

Counting Matters

Policy, Practice, and the Limits of Gender Equality Measurement in Canada

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Introduction

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INTRODUCED IN 2010, the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII), which encompasses measures on reproductive health, empowerment, and economic inclusion, is often used as a way to gauge a country's progress toward gender equality (UNDP n.d.). Although Canada occupied first place in the Human Development Index of 1995, its GII rating had dropped dramatically to twenty-fifth out of 155 countries by 2016.¹ This decline prompted Canadian women's groups to call upon the newly elected Liberal government of self-described feminist Justin Trudeau to make good on its promises to address gender equality (Glenza 2016). The GII, however, is only one of many gender equality reports. Others include the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, Social Watch's Gender Equity Index, and the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women review. In short, as many scholars have noted, mechanisms that track, measure, and report on gender equality have proliferated enormously, giving women's movements a dizzying array of indices on which to focus.

However, a paradox has arisen here: on the one hand, this turn to measurement can be seen as speaking to a broader trend of support for gender equality issues (see, for example, Pew Research Center 2020); on the other hand, it is also "representative of the kind of quantitative policy world to which gender equality politics has been reduced" (Runyan and Peterson 2014, 127). Feminists have problematized this paradox at the global scale (Liebowitz and Zwingel 2014; Merry 2016). The rise of gender equality measurement, and the certainty with which equality is assumed to be quantifiable, prompts complex questions about epistemology, political change, policy innovation, and feminist research. Ironically, though gender equality measurement has become a vibrant field for gender consultants, scholars have paid little attention to gender measurement as a distinct policy and social phenomenon.

In this volume, we approach this development through an examination of the turn to measurement in gender policy, practice, and politics in Canada. We consider the ways in which measurement culture is implicated in a variety of domains and scales, from formal politics to care work. The chapters in this collection provide a snapshot of how gender equality measurement has unfolded in Canada: How is gender equality measured in differing policy areas? How can we attempt to improve practices? What is revealed by examining and critiquing the “technical turn” in policies that promote gender equality? What are the practical and theoretical limitations of measurement?

The Rise of Indicator Culture: Measurement, Knowledge, and Governance

The ubiquitousness of measurement in policy and practice is part of a broader international trend that a number of scholars have flagged. In the 1990s, Michael Power (1994) used the term “audit explosion” in referring to the growth of auditing practices in the United Kingdom. Power (2000, 111) linked their emergence to three imperatives: “the rise of the ‘new public management’; increased demands for accountability and transparency; [and] the rise of quality assurance models of organizational control.” A few years later, Cris Shore and Susan Wright (2015) advanced the analytic concept of an “audit culture” as a rationality of governance (see also Strathern 2000). As Shore and Wright (2015, 422) explain, “audit culture refers to contexts where auditing has become a central organizing principle of society.” The authors note that techniques and instruments – be they quantitative indicators or performance measures associated with actuarial science and the corporate realm – have multiplied to the extent that “institutions are reshaped according to the criteria and methods used to measure them; and organizations and people are transformed into ‘auditable’ entities that focus their energies on doing ‘what counts’” (423). To put it differently, the arrival of an audit culture has affected how governance occurs and is also implicated in the growth of international agencies that specialize in various forms of measurement expertise (Shore and Wright 2015, 426–27).

In a similar vein, Sally Engle Merry (2011, 2016) has written about the spread of indicators and indicator culture as a key dimension of a broader measurement regime. Merry (2011, S86) defines indicators as “statistical measures that are used to consolidate complex data into a simple number or rank that is meaningful to policy makers and the public. They tend to ignore individual specificity and context in favor of superficial but standardized knowledge.” Kevin Davis, Benedict Kingsbury, and Sally Engle Merry (2012, 73–74) elaborate:

An indicator is a named collection of rank-ordered data that purports to represent the past or projected performance of different units. The data are generated through a process that simplifies raw data about a complex social phenomenon. The data, in this simplified and processed form, are capable of being used to compare particular units of analysis (such as countries, institutions, or corporations), synchronically or over time, and to evaluate their performance by reference to one or more standards.

