SR890 Action Research Project Prospectus

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**Compile the Prospectus**

**Compile all four sections together in the DSL Project Template as a Prospectus.**

**Addressing Work Life Conflict, Unpaid Care and Domestic Work and Gender Inequality in Jamaican Households using a self-training intervention strategy: An Analytical Auto ethnography**

**Introduction**

“In Latin America and the Caribbean, women work three times more than men per day, considering the domestic tasks and the unpaid care activities…” (Ximienes et al, 2021, p. 1). This data is in alignment with global statistics that reflect women’s challenge with work life balance (Haupt & Gelbgiser, 2023; Reich-Stiebert et al, 2023; UN Women, 2018; ILO/Gallup, 2017). Though it is an important factor, the challenge is not just about who is doing more work and how many hours but how societies continue to define, organize and structure productive work [without consideration for care work and appreciation of various intersectional vulnerabilities] that creates, perpetuates and promotes systems of inequality and inequity.

The family is an important part of God’s plan for human existence. Though paid work has become a large part of our existence it was never meant to be an end in itself but a means to an end. Within a system of capitalism, the need for the “worker” has become the focus of our lives, as consumers of goods and services. Within this research, and beyond the work life balance discourse lies a notion of reclaiming families.

Society’s socialized gender roles stand as a core challenge in a postmodern society of dual income households. What is uniquely a man’s role and a woman’s role within the gender role socialization and gendered division of labour discourse is a thing of the past. When compared to their male counterparts, women’s labour force participation continues to be interrupted by unpaid care work. The implications for women’s career advancement and promotion, income status and overall security is a major concern for Jamaican women trying to balance their lives, livelihood given their responsibility for bearing, rearing and raising the next generation often singly.

The way work has been constructed creates a dissonance with “life” and the negotiation of life priorities in particular lives of women with children given the rigid nature of paid market work as an employee. Critical to this study therefore is the continued legitimatization of this core responsibility and the inordinate challenges faced by women in paid work outside the home and unpaid care work in their own home.

There has been data that shows that men are increasingly helping out around the home ( Aumann, Galinsky & Matos, 2011). Notwithstanding this, the problem goes beyond men “helping out” around the household and “sharing the burden” of managing the family to a greater nuanced view of who owns the role of carer, nurturer, and household management and to what degree does this role expand? Is it task specific or do men share the mental load and emotional labour that is carer and household manager? Where does gender equality/gender justice reside within the household?

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# Statement of the Problem

***Diagram 1- Problem Tree***



**Root causes**-Cultural conditioning and gender role socialization

**Effects-**Ill health, Overwork, family dysfunction…Kengatharan, 2020

**Problem** -Women continue to carry the lionshare of household and care work (mental load and emotional labour)

Though women are major players in the workforce, the problem is that they continue to disproportionately carry the burden of unpaid care and domestic work (Dean, Churchill and Ruppanner, 2022). The problem is compounded by a lack of understanding of the real issues that exacerbates the problem that of the mental and emotional labour involved in care and household management. Women experience the mental load of caring for children, their husbands, (sometimes elderly and disabled) and others in the household while continuing to manage the household and plan for the family. The challenge remains not just in the physicality of the labour but the problem is compounded in the mental strain of planning and implementation of care. “The mental load is the combination of the cognitive labor of family life – the thinking, planning, scheduling and organizing of family members –and the emotional labor associated with this work, including the feelings of caring and being responsible for family members but also the emotional impact of this work” (Dean, Churchill and Ruppanner, 2022, p. 13). Even in households with a paid carer and household worker, the burden remains with the wife/mother to think and organize for everyone. The research has shown that men have increasingly been helping with doing dishes, bathing children, reading bedtime stories, taking children to school (though not to the extent to maintain equity or equality with women). Additionally, the mental preparation that goes into planning for these activities, scheduling and organizing and sequencing is often not undertaken by men. This mental load requires the woman to be ‘on at all times.’ This creates a challenge not just for the woman who has to balance her workload while maintaining her sanity and physical health through self-management; it also creates a challenge at the mezzo and macro scale for the family and society. The family is an essential part of maintaining and sustaining life, workers and continuity. The burden of this situation often rests on the shoulders of the wife and mother in the household and societies continuing to consider this a challenge for only women, will yield negative outcomes in communities, organizations, churches, governments and general erosion of society. Failure to address these factors and social problems will have a negative impact on women and families which can result in lost opportunities for the national human capital development. Additionally, the ill effects of the mental load promotes erosion of family structures and family systems which have long terms impacts on society (diagram 1). This challenge is often seen as a woman’s/family’s issue (private troubles) but it becomes a public issue when there is no infrastructure to support the needs of the household and the family and there are spillover effects on work, government, economics and other human capital factors.

**Background of the Problem**

***Historical Context***

Society evolved from pre-industrial agricultural hunter gatherer society where the locus of production was still centred around working from and near home, [a society which bred inequality and sexual division of labour], to a shift to the industrial revolution which saw the growth of industry through mechanization, science, technology and innovation, to the post-industrial society fuelled by information technology, service and innovation. For a long time market work did not work for the household and has been at odds based on the lack of appreciation for the changes in demographic situations, the status of women in market labour and other factors. While the demotherization and defamilisation has been seen to some extent through the state provisions of care, the adequacy based on quality and numbers of facilities and the cost of care have precluded some groups of persons. It is essential to acknowledge within the contention of the discourse the important relationship to land and agriculture as a means of survival through subsistence farming and barter of goods for exchange. As capitalism began to expand, non-owners of land were pushed out of agriculture and into factory work which was expanded and explained through Taylorism and Fordism in the north. This industrial era revolutionized the world and the world of work and led to the primary means of exchange for goods and services to be that of money, thereby further separating home and market without the adequate support for both structures. This is where the ideology of separation of ‘life’ and work began to take form which led to the segmentation ideology within the work life balance discourse.

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## *Problem Overview*

Notwithstanding the historical and philosophical accounts and the current separation of home and market as dichotomies of private and public labour, work is central to daily living, survival and reproduction of human society and even a sense of self and source of meaning. Work is tied to people’s livelihood and material well-being. At the core of our existence is home, market and state and work operates at all levels. Work therefore plays an important role in the home space operating at the point of the private lives of individuals and families, which has only recently been given due attention.

The challenge of gender inequality stems from a system of hegemonic patriarchy that fuels inequality for women in the home and a persistence of normative gender roles that perpetuate the male provider and woman caregiver model. This promotes the social and economic devaluing and undervaluing of ‘women’s work’ both in the private and public spheres. The challenge persists due to a lack of understanding around the issue, the levels and interconnectedness of household and care work that carries a cognitive load and cultural aspects of the problem perpetuated through language and cultural norms, mores and values. These factors continue to promote challenges of work life balance, burnout in women, lack of reliable and affordable care for elderly, children, and the disabled. Culturally, the system of productive and reproductive work and organization of work itself continue to make certain assumptions about workers, for example that households are nuclear families with wives staying at home or in the case where women work there is a “provider” husband/partner in the home. These assumptions continue to exacerbate the situation for household work and women and promote pay inequality.

