

The Lexicon of Mainstreaming Equality: Gender Based Analysis (GBA), Gender and Diversity Analysis (GDA) and Intersectionality Based Analysis (IBA)

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Abstract. In the last 15 years, much debate has ensued at the international level regarding gender mainstreaming (GM), its efficacy and future utility. In Canada, similar discussions have taken place where GM has largely been operationalized in the form of gender-based analysis (GBA). However, there has been a lack of clarity regarding the ways in which GBA as a conceptual framework compares to other approaches available for working towards equality in public policy, namely gender and diversity analysis (GDA) and intersectionality-based analysis (IBA). As a result, the potential of these models to respond to diversity and inequality, especially GBA and GDA, are often overstated and/or conflated. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the similarities and differences between GBA, GDA, and IBA. This analysis illuminates the strengths and limitations of these types of approaches, especially in terms of how each conceptualizes and is able to address a wide variety of diversities among the Canadian population. This paper argues that only IBA is flexible enough to capture the multidimensional nature of oppression and discrimination because it disrupts the systematic prioritization of gender as a starting place for assessing experiences of inequality.

Keywords. Gender-based analysis; gender and diversity based analysis; intersectionality-based analysis; public policy.

Introduction

In the last 15 years, much debate has ensued at the international level regarding gender mainstreaming (GM), its efficacy and future utility (Bacchi and Eveline, 2009; Crespi, 2009; Kantola, 2010; Walby, 2005; Zalewski, 2010). Similar discussions have taken place in Canada where GM has predominantly been operationalized in the form of gender-based analysis (GBA).¹ In the Canadian context most of the attention has focused on how to improve GBA implementa-

Résumé. Au cours des 15 dernières années, un débat important au niveau international a porté sur l'intégration des considérations liées à l'égalité entre les sexes (ICES), sur son efficacité et son utilité future. Au Canada, des discussions similaires ont été tenues, dans la mesure où l'ICES a été opérationnalisée sous la forme de l'analyse comparative entre les sexes (ACS). Cependant, il y a eu un manque de clarté concernant la manière dont l'ACS se mesure en tant que cadre conceptuel par rapport à d'autres approches disponibles qui permettent de travailler sur des questions d'égalité en politiques publiques, en particulier l'analyse de la diversité et de l'égalité des sexes (ADES) et l'analyse fondée sur l'intersectionnalité (AI). En conséquence, le potentiel de ces modèles pour répondre aux questions de diversité et d'inégalité, en particulier l'ACS et l'ADES, sont souvent exagérées. L'objet de cet article est de trouver les similarités et les différences entre ICES, ADES et AI. Cette analyse éclaire la solidité et les limitations de ces types d'approches, notamment dans la mesure où la conceptualisation de chacune est en mesure de répondre à une grande diversité au sein de la population canadienne. Cet article soutient que l'AI est la seule approche qui soit suffisamment souple pour appréhender la nature multidimensionnelle de l'oppression et de la discrimination, car elle met un terme à la mise en priorité systématique des sexes comme point de départ pour évaluer l'expérience de l'inégalité.

Mots clefs. Analyse comparative entre les sexes; analyse de la diversité et de l'égalité des sexes; analyse fondée sur l'intersectionnalité; politiques publiques.

tion and uptake while relatively less attention has been paid to the content and substance of GBA. Recently, however, this is changing largely prompted by a line of inquiry which seeks to determine "What are we mainstreaming when we are mainstreaming gender?" (Eveline and Bacchi, 2005) against a backdrop of increased attention to the deepening diversity of the Canadian population. To this end, important efforts are being made across many government departments federally and provincially to create models, manuals and tools that are more responsive to the equality needs of

differently situated individuals and groups of women and men.

Arguably, however, these efforts are hampered by a lack of clarity regarding the different approaches available for working towards equality in public policy namely gender-based analysis (GBA), gender and diversity analysis (GDA) and intersectionality-based analysis (IBA). As a result, the potential of these models, especially GBA and GDA are commonly overstated, especially in terms of their ability to respond to the demands of diversity. Moreover, these different approaches are often conflated or used interchangeably. For example, in 2009, the Minister for Status of Women stated that “as an analytic approach gender-based analysis takes into account the socio-economic situation of women and men in the diverse population groups in order to determine differential impacts, thus informing the decision-making process. This is also known as intersectionality” (Government of Canada, 2009).

The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the similarities and differences between GBA, GDA, and IBA. Although the analysis focuses on Canada it also draws on international literature to illuminate the strengths and limitations of these types of approaches, especially in terms of how each conceptualizes and is able to address a wide variety of diversities among the Canadian population which are based on many factors including but not limited to gender. Clarifying the essence of GBA, GDA, and IBA is essential because as Parken (2010) puts it best, without sufficient knowledge or awareness of the different understandings of gender and equality that different approaches promote, policy makers are hampered in fully understanding the different outcomes that follow from their use.

The argument put forward in this paper is that while all the existing approaches seek to accommodate women and men in their diversity, only one – IBA - is flexible enough to capture the multidimensional nature of oppression and discrimination because it disrupts the systematic prioritization of gender as a starting place for assessing experiences of inequality. In so doing, IBA profoundly challenges the status quo of GBA and even more progressive developments in the forms of GDA, which maintain a primary focus on gender. Not surprisingly, as Pease has argued elsewhere, “gender mainstreaming does not seem to have come to terms with intersectionality” (2006: 43). By describing and critically analyzing GBA, GDA, and IBA, this paper directly confronts the relationships and tensions between these models and raises important issues for thinking about the future of equality work not only in Canada but in other international jurisdictions. A key message emerging from this analysis is that conceptual frameworks that are used in policy work really do matter. GBA, GDA, and IBA are distinct models that generate specific modes of analyses and understandings of equality which ultimately lead to different policy priorities and interventions.