Merry (2011) further points out how indicators are implicated in global reform initiatives and global governance. In particular, she makes two critical observations. First, in relation to the production of knowledge, she notes that indicators provide numerical measures without the specifics of context or history that can be ranked and compared. Merry (2011, S84) argues, “This knowledge is presented as objective and often as scientific. The interpretations lurk behind the numbers but are rarely presented explicitly.” Second, and importantly, she highlights the role that indicators play in governance, as the knowledge they produce plays a part in decision making: “They influence the allocation of resources, the nature of political decisions ... They facilitate governance by self-management rather than command. Individuals and countries are made responsible for their own behavior as they seek to comply with the measures of performance articulated in an indicator” (S85). In other words, much like various auditing practices, indicator culture involves the abstraction of information from context and the mobilization of this information in a way that has generative effects in terms of behaviours and knowledge production. The terms “audit culture” and “indicator culture” speak to and emphasize the ways in which these measurement techniques have proliferated globally and have become enmeshed in knowledge production and governance.

This rapid increase in the development, circulation, and valorization of measurement is linked in part to the embrace of neo-liberal governing paradigms by many states in the global North. Indeed, as Shore and Wright (2015, 430) state, though regimes of audit are not unique to neo-liberalism, there is an affinity between the two: “the characteristics of this new order include all of neo-liberalism’s key ingredients – including ‘governing at a distance’; a relentless pursuit of economic efficiency; deregulation, outsourcing, and privatization; marketization and the privileging of competition over cooperation.” The turn to measurement and the broader rise of audit and indicator culture, then, are neither neutral, technical, nor apolitical. As many have noted, neo-liberal paradigms are now treated as common sense. Judy Brown (2015, 432) writes, “As neoliberal logic has become increasingly sedimented ... it is perhaps unsurprising

that many people cannot see how things could be different ... People are understandably hesitant to look as though they are *against* accountability, efficiency, and good governance, albeit that the real issue is arguably the need to contest the meanings ascribed to these concepts under neoliberalism and the related marginalization of other values (e.g., social justice, democratic participation, ecological sustainability).”

This volume, therefore, responds to this call to contest and problematize the meanings ascribed to measurement and, specifically, the measurement of gender equality in Canada.

Measuring Gender Equality: The International Context

Although it has long been acknowledged that measurement and quantification processes – regarding who and what to measure and determining “what counts” (Waring 1999) – are gendered, the upsurge of audit and indicator culture involves a further *explicit* gender component in that there is now a global push to measure gender (in)equality. The impetus for this can perhaps be traced to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, CEDAW is often described as “an international bill of rights for women” (UN Women 2009) in that it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and provides an agenda for ending it. Thus, as Debra Liebowitz and Susanne Zwingel (2014, 362) summarize, CEDAW “articulates a set of norms that prohibit all forms of discrimination, against all groups of women, in all spheres of life ... and ‘achieving gender equality’ is on the agenda of all major international institutions.” To date, 187 countries – the vast majority of the 194 UN member nations – have ratified CEDAW (UN Treaty Collection 2019). Following CEDAW, the report from the UN Third World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1986, noted explicitly that “a lack of reliable data prevents the assessment of relative improvement in women’s status” and called for greater cooperation among UN institutions in the “collection, analysis, utilization and dissemination of statistical data on the question of women” (United Nations 1986, 84).

Corresponding to this commitment to addressing gender inequality at the international level is the need to measure and evaluate progress toward gender equality; to this end, international organizations have established various gender (in)equality indicators. Gender inequality indices are typically intended to quantify aspects of gender-based inequality, thereby painting a portrait of inequality in differing countries and contexts, with the goal of supplying a means to compare, contrast, and rank countries and their level of gender-based inequality. [Table I.1](#) provides examples of some prominent indices.

