

**'Music, kindness, a government that listens to its people.'**

**From a gender perspective, to what extent does the UK Office for National Statistics approach to 'measuring national well-being' meet its aim?**

10,078 words

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September 2012

"I hereby state that this report is my own work and that all sources used are made explicit in the text"

## **Abstract**

This paper analyses, from a gender perspective, to what extent the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) approach to 'measuring national well-being' meets its aim. I argue that the aims of the project are promising from a gender perspective, and that the ONS programme does meet its aim of measuring national well-being as it defines it. However, adopting a gender perspective enables an analysis of the conceptualisation of well-being and methodology used in the programme that reveals substantial limitations in the programme's almost exclusive focus on existing quantitative data. I argue that ONS creates a measurable conception of national well-being that is aggregative and individualistic. As a result, it does not capture the role of care in creating well-being, mirroring a shortcoming of the economic indicators it seeks to complement. Thus I argue that, despite its promise, the ONS approach is not a valid measure of national well-being from a gender perspective, and that policymakers may wish to reconsider the assumption that well-being can be measured through existing quantitative data.

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## **1. Introduction**

In the public engagement exercise that opened the Office for National Statistics (ONS) programme Measuring National Well-being, respondents cited ‘music, kindness, a government that listens to its people’ (ONS, 2011a:5) as key elements of national well-being. In the context of such intangible phenomena, the ambition of ONS to measure national well-being is bold to say the least. This paper provides a gender analysis of whether ONS meets this aim.

Policy attention to well-being<sup>1</sup> has increased in Western nations, in part in response to a recognition of the limitations of using gross domestic product (GDP), an indicator of economic production, as an indicator of national well-being (European Parliament, 2011; Helliwell et al, 2012; OECD, 2007; Stiglitz et al, 2007). This policy attention draws on substantial academic literature. The capability approach looks beyond the economic to conceptualise well-being as a collection of capabilities and functionings, in other words, what people can do and be (Sen, 1985, 1999; Nussbaum 2000, 2003, 2011). A second seam of literature, drawing on utilitarianism, debates whether creating happiness should be the primary role of governments (Layard, 2005; Saint-Paul, 2011). Third, behavioural economics and behavioural psychology literatures set out

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<sup>1</sup> The terms well-being and happiness have been used variously across the literature. Generally ‘well-being’ indicates a wider scope often including material conditions and labour market activity. ‘Happiness’ is often used to refer to the emotional state or life satisfaction of the respondent. In some places, happiness is used more or less interchangeably with ‘subjective well-being’, although subjective well-being is also used more specifically to refer to psychological data on people’s evaluations of their own lives. In this paper I will use the term well-being to refer to broader conceptions of quality of life, and subjective well-being to refer to the specific data of this type. I do not refer to happiness, except when engaging with the work of others who use this term. This broadly mirrors the ONS terminology.

methods to measure people's happiness or subjective well-being (Dolan et al, 2007, 2008; Diener et al 2000, 2012; Strack et al 1990).

Gender scholars share the distrust of GDP and economic indicators as primary measures<sup>2</sup> of well-being, but their work challenges the assumption that happiness and well-being can be measured easily. Some gender scholars have focused their efforts on critiquing economic measures and developing new indicators of well-being, often including indicators of gender inequality (Dijkstra and Hanmer, 2000; Perrons, 2012; Plantenga et al, 2009). Ahmed's (2010:7) critique of happiness policy and happiness as a cultural imperative draws on Foucault and phenomenology to argue that happiness has a governmental function, orienting citizens to certain states and behaviours. To my knowledge, however, there has not yet been a gender analysis of the concepts and methodologies used to measure well-being in the policy literature.

Looking beyond the subject of well-being specifically, gender scholarship unsettles the aim of measuring well-being in a context of liberal citizenship. Feminist political theorists have explored the gendered character of liberal citizenship, excavating the masculine terms of the liberal individual model (Pateman, 1988; Brown, 1995) and questioning the assumption of autonomy as independence from other citizens (Nedelsky, 1989, 2012). This opens the question of whether conceptions of well-being are as neutral as the mainstream literature suggests. Feminist policy scholars and feminist economists have explored how mainstream policy and economics take inadequate account of care, (2005; Daly, 2002; Donath, 2000; Nelson, 1995), drawing attention to what may be omitted by mainstream conceptions of well-being. Finally, feminist epistemological work highlights and politicises the relationship between methodology and the creation of knowledge (Griffin and Phoenix, 1994; Harding, 1995;

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<sup>2</sup> I also follow the ONS use of the term 'policy measure' to refer to indicators and data that measure the impact of policy. I do not use the term 'policy measure' to refer to a course of policy action or a policy implementation.

Jayarathne and Stewart, 1991; Letherby, 2004) and foregrounds subjective and located knowledge rather than positivist assumptions of objectivity (Code, 1993; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1995; Griffin and Phoenix, 1994). This opens the question of how policy *creates* knowledge about well-being, rather than transparently recording it, and what part the measurements themselves play in this process.

This paper addresses the question of whether, in light of this body of gender knowledge, the ONS meets its aim of measuring national well-being. In answering this question, I explore both to what extent the ONS methodology is adequate to meet its stated aims, and to what extent taking a gender approach supports, shifts or challenges the ONS approach to well-being. I argue that the ONS project meets its aim of measuring national well-being, if one follows the programme's own rather bounded scope. From a gender perspective, the aims of the project have much promise, including putting the experiences of citizens at the centre of national well-being and focusing on the distribution of well-being across the population, but there are limitations to the approach. The ONS place bounds around the type of data that can be used which lead it to construct a conception of national well-being that is measurable, but overlooks the complexity of the concept of well-being. I argue that the programme conceptualises national well-being as measurable, aggregative and individualistic. This ensures that the well-being of all citizens is incorporated in the programme, but obscures interconnections and care, echoing the economic indicators the programme places itself in opposition to. The programme's inadequate acknowledgement of care and relationships as intrinsic to well-being invalidates its conception of well-being from a gender perspective. Furthermore, it is possible to challenge the programme's insistence that well-being must be measured quantitatively, relying as it does on the assumption that individuals know and transparently express their emotional states. As such, I argue that from a gender perspective, the programme cannot be said to meet its aim of measuring national well-being.

The paper proceeds with a literature review in which I further explore the literature outlined above and situate my paper within it. The methodology section provides an overview of the ONS programme and my reasons for selecting it, and summarises how I conducted my research. I present my analysis and the argument outlined in the previous paragraphs in four parts, analysing the ONS concepts, measurements and assumptions at progressively deeper levels. First I analyse the aims and scope of the programme, then the conceptualisation of well-being, the absence of care, and the positivist assumptions on which the programme is built. I conclude with my reflections on the question and the implications of my analysis for measuring well-being.

