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Equality: Frameworks for Change

Paper prepared for the NESF for the Plenary Meeting on January 30th

2001

By

Kathleen Lynch, John Baker and Sara Cantillon
Equality Studies Centre, UCD
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Equality: Frameworks for Change

Kathleen Lynch, John Baker and Sara Cantillon
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Introduction

In this report we present a draft framework for thinking about equality in conceptual terms. The framework presented is a tentative one and is open for discussion and development.

The report opens in Section 1 with a brief resume of some of the major initiatives and developments in the equality and related fields that have occurred since 1995, when we last prepared an equality framework paper for the NESF. We present a summary of some of the major developments in the equality field but do not attempt a comprehensive overview of change, as this is a major research task in itself. What is given is an outline of some of the major economic and legal developments with reference to their impact on selected groups.

Section 2 comprises a core section of the paper, in which we build on our earlier paper prepared for the NESF in 1995. We outline four core contexts, and correlatively, four sets of social relations in which inequalities can be generated, the economic, the political, the cultural and the affective. The inequalities which are being examined respectively therefore are resource inequalities and inequalities of opportunity, power inequalities, inequalities of respect and recognition, and inequalities in love, care and other forms of solidarity-related human relations. We outline the reasons why we think each of these matters and what kind of work needs to done to promote change in each field. We realise that this may not be a comprehensive list of the types of
inequalities which emerge in society; however, we regard the four areas as being of foundational importance in equality terms.

Section 3 is devoted to the outlining of the equality schema in more detail with reference to both the interrelationships between different forms of inequality and their relative importance for different groups (as identified in the Equality legislation and in the Poverty Proofing Guidelines). As a way of demonstrating how the equality framework can be utilised in the analysis of the position of different groups, we pay particular attention to gender issues.

Section 4 of the report outlines some of the barriers and obstacles which may need to be overcome if equality is to be institutionalised as a mainstream value in public life in Ireland. We focus especially on the politico-economic and ideological challenges to be addressed.
Section 1.

The State of Play

1.1 Introduction

As every publication unfailingly reminds us, Ireland has witnessed a sea change over the past five years, most obviously and spectacularly in the economy and in society; moreover, there have also been significant institutional and legislative changes. The current scenario is one of a growing economy with low unemployment and revenue buoyancy; increased public expenditure in areas such as educational disadvantage, health, childcare and disability services; a ten year National Anti Poverty Strategy, initiatives in poverty proofing, gender proofing and equality proofing of public policy and the integration of local government and local development. The establishment of the Equality Authority, the Disability Authority and the Human Rights Commission are all developments with potential to contribute to substantially reducing poverty, inequality and discrimination.

Developments in the South of Ireland are paralleled by comparable developments in Northern Ireland. Equality is a core principle underpinning the Good Friday agreement and the PAFT (Programme for Appraisal and Fair Treatment) guidelines have been given legislative effect in Northern Ireland (McCrudden, 1999).

At the EU level, Article 137 of the Treaty of Amsterdam now allows action to combat poverty at a European wide level. Article 13 allows the Union to ‘take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation’.

Institutional and legislative developments in the equality field have been paralleled by change in the public discourse on equality. Equality issues have entered into the public debate and equality language has become normalised in public discussions. Even when groups and individuals do not assent to the equality agenda, they recognise its place and importance.
This section of the report provides a brief overview of the changes that have occurred since the publication of the NESF report on Equality Proofing Issues in 1996. In particular, it reviews major economic, institutional and legislative changes which impact on the realisation of the different equality objectives outlined by the NESF in the 1996 report.

1.2 Economic Inequality –Equality of Resources

The economic state of play is a complex one to present from the perspective of its impact on the continuum of equality objectives (equality of access, participation, outcome and condition). In what has been a consistent and stable environment of rapid economic growth, most would agree that the majority of people are better off than they were five years ago, although new pockets of inequality have been created, especially among asylum seekers and refugees. Unemployment and poverty figures are testament to the general improvement, with the unemployment rate currently around 4%, with those living in consistent poverty around 7 per cent, both of which surpass the targets, set by NAPS. Whether these translate into improved quality of life is debatable with current house prices, transport problems, inadequate childcare supports and over-stretched public services, most notably in health. More worrying perhaps is the direction the economy, and almost by default society, is taking. If we examine trends in taxation and social welfare, in the distribution of income, in relative income poverty lines (despite falling deprivation levels) and in social expenditure, it is clear just how inequitably the benefits of economic growth are being shared, with those who have least benefiting least. In examining the economic state of play a scenario of a wealthier but more unequal Ireland presents itself. This suggests not only that there is a growing inequality of outcome between social classes but also between other marginalised and more powerful groups, between the disabled and non-disabled, between Travellers and settled people, and between men and women. Certainly the available evidence on poverty suggests that this may well be the case (Nolan, 1999; Nolan and Watson, 1999; Nolan et al., 2000a).
1.2.1 Poverty

With the launch of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in 1997 Ireland became the first European Union Member to adopt a global poverty reduction target. This represented a very significant step forward in terms of political acceptance of a definition of poverty; of explicit recognition of the responsibility of government for reducing the extent of poverty; and of the need for a systematic, institutionally based strategy to combating poverty.

In assessing what has been happening to poverty in Ireland over the last five years, very different patterns emerge depending on the whether the measure used is based on income alone or one based on income and direct measures of deprivation. If we use income alone, it shows that between 1994-1997 the numbers falling below relative income poverty lines have increased by a couple of percentage points across the three income poverty lines of 40, 50 and 60 per cent. The poverty gap, that is, the extent to which people fall below the lines, also increased over the period.

Using the income and deprivation measure combined however, shows there was a considerable reduction in the numbers of ‘consistently poor’ which fell from 15% (at the 60% line) and 9% (at the 50% line) in 1994 to 10% and 7% respectively in 1997. The combined income and deprivation (consistently poor) measure is the one adopted by the National Anti Poverty Strategy in setting its global poverty reduction target. The target set was surpassed in 1997 and a new target of below 5% has been set for 2004 which in all likelihood under current circumstances will be achieved before then.

An initial assessment of the impact of the National Anti Poverty Strategy (Johnson and O’Brien 2000) concludes that NAPS has made “a significant contribution to placing poverty and social exclusion at the centre of public policy making” but suggests that the exceptional opportunity presented by the rapid economic growth should allow the setting of new targets in key areas such as housing and health. This means in effect that as the average standard of living rises in Ireland, so the cost of participation increases. New measures of deprivation will have to be developed which assess the new ways in which poverty can be recreated in a wealthier society.
1.2.2 Distribution of Income

Alongside economic growth and significant reduction in consistent poverty, there is a growing degree of income inequality in Irish society. Better off households are gaining from the economic boom to a greater than those who are less well off. Overall income inequality increased during the 1990’s. The most recent research (Nolan et al 2000b) shows that income inequality increased between 1994 and 1998. In 1998 the bottom ten per cent of households had 3.4% of disposable income compared to 25% held by the top decile. One of the most significant findings was that there was a shift in the disposable income distribution away from the bottom 30 per cent of households. The share going to the bottom 30 per cent declined by over 1 per cent of total income between 1994 and 1998 which represents a substantial shift in a short period. In international comparisons the study shows that Ireland is one of the most unequal countries in the EU.

1.2.3 Taxation and Social Welfare

In international terms Ireland’s welfare payment and tax levels are both relatively low so the level of redistribution effected through both systems is also low. The welfare system rather than the tax system carries the primary role of redistributing income. This is because the modest progression of the income tax system is largely counterbalanced by the regressive nature of expenditure taxes (e.g. pension relief, health expenditure).

Income tax reductions over the last five years, and indeed since the inception of social partnership in 1987, have mainly reduced tax rates and have thus disproportionately benefited the better off. Substantial reductions in taxes on profits, capital gains and property transfers favour the accumulation and concentration of capital. The absence of any property or wealth tax, the halving of capital gains tax and the erosion of capital acquisitions tax leaves Ireland with one of the most lenient capital tax regimes in Europe.

Social welfare incomes have risen faster than inflation but slower than incomes elsewhere in the economy, therefore the relative position of welfare recipients has deteriorated. For the period 1994-1997 inflation rose by about 6%, social welfare rates
rose by around 12% and average household income by over 20% (Nolan, O’Connell and Whelan 2000a). The generous treatment of capital wealth is in contrast to the decline experienced in welfare payments relative to other incomes. The scale of welfare improvements relative to earnings has a key role in determining whether the poorest households hold their relative position or disimprove. In the longer-term if the current policy of setting welfare increase above price increases but below earnings growth continues, the gap between rich and poor will further widen.

Social partnership, with its core trade-off between modest pay rises and tax cuts has leaned more towards lower taxes than higher welfare spending. During the 1990s therefore the evidence suggests that the tax and welfare systems widened rather than narrowed the inequality gap. From 1987 to 1997, the cost of income tax packages ranged between being on the same scale as the welfare packages, to being twice the welfare package. In 1998 the tax package was almost three times the welfare package; in 1999 and 2000 the tax package was around five times the welfare package, a very disproportionate allocation even allowing for changes in the composition of those on welfare (Cantillon et al 2001), although the budget of 2001 did arrest this trend. While prosperity alters the distribution of income and wealth, the scale of revenue generated also offers unprecedented possibilities for change. In a near-zero growth environment, redistribution to the poor is at a cost to the non-poor. When growth is abundant, redistributing its fruits offers quite a painless way to achieve a more egalitarian result.

1.2.4 Social expenditure

Trends in gross social expenditure in Ireland, as a percentage of GNP have varied in recent decades. After the fiscal adjustment of the late 1980s, social expenditure fell from 33 per cent of GNP in 1986 to 24 per cent of GNP in 1990. The ratio of social expenditure to GNP rose again in the first half of the 1990s to 26 per cent in 1995. It is now close to the 1990 share of 24 per cent of GNP, reflecting the improvement in the economy. A crucial question is not the scale of expenditure on inequalities but whether spending is in line with prosperity levels as measured by GNP per head. In the early 1990s, on the basis on per capita income, social spending was higher than might have been expected. Given the economic growth in the second half of the 1990s and the slower social spending growth, it is unlikely this is still the
case. A recent welfare state classification placed Ireland in the low-spending social expenditure category (Bonoli 1997) reversing the situation of five years earlier when it was concluded that “the Irish welfare effort is rather higher than might be expected on the basis of level of income per head” (Callan and Nolan 1992a).

A large percentage of the Irish population receives some form of social transfer. These transfers are concentrated on people with a low standard of living. There is a significant redistributive effect, measured by the impact of social transfers on the distribution of income. However it is equally clear that considerable inequalities remain even after the transfers. This is not because the welfare state is any less effective than elsewhere but because of the considerable and increasing inequality in market incomes.

1.2.5 The Interface between Economic and Other Forms of Inequality
The discussion hitherto has not differentiated between any given sector of the economically disadvantaged population. However, from the research available we do know that various forms of social marginalisation tend to be coterminous. Thus those who are working class, lone parents, disabled or Travellers or who are of childhood status are more likely to be poor than those who are adult, middle class, settled, in dual parent households or without a disability (see Combat Poverty Agency, 1994; Nolan, Callan et al., 1996; Nolan et al, 2000a). In relation to women, the evidence for Ireland shows that there has been a significant feminisation of poverty throughout the 1990s (Nolan and Watson, 1999). Given these facts, it seems likely that the increased economic inequality which has been occurring in recent years has also worsened the relative position of these groups.

1.3 Institutional and Legislative Initiatives to address Inequalities of Opportunity
There has been a flurry of institutional and legislative activity over the past five years which has aimed at establishing an infrastructure for equality, putting in place rights-based legislation and developing specific initiatives. Quite a number of these
initiatives correspond to recommendations made in the NESF report (1996) including the establishment of an Equality Authority, the development of equality and gender proofing mechanisms, the establishment of monitoring procedures to review equality policies\(^1\) and the setting up of various review groups to report on progress in tackling inequalities experienced by homeless people, refugees, disabled persons and children (Inter-departmental Policy Committee on Social Exclusion, 2000). While these institutional developments must be seen as welcome progress, it is possibly too early to evaluate the long-term implications of the equality objectives outlined by the NESF or to assess the effectiveness of various legislative initiatives. What can be noted however, is that the majority of the changes which have occurred relate to the more minimalist conception of equality i.e. namely the objectives of equality of access and of participation rather than dealing substantively with equality of outcome. The concept of equality of condition is not taken on board at all.

