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# A Matter of Care in the Ghanaian Fashion Industry



An Exploratory Study of Female Entrepreneurs in the Ghanaian Fashion Industry

Master's Thesis

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## Abstract

Studies of creative industries typically point to precarious work conditions with creative workers being characterised as passionate although self-exploitive as they engage in highly individualized work for self-interest. More recent research has found that creative industries are embedded in relationships of care, with creative workers practising care towards others, although it remains underexplored. In Africa, the creative industries and entrepreneurship is booming with narratives of 'Africa on the rise' emerging, and with research on creative industries exploring economic growth and sustainable development. In this thesis we aim to explore the creative industries through an exploratory case study of the Ghanaian fashion industry and its female entrepreneurs to contribute to the scant literature on creative industries in Africa. Simultaneously we seek to critically investigate ethics of care and care theory in creative work in a new, unexplored, context. By drawing on theory of care, female entrepreneurship and creative industries and applying the theoretical framework of the 'Concentric Circles of Care Relations' (Lynch, 2007), we argue that female Ghanaian fashion designers practice other-centred care through their creative work. Indeed, our findings indicate care towards intimate relationships with high levels of dependency; relationships of mutual dependencies between designers and employees; attentive customer relationships; solidarity and care intent towards the broader community including competitors, female workers and local communities including vulnerable groups. Although findings indicate a great care intention towards others, the Ghanaian female designers do have care priorities and limits for care. Our findings are based on eight semi-structured interviews undertaken in Accra, Ghana in May 2022 as part of the collaborative research project, 'Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana' (ACIG).

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## Introduction

Growth and development have long been juxtaposed with capitalism and the economic process. Capitalist societies have been accused of being oriented towards profits and self-interest as well as rationalisation and efficiency, in conflict with ideas of a good life for members of society (Riegraf, 2018). Accordingly, the notion of "care" is not prominent in mainstream economic literature (Davis & McMaster, 2020). The economist Adam Smith argues that the commercialisation of society has decreased the need for relationships of affection, sympathy, and care (Smith, 2000 in Davis & McMaster, 2020). In this perspective of Adam Smith, it can be questioned whether economic development brings about more care-less societies.

Increasingly, development discourses are looking to private sector and entrepreneurship to solve development challenges including the creative industries which has attracted attention for its role in advancing economic development in developing countries (Langevang, 2017). Creative industries have been defined as the work involved in the production of symbolic, artistic and innovative products (Banks, 2006; Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). In alignment with the perception that capitalism is fostering care-less societies, the creative industries have previously been viewed as having a "care-deficit" (Alacovska, 2020) in that creative workers are seen as driven by self-interest, self-expression and self-exploitation (Arvidsson et al., 2010; Umney & Kretsos). However, recent studies are pointing to mutual dependencies as ethical foundations of creative work (Banks, 2006).

In Africa, creative industries are gaining recognition as the notion of the 'cultural' or 'creative' entrepreneur is increasingly recognised to "transform culture and creativity into tradeable products or services related to development" (Langevang, 2017, p. 2). Indeed, female entrepreneurship has become a key policy focus in the Global South as it is perceived to solve social issues related to poverty, employment and welfare (Langevang et al., 2015). In Ghana, more than a third of the population is starting their own enterprises, most of whom are female (Alacovska et al., 2021; Langevang et al., 2015). One of the emerging creative industries in Ghana is the fashion industry where a variety of creative female designers and entrepreneurs are

contributing to 'the rise of African fashion' (Langevang, 2017). Still, the research on female entrepreneurship as well as the creative industries and the fashion industry in Africa remains very limited.

#### Problem Field and Research Question

On the West coast of Africa is the country of Ghana, where creative industries such as music, film and fashion are flourishing (Langevang et al., 2021). With Africa "on the rise", some have questioned the relationship between a growing economy and the well-being of the population (Obeng-Odoom, 2015), in alignment with how creative industries have been accused of producing workers driven by self-interest. While Ghana is considered a growing economy, it has been characterised as an "urban informal economy" (Anyidoho, 2013), and informal work is recognised as taking place under precarious and insecure work conditions with a lack of social protection (Alacovska et al., 2021). In opposition to the notion that commercialisation produces care-less workers, care has been found to be central to creative work (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). As care is fundamentally about ensuring others' survival and well-being by "maintaining, continuing and repairing the world and the relations to others" (Lynch, 2007; Alacovska 2020, p. 733), it can additionally be a tool to improve and bettering peoples' lives living conditions. In this perspective, care in creative industries can have positive impact on Ghanaian lives and livelihoods. Still there is scant research that investigates care in creative industries as well as fashion entrepreneurship in developing countries.

Building on the rising fashion industry and female entrepreneurship in Ghana, our field is defined as the creative fashion arena as we seek to understand the phenomenon of care in creative work and explore how these Ghanaian women are potentially contributing to improved well-being through relations with others. To explore this, we have developed the following research question:

How are female entrepreneurs and fashion designers in Ghana expressing care towards others through their creative work?

#### **Delimitations**

Following the problem field as outlined above, the unit of our analysis is the female fashion entrepreneurs taking part in the Ghanaian fashion industry. During a field trip to Accra in Ghana in May 2022, we conducted 8 semi-structured interviews with Ghanaian female fashion designers, as a part of the larger collaborative and interdisciplinary research project, Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana (ACIG, 2022). Hence, we aim to understand the fashion industry, by exploring and valuing the individual experience of each fashion designer. Ghana is a large country with different cultures, religions, and ethnicities, it should be noted that our research is limited to the capital city of Accra and the fashion designers that work there. Due to limited resources of knowledge and time as well as to remain within the scope of a master thesis project, differences among interviewees have not been accounted for, besides more objective business facts such as number of employees. Our research is further limited to the female designers and entrepreneurs given that the care potential in the creative fashion industry is female as the industry is female-driven; they are further an interesting unit of analysis given that women often are said to have traditional care responsibilities, a responsibility that challenges "their entrepreneurial pursuit" (Langevang et al., 2015). As we consider the Ghanaian women both as fashion designers, by virtue of their creative design freedom in their work, and as entrepreneurs as they are self-employed business owners, we use these notions of "fashion designer" and "entrepreneurs" interchangeably to refer to our interviewees.

We explore these experiences of participating in the Ghanaian fashion industry through the theoretical lens of care theory and the Concentric Circles of Care model developed by Lynch (2007) with other relevant theory applied for the purpose of investigating care relationships within its social and cultural context. In the *Context of Ghana* chapter below, the developing and socio-economic context of Ghana including a contextual understanding of female entrepreneurship will be explored and accounted for, prior to the analysis. This has been considered essential as it contextualises care and points to the practical value of care in this study of Ghanaian female fashion designers.

#### Case Justification

This thesis follows the embedded single case study approach (Yin, 2009) with the single case being the Ghanian fashion industry and the subunits of analysis being the eight female fashion designers interviewed. While the fashion industry is mainly female driven, it further makes sense to focus on female entrepreneurship as female economic activity in the past has tended to "remain relatively invisible and unrecorded", although the importance of women's economic role is growing in recognition (Langevang et al., 2015, p. 450). Further, Ghanaian female entrepreneurial activity is distinctively high – compared to how globally there is a considerable gender gap in entrepreneurial activity, with more men than women starting new businesses (ibid, p. 450).

The creative fashion industry is a specifically interesting focus as there in the last two decades has been a shift from associating creative industries with advanced economies to the creative work taking place in developing countries and its role in economic growth (UNESCO, 2021, p. 9). Further, creative industries have attained policy and academic attention due to the increasing role played by creativity in economic development (Langevang, 2017, p.1). From a theoretical perspective, it is recent that scholars have argued against the autonomy and individualization of creative industries while little research has investigated the creative industries in Ghana that often materialises as informal industries characterised by precarity and uncertainty. These conditions of labour lead to the assumption that there is a lack of care in the informal industries in Ghana. At the same time, the rise of entrepreneurship is linked positively to economic growth, making it an interesting study as we aim to understand whether this phenomenon and process includes a concern for the well-being of others.

#### Outline of Structure

This section provides a short overview of the remaining chapters in this thesis. First, it will review the literature within the theoretical disciplines that we draw upon: the creative industries, the fashion industry and fashion entrepreneurship; female entrepreneurship; followed by care ethics and care in creative industries. Second, the analytical framework will introduce Lynch (2007) and his model of Concentric Circles of Care Relations that we adapt for analysis including broader theory on care. Third, we will introduce the nature and purpose of our study, our scientifical research philosophy, and the methodological approach taken in this thesis including reflections on methodological choices. Fourth, prior to analysis we will present the context of Ghana including the socio-economic context and the informal economy. Fifth, we will analyse our data following the theoretical framework whereafter we, as a sixth point, will summarize and discuss our findings including theoretical and methodological implications and our recommendations for future research. At last, we will conclude this thesis based on our research question and our theoretical and methodological approach, closely followed by recommendations to industry actors which completes this thesis.

# Literature Review

In this chapter, we will seek to position this paper within the broader research environment by introducing and evaluating existing relevant literature. Concretely, it illustrates the surrounding research environment which we have drawn from when identifying our theoretical framework and relevant contextual theory within creative industries, female entrepreneurship, and care. First, it will introduce the literature on the creative industries and the creative industries in Africa. Second, it will review the literature on the fashion industry and fashion entrepreneurship. Third, it will assess the concept of female entrepreneurship and its relation to feminist theory. At last, it will review the theory of care including the concept of moral justice, followed by the recent literature on ethics of care in creative industries, as it seeks to position care and ethics of care as the relevant theoretical framework for analysis.

#### The Creative Industries

There has been a tendency in the literature on creative industries to define creative work as 'individualised labour' (Banks and Milestone 2011; Lee, 2018), taking place in highly competitive 'winner takes it all markets' (Menger, 2006; Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). While the research is often disciplinary, most literature associate creative work with the rise of individualism, work insecurity and uncertainty, and the precariousness of creative work (Beck & Beck 2002; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Morgan et al., 2013; Umney & Kretsos, 2015; Arvidsson et al., 2010). Still, according to Gill & Pratt (2008, p. 15): "one of the most consistent findings on research on work within the creative industries is that it is experienced by most as profoundly satisfying and intensely pleasurable". This co-existing duality of bad labour conditions and claims of 'satisfying work' relates to research that views the intentions of motivations of creative workers as driven by a sense of personal reward. Here, creative work is seen as 'passionate labour' and 'acts of self-love' - co-existing with precarity or bad labour conditions (Arvidsson et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2016; Umney and Kretsos, 2015; Tokumitsu, 2014). This literature celebrates the self-actualization abilities of engaging in the creative industries while also being critical of how precarious labour conditions normalises selfexploitation. Similarly, it has been pointed out that entrepreneurship creates individualism which creates 'self-exploitative' workers (Lee, 2018). As expressed by Banks (2006): "the cultural industries... are seen as particularly culpable in this respect, offering the illusion of freedom, but actually eroding the ethical basis of work through tendencies for individualization and exploitation" (p. 455). While this research is critical of the labour conditions within creative industries, the critical approaches further argue that individualized workers deliberately avoid unions and stable employment in pursuit of work autonomy and self-expression (Endrissat et al., 2017; Scharff 2016).

Further, in the last two decades, creative work has increasingly attracted a lot of attention in the field of sociology (Alacovska, 2019; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2010; McRobbie, 2016a, 2016b; Banks, 2017). The literature tends to be based on studies from the UK (McRobbie, 200; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2010; Umney & Kretsos, 2015), Australia (Thompson et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2013), or other societies that would be identified as Western (Arvidsson et al., 2010). Social scientists have addressed empirical conditions of labour in the creative industries; through studying small entrepreneurs in the fashion industry (McRobbie 1998), employees in the television industry (Christopherson 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2008), or computer programmers (Gill 2002; Ross 2003). According to Arvidsson et al., (2010) the general findings have been that the creative industries have growing divisions between a small elite, commanding high levels of market power, and a growing mass of workers whose skills are generic and in constant oversupply, forcing them to accept low pay and precarious forms of employment.

Studies on developing countries in contrast tend to focus on the linkage between creative industries and economic growth (Barrowclough & Kozul-Wright, 2008; Fahmi et al., 2017). Few studies have deviated by focusing on, for example, socially engaged art in South-East Europe (Alacovska, 2020), the study of the music industry in marginal socio-cultural contexts in two Balkan countries (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019) and the study of care through art-based methods in an artistic workshop in Ghana (Langevang et al., 2015). This paper understands creative work following Alacovska & Bissonnette (2019, p. 135) definition as: "the work involved in the production of symbolic, artistic and innovative products within the rapidly growing creative industries".

In the same way, the literature on creative industries in Africa is often related to economic growth and sustainable development (Oyekunle, 2017; England et al., 2021; Mol et al., 2017). For the last few decades, the literature has largely agreed that Africa is 'on the rise', a narrative that connects Africa and its creative industries to economic growth (Langevang, 2017; Obeng-Odoom, 2015; Mol et al., 2017; Taylor, 2014; Mahajan, 2011). It has further been linked to the

narrative of a young population booming with creativity and entrepreneurship (Langevang, 2017; Mahajan, 2011; Alacovska et al., 2021). However, some scholars have questioned this new narrative (De Beukelaer, 2017; Taylor, 2014), for example, by arguing neglect of ethical questions on equality and sustainable job creation (Obeng-Odoom, 2015). De Beukelaer (2017) further criticises how the African context of the cultural and creative industry is often overlooked from Western literature – and when not, how the creative production in Africa is expected to fit Western notions of creative industries. Further, given new so-called challenges to growth, the recent Covid-19 pandemic and the war on Ukraine (UNESCO, 2021; UNDP 2022d), empirical attention is needed with respect for the new context of creative work in Africa. Hence this paper will contribute to the Western literature and the lack of empirical attention on creative work in the continent of Africa.

## Fashion Industry and Fashion Entrepreneurship

As a part of the creative industries, the literature on the fashion industry also tends to focus on conditions of precarity associated with fashion work. Perhaps most known are Arvidsson et al., (2010)'s study of labour conditions among fashion workers in Milan and Angela McRobbie's studies of the British fashion industry and her studies in Berlin and Milan (1998, 2002, 2016). McRobbie has focused on both the 'individualised' female workforce (2002) and the working conditions experienced by female fashion designers: "Working in an independent capacity [fashion designers] experienced high levels of stress, exhaustion and were forced into patterns of self-exploitation..." (1998, p. 86). However, most research on the fashion industry focuses on the experiences of individuals who work for firms rather than fashion entrepreneurs or designers (Brydges & Hracs, 2019). Still, whether the focus is on the worker or the designer, the literature tends to focus on the female worker or entrepreneur since the fashion industry is more often than not female-led and female-driven (Brydges & Hracs, 2019; McRobbie, 2002). The same researchers argue that it is essential to consider the gendered dynamics or the skills and attributes of the individual female entrepreneurs (ibid). According to Brydges & Hracs's study of the Canadian fashion industry (2019), entrepreneurial motivations, pathways and experiences are shaped by individual characteristics such as class and gender. Overall, the research on fashion

entrepreneurs tends to take into consideration 'Westernised' contexts and demographics when it, for example, explores the motivations behind female fashion entrepreneurs in the US (Lang & Liu, 2017).

Closely related to the 'Westernised' context of the fashion industry is the general notion of a 'global fashion industry' (Karra, 2021; Masson et al., 2007), which indicates common global conditions for competition. However, mature fashion markets have, at least previously, been mainly Western countries (Keller et al., 2014, p. 7) and similarly, global fashion studies have focused on UK clothing retailers (Masson et al., 2007) while stories of the pathways of the most famous fashion designers are stories of French designers (Karra, 2021). However, there are some empirical studies focusing on emerging fashion industries, such as Beta's (2021) ethnographic fieldwork exploring the emerging Muslim and female fashion industry in Indonesia. Still, as Brydges & Hracs (2019) also brings attention to, empirical studies on the experiences and motivations of female fashion entrepreneurs are limited while the global industry keeps evolving.

As reviewed above, the creative industries in Africa are said to be 'on the rise', which suggests a greater need for empirical research on the fashion industry and, perhaps particularly, in these "emergent" economies. As is the case with creative work in general, the African fashion industry is often linked to economic growth with recent literature regarding African fashion as attractive in international markets and hence a potential driver for development (Moreno-Gavara & Jiménez-Zarco, 2019). Still, the research on African fashion entrepreneurs remains very limited (Moreno-Gavara & Jiménez-Zarco, 2019, Ch. 7; Langevang, 2017; England et al., 2021; Pather, 2015; Jennings, 2011). Fashion entrepreneurs as other creative entrepreneurs often operate in immature industries with highly challenging business environments, although "African fashion design has caught the attention of international fashion magazines (...) hailing Africa as a new global locus for creativity" (Langevang, 2017, p. 1).

Hence this paper seeks to not only contribute to the scant literature on African fashion entrepreneurs but also add new perspectives by researching the fashion industry and entrepreneurs in Ghana – an industry which may vary greatly from the context of the global or Western fashion industries as reviewed here. In any case, there is a clear need for more empirical attention to emerging fashion markets in Africa, as "geography and location shape the working lives of creative workers" (Brydges & Hracs, 2019, p. 512).

## Female Entrepreneurship

As this thesis is focused on female fashion designers in Ghana, this section will focus on women entrepreneurship in developing countries and the challenges that they encounter. Undoubtably, the world of entrepreneurship has been traditionally associated to "men's world", while literature on women entrepreneurs has always been limited and only recent studies have started to progressively advance (Brush, 2008; Fraser, 2016). Hanson (2009, in Langevang, Gough, Yankson, Owusu & Osei, 2015) defines entrepreneurship as a "gendered geographic process" which include anyone who "owns a business, assumes the risks associated with ownership, deals with the uncertainties of coordinating resources, and is in charge of day-to-day management of the business" (p. 452). This definition expands the concept of entrepreneurship by opening the definition to incorporate women instead of focusing only on the traditional gendered association of entrepreneurship to men. Drawing upon feminist theories, women have been recognized to take advantage of their assigned roles of reproductive labour (such as cooking and cleaning) in both economic and social way, starting to place their role in the capitalistic business environment (Federici, 2011; Fraser, 2016). Evidence has highlighted the necessity for women to create a link between work, family and the community (Cesaroni et al, 2017) in order to be able to run their businesses. Much research has shown that women encounter several difficulties and obstacles in placing their spot within the business field with the situation being accentuated in the Global South (Grant, 2013; Banks, 2017). For this reason, women need to reinvent themselves in order to survive unemployment and poverty (Minniti & Naudè, 2010; Langevang, 2017).

It is well known that in developing countries, insufficient governmental and labour rules lead women to an overload of responsibilities that entails the maintenance and support of their families and communities (Alacovska et al., 2021), although they are inundated by financial incumbencies and poor conditions (Botha, 2006; Dolan, 2012). However, scholars claim a lack of recognizing and accounting for the additional unpaid care labour that most women carry out in a daily routine (Tronto, 1993). Moreover, critics argue that precarious work has real consequences also on women's affective relationships and spheres besides their contractual and financial uncertainty (Ivancheva, Lynch & Keating, 2019; Alacovska et al, 2021). Nevertheless, official surveys on global entrepreneurship illustrate that African countries compete to have the highest rates of female entrepreneurship businesses (Minniti and Naude, 2010; Langevang et al., 2015) with Ghana being one of the areas where it takes less than three and a half years to grow a new business (Langevang, 2017). On the other hand, a case study of women entrepreneurs across Africa showed that they have passion to create opportunities and overcome legislative, institutional, and cultural obstacles to make their way in the world of business (World Bank, 2008). Accordingly, researchers affirm how African female Entrepreneuring becomes a symbol of potential self-actualization and self-expression actualization (Tronto, 1993; Langevang, 2017; Alacovska, 2020). It has further been argued that family values among Ghanian women can serve as an explanation for the development of entrepreneurial competencies among women in Ghana (Quagrainie, 2018). The work contribution of Ghanaian women has also been explored in the literature as an equal duty between women and men (Darkwah, 2007). Indeed, "women are considered capable entrepreneurs and their ability to contribute financially to the household economy through their businesses is highly valued" (Langevang et al., 2015, p. 468).

Closely related to above is the research that draws upon care-precarity as it investigates low-paid women with care responsibility, some findings propose mutual care practices among women workers in emergency occasions, where covering and extending shifts serves to help each other (Raw & McKie, 2020). This kind of research serves us as a proof of urgency for delving further into relationships of care among these precarious workers (Fraser, 2016), because they stand for more than pre-set lust of tasks and showing that caring for the other is a way to care for oneself (Lynch, 2007; Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). Although scholars have gathered multiple

reasons that lead women to start their own company in developing countries (Langevang et al, 2012; Langevang, 2017; Alacovska, 2021) more research need to be developed in order to discover the values and motivations of these entrepreneurs when pursuing their businesses.

Despite all of this, women's businesses have largely been ignored in the literature on entrepreneurship (Langevang & Gough, 2012), although lately female entrepreneurs have been recognized as catalysts for development and growth (Langevang et al., 2015). By drawing on the understanding of traditional care roles of women and the emergence of female entrepreneurship in Ghana, we will seek to contribute to this literature by investigating female work in their role as entrepreneurs.