## **2. Literature review**

Recent years have seen a 'happiness turn' (Ahmed 2010) in international policy, led by Western nations, in which national governments and international organisations have paid increasing attention to the well-being of their populations. The Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, or Stiglitz Commission (Stiglitz et al, 2007), was foundational to this shift. It called for politicians and policymakers to recognise the limits of GDP in measuring well-being and recommended that policy measurement systems 'shift emphasis from measuring economic production to measuring people's well-being' (Stiglitz et al, 2007:paragraph 21). With Sen a co-author, the report drew on the capability approach to advocate for measurement of well-being in the domains of material living standards (income, consumption and wealth), health, education, personal activities including work, political voice and governance, social connections and relationships, environment (present and future conditions) and physical and economic insecurity (paragraph 28). In response, the OECD (2007) and European Commission (2009) have requested that member countries develop measures of well-being beyond the economic. The Stiglitz report

(paragraph 33) and the European Commission Communication (2011:18) both specifically reference the need for measures of subjective well-being, in other words, citizens' self-reported views of their happiness and life satisfaction. The greatest focus on measures of subjective well-being is found in the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al, 2012), commissioned for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Happiness. It compares the subjective well-being of countries around the world and includes a case study on the UK Office for National Statistics programme 'Measuring National Well-being' programme as an exemplar of the measurement of well-being (100-103).

Three impulses in the mainstream policy literature converge on the thesis that GDP is not an adequate indicator of well-being, that well-being or happiness approaches are preferable, and that the priorities of government should shift accordingly. First, the capability approach (Sen 1985, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000, 2003, 2011) places what people can do and be at the centre of its framework, with the implication that policy has a role in creating these conditions. Second, the reconsideration of utilitarianism as the preferred mode of government (Layard, 2005; Saint-Paul, 2011) places the happiness of citizens at the centre of the role of government. This has much in common with the third set of literature, behavioural economics and behavioural psychology, which focuses on what drives subjective well-being and how to measure it (Dolan et al, 2008; Dolan and White, 2009; Diener et al, 2000; Diener et al, 2012), and how governments can intervene in the decision-making of citizens to increase their supposed well-being (Bok, 2010; Greve, 2010; Halpern, 2009; Thayer and Sunstein, 2008; Thin, 2012).

It is outside the scope of this project to provide a sustained critical engagement with the arguments and implications in this literature, however I would like to draw attention to two points before I move to the gender literature. First, these literatures contain critiques of the over-riding focus on economic production in mainstream economics

(European Commission, 2009; Halpern, 2009; Helliwell et al, 2012; Layard, 2005, OECD, 2007; Stiglitz et al, 2007, Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). As I will outline below, this is not a 'new' piece of knowledge from a gender perspective. This opposition to GDP is in part a rhetorical move that deflects attention from the other types of data already held by governments on their citizens well-being, be it satisfaction with public services (Department for Work and Pensions, 2012) or civic engagement (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011), to give just two examples. Second, this literature has been composed almost entirely by advocates of the approach (Dolan et al 2007, 2008; Helliwell et al, 2012, Layard, 2005; Stiglitz et al, 2007) or by policy academics and policymakers who are concerned with applying the approach to policymaking or evaluation (Bok, 2010; Greve, 2010; Thin, 2012). As a result, there is an absence of critical engagement with the concepts and methodologies of this literature and its application to policy.

The gender literature on well-being and indicators shares the mainstream concern with the limitations of GDP as an indicator of well-being, but provides critiques and alternatives that take greater account of gender inequality. At the macro level, feminist literature on indicators has focused on quantifying gender inequality either alone or as one variable in broader indicators (Dijkstra and Hanmer, 2000; Perrons, 2012; Plantenga et al 2009). Other work has focused on the topic of well-being as a gendered historical and institutional construction, but has not analysed the happiness turn specifically (Addabbo et al, 2010; Addis et al, 2011; Harris et al, 2009; Woodward et al, 2011). The capabilities approach (Sen, 1985, 1999, Nussbaum 2000, 2003, 2011) can also be read as a feminist approach to well-being because is founded on a commitment to the well-being of each individual citizen, and so the well-being of women is at its core. A shared concern in this work, not present in the mainstream literature, is an awareness of the politics of measurement and a focus on what is hidden or over-simplified by indicators.

This critical edge is pushed to the fore in gender scholarship that deals with matters relating more broadly to the construction of knowledge about well-being in a liberal context. Three veins of gender literature raise questions that are particularly relevant to the matter of well-being as a policy measure, and which I will use to analyse whether the ONS approach is adequate to 'measure national well-being' from a gender perspective. The first provides gender critiques of liberal models of citizenship, including the gendered terms of the liberal individual (Pateman, 1988; Brown, 1995), and the assumption that autonomy means independence from other citizens (Nedelsky, 1989, 2012). This draws our attention to how the very terms of participation in a state are gendered, and raises the question of whether the approach to well-being is as neutral as the mainstream literature may suggest. The second focuses on the tension between care as central to social life, yet frequently absent from mainstream economics, policymaking and policy scholarship (Daly, 2002; Donath, 2000; Nelson 1995). This raises the question of how care is conceptualised in the ONS programme, and with what effect. The third is feminist epistemological work that politicises the relationship between methodology and the creation of knowledge (Griffin and Phoenix, 1994; Harding, 1995; Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991; Letherby, 2004); foregrounds subjective and located knowledge rather than positivist assumptions of objectivity (Code, 1993; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1995; Griffin and Phoenix, 1994); and argues that knowledge is held within communities rather than by individuals (Harding, 1993; Nelson, 1993; Potter, 1991). These works approach different questions and draw on different epistemological traditions, but together they raise the challenges of whether well-being can even be measured, and how the ONS definition of well-being and approach to measuring it are inter-related.

These three veins of gender literature<sup>3</sup> have not been brought to the discussion of well-being before, to my knowledge. I believe that placing them in dialogue with the ONS programme, alongside a critical approach to the ONS methodology, will fruitfully enable analysis of the fundamentals of the programme's approach to measuring national well-being that the mainstream literature does not. My analysis will also draw on Ahmed's (2010) critique of the happiness turn, which includes some attention to happiness policy (1-20) and provides a sustained critique of happiness policy from a gender perspective. Ahmed develops her critique using a different set of analytical tools to those I will use here, however. Taking a phenomenological approach and drawing on Foucault's concept of governmentality, Ahmed argues that the concept of happiness has a conservative and regulatory function in society, reinscribing 'what is already evaluated as being good as good and directing us towards those things as supposed sources of happiness (7). I take from her work the somewhat narrower questions of how ONS conceptualises well-being on an individual and national level, and the relationships between them.