Table I.1

Quantitative measures of gender (in)equality

<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Name of measure</i>	<i>Number of indicators or indices</i>
United Nations	Millennium development goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	3
United Nations	Sustainable development goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	14
UN Development Programme	Gender Inequality Index (GII)	5
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	Social Institutions and Gender Index	12
World Economic Forum	Global Gender Gap Index (GGI)	14
Social Watch	Gender Equity Index (GEI)	11
Cingranelli-Richards	Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Data Project (CIRI)	27
WomanStats	WomanStats	55
European Institute for Gender Equality	Gender Equality Index	8
World Bank	Women, Business and the Law	24
Economist Intelligence Unit	Women's Economic Opportunity Index	29

Sources: Adapted from Liebowitz and Zwingel (2014), using European Institute for Gender Equality (2015); UN Statistics Division (2016)

Although such indicators are useful because they can assist in the identification of broad trends and can give visibility to a range of issues that exacerbate gender inequality (see, for example, Johnson 2015; Walby 2005), “the limits of the information produced by quantitative measures must be made transparent” (Liebowitz and Zwingel 2014, 364). These limits, importantly, entail more than the literal accuracy of indicators; rather, they refer to the ways in which quantification is always-already a political and social process, steeped in and shaped by relations of power. As Merry (2016, 5) writes,

indicators are part of a regime of power based on the collection and analysis of data and their representation. It is important to see who is creating the indicators,

where these people come from, and what forms of expertise they have. Rather than revealing truth, indicators create it. However, the result is not simply a fiction but a particular way of dividing up and making known one reality among many possibilities.

The epistemic consequences of the political and social nature of quantification point toward numerous limitations. Although dominant discourses construct indicators, quantification processes, and counting as objective (Liebowitz and Zwingel 2014, 364),² they are not apolitical representations of reality. Instead, they come to produce and construct that which they purport to measure. Furthermore, value becomes ascribed to that which is easy to measure. Key issues and complex social relations are rendered invisible while simplified and decontextualized information gains currency as it circulates in the indicator ecology. In this process, the gap between what is measured and the complex realities that comprise our lives is also obfuscated (Parisi 2009), as are the political and social aspects of the measurement process itself. In this way, measurement regimes serve as important epistemic frames in that they determine, to some degree, “*what* can be known at any given time, as well as *how* this knowledge can be used” (Poovey 1998, 7, emphasis in original). Consequently, “measurement is never an innocent act” (Buss 2015, 381, quoting Mohr and Ghaziani 2014, 237), although this fact becomes lost in the authority of the final numbers (Buss 2015).

The Canadian Case

In Canada, the advancement of gender equality has been on the federal state’s policy agenda for several decades, largely in response to pressure from women’s groups and feminist organizations. In 1967, for instance, Ottawa acknowledged women’s claims of inequality by creating the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which ultimately produced 167 recommendations for government action in its 1970 report (Canada 1970). Although the commission did not call for the adoption of indicators, its report did note the limitations of the available economic indicators such as the gross national product, particularly with respect to women’s role in the economy (Canada 1970, 19).

In 1971, in the aftermath of the commission report, a coordinator on the status of women was appointed in the Privy Council Office to oversee cabinet’s response to the commission, and an Office of Equal Opportunity was also established (Bergqvist and Findlay 1999). The following year, women’s groups banded together and founded the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), whose purpose was to monitor Ottawa’s implementation of the report’s recommendations (Gabriel and Macdonald 2005, 74–75; Vickers, Rankin, and

Appelle 1993). This gender-based infrastructure (Brodie 2008) expanded with the establishment of a variety of women's policy mechanisms that were mandated to monitor gender equality, including the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, an arm's-length organization formed in 1973 and designed to liaise between the federal government and women's groups, and Ottawa's interdepartmental coordinating agency, Status of Women Canada (SWC), created in 1976 (Brodie 2008, 153). Although SWC finally became a federal government department in 2018 when it was renamed Women and Gender Equality Canada, it still serves as the "national machinery for gender equality" (Hankivsky 2013, 634). Taken together, these various institutional structures – sometimes deemed the "Women's State" (Paterson 2010) – allowed Canada to emerge "as a leader among Western welfare states with respect to the development of policies and agendas designed to promote women's equality and to open spaces for equality-seeking groups in the policy process" (Brodie 2008, 153).

