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University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg

Department of Occupational Therapy

THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK WOMEN FROM LOW TO MEDIUM SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENTS WITH THE INCREASED NEED OF USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR OCCUPATIONAL PARTICIPATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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A dissertation submitted to the School of Therapeutic Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

Johannesburg, 2025

Declaration

I, Snothile Buthelezi, student number 711266, declare that this Dissertation, ***The experience of Black women from low to medium socio-economic environments with the increased need use of technology for occupational participation during the COVID-19 pandemic***, is my own work and that any assistance obtained has been only in the form of professional guidance and supervision. No part of this research report has previously been submitted to any other research institution of higher learning or university. Where someone else's work was used, due acknowledgement has been given and references have been made accordingly to the requirement of the faculty of Health Sciences at Wits University. I claim complete responsibly for the conclusions drawn in this research study.



…….. 15/02/2025

Signature of Student Date

Dedication

"I come as one, I stand as ten thousand" – Maya Angelou

I am carried by the prayers of generations of Black women who came before me, entering spaces they could only dream of. I represent every Black woman who has paved the way for me to occupy the spaces I do now. I am them, and they are me.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to Dr Tania Rauch Van der Merwe my thesis supervisor, for her invaluable guidance, unwavering support, and insightful feedback throughout researching and writing this thesis. Their expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this work.

I am thankful to Luther Monareng, my co-supervisor during the initial stages of this dissertation. He was instrumental in fine-tuning this research topic.

I am deeply thankful to Juwairyya Paruk, who took over from Luther and provided valuable suggestions that immensely contributed to enhancing the quality of this thesis.

I extend my appreciation to my husband, Mlungisi Zuma, for his endless, unwavering, continuous encouragement, understanding, and patience during this demanding period. His support has been a constant source of motivation and strength.

To my son, Lumiphakade, you came at the busiest time in my life but somehow fit in perfectly. You are light, you are love.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to all my friends, parents, and siblings for their constant well wishes and prayers.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge God:
"*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths*" – Proverbs 3: 5-6

Abstract

Background:

The pandemic swiftly accelerated the demand for technology usage, prompting numerous operations and professions to adapt, maintain connectivity, and sustain productivity. It is essential to recognise the disproportionate impact of this transition on marginalised communities, particularly Black women in South Africa. This study aimed to shed light on Black women's experiences in South Africa regarding their engagement with technology. Considering the intersections of gender and race in their lived experiences, there is a paucity of evidence of how Black women from low to medium socio-economic statuses experienced the increased need for technology during the COVID-19 pandemic concerning occupational justice.

Method:

Subjective experiences are a qualitative phenomenon. Consequently, qualitative research was adopted to gain insights. This study was approached from an interpretivist, constructive, and feminist paradigm and adopted a qualitative descriptive research design. Ten Black women from low to medium socio-economic environments were interviewed. The participants provided vignettes of their experiences through semi-structured interviews and pictures, which were recorded and transcribed. The data was thematically analysed. This study used semi-structured interviews with the population to capture Black women's diverse narratives.

Findings:

Three themes and three categories emerged from the analysis. The themes are 1) *You are on your own*; 2) *Existential discomfort* as well as 3) *Transition and human adaptability*. These themes encompass the experiences the participants shared in relation to the objectives of the study. Under these themes, the following categories were established: *Systemic unpreparedness, Existential discomfort,* and *Figuring out how we gonna do it.*

Conclusion:

The findings highlighted the disparities that were faced by the participants in accessing and utilising technology, unveiling the complex layers of digital exclusion stemming from socio-economic constraints, educational disparities, and structural inequalities whilst recognising the adaptive strategies and resilience exhibited by these women in navigating the digital divide. Black women are afforded protection only when their experiences align with those of other groups; in cases where their experiences diverge, Black women may anticipate limited or no protection. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between technology and the lived experiences of Black women in South Africa. It provides some insights for policymakers and communities to implement inclusive and equitable strategies that address the digital divide and promote empowerment within this demographic.

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Nomenclature

Concept clarification

Co-occupation: the term refers to the dynamic interaction where the occupations or activities of one individual shape the occupations or activities of another (Pierce, 2009)

Occupational deprivation: The externally imposed barriers to valued, meaningful occupations necessary for the well-being and the state of not being able to engage in occupations (Hocking, 2017; Durocher et. al, 2014)

Occupational marginalisation: Exclusion from participation in occupations based on informal norms, such as habits, traditions, and expectations, about who should participate in what occupations, how, when, where, and why (Durocher et. al, 2014, p 422).

Occupational Justice: "bridging the gap between people's well-being and harmful social conditions that restrict what they can do and be" (Hocking, 2017, p 29)

occupational possibilities: "occupations that are viewed as ideal and possible within a person's socio-historical context" (Njelesani et al., 2015, p 1)

Gender digital divide: the gender inequalities that exist in accessing and using technology (Omotoso et. al, 2020)

Intersectional dimensions: the intersections between various aspects of one's identity (Fenner, 2020)

Fourth Industrial Revolution: the evolving of technology and transforming of 'the way of life' through embedding digitization in the way people live their everyday lives (Liu, 2020; Dunga, 2019)

Acronyms

COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease

OTPFIV – Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process fourth edition

Chapter 1: Introduction and Orientation

*"It is not difficult to imagine the impac*t this, pandemic, must have upon occupational disruption and quality of life." - (*Joubert, 2020, p 79)*

1.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the reliance on technology across various spheres of life, including education, healthcare, and remote work. However, it is essential to recognize the disproportionate impact of this transition on vulnerable groups or marginalised communities, particularly Black women in South Africa. The existing digital gender divide (Shaik 2023; De Haan 2004 and Omotoso *et al.* 2020), compounded by socio-economic inequalities and systemic biases, may hinder Black women's access to and utilization of technology. This study sheds light on the experiences of Black women in South Africa and their engagement with technology prior to and during the pandemic. I delve into the distinctive challenges and opportunities faced by Black women during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on their experiences in a rapidly evolving technological landscape within the South African context.

This chapter serves to introduce the research study, which aims to critically explore how Black women from low to medium socio-economic status experienced the increased need for technology during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to occupational justice. Consequently, the chapter commences with a background of the study, exploring the key concepts and their broad situatedness in literature that will be prevalent throughout the dissertation. The research question, aim and objectives are then highlighted, followed by an exploration of the theoretical framework used. This is followed by a problem statement and an overview of the significance of the study, which serves to illustrate the necessity of this study as well as to justify the study's aim and objectives. Lastly, the study's ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions, against a backdrop of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the study's chosen methodology. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the remaining chapters within the dissertation.

1.2 Background/Literature Overview

The residual effects of the apartheid system, which perpetuated imbalances in race, power, privilege, and class, have particularly affected men and women of colour, leading to varying expectations and opportunities, particularly regarding the attainment of education, paid employment, and caregiving responsibilities (Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998). However, as patriarchy was also deeply intertwined with the mechanisms of apartheid (van der Westhuizen, 2007), it can be argued that women, in particular, have faced an exponential degree of exclusion in accessing economic, sociological, and educational freedoms. Despite the dismantling of apartheid the issue of exclusion and marginalisation in contemporary South African society is still very prevalent and relevant, and consequently generates substantial debate amongst previously disenfranchised people (Levermore, 2003). Approximately half of the adult population is reported to live below the upper-bound poverty line—R1,227 (April 2019 rates) per person per month—with the poverty gap and severity of poverty measured as more significant in households headed by females compared to those headed by males (Africa, 2021).

Women face a greater risk than men of experiencing income poverty (Ramparsad, 2020), being excluded from the labour market, having limited leisure activities, and facing restrictions on their movements due to safety concerns (Ademiluka, 2018). Bhorat & Van der Westhuizen (2008), indicates that women, particularly households headed by females, are generally much poorer than male-headed households. In South Africa, women's vulnerability and tendency to be categorised as high risk has much to do with power relations, inequality and marginalisation (Veeran, 2006). Institutional structures of power continue to circumscribe the lives of women (Nussbaum, 2015). In particular, Black women in South Africa continue to face many challenges that exclude them and limit their occupational choices (Kronenberg & Pollard, 2005; Almeida and Guillard, 2020). The literature describes the challenges faced by women; however, in the year 2020, the world confronted a serious pandemic that threatened the livelihoods of everyone living in it.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the need for action in various sectors for production to continue, workplaces to function, and people to stay connected to each other and the world at large. As a result of the pandemic, many were left unemployed or had their working hours cut short due to the inability to work in the comforts of their homes. Between February and October 2020, there were more job losses from Black women, whose employment was down by about 430,000 jobs compared to pre-COVID-19 times (NIDS-CRAM, 2020). Furthermore, 56% of women tested positive for COVID-19, indicating a double burden on women (Parker et al., 2020). This arguably led to the occupational deprivation and occupational imbalance (Stadnyk, Townsend & Wilock, 2010) of many individuals, especially Black women, who were gauged to be the group that experienced the highest job losses (NIDS-CRAM, 2020). Thus, the increase in technology use resulting from COVID-19 led to Black women being denied opportunities and deprived of occupational participation.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the need for technology, which rose rapidly. Consequently, numerous operations and occupations have experienced significant changes as a result of the pandemic's disruptive effects. However, there is insufficient understanding of the impact that the heightened demand for technology has had and continues to have on occupational participation among vulnerable groups, including black women in South Africa. Certain jobs or industries, such as tourism, were more affected than others, this included those who perform administrative tasks.

Technology is defined as the use of social networking sites, emails, the internet, and voice/video technology on devices such as smartphones, computers, and tablets (Blaschke, Freddolino, & Mullen, 2009). Although there is evidence that the increased use of technology has made life easier for those with access to it, it has paradoxically widened the gap between the wealthy and the poor (Dunga, 2019). This has created a digital divide, which refers to the systemic exclusion of certain populations or communities from digital access and experience (Barnard-Ashton et al., 2018). A United Nations E-Government Survey (2012) indicates that technology itself is social, as it is shaped and determined by human action and applied in social contexts – not in isolation. As such, technology can be viewed as a co-occupation (Pierce, 2009), assisting in participation in various roles such as education and work.

While the increased use of technology, along with its rapid innovations and automation, has become integral to everyday occupations for many during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, it has also disrupted access, participation, and choice of occupations for marginalised groups. According to estimates Kwet (2019), South Africa is ranked among the most economically unequal societies in the world. Whereas the rest of the world adapted to the use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic, this has severely impacted access and consequently limited occupational choices, as originally noted by Galvaan (2012) in South Africa. Joubert (2020) reports that employment has significantly declined, with the effects being most pronounced for the disadvantaged and vulnerable, particularly the poor and women. If women's limited occupational opportunities are positively correlated with poverty and vulnerability to injustices, then their exclusion will remain a significant challenge unless the potential link between the increased use of technology and exclusion is addressed, especially at a systemic level. To understand this link, it is crucial to explore the experiences of women living in low to medium socio-economic contexts concerning occupational marginalisation and deprivation.

As it is almost impossible to avoid the use of technology, it is essential to understand the impact it will have on the decisions and power relations involved in everyday occupations, especially in a country where a large number of the population perpetually faces occupational injustices. While many societies are able to use technology to overcome some occupational injustices and exclusions, many South Africans, particularly Black women, do not have the same access due to not having equal access to digital tools (Omotoso et *al*., 2020).

Women residing in South Africa represent one of the highest-risk groups globally (Agenda 2000). By understanding these intersections, occupational therapists can deliberately advocate for digital access and inclusion in the workplace through effective policies and their implementation. Furthermore, it has been Nussbaum (2015) indicated that questioning what individuals can achieve and become allows for a deeper understanding of the barriers society has erected against justice for women. Therefore, if we do not explore these intersections, we will be unable to identify the injustices, thereby permitting them to persist.

1.3 Problem statement

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the global shift towards technology, highlighting the critical need for digital access and skills, both for social connection and income generation. Black women, disproportionately affected by historical discrimination, have suffered significant job losses during this period, with employment levels substantially lower than before the pandemic. This situation is further exacerbated by the digital divide in South Africa, which continues to disadvantage individuals based on race and gender, as highlighted by Barnard-Ashton et al. (2018). The exclusion of Black women—a particularly vulnerable group—from the economic and technological sectors is occupationally unjust and may lead to occupational marginalisation and deprivation (Stadnyk, Townsend & Wilock, 2010), infringing upon their occupational rights. This collective occupational injustice further contributes to the ongoing perpetuation of inequality, impacting the economies of knowledge, society, and gender equality. There is a lack of evidence concerning the intersections between Black women's access to digital resources during the COVID-19 pandemic and its relation to occupational (in)justice and occupational choices.

1.4 Research question

How do Black women from low to medium socio-economic environments describe their experience of the increased need for the use of technology that was required during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to occupational justice?

1.5 Research aim and objectives

1.5.1 Research aim

To critically explore how Black women from low to medium socio-economic statuses experienced the increased need for technology during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to occupational justice

1.5.2 Research objectives

1. To describe how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the increased use of technology required during the COVID-19 pandemic and to which extent it has impacted their occupational profile in terms of work.
2. To critically explore how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the required increased use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to occupational deprivation and marginalisation.
3. To critically explore how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the required increased use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to occupational possibilities.

1.6 Significance of the study

Any situation or condition that jeopardises the global health and well-being of humanity by hindering our capacity to engage freely in some or all activities of daily life necessitates heightened awareness and vigilance from the occupational therapy profession and occupational science regarding its implications for occupational justice (Joubert, 2020). South African women represent one of the highest-risk groups globally in terms of physical, environmental, social, and economic factors (Agenda, 2000). By focusing on the experiences of Black women in South Africa, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersectional dimensions of technology adoption. If we better grasp the intersections between digital access and occupational (in)justice, occupational therapists can advocate effectively for digital access and inclusion in work through policies and their implementation. Furthermore, neglecting to consider intersectionality may undermine our ability to recognise layered injustices, allowing them to persist.

The concept of occupational justice involves identifying and providing for the occupational needs of individuals and their communities as part of a fair and empowering society (Wilcock & Townsend, 2000). It is important to note how a hindrance in access can be detrimental to health and well-being. Although the

pandemic was a health scare, it revealed many inconsistencies in access and policy implementation. What we do with this information is very important in preparing for future pandemics and natural disasters.

As occupational therapists focus on the sustainability of community development, work with marginalised groups, social justice, and inclusion, understanding the relationship between the increasing use of technology and the social exclusion of women will be pivotal not only in creating possible interventions, such as within the community and educational spaces - which are discussed in chapter 5, but also in gaining insight into the inequalities faced by Black women. Furthermore, exploring interventions such as developing and implementing sustainable policies would help address the inequalities encountered. Additionally, this knowledge will contribute to the creation of nuanced insights that will inform future occupational therapy practices, specifically derived from various human experiences, as we recognise that theories tend to evolve in response to gaps or exclusionary perspectives present in previous theories.

1.7 Research design and methodology

Subjective experiences are a qualitative phenomenon, and consequently, qualitative research was adopted to gain insight into how Black women experienced the need for technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was approached from an interpretivist, constructive, and feminist paradigm, which was essential in not imposing a single paradigm. A single paradigm would have been reductionistic, thereby eradicating nuance from the participants' experiences (Shai, 2022).

Regarding sampling, participants were recruited using the linear snowballing method; however, the initial participant was known to the researcher. The participants were subsequently provided with a consent form and a demographic questionnaire, followed by scheduling an in-depth, open-ended interview. The interview could take place either face-to-face, over the telephone, or via Teams. Additionally, participants were invited to submit images that illustrated their experiences of the pandemic, which served as an icebreaker. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed by a professional transcriber. Drawing on the lived experiences of Black women, the

research provides insight from an occupational perspective within the aforementioned paradigms. A coding method was employed to analyse the data.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methods in detail. This includes the selected research paradigms, study design, study population, research context data collection, management and analysis methods, and rigour strategies.

1.8 Ethical considerations

The research proposal was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg—Protocol Ref No**:** M211190 MED21-09-138 (Appendix A). The participants gave informed consent for the study (Appendix C). The researcher kept the collected data anonymous, de-identifying the participants. Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of the ethical considerations of this study.

1.9 Dissertation style and outline

The Mendeley Cite-O-Matic plug-in in Microsoft Word 2021, using the "APA 7.0" style, was employed for referencing throughout this dissertation. A brief overview of the content in each chapter is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and overview—This chapter provides an introduction to the study and an overview of it. It includes an introduction, problem statement, purpose statement, research question, aim, objectives, the researcher's positionality, and the study's significance.

Chapter 2: Literature Overview—This chapter discusses material related to this study’s concepts and the literature required for interpreting its findings. The main concepts unpacked include feminist Theories, digital access, occupational consciousness, occupational Justice, and the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework.

Chapter 3: Research methodology—This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research methodology used, including a discussion of the research paradigms, methods of enquiry, data collection procedures, data analysis strategies, validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Presentation and discussion of findings—This chapter includes a description of the study participants. The results are then presented through the three themes that emerged from them: “*You are on your own*,” "existential discomfort," and “*transition and human adaptability*.” These findings are then discussed against a backdrop of literary interpretations.

Chapter 5: Conclusions—This chapter presents conclusions based on the study's findings and proposes a framework for Black women and digital exclusion.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter briefly introduces the study's background and key concepts, presents the research purpose and aims, and describes and argues the problem and significance of the research. The following chapter reviews the literature.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

'Power is not something that is divided between those who hold it as exclusive property and those who do not have it and suffer it […] it is never located here or there, it is never in someone's hands. Power works and is exercised through a reticular organisation. In their meshes individuals not only circulate but are also put in the condition of suffering or exercising it' – (Foucault M, 1992,p 39, as cited by Almeida and Guillard, 2020, p 328)

2.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which emerged in late 2019 and swept across the globe, brought about unprecedented changes in every facet of human life. As nations grappled with the challenge of mitigating the virus's spread, a parallel transformation occurred within the realm of technology. The sudden and widespread shift toward digital solutions for work, education, healthcare, and social interaction revealed both opportunities and disparities. Almeida and Guillard (2020) highlight that disparities in women's social standing and privileges lead to diverse experiences of injustice. Amid this digital revolution, one group that merits special attention is Black women, who have historically navigated the intersections of gender and race in their lived experiences.

In this chapter, I review key literature that explores the multifaceted experiences of Black women during the COVID-19 pandemic, when technology became an indispensable resource. By examining a range of scholarly works, research studies, and grey literature, this review will shed light on several key themes and theories related to Black women, technology, and occupation.

The relevant literature was obtained by accessing various databases, including EBSCOHost and SAGE, through the University of the Witwatersrand's online library database. Books, individual journals, academic websites, and master's/PHD dissertations were accessed. Additionally, grey literature, such as online newspaper articles, including Mail & Guardian and News24, is referred to if it marks a significant discourse associated with the research topic.

Keywords for the non-systematic literature search included: ‘Feminism’, ‘black feminism’, ‘occupational justice’, ‘digital divide’ OR ‘digital exclusion’, ‘access to technology for women’ OR ‘exclusion of women from technology’, ‘access and feminism’ OR ‘access and women’, ‘data in South Africa’, ‘fourth industrial revolution’ OR ‘4IR’, ‘need for technology’, ‘intersectionality’, ‘cyber feminism’, ‘COVID-19 and technology’ OR ‘COVID-19 and 4IR’, ‘effects of COVID-19’, ‘marginalised’ or ‘gender biases’, ‘lockdown COVID’, ‘history of discrimination’, ‘patriarchy’, ‘occupational participation’ OR ‘occupational exclusion’, ‘power relations in gender’, ‘standpoint theory’, ‘South African history’, ‘apartheid and feminism’ OR ‘apartheid and black women’, ‘digital access and race’, ‘digital access and gender’, ‘digital access in South Africa’, ‘occupational consciousness’, ‘occupational transition’, ‘occupational therapy and inequality’, ‘occupational science and gender inequality’.

2.2 The Gendered Lens

Deeply entrenched societal norms, historical biases, and structural inequalities have led women worldwide to experience discrimination across various levels and areas of their lives. Discrimination against women intersects with various identities, such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, resulting in compounded challenges for marginalised groups of women. Gender is a socially significant issue that affects many,(Farrell et al., 2023) and while the topic has been extensively researched and understood as multifaceted, the impact persists. The unprecedented shift in the demand for technology has not only reshaped socio-economic landscapes but has also unveiled the intricacies of existing inequalities, particularly with regard to gender.

Historically, women were excluded from voting or owning land and these gendered practices profoundly influenced women’s involvement in changing political landscapes (Veeran, 2020). Women from across the world, on various occasions in time, have campaigned against male domination and the abuse of power, which have plagued relationships for generations (Veeran, 2020). The fight for economic and political equality for women dates back to 1910, which led to the first wave of the feminist movement (Cullen, 2023). Efforts such as the Suffrage Movement highlight women's

resilience, courage, and determination in challenging oppressive structures and advocating for equality, autonomy, and justice within relationships and society as a whole.

At a more intimate level, women were not only subjected to discrimination in public but equally humiliated in their private lives through the practice of male domination (Veeran, 2020). This often presents a different set of challenges for women, where male domination and various forms of discrimination persist within intimate relationships, reinforcing the differences in roles, access to resources, and decision-making practices outside the household or relationship. South Africa has a staggering prevalence of gender-based violence, with one in five women reported to have experienced physical violence from a partner (Stats SA, 2020).

2.3 Historical Background and Perpetual Inequality

South Africa has a history of exclusion, discrimination and oppression, first through colonialism followed by apartheid, also known as colonialism of a special kind that prevented ‘non-white’ people from accessing resources, such as education as well as economic progression. Apartheid also caused many households to be bound, across generations, within low and medium socio-economic status. The apartheid system was done through institutional structures of power and politics, systemically undergirded by the four pillars of colonialism and their intersections: economy, authority, knowledge, as well as gender and sexuality (Mignolo, 2009). For the purposes of this study, we will explore the pillars of economy and knowledge in greater depth.

In South Africa, the political and knowledge economies intersect in complex ways, shaping the country's development, governance, education, as well as its socio-economic landscape. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa has undergone a significant political transformation, transitioning into a democratic system. South Africa has made strides through the enactment of legislations and policies that seek to reduce poverty and inequality and promote economic participation (Phiri, 2017). Despite these advances, the South African political economy is afflicted by socio-

economic inequalities that arise from the historical legacies of apartheid. High unemployment rates, poverty, and unequal access to resources remain pressing issues that impact the distribution of resources and knowledge, further emphasising the intricate intersection of political and knowledge economies.

However, as Shai (2022, p. 2) states: *'A knowledge economy is considered to be the future and the best guarantee for the well-being of the people'* The economies of leading countries have increasingly evolved into knowledge-based economies, with the general acceptance of new knowledge and technological change driving progress (Blankley & Booyens, 2010). In South Africa, the majority of the population, Black people, is on the periphery of the knowledge industry (Shai, 2022), as the education system faces challenges in terms of quality, access, and inclusivity. While efforts have been made to improve access to education, disparities persist between rural and urban areas as well as among different socio-economic groups. Shai (2022) notes that the pressure of the corporatisation of higher education in South Africa is a concern. This is despite the country having several reputable universities and research institutions contributing to the knowledge economy. While innovation is identified as a driver for economic growth and productivity, the capacity to innovate remains low in most African countries (Blankley & Booyens, 2010), with funding constraints and accessibility issues impacting the quality and reach of higher education. Centuries of settler colonialism and apartheid regime willed a legacy of deeply entrenched inequalities across race, class and gender (Phiri, 2017), further impacting accessibility for many.

The residual effects of the apartheid system, which entrenched disparities in race, power, privilege, and class, have led to men and women facing differing expectations and opportunities, particularly regarding educational attainment, paid employment, and caregiving responsibilities (Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998). Poor social and economic conditions and unequal access to resources and services have troubled South African communities for years (Raphael & Galabuzi, 2016). Due to the longstanding social inequalities in South Africa, the country witnesses the phenomenon of 'racialization of poverty' – characterised by labour market segregation and low occupational status, coupled with high and persistent unemployment rates, as well as daily experiences of racism (Raphael & Galabuzi, 2016). Moreover, as

patriarchy was also deeply intertwined with the mechanisms of apartheid (van der Westhuizen, 2007) and other societal practices, it can be strongly argued that women, particularly Black women, have suffered a significant degree of exclusion in accessing economic, sociological, and educational freedoms, due to the dual barriers of racism and sexism often encountered simultaneously (Deliu and Ilea, 2018).

2.4 Feminism Theories

Feminist theories on equal access to, for example, resources, are diverse and multifaceted, reflecting the complexity of gender and its intersections with other social categories. Feminist theories seek to challenge and transform systems of oppression and advocate for greater inclusivity, equity, and justice in access to resources as well as opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their gender or intersecting identities. Feminist theories have extensively explored the concept of access in the social, economic, political, and educational contexts (Deliu and Ilea, 2018). Access or accessibility can refer to the ability of an individual or group to obtain and benefit from resources, opportunities, rights, places and spaces. Botelho (2021) indicates that accessibility should be viewed as a continuous and evolving process rather than a static state. When considering access, we typically first think of geography, where people live, and finances, how much they can afford (Ransom et al., 2009), race and gender are often secondary in considering access. Feminist perspectives on access highlight how gender and intersecting factors such as race, class, sexuality, and disability can affect one's ability to access and enjoy resources and opportunities (Sikka, 2021). they aid in identifying and understanding the cluster of oppressive forces that undermine the status quo and hold these issues together(Deliu & Ilea, 2018).

