

'Personal' troubles and public spaces: the community as a site of care and social action

Mags Crean *

Abstract The crisis in community development in Ireland has been discussed by community workers, academics and equality experts. This article contributes to this analysis with empirical research encompassing the voice of people living with inequality, including a number of community activists. The research shows how affective relations take precedence in women's discussions about social class inequality and activism at a community level. Yet, this everyday concern with the affective is not given a legitimate status in academic and political discourse about community development. It is argued that this depoliticization of affective relations is part of the crisis in community development when it fails to incorporate a political analysis of what matters most to people at a community level.

Introduction

The economic and fiscal crisis in Ireland had a profound effect on the community development sector. [Harvey \(2012\)](#) examined the cumulative impact of the cuts in spending on the voluntary and community sector from 2008 to 2012 and found a 35 percent cut in funding for what was then called the 'local community development programme'. This impacted on the provision of vital community supports to some of the most marginalized communities and social groups in Ireland. In addition to budget cuts for community development services, there was also a reduction in the budget for some (and closure of other) key state agencies that upheld and supported the cohesion of community development projects. The cumulative impact of these shifts in finance and policy generated analysis about a crisis in community development ([Crowley, 2013](#); [Forde et al., 2016](#)).

*Address for correspondence: email: m.crean@ucd.ie

Crowley (2013) identified funding cuts, and threats to autonomy in the community sector, as a moment of crisis for the community and voluntary sector and persuasively highlighted the need for the community sector to respond. However, prior to the fiscal crisis with its attendant negative impact, critical thinkers like Meade (2005); Meade and O'Donovan (2002) and Powell and Geoghegan (2004) had begun a process of critically reflecting on community development in Ireland in the context of a growing professionalization, and an emerging consensualism with state policy through social partnership and reliance on state funding. Drawing on Meade, Shaw, Banks (2015) and Shaw and Mayo (2016), the crisis in community development in Ireland is best understood in terms of these wider issues: there has been a growing alignment with state policy towards managing rather than addressing structural causes of inequality, and a subsequent depoliticization of the community development sector. Shaw, Crowther and Martin (2003, p. 69) refer to a neoliberal direction in the community sector within an issue of the *Community Development Journal* (CDJ) dedicated to looking at Ireland:

As J.P. O'Carroll points out 'Ireland's case is not unique': it can be understood as a microcosm, highlighting processes which are being worked through in different national contexts, often with depressingly similar outcomes.

Shaw *et al.* (ibid) go on to state that the articles in the special edition of the journal dedicated to Ireland illustrate how neoliberal policies have worked their way through the state in ways that have redrawn the boundaries of state influence. They claim that:

demonstrates a serious deterioration (if not active suppression) of the very kind of debate, including the possibility of ideological difference and dissent, upon which a healthy democracy relies (2003, p. 70).

These discussions about a crisis in community development are significant as they open a space for not only considering responses to the crisis in the community sector but also rethinking the sector (see Meade, Shaw and Banks series *Rethinking Community Development* for Policy Press (Bristol)).

This paper aims to complement this 'rethinking' through empirical research on lived experiences of social class inequality in Ireland and the role of community development in challenging inequality. The paper sits with the more critical analysis advocated by Meade and others, which implies that the crisis in community development in Ireland had emerged before the fiscal crisis and, in some ways, it had laid fertile foundations during the later 1990s and early 2000s. Neoliberal policies were merely consolidated after 2008 under the guise of austerity (Meade, 2018). However, it offers something new to this debate as it provides an additional lens for conceptualizing and rethinking the

community sector by arguing about the centrality of love and care relations in community spaces that are at once about care and social action.

Drawing on literature and data from an explorative study on social class inequality and affective relations, this paper will explore the tensions between community development as a space for mutual care and as a space for social action. It will show that the 'personal' politics of providing love and care through affective relations takes precedence over, and informs, 'public' politics in the lives of poorer people. The pathologizing of personal troubles has led to state policy concerned with 'fixing' families and addressing the symptoms of structural inequalities (Sayer, 2017). The challenge to make community development meaningful to people again involves giving these affective relations a legitimate place in political community development discourse and activism. This paper will present the case for politicizing affective relations. It will open with a focus on the methodology and research findings, which provide significant data for then discussing the affective dimension of community development. The paper notes the warning by Wilson (1977) about the depoliticization of the injustices that matter most to women in communities. It concludes with a focus on how the affective dimension of people's lives has been neglected in the analysis of the crisis in community development in Ireland; thereby making the case that in rethinking community development, we need to return to the type of feminist analysis that once underpinned community development theory and practice.