Throughout the decades, lobbying by women's groups for gender equality and the equity-seeking agenda pursued by the women's policy machinery were bolstered by data from other quarters of the Canadian government. Monitoring women's participation in the paid workforce, for example, had been undertaken much earlier by the Women's Bureau, which was established in 1954 in the Department of Labour. During the early 1970s, Statistics Canada began to estimate the "volume and value of unpaid household work" in response to a need for "more accurate measures of economic activity and well-being" (Zukewich 2003, 9). By 1985, Statistics Canada had adopted the General Social Survey on Time Use to estimate the value of unpaid household work. That same year, it also released the first edition of *Women in Canada: A Statistical Report* "to aid the continuing discussion and evaluation of the changing roles and social characteristics of Canadian women as well as contribute to the development of policies concerning the status of women in Canada" (Statistics Canada 1985, iii).

Despite advances in the availability of data and, indeed, the reputation of Statistics Canada as an international leader in the field of gender statistics, Ottawa's efforts to address gender equality were subject to various limitations. As Christina Gabriel and Laura Macdonald (2005, 76) argue, for instance, SWC's original efficacy was limited given its designation as a stand-alone agency that did not occupy an influential position in the state's institutional matrix. Whenever a new party wins an election, this change can render strategies and infrastructures designed to address gender equality more or less effective. As Olena Hankivsky (2013, 639) maintains, whether gender equality initiatives succeed in gaining traction is "so often dependent on the political commitment of governments of the day." Several scholars demonstrate that this held true for SWC and other departments and agencies whose purpose was to advance gender

equality; when governments changed, so too did the prioritization and funding of certain issues (see, for example, Brodie 2008; Gabriel and Macdonald 2005; Tiessen and Carrier 2015).

A renewed interest in and commitment to addressing gender inequality was catalyzed by Canada's participation in the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Conference, in 1995 (Paterson 2010). In particular, the Beijing Conference cemented the policy strategy of gender mainstreaming as a crucial avenue for addressing gender inequality at the international level. Although the approaches to gender mainstreaming vary from state to state (see, for example, Hankivsky 2013), it is generally understood to be "a globally accepted policy strategy that promotes the assessment of institutions, legislation, policies, and programs to determine their potential or real gendered impacts with the ultimate goal of advancing gender equality" (Hankivsky 2013, 631). As a result, it requires a commitment to measurement: measuring and evaluating how policies, political processes, and institutions contribute to or alleviate gender inequality; measuring and evaluating the efficacy of initiatives implemented to address the inequality; and measuring and evaluating the overall situation of unequal gender relations in a given context.

In Canada, gender mainstreaming at the government level first took the form of gender-based analysis (GBA), which stems from the idea that "social impact analysis, including gender analysis, is not just an add-on, to be considered after costs and benefits have been assessed, but an integral part of good policy analysis. GBA identifies how public policies differentially affect women and men" (SWC 1995, 16). In 1995, Ottawa pledged to implement GBA in all its departments and agencies – with SWC playing a key part in the roll out and monitoring of its success. SWC pursued several avenues of gender mainstreaming work, including on economic gender equality indicators (SWC 1997). The initial implementation strategies were varied and mixed, as individual units attempted to develop their own approaches to gender mainstreaming and GBA (Rankin and Wilcox 2004, 55). As L. Pauline Rankin and Krista Wilcox (2004) explain, this was unsurprising given that the capacity of SWC to monitor developments was compromised by both insufficient resources and a lack of clout within the state infrastructure.

In 1999, a more centralized approach to GBA emerged as SWC and the newly established GBA Directorate developed a six-point strategy – encompassing training, tool development, policy case studies, research and education, evaluation and accountability, and coordination – for the widespread application of GBA (Brodie 2008, 157). As Francesca Scala and Stephanie Paterson (2017) suggest, GBA in this form consisted of an expert-bureaucratic approach – that is, an integrationist approach that introduced gender issues to policy processes

and paradigms without questioning either the paradigms or their founding assumptions (Lombardo 2005, 415). It was organized around a hub-and-spoke model, with authority extending from the hub to various spokes. Despite this effort, however, a 2005 report released by the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (2005) found that GBA remained at the margins of most departmental activities.