Gender biases, effecting in the disproportionate allocation of resources and opportunities have existed for centuries, which has had a greater barring in informing occupational participation, especially in the workforce. According to Ademiluka (2018) patriarchy is the term used to describe the society that people live in today, which is characterised by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men, where women are systematically disadvantaged. Patriarchy may be viewed as the foundation of systemic, cultural and religious discrimination that is faced by

women, leaving them vulnerable to many injustices (Mignolo, 2009; Ademiluka, 2018). One example of injustices faced by women was depicted by Madikizela & Haupt (2010) when they indicate that despite women constituting the major segment of the South African population, they only account for 33.3% of the labour force, which were taken from statistics from 1999. Over two decades later, according to the Stats SA (2023)– women currently make up 54.3% of the labour force – which has increased in the last 10 years by only 4% (Stats SA, 2023). However, when women are employed, they are more likely to work in low-paying jobs in vulnerable conditions, and there is a slow improvement forecast for this in the future (Stats SA, 2023).

For many women, entering certain occupations has been viewed as a privilege conferred on them by men (Naidoo, 2000). The prevailing patriarchal affordance to women accessing work is affirmed by the fact that though women make up 54.3% of the labour force (Stats SA, 2023), this statistical representation does not indicate income equality. Poverty patterns may be inherently influenced not only by gender but also by race, creating a double barrier for Black women. Furthermore, as patriarchy implies the taken-for-granted assumption that women's roles and values within society are of lesser importance than men's, women face various degrees of violence, including being socially excluded from the use of technology (Barnard-Ashton et al., 2018).

From an occupational therapy standpoint, women often encounter occupational apartheid, a phenomenon where access to occupational opportunities is granted or denied based on personal characteristics like gender (Durocher et al., 2014). As Durocher et al. (2014) emphasize, engagement in meaningful occupations significantly impacts overall health, which Law (1991) defines as a balance between self-care, productivity, and leisure. When productivity is compromised, and access to economic activities is limited due to factors like lack of technological access, it perpetuates occupational exclusion and entrenches poverty. This social exclusion of women begins early in life, and the resulting feelings of powerlessness stemming from discriminatory experiences can be profound (Hallman & Roca, 2007). Consequently, if Black women face diminished occupational prospects, correlating with increased poverty, vulnerability, and powerlessness, their social exclusion will remain a

persistent issue unless the intricate link between technology adoption and social inclusion is actively addressed.

Feminist theories provide a lens to explain the complexity of the ongoing exclusion and challenges women face in accessing resources and opportunities. Although there are numerous feminist theories, this study will discuss three key ones to aid in understanding and framing the impact of the increased demand for technology during COVID-19. These theories, which will be explored below, include standpoint theory, Black feminism, and intersectionality theory.

2.4.1 Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory argues that individuals from marginalised groups have unique perspectives and insights that emerge from their own social positions and views. Hekman (1997) indicates that the theory expresses the female experience at a particular time, place and within a particular set of social relations. Emphasising the importance of expression from a lived experience perspective as powerful and crucial whilst also considering their social position and perspective when analysing the power dynamics involved in social issues. The standpoint theory suggests that individuals from marginalised groups often possess unique insights and perspectives stemming from their lived experiences, making it crucial for women to narrate their own experiences (Kiguwa, 2019).

A Black women's standpoint includes experiences of systemic racism, gender discrimination, and the compounding effects of both. Feminist standpoint theorists argue that women, particularly those at the intersections of multiple marginalised identities, offer valuable insights into the structures of power and access, as they are more equipped to understand these social structures (Ilkmen, 2023). Therefore, the standpoint theory emphasises that the perspectives of Black women, rooted in their unique experiences, are valuable in understanding and addressing societal issues, in particular in the context of the increased need for technology during COVID-19. Since Black women often face disparities in digital access and technological resources (van

Dijk, 2020), their standpoint can illuminate the specific challenges and opportunities they encounter in accessing technology.

A parallel can be drawn between the standpoint theory and the occupational therapy–occupational justice framework, which is discussed below (cf. 2.7), as it argues for the right of individuals to participate in meaningful occupations through the addressing of systemic barriers (Wilcock and Townsend, 2000). Meaning can only be known and understood through the sharing and expressing lived experiences, viewed through a personal lens or reflection. Consequently, the expression of meaning is derived from a lived experience perspective, as emphasised and encouraged by standpoint theory. Furthermore, the profession of occupational therapy values the importance of understanding a person's lived experience, goals, and context, in order to provide therapeutic practices, interventions, or advocacy that are client-centred as well as contextually relevant (e.g. Cole and Tufano, 2024).

2.4.2 Black Feminism

Since the occupational therapy profession and the discipline of occupational science relate to the expression of lived experiences, the construction of meaning for an individual can, therefore, be influenced by various intersecting identities, histories, and cultural and social constructs. Race is an identity that strongly influences the construction of meaning and, therefore, occupational engagement. Black people, from an early age have been subjected to different forms of discrimination and racism that often place them in situations of exclusion (Almeida and Guillard, 2020). While patriarchy exists within the Black community and constitutes an additional form of oppression affecting Black women, the racial dynamics they face complicate the development of a political consciousness (Crenshaw, 2015). Black feminism is, therefore, a movement within feminism that centres on the experiences, struggles, needs and intersectional identities of Black women, specifically. Recognising that Black women's experiences, struggles, and needs have been marginalised in discussions focused on the supposed needs of the Black community (Crenshaw, 2015), is important to acknowledge that their experiences are not solely racially based.

Black feminists advocate for the rights and liberation of Black women while emphasis ing their unique perspectives and contributions, rooted in their lived experiences. Black feminism does not only emphasise the disparities between genders, but also the intersection of race and class in shaping access to education, employment, and social resources. It demonstrates that patriarchy affects women and men differently when social constructs associated with sex and race intersect, highlighting how systemic racism and sexism restrict Black women's access to opportunities and rights. Moreover, the differences in social positions and privileges among women lead to profoundly varying experiences of discrimination. The increased demand for technology has exposed existing disparities that predated the COVID-19 pandemic; the digital divide is not only a racial issue but also a gendered one. Therefore, Black feminism offers crucial insight into Black women's views on the impact of the heightened demand for technology during COVID-19, underscoring the importance of addressing digital disparities and ensuring equitable access to technology, particularly for Black women.

2.4.3 Intersectionality theory

Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals may experience intersecting forms of discrimination or privilege (Baum, 2021), which cannot be understood by looking at one aspect of their identity in isolation, thereby offering a new perspective on feminism (Ilkmen, 2023). Intersectional theory emphasises that people possess multiple intersecting identities, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, which (Collins, 2021) collectively shape and inform their experiences and overall access to resources like education and technology. According to intersectionality, Ilkmen (2023) it can act as a buffer against white heteronormative perspectives that often dominate societal views. The white heteronormative perspective not only constructs a narrative but also forms the basis of societal norms that dictate doing, being, and belonging. Therefore, intersectionality illuminates, through systemic thinking, the various levels at which doing, being, and belonging are influenced by discriminatory societal norms.

Similar to the previous theories discussed above, systemic thinking - which encourages diversity, equity and inclusion (Ilkmen, 2023), draws on the lived

experiences that the marginalised groups share. However, unlike the previous theories, there is a more significant emphasis on the complexity and plurality of intersecting identities (Sandu & Fernández, 2021) and how they inform doing and being. For Black women, intersectionality recognises that they face discrimination on more than one level of their identity, Sandu & Fernández (2021) referring to this phenomenon as the 'matrix of oppression'. Placing race alone at the margins of feminism does not accurately reflect the multi-layered discrimination that Black women often face.

In the context of feminism, intersectionality theory emphasises that feminism should be inclusive and address Black women's unique challenges and experiences. It recognises that the struggles of Black women differ from those of other races due to the compound impact of racism, sexism and classism. This study focuses on three interconnecting identities: race, gender and socioeconomic status. As discussed above, Black women, in the South African context, face more than one level of discrimination and we cannot delve into their nuanced experiences without acknowledging and exploring this. At the intersection of race, gender, and socioeconomic status, Black women faced distinctive challenges and opportunities. during the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences were unique due to the intersectionality of their identities, necessitating a more nuanced and inclusive approach to addressing these disparities. For example, there was a greater expectation for mothers to take on the primary responsibility for unpaid domestic labour and child care during the pandemic (Childress *et al*., 2023). This had various effects on working mothers; therefore, understanding these disparities is essential for creating more equitable solutions and opportunities for Black women, especially in the digital age.

2.5 Digital access

2.5.1 Digital access in South Africa

The dawn of what is popularly known as the fourth industrial revolution, which refers to the rapid evolution of technology (Dunga, 2019), has been an accelerator of technological advances that are continuously reshaping industries and ways of 'doing'

(Liu, 2018). Whilst these advances have promised a new frontier of opportunities, they also bring forth a myriad of challenges (Shaik, 2023). Digital access is vital to modern life, impacting various aspects, including education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and social interactions. The need for technology during the pandemic highlighted the disparities in technology access that existed before the pandemic (Childress *et al.*, 2023). Digital access in South Africa faces a mix of progress and challenges. While there was notable improvement in certain areas (Shaik, 2023), such as townships, disparities in internet connectivity, affordability, and access to technology still persist. It is essential to acknowledge that the digital landscape is dynamic – ever-changing and improving, with initiatives to enhance digital access already underway before the pandemic.

South Africa made progress in increasing internet penetration in the years leading up to the pandemic. An article by the Mail & Guardian, published in 2017, indicated that, according to the Finance Minister at the time, the government planned to allocate a budget of 1.9 million ZAR to invest in internet broadband infrastructure in public buildings and schools across eight pilot districts (Mohapi, 2017). There is no indication of whether this investment occurred or the results; however, recent publications have discussed the South African Government's intent to invest in internet infrastructure in rural areas. The South African government recognised the importance of digital access and introduced several initiatives to address these challenges. Programs such as the Broadband Policy, SA Connect, and the Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF) aimed to extend internet access to underserved areas and promote digital inclusion. Nevertheless, a pronounced urban-rural digital divide persisted. Urban areas enjoyed superior internet infrastructure and connectivity, while rural regions faced limited access and digital services. This inequality in access represents a significant challenge that impacts various facets of life for those living in underserved areas. Another article suggests that the silver lining of the pandemic was that it highlighted the digital inequality in the country and provided an opportunity to expedite regulatory processes that had been stagnant for years (Mathe, 2020).

During the pandemic, numerous institutions turned to technology as part of their response (Mhlanga and Dunga, 2023). Due to their evident and understandable unpreparedness, many industries and individuals were severely impacted. Concepts

such as the ‘digital divide’ and ‘digital inclusion’ emerged. Although these concepts were not new, they became a part of many individuals’ lived experiences.

De Haan (2004) described three different resources that are fundamental in understanding the digital divide concept: material, cognitive and social resources. The digital divide is explained as the distance between the individuals and communities that have access to digital resources and the individuals and communities that lack such resources (Agosta, 2022). It refers to the disparity in access to and the use of digital technologies, as well as the Internet, between different population groups. Some articles refer to the term ‘digital apartheid’, which refers to the systematic exclusion of certain communities from digital access and experience through political and business policies and practices (Barnard-Ashton *et* al., 2018). This divide is often influenced by various factors, including socioeconomic status, geography, education, and infrastructure. The digital divide in South Africa is a multifaceted challenge requiring government, the private sector, and civil society efforts. Furthermore, it perpetuates disparities in education, employment opportunities, and access to information and resources (Mhlanga and Dunga, 2023). Bridging these gaps involves not only expanding access but also addressing affordability and digital skills while ensuring that the benefits of digital inclusion are distributed equitably among all segments of the population, with particular attention to the most vulnerable members of society.

The affordability of internet access and data is critical, specifically in South Africa. In an article published by the Mail & Guardian in 2017, a journalist indicates that “South Africa’s four top mobile service providers have invested heavily in rolling out infrastructure to improve both coverage and connectivity, but yet, on average, mobile data in South Africa remains among the most expensive in Africa and across the world” (Mohapi, 2017). Campaigns such as #DataMustFall have come and gone with little to no change in data costs — instead, the cost of data has continuously increased over the years. Individuals with lower incomes may face financial constraints that limit their ability to afford access to the Internet or acquire the necessary devices (Mhlanga and Dunga, 2023). This brings rise to the question of how most South Africans access the internet when, statistically, they live below the poverty line (Stats SA, 2020). High data costs have made it difficult for many South Africans, especially those in lower-income

communities, to access the internet. While efforts have been made to reduce data prices and enhance affordability, there is still work to be done to ensure that digital access is attainable for all citizens. In addition to affordability, another factor to consider is the lack of training that exists within the digital divide.

Digital skills are essential for individuals to participate in the digital economy, such as the use of the internet and computers and access opportunities; therefore, promoting digital literacy and skills development, even from the basic education level, was recognised as a crucial step to fully harness the benefits of digital access (Botelho, 2021). In the years leading up to the pandemic, South Africa had made commendable progress in expanding digital access to a significant portion of the population. However, the persistent challenges included a rural-urban digital divide, affordability issues, and disparities in access and quality of internet services. The government's initiatives, private sector investments, and efforts to improve digital literacy fell significantly short in improving digital inclusion (Stats SA, 2022). The pandemic highlighted these existing digital access issues, underscoring the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure that all South Africans can fully participate in the digital age and respond effectively to crises like a pandemic.

2.5.2 Digital Access and Race

Ensuring digital access for Black people in South Africa is a critical and urgent issue that intersects with historical and social dynamics, technological progress, and the overarching goal of achieving digital inclusion (Omotoso et.*al*, 2020). Historically, South Africa was characterised by apartheid, a regime that indented a legacy of unequal access to resources and the development of essential skills. Black communities, especially those living in underprivileged areas, have historically faced disparities in access to opportunities (Nwosu and Ndinda, 2018), therefore severely impacting their ability to *do* and *be*. According to a South African statistics report (Stats SA, 2020) on telecommunications, 74,1% of South African households had at least one member who had access to or used the Internet at locations such as their homes, workplaces, places of study, internet cafés, or public internet hot spots. However, Less than one-tenth (8,3%) of South African households had access to fixed Internet at

home, with the highest access being in the Gauteng province and the lowest access being in Limpopo (Stats SA, 2020).

This indicates a significant digital divide between urban and rural areas in South Africa, where rural communities have limited access to technology and connectivity. Many black people reside in these rural areas due to the remnants of the apartheid system. Additionally, this highlights the importance of addressing the digital divide and ensuring that internet access becomes more accessible and affordable for everyone (Mhlanga and Dunga, 2023). There are insufficient articles and studies conducted thus far regarding the barriers to accessing technology for black individuals. However, significant challenges persist, particularly related to the digital divide, as noted above, as well as affordability. Bridging these gaps is essential to ensure that black individuals and communities can fully engage in the digital age. Given that we live in a knowledge-based economy, black people may find themselves marginalised for life due to their lack of skills and tools to participate in our globalised economy(Barnard-Ashton et al., 2018).

2.5.3 Digital access and Black women

Black women navigate the intersection of gender and race, which frequently leads to compounded challenges. These challenges encompass limited access to quality healthcare and educational opportunities, affecting their ability to access and utilise digital technology effectively. Evidence indicates that unemployment rates and the digital divide are considerably higher for females than for males. Currently, there is limited research on the gender digital divide in South Africa. Ensuring equitable digital access for Black women presents a multifaceted challenge that necessitates a comprehensive approach. This involves addressing affordability, expanding access to education and technology, promoting digital literacy, and fostering a safe and inclusive online environment.

2.6 Occupational Consciousness

Occupational science scholars have continuously examined structural forces that limit occupational participation (Hammell, 2020) to name and address the root causes of inequities and to be aware of systemic influences. Ramugondo (2015) coined the concept of occupational consciousness and defined it as referring to an ongoing awareness of the dynamics of hegemony and recognition that dominant practices are sustained through what people do every day, with implications for personal and collective health. According to Dickie & Cutchin (2006), occupational experiences are influenced by an individual as well as community. South Africa has a long history in which systems were created to enable more access for certain groups of people than others. In occupational therapy, there are also examples of how the profession perpetuated these inequalities, e.g. the rehabilitation of mineworkers to return to inhumane working environments and conditions (Ramugondo, 2018). Although the apartheid regime was demolished, the systems created remain influential to date, with the country being ranked among the most unequal in the world (Kwet, 2019).

As Black women navigate intersecting identities, awareness of this dynamic must not be overlooked when addressing their experiences. The way women perceive and experience their work and occupational identities can be deeply influenced by the technologies they utilise, the digital environments in which they operate, and the skills and adaptations necessary to thrive in the modern world. The intersection of occupational consciousness and technology represents a dynamic and evolving area that warrants further research, as it carries implications—such as the perpetuation of the digital divide and occupational inequalities—for both individuals and society.

Occupational consciousness can be used as a tool for self-advocacy and advocacy by occupational therapists. Occupational therapists must know the hegemonic dynamics that influence their client's life and their own (Queiroz, 2023). Becoming aware of the oppressive systems and structures perpetuated within the dominant practices of one's own context or environment allows one to challenge and disrupt the cycle of oppressive systems (Ramugondo, 2015). This tool can contribute to individual or collective occupational justice, allowing for the health and well-being of those engaging in occupations of choice without the influence of oppressive systems and dominant practices.

2.7 Occupational Justice

There is no question that the pandemic impacted human occupational behaviour, which may have resulted in changes in the occupational profile of the world, especially in vulnerable communities. Joubert (2020) indicates that the impact is likely to cause joblessness and related occupational disruption, which would, in turn, impact the state of wellness and the quality of life of humanity as a whole. According to Stats SA (2020), the imposed restrictions led to significant economic disruptions, with an approximate 7% decrease in economic activity in 2020. This resulted in a substantial loss of jobs, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups (NIDS-CRAM, 2020), such as women. Moreover, this exerted immense pressure on other sectors, particularly education, as schools closed and could not continue the curriculum due to insufficient technological access (Stats SA 2022). The situation underscored the existing digital divide or digital apartheid, as a substantial number of students were unable to engage in remote learning. Digital apartheid also impacted the workforce, as industries struggled to maintain operations, further infringing on individuals' occupational rights.

Occupational rights refer to the right to engage in meaningful occupations (Hammell, 2020). Occupational therapy, as a practice, has been concerned with the inclusion of individuals in society as well as the ability of individuals to participate in everyday activities. Everyday activities bring about meaning (Ramugondo, 2015), a sense of identity, purpose and fulfilment (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). Hammell (2020) indicates that an infringement of occupational rights due to biased and inequitable social conditions is seen as occupational injustice. From an occupational science perspective, occupational justice is an extension of social justice (Rauch van der Merwe, 2020). Occupational justice has typically been framed as an aspect of social justice, which is said to be a philosophical perspective that has traditionally emphasised treating people with respect and the equitable distribution of society's resources (Hocking, 2017). Occupational justice is characterised by the emphasis on inclusive participation in real-life occupations that individuals deem necessary or meaningful to them (Whiteford & Townsend, 2011).

Hocking (2017) indicates that occupational justice bridges the gap between people's well-being and harmful social conditions restricting their daily occupations. It is underpinned by a belief in the right to engage in diverse and meaningful occupations to meet people's individual needs and develop their full potential (Durocher et. al, 2014). Wilcock and Townsend (2000) conceptualized the different aspects of occupational injustice, elements include occupational apartheid, deprivation, marginalisation, alienation, and imbalance (Durocher et al., 2014). Hammell (2020) notes some conceptual difficulties with the current interpretations of occupational injustice, which fail to address the complexities of occupation and the ambiguities in definitions. Hammell (2020) asserts that, fundamentally, occupational injustices and inequalities equate to denying occupational rights. This observation has been acknowledged; however, for the purpose of this study, we will focus on two dimensions of occupational injustice, as highlighted by Wilcock and Townsend: occupational deprivation and marginalisation, recognising that the denial of occupational rights is a broad concept.

Townsend & Wilcock (2004: 81) indicate that "occupational deprivation, as a matter of justice, is that participation in a range of occupations is the day-to-day means through which we exercise health, citizenship, and social inclusion." We are denied these opportunities to participate when deprived of occupations as a result of inequalities. Sakellariou & Pollard (2017) argue that determining what constitutes a situation of occupational injustice requires understanding that everyday occupations are political and that occupations are shaped by decisions and power relations that overtly or covertly structure society. Occupational marginalisation is said to operate invisibly as a major force of injustice through the "normative standardisation of expectations about how, when, and where people 'should' participate" (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004: p 81).

2.8 Black Women and Occupational Injustice

Women's vulnerability and inclination to being regarded as a high-risk group has much to do with inequality, power relations and marginalisation (Veeran, 2020). women are more susceptible to occupational injustice. In particular, Black women in South Africa continue to confront numerous challenges that exclude them and restrict their

occupational choices (Kronenberg & Pollard, 2005). Institutional structures of power persist in defining women's lives, resulting in occupational apartheid and deprivation (Kronenberg & Pollard, 2005). When addressing issues of gender bias and inequality, particularly in South Africa, it is crucial to understand the intersectionality and multidimensional experiences of Black women, who face not only racial discrimination but also gender discrimination.

Compounding the issue of Black women being left behind in the economic sector, mainstream, taken-for-granted ontological assumptions in many of the euro-centric theories of the occupational therapy profession are only starting to be critiqued (e.g., Owen, 2017). For example Murthi & Hammell (2021), many Western occupational therapy theories uphold a neoliberal ideology, which assumes that choices are consistently and equally available to all individuals. Consequently, this misleading assumption informs an ontological perspective of occupational participation that regards individuals as being in control of their occupational choices and access to them.

From an occupational therapy perspective, Black women often face occupational apartheid, which occurs when opportunities are available to some individuals but restricted to others based on characteristics such as gender and race (Durocher et al., 2014). Tackling occupational injustice for Black women necessitates a multifaceted approach that considers intersectionality, as mentioned in the previous sections.

2.9 OTPFIV and Occupational Transition

In the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process, fourth edition (OTPFIV), occupations are central to a person's, group's, or population's health, identity, and sense of competence (Boop et al., 2020). The framework identifies various domains that are integral to occupational therapy. These domains are occupations, contexts, performance patterns, performance skills, and client factors (Boop et al., 2020). Occupational therapists can enhance an individual's ability to engage in meaningful occupations by understanding and addressing habits, routines, roles, and rituals—performance patterns (Boop et al., 2020) (Hammell, 2020).

In the context of technology access for Black women, the OTPF can inform and guide occupational therapy practice to address barriers to technology access and promote digital inclusion. The OTPF emphasises the importance of considering the physical, social, and cultural contexts in which clients engage in occupations. Due to the sudden need for technology during the pandemic, occupational profiles and performance patterns were significantly affected, particularly among vulnerable groups, such as Black women. Many experienced drastic occupational transitions, including working from home, losing their jobs, and increased unpaid labour. The Occupational Profile and Performance Patterns are key components of the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF) that help occupational therapists understand an individual's unique context, roles, and routines. When applied to technology access for Black women, these components offer insights into the specific factors that may influence their ability to access and utilise technology effectively.

2.10 Conclusion

Drawing on feminist theories, digital access, occupational consciousness, occupational injustice, and the OTPFIV, the theoretical framework for understanding the experiences of Black women during COVID-19, when the use of technology increased in the context of occupational therapy, can be summarised as follows:

The growing reliance on technology, while providing access to various occupations, also worsens disparities in digital access and skills. Occupational therapy interventions ought to be guided by a client-centred approach that recognises the multifaceted identities of Black women, as well as the context in which they engage in occupations.

This framework recognizes that:

- Black women's occupational needs and goals are influenced by their intersecting identities.
- Disparities in technology access and literacy are significant determinants of occupational engagement.

- Social support and occupational justice played crucial roles in shaping the experiences of Black women during the pandemic.

Occupational therapy interventions should be holistic, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the specific needs and strengths of Black women as articulated by them, while also considering the impact of technology on their occupational well-being. Therefore, occupational therapy practitioners ought to collaborate with Black women when designing interventions that enhance their digital skills and promote meaningful engagement in various occupations, ultimately contributing to occupational justice beyond the pandemic.

As the literature on the effects of the increased need for technology in the South African context evolves, understanding the experiences of Black women during the COVID-19 pandemic amid rising technological reliance is vital. This literature review contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding technology, equity, and the intersectionality of race and gender, illuminating both the challenges faced and the resilience demonstrated by Black women in a rapidly changing world.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Procedures

3.1 Introduction

In this study, the aim was to critically explore how Black women from low to medium socio-economic backgrounds experienced the heightened demand for technology during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to occupational justice. Subjective experiences are a qualitative phenomenon; therefore, a qualitative descriptive research design was adopted to gain insight into the relationship between the increased use of technology and the potential injustices faced by Black women during the pandemic.

This chapter explores the methodology employed by the researcher to fulfil the aims and objectives of the research. It examines in detail the philosophical assumptions, positioning within paradigms, methods of inquiry, and ethical considerations to address the following research aims and objectives:

3.1.1 Research aim

To critically explore how Black women from low to medium socio-economic statuses experienced the increased need for technology, during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to occupational justice

3.1.2 Research objectives

The research objectives ensuing from the research question (cf. 1.5.2), are the following:

1. To describe how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the increased use of technology required during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to which extent it has impacted their occupational profile in terms of work.
2. To critically explore how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the required increased use of technology during COVID-19 pandemic with regards to occupational deprivation and marginalisation.
3. To critically explore how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the required increased use of technology during COVID-19 pandemic with regards to occupational possibilities.

3.2 Philosophical assumptions

This section aims to clarify the ideas and beliefs that guided my decision-making throughout the research process, thus providing an interpretive framework.

The study's use of a qualitative descriptive research design was essential. As we are looking at a specific group of individuals who face multilevel discrimination, one

lens/paradigm would not have provided us with an appropriate lens. As such, a qualitative descriptive research design was used to frame this study.