#### Care Ethics

This section will first account for the main literature on ethics of care, including reviewing the literature on the concept of care. Then, it will investigate how the concept of care and ethics of care have been presented in the creative industries literature. As the review aims to distinguish between different approaches to 'care' in creative industries, it will seek to position the ethics of care approach as the theoretical framework for this thesis.

Scholars agree on the fact that "care" has no unique definition (Thomas, 1993; Robinson, 1997; Philips, 2007), however, it is often associated with "affection" and "compassion". The notion of care first emerged in studies of interpersonal connectedness and studies of relational – and gendered – responsibilities in private spheres (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019, p. 138). Similarly, many scholars consider care to be a core concept and activity in the daily life of human beings (Tronto, 1993; Archer, 2000; Thompson, 2015). Studies further agree that the ethics of care approach relies on determining values such as kindness, affection, and compassion (Archer 2000; Hall and Smith 2015; Thompson, 2015; Alacovska and Bissonette, 2019) and further that care should be adapted to work "through hands-on caregiving and human interdependencies actions" (Held 2006; Noddings 2010; Tronto 1993). Here, ethics of care is

also addressed in its correlation with gender and women's values including their role as caregivers and entrepreneurs. In fact, several studies on ethics of care have been carried out by feminist researchers or correlated to feminist theory (Thompson, 2015; Robinson, 1997 or 2015; Philips, 2007; Johansson & Edwards, 2021). Accordingly, studies claim that the act of caregiving ('care givenness') often has been identified with the morality of women and a woman's role in life and work, associating the values of caring – attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion – to women's lives. For this reason, these values of 'caring' – associated with women – have been excluded from societal decisions or economic matters (Tronto, 1993; Thompson 2015). Nevertheless, the previous section on woman entrepreneurship has already set the table for the tight connection existing between women and feminist theory with the concept of care (Graham, 1991; Thomas, 1993; Tronto, 1993; Lynch, 2007), emphasizing the gendered factor that appears to be predominant when talking about care roles (Thomas, 1993).

Whilst the care concept has been studied and analysed mostly in sociological and policy studies (Thomas, 1993; Philips, 2007), emotional and affective practices associated to care have recently been applied in commercial fields. Several researchers have been highlighting how economic exchanges rely on mutual trustworthiness, which involves deeper connections (Sayer, 2000; Bolton, 2012). Sayer (2000) specifically argues that interpersonal relationships in economic exchanges creates an "ethical surplus" that not only "escapes" market rationalization but also "lubricates" economic relationships, highlighting the benefits of including care-relations in commercial studies. Concretely, the moral economy concept refers to the interconnectedness of market economies and interpersonal relationships as it "recognises the possibility of workers carving out non-market spaces of interaction wherein more communitarian, non-instrumental and solidarity motives underpin work" (Banks, 2017; Umney 2017). Hence the ethics of care concept is known to adapt a moral economy framework when investigating collaborative or compassionate modes of work and in general, the concept of ethics of care is often associated with moral implications and put at the centre of moral justice and rights (Held, 2006). However, rather than implementing idealistic notions of creative justice and analysing at a macro idealistic level, the ethics of care approach gives attention to concrete situations with embedded emotional and practical elements of care (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019).

Building on the understanding of care as suggesting a degree of attentiveness and responsibility towards others implies for some scholars that care actions are "other-centered" (Tronto, 1993; Lynch 2007, Thompson, 2020). In relation to this, additional research shows how care fundamentally builds on the presence of relationships and interactions between individuals (Philips, 2007; Robinson, 1997), emphasizing that care always involves more than one person. This stands in contrast to the practice of self-care, which refers to self-preservation and selfrealization on the personal and professional level of the individual (England, 2005; Lynch, 2007; Lynch, 2010; Alacovska, 2020). Some theories argue that care should involve certain behavioural virtues, such as empathy and understanding (Philips, 2007; Slote, 2007), which requires a sense of sympathetic connection with other individuals. Similarly, Engster (2005) identifies three care virtues as he positions care acts to be carried out in an "attentive, responsive and respectful manner" (p. 55). This literature aligns with other researchers' claim that relationships of care promote respect for people's well-being and encourage help and care in all life spheres, including in the world of business (Sayer, 2000; Ashcraft, 2018; Alacovska, 2020). However, researchers further argue that care for others is not necessarily in contrast with selfcare and self-interests, since both altruistic and social career objectives mean caring for others, which leads to helping ourselves (Engster, 2005; Wuthnow, 1991). In alignment with this, it has been argued that caring through work can have beneficial and positive effects on the social and ecological environments (McRobbie 2016) In addition, Glenn (2007) explores caring labour within the larger political economy as he argues that is has been "mythologized as love, rather than labour... characterising care work in these ways serves the interest of capital... by denying that caring serves to maintain the labour force... corporations evade responsibility for paying the costs of sustaining workers and their families" (p. 48), hence emphasising how care should be understood as fundamental to all labour, beyond the intimate family work of women.

#### Care in the Creative Industry

The literature within the creative industries that focuses on 'the nature of creative work' tends to suggest opposing arguments that recently have been related to questions of to what extent and in what kind of way 'care' is practised in creative work. More specifically, in the review above, creative work has been defined as highly individualized labour (Banks and Milestone 2011; Lee, 2018), that produces passionate and self-expressive yet self-exploiting entrepreneurs and creative workers (Umney and Kretsos, 2015; McRobbie 1998; Lee, 2018). Overall, according to Alacovska (2020, p. 730), "creative work has prevalently been interpreted as having a 'care deficit' whereby creative workers are seen as displaying a disregard for moral considerations and relational commitments".

In continuation of above review of the moral economy concept, and in contrast to this view of creative workers as individualised and self-interested agents, is the literature that connects moral or ethical considerations to creative labour markets (Banks, 2017; Heshmondhalgh, 2017; Umney, 2017). According to McRobbie (1999) creative workers increasingly adopt commitment to wider community, ecological and social issues despite the driving force of neoliberal individualization. When the moral economy concept is applied to creative work, Alacovska & Bissonnette (2019, p. 137) argue that scholars particularly rely on "an abstract ethics of justice concept of what constitutes moral conduct and good life". The concept is perhaps especially interesting in the creative industries given how it has been connected to precarity, exploitation and underpayment and as a means to avoid harm (Banks, 2017). However, for the purpose of empirical studies, an ethics of care approach has been argued to be a way to concretise the abstractness of the concepts of moral economy and creative justice while recognising human interdependencies (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). Hence, building on this recent scholarship on the moral economies of work in the creative industries, Alacovska & Bissonnette (2019) applied an ethics of care approach in the study of the music industry in Canada which "affirms mutual dependencies with others and concerns for a common good as the ethical foundation of work" (p. 136). Building on the feminist theory related to care, the ethics of care approach in creative industries perceives caring as the fundamental element of all work in which actors "reach out to something other than the self" (Tronto, 1993, p. 104, Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019).

With almost no prior study adapting this ethics of care approach to creative industries in Africa, this paper will follow the understanding of ethics of care as understood by Alacovska & Bissonette (2019), as we are building on theoretical concepts related to feminist theory and moral work. It will further consider care as 'other-centred' following broader care theory although specifically through the definition applied by Lynch (2007). This, as our thesis seeks to apply the model of 'the Concentric Circles of Care Relations' (ibid) to analyse the care relationships among female fashion designers in Ghana. By interviewing female Ghanian fashion designers and probing a logic of care we hence aim to understand the relational infrastructures underpinning their female entrepreneurial and creative work. Here it will further add new perspectives to the discussion on whether creative workers are in fact driven by self-interest when working in a socio-cultural context that varies greatly from most studies undertaken on the fashion industry, as reviewed above. In continuation of this, the next section will review in greater detail our applied understanding of care and the theoretical framework applied for analysis.

## Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter, we will outline the theoretical framework applied for the purpose of our analysis. First, we will clarify the concept of care to make it explicit how we are adapting and applying the concept. Second, we will introduce the main theoretical framework for our analysis, inspired and based on the Concentric Circles of Care Relations model by Lynch (2007), with additional concepts from Alacovska & Bissonnette's (2019) adapted model. Third, given the limitations of the model, we will then introduce other care theories and concepts to be able to better evaluate how care is expressed in our study.

## Conceptualising Care

In this section we will introduce the broad concept of care and theory of care from which we draw our applicable version of care for the scope of our research analysis. According to Thomas (1993), care "can be a broad and inclusive category or a narrowly exclusive one" (p. 654). In fact, as already mentioned in our literature review, ethics of care is a theory that presents different nuances (and interpretations) in its definition and usage, being a notion that has been explored and adapted in a diversified set of contexts. Despite this, ethics of care originally derives from moral theory that encompasses the central elements of "attending to and meeting the needs of the particular others for whom we take responsibility" (Held, 2006, p.10). Ethics of care, therefore, presents at its core the key aspect of relationality that exists between people, who are interdependent to one another, given the "responsibility to respond to the needs of the dependent." (Held, 2006, p.10) Precisely, ethics of care - or care ethics - originates from a moral development study done by Carol Gilligan (1993) who argued the different approaches to morality between women and men, resulting in women's morality to be strictly connected to their sense of responsibility and attachment towards others (Robinson, 1997, p.120). Moral feminist theory of care, thus, emphasizes relational elements of women's morality that involve "the values of caring -attentiveness, responsibility, nurturance, compassion, meeting others' needs traditionally associated with women" (Tronto, 1993, p.3). Thus, based on ethics of care, care plays a fundamental role in the interactions of individuals (Philips, 2007, p. 1) and entails the existence of "particular relations among concrete individuals" (Robinson, 1990, p,120).

Although care is often considered from a moral perspective as a principle to follow or a value to be transmitted, care can be looked at in a more concrete way when taking the shape of practical and thoughtful actions (Held, 2006). Specifically, caring about someone or something can be expressed in several ways. We also understand care as a concept that is "practical, rather than [only] a theoretical, principled morality" (Robinson, 1999, 120). Similarly, Alacovska (2020) agrees with this affirmation by suggesting that care is a "hand-on practice of acting 'other-wise'" (p.733) According to Engster (2005), care practices can include more physical and direct actions that lead to helping others in meeting and satisfying their basic needs or social capabilities, for example, through feeding and clothing others or by teaching norms and languages.

Based the above, we consider and apply care in its broader definition in our research, with a reference of its origin in ethics of care. Therefore, we look at care as an other-centred and relational concept that contains "a set of activities aimed at maintaining, continuing and repairing the world and the relations to others", which entails affective relationships between individuals (Alacovska, 2021). Finally, care can be part of anything from personal to professional relationships as "it is often based on a relationship, not only within a family context but with others outside the family or social care setting" (Philips, 2007, p.1). In the next paragraph we will elaborate on the different types of care relationships that Lynch (2007) presents with the model "Concentric Circles of Care Relations" which is also adapted as the relational framework for our analysis.

## Introducing Concentric Circles of Care Relations

In this section we will unfold the Concentric Circles of Care Relations, the three-fold taxonomy that Lynch (2007) created that represents "the three major life-worlds or circles of 'othercentred' relational care work" (p. 555). The model is divided between primary care relations (love labour), secondary care relations (general care work) and tertiary care relations (solidarity work), Lynch (2007) and pictures care as a "multifaceted set of endeavours [that] involves all of the senses, but it also engages the mind and body in a complex range of interlocking practices and thought processes" (p. 557). In other words, practicing care requires physical acts, such as cleaning, hugging, or cooking, as much as emotional and mental engagement. Lynch (2007) furtherly argues that when people make decisions, they are not solely affected by self-thought and interest, but also by the consequences that those decisions may entail for others, especially the ones loved and cared for. Humankind unconsciously takes into consideration the bond and affectivity towards 'others' when acting in their ordinary lives (Ibid).

In a similar way, Alacovska & Bissonnette (2019) adapted the model by Lynch (2019) for their study, here understanding care as affectionate driven "labour" or responsible actions towards other people with no monetary reward (p. 136). In this regard, both authors emphasise othercentred work, "in that it is directed in the first instance by the good of the other rather than the good of the self" (Lynch, 2007, p.559). Where Lynch (2007) on one hand, considers care as a part of a work-related contexts – even with care acts such as nursing - Alacovska and Bissonnette (2019) focuses more on the relational aspects of care in the context of creative work, evaluating "collaborative and compassionate modes of work within alternative workspaces (p.137). In this regard, the authors perceive creative workers as practising hands-on actions of compassion, empathy and kindness towards close people while committing to mutuality and solidarity in the society (ibid).

Therefore, this research also follows Alacovska & Bissonnette (2019)'s study of creative work that builds on relational, other-centred work, particularly as our investigation is also focusing on the creative workers, in the context of the fashion industry in Ghana. While basing our analysis on the Concentric Circle Model of Lynch (2007), we are acknowledging how our respondents have different relational affinities beyond those mentioned in the model of Lynch (2007), which is based on western research. Therefore, by also drawing on Alacovska and Bissonnette's (2019) readapted model, arguments and concepts in our adapted model, we are consequently redefining the way in which Lynch (2007), Alacovska and Bissonette (2019) categorize some groups of care relations through the relationships identified in the interviews with our respondents. These relations will include relationships with families (primary circle), employees and customers (secondary circle), industry colleagues and community relations (tertiary circle), which will be analysed within the three main divisions of care relations as outlined below.

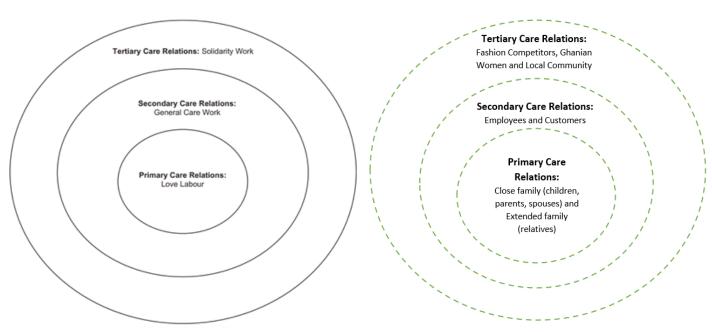


Figure 1 - Concentric Circles of Care Relations (Lynch, 2007) Figure 2: Adapted Concentric Circles of Care Relations (Source: own illustration inspired by Lynch, 2007) 1.0

Furthermore, Lynch (2007) introduces the concept of *dependency and interdependency* among relationships, which regards the extent by which one individual is in 'need' and depends on the other for his survival or well-being. Lynch (2007) claims that in all the three circles, people are expected to experience higher or lower stages of dependency and interdependency. However, the author emphasizes that the relationships belonging to the first circle, which occur between close family members, are subjected to a higher degree of dependency compared to the secondary care relations that are characterized by a lower order one, instead.

#### **Primary Care Relations**

In this paragraph, we will elaborate on the types of relationships encompassed in the primary circle and the concepts that usually emerge around them. The types of care relationships that we encounter in the first circle represent he more intimate types of relationships between individuals, that relies on "strong attachment, interdependence, depth of engagement and intensity" (Lynch, 2007, p. 555). Following this concept, one of the most representative and most intuitive relationships that Lynch (2007) entails in the primary care circle is the parent-child relationship, especially referring to the "hard work" (p.554) care reserved to young children and older parents. Amos (2013) acknowledges the main duties of parenting as "carrying out the responsibilities of raising and relating to children" (p.66), as similarly contemplated by Alacovska and Bissonnette (2019) in their study of intimate childcare relationships. However, they include other examples that belong to the close family, such as care for partners (that suffers for from long-term illness) and elderly parents or relatives. Following their path, the relationships that we considered to belong in the first circle of care relations are the close familiar relationships, such as relationships with children, with spouses, with parents, or any familiar but non-biological relationships that identifies with 'family', as long as it would involve the same level of intense interdependence and deep attachment (Lynch, 2007). In fact, one can be a parent both to the biological or non-biological children" (Amos, 2013, p.66). Additionally, in our framework we include the relationships of our respondents with the extended family, which involves relatives and kinships, given in the Ghanian context the extended family is considered closed relationships, differently from the usual western society (Amos, 2013; Lynch, 2007).

In the first circle, Lynch (2007) presents multiple features that characterize care work, useful not only to analyse our findings on the familiar relationships with the respondents, but also relations belonging to the secondary and tertiary circle. In the primary concentric circle Lynch (2007) concentrates on love labour, which is the care work that contributes to the "realization of love" (p.550) and creates close and intimate bonding connections between the individuals. In fact, love labour is recognized as a fundamental work for the "maintaining and nurturing relationships" (O'Brien, 2005, p. 226). According to Lynch (2007), love labour entails mutuality, trust, commitment, and responsibility. Firstly, the author describes the concept of *mutuality* as "a sense

of mutual dependence no matter how poor the relationship may be" (p.559). This means that both parts of the care relationship are expected to work and make efforts to "maintain and nurture" the relationship, by giving and receiving care, despite the level of care (given and received) does not necessarily match. Therefore, mutuality suggests "a relationship of power and control exercised through the medium of care" (Lynch, 2007, p.559). Secondly, *trust* which is central in a care relationship denotes a sensitive element in a care relationship – the lack of it would damage the balance of the care relationship. The quantity of trust conveys a sense of belongingness that makes the individual feel more secure and supported. Thirdly, Lynch elaborates on *commitment*, that incorporates a time concern because it refers to the capacity to care in a long-run and in a continuous manner. Commitment is connected to the "moral and legal imperative to care" (p.558) - which are care obligations that enforce a specific carer to enact care duties towards another individual – that implies a much stronger commitment detained by, for example, parents towards toward their children. Lastly, *responsibility* which Lynch (2007) argues to burden more on women in both familiar and work environment, and it is understood as "the moral imperative to undertake care work" (p. 564).

Lynch (2007) also draws on Engster's (2005) concept of attentiveness and responsiveness, by explaining that the primary care relations rely on more than a set of simple care tasks, but they are embedded in "very real activities of 'looking out for' and 'looking after' the other, [including the management of the tensions and conflict]" (p.559). Conversely, in our analysis the argument of attentiveness and responsiveness will be applied also in other relations outside of the primary circle, as we adapt the framework and, in contrast to Lynch (2007), pay equal attention to secondary- and tertiary care relations.

#### **Secondary Care Relations**

Following Lynch (2007), the secondary care relationships regard the relations that people build in a less intimate or familiar context, but that can still include close and affectionate bonding while involving "care responsibilities and attachments" (p.561). The author (2007) argues for "lower order engagements in terms of time, responsibility, commitment and emotional engagement" (p.556), meaning that here people are not expected to meet "long-term dependency needs" (p.561) such as in the primary circle, because the feeling or moral obligations involved are not considered as intense or deep. One of the main arguments that Lynch (2007) proposes is that individuals engaging in the second circles have a "degree of choice" (p.561) in terms of to what extent they meet the needs of the dependent person. Moreover, these relationships are "context specific" and the length of the relationship depends on the context in which the relationship exists. For example, a relationship with colleagues will end when the employment contract expires. Lynch (2007) contemplates as part of the second concentric circle, relatives, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. While Alacovska and Bissonnette (2019) here refer to the same groups of people, we extended our perception of secondary care relations categories to employees and customers, which belong to the specific context of employment of our fashion designers.

Moreover, Lynch (2007) considers relationships with relatives outside of the immediate family belonging to secondary care circle, "as they do not carry the same dependency demands in Western cultures" (p.561). In contrast from Lynch (2007), we include relatives in the primary care circle to adapt the model to our context. Lastly, Lynch (2007) affirms that secondary care relations, sometimes, can mutate into the primary ones if the circumstances related to the level of intensity and commitment towards the individuals – thus of interdependency – increases. Simultaneously, secondary care work can engage in relations of solidarity in community and associational relations (ibid). Similarly, our framework involves a high flexibility and interchangeability among care relations, as suggested by the dashed borders of the circles (see Figure 2).

#### **Tertiary Care Relations**

The care relations belonging to the tertiary concentric circle contemplate the counterparts who receive care actions from an unknown individual or a group of unknown individuals. In this case the care practices do not have to involve any "face to face relationship" nor "intimacy or personal engagement with the other" (Lynch, 2007, p.562). Besides, this circle is primarily associated with solidarity work, which entails "a wide range of other-centred public care work [that] can be both national and international in its scope" (Lynch, 2007, p.562). Here, Lynch (2007) argues for two dimensions in which care is present in a solidarity act, which are statutory obligation and voluntary or community work. The first one regards state actions that provide good conditions for the citizens through payment of taxes, while voluntary and community work still target a wide group of people that gain benefit but with any type of payment involved. (Lynch, 2007). In our research, voluntary and community work has more value and interest and reflect the findings of the research. In this regard, also Alacovska and Bissonnette (2019) draw on Lynch (2007) arguments of voluntary and community work. Here, the care work often includes individual or collective acts of solidarity to the local community, by contributing to the well-being of other fellow inhabitants or community members, being attentive to their needs and sustaining them through values and practice. Our framework in the third circle focuses on analysing the care relationships of fashion designers with communities, such as the community of fashion designers, namely the Fashion competitors, the Ghanaian women and the local community.