### **3. Methodology and about the ONS Measuring National Well-being programme**

I have selected the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics 'Measuring National Well-being' programme as the focus of my analysis for several reasons. First, the programme provides substantial material for analysis. The programme published just

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<sup>3</sup> Other gender literature on well-being enables different approaches to the ONS programme that I do not pursue here. I do not focus on gender inequality in well-being (Addabbo et al, 2011; Addis et al, 2010; Harris et al, 2009; Woodward et al, 2011), or whether the responsibility for well-being work is gendered (Hochschild, 1983). Unlike Ahmed and Ehrenreich (2010) I am not concerned with the broader social effects of the happiness turn. Lastly, I do not delve into the gender-inflected literature on the politics of affect (Panagia, 2009; Protevi, 2009; Tomlinson, 2010), thereby upholding an analytical distinction between the well-being of a population and the affectual experiences of citizens, which those theorists may question.

under forty documents between November 2010 and July 2012, in my language, English. Second, the programme presents well-being as a shared and contested concept, which aligns with my understanding of it. The programme has published documents relating to a public engagement exercise it held on happiness and has published iterations of its framework, as well as advisory papers from academics on measuring national well-being. Third, the programme is central to the ‘happiness turn’ in policy outlined above. ONS positions itself as in dialogue with the international policy community working on happiness (ONS, 2011a:3-7, 2011c:4,22, 2011i:10), many of the internationally influential thinkers on well-being and happiness are advising the ONS<sup>4</sup> (ONS, 2012), and it is featured as an exemplar country by Helliwell et al (2012:160-163). Fourth, the UK is taking a textbook approach to fulfilling the international requirements in collecting this data, by using domains that follow the Stiglitz Commission (2007) recommendations almost exactly, and collecting subjective well-being data as recommended by the European Commission (2009) and Helliwell et al (2012). It is possible that other countries that adopt well-being as a policy measure will follow these recommendations and take a similar approach to the UK, in which case my analysis may have some applicability their work.

The documents published by the ONS programme are listed in the bibliography, grouped into those which were core to my analysis (marked here with an asterisk) and those which were not. Some documents record the public engagement exercise entitled the ‘National Debate on Well-being’, in which the views of UK citizens on national well-being were collected (ONS 2011b\*, 2011i\*, 2012f, 2012i, 2012p). Others set out the overall approach ONS will use to record well-being (ONS 2011a\*, 2011c\*, 2012b\*, 2012b1\*, 2012d). Most provide discussion of the domains on which well-being

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<sup>4</sup> Professor Paul Dolan, Dr. David Halpern, Professor Daniel Kahneman, Lord Layard, Professor Joseph Stiglitz, Professor Amartya Sen.

data will be collected<sup>5</sup>, and provide existing data in these areas (ONS, 2011d, 2011e, 2011f, 2011g, 2011h, 2012a\*, 2012c\*, 2012e, 2012h, 2012j, 2012k, 2012m, 2012n, 2012o, 2012q, 2012r, 2012s, 2012t, 2012u, 2012v). The programme has also published a small number of discussion papers on various existing and potential aspects of the programme by specialists in these areas: subjective well-being (Dolan for ONS, 2011; Dolan et al for ONS, 2011; ONS 2011h), time-use data (Gershuny for ONS, 2012\*) and longitudinal studies (Longview for ONS, 2012). I have also analysed two documents that were published by the Prime Minister's Office as part of the official launch of the programme, a speech (Number 10 Downing Street, 2010a) and press release (Number 10 Downing Street, 2010a), to provide political context to supplement the rather technical ONS documents.<sup>6</sup>

I conducted a qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Prior et al, 2011; Wesley, 2010) of the core ONS documents, undertaking three readings of each document and coding the themes as is standard for this methodology (Wesley 2010). I began my analysis by reviewing all the published documents but focused the repeated readings on the core documents that were most relevant to my research question. I selected qualitative document analysis as my approach because it enables focus on both the content and themes contained within the documents. During my first reading of the documents, it became clear that my question could best be answered by focusing on the aims, scope and methodology elements of the programme, than more discursive or thematic discussion of the concept of well-being. Accordingly I kept the rigour of the qualitative document analysis approach, but focused more on methodology. This was

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<sup>5</sup> The domains are individual well-being, our relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, education and skills, the economy, governance, the natural environment (ONS, 2012b:3-11).

<sup>6</sup> The ONS is an executive office of the UK Statistics Authority, an independent body operating at arm's length from government. Through the UK Statistics Authority, the ONS is directly accountable to Parliament rather than a government minister and as such its publications reflect a degree of independence from the government of the day.

a fruitful approach because it led me to find disjunctures between the discussion of well-being and the measures used by ONS. Qualitative document analysis aside, my approach has been very much influenced by the gender literature I use to discuss the ONS programme, in particular in my focus on the assumptions underpinning the ONS methodology and my focus on what is omitted by ONS.

A limitation of my methodology is that the ONS programme is still evolving and I am analysing it before its completion. However there have already been iterations of framework and initial results, so it is my judgement that the documents I have analysed have made a substantive contribution to measuring well-being in the UK and my conclusions hold for the programme at the time of writing. There is an opportunity for further analysis of future publications in the series, as well as the approaches of other nations to measuring well-being.

A consideration in selecting my research question and methodology has been that I have studied part-time at the London School of Economics, alongside employment as a civil servant, currently as a policy team leader in the Cabinet Office. Accordingly I have sought to manage the tension between my professional and academic activities, not least the convention that that civil servants refrain from publicly<sup>7</sup> offering their views of the policy of the government they serve. Qualitative document analysis seemed a very suitable methodology to manage this tension, requiring me to stick close to policy documents and substantiate my points with direct quotations. These requirements had a further productive effect in ensuring that I produced a gender and social policy analysis of the ONS approach to well-being, rather than a policymaker's professional

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<sup>7</sup> Although this document is not public in the sense that it has been written in a personal capacity for a limited audience, it is public to the extent that it has been written in expectation that others will read, respond and potentially circulate it.

critique focusing on how I would have approached the programme differently had I been leading it<sup>8</sup>.

#### **4. Promise and tensions in the aims and scope of the programme**

I will begin by exploring the ambitious aims of the programme. I find much promise in these aims from a gender perspective, in particular the move beyond GDP as a primary indicator of citizen's well-being and the implicit acknowledgements that the government and national statistics do not know everything about life in the UK, and that citizens have their own understandings of well-being. However the aims of the programme are very bounded by the requirements of national statistics, bounds that sit in tension with the ambitious aims. Although the programme does seem to meet its aims within in these narrow bounds, the disjuncture between the aims and scope begs the question of whether the narrowness of the approach enables ONS to adequately measure national well-being.

The ONS documents do not contain a universal statement of the aims of the project. The most definitive statements of aims are made in the first discussion paper of the proposed domains and measures of well-being (ONS, 2011c:1):

The aim of the programme is to develop and publish an accepted and trusted set of National Statistics that helps people to understand and monitor national well-being

And in a modified version of that statement which is used as standard text in subsequent documents (ONS, 2012b:13, 2012c:38, 2012i:6, 2012h:38, 2012n:20, 2012o:19):

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<sup>8</sup> An impulse I have had to avoid indulging in my analysis!