Occupational scientists are concerned with the essence of being a human that lies in the daily engagement in occupations. They believe that it is within this doing and being that meaning is found (Joubert, 2020). it can be assumed that an interruption in this *doing* affects an individual's sense of meaning. Research has revealed how an individual's involvement in occupations fosters and sustains a sense of belonging, enabling both employed and unemployed individuals to maintain their social and personal identities alongside a sense of inclusion. By exploring both the act of *doing* and its interruption, we will gain insights into the essence of what it means to be human and how disruption impacts individuals—especially those considered vulnerable. For this, we require paradigms.

A paradigm is said to serve as a lens or organising principle that we use to interpret a lived reality (Niewenhuis, 2016: 52). Additionally, Denzin et al., (2018) reiterated that "paradigms represent belief systems that attach the user to a particular worldview." Drawing from this, the study employed multiple paradigms as part of the interpretive framework, namely, the interpretivist paradigm, the constructivist paradigm, and the feminist paradigm.

According to Niewenhuis (2016: 60) "Interpretivism was also strongly influenced by phenomenology, an approach that advocates the need to consider the subjective interpretations of human beings and their perceptions of the world (their life-worlds)". Similarly, constructivists believe that individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences. Therefore, the research relies on the participant's view of the situation (Creswell and Creswell, 2018)as much as possible. The feminist approach is particularly useful when the integration of methods is necessary to identify best, challenge, and potentially transform the injustices that exist in society (Niewenhuis, 2016). Furthermore, as discussed in the section above (cf. 2.4.2), Black feminism specifically addresses the various intersecting identities, histories, and cultural and social constructs, thereby shaping one's experience.

Thus, the interpretive, constructivist, and feminist paradigms were essential in not imposing a single paradigm. The use of these paradigms will be discussed further in the section to follow, detailing how they have shaped this study.

3.2.1 Positioning within the interpretivist, constructive and feminist paradigms

According to Niewenhuis (2016), paradigms serve as the organising principles which we use to interpret reality. Clarke and Braun (2013) further explained paradigms as a perspective that argues that there are multiple versions of reality which are very closely linked to the context in which these realities occur. This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to describe a group of people, phenomena or other entities (Niewenhuis, 2016). Within the interpretivist paradigm, the descriptive research design will be valuable in understanding if there is a relationship between the increased use of technology and the social exclusion of Black women towards the possible experience of social injustice.

The importance of understanding a particular group's lived experience is the foundation of tackling injustices. A lived experience can create bridges of empathy that would eventually become bridges that we use to close existing gaps in our society. The interpretivist research offers a perspective of a situation. It analyses the situation under study to provide insight into how a particular group of people make sense of this situation or the phenomena they encounter. This is valuable for the study as this creates opportunities to learn about the social impacts of a new phenomenon – the COVID-19 pandemic and the essential need for technology.

Similarly, the constructivist paradigm is said to be used to understand and describe human nature (Brown and Dueñas, 2020). Understanding people's decisions and uncovering any existing limitations and influence their decisions. The feminist paradigm is valuable for the study because the aim explores the lived experience of Black women, thereby addressing injustice and marginalisation. Furthermore, the feminist paradigm was suitable for this study in order to better identify, describe and challenge the marginalising social and political contexts of Black women.

3.2.2 Ontology, epistemology and axiology

Relativist ontology assumes that our reality is constructed through meaning and understanding of our experiences. The interpretivist and the constructivist adopt a relativist ontology (Denzin et al., 2018), referring to the specific constructing and co-constructing realities. Humans develop subjective meanings of their experiences - directed towards certain things which are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Feminist paradigms draw on the struggles and insights of disempowered women with various ontological viewpoints. These ontological viewpoints challenge traditional ways of thinking about gender, power, and social structures. The ontology of feminism is that there is a reality that has been created and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic and race that has evolved into social structures that are accepted as natural or normal (Laher et al., 2019).

Epistemology concerns the methods of knowing and learning about the social world (Niewenhuis, 2016). The epistemological premise of the interpretivist paradigm is: that to understand the whole it is necessary to understand the parts, (Niewenhuis, 2016). A study design and methods ensuing from an interpretivist research paradigm, have to allow a level of subjectivity, which will allow the researcher an opportunity to understand the experiences shared by the participants deeply. Niewenhuis (2016) indicates that one of the greatest power of the interpretivist approach is the potential richness and profundity of explorations and descriptions it yields. The constructivist paradigm assumes a subjectivist epistemology – the co-creation of understanding (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). On the other hand, the epistemological principles of feminism include the taking of women and gender as the focus of analysis to challenge the dichotomy between individual and social explanatory frameworks of gender (Laher et al., 2019).

3.3 Research method

This section discusses the method of enquiry into the research question with regards to the study design, research context, research population, exploratory research, data collection, data management, data analysis, and finally strategies to enhance rigour.

3.3.1 Study design

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design. This is a descriptive research design, aiming to describe a group of people, phenomena or other entity (Niewenhuis, 2016). Against the backdrop of the interpretivist, constructivist and feminist research paradigm, the descriptive research design was valuable in understanding how Black women experienced the demands of digital technology during the COVID-19 pandemic- hard lockdowns. As well as the possible intersections between the increased use of technology and the social exclusion of Black women. Furthermore, the research described how participants experienced the increased need for technology, as a phenomenon. This was important for the research as the goal of qualitative research is to explore and understand a central phenomenon (Maree et al., 2020).

3.3.2 Research context

The need for the use of technology, in the South African context has a significant impact across various sectors of our society. Technology has the potential to bridge many gaps across these sectors, including the gap that is created by the lack of access. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the world and more so on societies that were already experiencing many social ills. Whilst South Africa was slowly catching up and integrating technology into its society, we were thrust into a pandemic that required the minimalizing of physical contact and therefore tools were needed to keep the economy afloat. The need for technology became even more pronounced during this period.

At present there is insufficient research on the impact of the need of technology in the South African context during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on

vulnerable groups such as Black women. The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized existing inequalities in access to technology as not everyone had equal access to reliable internet connections and devices ultimately leading to disparities in access to sectors such as work, education, and health.

As I navigate the intricate process of constructing this dissertation, it was imperative to cast a critical gaze on the remnants of colonial epistemic driftwood that may subtly influence my scholarly work and the way in which it is presented. This metaphorical driftwood refers to the fragments of colonial ideologies and knowledge systems, often lingering unnoticed, shaping the way we think, write, and engage with the world. Colonial ideologies thus serve as the overlooked foundation upon which contemporary understandings of knowledge and law are constructed (Santos, 2014). I intuitively presented the findings as ‘we’ rather than ‘they’ and as such, in the spirit of transparency and reflexivity, I must acknowledge how my epistemological choices are influenced by historical and cultural legacies. The tendency to privilege certain theoretical frameworks and methodologies, often rooted in Western traditions, reflects the pervasive influence of colonial academic structures. As such, I strive to actively decolonize my approach to research and writing, which involves a conscious effort to include diverse perspectives, particularly those from marginalised and Indigenous communities, whose voices have historically been side-lined to honour the richness and plurality of global and occupational therapy’s knowledge systems, moving beyond the narrow confines of colonial epistemology.

As an occupational therapist, I am conscious of the way in which history plays a pivotal role in all aspects of life. As such, understanding the relationship between the increased use of technology and the social exclusion of women will be pivotal in aiding in, not only, the creation of possible interventions but also assisting in gaining valuable knowledge on the inequalities, past and present, experienced by Black women, in relation to technology.

3.3.3 Study population and sampling

The population for the study were Black women from low to medium socio-economic backgrounds who met the criteria outlined below. The ages of the participants were over the legal working age in South Africa. For the researcher to conduct the interviews with comprehension, participants who were English and/or IsiZulu language proficient, were eligible to be included in the study. Furthermore, the women included in the study engage in administrative jobs i.e. using forms of technology in order to fulfil their duties prior to the pandemic. It was important to keep this as a constant variable as this would assist in providing insight into any changes that took place during and after the hard lockdowns that were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Malterud et al., (2016, p. 3) indicates that “If the aim of the study concerns a very specific or rare experience, this would in itself limit the number of eligible participants”. Hennink et al., (2017) states that at least 12 participants are required for individual interviews and some data saturation. However, following the commencement of data analysis and concomitant transcription, participants were recruited until data saturation was reached. Data saturation was reached after 8 participants were recruited and interviewed. Thus, a total of ten participants were included in the study.

The first participant was recruited by the researcher, as a known person who was retrenched during the COVID-19 pandemic hard lockdown. Participants were subsequently recruited using the linear snowballing method: Linear snowball sampling is a form of sampling where the first participant recruited nominates another participant, who nominates the third participant (Etikan, 2016). This method allowed for the researcher to be involved in managing the origination of the sample, thus ensuring the eligibility criteria are met. The participants nominated participants that they thought met the criteria. I then contacted the potential participants and sent the participant information form as well as the questionnaire in order to ensure that they met the criteria. If the potential participant did not meet the criteria, they were informed as such and thanked for their time. If the participant did meet the criteria, an interview was then scheduled either face-to-face, telephonically or via teams (based on their access and convenience).

3.3.3.1 Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria were set to ensure that the data gathered from participants would sufficiently align with the study aim. The legal and ethical considerations were also included in the criteria. To participate in the study, the participants had to meet the following requirements:

1. Participants should be women who identify as female
2. Participants should be Black women (of African descent, born in South Africa)
3. Participants should be over the age of eighteen years to have the legal capacity to consent (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2008, p. 8).
4. Participants should have been retrenched or have had their working hours reduced due to the inability to access technology after March 2020.

3.3.3.2 Research population

The research study aimed to include between eight and twelve participants, as the literature suggests that this would be sufficient for data saturation. As noted in the previous section (cf. 3.3.3) the snowball method was used. It was necessary to obtain demographic data to describe the population. This was done by means of a demographic questionnaire (cf. Appendix D).

1. Age: Participants ranged from 28 to 45 years old, with the majority falling between 28 and 33 years old
2. Gender: The sample consisted of female participants
3. Home language: Sepedi, Setswana and Isizulu
4. Education: Eight of the participants held a bachelor's degree, one has completed a diploma and one has a matric qualification.
5. Ethnicity: All participants were of African descent
6. Effects on duties: All participants experienced an effect on their ability to perform their duties.

3.3.4 Exploratory study

An explorative study was done with two Black women who met partial criteria i.e. Black, female, over the age of 18 years old. These participants also voluntarily gave informed consent to participate in the explorative study. The study was conducted according to the data collection methods that will be described in the next section.

Prior to the first exploratory interview, I was nervous as I was afraid I would not be able to collect enough data. The first interview was conducted and it provided a clear indication of where I needed to improve in order to let participants' accounts speak to the research question. Additionally, it provided a possible tool (Microsoft Teams) for data generation for maximum efficiency. The data collected during the explorative interviews was not included as data to be analysed for the research. I was able to use the learnings above to improve the second explorative interview. I used the interview scheme as a guide and not as a list of questions for the participant to answer, this assisted in making the interview feel more like a conversation and therefore prompted the participant to elaborate more.

3.3.5 Positionality of the researcher

According to Denzin et al., (2018), the interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, and ethnicity, as well as those of the people in the setting. For the purpose of this research project, it is imperative to discuss my background and biases, as I was conducting interviews to gain insight into others' subjective experiences. This enhances the rigour of the study.

Niewenhuis (2016) discussed that the relationship between the researcher and the researched is interactive, where some have argued that the researcher cannot be objective or produce an objective account. Contrary to this, I recognised that the interaction of the researcher and the researched provided an opportunity for the levelling of the power imbalances, speaking to the transferability and dependability (cf. 3.4) of the study. The constructivist paradigm emphasizes the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the researched (Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach, 2009). Furthermore, it recognizes that my background may shape interpretation, therefore positioning myself in the research to acknowledge how my

interpretation flows from personal, cultural, and historical experiences (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

I cannot discuss my position as a researcher without acknowledging that I am a black female living in South Africa. This study is particularly significant to me, as I have witnessed the disparities between those who grew up with opportunities and those who did not. The study was inspired by observing colleagues at a previous job being dismissed due to their inability to connect remotely through technology. Although I have not lost my source of income in my role as a result of the lack of digital access during the strict lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am aware of women around me who have.

As a Black woman, I am often exposed, directly or indirectly, to injustices that I understand on a much deeper level than others. Many have asked me what my thesis topic is, and for a number of them, I have omitted the “Black women” part in my title. Recently, I took a moment to reflect on this. I considered numerous reasons why I downplayed the fact that I am specifically examining Black women’s experiences. Honestly, it was entirely related to my position as a Black woman – the need to explain and justify the importance of understanding intersectional discrimination. As a Black woman, I belong to two oppressed groups, granting me a unique insight into both while simultaneously excluding me from certain privileges that individuals who belong solely to one group might enjoy – it is either race or gender, never both.

I have experienced how a lack of access to essential tools can prevent one from experiencing the world as individuals who do have access do, thereby perpetuating systemic discrimination. I have been fortunate to have access to digital instruments, allowing me to continue performing numerous roles. As a Black woman, I am acutely aware that this is not the reality for many other Black women in South Africa.

3.3.6 Data collection

Two research instruments were used:

1. a demographic questionnaire (cf. Appendix D), which was alluded to in the research population section and
2. in-depth interviews

For the purpose of this study a 15-part demographic questionnaire was completed in writing by the research participants (cf. Appendix D) and as put forward in section 3.3.3.2 – research population.

The participants also completed the demographic questionnaire which was sent to them prior to the interview. The questionnaire was available in English and IsiZulu, however, the participants were proficient in the English language, as such, the questionnaires were provided in English. They were given an option of completing the questionnaire prior to the interview or during the interview. Only one participant chose to complete the questionnaire during the interview. Maree et al., (2020) indicates that design of the questionnaire is an important part of the research project and should have the participants as well as the data in mind. It was therefore important that the questionnaire be simple, easy to complete and only take a few minutes of the participants time.

In-depth, open-ended interviews were the primary method of data collection, as it is in line with a qualitative descriptive research method. Interviews allow participants to provide first-person accounts of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 2005). Drawing from the interpretivist, constructive and feminist paradigms, which all emphasize the necessity of understanding subjectiveness and co-creation of reality it was essential to use in-depth interviews. This allowed the participant to frame their reality and understanding of their truth or situation. The questions needed to be broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of the situation (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams, via phone calls or the participants' places of choice in order for the participants not to incur any additional cost. I tried as far as possible for the client not to incur any additional costs by offering to travel to the participants. Two of the interviews were done face to face, three were done telephonically and three were done on Teams. The various modes used to

conduct the interviews did not make significant differences in the data gathered, as they are valid and trustworthy alternatives (Saarijarvi and Bratt, 2021). additionally, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed equally.

The interviews were open-ended, utilising an interview guide (cf. Appendix D), as this enabled the participants to share their descriptions and reflections while allowing me to comment on any emerging concepts. Niewenhuis' (2016: 92) insight regarding the nature of interviews greatly assisted me in developing a conversational style rather than adhering strictly to the interview guide: "Open-ended interviews often take the form of a conversation with the intention that the researcher explores with the participant her or his views, ideas, beliefs, and attitudes about certain events or phenomena." Furthermore, I did not impose questions that had to be answered from my own perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which further facilitated the collection of data that was both in-depth and allowed the participants to express their own narratives fully. Creswell & Creswell (2018) stated that the central questions should be broad inquiries that seek an exploration of the central phenomenon and are consistent with the emerging methodology of qualitative research, ensuring that participants' views are not limited (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As an ice-breaker, the participants were asked to provide a picture or pictures that represented their 'COVID-19 story'. The aim was for the pictures to evoke meaningful information, feelings, and memories as part of the interview process known as photo-elicitation (Shaw, 2021). I also included these images in the data as they possess symbolic and discursive power that supported the findings and amplified the voice of the participants.

The first participant was approached, and the participant information sheet, demographic questionnaire, and consent forms were sent prior to the interview. The documents were received prior to the interview, and then an interview was scheduled. This is how the rest of the interviews went as well. The participants had access to WhatsApp, where we communicated and scheduled the interviews. The participants were given options (where applicable) for where and when they would like the interview to take place. The options were face-to-face, telephonically, and via teams.

Verbal consent to record was also asked before the interview began and the research was introduced. I described the purpose of the research as: 'I want to know how Black

women experienced the need for technology during the COVID-19 pandemic'. This was to engage with the participants without the constraints of research language. This assisted in having a conversation-style interview. A professional transcriber was requested to assist with transcribing the interview. Following the eighth interview, I realised that I was beginning to reach data saturation as I noted that the participants were relaying similar comments (Saunders et.al 2017). I decided to schedule two more interview to ensure that data saturation was indeed reached.

Obtain permission for the study

1. Research presented to the committee
2. Sent to the second reader
3. Sent to Ethics Committee
4. Approval received from the ethics committee

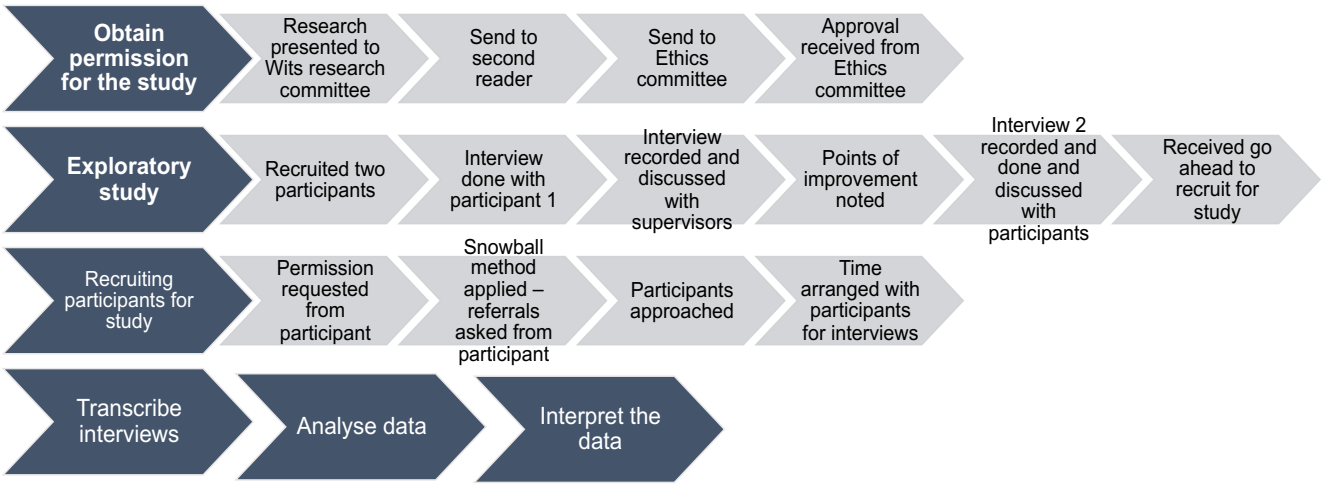
Exploratory study

1. Recruited 2 participants who do not meet the full inclusion criteria of the study
2. Interview done with participant 1
3. Interview recorded and discussed with supervisors
4. Interview with Participant 2 done and discussed with supervisors

Approached participant for the study

1. Permission requested from the participant
2. Snowball method applied – referrals asked from participant
3. Time arranged with the participant for interview

Fig 3-1: Summary of actions in the data collection aspect of research process



3.3.6 Data management

The data, questionnaires, interview recordings, and transcripts were uploaded, stored, and organised on a secure password-protected platform – iCloud. They will be retained until the research study is concluded. Each participant was assigned a unique code to ensure de-identification and confidentiality, e.g., Participant 1. During the data analysis, participants were given pseudonyms for further de-identification. It was essential to assign pseudonyms rather than numbers to preserve the human element in the research, acknowledging and respecting each participant's individuality and making them more than just data points. The pseudonyms were subsequently labelled on each recording, questionnaire, and transcript, replacing the unique codes initially used. Once the interview recordings were uploaded, they were sent to the transcriber via the WeTransfer application, which is also a secure password-protected platform. After the transcriptions were sent to the researcher via WeTransfer, they were checked against the original recordings. The transcriber then deleted all recordings after

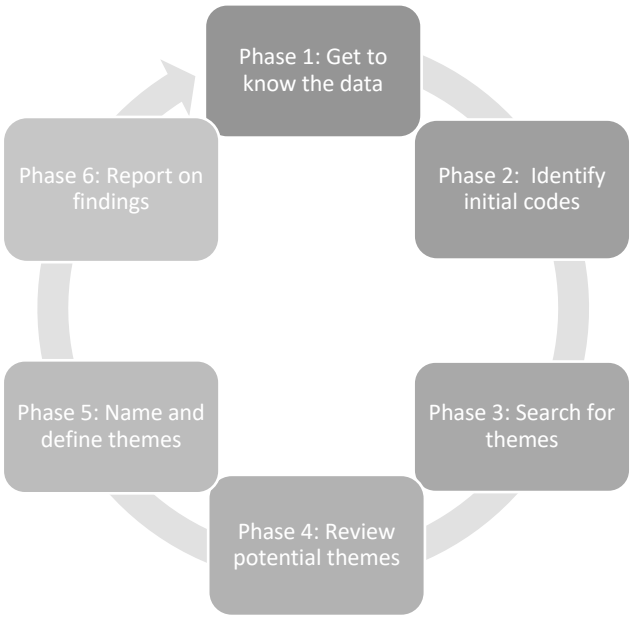
receiving confirmation that there were no errors in the transcriptions. The data was then ready for analysis.

3.3.7 Data analysis

A thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the data by the researcher. In line with the underlying principles of descriptive research design methodology. A thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The process of in vivo coding was utilised. “The coding process enables researchers to quickly retrieve and collect all the text and other data that they have associated with some thematic idea so that the sorted bits (meaning units) can be examined together” (Niewenhuis, 2016: 116). The researcher needed to retain copies of all the working documents for reference as necessary (cf. 2.10). Following the coding process, conclusions were drawn. The extent to which the information is meaningful significantly relies on the rigour of the research. It was, therefore, crucial that the collected data was accurately transcribed. The six-part ‘phase’ process was informed by relevant Braun and Clarke (2012; 2022) literature and is summarized in the diagram in Figure 3-2.

Figure 3-2. Data analysis process

(Braun and Clarke, 2012)



Phase 1: Get to know the data

Once the transcripts were received, via we-transfer, they were downloaded and saved on the drives, as described above (c.f 3.3.6). Each transcript was saved in a different folder, with the questionnaire that was completed by that specific participant. The folders were then labelled from one to ten, with no particular sequencing followed. Each transcript was read, in conjunction with the recording and the questionnaire completed. In this phase, the accuracy of the transcripts was checked and corrected, when needed. This initial review also assisted in helping to identify potential areas of interest, keywords and general potential themes that were emerging (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Phase 2: Identify initial codes

Once the transcripts had been reviewed and the records had been listened to, it was time to organize the data and notes. The transcripts were then loaded on Atlas.ti. Each transcript was labelled from one to ten, following the same sequence as noted above. Potential areas of interest, key words and general potential themes were highlighted,

and the process of coding began. Verbatim codes were created and saved on Atlas.ti. Once all ten transcripts were coded, the codes were pulled together and re-read to identify similarities or differences. Some portions of the data had more than one code. This was noted for future reference.

Phase 3: Search for themes

The transcripts were re-read to ensure that there was no data that was missed. Some codes were renamed accordingly, and new codes were added or removed, where necessary. The research question, aim and objectives were printed, read and kept close (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The codes are, again, pulled together and re-read to identify similarities or differences, whilst considering the research question. They were then grouped accordingly and renamed, creating a long list of potential sub/categories. Some data appeared in more than one group as there was more than one code attached to it. A thematic map (Braun and Clarke, 2012) was pulled through Atlas.ti, giving a visual representation of the potential categories and themes (c.f Appendix G).

Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes

With the assistance of two co-coders (both with postgraduate degrees), a table of categories was drawn, and each code was added, through identifying any patterns and relations amongst the codes. To ensure rigour (c.f 3.3.8), this was done together in the same room. Once the categories were listed, similarities or difference were then noted, and the categories were grouped accordingly. Some categories were renamed. Potential themes were then named, from the merging of various categories.

Phase 5: Defining and naming the themes

The listed themes were then reviewed, by the researcher. The codes were re-read, together with the categories. A process of merging, splitting and re-defining of the categories took place. Themes were then named and defined, ensuring the accurate representation of the data. The research question and objectives were read again to ensure accuracy in the narrative and the defined themes. Extracts from the data were also selected (Braun and Clarke, 2012), that best represented each theme. A table was created (cf. Appendix F) representing the initial theme, categories and verbatims selected.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

This phase of the process is also integrated into all previously mentioned phases. Each step involves a constant interplay between writing and analytical thinking, making them inseparable components of the research methodology (Braun and Clarke, 2012). All the notes, tables and maps drawn were consolidated. There was a constant revisiting of all phases whilst writing to ensure the accuracy of the narrative. Although the above phases are presented as a linear process, it is important to note that the phases were revisited many times.

3.3.8 Enhancing rigour

Four criteria should be considered by researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba,1981; Niewenhuis, 2016). These have been outlined below to ensure the rigour of the research.

Credibility: refers to the question of how congruent the findings are with reality. (Ni Niewenhuis, 2016). This ensures that the measures are taken for the findings to be as accurate as possible. For this study credibility was ensured by:

- "Data saturation refers to that point where all the themes and categories have been saturated and no new data are generated" (Niewenhuis, 2016: 83), this will be done through having multiple participants and the use of methods such as photo elicitation and open interviews, as well as continuous recruitment of participants.
- Frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher and supervisors (Niewenhuis, 2016), to ensure accuracy in process and the use of correct or appropriate theory.

Transferability: Invites the readers of the research to make connections between elements of a study and their own experience or research (Niewenhuis, 2016)

- The use of "rich, thick descriptions" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). "This means that the researcher provides the reader with a full and purposeful account of the context, participants, and research design so that the readers can make their own decisions about transferability" (Niewenhuis, 2016)

- Clarifying the bias the researcher may bring to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and ensuring the biases are managed through supervision during the data analysis processes.