Gender Mainstreaming and Gender-Based Analysis

Since the 1995 Beijing conference, when the international community formally acknowledged it, gender mainstreaming (GM) is recognized as the most effective and potential transformative strategy available for working towards gender equality in policies and programmes. According to the *Federal Plan for Gender Equality*, introduced in 1995 and in line with the Beijing resolution, the Canadian strategy is about “mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs so that, before any decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively” (United Nations, 1995: par. 202). The policy instrument for doing so is gender-based analysis (GBA) and within the federal government, Status of Women Canada (SWC) is responsible for the GBA function across government departments.

In its 2004 publication – SWC’s *An Integrated Approach to Gender-Based Analysis* - GBA is described as “a tool to assist in systematically integrating gender considerations into the policy, planning and decision-making processes. It corresponds to a broader understanding of gender equality using various competencies and skills to involve both women and men in building society and preparing for the future” (SWC, 2004). The guide provides the following questions to be used when undertaking a GBA:

- Does this policy/program/trend improve the well-being of women/men?
- What resources does a person need to benefit from this policy/program/ trend? Do women and men have equal access to the resources needed to benefit?
- What is the level and type/quality of women's and men's participation in the policy/program/trend? Has this changed over time?
- Who controls the decision-making processes related to this policy/program/trend?
- Who controls/owns the resources related to this policy/program/trend?
- Does this policy/program/trend have any unexpected negative impacts on women and/or men?
- Does this policy/program/trend benefit men more than women (or vice versa)? If so, why?
- Beyond the federal government, provinces and territories have also committed to the implementation of GBA, and in some instances, have government personnel dedicated to this initiative.

As evidence by the checklist above, GBA recognizes gender as an essential variable in policy analysis. An underlying assumption is that in order to properly undertake GBA, analysts require a solid understanding of gender trends in society, access to information that furthers the understanding of the ways that gender interacts with policy, how policy may reinforce existing power structures based on gender or how policy may produce gender inequalities.

Despite the primary focus on gender, it is also worth noting that from the very beginning, and specifically with the 1995 *Federal Plan*, diversity was seen as an important component of GBA. For instance according to the *Plan*: “A gender-based analysis...acknowledges that some women may

be disadvantaged even further because of their race, colour, sexual orientation, socio-economic position, region, ability, level or age. A gender-based analysis respects and appreciates diversity” (SWC, 1995: par. 23). In 2001, SWC identified the need for further progress in the development of analytical resources capable of reflecting diversity and its complex relations to gender. Additionally, one can identify some attention to diversity in what can be referred to as the first generation of GBA guides across federal departments in the Canadian context. For example, the Canadian International Development Agency’s (CIDA) *Policy on Gender Equality* (1999) stated that the use of gender analysis provides information on “the difference among women and men and the diversity of their circumstances, social relationships, and consequent states” (for example, their class, race, caste, ethnicity, age, culture and abilities) (17) without adequately incorporating these considerations into its implementation strategies. As a final example, The *Gender Equality Analysis* of Indian and Northern Affairs (now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada) emphasized the importance of considering diversity and listed diversity as a factor “in addition to gender” (CIDA, 1999: 6).

As a consequence of its efforts in the field, including the development of manuals and training, Canada has been recognized as a leader in the advancement of gender equality. Moreover, since the introduction of GBA in the Canadian context in 1995, numerous reports have evaluated its effectiveness (CS/RESORS, 2005; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), 2008; McNutt 2010; Office of the Auditor General 2009; Standing Committee on the Status of Women (SCSW), 2005) in efforts to improve on this strategy. To date, most of the attention has focused squarely on GBA’s lack of implementation and uptake across government departments. Most recently this was heightened by the 2009 Report of the Auditor General and development of a 2009 GBA Action Plan by SWC and other central agencies intended to strengthen the commitment and operationalization of GBA at the federal level. At the same time, an additional concern has emerged over the foundational content of GBA which is being increasingly interrogated and critiqued for its inability to deliver transformational effects on policy (Hankivsky, 2005; Hankivsky, 2008; Siltanen and Doucet, 2008). And according to Siltanen and Doucet, “the inadequacy of this approach has become a matter of concern – within government practice and among inequality activists and academics” (2008: 187). This has brought into question whether the Canada’s GBA warrants international recognition and praise (Hankivsky, 2008). It has also brought into sharp relief important issues regarding the very essence of this strategy.

Content Critiques of GBA

To begin, GBA has been critiqued for conflating gender with women. As one illustration, the final report of the Expert Panel on Accountability Mechanisms for Gender Equality made the following statement: “We...want readers of this report to understand that what we are really talking about

[when we talk about gender based analysis, gender equality and gender mainstreaming] is analyzing how government policies, program and actions affect women. We are working to ensure that those policies, programs and actions promote substantive equality *for women*” (Expert Panel, 2005: 14) (emphasis added). Most recently, the Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SPCA, 2010), in its review of the Auditor General’s Report on GBA also stated that “Canadians expect their government to produce public policy that does not adversely impact Canadian women” (9). Among many practitioners, there is also a belief that GM/GBA is explicitly or implicitly about women and not gender relations. As put by one Canadian policy analyst working in the area: “We really do see GM as largely a women’s issue” (as quoted in Hankivsky, 2008: 77). Policy discourse on gender equality has in fact “developed primarily in terms of what women have to gain from greater gender equality. This has become the ‘mainstream’ of gender equality work and thinking” (Hearn, 2006: 4). This creates resistance to those charged with using GBA. As the evaluation undertaken by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reported, “the conception that gender-based analysis dealt with ‘women’s issues’ was felt to be a barrier to examining this issue more thoroughly through a gender lens” (2008: 35).