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, given the tasks that have been assigned to boys and girls in the home. Though there continues to be some changes in the trend, the gendered division of household work is weighted more heavily and frequently on women (Ferdinand et al, 2016).

The term work has been gendered as masculine that is ‘economicus’ or economic man. Men ascribed as workers and aligned to productive work outside the home. The economic value placed on productive work has also exacerbated the issue. 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. Historically, the system of national accounts did not recognize household work as work.

**Sociological Theory**

Conflict Theories and feminist theories are useful to explore gender inequalities that exist when examining unpaid household and care work. Conflict theory helps us to expose inequalities and injustice in society, it explicates challenges in social structures including families, dissects unequal distribution of power and material relations of gender. Feminist theories dissects the gender inequality debate and advocates for a disruption of injustice against women and vulnerable groups.

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.

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 in order to bring about social change. Within this discourse the work would be centred on overthrowing the patriarchy and challenging the social norms around gendered labour within the household. This is aligned to feminist theorizing and advocacy.

This theoretical framework is oriented in feminist epistemology, role conflict theorizing and modernization theory with multiple perspectives drawn from economics and sociology as is consistent with the literature internationally and within the Caribbean. There are some key theoretical explanations which seek to form the basis of our understanding around gendered labour force participation through market production and unpaid care and domestic work through household and social reproduction that form key understanding around the concept of work and women’s placement within the work discourse. Historically and conceptually work has been defined through male hegemonic and patriarchal lens often using economic models of understanding stemming from ideologies about economicus/economic man and rational and moral thinking which is separate from ethical caring ways of being which is often aligned with women. At the forefront of conceptualizing and theorizing about work is the historical milieu of what constitutes and defines work and the separation of men’s and women’s work through a sexual division of labour.

***Economic Models that frame our understanding of work***

The old adage ‘time is money’ becomes relevant here as we explore time use and availability within economic models of understanding. Distribution and use of time, allocation of roles and economic bargaining are central to this economic theoretical approach. I will explore Becker’s allocation of time theory, Economic bargaining model (Relative resource perspective) and time availability theory.

Gary Becker was known for marrying economics and public policy. Central to his economic models was the idea that investing in people can yield great rewards. He founded along with his colleague Schultz (the concept of Human capital). His theory of allocation of time within the family is germane to our research. According to Becker, decisions in relation to the household and how to use one’s time can be analyzed in the same way that an analysis of cost of market goods can be done. He contends that households can be considered as small factories where members divide their time between paid work, unpaid house production and leisure activities. In his analysis, he does not account for material or social relations of gender, his focus is on micro-level economics. His assertion was that the decision, traditional household, husbands and wives roles as breadwinner and homemaker respectively was in utility. If one partner earns more, then they spend more time invested in market production (labour force participation), this led to specialization of roles. Additionally, Becker’s analysis did not take into account intersectionality or varying households e.g. single female households which is consistent with Caribbean society.

Unlike Becker's allocation theory that factors in economic utility, time availability perspective takes into account the factor of time. Both theories focus on the market and paid work in order to make a decision but for time allocation the analysis is based on the capacity to respond based on time needed in the labour force. This decision is based on a rational calculation of time needed for paid and unpaid work which is divided between a husband and wife. The notion here is that either the husband or wife picks up the slack at home for the spouse who works longer in paid employment. With this theorizing the understanding is that labour force participation accounts for the gender gap in unpaid care and domestic work. Again this theory presumes a dual income household which is not true for many Caribbean/Jamaican households. Additionally, the logic in this theory seems to suggest that women automatically are spending more time in unpaid care work because they spend less time in paid production and does not take into account societal and systemic patriarchy in the labour market which makes it difficult for women to compete in a male dominated economy. This theory presents a utopic future that is gender neutral and does not take into account ingrained systematic division of labour and gender role socialization ideology. “The theory is not consistent with the reality that female participation in paid work is low because they do not have much time available after doing unpaid care work.” (Gyekye, 2013).

On the other hand, the Economic bargaining introduces a conflict model to the theorizing that was not introduced by the preceding models. This model presumes that households do not necessarily present a holistic time or economic utility but that individualist conflicts of interest can present themselves in making decisions about labour force and household work. According to this perspective, “allocation of housework reflects power relations between men and women.” The level of resources each partner brings to the relationship determines how much labour is completed by each partner (p.6). “In explaining women’s lower average earnings…analytical conflict theorists give considerable weight to universal biological differences. All societies, they note, have found it more efficient for those who bear the children also to do the caretaking” (Wallace & Wolf, 2006, p. 434) thus making the case for women playing supportive roles to men. On the economic front when a woman is required, based on financial need, to enter the labour market she is not viewed or treated as an equal given her primary role is seen as caregiver. Wallace & Wolf (2006) continue that “women’s child care responsibilities affect their choice of occupation and the time they devote to it in a way that is not true for men” (p. 434).

***Models of Work-Life and Role Conflict theories in the paradox of work***

Balancing multiple roles can often result in conflict and/or strain when trying to maintain boundaries with personal/family life and labour market participation. The term work-life balance has been highlighted as a factor within this conflict of private and public roles and functions. ‘Work Life balance’ was mainly an issue for working women in the 1960s and 1970s and began to surface when women entered the workforce (Littlewood 2004; Barnett & Gareis, 2006; Matthews & Power, 2002; Gurney, 2009). Still today, work life balance is considered the number one challenge for working women (ILO, 2018). “The origins of research on work life balance can be traced back to studies of women having multiple roles” (Rantanen, 2011). The work life balance research and debates were put on the agenda and gained traction in the discourse for the following reasons- “rise in the number of two-income households (Gordon & Kammeyer, 1980; Johnson, 1980), heightened concern for employees’ quality of work life (Walton,1973), possible changes in the meaning of success (Tarnowieski, 1973) and changing expectations regarding self-fulfillment (Yankelovich, 1981)” (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 76).

The term work life balance is a human resource management terminology that creates a false dichotomy between work and life in an effort to separate them as if mutually exclusive. Additionally, because of the human resource roots in the labour market it assumes any work outside of the labour market is considered non-work or non-productive which is largely misleading in relation to the nature and definition of work. We can agree however that work life balance assumes a maintaining of balance between [often competing] roles and minimizing conflict and strain between paid work and unpaid care and domestic work inclusive of family and community responsibilities. Utilizing a gendered and sociological framework, I will utilize the term ‘life balance’ to establish the nuances of around life role balance, role conflict and strain based on the problematizing of the issue.