Following the above sections that have reviewed the three circles in the model "Concentric Circles of Care" including the model's limitations and how we have categorized our relationships fitting his model, it can be claimed that the Lynch (2007) model is particularly limited in secondary and tertiary relationships. Concretely, the theory is not applicable for analysis in terms of determining how care here is practically expressed – making it difficult to identify and analyse relationships between, for example, employees and employers or to define care activities towards communities. For this reason, we have incorporated a more general care theory that includes more applicable practical concepts for determining the extent to which the statements of our respondents are expressing care – in other words to determine how and when

care is expressed and shown by our respondents. This next section then adds to the applied care concepts from Lynch (2007) and Alacovska and Bissonnette (2019) as described above.

## **Enriching Care Theory**

This paragraph will explore further care theoretical concepts and care practices helpful to analyse our findings in a more detailed and concrete manner. As additional care theory, we have particularly drawn upon Engster's (2005) theory, which specifically argues for a re-elaboration of care and its practices. First, Engster recognises that individuals manifest their needs in different ways, based on their specific circumstances and taste. In his definition of caring, Engster (2005) understands the concept in a basic yet essential way. Therefore, for Engster caring means "helping individuals to meet their basic needs and to develop and sustain those basic or innate capabilities necessary for survival and basic functioning in society (p.52). Afterwards, Engster (2005) outlines the three main aims that the act of caring pursues, which they build one over another in a priority scale. The three aims concern the satisfaction of basic biological needs for the survival of the individuals, the development and sustenance of the capabilities useful for a basic functioning in the society, and lastly the relief of suffering and pain of people in order for them to live as well as possible and reach a good life (Engster, 2005).

Furthermore, Engster (2005) argues for three virtues of caring, that represent the way in which care practices are enacted and can achieve those goals: attentiveness, responsiveness and respect. As above-mentioned in the First Care Circle paragraph, Lynch (2007) also elaborates on attentiveness and responsiveness, after building upon Engster's (2005) knowledge. Attentiveness, as the first virtue of caring, contemplates the sensitive ability to understand and notice when another person is in need and, consequently, give support in an appropriate manner (Engster, 2005). This virtue often requires *empathy and compassion* (ibid), which are values that Alacovska (2020) closely connects with care. Particularly, Alacovska (2020) emphasises that compassion is a type of "moral capacity and judgement" (p.732), an incentive to act with care towards others aiming to their well-being. According to Engster, attentiveness is essential because the lack of it would limit the actions of care. Secondly, *responsiveness* is the virtue of

communicating and engaging with the people in need to assure that they receive care, and their necessities are satisfied in the proper way. It is important to monitor the actions of care, because to be fully implemented they might need additional care efforts. The third and last virtue is the virtue of *respect*, which implies that all individuals must be treated with the same attentiveness and responsiveness, regardless of if their needs are possible to be met or not.

Besides the three stated virtues, Engster(2005) argues for another candidate as virtue of caring, which is *emotional attachment*. This notion is strictly connected to the feeling of affection, and it assumes that generally individuals who carry affection towards the other are most likely more engaged in acting with utter care. However, the reason why emotional attachment is not considered as an 'official' virtue of care is because there are many situations of other centred care which do not require the caregiver to feel emotionally attached to the care receiver, for example care labours such as doctors and nurses. Additionally, Engster (2005) argues for a theory of moral obligations to care, through which the author explains the reasons why people should care. The duty to care is due to people's position to help other individuals, family and friends in the first place because of their proximity and the emotional attachment. This is further divided into primary and secondary care duties, not to be confused with the concept of Lynch (2007), although also here, primary refers to obligations of self-care and intimate relations as "we are often best suited to take care of them", with secondary duties being based on special relationships and proximity. Nonetheless, the author claims that vulnerability plays a key role in the care relationships between people, arguing that "fellow citizens and strangers are likewise vulnerable to our actions, and we are often in a position to help them" (p.58). The moral obligation to care reinforces the concept of responsibility that Lynch (2007) briefly explains, by arguing that the moral care duty leads people to be responsible for the well-being of human beings, either whether they engage in an intimate relationship or not.

As mentioned above, Engster (2005) believes that we have primary care duties not only towards intimate others but towards ourselves – in other words, a duty to practice self-care. Also Alacovska (2020) perceives self-care as the opposite to self-indulgence and rather as "self-

preservation" (p.739). Engster (2005) further explores the relationship between self-interest and acting otherwise by stating that "ensuring good care for individuals in our immediate social environment will increase the likelihood that we will be surrounded by more capable, sociable... individuals. This in turn will enable us to live fuller and safer lives and increase the probability that we will receive good care when we need it" (p. 61). The concept of self-care as a necessary and positive care relationship with oneself will be applied for analysis below, by exploring self-care as an enabler for the practice of other-oriented care.

Overall, the above explained care concepts will recur throughout the analysis of defined relationships, with no distinction between the circles they belong to. In fact, the first section regarding the concept of care has provided a theoretical background useful to understand the origins of care theory, while providing a definition of care. Moreover, Lynch's (2007) Concentric Care Relations model has been the basis on which we structured our analytical framework, through which we unfolded the three categories of relational care. Furthermore, studies on care from Alacovska & Bissonnette (2019) and Engster (2005) have been fundamental to enrich and improve the analysis of our findings through providing more insights and perspectives.

# Purpose and Nature of Study

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how Ghanaian female entrepreneurs and fashion designers express care towards others through their creative work. By researching Ghanaian female fashion designers, specifically, we wanted to examine how the female fashion designers through their creative businesses are expressing care for their families, employees and communities. In other words, we aim to investigate the potential of creative female entrepreneurs in Ghana and the relationship between them and their surrounding environments. We are doing so by primarily applying care- and ethics of care theory; contextualised further through theoretical understandings on creative industries, female entrepreneurs and the embeddedness of creative work in Ghana including socio-economic conditions.

The nature of our study can be defined as exploratory as we approached our thesis with curiosity and interest in gaining insights into the topic of female entrepreneurship and creative work in Ghana – and more specific, how care is expressed in this context (Saunders et al., 2021). This interest in gaining more knowledge about these topics was also led by the fact that the literature on creative workers in Ghana is scant, as accounted for in the literature review. Ultimately leading us to designing our research with many open questions, exploring the experiences of female entrepreneurs and fashion designers in Ghana, which characterises the exploratory study (ibid, p. 186). One of the advantages of the exploratory study is its flexibility; while we did have ethics of care theory in mind from the beginning, we went forward and back between data and theory, following our iterative research approach as described below. Our study further includes explanatory and descriptive elements, as we are exploring and explaining how relationships of care are expressed as well as describing the context of the Ghanaian fashion industry.

Altogether, this thesis aims to fill a theoretical and empirical gap in existing knowledge on the emergence of creative industries and entrepreneurship in Africa and add to the scant research on the fashion industry in Africa, Ghana. In addition, the study aims to add to the literature on ethics of care by exploring relationship dynamics in a new Ghanaian context and is intended to contribute to larger debates about the role of fashion entrepreneurship in a Ghanaian context. Hence, although this thesis has an academic purpose, the findings will in the end be presented as recommendations for the industry and for public policy makers.

# Philosophy of Science

Prior to our data collection, little attention was given to the concepts of ontology and epistemology, as is often the case in research (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 36). However, according to Van de Ven (2007, p. 36), we often inherit a philosophy of science through the underlying practices of our teachers and studies. This is also the case for this thesis as our own backgrounds have influenced our research even during initial collection of data. Our interview guide and

questions illustrate that we valued both subjective and objective elements, for example, while we were mostly focused on the statements; the thoughts and experiences of the female fashion designers, we also inquired into objective conditions such as business structures.

After collecting our data, we identified our underlying philosophy of science as pragmatism. According to Egholm (2014, p. 168), pragmatism aims to explore how specific individuals act in tangible situations. Here it can be argued that our thesis aims to explore how individual Ghanaian fashion designers act in their individual, yet related, situations and contexts. Just as "pragmatism considers human intentions to be processual, relational and situational – and therefore both individual and social at the same time" (Egholm, 2014, p. 170), our study explores and highlights individual designers' experiences, yet, to a certain degree we gather these individual experiences to understand and illustrate the situations and social contexts in which the individual experiences are embedded. In this way, our findings point attention to why "specific situations appear the way they do" (ibid p. 168), rather than focusing on certain general conditions in the industry.

# Methodology

Following a qualitative approach, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted among female fashion designers in Accra, Ghana. This section will account for the methodological choices, reflections and limitations during the process of conducting this thesis. First, we will introduce our abductive scientific approach. Second, we will present our research design as a qualitative case study. Third, we will account for any relevant considerations regarding the data collection. Fourth, we will account for methodological considerations related to conducting a field study in Ghana, followed by our reflections and choices made during data analysis. Finally, we will conclude this chapter with a section on ethical concerns.

## Research Approach

Our thesis follows an iterative process and abductive scientific approach. This claim is based on Reichertz (2014), who argues that "research happens when we are genuinely surprised to find something different from what we expect" (p. 126). In his view, abduction starts with the empirical data, where interpretation will de- and recontextualise the data, eventually leading to new ideas emerging. Before conducting our interviews, we had some theoretical understanding of creative work in Ghana and the care model by Lynch (2007). When processing, analysing, and interpreting our data, we were surprised that many interviewees did not recognise the concept of 'ethical fashion', a concept we initially explored during the interviews. Moreover, about half of our interviewees did recognise the concept of ethical fashion and most identified it as social labour issues. For example, many interviewees reflected on their employment responsibility in their community. Here, we found that ethics of care theory allowed us to not only identify ethical concerns but suggest motivations for engaging in social and relational dilemmas in the first place; suggesting a close relationship between responsibility and care. However, upon applying Lynch (2007) for analysis, we had two discoveries. First, that our findings did not necessarily fit within the circles as described by Lynch (2007), second, that the theory did not allow us to illustrate how our respondents expressed care in secondary and tertiary relationships – leading us to more operational care theory as accounted for above, which lead us to new findings.

These re-discoveries and surprises that characterises the abductive approach (Reichertz, 2014) also became apparent during the process of coding our data; as we initially did deductive coding, as elaborated more on below in the *data analysis* section. While we argue for an abductive approach, we recognise that we did have ethics of care theory in mind from the beginning, which could point towards a more deductive approach. In general, we have followed a highly iterative and flexible research approach as we have re-visited data and theory multiple times, following the exploratory nature of this study.

#### Research Design

This section will account for our research design; how the research is designed is important "to ensure [that] research practice and findings are reliable, valid, trustworthy, credible and dependable" (Hammett et al., 2015). Our research is designed as a qualitative and exploratory case study. Qualitative studies are "designed to study participants' attributed meanings and associated relationships" (Saunders et al., p. 179). In our case, we are seeking to understand the experiences, perceptions, and relations of the Ghanaian female fashion designers through semistructured interviews. It can further be defined as qualitative as we seek to understand the world of our participants through interpretation; in our study, we are attempting to make sense of "the subjective meanings" expressed by the fashion designers (ibid.). Our study further recognises that it is essential to collect the data in a "natural setting" and research context (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003 p. 57; Saunders et al., 2015, p. 179), as real-time conversations are important for the establishment of trust and to get optimal conditions for in-depth understanding of one another. Besides conducting interviews, we gathered visual data as meanings can be expressed through both words and data (ibid). Specifically, we provided our interviewees with pictures for what we refer to as the card prioritisation game, a data collection method elaborated on below in the section on *Data Collection*.

The case study research method was chosen following Yin (2009) as we seek to "investigate a contemporary phenomenon in real-life context" (p. 18). Our research curiosity was in many ways poked by the rising (creative) entrepreneurship in Ghana and the relationship between this social tendency and the developing context of Ghana. As it is further a common method in social science disciplines and when investigating professional fields or "the maturation of industries" (ibid, p. 4), it seemed an obvious choice for conducting research on the emerging fashion industry in Ghana. Concretely this study is applying what Yin (2009, p. 46) defines as an "embedded single case study approach". The unit of analysis is the fashion industry in Ghana, with the smaller units of analysis being the individual female fashion designers, including contextual dimensions. This method aligns with our scientific philosophy, pragmatism, as we are exploring individual situations within a related social context following an iterative, flexible approach. It further aligns with our research question, as it is starts with the exploratory "how".

This section has highlighted some of the strengths of choosing the case study research, however, it is also important to note its limitations (Yin, 2009). This is discussed further in relation to our data quality under the discussion section *methodological implications*.

### **Data Collection**

The primary data in our thesis study was collected on a two-week field trip to the capital city of Ghana, Accra, in early May 2022, as a part of the collaborative research project 'Advancing Creative Industries for Development in Ghana (ACIG)'. The collected data consists of 8 semi-structured interviews conducted in Accra, Ghana in May 2022. This section of our thesis will account for the methodological choices made before and during the collection of our data, including thoughts and reflections after gathering our findings. First, it will introduce our research participants. Second, it will introduce our qualitative research method, the semi-structured interview including our interview guide. Followed by, third, a section on the observation made during the interviews.

### **Research Participants**

For the purpose of our thesis, we interviewed 8 female, adult, fashion designers in Accra, Ghana. These interviews and the choice of participants largely came from the University of Ghana and the connections of the researchers at the University; who we were introduced to by our supervisor initially through email. Hence, our sampling process can be characterised as snowballing, where a web of personal connections led us to our research participants (Easterby – Smith et al., 2015). Upon greeting the university researchers, we were toured around the university campus, where we encountered many fashion designers working as seamstresses in smaller stores, often described as "container shops", illustrated later in our section on "The Context of Ghana". The Ghanaian female researcher who accompanied us, was already acquainted with the business owners when she made our introductions; increasing our own trustworthiness as researchers (Hammett et al., 2015). Besides these introductions, we were pointed in the right direction of possible interviewees, both by researchers and fashion designers, that we went to meet by ourselves the following days. With other participants, we received their

personal contact information from the University researchers; we then reached out on WhatsApp, making sure to introduce ourselves, the purpose of our study and how we got their contact information in the first place. For a detailed overview of our research participants please see table 1 below.

Table 1.

### Overview of Respondents

Name - Synonym	Highest level of Education	Business Location	No. employees	Market
INT. 1 Debbee	Apprenticeship	Small shop, University Campus, Accra	2	National market; physical sales
INT 2: Maria	Apprenticeship	Small shop, University Campus, Accra	1	National market; physical sales
INT 3: Afi	Apprenticeship	Small shop, University Campus, Accra	1	National market; physical sales
INT4: Antonia	Master's in Business Management	Physical store in Osu, Accra city	11	National & International; Online sales and Instagram
INT 5: Samirah	Nursing at University level	Physical store in Osu, Accra city	11	National & International; Online sales and Instagram
INT 6: Dudu	Marketing at University level	Home Showroom	5	National; Online sales and Instagram
INT 7: Ame	Architecture at University level	Physical store in Osu, Accra city	9	National & International; Online sales and Instagram
INT 8: Omeya	Undergrad in Business Administration	Physical store in Accra city	10	National & International; Online sales and Instagram

### The Semi-Structured Interview

In order to "understand the experiences, perceptions and relations of the Ghanaian female fashion designers", we choose to conduct interviews semi-structured, as this form is well suited to explore understandings and perceptions (Hammett et al., 2015). The structure of semi-structured interviews is characterised by some roughly predetermined questions although with flexibility, giving us the opportunity to improvise and adapt our questions to a fluid discussion around the pre-determined central topics (Ibid). Central is that both the interviewer and the interviewees have some control over the interview process and that data is secured through active listening on the part of the interviewer, which is necessary to adapt the questions to the content (ibid).

The interview guide was initially designed with questions within 5 main identified themes: 1) introduction; with very open questions we asked our interviewees to tell us a bit about themselves and, afterwards, a bit about their business. 2) fashion industry in Ghana; by asking about our interviewees' experience with being a part of the fashion industry, we aimed to get more insight into the industry and the local context including challenges. 3) female entrepreneurship; here we sought to understand their experiences as female entrepreneurs, why we started by asking if they see themselves as entrepreneurs; a closed question to check our own assumption. 4) ethical fashion; here we sought to investigate what ethical fashion means for our respondents and to test our own assumptions. The purpose of diving into the concept of ethical fashion was at the time to, potentially, start addressing our research question. 5) ethical care; at last, we asked how "do you feel that you with your business can help or support yourself or others?" also as we attempted to approach our research question (App. 1).

The interview guide illustrates the exploratory, descriptive and explanatory elements of our study; evident in the mix of what, why and how questions (Yin, 2009; App. 1). It is overall mostly structured as a "funnel sequence", which is characterized by "starting an interaction with very open questions and gradually reducing the level of openness" (Hargie, 2016, p. 154). An example of an open question is, for example, "what is your experience with being a (female)

entrepreneur" (App. 1). Open questions encourage the respondent to "talk and thereby control a greater part of the interaction" (ibid, p. 153). We attempted to follow our interviewees' lead and adapt to the topic they brought up; for example, some started out talking about themselves and others started out talking about their business. Sometimes, we used closed questions such as polar questions to, for example, confirm or disconfirm whether the respondents see themselves as entrepreneurs (ibid.). Before conducting the interviews, we noted down the importance of using probing questions which are "follow up questions that encourage respondents to clarify their initial answers", such as asking for clarification or examples (ibid, p153). However, in practice we used limited probing questions, which will be elaborated in the section of "Interviewing" below.

During the interviews, we became aware that we had to adapt our interview guide (App. 2). First, we became aware that we with the question: "what is your experience with being an entrepreneur", assumed that our interviewees were familiar with the concept of entrepreneurship. Given that our two first respondents worked as seamstresses who did not have a university/business background, it became clear to us that they did not see themselves as entrepreneurs and/or were not familiar with the concept. Therefore, we started asking whether they were familiar with the word 'entrepreneurship', and if not, instead asked about their experiences as business owners (App. 2). Second, we added questions with the purpose of diving deeper into relational aspects, for example, question 3.b "do you feel as a part of a community", in case our respondents did not themselves talk about the fashion community in their "experience with being a part of the fashion industry in Ghana" (ibid). In general, we adapted to our respondents and became more confident as the answers became more aligned with our new assumptions and pre-interpretations. In this way, our interview guide (and even more so, the transcripts) also reflect an iterative process of interpretation following our abductive and qualitative methodological approach.

#### **The Card Prioritisation Game**

Another part of our interviews was what we refer to as our *card prioritisation game*; in the end of each interview, 8 pictures were put in front of the interviewees as they were asked to arrange the pictures based on "what you care for with your business" (App. 5). We further introduced the cards as *the self; employees; family; customers; community; culture; environment; profit and children education*. The last two were only used occasionally; the children education card was only used for the last interview as the respondent brought the theme up herself. Although we introduced the individual cards, words and images may represent different meanings depending on the person that elaborate them (Saunders et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to interact with the participants and negotiate the meaning of these cards – and attempt to understand their own interpretation as they relate it to their own lives. Our purpose of adding this exercise to our interview was to make our respondents reflect on how they care about others, also with regard to people/entities that may not have occurred to them during the interview itself. It can further be seen as a method for ensuring better data as "it is often suggested that words alone cannot communicate the complex and intricate situations they encounter" (Easterby – Smith et al., 2015, p.457).

### Interviewing

While successfully interviewing 8 respondents in Accra, ultimately leading us to interesting findings and indicators, we recognise that we expected to get more, richer data. Our first 3-4 interviews are all characterised by short and conscious answers, and they were all a lot shorter than the last 4-5 interviews. In this section we will reflect on what happened during the interviews and the card prioritisation game including factors that can have influenced our data and ultimately our findings.

Our interviews were conducted in one of the spoken languages in Ghana, English, and when possible, in face-to-face interactions to limit misunderstandings and language barriers as much as possible. Out of the eight interviews, six were carried out physically, face-to-face, with the remaining two being carried out on Zoom due to geographical distance. Physical interviews further provided the best conditions for encouraging dialogue, as we as researchers are from a different culture we especially needed to focus on active listening. We let our interviewees decide on the location, both to attempt to create a safe and personal environment and to adhere to cultural practices as much as possible (Hammett et al., 2015). According to Hargie (2016), the environment can influence the interview significantly and one of the potential significant disruptions in active listening is noise. In our case, half of our interviews took place outdoors; a few of these places had a high degree of noise in the form of passing cars and people, further causing some data to get lost in the recording and the transcript. It should also be noted that in our first three interviews our respondents were at work. At the same time, these respondents were not expecting meeting us with a specific time set aside for the interview, which can influence the mind set they are in when entering "the communication situation" of the interview (Hargie, 2016).

Another barrier for mutual understanding was the language barrier. While our respondents did speak English, it is not considered a native Ghanaian language. As the interviewers, we did not always catch the meaning of our interviewees right away, and some interviewees were harder for us to understand than others. During the first couple of interviews, where we got very short and concise answers, we found the language barrier being the biggest challenge. Of course, all our respondents had a unique way of speaking. Still, two of our respondents were very quiet as well, making it hard to catch the meaning. As researchers, we were surprised that we had not been successful in getting our respondents to talk more, considering that we made our interview guide with the purpose of encouraging reflection and dialogue. An example is our respondent, Ami; when asked to tell us a bit about herself, she answered only with her age (Ami, 0:17); when asked if she had family, she answered "Yes. I have family" (Ami, 0:38). After reflecting and studying factors that influence listening (Hargie, 2016), besides the environmental factors, it includes speech delivery and structure and complexity of messages. It is possible that it was

more difficult for our first respondents to understand what we were saying, when compared to some of the later respondents. As small business owners, who did not study at university, it is likely that they are not used to talking about personal matters related to business and relationships in English – and especially not with strangers. In contrast to our later interviews and respondents who are used to doing business in English as well as share their business stories and information.

