Does Poverty Wear a Woman's Face? Some Moral Dimensions of a Transnational Feminist Research Project

ALISON M. JAGGAR

This article explains some moral dimensions of a transnational feminist research project designed to provide a better standard or metric for measuring poverty across the world. The author is an investigator on this project. Poverty metrics incorporate moral judgments about what is necessary for a decent life, so justifying metrics requires moral argumentation. The article clarifies the moral aspects of poverty valuation, indicates some moral flaws in existing global poverty metrics, and outlines some conditions for a better global metric. It then explains the methodology used in our project, providing its moral rationale and discussing some remaining moral concerns.

1. The Need for a Reliable Poverty Standard

For over thirty years, the received wisdom has been that poverty "wears a woman's face." The following quotation, attributed to a 1980 *United Nations Report*, was circulated for decades on posters, postcards, and bumper stickers. "Women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property." Whether or not this striking sentence was ever published by the United Nations, that organization has certainly promoted the idea that poverty is "feminized" in many publications up to the present. Yet some reputable critics dispute the most dramatic gender contrasts (Green 2010). How can we find out the truth?

It is surprisingly difficult to substantiate claims about the supposed feminization of poverty. Even counting heads is not easy. Resources for data-collection are often scarce; it may be difficult to count people who live in remote places; some people may try to avoid being counted, perhaps because they lack proper documents; and authorities may not wish to disclose true poverty statistics, perhaps because they do

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not want to acknowledge policy failure or needs for services. However, independent of problems with obtaining timely and sex-disaggregated data, substantive disagreements about the numbers of poor people stem also from the fact that various agencies measure poverty by different standards. The problem is not simply that they set the poverty threshold at different levels; more fundamentally, they measure poverty using different "currencies" or indicators.

Although the existence of poverty might seem to be purely a factual matter, the claim that someone is poor has an irreducibly moral dimension. Adam Smith recognized this moral element in poverty assessment in the founding text of modern economics, *The Wealth of Nations* (Smith 1776/1904). Smith famously defined poverty as the want of life's "necessaries" and he said that these included "not only the commodities that are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but (also) whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without" (1776/1904, 691). For Smith, avoiding poverty required not simply access to the things necessary for physical survival but also access to the commodities necessary for a decent life, including those required to ensure self-respect and the respect of one's fellow citizens. In eighteenth-century England, respectability apparently required a linen shirt. Smith clearly believed that an element of moral judgment is involved in determining both what life's necessities consist in and how much of these necessities people should have.

Various standards have varying strengths and weaknesses, but there is reason to believe that none of them measures reliably the gendered aspects of poverty. This paper describes one aspect of the work of a transnational feminist research project, based in Canberra, Australia, whose goal is to produce a better standard or metric for measuring poverty across the world.[1] I am a partner investigator on this project, which is motivated by the realization that, until we have a dependable measure, we cannot know in what sense, if any, poverty might be feminized. We cannot determine the numbers of the poor, the proportion of women among them, and whether that proportion is rising, falling, or stable. Is it even possible that poverty might "mean" something different to men and to women? We cannot find answers to these questions until we have a trustworthy standard for measuring poverty.

The project's research team is multidisciplinary. It includes scholars from disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and economics as well as several philosophers. One main responsibility for the philosophers is to monitor the project's moral dimensions.

2. Moral Problems in Existing Metrics

2.1. The International Poverty Line as Illustration

It might be wondered why a new poverty standard is needed when we are inundated daily by reports on global poverty. Our research team believes that the standards currently used to measure poverty all have defects, including moral flaws. Because so many alternative standards exist, I cannot discuss them all thoroughly, but I will illustrate some of their most common and persistent moral defects through a brief discussion of the world's most widely used poverty metric. This is the World Bank's International Poverty Line, also known as the "dollar-a-day" standard.