What has happened over the last five years therefore has been a growing development of recognition-based politics, policies and legislation. The formal status of different minority groups such as Travellers, or those who are minorities in terms of their sexual orientation (those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual) or those who are disabled has been recognised in law. Where recognition has been granted, as in the Equal Status and Employment Equality Acts in particular, it has however been very much within the liberal framework. The focus has primarily been on prohibiting discrimination, equalising access, and, but to a lesser degree, equalising participation (Whyte, 1999). There has been no serious attempt to promote a radical equality agenda (Baker, 1998).

The lack of commitment to a radical equality agenda is also visible from the provisions of various Finance Acts in the late 1990s. Although they are rarely seen as pieces of equality legislation, the Finance Acts are the most powerful and influential pieces of equality legislation in the distributive sense. By determining the rates of taxation, welfare and social expenditures they either exacerbate or remediate economic inequalities on an annual basis.

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1. It includes initiatives such as setting up a committee to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of Women, the establishment of the Beijing
1.3.1 Legislative Developments

Drawing on Langford (2000) and report of the Interdepartmental Policy Committee on Social Inclusion (2000) a number of the key legislative and institutional developments are highlighted below.

A number of major pieces of legislation have been passed since the publication of the NESF Equality report in 1996 which have helped promote equality. These include the Employment Equality Act 1998; the National Disability Act 1999, the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998.

Employment Equality Act 1998

National Disability Authority Act, 1999
The National Disability Authority Act, 1999 was enacted in June 1999. The National Disability Authority (NDA) is an independent statutory body reporting to the Minister
for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, which ensures that appropriate standards of
service provision are adopted, and that standards and codes of practice for services are
implemented. The NDA is also to assist in the development of a coherent approach to
disability policy issues including the proposed Disabilities Bill. The objective of the
Bill is to provide for proactive measures, which will advance and underpin
participation by people with disabilities in society.

*Equal Status Act, 2000*

The Equal Status Act, 2000 was enacted in April 2000. The Act deals with
discrimination outside the employment context, including education, provision of
goods, services and accommodation and disposal of property on the same nine
grounds as those covered by the Employment Equality Act, 1998. All services that are
generally available to the public, whether provided by the State or the private sector,
are covered. Under the Act, the Equality Authority and the Office of the Director of
Equality Investigations, which are operating since October 1999 in relation to matters
coming under the Employment Equality Act, 1998, have their remit broadened to
include equal status matters.

*The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998*

This Act imposed a statutory obligation on Local Authorities to prepare and adopt
local Traveller Action programmes by March 31st 2000. A National Accommodation
Consultative Committee has been established on a statutory basis to provide for
consultation with Travellers on matters relation to Travellers on accommodation.

It would be misleading however, to present all legislative developments in recent
years as supportive of equality. Certain legislative provisions, such as the Control of
Horses Act or the Refugee Acts have been strongly criticised for anti-egalitarian
provisions within them.
1.3.2 Institutional Developments

In conjunction with the development of new legislation, a range of institutional initiatives have also been undertaken to promote equality. These include the setting up of:

The Equality Authority and Office of the Director of Equality Investigations

The Employment Equality Act, 1998 provided for the establishment of the Equality Authority (to replace the Employment Equality Agency) and the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations. The enactment of the Equal Status Act, 2000 broadened the remit of both bodies, beyond the employment equality area.

The Equality Authority has statutory responsibility to work towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunities in employment and vocational training. The Equality Authority provides information to the public in relation to equality legislation, the Maternity Protection Act, 1994, the Adoptive Leave Act, 1995 and the Parental Leave Act, 1998 and is charged with keeping equality legislation under review. The Authority is empowered to develop draft codes of practice for the approval of the Minister and to conduct equality reviews and prepare action plans. These plans will facilitate the development of a proactive equality conscious approach to equal opportunities in the workplace.

The Office of Director of Equality Investigations provides the main locus of redress of first instance for equality cases arising under both employment equality and equal status legislation. The Director investigates each case (except those resolved at mediation) submitted to the office and will issue a decision. There is provision for the award of redress where discrimination is found to have occurred. Decisions of the Director and mediation settlements are binding and enforceable through the Circuit Court. Decisions of the Director may be subject to appeal.

The Gender Equality Monitoring Committee

The Gender Equality Monitoring Committee was set up in 1997 to oversee implementation of the recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of
Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. The Committee has the following terms of reference:

- To monitor gender equality in Ireland in the light of the recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of Women and the actions agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women.
- To draw up and submit to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform reports on progress in implementing the recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of Women and implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.
- To make recommendations to Ministers to accelerate implementation of the recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, which have been accepted by Government or by Ministers as appropriate.

The Traveller Community Monitoring and Co-ordinating Committee
In June 1998, a Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community was established by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The Committee is representative of Traveller interests, social partners and relevant Government Departments. A progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force will be submitted to Government in 2001.

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)
In July 1998, the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform established a National Consultative Committee on Racism and Inter-culturalism. The Committee is a partnership of non-governmental organizations, state agencies, social partners and Government Departments. The objective of the Committee is to provide an ongoing structure to develop programmes and actions aimed at developing an integrated approach against racism and to advise the Government on matters relating to racism and interculturalism.

A number of other Review and Planning Committees focused on Social Inclusion and Equality have also been established including:
• The National Anti-Poverty Strategic Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs
• A Cross-Departmental Team on Homelessness
• An Inter-Departmental Working Group on Refugees

Although the objective of these various institutional and legislative initiatives varies, their overall thrust is to tackle issues of discrimination and inequality of access. While these are undoubtedly important, it seems clear that less attention has been given to the objectives of equal participation, still less to equality of outcome and virtually none to equality of condition. In terms of the broader framework outlined below, the emphasis seems to have been primarily on matters of equality of opportunity, together with significant attention to issues of respect and recognition. Greater equality of resources and of power has not been an priority to date.

1.4 Inequalities of Power: Political Equality

The most significant attempt to make democracy more participatory and accountable, and hence egalitarian, in recent years has been the development of the Social Partnership system. The significance of Social Partnership in the Irish setting is illustrated by the fact that a section of the PPF is devoted to the renewal of the partnership system itself and that a National Centre for Partnership and Performance has been established.

The partnership framework operates from national to local level in a host of different partnership arrangements, and across a range of community, statutory, employment, and civil and political organisations. It includes the developments of powerful and influential National Social Partnerships that negotiate the framework for the national agreements such as the PPF, national policy bodies such as the National Economic and Social Council, new Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees with a partnership remit at local government level, and a host of different types of local partnerships, most notably the local Anti-Poverty Partnerships whose goal is to tackle poverty or social exclusion in very particular contexts. Partnership has not only been
encouraged in the area of governance however, it has also been promoted in the enterprise area, both in the private and public sectors.

To what extent the various partnership are really empowering for those who are most marginalised is the subject of continual debate. Overall there has been little research on the empowerment dimension of their functionings. What research has been undertaken is divided in its conclusions, with some suggesting the partnerships are relatively ineffective in terms of democratising decision-making or serving the interests of the most oppressed (Allen, 1999, 2000; Hardiman, 1998, 2000; Lynam, 1997) while others present a more positive view of their outcomes (Sandel, 1996; O’Donnell, …).

One area of political equality on which data is available is on gender, most especially in terms of the progress of different policies in encouraging more women to take up senior positions in public life, be that in politics, on national bodies or in employment. What evidence there is suggests however, that the increasing economically active role of women is not matched by increased empowerment as measured by involvement in politics or senior positions in employment. Yes, women’s labour force participation has risen dramatically, wage differentials have narrowed and women’s participation in higher education exceeds that of men (Fahey et al., 2000). Yet despite comprising half the population of Ireland, women occupy only 12% of the seats in the Dail and 15% of those in local authorities (Galligan, 1998). Over 85% of employers are men, most large corporations are controlled by men and over 90% of farm holders are men (O’Connor, 1998). Men are also significantly over-represented in senior positions across different sectors of employment (Ruane and Sutherland, 1999) By contrast over 70% of part-time workers are women, and women are over-represented among low paid workers and among those living in poverty, (Nolan and Watson, 1999) situations which are also associated with powerlessness.
1.5 Concluding Comments

Because of the long history of struggles over economic inequality, and indeed its foundational importance in terms of the realisation of other equality agendas, there are a range of generally agreed measures for determining the extent to which a given country such as Ireland is becoming more or less equal in economic or resource terms. Although there are indicators of status or respect and of powerlessness (such as those used internationally in the Human Development Index and Gender Development Index) there is less agreement on these. Moreover, they are indicators of fairly basic status and power inequalities, and are designed for cross-national comparisons. They are not designed to be sensitive to culturally-specific inequalities affecting different groups in specific countries.

Our review of progress in the equality field is limited therefore by the level of knowledge and the sophistication of the indicators available at this time. From the data available however, there are clear indicators that what progress has been made is largely of a liberal kind be that in terms of redistributing wealth, granting status or recognition to oppressed minorities or reducing powerlessness. Even where equality of outcome measures have been part of public policy for some time, such as the commitment to have a 40% gender balance on all government appointed committees, this has not been implemented systematically by all parties to the agreement.
Section 2

Social Contexts within which Inequality is generated

2.1 Expanding the Equality Framework

In the paper we prepared for the NESF in 1995 (Equality Studies Centre, 1995), we set out a framework for equality proofing which was based largely on a distributive view of social justice and equality. This concept of equality is one which gives primacy to the concept of having, either having or availing of material goods and services, or having opportunities to access participate or succeed in particular spheres. It has strong roots in materialist and economically-based concepts of social justice (Young, 1990). In the 1995 paper equality was defined in terms of four key objectives, three of which were essentially redistributive in focus: (1) equal formal rights and opportunities and equality of access, concerned with removing formal and informal barriers to goods, services and opportunities; (2) equality of participation, where the focus is on enabling and encouraging members of different social groups to be equally able to participate in society; (3) equality of success or outcome, which is concerned with ensuring equal rates of success for disadvantaged groups across different fields. We also outlined the importance of (4) equality of condition, which aims at creating equality in the living conditions of all citizens in a more holistic sense, although this was the least developed aspect of the paper. (Equality Studies Centre 1995a). We illustrated the application of the four objectives to a number of target groups (disabled people, working class people, Travellers and women) in a range of different contexts such as education, personal relationships, employment, accommodation, political participation and caring. Our framework was adapted by the NESF for its report on equality-proofing (NESF, 1996), which concentrated on the first three objectives.

Over the past six years, our thinking on equality has developed in response to changes in Irish society, academic research and discussions within the Equality Studies Centre. In its broad orientation, our 1995 paper concentrates on inequalities of opportunities
and resources: ways in which members of disadvantaged groups have restricted chances for accessing and participating in important areas of life and their resulting lower levels of success in these areas. These inequalities remain vitally important for most disadvantaged groups and we continue to emphasise them in our expanded framework. The suggestion that the equality objectives can be viewed as a spectrum ranging from weaker to stronger conceptions of equality has also proved valuable. We continue to see equal access, participation and outcome as steps towards what we there called equality of condition:

‘equality in the living conditions of all citizens, taking due account of their heterogeneity’ and involving ‘the equalisation of wealth distribution; substantial equality in working conditions, job satisfaction and income across different occupations; an educational system devoted to developing equally the potentials of every member of society; a radically democratic politics which aimed at the equal participation and influence of all citizens; and a restructuring of family and personal life for the sake of enriching the personal relationships of every individual.’

But as this quotation illustrates, our conception of ‘equality of condition’ had a number of different aspects or dimensions and we are now inclined to identify these dimensions of equality more explicitly.

Since the early 1990s there has been an increased interest both politically and academically in what has been called the ‘politics of recognition’. In response to social movements, a number of authors have emphasised the importance for some groups of cultural domination, misrepresentation, stereotyping and disparagement. Iris Young identified cultural imperialism as one of five ‘faces of oppression’ (1990) and Charles Taylor (1992) drew attention in a North American context to the ‘politics of recognition’. The idea of recognition has been analysed in depth by Axel Honneth (1995) and its relation to distributional issues theorised by Nancy Fraser (1997, 2000) and Anne Phillips (1999). Issues of recognition are prominent in discussions of multiculturalism (see for example Parekh 2000). Within Ireland, inequality of recognition has been an important issue for a number of social groups, including gays and lesbians, disabled people, women, older people and ethnic minorities, although it has
not necessarily been expressed in this language (for examples see Quilty 1998, Kwiotek 1999). Inequalities of recognition or social status are often rooted in inequalities of access, participation and outcome (cf. Equality Studies Centre 1995b), but they are not necessarily so linked. For this reason, we now consider it useful to distinguish respect and recognition as a specific dimension of equality.