Dependability: is demonstrated through the research design and its implementation in the research (Niewenhuis, 2016)

- Presenting negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), was done through discussing different perspectives and contrary information if applicable.
- The initial research design changed or was adapt whilst the research was being conducted to strengthen the study. Keeping a journal of the decisions during the research process, especially as far as the data collection and analysis process was concerned, helped with recording the reasoning (Niewenhuis, 2016). Changes were noted throughout the study.

Confirmability: was described by Lincoln and Guba (1985, in Niewenhuis, 2016) as "the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the participants and not by researcher bias, motivation, or interest"

- Peer debriefing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) with the research supervisors will be done to ensure that there is no researcher bias and that maximum neutrality is reached

3.4 Ethical considerations

Informed consent -The participants were informed before the interview of what to expect. They were informed of the confidentiality of their responses and what the data will be used for (cf. Appendix A and Appendix B)

Beneficence -A high level of sensitivity was applied during the interviewing stage. Acknowledging the potential harm of the interview questions in raising issues that may have been traumatic for the participant. Participation is voluntary and refusal to participate or continue with the research will not involve any penalty or loss.

Respect for anonymity and confidentiality - All data will be de-identified and code names will be provided for data collection and organization purposes. The researcher

will not ask the participants to divulge personal information such as the names of the companies worked for, and if such detail is included in the interviews, it will be taken out in the transcriptions (cf. Appendix B).

Respect for privacy -Should the participant have not wanted to divulge information about certain topics, the participant would not be forced and was free not to answer. The participants were free to withdraw from the interview process at any time without any repercussions (cf. 2.9 and cf. Appendix A), and they did not need to give reasons for withdrawing. The participants were give pseudonyms and any identifiable pictures were not included in the report. Furthermore, any data collected from the withdrawn participant will be destroyed, unless the participant consents to its retention.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter the methodology adopted by the researcher in order to meet the aim (cf. 1.5.1) and objectives (cf. 1.5.2) of the research was discussed. How the study was planned and conducted was explained in detail, concerning the data collection, data management and data analysis. A rationale was provided for the decisions that ultimately guided the research.

The findings of the study will be discussed in the next chapter, with focus on the study's findings. Drawing on existing literature to contextualise and support the finding.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings are presented in response to the research aim: 'To critically explore the experiences of Black women from low to medium socio-economic status, resulting in limited access to the required technology during the COVID-19 pandemic concerning occupational justice' (cf. 1.5.1). Three themes, along with their concomitant categories and subcategories, emerged from the data. In line with the integrative nature of qualitative research, the discussion of each subcategory is combined with the presentation of the findings. A specific pattern is followed in this process. First, each theme will be introduced with its cluster of categories and subcategories. Then, I will delve into the implications of the findings and their alignment with existing literature on the digital gender divide, intersectionality, occupational consciousness, and occupational justice, among other themes. The chapter will explore how Black women faced the heightened demand for technology amid the COVID-19 pandemic (cf. 1.4.1), situated within occupational justice as a construct of occupational therapy theory.

The themes are discussed in the order they are presented in Table 4.2 below. These themes encompass the experiences shared by the participants regarding the study's objectives, which aimed to assess the ramifications of the increased need for technology on their experiences of occupational engagement, deprivation, and marginalisation, as well as the impact on their occupational profiles and, ultimately, their occupational possibilities (c.f. 1.4.2). To narrate their experiences concerning occupational deprivation and marginalisation (c.f. 1.4.1), participants also shared their exposure to technology during their upbringing. It is important to note these experiences, as they contribute to the composition of their occupational profile (c.f. 1.4.2). Furthermore, the data illustrate their initial thoughts when the lockdown commenced, along with their experiences following the pandemic and the extent to which this impacted their occupational domain of work.

The verbatim quotes will, as far as possible, be presented in their original style, reflecting the way in which they were communicated by the participants. Some verbatim quotes have been translated into English from isiZulu by the transcriber and me, with special care taken to ensure that the meanings being expressed are not lost. I have also included relevant images sent by the participants (cf. 3.3) that depict their experiences. Although these images were part of the ice-breaker, they are included as data due to the universal power of visual elicitation. Throughout this section, I have incorporated literature related to the findings, which will serve as an interpretive lens and a strategy to triangulate data and enhance rigour (cf. 3.3.8).

At the beginning of each theme, I present a summary. For each theme, I provide the relevant category and, where relevant, the subcategory. I define each category and subcategory and indicate how many participants contributed to it. I then present verbatim examples that are aligned with the theme, which is subsequently interpreted and discussed.

4.2 Description of Participants

The study involved 10 participants (cf. 3.3.3); however, data saturation began with the eighth (8) participant. Saunders et al. (2017) argue that when the researcher begins to encounter recurring comments consistently, it indicates that data saturation has been achieved. At this point, it becomes appropriate to stop data collection and commence data analysis. To ensure data saturation, two additional participants were recruited. The participants in this study comprised a diverse group of Black women residing across the Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal regions of South Africa. The eligibility criteria aimed to ensure representation across various age groups, educational backgrounds, employment statuses, and geographical locations within the country. This approach aimed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of Black women from a medium socio-economic status while ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings, thus providing a more nuanced and inclusive analysis. Snowball sampling was employed for Black women over the age of 18. The initial phase of data collection, prior to the interviews, required participants to

complete a demographic questionnaire (cf. 3.3.5, Appendix D). Table 4.1 presents a summary of the participants gathered from the questionnaire.

To ensure ethical considerations and to safeguard the participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each individual throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Table 4-1: Demographic descriptions

Participant ID	Age	Education	Home language	Marital status	Children	Single Breadwinner	Job loss/reduced hours	Tech available prior	Not available after lockdown	Affected ability to work during COVID-
Zama	28	Honours degree	Sepedi	Single	0	No	Yes, reduced pay	Phone, Computer, Wifi	Wifi	Yes
Zandile	29	Honours degree	Sepedi	Single	0	No	No	Phone, computer	n/a	No
Thobeka	42	Bachelor degree	Setswana	Married	2	No	Yes, reduced hours	Computer, Wifi	none	Yes
Thandi	30	Bachelor degree	Isizulu	Single	0	Yes	Yes, job loss	Phone, Computer, Wifi	Computer, Wifi	Yes
Mpilo	45	Honours degree	Setswana	Single	3	Yes	Yes, Job loss	Cell phone, computer, Wifi	Computer, Wifi	Yes
Jabu	28	Honours degree	Setswana	Single	2	No	Yes, Job loss	Computer	n/a	Yes
Sizo	33	Diploma	Isizulu	Married	3	No	No	Phone, Computer, Wifi	n/a	No
Ntombi	27	Honours degree	Isizulu	Single	0	No	No	Computer, Wifi	none	No

Londi	28	Honours degree	Isizulu	Single	0	Yes	No	Phone, Computer, Wifi	none	No
Thembeka	33	Grade 12	IsiNdebele	Single	1	Yes	Yes, Job loss	Phone, Computer, Wifi	Wifi, Computer	Yes

According to the 2023 statistics report (Khuluvhe, 2023) that was presented by the Department of Higher Education & Training, higher rates of unemployment are noted amongst persons aged 15 to 34 years. All of the participants engaged in duties that are within the administrative context, e.g. sending and receiving emails, preparing reports, and using computers, and printers. Their ages ranged from late twenties to mid-forties, which is interestingly aligned with the current statistics in terms of ages of employment. Only two of the participants are married and of those who have children, three are single mothers. Six of the participants experienced a job loss or a reduction in their salaries due to the pandemic. Lastly, only one of the participants did not have a higher education.

4.3 Presentation and Interpretation of Findings

The findings are presented per theme, with its categories and subcategories, highlighting the diverse range of experiences and reflections expressed by the participants. These expressions will be reflected by verbatim quotes with insights as well as interpretations. For ease of reference, an overview will be presented in table format. The themes that emerged from the analysis are:

1) *You are on your own*
2) *Existential discomfort*
3) *Transition and human adaptability.*

Table 4-2 gives an outline of the four themes and their associated categories and subcategories. The codebook is available as Appendix F.

Table 4-2: Themes, categories and subcategories

Themes	Category	Subcategory
You are on your own (4.3.1)	Systemic unpreparedness (4.3.1.1)	a) We do not all have the same exposure b) Guilt c) Everything was destabilized d) Choice taken away
Existential discomfort (4.3.2)	Existential discomfort (4.3.2.1)	a) I did not have any plan b) It was traumatic c) Jobs/money loss and money needed to do the work d) Wearing all hats at once
Transition and human adaptability (4.3.3)	Figuring out how we gonna do it (4.3.3.1)	a) She's working, she is taking calls b) Thousand feelings c) Emotional support d) Transitioning and Adapting

Theme 1: You are on your own

The first theme emerged from the category of *Systematic unpreparedness* and the four subcategories as outlined below.

Table 4-3. Theme one with category and subcategories.

Themes	Category	Subcategory
You are on your own (4.3.1)	Systemic unpreparedness (4.3.1.1)	a) We do not all have the same exposure b) Guilt c) Everything was destabilized d) Choices taken away

The theme *You are on your own* encapsulates the sense of vulnerability and abandonment experienced and expressed by the participants as a result of how the pandemic exposed unpreparedness across various industries and sectors. It exposed vulnerabilities that were exacerbated by inequalities that pre-existed due to South Africa's colonial and apartheid systemic discriminations. These systemic discriminations, often leading to occupational deprivation and marginalisation, are impacted by the intersection of race, gender and class (Samaradiwakera-Wijesundara, 2022). As such, these women in dire need of systemic support felt 'left on their own', not just in terms of the physical isolation and confinement due to the legal lockdown, but also due to the systemic unpreparedness experienced: as individuals; by their employers; by the country and the world as a whole. Therefore, the category under this theme is that of *Systemic unpreparedness*.

4.3.1.1 Category: Systemic unpreparedness

Four subcategories form part of this category, associated with theme 1 i.e.,
a) We do not all have the same exposure,
b) Guilt,
c) Choice taken away,
d) Everything was destabilized.

The category of 'Systemic unpreparedness' speaks to the lack of preparedness of the participants, their employers as well as the country, to face a global pandemic. This category also speaks to how the systems and resources that existed, and that the

participants were exposed or had access to, prior to the pandemic, failed to accommodate the new way in which participants were expected to live, function and be. If people with particularly susceptible demographics, in terms of females and Black, lack equal access to resources, they are constrained in their ability to respond during periods of commotion and transition. The participants noted how they became acutely aware of their predisposing disparities in access to technology that they experienced from a young age. There was a direct link between their historical exposure to technology and skills training and how that impacted the level of difficulty experienced when transitioning into a new way of being and doing, e.g. having to use digital resources to continue productivity and meet work demands. From a political and governance point, the response to the pandemic and the mitigation of the spread of the virus was swift, through the almost immediate initial lock-down period. It was sudden and unexpected, leaving the participants feeling as if 'nobody expected it'. As such, this response had a ripple effect for which all 10 participants accounted for the destabilization of everyday life, of doing and of being. An example of this is indicated in below by the reflection by Zama.

> ***"You know, I wish someone would have warned us and be like…, and I think also just being financially ready to deal with the financial loss which took place and that would have also made things so much easy because as much as we were restricted in lockdown but things were actually moving." - Zama***

In the quote above, Zama indicates that the response to mitigate the spread of the virus was swift, she wishes she would have been warned so she could be financially ready to deal with the financial implications. This illustrates the vast financial implications that were faced by the participants, who were not prepared to deal with job losses, pay reductions or cuts as well as the additional costs they incurred to stay connected. Furthermore, despite being physically restricted, she notes that life continued, which resulted in the utmost destabilization as the participants were expected to continue living, engaging and being, regardless of profound disruption.

a) We do not all have the same exposure

In a society that is marked by inequalities, access to technology was/is not readily available to everyone, and navigating this digital divide can shape one's perspective on education, opportunities, and general empowerment. Technology continues to revolutionize the way we live, work, and interact with the world. For the interviews, technology was simply defined to participants as devices, equipment or infrastructure such as computers, cell phones and the internet (in the form of data and Wi-fi). Eight (n=8) out of 10 participants expressed that they were not exposed to technology in their formative years. Thembeka expressed the following:

> ***"I went to a rural school, so we did not have computers, libraries and other resources, it was bad" - Thembeka***

Thembeka expressed that her schooling system was severely under resourced to the extent that that she had to take herself for a computer course after matric in order to learn the basics. This is a reality for many public schools in South Africa and although the government has introduced policies that speak of integrating technology into classrooms, there are still factors (e.g. infrastructure) that prevent this from being rightfully implemented (Chauke et al., 2023). Similar to Thembeka, Sizo expressed that even though they had a computer room in school, they were never taught the essential skills needed to operate it. Therefore, exposure looked slightly different for Sizo, but she still did not gain essential skills which left her in the same situation as Thembeka, despite having the infrastructure or tools to engage with.

> ***"they said it's a computer room but we never used those computers, you came and kept it on and turned it off, then 30 minutes passed, you went back to normal like a subject, maybe we had Maths after that then we go to Maths, they never taught us exactly how well, what does the computer do" - Sizo***

Contrary to the above, Jabu indicated that she was fairly exposed to technology at a young age. Not only at school but also at home. This led to her being more comfortable and confident when it came to using a computer at a later stage in her life which gave her an 'advantage'. She further elaborated on how she became very aware of the disparities in how and what other students were exposed to in terms of technology.

> ***"my mom worked as a PA so she definitely was exposed, so if I would go to her job, if I'll be waiting for her at work, I would see a laptop, see a computer and that kind of stuff. At home we did have a computer, a laptop, we did have, we were exposed to quite a bit of technology" - Jabu***

All the participant's noted the 'digital apartheid' (cf. 2.5) that existed prior to the pandemic. They also noted how difficult and unfair it felt that they had to teach themselves. Whilst some had access to computers and the internet at home, many others, did not. Schools lacked adequate technology resources, and trips to the computer lab were rare treats rather than regular teaching occurrences. As a result, exposure to technology was limited, and understanding of its potential was constrained for many of the participants by these circumstances. There was therefore a sense of unpreparedness that all the participants reflected on, even the participants who were exposed to technology in their formative years.

Discussion – Subcategory: 'We do not all have the same exposure'

The pandemic exposed systemic weaknesses across various sectors and highlighted the urgent need for systemic reform. One such systemic weakness was access to technology during the participants' formative years. According to Barnard-Ashton et al., (2018), in 2015, just 19.5% of government primary and secondary schools in South Africa reported having internet connectivity for educational purposes, while a significant 67.8% lacked a dedicated computer centre. This was before the pandemic and is in line with what was expressed by a majority of the participants when asked about access to technology in their formative years. Policies, like the White Paper on Science and Technology (South African Government, 1996), which was initially introduced in 1996, had already begun mapping a way forward for the implementation of technology in schools. However, the progression has been very slow, to the extent that in 2024, infrastructure is still not available for many schools. Further solidifying the experience of systemic inequalities that existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting from the participants experiencing the variation in exposure. Interestingly, only 11.7% of schools offered remote learning options in South Africa when social distancing restrictions began, the transition was impeded by the absence of remote learning services offered by a majority of the schools and of particular concern was that the learning setbacks did not impact all students equally, but rather exacerbated

existing social inequalities in access to educational opportunities (Stats SA, 2022). Due to the lack of preparedness, the existing systems or policy frameworks were unable to sustain an adequate transition to the utilization of technology. Thus highlighting the extent of the systemic disparities and substantiating what was echoed by the participants. Furthermore, the participants that were not exposed to technology in their formative years mentioned how they had to teach themselves, with very little input from the companies that they worked for.

In an increasingly digital world, proficiency in technology has become a prerequisite for success in many fields, with many companies realising the possibilities of working from home. The pandemic revealed the extent to which many economies were unprepared for the stringent government lockdowns and the subsequent job losses caused by people being unable to work (Langry and Rena, 2023). Without access to technology, people are unable to develop essential digital skills or explore potential career paths in various fields, as technology plays a significant role in bridging the gender gap (Omotoso et al., 2020). As technology plays a crucial role in driving sustainable development across various economies (Omotoso et al., 2020), access can provide more opportunities for women to participate and engage in a wider variety of occupations ultimately contributing to the economy.

The feasibility of working from home in a country that has many social disparities needs to be questioned and further examined (this will be discussed in the following theme – *Transition and human adaptability*). As Black women, this lack of exposure further marginalised the participants in an already unequal society. This was greatly evident in how the participants expressed the realization of the disparity in not having access from an earlier age. There was also a great sense of occupational consciousness that was highlighted – which is interested in how daily actions, both individual and collective, perpetuate systems and structures that favour and advance specific occupations or approaches, while excluding others (Ramugondo, 2015). An interesting contrast was when the participants who were exposed to technology in their formative years recognized this privilege with one participant mentioning how it gave her an advantage compared to others and she was very much aware of how; we do not all have the same exposure.

b) Guilt

The acknowledgement of privilege was accompanied by gratitude with undertones of guilt for all of the participants. The next subcategory is named - Guilt. Even when the participants expressed feelings of anger, frustration and regret, there were constant undertones of guilt in their expressions. This was interesting as despite how 'bad' the situations they shared were, the participants would include words like 'at least' in their reflections.

In the below verbatim examples, the participants were reflecting on various experiences. Mpilo was reflecting on how 'at least' she had wi-fi access.

> ***"No I had Wi-Fi with me, at least I had Wi-Fi" - Mpilo***

Jabu reflected on how it took her just over six months to get another job, 'at least' it did not take years, like other people who are still struggling.

> ***"I know people who really struggled finding a job after and been struggling even now you know, at least I did not wait years and years" - Jabu***

There was also a sense of gratitude, with guilt, in the way in which Jabu presented the above reflection as well as the one below. She was grateful that she had had the opportunity but also guilty that this gave her somewhat of an advantage compared to her peers. A similar reflection is expressed by other participants when they recall the guilt of being able to work and still have a job during the pandemic, thereby overexerting themselves (this will be further discussed in the theme - *Transition and human adaptability*)

> ***"those are the little, you know, building blocks that at the time you're not even aware of, and then Fast forward, you get to varsity, you graduate, and you realized with people coming from different backgrounds and you know, rural areas that are actually, you know, we don't know. We don't all get exposed to the same, you know, things at the same time. And you your grass was greener at the time as you already have a laptop, you know you, you almost on an advantage." - Jabu***

Ntombi expressed how her employer would remind them of how fortunate they were that they were still able to work, thereby evoking feelings of guilt, forced gratitude and silencing.

> ***"I remember there were words thrown at us like at least you are still getting a salary, you have to, you know you have to work, like other people lost their jobs so be grateful that you still have a job so which is kind of you have you keep your head above the water and keep the cool" - Ntombi***

Another side of guilt was expressed by Zama. She expressed how angry she was at herself for not leaving her job prior to the pandemic because she now felt stuck, with very limited opportunities. This anger led to her feeling guilty for being too comfortable to leave when she had options.

> ***It's because I kept saying to myself if you had just left. Because I remember 2019 towards the end of the year. There was a time when I was thinking of leaving, but I didn't. And I decided to be comfortable. So when the time came when I was going through that period, I was like ohh man, I should have left." – Zama***

Discussion – Subcategory: 'Guilt'

When Black women are surrounded by people who constantly experience systemic oppression and marginalisation, some Black women may experience feelings of guilt due to being exposed to 'more' than the average Black woman. Oftentimes, the 'more' in the broader context, falls within the margins of deprivation and marginalisation. Countless research articles define and speak around the concept of 'white guilt' but the concept of 'black guilt' is not widely recognized or studied within academic literature (Dull et al., 2021; Cucharo 2023). There is also very limited research on the gendered aspect of 'black guilt'. However, there are scholarly works that explore related topics such as internalized racism and gendered racial identity. Chavis and Johnson (2023: 2) defined internalized racism as "the internalization of negative stereotypes about the abilities and intrinsic worth of black or other marginalised individuals". Gendered racial identity is defined as the developmental process through which individuals make sense of their marginalised identity at the intersection of race and gender (Williams and Lewis, 2021). The concept of internalized racism as well as gendered racial identity can therefore be complex and often contentious.

The reflections made by the participants about exposure and opportunities are not necessarily internalized racism, but they can be linked to gendered racial identity development. It had two elements to it; gratitude and guilt which highlighted the participant's conscientization of their racial identities and the norm of deprivation and marginalisation. I will refer to the feelings of guilt or responsibility experienced by some black individuals in relation to historical or societal issues affecting the black community as 'black guilt'. While the term is not commonly used in mainstream discourse, some individuals may grapple with feelings of guilt or internalized oppression due to systemic racism. Systemic racism refers to the policies and practices that are deeply rooted in institutions which ultimately result in the exclusion of certain races (Tarlow, 2024), i.e. Black women. Although the apartheid regime, which aimed to oppress black people, was abolished over 30 years ago with new policies introduced, the deeply rooted practices have not been uprooted. Education systems that fail to provide adequate access to infrastructure, such as technology, perpetuate and maintain systemic racism. Most of the participants grew up in environments where poverty was high and a normal part of life, with very few people able to leave such environments. The ability to 'leave' the environments or exposure to other environments, successfully, often comes with guilt. Additionally, navigating personal success while maintaining loyalty to their communities can lead to inner turmoil for Black women. They may feel compelled to understate their accomplishments or hardships to better align with the broader experiences of their community. This understatement of their hardships is seen in how the participants expressed their experiences.

In this case, guilt was not explicitly mentioned by the participants but how they reflected on their experiences during the interviews revealed elements of guilt. The feelings of guilt, which are influenced by their unique perspectives and experiences, could be distinctly highlighted as the participants shared similarities in their identities and experiences. According to MacKenzie and Zhao (2023), survivor guilt is experienced when one remains unharmed by situations that negatively impact others. There was a constant sense of acknowledging that they were better off or that things could be worse which was expressed by all of the participants. MacKenzie and Zhao (2023), further indicates that when someone survives an event that others around them do not, the difference in outcomes creates an undesirable imbalance, often

because it is due to chance or breaches a sense of solidarity. Additionally, the discussions surrounding the 'black guilt' seemed to intersect with a broader conversation about internal conflict, recognition as well as solidarity with those who were not exposed to technology and opportunities. Ultimately, the concept of 'Black guilt' underscores the complex dynamics of race, identity, and social consciousness within the black community and highlights the importance of addressing internalized oppression, systemic racism as well as racial identity.

c) Everything was destabilized

The emergence of the pandemic came with rapid change and brought about unprecedented disruption and upheaval across the world. The next subcategory is 'Everything was destabilized'. From healthcare systems to economies, social structures, and daily life, every facet of society had been profoundly affected. As a result, this left all the participants feeling destabilized as nobody expected it, as expressed by Zandile and Thandi.

"Nobody expected it" - Zandile

"We were not really expecting that to happen" - Thandi

This was also very evident in comments provided by other participants. The participants expressed how abrupt the news of the lockdown was. They did not expect the measures to be immediate and drastic. Jabu, in particular, mentioned how she thought it would just be a few days of the lockdown, as the president had announced the 21-day lockdown period.

"We closing the country we shutting down for days and like OK, days now we got this. You know, I'm like, yes, who does not want three weeks off like yes?" - Jabu

"You know, the first week it was kind of easy adjusting, adjusting to it. I think the second week is then when you start feeling the things, you know how our normal and standard routines of life have just been interrupted" - Jabu

For some of the participants, the initial lockdown period felt like a much-needed break, but soon, reality hit as uncertainty and disruption increased. The pandemic had upended life as we knew it, destabilizing and interrupting everything. All of the participants expressed that they had to undergo so much change. Change which was unexpected and felt abrupt as nobody was prepared for it.

The below verbatim from Thobeka is an example of how destabilized the participants felt. Thobeka did not own a mask but was very excited to be allowed to leave the house for 2 hours every morning. Occupational engagement was also destabilized and movement was restricted.



"First day when the country was allowed to go out and take walks/jogs between 7-9 am. I mean, I did not even have like a proper mask. You know, it was my husbands. Brought my son who had a cloth Mask. I had to use that; you can see it's more like a dust type of mask" - Thobeka

As a result of destabilization, the participants also reflected on how much change they experienced. With most of the change being negative, as indicated by Zandile.

***"I wouldn't have thought that going into 2020 I would experience so much change."* - Zama**

"Covid came it was a setback people are losing jobs, stores were closed and companies were being closed" - Zandile

Zama gave a powerful description of how she felt when her job was threatened. She expressed how her job formed part of her identity and therefore, the threat of losing it made her feel like trash as this threatened her identity as well as the sense of pride she derived from engaging in her job. Many of the other participants also shared this experience.

***"And your capability and literally who you are, remember work becomes part of your identity and you take pride in what you do. And when someone comes and take that part of who you are and they treat you like that, you do feel like trash. You're like yoh"* - Zama**

"I think I may have started disliking my job because of feeling regularly overwhelmed" - Ntombi

Discussion – Subcategory: 'Everything was destabilised'

Over time, individuals' occupational trajectories continuously shift and develop; new occupations emerge while others fade away, and the level of engagement fluctuates (Doble and Santha, 2008). Change is inevitable, however, when the world is faced with a life-threatening virus, rapid change needs to be enforced. Other elements of change, that speak to the participants' experience will also be addressed in the themes that follow. This subcategory speaks to how the participants experienced the introduction of lockdown and all the changes that came with it. This immediate change left the participants feeling as if everything had been destabilized, as all the participants expressed how unexpected the change was.

The pandemic led to widespread job losses and economic instability, leading to an impact globally (Vowels et al., 2022). This disproportionately affected Black women who were overrepresented in industries such as tourism, hospitality and personal services (Altman, 2022), which were the industries that were most affected by lockdown measures. Furthermore, the pandemic exacerbated existing and rising unemployment as well as poverty levels (Altman, 2022). The participants expressed that they faced layoffs, reduced hours, and increased financial insecurity which further left them feeling destabilized.