In the last few years more calls are being made to ensure that men and masculinities are integrated into both GBA and GM internationally (Flood, 2005; Hankivsky, 2007a; Hearn, 2006; Pease, 2006; Ruxton, 2004). There is some indication of movement on this front on a global level. In 2003, Finland’s Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen’s government stated that gender equality issues would be assessed from the male viewpoint. The UN Expert Group Meeting – working on men and gender equality – has argued that gender equality with men should take into account the general situation between genders, emphasize the active stake that men and boys have in gender equality (that is the gains to men and boys), recognize the well-being of men and boys as a legitimate aim of gender equality measures and recognize the diversity of men’s (and women’s) situations and circumstances. In Northern Ireland, the government has stated that in order to ensure that due regard is given to inequalities and disadvantages faced by women and men, the Gender Equality Strategy for 2006-2016 consists of two action plans – one for women and another for men. In Australia, the government has committed to developing national men and women’s health policies to ensure that specific health needs of both men and women are addressed. In Canada, Siltanen and Doucet (2008) have claimed that common interests between particular groups of men and women have emerged – especially among highly marginalized and pathologized groups, setting the stage for important progress in gender equality initiatives. Nevertheless, in GM and GBA practice, men and masculinities are marginalized and/or treated in an ambivalent manner (Hankivsky, 2007a; Holter et al., 2005; Zalewski, 2010).

GBA frameworks have also been critiqued for ignoring less traditionally gender-identified people. With the majority of current approaches there is no space conceptually,

practically and visually for more than two genders – male and female, to include for example the lived realities of transgendered or intersex persons. Another implication of this binary is that GBA enforces heteronormativity – which accepts two definable sexes and promotes the social enforcement of heterosexual relations to the occlusion of all other possibilities for sexual desire and expression. The “heteronorm is founded on the assumption that it is normal to be heterosexual, and that homosexuality and bisexuality must be explained, discussed and questioned” (The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights (RFSL), 2009: 8). Consequently, those life situations which do not fit or adhere to a heteronormative norm are disadvantaged within GBA (Busche, 2009; Jackson et al., 2006).

These lines of critique raise important questions for whether GBA is able to deliver on its assertion that women and men are not the same (SCSW, 2005) and that effects of policies and programmes on diverse groups of women and men must be examined. While most GBA frameworks acknowledge that men and women are not homogeneous groups and that GBA should be overlaid by or undertaken in conjunction with a diversity analysis, the reality is that in application, the implications of these observations gets lost (Association for Women’s Rights and Development (AWID), 2004; Hankivsky, 2005; Hankivsky, 2007b). By virtue of being ‘gender’ mainstreaming and ‘gender-based’ analysis, are based on an assumption – either made implicitly or explicitly - that gender is the most frequently-occurring, structural and important inequality for consideration. This is because GBA “prioritizes a coherent category of gender in which race and class, among other factors, are considered as an add-on to gender” (Hankivsky, 2005: 986).

Not surprisingly then, “While the *idea* of the significance of diversity for a full analysis of gender inequality [exists], the *practice* of gender-based analysis in federal government departments was more often than not limited to an analysis of inequalities between men and women as distinct and undifferentiated groups” (Siltanen, 2006: 89). This has led to concerns, including from the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), INAC, and Health Canada (SCSW, 2005) about how well GBA, as a model, is able to recognize and effectively respond to issues of diversity. The inherent limitations of GBA in this regard are underscored by those working in the field as researchers, activists, and policy makers in the following quotes: “GBA is an outdated concept whether seen as gender-based budgeting, gender awareness training, gender sensitivity training, and so forth. As a solution to the inequality of the most marginalized women in society, it has been an utter failure. One just has to look at the situation of urban Aboriginal women and children to see that it has completely missed the mark,” “I don’t see that it has made a big difference in getting women with disabilities into high positions of government, I don’t see that it has made a big difference in resolving or approaching any of the kinds of problems that Aboriginal women have. I don’t see it as really having big impacts on other kinds of marginalized groups of women in this country,” “The poorest of the poor are not really the focus of GBA policies. We

are not listening to the voices of the most marginalized. We are not consulting, really with Aboriginal women, immigrant women” (as quoted in Hankivsky, 2008: 77).

What emerging content critiques discussed above highlight is the extent to which GBA privileges gender over other social locations; conflates gender with women; pays little attention to men and masculinities; privileges heteronormativity and falls short of adequately taking into account and responding to difference and diversity. While GBA is intended to be informed by a diversity analysis, this approach posits gender as the *key factor* for the analysis, formulation, and implementation process of government policy making. GBA focuses on a singular ground - gender - and seeks to address the discrimination resulting from this social location. Although it may acknowledge diversity, it rarely considers more than one ground at a time. Thus, “...despite its potential (and explicit commitment) to consider multiple axes of difference, GBA has yet to grapple with the complexities of identity, including the ways in which gender mainstreaming itself produces and reproduces gender, thereby reducing its potential to transform social relations” (Paterson, 2010: 399).

