

United Nations
57th Commission on the
Status of Women Sessions
Reflection Paper

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First Impressions

Looking back, it did not really hit me for a long time that we are going to the United Nations to give presentations on our research papers. Even after we got to the New York City, I was just too excited (and concerned) to be away from my ordinary life as a college student. I have to say, however, I was nervous about staying in NYC for a week because I did not enjoy the city life the first time I visited NYC few years ago.

We spent the first day exploring the city and the United Nations Headquarters. After the registration, I had few hours to walk around and see the exhibitions (about what it takes for students around the world to get to school every day) inside the building, which clearly showed the mission of the United Nations. On the way out, I found portraits of the former and current United Nations Secretary-General. Those portraits reminded me of what my mom used to tell me when I was young. She used to encourage me that I would do big things when I grow up and that she can see me working in a place like the United Nations. Many years after, coming to NYC to present my research on ending violence against women and girls, it was my dreams come true. So it is indescribable how appreciative I was for this opportunity.

NGO CSW Forum Consultation Day

CSW started its 57th sessions with the Consultation Day forum on Sunday morning. When we got to the Armenian Convention Center, first thing we saw was a long line of people outside of the building. It was surprising (or shocking) to see that Jeff and I were the only men in line until I talked to few Japanese men later on. As other fellows and I started passing out hundreds of WomenNC fliers publicizing our presentations, I have had a chance to converse with many people. Yet, I failed to meet many men or young delegates like us.

It was only the first day of CSW sessions but I could sense the convention center charged with full of emotion and tension. Many women spoke out and expressed their anger

through singing, acting, stepping, asking questions, and encouraging others for actions. I would not say, however, they were necessarily angry at men. They were rather angry at the number of cases of violence against women and how they were handled back in their communities. This, to me, was something that united us very quickly regardless of the differences we might have.

The Consultation Day forum provided a range of panels featuring diverse aspects of this year's theme, eliminating and preventing violence against women and girls. The panels include trafficking of women and girls, the role of men, training in communication and social media. I was particularly impressed that they put a panel on the role of men because this means their commitment to and recognition of engaging men and boys in ending violence against women. From Bafana Khumalo, Senior Program Specialist of Sonke Gender Justice in South Africa – who expressed his concerns over alcohol consumption, possession of guns, parenting (need for men to be involved in children's lives; women get maternity leaves but what do men get for bonding with the children?), and investment for the research in the role of men – to Malika Dutt, CEO and founder of Breakthrough (Ring the Bell), it was a phenomenal panel as they connected theoretical works to practical examples.

Thanks to Beth (who shouted “we have a man here with a question!”), at the end of the panel, I got to ask a question, that was, “I find framing violence against women as a women's issue because it is essentially everyone's issue. How can we shift away from this societal attitude, not in a way putting men in a shame, but rather, encourage men to be part of the movement?” Although they did not have time to directly answer my question, it is something that we all should be mindful of, I thought.

Towards the end of their presentations, PCI Media Impact delegates wanted us to do interactive activities with our neighbors, I turned around and tried to talk with this lady behind me. She immediately said, “They did not target the audience like they told us to,

although they are doing their best.” During the conversation, she critiqued how this social media presentation was created for a selected audience, rather than the global audience. She even mentioned how the session was too intellectual for developing communities, and not practical enough. She even questioned circle of 6, which I disagreed with her. But then, she challenged me “Who is going to use it? Not all women can afford iPhones.”

This, to me, was a wake-up call that reactivated my critical thinking that I learned in Women’s Studies courses. She said she was sorry for being negative. But, in fact, she did not have to apologize because her concerns were rather constructive criticisms. In this field, especially, self-critique is crucial because our ultimate goal is to reach out to women (and men) as many as possible to end violence against women. I still think circle of 6 IS a useful app that many people can benefit from. Some of my friends use this app frequently. However, it is something that we need to deeply think about that the global audience might not have an access to technologies like we do in America. I fully appreciated the fact that these women and men are so passionate about their works; they challenge themselves to be even better through self-critique. Without self-critique, there is no progress; I applied this approach throughout the week as I attended more than 15 sessions.

Local to Global: WomenNC presentations

On the day of the presentation, it finally hit me that I am giving a presentation in front of about 100 experienced leaders in this field. The night before, Beth emphasized the importance telling a story in our presentations as it connects the audience to the message that we try to convey. I, personally, felt like I made the instant connection as soon as I shared my experience of interpersonal violence. That being said, I did not have any particular problems navigating my own presentation.