The participants also mentioned elements of their identities that were affected. Women often hold many identities that intersect (cf. 2.2). The intersectionality of race, gender, and other social identities further complicates Black women's experiences in the job market. Black women have embraced their dynamic, intersectional identities in professional spaces with a sense of pride (Williams and Lewis, 2021). Hansson et al., (2022) indicates that the connection between occupation and identity is significant to the extent that a lack of meaningful engagement in occupation can jeopardize one's sense of identity. Historical research has revealed that racism is present across all sectors of society and that workplace racial discrimination has been prevalent for many decades (Baum, 2021). Women have had to fight for decades to be able to work and to be recognized within the working environment. Roles as essential workers serve as a protective measure in some cases but also constitute a part of their identity (Godoy et al., 2024). According to Crenshaw (2015) statistics continuing to reveal notable disparities between black and white workers, as well as additional disparities between black men and Black women. For many Black women, work serves as a critical aspect of identity, intersecting with race and gender to shape their experiences, opportunities, and perceptions of self (Williams and Lewis, 2021). As Black women experience racism in all aspects of their lives, it is no surprise that the ability to work would be a critical as well as an affirming aspect of their identities. One of the challenges faced by the participants was the feeling of inadequacy which was brought on by the pandemic. Work can serve as a source of empowerment and identity affirmation for Black women (Caldera, 2021), providing opportunities for self-expression, skill development, and economic independence. As a result, many Black women derive a sense of pride and fulfilment from their work (Reynolds, 2001), finding meaning and purpose in their professional endeavours.

For many Black women, employment is not just about earning a salary; it is about asserting their humanity, reclaiming their dignity, and affirming their right to exist – thereby fostering a sense of belonging. According to Afonso et al., (2023) a sense of belonging can be characterized as a deeply personal and ever-changing feeling of being accepted, included, and connected to a particular context or entity. Reynolds (2001) indicates that historical and cultural factors, such as the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and economic migration, directly influence Black women's engagement with employment. Due to many factors, including the inequalities that exist in South

Africa – there is a sense of pride and belonging that is accompanied by having and maintaining a job. Recognizing a sense of belonging with others is positively associated with enhanced psychological well-being, increased happiness, and elevated self-esteem (Afonso et al., 2023). One of the challenges expressed by the participants is the feeling of inadequacy due to losing their jobs or having their salaries significantly reduced.

d) Choice taken away

As a result of this inadequate planning and preparedness, many were left with limited choices in terms of occupational engagement (cf. 2.8). All the participants expressed how the pandemic caught them and the world completely off guard. Jabu noted that due to the sudden impact of the pandemic, the company, which she worked at the time, did not have any contingency plans to assist individuals to continue earning an income from home (this will be further discussed in the theme – *Existential discomfort*).

> ***"And in fact, this company does not have any contingency plans in place to handle and be able to sustain our salaries or my job at the time" - Jabu***

As a result of companies, as well as systems, not having any plans on how to handle the pandemic, all of the participants expressed, in various ways, how the pandemic took away their choices, for example ranging from the choice in movement from place to place to the choice of engaging in activities such as the gym. The implementation of the lockdown measures in a quick response to the pandemic altered the fabric of daily life and engagement. From restrictions on movement to limitations on social interactions and economic activities, the choices available to people were severely reduced, taking away agency and autonomy, and in turn potentially exacerbating occupational deprivation. Whilst this was very necessary for the general health of the public, these measures fundamentally altered the relationship between individuals and their ability to make choices about their own lives and occupational engagement. Zama expressed a powerful statement:

> ***"Covid taking away choices" - Zama***

She further elaborated on how she felt, in addition to the isolation taking away the freedom of choice, she also felt she was then excluded from being able to participate

or engage in her chosen occupations. She shared an image of herself working out in the house as she had gained weight during lockdown and was feeling out of touch. She shared how being able to engage in a home workout made her feel self-love amid the chaos and centred her.

"prior to COVID was the freedom of choice and like being able to do whatever that you want when you want without having to think about any danger or restriction. I was excluded from that" - Zama

Despite her freedom of choice being taken away, Zama was able to find a way to re-centre herself and connect with herself. A new occupational choice was presented and she took it.



" Mentally, emotionally, psychologically, physically, I had gained so much weight, at work they had cut down my salary and each month they were cutting it down. And that was me doing home exercises, just trying to re-center and like reconnect with body, mind and soul. And yeah, I couldn't even go outside." - Zama

Zama was able to find healthy coping mechanisms in order to counter the difficult period she was facing. She used what she had and started exercising in the house.

Discussion – Subcategory: Choice taken away

An individual's or group's beliefs and assumptions about their capacity to pursue various career options are shaped by their perspective or worldview (Galvaan, 2015). The lack of exposure as well as an ability to choose certain occupations due to various constraints, limits one's perspective of oneself as well as the world. There was a consistent emergence of the concept of occupational choice/s that was expressed by all of the participants. The participants all expressed feelings of being stripped away of agency. Galvaan (2015) argues that instead of being solely a conscious assertion

of an individual's agency onto the world, making choices about what to do or not to do is a transactional interaction between the individual and their context. Therefore, it is true that the pandemic happened to the entire world, but its effects were disproportionately felt depending on many factors, e.g. race, gender, economic status and context. Many countries lacked adequate pandemic response plans and infrastructure to effectively contain the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact, revealing and highlighting the inadequacy that exists in the current social systems. The confinement, in order to mitigate the spread of the virus, further highlighted the injustices and inequalities that influence occupational engagement (Mthembu and Bell, 2023) as well as choice.

Another aspect that was explored by the participants was their ability to engage in different occupations that they previously did not. During the periods of isolation or confinement, people experienced significant disruptions in their usual activities. however, over time, these activities became the means through which they adapted and demonstrated resilience (Stanley and Prodinger, 2022). This was demonstrated by the participants who began new activities or re-engaged in activities they had not participated in for a while to maintain a certain level of engagement.

On a surface level, the limitation to occupational engagement, that was brought on by the pandemic, was just due to the pandemic. This meant that once the movement restrictions were lifted, the participants should have been able to return to their 'normal' occupations. However, on a much deeper level, the choices that were taken away and the exclusion of engagement the participants referred to, are deeply rooted in the constraints caused by socio-economic and political environments that existed before the pandemic. Opportunities to choose and act are distributed unequally, with social structures limiting the occupational choices of some groups while simultaneously enhancing the choices and advantages of privileged group members (Murthi and Hammell, 2021).

Conclusionary Discussion of Theme 1: You are on your own

The pandemic laid bare the disparities that exist within the world particularly in South Africa, with individuals facing heightened health risks and severe economic hardships

due to systemic inequalities and structural barriers. The lack of access to economic opportunities, and social support left many feeling abandoned by the very systems that are meant to protect them. How social systems react in times of crisis determines their readiness to endure or crumble when confronted with similar or more severe challenges in the future (Chauke et al., 2023). Although nobody could have predicted the severity of the pandemic, it highlighted the need to refine and build strong systems such as better policies for workers and technological infrastructures that address the disparities that currently exist. These systems could have also been in place to further prevent exclusion and feelings of the participants being on their own.

Whilst the world was scrambling to decrease the number of infections, this became the main focus, leaving systemic inequalities such as access to quality education, bare and exacerbating structural barriers. Living under lockdown measures was not viable for many individuals, forcing them to vacate their residences in search of food (Ramparsad, 2020). Since the pandemic, there have been many research studies that link the increase in mental health needs in marginalised groups. Camara et al., (2023) indicates that various marginalised communities saw significant spikes in the prevalence of psychiatric disorders, notably among those facing socio-economic challenges, homelessness, migration, and belonging to ethno-racial minority groups. Crenshaw (2015) argues that the intersectional discrimination faced by Black women, which combines both race and gender biases, suggests that the parameters of discrimination based on sex and race are determined by the experiences of white women and black men, respectively - according to this perspective, Black women are afforded protection only when their experiences align with those of either of these groups, in cases where their experiences diverge, Black women may anticipate limited or no protection. Above having to worry about the pandemic the participants had to worry about other socio-economic factors which further resulted in an additional layer to the legal obligation of physical isolation, warranting the expressed feelings of ‘you are on your own’. Naidoo (2000, p. 5), indicates that “Black women in this country have had to contend with various restrictions in their lives during the apartheid era”, over two decades later, Bhatta et al., (2023) indicates that “Black women have been particularly economically vulnerable to the pandemic due to significantly higher odds

of being out of work". The time between these quotes is quite long, however, both authors speak to the vulnerabilities faced by Black women.

'You are on your own' was a powerful depiction that was expressed by all of the participants, where they all recognize the injustice of not being exposed to certain tools that would have assisted in the transition that was caused by the pandemic. The pandemic had been a sobering reminder of the importance of preparedness, particularly through recognising the social everyday disparities that excluded the participants and other vulnerable groups from engagement and participation causing occupational deprivation and marginalisation. The pandemic unleashed widespread economic turmoil, disrupting industries, businesses, and livelihoods. Whilst this disruption was essential for the general health of the public, these measures fundamentally altered the relationship between the participants and their ability to make choices about their own lives and occupational engagement. This was clearly expressed by all of the participants, indicating that 'Covid took away choices', choices that were already limited due to structural inequalities. Occupational choices arise from deliberate and conscious decision-making processes as well as spontaneous and unconscious factors (Galvaan 2015). The pandemic added another complex layer in of occupational choices, challenges, and constraints experienced by Black women in South Africa.

Theme 2: Existential Discomfort

The second theme ensued from the subcategory, bearing the same title, *Existential discomfort* and has four concomitant subcategories as outlined below.

Table 4.4. Theme two with category and subcategories.

Themes	Category	Subcategory
Existential discomfort (4.3.2)	Existential discomfort (4.3.2.1)	a) I did not have any plan b) It was traumatic c) Jobs/money loss and money needed to do the work

		d) Wearing all hats at once

In the previous theme, the discussion was presented from a systemic unpreparedness view. The second theme delves deeper into describing the discomforts and shifts in livelihood as well as engagement that was experienced by the participants, brought on by the pandemic. From their fear of the virus and death to uncertainty about their future potential to engage in occupations, to desperately trying to keep up with demands of change in order to stay afloat. The extent to which the participants' occupational profiles were impacted varied from participant to participant, but it was noted that all participants experienced a severe impact. The category for this theme is also named – *Existential discomfort*. A combination of racism and economic inequality are 'two of the most lethal pre-existing conditions' that Black workers, specifically Black women workers, already endure which COVID-19 has exacerbated, not only are Black women more likely to experience consequential impacts from COVID-19; but they are also less likely to recover from the impacts of this disease (Pennant, 2022). The reference above by Pennant speaks to the intersectionality of gender and race that is experienced by Black women, leaving them vulnerable to and less likely to recover from a pandemic. This speaks to the existential discomfort that was shared by the participants.

4.3.2.1 Existential discomfort

As noted above, the category for this theme is the same as the theme, as it perfectly encompasses the subcategories and codes that emerged from the analysis. People can experience existential discomfort during times of uncertainty, crises, or existential reflection (Saunders and Sims, 2023). The pandemic formed fertile ground for existential discomfort, as its main component was isolation or confinement, which was enforced in order to prevent the rapid spread of the virus and curb the mortality rates. For the participants, the isolation caused a break in connection and disrupted doing as well as belonging, and as a result change, inevitably affecting occupational profiles. As a result of the rapid change in occupational profiles, an element that stood out and was expressed by all participants was the experience of uncertainty, trauma, loss and not having the tools to transition into the new expected way of living and being e of

existential discomfort. The subcategories under this theme are a) I may not have everything I need, b) It was traumatic, c) Jobs/money loss, as well as d) Wearing all hats at once. These subcategories encompass what was reflected by the participants.

> ***" I was actually going through the most like, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, physically, I have gained so much weight - Zama***

In the quote above, Zama exclaimed how the pandemic had affected her in all aspects of her being. Not only was she restricted but she had also had a significant pay reduction and due to this stress, she had gained a significant amount of weight. She also exclaimed how traumatic the overall experience was for her.

a) I did not have any plan

For many individuals and families, not having everything they need during this time posed significant hardships and forced them to adapt to a new reality of scarcity, uncertainty and fear. One of the first accounts that was made by all of the participants was recognizing or acknowledging how uncertain they were about their futures, not just in terms of the ability to engage in their meaningful occupations, but the uncertainty of mortality as well. Zandile reflected that the uncertainty for her was also revealed to her with the future of the industry she was in. This led to feelings of stress, anxiousness and fear.

> ***"I was like, what now, where do I go now, I wasn't sure I was going to be able to get back up"* - Zandile**

> **"It was a difficult thing and the uncertainty as well within the industry, the future of the industry, you know." - Zandile**

Jabu also spoke about the uncertainty of the industry she was in, but she also mentioned the environment she was from that forced her to realise that the pandemic is going to be here for some time.

> ***"Knowing the kind of in industry and environment that I was coming out from and the changes once I think we were like months in covid now and realizing that actually this thing is not going to get solved anytime soon." - Jabu***

Due to the uncertainty, all the participants echoed feelings of not knowing what to do next and not having a plan, edifying their existential discomfort.

> ***"I did not have any plan or idea on what I will be doing with my life." - Thandi***

Discussion – Subcategory: I did not have any plan

There was a constantly expressed notion of uncertainty that all the participants shared as there was a clear disruption in engagement in meaningful occupations. Saunders and Sims (2023) indicate that the elevated distress individuals faced stemmed from concerns about contracting the virus themselves or among their loved ones, apprehension regarding potential job loss and financial struggles, feelings of social isolation, adjustments to daily routines at home and work, disruptions to schooling, and the overarching fear of mortality. This was echoed by all the participants. Furthermore, the government applied blanket approaches when trying to mitigate the spread of the virus and this had various effects on the participants, as the uncertainty grew. Attempting to address disparate locales with uniform strategies did not effectively reduce the disparities between them, instead nationwide policies, applied indiscriminately, failed to account for these differences, inadvertently exacerbating inequalities (Turok and Visagie, 2021). This gave the participants an impression of the indecisiveness of the government. Additionally, the response to the pandemic often demonstrated a significant degree of policy uncertainty and indecisiveness on the part of authorities (Chauke et al., 2023), which also speaks to the level of unpreparedness that was discussed in the previous theme. This indecisiveness was also expressed by the participants as they witnessed it with their employers, who were unable to provide them with a plan going forward, and at schools where their children went. Another example of this was the Department of Basic Education's not well-thought-out closing and reopening of schools (Chauke et al., 2023). This also led to the participants experiencing financial changes of having to adapt to having their children in the house and then back at school and so on.

Furthermore, the uncertainty quickly became a realisation of not having everything they needed to survive the new way they were expected to engage with their

occupations. COVID-19 offers Africans an opportunity for self-expression and self-discovery (Ufearoh, 2020). Questioning their abilities to do, be and engage left the participants experiencing a high level of existentialism and the discomfort that surrounds that. The pandemic reminded people of the shortness of life and their mortality (Saunders and Sims, 2023), whilst revealing and highlighting inequalities and societal neglect. This was reflected by some of the participants as they shared their experiences with technology before the pandemic and during. Ufearoh (2020) argues that the pandemic was a chance for personal reflections from Africans; as it revealed inequalities within the societies and what has been neglected or forgotten. It can therefore be argued that the participants' level of discomfort is linked to the realization of systemic inequalities. The perpetuation of the inability to access resources or tools led to a greater level of uncertainty as the participants had no contingency plans in place to assist in managing the transition into the new way of engaging in occupations. Further emphasising occupational marginalisation and deprivation.

b) It was traumatic

The constant adaptation to ever-changing circumstances took a toll and it was emphatically communicated by the participants. All the participants acknowledged and expressed the difficulty they experienced during the pandemic with seven of the participants specifically stating that it was a traumatic experience. Thandi exclaimed how tough that period was.

> ***"It was tough I must say, things were rough" - Thandi***

> ***"It was quite traumatic." - Thobeka***

Thobeka also mentioned how traumatic the uncertainty was. It also brought a lot of fear. This was mentioned by eight (8) of the participants and they referenced the fact that the trauma/fear was not just related to the virus but also the rapid changes they were experiencing at the time.

> ***"It was quite traumatic. Yeah, the uncertainty" - Thobeka***

> ***"You know, there was a lot of uncertainty in that time, you know. So that really brought a whole lot of fear" - Thobeka***

Another form of trauma that was experienced and expressed by some of the participants was when they would overstretch themselves as they felt the need to prove they deserved to be employed.

> ***My 18 months contract for the internship, it ended, and they didn't extend it. We just got permanent jobs. That's when I started over stretching myself because I felt like, yoh, they're going to let me go. Yeah. I need to prove that I deserve to be permanent now." - Londi***

Discussion – Subcategory: It was traumatic

The pandemic indented a mark on individuals and communities worldwide, many experienced it as a traumatic event, with authors Fitzpatrick et al., (2020) referring to the pandemic as mass trauma. From the loss of loved ones to the sudden change in occupational engagement, the pandemic challenged a sense of safety, stability, and well-being. The pandemic disrupted nearly every aspect of daily life, from work and school to leisure activities and social gatherings (Saunders and Sims, 2023). Andreescu (2021) described the pandemic as a social trauma in which identities were disrupted. The loss of routine, structure, and familiarity left the participants struggling to find meaning and purpose in engagement, or lack thereof, amid uncertainty, isolation and change. Masiero et al., (2020) define trauma as a multifaceted emotional reaction to a challenging event that exceeds an individual's ability to manage. The traumas linked to the COVID-19 pandemic were extensive, diverse, and ongoing, affecting all aspects of life, including health and well-being (Abrutyn, 2024). One aspect of this trauma was linked to the uncertainty the participants experienced; navigating through a highly uncertain period that was marked by extensive digital mediation (Chiaraluce et al., 2024). Another aspect was transitioning to working from home, as the pandemic transformed homes into multi-functional spaces; trauma faced by the digitally disadvantaged, whose lack of access to digital skills and resources increased their vulnerability (Chiaraluce et al., 2024).

An aspect of the traumatic experience was the invalidation that some of the participants experienced. Despite facing unique challenges and hardships, Black women's experiences have often been invalidated or overlooked, perpetuating a cycle

of marginalisation. The experiences of Black women during the pandemic were frequently invalidated through gaslighting and dismissive attitudes, as one of the participants shared that she was told to be grateful for still having a job. This invalidation perpetuates a narrative that Black women's hardships are inconsequential or unworthy of attention. Crenshaw (2015), described that the problematic outcome of treating race and gender as separate and unrelated categories of experience and analysis is that it overlooks the interconnected and interdependent nature of these social identities which ultimately erases the experiences. There is also an element of dehumanisation that comes with this erasure; which is inherent to structural inequalities that persist in post-colonial contexts (Fourie et al*.,* 2022). Statements such as - *at least you still have a job*- or - *others have it worse* - minimize the unique struggles faced by Black women, negating their experiences and reinforcing feelings of isolation and alienation. Despite significant shifts in power dynamics post-apartheid, dehumanization ratings still reflected the apartheid-era hierarchy: with other races being deemed 'more human' than black African people (Fourie et al*.,* 2022). Furthermore, it made it difficult for these women to share the negative aspects of their experiences. Feeling unheard, unseen, and devalued contributes to feelings of anger, frustration, and despair. This psychological impact can manifest in various ways, including increased stress, anxiety, depression, fear and even trauma.

c) Jobs/money loss and money needed to do the work

One of the most immediate changes and effects of the pandemic has been the financial strain experienced by individuals and households. Thandi had lost her job, somewhat unexpectedly. The company she was working for had not been upfront with information during the initial stages of lockdown, causing a lot of confusion and uncertainty. They were then called in for an emergency meeting where they were told that unfortunately, they had to be let go. In her narration of this event, she exclaimed the trauma, uncertainty and confusion she experienced.

"it was a massive shock, because I had responsibilities and debit orders" - Thandi

She further elaborated, indicating that she had a family to take care of:

"cause yah I have responsibilities, I have to take care of the family. I have to call at home and explain I cannot send any money because we have been retrenched" – Thandi

Londi's 'financial change' was slightly different in that, she was allowed the opportunity to work from home. However, she initially had to get her data to use whilst the company was sorting out sim cards for the laptops they had provided. This posed as a challenge to her as her salary, at the time, was just enough for her expenses. This became an additional expense that she could not afford. She had to reach out to her mother for assistance. She needed the job, she had to work.

"I really didn't have money. I didn't have like a net salary. The salary I was getting was exactly enough for all my needs. There was no change, not even a 10 rand, there was no change. So that was kind of a challenge. My mom would send me money to buy data but eventually the company paid us back. They paid us more actually. Our data for the inconveniences and putting us on the edge that much. They paid us back for all of that. " - Londi

In addition to the changes in finances experienced by the participants, it was noted that there was also a significant addition in expenses that were experienced by some of the participants who had to shift from working at the office to working from home. The shift to remote work or working from home (WFH) for many employees necessitated additional expenses to set up offices, including technology equipment, internet access, and utility bills. These unexpected costs were noted by the participants that did not lose their jobs and they were both unexpected and exacerbated the financial strain. Along with the additional financial expenses, Zama mentioned how she felt when she had to take on these additional costs to keep her job. Despite her salary being reduced, she still had to incur additional costs to be able to work from home.

***"For as long as we are in lockdown, the company is not making money- so now you're fighting against Ohh. I need to make money. And I mean, I need to get money. So this job is important. I need to keep it and I will do whatever it takes to keep the job. And in doing whatever it takes to keep the job means that you need to now. Subscribe. Take that R400 and pay for the Wi-Fi. So now your money is further being reduced from your salary."* - Zama**

Ntombi indicated that she had to take on the additional cost of buying data without being compensated. With data prices being very high in South Africa, she expressed

how this additional expense was very unexpected and therefore had quite a financial impact on her and her family.

> ***"they did not compensate in terms of money for data, I did not have Wi-Fi at home so I found myself having to buy data on a regular basis way more than I used to use it, because now I am basically online from, let's say 07:30 until sometimes like until 18:00 or 18:30" - Ntombi***

Despite the additional costs and uncertainties, Zama also expressed that she had a significant reduction in pay, even though she was expected to continue to perform her duties. This was not only frustrating and traumatic, but it also left her questioning herself and her abilities.

> ***"The work kept coming, but the money just kept going down. The money kept going down" - Zama***

Discussion – Subcategory: Jobs/money loss and money needed to do the work

The economic effects of the pandemic had devastating consequences for vulnerable populations in Low and Middle-Income countries, with the severity affecting economically more vulnerable populations disproportionately (Ohrnberger, 2022). With widespread job losses, reduced work hours, and general economic instability, many families struggled to make ends meet. The inability to afford necessities such as food, housing expenses, and health care also led to increased stress and anxiety, exacerbating the challenges of coping with scarcity – which further perpetuates injustices. As previously discussed, this experience was also traumatic for the participants as the change and transition was rapid. The financial changes varied from participant to participant, and it depended on whether they lost their jobs, had reduced hours or needed to get equipment in order to stay connected for work, to continue earning an income. Despite these variations, what stood out was that there was a significant financial change that was experienced by all the participants.

The economic downturn caused by the pandemic had a more pronounced effect on women's employment and participation in the labour force compared to men (Goldin, 2022). Financial strain, which reflects the insufficiency of income to cover personal expenses, can differ significantly among individuals with similar incomes due to factors

such as family size, healthcare requirements, and available resources (Bhatta et al., 2023). Only four out of the ten participants did not experience a job loss or reduction in salary. There was a vast effect on the economy that was experienced at a greater length by Black women. The participants also mentioned how they were placed in positions where they had to buy their data which became an added expense, thereby affecting their ability to engage in occupations, such as work. Mobile data prices in South Africa are higher than in many other countries in Africa and around the world, resulting in expensive data bills for consumers and hindering economic growth (Isa, 2019). This has also been a cause for slow innovation as access is limited to many. The participants also indicated that they had to get WIFI as they found that trying to buy mobile data, daily, became too expensive. There is limited research on the effects of the financial changes, during the pandemic on Black women, however, considering the existing inequalities that plague South African society, it is clear that the changes were severely impactful and will likely be felt for some time– more so for Black women.

Four (4) of the participants are sole breadwinners and of the four, three of them lost their jobs or had significant pay reductions. According to Casale and Shepherd (2021), in sectors where jobs were lost, women were more likely to experience job losses, while in sectors where jobs were gained, women were less likely to reap the benefits. This speaks to existing systemic inequalities that continue to influence the experience of women. Additionally, experiencing financial strain also affected the participant's ability to engage in work. Amongst the many changes that were occurring, not having financial stability was the cause of the most uncertainty and trauma, as expressed by the participants.

d) Wearing all hats at once

As a result of having to transition into working from home, another challenge that emerged was the need to juggle many identities and responsibilities at once. Unpaid labour persisted amid the pandemic, further burdening women who would typically have less time demanding commitments. Thobeka noted how she particularly found this challenging as she was expected to fulfil all these roles during confinement. The pandemic highlighted on the one hand the challenges women had to face as workers

and caretakers, and on the other, the need for systemic changes to support women in balancing work and family responsibilities.

> ***"How do I juggle around this being, you know, mommy/teacher/ I don't know nanny slash, you know many slash cook slash this and that you know what so many slash that we have to wear at that time" - Thobeka***

Zandile also noted how at the time she had a one-year-old baby and she was also expected to juggle motherhood and work as well.

> ***"what am I going to do with my baby? Oh, and he was only like one year and a few months, one year and a month or something. So, I was like, how do I work with this baby?" - Zandile***

Contrary to the above, another participant mentioned how she felt as though this was an opportunity to spend more time with her family.