The programme aims to produce accepted and trusted measures of the well-being of the nation - how the UK as a whole is doing. It is about looking at 'GDP and beyond'

From a gender perspective, there is considerable promise in the commitment to look beyond GDP, particularly when read alongside the centrality of public engagement to the programme (ONS, 2011b, 2011i, 2012i). This acknowledges that the government does not currently have an adequate grasp of the well-being UK citizens, and that existing data such as GDP do not capture everything. The statement that the measures will only be adequate if they are 'accepted and trusted' by an unspecified audience, presumably one outside policy circles seen as the ONS are engaging the public in the development of the approach, implies that well-being is a contested concept on which government and citizens need to develop mutual understanding.

The aims statements are accompanied by what I will term a scope statement that sets out how the project will be undertaken, which also contain much promise from a gender perspective. The National Statistician provides this scope statement in reflecting on the public engagement exercise (2011i:8):

A framework to understand national well-being should reflect the following:

- individual well-being is central to an understanding of national well-being. It includes objective circumstance, for example an individual's employment status; and subjective well-being which includes the individual's experiences and feelings
- national well-being is affected by how these circumstances, experiences and feelings are distributed across society, and how well current levels of well-being can be sustained into the future or between generations

- a set of domains, such as health, and education will need to be established to help capture the individual measures which together determine national well-being
- local factors are also relevant to well-being, e.g. access to green spaces and strength of community involvement

The commitment to analysing the distribution of well-being across the population chimes with a gender focus on inequality. The commitment to collecting data across domains correlates with the capability approach (Sen 1985, 1999; Nussbaum 2000, 2003, 2011) in seeing a person's well-being in the round. It reflects that well-being is experienced across different spheres and that multiple factors affect whether a person experiences well-being. Further, the domains chosen later in the programme<sup>9</sup> take account of the things people in the public engagement exercise said were important to them.

The inclusion of 'subjective' as well as 'objective' data recognises that the everyday experiences and feelings of citizens are important to national well-being and that people's perspectives on life in the UK differ. The use of subjective well-being data places citizens' evaluations of their own lives, the worth of the things they do, and their levels of happiness and anxiety at the centre of national well-being (ONS 2012b:3). It brings to mind the calls of feminist epistemologists for subjective and located knowledge rather than claims of objectivity (Code, 1993; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993). Haraway (1998:589) argues that

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<sup>9</sup> The domains are individual well-being, our relationships, health, what we do, where we live, personal finance, education and skills, the economy, governance, the natural environment (ONS, 2012b:3-11).

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims ... I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.

Although Haraway's object of critique is the false assumption of objectivity in philosophical and scientific knowledge, there is a parallel with the shift from economic indicators to the views of citizens on the value they place on their lives and activities. These views are acknowledged by ONS as both partial ('subjective') and central to national well-being. The programme thus places the partial and located views of citizens at its core.

However, this breadth of the programme's aims and scope is in tension with its requirements for the data that will be used to measure national well-being. Much less emphasis is placed on these requirements than on the aims but they are central to the construction of the measurement framework (ONS, 2011c:7):

ONS would prefer to use measures which are:

- Available for the UK
- Policy relevant
- Internationally comparable
- Have a time series and are likely to be available in the future
- Can be shown and compared for countries in the UK, regions of England, and smaller geographic units where required

- Can be analysed in ways which show distribution of outcomes for individuals or households, e.g. analysis for poorest and richest households or by age group or employment status

It is understandable that stringent quality requirements must be fulfilled for data to be used by the ONS, and data restrictions are a frequent difficulty for indicator projects (Sigle-Rushton, 2009). It is also understandable that policymakers place boundaries on the scope of their projects in order to make them manageable. But that said, these requirements effectively limit the programme to existing quantitative data<sup>10</sup>. Subjective well-being is the exception as new questions will be added to the Annual Population Survey to gather these data (2011c:4, 2012b:3).

To put this tension aside for a moment, this approach does enable ONS to meet its own aims, within this narrowed conception of measuring national well-being. ONS has assembled and published a series of measures across domains of life outside the economic (2012b), which reflect their record of what citizens expressed as important to well-being in the public consultation (ONS, 2011b, 2011i, 2012f, 2012i, 2012p). The data meets the criteria of national statistics outlined above, so in that sense it can be said to be 'accepted and trusted'. Taken at face value, then, the ONS programme can be said to meet its aims. However from a gender perspective, the conceptualisation of well-being and the effects of the measurement approach require further analysis. To begin this analysis, I turn to the conceptualisation of well-being used by ONS.

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<sup>10</sup> It is possible to speculate that constraints of time and budget play a part in limiting the scope, though this is not stated in the documents. Either way, the effect on the measurement approach is the same.

## **5. Well-being as measurable, aggregative and individualistic**

The measurement framework and criteria for data contained in the programme's statements of aims and scope are firmly intertwined with the programme's conceptualisation of well-being. Following Ahmed's (2010) exploration of happiness, I argue that the concept of well-being used in the ONS programme is performative. I depart from Ahmed's analysis in arguing that the crux of this performative moment in ONS is not just about simultaneously finding well-being in places, denoting them as good and promoting them as goods, but also about locating well-being in places that can be measured by the methods the ONS deems appropriate. Rather than measuring national well-being in its complexity, then, the ONS *creates measurable national well-being*. Intrinsic to this is the conceptualisation of national well-being as aggregative, both in the counting methodology used by ONS to build national well-being from data on individual well-being, and in the structure of the domains of data from which national well-being is composed. The use of domains creates disjuncture as much as unity, and the methodology rests on the assumption that national well-being is the aggregate of individual well-being, with separate acknowledgement of distribution and sustainability. As such, the 'national' in 'national well-being' carries little weight. I argue that the well-being of the nation is composed by aggregating the well-being of liberal individuals, conceptualised as independent from other rather than embedded in social relationships.

### **Measurable well-being**

For Ahmed, proximity to certain objects or states is central to the functioning of happiness. Her object of critique is 'happiness', a term she uses variously to refer to some or all of the following: subjective well-being; the happiness turn in policy; positive

psychology; and the social and cultural effects of viewing happiness as an ideal state. Although this is a wider referent than well-being as defined by ONS, much of Ahmed's critique is relevant here, not least because she is in part writing response to Prime Minister Cameron's plans to measure happiness while he was in opposition (2010:3). Drawing on Butler (1990), and through Butler drawing on Austin (1975), Ahmed (2010: 6-7) traces the performative mechanism in happiness:

The science of happiness could be described as performative: by finding happiness in certain places, it generates those places as being good, as being what should be promoted as goods ... The science of happiness hence redescribes what is already evaluated as being good as good.