Our interview style is best described as a mix between a direct style and an indirect, responsive style; we did attempt to do more direct questioning characterized by probing questions, however, in practice we also let our interviewees decide upon the form and pace (Hargie, 2016). For example, when we asked our respondent Antonia about her family situation, she almost kind of re-directed our question: "Mm-hmm. My family situation. Regarding the business, how it affects the business or how I'm putting it all together?" (Antonia, 16:56). Here, instead of redirecting her, we let her talk about her relationship with her family in the context of the business (17:58).

How well we, as researchers, have acted and come across in the interview situation, can further be influenced by our own emotional state (Hargie, 2016). In the beginning, we were a bit nervous in the time up to conducting the interviews, which can have influenced what Hammett et al., (2015, p. 144) refers to as our "performance"; thereby also influencing our data. On the other hand, we did use the technique of reflecting (Omeya, 36:06; Ame, 17:57): by re-representing the essence of the interviewee's previous message, we demonstrate our interest and involvement; check our perceptions; and demonstrate that we understand our respondent which confirms their experience as valid and significant (Hargie, 2016).

We further attempted to be culturally sensitive and ensure understanding through adapting the right formality of speech (Hammett et al., 2015), visible in how we changed the questions on entrepreneurship and ethical fashion, by first checking our assumptions (App. 2). We further aimed to clarify and explain through paraphrasing when needed, to avoid that concepts, speech delivery or speech rate influenced our interviewee's ability to listen (Hargie, 2016). Since "you cannot respond if you don't understand, pay attention or remember the question" (Hargie, 2016,

p. 204), it is possible that we in our first interviews were not delivering our questions in an optimal way to secure attention and understanding, and especially here, we could have made more use of paraphrasing techniques. In general, after we started analysing our data, we realized that we introduced the purpose of our research as being about their business and them as business owners, which influenced the interviewees' answers and hence our data. It would have been beneficial to introduce the purpose of our research as concerning both their businesses *and* their relationships.

In our card prioritisation game, in practice, we did not ask our respondent about their choices and priorities as much as we had intended. With a few interviews, it seemed as though we forgot about it, while we with other interviews got explanations for some of the choices. It would have given us better data if we more often had asked about the priorities that surprised us, meaning for example, when a respondent prioritised environment highly despite not previously mentioning the environment (App. 5, R3: Afi).

# Conducting Field Research in Ghana

Before collecting our data in Accra in the month of May, we were able to get essential insights into what it means to do research in Ghana, both from the project coordinator at Copenhagen Business School and the project coordinator from the University of Ghana upon arrival. As first-time researchers, travelling to Sub-Saharan Africa for the first time to do field research in a developing country, we experienced both anticipation, excitement, and anxiety as typical in this situation (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). While staying in an accommodation that was entirely different than expected, entering the research field was an overwhelming experience with new impressions and some initial cultural shocks. It is likely that being overwhelmed and nervous have impacted our interviews and data (ibid.) in that we, for example, did not make use of probing questions as much nor did we always ask for clarification when needed. This is also closely related to the issue of language (ibid.) and how inexperienced we were with the local accent, as we attempted to be as polite as possible and perhaps even unintendedly have pretended to understand things that needed where further explanation could have benefited.

While we experienced some typical challenges, we also made sure to reflect on how to best carry out our research as Western researchers in a developing context (Hammet et al., 2015; Scheyvens & Storey, 2003), as an example, by introducing ourselves, by making our intentions clear, and by always attempting to be respectful towards our respondents and their opinions. While we are researching women in a developing context, "they are not all vulnerable or disadvantaged in relation to other members of society" (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 169). Still, as mentioned above, it is recognized that African women have been fighting against oppressive forces in both their own societies and through the imposition of Western norms (Langevang et al., 2015), hence emphasising the need for sensitivity (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003).

One of the difficulties we encountered with our research objective (female fashion entrepreneurs and Ghanaian women) was that our respondents were often very busy, which agrees with Scheyvens and Storey's (2003) statement that it can be more difficult to access women – "as they are often extremely busy" (p. 169). In this case, we adapted to their schedule although those fashion designers who worked as seamstresses proved to be more challenging to talk to, with availability depending on customers that could walk into the shop any time. At other times, the smaller businesses were closed at the scheduled interview time, which meant a lot of insecurity in terms of attaining the specific interview. It is possibly related to the fact that our interviewees are working in an informal industry and potentially, the many roles and responsibilities that these female entrepreneurs have, as touched upon in the introduction section. This difficulty has to some extent influenced the depth and quality of some data, mostly data from the smaller businesses, where the time duration of the interview was sometimes limited. On the other hand, we found great willingness and availability among the female entrepreneurs to participate in our research. All our interviewees seemed genuinely interested and happy to share their experiences and the time that they had, with us. Aslo taking into account that we ourselves as female researchers may have influenced our respondents to feel more comfortable in sharing their personal life and business and hence facilitated a more sensitive data collection (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003).

## Data Processing & Analysis

This section will account for how we approached our data processing and analysis including our thought-processes and limitations. First, we will briefly describe the analytical choices made during transcription. Second, we will account for our approach to qualitative data analysis, the thematic analysis, including diving deeper into the coding process. Hereafter we will also account for how we used the qualitative software programme NVivo.

### **Transcription**

Transcription can be thought of as the first step in our analysis, as we here "become familiar with our data" (Saunders et al., p. 652). In our case, we transcribed all our interviews after completing the interview process; transcribing our first interviews after completing the others gave new perspectives and impressions of these initial interviews. With the language differences in mind, transcription provided the opportunity to reflect more on the meaning of some sentences that had initially seemed unclear, it gave time to reflect on the statements in the interviews and overall increased understanding. For the purpose of not overloading the transcripts with unnecessary details, some light editing has been used to translate word for word, leaving out filler words and non-verbal communication (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2016) - although in some cases we have taken some liberates to secure understanding, for example, the sentence "a solid come in" was rewritten to "a solid income". The complete set of transcriptions can be found in Appendix 1 and 2.

## **Coding in NVivo: Thematic Analysis**

To assist with the data analysis, we choose to use the qualitative software programme NVivo; as a method-free programme, it supports the thematic analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). It is an efficient method for managing large data items as well as an efficient way to match and link data without losing the context and data source (ibid). Linking data together in different ways can be beneficial for interpretation and assist in overcoming assumptions. For example, by gathering

and illustrating codes across interviewees, we were able to consider the data more holistically than based on the individual transcripts.

The purpose of the thematic analysis is to find themes or patterns across a data set and can be thought of as a very general approach when analysing qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 651). Thematic analysis is useful for both inductive, deductive, and abductive approaches (ibid). We attempted to follow the abductive coding approach as described by Reicherts (2014), as we started out with "informed guessing", which is open coding influenced by "initial thoughts" (p. 125). Our findings from the open coding re-directed us back to the theory, whereby we started coding deductively. While following an overall abductive approach, our coding process may be better described as inductive-deductive, as it can be discussed the extent to which we were re-directed back to "new theory" - although we did gather additional, complementary care theory based on our findings from the deductive coding. Throughout this section we will go through the different steps in our coding process, which involves "labelling each unit of data within a data item". In this case our data set consists of 8 data items in the form of transcribed interviews and 8 pictures from the card prioritisation game.

After getting familiar with our data in the process of transcription, we did an initial inductive coding of all the data/text in the transcript, to investigate everything with no intent to consider the data from any theoretical lens; still, we did identify themes related to *care* and *ethical fashion*. In this way, it was not completely open coding but rather inspired by our interview guide with the identification of themes of *entrepreneurship* and *fashion industry*. With other identified themes being *fabrics* and *motivations*, there is no specific pattern, characterising the codes as a mix between themes "developed from data" and themes "derived from existing literature" (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 654). Many researchers have argued that we base our interpretation of data on existing knowledge, assumptions and bias (Willig, 2014; Saunders et al., 2015; Hammett et al., 2015) hence challenging whether we as researchers can ever be entirely open to data. After the initial coding, we started exporting some codes into others, changing node

names, and creating child nodes; the findings of our initial open coding (without child notes for simplicity and visibility) are illustrated below in a Treemap (App.3).

As illustrated in the treemap, we did find data related to care although we remained sceptical on whether we had enough data for an ethics of care approach. To check and investigate our carerelated data in detail, we attempted deductive coding on the entire dataset based on the care model by Lynch (2007). The initial thematic coding was based on his model and hence we identified three themes: 1) Primary Care Relations; 2) Secondary Care Relations; 3) Tertiary Care Relations, and a fourth theme: 4) Others. The fourth theme was for any care-related statements that did not fit within the first three themes. Hereafter, we went into each "topic" to examine what our respondents talked about within each theme; in the process, we created and recreated child nodes, ultimately ending up with the nodes as illustrated in our code tree below (App. 4). Overall, the code tree illustrates an aggregated coding process that is based on the Concentric Circles of Care Relations by Lynch (2007). However, instead of searching/coding for the specific relationships mentioned in the theory, we identified the care relationships from our data (for example, customers and employees). With Others we identified the child nodes fashion industry and female entrepreneurship; which was contextual related to conditions for care or a lack of care, for example, a statement that expressed how difficult it is to take your children with you to work or one that expressed the competitiveness of the fashion industry. We further identified the child node the self; in the end, we based part of our analysis on the relationship with the self – although it is a more ambiguous concept than "primary, secondary and tertiary relations", why we kept it as a child node.

## **Ethical Concerns**

To interpret another person's experience means claiming to have access to some underlying meaning; as researchers, we then have "the power to shape what comes to be known about somebody's experience" (Willig, 2014, p. 6). Further, it has been pointed out by scholars that research ethics are critical for development researchers and that researchers must "consider the ethical issues that arises from cross-cultural communication" (Hammett et al., 2015, p. 84;

Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). We must further, as Western and social science researchers, account for responsibilities in terms of treatment of participants, respect, and transparency (Hammett et al., 2015).

One of the ways we ensured our ethical responsibility, was through the promise of anonymity. As "the research process must endure the participants' dignity, privacy and safety" (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 140), it was our responsibility to keep the identity of our participants private as well as inform them about this prior to conducting the interview. Related is the promise of confidentiality; our storage of research field notes, recordings and transcripts were promised to be used purposefully, for the sake of this thesis project (ibid.). As a fundamental part of ethical research, it should further be affirmed that we were guaranteed informed consent from our female respondents, who had chosen freely to participate in the research and as a part of our final master project (ibid., p. 142). Also, by informing our respondents orally about the structure of the interview, meaning the different topics we would be asking about, and by informing them of the expected duration of the interview – around one hour.

Another main ethical issue in field research is the recognition of power relations between the researchers and the interviewees. We recognise that we are Western researchers travelling to the home country of our respondents and interviewing them in their home environments. By some scholars, it has been referred to as "studying down", when researchers of Western privilege are studying the less privileged (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 140). While in a developing context, our respondents are all business owners in Ghana and therefore may not perceive themselves as "less privileged". It is, however, recognised here that we as Western researchers in many perspectives are considered privileged – although there are many perspectives and ways to approach questions of power. In our experience, it was most explicitly present for us when emphasis was put on general precarious working conditions and how employment is an important factor for not only individuals, but for families and communities.

Moreover, our different cultures including language and appearance, are all things that can impact our trustworthiness and potentially create an uncomfortable environment for our respondents. With this in mind, it is important to emphasise our intention for sensitivity, and to engage with our interviewees with carefulness, in a sensitive and respectful manner. Scheyvens and Storey (2003) highlights how "doing ethical research in a foreign setting is about building mutually beneficial relationships with people you meet in the field" (p. 139). One on side, we recognize that our respondents might have been sharing less informing as we presented ourselves rather stiffly with our papers and pens and often with short introductions. On the other side, we did engage with our respondents by showing interest in and recognising their work and fabrics (also off transcript), by following their business on social media, and in occasion by buying clothes, all in recognition of the work they are doing. We further attempted to show sensitivity by expressing a lot of interest in our respondents' answers during interviews, by smiling and nodding (based on own interpretation of appropriateness) and by paraphrasing to illustrate that we engaged in active listening (Hargie, 2016). This also in an attempt to minimize any discomfort felt by the participants.

# Context of Ghana

This chapter presents the context of Ghana, where we conducted our study. It will first present the socio-economic context of Ghana, taking into consideration the impact of recent national and international crises. Second, it will present the landscape of the informal economy in Ghana and relate it to female entrepreneurship.

### Socio-economic situation

The country of Ghana has a population of about 29.6 million people (World Bank, 2022). As introduced, Africa has been 'on the rise' with rapid economic growth (7% between 2017-2019), however, the COVID-19 pandemic halted the growth as the country went through lockdown in March 2020 (World Bank, 2022). According to the World Bank (2022), the economy of Ghana has rebounded as growth is expected to reach 5.5% in 2022 – in contrast, it was as low as 0.4% in 2020, as illustrated below in figure 3. Furthermore, employment is considered a major issue with 4.7% of the labour force being unemployed (World Bank, 2022).

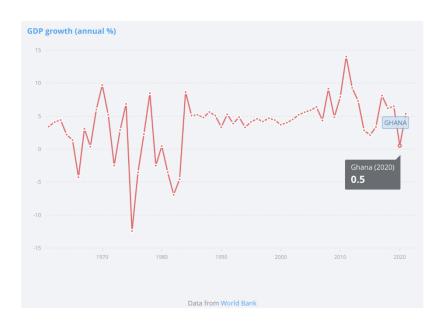


Figure 3: Overview of Ghana's GDP Growth. Source: World Bank (2022)

According to the recent report on human development from September 2022, Ghana has an HDI rank on 0,466 which is "medium human development" in opposite to very high, high, and low HDI (Human Development Reports, 2022; UNDP, 2022b). Ghana's ranking is illustrated in figure 4 below. It thus lies below the world average (App. 7). The Human Development Index intends to measure people and their capabilities rather than economic growth to assess the development of a country; through indicators such as life expectancy and expected years of schooling (Human Development Reports, 2022). The report further illustrates with its multidimensional poverty index for developing countries how, between 2009 and 2019, 23.4% of the population was living below the national poverty line (UNDP, 2022b, p, 296).

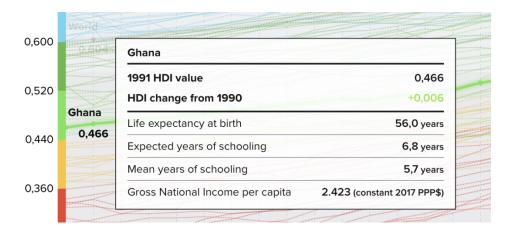


Figure 4: Ghana's Human Development Index Value (HDI) Source Human Development Reports (2022)

One of the challenges currently facing the development of Ghana – and the recovery from the pandemic – is the war on Ukraine. Increases in prices as a result of the war in Ukraine have impacted the cost of living across the world, with Africa being no exception. Ghana is among the countries most likely to be facing high poverty impacts across all poverty lines according to a recent report addressing "the cost-of-living crisis in developing countries" (UNDP, 2022a, p. 6). For example, a significant increase in fuel prices in Ghana is increasing transport costs for manufacturers and 25% of the Ghana's wheat is imported from Russia (UNDP, 2022e).

# Female Entrepreneurship in the Informal Economy

The majority of the Ghanaian population work in the informal sector, "characterised by highly precarious form of employment, underemployment, low and irregular earnings and lack of social protection", despite policy attempts to promote formal employment (Gough & Langevang, 2016; Alacovska et al., 2021, p. 620). Since what is often referred to as "the collapse of the public sector" and since the 1980s, a large part of the Ghanaian population has become self-employed and run their own businesses (ibid). According to a survey of street vendors in Ghana from Anyidoho (2013) in 2012, government institutions are perceived negatively. The informal economy in Ghana is said to be growing and with it follows an increased urbanization (Anyidoho, 2013). The most urbanized region is Greater Accra which hosts the capital, Accra; while this region is only about 1.4% of the total land, in 2010 it hosted over 15% of the country's population (ibid).

Despite how the informal economy is associated with elevated precarity and poor labour conditions, female entrepreneurs in the Global South tend to be concentrated in the informal economy and almost the majority of the Ghanaian population consider entrepreneurship as an optimal and successful career path (Langevang et al., 2015). According to Anyidoho (2013), informal work in Ghana has an overconcentration of women tracing back to colonial times where employment opportunities were more accessible for the educated man (p. 8). While selfemployment in the informal economy has been celebrated for its creation of job opportunities for women, others have argued that the informal economy is "a poverty trap for women, concentrating them in low-skill, low-income activities with little prospects of advancement" (Meagher, 2010 in Langevang et al. 2015). In fact, "Women in Ghana find their businesses restricted due to the number of entrepreneurs engaging in similar activities, resulting in high levels of competition" (Langevang et al., 2015, p. 465). Further, while men have established medium and large businesses, women mostly operate micro and small businesses (ibid., Quagrainie, 2018). Despite these difficulties, "women [in Ghana] are generally considered capable entrepreneurs" and are generally not any less respected than men's (Langevang et al. 2015, p. 468).





Source: private pictures showing one of the female designers and entrepreneurs in one of the smaller fashion stores in the campus of the University of Ghana. The picture to the right portrays both our interviewee and her sister; they both work with fashion and have individual shops across from each other.

# Analysis

The following chapter of our thesis will present the analysis of the findings obtained from our field research in Ghana that follows the theoretical framework as outlined above. In the following sections, we draw on our data to show how our creative workers engage in relationships of care with others throughout their role as female entrepreneurs and owners of their creative fashion businesses. Following the adopted theoretical framework, firstly we explore the relationship of self-interest as self-care; secondly, we investigate 'other-cantered' relational care work drawing upon the original model of Lynch (2007) and its division of Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Care Relations. Additionally, as the care circles are deeply intertwined, each section will elaborate on the overlap between care relationships.

### Self-Care

As mentioned in our *literature review* chapter, creative workers have often been claimed to be driven by self-interest and self-actualization with business activity being an expression of self-love (Arvidsson et al., 2010; Thompson et al., 2016; Umney and Kretsos, 2015; Tokumitsu, 2014). Self-interest has also been related to care, as it has been argued that self-interest is not necessarily in contrast with the ability to care for others and that care for others is sometimes in our self-interest (Alacovska, 2020; Wuthnow, 1991; Engster, 2005). This section will seek to position self-interest as self-care – and hereafter position self-care as other-centred care.

Self-care is by Engster (2005) expressed as a duty: "we have a primary duty to care for ourselves... and self-care precedes and sustain caring for others" (p. 66). The card prioritisation game illustrated that all our respondents are firstly or secondly supporting themselves through their creative work (App. 5). Fashion designer Omeya, who owns a store in Accra, is single, and without children herself, considers her creative work as an act in her own self-interest:

I always said I started from a very selfish point of view, it was to satisfy me, my own interest and then it grew into this (...) I'm satisfying a strong desire to own a brand. It's almost like saying satisfying your ego if you know what I mean. I've created a business and I have this strong desire that it grows (Omeya, 9:52).

Omeya's statement expresses an interrelation between her business, her own interest and the "satisfaction of ego", suggesting that she through her creative work is self-actualising. Moreover, she expresses that her personal goal equals her business goal ("business growth"), which suggests that she highly identifies with her business and brand (Omeya, 43:07). In this way, "labour is ultimately a form of self-expression" (Marx's conception of human labour in Glenn, 2007, p. 48). Similarly, fashion designer Samirah also highlights the relationship between business activity and self-interest, the owner of a larger business and brand. She chose fashion over an education in nursing as the "hospital scene was traumatic" (Samirah, 0:29), which impacted her creative side; her choice of choosing to create is expressed as a choice of passion:

"A lot of people thought: fashion and nursing. That's a bit weird. Because the art world is totally different from the science world. But I did it for fun, and also to support myself

through college... But I also knew that I love to create. So, one morning I just woke up and asked myself "what does your heart beats for more?" and it was the creative side of me. I decided to quit nursing so that I could create full time, and I did" (Samirah, 0:29).

In both cases of Omeya and Samirah, their creative work is securing positive feelings of affection towards the self, hence their creative work is contributing to positive self-preservation and self-care. Additionally, despite great personal and professional ambitions, Omeya states that: "My accountants will tell you; we're not making profits. We're breaking even when we're lucky and we're still making a loss because of the way we want to do things and the way we do, especially because of the climate we find ourselves in" (Omeya, 24:11). The fact that Omeya is pursuing her creative work despite not making profits only emphasises the statement that her business is driven by own personal interest and satisfaction. Samirah similarly expresses that: "I didn't care if I made money from it. I just wanted to wake up happy" (Samirah, 0:29). As profit is seemingly unrelated to Omeya and Samirah's prioritisation of self-care through their creative work, it gives a new and different perspective than McRobbie's (2016a) claim that caring for oneself contributes to "and unethical economy driven by market conditions".

