SR950 Clinical and Applied Sociology

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Professor

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1.Select a social issue or problem relevant to your profession. Clearly state your thesis (purpose) for your essay.

2. Critique the issue through the lens of one or more of the major sociological theories (Structural Functionalism, Conflict Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, Postmodernism).

3. Draw on Christian perspectives of cultural critique to consider where your chosen sociological theories might fall short or might affirm Christian principles from your faith tradition.

4. Answer the question, "How can sociology foster understanding of this issue?"

5. Construct potential "constructive" approaches to the problem through a sociological lens.

6. Synthesize and integrate sources from your developmental reading.

7. Compose a succinct conclusion and restate your thesis.

8. Include your references.

Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**Inequality and Care: Women’s Cognitive and Emotional Labour within the Household**

Care and domestic work in the household has put women at a disadvantage and encapsulates the material and social relations of gender, gender systems and power relationships. Gender inequality in the household is not often obvious, it can be silent, invisible and obscured (Dean, Churchill and Ruppanner, 2022). Gender inequality is discrimination or privileging one gender over another. That men and women carry different roles in society is a sociocultural reality that has persisted over time. In postmodern times, the majority of households are dual income and require women and men to work outside the home. However, the data confirms that women continue to carry the lion share of care and household work. This creates inequality and promotes not just mental strain but cognitive and emotional labour for women. The purpose of this essay is to use a sociological lens to explore the socio-cultural factors influencing gender inequality, unpaid care work and cognitive labour for women and critique sociological approaches from a Christian sociology perspective.

**Gendered Social Roles, Norms and Values**

Society has continued to assign roles and labour based on gender. Women ascribed as carers and men as workers [outside the home]. These roles have been socialized from childhood. The term work has been gendered as masculine, that is ‘economicus’ or economic man. Therefore care and domestic labour still today struggle to be defined and quantified as work and amplifies the gender inequities in household and in work overall.

Fostering communal behavior in men is important to promoting gender equality in the household and lessening the mental and cognitive load of women. “Being communal is a trait that is generally valued positively. However, traditional gender roles inhibit prosociality in men. The GRIP (gender roles inhibiting prosociality) model (Croft et al., 2021) describes the interplay of gender role expectations and status differences that predict gender differences in prosocial behavior. Gender-inconsistent prosocial behavior (i.e., men behaving communally) can be fostered, for example, by reducing men’s fear of social backlash or by placing a higher value on communal roles and traits and strengthening the association between men and communion.” (Reich-Stiebert et al, 2023,pp. 490). Reich-Stiebert et al have highlighted that gender inequality in care and household labour is not just physical (laundry, cooking etc.) it is cognitive and mental. The mental work includes thinking about what to cook, do you need to stop at the supermarket to get ingredients, can you do that on your way to pick up the kids and many other mental and cognitive “worry work” and strategic thinking before you can start cooking. The authors suggest that there is a need for multidisciplinary research and approach to the challenge. They suggest that strategies to intervene ought to include men’s increased involvement in the home and care of children and others in order to address the gender inequalities. The authors have honed in on important aspects of my own work to change the world and in particular hinted at the type of sociological intervention I want to undertake for my action research. I want to ensure that my intervention seeks to educate on the cognitive and emotional labour of care and household work and include men and women in strategies for improvement. Public discussion on these issues as highlighted by the authors is important. As a clinical social worker, I believe that engaging with the family is important but also that a macro approach through public dialogue is paramount. That there is a need for more scales and models to investigate the challenge is true. However, in Jamaica there is need for education around definition and further exploration before we can get to development of scales to include in our national labour survey.

**Cognitive Labour and the Mental Load**

The discourse on gendered division of household work has captured physical and socio-emotional labour. However authors have recently examined a third labour, that of cognitive labour that is unevenly divided by couples in the household. Cognitive labour consists of multiple mental tasks that can be emotional, stressful and draining. Women also undertake these tasks disproportionately and this labour is underappreciated and is not outsourced as are some physical tasks in the household. “The lion’s share of the scholarship on the gendered division of household labor has focused on two types of task: physical tasks, such as cleaning, doing laundry, or grocery shopping; and socio-emotional tasks that involve aﬀect management, like calming down an overly excited child, supporting a partner, or investing in social relations (Erickson 2011;Newkirk et al. 2017). Recently, scholars have convincingly argued that cognitive housework is a third task type that is unequally divided within couples (Oﬀer 2014; Ciciolla and Luthar 2019; Daminger 2019;Robertson et al. 2019)... Daminger (2019) outlines four types of cognitive household task: (1) anticipation, which includes recognizing an upcoming need or problem; (2)identiﬁcation, which refers to researching and determining the options for meeting the upcoming need; (3) decisions, which include considering and choosing among options; and (4) monitoring, which includes supervising the execution of decisions and ensuring they suﬃciently address the need” (Haut & Gelbgiser, 2024, pp.829,831). Work-family and family-work conflict are key constructs in this discourse. As we begin to unpack and uncover nuances to the debate such as emotional, socio-emotional labour, mental load and others, we begin to appreciate the magnitude of the issue. As a helping professional the issues are clear and need further public discussion. This article contributes a great deal to applied sociology in particular sociology of the family and gender. It highlights key aspects of cognitive household labour and its focus on gender division and inequalities that exist within care and household work. It brings to bear the increasing thrust and importance to record/document cognitive household labour as distinct from physical household labour which is documented in time use surveys. It emphasizes the sociological significance of creating studies that examine the nuances of inequality around cognitive labour and the situation for women in the household and societal impact.

