

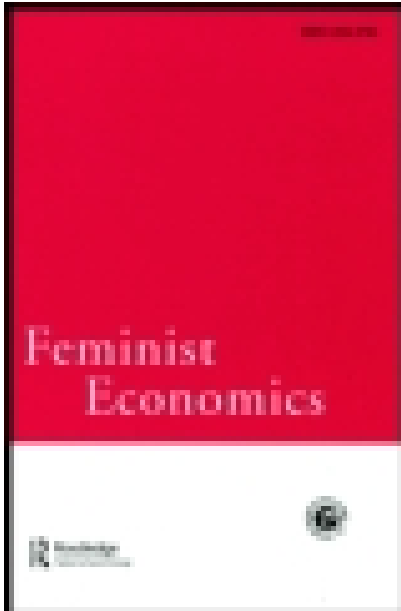
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Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics

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BOOK REVIEW

Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics, edited by Margunn Bjørnholt and Ailsa McKay. Foreword by Julie A. Nelson. Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2014. 279 pp. ISBN 978-1-92645202-9. (pbk.). \$34.95.

Counting on Marilyn Waring: New Advances in Feminist Economics is a joy to read and a revelation. In seventeen wide-ranging, well-written chapters, it demonstrates the span and depth of Marilyn Waring's global influence on feminist economics, politics, and culture. This book provides dramatic evidence of Margaret Mead's oft-cited maxim that the actions of thoughtful, committed people change the world. Looking back from the perspective of more than twenty-five years after the publication of Waring's pathbreaking book *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* (1988), we can see how her work, and the work of those she inspired, has brought about fundamental change and progress for women. While they are happening, advances are sometimes hard to discern; that's why books like this one, which document and celebrate progressive change, are welcome and needed.

Counting on Marilyn Waring was co-edited by IAFFE member Ailsa MacKay, who passed away in 2014. This book, Ailsa MacKay's last research contribution, is a fitting culmination of her lifelong work using economics to advance equity for women. Her own stellar career in public service, as a progressive policy advisor in Scotland and a global advocate for a basic income for all, is well reflected in the Introduction and first chapter of this book, both authored with Margunn Bjørnholt. The introductory chapter frames the book, pointing out that in times of economic crisis, "women have borne the brunt of austerity measures . . . [and] by continuing to absorb the dramatic costs . . . women will keep our economies afloat. However, with what impact, and is it a price worth paying?" (p. 8). They go on to state:

We need to build economic theory, as well as policies informed by those theories, on a more realistic assumption of human nature and human agency – taking "homo-socius" rather than "homo-economicus" as our starting point. Assuming that people are genuinely social provides a more optimistic view of human capacities to build

and maintain institutions and to pursue the common good. Mobilizing these human capacities is crucial in order to address the huge and manifold challenges of our time. (p. 12)

They cite three specific examples of how this can be done: Martha Fineman's work on vulnerability and resilience, Radhika Balakrishnan and Diane Elson's framework for macroeconomic policy evaluation, and Elinor Ostrom's principles for sustainably governing common resources.

Many older feminist economists will recall how Marilyn Waring's book *If Women Counted* affected their own intellectual growth and their careers. Most chapter authors in this collection (including many IAFFE members) share their individual stories of "ah-hah" moments, taking courage, or finding confirmation in Waring's writing and activism of research and policy gaps they also wanted to address. The chapters, written by feminist authors from five continents, discuss a range of topics: the ecological and justice implications of feminist economics grounded in Waring's holistic perspectives; unpaid work, care, and how to value and create space for important nonmarket social contributions; the costs society incurs when such nonmarket activities are ignored and undermined; ways of going beyond individual welfare and decision making to include community or shared activities and values; the importance of feminist visioning and grounded priorities in activism and policy work; feminist social movement strategies and pedagogical process; and the implications for global equity, justice, and policy of a feminist perspective. Chapter authors, in addition to the book's editors, include Iulie Aslaksen, Torunn Bragstad and Berit Ås, Sabine O'Hara, Iulie Aslaksen and Charlotte Koren, Johanna Varjonen and Leena M. Kirjavainen, Monica J. Casper and William Paul Simmons, Shirley Jülich, Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, Rod Dobell with Jodie Walsh, Hadara Scheflan Katzav and Shira Richter, Meena Shivdas and Anit N. Mukherjee, Heather I. Peters, Dawn Hemingway, Anita Vaillancourt and Jo-Anne Fiske, Marty Grace and Lyn Craig, Julie P. Smith, Mara Fridell and Lorna Turnbull, Jill Eichhorn, and Karen Webster.

Specific examples of the themes discussed in various chapters include the socioeconomic value of breastfeeding, HIV care, and women's political participation, and the socioeconomic costs of infant mortality and child sexual abuse; with regard to visioning, activism, and pedagogy, chapters discuss art and drama such as sculpture and photography by Shira Richter and Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, "feminist parkour" (p. 254) as a strategy to counter funding cuts and neoconservative politics through networking, and pedagogical mentoring of other activists and scholars via potluck suppers, collaborative research, and feminist ecological visioning.