While acting "otherwise" by some has been seen as opposing to acting "self-wise" (Tronto, 1991, 1993; Ball et al., 2004), Engster (2005) has argued for a close relationship between self-care and the ability to care for others; for example, by highlighting how the financial aspect of business "secure the necessary resources to care for themselves and others" (p. 51). This relationship between business and self-care and other-oriented care is also expressed the female Ghanaian fashion designers – for them, prioritising themselves often mean being able to prioritise others: "I have to be responsible for myself and my business, not just for myself but for my family and community. I need to help my husband in buying food and paying the bills of our new house. We had to move after Covid" (Dudu, 08:55). Our respondent Dudu first highlights the mutual dependency relationship between herself and her business, and second, how the functioning of both is a necessity for supporting the community and for financially being able to support her family. Hence, for Dudu, acting self-wise equals acting otherwise. This dimension of "self-functioning" for the purpose of taking care of others is further supported by Engster (2005) who argues that "a person who does not attend to his or her own needs and capabilities may, in

the long run, be unable or unwilling to provide good care to others or may do so less effectively" (p. 34). These feelings of responsibility towards others are also expressed by Antonia, a married fashion designer, who emphasises a "shared responsibility":

"When I was not married, my business was sustaining me 100%. But in the entrepreneurial space, we have our ups and downs... But now, I think, I am married. I have my husband and I have a work that sustains us, but, let's say we are co-supporting because I can not spend all my money. Neither can he spend all his. We have a shared responsibility" (Antonia, 39:27).

Antonia explains she shares caring responsibilities with her spouse (which is examined more in the section *primary care relations*), suggesting that her self-interest is his and vice versa. In this way, self-interest can be expanded to incorporate *others*, as in this case of shared care-responsibilities for the rest of the family. This can be related to what Heidegger (1996, in Alacovska, 2020) describes as compassionate care actions enabled by resources based on an existential self-orientation towards "being-together-in-the-world", meaning that our self is in many ways bound to our conception of our agency in a shared world. In other words, Antonia is aware of her care responsibility towards others as a result of being in a married relationship. In her situation, her self-interest is not limited to herself as an individual, since spouses or children can be a part of a self-interest or priority, as suggested here.

This close relationship between self and others is also apparent in the card prioritisation game. As just mentioned above, *the self*-card was always put as a first or second priority although for different individual reasons. Our respondent Ame shares the same rationality as Dudu for prioritising herself: "I would put myself first because I'm not going to be able to support anyone else without first supporting me. I won't be able to do anything if I'm not healthy and able to work and provide for my family and husband family, yeah, so myself first" (Ame, 35:11). Like Dudu, Ame is here expressing a financial responsibility of care by the need to be "providing" for her family, while additionally highlighting the priority of her own health. As working can be seen as an act of care (by securing resources as mentioned above), it is evident here how self-care is seen as a necessity for practising other-centred care.

To sum up this section, the findings show how self-interest can be positive self-care and further that Ghanaian women sometimes act self-wise to be able to act otherwise. In other words, they are prioritising themselves to ultimately provide care for others, which suggests that the fashion designers' well-being is tied up in others' well-being (Engster, 2005). It is further indicated that care-responsibility can extend what it means to be acting in self-interest; with self-interest being a necessity for the care prioritisation of primary care relations.

# **Primary Care Relations**

In this first section of analysis, we will analyse how our Ghanaian fashion designers practice care towards the 'closest others', which are mainly represented by the fashion designers' family members. This first circle is the most internal circle presented in the theoretical framework and it refers to the intimate and immediate relationships between our respondents and their nuclear and extended family (Figure 2). In relation to the nuclear family, we will analyse more in depth the care relationships between our respondents and their children, partners and parents. Whereas our analysis of the extended family will consider the relationships with their relatives (Amos, 2013). Therefore, we will be subdividing this primary section between care relationships with family in general and then more specifically with children, spouses, parents and the extended family.

## **Care Relations with Family**

Generally, it has been possible to understand that our creative workers' family relationships are a fundamental part of a daily care routine. In fact, according to Amos (2013), "family is usually the major source of the basic necessities of life and health" (p.68). In this regard, Maria, a fashion designer who has been running a small clothing shop in the University Campus in Accra for almost 8 years, expresses agreement on the fact that family is an indispensable moral and physical support: "Because sometimes when you go home, you need your family. If the family is not there you won't be happy. Family keeps us happy" (Maria, 24:43). Maria is married and has a young son, and those are the family members she refers to when above she expresses relief and

gratitude. In her statement, indeed, Maria makes it clear that receiving emotional care and support from her family members at the end of the day is a necessity for her, enhancing that receiving care from others is an essential human condition (Engster, 2005).

Besides the importance of care-receiving, our fashion designers are also deeply engaged in caring-giving, as they feel the responsibility to sustain and nurture their families through their roles as entrepreneurs. For example, Dudu, a newly married fashion designer who is not mum yet states: "I have to be responsible for myself and my business, not just for myself but for my family and community" (08:55). Dudu explains that she sees herself as an entrepreneur who needs to take care of her and her husband by contributing to pay bills and taking care of living expenses, as they had to change their house due the pandemic (08:55), reinforcing the image of Ghanian women who are expected to contribute financially to their household through their businesses' earnings (Langevang et all., 2015). Following a similar path, Antonia, an ambitious fashion designer who is married and have two children, describes being a female entrepreneur quite challengingly when "seek[ing] to balance care responsibilities with a career" (Stalford, 2005, in Ivancheva, Lynch & Keating, 2019), especially after creating her own family and furtherly having to take on mother's responsibilities.

"Ok, as a female entrepreneur [...] Now that I got married, I have two lovely kids, it's quite interesting. Because you find yourself having to balance between being a mom, being a wife, and also making sure your business is consistent." (Antonia, 16:56)

Antonia has been having now a well-established brand on her own for 10 years, that she started after having pursued a master's in management. However, she tells that her very first entrepreneurial activities begun when she was cutting her mum's clothes to turned them into dresses. Step by step, she would make her own fabrics and sell them to her friends (06:39). Along the way, Antonia has built her own fashion business that could generate enough financial resources to sustain her family, as she affirms: "I think I should still be in a position to support my family if the need arises" (39:27). Antonia's affirmations align with Langevang et al. (2015) when they argue that becoming mothers in Ghana on one hand incentives women to start entrepreneurial careers "in order to secure the future of their children," (p.468) while it also

limits their working time and tasks because of their small children needs that they need to take care (ibid). Overall, Antonia and Dudu are two great examples of Ghanaian female entrepreneurs who take on their role of "breadwinner" by creating income—generating activities indispensable for the survival of the families (Langevang et al., 2015).

Moreover, patterns of primary care also improve the respondent's ability to set boundaries, to identify business weaknesses and, in addition, improve the individual's capacity to balance primary care relations with work (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). For example, this is visible from the case of Antonia, when she declares: "I would say that my family setting [...] has actually helped me see the loopholes in my business. [...] it has actually opened for me to see the areas I need to grow in my business, so that when I'm not there, it can still function" (17:58). This attentively communicates how family relations of care play a significant role in our respondent's day-to-day life as female entrepreneur, contributing to challenge and simultaneously inspire Antonia's role as fashion designer and female entrepreneur.

### **Care Relations with Children**

In this section we will present how our Ghanian women experience care in their role as fashion designers and female entrepreneurs while having to attend to their duties as mothers. Lynch (2007) considers the parent-child relation the most representative and significative example of care relationship existing among human beings. It should be stressed out that in Ghanian culture and values, the mother is seen as the traditional housewife of the house and the one who is primarily responsible for the childcare activities (Amos, 2013). From our conversations with the creative workers, it emerged that three of them (Maria, Antonia and Ame) are mothers of 1 to 2 children: Maria and Ame have one child each, while Antonia has two young children.

In the Ghanian fashion industry, the different types of clothing services can have an impact on working schedule of a fashion designer, indirectly impacting her duties as a mum. Antonia, for example, has explained how, after becoming a mum, she had to change her business service from Couture to Ready—To—Wear. In fact, ready—to—wear services involve less timing - engagement, since clothes are made with the intention of being sold to anyone. On the other hand, Couture is a

more demanding service, because it requires the fashion designer to be more immersed in the relationship with the client, therefore it needs more engagement and flexibility in terms of time and movements (Gott & Loughran, 2010). Going back to our respondent Antonia, during the interview she explained that before having her first baby, she was used to going and meeting with her clients in their offices, as the Couture fashion service demands. For this reason, the switch of business plan to a Ready – to – Wear service allowed Antonia to adjust her working life and priorities to her new role as a mother:

Are you able to leave your family, your kids, to take on certain rules that demand immediate attention? When these questions come up, then you find yourself in a box because you cannot just get up if you have a 6-month-old baby and go for a web shop in another country, you have to reconsider it (Antonia, 23:02).

Antonia's vision for her business, indeed, has always involved expanding her production and export internationally, being one of the numerous Ghanaian women who are "highly active in cross-border trading" (p.463). As a matter of fact, in Ghana the ideology of a woman who is married and is a mum is not in contrast with the concept of female business ownership that engage in long-distance trade (Langevang et al, 2015). Despite her ambitions, however, with the arrival of her new baby she decided to reduce her flexible schedule and re-evaluate her familiar priorities, leading to a reconciliation of the demands of creative work and primary care (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019), but at the same time "restricting her entrepreneurial pursuits" (Langevang et al, 2015, p.468) Antonia explained that she practically had to take care of her child, especially at his very first months of life "Because I had constantly to feed my child and make sure he got sleep at the right times" (17:58). Thus, Antonia, when taking care of the basic needs of her child, aligns with Lynch's (2007) view of caring in the primary circle, because clearly, she bears in mind and accounts for her child by prioritizing the child's necessities and interests, which presuppose a mental planning and care towards her baby. In contrast, the example of Antonia arises the tension between her tasks as mother/wife that limits instead her business-related duties. Langevang et al (2015), in their studies of female entrepreneurships in Ghana, claim that "[...] women still do the majority of housework and childcare, which affects their labour market activities" (p. 463).

On the other hand, prioritizing the childcare responsibilities over the compelling demands of being fashion entrepreneurs seems to provide beneficial learning to their fashion enterprise. For example, Antonia explains that anticipating her child's needs resulted in improving her business structure and strategy: "I didn't use to delegate. So, before I had my daughter what I have done is I trained my supervisors to step into my shoes so when I'm away the business can still function" (17:58), and this enable our fashion designer to spend more time to the care of her child. Similarly, Ame describes her creative businesses (fashion designer and architect) in relation to her role and responsibility as a mum. Ame is both fashion designer and architect. She firstly studied to become an architect and her passion for fashion led her to quit her stable job as an architect and invest fully her time in creating her own fashionable brand. After she started to establish her creative enterprise, she decided to open an architectural business as well, becoming a full-time female entrepreneur in creative industries. Although she has already a double job, Ame comments: "I run two businesses [...] Then I have a toddler. So yeah, that's three jobs, but my child is my main important job, my priority". Ame explains that when her toddler is sick and wants her mum, she makes it possible to be there for him, sometimes also by bringing him with her at work (09:39). In her statement, Ame shows how putting her child first is synonymous of care that requires physical, mental and emotional work in a systematic and continuous way, making her constantly responsible for a range of childcare activities while running her businesses (Mckie, Gregoy and Bowlby, 2002). Despite this, Ame represents one of the many Ghanaian women who needs to carry her children along at work, in order to comply with both their roles as mothers and as business owners, being parents the ones strictly in charge of the children's financial support. (Langevang et al., 2015; Darkwah, 2007).

Our mothers fashion designers also manifest unconditional care towards their children despite their need to balance their creative work and childcare responsibilities, shedding light on the emotional side of their relationships. For instance, Maria, who is married and have one daughter, expresses her love and care towards her child: "Yeah, I have one child. She's called [child's name]. She is my precious baby and I love her. When the workday is finished, I look forward to going back home to her and staying with her. Despite I have to cook and clean every night when I come home from work" (01:22). Here, Maria is an example of how mothers in particular are

embedded in a kind of care-loop in which the high dependency relationship with children is an everlasting factor (O'brien, 2005). Specifically, this tendency emphasizes the side of 'natural carers' of mothers to continuously comply with extra burden of looking after their children. The fashion designers in their roles as mothers identify as caregivers who convey a high degree of commitment, which is core to primary care relationships, reflecting in a constant caring liability and a strong moral care priority towards their children (Lynch, 2007). However, Langevang et al (2015) and Darkwah (2007) underline that is essential for women to work which is an equal duty as it is parenting. Indeed, the hard work of Antonia, Ame and Maria just proved to be three examples of how traditional Ghanaian women, beside their affectional care towards their children, equally practice their care by working exhaustively in their businesses (Darkwah, 2007).

### **Care Relations with Spouses**

The following section analyses the relationship of our fashion designers with their spouses and how it affects their creative work. Here, it is important to highlight how the Ghanian context once again plays a determinant role in explaining the importance of marriage as an official union between partners. In fact, in the general Ghanian family systems, with respect to different ethnicities having different systems, it is a tradition that young adults stay and live with the family before getting married and creating a new nuclear family (Degbey, 2012 in Amos, 2013). The data gathered from our research illustrates that more than half of the fashion designers (Maria, Antonia, Samirah and Ame) are married.

Some respondents when explaining about their relationship with their spouses, happen to mention how essential it is for them to practice mutual support and care. For example, Maria, recognizes that mutual support received from her husband is important to alleviate the fatigue of the daily working routine: "You need someone to support you. So, the person who is supporting me and us is my husband [...] Oh, we support each other and that's perfect" (Maria, 14:47). Maria remarked multiple times how the intimate care relationship with her partner functions thanks to a strong sense of 'mutuality', a determinant factor in close relationships: "Most of the time, I am

the one that cooks the dinner and clean, but sometimes he also helps with chores" (Maria, 14:47). Clearly, cooperation and collaboration in the household with the partner creates benefit in her daily work, showing practical care with the result of the fashion designer of being partially relieved from her traditional gendered burden as housewife (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). One example is the task of cooking, "which can be very time consuming in Ghana [and] is still considered [as] a woman's responsibility" (Langevang et al.,2015, p.468). In correlation with this focus, Ame states that the aid of her husband in carrying their baby and taking care of him has been often helpful for the management of her dual creative businesses. However, as mentioned above, there were sometimes in which Ame had to bring her child along with her at work (09:39). This supports Overå (2007, in Langevang et al., 2015) who explains that "having children does not impact much on men's working hours or working practices whereas women [...] have the extra burden of taking care of their children." (p.468). Simultaneously, Antonia reveals mutual support between her and the husband, in which both subjects give and receive equal care:

But now, I'm married. I have my husband and I have a work that sustains us, but let's say we are co-supporting because I cannot spend all my money, and neither can he spend all his. We have a shared responsibility. But if I wasn't co-supporting, I think I should still be in a position to support my family if the need arises (Antonia, 39:27).

In correlation, Engster (2005) investigates mutual support by arguing for cooperative schemes, which builds upon the care our creative workers and their husbands give for the well-being of the other, also in financial terms. In other words, the cooperative scheme of caring involves the duties that all involved in the relationship should meet. On the other hand, studies from Langevang et al. (2015) highlight how in Ghana "women have to spend a larger part of their profits on household expenditures and therefore have less money to reinvest in their businesses" (p.468) since men are also increasingly uncapable or unwilling to contribute to the financial support of the family. Moreover, additional expectations over Ghanaian female entrepreneurs to participate into the household finances increases the loads of responsibility that women detention already in their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

Our research further demonstrates that showing care for the family sometimes means accommodating the spouse's different needs, duties or emotional attachment (Engster, 2005) which would lead our creative workers to change their lives and working plans. This is the case of Samirah, a Ghanaian woman in her late twenties who studied initially to become a nurse and who then understood that her real ambition and passion was to be a creative and passionate fashion designer. Her husband is Australian, and despite they don't have children, she would like to have one soon. Samirah expressed her concerns about eventually having to move her production to Australia to follow her husband to his home country, affirming: "Yeah, my husband is Australian. So, the challenge that I will have to face eventually is that he will want to move back to Australia, and I'll have to figure out how to juggle" (Samirah, 24:11). This is an example of how often Ghanaian women have reduced possibilities to maintain or innovate their own business, because of their husband's income-generating activities (Amu, 2004 in Langevang et al, 2015). Despite the concern, Samirah shows a high level of commitment towards her partner, demonstrated by her thoughtful willingness to compromise her business settlements in favour of her partner's needs. Following Lynch (2007), commitment constitutes one of the main factors that characterise the primary relations of care, and it entails that the caregiver deploys a sense of caring over time.

#### **Care Relations with Parents**

Primary care relations, as already mentioned, studies the close bonding between a parent and a child. As we have already analysed the relationships of our creative workers with their children, in this following section we will explore instead the care relations that our fashion designers experience with their parents that essentially embeds emotional and financial support. Although the parent-child relationship often represents the strongest bond, in adulthood, the relationship with elderly parents is perceived weaker as it is expected to leave more resources in favour of the new family (Lynch, 2007).

Parents' relations are a long-term moral commitment, where care involves the assumption of a continuous and everlasting emotional attachment (Barnes, 2005) as well as belongingness and trust (Lynch, 2007). Omeya, for example, mentions briefly her parents when she talks about her process of becoming a fashion designer. She explains how she used to follow her mum to her seamstress where she got interested in their work while slowly getting involved in dressmaking and fashion. The respondent also points out the emotional support that she received from her mum, as she started to sew and produce her first dresses (09:52). Moreover, Omeya is a female entrepreneur who has a business and administration university background in Insurance, like her father. Not by chance, she started working with his dad in his business and factory right after university (Omeya, 04:05). Darkwah (2007) argues that it is traditional in Ghanian context to follow the career steps of one's parents as "type of income-generating avenue" (p.210). Although Omeya chose then to pursue her passion and take on her own business in fashion, she still refers to her father's vocation, conveying signs of attachment to him "Yes, I'm very familiar with that term (entrepreneur). My father is an entrepreneur [....] I identify as an entrepreneur" (Omeya, 36:40) and "If there's something we say, my father and I say is that [...]" (Omeya, 38:04). From these brief sentences it is thus possible to extract a sense of belongingness and trust that the respondent maintains with her parents, two elements that characterize positive care relationships (Lynch, 2007).

Furthermore, in our research we have found out that other respondents have engaged in working relationships with one of their parents, showing an interlink between family and business relations. As the boundaries between these two forms of relation are often blurred, family and work are hard to disentangle (Lynch, 2007; Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). Samirah's mum, for instance, owns a shop in Makola Market, one of the biggest and busiest market in Accra, where she trades wedding souvenirs. Samirah enacts care towards her mother by helping her in the market business, although it requires time and resources, as she explains:

So, apart for that [my business], my mom has a store [...] where she brings wedding souvenirs and containers for packaging and stuff like that. [...] I partnered with her now, so I help her to do that. Those are the two things that, currently, I'm juggling between. That one [mum's store] is very demanding" (Samirah, 21:15).

Samirah is an example of how Ghanaian mothers are usually involved in trading as occupational choice, and consequently how the parent's job can often shape the child's occupational path in Ghanaian's communities (Darkwah, 2007, p.210). At the same time, Samirah shows care towards her mum in a compassionate and thoughtful way, by dedicating time that she would have used for her business, to help her mum instead (Alacovska, 2020).

Barnes (2005) recognizes that there are different ways of expressing care, even the ones who seem uncaring at first. Sometimes parental approaches initially perceived as careless may hide intrinsic other-centered care towards children. For instance, Antonia experienced a situation in which her parents weren't initially supportive of her decision to pursue her passion and become a fashion designer. During the interview, she explains: "They feel that if you don't do well in school, that's when you're supposed to do fashion. My dad was like: Why don't you do architecture? Why don't you go do something else?" (Antonia, 27:04). Here, the parents of the respondent may appear uncaring and unsupportive, because they seem against Antonia's idea of starting a career into fashion. In Ghana, the dressmaking still struggles to be considered a 'proper' occupation from many, because mostly related to "a dull occupation for school dropouts or weak students" (Langevang & Gough, 2012, p.248). However, Engster (2005) supports the idea that parents pursue their goal to develop their children's basic capabilities in order to gain "possibilities for a good life" (p.53). Even though often parents' interest doesn't necessarily foresee children's needs or passions, "by their own visions of the good life, both are raising their children in what they consider to be highly caring ways" (Engster, 2005, p. 53).

