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

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Introduction

Recent attention to a new strategy of gender mainstreaming (GM) or, as it is known in Canada, gender-based analysis (GBA), has taken hold both internationally and nationally. This strategy, formally adopted at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, illuminates the significance of gender as a central element of thinking and acting (Vlassov and Garcia Moreno, 2002) and recognizes its role in power relations and institutions (Woodward, 2003). GM assumes that women and men are differentially affected by policies and its aim is to integrate such knowledge into all dimensions of decision making. GM requires that from inception all policies should be analyzed for their gendered impact so that they can benefit men and women equally. It has been hailed as a "potentially revolutionary concept" (Pollack and Hafner-Burton, 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, its impact has been uneven. 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, 2002; Bennett, 2000). Consequently, an unreflective interpretation of GM continues to be held 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 and intersectionalities and multiple identities remains largely uninvestigated.

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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 adequately 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 liberal 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 or marginalized 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. 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 Iris Marion Young's call that feminist theorists should take a more pragmatic orientation to 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 GM, 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 GM 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 a broader approach to mainstreaming, one that is able to consistently and systematically reflect a deeper understanding of intersectionalities—the combination of various oppressions that together produce something unique and distinct from any one form of discrimination standing alone. Arguably, those who are

Abstract. This paper considers why gender mainstreaming (GM), a strategy that many have claimed holds promise for transforming public policy and working towards social justice, is inherently limited and flawed. The paper begins with a brief overview of GM, specifically focusing on the Canadian context, and highlights current discussions in the literature regarding issues of implementation and best practices. It then moves on to reveal that a critical but overlooked dimension of GM is its theoretical foundation. In contextualizing GM within a contemporary feminist theory framework, the paper seeks to illuminate the problematic relationship that currently exists between GM and feminist theory and, moreover, demonstrates why the theoretical premises of GM need significant reworking. The argument put forward is that if insights of recent feminist theorizing are taken seriously, it becomes clear that GM should be replaced by an alternative and broader strategy of diversity mainstreaming. Through the use of practical examples, the paper illustrates how diversity mainstreaming is able to better capture, articulate and make visible the relationship between simultaneously interlocking forms of oppressions that include but are not limited to gender.

Résumé. Cet article étudie pourquoi l'intégration d'une perspective de genre (IPG), une stratégie dans laquelle beaucoup ont vu la promesse d'une transformation de la politique publique et d'un progrès vers la justice sociale, est en soi limitée et défectueuse. L'article débute par un bref exposé sur l'IPG, s'intéressant principalement au contexte canadien, et il met en évidence les discussions actuelles dans la littérature au sujet de problèmes de mise en oeuvre et de pratiques exemplaires. Il révèle ensuite qu'une dimension critique mais négligée de l'IPG est son fondement théorique. En contextualisant l'IPG dans un cadre de théorie féministe contemporaine, l'article cherche à éclairer la relation problématique qui existe actuellement entre l'IPG et la théorie féministe et, de surcroît, démontre pourquoi les prémisses théoriques de l'IPG nécessitent une révision significative. L'argument avancé est que, si l'on prend au sérieux les conclusions des théories féministes récentes, il semble évident que l'IPG devrait être remplacée par une stratégie plus vaste d'intégration d'une perspective de diversité. S'appuyant sur des exemples pratiques, l'article montre que l'intégration d'une perspective de diversité réussit à mieux capturer, mettre en rapport et rendre visible la relation entre des formes d'oppression qui s'entrecroisent simultanément et qui incluent mais ne se limitent pas au genre.

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 GM 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 diversity[1] mainstreaming framework that draws on Iris Marion Young's notion of "gender as seriality" (1994) and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's work on intersectionalities (2000, 1991). This framework also builds upon a number of alternative models of mainstreaming developed in the United Kingdom (Donaghy, 2004; Beveridge and Nott, 2002; Rees, 1998). Diversity mainstreaming 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) and 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 compounding 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).

