Caring Masculinities and Affective Equality: the Role of Caring in Gender Justice and Transforming Masculinities

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Caring Masculinities and Affective Equality; the role of caring in gender justice and transforming masculinities

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Abstract

The unequal distribution caring, emotional and relational work has long been recognised by feminists as an impediment to gender equality in social, cultural, economic and political life. Gender equality requires affective equality; the equal sharing of both the burdens and benefits of love, care and solidarity. Studies of men and masculinities, while also interested in caring, having a traditional emphasis on issues such as fathering, the socialisation of boys, male role models, and men’s wellbeing, have now also begun to address caring and equality more broadly and specifically within sociology, social policy and welfare state studies. Critical studies of men and masculinities are crucial in highlighting the ways men are responding to, or lagging, greater expectations for affective equality. How are masculinities being transformed, and transforming gender relations through caring, or how are they resisting and reproducing inequality by evading it? Can caring transform masculinities and are caring masculinities a threat or challenge to hegemonic masculinities? This presentation reflects upon some of the central themes, challenges and debates in contemporary discussions of caring masculinities and gender equality.
Caring men and masculinities
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1. Affective inequalities

- **Feminist / gender theory** - care matters - explicit / implicit (e.g. anti-violence, domestic labour, economic and psychological dependency etc.) - but differing political perspectives!

- **Public/private** - gender division of labour [GDL] (public) & (total) division of household labour [TDHL] (private)

- **Unequal burdens** - (time, dependency, autonomy, recognition, monotony, opportunity cost, emotional demands) caring men/boys = less care burden for women/girls

- **Unequal benefits** - opportunities for love/caring relations (e.g. intimacy, interdependency, fulfilment, wellbeing) = benefits for men/boy & caring for all caregivers

- **Patriarchy** – women as default carers, male dominance supported & men marginalised from affective self/other relations

- **Resistance** - care equality will/is being ideologically, structurally, psychically resisted, in part through invisibility

- **Caring masculinities** - focus on caring men / masculinities - 4th wave of CSMM?

- **Caring citizenship** – more than rational, economic, political

2. Gender inequalities

- **Affective system** - (human relationships & caring social institutions esp. family, welfare systems) primarily generative of affective inequalities of love, care and solidarity but has implications for other domains

- **Affective inequalities** – deeply entwined with other domains – gender equality requires greater levels of affective equality

- **Resource inequalities** - (equal distribution of economic resources) – the way care is assigned or denied economic resources through welfare, tax and employment and the economic value/position of paid/unpaid caring

- **Representation inequalities** - (participation in political power and decision-making) – political opportunities restricted for women/carers and lack of prominence given to caring issues in male dominated public sphere

- **Respect & recognition inequalities** - (status) – the low value placed on caring/caregivers, institutionalization of economic self-interested materialism

- **Working & learning inequalities** - (wellbeing/fulfilment) – carers denied opportunities

3. Masculinities and care

- **Caring inequality** - pervasive social issue
- **Intersectionality** – gender & other identities
- **Oppression** - poor, majority world, migrant women, children, older people, disabled people etc.
- **Gender privileges** - not zero sum – advantages / disadvantages for boys/men but equality required
- **Men/boys** – care needs, socialization/care, emotional/relational deprivation, vulnerability, emotional pain, suicide imprisonment, violence, intimacy/sexuality etc.
- **Crucial** – study men’s care world - e.g. contradictory experiences of power/care
4. Social change (in Ireland)

- **Surveys** - Time Use & Self Reports (e.g. European Quality of Life Survey), more data required
- **Change** - slow, uneven, gradual - reactionary
- **Context** - historical & cultural
- **Supports** - inadequate supports for caring & paid work
- **Incentives** - little to reconfigure gendered order of caring
- **Politics** - inc. populist, far right, (neo) conservative & (neo) liberal, feminist, socialist

5. Caring identity

- **Feelings** - 'caring about'
- **Practices** – ‘caring for’
- **Other-centred** - disposition, sensibility, subjectivity
- **Moral values** - ethic of care (not entirely altruistic)
- **Complex** – relationship between ‘caring about’ and ‘caring for’
- **Conflicting** – being a primary carer goes against the trajectory/identity of masculinity
- **How are caring identities gendered through different configurations of feelings and practices?**
6. Caring work

• **Physical** - personal, practical, everyday tasks for living

• **Mental** – cognitive, thinking, planning, organising

• **Emotional** – managing one's own and others' feelings

• **Feminized** - (numerically/symbolically), stereotyped & essentialised

• **Subordinated** - economically and politically but valued ethically in terms of care ethics (care kudos)