Another type of care that arises between parents and our fashion designers is financial aid. From the interviews it emerges that some of the respondents offer financial support to their families through their businesses. One example is Debbee, who has her small outdoor shop in one of the residential areas of the University campus in Accra. With her creative business, she supports her numerous family (she is one of 10 children), as she contributes to the payments of her little sister's studies and living expenses: "I am the second born child. So, I have to support all my siblings, one was here [...] she lived on campus, she was schooling, and she just completed last

year. So, I supported her" (Debbee, 10:28). This finding aligns with Engster (2005) when he argues that: "Caring for another, especially one in dire need, often means depending upon others for material resources and other forms of support or accommodation" (p.59). At the same time, it confirms the uniqueness of African families that tend to share responsibilities in taking care of their family members, with the intention of spreading the burden among everyone and aim for the common well-being of the group (Amos, 2013). Similarly, Dudu explains how the economic support of her family has been critical to start her own fashion business, despite the challenges that the industry presents: "[...]to be a fashion designer, you need things like capital and help, you cannot do it alone. What has helped me is my family, to get me started, I could not have done it without them" (Dudu, 07:45). Therefore, financial support seems to be another means of expressing caring, simply because it involves practical and concrete gestures that contribute to the well-being of the care receiver (Lynch, 2007). All in all, our data illustrate how the parents of our respondents can also act as subjects of caregiving and care receiving in the relationships with our fashion designers.

### Care Relations with Extended family

Besides the nuclear family there is the relationship with the extended family, a concept which can draw some confusion. Amos (2013) confirms how in African context the extended family is a traditional practice. In fact, when someone speaks generally about family, it is common to consider the whole extended family instead of only the nuclear family. In this regard, during the interview, Maria mentions her extended family and how African holidays are happy occasions for reunions and an opportunity to exchange favours: "We know Africans, we like having our family over for Christmas. So, occasionally before Christmas the family would come and gather. And as a seamstress, sometimes, some people would bring their materials to me and want me to sew something for them, and I do it for them" (Maria, 15:15). The familiar tradition and experience that Maria shares informs of how African communities rely on social and traditional gatherings which are often an occasion to participate in care and attentiveness, also in a material manner (Degbey, 2012 in Amos, 2013; Lynch, 2007). For example, as for Maria to sew some dresses for her relatives. However, Maria, while disclosing her deepest care for her family, makes a distinction between caring for her nuclear family and her extended family, particularly

in terms of how much support a person should give to the extended one. Indeed, although she shows care and support towards her extended family, Maria also emphasizes that they should not demand as much effort compared to the nuclear family, which requires constant care (Lynch,2007). In this regard, Maria declares: "Yeah, I support my family (*referring to the extended family*). [...] you do have to support them, one or two people in the family [...] but not always, not every day" (Maria, 15:15). This information shows that the first circle provides different layers of support and prioritization depending on the intimate relationships (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). Moreover, Maria argues for mutual financial and emotional support among extended family members, especially when one family member is having hard time. In Ghanaian families, on the other hand, one of the recurring supports from relatives is the help to take care the children while the mom is working (Langevang et al, 2015). All in all, Amos (2013) portrays the extended family in Ghana as a cohesive unit that contributes to support all the components of the family on economic, social and psychological levels.

### **Sub conclusion**

Overall, the primary circle of care analysis focuses on the familiar care relationships of the fashion designers. Our analysis shows that both intimate family and extended family play a fundamental role in the active life of our fashion designers while running their businesses. Thus, identifying with the role of female entrepreneurs, our respondents confirm their key roles as familiar financial supporters, as well as care mothers/wives that take care of the household. In relation to their children, our fashion designers show their highest interdependency relation, as they reveal also a large extent of commitment and prioritization due to their moral obligations as mothers, although their duties as entrepreneurs. As the emotional attachment is a recurring theme across all familiar relationships of care, our Ghanian fashion designers finally show a mutual care support and a cooperative behaviour especially with their spouses, parents and relatives.

# **Secondary Care Relations**

This paragraph will analyse care relationships belonging to the secondary care circle following Lynch's (2007) definition of lower independency relations with lower moral obligation to meet dependency needs when compared to primary care relations. We have identified two main groups of care receivers that represent those individuals with whom our fashion designers engage during their creative work, employees, and customers. First, the care relationship between the female fashion designers and their employees will be analysed, including care relationships to apprentices. Second, the analysis will examine the care relationship with the customers.

### **Care Relations with Employees**

While creative work is generally seen as informal in nature (Alacovska, 2018), in Ghana, the vast majority of jobs are found in the informal sector (Gough et al., 2019). This means that jobs are often characterised by insecure employment and poor working conditions (Langevang et al. 2015; Gough et al., 2019). Despite this, fashion designer Samirah who has 11 employees, states that all workers work under safe conditions and are paid fair wages. She further expresses feelings of gratitude and affection towards her employees "I think they love what they do. We communicate. Everybody comes together, we laugh and everything. I also give them the opportunity to bring out their inputs, what they think... My team, I feel my team is amazing. I am really lucky to have them, and I appreciate them... No issues, fair wages, medical release." (Samirah, 12:50). Samirah shows that she is emotionally engaged in her employees while further taking time to listen and "communicate". According to Lynch (2007) taking time to listen is essential for the quality of work relations, hence suggesting that Samirah is concerned about nurturing the care relationship with employees. Further, by receiving input, Samirah gives her employees attentiveness and responsiveness which suggest the care virtue of respect (Engster, 2005). Further, according to Engster (2005), feelings of affection increase caregivers' motivation for providing care; as Samirah expresses appreciation and gratitude, it increases the likeliness of her supporting her employees by, for examples, providing fair wages and medical release.

The provision of fair wages and medical assistance can be characterised as social and ethical considerations on labour conditions. Care for employees is also important from a business perspective as "caring serves to maintain the labour force and therefore the productive processes" (Glenn, 2007, p. 48). Just as Samirah, our respondent Antonia who also has 11 employees, emphasised the importance of mutual respect and the importance of including employees in the business so although work must be done "people do not feel they are being exploited, overused or underpaid" (Antonia, 25:11). She further points to physical conditions such as air conditioning, water availability and sanitation while stating that she works in the same facility as her workers, "naturally, whatever applies to you applies to them" (34:49). While in a Western view, these conditions can seem like basic necessities for any work environment, in Ghana only 36 per cent has access to a safely managed water source while only 18 per cent have access to basic sanitation (USAID, 2022), in alignment with how precarious conditions in Accra are said to be a "permanent feature of urban working lives" (Alacovska et al. 2021). Despite this, fashion designer Omeya, who has 10 employees and a store in Accra city, states that all employees are paid a living wage above the minimum wage imposed by ILO "because we understand what the cost of living in the city is like... just to make sure they are comfortable" (Omeya, 41:54). Here, it can be claimed that Omeya is suggesting that she is in "a special position to help" and care for her employees. It can be suggested that our fashion designers are alluding to their obligations to care (Engster, 2005) by virtue of their position as employers, as they recognise the capabilities and responsibilities of their position. As also our respondent Ame, who likewise owns a physical store in Accra and employs around 9 people, emphasises that the two pillars of her business is a good environment and a good salary (Ame, 29:46), it can be suggested that all our respondents who own physical stores and employ more than a few people are living up to secondary duties of care, at least in the context of meeting some of their employees' basic needs through salaries (Engster, 2005).

Sometimes, social and ethical responsibilities extend beyond the individual employee – to the objective(s) of the employee's own care responsibility. Dudu, a smaller brand-owner with 5 employees, shows concern beyond the lives of her employees, by highlighting employees' living conditions and family situations: "I have one elderly woman. She has children at the university.

I'll say that it is really helpful for her and for her children" (Dudu, 15:30). Here, Dudu expresses care and concern for not only her employee but the family relations, which supports that the responsibility of caring for workers is not only limited to sustaining workers but also their families (Glenn, 2007). It further follows Engster's (2005) concept of dependency as it illustrates how the ability of the employee to care for family depends upon material resources and support from her employer (p. 59). This extended responsibility or social obligation to care collectively for others is extended more below in the section on *tertiary care relations*. Overall, our respondents manifest care responsibility for their employees, and hence our findings support recent findings that care can be a tool for obtaining better working conditions within creative businesses (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019).

### **Care Relations in Apprenticeship Systems**

Skills in Ghana are widely obtained through the apprenticeship system – while male apprentices are found in many professions, female apprentices are primarily working as seamstresses or hairdressers (Langevang & Gough 2012; Schraven et al., 2013, in Gough et al., 2019). Accordingly, three of our respondents whom all have apprentices, work as both fashion designers and seamstresses. One of them is Debbee, who currently has 2 apprentices herself. When asked about her relationships with the apprentices, Debbee acknowledges their abilities by expressing that they are "good workers that makes good things" (Debbee, 3:13). Here, Debbie shows her workers the care virtue respect by "treating them in ways that do not degrade them in their own eyes or the eyes of others and by acknowledging the abilities they have" (Engster, 2005, p. 55).

It is further common in Ghana that apprentices are restricted to young people belonging to a specific family or community as it is seen as a way to pass on certain skills (Gough et al., 2019). Continuing with our respondent Debbee, she is an example of a working seamstress who started out as an apprentice before taking over from her mom, who is still working with her (0:40). Sometimes, it is difficult to identify the specific family relation between the fashion designers and their apprentices as concepts like 'daughter' are occasionally used to refer to extended

family. An example of this is our respondent Maria, who has one apprentice for whom she provides skill training and considers a part of her family: "She's my daughter... She's like a family friend ..." (Maria, 5:08). Further, in our card prioritisation game, Maria puts her employee on 1st priority with "self" and "profit" and explains that she needs her "for the business to function" (24:34), which suggests some degree of dependency (Lynch, 2007), which further also leads to an obligation to care (Engster, 2005).

While the relationship with apprentices has been said to transcend traditional known spaces of social support, such as family ties, previous studies have identified rationales for keeping apprentices as the benefits of free labour and prospects of attracting more clients (Hanson, 2005). While the labour undertaken by apprentices may be free, participating in an apprenticeship provides, besides the development of skills, essential networking and connections vital to both their own and others' livelihoods (ibid, 2005). For the fashion designers, their livelihood and income depend to a certain extent on the skills of their apprentices and hence the caring relationship between on one side Debbee and Maria and on the other their apprentices are related to how the well-being of one is depending on the well-being of the other (Engster, 2005). In other words, Debbee and Maria are most likely to provide general care as there is an extent of dependency in their relationship with their apprentices (Lynch, 2007), although care responsibility is lower than with primary care relations – even if they refer to apprentices as family.

## **Extended Care Responsibility**

While the use of family-references as above can allude to close dependencies, according to Alacovska (2018), it can further mean that "the informal, interpersonal efforts become the basis for the accomplishment of economic activity" (p. 1565). While it is recognised that informal and relational-focused environments can underpin precarious working conditions (Alacovska, 2018), our data show that the familiar relationship between employer and employee can have caring benefits for the employees. In other words, interpersonal work relations can carry heavy care responsibilities on the part of the Ghanaian fashion designers. It is evident in the case of the

home-store owner and fashion designer Dudu, who expresses concern for not only her employee but for the family of the employee, when stating that an elderly employee has children at university [Dudu, 15:30]. She continues to talk about the family situation of her other employees, illustrating that she is aware and attentive towards employees' home situations. This extended responsibility can be related to Engster's (2005) concept of obligation to care, where "caretaking work creates a collective or social debt that obligates each and every member of society to help support caring activities" (p. 58). In this perspective, family references can denote how the care responsibility for employees implies deeper dependencies — as the fashion designers are supplying and supporting whole families. The responsibility to care is only more apparent when we understand the needs of those around us "who share our social institutions or culture" (Engster, 2005, p. 67); care towards broader communities will be explored more below in the section on *tertiary care relations*.

### Care Relations with Customers

The second group of care relations that belong to the secondary care circle in our model is our fashion designers' customers. In Ghana, for seamstresses and fashion designers, one of the most demanding tasks is to create a new customer base by flaunting the best innovative and entrepreneurial strategies, while nurturing the relationships with them with attentive and thoughtful gestures (Langevang & Gough, 2012; Engster, 2005). Our respondents have similar types of clients that range among professional women, creatives, stay at home moms, young graduates and teachers. Our fashion designers' customers are women with an average age that goes from 25 to 35 years old, but occasionally also women up to 60 years old.

## **Customer Care Experience**

Customer experience represent a meaningful occasion for our fashion designers to show care towards her customers. Ame, for example, mentions how important it is for her to deliver a good customer experience. why she tends to foreground and improve this type of service in her business: "our customer experience is, number one. Our customer is very important to us, not

just the service we provide to them, but then the experience they have of us [...]" (Ame, 08:05). Ame also describes how she takes care of her customers from "the very first interaction all the way to them wearing that dress" making sure that they are highly satisfying their "guests" – way in which she refers to her customers – at every stage of the interaction providing a special treatment: "Just as when I come to your house, you're going to treat me with the highest respect you're going to give me [...] that's how we treat people when they're here" (Ame, 32:52). Ame argues for the "highest respect" possible, aligning with Engster (2005) who considers respect as one of the three crucial virtues of care. The author claims that services should always treat their clients with respect in order to avoid resentment and mistrust. In this case, Ame shows her respect towards others when she recognizes that her customers are worthy of attention and responsiveness, that follows the reasoning of Engster (2005) in regard to his meaning of respect.

In addition, other respondents aim to deliver a good customer experience through attentiveness and responsiveness. One of them is Omeya, who argues that the overall goal for her brand is to satisfy her clients by understanding their needs and selling them pieces of quality: "[...] people want to go through reliable sources where they can have these pieces uniquely made, designed for them. And we do that throughout the year" (Omeya, 12:42). Similarly, Maria, the fashion designer owning a small shop in the market area in the Campus, is very keen on creating an accommodating and caring environment for the customers: "We are always saying the customers are right [...] So, we are always nice to them. So, they came, and they are here always. [...]" (Maria, 05:49). However, she further explains that their propensity to come back depends on how likely they approach them, that entails the requirement of acting nicely and with care in order for the customers to come and stay: "It depends on you, and how you go with your customers" (Maria, 13:01). Another example is given by Dudu, who welcomes her customers in her show room in her house. Through our analysis, we have found out that Dudu is very attentive and responsive towards her customers, as she ranks them first in the card prioritizing game: "They're the people that motivate me to wake up every morning and do what I do. So, my customers come first before me" (Dudu, 21:20). Here, Dudu shows a high sense of attentiveness towards her clients, by favouring the necessities of the others prior than hers (Lynch, 2007).

#### **Relationships of Feelings**

In the care relationships with customers, most of our fashion designers reveal to show feelings such as emotional attachments, compassion, and empathy. According to Engster (2005), emotional attachment is another candidate virtue component of care although it is not fundamental. For example, Samirah, who runs her shop in Accra city hints feelings of emotional attachment and care towards her customers, when she affirms: "People can come and try things on, and they won't buy anything, that's fine, they will come back, you know. Because of how it made them feel, in a certain type of way. So that's the joy of it sometimes" (Samirah, 24:05). Samirah explains that when she is present in the shop, and not helping her mum in Makola Market (usually weekends or mornings), she loves to see the reactions of her customers while wearing her outfits and receiving suggestions and feedbacks from them: "Oh, can you cut it this length for me? Or can you do this?" And I like that because they're getting something that they love, you know?" (Samirah, 24:05). From these words, we understand how Samirah cares about her customers and how she prioritizes their satisfaction and positive feelings rather than the pecuniary earnings. Thus, she conveys how her creative work is other centred as "it is directed in the first instance by the good of the other rather than the good of the self" (Lynch, 2007, p. 559).

The concept of emotional attachment is furtherly often aligned with the virtue of compassion and empathy that Alacovska and Bissonnette (2019) largely support to be of central importance in the learning environment of general and creative businesses. This is illustrated for example by Ame, who has a fashion boutique close to the main shopping street in Accra city. Regarding her relationship with her customers, in fact, she comments: "But when my customers and people walk in it's not about the money that they give to me, but also the smile or the level of comfort and calmness you can provide to them" (Ame, 22:12). The feeling of empathy that Ame shares towards her customers implies a caring approach that Alacovska and Bissonnette (2019) argue to be a central pillar in creative industries, a feeling that accompany hands-on caring practices and acts of compassion. To reinforce the concept, during the interview Ame highlights her focus on the "intangible values" that she is able to convey to her customers through her creative work and the attentive care approach that she adopts with them (Ame, 22:12). By emphasizing the importance of intangible values, such as the calmness and comfort, over the tangible ones, as the

monetary gain, Ame demonstrates how fashion industry can be an example of business industry that prompts caring actions through a compassionate behaviour that pursue the well-being of others (Alacovska, 2020).

Additionally, some other respondents communicate their general sense of gratitude and satisfaction when customers wear their clothes. For example, Antonia, who targets women of young and older age, shares her feelings regarding seeing her creations being worn by clients: "Well, I think that when you see people wearing your clothes. It gives you... You feel happy. Even though it is a business" (Antonia, 43:30). Similarly, Dudu, the fashion designer who has now a show room at home, talks about a time when she showed her clothes in a fashion parade for Runaway Boutique, an organization that sells different fashion brands on one website. Here, she had the possibility to dress women belonging to upper working-class: "Every day seeing like all this top-management woman wearing my things makes me excited. [...] after the show, they all came looking for me, you know?" (Dudu, 09:58). The emotional attachment that Dudu expresses is critical for creating a strong and entrusting bond with her clients, who are part of an influencing social networks (Putnam, 1995 in Lynch, 2007). In relation to this, Hanson (2005) claim that in Ghanaian business contexts is fundamental to invest in "cultivating and sustaining social network contacts" (p.170), particularly the ones with clients.

#### **Social Networks and Communication**

Social networks obtained through a caring relationship with the customer enable our fashion designers to widen their clothing production, increase their daily work resources and consequently improve their service and survive in the marketplace (Hanson, 2005). For example, Afi, a 30-year-old seamstress located in the Campus of the University of Accra, affirms to have a "cordial relationship" with her customers (Afi, 03:19) while she reflects: "Well, customer care I feel is important. I like it when I get other people to come here" (Afi, 10:17). With that statement, Afi makes a clear connection between customer care and social network, also mentioned by Dudu beforehand. In these terms, a good and healthy relationship with the customers guarantees the attraction of new potential clients (Putnam, 1995 in Lynch, 2007).

Some fashion designers have created a larger network of customers relationships exploiting the online world. This is mostly given by their characteristic of being internationally oriented and their aim of reaching a higher amount and diversified customer group. For example, Samirah states: "Yeah, we've had a lot of customers that we've retained since we started. And we get new customers all the time. Online is huge, because we have customers from all over" (Samirah, 20:35). Although having a huge international online clientele, Samirah focuses to build a genuine and informal care relationship with the local customers, with the purpose of creating a long-lasting relationship: "Some of them are like become... some just sit in the shop and just have a conversation. So, you know, it's open to everybody" (Samirah, 20:35) In fact, she explains how the women that attend her shop are usually the "women next door" or "very fun clients", with who the fashion designer develops friendly and casual relations. Both virtual and in person types of networks represent people's creative response to the new ways to create care relationships (Hanson, 2005).

Concerning the communication, our respondents have different strategies related to how they reach their customers and stay in contact with them (or retain them). Depending also on the extent of customers that they possess, they use a way of communicating that can vary in the use of the language (Ghanaian dialect or English) as well as in the means of communication (words of mouth or social media). Dudu, for example, has mostly local customers who she invites in her showroom at home, and she comments: "Communicating with them (local customers) is easy because they speak the local language, so if English is a challenge for them, I can speak with them locally" (Dudu, 05:17) Moreover, Dudu also reveals that she expands her customer network through words of mouth, which is common practice among seamstresses in Ghana. In fact, also Omeya voices her similar experience with local customers: "How we interact with them? We do direct communication [...] And a lot of our clients have been through referrals and word of mouth" (Omeya, 18:48). Omeya describes more thoroughly affirming that the local clients don't like reading emails. On the other hand, she has realized that sending newsletters through WhatsApp incentives them to get in touch with the brand. Indeed, Omeya explains also that another type of customer interaction that she experiences a lot occurs through social media (Omeya, 18:48). In support of this, Overå (2006, in Langevang & Gough, 2012) informs that the

increased use of the mobile phone contributes to create more fruitful occasions for Ghanaian entrepreneurs of expanding their network of clients and build.

### **Challenges with customers**

Seeking to create care relationships with customers, some fashion designers inevitably encounter some challenges when trying to support them in their purchases choices or when misunderstandings arise. For instance, Maria shares some examples in which the relations with customers are characterized by some tensional situations. One of the main challenges with customers that Maria often encounters is the scarcity of trust customers have on the fashion designer's vision. In other words, Maria informs that it often happens that women go to her market shop with one style that they want to pursue but that doesn't fit their identities. Thus Maria, with the intention to make a suitable dress for her client suggests another style or other options, without success (Maria, 07:46). It's common that in Ghana fashion designers "create new styles to suit changing identities and markets" as part of their creative and inspirational job (Gott & Loughran, 2010), 2010, p.103). Moreover, these incongruencies between the customers' wants and the designer's competencies sometimes leads to the client not to pick up the finalized dress, and consequently not paying the service, which grave encumbers on our fashion designers' income (Maria, 09;13). In relation to this, a study from Anyidoho (2013) informs that often vendors in Accra express their disappointment for not receiving adequate respect to the value and service they offer.