> ***"Personally, it was and the good thing, yes, is got to spend a whole lot of time with your kids." - Thobeka***

As they were transitioning into work from home, their homes became a place where they had to live, work and socialise.

> ***"So there is no app to say I can escape this, so this environment using it to sleep. You're using it to work, interact for leisure. So literally all the activities that one would engage in in different environments, one environment has to fulfil all of those" -* Zama**

Discussion – Subcategory: Wearing all hats at once

The participants shared how they navigated the abrupt change in identities that they experienced. This was closely linked to the inability to work as well as the pressure of the change in work environments as well as finances. A social identity that was highlighted by the participants was the burden of caregiving responsibilities, coupled with societal expectations of resilience and self-sacrifice, which adds another layer of complexity to the employment journey of Black women.

Studies have found that COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted women, intensifying challenges in work-life balance and increasing mental burdens at home,

thereby exacerbating gender inequality in the division of household labour (Childress et al., 2023). With the suspension of externally provided childcare services as well as domestic workers unable to work, the childcare burden within households increased significantly, and women bore the brunt of this additional unpaid care work, taking on a larger share compared to men (Casale and Sherpherd, 2021). Women are often seen as the primary caregivers. The capacity to manage caregiving responsibilities alongside work varied significantly depending on factors such as education, occupation, and race (Goldin, 2022). Furthermore, the disparities in employment and domestic responsibilities may contribute to the increased stress reported by mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Childress et al., 2023). The participants were not only working longer hours but were also expected to juggle the roles of being mothers, wives and teachers, to their school-aged children.

Goldin (2022) further reiterated that those who experienced the greatest impact were the mothers of school-age and younger children. This was expressed by the participants who did not lose their jobs and have children. Women found themselves engaged in structured work during constrained hours, without the ease of access to transportation and amenities that are typically available outside of pandemic conditions (Ramparsad, 2020). This caused great occupational deprivation and significantly altered the participants' occupational profiles; enacting situations which facilitated transformational engagement in daily life and occupational transition (Mthembu and Bell, 2023). Whilst the pandemic reshaped which people could work, it also blurred the lines between professional and personal life. Working from home necessitated a reconfiguration of traditional roles and responsibilities, particularly for women. Many have found themselves simultaneously fulfilling professional duties while also taking on increased caregiving responsibilities. The closure of schools and daycare centres has significantly amplified the demand for childcare, particularly affecting working mothers (Ramparsad, 2020). As noted above, research on the intersectional nature of the identities of Black women exists, but there is a void in research in terms of working from home and how these intersecting identities can clash, specifically for Black women.

Another aspect of this category - *wearing all hats at once* - was the expected transition into working from home. During the apartheid era, South African townships and non-

urban areas were built with the dual objectives of spatial and social engineering, aiming to confine people of colour to the outskirts of urban areas, where infrastructure was scarce (Christopher et al., 2021). Although apartheid was abolished over 30 years ago, those townships still stand, with scarcity and overpopulation. Years later, we are faced with a pandemic that requires social distancing and isolation. According to Ramparsad (2020), the requirements for lockdown for women living in rural, peri-urban and informal settlements were unrealistic and felt unnecessarily oppressive. This may also be the view for the requirements of working from home, especially for women who live with multiple people in small spaces. The participants were now expected to fulfil various roles and identities in one space or environment, further perpetuating occupational deprivation and marginalisation. Although not all the participants were able to transition into working from home, the participants who did transition were very much of the opinion that it was not an easy transition, but they had no choice as they had to keep their jobs. The transition will be discussed further in the next theme.

Conclusionary discussion of Theme 2: Existential discomfort

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly disrupted lives, thrusting them into a collective experience of uncertainty, isolation, and anxiety (Bhatta et al*.,* 2023*)*. The pervasive threat of illness and possible death, coupled with social isolation, economic instability, uncertainty about the future as well as trauma intensified feelings of existential discomfort. The pandemic also posed a challenge to some of society's core principles concerning freedoms, rights, and the sanctity of human life, resulting in an existential dilemma (Saunders and Sims, 2023). As its main component was isolation, it exacerbated feelings of loneliness, alienation, and disconnection, not only depriving meaningful human connections but also a sense of belonging. It can also be argued that the increased isolation also directly impacted the participants ability to engage in occupations of their choices. This further perpetuated existing notions of occupational deprivation and marginalisation. Studies found a correlation between social isolation and an increase in symptoms of depression (Jin and Bae, 2024). This was collaborated by the reflections expressed by the participants who noted contributing elements as well. Jin and Bae (2024) further offered that social isolation and loneliness are recognized as separate concepts with social isolation referring to the objective absence of social interactions, while loneliness refers to the subjective perception of

lacking meaningful social connections. Increased levels of loneliness were noted among women experiencing greater financial strain (Bhatta et al., 2023). The participants were unable to enjoy recreational activities but they were expected to fulfil roles such as being mothers, employees and wives with no way of escaping or getting a break. Additionally, some of the participants experienced greater financial strain. These elements, combined, heightened their experience of existential discomfort.

When meaningful occupations, which lead to meaningful connections and belonging are no longer available, in this case – due to the pandemic, this can cause existential discomfort. The concept of belonging can be defined as a deeply personal and fluid sensation of being accepted, included, and connected to a particular contextual entity (Afonso et al., 2023). In occupational therapy – the concept of belonging is pivotal in sustaining a healthy and meaningful life, with engaging in occupation offering opportunities for individuals to foster a sense of belonging by establishing and nurturing connections with others (Doble and Santha, 2008). All of the participants experienced a decline in engagement in meaningful occupations, even outside of the occupational domain of work, as they did not have everything they needed to continue engaging in occupations of their choice. A crucial aspect of the experience of existential discomfort that was shared by the participants, was uncertainty and trauma.

Theme 3: Transition and human adaptability

The third theme emerged from the category of *Figuring out how we gonna do it* and consists of three subcategories as outlined below.

Table 4-5. Theme three with category and subcategories.

Themes	Category	Subcategory
Transition and human adaptability (4.3.3)	Figuring out how we gonna do it (4.3.3.1)	a) She's working, she is taking calls b) Thousand feelings c) Transitioning through adapting

The last theme is *Transition and human adaptability* which describes the way in which the participants transitioned into the 'new normal' that was brought on by the pandemic, the feelings as well as the occupational possibilities that emerged. Throughout the existence of humans, there have been many stories and examples of transitions and adaptations, which reflect our innate capacity and ability to navigate change and uncertainty (Saunders and Sims, 2023). From societal shifts to personal transformations, humans have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of various challenges. The category for this theme is *Figuring out how we gonna do it*.

4.3.3.1 *Figuring out how we gonna do it*

The abrupt nature of the pandemic required swift solutions to protect the masses and reduce the spread of the virus. These swift solutions left the masses trying to *figure out how we gonna do it* – how to transition, cope and survive. The uncontrollable nature of the pandemic threatened people's sense of significance, creating a pervasive feeling of powerlessness and vulnerability to illness (Saunders and Sims, 2023). Furthermore, the coloniality of power was reinforced as a modern form of domination (Mthembu and Bell, 2023) – through the limiting of engagement and movement. The participants reflected on how uncertain they were about many aspects of their lives which led to them experiencing various feelings and emotions. While change can be and was daunting and disruptive, it also offered opportunities for growth, learning or complete change in some of the participants' occupational trajectory i.e. occupational transition (cf. 2.9). The subcategories that this category emerged from are; a) She's working, she is taking calls, b) A thousand feelings c) Transitioning through adapting

a) She's working, she is taking calls

The pandemic reshaped all aspects of human lives and this was a constant in the conversations with the participants. From things like travelling to work to attending social gatherings to working at the office, many activities that once formed the fabric of their daily activity engagements were put on hold or drastically altered.

Zama gives an account of her change in occupational profile (cf. 2.9) that led to a change in occupational engagement.

***" the flexibility, literally, there's no spontaneity. And when you think about leisure when not playing, they should be a component of being able to be spontaneous. You know it it's not work where you need structure, and it needs to be this manner at this time. You know, so when you come to doing leisure activities, you want to have the flexibility you want to have the, the spontaneity you want to have the choice. But with COVID, all of that was not there."* - Zama**

Another aspect that faced disruption was the ability to work. The transition to remote work during the pandemic blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life, leading to a phenomenon of overworking and feeling overstretched, more so for Black women who already experience the burden of constantly having to prove themselves. While remote work offered some flexibility, it also presented challenges such as longer hours, increased workload, and difficulty disconnecting from work. Overworking and feeling overstretched can have significant implications for mental and physical well-being. Chronic stress, fatigue, and burnout are common consequences of overwork, leading to decreased productivity, motivation, and job satisfaction. Of the participants who were able to transition working from home, all of them accounted for feeling as if they were over-stretched due to the fear of losing their jobs.

"She's working. She's taking calls. I could work from anywhere. There's food. There's people helping me prepare food. There's my sisters forcing me to step out of work mentally. I could be a daughter. I could be a sister. The little arguments, the conversations were different. When you bond over trauma, you all end up depressed. That's a toxic space. My sisters don't relate to the stress that work would give me. not work because we don't know what's going on. Then talking about something else makes you realize life is actually not so bad." - Londi

Below, Londi acknowledges how her colleagues wanted to prove that they deserved to be still employed.

***"A lot of people overcommitted to working when they were working from home. Stretched themselves way too far when working from home. Because they wanted to prove to the company that they deserve to be here. I already knew they deserve to be here and they want me here. I even got my permanence while we were on COVID. I got permanent while I was on COVID."* - Londi**

She further elaborated that once she got a promotion – she began over-stretching herself as she felt the need to want to prove that they did not make a mistake by promoting her.

The second verbatim example is Londi, who felt the need to go above and beyond as she wanted to show that she deserved to earn her salary.

”and sort of work my a** off. To try and increase the employer to show her that you know what. As much as. Not doing what we are would typically do on a normal day, but I'm gonna push that we have, you know. And just so, when she paid salaries she doesn’t feel like I’m just paying out but nothing is being done”

”My 18 months contract for the internship, it ended. And they didn't extend it. We just got permanent. That's when I started over stretching myself because I felt like, yoh, they're going to let me go.” - Londi

Discussion – Subcategory: She’s working, she is taking calls

One of the most immediate impacts of the pandemic had been the disruption of daily routines, no longer participating in this, no longer engaging in that. The pandemic also forced individuals to let go of long-held plans and aspirations. Weddings, vacations, career advancements, and other milestones were postponed or cancelled altogether. The postponements and cancellations left individuals grappling with disappointment about the prospects of their futures as well as the ability to engage in occupations of their choice. According to Mthembu and Bell (2023) confinement led to occupational losses for many during the pandemic. Letting go of these plans required a process of acceptance and adjustment to new possibilities. Some individuals may have needed to redistribute resources towards specific objectives such as household chores, childcare, and work, owing to heightened demands across these domains (Vowels et al., 2022). Whilst recognizing the pay gap that historically exists Godoy *et al.* (2024) argue that pay discrepancies contribute to the economic instability of Black women and reflect the racial injustice that devalues their work and lives. From daily routines to long-term plans, the pandemic forced everyone to reconsider and adapt to new realities i.e., change in occupational profiles and ultimately occupational engagement. Some of these realities were painful and others were slightly pleasant. Even

individuals who have managed to retain their employment amid the pandemic are likely to have encountered alterations in their work practices (Vowels et al., 2022).

The idealization of hard work poses particular risks for Black women, who occupy the bottom of the occupational hierarchy and face lower social status, despite having the highest rates of workforce participation among women (Caldera, 2021). Groups can integrate the experience and interpretation of trauma into their identity, making it one of the, if not the, defining attributes of who they are (Abrutyn, 2024). Black women often have to show up in workspaces as 'hard working' or face the challenge of being over-looked or being perceived as an equity hire. Although the participants did not allude to feelings of being overlooked, they shared how they felt the need to prove that they deserved to be employed in order to prevent retrenchment. Caldera (2021) further speaks about witnessing the desire for a 'chance to get to work' first-hand among the Black women in her family. Godoy et al*.,* (2024) indicates that Black women felt they needed to work and could not just take a day off. When the fear of losing your job is far greater than acknowledging your current circumstances, this often leads to exploitation. This was expressed by one of the participants who indicated that she felt anger towards herself for not leaving the job sooner as she felt like she was working hard but her salary kept being reduced.

b) A Thousand feelings

The participants gave detailed accounts of how they were feeling which was a pivotal part of their experience of the pandemic. The feelings include both positive and negative accounts. This subcategory encompasses the various feelings that were acknowledged by the participants.

The pervasive uncertainty surrounding occupational engagement, the virus as well as mortality, fuelled feelings of anxiety, stress, and fear with a glimmer of hope, for some. The constant barrage of alarming news and updates heightened feelings of fear and unease, leaving individuals overwhelmed. The inability to predict or control the course of the pandemic contributed to a sense of powerlessness, further fuelling feelings of fear. However, the uncertainty also gave some of the participants opportunities to re-look at their occupational profiles- thereby experiencing hope.

Thobeka and Londi linked her fear to the uncertainty she was experiencing.

> ***"You know, there was a lot of uncertainty in that time, you know. So that really brought a whole lot of fear." - Thobeka***

> ***"A very scary time. Uncertain times." - Londi***

Jabu referred to the fear which felt like a rug being swept from under one's feet. This analogy also explains uncertainty and the rapid change the participants experienced.

> ***"You know, as challenging as it was, as difficult as it was, as scary as it was, because you know , it felt like being swept under your feet and not knowing what the plan will be tomorrow." - Jabu***

Another aspect of fear that was expressed by Londi was the fear of breaking the tools she was provided to work from home. She describes this fear that came with the pressure to perform as she had been provided with the tools.

> ***"They're going out of their way to give us extra resources to be even more comfortable. And maybe they're even opening up to the idea that it's possible to work from home. So, I also needed to make sure that I'm comfortable enough because I can't break the screen. I can't break the laptop. I should be able to take calls. I should be able to write when I need to use what I had." - Londi***

> ***"And the frustrating part is that the work kept coming" - Zama***

During unprecedented challenges brought forth by the pandemic, hope emerged. Eight (n=8) out of the 10 participants mentioned hope during their account of the pandemic. Hope became the first step in being resilient. It also provided an awareness of self and circumstances for the participants.



”if I were to give it a title at a title it leap of faith and that's how I feel and the COVID experience trusting in the universal, trusting in in, in, in, in a power that is beyond your control at the time.”

“having that hope that you know what all things that you know will fall into place, you know, it's sort of like the alchemy theory as well”

- Jabu

”I was quite hopeful that, you know, things will get better eventually.” - Jabu

“It ignited a bit of hope that you know what, maybe not gonna be in the lockdown definitely” - Thobeka

Discussion – Subcategory: A thousand feelings

The pandemic has had a complex and multifaceted impact on the female population, encompassing both positive and negative outcomes (Cano, 2022). Relaying experiences without exploring feelings or emotions, would be incomplete, as they reflect the subjective aspect of experiences, capturing the unique perspectives and interpretations of the participants. As such, it was important to include this as a subcategory. From the loss of lives to economic hardship and social isolation, the pandemic's toll on mental health and well-being cannot be overstated. It brought about many feelings and emotions which were expressed by all of the participants. Some of the negative feelings that were expressed were ‘depressing’, ‘frustrating’, ‘stressful’, ‘angry’. Some of the positive feelings were feelings of gratitude and hopefulness. One of the participants promptly and fittingly expressed this period as ‘it was just a lot’.

Fear was one of the feelings that was expressed by all of the participants. This fear was associated with uncertainty in terms of the death of self and others, not being able to engage in fulfilling occupations as well as economic standing. The knock-on effect of social isolation and direct loss of personal connection during quarantine has contributed to an increase in fear (Saunders and Sims, 2023). Seclusion and isolation during the pandemic regulations created additional problems in occupational

engagement (Mthembu and Bell, 2023) thereby removing routine and normalcy and creating a conducive environment for fear and trauma. Additionally, the lived experiences of pre-colonized and vulnerable communities may have exacerbated these feelings. The pandemic stress was, therefore, exacerbated by an acute awareness of historical and ongoing structural racism (Godoy et al., 2024). It is therefore of utmost importance to note and remember that before the pandemic, Black women were already facing numerous challenges and disparities, the pandemic has only exacerbated these existing stressors and disparities, further intensifying the struggles of Black women (Walton et al., 2021). It can, therefore be argued that the fear of uncertainty, mortality and financial strain is not new to the participants but was heightened by the pandemic and the regulations that were put in place.

Despite the ongoing, lingering feeling of fear and depression, some of the participants remained hopeful. Hope emerged as a beacon of resilience, which will be discussed further below, offering solace and strength amidst the uncertainty and challenges experienced by the participants.

c) Transitioning through adapting

For the economy to continue, businesses were faced with the reality of having to act fast and supply their employees with the necessary tools. Recognizing the importance of supporting employees during this transition, some companies stepped up to provide essential technology equipment to facilitate remote work. Whilst this support would have been ideal for all employees, some companies were unable to meet this standard, new, practice.

Londi expressed how she did not have enough space to comfortably transition to working from home but had to make it work to continue generating income.

> ***"oh, be stuck in front of this computer in this one room. When you look to your right, you see your bed where you sleep, which is very uncomfortable. You're in your kitchen looking at your toilet, which is also not the best view." - Londi***

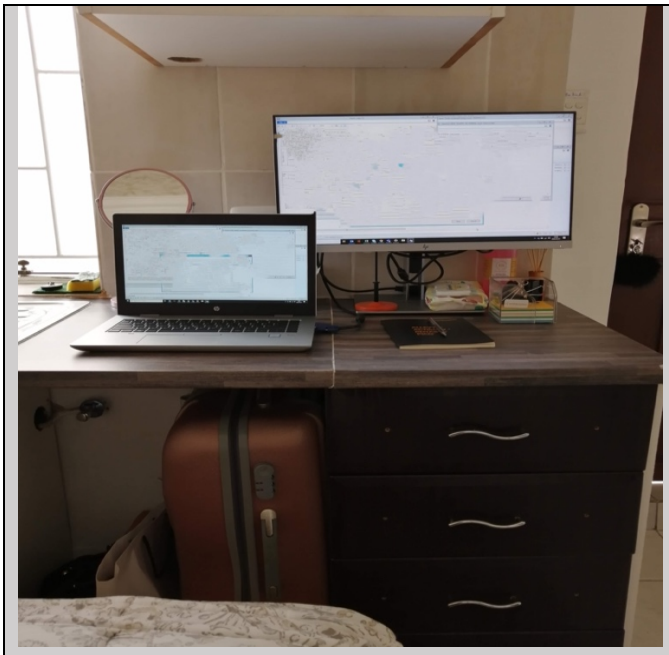
She further elaborated that if the company was going through such great lengths to make her comfortable enough to work from home, i.e. provide the necessary technology then she had to be comfortable and also careful with this new equipment.

”They're going out of their way to give us extra resources to be even more comfortable. And maybe they're even opening up to the idea that it's possible to work from home. So, I also needed to make sure that I'm comfortable enough because I can't break the screen. I can't break the laptop. I should be able to take calls. I should be able to write when I need to use what I had” - **Londi**

Jabu mentions, in the quote below, that the company’s financial constraints, at that time, prevented them from even engaging in the conversation about working from home. The company was therefore unable to adapt fast enough to accommodate this transition and this led to a different conversation of retrenchments.

“[The company’s] inability to afford inability to adapt and not having the resources to even begin that conversation or transition towards it” - Jabu

On the other hand, Londi had the opportunity to construct her workspace as her employer was able to provide her with equipment for her to work from home. Although this came with its challenges, she found pride in having been able to use the little space she had to construct a functional workspace.



“And that was my third attempt to making a working station. And it was at the kitchen under my microwave. And that was before I had a microwave also. So, it was like a proud moment because I really thought that they were just going to let us go. But instead they made means for us to work from home comfortably. And as I realized that I can actually have a bigger screen, they sent it to me. So that was me constructing my workspace after they gave me my extra screen because I need extended screens to do my work.” - Londi

> ”*I really did have colleagues that were based in Soweto so they did struggle and they were scared that they're going to get let go because the setup of their homes is so much different. You can't just say, Ma, I'm going to take this table and put it in my room. You're sharing your bedroom with your two other siblings. You can't take a whole table into your space. We're all using that table. So it was kind of those struggles.” - Londi*

Despite the challenges and disruptions, the participants found resilience amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic. The ability to adapt, pivot, and find silver linings in difficult circumstances has been a source of strength for many. Whether through cultivating new skills, deepening connections with loved ones, or finding ways to push through the adversity, they were able to navigate some of the challenges of the pandemic.

> *”that's when I started looking to say that you know what if honestly this thing is not going to end, we're going to learn to live with it.”* **- Jabu**

> *“I don't think I deserve this, but I don’t have a choice. I'm going to stomach it and I'm gonna take it, it wasn't really nice.” - Zama*

For some of the participants, a silver lining of the pandemic came in the form of opportunities to explore other industries as well as promotions, seemingly widening

> *”two things happened. So it was that thing where I was given space to work at my level best., the way I prefer, and then also committing to something else. Now I introduced a YouTube channel to my routine.”* **- Londi**

> *”I came here with nothing, people sponsoring me to be here. And as they say, the rest is history. So, for me to grab that opportunity with both hands and here I am today, you know, maybe even in the UK. Yes, maybe even COVID played a good, it was a good thing. I don't know, but yeah” - Zandile*

Discussion – Subcategory: Transitioning through adapting

As organizations worldwide transitioned to remote work models in response to the pandemic, the need for technology equipment and infrastructure became visible. Technology plays a crucial role in reducing the gender gap in labour market outcomes (Oluwaseun et al., 2020). One of the key benefits of companies providing technology equipment for remote work was the increased accessibility and affordability for employees. By supplying essential tools such as laptops, monitors and headsets, companies ensured that all employees had access to the necessary equipment to

perform their jobs effectively from home. This level of support attempted to eliminate barriers to remote work and promoted inclusivity and equity within the workforce. Although it came with various difficulties – the participants that were afforded these opportunities echoed feelings of gratitude.

The participants exhibited post-traumatic growth, where they found strength and resilience amidst the uncertainty. Post-traumatic growth is characterized by the experience of trauma or profound existential crisis (Xu et al., 2024). Although resilience can be a trauma response, as discussed in previous themes, it is important to acknowledge that it also assisted in the participant's ability to cope and persevere. Research shows that feelings of gratitude can increase resilience, life satisfaction, and positive emotions while lowering stress (Saunders and Sims, 2023). This indicates that cultivating gratitude was a valuable tool for improving overall well-being and resilience, which was displayed by the participants. Believing that there was no viable option helped the participants overcome and accept (Afonso et al., 2023); which assisted some participants to thrive.

Conclusionary discussion of Theme 3: Transition and human adaptability

The pandemic tested the resilience of individuals and communities worldwide, challenging everyone to confront unprecedented threats to health, livelihoods, and social connections. Societies often evolve in response to external pressure, with cultural and societal adaptations reflecting collective resilience and creativity, shaping the way communities navigate change (Saunders and Sims, 2023). By embracing change with resilience, openness, and creativity, individuals and communities can harness the power of transition to cultivate growth and resilience. Black women strongly endorsed pride in their strength and resilience as key aspects of their identity (Williams and Lewis, 2021). Contemplating mortality can evoke a range of emotions, from fear and sorrow to resilience and tranquillity, however, this introspection can also catalyse personal growth and healing, by acknowledging and understanding the challenges we encounter, we gain greater self-awareness and insight (Saunders and Sims, 2023). The participants experienced various levels of change from losing jobs and reduced pay to moving back to their parent's homes. Some positive experiences

also included new opportunities as well as job promotions. One of the participants also mentioned how she appreciated the lockdown as she got to spend more time with her children. There was a constant theme of resilience and adaptability whilst the participants shared how they were figuring it out.

Transition is an inherent part of the human experience (Afonso et al*.,* 2023), and it often includes both external shifts in the environment and internal shifts within the self. For the participants to transition, they had to grapple with changes in their occupations and occupational engagements. As one of the participants mentioned how home became a multipurpose environment for occupational engagement. Occupation serves as a way for individuals to interact with and navigate their surroundings, implying that the environment is shaped in part by individuals' actions, underscoring the interconnectedness of these concepts (Galvaan, 2017). Linking environment with occupational engagement involves understanding how the physical, social, and cultural contexts in which individuals operate influence their participation in meaningful occupations and roles.