Central to this role narrative and perspective is the seminal work of Caroline Moser. Her “triple role” framework is still an important one today. She posits that women play three major roles in society, *reproductive role* (unpaid care role of the children and other dependents), includes not just child bearing but rearing and domestic responsibilities and care of male partner; the *productive role* which is shared by men which is work carried out for reward or payment and the *community managing role* which encompasses other roles of social life and living that are carried out at the community level. Women play these roles “simultaneously, balancing the demands of each within their limited time constraints. The basis of her argument is that women’s roles are seen as naturally occurring and therefore overlooked but that the role of “breadwinner” often assigned to men is glorified and overemphasized (Moser, 1989, 2012). In justifying the sex role differentiation/sexual or gender division of labour, functionalists contend that this is an important way that society responds to the needs of various systems [including the family] in carrying out different tasks/functions.

“Thus according to functionalist analysis, primary responsibility for breadwinning and instrumental leadership is allocated to men, and primary responsibility for family and expressive leadership to women. This gender-based societal response to the need for both kinds of role is, according to this argument, reflected in the labour market. Higher average earnings for men reflect a combination of giving higher pay to people who have the main occupational responsibilities; men doing more overtime (for the same reasons); and women’s choice of less well-paid but “caring” occupations that are consistent with their general expressive role” (Wallace & Wolf, 2006 p. 433).

Though in some corridors of society the language of breadwinner and homemaker has changed to include more gender neutral and equality affirming and acceptable terminology, which is reflected in some social policies. The social systems and structures, social and material relations of gender continue to maintain [in practice] the patriarchal archaic systems maintained through occupational segregation, no or low gender pay parity and other systems of gender inequality and inequity.

Within the concept of Moser’s ideology of women carrying out multiple roles in the home, labour market and community space, there can be conflict between roles as a factor of not just demands on time but levels of exhaustion and intensity of demand. Role conflict theory “has focused on the conflict linkage whereby participation in one role is made difficult by virtue of participation in another” (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009, p. 389). Role conflict occurs when there are competing demands on time and human resources. According to Ezzedeen & Ritchey (2009) however, role integration can occur when multiple roles are facilitated. They contended that, “this notion of facilitation is grounded on theories of role accumulation which argue that individuals, especially women, derive benefits by engaging in multiple roles, including social support, resource access, and diversified gratification” (p. 389). Role strain contributes to the division of labour and role ideology. However, unlike role conflict theory, role strain theory focuses on strain and a feeling of overwhelm within one role whether the role of mother while carrying out different functions of motherhood (i.e. preparing meals/snacks, doing laundry, assisting with homework, monitoring during play time) or strain in the paid labour market while carrying out multiple job functions in the labour market ( ). Therefore role strain can occur within singular roles and compound the issue of role conflict across multiple roles and various types of work both paid and unpaid.

As a response to minimizing role conflict there are two important theories that speak to creating borders and boundaries. Work-family border theory "is devoted only to work and family domains. The outcome of interest in this theory is work-family balance/stability, which refers to 'satisfaction and good functioning at work [paid work] and at home, with a minimum of role conflict” (Clark, 2000, p. 751). Border theory looks at how people are able to balance or not by the way they structure their work/life obligations. “The theory addresses how domain [work/family] integration and segmentation, border creation and management [that is creating boundaries], border crosser participation and relationships between border-crosser [and border-keepers] and others at work and home influence work/family balance” (Clark, 2000 p. 747). Border theory discusses issues of flexibility, segmentation (work and family roles are separate), permeability of roles where integration becomes possible (can be negative or positive), work-family blurring or work family boundary ambiguity. With technology for example the integration of work through emails, and cellular phones allow for options to work from home but there are issues with ‘shutting down” from work and this may impact balance. Boundary theory argues from a similar point however, it focuses on the meaning people give to work and home and how well they are able to transition from one to the next. Boundary theory was derived from cognitive sociology and focuses on ‘ways people create, maintain or change boundaries in effort to simplify and classify the world around them” (Allen, Cho & Meier, 2014, p. 101).

There are some key models that would align with border and boundary theories that have been used to explain the dynamics of balancing and managing multiple roles. **Spillover** speaks to the permeability of work and other life commitments on each other, where demands of either aspect of life may conflict or superimpose itself on the other, therefore the lines of work, family, community, social life and activities become blurred. **Segmentation** speaks to the separateness of work and other life commitments. **Compartmentalization** reduces role conflict and role strain by allowing individuals to focus on roles that require urgent attention by ignoring other roles. **Compensation** which speaks to using one aspect of one’s life to satisfy or make-up for another aspect which may be missing. “For example work may be routine and undemanding but this is compensated for by a major role in local community activities outside paid work.” **Instrumentation** is another model “whereby activities in one sphere facilitate success in the other.” An example of the “instrumental worker is one who will seek to maximize earnings, even at the price of undertaking a routine job and working long hours, to allow the purchase of a home or a car for a young family.” The final model is a ***conflict* model** which proposes that with high levels of demand in all spheres of life, some difficult choices have to be made and some conflicts and possibly some significant overload on an individual occur.” (Guest, 2001 p. 3; Bello & Ibrahim, 2020).

Work life balance is a broad conceptual terminology that has multiple meanings for different people and different societies. It is a “wide concept which includes appropriate equilibrium between career and aspiration on one hand, compared with pleasure, vacation, and family life on the other. Work life balance was initially visualized in terms of work family conflict, defined role conflict as simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other.” Work family conflict arises when there is conflict between labour market roles and family/personal life or other roles. (Alhazemi & Ali, 2016 p. 74).

***Women, Gender and Development and Feminist Epistemology***

The discourse on women and gender relations is key to our theoretical discourse. How we have moved from the political stance of women’s research and understanding to a gender focused feminism is crucial for politicizing and orienting the conversation. A lot of this distinction is rooted in the genealogy of women’s rights movement and activism that is Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and the Gender and Development (GAD) approaches. These approaches are policy and development focused and have influenced and been influenced by the socio-political landscape of women and gender discourse and the theoretical academic paradigms of their time. The Women in Development (WID) approach was introduced by liberal feminists and was considered a non-confrontational approach utilizing egalitarianism focusing on economic participation and access for women. This looked at the incongruence of employment opportunities between men and women. Equality feminism was the theoretical and ideological focus by comparing men and women on equal/sameness grounds.

WAD was introduced by neo-Marxist feminists and more closely aligns with the equality framework which is important for improving women’s access to the productive sector and their overall station in life. The approach however does not address the systematic challenges in society and the problems associated with the relationship between men and women. Therefore the GAD approach was introduced which focuses on the neo-liberal ideologies around women’s productive and reproductive lives that keeps women oppressed in society. This approach and orientation was founded by socialist-feminists and explores why women have been relegated to inferior and secondary roles in society. This approach has been difficult to implement due to its confrontation of systematic oppression, gender inequality and focus on overturning systems of patriarchy, power and control and moving towards a more just society. For some this is seen as a threat to patriarchal equilibrium and homeostatic and for others it is seen as the “rise of the feminists and feminist agenda”. This move from a focus on women to a focus on gender has been criticized as a cover-up for women’s socio-political agenda and has seen a shift of focus in women, to women and men and now back to men through the marginalization of men discourse.