Moreover, different challenges impact the different care relations with the customers and our fashion designers' creative work. Afi, who argues to have different types of relationships depending on the types of customers, refers generally to the customers mostly being challenging, due to their arduous demands and their expectations in terms of quality and prices: "Most of the time customers wanted us to put a lower price and they wanted our clothes to be of quality. So, it is very challenging" (Afi, 07:32). The uncaring actions of the customers, indeed, go in contrast with what Engster (2005) considers a duty of respect "by acknowledging the abilities [people] have" (p.55) while maintaining the moral obligations "to refrain from causing [people] harm"

(p.58). Additionally, Debbee, shares the difficulties that arise in interacting with her clients: "Dealing with them (customers) is not easy [...] All of them are not that easy" (Debbee, 04:13). Debbee, when voicing her challenges with her customers, also affirms that the variety of clientele and personality leads her to approach customers in different ways, although trying always to be attentive and responsive: "It's how you talk to them, how you approach them. How good you are working, how you charge, [...] especially because there is a lot of competition" (Debbee, 04:13). The competition among other fashion designers clearly causes in Debbee fearful feelings of losing customers (Anyidoho, 2013) pushing her to always adopt an attentive and caring approach towards her customers, even with the tough ones, for the critical survival of her brand.

#### **Sub Conclusion**

To sum up, this section has indicated that the Ghanaian fashion designers practice other-centred care in their relationships with their employees, most evident in feelings of affection and gratitude. It is further based on mutual dependency relationships between fashion designers and employees; as our respondents have suggested feelings of care obligations towards sustaining employees and their families, while also relying on their employees' skills and productivity. It can be suggested that work relationships between Ghanaian fashion designers and employees including apprentices are transcending more traditional known ties of 'family', illustrated with the usage of family concepts. Analysis of the relationship of care with the customers illustrate how our fashion designers in an attentive and respectful way aim to provide a quality customer experience. Other-centered care is also transmitted towards a high sense of respect towards the customer, who sometimes lacks recognition and appreciation towards the fashion designers, as challenges convey. On the other hand, our respondents express care for their clientele when they engage with them in their shop sharing feelings of empathy and compassion. A further element of care is given by our respondents' informal and friendly communication styles, which all in all can widen the fashion entrepreneurs and designers' social network of customers.

# **Tertiary Care Relations**

In this section we will introduce our findings and undertake an analysis of Ghanian female designers' tertiary relationships of care defined as care practices between "unknown others" (Lynch, 2007). Based on our interviews, we will explore the relationships of care among competitors in the fashion industry, care relations among Ghanaian women, and care for local communities.

## A Community of Care: Care Relations among Competitors

While work and relational dynamics in the creative industries have been characterised as competitive, taking place in winner-takes-it-all markets, studies taking an ethics of care approach have found that care for collegiality and reciprocal relations are indeed present in these markets - especially in environments that lack well-developed local infrastructure (Alacovska, 2020; Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). In our research context of fashion designers in Accra, our data supports the notion of a competitive fashion industry, characterised by high work autonomy and uncertainty. However, our data also clearly supports care for collegiality, in the context of the Ghanian fashion industry, as expressed here by fashion designer Samirah:

What we need to do as an industry in Ghana, is to come closer together and collaborate instead of competing, because I see a lot of competition and I feel like we need to be completing each other, not compete with each other. Can you imagine the impacts that we will be able to make? ... I should be able to call the designer and say, "hey I'm looking for this type of something, where can I find it" (Samirah, 30:30).

Samirah is a young, early-30 fashion designer with an established brand and physical store in Accra. According to Samirah, her business is doing a lot to support the community, emphasised by how she in our card prioritisation game prioritised community above customers and employees (App. 5, R5: Samirah). As illustrated in the above quote, Samirah is one out of three respondents who expressed hope for, and an interest in, nurturing the industry relationships for mutual benefit. In the words of Lynch (2007, p. 556), "varying states of dependency and interdependency" exists which each care relationship, here it is evident in the degree to which the

designers depend on each other for support. While established fashion brands might be less dependent on competing designers for making ends meet, for some, dependency and mutual support can be a way to ensure sales and perhaps ultimately business survival. Fashion designer and smaller business owner Dudu, who recently had to fire employees and move her physical showroom to her own home because of the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, engaged in mutual solidarity with a fellow designer by sharing a selling stand at a market. She expressed that they did not distinguish between the two fashion brands, which signals collaborative behaviour. Dudu expressed how, despite competition, "we are in it together" and that "we can still try and support each other" (Dudu, 12:30). Hence, suggesting and supporting that creative work is also "enmeshed in relations of mutuality" when caring about fellow fashion colleagues (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019, p. 146).

While our data demonstrate feelings of compassion and solidarity between Ghanian fashion designers and competitors, it also suggests that they extend this care more carefully and selectively. As emphasised by Ame, one of the owners of the bigger brands attempting a global outreach, the fashion industry in Ghana can be very pretentious which makes it more difficult to ask for help, why Ame herself only has "a few people I would call within the fashion industry" (Ame, 26:23). According to Langevang et al., (2015, p. 465), "women in Ghana find their businesses restricted due to the number of entrepreneurs engaging in similar activities, resulting in high levels of competition". In continuation of this, only few of the Ghanian fashion designers are a part of an industry association with none of our respondents' expressing benefits of joining. For fashion designer Omeya, who also runs a larger fashion brand, the goal and purpose of these associations remain unclear and untrustworthy, as she compares it to the preferred option of communicating among close, selected, fashion designer "friends" (Omeya, 42:15). Mutual trust has also previously been identified as a factor for collegiality in creative industry communities (Langevang et al., 2015), while "trust in public institutions is important for allowing people to cooperate with and express solidarity for one another" (United Nations, 2021). As there is often a negative perception of the Government in the informal industries in Ghana (Anyidoho, 2013), it may influence the extent to which the fashion designers put trust in associations and hence the solidarity between the Ghanaian fashion designers. Although in general, following Lynch (2007),

it makes sense that more care is extended to closer relationships of friends with tertiary relationships such as wider industry relationships being more characterised by "care-less-ness".

Within the fashion industry in Ghana there are smaller communities based on, for example, business size or educational background of designers. While there is a long history and tradition of the apprentice system in Ghana, "formal education is prized highly by Ghanaians" despite the challenges of obtaining formal employment (Gough et al., 2019, p. 1889). Fashion designer Ame, a brand-owning designer with a store in central Accra, compares the negative reputation of the fashion industry in Ghana with uneducated fashion workers: "People who did fashion were school dropouts and people who don't know what to do with their lives. Yeah, the good for nothings" (Ame, 12:13). This statement suggest that Ame does not share the same feelings of solidarity as identified above towards all colleagues, further as she believes that the industry is getting more respect with "people like me entering it" (Ame, 12:13). Ame herself is an educated Architect and she works "three jobs", being an architect, a fashion designer and a mom (Ame, 9:39). Similarly, Antonia, who has a master's in business management, perceives the industry as evolved so that you now need a fashion degree to be a fashion designer (Antonia, 37:07). While Omeya, undergrad in business administration, shares the view that the industry has changed: "Traditionally, people would go into sewing and dressmaking... designed for people that couldn't make it to another level, if you know what I mean. There wasn't a lot of respect given to the creative industry. Now that has changed" (Omeya, 33:50). Omeya emphasises how education in fashion has changed the industry perception, which aligns with other empirical studies in Ghana stating that while entrepreneurial professions like fashion entrepreneurship is respected (Langevang et al., 2019), the prestige within dressmaking has decreased (Langevang & Gough, 2012). Overall, the statements from these three educated fashion designers point to a very fragmented industry, supporting the great variability within trades in Ghana (Gough et al., 2019). In addition, the collegial solidarity in the fashion industry in Ghana is also an element of competitive advantage considering how networks and friendships can increase the chances of a profitable business (Gough et al., 2019).

### A Community of Care: Care Relations Among Ghanaian Women

With more women than men engaged in entrepreneurial activities in Ghana, and with many of them choosing the female dominated trading and retail industry (Langevang et al., 2015), a community of women in Ghana is identified as a distinct tertiary care relationship to which our respondents express solidarity. While the fashion designer Omeya is aware that Ghana has a lot of female entrepreneurs (Omeya, 36:40), she is further conscious of supporting other female entrepreneurs:

"We're helping women owed businesses by buying from them locally, as opposed to other brands that will impose their fabrics. We don't import because ... there are all these small business owners who have brought fabrics from all over the world. And what good would it be if I bypassed them ... Maybe I might have a wider variety? Maybe, but then how do I help the woman in my local community to empower themselves if I'm not catching from them and helping them to make an income?" (Omeya, 14:15).

These statements from Omeya clearly indicate that she feels an obligation to support women in her local community - what Engster (2005) refers to as feeling "obligated to care" (p.65) - by virtue of her position as a fashion designer in need of fabrics, despite not currently making any profit herself. The same is the case with Samirah who owns one of the larger businesses and fashion stores in Ghana: "maybe 75%-80% of the staff I work with are women, of course. Any chance or any way to build women, I'm here for it, so I work a lot with them ... I just want women to feel empowered, confident" (Samirah, 5:45; 10:27). Here, Samirah clearly expresses a sense of solidarity towards women, as she intends to support them through her creative business everytime she has the possibility. In addition, Samirah has previously been producing bags in partnership with widowed women in Bolgatanga, in Northern Ghana: "they weave stuff for you, and then you provide their livelihood, payments will go to their kids' school fees and so on. It was amazing" (Samirah, 4:05). While Samirah had to end the partnership during Covid-19, she expressed the care virtue of respect (Engers, 2005). She indeed recognised the capabilities of this group of women while perceiving them as worthy of being in a partnership with her, why she expressed intent to work with them again. Besides, the fact that she collaborated with a Northern Ghana community that generally is challenged with higher poverty lines and hardship, suggests that Samirah is also attentive to vulnerable communities that may be harder to reach.

The card prioritisation game revealed that some fashion designers feel like they belong to a community of women. The fashion designer and brand/store owner Antonia feels that, with her business, is supporting the surrounding community and society, third to her family and herself (App. 5; R4: Antonia): "First of all, I belong to the community of women trying to make a change in our community. Trying to make a difference, trying to give employment, to make a change" (Antonia, 42:24). Hence Antonia sees herself as part of a community with the ability to create change in the society which signals other-centred care for the broader community as well as an obligation to care by virtue of being a capable female business owner and entrepreneur (Lynch, 2007; Engster, 2005). While perceiving herself as capable entrepreneur and expressing specific female opportunities in the female-dominated fashion design industry, Antonia further highlights specific challenges related to being a female entrepreneur, including:

"If you want to go do mass production for companies or industries or government institutions that [female challenges] comes to play. At that point, it doesn't matter that it's a female dominated industry. If there is a male, there is a higher chance that he will be considered... Are you going to be able to attend meetings, travel. Are you able to leave your family, kids, to take on certain roles that demand immediate attention?" (23:02)

Antonia alludes to the traditional care role and expectations of women as she positions it as a challenge or obstacle for business growth. Also, Omeya is highly conscious about challenges related to female entrepreneurship in Ghana and highlights both internal and external challenges with being a woman in business, for example, when meeting stakeholders that ask her "why don't you just get married? And let your husband take care of you?" (Omeya, 40:56). In both Antonia and Omeya's cases, their statements align with how "women [...] are likely to be perceived as and frequently are those responsible for a range of care activities and the organization of care" (Mckie, Gregoy & Bowlby, 2002, p. 901). It is possible that there is a link between the expected care role of women and challenges with business growth, also evident in how women in Ghana typically operate in the smaller businesses in comparison to their male counterpart — despite most entrepreneurs in Ghana being women (Langevang et al., 2015; Quagrainie, 2018). Moreover, Ghanaian women in business are more likely to encounter problems of accessing finance and lack of profitability leading them to end their business

endeavours (ibid). In this perspective, the female community of entrepreneurs including fashion designers may be prioritising care for each other and themselves to overcome specific challenges related to female entrepreneurship and female work.

## A Community of Care: Relations with Locality

On a general level, care is seen as an activity that aims to "maintain, continue, and repair our world" to make it as liveable as possible (Engster, 2005). A part of this world is our surrounding environment, including our local community, and how we care for these surroundings will have an impact on our individual world. Our respondents especially emphasised social engagement through business activity and affection towards the local community, as exemplified in the following quote from storeowner and designer Samirah: "I just never wanted to move production from here. It's giving jobs to people here. People make their livelihood... the bigger it [the business] gets ... the more openings for employees I get" (Samirah, 24:11-36:40). Here, Samirah explicitly expressed the importance of job creation for sustaining locals' livelihoods. While Samirah did confess to considerations about moving for personal reasons with her Australian husband, she explained that she ultimately found it impossible, as she is supporting people's "livelihood" (Samirah, 24:11-36:40), suggesting that she is caring for people's basic needs and functioning (Engster, 2005). In contrast to Samirah, fashion designer Dudu only has a few employees and no physical showroom or store in the city. Still, also for her, the ability to have her business in her hometown is a way of supporting herself and her local community, by being "a source of employment" (Dudu, 15:30). As explored in more depth above in the relationships of care with employees section, Dudu is very conscious about how she is supporting her community through her employments, as she is aware of her employees' family situations (Dudu, 15:30). In this way, our findings illustrate the consciousness of social impact among Ghanian fashion designers and support other recent findings that creative workers care for the communities in which their work is embedded (Alacovksa & Bissonnette, 2019).

When it comes to employment of workers in Ghana, we recognize that it is difficult to make a distinction between care for closer relationships and care for the general local community. As mentioned in the above-analysed section on *the care relationship with apprentices*, employments are often made from a social network or closer community of family, friends and neighbours. This is further emphasised given the informal nature of creative work itself, where employment is based on social capital including connections of friends and family (Alacovska, 2018; Menger 2006). Hence care circles overlap in the context of what makes up a community – by caring for friends or neighbours, one can be caring for the local community. However, we do believe that we can distinguish between the closer community of specific individuals like friends and the wider collective and general community, especially when our respondents make explicit their care objective and intent as here the "local community" and "people's livelihoods".

A more critical take on the claim that employment of others can be other-centred care is that the action of employment is a natural consequence of business growth and hence possibly driven by monetary ambitions and self-interest or self-care. In this context, local employment and community support will become a somewhat accidental care consequence or benefit. While it is hard to distinguish the extent to which care for the community is an objective business aim or goal, it can be argued that the respondents' statements undoubtedly do signal care for the collective others, as employment makes it possible for fashion designers to meet, develop, and sustain basic needs by, for example, providing food on the table (Engster, 2005). It is important to note that while these care acts towards communities typically are more diffuse or less caring than direct care acts such as going out and buying someone food, even business growth or money generating activities can have caring purposes simultaneously to profit (Engster, 2005). In this perspective it can be hard to disentangle profit from community care acts. In the card prioritisation game, how profit was prioritised varied greatly; 3 out of 7 times profit was prioritised higher than community, 2 times below community and 2 times equally prioritised (App. 5). As it remains unclear what the rational was from prioritising profit, it remains unclear whether profit relates to being able to support others. While the act of generating jobs may be a less conscious and more diffuse act, the impact of generating jobs in low-income countries where many live under the poverty line, is indeed not small in its ability to prevent suffering and hence

has a great paradigmatic care potential, understood as care for others basic needs (Engster, 2005).

Another way of caring for the community is through volunteering activities (Lynch, 2007). Our findings suggest community solidarity as some fashion designers expressed how they support and actively help vulnerable groups. The best example is Dudu, the fashion designer whose business has been quite financially affected by the Covid-19 crisis. Still, Dudu is conscious about donating clothes to those "less privileged" (Dudu, 43:07). As exemplified by our respondent Samirah, there are different ways that one can support vulnerable groups with different levels of engagement. Besides the partnership with the vulnerable community of widowed women in North Ghana as explored above, in a more distanced relationship, Samirah donates the percentage of sales for the month of October to breast cancer awareness (Samirah, 43:07), which can also be seen as a care act towards the community of women. Hence, the fashion designers are showing feelings of solidarity toward the broader surrounding community, which also supports other recent findings that creative workers are perceptive of social injustices (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019).

While perceptive of social injustices, most of our respondents did not explicitly express engagement in volunteering community-related care activities, just as there was limited participation in industry associations as identified above. According to Engster (2005) human capabilities of social cooperation and social contributions depend on the extent to which we receive care from others, "if we are to care for others, most of us depend upon others" (p. 59). This aligns with Lynch's (2007) concept of how "those who have received much care in life are care-rich" (p. 565). In this context, the ability of these female fashion designers to support and develop the local community to a certain degree depends on the extent to which they receive care from others. Further as quality of care "varies with the wealth of emotional resources available to sustain it" (Lynch, 2007, p. 565), it can be suggested that the lack of engagement in volunteering activities is a result of limited emotional resources. Based on this, it is possible that "othercentred public care work" (Lynch, 2007), such as volunteer work, is limited in our case of the

Ghanaian fashion designers because of limited received support and care from governmental and public institutions, building on the analysis above. At least, neighbourhoods mired by poverty are not likely to create the kind of trust that builds social capital and enables other-centred care (p. 556). However, rather than arguing that communities are not "care-rich", our data above overall suggests that Ghanaian female fashion designers do care for the communities in which they are embedded. Specifically, our findings show that they tend to care for and rely more on closer relationships which for them is not limited to biological family but close communities of friends, employees and neighbours, who they trust more. Hence, it can be argued that the fashion designers practice care but in a different way and engage in care-rich communities although these are defined as closer communities of trust and most often with respect for proximity.

#### **Sub Conclusion**

To sum up, this section supports other findings that the Ghanaian fashion designers practise other centred care, also towards broader communities and unknown others. Our findings indicate that some of the fashion designers are seeking to actively support vulnerable groups as well female communities, while attentive of challenges related to female entrepreneurship and work in Ghana. Still, the fashion industry in Ghana is taking place in a highly competitive environment with trust mainly being shared between closer relationships of friends despite some intentions and interest in nurturing industry relationships for mutual benefit.

# Discussion

In this chapter, we will reflect upon and discuss the findings, the theories and the methodology used in this thesis with the purpose of answering the research question: "How are female entrepreneurs and fashion designers in Ghana expressing care towards others through their creative work?" In the first section, we will present the empirical findings that emerged from our analysis of the data. The second section we will discuss upon the theoretical framework implications, the contributions that have apported to our analysis and the limitations that led us to adapt the model better fit our analysis. In the third section, we will reflect on the methodological implications, by considering the validity and reliability of our data. Finally, in the fourth section we will identify some topics for further research.

# **Empirical Findings**

Based on our research question, this section seeks to present and reflect on the most important empirical findings from our study, building on the 8 semi-structured interviews with Ghanaian fashion designers in Accra. It is structured based on the theoretical framework and structure of our analysis: the self, the primary care relations, the secondary care relations and the tertiary care relations. As it follows the theoretical and analytical framework, this section will also consider how the findings relate to identified theory including the care model by Lynch (2007).

The first part of the analysis focused on how the Ghanaian fashion designers through their creative work are expressing care towards others by practicing self-care. Our analysis shows indication that acting in self-interest can be an act of self-care, and second, that prioritising self-care can be a considered a necessity for the ability to practice other-oriented care. Our findings in this section adds a new dimension to the existing theory and the Concentric Circles of Care Relations model by Lynch (2007). While the care relationship with oneself can be viewed as a distinctive, additional, relationship, it does not share the characteristics of the primary, secondary and tertiary care relationships, why this thesis has not proposed to add the dimension of self to

the Concentric Circles of Care Relations (ibid). It is here proposed instead as a somewhat ambiguous concept that can illustrate the relationship between self-interest and self-care as potentially other-centred, hence supporting the literature arguing that care for others is not necessarily in contrast with self-care or self-interest. In addition, our findings specifically indicate that the Ghanaian fashion designers act in an other-oriented self-interest specifically to be able to support and care for primary care relations, which aligns with theory by Engster (2005) and Alacovska (2020) suggesting close relationship between the well-being of oneself and that of others.

The second part of the analysis started to follow the analytical framework inspired by Lynch (2007) and focused on how the fashion designers are expressing care through their creative work towards their primary care relations. Therefore, our findings here explore the care relationships of our fashion designers with their family, including relationships with children, spouses, parents, and the extended family. Firstly, our findings show that family in general represent an essential point of reference for our respondents. Both receiving and giving care within family is considered important as much as necessary. In relations to giving care to their families, most of the fashion designers have manifested care by providing financial support while being present and active in the household maintenance and childcare activities. This double burden appears to convey support to their spouses, as our Ghanian fashion designers' experiences confirm their role as breadwinners argued by Langevang et al, (2015), responsible for both generating income and the compliance of the overall household duties. At the same time, our findings disclose that our respondents provide support to their parents, as some of them declared to help their parents' by sustaining them with their own businesses or by helping them in their family businesses. Moreover, our fashion designers have shown to enact care through attentiveness and responsiveness, in line with Engster's (2005) virtue of care, especially in relations with their children. In particular, the experiences of our fashion designers as mothers inform how having a child certainly impacts their roles as business owners, as they must anticipate and prioritize their time to dedicate to their childcare activities while running their businesses. In fact, in accordance with Lynch (2007), our respondents demonstrate to have a high interdependency relationship with their children, as they need to guarantee the satisfaction of their children' needs and comply

with their duties as wives in the households. Furthermore, findings have illustrated how our respondents engage in caring relations with their relatives, considered part of the family – in contrast with how Lynch (2007) position the extended family in the secondary circle. Here, despite some lack of data, one respondent has shared how mutual care is shown through emotional and economical support, although with a lower intensity of attentiveness and responsiveness.