Another dimension of equality that it seems useful to distinguish explicitly is equality of power. Of course, egalitarians have always been concerned with power relations, but boundaries between academic disciplines and areas of specialisation have had a tendency to separate these issues from those relating to the distribution of opportunities and resources. Here again, Young (1990) has usefully reasserted the importance of power relations to issues of social justice, drawing on the work of Foucault and other post-structuralist writers, and the importance of this dimension of equality has recently been acknowledged by Fraser (2000). A more integrated conception of equality has also been developing among liberal theorists such as Dworkin (2000), whose work on political equality has been effectively criticised by Brighouse (1996). In the Centre’s own research, power inequalities have emerged as central concerns within educational system both in secondary schools (Lynch and Lodge, 1999; Lodge and Lynch, 2000) and in community education (McMinn 2000).

Although the three-dimensional framework distinguishing equality of opportunity and resources, of respect and recognition and of power is helpful in capturing many of the central concerns of contemporary egalitarians, it runs the risk of excluding other important dimensions of social justice–other respects in which individuals and groups can be significantly unequal. That is to say, not all inequalities which people experience fall within the realms of economic relations, cultural relations or political relations. There are other spheres of human relations within which inequalities arise which can have a profound and debilitating effect on a person’s life even though they are neither as visible or as readily measured as resource, power or respect-related inequalities. What we are especially concerned with here is the unequal availability of relationships of love, care and solidarity with others, inequalities which arise in the affective or emotional domains of human relations. These inequalities have sometimes been studied empirically, for example in the 1972 Comparative Scandinavian Welfare
Study, which employed indicators of Having, Loving and Being (Allardt 1993) although they have not yet been adequately addressed by egalitarian theory. For the purposes of this paper, we identify relations of love, care and solidarity as a fourth dimension of equality, although we recognise that there is further work to be done in developing this area of egalitarian thinking. There are a number of reasons why we think it is important to include the love/care/solidary relations of human life in any core equality framework. One of the most obvious is their central importance to human development (Nussbaum, 1995). A further reason is because, like economic, political and cultural relations, they are a social field of existence over which the State exercises both direct and indirect controls, through constitutional and legislative provision and policy development. Although they are sometimes defined as private matters, in policy terms they are publicly regulated and facilitated and hence open to change.

2.2 Four Contexts

There are four core social contexts in which the generative causes of inequality may emerge: these are the economic, the political, the cultural and the affective. The economic sphere is concerned with the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services; the cultural sphere is concerned with the production, transmission and legitimisation of cultural practices and products, including various forms of symbolic representation and communication; the political sphere refers to all activities where power is enacted, including decision-making procedures within all types of organisations and institutions, policy-making procedures, and decision-making within political life generally; the affective domain connotes those activities involved in developing bonds of solidarity, care and love between human beings. It refers to the socioemotional relations which give people a sense of value and belonging, of being

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2 Since the 1980s, a number of authors have pointed to the absence of relationships of love and care from liberal conceptions of justice, but much of the ensuing discussion has concerned the alleged conflict between justice and care rather than any attempt to redefine justice to incorporate issues of care (see for example Behabib 1992 ch. 6; Held 1995). Among those who have attempted to do so, Martha Nussbaum (1995: 84) treats ‘being able … to love, to grieve, to experience longing and gratitude’ as one of the basic human functional capabilities that societies ought to support. In a similar vein, Eva Kittay (1999: 103) suggests that ‘the good both to be cared for in a responsive dependency relation if and when one is unable to care for oneself, and to meet the dependency needs of others without incurring undue sacrifices oneself is a primary social good in the Rawlsian sense’ which may require a separate principle of justice.
appreciated, loved and cared for in their personal, community, associational and working lives. Correspondingly, therefore, in the pursuit of a socially just society, there are four core equality issues which must be addressed.

2.3 Economic Context:

Resource Inequality, Issues of Distribution and Redistribution

Economic injustice refers primarily to the unequal distribution of material resources and inequality in their ownership and control. In societies in which these inequalities are substantial, an additional aspect of economic injustice is inequality in people’s opportunities to improve their economic position. It is manifested in various forms of exploitation and deprivation of a material kind, notably in exclusion from employment and wealth ownership. It is also evident in inadequate welfare or income provision, or exploitative pay. While poverty is not an inevitable outcome of economic inequality, in the sense that it is logically possible to have an economically unequal society in which there is no poverty, in practice most societies in which there are substantive wealth and income disparities also tend to have a sizeable number of people living in poverty. One important political and cultural reason for this is that societies which tolerate, or even foster economic inequalities, also tend to be societies where there is limited allegiance to eliminating poverty. The cultural mores which promotes economic inequality also tend to those which easily tolerate poverty. Finally, economic inequality is revealed in systems of exclusion and discrimination which work to reproduce the unequal distribution of resources and to pass privilege from one generation to the next.

2.4 Reasons for Addressing Economic Inequalities

2.4.1 Cost of participating in social life

The cost of living in a given country is not set in the abstract, it is determined by the cost of participating in the relevant social, political and civil institutions of a given state. In market societies when most basic services are dependent in whole or in part
on the ability to pay, those who are poor or live on relatively low incomes either do
not have access to the service at all, or if they have access, have it at a level which is
significantly below that enjoyed by most people in the society.3 Even though a formal
right to access services such as health or education may exist, often one can only
access these at a low level. In addition, those who are poor have little choice or control
over the nature or quality of the service and they also generally lack the power to
maximise gain or influence within it. In an economically unequal society, not only is
access to health, education, housing and leisure most accessible to those who have
good, secure incomes, even political participation itself is affected; those with most
money are best positioned to buy the time that it takes to be involved in political life
(Phillips, 1999: 74-76). This further exacerbates the exclusion and marginalisation of
those in poverty making it difficult for them to influence the very decisions which
determine their own economic future.

2.4.2 Ability of the rich to dominate the cultural and political spheres
One of the factors that makes economic inequality so pernicious is that it that those
who are economically powerful can so easily and visibly convert money (economic
capital) into other valued forms of capital. Those with most economic capital are also
best positioned to acquire cultural or social capital, a fact which further reinforces
their dominance (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1974, 1996; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).
They are also best positioned to exercise political power (Phillips, 1999).

Although education (a cultural process) is presented as a neutral exercise, endowing
credentials on those with greatest competence, it is clear from the persistence of social
class inequalities in educational achievement in the post war era across several
countries, that this is far from being the case (cf. Blossfeld and Shavit, 1993). Rather,
those with wealth can buy credentialised cultural capital in the form of education
credentials through the exercise of procedures such as exclusive schooling, extra
investment in their children’s education both in and out of school, and investment in

3 In the Irish case, for example, those who are poor have minimal access to the civil legal aid as legal
services are largely privatised in this sphere; while they do have access to ‘free’ education as this is a
public service, the quality and level of education which they can avail of is often significantly lower
than that of other groups because of both the direct and indirect hidden costs of schooling (Lynch and
O’Riordan, 1998).
ancillary goods and services which boost educational achievement including grinds, summer schools, travel, student exchange etc. The perpetuation of elite power in higher education has been facilitated in some countries by the development of expensive private third-level colleges, especially where the competition in the State sector is too intense, or the resources are not sufficiently focused on the elite (the US being a case in point). Groups which already exercise power and influence in society economically therefore are able to utilise their superior economic forces to acquire the cultural license of credentials (higher education credentials especially). The acquisition of cultural legitimacy through economic investment reinforces the political power of the elite outside of the cultural and economic spheres. They are enabled to exercise power more effectively in the name of competence (Bourdieu, 1996).

2.4.3 Symbolic and Normative Influence of the Economically Powerful

Because of the imbrication (overlap) of cultural, economic and social capital, the relatively wealthy and privileged in society exercise considerable symbolic influence over lifestyles and expectations. They become the arbiters not only of economic value, but also of cultural and social values; their tastes, modes of dress, lifestyles etc., are presented as the ‘ideal type’, the pinnacle of ‘high’ culture for other to emulate (Bourdieu, 1984). The process whereby elite lifestyles are constructed, commodified and sold as an image commercially to subordinate groups takes time; it often appeals initially to the social ambitions of the upwardly mobile middle or better off working classes, gradually permeating other classes. Over time, however, it recreates a sense of cultural value, changing the norms of participation and modes of self presentation which are defined as socially appropriate for all classes. Social exclusion for those who are poor does not arise simply therefore from lack of money, it arises also when those who are economically excluded also become culturally and socially excluded. Their lifestyles and values are negatively defined, being both non-normative and subordinate.
While it is evident from what is said here that economic inequality is not synonymous with poverty, it is a powerful factor in its perpetuation in most societies. First, it is evident that the cultural norms and values which allow significant economic inequalities to develop also facilitate the perpetuation of poverty. Second, because the economically powerful exercise a strong normative role in determining desirable lifestyles and tastes, the tastes and lifestyles of the economically marginal become subordinated. This is especially problematic in societies like Ireland where the majority are reasonably well off, as relatively high-cost norms of participation become modal, thereby excluding the poor from involvement in what would widely regarded as desirable forms of participation in areas such as leisure, education, housing and health. The inability of those who are economically marginal to participate further exacerbates their poverty and isolation over time, as they lose access to the forms of social and cultural capital which can be acquired when associating as equals with those who are rich in both.

2.5 What Needs to be Done

In welfare capitalist societies like Ireland, there are three core mechanisms for acquiring economic resources: 1) inheriting, receiving or benefiting from unearned wealth, 2) earning an income, or 3) having an entitlement to a welfare-related income. Consequently there are three core contexts within which economic inequality arises and can be addressed

2.5.1 Wealth Inequality

Despite the limited research data in the area (itself an indication of the reluctance to address wealth inequalities)⁴, there is enough evidence to suggest that there are significant wealth inequalities between households in Irish society (Nolan, 1991, Nolan and Maitre, 2000).

⁴ The wealth which we refer to here is material wealth or capital. It is clear that people may also be unequal in terms of non-material wealth, most notably cultural or social capital. The former refers to cultural resources (most especially formal education but also work-related learning) which people accumulate. Social capital refers to valuable social networks at family, community and associational levels (see Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1990, Putnam, 1993).
Some of the key conditions for achieving substantive wealth equality (in terms of the ownership of land, industrial and financial capital) are:

a) A commitment to developing an equitable distribution of wealth distribution at a given time through effective transfer and taxation systems including inheritance tax;

b) The democratisation of the systems of wealth ownership and control which determine wealth distribution in the first instance. Without ensuring that systems of ownership and control are subject to public monitoring or regulation, any redistribution of wealth which may be achieved at a given time, can be readily reintroduced.

c) Constitutional change. Given the existing protections for private property in the Irish Constitution and the interpretation of the rights of property owners by the Courts, it is evident that constitutional changes would be required if there were to be any substantive change in systems of ownership of private property.  

2.5.2 Earned Income

The rate and level at which one is rewarded for work is not only determined by the demand for the goods or services produced, but also by the institutionalised systems of wage bargaining within a given labour market, and the consequent status and income negotiated by particular groups for their given occupation; at the individual level, Earned income is also dependent on one’s education, health and general developed abilities to earn an income in the first instance. In a society such as Ireland which have strong system of centralised planning the government plays a central role in determining earned income levels

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5 It is important to distinguish analytically between personal property (one’s home and other basic personal goods and utilities) and productive property which generates income. Although the distinction between each of these is not always perfect (as when one uses one’s home for business purposes, or as a means of accumulating wealth) nevertheless it is an important conceptual distinction which has significant policy implications in political and legal terms. While approximately 80% of Irish householders are home owners, and hence owners of personal property, the vast majority of these are not owners of any significant amount of productive wealth (Nolan, 1991). It is the redistribution of productive property and wealth which is the central problem in equality terms rather than personal property.
Equalising earned incomes is a complex and politically fractious process, some key conditions for promoting equality are:

a) A reassessment of the value of particular occupations;

b) The development of systems for the equalisation of incomes across occupations either at source or by the introduction of appropriate taxation, welfare and related provisions;

c) Procedures for ensuring that all people have equal opportunities to develop their capacities to work, for example by having fully accessible and effective health and education services. As set out in our 1995 paper for the NESF, these opportunities need to extend beyond formal equal opportunity and access to equality of participation and outcome, with the ultimate aim of substantial equality in working conditions, job satisfaction and income across different occupations.