Methodology

The research aim was originally informed by the author's lived experiences of childhood inequality having grown up in local authority housing in a family reliant on social welfare as the only source of income. The methodology and research process was also influenced by additional identities such as my gender and carer status as a mother. In addition, I had been engaged in community activism in paid and unpaid capacities and had witnessed first-hand how community development projects enriched the lives of my neighbours and friends. Although the autoethnographic data provided a rich dataset for analysis, there was still a need to design the research in such a way that the data collected via autoethnography and lived observation could be tested and compared and contextualized with wider experiences and conditions. For this reason, interview conversations and group discussions were held with other working class women living with class and care inequalities. The women who I conversed with for this

explorative study ($n = 13$) were a combination of women who use community projects ($n = 8$) and those involved as activists ($n = 5$) in such projects.

Because I was self-disclosing as part of the research process, ethically, it was important to ensure that there was a level of trust between me, as researcher, and the participants. This dictated how the sample was selected and the size of the sample. The women were recruited using snowball sampling through personal contacts and contacts with community centres that I was familiar with from my community work. The centres were provided with information about the research and women were invited to volunteer for a conversation with the researcher if they were interested in talking about inequality based on their own experiences and opinions. Having a working class background was an important selection criterion given that I was interested in sharing and exploring experiences of class inequality. In addition, given the gendered structure of the affective system and my interest in how class and care intersect, the gender and relational identity of participants was also important. For this reason, all participants were women, and all identified as mothers or grandmothers. Five of the women also self-identified as community activists and they were purposely selected to participate, again recruited through contacts in the community development sector. Having activists was significant for understanding not only how women live with, but how they also challenge, inequality.

Emancipatory research and activism on inequality

The community sector is experiencing a crisis in terms of funding and direction (Crowley, 2013) and a crisis politically in terms of a growing professionalization of the sector and growing status and influence of expert knowledge to 'fix' social problems (Meade, 2005, 2018). This raises a significant concern about the implications of these developments for people living with inequality through this crisis who would have traditionally benefited from a community development approach to activism on inequality.

The explorative study informing this paper started out as a research piece to explore how women live with inequality in Ireland and how it impacts on their capacity to give and receive love and care but also how they challenge inequality. The findings included narratives about social class inequality whereby the women articulated class inequality through affective relations of love and care in their lives. Their conversations also encompassed discussions of barriers to community activism and social change. The emancipatory design of the research placed an onus on the researcher to use the findings to influence social change with the women in the research. Trying to influence the community development agenda is one way of doing this.

Co-creating theory

This combination of autoethnography, interviews and learning circles (facilitated group discussions) was framed by a participatory and emancipatory approach to the research with the aim of co-creating *theory* rather than just generating qualitative data. Viewing everyday experience as knowledge was inspired by feminist standpoint theory, which argues for the importance of starting from the experiences of those who have been traditionally left out of the production of knowledge. Naples (1998) maintains that feminist standpoint theories privilege the everyday lives of women and others who traditionally have been invisible within scientific and social scientific analyses. Proponents of standpoint research (Harding 1987; 1991; 2006; Hill-Collins 1997; 2000) suggest that the value in this approach lies in uncovering the relationship between knowledge and power.

