



The BIG Thinkers

Leaving Certificate Politics and Society



Lynch, Kathleen



Key Concepts: Patriarchy, Gender, Social Class, Equality, Social Justice.

Kathleen LYNCH



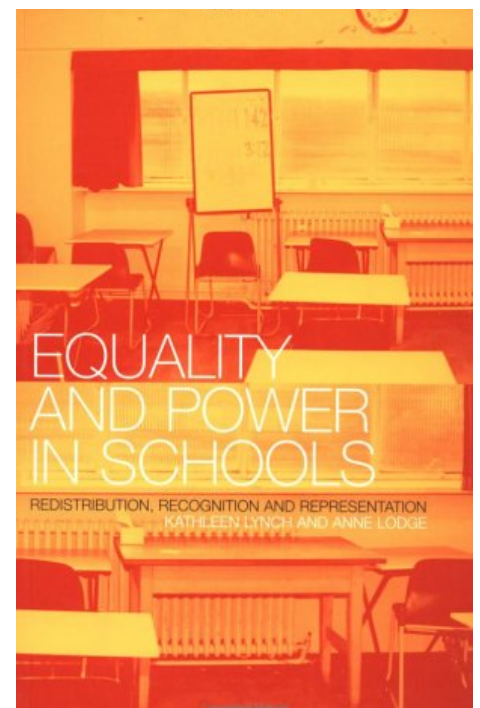
Kathleen Lynch was born to a farming family in Co Clare. She started her career as a social worker and what she witnessed while working as a social worker sparked her passion for social justice.

She focused her early studies on education and, along with Dr Anne Lodge of NUI Maynooth, produced *Equality and Power in Schools* (2002), a major work on the subject of education access and attainment. Based on two years of classroom observation in 12 Irish schools, Lynch and Lodge painstakingly examined the dynamics that create and perpetuate inequality in Irish education, from school choice to streaming to sexual orientation. In *Diversity at School* (2004) Lynch and Lodge again examined the subject of education inequality, this time under the nine grounds covered by equality legislation – gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community.

In more recent years she has published and lectured widely on affective (care-related) equality. In *Affective Equality: Love Care and Injustice* (2009) Lynch explains why the issue of care is such an important equality issue. She argues that care is a relational activity focused on nurturing people as humans, and of course, environmentally it is about nurturing the natural world. Care involves repairing, maintaining and enhancing human life within families, communities and within and beyond nation states. Caring involves emotional work, being attentive, available, committed, etc. but it is also a very material activity involving physical work (e.g. lifting, feeding, cleaning, showing affection), and mental work (listening, planning, learning etc.) We need to promote relational justice and gender justice, Lynch argues, if we are to recognise the importance of affective equality.

She points out that while economic, political and cultural inequalities are all publicly recognised (and many seek re-distribution of wealth, income and resources, as well as parity of political representation/participation and respect and recognition of differences to address each of these respectively), very little attention is given to care-related inequalities, not only in the doing of care work (which is highly gendered, and also classed and raced, in both paid and unpaid forms) but in terms of securing equal access to love and care in our lives, at both individual and collective levels.

While she has committed her life to highlighting issues of human rights she believes that ‘a human rights framework operating alone is highly individualistic – it assumes people have the capacity to claim their rights...but many do not. Those who are least powerful to assert their rights can be ignored or treated unjustly (e.g. carers, children, intellectually disabled people)’. Therefore she suggests that a rights-based approach to justice needs to be aligned with an ethics of care.



To sum up then Kathleen Lynch's work spans four major themes:

- 1) Economic Inequalities
 - where she examines income, wealth and related inequalities especially inequalities between social classes, but also between women and men, disabled and non-disabled people (and their impact on health, education, housing, wellbeing.)
- 2) Power Inequalities
 - where she examines inequalities in the exercise of power and highlights in particular the power exercised by the media. What power do the media social institution act to perpetuate inequality or can it promote a more equal society?
- 3) Cultural and Status Inequalities
 - Status-related injustices can occur for many reasons be it age, race, Traveller status, disability, sexuality, family status, belief/religion and gender.
- 4) Affective Inequalities
 - This is not random or individual as it might appear. Instead, it operates under patterned and systemic criteria. When states do little else other than condemning male to female violence, they effectively perpetuate it via non-interference.



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A selection of her articles can be accessed on this website.