Affective Equality:

Love, Care and Solidarity as Productive Forces

Kathleen Lynch, Equality Studies UCD School of Social Justice

Introduction

Feminist-inspired work has played the key role in taking issues of care, love and solidarity out of the privatised world of the family to which they had been consigned by liberal and indeed most radical egalitarians (Benhabib 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1995; Held, 1995; Jonasdottir, 1994, Kittay, 1999). They have drawn attention to the salience of care and love as goods of public significance, and have identified the importance of caring as a human capability meeting a basic human need (Nussbaum, 1995, 2001). They have also exposed the limitations of conceptualisations of citizenship devoid of a concept of care, and highlighted the importance of caring as work, work that needs to be rewarded and distributed equally between women and men in particular (Finch and Groves, 1983; Fraser and Gordon, 1997, Glucksmann, 1995; Hobson, 2000; Hochschild, 1989; O'Brien, 2005; Sevenhuijsen, 1998).

Overall, what feminist scholars have helped to do is to shift intellectual thought from its intellectual fixation with the Weberian and Marxist structuralist trilogy of social class, status and power as the primary categories for investigating the generation of inequalities and exploitations. They have drawn attention to the way the care world and affective domains of life are discrete spheres of social action, albeit deeply interwoven with the economic, political and cultural spheres.

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This paper builds on this work, and on our own studies of care and love relations (Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009) and equality more generally (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004, 2009), by highlighting the importance of care relations generally for the pursuit of equality and social justice in society. It highlights the importance of affective equality for producing a society governed by principles of deep egalitarianism.

The paper opens by defining affective equality and inequality and outlining the core assumptions underpinning affective egalitarian thinking. From there it explores the history of neglect of affective relations in egalitarian theory. It then outlines a new framework for egalitarian thinking, one that takes account of affective relations and highlights their inter-relationship with other social systems. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of relationality at the heart of affective equality and a short comment on the links between affective relations, ethics and politics. The paper concludes with some comments on why social scientific and political thought needs to change to take account of the affective and the normative in social life.

Defining Affective Equality and Inequality

Affective equality is focused on two major issues, securing equality in the distribution of the nurturing provided through love, care and solidarity relationships and securing equality in the doing of emotional and other work involved in creating love, care and solidarity relations. Affective inequality occurs *directly* therefore when people are deprived of the love, care and solidarity (LCS) they need to survive and develop as human beings and/or when they are abused, violated or neglected affectively. It also occurs when the burdens and pleasures of care and love work are unequally distributed in society, between women and men particularly but also between classes, ethnic/racial groups. And it occurs when those doing love and care work are not recognised economically, politically and/or socially for that work. Affective inequality occurs *indirectly* when people

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are not educated regarding the theory and practice of love, care and solidarity work and when love, care and solidarity work is trivialised by omission from public discourse, when they are made inadmissible political subjects.

The concept of affective equality is based on a number of key premises. First, it assumes that humans live in profound states of dependency and interdependency and are therefore relational beings. Second, it assumes that people are deeply vulnerable at several levels, corporeally, emotionally, socially, politically, culturally and economically. Third, it assumes that people are sentient beings, with relational identities and feelings (both positive and negative) and that these feelings and identities play an important role in informing normative rationality; relational feelings influence choices about what is good and bad, moral and immoral. Finally, it assumes the citizen is a carer and care recipient both in the public and the private domain of life so lay normativity is not the prerogative of the private sphere.

Egalitarian Theory and Affective Equality

Political theory has tended to define the human person in three distinct ways, first as a public persona, second as an autonomous person devoid of relationality, and thirdly as a self-sufficient rational (cerebral) being, exemplified in the Cartesian assumption, '*Cogito ergo sum'*.