A specific focus on the co-creation of theory and ways of conceptualizing inequality influenced the type of research methods used to collect data. For this purpose, a learning circle was used in addition to traditional qualitative methods. The circle, inspired by Freirean approaches to facilitate learning (Freire, 1970), was a redesigned focus group where participants were invited to discuss ideas with the facilitator as an active participant too. Participants were not asked to talk about personal experiences but rather to comment on wider ideas around inequality and activism. The circle was presented as an opportunity to share ideas about inequality and to learn from others as well as the researcher/facilitator who was also active in the circle. Two circles were organized, each circle involved three women (some of whom also participated in the interviews) who were recruited through community contacts and community centres. The circles met on three separate occasions so there were six learning circle meetings in total. Each circle lasted from 1 to 2 h where ideas generated from my autoethnography (rather than their personal experiences) were discussed. As a form of data collection, the learning circle provided an emancipatory approach to engaging people in research about their lives as it generated ideas for not only exploring but also for challenging inequality. The data generated in the learning circle, therefore, was created collectively with the researcher playing a dual role of 'facilitator' and participant, sharing knowledge rather than taking knowledge and developing theory in a dialogical way rather than in an individualized and privatized academic manner after the data has been collected. This methodology is in line with the communicative methodological approach to research developed by Gómez, Puigvert, and Flecha (2011) and Flecha and Soler (2014).

The methodology is explored in detail in another article (Crean, 2018a) where I examine my insider/outsider status as a researcher and the personal, professional and political continuum that underpins autoethnographic and participatory research that is concerned with co-creating theory and social change. In it, I specifically name an ethical and political issue in emancipatory research when conducting research with people presently living with inequality. This refers to their need for more urgent political change when I no longer share this urgency despite having a shared identity and legacy informed by social class and inequality. For this reason, it was important to use the research findings to influence debates within the community development sector as this will have a direct benefit to women living with class and care inequality and is part of the emancipatory design of the research.

Findings

Material and affective inequalities

The conversations in this study included regular references to anxiety, depression, post-natal depression, loss, shame, tiredness; and the hurt and daily anxieties of living with scarce resources to provide and sustain love and care labour. The emotional way in which the women spoke, and the stories that they told, captured the individual ways in which inequality had impacted on them personally. My autoethnographic material also spoke vividly of anxiety linked to childhood development in unequal economic conditions. The intersection between personal well-being and the institutions and wider relations that shape people as they grow and develop is evident in the hurt that individuals spoke of. This was in relation to themselves, and the children and significant others they provide care for.

There is a hidden struggle that we don't talk about. [Lorna, grandparent, age 60+]

And;

If you look at a kid kept on an estate all the time because they don't have the money and if they do go somewhere they suddenly realize they are different. I don't want that for my daughter. [Laura, lone parent, age 30–40]

Although talking about material inequalities, the reference point for the women was the struggle to do love and care work to bring up children against the odds of a low income:

The first thing is not being able to provide for their children. It's the practical side like whether they get a new school jumper. Now, mine won't be getting two

new school jumpers. They're in them two years and they have another year. The jumper has to last three years. It's things like that, and then that affects them. They're going back to school with kids that have new jumpers. [Jennifer, mother, community activist, age 40–50]

Having a community space to meet provides a supportive space as people go through personal troubles:

We used to be able to make time here to just open the place and have a cuppa and chat, especially after a local bereavement. That is all gone now. [Joline, community activist, age 60+]

Joline (in the quote above) was referring to the fact that community development projects have closed in some areas and merged or reduced or redirected services. Like the stories of living with inequality, her reference point was the classed affective-political role of community development. The politics of community development involved classed affective relations as well as classed economic and political relations.

Activism and affective inequalities

The activists did not discuss their lived experiences of inequality in a political context or frame of reference. Instead, the conversations with the activists, although they brought in a focus on the wider community and societal conditions, still revolved around personal stories and anecdotes and references to affective inequalities. The 'politics' or activism that they engaged was at a local, community level and they presented their narratives in a similar way to the non-activists.

As Naples and James have shown, as has social movement theory (Kuumba, 2001) poorer women need to mobilize close to their homes and communities. Research has also shown that love and care can be motivating factors in community activism (Powell and Geoghegan, 2006). The women in this research were clear about the role of affective relations in their involvement in community work. One of the interviewees was very articulate about the role of women:

Women hold communities together. You look at this centre, there are no men working in this centre. It's all women. It has always been women that take an interest in communities. [Jennifer, mother, community activist, age 40–50]

When asked what she felt was lacking at a policy level or in the eyes of those with power to make change, she replied:

They are missing ...it sounds like the simplest thing in the world. They are missing reality. I mean you can write all the papers you want. Unless you have been there and lived in those conditions, you cannot understand. Really, unless you

care about someone here, you cannot understand. [Jennifer, mother, community activist, age 40–50]

Another activist drew on affective work to show how difficult it was for lone parents to get politically active:

We don't have time, we don't have money. [Sarah, lone parent, community activist, age 40–50]

Asked then, what motivated her and other lone parents against these constraints; she explained that the imminent threat to their children was a key motivation:

They are terrified of what is coming down the line, the ones that are most active. We have 3000 members but 1,200 in the closed group but when I look at the core group who is most active, we are all lone parents who are going to lose 25 percent of our income. We can't afford to lose 25 percent of our income.