2.5.3 Welfare-dependent Income

Across all societies, there are many people at a given time who cannot earn an income and who are largely or wholly dependent on others (often on state transfers of income) for a living. Clearly, any system which is economically just, must also ensure that such people are also in a position to participate fully in the relevant institutions of society, in a manner comparable to those who earn an income and/or whose income is based on wealth.

For those who are welfare dependent at a given time, equality demands

a) a commitment to an adequate incomes system for all members of a given society (including those without citizenship status);

b) that those who cannot earn a living are not worse off than those who can;

c) For a) and b) to happen, it is essential that those who are welfare dependent are core partners in policy-making affecting their own welfare. This need arises because of the inevitable social distances which develop in society between decision-makers and decision-takers in the welfare system.

2.5.4 Relationship between inequality of resources and inequality of opportunity
What the aforementioned analysis demonstrates therefore is that it is no good trying to maintain that economic inequality would be acceptable if only we had equal opportunity. Research to date shows what economic inequality inevitably undermines equality of opportunity by ensuring that the children of privileged parents have greater opportunities than the children of the disadvantaged (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). Inequalities of resources operate in the ways mentioned above to provide the privileged with a wide range of mechanisms for passing their advantages to their children. Thus any thorough equalisation of opportunity requires a substantial shift towards equality of resources.

2.6 Cultural Context: Inequality of Respect, Issues of Recognition

What are cultural injustices? Basically they are injustices rooted in patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. They take the form of cultural domination, symbolic misrepresentation or non-recognition all leading to a lack of respect.

Promoting cultural equality is concerned fundamentally therefore with the status systems which exist in a given society. The core concern is with the mutual respect and recognition which is due to all members of society independent of their race, gender, age, marital or family status, sexual orientation, physical or mental capacities, ethnicity, social origin, or political or religious affiliations. Because a person’s status is both a function of personal characteristics and group affiliations; equality of recognition relates to both individuals and groups.

2.7 Why Respect Matters

Given the increased evidence of racial attacks on minority ethnic and immigrant groups in Ireland in the last two years, the ongoing religious/ethnic divisions in Northern Ireland, and the evidence of exclusions documented by those who are Travellers or who are lesbian or gay, it is clear that addressing status inequalities is a matter of urgent concern. Social relations of recognition and respect are also
essential for maintaining social unity and civility and for sustaining people’s sense of their own worth. Institutionalising respect for differences also matters because unequal respect can exacerbate both economic and political injustices.

2.8 What Needs to be Done

Cultural equality is about institutionalising systems of recognition for differences. It is about moving beyond tolerance to the respect for diversity. It is about the development of a critical inter-culturalism (Baker, 2000) whereby we critically and respectfully engage with the values and norms of others without claiming the superiority of our own. It requires:

a) An end to cultural imperialism whereby dominant groups in society project their own values and mores as representative of humanity as such (Baker, 1998);

b) A change from a situation in which ethnic, religious, linguistic or other minorities find their lifestyles and values are either made invisible in public discourse, or if visible are represented stereotypically or even denigrated (Young, 1990: 58-60).

c) A need for dominant groups in society to critically evaluate their own norms, values and practices. The culture of the dominant is subjected to appraisal, not just the lifestyles and values of the excluded.6

As the systems for cultural production, transmission and legitimisation are highly developed in societies like Ireland, through highly advanced systems of communication, media presentation and education especially, it is not really possible to conceive of systems of recognition without examining the ways in which cultural institutions legitimate certain cultural forms and values while omitting, denigrating or marginalising others. Therefore:

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6 As the exercise of dominance is often itself an integral element in the identity of powerful groups (Connell, 1995 claims, for example, that dominance is a core element in the definition of masculinity in most societies, while it is also suggested that that racial supremacism is an integral part of white Western identity, Said, 1991) exploring the cultural assumptions of dominant groups is essential for promoting equality. This is an especially important issue for subordinate groups, as it is they who are generally subject to analysis and investigation by diverse cultural institutions including research bodies,
d) Cultural injustices need to be addressed in institutional contexts in the media and education especially, as both of these institutions play a powerful guiding role in determining how differences are perceived and interpreted. How that is to be done needs to be worked out in each field.

e) In addition, all social institutions need to develop policies and practices of respect and inclusion based on an appreciation of differences, even though the task of the organisation or service in question may not be specifically concerned with the generation of cultural images or interpretations in the first instance. This includes employers, service providers and all non-governmental organisations.

2.8 Political Contexts: Inequality of Power, issues of Empowerment and Parity of Representation

Political injustice occurs when and wherever power is enacted - for example, in the realms of decision-making, including policy-making, and in political life generally. It may take the form of political exclusion, political marginalisation, political trivialisation or political misrepresentation (Baker, 1998).

Equality of power, the third core egalitarian principle is about eliminating relations of dominance and subordination in social life. It refers to all types of political equality, including the protection of civil and political rights and the democratisation of decision-making procedures in public and private institutions.

2.9 Why Power Matters

As Phillips (1995: 44) points out: “when there is a significant under-representation of disadvantaged groups at the point of final decision, this can and does have serious consequences”. Their interests can be easily ignored in the privacy of the decision-making table. It is only when people who are affected by particular decisions, are consistently present in the process of working out alternatives that they have much welfare institutions and the media. In a culturally egalitarian society, the focus of analysis would be re-
chance of challenging dominant discourses and conventions (ibid:45). This is a particularly pertinent issue for people who are marginalised as they are almost universally excluded from decision-making positions in the policy-making arena.

Given the subordinate status of those are marginalised in our political system (howsoever their powerlessness may have arisen) and their general high level of dependence on services over which they generally exercise little choice or control (be these housing, health, education or welfare) the democratisation of service planning, provision, and delivery seems central to realising equality in their case. It is especially important given the social (and oftentimes, geographical) distance between the poor and service providers. As with all systems of democracy, however, democratising service provision will be symbolic rather than substantive, unless those who are marginalised are enabled, by resources, training, information, child care supports etc., to be effective participants in the democratic process, and unless systems of accountability, appraisal and replacement are built into the representative structures.

2.10 What Needs to be Done

a) Political equality is first concerned with making democratic government more representative and accountable. Representative democracy has been shown increasingly to have serious limitations, not only in terms of how it can be seriously undermined by the alliances which develop between the political and economic elite, but also in terms of how truly representative and accountable it is in highly diverse, mobile complex societies\(^i\). In most of our political institutions, representatives have considerable autonomy at the point of decision-making; it matters both who they are therefore and how they are held accountable.

b) When and if marginalised people get to the decision-making table, they are rarely resourced, supported or educated sufficiently to be fully effective.(Evident from the ADA suggests this to be the case, Lynam, 1997, for example). Democratising structures of power and decision-making therefore, not only involves recognising balanced to focus on the dominant as well as the subordinate.
the importance of having those directly affected by inequality involved in
decision-making forums, especially where these bear directly on their quality of
life, it also involves working out proper procedures of accountability for all those
who claim to represent the interests of those who are marginalised, and providing
resources as required for those who want to be part of the decision-making process
but lack the educational, financial or other means to be effective within it (Baker,
1998).

c) Political equality therefore, is about ensuring that the formal political system is
restructured in such a way that it empowers those who are currently marginalised
in terms of political influence. International evidence suggests however that this a
difficult task, not least because of the capacity of those who are powerful and
wealthy to use their own social capital (in the form of social networks in
particular) to advance their interests by informal means across different contexts
(see various studies cited in Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

d) The strengthening local government, and the widening of access to information
and technical expertise are all elements of a more radical democratic programme,

e) But political equality is not simply concerned with local, regional or state
governance, important as these may be. It also demands the democratisation of
social relations in other institutions where power is exercised, including work,
education, social welfare, health, the family, and the administration of justice. The
equalisation of power is essentially about challenging hierarchical relations of
domination wherever these persist. The agenda here includes democratic
management of individual firms and democratic control over key planning issues
for the local, national and global economy. It involves rejecting the power of
husbands over wives and questioning the power relations between parents and
children. It means a democratic, co-operative model of education. It implies that
the power structures of religious organisations are just as open to question as those
of the secular world (Baker, 2000).
2.11 Inequality in the Affective Context

In undertaking the naming of the affective sphere of human relations as a potential area in which inequalities may arise, we are aware of the tentative nature of the analysis presented and the need for more research in the field. As noted above (2.1), this is an area which has not received much attention from egalitarian theorists. It has been treated as a private or personal matter rather than an issue of public policy for those writing on social justice. However, social scientists and feminist scholars have recognised that the relations of love, care and solidarity are fundamental to the reproduction of the human species, and should therefore be of central concern to policy makers (Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Erikson, 1987; Finch, 1990, Leira, 1994, Lynch and McLaughlin, 1995; McLaughlin, 1992 see the 1995 paper, Ungerson, 1990). The primacy of reproductive work, in its broadest sense, was also recognised long ago by Marx’s collaborator, Engles in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

What social policy and related researchers also observe is that the State does intervene in the ordering of affective relations in society, in so far as it strongly regulates sexual relations between adults, care relations between children and parents, relations between adult carers and adult dependants, and relations between peers at work. The State also indirectly influences the way in which affective relations are managed by regulating everything from time spent on formal education to hours spent in paid employment, to the time spent at rest when in work. Consequently, to ignore the ways is which inequalities may arise in the affective domain is to ignore a significant sphere of life which is influenced by public policy.

One of the major reasons why egalitarian theorists have tended to ignore human relations built around emotional ties and attachments is because they have assumed that emotions are irrational and divorced from intellect. Yet, there is ample evidence that emotions are intelligent and discriminating aspects of the human personality; they are closely tied to perception and judgement, and provide us with guidance and information in respect to both (Nussbaum, 1995; cf ref on Emotional Intelligence, Erikson).
Moreover, emotional nurturance is a fundamental prerequisite for human development. Relations of solidarity, care and love give people a basic sense of importance, value and belonging, a sense of being appreciated, cared for and wanted. Being deprived of intimate bonds of love and care inhibits the development of those emotional capabilities required for maintaining relations of companionship and solidarity with others.

Affective inequalities exist therefore when a person is deprived of the emotional nurturance they need to develop and/or maintain intimate, trusting and solidaristic human relations. It may exist when a child is deprived of close, trusting and loving relations, or when an adult is deprived of the intimacy they have the capacity to enjoy, or is denied opportunities for friendship, solidarity and belonging in their community, associational or work relations.

Promoting equality in the spheres of human solidarity and love involves recognising the complex ways and contexts in which deprivations can occur as well as promoting conditions for a quality of life that includes intimacy, solidarity, trust and care.

### 2.12 Why Affective Equality Matters

All human beings have the capacity for intimacy, attachment, and expressive relations with others. We all recognize and feel some sense of affiliation and concern for others; we value the various forms of social engagement that emanate from such relations; and we define ourselves in terms of them. Solidary bonds, be they ones of friendship or kinship, are frequently what gives meaning and purpose to life. Without them life would be without warmth or joy for most people. Being deprived of the capacity to develop such supportive affective relations, or of the experience of engaging in them when one has the capacity, is therefore a serious human deprivation.

Ireland is a society which is experiencing rapid social change. There is ample evidence of an increase in the intensification of conflicts between different parts of our lives, most especially between the reward-bearing paid work and unpaid love or solidarity.
work. Because the pure love or solidarity dimensions of care work is not commodifiable (Lynch, 1989), the dilemma is not readily resolved. It cannot simply be resolved by providing public care services for children or older people, important though these may be. The conflict is not simply a personal dilemma either, it is also a conflict between ethical principles; it is a conflict between the self-interested principles of the economic rational actor and the other-interested principles guiding solidarity-related forms of work.