Many feminists were not surprised by these findings, as feminist activists and scholars had criticized the implementation of gender mainstreaming, including GBA, on a number of fronts. Christina Gabriel (2017, 183) notes that the “disjuncture between theoretical conceptualizations of policy analysis and how gender analysis is actually practiced” limits the potential for gender mainstreaming strategies such as GBA to address gender inequality, as the expert-bureaucratic approach fails to alter policy paradigms, raising questions about the “ability of the model to promote wider social transformation.” Stephanie Paterson (2010), on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that the lack of a compliance mechanism resulted in uneven applications of GBA. Petra Meier and Karen Celis (2011) point to more conceptual issues, arguing that because there is no consensus on the meaning of “equality” in the context of gender mainstreaming, the ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming tools remains unclear. Rankin and Wilcox (2004, 55–57) highlight this problem by noting that the application of GBA focused on internal and procedural aspects of gender analysis, at the expense of critically examining government outcomes. As a result, the women’s movement – and its visions for gender equality – was further marginalized from the politics involved in government initiatives to address gender inequality. At the same time, the views of so-called gender experts were valorized, obfuscating the ways in which they themselves were constituted by the impetus to evaluate gender equality and ensuring that their biases remained unscrutinized (Paterson 2010, 409).

Paterson (2010, 402–3) also criticizes the GBA model for the very way in which it frames the problem of gender inequality. In particular, the GBA approach assumes that the problem arises from limited information, rather than from patriarchal institutions, social relations, or even measurement frameworks and analysis. According to this logic, the problem becomes addressable once there is simply more, better, and sex-disaggregated data to allow policy-makers to reach informed decisions. Similarly, Carol Bacchi (2010, 26) emphasizes the ways in which gender mainstreaming conceptualizations are based on the notion that policy needs to respond to gender difference, as opposed to uncovering and interrogating the ways in which policy itself serves as a gendering process, functioning through institutions that are gendered. The GBA approach, as Paterson (2010, 400) observes, thus involves a failure to recognize that “policies

have a creative or productive force; that is, they also play a role in ensuring the reproduction of the necessary social conditions, norms, values, relations of ruling, etc., that allow for (present and future) action.”

Lastly, gender mainstreaming approaches, and GBA specifically, have been extensively criticized for relying on sex-disaggregated statistics, premised on a simplistic dichotomy between women and men, coded according to “sex” (Bacchi 2010; Gabriel 2017; Hankivsky 2005, 2013; Paterson 2010). Although the conflation of sex and gender permeates measurement processes more generally (see, for example, Bittner and Goodyear-Grant 2017), the perpetuation of the female/male or woman/man binary does not reflect the reality of gender experience today. Nor does it acknowledge feminist theorizing, which has complicated and challenged binary notions of gender and sex. Further, in focusing on sex-disaggregated data, gender mainstreaming and GBA have prioritized gender relations over other social relations and axes of oppression, including race, class, disability, and age (Gabriel 2017; Hankivsky 2005, 2013; Siltanen 2006). Again, this fails to capture adequately the lived realities that result from multiple forms of oppression and ignores the feminist literature and feminist activism that have asserted the importance of the intersectionality of social relations (Crenshaw 1989).

Over time, Ottawa sought to address some of these concerns through various changes to the GBA model and approach. Since 2007, GBA has been required for all cabinet submissions, and though SWC (and later Women and Gender Equality Canada) remained a key authority on GBA, its implementation shifted somewhat, as *all* public service employees are now expected to train in and use gender analysis (Scala and Paterson 2017, 432). Further, in 2011, a new iteration of the GBA framework, GBA+, was developed. Significantly, “GBA Plus is an intersectional analysis that goes beyond biological (sex) and socio-cultural (gender) differences to consider other factors, such as age, disability, education, ethnicity, economic status, geography (including rurality), language, race, religion, and sexual orientation” (Women and Gender Equality Canada n.d.). This reorientation was designed to more substantially incorporate the concept of intersectionality and to address the problem of privileging gender relations at the expense of other intersecting axes of oppression.