Most branches of political egalitarian thinking have been concerned with the 'public' sphere of life, namely the political relations of the state, the economic relations of the market, and the cultural relations governing social recognition. The preoccupation has been with inequalities of income and wealth, status and power. Rawls's *A Theory of Justice,* which has been the dominant work in Anglophone political theory since its publication in 1971, is a clear example of a text that gives primacy to the public sphere.

Those coming from a socialist and feminist tradition (Young, 1990, 2000, Fraser, 1995, 2008) also frame egalitarian questions in terms of the economy, polity and culture. While some feminist political theorists (Tronto, 1993, Jonasdottir, 1994) have recognised the importance of care as a form of work, and a discrete site of injustice, this is the exception rather than the rule. Fraser, who is one of the most influential contemporary political egalitarian theorists within the socialist feminist tradition, while giving attention to care work (Fraser and Gordon, 1997), has not recognised the affective domain as an independent site of injustice. She has argued in most of her work for a perspectival dualism, a two-dimensional conception of justice. She identified redistribution and recognition as the two fundamental and mutually irreducible dimensions of social justice, although acknowledging the discrete ways in which the political sphere generates injustice in her recent work (Fraser, 2008)[i].

From the time of Hobbes and Locke, that of Rousseau and Kant, up to and including Rawls, Western political theorists have also glorified the autonomous concept of the citizen. The have upheld a separatist view of the person ignoring the reality of human dependency and interdependency across the life course (Benhabib, 1992). Moreover, they have idealised autonomy and independence as a sign of maturity and growth, placing a premium on a human condition that is never fully realisable (England, 2005). In so far as it ignores relationality, liberal political thinking has glorified a concept of the person that is potentially socially unethical in that it is assumed to be detached and accountable primarily to the separated self.

Like most of the social sciences[ii], political theory has also been driven by a Cartesian rationality. There is a denial of the importance of emotions and affective realities in politics; this creates significant omissions in political understanding not only as to how gender inequalities operate across society, but

also in terms of what subjects are deemed suitable for political analysis. It is no exaggeration to say that care politics have been consigned to the sub-altern.

While there has been an intense debate about care and its implications for gender justice, this has taken place largely outside the domain of mainstream egalitarian theory, operating mostly among feminist economists and sociologists (Folbre, 1994, 2001, 2009; England, 2002, 2005; Himmelweit, 2002; Hochschild, 1989, etc, Gornick and Meyers 2003). Some philosophers (Kittay, 1999, Nussbaum, 2001) and feminist legal theorists (Fineman, 2004, Fineman and Dougherty, 2005) have also drawn attention to care as a site of injustice, although the reigning preoccupation in political egalitarian theory is with redistribution or recognition and, but to a much lesser degree, with the equalisation of power.

An Equality Framework incorporating the Affective System

Equality is not simply about (re)distribution and/or recognition, nor is it simply about the interface between redistribution, recognition and power relations, overcoming the Keynesian-Westphalian frame, as Fraser (2008) has recently suggested. The Marxist-Weberian trilogy of class, status and power do not establish the parameters for the knowing the scope of inequality and injustice. Neither is inequality and injustice simply about the public domains of life, nor is it indifferent to the matter of care and love, or affective relations generally.

In *Equality: From Theory to Action* (EFTA) (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004, 2009) we challenged the sociological axis on which most contemporary egalitarian theory is premised. We identified four rather than three major social contexts in which inequality is generated in society, namely the economic, the cultural, the political and the affective[iii]. Figure A.1 in the Appendix below shows how these four key social systems generate inequalities in different contexts and

how particular social institutions play a key role in either countering or exacerbating injustice.

The salience of the affective system arises in particular from the fact that all people have urgent needs for care at various stages in their lives, as a consequence of infancy, illness, impairment or other vulnerabilities (Fineman, 2008). Being cared for is also a fundamental prerequisite for human development (Kittay, 1999: Nussbaum, 2001). And relations of love, care and solidarity help to establish a basic sense of importance, value and belonging, a sense of being appreciated, wanted and cared about. (Lynch, et al., 2009). Being deprived of love and care is experienced as a loss and deprivation (Feeley, 2009). Humans are relational beings and their relationality is intricately bound to their dependencies and interdependencies (Gilligan, 1995; Kittay, 1999).