2.13 What Needs to be Done

Developing the human capacities to form and maintain solidary relations takes time, energy and commitment. It is work in the emotional sense, especially in the developmental stages of life, but also in adulthood (Delphy and Leonard, 1992). It takes an intense and prolonged engagement with others to establish and maintain relations of solidarity and bonds of affection, to provide moral support, to maintain friendships, to give people a sense of belonging and to make them feel good. Caring labour and love labour are demanding on our energies and resources (Lynch, 1989; Lynch and McLoughlin, 1995).

Given the demographic and labour market changes which have occurred in Ireland in recent years, especially in the case of women (Fahey, Russell and Smyth, 2000), it is clear that the context in which care and love relations are now operating is changing rapidly. The conflicts between the demands of paid work on the one hand, and the demands of unpaid socioemotional work are likely to be increasingly acute, especially, albeit not exclusively for women. Moreover, this conflict is increasingly recognised in public debates about child care, adult care, family friendly policies, individualisation and financial support for carers (mostly women) who work full-time in the home.

Despite the debates however, there is no substantive resolution of the dilemma. Most of the conflict between care and paid work has to be managed in the privacy of the home, the kitchen, the living room, the bedroom. It is a privatised conflict although it is a deeply public matter. Individual couples, families, friends, work colleagues etc., are forced to constantly manage the dilemmas posed by two opposing cultures without
any serious recognition as to the complexity of the task. They manage time and try to squeeze out of each context that which will allow it to be most effective in the other.

The conflict between care or solidarity-related work (as this can occur with friends, and neighbours outside the family) is not simply a problem of time and resources, it is also a conflict over values and priorities. If a person chooses to spend time on either care labour or love labour as opposed to materially rewarding labour, there is a value judgement involved, value judgements which may be supported or discouraged by the State and employer organisations.

Recognising the place of the affective in life, highlights one of the great conflicts of our time, the conflict between the values of economic rationality, premised as it is on a concept of the person as rational, self interested individualistic actor, and the values of care emanating from the lifeworld of caring and other relations of interdependency (Hays, 1996). Much social scientific analysis presupposes that those who do not act in terms of economic self interest are effectively irrational. Yet Hays argues (like Gilligan, 1982) that carers (and these are mostly women) operate out of different ethical principles, in particular that they operate out of contextualised principles, and that these are not irrational. They are other-centred as the context in which they are generated is other-centred. To be rational in the care context is to be other-centred.

Conflicts over the time to develop nurturing relations are not confined to families however, they also apply in the community, associational and work domains. While the reasons for such conflict may vary across social classes, gender groups, ages and locations, in all cases it is affected by the rise in the increased levels of engagement in paid employment, the intensification of communication systems, increased internal migration, and the rise in patterns of both geographical and social mobility. The growing flexibilisation of work and its attendant insecurities, and the intensification of performance appraisals in both secure and insecure employments all introduce new pressures for productivity, which in themselves deplete the time and energy available for friendships, solidarity and nurturing relations.
What needs to be accepted therefore is that if we recognise the place of the affective in public life, it poses values choices which are as problematic and contentious as conflicts over economic policies, political policies or cultural policies. The relative invisibility and privacy of affective deprivation makes it a much more difficult issue to address. Moreover, there are no sophisticated measures developed in our own society for assessing levels of belonging, loving, solidarity in persons lives, although extensive work has been done in this area in Northern Europe (Allardt, 1987; Erikson, 1987).
Section 3

Applying the Equality Schema

3.1 The Importance of the Interrelationship between the various forms of Inequality

For the purposes of conceptual clarification, we have defined resource, recognition, power and affective inequalities as if they were discrete entities. In practice, all forms of inequality are inter-related, most especially there is a very strong interface between economic, political and culturally-generated inequalities.

3.1.1 Interface between economic and other inequalities

Those who depend on poorly paid work, or are on low welfare incomes, for example, lack not only economic capacity *per se*, they also frequently lack the capacity to exercise political power due to lack of time, energy and financial resources. Their inability to exercise political influence may also arise from factors which have either contributed to their low income in the first place, such as lack of formal education and credentials, or factors which are derivative of their economic position, such as the lowly social status of their occupation. Each of or all of these may be reasons why they are regarded as unsuitable for political office or influence.

At the other end of the economic spectrum, the wealthy are advantaged politically, not only through their access to privileged social networks in expensive schools, colleges, clubs or societies, but also through their ability to buy political influence through the funding of political parties and/or political causes. In addition, they are generally holders of valued educational credentials, occupational positions and roles which develop the skills and experiences deemed necessary for political offices of different kinds.

Economic inequality also impacts on the cultural sphere as it negatively affects the status of the marginalised in a negative way. That is to say, economic inequality does
not only shape our relationship to property, income or wealth, it also shapes perceptions of fellow citizens (Phillips, 1999: 83). Thus those who are poor (without choice) do not simply experience economic inequality, they also frequently experience cultural marginalisation or even denigration. Their accents, tastes, lifestyles, music etc., are often defined as socially inferior (Bourdieu, 1984), a factor which further exacerbates their social exclusion.

3.1.2 The interface between culturally-generated and other inequalities
The interface between economic and other inequalities is not one way however. Lowly status, or lack of recognition in the cultural sphere can have profound implications for economic well being. Research within Ireland on the relationship between sexual orientation and poverty (NEXUS/Combat Poverty, 1995), between disability and poverty (Combat Poverty, 1994) or Traveller status and poverty (Government of Ireland, Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995) or gender and poverty (Daly, 1987; Nolan and Watson, 1999) shows that lack of recognition of differences in the cultural sphere impacts negatively on several types of social groups economically. This can occur in different ways: in the case of married women their subordinate status has led to their official designations as dependants in the welfare systems which, in turn, exacerbates both their poverty and their subordination to men; the lowly status of Travellers has led to experiences of discrimination in housing, often being forced into types of accommodation which are not of their choosing, and which further reinforce their isolation and marginalisation. Subordinated groups like Travellers, asylum seekers or persons with certain disabilities may also avoid unnecessary social contact with dominant groups to minimise their experience of prejudice and discrimination. In so doing, they are precluded from occupational and social opportunities which may assist them economically. Indeed, their segregation further exacerbates their exclusion as they have fewer opportunities to interact with dominant groups on an equal footing. When there is little social or occupational convergence in people lives it is difficult to develop equality of respect.

Cultural marginalisation can also exacerbate political marginalisation. Groups that are ignored, misrepresented, trivialised, or otherwise negatively portrayed in institutions such as the media or education, are generally not granted political credence in other
social contexts. Consequently, they may be excluded from consultative arrangements, decision-making processes, or other relevant political engagements. The exclusion of the Unemployed for many years from certain social partnerships, and of Gay and Lesbian organisations from partnership bodies, are each examples of how lack of cultural recognition can impact negatively on the level of political equality granted to a particular group. Another example is the case of those who use Sign Language; they are not recognised as a linguistic minority in Ireland. Consequently it is difficult for them to be granted the political opportunity to influence language policy, a factor which further reinforces their cultural subordination.

3.1.3 Interface between political and other inequalities
Lack of political equality, can, in turn, exacerbate cultural marginalisation. The absence of democratic procedures within decision-making systems in the media and education, for example, will mean that there is no opportunity for those who are marginalised to define what is culturally valued. Only those who have immediate and direct access can influence cultural policy. In an Irish context, Travellers have traditionally been an example of a group who have not exercised influence in cultural spheres, such as education. They have not been defined as ‘educational partners’, consequently, much of the education provided for Traveller children failed to take sufficient account of their culture and lifestyles (Report of the Task Force on Travellers, 1995). Their lack of power to influence education policy added to their experience of cultural imperialism in education. The sense of alienation which ensued from such cultural imperialism precipitated Travellers’ early departure from education, further reinforcing their marginalised status in society, economically and socially, through lack of education. Political exclusion, working through, and being reinforced by, cultural exclusions led ultimately therefore to particular forms of economic marginalisation through lack of education.

3.1.4 How Affective deprivations interfaces with other inequalities
Although the ways in which people receive emotional nurturance in life are both personally and culturally specific, we know from the extensive research undertaken across the psychological, and related disciplines that deprivation of love and care, especially in the formative years of life has a profoundly debilitating effect on human
development. Deprivation of this kind is not confined to any given class or status group in society however. Indeed research in the Scandinavian countries indicates that companionship and solidarity are zero-correlated to level of material well being (bearing in mind that the level of material being enjoyed in the societies in question is very high by international standards) (Allardt, 1993).

Notwithstanding the above, we do know that there are certain groups in society who are likely to experience a severe lack emotional nurturance at different times. These include children who are exposed to abuse and experience fragmented early systems of care, people who are homeless or people who are in prison. In the latter two cases, we know from extensive research in the field, that it is those who are economically marginalised who are most likely also to become homeless or to go to prison (O’Mahony, 1997; Focus Point, …)

In addition, there are others who may be involuntarily institutionalised for reasons of mental illness or because of a disability who may also lack the opportunity to develop relations of intimacy and/or of personal or sexual attachment. Indeed, in general it is arguable that affective inequality is likely to be a disproportionately greater problem for disabled people (especially the learning disabled) than it is for those who do not have such disabilities (Equality Studies Centre, 1995). The inequality may be a function of either the lack of status (and hence of rights) accorded the person, their powerlessness, or the limitations imposed by their impairment per se. Or it may arise from a combination of all three factors.

Older people, especially when they live alone (and there is evidence that this is a growing pattern) and are immobile, are also susceptible to loneliness and isolation and hence may lack a sense of belongingness, inclusion and importance. Their difficulties are exacerbated in a society like Ireland in which internal migration is the norm and in which family size has fallen dramatically.

Loneliness and isolation can also be a problem for persons who are gay or lesbian in a society which negatively sanctions same sex relationships. This is especially the case
outside large towns and cities where there may be little privacy and where fear of reprisal will force people to live lives of isolation.

3.2 Locating the Generative Causes of Inequality across social groups

Although the economic, political and culturally-generated inequalities are especially closely interrelated, they are not of equal significance for all social groups. They may also vary in significance for any given group at a particular point in time.

3.2.1 Being Able to Name the Inequality

In addition, what may be identified as a generative force in the precipitation or perpetuation of poverty from a sociological, economic or political perspective, will, very likely, not be synonymous with what a given group might identify as an immediate priority in terms of alleviating the inequality. One of the issues is that what may matter for the alleviation of an injustice in the longer term, may not be visible in the short term, or if visible may not be seen as a priority. This is a problem identified repeatedly in the development literature. Those who have long been accustomed to hunger, poor health or discrimination, may come to see their deprivation as natural (Sen, 1985). Thus, if we rely on utility, or preferences as a measure of life quality we may get results that support the status quo and oppose radical change (Nussbaum, 1995: 91).

It is also the case, that the ability to name the causes of inequality in one’s own case requires the time, opportunity, and in some cases education, to do so. There is a language to be learned, and those who are poor or marginalised are frequently deprived of that language by lack of education and information about the politics and economics of their own position. In addition, their voice is often taken by ‘experts’, who claim to know their world and speak on their behalf (Lynch and O’Neill, 1994). This is an important consideration when analysing inequality as groups vary considerably both in their level of education, politicisation and awareness of their own inequalities. Lesbian Gay and Bisexual groups, for example, have been highly politicised and educationally well-informed about the causes of their own oppression.
in Irish society. Other groups, however, such as racial minorities who are asylum seekers, are at a very early stage of education both of themselves and of the public about the inequalities which they experience. The Learning Disabled are also a group who do not have a self-advocacy movement behind them to research, name and support them in seeking equality. Thus, even if one engages in empirical research about the causes of inequality, there is a need to be mindful of the differences in resources, abilities and experience of different groups which impacts on how groups name their world.

3.2.2 Understanding the position of different groups in the light of the Equality Schema in Figure 1

In this section, we try to identify what, from a sociological and political perspective, could be defined as generative causes of inequality for different groups identified in both the recent Equality legislation and the Anti-poverty Proofing Guidelines (Figure 1) We realise that this is an ideal-type model and is open to empirical investigation. It is presented as a heuristic device to enable us to identify the range and types of inequality across social groups. We realise that research with different groups, especially research which takes account of the heterogeneity within groups, may arrive at a different ordering of priorities, especially given what is stated above.

It is also clear that the relationship between affectively-generated inequalities, and resource, respect and power inequalities, and particular group identities, is not linear in any meaningful sense. While older people and disabled people are more likely to be susceptible to affective deprivations, this does not apply to all disabled or older persons in the way that power deprivations applies to all children or status deprivations have traditionally applied to all Travellers.

