



An Organisation for Promoting
Understanding of Society

Canada, January 2020 Report of a Listening Post on Gender Justice

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The LP was held in a community-based organization and at the university.

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Are we getting somewhere/anywhere in terms of gender justice? Does the worry that the end of the world is upon us mean 'let them have it (gender justice)'. Men and systems are being called out: Harvey Weinstein, Canadian broadcaster. We can't be sure what the outcomes of this will be. And simultaneously, there is also a "make women great again" conference in the USA.

Rising inequality within Canada and globally. Crime and violence in Toronto are increasing; extreme economic and political polarization across the world. Increase in incivility and withdrawal. O- line and in person surveillance is growing. Possible to see more of what is going on in the world.

The belief in public institutions is being eroded. These systems seem to be more and more broken. There is less and less belief that these can be mended. Greater unpredictability in every aspect of life. The immigration department of the government seems overwhelmed due to lack of resources to meet the demand making it harder for people to come to Canada.

There is a sense of a pending Armageddon given the rising impact of the climate crisis and the inability of our public institutions to take collective action. This threat of the end of the world that leads to a plethora of emotions: fear and panic; questions about our capacity to cope and how to prepare our children. There are also feelings of being overwhelmed. There is a sense of responsibility – confusion around what's mine, what's theirs, it's not clear about what to do and yet not wanting to live in denial. Reduce, reuse and recycle hardly feels sufficient for this moment. Pandora's box is open; people don't know what to do. It is exhausting to constantly be in it.

There is a belief that the system will crack and then how do we supplement our knowledge – for example, how do we assist like the volunteer firefighters in Australia. How do we plan to support vulnerable people in times of disaster?

What are the other possible patterns that we haven't paid attention to such as pleasure activism and self-care? Are there ways of helping with the despair and extreme polarizations and divisions?

Protests are happening across the world. In Hong Kong they haven't yet been crushed. Youth movements are rising. People are speaking up locally against anti-Semitism, and islamophobia

People want to connect somewhere. There is more need for humour and there is much more specialized humour in terms of diversity and self-disclosures.

There are places where diversity is valued; some possibility of learning from each other as we learn and work together in diverse environments. The next piece is to mobilize this possibility.

In small ways narratives in parts of Canada have shifted: Iranian students who died in the plane crash were articulated as part of our community, as Canadians. This is different from the Air India crash.

On the other hand, some felt that our society isn't broken, people are finding a sense of connection somewhere. How do we increase a sense of community in large metropolitan areas?

There is some hope that technology can support our continued existence. Bill Gates is funding innovative research to address international problems (clean water)

We have a 'truth bias' – we try and think something is true until it is really clear it's not.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

Theme 1: Public institutions are unable to act effectively for the collective good. There is growing social inequality, increased violence (islamophobia; rising anti-Semitism); more migration of people leaving their homes because of climate change and war. With increased polarization, in society, developing a social consensus is becoming impossible. Although there are powerful social movements to raise issues (me too movement; Hong Kong protests; Greta Thurnberg, Trump impeachment), the response of social institutions seems to be increasingly driven by the politics of the moment and not ethical decisions.

Theme 2: There is a sense of sceptical hope or hopeful uncertainty that gender justice can be realized through such actions as #metoo and the Weinstein trial. Women around the world continue to be harmed, with what seems like little hope of redress.

Theme 3: People are struggling to know how to respond effectively within a world that is increasingly uncertain and not become completely overwhelmed or flee into denial. Parents are wondering how to prepare their children for an unpredictable future. Within the increased polarization in society, there is still a desire to connect and stand together (people speaking out against islamophobia; volunteer firefighters in Australia; how thoughtful implementation of technology might sustain our world). Given the diversity of society in Toronto, there is a sense of learning from one another across cultural differences.

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

Analysis 1: Because public institutions are unable to build a social consensus based on shared ethics, they are unable to act effectively on behalf of citizens to address issues that threaten human existence including climate disaster, social inequality and the international migration that results from war and climate disaster.

Hypothesis 1: This lack of decision making based on shared ethics erodes faith in public institutions and increases uncertainty. This leaves citizens struggling with feelings of being overwhelmed, either in a state of denial or uncertainty about how to take effective action which in turn reinforces social and individual inertia.

Analysis 2: Because there is greater public critique of how power and privilege are exercised within public institutions such as the justice system to maintain the status quo, citizens, particularly women are more aware of the harms that can result from attempting to use these systems to seek justice.

Hypotheses 2: Having to use public institutions such as the justice system to address violence while knowing how it protects those with power and privilege, increases scepticism, polarization and a lack of faith in public institutions to serve the social good.

Analysis 3: People are really seeing, feeling and grappling with the threat of complete human extinction. That realization has provoked citizens out of their complacency. People are grappling with how to respond, how to prepare their children for the future and in some cases of the need to speak up and take action locally. Even though there is a sense that it might be too late to fundamentally reverse the demise of humanity, there is interest in finding new ways of learning and working across diversity, of maintaining and strengthening a sense of community and how technology might assist us.

Hypothesis 3: The deepening climate crisis and the loss of the effectiveness of social institutions to maintain social cohesion and restore justice has broken a sense of social continuity and catapulted some individuals into greater reflection, an increased sense of urgency to explore new avenues for social change.

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