But the affective world does not operate autonomously. Figure 1 below maps out visually the relationship between the affective system and economic, political, cultural systems, and between each of these and the dimensions of equality/inequality to which they are related. The four social systems are deeply interwoven. The relationships between parents and children are not only affective they are also economic, cultural, political. While affective relations play a key role in framing how people are loved and cared for, so do economic relations, and power relations as the pervasiveness of child abuse internationally makes clear. The economic relationship between an employer and employee is also a relation of political power, as is the cultural relationship between the newspaper editor and a reader. The significance of all of this for public policy is that it is not possible just to address problems of inequality or social justice in one social system without addressing inequalities in related social systems. Inequalities are intersectional and deeply interwoven because human beings have multi-dimensional, structurally influenced identities that are constantly in flux.

Figure 1

4 Key Systems where equality/inequality is generated
mapped with 4 key dimensions of equality/inequality
Source: Baker,J. Lynch, K.Cantillon,S. and Walsh J.(2004, 2009) *Equality: From Theory to Action*

Systems		Dimensions of	In/equality	
	Resources	Respect and Recognition	Power	Love, Care and Solidarity
Economic System	XX	X	X	X
Political System	X	X	XX	X
Cultural System	X	XX	X	X
Affective System	X	X	X	XX

4   4

Not only does inequality occur across all systems, the ways in which inequality operates for different groups varies across systems. While it is clear that class inequality is generated in the economic domain, it is not confined to this. Class inequalities are also generated in the cultural system; cultural tastes are class stratified so the accents, modes of dress, ways of speaking, ways of eating, tastes in music and literature etc., of working class people are also culturally defined as inferior to those of the middle classes (Bourdieu, 1984, Skeggs, 2004). Working class people experience a moral judgement of themselves as socially lesser; this judgement has an affective outcome as people experience the shame and embarrassment of being judged to be of lower moral worth (Sayer, 2005). Equally, while children could be defined as the prototypically powerless group in

society, the injustices they experience are not confined to that system as poverty studies show that children are disproportionately poorer than adults (Survey of Income and Living Conditions in Europe, 2006, data from Ireland)

**The Relational Realities of Caring and its implications**

Love, care and solidarity[iv] are productive forces not only emotionally but also materially (Hardt and Negri, 2009). Studies of countries operating public polices involving the equalisation of wealth and income show that people are healthier and have higher levels of well-being in more equal and solidarity-led societies (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, Dorling, 2010). Equally, we know from psychology, that experiencing love and care at the personal level is vital for producing emotionally and mentally healthy persons, and that the latter, in turn, influences physical health and well being enabling people to work and function more effectively in all areas of life. Given the primacy of love, care and solidarity for human well being, it is important to comment on them further here (see Lynch, 2007 for an in-depth analysis).

There are three major life-worlds or circles of relational care work (Figure 2). First, there is the world of primary, intimate relations where there is strong attachment, interdependence, depth of engagement and intensity; the prototypical relationship in this circle is that between parents and children. Even if little love labour is invested by the parties to this intimate world, or if there is abuse or neglect, these relationships retain a high level of emotional significance. Secondary care relations involve outer circles of relatives, friends, neighbours and work colleagues where there are lower order affective engagements in terms of time, responsibility, commitment and emotional engagement. Tertiary care relations involve largely unknown others for whom people have care responsibilities through statutory obligations at national or international levels, or for whom people care politically or economically through volunteering or activism. Within each of these circles of care, people live in varying states of dependency

and interdependency. And each care reality is intersectionally connected to the other, moving along a fluid continuum from care-full-ness to care-less-ness.