To clarify the interface between different forms of inequality for various groups identified in the Poverty Proofing Guidelines and in the Equal Status Act, an outline of the interrelations between their status and different forms of inequality is presented in Figure 1 below. While there is a sense in which most groups experiences all of the inequalities in different degrees, depending on what sub-category of the group one
belongs to, particular contexts of social action are more important in generating inequalities. Selected groups have also been partially disaggregated in Figure 1 (within the limits of the space allowed) for the purpose of illustrating the diversity within groups, many of which are defined as homogenous in public discourse, but which are highly diverse in practice. The nature of the inequality experienced by large diverse groups, such as women and people with disabilities, varies greatly within the group itself. We give particular attention to the case of women in our analysis to demonstrate the way in which different statuses or identities occupied by women may generate inequality in particular cases.

What is clear from Figure 1 is that the contexts which generate inequality vary with different groups. The differences between groups is most visible where economic, political, cultural or affectual inequalities are highly polarised. It is less clear however, for those groups which are internally diverse and where inequalities are cumulative across all three areas with no one context predominating.

While the economic context may be the principal one generating inequality among those groups whose most defining status is an economic one, (the homeless, low income workers or those who are welfare dependent such as the long-term unemployed) other groups may experience economic inequality or poverty as a derivative of either cultural and/or political inequalities.
The Relationship between Different Statuses and Different Forms of Inequality in Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Key Contexts of Inequality</th>
<th>Forms of Inequality</th>
<th>Status Groups</th>
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<td>Travellers</td>
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<td>Age older people</td>
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<td>Social Class</td>
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<td>Learning Impairment</td>
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<td>Low Income</td>
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<td>Welfare dependent women</td>
<td>Refugees/Asylum seekers</td>
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<td>Home maker parent</td>
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| Political                  | Powerlessness & issues of Representation | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | *
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---
| Economic                   | Lack of adequate Resources               | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | *
| Cultural                   | Lack of Recognition of culture, values etc | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | **
| Affective                  | Lack of love, care and solidarity relations | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | * | *

Each context is defined as being of some (one asterisk) or of major (two asterisks) significance for a particular group in generating an inequality. A dash - indicates that this context does not create inequality in any significant way for this group. A question mark is used to signify the lack of knowledge either about the group as a whole or large sections within the group. Given the lack of research in the affective domain, it is not surprising that this is the field about which it is most difficult to hypothesise for any given group.
3.2.3 Examples of Overlapping Inequalities for Selected Groups

Low income working class or welfare status is undoubtedly one of the major statuses associated with poverty, not least because economic inequality is institutionalised in those statuses within society. Consequently, for those whose poverty is primarily class specific, the key issue is greater economic equality between waged workers, an equitable distribution of wealth, and income provision within the welfare codes which is above the poverty line. While those living in poverty for class reasons, may also experience political and even cultural marginalisation associated with their class position, the elimination of their poverty is fundamentally an economic matter. Political or cultural inequalities cannot be changed in any significant way without the economic injustice being changed in the first instance. Those who are poor cannot avail of political or cultural opportunities, when and if they present themselves, as they lack the resources (time, energy, money) which is necessary to do so.

To say that economic equality is a priority for those who are poor for class reasons is not to underestimate the interface between other inequalities and economic factors. People are not singular in their social identity. They have multivalent identities, that is to say, at any given time, any given person is a member of a multiplicity of social groups in society, some of which may be oppressed, some of which may not be.

This is particularly evident among people with disabilities. For those whose poverty arises from their inability to access work, arising from a lack of support services for disabled workers, including accessible transport, inclusive work environments, etc., their main concern may be with having substantive (fair) equality of opportunity in employment. For people who are severely learning disabled, and who are unlikely to enter formal employment, poverty may be derived primarily from their lowly status in society generally, and the failure of welfare and other state and voluntary institutions to grant them their full educational and welfare entitlements due to the low value placed on them as disabled persons. Their inability to voice their concerns in political terms further exacerbates their low status, and reinforces their poverty. Because people who are learning disabled generally rely on others to advocate on their behalf (although there is plenty of evidence from other countries that need not always be the
case) and many live in the care of others, oftentimes in institutions, they are less likely to have opportunities to form emotionally nurturing relations in especially in the absence of a caring parent. There is a sense therefore in which those with extensive learning impairments are likely to experience all four forms of inequality equally severely (Ryan, 1999).

In our society children live in a state of institutionalised dependence on their parents or guardians. The cultural code governing adult-child relations is strongly protectionist and hierarchical (Devine, 1999). Under the Irish constitution, and in Irish law, generally children are defined structurally as subordinate to the power of adults, mostly their parents (see Duncan, 1996, CRG, 1996). In common with many other countries, children are treated in many respects as the property of their parents in law; the family has inalienable and imprescriptible rights while children are subject to parents within this family context (Duncan, 1996). Children lack power therefore, their dependence and subordinancy being enshrined in law. They are unable to act autonomously to protect their economic interests (until after age 16) and the State does not guarantee them control of the child care benefit paid to parents on their behalf. When and where children come to experience poverty therefore, it is a derived state, arising in significant part from their economic subordination to adults.

While it is evident that most children in society are not poor although they are subordinate to parents, the proportion of children (17% in 1997) living in consistent poverty is twice that of adults (Nolan, 1999). The lack of any independent entitlement to an income separate from that of their parents, does significantly increase children’s chances of poverty. We are suggesting therefore that the primary generator of children’s poverty or lowly status is their relative powerlessness as a political force in society, a powerlessness which is enshrined in law and in the constitution.

Travellers are very clearly a group for whom a generative cause of inequality has been a prolonged history of cultural exclusion, marginalisation and denigration. While they also experience economic and political marginalisation, the generative cause of poverty among Travellers has not been because of poor pay, exclusion from wealth ownership or welfare dependence. Where welfare dependence has occurred and where
it precipitates poverty among Travellers, the generative causes of this has often originated in prior exclusions which were cultural in origin, including the lack of a culturally-sensitive education, exclusion from mainstream schooling and prejudicial attitudes and discrimination in housing and employment.

While the generative cause of inequality for gays, lesbians and bisexuals is generally defined as cultural, arising from the lack of recognition and respect for sexual difference, (Fraser, 1995), the implications of this extend far beyond the cultural sphere. Given Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act in Ireland, for example, those who are gay or lesbian are especially vulnerable in educational and health employments which are controlled by religious organisations that regard same sex partnerships as immoral. People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and are in same sex relationships could be regarded as being a threat to the ethos of the organisation in which they work. Not only does the lack of recognition impact on employment opportunities in particular areas, it also impacts on political participation in the wider cultural sphere. The denigration of homosexuality generally precipitates the political subordination of a sexuality-specific politics and limits the opportunities available to enjoy emotionally and sexually satisfying relationships.

3.3 The Particularities of Different Identities: the case of Women

Women are a particularly important group to analyse, not only because they comprise half the population, but because the problems of inequality faced by women are complex, given the high level of diversity among them. Focusing on women, highlights the problems of diversity within all groups. Women, are not just women, they are also women of a particular social class, age, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, ability type etc.

Given the male-dominated nature of Irish society in its socioeconomic and legal infrastructures (Connelly, 1993; O’Connor, 1998), and the relative absence of women from formal politics with some notable exceptions (Galligan, 1998), it is not unreasonable to suggest that women as a group are generally subordinate to men in Irish society. This is not to suggest that all women are subordinate to all men at all
timesiv, rather that, *ceteris paribus*, women are unequal to men. be that in literature (Boland, 1996), in or in the wider cultural, economic or social spheres (Commission on the Status of Women, 1993; Moane, 1998; Nolan and Watson, 1999; O’Connnor, 1998).

The general subordination of women does not take away from the fact that certain women are subordinated to other women, working class to middle class, those with impairments or disabilities to those without disabilities, or those who are lesbian to those who are heterosexual. In other words, gender inequalities are compounded by other inequalities.

Given the multivalent character of women’s social identity, on some occasions, it may be a woman’s social class which is the principal generator of her poverty, in other cases, it may be her age, marital status or disability. Thus, while economic status and social class are clearly powerful precipitators of poverty for women, as for other groups, women’s poverty is not singular in its cause.

The reasons why **women are poor** is an important consideration in addressing their poverty. Women who are married and are dependent on a husband’s low wages or a low welfare income are clearly not only adversely affected by the poverty emanating from their class position, they are also further impoverished by their lack of an independent source of income arising from their marital status. The poverty they experience, arising from an involuntary state of welfare dependence on her husband, derives from both the patriarchal assumption than married women are dependants on their husbands, and from the subordinate cultural standing of care work and domestic work which (with some minor exceptions) receive no remuneration. Addressing the economic inequalities experienced by women therefore need to take into account the gender specific or family/marital-status specific inequalities which may exacerbate their poverty.

The poverty, experienced by poor women employed in the low paid, often temporary, labour market, is different from the case cited above. While their poverty is derived directly from their social class status (i.e. the deliberate stratification of the paid
labour market which is one of the hall marks of capitalism) it is also compounded by both the vertical and horizontal segregation of the labour market along gender lines. As a result of the latter in particular, working class women are disproportionately socialised, educated and guided into low status stereotypically feminine, service occupations (cleaning, catering, assisting, etc.) with low pay and insecurity. Given the lack of state-founded child care supports, such women may earn little when child care costs are taken into account, or they may be forced back, by lack of care supports, into a spouse-dependent or welfare status, which perpetuates their poverty.

As most adult disabled people are not in employment, disabled women who are poor are undoubtedly most often poor because of their dependence on low levels of disability-related welfare. Yet, the poverty of disabled women may be exacerbated by the unique way in which disability interacts with femininity.

Given the importance of appearance and ‘the beauty culture’ which underpins conventional definitions of femininity in our society, and the cultural codes which assumes women will be carers (O’Connor, 1998), women with physical impairment are especially vulnerable to stereotyping or prejudice. This is the case not only in intimate, relationships where their physical impairments make them less desirable as partners but also in employments where appearance is valued. For many women with physical disabilities, the sense of denigration and isolation which they experience because of their physical disabilities can be so overwhelming that cultural recognition and celebration of their differences is the crucial equality concern (Lonsdale, 1990). It is a priority beyond political empowerment, which may be the priority of the male-dominated disability (physical) movement, or even economic independence, as they cannot engage effectively in either work or politics without experiencing the affirmation and recognition which has been denied to them because of their physical appearance in the first instance.

We know that women are more likely to live longer than men in Ireland and that they are more and more likely to live alone as they get older. While living alone does not necessarily imply that one experiences loneliness or isolation, it is a condition which predisposes one to such affective deprivations, especially when it is involuntary and/or
when one is cut off by poor transport and communication networks, or incapacitated by mobility impairments. Thus for **older women**, the injustice that may exercise them most is an affective one, a loss of opportunity to enjoy supportive solidary relations with family, friends or even neighbours. This problem is generally exacerbated as time advances and the opportunities for affectively supportive relations declines.

What the foregoing analysis suggests is that it may be inadvisable to treat a given group, especially a highly diverse and large group such as women (or indeed older people or disabled people) as homogenous entities when addressing their inequalities. All groups need to be disaggregated in equality terms. Moreover, all forms of inequality are interrelated with one another. While it is true for example, that certain injustices are more purely political, cultural or economic or affective in form, and that certain groups may be subjected primarily to one form of inequality more than others, because all human beings operate within multiple and overlapping identities, there is no person whose status, and correlative whose experience of injustice, takes a singular form.
Section 4
Challenges for Change

4.1 Some structural forces generating economic inequality: capitalism, patriarchy, racism, disablism

The economies of capitalist societies like Ireland are strongly focused on maximising the conditions which generate profit (Allen, 2000; Breen, 1990, Nolan et al., 2000). As the maximisation of profit is frequently made possible at the cost of minimising wage costs, and/or reducing the costs of State funded health, education and other welfare services, which are funded in part from the tax paid on capital accumulated (Offe, 1984), it is inevitable that capitalist societies will generate economic inequality. A strong and unregulated focus on capital accumulation also fosters poverty as workers are treated as units of production in the realisation of profit objectives; they are used or dispensed with as the share price and market share demands, frequently being left without adequate income or welfare at times of slowdown in production or in recession.

