthesis of these findings suggests that intensive mothering beliefs form the foundations for maternal burnout via the mechanisms of socially prescribed perfectionism, maternal guilt, and compensatory behaviors related to the ideology. The literature suggests there is value in deconstructing and exploring these subsystems in understanding their effect on the individual experiencing maternal burnout. The literature also supports the notion that the influence of intensive mothering beliefs may be a meaningful therapeutic target in maternal burnout treatment at both personal and systemic levels that increases the cultural responsiveness of therapeutic treatment (Bozkur et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2022; Maslach, 1998; Montano et al., 2024; Raudasoja et al., 2023, Ren et al., 2024, Sur, 2022).

Recommendations for Future Research

Though this investigation has provided novel considerations for practitioners treating maternal burnout, there is still much that is unknown regarding maternal burnout treatment and the implications of intensive mothering beliefs. The literature suggests that exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in maternal burnout treatment may be culturally responsive and meaningful, but the influence this approach has on the outcomes of treatment has yet to be explored. This research is limited in scope as it is a literature review. As such, the novelty of the conclusions made arises from the synthesis of other publications rather than the presentation of new data. It is pertinent for future research to explore the impact of exploring and deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in culturally responsive maternal burnout therapeutic treatment.

Future research could explore the outcomes of deconstructing intensive mothering beliefs in maternal burnout therapeutic treatment both quantitatively and qualitatively. Future research may address the question: what is the lived experience of mothers who receive maternal burnout therapeutic treatment that explores and deconstructs intensive mothering beliefs. Additional research may also explore the different mental health outcomes that occur for mothers receiving maternal burnout treatment that explores and deconstructs intensive mothering beliefs. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies allows the research to capture both quantifiable outcomes; and the meaning mothers ascribe to this approach. Both elements are important in validating the proposed therapeutic target within this investigation.

Reflection of Learning

The process of analyzing and synthesizing the current literature related to intensive mothering beliefs, maternal burnout, and culturally responsive treatment has allowed me to gain new insights, not only on the topic itself, but also related to clinical applications and research practice. Clinically, I learned about an impactful ideological system that may influence clients I treat in the future. I also developed my understanding of the value of culturally responsive therapeutic approaches. Regarding research practice, I learned how to explore the current literature and develop a relevant research question and methodology that addresses a gap in the literature. The conclusions generated from this literature review will also influence my future practice in the counselling field.

Clinical Learnings

This research process increased my awareness and understanding of both maternal burnout and intensive mothering in the context of clinical treatment. I learned about the nuances of maternal burnout, the origins and influences of intensive mothering ideology, and established

that the current literature had not yet addressed how these factors might intersect in culturally responsive therapeutic treatment. I gained experience exploring how cultural systems might impact client concerns. Clinically, these learnings will support my future therapeutic practice working with mothers experiencing maternal burnout. This process will also support my future clinical practice in that I also developed a greater understanding of the importance of culturally responsive treatment approaches for a variety of different cultural groups and psychological concerns. I now better understand the importance of reflecting on the cultural systems that influence client's identities and presenting concerns. I believe this to be true both in the context of treating maternal mental health concerns, but also in the work I do with any client.

Research Learnings

Throughout the process of compiling, analyzing, and synthesizing the literature I developed new skills and considered new approaches to research. At the outset of this review, I learned the importance of deeply exploring relevant literature to establish a research problem and question. This process took more critical thinking and creativity than I would have anticipated before. I explored new databases and repositories for research and learned the importance of developing strong query words and phrases when searching for literature. This is the first literature review I have conducted of this length and depth and therefore the first time I have extracted complex and interconnected themes within the literature. These new experiences have developed my abilities to search, analyze, and synthesize literature into meaningful themes that lead to novel conclusions.

Applications to Practice

I plan to continue to develop my understanding of burnout in therapeutic treatment. This process has developed a new passion for me in supporting mother's experiencing maternal

burnout. I anticipate that the learnings I developed related to feminist theory and maternal burnout will influence my future practice working with mothers experiencing maternal burnout. The results of this literature review indicate to me that it will be important to my future practice to consider the systems that influence my clients. Exploring a cultural system that influences on subpopulation of clients has increased my appreciation for evidence-based and culturally responsive treatment frameworks. I have also come to value the process of reviewing literature related to client concerns. I intended to employ an in-depth exploration of literature related to a client's concern and cultural background in clinical situations where I might benefit from gathering information on evidence-based and culturally responsive frameworks.

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