

**Gender Mainstreaming vs. Diversity Mainstreaming: A Preliminary
Examination of the Role and Transformative Potential of Feminist
Theory**

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Introduction

Gender mainstreaming (GM) has emerged as a key strategy for advancing gender equality at all levels of public policy. It is the systematic integration of gender into all systems and structures with a particular emphasis on policies, programs and services. Over one hundred countries worldwide, including Canada, have embraced GM in their state machineries. It has been hailed as a “potentially revolutionary concept” (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2000), a significant policy innovation, and even a paradigm shift for thinking about gender equality in policy-making processes (Rees 2002). Despite the rhetoric about GM’s potential, it has not been successful, and in particular, it has not brought about changes in values and priorities in the public policy realm (Sjoroup 2001). Not surprisingly, many feminist scholars have been critical of the mainstreaming strategy and have been reluctant to contribute academically to the policy debate regarding GM (Booth and Bennett 2001; Bennett 2000). Consequently, an unreflective interpretation of GM continues by both policy makers and femocrats (Carney 2004). The discursive effects of GM on constructions of gender and equality are not being interrogated. In particular, the potential of recent feminist theory for providing conceptual and analytical knowledge of the complex circumstances involving gender differences, intersectionalities, and multiple identities remains largely uninvestigated.

In this paper, I provide an overview of GM focusing on its conceptualization, political context, and the challenges typically identified as impeding its effective implementation. I suggest that one of the most overlooked impediments to GM’s growth and impact is its present disconnect with its feminist theoretical groundings. Contemporary feminist developments in understanding gender and the interface between gender, race, class, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality and power are not reflected in the concept of GM or in the strategies and tools that have been developed to engender public policy. In its attempts to institute social justice, GM has not moved beyond the male-female dichotomy so prevalent in second wave feminist theorizing. As a result, GM has become a ‘watered down’ approach to challenging the status quo. This in turn affects how gender issues are constructed and leads to important issues being excluded in the realm of policy. And yet, it is the very knowledge embedded within present-day feminist theory, and in particular around equality/difference and diversity debates, that is essential to being able to ask the right questions, to develop the right approaches, and to anticipate intended and unintended consequences of policy decisions.

The argument of the paper is that the relationship of feminist theory and practice needs to be revisited if the mainstream is to be transformed. As Marshall has correctly observed, “the theory and politics of gender are intimately related, and it is through understanding this relationship that we can begin to sort through some its complexities” (2000: 154). In making this argument I am contributing to the literature theorizing mainstreaming, which is still at a rudimentary stage of development (Booth and Bennett 2002). By linking theory and practice I am also responding to Young’s call that we, that is feminist theorists, should take a more pragmatic orientation to our intellectual discourse by “categorizing, explaining, developing accounts and arguments that are tied to specific practical and political problems” (1994:717-718). Accordingly, my project is driven by

the current problems linked to the theoretical shortcomings of gender mainstreaming which have practical importance in terms of social justice in the realms of policy, research, and practice. Narayan and Harding (2000: vii) have gone as far as to claim that analyzing policy in this way is crucial because “the shape of the conceptual frameworks that guide public policy can be a matter of life and death.”

If we take seriously the need to apply the insights of recent feminist theorizing, it becomes clear that there are in fact no real possibilities to adequately improve or expand the gender mainstreaming framework. GM is inherently limited and limiting because it always prioritizes gender as *the* axis of discrimination and moreover, the conceptualization of gender that GM rests upon is clearly outdated. What is required is an alternative approach to mainstreaming, one that is able to consistently and systematically reflect a deeper understanding of intersectionalities - the combination of various oppressions including gender, which, together, produce something unique and distinct from any one form of discrimination standing alone. Arguably, those who are interested in developing effective mainstreaming strategies for public policy can no longer be impervious to factors that are more important or compound experiences of gender. However, as long as the conceptual framework of gender mainstreaming is used, this primacy will not be displaced and the unique vulnerability of differently socially constructed groups of women and men will remain obscured.

As a way to move beyond the current impasse in GM, I am proposing a diversity¹ mainstreaming framework which draws on Iris Marion Young’s notion of ‘gender as seriality’ (1994) and Kimberle Williams Crenshaw’s work on intersectionalities (2000, 1991). This alternative framework retains the category of gender, albeit in a qualified manner. Most importantly, it puts front and centre various forms of oppression (e.g. race, class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality) explores how they interconnect and mutually reinforce one another. The framework, as I briefly demonstrate using the examples of HIV/AIDS and human trafficking, is able to better capture, articulate, and make visible the relationship between various kinds of discrimination and oppression. This kind of analysis is currently absent in GM but is of critical importance if decision makers are to create effective policy. In sum, diversity mainstreaming provides what Dhamoon has described elsewhere as a “roadmap for policy with normative concerns for social justice” (2004).

What is Gender Mainstreaming?

Gender mainstreaming can be understood as “a deliberate and systematic approach to integrating a gender perspective into analysis, procedures and policies” (Schalkwyck and Woroniuk 1998). The goal, driven by social justice (Rees 2002), is to take into account gender in all aspects of policy-making by focusing on the adverse effects of policy on

¹ In referring to the alternative as diversity mainstreaming I want to acknowledge Bhabha’s point that diversity can depoliticize power differences and reduce difference to simplistic versions (1994: 31-2). In the current policy context, it is my contention that diversity is an expedient term for policy discourse.

both men and women and to address and rectify persistent and emerging disparities between women and men (True and Mintrom 2001). A useful definition, often referred to in the literature, is that of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's and well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality...²

Gender equality assumes that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the diverse behaviour, aspirations and needs of all women and men are taken into account, valued and responded to equally (Carney 2003).