While capitalism remains therefore, there will always a problem of inequality and, depending on capitalism is managed by the State, a problem of poverty, first, because capitalism depends on profits and cannot accommodate significant redistribution, and secondly, because capital needs to retain command over labour, which necessarily means unequal power; this lack of power increases the vulnerability of labour both economically and politically, making it more susceptible to poverty.

In most Western countries, the State plays a pivotal role in managing economic relations. As evidence from our own country shows, the State exercises considerable redistributive powers even within a capitalist system. Poverty, can be and has been reduced when economic and social policies were focused on the task (Dreze and Sen, 1996; Nolan and Maitre, 2000). There is no reason why this pattern may not continue and why wealth and income inequalities generally cannot be reduced significantly; the
question is one of political will rather one of lacking effective mechanisms for realising change.

It is not only capitalism however, which generates economic inequality and poverty among particular groups, patriarchal systems also generate poverty. This arises due to the unequal distribution of work between women to men in the social relations of care, the more general subordination of women in the gendered division of paid labour and welfare, and the unequal status between gender groups in a patrilineal society resulting in a gendered distribution of property both within and between generations.

Institutionalised racism and xenophobia operate other segmentations in labour, welfare and property relations which promote poverty among those who are defined negatively in racial terms (most conspicuously black people in white societies, or Travellers or immigrants in Irish society). The poverty induced by race or ethnicity is group specific and may arise from a range of race or ethnic induced exclusions, be it in legislation which prohibits certain categories of person from working (asylum seekers, who are ethnic minorities, for example), in ethnically-determined welfare codes, or in legislation undermining forms of trade which are endemic to the lifestyle of an ethnic minority, such as Travellers, such as nomadism in the case of Travellers.

The high levels of poverty among the disabled is not confined to any one type of political or socio-economic system. While the operation of global capitalism, patriarchy of racism may all interact to reinforce poverty for any given disabled person, none of these alone can explain the disability-specific poverty which she or he experiences. The poverty of the learning disabled for example, is arguably as much a function of lowly status resulting in their incarceration and isolation in institutions, and their lack of education, training and advocacy support, as it is of the ordering of the labour market along capitalist lines.

While the end goal of poverty elimination is undoubtedly a significant redistribution of resources from the better off to the poor, the complete elimination of poverty and most especially of deep economic inequalities generally, demands restructuring multiple forms of social relations. It demands ultimately a restructuring of work, a re-
valuing of particular forms of labour including care work, a revaluation of states of
dependence however they arise, and significant changes in the way in which wealth is
managed and owned in society. The problems to be addressed are not simply
economic, they are also social, cultural and political. They demand changes at the
ideological and institutional levels that extend far outside the formal relations of
material production, distribution and exchange. Eliminating poverty demands a
restructuring of gender relations, ability relations, race and ethnic relations, age,
sexuality and such other relations as are cognate to the problem of economic
inequality in a given society.

Without such a multifaceted structural analysis, one which focuses on both the
deliberate and indeliberate practices and decisions which create poverty and economic
inequalities, poverty is individualised; it is construed as pathos. The net effect of this
is that the focus of analysis is on those who are affected by inequality and injustice
rather than on those systems and institutions which help to determine their position.

Academic analysis (and correlatively, policy attention and media analysis) needs to
move therefore from its concern with the marginalised to a concern with how the
economically and politically powerful resist change. It must also focus on how
economic, political and sociocultural structures generate economic inequality, and
how the relative significance of any one of these may vary in any particular case,
depending on the age, gender, ethnic identity etc of the persons in question.

4.2 Changing the terms of the Debate about Economic Inequality

Although there has been a debate over the last five or six years about issues of
recognition, most especially over Travellers and refugees and asylum seekers, no such
debate has taken place about economic polarisation. Economic inequality seems to be
increasingly accepted.

To challenge the dominant discourses about the economic order is a major task in
itself, it cannot be achieved without recognising the role that ideology plays in
promoting social change. That is to say, it is not really tenable to speak of changing
institutions and practices without changing the language in which we define the problem. To create a more egalitarian society demands that there is a widespread commitment to egalitarian values culturally and politically. Such a commitment cannot develop in a society in which deep economic inequalities are not named or publicised.

One of the most serious difficulties facing those who want to address issues of poverty and economic inequalities in society is that the political context within which the debate can take place has radically changed internationally. The demise of communism in Eastern Europe and Russia in particular, has seriously challenged the legitimacy of economic equality as a political project. By implication it has also marginalised political concerns about poverty. Those on the New Right even claim that the problems of poverty have effectively been resolved through the market system (Saunders, 1993). Although such a claim is clearly untenable in the light of the continuing and growing economic inequalities in several countries including Ireland (Atkinson et al., 1995; Coates, 1998; Greider, 1997; Nolan and Maitre, 2000), nevertheless it has enormous political credence evidenced by the serious challenges to the welfare state occurring in several countries in Western Europe. A concept of the ‘market citizen’ has developed at the expense of the ‘citizen with social rights’ (Hanson, 2000). The market view of the citizen is highly individualised and privatised; it is premised on assumptions of possessive individualism (consumerism) as the defining element in social identity. The idea that citizenship is untenable without a strong redistributive component and social rights has been seriously undermined.

Underpinning the demise of a politics of economic inequality is a clear belief internationally that capitalism has ‘won’ the Cold War. A deep-seated resignation as to the power and influence of capitalism exists; many now believe there is no alternative to it (Phillips, 1999:16). This wider international development is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to realise change in a more radical economically egalitarian direction within Ireland. We are subject to a host of international influences which are pulling in the opposite direction, including such institutions as the OECD, and powerful industrial interests within the EU. Although the EU is often
portrayed as a positive egalitarian influence on Irish social policy, research on EU Commission reports indicate that this is far from being the case. (Hanson, 2000). The European Commission is equivocal on social rights in many of its policy recommendations in the 1990s.

The net outcome of the aforementioned social trends is that the ideology of the New Right which has glorified ‘free enterprise, individual ‘choice’ and the primacy of the ‘market’ informs much of public understanding about what are the appropriate policies to address economic inequality and poverty in Irish society. The terms of public discourse have changed; a new managerialism reigns with a focus on the market and ‘consumers’ Those who avail of public services now are increasingly referred to as in market terms as ‘customers’ and ‘clients’; it is increasingly assumed that people are autonomous entities making individual ‘choices’, devoid of the constraints of economic and political circumstance and of the obligations of care and related commitments, etc. A new possessive individualism pervades public thinking about social policy and social justice. And there is a reluctance in a consensus-based partnership culture to challenge this discourse (Allen, 1999; Lynch, 2000).

What the above suggests is that the power and influence of global capitalism is undoubtedly immense (Sklair, 1994). While ascendant monetarist values, and the associated culture of possessive individualism underpinning it are powerful forces in the early 21st century, there is no reason why they cannot be challenged, there is always scope for resistance (Gramsci, 1971). One of the first tasks to be undertaken is to deconstruct the ideologies legitimating the monetarism and possessive individualism underpinning contemporary economic practices. Without undermining the principles and values underwriting global capitalism, there is little chance of having the kind of public political support which significant egalitarian changes require. The terms of the debates must change and the principles which support inequality must be challenged systematically if policy is to change in a significant manner. This is a challenge especially within the discipline of economics which has a formative influence on the terms of the public debate about economic inequality
4.3 Intellectual Contexts of the Debates: Issues in the Discipline of Economics

Higher education and research play a central role in defining the terms in which the debate about economic and social policy take place in society. The discipline of economics is central in framing the terms of the debate about economic inequality.

The discipline of economics is dominated by neo-classicalism. Although there is no homogeneity within the discipline in Ireland or within economics as a whole, there is no powerful alternative to neo-classical thought (such as feminist economics or Marxist economics) operating within Ireland. Consequently, it is almost impossible intellectually for a new paradigm to develop. Put simply, intellectual closure within the discipline of economics means that the debate about equality rarely moves beyond concerns with welfarism. There is no serious intellectual challenge to the operation of the capitalist market or to the unequal outcomes of the gendered division of labour, the focus is never on assessing economic structures in terms of such moral considerations as economic justice, enhancing human relations or preserving the environment for future generations. While individual economists are undoubtedly deeply committed to social justice, the constraints of the dominant paradigm within the discipline are overwhelming, leading to an overriding concern with economic efficiency and growth per se.

The lack of attention given to the ethical dimensions of the economic order is far from being an exclusively Irish problem however. It is an endemic problem within the discipline. Internationally, the core principles of the discipline focus on relations between individuals as autonomous rational actors (normally male) rather than people as group members living in states of deep interdependency. The ethical dimensions of economic relations are thus dispelled from consideration without being subject to empirical analysis.

“Like economic behaviour itself, the study of economics has become de-valued in the sense that moral values have been expelled from consideration. Conversely, values and norms have become de-rationalised so that they become mere subjective, emotional dispositions, lying beyond the scope of reason. Thus, the (attempted)
normative-positive split reflected a real subjectivization and de-rationalisation of values on the one hand, and the devaluation and expulsion of moral questions from matters of the running of economics on the other” (Sayer, 2000: 87).

To say that the ethical is jettisoned from economic analysis is not to deny the deep personal commitment that many economists have to social justice. Moreover, many economists (especially those in the ESRI) have undertaken valuable research on poverty and economic inequality, analysing the ways in which groups and individuals differ in their command over goods and services. Others, including Sen (1992, 1997) and Roemer (1994) have introduced ethical and critical concepts into economic debates. However, the problem remains that the dominant discourse in economics assumes a positivist split between fact and value, a practice which characterises much sociological analysis of inequality as well (Lynch, 2000).

Economic inequality and poverty are not morally neutral subjects, and their study requires a level of moral engagement which may well not be salient for other issues. To discount the ethical implications of poverty and economic inequality in intellectual analysis however, is to discount a substantive defining element of the research subject itself. Poverty causes intense and prolonged human misery especially where it persists over time. To analyse it without regard for its degrading, exclusionary and often life-threatening implications is to ignore a substantive part of what poverty is. It is to confine oneself to a partial analysis of the research subject.

Changing the terms of the debate about economic inequality therefore is an essential part of the equality project. Without such an ideological movement, it is difficult to imagine a change occurring in public values which will support greater economic equality in particular.

4.3 Creating Change: the Role of Ideology Generally
4.3.1 Recognising what has been achieved

That there has been a movement towards greater formal equality, especially in terms of the recognition of differences of religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and abilities, in recent years is beyond doubt. Such recognition of differences is most powerfully reflected in the passing of the Equal Status Act 2000 and the Employment Equality Act of 2001.

There has also been an attempt to promote greater equality of power through the partnership system, although the extent to which the system involves substantive as opposed to symbolic power sharing is increasingly called into question (Allen, 1999, Hardiman, 1998).

As noted in Section 1 above, however, with the exception of certain provisions in the Budget of 2000, the Finance Acts of the late 1990s have been anti-egalitarian in several respects. When we examine trends in taxation and social welfare, in the distribution of income, in relative income poverty lines (despite falling deprivation levels) and in social expenditure, it is clear that the benefits of economic growth are not used to reduce economic inequality. To date those who have least have benefited least.

In the affective domain there have been a number of legislative provisions addressing the regulation of the care of children in particular (such as the Child Care Act 1991, the Children Act, 1998? or the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000) The development of increased maternity leave and of parental leave also signifies a growing recognition of the importance of care for infant children. However, the overall lack of support for child care, the wholly inadequate support for home carers of adults and dependent disabled persons, and the absence of strong policy provisions underpinning family friendly policies, suggest that affective relations generally are not a political priority to date.
4.3.2 The Challenge of Ideological Change

The question arises therefore, how can the seeming political indifference to so many important equality agendas be changed? At a Plenary meeting of the NESF in May 2000, a senior civil servant made an important and telling political observation. He observed that we cannot rewrite the cultural and power relations of our society by simply wishing it, by merely identifying the legislative and administrative and procedural mechanisms by which this can be done. What will be changed will be that which is sustainable in terms of electoral success, certainly in the short term. To achieve radical egalitarian change, we must develop a political culture which supports change; and the changes must be supported by the electorate.

