GENDER EQUALITY MEASUREMENT (GEM)
Measurement and Violence against Women
Workshop
Friday September 30th
Residence Commons C272

Introductory remarks: Sally Engle Merry
Roundtable VAW & Measurement in Practice

- Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director, DAWN Canada
- Sunny Marriner, Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre
- Anuradha Dugal, Canadian Women's Foundation
- Jamie Chai Yun Liew, Faculty of Law Ottawa University
- Kate McInturff, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Chair: Doris Buss

Workshop Notes

The workshop started with Doris Buss introducing the issues surrounding "the measurement of violence against women," and its significance for public services, feminist organizations and scholars. The importance and the limits of measuring violence against women are varied; in some contexts, requirements to measure can impose burdens on overworked activists and service providers, and the production of data can be linked to increased surveillance. In other contexts, the production of data on violence against women can be invaluable in the ongoing struggle to strengthen legal and political action. On this note, Doris Buss posed the question: *"How could we work together as activists and scholars to address this issue?"* to the panel participants.

In her opening remarks, Sally Engle Merry discussed how the increasing emphasis on the measurement of VAW has affected forms of governance. She illustrated these effects with reference to "venture philanthropy," where a "business model" is transferred to a "service delivery model" in order to make people accountable. As a result, she argued, the most pressing objective of NGOs is to have relatively effective consequences in a short period of time. In other words, NGOs are now evaluated on the basis of the

measurement/measurability of the consequences of their projects. Sally Engle Merry argued that the problem here is the direct link made between *accountability* and *measurement*, because such a link undermines any project that does not rely on measurement. Consequently, she argued, NGOs are put into a position where they need to allocate most of their time and effort to quantification. She suggested that the examination of what "the project of measuring violence against women" means to the NGOs, and addressing how they are to engage with it, has become an urgent need.

Following her observations on governance, NGOs and quantification, Sally Engle Merry outlined the problems regarding the present tools of measuring violence against women. The main issues she outlined are as follows:

1) ***Disclosure*** – Administrative data on VAW is unreliable. Therefore, new measurement tools need to be developed.
2) ***Definition*** – It is important to have a clear definition of what VAW means in a specific project in order to know what the project will try to measure. For instance, does your definition of VAW include fears, affects, actions, and feelings? If the researcher knows what her definition of VAW includes, then it will be easier to determine what she needs to ask. Moreover, it is crucial to find ways to integrate experience into the examination of VAW. This means that the research tools might need to be changed in accordance to research location, because what "violence" means/connotes/consists of changes from place to place. They ways in which words are used are essential in revealing the scope of VAW.
3) ***Local Knowledge & Local Participatory Work*** – It is important for the researchers to get to know the community in which they will conduct their research. This could be done by a through ethnographic study. Working on the local level makes it easier to understand the issue of violence against women, thereby rendering it possible to design a study that speaks to the participants in the most effective and productive way. More simply, there is a translation problem in the use of word "violence" and people's experience of violence. This translation problem could be reduced by local participatory work on data collection.

Getting people to think about punishment as violence is an issue of cultural and social transformation – i.e., the internal learning process regarding what they see/understand violence to be. Therefore, it is very important to articulate women's experiences and their relation to violence into the research design. This could be done by using the words (in the study) as they are understood in the community.

The questionnaire constructs a particular way of defining oneself. Therefore, we should consult those whom we want to survey when defining and describing what the problems are. In other words, the researcher should collaborate with people about whom they are trying to gather information while designing their research.

Activists and scholars should work together in reforming the tools that are used to measure violence against women in order to reflect the experiences of women involved and local knowledge. To do so, it is necessary: a) to conduct an ethnographic study in the research location, and b) to integrate local participatory work in the designing of the study (e.g. questions of the survey), which will be used to measure the violence against women.

Respondents Contributions

The four respondents then outlined their criticisms of quantification, and its effects on their work and feminist grassroots movement.

Sunny Marriner summarized the history of the formation of Sexual Assault Centers in Canada. She stated that in the 1950s and 1960s, women suffering from violence were pathologized by the psychiatric profession; in the early 1970s, women resisted the ways in which their experiences were documented and defined. Hence, Sexual Assault Centers did not produce records or documentation, and were committed to confidentiality. They protected women from being forced to give up information that might be used against them. In order to comply with the drive towards measurement, however, women have to give up power in order to get help.

Currently, in Canada, the quality of services provided by sexual assault centres is measured by the number of new clients at the centre. In this process, Sunny Marriner argued, measurement is becoming synonymous with tracking, and in turn, ethical commitment to confidentiality is being undermined. In addition, funding is linked to measurement, and measurement to a particular conception of 'effectiveness'. When effectiveness becomes the criteria of success in service providing, the quality of service declines. Sunny Marriner thus argued that what the centres offer now is not what women need but what the funding application requires the centre to measure.