My favorite part of the session was the Q&A section; in a way, the number of

questions we get is a measurement of how the presentations went. One of the most challenging questions of the session was elaborating global expansion of American culture of masculinity. It is such a complex concept that I could not define in such a short amount of time. I ended up articulating myself through comparing Korean culture before the wider access of American movies, music, and TV shows and after they have become popular in Korea.

Creativity. Diversity. Energy.

After attending 16 sessions, there are three things I would like to touch on about 57th CSW gatherings. First, the conferences were full of innovative and creative ideas of ending violence against women and girls. From Ring the Bell campaign to Circle of Six, these are two of many strategies that were introduced at the conferences. One of the sessions that inspired me was hosted by Chinese feminists. They introduced their works on local villages and commercialized cities and provided a wide range of examples such as bruised bride street performances on Valentine's Day to raise awareness on domestic violence. Although the majority part of the session was in Chinese, I value the session as I got to see a variety of strategies in non-western communities. That being said, second, the diversity of the ideas and projects were unforgettable. This wide range of strategies incorporates music, art, sports, and technologies. The collaboration that PCI Media Impact has made with a popular hip co artist in Liberia, creating a song and a music video addressing violence against women, is such an effective way to motivate the community, especially young generations, fighting for advanced status of women. Last but not least, I cannot forget how energetic both panels and the delegates were at the sessions, sharing their projects and ideas back and forth and inspiring one another.

Engaging Men and Boys

Regardless of the subjects of the sessions, engaging men and boys came up in every single session as a common topic. This was a clear indication that there is a strong demand for men's involvement in enhancing status of women.

One thing I particularly paid attention to is what Dean Peacock, the executive director of Sonke Gender Justice Network, mentioned about funding for engaging men and boys program (Dean Peacock is also one of the founders of MenEngage, a global alliance of NGO leaders and UN agencies seeking for engaging men and boys for gender equality, that I suggested as an example of engaging men in global level). He said the governments need to expand their funds for programs eradicating violence against women and girls as a whole, rather than redistributing the limited amount of funds among the services that are absolutely needed for women and girls. This relates to my research as I critiqued the significant decrease of funding for engaging men and boys programs in the United States; if other services have been financially influenced by the newly established category of engaging men and boys, this is something we need to take in consider in the equation.

As far as the practices go, it seemed like the common thread was incorporating music or sports. For example, I was extremely impressed by the Canadian governmental session that introduced their collaborations with BC Lions Football team. The football players even gave presentations in local schools encouraging young students to be more than just bystanders. Nepali NGO leader, at the same session, discussed a similar kind of collaboration with a soccer team in Nepal. It was fascinating how they gained support from athletes and musicians who we often consider as idols in our lives and pushed the mission of engaging men and boys as they played as a role model for young men.

Lastly, I appreciated that there were a lot of efforts in theory developments and research studies on engaging men and boys as well as the practices. Theoretical works,

statistical backgrounds, and practices go together and I thought this is something we need back in North Carolina as it lacks theoretical works and statistical backgrounds.

Self-Critique

Like I mentioned earlier, self-critique is essential as we strive to have better resolutions for ending violence against women and girls. One of the concerns I had is the practicality of the innovative ideas and solutions. There were a record breaking number of delegates (6,000) at the CSW conferences this year. Those who are marginalized in such conversations need to be addressed and covered in a more extensive level. For example, at the session hosted by Avon foundation discussing emerging communication tools for violence against women prevention, (reflected upon the conversation with the lady at the Consultation Day forum) I asked how we can engage those who do not necessarily have such advanced technologies. One of the panels, then, discussed how graffiti worked effectively in a small town in Mexico to raise awareness for ending violence against women. Through this experience, I have learned that we need to be mindful of our privileges so that the conversations can be more fruitful and inclusive for all of us.

Additional critique is the lack of participation of the youth and men. I wonder if there was any push (like WomenNC) in CSW to gage in young delegates and male delegates. As a young male participant, this was an experience that I will never forget and I wish more men and young leaders have had a similar experience.

The Future

Participating in CSW conferences, I have made incredible connections with NGO leaders and UN agencies all around the world. I am excited to keep in contact with the people I have met as I pursue my passion for ending violence against women and girls. Meantime,

this is our time to put what we learned from the conferences into actions so that our local community in North Carolina can have a greater access to the United Nations and the Commission on the Status of Women. Other fellows and I will be working on WomenNC symposium that will be held at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

But lastly, I found hope at the CSW conferences. I have to say, I did not see many men at the conferences. However, those who I saw were fully committed and dedicated to end violence against women and girls. With this, I do not feel alone anymore. I used to feel alone because I felt like I was the only guy concerned with violence against women. But the conferences assured me that I am not alone; I am doing the right thing. Thus, I am extremely honored to join these men and fully inspired to continue my work to end all forms of interpersonal violence.

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