In producing a partial and distorted view of gender equality that is far from inclusive, GBA is not immune to the stereotypes it imputes on either gender neutral or arguably male-centered political approaches (Lombardo et al., 2009: 79). For those who continue to insist on the primal importance of gender, to the exclusion of other considerations, Dutt puts it best in asking: “Why is it that for us gender is the only construct that we can understand and accept in our work, yet we expect everyone else to incorporate gender into theirs?” (as quoted in AWID, 2004: 5). Resulting policies from such a stance that privilege the treatment of some inequalities while marginalizing others reproduce inequalities and fail to address the creation of categories that in fact are at the root of the creation of inequalities (Ferree, 2009). Not surprisingly, the limitations of GBA have led to calls for more contextual approaches that would expand on GBA including gender and diversity analyses (Jackson et al., 2006).

Moving Beyond Traditional GM/GBA: Gender and Diversity Analysis

In response to the critiques of GBA, a number of government departments have made concerted efforts to address issues of difference and diversity in revised GBA manuals and toolkits in ways that can be seen as consistent with a gender and diversity analysis approach. The addition of a diversity analysis to a gender based analysis entails examining ideas, policies and programmes and research to assess their potentially different impact on specific *groups* of women and men, girls and boys. It *explicitly* acknowledges and *integrates* into its line of analysis the fact that neither men nor women compromise homogenous groups, but rather that class or socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, geographic location, education, and physical and mental ability – among other things – may

distinctly affect a specific group's needs, interests and concerns (Hankivsky, 2007a: 156).

For example, in April 2009 Health Canada replaced its Gender-Based Analysis Policy (2000) with Sex and Gender Based Analysis (SGBA) Policy to respond to evidence that "biological, economic and social differences between women and men contribute to differences in health risks, health service use, health system interaction and health outcomes" (Health Canada, 2010). The SGBA is supposed to be applied within the context of a diversity framework, that attends to the ways in which determinants such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, migration status, age and geography interact with sex and gender to contribute to exposures to various risk factors, disease courses and outcome. As Clow et al. (2009) explain, SGBA "also recognizes that there is a great deal of variation among women and among men – as well as between them – and analysts must therefore be careful to avoid generalizations about *all* women or *all* men... (1) and that "Emerging theory and practice in SGBA emphasize this intersection of multiple aspects of individual identity and experience when it comes to explaining their health, illness and opportunities for change" (1).

Important strides have been made within many other federal departments: *Canadian Heritage*, *Canadian Human Rights Commission*, *Canadian International Development Agency*, *Department of Justice*, *Indian and Northern Affairs* and even *Treasury Board Secretariat* all exemplify characteristics of a gender and diversity approach. For example, in its newest guide INAC states that in defining policy issues for consideration, "It is necessary to ensure that this identification takes into account diversity by including, but not limited to the following dimensions: race, skills, culture, income, education and geography" (2008: 99). Arguably, the most progressive guide in terms of promoting a diversity analysis is Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's 2009 – *Gender Based Analysis: Integrating Gender and Diversity into Public Policy*. According to the guide:

Gender based analysis provides information that recognizes that gender and its relationship with race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, disability, and/or other status, is important in understanding the different patterns of involvement, behaviour and activities that women and men have in economic, social and legal structures. If we neglect to consider these intersecting factors when developing policies and programs, we may miss or misread the experiences of a significant portion of the population... (5).

Each component of the guide attempts to integrate attention to difference and diversity and provides effective illustrations, examples and hands on exercises to bring this focus to the fore.

In terms of the provinces, Manitoba, Yukon and PEI exhibit best practices in gender and diversity analysis within their informal reporting and training initiatives despite a lack of formal government frameworks. This is reflective of legislation that mandates the application of gender and

diversity considerations within government policy processes as well as an increased push for training initiatives, evaluation and accountability. For example in its newly published guide: *Gender and Diversity Analysis in Policy Development*, the government of Manitoba states that: "We know that Manitoba's population is changing. Recent trends like aging, immigration and urban-rural migration are creating demographic shifts. As policy makers, we must have a clear understanding of our population demographics, and tools such as GDA to take changes into account as we design policy and programs to fit the needs of Manitobans" (Manitoba Status of Women, 2010, 15). According to the guide, GDA is the preferable tool of gender mainstreaming because it "provides information on how gender intersects with race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, culture, geography and ability across social spheres, including legal and economic structures" (14).

Beyond government departments, other tools have emerged to expand the GBA approach, and in particular by Aboriginal communities who have argued that GBA does not adequately take the effects of culture and Indigenous history into account. According to the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC): "Canada and others who have applied a GBA have failed to do so in a way that is sensitive to the multiple needs of Aboriginal women, who suffer not only from gendered discrimination, but racism and other forms of oppression" (2007: 6). Not surprisingly, both before and after Beijing + 5, "the international Indigenous women's movement has been calling for the recognition of a CRGBA [Culturally-Relevant Gender-Based Analysis], meaning a GBA that bridges the persistent analytical gaps between the global women's movement and the international Indigenous movement by putting forward Indigenous conceptualizations of gender-based analysis, to rights such as the right of self determination" (NWAC, 2008: 1). Moreover, other GDA models that seek to improve and expand upon GBA have emerged from other sources including academic researchers and labour organizations (Assembly of First Nations, 2009; Canadian Association of Administrators of Labour Legislation's Women in Employment Committee, 2003; Eichler and Burke, 2006; NWAC, 2008).

Possibilities and Limitations of GDA

Different versions of GDA, do improve on traditional GBA in their attention to difference to diversity. They can, however, be classified as 'additive' or 'multiple' models because they start with the perspective of one strand (for example gender) or in the case of the Health Canada example, sex and gender, to which others are added to determine multiple or compound discrimination (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This specific way of attending to difference has been critiqued for many reasons for falling short in generating the kind of analysis that effectively advances accurate understandings of diverse experiences of women and men.