Through this process, citizens are directed to certain associations (2) and attending to those associations becomes a duty (6). Ahmed's analysis has a strong resonance with how the ONS conceptualises well-being through domains and measures of physical and mental health, what we do (i.e. work and leisure), personal finance, education and skills, our relationships, where we live (ONS, 2011c:2). It is implicit that certain states and behaviours are linked to well-being. To give just two examples, expressing the view that it is not difficult 'to get by financially' is read as well-being in personal finance (2012b:8), and volunteering is read as well-being in 'what we do' (6), with the implication that being financially comfortable and volunteering are states of well-being. The ONS programme puts these states on the official national record as states of well-being, against which people will judge their own well-being and orient their own activities.

But if we depart from Ahmed's discursive analysis and focus on the ONS methodology itself, a different performative movement comes into view. In the previous section, I noted the disjuncture between the aims of the programme and its requirements for data. Accordingly, if the programme can only record what is measurable in a way that

meets its criteria for data, then the programme constitutes states of well-being through their very measurability. In other words, only things that can be measured appear in the programme, and only those things are recorded as states of well-being. Rather than simply 'measuring national well-being' in its complexity, then, the programme *creates national well-being as measurable*.

### Aggregative well-being

Central to this creation of a measurable notion of well-being is aggregation, demonstrated in three exemplars of the relationship between individual and national well-being. These explanations of the development of the measurement approach focus on the process of aggregation through which national well-being is developed (2011a:7):

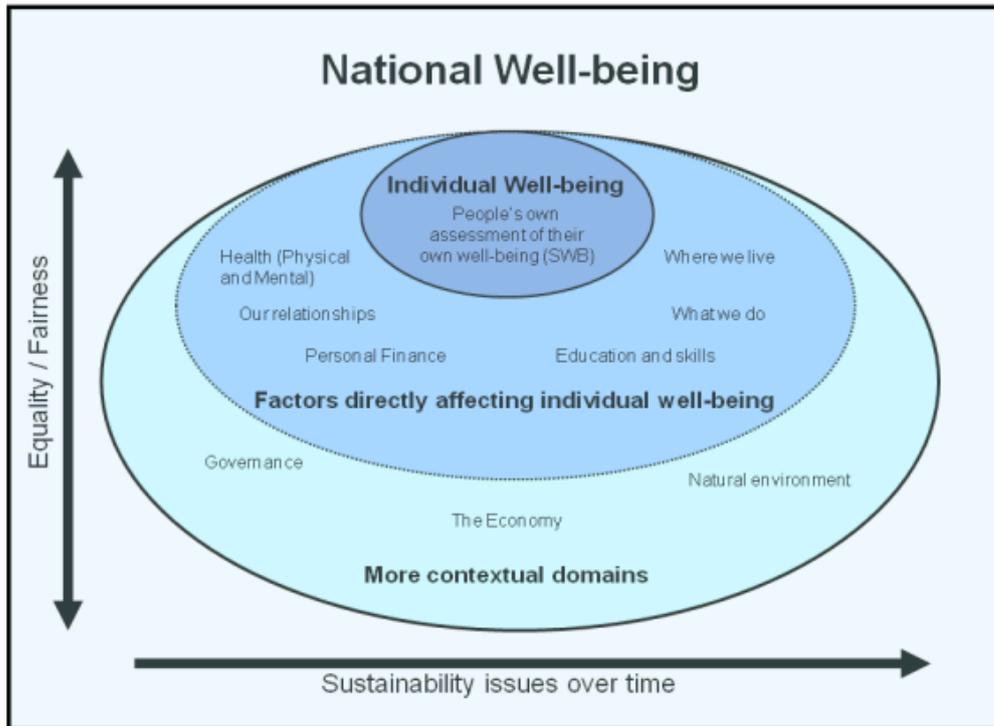
ONS regard national well-being as being centred around the well-being of individuals, however, it is more than the sum of individual well-being. It also encompasses the equality with which this well-being is distributed across society and the sustainability of this level of well-being into the future on between generations.

And later (10):

ONS will develop a national well-being measurement framework which will reflect the following underlying key concepts

- Individual well-being is central to understanding of national well-being
- National well-being is affected by how these circumstances, experiences and feelings are distributed across society

In diagrammatic form, ONS shows how the well-being of individuals is plotted through the domains and contextual elements. The factors are grouped by type and are in proximity to each other, but exist alongside each other rather than being inter-related.



**Figure 1: National well-being framework (ONS, 2011c:2)**

This aggregative model is displayed most boldly in the measures that compose the domains themselves. To give one domain as an example (ONS, 2012b1:5-6), the measures for the domain of 'What we do'<sup>11</sup> are:

- Unemployment rate
- Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their job

<sup>11</sup> I focus on the domain 'What we do' because it includes what the ONS terms 'subjective' data (satisfaction), it includes an existing quantitative measure (unemployment rate) and, as I will discuss later, it excludes anything that is not already measured quantitatively as either work or leisure.

- Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their amount of leisure time
- Percentage who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their use of leisure time
- Percentage who volunteered in the last 12 months

There are three forms of aggregation at work here. There is the aggregation of the expressed views and experiences of individual respondents, which create the data themselves. There is the aggregation of information within domains, as unemployment, use of time, satisfaction with time and volunteering come together to represent 'what we do'. There is also aggregation across the domains, as they are brought together under the banner of national well-being.

It could be argued that aggregation is the only way to create a bottom-up measure of national well-being which avoids putting measures like GDP at the centre, and ONS implicitly takes that position. I do not contend that aggregation is invalid as a way to produce measures of national well-being, as of course the national and the individual are linked. Equally, I do not contend that issues of distribution and sustainability are peripheral to understanding the well-being of a nation, and I welcome that these concepts are integral to the ONS approach. My contention is that a plainly aggregative model does not show the relationships between domains of well-being or people. The domains may have been created with the intention of encompassing the breadth of factors related to well-being, and they do perform this function to the extent that they capture the concepts they seek to represent (I will return to this in the case of care below). They also and follow the approach recommended internationally by the Stiglitz Commission and OECD, and make the task of measuring well-being more manageable. However, they have the consequence of focusing on the different

elements on well-being, rather than the interconnections. For example, there are no links between the domain of 'health' and 'what we do', even though a person's health has a dramatic impact on what they are able to do, and what they do may have an impact on their health.

Core in this aggregation is a very straightforward view of the 'national' in 'national well-being'. The nation is not a body greater than the sum of its (citizen) parts, but only the aggregation, distribution and sustainability of their individual well-being. The national is aggregated from the people who are represented in the data, and receives attention in the examples of aggregation quoted above, as concern with distribution of this well-being across the population. In the first two statements, distribution and sustainability constitute the 'national' element of 'national well-being'. In Figure 1, the axes of 'equality/fairness' and 'sustainability issues over time' are superimposed on the domains, though without challenging the aggregative model. The statistics that make up 'What we do' can be disaggregated by demographic characteristics. From a gender perspective, this focus on equality is welcome and there are advantages to using a thin concept of nation. Yuval-Davis (1997) has argued that nationalism and nation-building projects are linked to inegalitarian gender regimes, with women's primary role located in the reproduction of the nation. But in the context of the ONS programme, the thin conceptualisation of nation enables the ONS to neglect the interconnectedness of people's experiences of well-being.