Figure 2

Concentric Circles of Care Relations

Tertiary Care Relations: Solidary Work

Secondary Care Relations:
General Care Work

Primary Care Relations:
Love Labour
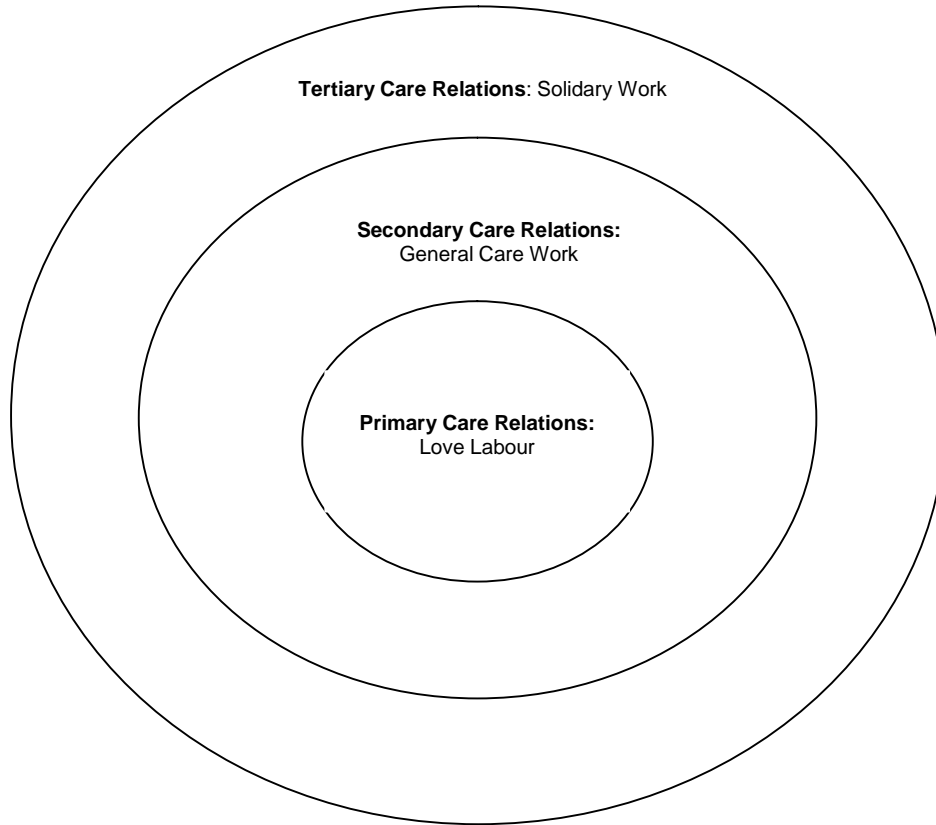
(original source: Lynch, *Sociological Review,* 2007)

The world of care is not an isolated and autonomous sphere however. It is deeply interwoven with economic, political and cultural relations, and inequalities in the latter can undermine the capacities and resources to do love, care and solidarity work (Baker et al., 2004). It is no accident of history, for example, that those who are in prison are not only disproportionately from very poor households, but are also very likely to have suffered severe care deprivations and to have lacked equality of access to education and other social goods (Feeley, 2009; O'Mahony, 1997). Structural injustices exacerbate affective deprivations.

In primary care relations, labours of abuse and neglect can replace love labouring, not only denying someone the benefits of love labour but damaging

the person through abuse and/or neglect. Equally in the secondary care relations fields, other-centred care labouring may or may not take place. Highly competitive work environments do not generate cultures of care and concern among colleagues (Ball, 2003). Neighbourhoods mired by poverty or violence are not likely to produce the kind of trust that underpins neighbourly care or so-called 'social capital' (Leonard, 2004). In the global or national sphere of social action, opportunities to express solidarity through forms of fair trade, debt cancellation or the curbing of sex trafficking are greatly undermined when governments and multi-lateral agencies conspire against them in their own interests. There is therefore nothing inevitable in the love, care and solidarity (LCS) world; the relational sphere provides contexts where they can be either fostered or destroyed, not least because economic, political and cultural injustices interpellate with affective relations and frame their character.