GM concentrates on the reorganization of every policy process so that gender equality is reflected in all planning and decision-making. This 'new equality strategy' (Booth and Bennett 2002) focuses on impact and on the differences between men and women. For example, in prioritizing equality of outcome, GM moves beyond previous methods that focused on equal treatment or positive action - specific or targeted gender equality policies attending to women's different needs³ or perceived 'deficiencies.' According to Squires and Wickham-Jones "the shift from equality of treatment to equality of impact allows the apparent dichotomy between equality and difference to be overcome" (2002:60). Other major points of departure from earlier approaches are GM's focus on gender (Woodward 2001) and on how social, economic and cultural structures, systems, organizations and policies affect these differences. For example, GM seeks to illuminate the gendered implications of relations between the family, state, and market so that a new gender contract based on equality can be realized.

Mainstreaming gender often includes gender-sensitive as well as women-specific policies and programs. In fact this dual-track strategy has been recommended as necessary for developing a comprehensive approach to gender equality (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Greaves and Hankivsky 1999). Moreover, mainstreaming strategies can be either 'integrationalist' or 'agenda-setting' (Jahan 1995). The 'integrationalist' approach seeks to introduce a gender perspective into existing policy while an 'agenda-setting' approach seeks to challenge and transform policy paradigms in the process of engendering policy. For the most part, agenda-setting approaches are now being favoured over those that seek to address gender issues within existing policy paradigms. There is an understanding that

² United Nations ESCO ((E/1997/L.30 Para Adopted by ECOSOC 14.7.97).

³ Concentrating only on women explains little about how gender relations are organized and cause gender inequalities. To understand and describe patterns in women's or men's lives requires analyzing the oppositional relations between them (Harding 1995: 298).

the male-stream and androcentricity of policy (Rees 1998) need to be challenged for meaningful transformation to be realized.

Integral to the agenda setting approach is the attention to not only the specific interests of both men and women but also to issues concerning different populations groups, including the interrelated conditions and factors that influence equality across the population (Health Canada 2003). In general, GM typically acknowledges that gender does not operate in isolation but in relation to other factors such as race, ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, and so on. In fact, there is an assumption that the ways in which GM advances gender equality “is equally accessible and applicable to other areas of inequality” (Booth and Bennett 2002: 431). As the United Nations maintains, “a strong continued commitment to gender mainstreaming is one of the most effective means for the United Nations to support real changes at all levels” (Hannan 2001: 7).

The Political Context

Canada along with the Netherlands were among the first countries to develop gender equality policies and stress the importance of trying to effect change by fully integrating women and their policy concerns throughout the policy process (Geller Schwartz 1995). In the Canadian context, for example, improvements in gender equality were made through piecemeal changes in legislature, the funding of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1970), and the establishment of various departments, which were charged with furthering women’s rights and improving the status of women. Early strategies were focused on women and ensuring the attainment of equal status for women with men in terms of rights and opportunities with men in the public sphere (Burt and Hardman 2001). A clear legal foundation for the development of policies supporting gender equality was established with sections 15 and 28 of the 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

As an approach to gender equality, gender mainstreaming is fairly recent. A formal commitment to GM in Canada was made in 1995 when the Liberal government announced its *Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality (1995-2000)*.⁴ The *Plan* was a document that had been prepared for the Fourth United Nations Conference in Beijing by Status of Women Canada in collaboration with 24 federal departments and agencies. In the *Plan* as well as the more recent *Agenda for Equality (2000)* the federal government has committed to “ensuring that all future legislation and policies include, where appropriate, an analysis of the potential for differential impacts on men and women.” Unlike other international jurisdictions, Canada has adopted the term gender-based analysis (GBA) rather than gender mainstreaming. The strategy of GBA is led by Status of Women Canada and includes a number of key

⁴ Although a promising development, it is important to note that this policy shift, ironically occurred at the same time that national funding of women’s groups was being reduced at significant levels. It is after all, through the use of gender mainstreaming that the diverse gendered damages caused by policies can be brought to light and named (Teghtsoonian 2000: 111).

federal departments including Health Canada, Justice Canada and Human Resources Development Canada.

It is important to note that the acceptance of gender mainstreaming internationally, and in particular within Canada and the European Union, contrasts quite sharply with the United States. Although a women's policy agency exists, it is contained within the Department of Labour and has not been directed to oversee any comprehensive implementation of gender mainstreaming in all issues of policy (Stetson 1995; Nelson and Carver 1994). In 1995 a President's Interagency Council on Women was established to "anticipate the United States' commitment at Beijing to set up an institutional mechanism for mainstreaming gender across all policymaking" (True and Mintrom 2001: 35). Until 2001 the Council worked with non-government organizations in furthering the dialogue on gender and policy, when it was replaced with the Office of International Women's Issues. In general, however, the concept of GM remains unfamiliar in the U.S. context, in terms of practices, strategy or as a tool in public policy (Myerson and Northcutt 2004; Rees 2002).

Challenges of Implementation

With the adoption of the *Platform for Action* at the Beijing conference by 189 countries, the goal of gender equality was formally endorsed and gender mainstreaming became firmly entrenched as an international strategy for ensuring that before policy and program decisions are made, an analysis is made on their effects on women and men respectively (Schalwyck and Woroniuk 1998). GM's aim of radically redefining policy values through the horizontal insertion of gender equality, however, has not been realized in any jurisdiction or in any area of public policy (Woodward 2001; Bretherton 2001; Beveridge at al. 2000; Burt and Hardman 2001). This has led to the question so poignantly posed by Einarsdóttir (2003:1): "*Why don't we see more progress in gender equality with all the institutional, governmental, national, international gender equality machinery we have to pursue our goals?*" In the Canadian context, limited progress on issues such as childcare, unpaid work and pension reform are cited as examples of the few inroads femocrats have had in instigating gender-sensitive policy (Chappell 2002: 100). Indeed, the necessary conditions and components for radical transformation in policy continue to be debated (Woodward 2001).