She used a story from one of the other lone parent activists to show the care injustice in the proposed changes to lone parent payments in 2012:

She said 'I have two choices'. She is going to be down 100 euro. I can't afford to lose the hundred euros so I work extra hours and leave my son roaming the streets and forget the junior cert as he won't study on his own or else I live in poverty. The societal problem like if you have all these 15 year olds on the streets with no parents. What would she do for 'child care' for him? [Sarah, lone parent, community activist, age 40–50]

The other activists interviewed all told a similar story when asked what motivated them into more organized or 'public' politics at a community level; each spoke of how personal situations drove them to take their issue to another level. For example, here, Janice, an activist of 30 years explains why she got involved in activism beyond her own personal struggles:

All of my adult life I have been involved in activism. I suppose as a lone parent in my twenties...when I ended up a single parent living in a one bedroom flat in Ballymun, I suddenly saw a side of the world I had never seen and I wasn't happy...I struggled quietly and nicely in a man's world. Nobody ever seemed to stop me but suddenly when I was a single parent, things were different... [Janice, mother, community activist, age 60+]

For these women, the community offered a space to 'assert, celebrate or contest their 'place' in the world' (Shaw, 2008: 34). Yet their narratives also contain references to a world of value in the love and care work and the significant others in their lives. It is the reason they engage in activism and the reason the community matters as a place to do this activism.

Politics at a community level

The more the women chatted about caring in an unequal society, the more they became exercised that their capacity to provide love and care was dictated by their economic situation. They also seemed to agree that this was too often ignored:

Well they are interested in the family but only to blame you! They are too quick to say oh that's a bad mother there on her own not having the time for that many kids or that's the father drinking too much, but they're not as quick to say maybe she works that much because the money is so low or maybe he drinks that much because he is so down not having a job. [Clara, mother, age 20–30]

Of course, what you are saying is very real (referring to the importance of love and care work raised by the researcher), it is definitely very real. Like I know that I did a good job when you say it like that. I suppose like when you are living on a low income and you have your kids. I think the effect...you can see it...I'm a lone mother and I used to look at my kids and it's like history repeats itself. I feel guilty that I didn't do better. Then I look at their high hopes and I worry I can't do anything for them. It's like the graduation, she is babysitting to go to that. It is guilt. [June, lone parent, age 30–40]

They talked about how people do not see themselves as part of a social class but how they would see themselves in terms of being a mother or a daughter. Yet, they were also exposing the problem of making affective and materially-related injustices political in that those who live out these experiences do not frame them politically:

You should not have to live in poverty to care for your children. But our work in the home is not acknowledged and it is only when you have to pay someone else to do it that you put a value on it. The way I looked at my deserted wives' allowance but that is an income from the State to rear my family and I still take care of my community and the wider area and that [they] get good value for money. But you care in poverty and you care with stigma. [Pauline, grandmother, community activist, age 60+]

And;

I'm just a person so I don't think I am working class as I don't work but I am a mother and I am a daughter [June, lone parent, age 30–40]

And;

At the end of the day when you don't have money, all you have is each other. I was thinking the other day of all the stuff, we didn't have as kids but we had each other. And it came up as being from a single parent home and I was saying how all the other kids, they didn't have much, but they had more than me but then I had a good family. [Laura, lone parent, age 30–40]

It is clear that many women defined themselves from their position as carers and they connected this to struggle on low incomes but there was no sense that they perceived the injury to love and care work as a political issue (see also [Crean, 2018b](#)). It was interesting that none of the five activists that participated in the study had been party political activists. Two had some involvement with party politics but all five stressed that political actions need to happen where you are at. By 'at' they were referring to their community or their current situation.