Moser, who was mentioned earlier, is a foundational part of the discourse with her development of the gender planning framework. This gender planning framework was developed based on her studies of third world women. She believes that a generalized gender planning model is not as useful in planning for development given that there are different needs and that men and women carry out different roles. Additionally, the social relations of gender and intersectional nature of women’s lives must be considered when planning for development.

The socio-political tension between theory and practice have moved between *gender planning* as a technocratic practice focused framework to *gender mainstreaming* as a theoretical construct and paradigm of equality practice and empowerment to include gender conversation in all areas of society based on the ubiquitous nature of gender in our lives and *gender transformation* which acts a dominant paradigm of interest that seeks to include post-modern ideas around policy, development and practice on a large scale to include the social relations of gender.

Though not universally accepted, chronological and ideological development of feminism through critical pedagogy has been classified in four waves. This wave narrative has been used to emphasize the shifting discourse of feminist activism between basic rights and empowerment of women and disenfranchised groups. First wave feminism (19th and 20th century) focused on legal access, elective suffrage and other rights. Second wave feminists (1960s to 1980s) broadened the debate and focused on inequality, discrimination, gender norms and role of women in society highlighting the impact of patriarchy and sexism(Ritzer, 2007; Newman 2011). An important emphasis was on breaking gender stereotypes. Black feminists like Bell Hooks heralded the next wave, her work *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (borrowing the title of Sojourner Truth’s famous speech), highlighted the lack of inclusivity and the undermining of women of colour in the feminist discourse. Third wave feminists (1990s) focused on intersectionality of race, class, gender, ethnicity and a noted rise of black feminism and womanism merging racist and sexist challenges introducing women of colour to an otherwise upper class white North American woman’s approach to feminist thought and activism. Third wave feminism also introduced queer theory and focused on the individual micro-politicking as seen through a shift in individualism during the decade. Fourth wave feminism (2012) has been enabled by the internet perpetuated by a free-speech social media culture which challenges the etiology of sexism and misogyny promoted through everyday rhetoric. It is important to note that feminist agendas were not all together resolved and closed at each wave but took on new focus/direction based on socio-political changes, postmodern conditions and overall more holistic understanding of the discourse and women’s overall struggles.

Second wave feminism which championed the “personal is political” campaign is where women’s equality in society came into question. Friedan (1963) in her book Feminine Mystique highlighted the alienating nature of private lives of housewives and critiqued the idea that women’s role was to be that of caregiver and that her only fulfillment is that of childrearing and homemaking. Towards the end of this feminist period, the care issue gained some traction and discussions about a second shift and a double burden were coined and popularized. During the third wave, the issues deepened and shaped the discourse around balancing of productive and reproductive roles which saw the rise of the work life balance debate. Fourth wave feminism further emphasized the intricacies of the challenge for women given the impact of technology, internet and social media which brought about challenges of work-life spill over, segmentation and other personal/political conceptualizations.

Within these wave debates is the ideology of an equality feminism and proponents of difference feminism. Equality feminism is consistent with liberal feminist egalitarian ideology of sameness where men and women are equal, presenting an androgynous ideal. This was the ideal of second wave feminism and the women in development movement which promoted an equalizing of roles of men and women which saw the demise of the attempts of quantifying “housewife services” using androgenic economic models. Classical liberal feminists believe in removal of all discriminating laws and policies enabling women to compete on equal grounds with men, while contemporary egalitarian liberal feminists believe more in promoting equal social and economic status of men and women through affirmative action and equitable policies that level the playing field. Liberal feminist conform to the idea that women have the mental capacity and fortitude to be equal to men and that they should be afforded the same luxuries. They purport a change in gender equality without radically changing socio-economic and political systems. The ideology is built on the premise that providing the same rights, freedoms and opportunity for women that men enjoy will bring about gender equality. Classical liberal feminist views are best known through Friedan’s work ‘feminine mystique” where oppression of women is looked at through privileged eyes and equal on the grounds of sameness with men.

The difference feminist approach adopted later asserts that our unique differences as men and women should be emphasized. There are differences not just biologically but in values and quality of relationships and roles in care of children. This feminism ideology brings to bear on factors of gender equity and justice when we come to look at opportunities and challenges of maintaining a presence in labour market work and in household work (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005 p. 148).

The feminist discourse and debates continue around the politics of difference and the politics of sameness. This discussion is important for this paper given the socio-political stance around gender equality that pervade our debates today around men participating equally in household work. With the discussion around the politics of difference the discourse is about demystifying gender equity and gender justice and adding support through policy, turning socio-political systems on its head and removal of institutional and societal barriers for women (structure of work, presenteeism, hrs of work, productivity, pay inequality) to be able to compete in and balance efforts in both the labour market and household.

***Feminist Theorizing and Critique and the Nuances of Work, Labour and Gender***

Though there have been contentions in policy and practice, gender planning and activism and feminist theorizing are aligned based on focus, emphasis and development of the women’s movement. Feminist theorizing seeks to deconstruct and reimagine androcentric value laden perspectives and renegotiate understanding based on the experiences, concerns and knowledge of women and other marginalized and disenfranchised groups.

*Liberal Feminism*

Liberal feminist analysis criticizes functional theorizing about work. Functionalists like Talcott Parsons characterized gendered division of labour in the public and private sphere as maintenance of societal equilibrium where role specialized is considered functional, useful and important in an industrialized society. Liberal feminist criticized this notion highlighting that this ideology negates the fact that this way of operating could be functional and beneficial for some (mostly men) and dysfunctional for others (women). Liberal feminists often focus on paid employment when theorizing about work much like the functionalist they criticise, the emphasis is often on how women can break the glass ceiling and the potential for greater participation in the labour force not as part-time or temporary workers with low wages….for ‘functional’ roles as wives and mothers. “Liberal feminists reject the “separate spheres” ideology arguing that it denies women the opportunity to participate in the more valued sphere. At the same time, the separate spheres ideology misrepresents and undervalues (in terms of the values of the public sphere) the activities of the private sphere.” (Denis, p. 266).

Unlike liberal feminists, radical feminists promote a total dismantling of the system of patriarchy to create a new social order where women are not exploited or subordinate to men. They contend that this system of patriarchy is deep rooted and is the source of gender inequality. They argue that a capitalist economic system creates a sexual division of labour that exploits women and that a creation of “a socialist system will allow women to do more paid work” Gills and Jacobs (2017 p. 408). Radical feminist don’t all agree on the root of patriarchy however they do agree that oppression of women is primary, and that it is more universal and rooted in our psychology and social relations than other systems of oppression.