First, such models, like some GBA practices, tend to treat differences as kind of "add-on characteristics" of gender. They essentially prioritize the importance of gender while

other factors such as race, class, ability, and sexuality are relegated to a secondary status. In one of the earliest critiques of such approaches, Teghtsoonian (1999) argued that “despite drawing attention to the specific circumstances of multiply-marginalized women, the focus in these documents tends to remain on gender-in-general” (5). Those who do not belong then to the ‘dominant culture’ by virtue of their race, sexual orientation or disability, continue to confront marginalization in the policy-making process (Rankin and Vickers, 2001: v). Second, additive models, by virtue of seeking to understand multiple or compound discrimination, draw on a homogenous conception of factors, categories and social locations. As such, they ignore diversity *within* strands suggesting that there is only one way to be woman, black, gay, disabled, and so forth, and in so doing, leaving it to the most powerful within those groups to define those experiences (Yuval Davis, 2006 as cited in Parken, 2010: 83).

Third, these approaches often assume that by attending to gender, the analysis used can be ‘stretched’ and ‘expanded’ to capture other inequalities. As Baer et al. (2009) argue, “if you have understood gender inequality, you can transfer your knowledge onto any other inequality” (14) even though it has been shown that the structure, impact and relations of and between inequalities is only starting to be better understood. The end result is that gender and diversity approaches purport operationalizing a newer view of difference, but in reality continue to work in the same way not changing a thing about how difference is theorized or studied (Shields, 2008: 306).

Fourth, additive approaches do not adequately capture the relationships and intersections between social locations and systems of oppression. Siltanen (2006) similarly states “the problem with an additive approach is that it cannot cope with the complex connections and interactions between various dimensions of oppression” (93). For example, it is interesting to note that in many policies and guides, the list of who benefits from a gender and diversity analysis are men and women *and* marginalized and vulnerable populations as if men and women are somehow separate from such populations. As *Gender in Norway* explains, “women and men...are also black or white, belong to an ethnic minority or majority, have different levels of education and incomes; some are refugees, elderly, lesbian, disabled, and some are discriminated against on several grounds” (Gender in Norway, 2006). Invisibility of combined social inequalities “makes some individuals and groups at the points of intersection invisible and does not provide solutions for their problems” (Lombardo and Agustin, 2009: 7). The tendency is to view different social categories as separate and unrelated entities - which at the policy level means that policy makers can pick their categories of interest - and deal with them in isolation, without paying attention to how they intersect with other social divisions” (Thorvaldsdóttir, 2007: 6). Similarly, Weldon (2005) has argued that “ignoring the intersectional nature of these systems means we systematically overlook the experiences of many different groups of marginalized women, and by default focus only on the most privileged women (white, middle-class, able-bodied heterosexual” (4-5) on whom most research and policy are based. How the

relationship between different inequalities is conceptualized is crucial; singling out one as most important or simply using an additive approach is inadequate (Verloo, 2009a; Verloo, 2009b).

Fifth, the additive framing can lead to competition between different social locations and inequalities (Verloo, 2005), an “Oppression Olympics” (Martinez, 1993), whereby social groups compete for the political and monetary support of dominant groups and at the cost of excluding “other” disadvantaged groups (Dhamoon, 2008). This can prevent coordination among marginalized groups and undermine efforts for systematic reform that could transform the entire logic of distribution (Hancock, 2007: 70). This may in fact be exemplified by the numerous separate frameworks that are emerging within the Aboriginal community to try to adapt GBA, presumably to adapt to and navigate state structures. It is not clear that having all these separate tools will lead to the type of coordination that is required to press for systemic changes that will improve the lives of Aboriginal men and women.

Referring to their research on the EU context, Lombardo et al. (2009) have concluded “Our findings point to the difficulties that public policies show in stretching gender equality in order to address multiple forms of inequality” (69). Urbanek (2009) has similarly asked, “How are we as researchers going to make policy makers aware of the problem of intersectional discrimination or privilege when experts themselves fall into the trap of talking about separate inequalities without referring to their intersectional character?” (6). Simply counting different types of oppression does nothing to facilitate the understanding of the whole person and of simultaneous experiences of oppression and discrimination.

Not surprising then, critiques of the status quo and more recently attempts to expand GBA to accommodate diversity have illustrated that these approaches fail to understand the relationships and dynamics between specific social locations such as gender, race/ethnicity and class (Hankivsky, 2005; Hankivsky, 2007a; 2007b). This has led to calls in Canada and internationally to move beyond simple ‘bending’ and ‘stretching’ of GBA, as in the ‘gender and diversity’ approaches, to incorporating an intersectional approach into equality work (Christensen and Larsen, 2008; Langvasbråten, 2008; Williams, 2008). The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) has taken the position that “after years of working toward greater equality for women, the CRIAOW believes that different approaches are needed to make real social and economic change approaches that offer diverse contributions, and that work from Intersectional Feminist Frameworks (IFF)” (Morris and Bunjun, 2007: 6). Writing in the context of public policy and health in Canada, Hankivsky (2005) has argued along the same lines that “what is required is a broader approach to mainstreaming, one that is able to consistently and systematically reflect deeper understanding of intersectionalities – the combination of various oppressions that together produce something unique and distinct from any one form of discrimination standing alone” (978).