Even though implementation remains highly variable across states, analyses of gender mainstreaming to date tend to concentrate on 'best practices' and alternatively, the political, legal, and institutional barriers and obstacles to effective implementation. The need for a supportive policy environment has been recognized (Health Canada 2003, Status of Women Canada 2002, Squires and Wickham-Jones 2002). For example, in the post-war citizenship regime in Canada, the goals of social justice and equity were accepted and therefore, claims made by groups such as women were seen as part of the political mainstream (Jenson and Phillips 1996). Now one can argue that gender mainstreaming is at odds with the neo-liberal focus on individuals and suspicion of identity-based politics (Teghtsoonian 2000: 110). Neo-liberal priorities, including

privatization and deregulation, are not conducive to protecting or promoting women's equality. Nor do they provide the convergence of ideas and interests necessary for the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming. Bretherton (2001) refers to the lack of such convergence as 'swimming against the tide.' For gender mainstreaming to be effective, its goal of gender equality must be culturally approved (Bustelo 2003, Squires and Wickhman-Jones 2002). It must also resonate with the values and norms of regular actors in the policy process (Verloo 2001). As Stone puts it, the policy agenda is determined largely by a complex interplay of ideas and values that can be emotionally and ideologically laden (Stone 1989).

Secondly, governments at all levels need to prioritize gender issues if the mainstream is to be successfully transformed (Bretherton 2001). This includes the proper resourcing of GM initiatives as typically attempts to mainstream tend to be under-resourced (Rees 2002). Third, the importance of having GM integrated in all steps of the policy process has been highlighted. As Burt and Hardman emphasize (2001: 210) "If GBA is applied in the middle of the policy cycle, after a policy direction has been set, it can have only a limited impact on the shape of policy." Fourth, the need for a diversity of methodologies and tools for the range of policy sectors has also been recognized (Status of Women Canada 2002). Fifth, a more bottom-up approach to GM that includes the insights of the women's movement has also been identified. Specifically, consultation with a range of women's organizations and interests has been determined as a key requirement of gender mainstreaming (Stetson and Mazur 1995). Finally the need for effective state mechanisms and adequate training among government bureaucrats is seen as essential to successful GM. At the same time, GM should also be 'user-friendly' (Booth and Bennett 2002). As Woodward has argued, gender mainstreaming "should be something that can be learned and carried out by the Weberian ideal typical androgynous servant of the state"(2001:70).

Theoretical Issues

Because of the disproportional focus on issues of implementation, insufficient attention is being paid to whether the conceptual framework of GM is in fact effective and appropriate for policy implementation. While addressing the practical requirements, including the political and institutional contexts is important, it is equally, if not more important, to examine the theoretical framework that informs the strategies, techniques and tools of GM. The core content of gender mainstreaming needs to be interrogated and more effort needs to be made to evaluate GM at a theoretical level. Examinations of such nature have been largely overlooked in the literature and practice of GM. As Beveridge et al. have argued elsewhere "There has been little attempt to develop a general theory of mainstreaming which transcends the diversity of state practice in order to provide a universal frame of reference, or set of criteria, by which mainstreaming may be understood and particular mainstreaming initiatives judged" (2000: 388). Similarly, Booth and Bennett have noted, "the literature theorizing mainstreaming is still at a rudimentary stage" (2002: 432).

This gap may be somewhat surprising given that mainstreaming as a concept was transferred from the realm of feminist theory to policy application (Carney 2003, True and Mintrom 2001, Woodward 2001). Theories of organizational practice (Rees 1998) and social movement theories (True and Mintrom 2001, Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000) have also influenced its development. In particular, feminist theories about engagement with the state and normative arguments regarding women's oppression, subordination and inequality constitute the foundation on which gender mainstreaming is constructed (Carney 2004, Phillips 1987). By looking to theory, the challenges of engaging with the state to bring about social change can be grasped, and the core content of gender mainstreaming can be interrogated. We need to ensure, as Verloo puts it, "a more dynamic connection to feminist academic knowledge" (2001: 17).

Engagement with the state

Mainstreaming is about working within the system while at the same time criticizing it (Einarsdóttir 2003). It is not unlike other struggles in which feminists have outlined both the limitations and possibilities for social change when interacting directly with the state. As Morrow (1999) explains, at the heart of this tension is that which faces all social movements: that is, how to resist the social institutions that often perpetuate social inequities while at the same time garnering their support in order to influence systemic changes. In the case of gender mainstreaming, this presents particular challenges. While the gender equality machinery of the state "needs the theoretical knowledge of feminism, the very substance of that same knowledge has to be assimilated or 'translated' into the language of the establishment, in order to be negotiable" (Einarsdóttir 2003). Determining the proper language to use in GM often entails reducing and even distorting gender equality to technocratic language.