The International Poverty Line measures poverty in terms of monetary income. People are defined as poor if their income or the monetary value of what they consume falls below a certain "line" or threshold. The IPL was originally defined by the purchasing power of $1.02 in the US in 1985, and since then it has been revised several times. Because most countries use currencies other than the US dollar, the IPL relies on a calculation of "purchasing power parity," which seeks to establish the monetary equivalent of the spending power of a dollar in the United States in various other locations across the world. Purchasing power is calculated by using a consumer price index for a supposedly typical basket of goods. In 2008, the World Bank revised the International Poverty threshold to $1.25 at 2005 US purchasing power parity (Ravallion, Chen, and Sangraula 2009).

The basic idea of the IPL initially appears straightforward, but closer inspection reveals that it relies on a number of disputable value judgments.

2.2. Cultural Bias in Selecting the "Currency" of Poverty

Any poverty metric must not only select a threshold below which people are impoverished. It must also select a "currency" of poverty; that is to say, it must decide what it is that poor people lack or the specific deprivations that make them poor. The IPL selects money as the stuff that poor people crucially lack. It determines the amount of money people can access by investigating their income (that is, how much money comes into the household) or their consumption-expenditure (that is, the value of the goods consumed by the household). Insisting that lack of money is the essential constituent of poverty disregards the fact that people in some societies do not regard scarcity of money as the sole or even primary deficiency that impoverishes them. For example, some indigenous people regard themselves as poor if they lack kin relationships (Hunt 2010).

No one would deny that access to money and the ability to buy commodities is essential for keeping people out of poverty in most of the contemporary world. As societies become increasingly dominated by markets, money becomes a multipurpose means for obtaining what Smith called the necessaries of life, which increasing numbers of people must buy rather than foraging for them, growing them, or making them. With money, people can purchase food, health care, and even leisure time, and reduce vulnerability and stigmatization. However, even in societies with an extensive market sector, earned income may be only one of several resources lacked by impoverished people or by specific groups of poor people. Even if people have sufficient income at any particular moment, they may be vulnerable to poverty if they lack liquid assets or other forms of social protection. Moreover, even when people's experiences of poverty are characterized by insufficient money, they may equally be characterized by sexual vulnerability, political marginalization, and heavy burdens of work. This is often especially true for women.

The fact that, in most societies today, it is almost tautological to say that poor people lack sufficient money does not mean that simple comparisons of monetary income across societies provide comprehensive or even meaningful measures of poverty. In societies whose members hold important resources in common, such as fisheries and forests, the significance of money is very different from its significance in societies with a more extensive market sector. Simply measuring consumption-expenditure may not reveal whether a resource is being depleted or enhanced, and it may also fail to show the cultural importance of that resource to the people who depend on it. Poverty is experienced differently again in societies with developed social-welfare systems, where people do not pay directly for such vital services as health care, education, and support in disability and old age; merely measuring the monetary value of consumed services does not reveal the quality and reliability of those services or the varying experiences of the individuals who receive them.

2.3. Gender Bias of the IPL

There is reason to think that the IPL obscures and likely undercounts specifically female poverty (Okin 2003). One way in which it does this is by relying on calculations of household consumption. Within a single household, all members often do not have equal access to the available resources; for instance, more money is often spent for boys' education than for girls' and on health care for men and boys than for women and girls. Treating households as single units of consumption inevitably obscures inequality within them.

In addition, as noted earlier, the lives of poor women may be characterized not only by low incomes but also by hardships related specifically to their gender, such as sexual vulnerability, political marginalization, and excessive burdens of work. It is also possible that women's culturally assigned caretaking responsibilities mean that, in societies where money income is a crucial resource, women may require more income than men. When poverty is measured primarily by the International Poverty Line, it is impossible for such gendered inequalities to come into view.

2.4. Antipoor Bias of the IPL and Income Threshold Approaches in General

Measures of poverty must not only select a currency; they must also set a threshold below which people count as poor. The roughly dollar-a-day threshold of the IPL is morally problematic both in principle and in practice.

In practice, the International Poverty threshold is set very low. This is partly because the basket of goods used to determine adequate purchasing power does not reflect the consumption needs of the very poor; for instance, it does not give sufficient weight to the price of basic foodstuffs, on which very poor people spend most of their income (Pogge and Reddy 2005/2010).[2] The present International Poverty Line may be said to incorporate an antipoor bias simply because it is set so low (Pogge 2010, 67).