Despite these strides, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada (2016) found that gender mainstreaming in the form of GBA+ was either absent or incomplete in most federal agencies. On the other hand, the findings of Scala and Paterson (2017) are somewhat more encouraging. When the authors interviewed a small sample of public servants to gauge whether GBA+ was living up to the transformative potential claimed by its proponents, they discovered that

despite bureaucratic obstacles and institutional challenges, key actors had used GBA+ to make small discursive and relational gains in terms of gender equality that could potentially prove fruitful. Post-2015, the embrace of an overtly feminist orientation by the new Liberal government, including, for example, the adoption of a Gender Results Framework as part of the 2018 federal budget, now requires gender measurement indicators that align with the UN sustainable development goals. In fact, the ambitious goals of the Trudeau government around gender equality have ushered in an even more robust indicator culture. Clearly, the drive toward enhanced gender measurement persists; whether it will yield substantive gender equality, however, remains the question with which the contributors to this volume engage.

Outline of the Volume

Although gender mainstreaming and GBA/GBA+ have garnered particular attention in terms of the numerous tensions and potentials for addressing gender inequality via technologies of measurement and evaluation, the literature has not focused on the actual measurement techniques, processes, and indicators that are inherent in the GBA/GBA+ framework. Research on other sites of gender equality measurement in Canada is similarly lacking. In this volume, our contributors begin to address these gaps, to critically consider the various manifestations of measurement culture as related to gender equality, and to explore the questions mentioned previously: How is gender equality measured in differing policy areas? How can we improve current practices? What is revealed by examining and critiquing the technical turn in policies that promote gender equality? What are the practical and theoretical limitations of measurement?

Counting Matters begins with four chapters that discuss gender equality measurement at various locales in the federal government. In [Chapter 1](#), Marika Morris examines how the government responded to the 1995 United Nations call, made during the Beijing Conference, to develop indicators measuring gender equality. She outlines the latest effort of Women and Gender Equality Canada, the Gender Results Framework (GRF), and compares it to its immediate predecessor, the performance measures of SWC. Morris details how the GRF links gender equality measures to progress on the sustainable development goals of the United Nations and to the new role of Statistics Canada in tracking these measures. She suggests that though the GRF constitutes an improvement over its predecessor, it nonetheless falls short because it does not adopt an intersectional frame. The chapter illustrates the manner in which gender equity measurement is inherently political, reminding us to ask how gender equity data are collected, who is engaged in the task, and what questions are used.

In [Chapter 2](#), Joan Grace focuses on the House of Commons and argues that gender equality indicators must be developed to counter its masculinist norms. She notes that though some research has assessed the gender dimensions of the House, much more is needed. An important step here would be the creation of gender equality indicators that take stock of the gendered dynamics in the House. Grace foregrounds the linkages between the House, political parties and electoral processes, and other government agencies, noting that gender equality can be achieved only when a gender lens is applied to both the administrative state and political institutions. She advocates for a holistic approach to gender equality indicators, in which all levels, sectors, and agencies of government are assessed in a systematic and ongoing manner.

Stephanie M. Redden's contribution, [Chapter 3](#), uses an autoethnographic approach to reflect on the process of developing GBA/GBA+ infrastructure in the Canada School of Public Service (CSPS), where she was employed for a time. Specifically, Redden argues that though numerous resources are available to government units *about* GBA+, almost none explain how to go about constructing it. Yet, this is the very task set before many departments as Ottawa prioritizes GBA+. This lack of information, Redden posits, reflects a failure in knowledge transfer between units and departments regarding GBA+ and its implementation. Given that Canada's auditor general has continually noted the disappointing application of GBA+, Redden uses her personal experience as a key actor in the development of GBA+ infrastructure in the CSPS to argue that more readily engaging in cross-departmental knowledge sharing may improve the situation.