The Ethical, the Affective and Politics

Human beings are ethical, committed and emotional, as well as economic, political and cultural; the sets of values that govern people's actions in everyday life and the emotions that accompany them are central to how people live and define themselves (Sayer, 2005: 5-12). People struggle in their choices between what is good and the not-so-good; their lives are governed by rules of lay normativity in much of their social action (ibid: 35-50). Because human beings live in affective relational realities, they also have emotional ties and bonds that can reinforce their motivation to act as moral agents, to act 'other wise' rather than 'self wise' (Tronto, 1991, 1993). To say this is not to deny the fact that people can and do disregard feelings for others in all relations; they can and do behave indifferently, neglectfully and abusively. One of the defining struggles in the lay normative world is the struggle over how to balance concerns and commitment to others with self-interests tapping into and managing corresponding emotions.

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Given the complex character of human relationality however, social actions are not simply interest-led in the economic, power and status sense. While interests do play a role in framing choices and actions, people are evaluative; they make moral judgements about what matters to them in terms of their relationships, money, work and/or leisure. Because people have relational nurturing (nurtured) identities as carers and cared-for persons, their decisions are influenced by their love, care and solidarity priorities and values (Lynch, et al., 2009). Recognition of their vulnerability as human beings undoubtedly drives self-interest in the traditional economic sense, but it also drives people as moral and relational agents. In recognising the vulnerability of themselves, people can come to see the vulnerability of others.

Relations of love, care and solidarity matter not only for what they can produce personally (or what their absence of abuse can do negatively to persons, communities or societies) but for what they might generate politically in terms of heralding different ways of relating beyond separatedness, competition and aggrandisement. Grounding politics in the ethics of love, care and solidarity rather than the ethics of competition and self interest alone (I am not suggesting that self interest is not desirable or that it cannot at times work in the service of others) has the potential to help generate the type of egalitarian-driven societies that would be so beneficial to the well-being of humanity (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). It would enable the principle of other-centredness to manage and contain the principle of rational economic interest, thereby driving economic and social policy in a way that is ethical in the sense that is it always two-dimensional in focus; it is not just focused on simple economic self interest or advancement (growth for growth's sake) but is also focused on the care-of-the-other in the context of caring of the self.

Conclusion: The Normative, Positivism and the Neglect of the Affective in the Social Sciences

To move beyond the narrow definition of the human person as a public, rational and cerebral actor, one needs to address a major tension in contemporary sociological theory, namely the tension between the normative and the analytical within positivist led social science. While maintaining the separation between the positive and the normative is vital to avoid representing *a priori* assumptions and values as empirically valid 'facts', the dichotomy also presents us with unique problems of analysis. One of the issues is that it generates disinterest in the role of the normative, and relatedly that of affective relations in social life. Yet, as observed by Sayer in his analysis of social class and related inequalities (2005, 2006), human beings are not emotionally and morally detached entities. Social actors are not only interest-led, power-led or status-led. They can and do make moral choices that are driven by their relationality.

Humans are not objects devoid of vulnerability; they have a susceptibility to loss and injury emotionally, physically and mentally (Fineman, 2008). Their vulnerability grounds their relationality no matter how complex and conflict-laden these relations may be. A political space for new modes of political engagement, redefining the public from the inside out rests in that relationality. There is scope to direct political desire towards an admission of vulnerability and other-centredness. While economic and other self interests will inevitably play a role in desire, there is scope to define desires relationally not least by naming and recognising the collective (and ultimately individual) benefit of solidarity.