No matter where the line is drawn, however, any single, income-based threshold inevitably will be insensitive to individuals' differing needs and differing costs of procuring commodities. For this reason an income-threshold approach will always weigh more harshly on those whose needs and costs are greater. This is why income-threshold approaches may be said to incorporate an antipoor bias in principle as well as practice.

3. Some Alternative Metrics and a Shared Flaw

Although the International Poverty Line is the most widely used global poverty metric, many alternative poverty standards exist, and more are constantly being developed. Most countries have their own national standards, and several international metrics also are available. For two decades since the early 1990s, the most influential alternative to the IPL at the global level probably was the United Nations Human Poverty Index, a composite index influenced by Amartya Sen's work on capabilities. The HPI defines the "currency" of poverty as deprivation in the three basic dimensions of human development identified by the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI). These dimensions include not only access to overall economic provisioning (as measured by access to an improved water sources and the percentage of underweight children), but also two so-called quality of life indicators, namely longevity and literacy.[3] The three "currencies" are combined using a mathematical formula that establishes their relative weights. The United Nations Development Program has recently switched to an alternative Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which has three dimensions: health, education, and standard of living (Alkire and Santos 2010). The three dimensions are measured using ten indicators. Each dimension is equally weighted and each indicator in a dimension is equally weighted within the dimension. Further standards proposed for measuring poverty are deprivations of rights (Woodward 2010) and social exclusion, which is especially influential in Europe.

Each of the available standards has its own varying strengths and weaknesses (Wisor 2011). Critics debate the merits of the indicators that the various standards use, the relative weight they are assigned, and the levels at which the thresholds are set. Despite the differences among them, however, the official standards all resemble one another in one respect: they are all decided by officials and experts who do not live close to any poverty threshold, and they are not supported by a clear rationale justifying the selection of some indicators over others. For instance, the "currency" and level of the IPL were initially decided and continue to be monitored by economic experts at the World Bank, and the level of the IPL is set as an average of the domestic poverty line in the world's fifteen poorest countries, most of which are located in sub-Saharan Africa. It is unclear why these particular countries should be taken to set a standard for countries elsewhere in the world, especially when we have no indication of how their poverty lines are justified, and whether their justifications are compatible (Pogge 2010, 66). All the standards appear to be based on some unexplained mix of intuition and expedience.[4] To the extent that metrics lack explicit and transparent justification, they are epistemically and morally arbitrary.

Arbitrariness is not simply an abstract philosophical concern; arbitrary standards are problematic in several ways. Most evidently, metrics that lack justification are unreliable, prone both to underreport and overreport poverty. Metrics that neglect important dimensions of deprivation will fail to recognize the extent of poverty among those who are worst off. In failing to capture the systematic impoverishment of some groups, they are also likely to mask disparities and inequalities. For example, if metrics disregard or give inappropriate weight to privations that exclusively or disproportionately affect particular groups of women or men, they will fail to reveal the full extent of gendered poverty and inequality. At the same time, arbitrary or unjustified metrics may also fail to recognize the wealth that some people regard themselves as possessing. Elisabeth Fürst-L'Orange writes about interviewing a woman in Moldova, the poorest country in Europe: "I particularly remember one woman, as I talked about Moldova as a severely poor country. 'Don't say we're poor', she begged me. Well, this is a fact, I responded. 'But we are so much more! Think about our lovely countryside, think about our rich culture, our food and wine!'" (Fürst-L'Orange 2010).

Poverty is a stigmatizing term. Misattributions of poverty can be insulting if they refuse to recognize the value of the wealth that people take themselves to possess. It can be equally disrespectful to disregard or dismiss privations that people take themselves to be suffering, perhaps on grounds that they are wrong about what are the "necessaries" for a decent life. Such dismissal is especially likely when local understandings of wealth or deprivation invoke particular cultural or religious meanings and values that are not widely shared. Insults are multiplied when powerful people "explain" impoverished people's resistance to external standards of poverty by attributing to them adaptive preferences, false consciousness, superstition, or ignorance.