Beyond Gender & Diversity: Intersectionality Based Analysis

IBA focuses on the interaction between core dimensions of diversity in ways that are complex and which compound one another and is grounded in the normative paradigm of intersectionality.² Intersectionality moves beyond single or typically favoured categories of analysis (for example gender, race, and class) to consider simultaneous interactions between different aspects of social identity (for example, race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, religion, geography, age, ability, immigration status) as well as the impact of systems and processes of oppression and domination (for example, racism, classism, sexism, ableism) (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2009). It maintains that traditional approaches to inequality - such as those based on gender or race or ethnicity or religion or class or ability, among other markers of difference - are flawed because such approaches fail to recognize the complex inter-relations between such social locations and the processes by which marginalized groups experience oppression. Nor does an intersectional perspective promote adding social relations and identities to each other - for example gender + race or gender + disability or race + class to understand discrimination, as is the case with the 'gender and diversity' approach. As Conaghan (2007) explains, the focus is not on combined effects but on cumulative experiences which are qualitatively distinct from the sum of their discriminatory parts. Instead it posits that oppression is caused by multiple and *intersecting* and *inseparable* systems and processes.

Indeed, intersectional scholarship strives to elucidate and interpret multiple and intersecting systems of oppression and privilege (Brewer, 1993; Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). It resonates with common sense recognition that people's experiences are influenced by a multitude of factors, including but not limited to gender, and that the interaction of these factors can lead to experiences of discrimination and disadvantages, which profoundly affect life chances and opportunities. Intersectionality thus complicates our understanding of social identities, locations and subject formations and in so doing provides a framework "for fundamentally altering the ways in which social problems are identified, experienced, and understood so as to reflect the multiplicity of lived experiences (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2002: 23).

IBA and Public Policy

Accordingly, the goal of IBA is to identify and address "the way specific acts and policies address the inequalities experienced by various social groups" (Bishwakarma et al., 2007: 9). In policy terms then, the recognition of multiple and interacting identity categories leads to the rejection of single axes for determining discrimination and leads to an acknowledgement that people can be discriminated against on the basis of more than one identity category (Kantola and Nousiainen, 2009). Intersectionality recognizes that to address layered inequalities, a 'one size fits all' approach will not work (CRIA, 2006; Hankivsky, 2005; Parken and

Young, 2007). From this viewpoint, targeted policies are often deemed as ineffective as general policies in that both fail to address multiple identities and within group diversity. As Hancock (2007) explains: "intersectional work goes deeper to examine the limits of policy-making designed to assist target populations who should theoretically benefit from either racially-targeted or gender-targeted public policy but in reality benefit from neither" (66). Lombardo and Verloo (2009) put it best when they reference Feree (2009) and explain:

It [intersectionality] warns us of the risks of policies, that, by privileging the treatment of some inequalities and ignoring the fact inequalities are often mutually constitutive, end up marginalizing some people, reproducing power mechanisms among groups, and failing to address the creation of categories that are at the root of the constitution of inequalities (479).

Moreover, an intersectional based policy analysis differs from efforts that attempt to get at issues of diversity by starting with one identity category, such as gender, to which others are added. As noted in the previous section on GDA, these forms of analyses assume unitary categories that are based on a uniform set of experiences (Hancock, 2007; Hankivsky 2007a) which can be simply brought together to understand differences. This type of "additive approach" is typical but inadequate for "getting at the layered interrelationships between wider social inequalities and individual experience of discrimination" (Parken and Young, 2007: 27). The emphasis is on interactions and relationships rather than simple additions.

The goal of IBA is to improve on traditional approaches to analyzing how specific acts and policies address or fail to address the inequalities and related needs experienced by various social groups. Emergent policy problems, whether in the areas of labour/employment, immigration, domestic violence, healthcare, maternity/paternity leave, childcare and other forms of social care, multiculturalism or education, cannot be productively advanced through traditional framework. By bringing to the foreground the various dimensions that interact to create layers of inequality, a more complete and sophisticated analysis can be developed, one that better captures the ways in which public policy is experienced by various groups of women and men who often encounter multiple forms of discrimination. Using an intersectional lens changes the policy questions that are asked, the kind of data that is collected, how data is collected, and how it is disaggregated and analyzed to produce evidence-based policy making.

In particular, its focus on different structures of inequality leads to a fuller and more developed picture of oppression and discrimination faced by different groups of people (Weldon, 2008). Bringing together a range of differences into one framework may also lead to cooperation and coalition building between various groups representing specific inequalities as they start to recognize overt and subtle similarities and join efforts to make transformative change in public policy. This in turn will allow policy makers to be more effective in

creating policies that improve both individual and societal well-being through the appropriate allocation of limited resources (Murphy et al., 2009). The adoption of a more intersectional approach to the treatment of inequalities can promote the development of more inclusive and better quality policies (Lombardo and Verloo, 2009). Similarly Siltanen and Doucet (2008) have argued: “Intersectionality analysis can provide the detailed specifications of complex inequality configurations required to determine the equality policy implementation strategies likely to be most effective for specific policy jurisdictions and locales” (189).

In sum, IBA allows for 1) a fuller and more accurate analysis of social problems and specifically the complex contours of discrimination and inequality; 2) the shaping of more effective policy interventions which address actual lived experiences and 3) the creation of common ground and alliances between differently situated groups in society, often competing for similar policy attention and resources. IBA therefore has the potential to raise awareness and capacity among policy makers and analysts to expand and deepen current tools for analyzing discrimination and discriminatory practices and in the process, lead to more effective and efficient policy decisions.