The emphasis on measurement, Marriner argued, also erodes feminist grassroots solidarity, because centres are forced to compete for funding. She depicted this process as systematic de-assembling of women's organizations, which reduces the ability of the sites of resistance to work collectively. To put it differently, according to Sunny Marriner, pressures of quantification have broken solidarity within the feminist grassroots movement. She thus concluded that feminist revolution is being undone through quantification.

Sunny Marriner concluded her comments by posing another question: *How do we measure "cured"?*

Anuradha Dugal noted that for funders, the indicators of success are usually tacked on to projects after their design; projects are very rarely designed with indicators in mind at the start. These measurements are either health- or economics-based. She thus argued that there is a need to push back on this quantitative form of measurement. This could be done, according to Dugal, by local programs and by asking communities what they want to be measured and what indicators make the most sense. Collaboration between all stakeholders would make the process less onerous and potentially have more impact.

She also emphasized the importance of organizations making clear in their proposals what they learned from their previous projects not only in regards to their successes but also their failures. This demonstrates reflection on the part of the organizations. For instance, when they make a change in their programs, it is important that they highlight why they are making these changes, and what these changes demonstrate in terms of what they learned from their failures. Measurement is most often used to reflect on what the

organizations have done right rather than showing how the existing measurements have failed because of the disadvantages of quantification as a method of inquiry especially for studies on violence against women.

Jamie Liew started her comments by stating that she is a lawyer and an academic, and that practice informs her research. Then, she drew attention to the fact that gender is not a part of the definition of refugee in Canada, and outlined the problems with this approach while emphasizing the importance of recognizing gender as an aspect of refugee claims. She indicated that in the 1990s feminists complained about the gender-blind nature of formal definition of refugee in Canada.

In Canada, there is a recognition of the obligations of the state within the scope of Convention against Torture. According to this Convention, anybody under the threat of torture, violence shall be given refugee status. Yet, Jamie Liew argued, there is a caveat under Canadian law where people are not granted protection if the risk of harm is considered a "generalized risk" or one that is faced by a large population generally. The fact that gender-based violence is being characterized as "random" or "general crime" is problematic.

Gender-based refugee claimants have hard time proving how their state is not protecting them. It is very hard to *quantify* the lack of protection from the state when it concerns gender-based claims. In these situations, the decision-makers turn to datasets – including the services of these countries – in order to make their decisions. For instance, is it a democratic country? Is there enough police protection? Does the country have reliable judicial institutions? Yet, these questions are acting as proxies for the real question, which is whether there is protection for refugee claimaints. In these situations, the decision makers use these proxies, which, according to Jamie Liew, are very problematic. In this process, Liew argued, a systemic problem of violence against women is ignored, and a narrative that VAW is not a problem anymore is strengthened.

Kate McInturff focused her comments on how feminist movement and feminist organizations could make use of quantification strategically. She acknowledged the fact that quantification is reductive; but she emphasized its constructive aspects, particularly when it is used strategically within policy world. Drawing attention to the lack of belief in the reality of VAW in policy circles, and highlighting the fact that this is not actually a problem of

methodology but a problem of misogyny, she argued that statistics could be used as a proxy to prove the reality of VAW.

Supporting Kate McInturff's idea of using quantification strategically, **Bonnie Brayton** highlighted the importance of using disability statistics to make people take the issue of women's disability seriously. She drew attention to the fact that women with disabilities are discriminated against both as women and as persons with disabilities while also defining ableism as a form of violence. She also indicated that women are becoming disabled through violence. She illustrated this with reference to women survivors of intimate partner violence who are vulnerable to traumatic brain injury – the reports of elevated rates of TBI (35 to 80%). Therefore, Bonnie Brayton argued, the current plan of DAWN is to build a body of evidence (including both qualitative and quantitative data) to address systemic barriers in overcoming the problems of women with disabilities. She also suggested that it is important to shift responsibility for violence protection to larger community and society, and that this could be done only when the community is convinced of the reality of violence. Measurement plays a crucial role in bringing the issues to the forefront and proving the reality of the issues concerned. In her concluding remarks, Bonnie Brayton expressed the importance of integrating intersectionality into statistical data gathering and the need for feminist disability analysis as well as the significance of participatory action research.

Dialogue

When panelists completed their responses, Doris Buss posed the following question: *"What are some ways of acting together to be transgressive in terms of measurement?" "How we can work collectively to act, transgress and resist?"*

Anuradha Dugal suggested that one of the ways to transgress the limitations imposed by quantification is advocacy and awareness raising. To articulate and demonstrate the reality of violence against women, she argued, there needs to be a move from quantitative to qualitative methodology. Quantification relies on a single story, and a single story can be dangerous. For example, often we have expectations about what a victim should look like, and how she should behave. Instead, what is needed is **the creation of composite, multiple stories** that reflect women's reality, which could be used to transgress the limitations imposed by measurement. In addition, she

suggested that funders need to make it easier for organizations to access funds for evaluation and measurement.