Attributions of poverty are often used as rationales for policy interventions touted as lifting those designated as poor out of poverty. However, if the standards used to measure poverty are unreliable, they are poor guides to policy. They will not enable policymakers to identify resources appropriate for alleviating specific types of poverty and they will misdirect the distribution of resources. Such mistakes result in both inefficiency and injustice. In the last half of the twentieth century, many non-Western countries were characterized as poor on the basis of their low GDP; this characterization was used to justify radical attempts to "develop" these countries, destroying environments and sustainable ways of life while creating enormously profitable "development industries" and a huge transfer of wealth from (now) poor to (now) much richer countries. Today, it is arguable that some metrics operate to rationalize an unjust economic order, insofar as they are overly optimistic and misleading about the extent and trends of global poverty (Pogge 2010).

Only in exceptional cases can it be justified to intervene coercively in people's lives in contravention of their own perceptions of their needs. This is one reason why determinations of whether or not people are impoverished should not use standards that are alien to the beliefs of the people in question. It is authoritarian and antidemocratic to guide policy by metrics that initially were decided and continue to be monitored by unelected and unaccountable economic "experts" and academics whose reasoning is opaque and who report little or no consultation with poor people. How to measure poverty in a particular context is a proper topic for open public discussion among all those concerned, including especially those whose situations will be assessed by the resulting measure.

4. What is Needed for a Better Metric?

4.1. Poverty as an Essentially Contested Concept

Reasonable people disagree over what constitutes poverty. They disagree both because the concept is indeterminate and because it relies on evaluative as well as empirical judgments. Both in being indeterminate and in having an evaluative dimension, poverty resembles many of the other concepts that philosophers investigate. For instance, concepts such as health, democracy, and justice, like truth, beauty, and goodness, all have sufficient empirical meaning that everyone agrees about their clearest cases, but these concepts leave considerable room for disagreement about controversial cases. Disagreement is not limited to questions about where to draw the line marking health from illness, democracy from autocracy, and justice from injustice; most if not all ordinary concepts, such as color concepts, have fuzzy borders. However, philosophical concepts generate debate not only over their extension or precisely where they apply; they also generate debate over their intension or conceptual meaning. Reasonable people disagree not only about whether the criteria for health, democracy, and justice are satisfied in borderline cases; they also disagree about what are the proper criteria for applying these concepts. In other words, people disagree about what constitute health, democracy, and justice. Concepts whose intensional meaning is subject to perennial debate are called "essentially contested" concepts (Gallie 1956).

If poverty is taken to be an essentially contested concept, it is to be expected that people's understandings of what it means to be poor will vary, just as their understandings of health or justice vary. Such disagreements are not merely matters of idiosyncratic individual opinion; typically, they also involve systematic differences in public community standards. In all communities, prevailing conceptions of poverty will be shaped by customary ideas about what is necessary for supporting life and for social respectability. This means that it makes no sense to seek a single best metric capable of identifying poverty at all times and in all places. Different poverty standards must be developed in different contexts to measure poverty among diverse populations for different purposes.

The flaws identified in existing standards suggest some of the necessary conditions that must be met by a morally acceptable metric designed to measure poverty at the global level today.

4.2. A Good Global Poverty Metric Must be Nonarbitrary and Widely Credible

Any proposed metric should have a credible and transparent rationale. The reasoning justifying it should be as transparent as possible, facilitating critical scrutiny of the assumptions and inferences on which the metric relies. The fact that conceptions of poverty are variable and contested does not mean that proposed poverty standards must therefore be arbitrary, in the sense of incorrigible, or that they must be subjective, in the sense of depending entirely on personal perceptions. A poverty measure may be taken as objectively justified when it is supported by open, accessible argumentation based on the best available evidence and valid inferences. This is not to say that the reasoning in favor of the proposed metric must be absolutely compelling, beyond reasonable disagreement. Such an aspiration is not appropriate for a concept that is essentially contested.