#### Individualistic well-being

If the well-being of the nation is composed of the well-being of individuals, what characteristics do these individuals have? The programme's conceptualisation of well-being as aggregative relies on the model of the liberal individual, which is an ambivalent move from a gender perspective. On the one hand, individualism incorporates the well-being of each woman in the nation as an end (Nussbaum,

2000:56-67). On the other hand, it stresses isolation rather than interdependence (Nedelsky 1989, 2012), which has an impact on what the ONS measures as well-being.

Liberal individualism is at the centre of feminist defences of liberalism. Nussbaum (2000:58) sums this up as the 'intuition' that 'all, just by being human, are of equal dignity and worth, no matter where they are situated in society'. Rather than the well-being of women potentially being sacrificed for the well-being of the family or nation (63), the well-being of each woman is an end in itself. In the ONS programme, this results in the well-being of women and men carrying equate weight in both the aggregating of national well-being and the analysis of the distribution of well-being.<sup>12</sup>

This model has been challenged as upholding masculine norms from multiple perspectives, and I will engage with two core critiques here. The first critique is that it upholds a masculine model of citizenship. Pateman (1988) argues that the liberal citizen is based on a sexual contract in which women are pushed to the private sphere and men the public. Brown (1995:135-165) argues that the very terms of liberalism are gendered. However, there is little room to manoeuvre around this model in a programme of research into well-being of sovereign, individual citizens in a liberal nation, especially in light of the favourable focus on the distribution of well-being. As such, I put this critique aside.

The second is Nedelsky's critique of the assumption that autonomy for liberal individuals means separation and isolation from other citizens (1989, 2012). Nedelsky's conceptualisation of relational autonomy has appeal in light of the ONS programme's lack of focus on the interconnections of national well-being, because Nedelsky stresses

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<sup>12</sup> I follow ONS in the use of a binary gender framework here. This terminology points us to something else that disappears in the ONS framework – the well-being of UK citizens who do not define or record their gender as male or female.

the interconnectedness of citizens rather than their separation.<sup>13</sup> Uses childrearing as the metaphor for autonomy, she argues that (1989:12):

If we ask ourselves what actually enables people to be autonomous, the answer is not isolation, but relationships—with parents, teachers, friends, loved ones—that provide the support and guidance necessary for the development and experience of autonomy.

Nedelsky places the individual in a web of productive social relationships (2012:19):

In my view, each individual is in basic ways constituted by networks of relationships of which they are a part—networks that range from intimate relations with parents, friends, or lovers to relations between student and teacher, welfare recipient and caseworker, citizen and state, to being participants in a global economy, migrants in a world of gross economic inequality, inhabitants of a world shaped by global warming.

Nedelsky's analysis of course focuses on the autonomy of the individual, not well-being. However her critique of liberal conceptions of autonomy as placing too much emphasis on the independence of the citizen enable a similar argument about the conception of well-being in the ONS programme. If people achieve autonomy through their relationships with other people who guide and support them to achieve that autonomy, surely well-being is achieved in a similar manner, and the personal, state and economic 'networks' which support autonomy also support well-being. This relational view of well-being is in stark contrast to the ONS conception of well-being, in which a person's well-being is recorded in isolation from others. The only relationship an individual's well-being has with the well-being of another is being added to it to

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<sup>13</sup> For these reasons, I focus on Nedelsky's conception of autonomy specifically, rather than the broader gender debate on autonomy (Friedman, 2003; Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000).

create national well-being, or compared with it to assess distribution. In a conceptualisation of well-being as measurable and aggregative, this has particular implications for how care is (not) incorporated into well-being by ONS.

## **6. Well-being without care**

Together, these conceptual and methodological choices mean some things disappear from well-being, notably from a gender perspective, care. I now trace the path of care through the documents, focusing on where care might have been as much as where it is. In essence I take the opposite approach to Ahmed (2010:14), who traces happiness wherever it goes. I find that care disappears because it cannot be easily measured in the manner required by ONS, although it could be captured by different means. This is illustrated by a comparison with the methodologies of time-use surveys as set out in a paper commissioned by ONS as part of the programme. In light of the disappearance of care, measuring well-being as ONS conceives it does not seem as far from measuring GDP as it aimed to be.

Nedelsky has drawn our attention to relationships in producing citizens. Using different tools, feminist social policy scholars and economists have drawn attention to care as a productive area of social life in which well-being, the state and the economic sphere are embedded. Daly (2002:252) defines care as 'looking after those who cannot take care of themselves.' I follow this definition but emphasise that this does not purely mean people who are incapacitated. To a greater or lesser extent, none of us can take care of ourselves without others helping by providing care, whether it is caring for us as children, when we are ill, or in later life. Daly argues that care is 'an inherently social activity ... one of the key activities connecting state and society' through various models of provision. Donath (2000:115) argues that care is a productive 'other' economy concerned with the 'direct production and maintenance of human beings' and

Nelson (1995) notes that this informal, unpaid activity is excluded from mainstream economic models, including gross domestic product. A detailed examination of the care literature is outside the scope of this paper, but collectively these works raise an important question for the analysis at hand. If care contributes to each person's well-being, where is care in the ONS programme?

Care is very present in the public engagement activity conducted by ONS at the start of the programme. Interestingly, it features in the ONS list of suggested responses to the question 'What things in life matter to you?' in the wide response 'personal and cultural activities, including caring and volunteering' (ONS, 2011b:8), but is represented separately in the results, presumably because 41% of respondents said that 'unpaid caring, such as for children or other family members' was something in life that mattered to them (10). I will not dwell on whether the other 59% had not received any care in their lives to date, or whether they saw they care they did receive as unimportant.

Care appears in the discussion papers on two domains: 'What we do' (ONS, 2012c) and 'Households and families' (ONS, 2012a). In both cases, the conception of care is narrow and the evidence is mainly quantitative data about the carers and the duration of the care they provide. There is little focus on sizing or valuing care as a contributor to or result of well-being. Care is incorporated into 'What we do' as 'informal care giving'. It is noted that 'there has been little research conducted into the effect that providing care has on the carers well-being' (ONS, 2012c:15). The possibility that care could be productive of well-being in the person receiving the care is not considered. It is also noted that 'it is difficult to identify carers as a sub-group of the population' (16) and that the amount of care provided varies by the number of hours per week. The possibility that a majority of people provide informal care to family and friends is not considered, and neither is the possibility that care could vary in type and intensity.

Care is incorporated into 'Households and families' (ONS 2012a) as 'carers and caring'. The paper provides a breakdown of carers by their employment status, gender and whether they care for people inside or outside their own households (29-30), but does not consider what proportion of the total population cares or what they care involves. Through this focus on quantitative understandings of care as a person's primary activity, care shrinks from something that a substantial portion of the population value as part of well-being, to something performed by specialist groups of people on which ONS holds little knowledge.