In her comments, Kate McInturff re-emphasized the strategic benefits of using quantitative data, in particular making it possible to contact people from different fields, such as finance. She suggested that quantitative data has certain amount of emotional appeal that should be utilized.

In response to Doris Buss' question, Kate McInturff pointed to **social media** (as a means of transgression). Social media, she argued, is a space where the reality of violence against women can find its manifestation through the re-presentation of women's experiences and the demonstration of the scale of those experiences. The stories of women that can be found in social media are not a representative sample, yet they have a visceral impact on other people who might not believe in the reality of violence against women. She also added that the manifestations of violence against women on social media are neither qualitative or quantitative data; they are a different phenomenon, yet they give a sense of the scope of the presence and reality of violence. Lastly, as a transgressive practice, Kate McInturff suggested to quantify the perpetrators in order to shift the focus from victims to the perpetrators.

Sunny Marriner pointed out the ways in which services provided to women are reshaped through various mechanisms, in particular quantification. She argued that this process turns women's organizations into tracking agencies that supply data about their clients to other agencies. As a result, women in need of support are asked to trade power (by providing their data) to have their needs met, to have access to support services. This, Sunny Marriner argued, is an occasion where the notion of responsibilization comes to the fore. But, she suggested, there are examples of resistance to these forms of quantification and categorization by women on **micro-level** and **community level**. For instance, when survivors are asked to fill out surveys, sometimes, they refuse to do so, or refuse to provide the form of information requested. Therefore, instead of concentrating solely on the ways in which women are being vulnerablized, we also need to look at and **demonstrate their resilience**.

In addition, Sunny Marriner criticized the one-sidedness of data exchange process. She underlined the fact that the data goes up the chain, yet no information comes back. Therefore, she argued, if measurement is

necessary for accountability and transparency, then the process of data exchange has to change in a positive way – there needs to be an actual exchange between the government and women's organizations.

She also noted that we need to return to an examination of the power relations that structure knowledge and its communication – currently, organizations have to spend an inordinate amount of time proving that violence against women exists. She would like to see us pushing for transparency regarding government decision-making, what gets taken into consideration in policy making and what's ignored.

Bonnie Brayton argued that quantification of women's experiences leads to the vulnerabilization of women. But, she also suggested that screening of women might be useful in identifying the specific needs of each woman. She argued that it is important to think about how the data could be used strategically, and without over-surveying the victim.

In her comments, Sally Engle Merry highlighted the central role of the donor, and the donor's tendency to focus on a specific type of victim – i.e., a particular image and story – in order to galvanize attention and interest. She argued that this practice itself creates victims and further victimizes victims. While drawing attention to dangers of creating powerful stories, she identified the vulnerabilization of women in this process as an effect of playing to the needs of the donor. In addition, Sally Engle Merry argued that radical feminists and front-line feminism are being domesticated through state-funding and reliance on experts and technocrats.

Jamie Liew suggested an examination of **other movements** in order to find out which tactics and strategies have used (e.g., gay marriage). She argued that these other movements do not need to be the ones that feminist movement would think of as allies, or see as successful, or typically agree with (e.g., gun movement). She also emphasized how important it is to repeat the feminist messages in order to make sure that they are heard. This could be done simply by re-tweeting and/or re-posting on social media.

Bonnie Brayton emphasized the necessity of the **formation of feminist disability activism**.

Doris Buss depicted the **VAW as a site** where more demands can be made.

Kate McInturff highlighted the fact that in the policy circles there is a resistance to give money to women's empowerment. There is also aversion to risk, which feeds into professionalization of services – a shift from advocacy to provision. Advocacy is seen as risky. On this note, she expressed her disagreement with the separation of service providers from advocacy groups, and she suggested that more attention should be paid to "riskier experts" who do things that do not fit into neat little boxes of bureaucracy and technocracy.

The following points were also raised during the discussion:

There isn't a lot of space available to talk about complex problems – not only for feminists, but also for government officials. Government officials also face pressure to "get the point across", and avoid complexity.

The cleavage between providing services, and advocacy, is artificial; good service delivery needs advocacy and vice versa.

It was suggested that we need to pursue "risky data"; not just PhD students collecting data, but also young, grassroots activists. We need to make space for grassroots action on data collection, to fight the professionalization of feminism.

The importance of robust, autonomous feminist movement was emphasized by the attendees and panelists of the workshop. During this discussion, one of the common problems that was identified was the issue of funding not only in terms of how hard it is to get funding for women's organizations but, perhaps more importantly, in terms of the implications of funding, particularly the domestication/mainstreaming of feminist movement.

Doris concluded the workshop by emphasizing the importance of increasing cooperation between academics and activists, and creating more occasions where they work together.