What this means is, if there is to be radical change in society, it has to be something to which people are deeply politically committed; political change follows ideological commitment to this change in the wider community. People must value the ideal to the level that they will vote for it. Thus while institutional and legislative changes are essential for creating an egalitarian society, so also is ideological change. Ideologies or systems of ideas, disseminated through global and/or local information systems and institutionalised in codes of practice and modes of organisation, are one of the primary engines of change in all societies. As Bourdieu (1993: 37) has observed “..the production of representations of the social world.... is a fundamental dimension of political struggles”.

4.3.3 The Media

The capacity to collect, process and transfer information has been developed, over the last 25 years, at a pace which is unprecedented in the history of humanity. Much of what we see and understand in the world is understood in terms of the frames and codes produced in global (and local) communications systems (Melucci, 1985, 1996). Power and control is exercised not only in the market or in the control over the means of production but in terms of the control of the means of understanding. Those who control the master/mistress codes of information and communication networks

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7 We are using the term ideology here in the Gramscian sense as a site of political and cultural struggle, rather than in the false consciousness sense, or in the sense of simple vested interests.
exercise control over our thought processes, our tastes, our interpretations of events. They provide us with the operational codes, the formal rules and knowledge systems whereby we encode and decode the world. The salience of ideology as an engine of change in society is especially important therefore at this time as knowledge and information flows constitute a core web of social practice in contemporary society. Symbolic and information resources are in and of themselves major resources.

There are two major sites of ideological production and control in contemporary Western societies, the media and education. (While the Churches are also a potential source of ideological production, their capacity to influence dominant ideologies in society has been greatly reduced in recent times) with the media been visibly the most powerful of the two. Much of what we learn, see and know is framed through global communication and information networks by those who control and influence the master codes of the computer software and the telecommunications industry. These are the new centres of power and influence; they operate far outside the parliamentary and partnership system. While the dividends and gains that flow from the control of telecommunications technologies are clearly material and capitalist in nature, the nature of the power and influence that is exercised is not simply material, it is heavily symbolic. The media exercise considerable control on public discourses and debates; they increasingly provide not only the topics for discussion but also the language in which the world will be named. What people lack increasingly is the power to name their own world. One of the greatest exclusions today is exclusion from the power of naming (Melucci, 1996:182). Consequently one of the most important areas of resistance is in the ideological sphere, in the realm of ideas, deconstructing and challenging the deep structures of common sense, challenging what appears natural and inevitable, especially in terms of inequality. We know that what is defined common sense is often the interests of dominant groups dressed up as universal interests; a hegemonic (unquestioning) consciousness which sees inequality as inevitable is sustained and elaborated by those with the power to name the world.

The media constitute a site of ideological production which is largely under private (profit driven) control, especially in the international domain. In addition, much of the media-based global communications networks are already interfaced with dominant
sectors within the economy forming a type of global corporate web (Castells, 1996, Hamelink, 1994). While the media can and do promote equality agendas at different times, it is unlikely that commercially-driven media will work towards this agenda unless there is a tangible dividend.

Because the media are part of a major global capitalist enterprise it is naive to assume that one can democratise the information communications industry in the short or medium term, and thereby make them more accountable in equality terms. In the United States alone, entertainment products are one of their largest exports. It is not easy to identify ways therefore in which a capitalist driven ideological system can be required to promote equality, especially in the redistributive areas. While advertising revenue is one means of exercising control (as has been shown recently in relation to the Sunday Independent) what scope or capacity equality-interested bodies (including the State) have to challenge anti-egalitarian ideologies in the media is something which needs both research and equality investigation.

4.3.4 Education
The question which arises therefore where is the scope for ideological development in relation to equality? In what way may education play a role? While it is clear that formal education can play a role by developing substantive human rights and equality-oriented programmes throughout primary and second-level schooling (the development of the Civil, Social and Political Education programme in the Junior Cycle in 1996 being a welcome start) there has been very little advance to date in this field in Ireland. The CSPE programme is an innovative and welcome development; however, it is only given one time period per week in most second-level schools and there is still no similar programme at the senior cycle. To what extent equality and human rights issues are addressed in primary schools is not really known, as there has never been a major study of the implementation of the Social Education elements of the Primary Curriculum. In addition, and quite amazingly by European (and Northern Ireland) standards, there are no social scientific subjects (such as politics, sociology, women’s studies, equality studies, human rights, media studies) available on the senior cycle curriculum. Yet these are the subjects which are most likely to provide
students with the intellectual skills to analyse equality issues and ultimately promote them in the public domain.

We will argue here however, that not only are developments such as those outlined in the previous paragraph necessary to promote a culture of understanding about human rights and equality issues, they need to be supplemented by new alliance between educational institutions, especially higher education, and social movements and organisations working towards egalitarian change.

4.3.5 The Rise of Equality Movements in Ireland and the Need for New Alliances

The nature of politics is changing in Irish society. The political agenda is set increasingly by groups and social movements which are outside the party political system (Crotty, 1998). This is as true in the equality and human rights fields as it is in relation to farming or the communications industry. In the equality field alone, there has been a sustained rise in the number of social groups promoting various forms of equality in recent years. Within the so-called voluntary and community sector we have seen the rise of global solidarity movements in the non-governmental sector, including bodies such as The Debt and Development Coalition, Oxfam, Trocaire, Comhlamh, Concern, and smaller support groups, whose primary goal is to heighten awareness of injustices within or between specific countries, such as the East Timor Support Group, or the Ogoni support group. Paralleling these organisations are a host of human rights groups some of which are local (Irish) in focus (such as the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Centre for the Administration of Justice or Penal Reform Trust) while others, like Amnesty International, are global.

Many community development groups also have a strong justice agenda, although their terrain of political action may be local in many cases. Groups such as the Community Platform (with approximately 22 group members), the Inner City Organisation Network or KLEAR adult education Centre in Kilbarrick are examples of bodies which vary from the national, to the regional to the local. Women’s groups also constitute a major element in the equality movement with the National Women’s
Council being the most significant of the non-governmental bodies. McMinn (2000) identified almost 1,500 women’s community groups between the North and South of Ireland, all of which had some concern with equality, albeit with very variable interpretations. Labour-based (trade union) organisations generally have some commitment to social justice and equality, albeit again with varying degrees of emphasis and levels of interpretation. There are numerous other bodies devoted to the promotion of justice, some of which are comprised entirely of members from a disadvantaged group (the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, Irish Deaf Society, the Irish Travellers Movement, INOU) others of which are campaigning groups on behalf of the disadvantaged, including the Anti-Poverty Organisations, CORI, SVdeP, Focus Point.

From the list outlined above, what is evident is that different groups have different equality agendas. These vary not only in terms of whether their principal focus is on achieving equality in the economic, sociocultural or political areas, to whether their concern is for a radical or neo-liberal equality agenda. For some, the principal focus is on achieving recognition in social status and cultural terms (such as GLEN, the Irish Deaf Society or the Irish Travellers Movement). For others the core equality agenda is economic, it concerns redistribution and/or ownership and control of the means of production (the Combat Poverty Agency or the Socialist Workers Party). Large national organisations (such as the NWI) have multiple equality concerns, ranging from redistribution to recognition to empowerment. One of the difficulties of mobilising the equality movements is precisely because of the diverse ways in which they define equality itself.

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8 Action for equality is not just the preserve of the institutions of civil society as there are a number of bodies which are within the State Sector which also have an equality remit, including the Combat Poverty Agency and the Disability Authority). Moreover, there are a variety of other agencies and bodies within the public sector with an equality remit, including bodies such as the Higher Education Equality Unit, etc. Some political parties have also made equality part of their agenda, again with varying levels of commitment. The question is not is there or is there not a widespread concern for greater equality, clearly there is, the issue is what type of equality are the various bodies interested in promoting and for whom? The other question is, how deep is the concern for equality, is it merely rhetoric or is it substantive?
It would be wrong to assume that only pro-equality movements have developed in Ireland however. In terms of race and ethnicity for example, the Immigration Control Platform is clearly an anti-egalitarian movement, purporting racist beliefs in an explicit and systematic manner. Other groups have also emerged which are clearly contesting the promotion of greater equality for women in society, even though their formal rhetoric may be more nuanced than this: groups such as Amen and Parental Equality are explicitly anti-feminist even though they profess not to be anti-women.

The significance of the aforementioned movements lies in the role they play in determining new political agendas. They exercise influence not by formally joining political parties or entering formal politics (although this can and does happen), but by revealing the stakes, highlighting the key issues of our time. They have a hugely prophetic, symbolic function: “They are a kind of new media. They do not fight merely for material goals, or to increase their participation in the system. They fight for symbolic and cultural stakes, for a different meaning and orientation of social action.” (Melucci, 1985: 797).

The networks of organisations and groups that promote equality therefore are highly significant not always for what they can achieve directly politically at any one time. As Haridman (1998, 2000) points out, the actual political gains made by the marginalised in annual budgets, for example, is quite limited. What they have changed however is the terms in which the debate takes place. They question the deep structures and values of politics itself; they challenge the rules of normality, the assumptions about differences, the rules of distribution, recognition and participation. Their role is political but it is political often in the symbolic spheres of social action not just (or even mainly) in the formal political sphere. By highlighting particular injustices they have the capacity to challenge the codes of meaning and interpretation; they can and do challenge the rules of normality, the common sense understandings about the inevitability of various inequalities. Their very existence undermines the existing power relations of interpretation and communication.

What is being suggested here is that there are major movements in civil society which signal a challenge to the dominant discourses of profit maximisation, economic self
interest, environmental abuse etc. These movements are creating new political agendas and redefining the core from the periphery. They are, in many respects, prophetic, even though what they prophesise may not always be either consistent or even emancipatory.

If such groups are to be effective they need to develop their capacities to challenge the hegemonic discourses of our time, discourses which are propagated systematically in the interests of the powerful. The Universities and other institutions of higher education and research, as bodies which play a key role in developing, disseminating and validating all types of intellectual discourse, represent one potential site of support for this counter-hegemony. They have to capacity to sustain and develop the work of egalitarian movements both locally and globally. They can do so especially by democratising the relations of research production and exchange, by having dialogue with equality movements about research itself, and by resourcing equality movements intellectually. While this would represent a major challenge to the higher education system (Lynch, 1999), it is a challenge which is imperative for them to meet, especially in an age when information enfranchisement is increasingly a prerequisite for political enfranchisement. Unless non-profit public institutions, such as the Universities, commit themselves to the development of the capacities of civil society (especially in this case to the equality movements within it, which are by any standards, quite extensive in Ireland) then a major opportunity to enrich an emergent and vibrant egalitarian political movement will be lost. By creating alliances between new egalitarian movements and learning organisations, there is scope for creating more informed and effective movements, and conversely, more informed and engaged institutions of higher education and research.
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1Bourdieu (1986) makes an important distinction between social and cultural capital. Cultural capital exists in three forms: the embodied (tastes, accent, vocabulary etc); the credentialised (degrees, diplomas etc.) and the material (works of art, music, books etc). Social capital however refers to the range of social and political benefits which accrue from holding certain statuses or positions or which accrue from being associated with persons who are such holders. It can refer to the benefit of titles of nobility, religious titles, or even social networks which advantage people in accessing a diverse range of goods and services, be these jobs, credit etc.

2In our own society, for example, political constituencies are drawn up on the basis of regional interests (fundamentally along geographical lines), yet many of the major social and political divisions in our society today are not regionally-based, gender and social class differences being the clearest examples. There is no mechanism within the present political structures to take account of the representation of diversity within regions. Moreover, there is no recognition of the serious problems posed by a politics of ideas (although it is now arguable whether we have such a system in Ireland any more) divorced from a politics of presence. It is assumed that through the party system, men can effectively represent women,
middle class people can represent the interests of working class people, settled people can represent Travellers etc.

The following groups/identities have been identified as being associated with poverty in the Poverty Proofing Guidelines: age, gender, disability, Travellers, ethnic minorities, family and marital status - lone parents, single adult households, households with homemaker parent-, the unemployed, especially the long-term unemployed, the homeless and children (esp. in large families). It does not name name religion, sexual orientation or race as being associated with poverty although these are included in the Equal Status legislation as three of the nine grounds on which discrimination is prohibited.

While middle class professional women experience inequalities arising from their feminine status, in social class terms they are generally neither culturally or economically subordinated, and in fact enjoy the privileges of their class denied to women and men in working class occupations. However, such women, can and do experience social inequalities in the political and the cultural areas which are specific to their gender, although these do not generate poverty given professional women’s strong occupational status, they do generate economic inequalities between men and women.