The third part of our analysis investigates the identified secondary care relationships of the female fashion designers the employees and customers. Through analysing the care relationship with employees and apprentices, we found the Ghanaian fashion designers do practice othercentred care towards their employees and apprentices. The data from the larger business owners and designers indicated feelings of affection, gratitude and appreciation towards employees as well as strong care obligations evident in concerns on labour conditions and salaries. This focus on labour conditions correlates with how creative industries are connected to precarity, exploitation and underpayment (Banks, 2017), a common employment concern in Ghana (Langevang et al. 2015; Gough et al., 2019). Potentially related is the finding that the obligation to care for employees can go beyond the employee, with some fashion designers expressing an obligation towards sustaining workers families. The data from the apprenticeship care relationships indicate mutual dependency relationships, although how the data remain limited as to indicate how the fashion designers rely on care from apprentices in practice. Still, it was indicated that apprentices are often a part of- or considered a part of- close or extended family, which can suggest both that the designers feel an obligation to care and that it is a relationship which they highly depend on. Hence our findings in this section indicate mutual dependencies between fashion designers and employees which supports the applicability of both Lynch (2007) concept of secondary care and Engster's (2005) concept of care obligations.

Regarding the relationships with customers, we have found out that our fashion designers focus on enhancing their customer care experience in order to build a long-lasting and trusting care relationship with them. As part of their creative business, it is important for our respondents to deliver their values through the quality of their services. This is reached by our respondents through adopting the three main virtues of care – attentiveness, responsiveness and respect – introduced by Engster (2005). In this sense, our findings have shown that our fashion designers tend to adopt a caring approach towards their customers, aiming to their satisfaction and wellbeing. We have furtherly found out that the responsiveness of our respondents and their open and casual communication, help to increase a network of clientele that consequently improves the market of the fashion designers (Hanson, 2005). Furthermore, our findings have demonstrated that part of our respondents develop emotional attachments as well as feelings of compassion and empathy towards when making their customers happy through their creative work, underlying their other-centred behaviour. However, from our finding it also emerged that despite trying to facilitate the relationship with care and attentiveness, fashion designers experience challenges and tensional situations with some customers. In fact, they tend to mistrust the creative judgement of our respondents and they are sometimes difficult to handle, implying some carelessness from the side of the customers.

When investigating the tertiary relationships of care, we identified both care relationships with industry competitors, among Ghanaian women, and relationships of locality. First, we found that Ghanaian designers in general do not trust the broader industry both regarding competitors and public institutions, rather the designers prefer closer creative communities of friends. Despite this, we found a clear intent and interest in nurturing the industry relationships for mutual benefit. These intentions and feelings towards colleagues support other studies that claim that care for collegiality and reciprocal relations are present in the competitive and creative fashion industry in Ghana (Alacovska, 2020; Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019). It should further be noted that the industry is fragmented and perhaps within some fashion communities' competitors are not "unknown others" as Lynch (2007) defines tertiary care relations. Second, we found othercentred care towards a community of working women and more vulnerable groups, including feelings of solidarity towards the ability of women to succeed professionally beyond the care-

roles often identified with female work. This identified care relationship and the findings are somewhat fragmented into, for example, some expressing care towards female entrepreneurs and others towards vulnerable women. Third, the Ghanaian fashion designers engage in care towards their local communities through social business engagements and through awareness of their creation of jobs. Still, other-centred care is evident on a community level specifically through business activity in support of vulnerable groups. There is great overlap between the findings in tertiary care relations as locality and community can also incorporate the industry- and Ghanaian women community.

More generally, our findings do not oppose the theory that positions creative workers as passionate and self-expressive entrepreneurs (Umney and Kretsos, 2015; McRobbie, 2016a; Lee, 2018). It does, however, argue against the notion of creative work as highly individualized work. In other words, it has been illustrated that creative work is embedded in relationships of care characterised by mutual dependencies (Lynch, 2007), supporting Alacovska & Bissonnette's (2019) study that considers the common good as an ethical foundation of work. Simultaneously, these findings align with both Alacovska (2020) and Alacovska & Bissonnette's (2019) study on care in the creative industry when claiming that creative workers do include moral considerations and participate in relational commitments, in their creative work.

# Theoretical Framework Implications

In this paragraph, we will discuss how the adapted theoretical framework of Concentric Circles of Care Relations by Lynch (2007) has been critical to help us analyse our data and answer our research question. However, we must acknowledge that Lynch's (2007) framework presents some limitations to our research. In correspondence, we will assess whether the framework has been compatible with our data and elaborate on how the framework has contributed and impacted our findings.

First, the theoretical framework has been initially perceived as a suitable starting point for our analysis in the intent to answer our research question afore mentioned. Indeed, the model has been a useful input source providing us with solid foundation for our final analysis structure. The framework is represented in a very direct and simple way, which enabled us to apply it to our research without many complications. The simple subdivision in concentric circles between primary, secondary and tertiary care relations has made our initial process of finding screen fast and effective. On the other hand, by dividing the model in only three basic categories, Lynch (2007) has created a fixed number of sections in which care relations 'must fit', without possibility to intertwine. Therefore, despite the multiplicity types of affinities that exist between individuals (Hanson, 2005), the three defined circle sections in which Lynch (2007) group the different care relations represent one of the limitations of the model. In contrast, in our adapted model we allow for the different care relationships to connect and fluctuate and belong to more than one circle, if necessary. In our reviewed model this adjustment is possible to be seen through the dashed borders that represent fuzzy and blurred boundaries.

Second, when Lynch (2007) was unfolding and describing the characteristics and care concepts concerning the different relationships, there was a clear distinction on what type of care or what type of implications each section involved, delineating firmly the differences between the three sections. However, through the implementation of the framework we have experienced more flexibility and fluidity in the use of the care concepts among the care relationships throughout the circles. Specifically, we have argued for similar care concepts in different care circles, because in our experience care concepts were relevant in more types of relations and not only in one of them. That is because the virtues or concepts, especially from Engster (2005) that we have used were adaptable to different situations and different types of relations.

Third, the framework has contributed largely to the understanding of the different relationships that our fashion designers have with others, bonds that are somehow impacted by the role of our respondents as female entrepreneurs. In fact, the theory of interdependency has played a key role in understanding the relational dynamics between the group, based on the levels of closeness and

proximity. In this regard, the original model presents some limitations as the level of dependency between our fashion designers and others do not necessarily dependent on the relational circle. Hence, we found overlaps between the primary-, secondary-, and tertiary care circles. This underlines why we have decided to add bidirectional arrows between the borders of the circles of our adapted model to show more dynamicity and flexibility of care relations.

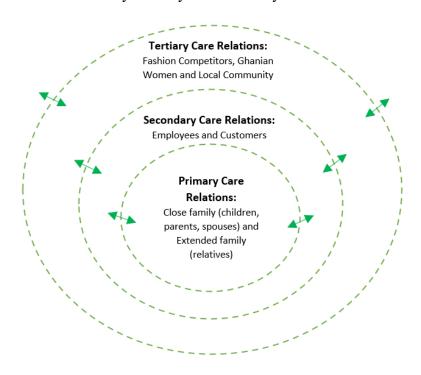


Figure 5: Adapted Concentric Circles of Care Relations 2.0 (Source: own illustration adapted from Lynch, 2007)

The fact that the original framework (Figure 1) is generic and not specific to any industry or context, made it easier for us to adapt it to our analysis considering our research in the cultural context of Ghana and within the creative industry. However, Lynch (2007) focuses on explaining the care work required to maintain those three types of relationships, having a major interest on the first care circle, presented as love labour, while paying less attention to the second and third circles. Therefore, we have found a lack of theoretical support for the care work related to the secondary and tertiary care relationship, which are considered to require less "care effort". Overall, the theoretical framework has contributed to our findings particularly in the initial structuring and understanding. However, due to some contextual incongruencies and limitations, we have had to adapt the model for the sake of our research purpose.

# Methodological Implications

Following the discussion on applied theories and concepts, it is further essential to reflect on the methodological approach including reflections on the quality of data. When conducting a qualitative study there are some specific data quality issues that should be addressed in relation to the collection of data and the semi-structured interviews as well as development researchers (Saunders et al., 2019; Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). This section will first address discuss the implication of choosing a qualitative case study design, followed by a section on reliability and validity including the implications of certain quality data issues that impact our findings.

There can be a tendency to consider qualitative data less 'real' as "hard statistics" (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003, p. 71). We recognise that only applying qualitative methodology brings with it certain limitations, however, it has been considered the most appropriate method for collecting data on our research question (ibid, p. 72). For the purpose of studying how Ghanaian female entrepreneurs and fashion designers express care towards others, the qualitative method has been considered the best suited to understand care in creative work in the context of Ghana – where care may be expressed differently than in previous studies and hence need to be understood in its unique context. In short, quantitative methods would have been limited and inadequate when exploring the subjective experiences and meanings of Ghanaian female fashion designers in their socio-economic and cultural context.

Similarly, case studies have attracted some concerns including that "they provide little basis for scientific generalization" (Yin, 2009, p. 15). However, it makes little sense to consider generalizability given that we are studying specific, individual experiences at a specific place and point in time. This is further supported by the scientific approach adapted in this thesis, highlighting scientific "truth" as restricted to the concrete situation that is studied; here knowledge does not need to be true in an objective sense (Egholm, 2014, p. 170). While our thesis does not claim high generalizability, it can instead contribute to the generalization of theory, also referred to as "analytical generalization" (ibid p.15), as it is applying care theory in the context of Ghana and providing new insights into the applicability and limitations in this context, as explored above.

### Validity and Reliability

While generalizability is not commonly sought in case study research, validity is considered important as researchers should "maintain a chain of evidence" (Yin, 2009, p. 19). Validity can be described as credibility and relates to the quality of the data (Saunders et al., 2019). During our analysis we have encountered meaningful lack on data regarding the family situations in the households. More specifically, the absence of concrete examples of how our fashion designers were taking care of their children and spouses in a practical way. With semi-structured interviews, it is possible to achieve a high level of validity by probing meanings and by using clarifying questions (ibid, p. 451). As touched upon a few times, the validity of our data could have been better as we did not attain as much information as expected. While we did make use of paraphrasing, the interviews could have provided us with richer data if we had asked more indepth questions, asked for more clarification and re-phrased our questions to ensure that our respondents knew what we were asking of them. Other options for increasing the validity includes expanding the data set by interviewing more respondent and continuing the interviews until reaching data saturation (ibid), although, it would still have been relevant to ensure rich data in individual interviews through deeper questioning. Still, we managed to interview fashion designers from both very small businesses in containers to larger businesses with physical stores in Accra, which gives a more valid portray of the fashion arena in Accra. Conducting more interviews have in this case not been an option due to the time available for field research further given that the purpose of the interviews is limited to this master thesis. Similarly, more time and opportunity to build stronger relationships and increase mutual understanding with both Ghanaian researchers and fashion designers could positively impact the quality of the data especially when dealing with language barriers as development researchers (Scheyvens and Storey, 2003). A better understanding of the Ghanaian cultures and knowledge of the native languages would naturally provide more validity to our data as it would allow us to understand the data in its embedded context.

Reliability refers to whether the study would reveal the same findings would if conducted by another researcher (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 447). Using semi-structured interviews will have some impact on the reliability simply because of the lack of standardisation in interview guides (ibid). Further, an essential concern with the reliability of qualitative studies relates to the issue of interviewer bias (ibid); meaning how we as interviewers have acted in the interview situation and come across which further has influenced the interviewees' responses, as touched upon above in our interviewing and ethical concerns sections. Reliability is also often related to bias which according to Saunders (2019, p. 448) includes interviewee bias, meaning how we as researchers have been perceived and how we have come across. When conducting the interviews, we introduced the purpose of the research as related to their business, why our findings should be viewed in the context of the respondents' lives as business owners, as female entrepreneurs and fashion designers. How we have conducted the interviews will have had an impact on what the fashion designers have chosen to disclose about care relationships related to their creative work. It is possible that other findings would have emerged had the interview been introduced with an interest in personal relationships, and with questions only focused on the care relationships of the interviewees.

While acknowledging that our data could have been richer, we do consider the data that we retrieved to be reliable 'enough' under the circumstances that we have accounted for. It is important to note that our findings are not intended to be repeated since they "reflect reality at the time they were collected, in a situation that may be subject to change" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 449). Rather, we approached our study with qualitative flexibility and a pragmatic scientific approach.

## Future Research

From the findings we obtained from our research, we have found that there are multiple areas that can be investigated in the future more in-depth. First, our thesis has mostly relied on care theory researched in Western countries, consequently developed by western authors who typically study and look through Western lenses. For this reason, it would be interesting to carry out further care studies in Ghana, or other African countries as well as in other developing areas, to have a more local perspective of care. For researchers, it can be recommended to apply intersectional approaches to consider historical, social, and political contexts. Furthermore, it would be useful to use inductive approaches to generate knowledge and theory, and/or if possible, integrate local theories or adopt local philosophies, for the research to build on local knowledge. Otherwise, these studies should be carried out by researchers with a particular understanding of the cultures and idioms to avoid language barriers and to better understand care within the socio-cultural context. At that point, it would be interesting to create a new contextualized framework that, compared to the western one, could reveal contrasts, tensions as well as similarities with Western theories and challenge dominating normative understandings of creative industries, fashion industries and entrepreneurship.

It could have been researched more about how the female Ghanaian designers and entrepreneurs are expressing care through "the production of a symbolic, artistic and innovative product", following our definition of creative work. As our research is more focused on the designers' care relations while running a fashion business as female entrepreneurs, our findings have been limited in terms of investigating their actual creative products, in this case, their designs. While it is touched upon in relation to how the designers are expressing care towards their customers, it would be interesting to dive further into what way this care comes across, such as through ascetics or cultural expressions such as choice of fabrics. While our findings did not indicate a lot of care prioritization towards culture, other researchers have found culture as a strong part of creative work- and products in Ghana (Langevang et al., 2021), as well as entrepreneurial activity as a part of transforming culture (Langevang, 2017). By applying theories of care in combination with a cultural lens perhaps through inductive approaches, it can also be explored

more in-depth how cultural concerns are evident in creative work and add to this scant literature on culture and care.

Furthermore, our thesis has focused on the study of ethics of care and on our respondents' care relationships towards people and society, despite our initial intention to include ethical fashion. Although our research directed us away from combining ethical fashion with ethics of care, it still presents itself as an interesting research topic. In order to research ethical fashion however, considerations should be made towards the fact that it is a Western concept that is mostly known by larger fashion businesses. Hence, it could be recommended researching what ethics means for the fashion industry in Ghana from a bottom-up approach instead of applying ethical fashion concepts into a mainly informal economy that perhaps understands ethics within its own social and cultural context. Upon understanding ethics in the creative fashion industry, it can be interesting to explore how or whether these understandings of ethics relate to care.

# Conclusion

Through an explorative study, this thesis has aimed to contribute to knowledge around the phenomenon of care in creative work and explore the care relations of female entrepreneurs in the Ghanaian fashion industry. Specifically, we seek to answer our research question:

How are female entrepreneurs and fashion designers in Ghana expressing care towards others through their creative work?

To conclude, our data and findings have shown that the Ghanaian entrepreneurs and designers demonstrate other-centred care in a variety of ways and forms through their creative work while simultaneously acting in their own self-interest for self- and other- caring purposes. Indeed, they show care to their intimate relations by providing emotional and financial support obtained through their creative work; to their employees and customers engaging in mutual dependency relations and attentive customer service through their business activities; and finally, they take their social responsibilities seriously, as they further play an active care role in their communities through the creation of employment. Further, the findings indicate interest in strengthening collaborative behaviour within the fashion industry and solidarity towards Ghanaian working women. At last, our findings indicate that the designers' creative work aims to serve as self-care to ensure own well-being, which further leads to being able to extend care towards others.

These findings were concluded based on the theoretical lenses and the contextual lens of Ghana. Interestingly, our analysis does not contradict the arguments of creative work being driven by passion or self-interest, however, it recognises that this can have self-caring purposes and further that self-caring is important for female Ghanaian entrepreneurs in the fashion industry. While supporting other research that self-care is related to other-centred care, in the context of our study, it was further shown that these self-care acts are often closely connected to care for intimate relations. In the care extended to intimate relations, it was particularly the financial care responsibility that stood out; while Ghanaian women have traditional female care responsibilities, it further includes financial care responsibility for children. Also, for the employees in the creative businesses, we found that the female designers sometimes viewed workers as family, possibly to retain labour, although the Ghanian entrepreneurs also extended

care responsibility to the employees' situations and families. Moreover, despite attentive customer care, the Ghanaian designers experienced many challenges as customers, for example, would not consider the creative suggestions of the designers or would order a product and not go through with the deal, which relates to the informal conditions of the Ghanaian fashion work. Additionally, for Ghanaian female entrepreneurs, traditional female care labour is also seen as an obstacle to their entrepreneurial pursuits or at least as limiting their creative work. At last, our findings showed great attentiveness towards communities although limited care act towards unknown others, except for the creation of employment. This possibility relates to the care priorities of the fashion designers – although it can be challenged whether it is a question of priorities or care capabilities.

Our thesis has contributed with more knowledge to the literature on care by adapting the theoretical framework model inspired by Lynch (2007), the 'Concentric Circles of Care Relations', to our study of Ghanaian entrepreneurs in the fashion industry. Besides providing a structure for analysis, the theoretical framework helped us understanding how our fashion designers were expressing care and support to the others – from the closest people with a more intimate relation to acquaintances and unknown people. In this way it further served to structure our findings around key concepts in a specific order. Other studies of care (Engster, 2005) including care in creative work (Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2019) have also contributed immensely to the structure and content of our analysis. By drawing on Alacovska and Bissonnette (2019) adapted framework, we were able to observe and get insights of care in a creative business context. Through Engster's (2005) concepts of care virtues and obligations of care, we were able to deepen the analysis as it allowed us to investigate and determine how care is expressed. The additional care theory also provided the analysis and findings on self-care as a necessity for other-centred care, allowing us to add new perspectives to our analysis on care relations.

# Recommendations

Building on our research and findings as summarised in the discussion and conclusion, we identified some practical implications for the Ghanaian fashion sector. Despite larger fashion businesses' intentions to nurture industry relationships and learn from each other, our findings indicate that there is a tendency to trust few, closer circles of friends within the creative competitive fashion industry. Still, given the intentions and wishes for a more collaborative industry, it is recommended that relevant industry actors promote cooperation and affective solidarity for the collective advantage and advancement of the industry. If not for the individual benefit that can be derived from collaboration and mutual learning, then for the benefit of the community and industry as solidarity work enhances mutuality and relationality within both professional communities and surroundings neighbourhoods (Alacovska, 2020). A way to enhance trust and collaboration is by bringing creative workers together in, for example, workshops. A study by Langevang et al., (2021) has found that artistic workshops in Ghana can foster more respectful, attentive, and affective relationships among creative participants, with a respondent expressing that it enabled participants from diverse backgrounds to develop mutual trust. Hence, collaborative events or workshops can further be a method to attempt to unify the fragmented Ghanaian fashion industry.

Considering the tendency not to trust the public sector in the informal industries in Ghana other actors may need to step in as "relevant actors" to promote cooperation and affective solidarity. One of these actors is the fashion designers, although, the capabilities of this group may be limited as also evident in their care priorities and, perhaps, the insecure context of their work. Rather, we appeal to national and international development organisations and private sector initiatives. Although, it should be emphasised that these actors should engage with the Ghanaian entrepreneurs and designers to identify and meet needs to enhance self-care and well-being, to ultimately produce caring communities. This is supported by our findings that indicate that the self must be supported to be able to support others. When facilitating collaborative processes, it is again important to engage with respect for the socio-cultural context and restrain from identifying needs of Ghanaian female designers from Western notions.

Despite the lack of trust in public institutions, there are valuable learnings for government which has capabilities to build and sustain creative fashion designers. Also, as lack of trust in public institutions influences both economic and social growth (United Nations, 2021). For example, while it is long recognized that female entrepreneurship should be promoted to reduce poverty and create employment, the employment that is generated is more often not taking place in questionable and criticised labour conditions (Langevang et al., 2015; Langevang & Gough, 2012). We suggest that by investigating and identifying the needs of the entrepreneurs and the fashion industry including their challenges to growth (such as requiring capital as a female entrepreneur), governmental actors should extend care in an attentive, responsive and respectful manner while focusing on building relationships of trust. Beyond economic contributions such as investments in female entrepreneurship, there are possibilities of social contributions by partnering and collaborating with creative workers and fashion designers. Concretely, we urge policymakers to consider care ethics and the promotion of solidarity by investigating how they could effectively extend care and support to the Ghanaian female fashion entrepreneurs and designers.

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