The other side of resilience is the factor of weaponizing it, especially when it comes to Black women. Black women may have also felt pressure to project strength and resilience, even while internally struggling or suffering, this behaviour could be a consequence of historical expectations for Black women to embody strength for their families, despite facing discrimination and adversity (Godoy et al*.*, 2024). The resilience and strength demonstrated by many Black women, generation after generation, may give the impression of business as usual, however, in many cases, they have been compelled to continue as normal despite significant challenges (Pennant, 2022). The notion that Black women can take it and rise above it has been weaponized for centuries and causes a sense of silencing and a refusal to recognize the occupational injustices they constantly face. This was explicitly expressed by one of the participants, who noted how even though her pay had been significantly reduced – she felt like she could do nothing but take it and continue working hard. Black women are often denied the opportunity to be vulnerable, which devalues their personhood and ultimately compels them to remain strong as a survival mechanism (Godoy et al*.*, 2024). Furthermore, it was surprising that most of the participants needed more prompting when asked to elaborate about their struggles during the pandemic. This

underscores a pervasive sense of distress and an ongoing obligation to maintain strength in the face of increased responsibilities and the uncertainty of the future, in keeping with the strong, Black woman narrative.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter the findings of the study were presented to answer the research question that was presented in chapter one - How do Black women from low to medium socio-economic environments, describe their experience of the increased need for the use of technology that was required during the COVID-19 pandemic, in relation to occupational justice?. The themes that emerged from the data are ‘You are on your own’; ‘Existential discomfort’; as well as ‘Transition and human adaptability’. These themes encapsulate what was shared by the participants. Through exploring their experiences, it became evident that the pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities. These pre-existing inequalities played critical roles in the participants’ ability to adapt and transition. A majority of the participants were only exposed to technology later in their lives which meant navigating the increased need for technology became a lot more difficult. The participants experienced an array of feelings and overall resilience in their quest to transition and adapt. As a result, they recognized the overall importance of technology, as access to technology played a pivotal role in shaping their ability to navigate life and work. The findings will contribute to an understanding of the nuanced ways in which the participants engage with technology, offering insights into occupational marginalisation, deprivations as well as opportunities, furthering potential areas for further research, intervention and policy developments. In the following chapter, I will further discuss how the above-mentioned themes address the purpose of the study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I consolidate the insights gained from exploring the experiences of how Black women from low to medium socio-economic status experienced the increased need for technology during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to occupational justice (cf. 1.3). Data presented and discussed in the previous chapter outlined understandings that were gained about the occupational and intersectional dimensions of the digital divide and how the increased need for technology both exacerbated and mitigated inequities for Black women. Insights were also gained in the resilience and hope that was expressed by the participants with links to history. A summary of the results will be explored as they pertain to each of the study's research objectives. To conclude, a possible framework that can be considered to address the intersectional experiences of Black women will be addressed.

5.2 Answering the Research Question

The study intended to critically explore how Black women from low to medium socio-economic statuses experienced the increased need for technology, durng the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to occupational justice.

The three objectives of the study were the following:

1. To describe how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the increased use of technology required during COVID-19 pandemic, and to which extent it has impacted their occupational profile in terms of work.
2. To critically explore how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the required increased use of technology during COVID-19 pandemic with regards to occupational deprivation and marginalisation.

3. To critically explore how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the required increased use of technology during COVID-19 pandemic with regards to occupational possibilities.

In summary, the objectives examined how Black women experienced the need for technology during a pandemic by focusing on the impact on their occupational profiles (primarily work), occupational deprivation and marginalisation, as well as the occupational opportunities encountered. However, it was also noted that the intersectional experience of Black women extends beyond these objectives, making their experiences so complex and layered that the themes overlap and inform one another. In this section, I will address the research question (cf. 1.3) in three parts, connecting the research question to the study's objectives. The themes were associated with the objective/s that align best; however, it is important to note that the themes are inevitably connected to other objectives as well.

Table 5-1 outlines which parts of the objectives were met by each theme. The first theme - '*You are on your own'* primarily corresponds to the second objective, which examined the participants' experiences related to occupational marginalisation and deprivation. This theme highlights the marginalisation that participants faced before the pandemic and the subsequent impact it had on their pandemic experiences. The participants also conveyed a sense that their choices had been stripped away, leading to feelings of destabilisation. Additionally, another subcategory that emerged from the data was their experience of guilt. The theme also related to the first objective, which addressed the impact on their occupational profiles, as their profiles before and during the pandemic were scrutinised.

The second theme – *Existential discomfort* mostly speaks to the first objective which addresses any changes to occupational profiles and identity, concerning work and expectations. The theme spoke to how the participants did not have a plan due to the unexpected nature of the pandemic which led to trauma and a great shift in occupational performance in their respective roles. The discussion extended beyond work and looked into how the participants experienced greater demands on their roles as mothers/wives/friends etc, where the participants were overwhelmed with the

responsibility to wear many hats at once. Furthermore, It also addressed the third objective which spoke to the participants' occupational possibilities - as their discomfort extended into all occupational domains.

Lastly, the third theme – *Transition and human adaptability*, mostly addresses the third objective which looked at the occupational possibilities that were experienced by the participants. This theme looked at how the participants had to grapple with the changes they experienced and how they transitioned into the new way of doing. It explored the participants' thoughts and feelings as well as how they experienced any assistance, or lack thereof, from family as well as businesses or employers. Additionally, it addresses the first objective, with changes to occupational profiles as well as the second objective of occupational deprivation and marginalisation, as the changes affected their occupational profiles and also highlighted constant , historically linked occupational deprivation and marginalisation.

Table 5-1 indicates how the themes generated through this study (cf. 4.3) addressed the research question.

Table 5-1: Summary of how research themes related to the research question

Themes	Category	subcategory	Aspect of research question addressed	Research objectives addressed
You are on your own	Systemic unpreparedness	a) We do not all have the same exposure	How Black women experienced the increased need for technology– In relation to occupational justice -Contextual experience	To critically explore how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the required increased use of technology during COVID-19 pandemic with regards to **occupational deprivation and marginalisation.**
		b) Guilt		
		c) Everything was destabilized		
		d) Choices taken away		
Existential discomfort	Existential discomfort	a) I did not have any plan	How Black women adapted to using technology and the impact it had financially.	To describe how women from low to medium socio-economic environments

		b) It was traumatic		experience the increased use of technology required during COVID-19 pandemic, and to which extent it has **impacted their occupational profile in terms of work.**
		c) Jobs/money loss and money needed to do the work		
		d) Wearing all hats at once		
Transition and human adaptability	Figuring out how we gonna do it	a) She's working, she is taking calls	How Black women experienced the need for technology in relation to occupational justice – transitioning to different work environments	To critically explore how women from low to medium socio-economic environments experience the required increased use of technology during COVID-19 pandemic with **regards to occupational possibilities**.
		b) Thousand feelings		
		c) Transitioning through adapting		

5.2.1 Experience and adaptations to occupational injustice

For the participants, the pandemic exacerbated inequalities that existed prior, related to access to technology, and highlighted the intersecting challenges they face in achieving occupational justice. The heightened reliance on technology unveiled systemic barriers and inequities, exacerbating occupational injustice and revealing an urgency in actively bridging these barriers. As individuals or as part of specific communities, the participants possess unique occupational needs, strengths, and potential, each necessitating tailored forms of support to thrive (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). The violation of occupational rights leads to occupational injustices (c.f 2.8). Occupational justice closes the divide between individuals' well-being and detrimental social circumstances that limit their opportunities and potential to do and be (Hocking, 2017). It is thus defined as an action which promotes change to increase equitable opportunities (Hocking, 2017).

The first theme - *You are on your own* - relates to occupational injustice as it refers to how systemic barriers and inequalities limited the participant's ability to engage in occupations related to technology use in their formative years – which is relayed in the subcategory *We do not have the same exposure*. Additionally, they indicated that technology use was mostly self-taught as they did not have opportunities to engage with technology in their formative years due to systemic inequalities. The idea of the participants not having the opportunity to engage in technology in their formative years speaks to the occupational deprivation, which people have limited choice in occupations (Hammell and Beagan, 2017) as well as occupational marginalisation – in which people are prevented from participating in their choice of occupations (Hammell, 2020). Both of these occupational justice concepts would later affect some of the participants' abilities to transition and adapt during the pandemic. Further perpetuating their experience of occupational deprivation and marginalisation.

For the participants that were able to participate in working from home, that came with challenges of 'black guilt'. It is noted that occupational injustice can manifest in various ways. Being conscious of their intersecting racial identities left some of the participants feeling guilty for having access, even within the margins of deprivations, but it also left

them realising the overlapping injustices they experience, which was explained in the subcategories ‘guilt’ and ‘everything was destabilized’. The concept of survivor guilt was explored in the previous section; this is experienced when there is fortune amidst widespread misfortune, which is often coupled with feelings of gratitude (MacKenzie and Zhao, 2023). As a result, the participants found themselves being occupational conscientized as they were aware of systemic inequalities that affect their communities as well as themselves. Ultimately, the participants expressed how their *choices were taken away* from them which affected their abilities to engage in meaningful occupations as the isolation had ripple effects, financially and personally. The COVID-19 pandemic became a systemic barrier that enforced existing barriers to engagement and choice – speaking to the systemic unpreparedness experienced worldwide.

Lastly, the third theme - *Transitioning through adapting*, also addressed the objective of occupational injustice as it referenced the participants’ struggles to transition and adapt through limited resources as well as inadequate working conditions. The participants were so uncertain about their futures and were not adequately supported in this transition – thus also feeling like ‘you are on your own’ – theme one. Furthermore, the concept being relentlessness and persevering through the difficulty was explored. The strength shown by the participants was both a prideful moment but also a realization of the expectation that is often placed on Black women; showing the significance of strength and the diversity in Black women's perceptions and attitudes toward their identity (Williams and Lewis, 2021). This also addressed the first objective of occupational profiles and the occupational injustices associated with occupational profiles.

Occupational deprivation and marginalisation

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, occupational deprivation and marginalisation are concepts that were explored and used to frame this research. Occupational deprivation can occur when populations face restricted options in engaging in occupations due to factors such as geographical isolation, physical abilities, or other situational constraints (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). In a more recent depiction, it is said to be a form of social exclusion that results from restrictions placed on

populations, limiting their ability to participate in occupations that are essential for promoting health and well-being (Hammell and Beagan, 2017). The pandemic inevitably affected occupational engagement, as its primary component was isolation. The impacts of the pandemic were felt globally, with countries struggling to curb the spread of the virus. This situation resulted in individuals being confined to their homes for extended periods, thus hindering their ability to engage in a variety of occupations. The occupational deprivation was also evident in the second theme—existential discomfort. Firstly, the pandemic exposed pre-existing disparities in access to technology among Black women, as highlighted in Chapters 2 and 4 in South Africa, echoing what was shared by the participants: 'we do not all have the same access.' Limited access to digital devices and remote workspaces, affordable and accessible reliable internet connectivity, as well as digital literacy skills, presented significant barriers to their full participation in remote work.

The digital divide has long been a barrier for marginalised communities, including Black women, and it limited their access to essential technological resources and opportunities despite the government introducing telecommunication policies in 1996, almost three decades ago. As noted in the first theme, the statistics presented are an indication of how, despite telecommunications policies, rural schools had not implemented any of these policies. Although the participants were well over the age of twenty years, their experience of exposure to technology was very much in line with 2020 statistics. Therefore, as remote work became essential during the pandemic, disparities in internet access, device availability and digital literacy widened, further marginalising Black women who lacked adequate resources and support. The assertion that occupational deprivation is an issue of justice stems from the understanding that engagement in various occupations is the daily pathway through which we maintain and foster social inclusion; when deprived of these opportunities, we are denied essential avenues for personal fulfilment and societal participation (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004; Hocking, 2017).

Secondly, the transition to working from home also came with challenges as some of the participants struggled to juggle work and unpaid work or domestic duties – this speaks to occupational marginalisation both as women and Black women. Occupational marginalisation underscores the importance of individuals exerting

micro-level, everyday choices and decision-making power as they engage in various occupations (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). The increased demand for technology blurred the boundaries between work and home life, exacerbating work-life imbalance and caregiving burdens for Black women. It therefore functions covertly, with a significant impact on injustice arising from the normalized standardization of expectations regarding how, when, and where individuals are 'expected' to engage (Townsend and Wilcock, 2004). With limited access to affordable childcare and support services, many Black women have been forced to juggle remote work responsibilities with caregiving duties, placing strain on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The lack of workplace accommodations and flexibility further compounded these challenges, perpetuating occupational injustice. Participants also expressed, that statements from employers like 'at least you still have a job' often invalidated the very real struggles and hardships they faced during the pandemic. Instead of offering support and empathy, these remarks dismissed their concerns and perpetuated the myth of the 'strong Black woman' who is expected to endure without complaint. This invalidation further marginalises Black women, denying them the space to express their emotions and seek assistance when needed, whilst perpetuating an expected way to engage in occupations.

Occupational marginalisation and deprivation affect one's ability to make occupational choices, as justice must focus on the actual choices available to individuals (Hocking, 2017). This Christopher et al*.,* (2021) indicates that inherent patterns of inherited pain and imposed occupations often work together to limit occupational choice and possibilities. This notion was explored in the first theme – 'You are on your own'. The pandemic forced the participants to reassess their occupational priorities and constraints. Some participants only realised the injustice of lacking access to technology once it became a requirement, namely when they went to university and when the pandemic began. Furthermore, the concept of occupational choices was explored in the second theme – 'existential discomfort'. With widespread job losses, remote work opportunities, and caregiving responsibilities, the participants had to weigh factors such as financial stability, work-life balance, and personal fulfilment in making occupational decisions that the participants shared. Intersecting identities, including race, gender, and socioeconomic status, shaped the occupational experiences of the participants during the pandemic. Additionally, structural

inequalities and systemic barriers influenced their options and constraints, further complicating their decision-making process.

Occupational Possibilities

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly altered the landscape of occupational possibilities, presenting both challenges and opportunities for Black women. The third theme – 'transition through adaptation'- explored this objective. Their reflections echoed the participant's ability to forge occupational possibilities through their resilience. The interactions between socially embedded structures and individual or collective agency influence occupational engagement both at individual and group levels, this dynamic process shapes occupational opportunities uniquely for various individuals or social groups (Ramugondo, 2015). been significant shifts in work dynamics, with remote work becoming the new norm for many industries alongside considerable job losses. For some women, this shift provided flexibility and autonomy, allowing them to balance professional responsibilities with caregiving duties and personal needs. However, this was not the reality for most participants who have children, as factors like being single mothers and general societal expectations created additional occupational burdens.

Despite facing numerous challenges, the participants have demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience in navigating their occupational choices during the pandemic. Although some participants indicated that they are still recovering from the pandemic, they have embraced remote work arrangements and sought employment following retrenchments. The participants displayed ingenuity and determination to overcome obstacles and seize opportunities for growth and advancement. Acknowledging their resilience should not detract from the fact that the barriers they have encountered due to existing disparities require further research and, ultimately, resolution. This Ramugondo (2015) indicates that through everyday actions at both individual and collective levels, systemic inequalities, which support and promote certain occupations while excluding others, are maintained and perpetuated.

In relation to occupation possibilities, another concept that emerged in the second theme was occupational consciousness, which refers to the awareness and recognition of the significance of one's engagement in meaningful activities, roles, and

responsibilities within various contexts and how it can resist and challenge hegemonic practices (Ramugondo, 2015). The participants' occupations encompassed various activities, from professional work and caregiving to community involvement. These occupations are essential for personal fulfilment and contribute to the collective well-being of families, communities, and society at large. The pandemic necessitated significant adjustments in how the participants engaged in their occupations, particularly with the need to shift to remote work, virtual communication, and job losses. The participants expressed this as they reflected on navigating the need for technology and their ability to transition. The heightened need for technology during the pandemic underscored

5.2.2 Summary

Along the pre-existing fault lines of racial, gender, and educational inequity, Black women appear to have been disproportionately affected by job insecurity and loss during the pandemic. As the participants shared, this has impacted their occupational profiles and overall identities. The participants worked in sectors significantly affected by the demand for technology, and thus, during lockdowns, job loss and salary reductions were prevalent. Although some participants managed to transition to remote work, this also presented challenges. The loss of employment not only threatened their financial stability but also exacerbated existing inequalities in access to opportunities for career advancement, economic security, and connection.

In answering the research question, the participants experienced occupational injustices on many levels. Existing inequalities exacerbated this, limiting their access to learning and opportunities that would have likely assisted in a smoother transition during lockdown. The pandemic conscientized some of the participants, causing them to realise some of the disparities they had encountered.

5.3 Limitations and Strengths of the Study

Several strengths and limitations influenced this study's findings. Acknowledging these is crucial for academic integrity and for informing future research efforts to address the complexities of Black women's experiences with technology in South Africa.

- This study was a qualitative study with an appropriate study sample, however, a larger sample size would allow for a larger variety in terms of socio-economic levels, education levels, geographic, and cultural contexts. Therefore, the findings from the study may not be generalizable to all Black women in South Africa, as individual experiences and perceptions may vary. Generalizability remains for the reader.
- Language barriers: Language barriers may have restricted participation among some Black women who are not proficient in English or isiZulu, as the participants who were able to converse in isiZulu did and the participants who did not – would revert to English.
- Language opportunity: Most of the participants completed the interview in English, with some using both English and IsiZulu to richly describe their experiences in their home language.
- Contextual factors: The study may not fully capture the influence of broader contextual factors, such as socio-political dynamics, and cultural norms, which may have influenced the participant's experiences with technology in South Africa.
- Temporal delimitation: Data was collected in 2023 – three years after the hard lockdown in SA. While time passes enables people to integrate and make sense of past difficult experiences, some accounts of the essential lived experience may have become vague. The study's timeframe may limit the exploration of long-term.
- Data analysis and discussion: Negative case analysis was applied consistently to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, rigorously examining emerging data that did not fit the patterns and hypotheses. thereby ensuring a more credible analysis.
- Intersectionality: Only aspects of intersectionality in direct proxy to the research objectives and research question were explored. Factors such as age, disability, or sexual orientation and how that intersect with their experiences of technology use during the pandemic were beyond the scope of this study.

5.4 Implications and Recommendations

Meaningful engagement in occupations, as well as access, should be concerning to occupational therapists. Equitable access to technology for work is not only an occupational justice imperative but also a social justice necessity. The study revealed other aspects of injustices perpetuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the intersecting roles of Black women and how these affect occupational choice and engagement. Overall health and well-being, which also contribute to economic growth, cannot be realised if essential activities are excluded from certain groups. Additionally, the spatial disparities that participants faced when given the opportunity to work—setting up workstations in kitchens and bedrooms—disrupted their ability to engage in work. By addressing these implications and recommendations, occupational therapists can collaborate with other stakeholders to create a more equitable and inclusive digital landscape that empowers Black women and promotes their full participation and access within society.

5.4.1 For Practice

Once standards become ingrained in practice, clients' occupational performance is assessed based on these established ‘normal’ activities, as evidenced by the emphasis of assessment tools and client objectives that solely encompass such ‘normal’ occupations (Njelesani et al., 2015). It is, therefore, essential for occupational therapy to continually critique what society considers ‘normal’ and how it affects various racial and gendered groups–to advocate for occupational justice. This approach enhances our understanding of systemic inequalities and injustices, informing how occupational therapy engages, critiques, and advocates. With the expectation of transitioning to remote work and the increased use of technology, very little consideration was given to how participants would make this transition and the environments they would move into, raising questions about social and systemic injustices. Thus, this study contributes to the discourse on occupational justice by revealing how the heightened need for technology during the pandemic has impacted Black women's occupational experiences as active participants in their fields. Understanding these dynamics can inform occupational therapy interventions aimed at promoting equitable access to technology and occupational rights and supporting Black women within the occupational arena of work.

Occupational therapists work in three main domains that are directly implicated in the study: Community based interventions, work as well as school.

1. Community support: Community-based organizations and networks, including non-governmental organisations, play a critical role in providing support and resources to Black women. Occupational therapists that work in this field should use collaborative efforts to enhance community support systems and expand access to technology-related services, training, and mentorship opportunities for Black women.
2. Workplace practices: Occupational therapists that work in the domain of work, and use collaborative methods to advocate for the implementation of inclusive workplace practices that accommodate the technological needs of Black women, such as flexible work arrangements, access to necessary equipment and software, and training programs to enhance digital skills as well as spaces that accommodate the multiple roles Black women play, e.g. motherhood. This could be done through working with HR departments to ensure that the policies the companies create and enforce are wholistic in nature. Furthermore, the legislation on technology should be considered.
3. Lastly, occupational therapists who work in government-level basic and formative education could assist in advocacy for the implementation of technological practices and tools for their students especially in the formative years.

5.4.2 For Education

There is a heightened sensitivity and awareness necessary for occupational therapy educators. The findings highlight systemic inequities in access to technology for Black women, reflecting broader disparities in digital infrastructure and resources. Addressing these structural inequities is vital for promoting digital inclusion and lessening the impact of future crises. Efforts to raise awareness about the digital divide and its effects on Black women's occupational experiences are imperative. Educational initiatives and advocacy campaigns can amplify the voices of Black women, champion their needs, and mobilise support for systemic change. It is

important to advocate for continuous support throughout the curriculum and place greater emphasis on the various forms of occupation justice and injustice.

5.4.3 For Further Research

The study underscores the significance of adopting an intersectional lens when examining the experiences of Black women. Future research ought to consider the intersecting factors of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and access to technology in studying Black women's experiences to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Investigating the impacts or changes in Black women's experiences with technology beyond the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic would constitute an excellent further study, as it would address the occupational conscientisation that was initiated by the pandemic and how that may have altered perceptions and experiences.

5.5 A Framework, Imagined

This indicates that the issues of exclusion cannot be resolved merely by incorporating Black women into an existing framework, as the intersectional experience transcends the combined effects of racism and sexism. If we anticipate pandemics in the future, the question remains: how can occupational therapists be better equipped to advocate for and implement interventions for those who may potentially be vulnerable during these future pandemics? Developing a theoretical framework for the experiences of Black women regarding technology use in the context of occupational therapy involves integrating relevant concepts from occupational therapy, psychology, and intersectionality theory. An outline of a potential framework will be presented that considers all the factors mentioned above.

The occupational needs and goals of Black women are influenced by their intersecting identities. Disparities in technology access and literacy are significant determinants of occupational engagement. Therefore, occupational therapy interventions should be culturally sensitive, addressing the specific needs and strengths of Black women while considering the impact of technology on their occupational well-being. Furthermore, a collaborative approach should be employed to ensure culturally sensitive interventions, enhance their digital skills, promote occupational justice, and foster

meaningful engagement in various occupations, ultimately contributing to greater occupational justice for this population. A framework that considers these factors is pivotal in the implementation of future strategies that combat inequalities and seek to provide education.

The outline of a proposed theoretical framework considers the following dimensions: occupational categories, intersectionality theory, occupational justice, and digital access. Digital access is relevant to this study but can be substituted for other occupations from which Black women or other vulnerable groups are potentially excluded.

Figure 5-1 – Proposed framework

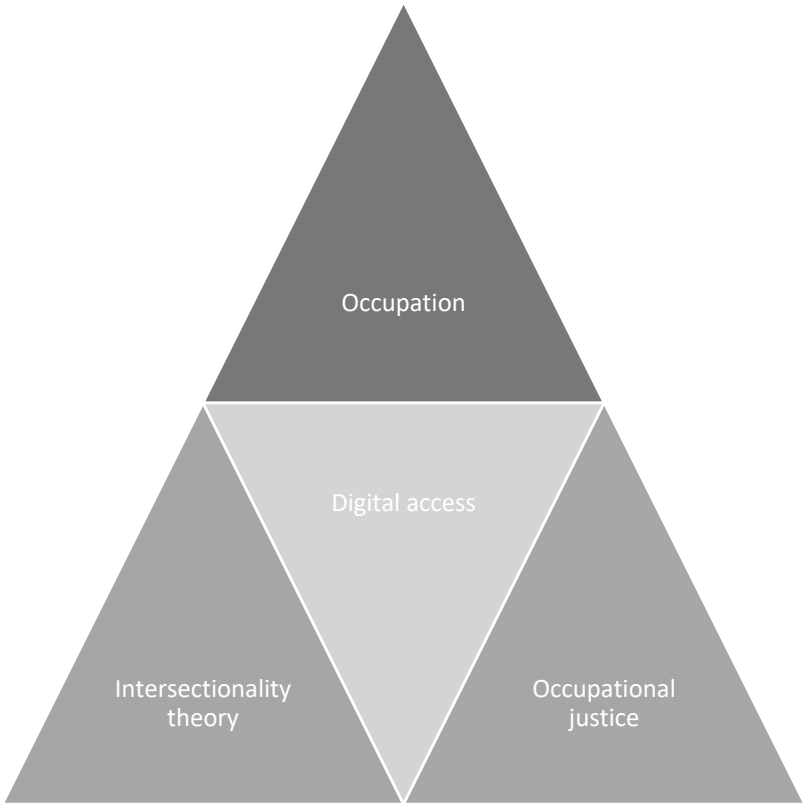


Figure 5-1 explained

1. Occupation:

- Occupation places occupations and engagement at the centre of human life.

- This aspect of the framework speaks to the participants' entire occupational scope – the occupations they engage in, the occupations they wish to engage in, occupations they are systemically excluded from.
- This occupational scope is informed by various aspects such as exposure, race, gender, systemic justice, time and experience. These aspects inform occupational identity which speaks to intersectionality theory.

2. Intersectionality Theory:

- This theory recognizes that individuals have multiple intersecting identities (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status) that shape their experiences and access to resources. Black women's experiences cannot be understood by considering race and gender in isolation.
- This aspect of the framework speaks to the identities which were shared by the participants, how they intersect and how they inform occupational engagement, choice and possibilities.

3. Occupational Justice:

- Considering how technology-related disparities impacted occupational justice, which is about ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities to engage in meaningful occupations.
- This aspect of the framework speaks to the prevention of occupational marginalisation and deprivation that was explored in the study.

4. Digital Access:

- Digital Divide: Investigate disparities in access to technology, including devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy.
- Digital Inclusion: Explore how technology can empower or disempower Black women by enhancing their access to education, employment, healthcare, and social connections.

At the intersection of race, gender and socioeconomic status, Black women experienced unique challenges and opportunities during the pandemic. The

intersection of these identities causes Black women to experience a multitude of systemic oppressions or vulnerabilities. The consideration of all the identities will assist in interventions that are culturally sensitive, relevant and intentional. The increased reliance on technology, while offering access to various occupations, also exacerbated disparities in digital access and skills. Occupational therapy interventions should be guided by a client-centred approach that acknowledges the multifaceted identities of Black women.