Gender Mainstreaming and its Political Context

While it is important to acknowledge that there is no single definition of GM (Mackay and Bilton, 2000; Woodward, 2001; Rees, 1998), GM can be understood as "a deliberate and systematic approach to integrating a gender perspective into analysis, procedures and policies" (OECD, 2000). 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 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 as 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]

Mainstreaming gender often includes gender-sensitive as well as women-specific policies and programmes. 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 the male-stream and androcentricity of policy (Beveridge and Nott, 2002; 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 concern-

ing different population 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 are "equally accessible and applicable to other areas of inequality" (Booth and Bennett, 2002: 431) and have "the potential capacity to move beyond gender into other dimensions of equality such as race and disability." 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).

GM models can be participative-democratic or expert-bureaucratic (Nott, 2000). Participative-democratic models, such as those developed in the UK, rely on civil society participation and attempt to incorporate multiple equality areas (Donaghy 2004). Expert-bureaucratic models, like the approach embraced in Canada, rely on gender experts being located in government bureaucracy. A formal commitment to GM in Canada was made in 1995 when the government announced its agenda in the document *Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality (1995–2000)*,[3] which had been prepared for the Beijing conference 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 committed to ensuring that all future legislation and policies include, where appropriate, an analysis of the potential for differential impacts on men and women.

Challenges of Implementation

GM's promise to transform every policy process so that gender equality is promoted in all planning and decision making has not been realized in any jurisdiction or in any area of public policy (Hankivsky, 2005; Sjoroup, 2001; Woodward, 2001; Bretherton, 2001; Beveridge at al., 2000; Burt and Hardman, 2001; Nott, 2000). In part this may be due to the fact that GM is intended to be a long-term strategy. However, its failure to date to bring about substantive change has led some observers to question its role, as does 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 child care, unpaid work and pension reform are cited as examples of the few inroads femocrats have had in instigating gender-sensitive policy (Chappell, 2002: 100). Recently the Commonwealth Secretariat noted that "despite a much

greater level of overall awareness on gender issues, and despite the solid body of research and analysis that now exists, policy and programmes continue to show very limited and compartmentalized concerns with gender equity" (Kabeer, 2003: 24). 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 GM 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 postwar 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 GM is at odds with the neoliberal focus on individuals and suspicion of identity-based politics (Teghtsoonian, 2000: 110). Neoliberal 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 GM. Bretherton (2001) refers to the lack of such convergence as "swimming against the tide." For GM 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).

Second, 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 attempts to mainstream typically 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), "[i]f 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 GM (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, GM "should be something that can be learned and carried out by the Weberian ideal typical androgynous servant of the state" (2001: 70).

Theoretical Issues

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. Examinations of such nature have been largely overlooked in the literature and practice of GM. As Beveridge et al. have argued elsewhere, "[t]here 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 the links between GM and feminist theory. While it is often argued that GM emerged from networking and promotion of the strategy by femocrats at the Beijing conference (Russel and Sawer, 1999; Sawer, 1996), less attention has been paid to how mainstreaming as a concept was transferred from the realm of feminist theory to policy application (Carney, 2003; True and Mintrom, 2001; Woodward, 2001). In particular, feminist theories about engagement with the state and normative arguments regarding women's oppression, subordination and inequality constitute the foundation on which GM is constructed (Carney, 2004). 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. In the case of GM, 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 reduc-

ing and even distorting gender equality to technocratic language. When the essence of GM 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). bell 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. 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 (Bacchi, 2001). 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, 2000: 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).

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. What is possible in theory is often not possible when one attempts to translate theory to practice. Some practitioners, for example, question the applicability of the knowledge produced by feminist theorists (Einarsdóttir, 2003). Woodward (2001) 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 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 GM. 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, that of 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) argument that 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 what transformation 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 particularly 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 the normative transformation of the existing social and political order that leads to gendered outcomes (True and Mintrom, 2001) has been hampered by its growing disconnect from the valuable insights of contemporary feminist theory. It has in essence become a strategy, a set of methods, without an adequate theory. I therefore disagree with those who claim that GM 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 systematically or consistently 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. 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 woman, 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.