When the essence of gender mainstreaming gets 'lost in translation,' this of course raises the larger issue of whether or not feminists should engage with the state when seeking fundamental changes. Wendy Brown for example, cautions against a myopic over-reliance on the state (1995). hooks has similarly pointed to the difficulties of abandoning the safety of the margins when one engages with the mainstream (1996). Working inside the state does put one at risk for losing the perspective of the 'outsider' (Spalter-Roth and Schreiber 1995) and it can interfere with the ability to maintain a certain distance from political events (Sypnowich 2001). Indeed, engagement with the state necessitates an imperative of compromise and the need to adjust radical demands to those that are politically feasible (Prugl 2004: 6). In turn, this may lead to a measure of dependence and implicit agreement to abide by state rules.

Arguably, the potential for compromise or even cooptation is a real problem for many feminist theorists and one of the reasons why there is resistance by academic feminists in regards to practical work on issues of gender equality. It is important, however, to remind ourselves that feminism is both an intellectual and a political movement that seeks justice for all women (Haslanger and Tuana 2003). And if we accept that "the state, as an area of political practice, is not something feminists can choose or refuse to enter" (Marshall 1990:94) then we must continue to explore ways in which the strategy of mainstreaming

may be improved, while being “alert not to be swept away by the mainstream” (Verloo 2001). And finally, it is also worth noting, as does Vickers, that despite the challenges “many feminists see state institutions as potential allies that women can mobilize to help them achieve the changes they want and need” (1997: 14).

Improving the Mainstream

One largely uninvestigated way that improvement can be realized is if the questions and critiques being raised within modern feminist theory are better reflected in mainstreaming to challenge the dominant paradigms of this form of policy discourse. At the same time, it is crucial to understand the perimeters in which both policy and theory operate and the kind of relationship and conceptual bridges that can and conversely cannot exist between these two disparate realms. First, there should be explicit recognition that the realm of policy is fundamentally different from the realm of theory. Exact approaches to conceptualizing and critiquing gender and equality, for example, are not possible in the two different spheres of discourse. What is possible in theory is often not possible when one attempts to translate theory to practice. Some practitioners for example, question the legitimacy of the knowledge produced by feminist theorists (Einarsdóttir 2003). Woodward has argued that adapting a ‘gender approach’ in GM helps to win broader audiences for gender issues precisely because it is not associated with feminism (2001) or feminist theory. Others have suggested that feminist theories are “ill-suited to deal with real-world issues of human difference and diversity”(Armstrong 2003).

In addition, it may not be possible to draw on theory in a linear fashion to sketch out a coherent blueprint or pathway for realizing gender equality. To some it may even seem paradoxical to look to feminist theory, which is inconclusive in terms of its treatment of gender and equality, to improve GM, which seeks clarity in promoting gender equality. Despite this tension, however, insights from theory do provide the impetus for rethinking the efficacy of the current framework of gender mainstreaming. While there is much to draw upon from theory to advance mainstreaming the reverse is also true. There are shortcomings in terms of how feminist theorizing approaches questions of gender and equality. In many ways, this becomes more evident when one attempts to translate theory to practical application. Often, however, feminist theorists who interrogate issues of difference and diversity do not engage in practical debates or political activism (Squires 1999: 136). So while the project of moving the debate on gender and social justice forward may be compelling in theory, if we are to follow theory to what I think should be one of its logical conclusions – being *able* to deal with real-world issues, we may find that certain adjustments may need to be made to the theory itself. Here I am in full agreement with Carens (2000) when he argues we really do not understand theory until we see it interpreted and applied in a variety of contexts.

Current GM Framework and its Normative Underpinnings

Before I move on to demonstrate that transformation that may come about by connecting GM to recent feminist theoretical developments, it is important to look at the status quo and current practices. Rather than continuing to evolve in a parallel fashion with the

developments in feminist theory, and particular those that have emerged in response to the second wave of the women's movement, GM in fact, has been 'frozen' in its content and state of knowledge (Verloo 2001). It has 'taken on a life of its own.' GM's potential to bring about normative transformation of existing "social and political order that lead to gendered outcomes" (True and Minstrom 2001) has been hampered by its growing disconnect from the valuable insights of contemporary feminist theory. I therefore disagree with those who claim that gender mainstreaming corresponds to the most recent developments in academic feminism, and in particular to the significance of diversity and intersectional types of oppression (Einarsdóttir 2003). In fact, questions and critiques being raised within well-elaborated feminist theory are not reflected in GM.

The concept of mainstreaming has become synonymous with the gender perspective alone (Booth and Bennett 2002) and within the context of policy decision-making, this perspective promotes a very one-dimensional conceptual understanding of gender equality. Burt and Hardmann (2001) are correct in observing that gender and equality are highly contested concepts whose complexity is not always reflected in GM. And as gender has become a more conventionally accepted term and concept, GM has divorced itself from the "feminist transformatory project" (Baden and Goetz 1997: 7). Disjointed from the progress made in feminist theory, GM invokes a liberal concept of an abstract women, obscuring the variety of conditions that inform women's experiences, needs, and status. As Verloo (2001) elaborates, the phrases – inequality between men and women, differences between men and men, equal opportunities between men and women are used without a clear understanding of what they entail and how they relate to the goal of gender equality.

As one example, GM's focus on gender equality tends to makes it difficult to see the specific inequalities experienced by women (Greaves, Hankivsky et al. 1999). The focus on gender tends to make less visible the distinct needs of groups of women vis-à-vis men and moreover, makes defining strategies and establishing programs specifically for women more difficult. Within the Canadian context, Grace has argued "by using the term gender instead of 'feminist'...gender-based analysis is representing a narrow approach, since it simply adds women into policy analysis without comprehensively examining the structural factors that contribute to women's disadvantaged status" (1998: 587-588). In addition, the privileging of the public sphere as the area of focus ignores the details of systematic inequalities in the private realm (Verloo 2001; Corrin 1999) and is reflective of the limitations of a liberal feminist conception of gender equality.