Concepts like intelligibility, plausibility, and credibility are always relative to particular audiences or constituencies. Proposed global poverty metrics must be credible to multiple constituencies. My argument so far has emphasized that morally acceptable poverty metrics must be credible to those people whose material situations they will be used to assess. No metric will be plausible to people if it is not responsive to their conceptions of what constitutes a decent life. Therefore a morally acceptable metric cannot disregard the cultural values and conceptions of material necessity and social decency that prevail in diverse communities. At the same time, a metric cannot be used to measure poverty on a transnational scale if it is restricted to items that are associated with poverty in only a few cultural contexts. In order to be both plausible and practical, a global poverty metric must have a sufficiently universal meaning that people across the world recognize it as continuous with their understandings of poverty and do not dismiss it as relativist, subjectivist, or not poverty at all.

It is obviously quite a challenge to develop a standard of poverty measurement that is intelligible, plausible, and credible both to economic experts and to people from very diverse cultural backgrounds. It is only worth undertaking this challenge because impoverished people across the world increasingly participate in an integrated economic order and are coming increasingly to share common understandings of material necessity and social respectability.

4.3. A Good Poverty Metric Must Reveal the Full Extent of Poverty and of Systematic Disparities in Material Well-Being

Recognizing that the meanings of poverty are contested does not imply that the suffering and hardships that poverty produces are not real and urgent. A second necessary condition for a morally acceptable global poverty metric is that it must be capable of revealing the privations suffered by those who really are materially worst-off in the present global order. In doing so, it will reveal the true extent of material inequality.

People suffer from different privations, and even similar privations do not affect everyone in the same way, depending on how they are situated. People's needs vary according to innumerable factors such as gender, age, and health, and also according to the economic context in which they live. The metric should, so far as possible, take account of differences in people's particular needs and in their social/economic situations.

Our research team is especially concerned to develop a metric that is gender-sensitive, revealing aspects of poverty that are related systematically to gender. However, gender is always lived out in the context of particular other social groupings, so a genuinely gender-sensitive metric must recognize the ways in which gender disparities in material well-being are affected by other systematic factors such as age, marital status, religion, ethnicity, and disability. It is important to reveal disparities along these dimensions both for their own sake and for the sake of achieving a poverty metric that is genuinely gender-sensitive.

One way in which existing poverty metrics have sometimes obscured disparities in material well-being is by measuring the average poverty of groups. This obscures inequalities among individuals within those groups. Especially but not only for measuring gendered poverty, it is important for the unit of assessment to be individuals rather than larger groups such as countries, ethnic groups, or even households.

4.4. A Good Poverty Metric is Subject to Several Pragmatic and Technical Constraints

A full discussion of pragmatic and technical constraints on poverty would be the topic of another paper, but a few points are worth mentioning.

It is best if the deprivations measured have considerable overlap with the items collected by existing poverty metrics. If there is no overlap, earlier statistics will have no relevance, and it will be impossible to identify poverty trends by comparing the present with the past. Indeed, unless there is overlap, critics could even object that the proposed new standard does not measure poverty at all. (Of course they can still make this objection even if some overlap exists.) Obviously, the overlap requirement is likely to be in tension with the desire to reform or transform existing metrics.

Collecting reliable evidence should not be too difficult or expensive. This means that the types of information required by a given metric should be limited. Since the metric is intended to be used on a global scale, it should be possible to collect the information for most countries.

Finally, good metrics should be easy to calculate and interpret, which provides an additional reason for utilizing limited types of evidence. It may be desirable for the final conclusion to be expressible in a single number.

Our project has developed a methodological approach designed to build a poverty standard that meets these conditions while also being morally acceptable.

5. Overview of Our Project's Approach

5.1. Summary of Our Goals

As noted above, the rationale for any poverty standard should be plausible not only to professional economists and practitioners of development but also to the people whose life situations are to be measured via that standard. The research team would like to synthesize and integrate the various experiences and perspectives on poverty held both by poor women and men and by professional poverty experts. In order to move toward integration, we have developed a three-phase approach, described below, which utilizes both qualitative and quantitative research methods as well as conceptual analysis and moral argument. We think that this approach will enable us to develop a poverty metric that is better justified than existing metrics both empirically and morally. The approach is based on the assumption that lay participants are capable of more than simply providing unreflective opinions, data, or intuitions, to be interpreted, conceptualized, theorized, and assessed by professional researchers. We assume that lay participants are also capable of providing critical reflection and assessment.