*Marxist/Socialist Feminism*

Marxist concept of human nature is that unlike liberal feminists, what sets us apart from other animals is not rational thinking, attitudes, language or behaviours but what we do to produce, and meet our basic needs i.e. production and reproduction of social life through work. Marxist feminist is the feminist movement that most aligns with traditional understanding and theorizing about work. Marxist feminism is concerned with ending exploitation of women workers perpetuated by a capitalist system. The system of capitalism perpetuates unequal division of labour and undermines and undervalues women in paid production and reproduction or care work which reduces women’s power in society.

Marxists and socialist feminists believe that women’s role in the family and in the workplace influence consciousness and self-image. Women’s work never ends and women’s role in the family and workplace keeps them socially and economically subordinate to men.

“Marxist feminist argue that gender has to be used alongside class in analyzing inequalities and see societies as patriarchies in which power relations favour men at the expense of women” (Tong and Botts, 2017). The sexual division of labour is a basic mechanism of control, of preserving men’s superior position. Marxist feminism content that unpaid labour is a “requirement of capitalism” which keeps women oppressed. They challenged traditional gender roles at home, examining the unpaid labour of women and the expectations of society on women to look after their husbands. The unequal wages created by this segregation of types of work is not adequately addressed by the theorizing and conceptualization of Marxist Feminists.

Marxist feminists contend that Marx’s analysis failed to consider the systematic and holistic value of labour in theorizing about capitalist society. The value of labour cannot be estimated or monetized for a single individual. The value of labour must consider not just the cost of production/labour force participation but also the cost of reproduction of the working population. In essence, waged labour must consider the support of the worker and the household.

The thinking and preoccupation here is whether housework could be considered as productive and how this ideology led to the wages for housework approach to the problem. The International Wages for Housework campaign was a significant turning point for women’s work and reproductive and care work in particular. This approach was centred on the notion that the survival of the capitalist society regime was reliant on the exploitation of labour of minority groups. These wages represented exchange values which was a means of incorporating the housewife into “capitalist relations of production” considering that the working class husband would be a direct employer which introduced division not only within the working class but also within the household, this approach was short lived. Additionally, the cost of a paid wife was too costly for a working class husband. This ideology thereby highlighted the exploitation of housewives by capitalism. These considerations to the wage for housework is why there is considerably slow progress in inclusion of housework and caring activities in the calculation of national accounts. The development of a working class consciousness through productivization of household work in paid work is an important stage for Marxist feminists. In capitalist society women are considered as the “reserve army of labour” in the productive sphere. In the Caribbean, this archaic ideology of a reserve army is not culturally relevant, demographically appropriate or popular and varies based on class race and other factors.

Socialist feminists were the first to introduce both public and private sphere analysis into the discourse on work, that is the differentiation of labour market in production of goods and the work to reproduce, sustain and maintain the labour force (Duffy, 2007). Engels, Marx’s trusted colleague, was the thinker who thought systematically about the cost of social reproduction. “Engels set a precedent for analyzing women’s paid employment in the context of their unpaid domestic labour. Within his analysis he detailed how women’s role within the family defines their role within the public sphere, and how this role lays the foundation for women’s subordination to men within capitalist societies” (Gurney, 2009 p. 23). His argument was that “socialism cannot simply mean socialized ownership of the means of production, it also has to mean the collectivization of the housework and social reproduction” (Fraser, 2019). He recognised the duality of what is considered “productive” labour and the importance of fostering a holistic and integrated understanding of how reproductive and productive labour are interconnected. This conversation brings to bear, the current reality in relation to recruitment of women into the labour force and the problem of where, how and who is doing the social reproduction work; is there *demotherisation*, *defamilisation* and state care? It is noteworthy that care work is dualized where some households can afford to hire paid workers for the household. This again challenges the systematic intersectionality of the issue given the class, race, sex, household status and often immigration considerations to paid care work. Notwithstanding this, the consideration also is about the working class and the state of care in their own household. Often, there is no disposable income to hire household/care assistance due to low wages and questionable working conditions.

Socialist feminists draw on the discourse of class oppression as posited by Marxists analysis and gender oppression through patriarchy as highlighted by radical feminists. However, while radical feminists look at oppression of women by men, through a system of patriarchy, these feminists understand patriarchy as a system of oppression of women and most men by a minority of men. Some socialist feminists consider patriarchy as having “unacceptably essentialist overtones” and use the concepts of social relations of gender alongside social relations of class in their analysis of production and reproduction (Chhachhi, 1998; Denis, 2003 p. 269). Their analysis focuses on social reproduction of the labour force which serves the dominant class in society. Unlike Marxist analysis which conceptualizes unpaid domestic labour as “productive” socialist feminists introduce the concept of social reproduction, biological reproduction, socialization of the young and reproduction of the labour force. In less economically developed societies, the oppressed continue to be subjects of study with imperialism, post-colonialism or world systems theory in the context of social oppression (Denis p. 270). Against this contextual framework both in developed and developing countries, Maria Mies (1986) introduced “housewifization” … “material and ideological pressures on women of the North to become full-time housewives and consumers and those of the South to cheap producers of the consumption goods.” (p. 270) Thus promoting how women’s work in both private and public spheres serve the interest of capitalism. Mies’ work has been criticized for not acknowledging the “importance of consumption and production in the case of Caribbean women Freeman (1997) while Reddock (1989, 1994 …) explicitly discusses the housewifization of Afro and Indo-Trinidadian women since the late nineteenth century” p. 270

The race/ethnicity has been introduced later by some socialist feminist into the analysis of women and work, however authors tend to examine 2 or 3 (gender, class or race) and hold other constant. “Since the 1980's social feminism and to a lesser extent other aspects of feminism have informed the research on women’s paid and unpaid work in the economic south including the Caribbean...” (p. 271).

*Neo-liberal Feminism*

Feminism has manifested in a myriad of ways and continues to unfold as scholars and activists assess and reassess social change and progress in systems of patriarchy and capitalism and the socio-political space. Neo-liberal feminism has evolved and has met with controversy based on ideological and strategic debates. It has been accepted and lauded for its ideological stance of conservatism and individualism promoting a nuanced view of resilience and control of your own life in the face of various forms of inequality (Slaughter 2012; Sandberg, ). However, it has been criticized as a move to depoliticize women’s collective challenges and an undermining of liberal feminism (Dabrowski, 2020; ).

Neo-liberal feminism serves capitalist agenda and focuses on individual empowerment and advancement of individual women. Some women are able to succeed based on privilege, positioning, opportunities and the ideology of “pulling oneself up by their own bootstrap” but what about other women on the proverbial and literal factory floor? So while some can break the glass ceiling, the sticky floor concept important becomes where others are held down because of their vulnerabilities and intersectional politics. It is therefore imperative to understand and take into consideration, the social politics and privilege inherent in the neo-liberal view of women’s advancement making the marrying of feminist ideology (through neo-liberal feminism) with capitalism very suspicious. Saunders ( ) criticized Sandberg’s work (lean in) for appearing to blame women for their failure to advance thereby ignoring the mezzo (community) and macro (state) responsibility for women’s advancement; the personal is political. The neo-liberal stance brings to bear that not all women’s movements are feminist movements as neo-liberalism drags people into homogenizing and distracts from the real issue.