Significantly, despite its intention to attend to diversity, GM tends to concentrate on differences between men and women, treating each gender 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 and 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 political and economic structures, and its inability to provide the radical critique of existing power relations (Carney, 2004: 19) necessary for social justice.

The central problem is that GM prioritizes a coherent analytic category of gender, in which race and class, among other factors, are considered as an *add-on* to gender. For example, in Canada, where this approach is particularly evident in the manual put out by Status of Women Canada (1996), we are given weak analytical tools for understanding women's diversity, such as: consider how experiences of women and men will differ geographically, and are influenced by poverty, colour, aboriginal ancestry, disability/ability. Health Canada's *Gender-Based Analysis* states that the gender-based framework should be overlaid with a diversity analysis. Similarly, the policy of Human Resources Development Canada (now divided into Social Development Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada) calls for policy analysts to "consider gender together with other demographic/diversity factors" (2003: 13). The Canadian International Development Agency's *Policy on Gender Equality* contends that the use of gender analysis provides information on "the difference among women and men and the diver-

sity of their circumstances, social relationships, and consequent states"
(for example, their class, race, caste, ethnicity, age, culture and abili-
ties) (CIDA, 1999:17), without adequately incorporating these consider-
ations into its implementation strategies. And although the *Gender
Equality Analysis* of Indian and Northern Affairs emphasizes the impor-
tance of considering diversity, diversity is listed as a factor "in addition
to gender" (1999: 6). Teghtsoonian has similarly argued that "despite
drawing attention to the specific circumstances of multiply-marginalized
women, the focus in these documents tends to remain on gender-in-
general" (1999: 5).

Even if the intention of GM is to have the needs of different demo-
graphics and specific groups considered (Donaghy 2004), this does not
occur as a matter of course with any consistency. And, the often-resulting
"add other differences and stir" approach is ineffective. It is not appro-
priate for other equality dimensions (Rees, 2002) or for understanding
multiple and diverse forms of oppression. When complex relationships
are simplified and systematically reduced to only one form of discrimi-
nation, as in the case of gender discrimination, there is a serious risk that
the causes and consequences of these experiences will remain mis-
conceived and inadequately addressed. Harding notes that this kind of
approach faces the "same kinds of problems encountered by attempts to
add women and gender to conceptual frameworks designed, intention-
ally or not, to exclude them" (1998: 32). Thus, the current GM frame-
work reveals the gap between feminist practice and feminist theory.
Moreover, policy interventions that are based on such incomplete knowl-
edge of women's lives cannot be effective.

The obvious problem, of course, is that women are not a single con-
stituency 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 inter-
locked with class, race, ethnicity and other structural relations that under-
pin a society's institutions and practices (Harding, 1995). Thus, tolerance
of differences and attempts to include diversity do not go far enough in
changing GM. In reality, 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"
(Kittay, 1998: 573). Important questions that GM has not adequately grap-
pled with include: What is gender? What is equality? Can we speak of
women as a group? What constitutes salient issues for GM and who
defines such issues? How can differences among women be dealt with in
formulating, implementing and evaluating policies? Returning to the roots
of GM, to 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 have been complicated. Difference feminism (MacKinnon, 1987; Hartsock, 1987; Irigaray, 1993; Kristeva, 1984), diversity feminism (Lorde, 1984; Collins, 1991; Mohanty, 1997; Haraway, 1990; Anzaldúa and Keating, 2002) and deconstruction feminism (Butler, 1990; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990) represent 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. Diversity feminism, in particular, seeks to recognize and empower traditionally marginalized, oppressed and excluded women. 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 is the very concept of gender and its relation to the category of women. Mary Dietz (2003) puts it effectively when she argues that feminist theory is struggling to identify "the critical conceptual coordinates" of its claims. And, the stakes in current feminist theoretical debates are "every bit as practical and political as they are categorical, analytical, and philosophical" (403).