Besides their collective importance in documenting progressive change stemming from Waring's work, the original chapters in this book each

represent a valuable contribution to feminist literature through their detailed reports on research and action projects, policy development, and knowledge production in relation to the many specific topics they cover. Going far beyond feminist economics *per se*, various authors address art and drama as political and educational self-realization tools for cultural change; the broad policy and growth implications of valuing unpaid work; the short step between care for humans and care for the environment; and justice for the victims of local and global patriarchal systems.

The audience for this book therefore includes not just feminist economists, but also feminists working in cultural studies, politics, education, law, global development, environmental studies, and psychology. While the book contains plenty of graphs, charts, economic statistics, and data documenting a range of feminist economics questions and progress (especially on estimating GDP, counting unpaid work, and conceptualizing feminist visions of good economic functioning), its contributions are much broader and include language, models, and examples of the kind of transgressive, creative, outrageous, and radical challenges to the status quo for which Waring herself is justly famous: what she has called “the opportunity to be wicked” (p. 3).

The book’s contribution to research on unpaid household and care work – in both theoretical and practical terms – is a particular strength. At least nine of the book’s seventeen chapters address aspects of unpaid care work, making this an excellent supplemental text for feminist economics courses that include the “why” and “how” of valuing this work, fundamental for societies and economies and largely done by women.

I have one small disappointment with this book: it contains a number of unfortunate typos and typesetting errors that are somewhat distracting. Also, an index and bibliography for the whole volume would have helped to make it more accessible to interdisciplinary researchers and students. But in general, each chapter is well documented and contains a thorough list of references, thus providing multiple points of entry to the related literature.

Of course, the need for the kinds of progressive change documented in this book is ongoing. But here are a few of the advances mentioned in this book that reflect the inspiration and catalyst provided by Waring’s ideas:

- IAFFE’s manifesto at the 2012 Barcelona conference on the limitations of neoclassical economics and neoliberal policy and the marginalization of women in the economics profession and of women’s unpaid work, which remains foundational to the economy. Economics is seen now as a discipline in crisis, which was not true twenty-five years ago.
- Martha Fineman’s research on vulnerability and the sources of resilience with the goal of “anchoring equality in the human condition” (p. 15).

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- Radhika Balakrishnan and Diane Elson’s framework for a legal and moral social containment of the economy using human rights to evaluate macroeconomic policies and hold governments to account.
- Elinor Ostrom and colleagues’ empirical work on the characteristics of sustainable commons governance – the “human capacity to build the institutions necessary for sustainable governance of the common earth systems that we all depend upon” (p. 17) – for which Ostrom won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009.
- Sabine O’Hara’s research on the characteristics and need for care and the constraints care may pose on sustaining production.
- Detailed Scandinavian measurements of unpaid work, which allow for the tracking of shifts from unpaid to paid care and household work and their implications for overall growth, consumption, income distribution, and social equity (a research program led by Charlotte Koren, Iulie Aslaksen, Johanna Varjonen, Leena Kirjavainen, and others).
- Recognition of the shortcomings of the neoliberal Millennium Development Goals as exemplified in the use of infant mortality rates to “measure” poverty reduction and progress, rather than women’s empowerment.
- Development of intervention programs for victims of sexual violence in New Zealand and elsewhere that sensitively support victims’ recovery while documenting the costs for society and the effectiveness of improved intervention.
- Inclusion of reciprocity and collective resource use for production in nonindividualized methods of counting unpaid work in the Pacific and elsewhere, leading to data collection and use and political empowerment for aboriginal and traditional communities.
- Reframed discourses on the relation of humans to the earth and its common heritage, human rights, and responsibilities: What Rod Dobell and Jodie Walsh call “contextualization, visualization and narrative within inclusive nested institutions to provide a foundation for deliberation and judgment leading to responsible decisions at local scale based on norms of cooperation and continuity, recognizing inherent rights of Nature along with fundamental human rights, including rights to a healthy environment” (p. 151).
- Use of art and drama as feminist methods of awareness building, consciousness raising, and political action in countless encounters and spaces worldwide.
- Participatory research design leading to the valuation of vulnerable or formerly uncounted views and the development of new policies, such as the “anticipatory social protection framework” for unpaid HIV caregivers in Uganda.

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- Hope and defiance in the face of funding cuts for women's social services, global networks for mutual support, and theoretical and practical defense regarding the value of unpaid work and women's social contributions.
- Significant scholarship in Australia on time-use surveys and other methods of counting unpaid work, fair wages for care workers, paid maternity leave, valuing breastmilk, and broader economic implications of feminist perspectives (research of Duncan Ironmonger, Waring herself, Julie Smith, and many others).

Many other feminist economists have also been influenced by Waring's work. This book provides an opportunity to look back, reflect on how change occurs, and take inspiration that remarkable progress is possible and that we collectively have a great deal of power to bring it about.

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