What's love and care got to do with it?

The findings convey a specific type of social suffering ([Bourdieu, 1999](#)) arising from the harm inequality imposes on oneself and/or the significant others in a person's life, those whom they give and receive love or care. The focus is on people's care relational lives and affective inequalities of love and care ([Lynch, Baker, Lyons, 2009](#)). The study shows that the community as a space for talking about problems and accessing support matters most to poorer women accessing community services. Likewise, for the community activists, their interest in the need for community development infrastructure lay primarily in the personal issues that they spoke about in terms of lone parenting, dealing with anxiety and poverty, and supporting friends and family members. The narratives of love and care inequalities, drawn upon by women to articulate social class inequalities, reflects a care consciousness where poorer women see the contradictions of the class system in the inequalities in love and care that arise in their lives when producing and reproducing love and care in a classed society ([Crean, 2018b](#)).

Within Ireland, community development work was traditionally about self-help dominated by Catholic thinking ([Motherway, 2006](#)). It gradually grew into a more political space that offered poorer people, especially women, the infrastructure to do, not only self-care work but also, political work to the betterment of their own situation and that of their wider social class, gender or other positionality. This shift in focus was, in part, influenced by the feminist movement in Ireland in the 70s and 80s. Working class women began to organize in spaces outside of waged relations ([O'Neill, 1992](#)). In the midst of the women's liberation movement, community based centres and groups became places where women could bring their stresses and turn them into something less inward and more outward looking. It allowed some to advance in education and grow in self-confidence. Community development infrastructure at a local level legitimized the importance of supporting people at a personal level, whilst acknowledging and challenging the wider public conditions structuring

personal troubles. It provided a unique public space where the politics of economic injustice and affective injustice could be tackled at once.

The findings above revisit and affirm this link between personal and public politics for poorer people in Ireland. [Dominelli \(1995\)](#) also refers to these affective relations when discussing how community development work is constructed around the needs of those under care and how women, organizing at a community level, revolve around family life. However, Dominelli maintains that this type of organizing was designated a secondary status in the community work hierarchy where issues like providing jobs and restructuring the local economy were deemed as being of primary importance and the prerogative of men.

Depoliticization of affective inequalities as part of the crisis

Yet, despite the gendered conditions and concerns of the community sector ([Grimshaw, 2011](#)), there has been little by way of feminist analysis of the changing structures, policy, financing and subsequent crisis in community development. Referring to the UK, [Robson and Spence \(2011\)](#) maintain that changes to the management of community development to a more instrumental framework, similar to the shift in Ireland, undermined the 'developmental, inter-subjective practices associated with feminist and other anti-oppressive approaches and created tensions between policy and practice' (ibid: 288). Patricia Hill-Collins, writing about black women's activism states that:

Social science research [on activism] typically focuses on public, official, visible political activity even though unofficial, private, and seemingly invisible spheres of social life and organization may be equally important ([Hill-Collins, 2000:202](#)).

[Wilson \(1977\)](#), similar to what Patricia Hill-Collins writes of, highlights what she posed as a contradiction between the political orientation of community development and women's experiences of injustices in the home and the community. A special edition of the CDJ (2011:46:3) revisits her critiques about the political orientation of community development and the impact for feminism and concludes that feminism is marginalized within community development discourse. What is significant for the editors ([Emejulu and Bronstein](#)) of the 2011 special edition of CDJ is the fact that feminism is being further silenced by the spaces created by local agencies and the national state. They note that '*whilst some women can subvert these structures to support individual personal development, it is not clear how individualized development translates into real power and decision-making in the interests of different types of women*' (ibid, 286). [Emejulu and Bronstein \(ibid\)](#) raise an important concluding remark about how different women's interests

and needs are depoliticized and constructed as illegitimate. This is significant when we consider the traditional role of community development in politicizing the personal inequalities endured by women.

There is an urgent need within community development discourse and practice for a refocus on love and care inequalities at a community level. As the women in this study have shown; a focus on love and care engages them in local community structures and offers solutions to the inequalities that they are experiencing. Because they also showed how these love and care inequalities are intrinsically linked to the social class inequalities that structure their daily lives, there is also a need for community development to avoid pathologizing and psychologizing affective inequalities and instead link, as it did historically, lived experiences on the ground to a movement for more structural social change in policy and institutional practice.