However, unlike the additive approach discussed above, intersectionality cannot be a simple extrapolation of gender mainstreaming (Verloo, 2006) or more specifically in the Canadian context – GBA – for it fundamentally challenges the universalizing and prioritizing of a single category, such as woman or gender. On this point, Lombardo and Agustin’s (2009) definition of ‘good intersectionality’ is extremely informative. They explain:

“Good intersectionality” is determined along the following lines: *explicitness* and *visibility* of certain inequalities as well as the *inclusiveness* of a wide range of multiple inequality categories in the policy documents; the extent of *articulation* of intersectionality which implies both the mentioning of the intersecting categories and the way they are dealt with in the documents (for example as separate or mutually constitutive categories for examples); the gendering and degendering of certain policy issues and intersecting inequalities; the appearance of lack of *transformative approach* to the issue of intersectionality; a *structural understanding* of power hierarchies and the dimensions of inequality, also in relation to addressing both individual and group dimensions; awareness/challenging of *privileges* and internal inequality biases in the policy documents; avoiding the potential *stigmatization* of people and groups at different points of intersection; and the *consultation* of civil society actors in the policy-making process (4).

Challenges of Moving Forward With IBA

A formidable obstacle in terms of moving to IBA, is that GBA and to some extent GDA, continue to be part of the accepted language and policy discourse internationally and nationally, and especially in the Canadian context. In Canada, until very recently, the entrenchment of such approaches appears firm, especially at the level of bureaucracy. As Canadian

research on GBA argued just a few years back: “While many in the activist and academic communities have moved beyond gender as a primary or sole lens of analysis and place of social action, the bureaucrats are frozen in time. They are committed to persuading the government bureaucracy to adopt and implement it” (academics and activists quoted in Hankivsky, 2008: 76). To further illustrate, this same informant explained that when her organization approached SWC to participate in the development of alternative frameworks that take into account the diversity of women, “we were met with defensiveness, guardedness, and in some cases hostility. Their explanation was that it has been so challenging working within government to sell the idea of GM, that the introduction of an alternative ‘more complex’ lens for policy analysis and development would undermine the work the officials had been doing and would ‘confuse’ other departments” (as quoted in Hankivsky, 2008). Without doubt, political pragmatism in the realm of policy is powerful and shifts that would complicate the policy process further are not generally welcome. Thus it is critical that change be undertaken incrementally, building on the success and lessons learned to date, but at the same time with a view to making change that will produce policies, approaches and tools that will more effectively respond to the growing complexities of discrimination and inequalities in which gender is an important but not necessarily primary or sole social location for consideration.

Despite the critiques that have been made of SWC in the past and the challenges of making policy change, as evidenced by current developments, *significant* change is underway. For example, as stated in Status of Women Canada’s 2010-2011 Report on Plans and Priorities, SWC is exploring progressive integration of intersectionality in its approach to gender-based analysis. The organization has devoted efforts to learning about the current status of intersectionality and GBA in Canada and abroad, and is now beginning a process to engage with other government departments both federally and provincially in this field of analysis. In fact, the organization is currently exploring ways to update its current approach so that the analysis can be made more relevant to practitioners (for example, researchers, policy-makers, evaluators), and more sustainable as a practice over time. What remains to be seen, however, is how the inherent tensions between GBA and intersectionality can be resolved in an approach that is attempting to integrate intersectionality into GBA rather than replacing GBA with IBA.

A second key conundrum that continues to emerge in discussions and debates about how to move forward, and relates to the point raised above, are the questions what do we gain and alternatively, what do we lose by choosing the various options that are available? Consistently, a misinformed claim is made that moving to more complex and broader approaches to equality, as in the case of intersectionality, will necessarily reduce the importance and understanding of gender in public policy (Song, 2008; Thorvaldsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2007; Walby, 2005; Woodward, 2006). As Pauline Rankin testified to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, “My concern is that if we pile on all those other kinds of differences into one lens,

we lose a lot of the precision of policy that might come from separating out those differences” (as quoted in Hankivsky, 2009).

Arguably, however, the very opposite is true. As Lombardo et al. (2009) explain: “...the absence of intersectionality in existing equality policies makes room for only a limited understanding of gender, one that does not take into account that inequalities are often mutually constitutive, that does not open to contestation of existing hegemonic discourses, and thus has little chance of being transformative, inclusive of different voices and defiant of social norms” (63). Arguably, gender inequalities thrive where there is a lack of awareness of the interaction of the impacts of the multiple identities and diversities of men and women (Equality Commission of Northern Ireland, 2008: 9).

IBA does not reject the importance of the category of gender, but displaces gender as *the* primary, foundational axis for understanding discrimination, inequality and oppression. Instead it proposes a more complex conceptualization of gender – one that does not conflate gender with women and one that focuses on how gender interacts with other variables without assuming that gender is always and everywhere the most important category or identity for understanding people’s social locations. Some like Bagilhole assert that “intersectionality offers a potential opening for continuing equality policy where gender does not disappear but remains in a prominent place...” (2006: 2). The essential difference is that with IBA the focus is no longer on gender inequalities in isolation but on equality in all its multiple dimensions (Thorvaldsdóttir, 2007).

IBA therefore leads to broader conceptions than GBA or GDA of the variety of interactive factors that shape people’s choices, decisions, behaviours and circumstances of their lives. At the same time, however, IBA can also be considered a natural extension and improved expansion of these two approaches. For these reasons, the recognition of the multi-dimensional reality of equality seems to be advantageous not only for designing more inclusive equality policies but also for keeping the gender struggle alive. The adoption of a more intersectional approach to the treatment of gender has potential benefits for understanding gender, for increasing awareness of policymakers’ biases and for improving the equality of equality policies themselves (Lombardo et al., 2009: 79).