5.2. Phase I

In order to avoid reinventing the wheel, we began with a review of the professional knowledge contained in the vast multidisciplinary literature on gender and poverty, gender and development, and gender-sensitive measures of poverty. We did not simply go out and engage in undirected conversation with random people whom we regard as poor.

We then undertook fieldwork designed to uncover what the poorest people in some very poor countries think poverty consists in. We carried out fieldwork in six countries—Angola, Fiji, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique, and the Philippines—with three sites in each country. In each country, local teams collected data at three sites: a poor urban community, a poor rural community, and a marginalized community. We define a marginalized community as one that is not only poor, but also excluded, powerless, or subject to systematic discrimination in some distinctive way. It may be a religious or ethnic minority, or a group targeted for political reasons. It may be a community of identity or interest whose members are connected by some shared feature that makes them subject to systematic disadvantage, such as homelessness, ethnicity, religion, or membership in a sexual minority. The sites that were identified as marginalized varied significantly by country, but often included displaced persons, distinct ethnic groups, squatter settlements, or groups largely excluded from the provision of state services.

Our research began with a qualitative approach to learning about specific groups' experiences and conceptions of poverty. In Smith's language, we wanted to learn what poor people thought were the "necessaries" for a decent life. Our investigation was gender-sensitive in that it explored the perspectives of both poor women and poor men regarding what poverty is and how it should be measured. We were interested especially in differences that might exist between the perceptions of women and men who were otherwise similarly situated.

Phase I of the work was completed in spring 2011, and in March of that year as many team members as possible met in Canberra to analyze the data that had been collected and to compare results across research sites. The goal was to identify ideas that different communities shared about poverty on several dimensions and also to identify indicators capable of measuring the dimensions. We did not want to winnow out ideas without an explicit rationale for doing so and without consideration of the ethical implications of such exclusion.

5.3. Phase II

In 2012, fieldworkers returned to the communities with a questionnaire developed from the information provided in Phase I. The researchers asked people to assess the appropriateness and relative importance of various items proposed as dimensions of poverty and its concomitant hardships. This phase was intended to elicit information in a more quantitative form, seeking to identify with greater clarity the preferences and priorities of participants over a range of privations.

In the second phase, the research team wanted not only to continue learning what impoverished people think is necessary for a minimally decent life. We especially wanted to learn their priorities among a range of proposed necessities and deprivations in order to ascertain the relative importance that they assign to various areas of life. The information is intended to help the research team rule in or out different dimensions of deprivation for the final measure and to determine what weights should be assigned to different dimensions.

The second phase was gender- (and otherwise) sensitive in two ways. First, we carried out structured individual interviews, allowing disaggregation of responses by gender, age, and other factors like employment status and relationship status, which might reveal systematic gender and/or other variations in the priorities of participants. Second, we included for consideration in the list of necessaries items that are frequently discounted or excluded from measurement but may be of particular importance to women—such as leisure time, sexual rights, and reproductive rights.

5.4. Phase III

We intend to draw on both Phase I and Phase II, in combination with other thinking and research on the subject, to construct a gender-sensitive poverty measure for the third phase. In the third phase, we will take our pilot metric back to some of our lay participants to test whether they find that it captures their present understandings of poverty and its hardships.

6. Some Moral Commitments Incorporated into Our Project

Our project is feminist in senses that are moral/political, epistemic, and methodological. Below, I list some of our moral commitments and some tensions that we continue to try to negotiate.

6.1. Opposition to Injustice, Especially Gender Injustice

Our entire research enterprise is motivated by the desire to uncover aspects of poverty that are uncounted and unrecognized, especially those linked systematically with social structures such as class, caste, ethnicity, race, religion, and age. We are particularly concerned to expose the gendered dimensions of these social divisions, since gender shapes everyone's experience, men's as well as women's, boys' as well as girls,' and is frequently a site of injustice. We wish especially to reveal the gender-specific ways in which people are afflicted by poverty.

