

## **Using an Integrated Feminist Analysis in Research for Social Change**

The following article is a report on the recent round table on the research methodology identified as Integrated Feminist Analysis hosted by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW). A full publication on this topic is forthcoming from the offices of CRIAOW, and may be accessed at <http://www.criaw-icref.ca/> later this spring.

Feminist organizations across Canada have been working to find new ways of conducting social research that does not reinforce or reproduce binary assumptions of gender. The purpose of using this methodology is to focus on not just gender issues, but “the integrated nature of all aspects of women’s lives including race, ability, citizenship, sexuality, age, and an infinite number of other realities” (see below for quote).

On February 19-20 the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) hosted a round table in Ottawa that brought together more than 25 women from various social change organizations, universities, government departments and women’s organizations to discuss the use of integrated feminist analysis (IFA) in research for social change.

The discussion opened with a shared understanding that there was no one single definition of IFA and as such, dialogues such as the round table were needed to help develop a framework of just what integrated feminist analysis is. Until this preparatory work is done, attempts to get researchers who shape public policy from both inside and outside of the government to use IFA would be ineffective.

Nelcia Robinson, Coordinator of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), was one of two international representatives who attended. She says the greatest strength of the round table was the simple bringing together of so many feminists to share their experiences with integrated research.

“Taking the time to listen to each other was so important. Sometimes we don’t have the time to do that, or sometimes we don’t take the time,” says Robinson.

Michèle Bougie, a senior policy and program analyst in the Gender-based Analysis Directorate at Status of Women Canada (SWC), agrees. She commented during the round table on how helpful it was for researchers such as herself working within the government on gender policy initiatives to know that they are not the only ones struggling with defining and implementing IFA.

Bougie and other participants agreed that part of the barrier to such dialogue is the lack of common language to talk about the transformational power of IFA inspired research.

Bougie suggested that SWC’s work does attempt to have various government departments analyze policy impacts not just around gender, but also around the integrated nature of all aspects of women’s lives including race, ability, citizenship, sexuality, age, and an infinite number of

other realities. However, this integrated aspect of their research is not seen because they are not positioned as government researchers to call their work an integrated feminist analysis.

The lack of understanding around the relationship between IFA and other research lenses that attempt to use an integrated approach is a further barrier to dialogue. In fact, IFA is a lens that grew out of GBA, a historical connection that participants noted has been lost.

Gender-based analysis was a cornerstone of the Beijing Platform for Action that grew out of the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Several participants suggested that it was as if the women's movement began to feel that the transformational potential of GBA was being lost in various institutional interpretations of it that IFA began to emerge.

Participants agreed that the same mistake of co-optation must not be made with IFA.

“There is already an element of IFA in our research,” says Leelangi Wanasundera, a board member of the Sri Lanka based Centre for Women's Research, “but we're hoping this (discussion) will give us a more systematic approach to apply.

“We can not take it lightly, we need to study it (IFA) more, we need to be trained,” she says.

Wanasundera's suggestion was echoed by many at the round table who agree that the discussion that took place over the two day gathering is merely a starting point in the future development of IFA tools.

In summing up, Dr. Jo-Anne Lee of the University of Victoria and president-elect of CRIAW, indicated that IFA is in fact much more than a methodology fact rather a conceptual framework. This was reiterated by Andrée Côté of the National Association of Women and the Law who also understood IFA as an approach with underlying values.

CRIAW will in the coming year continue to operationalize the framework for IFA.

The round table closed with the launch of the International Network of Feminist Research Organizations, a virtual meeting place to share international research experiences that participants' hope will one day include tools and examples of IFA research.

According to Robinson of CAFRA, the practical impact of such sharing is great. “We need to share experiences so that we can use the common points to reinforce our work, and the new ideas to begin to work differently.”