[Chapter 4](#), by Rebecca Tiessen, Liam Swiss, and Krystel Carrier, provides a case study of gender measurement in the Government of Canada's official development assistance through a discussion of the Muskoka Initiative, one of the largest Canadian development programs to target women. Introduced by the Stephen Harper Conservatives in June 2010, it aimed to improve maternal and child health in developing countries, and as the authors argue, it provides an excellent case study to examine the measurement of gender equality in the context of programs that inherently should have gendered effects. By interrogating the ways in which small changes to coding definitions, processes, and language can result in vastly different pictures of the performance of the program in terms of gender equality, the authors show that the Muskoka Initiative was not used to directly promote gender equality through its maternal health work; instead, gender equality was simply a *result* of the initiative. In this way, Tiessen, Swiss, and Carrier underscore the highly political nature of gender equality coding as a measurement device. They conclude with suggestions for what an

approach to maternal health that meaningfully incorporates gender equality would look like.

The volume then turns to non-governmental sites of gender equality measurement. [Chapter 5](#), by Pat Armstrong, Hugh Armstrong, and Jacqueline Choiniere, analyzes measurement in long-term residential care (LTRC), focusing specifically on a tool called the Resident Assessment Instrument–Minimum Data Set (RAI-MDS). The authors distinguish between medical and social care, noting that LTRC is both medical, as residents often have complicated health conditions that require medical responses and treatments, and social because their conditions are typically chronic and are thus treated via the provision of comfort, respect, and maintenance, as opposed to cure. However, measurement regimes such as RAI-MDS tend to focus on the medical aspects of care, as these are often easiest to quantify. The authors reveal what is lost through such a focus: aspects of care that are relational and difficult to quantify, such as autonomy, quality of life, and social engagement. The related types of care work that support these aspects, typically performed by women and racialized individuals, are omitted and devalued. Although the authors do not reject measurement, they insist that evidence informed by measurement alone is insufficient in the context of care, and they warn against the resulting hierarchies of differing aspects of care – and the people who need and provide them – that often arise through measurement processes.

In [Chapter 6](#), Sari Tudiver and her colleagues, members of the Sex/Gender Methods Group, describe their nearly two-decade-long research project that sought to develop and mobilize sex- and gender-sensitive methodologies and measurement devices in the design and reporting of health research. The authors focus on how to foster consideration for sex and gender in systematic health reviews – high-level metasyntheses that critically analyze, assess, and summarize evidence from primary research studies on a given topic. As governments and research organizations increasingly called for such systematic reviews, the scholars of the Sex/Gender Methods Group realized that without robust sex and gender methodologies, these reviews would fail to identify important aspects of various health research topics. This was a particularly worrisome omission, given that reviews are increasingly used by researchers, clinicians, policy-makers, and consumers to provide evidence-based assessments of the state of a field of research. Noting that the exclusion of women from health studies has compromised the quality of health evidence in the past, the authors trace the history of their project, providing a breadth of strategies for incorporating sex/gender analysis into disciplines that have historically failed to adopt a gender lens. The chapter foregrounds the challenge of measuring variables, such as sex and

gender, that are not simply static identity categories but are themselves dynamic processes in various research endeavours.

In [Chapter 7](#), Lee Lakeman and her colleagues draw upon their various experiences as feminist legal scholars, social science researchers, and front-line workers to reflect upon measurement in the context of the fight to end violence against women (VAW). They contend that VAW is the lynchpin of women's inequality and that gender equality is therefore necessary for its eradication. They argue that data and measurement have an important part to play in the movement to end VAW, although they note that the current mobilization of data and measurement – as an end in itself – is insufficient. Instead, the authors call for new ways of thinking about data so that measurement can serve as a tool to tie together individual stories of VAW, thereby demonstrating more fully its force, scope, and persistence. In other words, this chapter ultimately asks us to consider the relationship between gender equality and VAW, and to ponder how data and measurement might be enhanced or reconceptualized to illuminate and demonstrate this relationship. In the end, it leaves us with a call for new global statistics, data, theories, methodologies, and strategies to help us better identify and understand the connection between gender equality and VAW.