Second, despite its rhetoric of 'attending' to diversity, GM tends to concentrate on differences between men and women, treating each category as a unitary, one-dimensional category of analysis, further obscuring the differences among and between women (Beveridge et al. 2000; Burt and Hardman 2001) and in particular, the variety of conditions that inform women's experiences, needs, and status. The focus on differences between men and women also obscures considerations and analyses of power and inequality (Marshall 2000). This is most clearly evidenced in the manuals, measurement techniques and tools used to measure gender equity. Gender-disaggregated data, gender equality indicators, gender impact assessments, gender proofing, engendering budgets are

focused predominantly on fairly crude distinctions between women and men. In many ways, this simplistic way of delineating between the sexes demonstrates the ability of GM to cohabit with liberal economic, political and economic structures and inability to provide a radical critique of existing power relations (Carney 2004: 19) necessary for social justice.

The central problem is that gender mainstreaming assumes a coherent analytic category of gender. Accordingly, the way in which gender mainstreaming is operationalized, race and class among other factors, are considered as some *add-on to* gender. For example, in the Dutch Gender Impact Assessment tool, there is just one question that deals with differences within the category of women (Verloo 2001). In the manual put out by Status of Women Canada (1996) we are given weak directives such as: consider how experiences of women and men will differ geographically, and are influenced by poverty, colour, aboriginal ancestry, disability/ability are the analytical tools provided for understanding women's diversity. This "add other differences and stir" approach is ineffective. It is not appropriate for other equality dimensions (Rees 2002) or for understanding multiple and diverse forms of oppression. Moreover, policy interventions that are on such incomplete knowledge cannot be effective.

The obvious problem of course is that women are not a single constituency with the same social and cultural backgrounds. Not all women who live within the same society at any given point in time are oppressed or subjugated in the same way (Yuval-Davis 1997). Gender is interlocked with class, race, ethnicity and other structural relations that underpin a society's institutions and practices (Harding 1995). In reality and in many instances, factors other than gender are the primary cause of discrimination, oppression and inequality. The project of transforming the mainstream therefore "runs headlong into the question of *what* women's needs are and *which* women's needs they are" (Feder Kittay 1998: 573). Important questions that gender mainstreaming has not adequately grappled with include: What is gender? What is equality? What constitutes salient issues for gender mainstreaming and who defines such issues? Can we speak of women as a group? How can differences among women be dealt with in formulating, implementing and evaluating policies? Returning to the roots of gender mainstreaming - feminist theorizing, can inform the process of beginning to address some of these key issues.

Feminist Theory – Gender and Equality

Recent debates about gender, and gender equality, within feminist theory - which are at the heart of gender mainstreaming, have been complicated. One of the primary debates within feminist theorizing during the last decade has been whether it is possible or desirable to posit a category such as 'women' upon which feminism is predicated and to which it responds. Without doubt there is growing skepticism about the value or relevance of gender-specific theoretical outlooks. Included in the theoretical skepticism of is the very concept of gender and its relation to the category of woman. Mary Dietz (2003) puts it effectively when she argues that feminist theory is struggling to identify "the critical conceptual coordinates" of its claims.

To understand these struggles, it is useful to give a very brief account of some of the major developments in feminist theory. The category of gender was introduced in reaction to the category of sex and traditional theoretical tendencies to define women's nature through biological sex (Young 1990). Feminists have rejected such framing on the basis that there is nothing about being female that naturally binds women (Haraway 1991). More recently, the assumptions of the foundational category of gender have been interrogated. In particular, postmodern feminism has done much to challenge foundationalist and essentialist assumptions in theory (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, Butler 1990). Feminist theorists have critiqued the reductionism nature of gender and the lack of recognition for differences of race, class, culture, religion, nationality, ableness, and sexuality (Spelman 1988). Without doubt, most constructs and conceptualizations of gender privilege a universal model of a "predominantly middle class, white, able-bodied and heterosexual woman" (Howry and Wood 2001).

Other important critiques of the primacy, universalism and colonialism of Western feminist theory have been articulated by postcolonial theorists, particularly around the implications such approaches have had for understanding diversity and for discursive constructs of 'third world women' (Yuval-Davis 1997, Mohanty 1997). Examinations of the consequences of the intersection of two or more forms of discrimination or systems of discrimination have been undertaken, with the work of Lorde (1994), Collins (1990) and Williams Crenshaw (1991) at the forefront of these efforts. The focus on intersectionality in particular has been invaluable for understanding how systems of discrimination or subordination overlap, create complex intersections (Hannan 2001) and as Hall explains, how they "articulate" with one another (Slack 1996). And of course, the focus on difference (Young 1990) and issues of redistribution/recognition (Fraser 1997) has further complicated the discourse around gender equality. In fact, it has been argued that difference has taken over equality as the central concern of feminists (Fox-Genovese quoted in Arneil 1999).

While there are various currents in the theoretical debates over questions of gender, identity, intersectionality, and equality, what is clear, is that feminists are grappling with the complexities of gender questions, the problematic nature of gender construction, and the need to address women in their diversity. As a result of these recent theoretical developments, we must take seriously whether a focus on gender is adequate for understanding inequality or for moving towards social justice in public policy. As Kittay explains elsewhere, "The seeds of transformative possibilities in social policy affecting policy may in fact be found by looking beyond gender as such" (1998: 54). Without any doubt, we need a more critical understanding of gender and gender equality – beyond what is currently reflected in the gender mainstreaming literature and practice. Most importantly, it is clear from feminist theory, that simply recognizing or attending to diversity and difference is inadequate for understanding the texture and diversity of women's lives. As Verloo has observed correctly, "the relationship between gender and ethnicity/or race, between gender and sexuality, or between gender and class, to name just three of the most important structural inequalities are too complex for the current conceptual framework of gender mainstreaming" (2001: 21).