The central ideology around contemporary feminism is society’s reliance on women’s care work and the degree of inequality that underlines women’s lives. Care within traditional liberal and radical feminist thought and ideologies have presumed under private and personal problems presenting and supporting a model that has been presented today as “lean in” ideology.

***Caribbean Black Feminist and Womanist Thought***

In the Caribbean, liberal feminist theory informs the Women in Development approach, major policy preoccupation has been the integration of women into work in the formal economy. The largely western ethnocentric analysis of work utilizes the public private sphere ideology where the public sphere (paid work) more highly valued and male bread winner family and housewife is considered the norm. This ideology though presumably transient and present in Caribbean society, are not consistent with the realities of the majority of women in the Caribbean and are therefore inadequate to theorize gender and work in the Caribbean. (Denis, p. 267).

“Many of the concerns of black feminists are also those of Caribbean and other third world feminists who are critical of the assumption of homogeneity among women, and a lack of recognition of differences and interactions based on culture, race, class as well as sex, and who emphasize that gender is not the sole determinant of a woman’s role in life” (Leo-Rhynie, 2002, p. 150). This lack of homogeneity and intersectionality is key when speaking about Caribbean feminisms. Jamaica is a largely racially stratified country with a colonial past built on colourism and classism which impacts the consciousness of its people. Compensatory responsibility that promotes racial and class equity such as education, access to rewards and other incentives is important racial groups and genders at the base of the social pyramid for example black working class women (Nettleford, 2001).

In thinking about work and how women’s lives have been fundamentally different from that of men, the ideological, material and social relations of gender and gender systems become apparent and frames our way of thinking (Barriteau ,2003). Barriteau contends that there are conflicting messages about gender identity in the region and that government policy and other mechanisms do not adequately understand the structures of women’s lives. The fact that, “Caribbean countries have one of the world’s highest percentages of female-headed households, with a regional average above 40%” gives credence and legitimacy to focusing on women’s lives (Barriteau, 2003 p. 58). Social relations of gender encapsulates the power systems inherent in unequal experiences of men and women.

As a means of departure from grand narratives of western women, post-colonial and transnational feminists, black feminists/womanists from the Caribbean have sought to de-homogenize ‘women’ and the ideologies of feminised productive and care work. Since slavery, women’s reproductive health and activities have been controlled, exploited and centred on producing and maintaining the existing and the next generation of workers (Turner, 2017). Women’s work in the post-colonial Caribbean is still centred on power, status and inequalities promulgated through plantation, plural and creole society phenomenon. Socio-economic and political and international policies, work and other aspects of life continue to be influenced by this history. Traditional sociological models have focused on the historical outer-structural or macro aspects of Caribbean reality however the identity and consciousness of Caribbean people and their ability to build individual agency and promote resistance in work is also important.

Massiah, a traditional Caribbean feminist outlined early the inequalities in the lives and work of women when compared to men in the Caribbean. When compared to the economic participation (labour market) of other women in developing nations however, Caribbean women were not doing too badly (Massiah, 1989). From these conventional times, Massiah and other feminists have been advocating for an increase in women’s economic participation in order to support themselves and their families [i.e. children] but also for a systematic income-earning policy approach that supports shifting family structures and household ecologies.

Crawford (2018) a Caribbean Feminist scholar believes that there are inherent challenges around care work/reproductive labour. She contends that gender, race, class and citizenship intersectional inequalities influence reproductive/domestic work in the economy and contributes to the devaluation of reproductive labour. She uses the colonial past of the Caribbean to dissect the literature on care work. For her “the issue of paid domestic not only raises several questions about an unequal gender division of labour vis-à-vis so-called women’s work and men’s work, the under-remuneration of domestic labour, and the devaluation of care work, but it also exposes the stratified class and race dynamics in reproductive work (both paid and unpaid) among different groups of women in the global economy” (p. 33-34).

For Mohammad (2017), Caribbean society is still battling the “balance between family care and economic productivity” as Adam Smith pointed out in the 18th century. Care work is still not just seen as women’s work but is seen mainly through the health sector as a state responsibility and while private care work is seen as the individual or family responsibility (Mohammad, 2017)

***Care work Frameworks***

Care work is still a gendered issue and is promulgated by an association of care as a feminized, feminine intrinsically emotive/emotional hence women’s work. Care work protects and sustains human life and economic production and human development. It reproduces and maintains the labour force but remains undervalued, unregulated and even unpaid in many instances. Unpaid care work comes with a material cost of time, energy, health and other human resources (Esquivel, 2013). Unpaid care work received greater global attention through the United Nations, academia and other advocacy circles in the 1990s. The UN Women’s conferences in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) and subsequent review of the Beijing Platform for Action on gender equality, the International Labour Organization (ILO), Organization for Economic Corporation and Development (OECD) focused much attention on women’s involvement in unpaid care work and supported policy development to address and recognize this important work. There however remains a lot of work to be done around socio-economic policy, research and practice.

In theorizing care work, an ethic of care is central to the discourse for some care-focused feminists. This care ethic theory centres on the idea that care is a moral good done through interpersonal relationships and care which is virtuous. This ethic of care stems from Carol Gilligan’s work on sex differences in moral reasoning. In her study she found that men had a separation and individuation ethic valuing autonomy and disconnectedness from others while women valued responsibility, relationships and caring for others.

Five frameworks have emerged in relation to the discourse around care research and theorizing. The following frameworks have been highlighted by England (2005) and emphasized and endorsed by other authors. These frameworks are interconnected and point to the nature of care work as being a social and public good founded on love, emotions and care, hence associated with women and underscores why though valuable, is often undervalued and not aligned with remuneration or fair remuneration.

* “The *devaluation* perspective argues that care work is badly rewarded because care is associated with women, and often women of colour.
* 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, (instrinsic rewards of altruism)
* The *commodification of emotion* framework focuses on emotional harm to workers when they have to sell services that use an intimate part of themselves. More alienating than other kinds of work. According to Tronto, care work engages both instrumental and emotional support. Tronto (2011), found a connection between emotional labour and reproductive labour which presents a “moral uniqueness” that created nuanced emotional and ethical dilemmas in paid domestic work. In these situations, the market product is built relationships in households with emotional bonds with other families and these feelings must be managed for a profit.
* The love and money” framework argues against dichotomous views in which markets are seen as antithetical to true care” (England, 2005 p. 1). Stacey and Ayers (2011) contend that caregivers try to make sense of carework and struggle with the idea of providing free care to families and their own economic and financial situation to be able to do so. They perceive carework as a “violation of social norms surrounding family care” and that this work should not be done for pay. These ideologies are grounded in Hochschild’s conceptualization of a third sector that explains what happens when private family and public market lives collide. Hochschild, through her seminal works inclusive of the Managed Heart (1979), The Second Shift (1989) and The Outsourced Self: Intimate Life in Market Times (2012) has charted the challenges of managing productive with reproductive work. She explores the ever-changing boundaries between public production and private reproductive work and how workers have kept their personal life private and protected and are often exploited through emotional labour in customer oriented service jobs.