5.7 Final reflections and closure

> *" I argue that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender" - (Crenshaw, 2015, p 140)*

Occupational therapy and occupational science literature increasingly focus on issues of justice, marginalisation, and human rights. Although the size of the sample may limit the statistical significance of the need for technology during the pandemic among Black women, this study serves as a foundational exploration of the complexities arising from the digital divide that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining the experiences of Black women in South Africa regarding the heightened demand for technology during the pandemic, this dissertation contributes to a broader understanding of the digital gender divide and its implications. The findings of this research can inform future studies on relevant policies and initiatives aimed at reducing inequalities and promoting equitable access to technology for Black women, thereby fostering a more inclusive and empowered society. Ultimately, this study seeks to amplify the voices of Black women, ensuring that their experiences and needs are adequately represented in the expanding discourse surrounding technology and societal transformation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG	HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MEDICAL)

Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

TO:	Ms S Buthelezi School of Therapeutic Sciences Department of Occupational Therapy Medical School University E-mail: 711266@students.wits.ac.za
CC:	Supervisor: Dr T Rauch van der Merwe <Tania.vanderMerwe@wits.ac.za> and <HREC-Medical Research Office@wits.ac.za>
FROM:	Mr Iain Burns Human Research Ethics Committee (Medical) Tel: 011 717 1252 E-mail: Iain.Burns@wits.ac.za
DATE:	2022/03/29
REF:	R14/49
PROTOCOL NO:	**M211190** (This is your ethics application reference number. Please quote it in all enquiries, oral or written, relating to this study.)
PROJECT TITLE:	*The experience of black women from low to medium socio-economic environments with the increased need of use of technology for occupational participation during the COVID-19 pandemic*

Please find attached the Clearance Certificate for the above project. I hope it goes well and that an article in a recognized publication comes out of it. This will reflect well on your professional standing and contribute to Government funding of the University.



MSWorks2000/Iain0007/Clearscan.wps

Appendix B: Plagiarism Declaration

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION TO BE SIGNED BY ALL HIGHER DEGREE STUDENTS

SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY:

I **Snothile Buthelezi** (Student number: **711266**) am a student registered for the degree of **Msc Occupational Therapy** in the academic year **2024**.

I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that the work submitted for assessment for the above degree is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.
- I have included as an appendix a report from "Turnitin" (or other approved plagiarism detection) software indicating the level of plagiarism in my research document.



…… 03/09/2024

Signature Date

Appendix C: Turn-it-in report

Final turn it in submission

ORIGINALITY REPORT

10%	7%	4%	4%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	scholar.ufs.ac.za Internet Source	2%
2	www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov Internet Source	<1%
3	www.scielo.org.za Internet Source	<1%
4	mafiadoc.com Internet Source	<1%
5	www.coursehero.com Internet Source	<1%
6	Piyush Sharma, Tak Yan Leung. "How to Manage and Survive during a Global Crisis - Lessons for Managers from the COVID-19 Pandemic", Routledge, 2024 Publication	<1%
7	uir.unisa.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
8	www.tandfonline.com Internet Source	<1%

Appendix D: Participant information sheet



Participant information sheet

Good day,

My name is Snothile Buthelezi and I am a Masters student at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I am investigating the relationship between the increased use of technology and the exclusion of Black women, under the supervision of Tania Van der Merwe. The aim of this research project is to explore the experiences of Black women and the increased use of technology required, during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to occupational justice.

I would like to invite you to take part in the above research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and will involve an interview as well as answering a questionnaire. This will take about a 1 hour. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be stored on a platform that only the researcher will have access to. It will be deleted following the completion of the research study.

There will not be any personal costs to you if you participate in this project. Furthermore, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question that you are nor comfortable with. The interview will be confidential and anonymous.

If you have any questions during or after the research study, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za
Thank you for showing interest in my research study.
Yours sincerely,
Researcher:
Snothile Buthelezi
711266@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor:

Tania Van der Merwe

tania.vandermerwe@wits.ac.za

Appendix E: Informed consent

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Department of Occupational Therapy
Wits Education Campus

Informed Consent

The experience of Black women from low to medium socio-economic environments with the increased need of use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic in occupational participation
Name of researcher: Snothile Buthelezi

I, ……, agree to participate in this research study. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:
Please circle the relevant options below.

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO

……	……
Participant signature	Researcher signature
……	……
Name of participant	Researcher
……	……
Date	Date

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Department of Occupational Therapy
Wits Education Campus

Informed Consent to be Audio recorded

The experience of Black women from low to medium socio-economic environments with the increased need of use of technology during the COVID-19 pandemic in occupational participation

Name of researcher: Snothile Buthelezi

I, ……, agree to participate in this research study. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO

……	……
Participant signature	Researcher signature
……	……
Name of participant	Researcher
……	……
Date	Date

Appendix F: Demographic Questionnaire

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Department of Occupational Therapy
Wits Education Campus

The following questionnaire is aimed at obtaining background information about the participant. The information will be kept confidential.

Question	Answer
1. Participant Number:	
2. Age:	
3. Ethnicity (Please tick appropriate box) Asian ☐ Black ☐ White ☐ Coloured ☐	
4. Home Language	
5. What other languages can you speak?	
6. Highest level of education	
Marital status. (Please tick appropriate box) Married ☐ Single ☐ Divorced ☐	
7. Do you have any children, if yes, how many?	
8. Are you the sole bread winner in your home?	
9. Current Job title	
10. Previous Job title	
11. Did you lose your job or had your hours reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic	

12. Which technological instruments were available to you (at work) prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Cell phone ☐ Computer/laptop ☐ Data/wifi ☐
13. Which of the above was not available to you after the pandemic?
14. Did this affect your ability to perform your duties?

THANK YOU!!!!

Appendix G: Interview scheme

Preamble

- Look at breaking down the concept using accessible language (not leading) more in layman terms

I am investigating the relationship between the increased use of technology and the (experience thereof?) possible exclusion of Black women, from participating in work activities. The aim of my research project is to explore how Black women experienced the increased need for the use of technology, during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the year 2020.

- **Talk about the picture participant sent first – uncover and probe**

Asking participants if they have a photo that represents a time prior to the pandemic and during COVID-19 pandemic – related to work participation, their occupational profile and access to tech.

- Allow participant to unpack photo, with probing questions

  E.g.:

  - Tell me why you chose these pictures
  - Can you explain what was happening when these pictures were taken
  - How did the pandemic affect you (referring to the image chosen during covid)

Possible exclusion:

- Open ended and non-directive
- Did you feel equipped/ready for the virtual shift if/when it occurred?
- Do you perceive that you had access to the technology necessary for successful engagement in work in 2020?
- What virtual support was available to you to ease the transition into increased technology use?

Work activities:

- Can you walk me through what your duties were prior to the pandemic

- Did you use any tech to help you perform any of your duties – if yes what were they

Technology

Purely speaks to the past and needs to include a current focus as well

- How would you describe technology
- How did you experience technology when growing up
    - What tech devices did you have access to growing up
    - What didn't you have access to that you think would have assisted you
    - What tech devices do you have now – what do you use them for
    - When did you start having access, if ever

Exhibit 1. Aspects of the Occupational Therapy Domain
All aspects of the occupational therapy domain transact to support engagement, participation, and health. This exhibit does not imply a hierarchy.

Occupations	Contexts	Performance Patterns	Performance Skills	Client Factors
Activities of daily living (ADLs) Instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) Health management Rest and sleep Education Work Play Leisure Social participation	Environmental factors Personal factors	Habits Routines Roles Rituals	Motor skills Process skills Social interaction skills	Values, beliefs, and spirituality Body functions Body structures

Occupational profile - work

- Tell me your story / about what happened during the COVID-pandemic when many people all of a sudden had to access technology to work; what happened / changes / adaptions etc/ consequences….with your work when the COVID-19 pandemic started/during the pandemic.- overarching question / probing question
- The rest will all be prompts
- Describe what type of things you were not able to do/have access to/ no longer able to do because of the need for technology? How did your daily life change? .
- What adaptations did you make / have to make?.
- How do you think you would have experienced the pandemic had you had access to

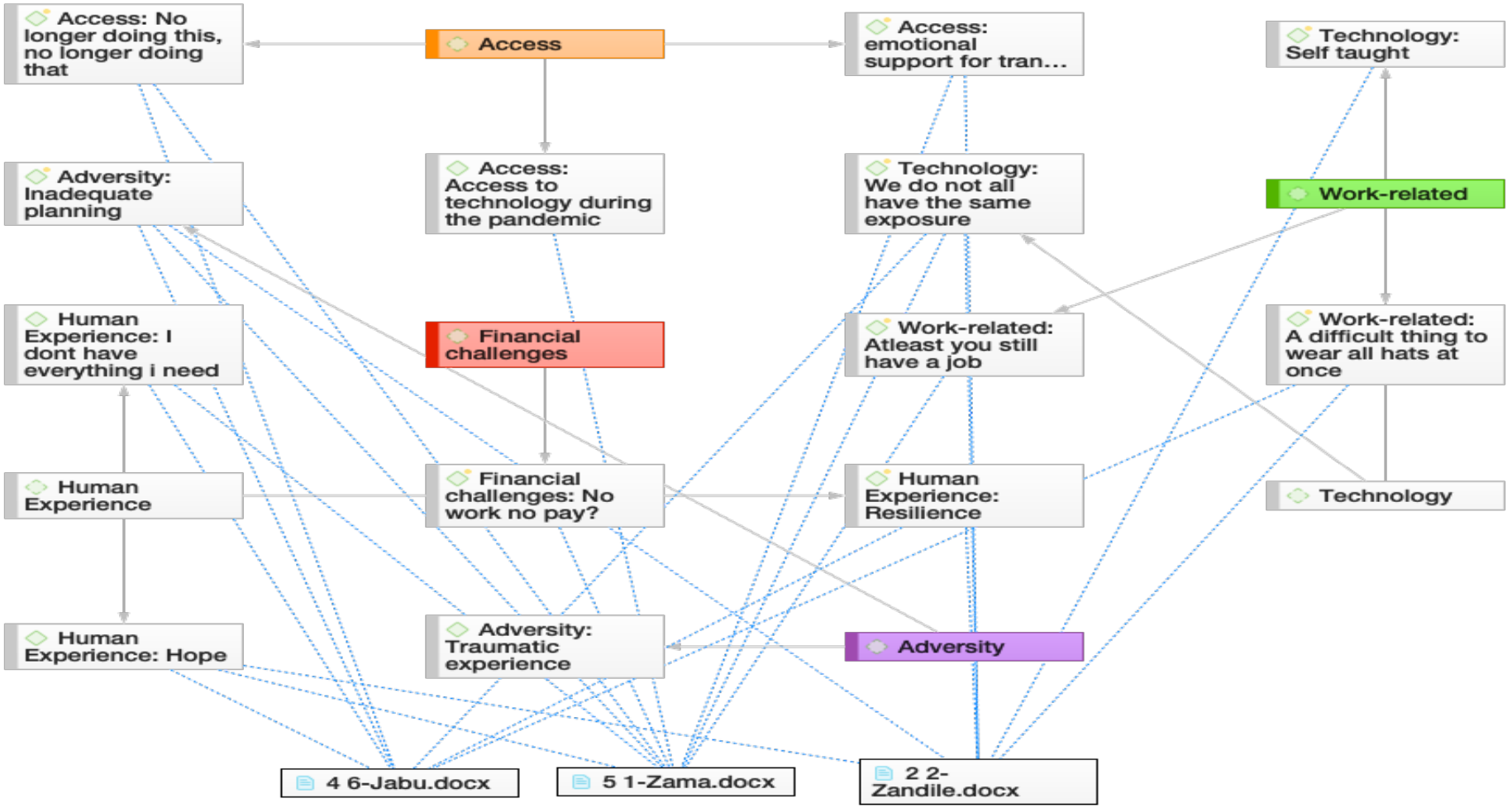
Probing questions:

- Can you tell me a little more about how that made you feel…
- What did you mean by …
- What does access mean for you ….
- What thoughts go through your mind when ….

Appendix H: Codebook extract

Code	Comment
Access	
Access to technology at home prior to the pandemic	
Access to technology during the pandemic	
Access: Limited resources	2024/01/15, 23:37, merged withAccess: Access issues2024/01/03, 09:28, merged withAccess: Access to information2024/01/15, 23:52, merged withAdversity: Lack of resources
Access: Psychosocial support	2024/01/03, 23:18, merged withAccess: Support seeking2024/01/03, 23:18, merged withAccess: Emotional Support
Access: Remote support from employer	2024/01/15, 21:31, merged withTransition support from employer2024/01/15, 23:23, merged withAccess: Material assistance2024/01/03, 23:23, merged withAccess: Training and support2024/01/03, 23:23, merged withAccess: Technical
Access: Restricted in moving and living	2024/01/03, 23:16, merged withAccess: Restrictions2024/01/15, 23:52, merged withAdversity: Lack of flexibility2024/01/04, 16:35, merged withAdversity: Lack of freedom2024/01/04, 22:48, merged withAdversity: Feeling trapped2024/01/
Adapting to the increased need for tech	2024/01/15, 23:36, merged withAdversity: Adaptation difficulties2024/01/04, 16:00, merged withAdversity: Lack of control2024/01/04, 16:49, merged withAdversity: Lack of support2024/01/04, 22:44, merged withAdversity: Challenges202
Adversity	
Adversity: Confusion	
Adversity: Discomfort	2024/01/04, 10:38, merged withAdversity: Feeling of discomfort
Adversity: Discouragement	
Adversity: Disruption	2024/01/04, 16:00, merged withAdversity: Interruption2024/01/04, 22:45, merged withAdversity: Unexpected transition2024/01/04, 21:45, merged withAdversity: Unexpected events
Adversity: Inadequate planning	2024/01/04, 11:14, merged withAdversity: Lack of contingency plans2024/01/04, 11:15, merged withAdversity: Inefficiency2024/01/04, 16:38, merged withAdversity: Lack of preparation2024/01/04, 21:47, merged withAdversity: Unprepare
Adversity: Missed opportunities	
Adversity: Regret	2024/01/04, 21:09, merged withAdversity: Self-blame
Adversity: Trauma	2024/01/04, 21:42, merged withAdversity: Traumatic experience
Adversity: Uncertainty	2024/01/04, 10:19, merged withAdversity: Doubt2024/01/04, 10:18, merged withAdversity: Expressing uncertainty
Adversity: Under valued	2024/01/04, 10:47, merged withAdversity: Feeling devalued2024/01/04, 10:48, merged withAdversity: Perceived inadequacy2024/01/04, 22:50, merged withAdversity: Unfair treatment
Adversity: Various feelings	2024/01/03, 23:54, merged withAdversity: Depression2024/01/04, 00:20, merged withAdversity: Despair2024/01/04, 10:36, merged withAdversity: Feeling drained2024/01/04, 10:37, merged withAdversity: Feeling lost2024/01/04, 21:47,
Attitudes towards technology during pandemic	
boredom	
Desire for technological accessibility	2024/01/16, 10:46, merged withAccess: Desire for access to tech during pandemic
Exposure to technology	2024/01/16, 10:47, merged withAdversity: Inadequate education or training2024/01/04, 11:08, merged withI went to rural schools, so we did not have computers, libraries, and other resources. It was bad.2024/01/04, 11:17, merged withA
Fear of breaking resources loaned from employer	
Financial challenges	
Financial challenges: Additional expenses incurred during covid	
Financial challenges: Concerns that arose during Covid	2024/01/05, 00:30, merged withFinancial challenges: Financial2024/01/15, 23:42, merged withFinancial challenges: Financial stress2024/01/05, 01:02, merged withFinancial challenges: Financial constraint2024/01/05, 00:35, merged with
Financial challenges: Financial change	2024/01/05, 00:27, merged withFinancial challenges: Financial challenges
Financial challenges: Salary cut	2024/01/05, 00:53, merged withFinancial challenges: No work no pay
Human characteristics	
Human characteristics: Opportunity	2024/01/05, 01:48, merged withHuman characteristics: Opportunity-seeking
Human characteristics: Resilience	2024/01/16, 10:49, merged withHuman characteristics: Motivation
Human Experience	
Human Experience: Hope	
Human Experience: Impact of pandemic	
Human Experience: Transition during pandemic	2024/01/16, 10:58, merged withHuman Experience: Change2024/01/16, 11:16, merged withHuman characteristics: Adaptability2024/01/05, 01:27, merged withHuman characteristics: Adaptation
positive experience in retrospect	
Technology	
Technology: Self taught	2024/01/05, 10:51, merged withTechnology: Limited technology literacy
Technology: Technological access	2024/01/05, 11:25, merged withTechnology: Technology usage2024/01/05, 02:47, merged withTechnology: Technology use2024/01/05, 11:25, merged withTechnology: Dependence on technology2024/01/05, 02:45, merged withTechno
Technology: Technological changes	
Technology: Technology	
Technology: Technology exposure	2024/01/05, 10:54, merged withTechnology: Technology familiarity2024/01/05, 10:52, merged withTechnology: Technological capability2024/01/05, 10:52, merged withTechnology: Technical expertise
Technology: Technology limitations	
Technology: Technology literacy	2024/01/05, 11:14, merged withTechnology: Technology education
Technology: Technology support	2024/01/05, 11:23, merged withTechnology: Technological impact
Transitioning to WFH	
Traumatic exoerience	
Work-related	
Work-related: Adaptation to remote work	2024/01/05, 11:28, merged withWork-related: Home office2024/01/05, 11:30, merged withWork-related: Remote work2024/01/05, 11:29, merged withWork-related: Workstation adjustments2024/01/05, 12:06, merged withWork-related: Wo
Work-related: Administrative duties	2024/01/05, 02:44, merged withWork-related: Administrative tasks2024/01/05, 11:29, merged withWork-related: Office work2024/01/05, 11:42, merged withWork-related: Job description2024/01/05, 02:48, merged withWork-related: Job res
Work-related: Anticipated layoffs	
Work-related: Career change	2024/01/05, 02:44, merged withWork-related: Career advancement2024/01/05, 02:44, merged withWork-related: Career development2024/01/05, 11:31, merged withWork-related: Career setback2024/01/05, 02:44, merged withWork-relat
Work-related: Change in work environment	2024/01/05, 11:31, merged withWork-related: Change in routine2024/01/05, 11:53, merged withWork-related: Role shift2024/01/05, 02:49, merged withWork-related: Shift in roles

Appendix I: Thematic map



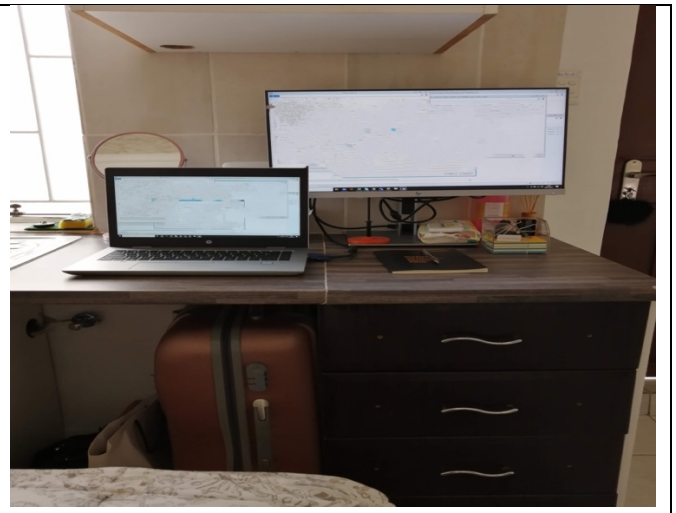
Appendix J: Themes

Themes	Category	subcategory	Code	Verbatim
You are on your own	Systemic unpreparedness	Everything was destabilized	Nobody expected it	*"I wouldn't have thought that going into 2020 I would experience so much change."* *"Covid came it was a setback people are losing jobs, stores were closed and companies were being closed"* "You know, the first week it was kind of easy adjusting, adjusting to it. *I think the second week is then when you start feeling the things, you know how our normal and standard routines of life have just been interrupted"*
		We do not all have the same exposure	Inadequate planning	*"And in fact, this company does not have any contingency plans in place to handle and be able to sustain our salaries or my job at the time"* *"Covid taking away choices"*
			Technological access	*"I went to a rural school, so we did not have computers, libraries and other resources, it was bad"* *"my mom worked as a PA so she definitely was exposed, so if I would go to her job, if I'll be waiting for her at work, I would see a laptop, see a computer and that kind of stuff. At home we did have a computer, a laptop, we did have, we were exposed to quite a bit of technology"*
Existential discomfort		I don't have everything I need	Uncertainty about the future	*"I was like, what now, where do I go now, I wasn't sure I was going to be able to get back up"*
			Financial change	*"it was a massive shock, because I had responsibilities and debit orders"*
			Additional expenses incurred during Covid	"For as long as we are in lockdown, the company is not making money- s*o now you're fighting against Ohh. I need to make money. And I mean, I need to get money. So this job is important. I need to keep it and I will do*

				whatever it takes to keep the job. And in doing whatever it takes to keep the job means that you need to now. Subscribe. Take that R400 and pay for the Wi-Fi. So now your money is further being reduced from your salary." *"they did not compensate in terms of money for data, I did not have Wi-Fi at home so I found myself having to buy data on a regular basis way more than I used to use it, because now I am basically online from, let's say 07:30 until sometimes like until 18:00 or 18:30"*
		wearing all hats at once	Identity management	*"And your capability and literally who you are, remember work becomes part of your identity and you take pride in what you do. And when someone comes and take that part of who you are and they treat you like that, you do feel like trash. You're like yoh"*
			Slash this, slash that	"How do I juggle around this being, you know, mommy/teacher/ I don't know nanny slash, you know many slash cook slash this and that you know what so many slash that we have to wear at that time" *"Personally, it was and the good thing, yes, is got to spend a whole lot of time with your kids."*
Thousands feelings	It was just a lot really	At least you still have a job	Traumatic experience	*"It was tough I must say, things were rough"* *"So there is no app to say I can escape this, so this environment using it to sleep. You're using it to work, interact for leisure. So literally all the activities that one would engage in in different environments, one environment has to fulfil all of those"*
			Invalidation	*"I remember there were words thrown at us like at least you are still getting a salary, you have to, you know you have to work, like other people lost their jobs so be grateful that you still have a job so which is kind of you have you keep your head above the water and keep the cool"*

		Existential hope	Hope	 *"if I were to give it a title at a title it leap of faith and that's how I feel and the COVID* experience trusting in the universal, trusting in in, in, in, in a power that is beyond your control at the time." "*I was quite hopeful that, you know, things will get better eventually."*
		Brought a whole lot of fear	Depressing	*"Depressing because I don't think any of us knew what was happening when Covid came, what is going to come next so everybody was just stressed and depressed"*
			Frustrating	*"And the frustrating part is that the work kept coming"*
			Fear	*"They're going out of their way to give us extra resources to be even more comfortable. And maybe they're even opening up to the idea that it's possible to work from home. So, I also needed to make sure that I'm comfortable enough because I can't break the screen. I can't break the laptop. I should be able to take calls. I should be able to write when I need to use what I had."*
Transition and human adaptability	Figuring out how we gonna do it	She's working, she is taking calls	No longer doing this, no longer doing that	*" the flexibility, literally, there's no spontaneity. And when you think about leisure when not playing, they should be a component of being able to be spontaneous. You know it it's not work where you need structure, and it needs to be this manner at this time. You know, so when you come to doing leisure activities, you want to*

				have the flexibility you want to have the, the spontaneity you want to have the choice. But with COVID, all of that was not there."
			Working my a** off	”*A lot of people overcommitted to working when they were working from home. Stretched themselves way too far when working from home. Because they wanted to prove to the company that they deserve to be here. I already knew they deserve to be here and they want me here. I even got my permanence while we were on COVID. I got permanent while I was on COVID."* ”and sort of work my a** off. To try and increase the employer to show her that you know what. As much as. Not doing what we are would typically do on a normal day, but I'm gonna push that we have, you know.And just so, when she paid salaries she doesn't feel like I'm just paying out but nothing is being done”
		Adapting	Emotional support for transition	*"I would call my mom and just like, cry like yooh"* *"She's working. She's taking calls. I could work from anywhere. There's food. There's people helping me prepare food. There's my sisters forcing me to step out of work mentally. I could be a daughter. I could be a sister. The little arguments, the conversations were different. When you bond over trauma, you all end up depressed. That's a toxic space. My sisters don't relate to the stress that work would give me. not work because we don't know what's going on. Then talking about something else makes you realize life is actually not so bad."*
		Transitioning	Remote support from employer	*"Inability to afford inability to adapt and not having the resources to even begin that conversation or transition towards it"*

				 *“And that was my third attempt to making a working station. And it was at the kitchen under my microwave. And that was before I had a microwave also. So, it was like a proud moment because I really thought that they were just going to let us go. But instead they made means for us to work from home comfortably. And as I realized that I can actually have a bigger screen, they sent it to me. So that was me constructing my workspace after they gave me my extra screen because I need extended screens to do my work.”*
			Resilience	*”that's when I started looking to say that you know what if honestly this thing is not going to end, we're going to learn to live with it.”* *“I don't think I deserve this, but I don’t have a choice. I'm going to stomach it and I'm gonna take it , it wasn't really nice.”*
			Opportunity	”I *came here with nothing, people sponsoring me to be here. And as they say, the rest is history. So, for me to grab that opportunity with both hands and here I am today, you know, maybe even in the UK. Yes, maybe*

				even COVID played a good, it was a good thing. I don't know, but yeah" *"two things happened. So it was that thing where I was given space to work at my level best., the way I prefer, and then also committing to something else. Now I introduced a YouTube channel to my routine."*

Notes:
2 verbatims for the codes that can show a + or negative.

Discussion points
People felt uncertainty as 'traumatic' (constant destabilization)

Thousand feelings – emotional lability, volition, identity

Occupational identities

Access to tech prior and during and we don't have the same exposure – check which quotes fit in where

Write up
After systemic unpreparedness – speak about the transition and the negative which is the quote from Kamo about not having the conversation of transitioning – and the go on to speak about the positive

Speak about resilience after