The final chapters in this volume foreground how measurement operates in and across various scales – from the local to the international. In [Chapter 8](#), Maggie FitzGerald continues, in some ways, the discussion of the previous chapter by summarizing recent developments and practices related to the measurement of, and subsequent creation of indicators for, VAW at a variety of scales. Specifically, she reviews how VAW has been counted internationally, particularly by the United Nations system, and at the supranational level, demonstrated via the case of the European Union and the Council of Europe. She then explores how VAW has been measured at the national level in Canada, before reviewing some of the challenges pertaining to the measurement of VAW at the local level or for subpopulations. For the latter, FitzGerald reviews the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's initiative to develop statistics and indicators related to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. She points to numerous issues and challenges that are involved in these processes. Finally, the chapter illustrates the ways in which quantification methodologies, data, and indicators come to circulate and gain currency (or not) across scales.

Linda Briskin similarly turns a critical eye on international indicators and data in [Chapter 9](#), noting that they largely pivot around measuring the gender gap, the discrepancy between women and men in terms of achievements and access to resources. However, as Briskin argues, the gender gap is often a poor proxy for women's equality and empowerment, as it is premised on the idea that the conditions of men are the standard against which women's experience and

status should be evaluated. As she reveals, the indices consistently show that the greatest, and most persistent, gender gap relates to women's empowerment through political participation and representation. The indicators typically link the problem to a lack of political representation, as opposed to economic representation. To counter this, Briskin calls for a new focus on "collective agency," as fostered through union membership and organization; this shift to economic representation and empowerment may be fruitful, given the evidence that political representation does not (necessarily) translate to gender equality. Additionally, a plenitude of sex-disaggregated data on union membership is available internationally, and such data could be collected in Canada. They could be mobilized to form other indicators that capture collective agency and its relationship with gender equality.

In [Chapter 10](#), Laura Macdonald and Nadia Ibrahim discuss Canadian trade policy, flagging the importance of trade agreements to gender equality. They contend that "trade agreements and policies themselves have been used as a form of measurement – to quantify trading relationships and the flow of goods and services, and to establish tariffs, quotas, and penalties" (page 228). In seeking to problematize this development, they highlight and analyze the widespread use of computer-based modelling to assess the impact of trade liberalization. The authors show that this modelling is itself often premised on narrow gender assumptions, which limits its ability to identify gender impacts. Unlike in other policy areas, attempts to measure and evaluate gender equality in trade agreements are in their very early stages. Macdonald and Ibrahim use the case of Canada's inclusive trade policy to examine the efficacy of including gender chapters in trade agreements and the redesign of evaluation measures to take gender and trade more seriously. They conclude that the development of new evaluation models must involve the active participation of civil society organizations.

In the final chapter, Leah Levac and her colleagues present a rare case study of the development of an indicator at the local level, specifically in Happy Valley–Goose Bay, Labrador. Using a feminist intersectional participatory research process, they created a women's well-being framework and index called a community vitality index (CVI). Created through a community-grounded process, it was designed to capture a localized picture of women's well-being that simultaneously reflected participant understandings of the subject. During the research process that generated the CVI, the authors were able to imbue it with conceptual clarity and relevance for the community, to maintain equitable collaboration with participants, and to facilitate leadership development for them. Importantly, the authors assert that their approach can push back against the risks of indicator development – the fact that indicators are often developed

by “experts” who are removed from the contexts that the indicators will ultimately come to represent, and that indicators measure standardized definitions that do not reflect local understandings. As the authors demonstrate, the process and resulting CVI point to new possibilities for approaches to gender equality measurement that better capture the realities of the experiences being measured and that may better inform policy initiatives that seek to address gender inequality in Canada.

Together, the chapters in this collection contextualize, query, and assess both the potential and the challenges of gender equality measurement in Canada. In so doing, they offer critical perspectives on the nexus of gender equality and measurement as it has manifested, and continues to manifest, in Canada, and provide us with directions for future research.

Notes

- 1 Canada ranked nineteenth in the 2020 GII.
- 2 As feminist scholars have long pointed out, objectivity is a myth.

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