Parrenas (2012) in her conception of international division of reproductive labour/ the international transfer of caregiving (or care chain as Hochschild terms it) looks at reproductive labour of how care is transferred from one wealthy women to often a migrant worker who transfers care work to a woman in her village. Parrenas expresses concerns for the consequences for domestic workers who separate from their families to build relationships with other families similar to Mohammad’s seminal work and study of migrant Indian household workers and responses to negotiating the emotional unique work space.

***Action research theory***

Auto-ethnography is an innovative method of qualitative inquiry where the personal story of the researcher is importantly grounded in the research. This type of research utilizes a postmodern philosophy espousing a 4th wave feminist epistemology which has been criticized as being self-serving but there is an undeniable philosophy of usefulness in the sharing of the lived experience and personal narrative beyond mere bracketing. Auto-ethnographies challenge canonical approaches to research and demystifies stories presenting them as complex, meaningful phenomena and introduce unique ways of thinking, feeling and knowing and help people make sense for themselves and others. (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Adams 2008).

For this research, I will utilize an analytical auto-ethnography grounding the accounts of the personal experiences in the social, political and societal ways of knowing. Analytical auto-ethnography is more widely accepted and differs from evocative auto-ethnography given its embodiment of the ideology ‘the personal is political’ and its connectedness to grand narratives and theorizing. These experiences are assembled using hindsight. Additionally emphasizing a collective autoethnography by bringing others into the life world of the researcher gives more rich thick data for the reflective process. This can be done through experiential sampling, automated journals or traditional journal logs to gain data and feedback on the use of the self training manual. This action research method will use analytical reflexivity and narrative visibility of the researcher’s self and dialogue with information beyond the self.

**Faith-Based Analysis**

N. T. Wright’s examination of the seven broken signposts is reminiscent of people’s longing and need for love, justice, beauty, freedom, truth, power and spirituality. In our human existence we all long for this sense of being that is rooted in God.

Justice and power are the two universal human longings that align with the discourse around gender inequality in care work and mental load. Justice is a universal human sense that something is not right and should be put right (Wright 2021). In secular sociology, justice denotes impartiality and fairness. Within N. T. Wright’s thesis, he presents justice as an important signpost that is essential for human sensitivities and for daily living that is often difficult to achieve. People long for and crave justice throughout human existence. Wright (2021) examines the gospel of John as a pronouncement of the importance of not just God’s love but also on justice.

Power is often abused in our modern world. Our examination of gender inequality and injustice is around power dynamics through systems of patriarchy and capitalism. God is all powerful. But he gives us the will to act, to work for change in our world. Wright (2021) makes reference to people waiting passively and prayerfully waiting for God to act. Should there be human initiative and action mingled with divine action? The bible itself says “Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:26). At what point does power and action become one?

In examining the bible, it can be easily misconstrued as promotion and acceptance of the subjugation of women and bypassing justice and giving over power to men. However, this needs further exploration given that roles and norms in society are a reflection of 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.

**Intervention Design Plan**

Though there is a notable macro component to gender inequality around household and care work that looks at policy and build out of care infrastructure for the preservation of families and workers, the scope of this research will be at the micro and mezzo level focusing on individuals and families. The action research will take the form of a *gender and care work self-training intervention* via development of a sensitization manual and workbook for couples and families. The post-intervention is a co-constructed multilayered narrative of reflective experience of interacting with couples in my practice as clinical social worker, reflections of developing the manual, and couples reflective experience of using the manual (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). This will formulate the collective auto ethnography as a composite of thoughts, feelings and cultural reflections of engagement and developing (author) and using the manual.

**Purpose and Objectives**

The overall purpose of this project is to empower couples and families holistically through a self-training intervention that can foster good couple and family relationships, gender equity and equality in care, improve cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes while fostering positive work life balance practices. This will enable them to gain insight into their attitudes and decision-making around care and household management.

**Goal**

The goal of the project is to develop a critical and credible *gender and care work self-training sensitization manual and workbook* for couples.

The **specific objectives** of the action research intervention are:

1. To unpack the challenges around the philosophy, definition, conception, and hegemonic construction of work in public and private (home) spheres through a situational analysis.

2. To equip couples with a “holistic” toolbox of work-life balance strategies and gender equitable alliance strategies in the home.

3. To promote inclusivity that considers intersecting identities connected to gender, class status and family status to increase awareness and engagement with diversity issues. This will focus on the lived experiences and realities of the family.

4. To critically unpack policies around work-life management that exist locally and internationally.

5. To bring awareness to the challenges faced by women and families and gender inequality within unpaid care and household work.

6. To educate couples and families on the invisible mental load and emotional and cognitive labor in managing and caring for families

7. To provide insight into the potential strategies to address gender inequality and promote shared roles in the home.

## Sociological Theory and the Research Design

A research paradigm highlights the worldview of research and is endorsed by the particular research community. It highlights particular principles, beliefs and practices that the research community has adopted to guide research methods and analysis (Creswell, 2009). The critical feminist paradigm informs my intervention approach. The governing research paradigm that guides the research is that of a critical research approach that explores and emphasizes power, inequality and social change. The critical research approach is derived from critical theory which empowers human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class and gender. Critical paradigm is a philosophical ideology forged in critique often used in minority discourse such as women’s studies. It politicizes research and emphasizes power analysis, social justice and call to action (Hesse-Biber &Leavy, 2010; Leavy 2022). This worldview is an appropriate approach for engaging with feminist research methodology and scholarship that is transformative and promotes social change and social action. “Feminist paradigms reflect both a concern for the unequal treatment of women but also an epistemological recognition that men and women overall perceive and understand society differently” (Babbie, 2010 p. 40). Because of this, co- education is key, so that men and women (couples) can begin to learn together through a critical self-training manual for couples.

A critical feminist paradigm and methodology is a most appropriate way to conceptualize and think about the problem of gender inequality and unpaid care and domestic work based on my own philosophical beliefs that drive research decisions (Mertens, 2017). This type of reflexivity that is interwoven in this research is a feature of feminist research. Using this analytical lens to challenge paradigmatic assumptions and critique the ‘problematic’ of work and women’s work through gendered division of labour is akin to the revolutionary and emancipatory praxis and advocacy milieu of critical paradigm. The covert power, inequality and difference discourse will be analyzed within postmodernist feminist ideologies that illuminate concerns around work.

