

Gender-Based Analysis: Counting Women In! 11/19/05

Dr. Fiona Joy Green, Women's Studies, University of Winnipeg f.green@uwinnipeg.ca

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to today's important workshop. I am delighted to be here.

My task for the next few minutes is to introduce, and hopefully clearly define, gender-based analysis.

Molly Secours, an American activist, author and filmmaker, wrote an article "Where are the Voices of Reason and Dissent", posted on the online site ZNet commentary. Here she notes that she first asked the question, "Where are the women"? 4 years ago in response to the lack of women leaders and participants at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, S. Africa. She again asked, "Where are the women?" 10 days ago, in the context of the death of civil rights activist Rosa Parks and the Bush administration's incessant military retaliation plan against so called 'terrorists'.

Secours believes we are doomed to be repeatedly led by male politicians and community leaders who seem to 'misplace' their humanity as they continue to disregard voices and perspectives that evaluate humanitarian issues along side political issues. She names the discounted humanitarian view the 'feminine perspective', which, she notes while not necessarily held by all women and sometimes held by men, is most often heard in the voices of women.

Secours reminds us that "it is primarily the masculine that destroys human life through war, aggression and greed, and the feminine which counterbalances the tendency to dominate, conquer and exterminate." She also reminds us, "Often times it is in the presence of the feminine that the masculine remembers itself as a member of the human family."

So, what does my talking about Secours' feminine perspective have to do with gender-based analysis? Simply put, it underscores the central theme of gender-based analysis – keeping humanitarian issues central to political work and asking questions such as "where are the women?"

More precisely, a gender-based analysis puts gender at the centre of its inquiry.

- GBA is a process that assesses the different impacts of proposed and existing policies, programs, and legislation on women and men.
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- **A BIT OF HISTORY:**
- Gender-based analysis has been circulating for the past 30 years or so within the international arena, especially in the United Nations. The idea that governments need internal mechanisms to help the advancement of women was first raised at the International Women's Year World Conference in Mexico in 1975.
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- 20 years later, or ten years ago, in 1995, the Canadian government adopted a policy requiring federal departments and agencies to conduct gender-based analysis of future policies and legislation.
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- **THE CURRENT SITUATION**
- The development of policies and practices using a GBA are almost non-existent even though GBA is discussed in various provincial and federal government documents, and there have been training workshops on its use. (Williams, 1999:2).
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- It appears that gender-based analysis will be part of the world of governments in the future, with the gradual adoption of these processes across provincial and federal government.
 - For e.g., the UN has adopted this process in agencies like the World Health Organization. Some federal departments are using it, and the provinces of BC, Newfoundland & Labrador, and Quebec are also committed to its use.
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- **WHAT THE Critics SAY**
- **Critics** note that as government departments adopt this process there must be a mechanism to document both its use and the results of its use. Some call for the publication of government case studies using a gender-based analysis that result in policy or

programs that reflect the diversity of women's lives. To my knowledge, no such reports exist.

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- Critics also question who will be doing the work of gender-based analysis? Will people be trained how to do GBA? If so, Who will do the training? Furthermore, accountability for the training and reports needs to be set in place. Who will do this?
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- Some folks are concerned that a gender-based analysis is not a feminist analysis and worry that women will disappear, as they often do, when gender-neutral language and lenses are used. For example, there is a fear that by putting both women's and men's experiences into policy process, the real needs of women and girls will be neglected.
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- And still others are concerned that diversity will not be addressed in this process. For instance, there are almost no statistics on lesbians. Given that many issues of diversity are not captured in statistics, from which much public policy is developed, will governments find qualitative research to see if the diversity of women's experiences is reflected in the new policy or program?
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- Central to any understanding of gender is that people are located differently and variously. How does GBA consider, include, and account for influential factors that intersect the lives of women, such as race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, and age?
- - For decades women have been analysing government policies and programs to see if they meet women's needs. Often they found that they did not. In response, they set up services, such as sexual assault centres, birth control and counselling programs, abortion clinics and women's health clinics to meet women's needs. (Williams, 1999:1)
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 - Feminists - – whether activists, academics, mothers, researchers, grassroots organizers – have been asking the

question, "Where are the women" and other related questions, such as: What are the effects of social and economic policy and legislation on the everyday lives of women (and children)? What are the consequences for the women who are included and those who are excluded from such policies?

Feminists are concerned that the richness and complexity of women's lives will not be fully considered in state run GBA of their own policies and programs.

While keeping these critical views in mind, the fact remains; there is a global move toward incorporating gender-based analysis in social and economic policies, programs and legislation.

More importantly, good work is being done to encourage governments to use gender-based analysis and to hold governments accountable to the process and outcome of such programs. For instance,

- The Canadian Centre for Alternative Policy (CCAP) and the feminist organization United Nations Platform for Action Committee (UNPAC) is working together to push the Doer Government, here in Manitoba, to be responsive to a gender-based budget. They are not only demanding for a gender-based budget, they are modelling how to do one, by providing alternative budgets to those proposed by the Provincial Government.
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- Additionally, they are conducting gender-based budget workshops and consultations with women across the province to ensure that women's diverse knowledge/s and experiences are present in their gender-based analysis of the budget.
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- It is important we understand what gender-based analysis is, how it works and how and where we can have a voice in the process. It is important we continue to ask the question "Where are the women?"

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- The panel sessions taking place later on today will provide further detail and examples of applying a gender-based approach to understanding social and economic policy and how it relates to the everyday lives of women and children.

Please remember:

- Women are competent at gender-based analysis and have been keenly aware of the social and economic injustices suffered by women and other marginalized people for many decades.

In parting, I would like to say:

- “Your voices and experiences as women are unique and priceless. You are experts on your life. Your knowledge is so very valuable and so desperately needed.
- If you already know this, I encourage you to use your voice to contribute to the work of ensuring that women’s experiences are central to gender-based analysis.
- If you don’t know your knowledge is meaningful and far-reaching, I encourage you to think about yourselves in this way and to act in the world with the strength that comes from collective consciousness and action.

Thank you.

Resources:

Molly Secours “Where are the Voices of Reason and Dissent?”

<http://www.zmag.org/sustainers/content/2005-11/07secours.cfm> Accessed 11/10/2005.

Wendy Williams. Gender-based analysis: Will it make things better for women? Canadian Women’s Health Network. Fall 1999 2(4):1-4.

<http://www.cwhn.ca/neetwork-reseau/2-4/generlens.html> Accessed 11/14/2005

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