6.2. Rejection of Scientism

Our project is predicated on the recognition that poverty is not a natural phenomenon that exists independently of human values. People decide rather than discover what poverty consists in. Standards designed to assess whether people are impoverished or to determine their relative degrees of impoverishment incorporate judgments about which privations are morally crucial. We recognize explicitly that our research is more about creating and justifying an appropriate poverty metric than about finding out what poverty "really" is. What we produce will not be a super metric for all places, times, and purposes. Rather, it is a workable conception and metric with international comparability, which we think serves important purposes for the near future. Over time, as conceptions and circumstances change, this metric should be revisited through renewed processes of public reason.

Our research is explicitly normative. Its most exceptional feature is our commitment to developing a metric supported by explicit moral argumentation among poor people as well as poverty experts. We think that the distinctive contribution that philosophers can make to revealing feminized poverty is to provide critical moral scrutiny at every research level, from selection and design of the project, through human interactions at every stage of the process, to interpretation of data and disposition of the results. We intend to make explicit and to clarify the moral judgments implicit in our new proposed standard; to justify that standard with sound reasoning; and to reflect on our own moral authority to advocate the standard.

6.3. Transparency and Reflexivity

Our research team aspires to be open and transparent about our methodological and moral commitments and to maintain these in all stages and at all levels of our research. As part of this, we aim to be methodologically reflexive and continually aware of how the research process is affecting not only those whose lives we are studying but also how it is affecting us and how we are responding. This may well mean recording significant differences of opinion among researchers and perhaps even producing minority reports. Our overall goal is not to achieve a highly polished product that conceals the contingent investigative and discursive processes from which it emerged.

6.4. Resistance Both to Cultural Arrogance and to Cultural Romanticism

For reasons explained earlier, we are determined not to judge poor people's lives by standards that are foreign or alien to them. Moreover, if poor people's standards differ from those of professional "experts," we do not assume that poor people necessarily have adaptive preferences or false consciousness. Diagnosing and "treating" the adaptive preferences of poor people, especially poor women, is a philosophical mini-industry (Nussbaum 2000; Khader 2011). We do not doubt that poor people have adaptive preferences, but we see no reason to believe that the poor are any more susceptible to such preferences than the rich. We are sure that researchers, including feminist researchers, have adaptive preferences too. In our view, the only epistemically credible and ethically defensible way to determine whose preferences are adaptive is through power-aware conversations in which all views are treated with respect.

One team member aptly remarked that respect for the ideas of poor people does not mean reverence for those ideas. Recognizing that poor people are able to think critically does not mean denying that our team members are also able to do so. The professional team members regard ourselves as being in dialogue with our impoverished lay participants, and our research resists privileging exclusively the ideas of any individual or group.

6.5. Concerns about Power Inequities in the Research Process

Research projects intervene in people's lives in ways that must be guided by ethical reflection. Awareness of power disparities between professional researchers and lay participants, as well as among our team members, is important for both the ethical integrity of our process and the epistemic integrity of our conclusions.

We constantly strive to negotiate the tension between, on the one hand, the fact that the explicit goal of our research is to give voice to impoverished people and, on the other hand, that the professional team members inevitably direct the research. They initiated the project, framed it, pursued funding, designed the methodology, selected the sites for investigation, and appointed field researchers for those sites. They decide how the field research should be done and when it has been completed satisfactorily enough to deserve payment. Only team members attend face-to-face meetings and participate in electronic discussions about how to interpret and analyze our data. Although our team aspires to epistemic democracy, the professional members of the team ultimately decide the weight carried by the voices of lay participants. We aim for reflexivity and sensitivity to the ways in which power inequalities shape interactions between paid researchers and other participants, but we cannot be sure that blind spots and biases do not distort our reasoning.