Politicizing personal troubles

So a clear message from this study is the interconnectedness of relational and redistributive justice. Within policy discourses on inequality, community work is consistently linked to the family and the private sphere (Fremaux, 2005; Grimshaw, 2011). But this reliance on the family to 'fix' social problems serves to pathologize the family and isolate and privatize public issues as private or personal troubles removed from wider economic justice concerns. Parents are meant to be active in preventing a series of social problems and contributing to the revival of local communities, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods (Grimshaw, 2011). Grimshaw (2011) maintains that when the State is not providing services at a community level, there is an increased reliance by the state on women's unpaid work in the home and in the community to fill gaps in public services. Gosling (2008) maintains that this link between the family and the community is central to understanding the gendered nature of community.

In contrast to placing responsibility on families to solve structural inequalities, feminists have drawn attention to the significance of the community as a space for women's activism on issues that are deemed the responsibility of the family. For many poorer people, women in particular, community activism, which is in close proximity to their homes, amenable to their role as carers, is the only space available for organizing politically (Naples, 1998; 2003). Feminist activists have presented the community as an organizing space for many decades:

Once we see the community as a productive centre and thus a centre of subversion, the whole perspective for full generalized struggle and revolutionary organization is re-opened (James and Dalla Costa, 1972, 18).

Dalla Costa and James (1972) provide insight into the community as an organizing space and one in which women play the role of the subversive. Their work draws attention to a space for political activism outside of the paid workplace. In an analysis of the community work of African-American women and Latinas living and working in low-income neighbourhoods, Nancy Naples (1998) shows how activist mothering at a community level is a form of everyday politics. As activist mothers, the women are motivated by love and care demands.

A feminist framework of care acknowledges the materiality of care (Lynch, 2007; Bryson, 2014) and offers a way of politicizing care at a community level that avoids pathologizing families and communities by maintaining a focus on the material resources needed to do love and care work. Many of the personal troubles evidenced in the empirical data informing this research related to the impact of a lack of housing or money on raising children or personal well-being. Declining investment in public care, welfare services and community supports has a direct impact on people's care relational lives when living with economic inequality (Lynch, Cantillon and Crean, 2017). But the way to engage activism towards ending economic inequality is to connect material inequalities with the affective relations through which they are lived.

Community development work and community spaces represent one of the only spaces where care and class inequalities can be tackled simultaneously. Yet, for this to happen, those active within the community sector from grassroots service provision to analytical/tactical education and research roles must acknowledge affective relations in how people live with inequality but also in what matters most to them when engaging in activism and community development. The materiality of care must be placed at the core of the community development agenda as a means of not only rejuvenating local engagement with community infrastructure but as a way of challenging the growing dominance of a discourse in and about community development that centres on individual, family and community deficits.

Conclusion

bell hooks (1991) reminds us that psychoanalyst Alice Miller, in her book *Prisoners of Childhood*, drew on her own personal struggle to recover from the wounds of childhood that led her to rethink and theorize anew prevailing social and critical thought about the meaning of childhood pain and child abuse. In her adult life, through her practice, she experienced theory as a healing place and hooks draws on this to emphasize the need to link

theory to experiential knowledge. We also meet this link between theory and lived experiences in the work of [C. Wright Mills](#)' (1963: 534) when he contends that personal troubles are in fact public issues yet we 'slip past structure to focus on isolated situations' and consider problems 'as problems of individuals'. Walkerdine, although approaching affect from a psychoanalytic sense in her work on affect and communities (2010; 2016), suggests that affective processes need to be much more strongly foregrounded in work with communities (2010:94). Rethinking community development and reflecting on the crisis in community development is deeply connected to the lived experiences of those living with inequality at a personal and community level and the structures of affective relations are central to that experience as it is through these that classed experiences are intensely mediated, especially for primary carers, most of whom are women.