As a result of these recent theoretical developments, we must seriously consider whether a focus on gender is adequate for understanding inequality or for moving towards social justice in public policy. As Kittay explains elsewhere, "[t]he 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 GM 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. The confluence of factors that compound one another to produce discrimination must be integrated as a fundamental basis of feminist theory and, by extension, of GM. But 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).

Even though improvements to GM have been proposed (Booth and Bennett, 2001), some feminists have questioned whether or not factors that create gender equality are distinct enough to warrant a specific GM

approach or whether a broader approach to mainstreaming equality is required (Verloo, 2000). As a result, mainstreaming equality has been both proposed and applied in a number of jurisdictions (Donaghy, 2004; Beveridge et al., 2000; Mackay and Bilton, 2000). As Donaghy explains, in Northern Ireland and Scotland, "the concept of mainstreaming is shared by GM and mainstreaming equality, and the difference between the two models is the groups for which equality of opportunity is promoted. Gender mainstreaming considers men and women, while mainstreaming equality adopts a number of groups for whom equality of opportunity is considered" (2004: 51). Support for a race-based parallel to gender mainstreaming has also been expressed (Williams Crenshaw, 2000). But as Mackay and Bilton correctly observe, "further theoretical work is also needed ... to construct more sophisticated understanding of 'simultaneous' experience of different dimensions of difference and disadvantage" (2003: 153).

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 perspective(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 naming, being aware or considerate of these differences and their relationship with one another. This is where GM falls short and is inherently inadequate. The key issue, as Teghtsoonian puts it, is "how initiatives to 'mainstream gender analysis' can respond to diversity among women in a positive and productive way" (1999: 5).

What is needed at this juncture in time is a conceptual shift that will lead to a strategy that is far more progressive and consistently inclusive. What I propose is a diversity mainstreaming framework that transcends the current focus and form of GM. While other jurisdictions, including Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, have opted for models that resemble such an approach, diversity mainstreaming represents a new direction in the Canadian context. In elucidating the diversity mainstreaming approach, I put forward a qualified defence of gender, but one that challenges traditional conceptualizations and displaces gender as the primary axis for understanding experiences of discrimination, inequality and oppression. Accordingly, the privileging of gender is replaced with a more sophisticated and comprehensive approach to understanding lived experiences, especially for those persons who have been and continue to be marginalized by current perspectives and practices of GM. Most importantly, the diversity framework places the importance of intersectionali-

ties 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.[4] Drawing on Young's work on gender as serial collectivity, I am putting forward a *reconceptualized* concept of gender that 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 that "gender is basic in ways that [we] 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 remains 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 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 (1995) of the articles published in *Canadian Public Policy* between 1975 and 1993, in which only 1 per cent of published works focused on women's issues, while mainstream policy analyses were void of any kind of gender analysis, illustrates the dangers of such gender blindness and exclusion of women from policy agendas and processes. The question remains, however, how to bring to the foreground issues without essentializing gender.

As feminist 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 ide-

als, 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). Phillips' 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).

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 is 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. Young's work, like that of a number of other feminists, seeks to bridge the divide between essentialist feminism and those who see the utility in maintaining some category of "woman." With her specific interpretation, Young does leave open the door to variability and diversity in experience even if there are pratico-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). The fact that universal gender inequalities exist does not mean that gender oppression is more oppressive than racism, classism, heterosexism, ethnocentrism or exploitative global economic conditions (Whittle and Inhorn, 2001: 160).

Moving Beyond Privileging Gender

The key is not to abandon the analytical category of gender but to explicitly recognize that it is not the primary or key axis of social oppression, or "*the* issue in GM" (Beveridge and Nottt, 2002), 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). Recently, Teghstoonian noted that "further work needs to be done to weave systematically into gender analysis a focus on race, sexual orientation and ability, and to weave gender into lens-based work focused on other marginalized groups" (1999: 4).