When complex relationships are simplified and systematically reduced to only one form of discrimination as in the case of gender discrimination, there is a serious risk that the causes and consequences of these experiences will remain misconceived and inadequately addressed. In the realm of legal decision-making Madame Justice L'Heureux-Dubé (*Canada (A.G.) v. Mossop*, [1993] 1 S.C.R) has made similar observations about the shortcomings of reducing overlapping forms of discrimination as either gender or race-oriented. She explains:

categories of discrimination may overlap, and...individuals may suffer historical exclusion on the basis of both race and gender, age and physical handicap, or some other combination. The situation of individuals who confront multiple grounds of disadvantage is particularly complex. Categorizing such discrimination as primarily racially oriented, or primarily gender-oriented, misconceives the reality of discrimination as it is experienced by individuals

To date, some feminists have gone so far as to question whether or not factors that create gender equality are distinct enough to warrant a specific gender mainstreaming approach or whether a broader approach to mainstreaming equality is required (Verloo 2000). There have been suggestions that it may be more appropriate to mainstream equality as opposed to gender (Beveridge et al. 2000). Support for a race-based parallel to gender mainstreaming has also been expressed (Williams Crenshaw 2000). To date, however, there have been few concrete proposals of how to improve GM. One exception is the work of Booth and Bennett (2001) who have developed the metaphor of a three-legged 'equality stool' to emphasize the need for three sets of supports in GM for understanding fully equal opportunities. The three legs are equal treatment perspective, a women's perspective and a gender perspective. Booth and Bennett describe the components of the three-legged equality stool: "The equal treatment perspective...guarantees women the same rights and opportunities as men in the public sphere..., the women's perspective... requires particular treatment and provision...and the gender perspective promotes actions that aim to transform the organization of society to a fairer distribution of human responsibilities" (2001:434). Despite their attempts to further an understanding of various dimensions of equality, they say virtually nothing about the issues of difference and oppression and how gender mainstreaming should respond to these.

To move the analysis forward in any meaningful way, it is useful to begin where theory and practice converge. The common challenge, which is particularly salient in terms of GM, is well articulated by Arneil when she asks: "[is] it possible, or desirable, to maintain a unified force of 'women' and their different perspectives(s) in order to resist the historical oppression of women, as women, while simultaneously incorporating, in a serious way, the 'differences' among women in both theory and practice?" (1999: 204) From the valuable insights gleaned from theory, seriously incorporating the differences among women in practice requires more than being aware or considerate of these differences and their relationship with one another. This is where gender mainstreaming falls short and is inherently inadequate.

What is needed at this juncture in time is a conceptual shift that will lead to an alternative strategy. What I propose is a diversity mainstreaming framework that transcends the current focus and form of gender mainstreaming. With this alternative, I put forward a qualified defence of gender but one which challenges traditional conceptualizations and displaces gender as ‘the’ primary axis for understanding women’s experiences of discrimination, inequality, and oppression. Accordingly, the privileging of gender is replaced with a more sophisticated and comprehensive approach to understanding the lived experience of all women, especially who have been and continue to be marginalized and by current perspectives and practices of gender mainstreaming. Most importantly, the diversity framework that I introduce below places the importance of intersecurities front and centre in the analysis. This is consistent with Collins’ insistence that “all must support a working hypothesis of equivalency between oppressions that allows us to explore the interconnects among the systems and extract us from the internecine battles of whose oppression is more fundamental”(2002: 83).

Diversity Mainstreaming

Qualified Defense of Gender (and sex)

In formulating the diversity framework I do not dismiss categorically, as do some feminist theorists, the category of gender. Also unlike many feminist theorists, I do think that the category of sex is also important – in particular in the realm of health policy.⁵ Drawing on Iris Marion Young’s work on gender as serial collectivity, I am putting forward a *reconceptualized* concept of gender which challenges the essentialization associated with gender. So while I am not altogether moving beyond gender as such, I am proposing a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding and I am seeking to appropriately situate gender within diversity politics and public policy. My position in relation to gender is similar to that of Di Stefano who argues: “..gender is basic in ways that have yet to fully understand, that it functions as a ‘difference that makes a difference’ even as it can no longer claim the legitimating mantels of *the* difference” (1990: 78).

Within this alternative conceptualization, gender does remain an important category of analysis. I agree with Young that “there are pragmatic political reasons for insisting on the possibility of thinking about women as some kind of group” (1994: 714). Gender has practical implications for both women and men, and thus in the context of policy remains an important interpretively and politically. It is clear that “where gender has not been insisted upon as a category of analysis, gender-blindness is the result” (Marshall 2000: 67). Burt’s analysis of the articles published in *Canadian Public Policy* between 1975 and 1993, in which only 1 percent of published works focused on ‘women’s issues’ while mainstream policy analysis were void of any kind of gender analysis (Burt 1995) illustrates the dangers of such gender blindness and exclusion of women from policy

⁵ Sex can determine differential propensities for certain health conditions or diseases, different risk factors and treatment requirements (Greaves, Hankivsky, et al. 1999).

agendas and processes. The question remains, however, how to bring to the foreground issues without essentializing gender.