Traditionally, within low-income communities in Ireland, Family Resource Centres and Community Development Projects have provided places of refuge for people experiencing structural inequalities at this personal and community level. These local settings provided a space for discussing personal issues that avoided the professional ideology of what [Mills \(1963\)](#) described as social pathologists. Instead, they allowed people to share personal troubles collectively and, according to [Crowley \(2013:153\)](#), the community space offered the platform from which to articulate these collective interests and the means to agitate for an effective public and policy response to these interests.

The feminist methodology employed in this research sought to engage women in generating ideas about challenging inequality rather than just document their experiences of inequality; their lived experiences of inequality were engaged to generate theory and not just data about inequality and activism. The intention is to contribute to the discussion about the crisis in community development in Ireland ([Powell and Geoghegan, 2006](#); [Gaynor, 2011](#); [Crowley, 2013](#)).

When given the opportunity to reflect on inequality and how it is challenged, the women in this explorative study have shown how affective inequalities in love and care matter most at a personal and community level. It matters in how they navigate and manage material inequalities and it plays a role in motivating their activism and engagement as clients or activists within community development. The narratives informing this study point to how this affective dimension of people's lives has been depoliticized and delegitimized given its omission from the discussion of the crisis in community development.

For community members, mainly women, to struggle for community development infrastructure and to link personal troubles to structural arrangements shaping their lives, they need a discourse that politicizes

their love and care inequalities. This is lacking in how we currently discuss political community development and may be part of the problem in building popular support for a space with the potential to challenge material and affective inequalities at the same time.

Mags Crean is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Education, University College Dublin. Mags holds undergraduate degrees in Science and Social Science from UCD where she also completed a Masters and PhD in Equality Studies from the School of Social Justice. Her activism and work in the community sector informs her academic research and writing.

References

- Bourdieu, P. (1999) *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, Polity, Cambridge.
- Bryson, V. (2014) Time to love, in Jónasdóttir A. G. and Ferguson A., eds, *Love: A question for feminism in the twenty-first century*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, pp. 113–126.
- Crean, M. (2018a) Minority scholars and insider-outsider researcher status: challenges along a personal, professional and political continuum [32 paragraphs], *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, **19** (1), Art. 17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.1.2874>.
- Crean, M. (2018b) Affective formations of class consciousness: Care consciousness, *The Sociological Review*, advance online via <https://doi-org.ucd.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0038026117751341>
- Crowley, N. (2013) Reflections: lost in austerity: rethinking the community sector, *Community Development Journal*, **48** (1), 151–157.
- Dalla Costa, M. and James, S. (1972) *Women and the subversion of the community*, Falling Wall Press, Bristol, UK.
- Dominelli, L. (1995) Women in the community: feminist principles and organising in community work, *Community Development Journal*, **30** (2), 1.
- Emejulu, A. and Bronstein, A. (2011) The politics of everyday life: Feminisms and contemporary community development, *Community Development Journal*, **46** (3), 283–287. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44258285>.
- Flecha, R. and Soler, M. (2014) Communicative methodology: successful actions and dialogic democracy, *Current Sociology*, **62**, 232–242.
- Forde, C., O'Byrne, D., O'Connor, R., et al eds. (2016) *The Changing Landscape of Local and Community Development in Ireland: Policy and Practice*, Conference Proceedings, published by the Institute for Social Sciences in the 21st Century (ISS21), University College Cork University College Cork.
- Freire, P. (2000, originally published 1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed (30th anniversary ed.)*, Continuum, New York.
- Fremaux, I. (2005) New Labour's appropriation of the concept of community: a critique, *Community Development Journal*, **40** (3), 265–274.