To recognise the salience of relationality for human choices and actions is not to suggest that relationality is disinterested or driven by simple altruism. Relational beings are simultaneously living in an autonomous space; they are both self-interested and relational simultaneously. People are individuals-in-relation, not separate and soluble persons (England, 2005). And being self-interested in the

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classical economic sense may indeed be what enables people to be other-centred in other spheres of life; autonomy is not the enemy of relationality. Neither is relationality the enemy of autonomy; people who are engaged with the interests of others are more sensitive to their needs and desires and this knowledge of others gives one power to service the other and to be rewarded in turn by reciprocal appreciation and action.

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APPENDIX

Figure A.1

Key Social Contexts for the Generation of Equality and Inequality

Key Social Systems And Relations	Central functions of each	Systems and institutions with prominent roles in each
Economic	Production, distribution and exchange of goods and services	Private sector producers and service providers State economic activity (social transfers, public services, etc.) Voluntary sector service providers Cooperatives Trade unions
Cultural	Production, transmission and legitimisation of cultural practices and products	Educational system Mass media Religions Other cultural institutions (museums, theatres, galleries, concert halls, etc.)
Political	Making and enforcing collectively binding decisions	Legislation/policy-making system Legal system Administrative bureaucracies Political parties Pressure groups Campaigning organisations Civil society organisations

Affective	Providing and sustaining relationships of love and care and solidarity	Families Friendship networks Care-giving institutions (children's homes, old people's homes) Solidaristic bodies engaged in work for justice and equality

Adapted from Baker, Lynch et al., *Equality: From Theory to Action*, 2004: 57-72.

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[i] Honneth (2003), in response to Fraser, claims that recognition is the fundamental and overarching moral category and that the distribution of material goods is a derivative category. Fraser's retort is that Honneth has psychologised the problem of injustice, and is treating social justice as primarily an issue of self-realization, a subjective identity problem (via loss of self confidence, self respect, self esteem), thereby ignoring the deeply structural aspects to this type of injustice (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). In neither case are care relations, nurturing and dependencies, deriving from the inevitable vulnerability of the human condition, entertained as a site of injustice, except in a derivative or secondary sense.

[ii] The same three type of assumptions inform sociological analysis of injustice be it within the neo-Weberian (Tilly, 1998) or the neo-Marxist tradition (Wright, 2010).

[iii] While is it obvious from extensive research over time how the economic, political and cultural relations generate injustice, it is not so clear how affective relations are generative forces for inequality, nor is it clear how each set of relations interfaces with each other (for a detailed discussion of all four and their interrelations see Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004: 57-72).

iv Love relations refer to relations of high interdependency where there is greatest attachment, intimacy and responsibility over time. They arise from inherited or contractual dependencies or interdependencies and are primary care relations. Secondary care relations are lower order interdependency relations. While they involve care responsibilities and attachments, they do not carry the same depth of moral obligation in terms of meeting dependency needs, especially long-term dependency needs. There is a degree of choice and contingency about secondary care relations that does not apply to primary relations. Solidarity relations do not involve intimacy. They are the political form or social form of love relations. Sometimes solidarity relations are chosen, such as when individuals or groups work collectively for the well being of others whose welfare is only partially or not immediately related to their own, or solidarity can be imposed through laws or moral prescriptions that are collectively binding. While most people can readily identify the value of love and care at the personal level, there is less understanding of solidarity. Solidarity is the more political or public face of affective relations. It finds expression in the values a society upholds in support of others who are not autonomous. It is both a set of values and a set of public practices. It connotes the work that is involved in creating and maintaining local

communities, neighbourhoods on the one hand, and the advocacy work in civil society for social justice and human rights at local, national and global levels at the other. It finds its expression in people's willingness to support vulnerable others within their own country or to support to peoples in other countries who are denied basic rights and livelihoods to live a life of dignity. The levels of solidarity in a given society are reflected in everything from the vibrancy of its community activities to the taxes people are willing to pay so as to fund and support vulnerable members of their own and other societies. It is where the moral, the affective and the political systems overlap in public life.