As feminists theorists have made very clear, we need to find a way to resist and challenge the normalization and essentialization that occurs when we try to describe women as a group, experiencing ‘sameness of oppression.’ In her response to the challenges of difference, Phillips has argued that “in the reworking of contemporary political theory and ideals, feminism cannot afford to situate itself *for* difference and *against* universality, for the impulse that takes us beyond our immediate and specific difference is a vital necessity in any radical transformation” (1993: 71). Phillip’s position is not altogether satisfactory because it does not lead to a critical examination of the conceptualizations and implications of universality constructs. It is extremely problematic to assume, as Mohanty has noted, that women are “an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial or locations, or contradictions” (1997:80).

Iris Marion Young has suggested one way out of this dilemma, which has particular significance for my approach to reconceptualizing mainstreaming, in her examination of gender as seriality. Drawing on the concept of class seriality that Sartre develops in his *Critique of Dialectical Reasons*, Young proposes “a way of thinking about women as a social collective without requiring that all women have common attributes or a common situation” (1994: 723). Her approach points to the need for “some conception of women as a group prior to the formation of self-conscious feminist politics” (Young 1994: 722). According to Young, serial collectivity provides a way of thinking about women without having to rely on identity or self-identity. In a serial collectivity, Young maintains that members are unified *passively* by the objects around which their actions are oriented, limited and constrained, or by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of others.

Unity of the collectivity is shaped by what Young refers to as practico-inert realities that construct gender. These are the material and social facts that each individual must relate to and deal with (1994:731). The practico-inert realities that construct gender include female bodies, other objects and materialized historic products which condition women’s lives as gendered (Young 1994: 729). These can be verbal, visual representations, artifacts and social spaces, clothes, furniture, cosmetics and so on. For Young the material organization of social relations as enabled and constrained by the structural relations of enforced heterosexuality and the sexual division of labour position women in a gender seriality. At the same time, she cautions that this represents a ‘passive unity’ and that in the end, she is only claiming “that the level of gender as series is a background to rather than constitutive of personal and group identity” (1994: 731).

Young is right when she concludes that “applying the concept of seriality to gender makes theoretical sense out of saying that women is a reasonable social category” (1994: 728) without falling into the trap of essentialization and undifferentiated analysis. Marshall similarly argues that “..we do not need to believe in any common essence to a category for it to have intelligible meaning, even in a sense which recognizes that it is

mutually constitutive with other categories, as it always the case when we talk about gender” (2000: 54). In Young’s approach, gender structures are not defining attributes of individuals because individuals can relate to them in different ways in different social contexts. With her interpretation, she leaves open the door to variability and diversity in experience even if there are prático-inert realities in every society. In the end, however, Young’s approach, although effective in challenging the homogenizing tendencies of gender constructs, is incomplete since it does not *necessarily* lead to any kind of meaningful intersectional analysis, where gender does not always prevail “over and above everything else” (Mohanty 1997). I am therefore in complete agreement with Williams Crenshaw when she argues that “while it is true that all women are in some way subject to the burdens of gender discrimination, it is also true that other factors relating to women’s social identities such as class, caste, race, colour, ethnicity, religion, national origin and sexual orientation are ‘differences that make a difference’” (2000:3).

Moving Beyond Privileging Gender

The key is not to abandon the analytical category of gender but explicitly recognize that it is not the primary axis of social oppression, and work towards a mainstreaming framework that does more than ‘add’ or ‘attend to’ difference while transforming the very policies and practices from which difference emerges. Central to such an exercise is the “openness to relinquishing genders’ hegemony as a *starting point* for analysis, looking instead to if and how it emerges as a significance in particular circumstances” (Marshall 2000: 162). To move forward in this direction, I build upon Williams Crenshaw’s model of intersectionality, which she has applied in the context of violence and human rights discourse to capture the relationship between race and gender. Her work is part of growing body of literature dealing with multiple grounds of disadvantage. According to Williams Crenshaw, her model “addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along the axes of gender and race constituting the dynamic or active aspects of disempowerment” (2000:6).

In general, an intersectional approach to investigating the disempowerment of women attempts to capture the overall consequences of two or more forms of oppression. This form of analysis, “addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and the like” (Centre for Women’s Global Leadership 2004). Intersectional subordination is described by Williams Crenshaw using the metaphor of a traffic intersection. Race, class, gender and other forms of discrimination are the roads that structure social, economic and political terrain. This metaphor allows one to capture the numerous systems of subordination that often overlap and cross and which create complex intersections. It avoids thinking about these dynamics as disjointed or simply parallel. It is within the intersections of these contexts that multiply burdened populations are located. They must negotiate the oncoming traffic and the injuries from the collisions of the various forms of discrimination whether these are pre-existing conditions or those brought on my particular acts and policies.

Within a gender mainstreaming framework, where gender is dominant, these dynamics and their consequences may be marginalized or completely invisible. In the context of diversity mainstreaming, however, the mapping multiple forms of discrimination allows for the understanding of gender relations in their specific context, and in particular, their relationship to other structures of inequality such as class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, among others. Using this approach can contribute to furthering the not just the variability of discrimination against women within the context of Canada, but also internationally. Even though there is a cross-national convergence around gender mainstreaming through the role played by transnational networks (True and Mintrom 2001), strategies of engendering policy at the national levels tend to obscure growing feminist critiques regarding economic globalization (Hankivsky and Morrow 2004 forthcoming). The complex and contradictory forces both nationally and globally that determine and structure women's lives must also be carefully investigated. If heterogeneity is to be respected fully, women in the North for example, should not be ignoring the experiences and living condition of women in the South. What would be required, according to a diversity mainstreaming approach is the foregrounding the intersections of the local and global (Hegde 1998).