The narrowing continues in the domains and measures of well-being (ONS, 2012b:3-4), in which care is not specifically represented. The question closest to care is 'Average rating with satisfaction with family life', acknowledged as an 'interim measure in response to consultation responses that a wider measure of relationships with family and friends should be used'. A related measure, also an interim measure, is the 'percentage who said they had someone they could really count on in a crisis', although this is framed as about trust in the neighbourhood rather than care. These questions follow the model of an isolated individual citizen because they conceptualise the role of family and friends as people who provide satisfaction and assistance. There is no sense that the well-being of the family and friends may be linked with the well-being of the respondent, or that they have sustained and productive caring relationships.

It is possible that time-use data provides a way to flesh out how care is recorded by the programme (Bittman et al 2005), and the programme includes a paper on the contribution of time-use surveys to understanding well-being that sets out the benefits of time-use surveys (Gershuny for ONS, 2012). Contrasting this approach with the ONS domain of 'What we do' (ONS, 2012c) highlights two shortcomings of the ONS approach as it currently stands. First, 'What we do' is focused around a binary of work and leisure time, with the effect that there is no space for activities that are a mixture of

work and leisure, or that could be either work or leisure. Paid care would be recorded as work, but informal care giving drops out of the picture because of a lack of data and because it is neither work nor leisure, but could be both. Second, 'What we do' focuses on what people do, not who they do it with or what context they do it in. This reinforces the individualistic conception of well-being, in which 'what someone does' is something they 'own' or a state they inhabit, and is not related to the wider context or relationships that enable this to occur. In contrast, time use data records secondary information to the main activity and time, including whom else was there (Gershuny for ONS, 15). From this we develop a sense of context about what people do, where, when and how.

Although the advantages of time use data in measuring care are substantial, it still cannot quantitatively capture all of the facets of caring relationships. This tension means it could be included within the ONS quantitative framework, but it would still lose much of the complexity. Here I am not criticising quantitative data in general. But in light of the gender literature's focus on the links between methodology and knowledge, the mandation of quantitative data poses substantial limitations to the content validity of the ONS framework (Trochim and Donnelley, 2007). I contend that the measures do not adequately reflect the concept of well-being because they fail to capture the interpersonal relationships and care that are crucial to well-being and core to how we experience the social world. Looking beyond care, this also points to the difficulty of capturing the more abstract concepts that people in the public engagement exercise related to well-being, not least 'music, kindness, a government that listens to its people' (ONS, 2011a:5).

Reflecting back on the literature discussed at the start of this section, it is striking that the exclusion of care and other nonmarket activities is a core feminist critique of mainstream policy and economics (Donath, 2000; Nelson, 1995). Yet ONS and the

body of well-being policy it draws on aim to make a definitive shift from economic indicators to well-being indicators, in order to capture the richness of life outside measures of production. The omission of care suggests that the ONS programme does not meet this aim. Examining the assumptions about knowledge and citizens that underpin the ONS programme sheds further light on these limitations.

## **7. Positivist assumptions**

Thus far I have analysed the ONS programme at progressively deeper levels – the aims, the conceptualisation of well-being, and an element of well-being that is hidden. The final aspect of the programme I will examine is the deepest-held assumption: that well-being can be measured quantitatively. I argue that the programme relies on positivist assumptions that well-being both measurable and known by subjects, which do not hold up to scrutiny from a gender perspective. This reinforces my questioning of the validity of the measures in meeting the aims of the programme in anything but its own, narrow scope, and forms a sister argument to my contention that ONS creates a concept of well-being that is measurable.

The ONS programme is embedded in an epistemic community (Nelson, 1993) that assumes well-being is measurable. The documents situate the programme exclusively among policy-makers, economists and social scientists that take this assumption as foundational to their work. References are made to the Stiglitz report (ONS, 2011c:4,22) and OECD commitment on measuring well-being (ONS 2011a:7; 2011h:7; 2011i:10). The academic literature cited in the ONS documents is based on the assumption that well-being is measurable, notably Dolan's work on measuring subjective well-being (ONS 2011a:3 2011c:22; 2011h:3; 2012h:5) with dissent only around the most appropriate way to measure it (Dolan et al for ONS, 2011, Dolan for ONS, 2011).

This assumption provides intellectual context for the programme's binary schema of 'subjective' and 'objective' knowledge that, in my view, over-emphasises the similarities at the expense of the differences. In the programme's definitions, 'objective knowledge' is based on physical or economic phenomena (ONS, 2011i2). 'Subjective knowledge' is people's views of their general well-being or their satisfaction with the objective phenomena (2). Both are collected through quantitative survey methods, with the 'subjective' questions based on a scale of one to ten or from dissatisfied to very satisfied (ONS, 2011b:2). This methodology reflects Ahmed's (2010:5) argument that

happiness research is based primarily on self-reporting: studies measure how happy people say they are, presuming that if people say they are happy, they are happy. This model both presumes the transparency of self-feeling (that we can say and know how we feel), as well as the unmotivated and uncomplicated nature of self-reporting.

Ahmed here raises the possibility that people may not always know or say what they feel. Further, proponents of measuring subjective well-being from within behavioural psychology have argued that there are effects in play that shape responses to questions about well-being, including whether the respondent has a generally positive outlook on life (Strack et al, 2000), views of what levels of satisfaction are socially acceptable (Diener et al, 2012:19), and whether the judgement is private or public (Diener et al, 2011).

Both of these contentions are highly plausible in light of an understanding of well-being as relational. The ONS questions that are most focused on 'subjective knowledge', those on individual well-being or subjective well-being (ONS, 2012b:3), do not accommodate these complexities. The questions ask respondents to rate, on a scale of one to ten, their satisfaction with their life overall, how worthwhile the things they do are, and how happy and anxious they felt yesterday. These questions presume that the

respondents know how they felt, choose to express it transparently, and take these judgements as quantitative expressions of well-being. Here, again, the conception of well-being is measurable (one a scale of one to ten), aggregative (across areas of well-being and across people) and individualistic (known to the respondent alone).