Power inequalities also exist among the professional team members. One philosopher is the team leader and other principal and partner investigators are academics and NGO officials. Professional staff members have different responsibilities. People with professional credentials lead fieldwork at the various sites, but a main qualification for those conducting the interviews is fluency in a native language or dialect. Ethical issues are raised by problems of translation and also by questions about how to deal with disagreement in analyzing and interpreting our data. The team aims for consensus, but it is never certain that team members with less power or less fluency in English have not simply decided to remain silent. Committing ourselves to epistemic democracy should not mean acquiescing in the inexplicit and informal tyrannies endemic to structurelessness (Freeman 1972). We continue to work on developing explicit and fair procedures for balancing and reconciling divergent views among team members.

One way in which we try to mitigate power disparities among researchers is by inviting field researchers to participate in the analysis of the data they have collected, instead of just tabulating and analyzing the data centrally. We would like to continue to strengthen research capacity among researchers in poor countries; the team from the Philippines is explicitly committed to training people in doing research.

6.6. Concern about the Disparate Costs and Benefits of the Research Project to Participants Situated Differently in the Research Process

We worry about the fact that the costs and benefits of our research accrue very differently to people who are situated differently in the research process. In the short term, the professional members of the team receive most of the benefits of the research. Some members are paid directly for their work on the project, and most will advance their professional careers through publishing about it.

For the lay participants, the situation is quite different. Although they receive compensation of about $5 per day, their contributions often come at considerable personal cost. Being poor is hard, and talking about it can be traumatic. In describing the deprivations characteristic of poverty, impoverished participants in our research often found themselves reliving fear, humiliation, shame, and loss. Sometimes they cried. Interviews about poverty may be painful not only for respondents but also for researchers, who often experienced feelings of sadness and powerlessness. The personal pain of such interviews could be seen as raising problems for maintaining the objectivity of our research. For many of our researchers, they also raised ethical questions about how to respond appropriately at the time of interview and even about the moral justifiability of the entire research project.

These concerns have been intensified recently by a shocking event involving a citizen of the Philippines, who had been collaborating in our research. On July 22, 2012, Marilou Valle, the leader of a local nongovernmental organization in the Philippines, was shot and killed by civilian guards who were deputized by local authorities to "keep the peace" in the community. The killing appears to be a direct result of Ms. Valle's work on behalf of poor and marginalized communities. Since her death, members of Ms. Valle's family, including her children, have been threatened and have reason to fear for their own safety.

This terrible event provided our team with a dramatic illustration of the vulnerability of impoverished people and revealed that, in some cases, participation in poverty research may carry risks beyond psychic suffering. In recent workshops, some team members had already raised questions about the responsibility of professional researchers toward those who have contributed to our work. They asked how impoverished respondents might gain directly from research to which they have given their time and expertise, especially when their participation may have raised some hopes for change. The killing of Marilou Valle has made these questions even more urgent and acute. Our immediate response has been to write letters on behalf of the team to government officials, Philippine newspapers, aid agencies, and human rights organizations. We are also sending money to Ms. Valle's family.

All the members of our team hope that the significant costs of our research, borne disproportionately by the lay participants, will eventually be justified by the development of a better poverty standard capable of providing an accurate and fair measure of gendered poverty and inequality. Revealing the true extent of poverty and inequality is a small but necessary step toward reducing and perhaps eventually ending them.

Notes

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1. http://www.genderpovertymeasure.org (accessed November 2, 2012).

2. With recent surges in the price of basic foods, partly resulting from the increasing use of farmland to produce biofuels, the IPL likely masks even more poverty than it did when Pogge and Reddy published their criticism in 2005/2010. See various reports on the costs of food from the Food and Agriculture Organization, http://www.fao.org/isfp/isfp-home/en/ (accessed November 2, 2012).

3. There are actually two HPI indices, one for developing countries (HPI-1) the other for OECD countries (HPI-2). HPI-2 aims additionally to capture social exclusion, as measured by long-term unemployment.

4. Changes in poverty thresholds are always politically controversial, since altering the definition of poverty changes the numbers of people who count as impoverished. If official impoverishment carries entitlements to poor relief, many people obviously will want the line to be set higher, but other players may have reasons for wanting to keep the line low.

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