Coupled with my emerging feminist stance/standpoint, I will use my social work and sociological understanding to bolster the call to advocacy and critical logic. This approach to enquiry often uses a dialogic and dialectical approach (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) often aligned with qualitative methodology through interviewing and observation. In particular, in this research there will be observation and interrogation of the data. The dialogic and dialectical approach to the part of the research will not engage with study participants but will instead, as a form of analysis, engage in a critique, examination and discussion of the nuances of power and inequality inherent in the discourse around the structure, meaning and valuing of work.

## Faith-Based Considerations

Power and justice as human longings (Wright, 2021) will be intertwined into the intervention approach. In exploring this critical research and writing the manual, aspects of gender justice and power are key themes throughout. In examining care work in the household, justice will be explored through particular care activities, for example assisting with homework, making meals among other activities will utilize gender equitable approaches in the home. Power is about the ability to influence and lead. Within the discourse on care work and gender inequality, power will be explored as a topic of contention in the household based on gender roles. This will be contextualized in the manual and give couples a chance to explore power dynamics together from within the cultural nuances of their family and the wider society. The dynamics of power within couple relations will be explored from a biblical perspective.

## Target Group or Issue

My intervention targets heterosexual couples with gender role challenges based on traditional gender norms that create challenges of work-life imbalance and mental load for women in the home who disproportionately carry out unpaid care and domestic work. The target issue is the unpaid care and domestic work challenges that have invaded contemporary dual income households. The intervention seeks to educate couples around the invisible work around care of children, elderly and others in need of care.

## Strategies and Activities

The intervention strategy will be the creation of a self-training manual for couples to help with gender justice within the household and impact gender roles to balance the disproportionate weighting of care work and mental load. Activities include conducting a situational analysis, this forms part of the introduction to the manual and researching interventions that exist that can be manualized. Situational analysis forms an important part of sociological research. Additionally, self-training tools will be developed for use throughout daily living as a couple. The manual will contain self-use material that will establish the expected outcomes from use and will use educational material, gamification, and other activities (such as puzzles, completing tasks and others) for learning the material.

As part of the analytical autoethnographic process, I will document my thoughts, feelings and observational perspectives of the cultural experience while researching and writing the manual and experiences of working with and interacting with couples. This process will include using a journal to reflect on and document my experience and that of others who have shared their stories with me. This will be part of the field notes.

The draft manual will be shared with three (3) couples to gain feedback about the learning opportunities presented/levels of learning, the usefulness of the manual for improving the relationship and provide credibility to the intervention/manual. This will help to improve the validity of the intervention and will form part of the post intervention strategy.

## Resources Needed

The resources that will be needed for this action research intervention are a computer, journal, internet, paper, pen and personnel - the researcher/author and couples.

## Timeline

***January - June 2025***

January 6- 17, 2025: Conduct and refine situational analysis

January 18 to March 14, 2025: Complete Draft of Self Training Manual

March 15-29, 2025: Share draft manual with couples

Review reflective field notes/journal

March 30, 2025- deadline to receive feedback and reflection from couples

April- May 2025: Incorporate feedback from couples, write reflection and final report

June 2025: Finalize Action Research

**Anticipated Challenges**

In conducting this action research there are potential challenges to consider. Firstly, there are cultural considerations based on the types of tools utilized by the manual. In particular, are the tools that have been developed by others outside of Jamaica appropriate based on cultural differences such as household types, norms, values and practices and other factors. This challenge will be overcome by ensuring that activities found are reviewed and revised for cultural relevance and sensitivity. Additionally, as a Jamaican woman who is also in a relationship and have worked with couples within households with this challenge I have a general understanding of the challenges being experienced in some Jamaican households. Therefore, I will develop most of the activities and tools to ensure cultural relevance. The manual will be further scrutinized by couples who will review, use and reflect on cultural appropriateness. Secondly, another challenge that could arise is around the timing of the intervention activities. Given this factor, I have arranged for leave from work to be able to dedicate time to the project. Additionally, I have also contacted couples who are excited about utilizing the manual and have committed to providing their reflection of their experience in a timely, thorough and critical manner.

## Measuring Success

## Success will be measured based on feedback from couples who will use the draft manual and share their experience with the manual. Couples will be allowed to reflect on the activities through use of journal entries of free expression and then a follow-up written evaluation.

# Some specific indicators of success include:

● A written *gender and care work self-training* manual for couples

● Couples reflection of the use of the manual- its usefulness, opportunities for learning and growth in their relationship, readability and user friendliness, and whether they would recommend to other couples

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# Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles in sociological research range from informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, voluntary participation (with the option to withdraw) and at the core of all the principles is respect for the research participants and protecting position as respondents (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The first rule of ethical research principle and practice in sociological research is “do no harm” that is avoiding iatrogenic interventions (Brear & Gordon, 2021). In this research the potential for harm is minimal given the methodology and methods used for intervention. There is minimal interaction with the target group and the information from participants will be in the form of a review of the couples’s manual that will not necessarily reveal confidential information from participants. However this does not take away from the validity or trustworthiness of the research. Notwithstanding this there will be indirect data collection, secondary data collection and observational data analysis. Additionally, review and reflection from couples will enhance credibility of the research intervention.

Autoethnographies, though constructed through the lifeworld of the researcher, have been criticized for their use of observational data of others in the community without permission from community members (Sparkes 2024). For example, in this study there could be inferences drawn from my own life experiences that may include others such as my spouse, friends, family, neighbors and former clients. However, this does not become an unethical practice given that there are no identifiers such as names and specific reference to geographical neighborhoods. It therefore preserves confidentiality and anonymity of the observed. Additionally, the perspectives form part of the co-constructed cultural reality of the researcher and therefore is not a breach of ethical research practice and codes of conduct. Consequently, my identity is however not concealed and poses real questions about confidentiality and anonymity. This is however part of the reflexive process of auto ethnographies, choosing to unpack and share thoughts, feelings and actions around a phenomenon and ensuring levels of comfort around sharing sensitive data in some instances. The data must not just be personal but meaningful to the research and to the community thereby making the personal political. Thereby making personal narratives useful and impactful data that can change the world.

Throughout the action research, respect will be shown to the community of women and men impacted by the intervention. Given that I am a member of the community of women experiencing gender inequality and mental load in the home, the subject will be dealt with sensitivity, additionally, because males and females will be part of the process, this will ensure a balancing of perspectives and gender nuances. Additionally, respect for people is part of the ethical principles of social work which is the professional group which I align with and therefore respect will be paramount to this action research project.

Cultural sensitivity is important in my research given the ethnographical focus of this intervention. Ethnographies are by design studies of culture and cultural practice within a particular group or community. Therefore cultural sensitivity is built into the core of the methodology. For this research, cultural sensitivity will be ensured through engagement with key experts.

In this action research, disclosing and addressing bias is paramount given the auto ethnographic methodology which seeks to establish positionality within the research and highlight alignment with the study community. This qualitative approach does not seek to bracket or separate the research but rather incorporate views and experiences within the dual role of researcher and study participant. No site permissions are required for the research.

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