Feminist epistemology enables two further challenges of the assumptions held by ONS on 'subjective' knowledge. The first challenge is that knowledge may be held by communities rather than individuals:<sup>14</sup>

My claim is that the knowing we do as individuals is derivative, that your knowing or mine depends on *our* knowing, for some "we." (Nelson, 1993:124)

And further,

Communities and not primarily individuals produce knowledge. For one thing, what I believe that I thought through all by myself (in my mind), which I know, only gets transformed from my personal belief to knowledge when it is socially legitimated. (Harding, 1993:65)

Although this work is focused on the construction of knowledge rather than well-being, it is in keeping with the acknowledgement of relationships and embeddedness that I have argued is missing from the ONS programme so far. If we follow it, then our knowledge about well-being is relational as our well-being itself. We recognise our level of well-being through comparison and discussion with others. The ONS does not acknowledge this way of knowing about well-being, but it is central to its approach. The ONS measures validate our experiences as well-being by measuring them, turning

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<sup>14</sup> Although drawing on different intellectual traditions, this can be linked to sociological analysis of emotions as social (Tiedens and Leach, 2004).

experiences into 'well-being'. To return to earlier examples, expressing the view that it is not difficult 'to get by financially' is recorded as a lack of well-being in the domain of 'personal finance' (2012b:8), and volunteering is read as well-being in the domain of 'what we do' (6). ONS is providing the social legitimisation of personal reports of respondents' views and behaviours, and turning them into records of well-being. This national knowledge of well-being then allows individuals to situate their own experiences in the formalised schema of well-being, and as such represents a cycle of shared knowledge, not a transparent record of independent experiences of well-being.

The second is the challenge that perhaps some things are best measured qualitatively, or through a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Gender scholars have argued for the use of appropriate methods to match the topic at hand (Letherby, 2004; Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991), be they quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. I have traced the impact of the decision to primarily use existing quantitative data and an aggregative conceptualisation of well-being through the ONS programme, arguing that this approach does not take account of the relational creation of well-being and knowledge about well-being. I have argued that as a result, the programme fails to reflect how well-being is created across domains and through caring relationships. Due to the complexity of the concept of well-being from a gender perspective, perhaps qualitative methods may in some cases be more appropriate to deal with the theoretical content of national well-being, or at least a consideration of whether new quantitative data is required, other than subjective well-being data. In this light, I conclude that, if well-being is assumed to encompass interpersonal relationships and care (as from a gender perspective it must), the approach taken by ONS lacks content validity (Trochim and Donnelley, 2007). Whereas the ONS programme meets its aim of measuring national well-being within its own narrow scope and conceptualisation of well-being, it cannot be said to adequately measure national well-being from a gender perspective.

## **8. Conclusion**

With this paper I set out to ascertain, from a gender perspective, to what extent the UK Office for National Statistics approach to ‘measuring national well-being’ meets its aim. In summary, the ONS programme can be said to meet its aim of ‘measuring national well-being’ to the extent that one adheres to its own scope and conceptualisation of well-being. The ONS has produced a set of measures that are largely drawn from existing national statistics, so likely to be trusted and accepted, and are robust by its own standards for quantitative data. The programme encompasses realms of life in the UK beyond GDP and includes citizen’s own evaluations of their lives, as the aims and scope require. In this light, ONS has met its objective of measuring national well-being.

From a gender perspective, I found much promise in the programme. The programme puts the experiences of citizens at the heart of national well-being, acknowledges that citizens may have different views of well-being than the government, includes the distribution of well-being as well as the aggregate, and contains domains that look outside economic production. But despite this promise, the programme does not provide an adequate approach to ‘measuring national well-being’ from a gender perspective. The approach is underpinned by the need to create a model of well-being that is quantifiable in standards used by national statistics, which prompts the programme to *create measurable national well-being* rather than measure national well-being in its complexity. The focus on individualism has the advantage of ensuring the well-being of all respondents is considered, but is tied to an aggregative approach that loses any sense of interconnection between the well-being of people in the UK or across the domains of life. The focus on existing quantitative data and the experience of well-being by individuals results in care being absent from the measures of national well-being. In light of this relational understanding of well-being, the programme’s

measures lack validity. Further, I question the programme's assumption that well-being is transparently known to individuals and can be adequately measured with quantitative data. From a gender perspective, then, the programme does not meet the aim of measuring national well-being and is in some ways closer to GDP than it claims to be.

The ONS approach to well-being follows the recommendations of the international policy community closely, and so the implications that fall out of my analysis may be relevant to other countries adopting the approach set out by the Stiglitz Commission (2007) and OECD (2007). Policymakers may wish to reflect on the effects of heavy reliance on quantitative data and existing national statistics in measuring well-being. If they aim to capture well-being in the round, it may be that a mix of methods may enable them to capture a richer account of well-being. This raises tensions with the requirements of national statistics, but if national statistics are not able to produce valid data for the entirety of well-being, then the implication is that either the ambition or the methods must be reconsidered. To be clear, I am not arguing that quantitative methods cannot be used to measure well-being, but in light of the conceptual and empirical complexity of well-being and the limitations of the ONS approach in capturing this, it is likely that existing statistics alone are inadequate. Second, policymakers may wish to consider afresh the role of domains in measuring national well-being. The domains have advantages in bringing together data from multiple areas of well-being and providing structure to the ambitious task of measuring national well-being. However, they also create a structure of separation between elements of well-being that are interrelated in real life. A careful balance has to be struck if domains are to be used, and it is my judgement that the ONS programme currently emphasises the disconnections over the connections.

My analysis has focused very much on the conceptualisation of well-being by ONS, yet the ONS programme itself is firmly empirical. To bridge this gap, I would like to point to

two contemporary manifestations of the relationality of well-being that crystallise the need to conceptualise well-being as relational, especially where the distribution of well-being is a concern. First, the sexual division of labour divides well-being work along gender lines, with, to a greater or lesser extent, men specialising in participating in the labour force and women specialising in domestic and caring labour. Second, in the contemporary UK context of neoliberalism and economic inequality, the well-being of those in elite, professional employment is reliant upon the well-being of those who do the low-paid caring labour, service provision and maintenance that enable the highly-paid to perform their jobs and consume goods and services. I have spelt out these phenomena baldly for emphasis, but more nuanced accounts would carry a similar message. The well-being of each person in the nation is dependent on the well-being of others, and any one person's overall well-being is dependent on the interplay between their well-being in different areas of life.

I criticised ONS for an approach in which care and relationship fall into the background, but my focus on their methodology and assumptions means some concerns drop into background in my analysis. Particular issues that I did not focus on, and which may merit further research, are the ethics of a government asking people to evaluate their well-being and lives, and the distribution of well-being between nations. Although I included some discussion of whether the self knows its own state, I did not consider what becomes of the task of measuring well-being in light of post-structuralist and psychoanalytic challenges to the sovereign, unitary subject. Perhaps most importantly, my preference for an approach to measuring national well-being that takes account of the relationships between domains and people raises methodological challenges that I have not addressed here.

Although I have been critical of the ONS approach, I would like to end by reiterating my support of their ambition of measuring national well-being (although I prefer the aims of

'measuring population well-being' or 'measuring people's well-being' which do not link the concepts of well-being and nation). In the face of the feminist challenges to liberalism and knowledge production I have brought to the ONS programme, my view that there is value in measuring well-being has not shifted. It may not be possible to create measures of 'music, kindness and a government that listens to its people', but I retain the hope it is possible to measure well-being in a manner which captures its complex nature to a satisfactory degree.

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