Outside the context of Canada, growing pressures on the EU member states to deal with different grounds of discrimination in political institutions and judicial processes have led to a range of reforms that are changing the landscape vis à vis equality policies and in which intersectionality is now figuring prominently. Member states are moving away from unitary approaches to inequalities. Research is demonstrating that there is an increasing presence of discourses that deal with other inequalities than gender (Lombardo and Agustin, 2009). Moreover, transformations in anti-discrimination and equality policies in Europe have resulted in the creation of ‘single equality bodies’ in Britain, Norway and some Central and Eastern European Countries (Koldinska, 2009). In each of these instances intersectionality is

being drawn on to inform policy directions. For example, referring to the UK context in which an Equality Bill and Single Equality Duty are necessitating the promotion of equality and diversity, Squires (2007) has concluded that “intersectionality has emerged as a central concern among British policymakers” (556).

In the final analysis, one should not lose sight of the fact that “policies do not simply ‘impact’ people; they ‘create’ people” (Bacchi and Eveline, 2003: 110). Policies invite or limit challenges to dominant modes of social organization (Schneider and Ingram, 2007). While there are real limitations to making transformative changes through state policy alone, it is also true that there is unrealized potential in moving beyond GBA or GDA to IBA. Arguably, “by bringing to the foreground the various background dimensions that interact to create layers of inequality and which structure the relative positions of women and women, a more complete and sophisticated analysis can be developed, one that better captures the ways in which public policy is experienced by various groups of women and men who may experience multiple discrimination” (Hankivsky, 2005: 996). Writing in the Dutch context, Wekker (2009), best illuminates both the power and importance of intersectionality by presenting an alternative vision for thinking about how to approach the ‘implicit subject’ in policy. She writes:

Of course, it is important that gender is part of the process of policy development and implementation, but it is not enough. It is a missed chance when policy makers foreground instruments that are only targeting gender, while the other axes of signification are left to the side, as if they had no meaning. It is important that all policies, whether in the field of poverty eradication or health care should take the relevant differences that exist between people into account. My radical proposal is that, if one wants to reach as many people as possible with a policy, then the imaginary subject should not be the norm – a white middle-class man or woman – but a person who deviates in many respects from that standard. The implicit subject in most policy is a white man or woman, who speaks Dutch fluently, is autonomous, can take care of him/herself financially, has a sufficient body of knowledge to make informed choices, and does not suffer from racism. I want to highlight the principle that what is good for a subordinate group is also good for the groups and individuals who are situated in more favourable positions. What is good for black, migrant and refugee-women, such as new ways of thinking about labour or more just and equitable ways of calculating pensions, is also good for other women and men. The reverse is not true (75).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Canada is at an important crossroads in terms of its existing GBA policy. Given the recent focus on this strategy at the federal level, a window of opportunity is open to take stock of lessons learned to date and reflecting on emerging developments and insights including from other jurisdictions. A key issue confronting policy makers is how to use tools like GBA to address the needs of an increasingly

diversity citizenry. Understanding what GM or GBA in the case of Canada might entail in the context of diversity and not just gender represents a significant challenge (Squires, 2005) but appears to strongly signal the need for new models that are able to accommodate more than just gender but other locations and processes that impact on equality.

As this paper has shown, there are two distinct lines of argument that have developed in response to the need to expand GBA – GDA and IBA, but not enough attention has been paid to clarifying their similarities and differences. GDA can be interpreted as expanding, in an incremental fashion, on existing foundational frameworks by explicitly adding to the focus on gender, which remains nevertheless *primary*, other important but separable grounds of inequality. It is often referred to as an additive or multiple approach to equality. In comparison, IBA, which moves towards an understanding of the intersecting nature of inequalities, presents a more fundamental challenge to the status quo because it seeks to understand the interactive dynamics and process of various social locations and processes on people's experiences of discrimination and oppression. In so doing, it recognizes the significance of gender but does not automatically prioritize its importance in examining and responding to social inequalities. Although a more radical departure from GBA than GDA, IBA purposefully displaces the dominance of gender to open new avenues of analysis and make visible a broader range of experiences.

The complexities and multifaceted nature of people's lived experiences (which cannot be reduced to the explanatory category of gender or in fact any other singular category of analysis) requires that policy becomes more complex and sophisticated. The issue of what governments are missing when they use certain categories, or privilege certain dimensions, of inequality has profound consequences. Taking into account the experiences and needs of real people is essential for policy to be effective and in turn cost-effective for government. By moving beyond GBA, GDA and considering the potential of an IBA strategy – a 'whole person' approach to equality - Canada can more effectively promote the equality of its increasingly diverse and multifaceted population, "do justice to the actual complexity of social inequality" (Ferree, 2009: 85), and once again position itself as an international leader of best and promising practices.

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Endnotes

- 1 While the preferred term in the Canadian context is GBA, the
- 2 Although the history of intersectionality has not been accurately documented, the concept first emerged in the late 1960s largely in response to the limitations of second wave feminist theorizing that privileged gender as an identity category. The term itself is credited as emerging from the seminal works of critical social science and humanities researchers such as bell hooks (1990), Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000), and in particular, American legal scholar Kimberle' Crenshaw (2000; Crenshaw et al. 1995). It is now a well developed field of scholarship (Walby 2007; Dhamoon 2008; Hancock 2007; Verloo 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006; McCall 2005) and intersectionality is gaining prominence in research for its ability to deal with multiple, complex and intersecting inequalities.