The burden of cognitive labour at home impacts women’s output at work and their overall family-work conflict which is not true for men. According to Haupt and Gelbgiser (2024), “the higher the share of cognitive labor women bear, the more exhausted they are at work. For men, by contrast, the relative share of (self-reported) cognitive labor is not predictive of their family–work conﬂict. Thus, it is important to add cognitive labor and its consequences to discussions of the consequences of inequalities within the household for gender inequalities outside the household” (pp.848).

**Sociological Critique- Conflict theory and Structural Functionalism**

Fritz (2021) seeks to define clinical sociology in the context of a profession of analysis and action that is interdisciplinary and seeks to intervene in the lives of individuals and groups. Clinical sociologists work with policy development and on change in client systems. Clinical sociology brings a good understanding of gender inequality and care and household management. It emphasizes that policy work and group intervention can take the challenge further beyond the personal to the political.

From a sociological perspective, work life conflict and the sociology of work has been disaggregated through theorists and debates around Marxist, conflict and functionalist ideologies, feminist notions of gender roles and society and other socio-political and structural notions around society (Grint, 2005; Watson, 2017). Through this lens the nature of man is centered on the purpose of serving society, creating labour and care responsibilities for workers. Gender inequality in the home can be understood through a sociological lens based on the social institution of the family and role functioning. Society often seeks to maintain stability, functioning and homeostasis based on norms in society. Because women are child bearers and traditionally stayed at home to care for the family, functionalist sociology would consider it functional that women carry out the carer role. Feminist theorizing built on a conflict sociological tradition is most useful to understanding the problem of inequality. From perspective around patriarchy and power relations, intersectionality, and structural and systematic inequality the debate around unpaid care work in the home can be explored.

Additionally, within the discourse there is a sociology of care perspective. England (2010) presents five sociology of care frameworks. “The “devaluation” perspective argues that care work is badly rewarded because care is associated with women, and often women of color. The “public good” framework points out that care work provides benefits far beyond those to the direct recipient and suggests that the low pay of care work is a special case of the failure of markets to reward public goods. The “prisoner of love” framework argues that the intrinsic caring motives of care workers allow employers to more easily get away with paying care workers less. Instead of seeing the emotional satisfactions of giving care as its own reward, the “commodification of emotion” framework focuses on emotional harm to workers when they have to sell services that use an intimate part of themselves. The “love and money” framework argues against dichotomous views in which markets are seen as antithetical to true care.” This framework seeks to create a model for understanding the burden of inequality within care work.

Structural Functionalists see value in women being carers for children and the household as a functional role to maintain status quo and equilibrium in society. Conflict and critical theorists expose inequality within various systems and social institutions like the family. Conflict theory challenges power dynamics and advocates for marginalized and disenfranchised groups to bring about social change. Within this discourse the work would be centred around overthrowing the patriarchy and challenging the social norms around gendered labour within the household. This is aligned to feminist theorizing and advocacy.

**Christian Sociological Perspectives for further Ponderance**

**“**Perhaps the most useful sociological interventions for Christian clinicians involve, as Roger Straus (1979) noted, “redefining the situation” in religious terms, grounded in shared religious values and meaning, for groups, organizations, churches, and communities (63). Thus, sociological interventions often involve re-defining the situation in explicitly religious or theological terms, grounded in shared values and meaning (63)” (Reichard, 2023,pp 375).

My research interest has been around women and empowerment through work and family policies. The sociological context around women has been considering inequality/inequity, subjugation to men and powerlessness and this continues to this day. In examining the bible, it can be easily misconstrued as promotion and acceptance of the subjugation of women. However, this needs further exploration given that roles and norms in society reflect structural functionalism and culture and cannot be taken out of theological context. In my research on work-life balance and women’s inequality, the discourse is consistent with how the intersectionality of women has provided an unequal context for women across various races and classes. The religious subjugation of women is also something to be explored along this messaging. Umoh (2021) highlights socio-cultural and biblical teachings of women’s inequality in Nigeria. She presents a picture of Nigeria as not in favour of women’s equal rights and justice even though 50% of the population is made up of women. There are clear misgivings of incorrect interpretation of the bible as promoting women’s inequality and how this misinterpretation has been taken out of context the socio-cultural and socio-structural situation back then. Umoh calls for a unifying of forces both sociological and religious to combat systemic gender inequality and influence parity with women and men. This call to action is aligned with feminist scholars and activists across the world.

This discourse has a critical piece for Christian scholars. Though not obvious, it points to key aspects around the theology of work that present a different position from the sociology of work. Importantly, gender equality is another key pillar to the debate. Today, women have more liberties and rights in countries where the bible has a strong influence, though the challenges with misinterpretation still continue to this day around texts that speak to the husband as head of the household and other nuances that do not associate women as equal to men. It is important to understand work-life balance within Christian scholarship as expressed through the theology of work which brings us back to the theme of God’s traditional gender roles for man and woman. Although critical sociological tradition examines religion and religious activism and practice, secular sociology falls short in its analysis of family life and work because it refuses to acknowledge God’s divine renewal and purpose in our lives. Clinical sociology does however come close to its alignment in intervening in human lives for the betterment of society.

**Conclusion**

As a Christian scholar and social worker, my passion and motivation is towards gender equality in the home and society and making efforts towards family life development and renewal. The mental load that women carry within the household reflects socio-cultural factors such as gender role socialization, expression of societal norms and values that perpetuate gender inequality. Clinical sociological intervention and Christian sociology can address the challenges of care and gender inequality in the household through strategic and guided moral epistemology and theological and biblical teachings.

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