In the end, diversity mainstreaming allows for a more complex understanding of equality and social justice because the contours and compound effects of discrimination that women experience can be captured and the invisibility or marginalization of differences is no longer an option. Concretely, in terms of practice, diversity mainstreaming, would influence: the policy questions that are asked, research design, development of improved research methods to uncover key aspects of intersectional subordination, data collection (e.g., what kind data is collected, how it is collected, and how it is disaggregated). There would be for instance, an explicit commitment to take into account a range of women's perspectives. In the realm of policy this can be understood as bringing the voices of women together with their relevant concerns to the formation, monitoring, and evaluation of public policy. This helps to avoid what Phillips has described as policies that are worked out *for* rather than *with* a politically excluded constituencies (Phillips 1995). Finally diversity mainstreaming would change the way in which policy analysis is undertaken and resultant policy is developed, implemented, and evaluated.

The need for diversity mainstreaming is apparent for example when considering the multiple forms of discrimination and subordination that influence a phenomenon like HIV/AIDS. It has been argued that gender mainstreaming is the most effective and equitable way of using existing resources for combating HIV/AIDS (Commonwealth Secretariat and Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health 2002). To really understand, contain, and respond to HIV/AIDS, however, it is no longer enough to frame our analyses solely in terms of gender. An analysis prioritizing or focusing on gender would not necessarily capture intersectional subordination and oppression which is crucial to understanding this pandemic. In comparison, diversity mainstreaming would lead us to consider for instance: patterns and prevalence of HIV transmission that are region and country-specific, complex issues of access to health services and medication including antiretrovirals, differing rates of violence, cultural attitudes and norms towards sexual behaviours and sexual orientation, individuals' proximity to centers of political,

economic, and social power. This analysis would not subsume all experiences of oppression along the axis of gender, even though gender could remain as one of a number of intersecting forms of oppression. Instead it would consider all relevant factors as equally important and demonstrate how they cause oppression for those who are at their intersection.

Another example through which the limitations of gender mainstreaming can be observed is with the issue of trafficking. Trafficking is often described as one of the most serious contemporary forms of gender discrimination. A gender mainstreaming both supports and perpetuates this framing of trafficking with its primary focus on the analytical category of gender. As a result, reports by Status of Women Canada and the United Nations pay little or no attention to the role of race and other forms of subordination when assessing the risk for being trafficked (Williams Crenshaw 2000). Interpreting trafficking of women as only an issue of gender discrimination, while ignoring, or not properly capturing the racial, ethnic and class dimensions of the problem, harms women. This approach, typical of GM fails failing to properly take into account fundamental elements in a proper analysis of causes and undermines the means for addressing the problem (Hannan 2001:5). As Hannan persuasively argues, “attention has to be paid to the groups of women who are more likely to be trafficked and a greater understanding developed on the links between their vulnerability to trafficking and other aspects of their situation, such as race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, etc” (Hannan 2001:5). A fully integrated analysis of trafficking would require that all factors that contribute to the vulnerability of women in this context be included both in the analysis of the problem as well as in the recommendations designed to address the issues (Williams Crenshaw 2000:4). Diversity mainstreaming would be a way to ensure such an approach and moreover, would encourage weighing appropriately/equally all relevant factors.

In the final analysis, any transformative potential of diversity mainstreaming will still need to confront the constant barriers and obstacles associated with state engagement and related political struggles. Indeed, as Williams Crenshaw correctly notes, “efforts to bring greater understanding of problems related to intersectionality face a steep climb from its current invisibility to the conscious awareness of .policy makers” (2000:11) These challenges, however, should not undermine efforts to displace gender mainstreaming with diversity mainstreaming. Diversity mainstreaming would allow us to broaden our inquiries about a whole host of issues extending beyond HIV/AIDS and trafficking. By bringing to the foreground the various background dimensions that interact to create layers of inequality and which structure relative positions of women and men, we can develop a more complete and sophisticated analysis that better captures the ways in which public policy may be experienced by various groups of women and men.

Conclusion:

Without doubt, gender mainstreaming has brought some important advances in terms of policy decision making because it introduced the idea that gender matters and that its differential effect must be analyzed (Williams Crenshaw 2000: 2). However, policy development in this area is at an impasse. Despite good intentions by governments and femocrats, GM is not transforming the mainstream. One key area that is consistently overlooked in analyzing GM is its conceptual framework. As illustrated in this paper, the GM framework is built upon an outdated theoretical foundation that is able to capture at best partial and distorted understandings of women's conditions in ways that tend to be ineffective, inefficient and counterproductive (Williams Crenshaw 2000: 6). If the promise of GM – that is social justice, is to be realized, there is a pressing need to integrate present feminist knowledge about the context of women's lives and experiences, structural inequalities in the public and private spheres, and gender with all its intersectionalities.

The argument that I have made is that by returning to its theoretical roots, it becomes clear that there is disjuncture between GM and contemporary feminist theory. GM is outdated and ineffective and needs to be rejected in favour of a more expansive diversity mainstreaming framework. The diversity mainstreaming framework proposed in the paper is connected to feminist academic knowledge because it is able to take into account emerging theoretical developments that provide crucial insights into existing and varying forms of inequities. It responds to Verloo's urgent call "to formally develop more knowledge and practices on the intersection of gender and other inequalities" (2001: 22). In outlining the elements of the proposed alternative I have sought to illustrate a mainstreaming approach that has the potential to broaden the terms of inquiry, lead to more inclusive and egalitarian practices, affect the centre in profound ways, and in the final analysis, contributes an important conceptual advancement in expanding policy discourse in relation to social justice.

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