- Gaynor, N. (2011) In-Active citizenship and the depoliticization of community development in Ireland, *Community Development Journal*, **46** (1), 27–41.
- Grimshaw, L. (2011) Community work as women's work? The gendering of English neighbourhood partnerships, *Community Development Journal*, **46** (3), 327–340. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsr034>.
- Gómez, A., Puigvert, L. and Flecha, R. (2011) Critical communicative methodology: informing real social transformation through research, *Qualitative Inquiry*, **17**, 235–245.
- Gosling, V. K. (2008) Regenerating communities: women's experiences of urban regeneration, *Urban Studies*, **45** (3), 607–626. <https://doi-org.ucd.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0042098007087337>.
- Harding, S., ed. (1987) *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues*, Indiana University Press.
- Harding, S. (1991) *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*, Cornell University Press.
- Harding, S. (2006) *Science and Social Inequality: Feminist and Postcolonial Issues*, University of Illinois Press.
- Harvey, B. (2012) Downsizing the Community Sector: Changes in employment and services in the voluntary and community sector in Ireland, 2008-2012, ICTU Community sector committee, Dublin at <http://www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/downsizingcommunitysector.pdf>
- Hill Collins, P. (1997) Defining Black feminist thought, in Nicholson, L., ed., *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Routledge, New York, pp. 241–260.
- Hill-Collins, P. (2000) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge.
- hooks, b (1991) 'Theory as Liberatory Practice,' *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism*, 4:1: Article 2. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf/vol4/iss1/2>
- James, S. and Dalla Costa, M. (1972) *The Power of Women & the Subversion of the Community*, Falling Wall Press, Bristol.
- Kuumba, M. B. (2001) *Gender and Social Movements*, Rowman Altamira.
- Lynch, K. (2007) Love Labour as a distinct and non-commodifiable form of care labour, *Sociological Review*, **55** (3), 550–570.
- Lynch, K., Baker, J. and Lyons, M. (2009) *Affective Equality: Love, Care and Injustice*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Lynch, K., Cantillon, S. and Crean, M. (2017) 'Inequality', in Roche, W. K., O'Connell, P. J. and Prothero, A., eds, *Austerity and the Recovery in Ireland: Europe's Poster Child and the Great Recession*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 252–271.
- Meade, R. (2005) We hate it here, please let us stay! Irish social partnership and the community/voluntary sector's conflicted experiences of recognition, *Critical Social Policy*, **25**, 349–373.
- Meade, R. R. (2018) The re-signification of state-funded community development in Ireland: A problem of austerity and neoliberal government, *Critical Social Policy*, **38** (2), 222–243.

- Meade, R. and O'Donovan, O. (2002) Editorial introduction: corporatism and the ongoing debate about the relationship between the state and community development, *Community Development Journal*, **37**, 1–9.
- Meade, R., Shaw, M. and Banks, S. (2015) *Politics, Power and Community Development*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Mills, C. W. (1963) Power, politics and people. The collective essays of C. Wright Mills, in Horowitz I. H., ed., 1967, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Motherway, B. (2006) *The role of community development in tackling poverty*, Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin.
- Naples, N. (1998) *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work, and the War on Poverty*, Routledge, New York.
- Naples, N. (2003) *Feminism and Method: Ethnography, Discourse Analysis, and Activist Research*, Routledge, New York.
- O'Neill, C. (1992) *Telling it Like It Is*, Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin.
- Powell, F. and Geoghegan, M., (2004) The politics of community development: reclaiming civil society or reinventing governance? Dublin, A&A Farmar.
- Powell, F. and Geoghegan, M. (2006) Community development, partnership governance and dilemmas of professionalisation: profiling and assessing the case of Ireland, *British Journal of Social Work*, **36**, 845–861.
- Robson, S. and Spence, J. (2011) The erosion of feminist self and identity in community development theory and practice, *Community Development Journal*, **46** (3), 288–301. <https://doi-org.ucd.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/cdj/bsr037>.
- Sayer, A. (2017) Responding to the troubled families programme: framing the injuries of inequality, *Social Policy and Society*, **16** (1), 155–164.
- Shaw, M. (2008) Community development and the politics of community, *Community Development Journal*, **43**, 24–36.
- Shaw, M., Crowther, J. and Martin, I. (2003) Community Development Journal Volume 37(1) January 2002: 'Ireland, Corporatism and Community Development': Special Issue, *Community Development Journal*, **38**, 69–73.
- Shaw, M. and Mayo, M. (2016) *Class, Inequality and Community Development*, Bristol University Press, UK.
- Walkerdine, V. (2010) Communal beingness and affect: an exploration of trauma in an ex-industrial community, *Body and Society*, **16** (1), 91–116.
- Walkerdine, V. (2016) Affective history, working-class communities and self-determination, *The Sociological Review*, **64**, 699–714.
- Wilson, E. (1977) Women in the community, in Mayo, M., ed., *Women in the Community*. *Community Work* 3, p. 2, Routledge, London.