• **Burdensome** - physically and psychologically demanding, isolating

• **Rewarding** – emotionally, psychically, fulfilling

• **How do men construct their identities in relation to different aspects of caring work?**
7. Caring tasks

- Interrelation of housework/care
- Cooking, feeding
- Cleaning, laundry
- Minding, tending, intimate personal caring
- Disciplining, educating
- Listening, talking
- Planning, organising, troubleshooting
- Managing, provisioning
- Relationships, medical/health, illnesses
- Education
- House maintenance
- Caring for self
- Breadwinning??
- Stereotypes - multitasking

How do men construct their identities in relation to different practical tasks of caring work?
8. Caring relations

- **Primary love relations** – non-commodifiable affective relations, private, intimate sphere e.g. fathering – requires *love labour*

- **Secondary care relations** – commodifiable affective relations, private & public sphere, e.g. social care, nursing etc. - *requires care work*

- **Tertiary solidarity relations** – distanced affective relations, public sphere, e.g. charity, human right - *requires solidarity work*

- **Masculinities care relations** - how do men construct their identities within differing concentric relations of caring?

9. Complex masculinities

- **Symbolic** - produced ideologically/discursively (e.g. essentialism)
- **Constructions** - historical, national, cultural, religious, geographical, globalised etc.
- **Structured** – institutionalized, constrained, enabled - state, law, policy, regulations, technology, time etc.
- **Intersectional** - based on gender, sexuality, class, race, religion/beliefs, ability, age etc.
- **Positioning** - active investment, response to positioning (e.g. boy’s don’t cry)
- **Performances** - active process, performing, presenting & displaying masculinities in social interaction
- **Negotiations** – over meaning, identity, power, caring (e.g. duty, ethics, evaluations of good man/good worker)
- **Embodied** – materiality, active body work, body reflective practices, internal contradictions – ability, aging, illness etc.
- **Habitus/fields/capitals** – resources and disposition adjusted to particular fields of social relations (e.g. couples, family, work, friendships)
- **Practices** – produced through everyday social practices, socialization, habituation, repeated performances (e.g. gdol)
10. Hierarchical masculinities

- **Hegemonic masculinities** – legitimates & normalizes male dominance
- **Carefree masculinities** – default/hidden template for hegemonic/complicit/socially valued masculinities
- **Caring femininities** – institutionalised moral feminine imperative, ethic of care without justice
- **Subordinated** - stigmatised, invisible, illegitimate, incomprehensible, emasculating
- **Marginalised** – income, power, wealth etc.
- **Power/Dissonance** - may not contradict hegemonic expectations (e.g. involved fathering, care breadwinning), hierarchies also exist in caring relations
- **Counter-hegemonic** – undoing/reproducing gender, men may perform caring masculinities whilst also reproducing gender hierarchies
11. Researching caring masculinities

- **Symbolic** - what dominant discourses are constructing caring/carefree masculinities and how can they be deconstructed (e.g. breadwinner/dangerous masculinity/toxic masculinity)

- **Constructions** - how are caring/carefree masculinities produced/changing historically, culturally, geographically? (e.g. norms of interpersonal equality)

- **Structured** - How are caring/carefree masculinities institutionalized within welfares states, law, policy etc. & producing patriarchal dividends? (e.g. gender equality policy)

- **Intersectionality** – How are other identities factors in producing caring/carefree masculinities? (e.g. class, other sources of masculinity, career and care)

- **Positioning** - how do men/ boys actively position themselves as caring/carefree? (e.g. homophobia, incomprehension, flight from feminization, preferences)
11. Researching caring masculinities

- **Performances** - How are caring/carefree masculinities performed? (e.g. emotionality, avoiding intimacy, emotional labour)

- **Negotiated** - how are caring/carefree masculinities negotiated within specific relationships or contexts? (e.g. couples, siblings, women’s availability, life course, dependencies etc.)

- **Embodied** - how are caring/carefree masculinities being internalised? (e.g. competence, feigned incompetence, skills, attributes, preferences)

- **Habitus/Field/Capitals** – how is caring tradeable as masculine capital and competing with other socially valued resources men use (e.g. invisibility, higher status, technical, specialist, practical, managerial, authoritative, commanding positions vs. recognition/love)

- **Practices** - how are caring/carefree masculinities produced through everyday social practices and repeated performances? (e.g. comfort zones, gatekeeping, spheres of expertise/influence, retraditionalization)