What I am proposing, however, is different. It is not about fitting missing pieces into existing frameworks. It is also different from the approach in Northern Ireland,[5] which is lauded as "unique and world leading" because it expanded traditional mainstreaming beyond gender (Donaghy, 2004a; McCrudden, 2003). The approach in Northern Ireland promotes a multiple equality approach that requires due regard for the need to promote equality of opportunity: a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sex-

ual orientation; b) between men and women generally; c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and d) between persons with dependants and persons without. At the same, it is less clear that this approach leads to an analysis that effectively captures the relationships between all these different and multiple equity grounds. The framework for diversity mainstreaming is one that enables a truly integrated analysis, one that systematically captures the interstices of all factors of oppression.

Diversity mainstreaming, thus conceptualized, builds upon Williams Crenshaw's model of intersectionality. Crenshaw's approach reflects the emerging literature, both normative and empirical, that is seeking to deal with multiple grounds of disadvantage (Collins, 1991; Jhappan, 1996; Mouffee, 1993, 2000). 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). In so doing, it neither prioritizes nor essentializes gender or race or any other factor. As Zierler and Krieger explain elsewhere, this type of approach goes beyond "adding one-dimensional terms like *race/ethnicity* or *social class* to a long list of other variables ... and looking for multiplicative effects. It instead requires asking questions about deprivation, privilege, discrimination, and aspirations, to permit characterizing people more fully, and as more than the sum or product of their parts" (1995: 253). Similarly, Spellman has argued that "one's gender identity is not related to one's racial and class identity as the parts of pop-bead necklaces are related, separable and insertable in other 'strands' with different racial and class 'parts'" (1988: 15). Intersectionality recognizes this and instead seeks to illuminate the synergistic effect of interlocking forms of oppression.

Williams Crenshaw uses the metaphor of a traffic intersection to describe intersectional subordination. Race, class, gender and other forms of discrimination, such as sexual orientation and ability, are the roads that structure social, economic and political terrain. This metaphor captures the numerous systems of subordination that often overlap and cross and that create complex intersections. It allows us to avoid thinking of these dynamics as disjoined 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 inter-related and interlocking discrimination, and decide whether these are pre-existing conditions or brought on by their particular acts and policies.

Within a GM 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 of mul-

tiple 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 and sexual orientation, among others. Using this approach can contribute to furthering the variability of discrimination and oppression nationally and internationally. Even though there is a cross-national convergence around GM 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). The complex and contradictory forces that operate on national and global levels to 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 conditions of women in the South. What would be required, according to a diversity mainstreaming approach, is a foregrounding of the intersections of the local and global (Hegde, 1998).

In the end, diversity mainstreaming allows for a more complex and dynamic 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 following: the policy questions that are asked, research design, development of improved research methods to uncover key aspects of intersectional subordination, and data collection (e.g., what kind of data is collected, how it is collected, and how it is disaggregated). Using this framework would entail 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* 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.

Practical Applications of the Alternative Approach

HIV/AIDS

The need for diversity mainstreaming is apparent when considering the multiple forms of discrimination and subordination that influence a phenomenon like HIV/AIDS. It has been argued that GM is the most effective and equitable way of using existing resources for combating HIV/AIDS (Commonwealth Secretariat and Maritime Centre of Excel-

lence 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 are 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; and individuals' proximity to centres 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. It would reflect the reality that all aspects of HIV/AIDS are embedded within the context of gender, race/ethnicity and class oppression (Amaro and Raj, 2000). It would also demonstrate how such factors cause oppression for those who are at their intersection.

Trafficking

Another example through which the limitations of GM can be observed is with the issue of trafficking. Trafficking is often described as one of the most serious contemporary forms of gender discrimination. GM 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 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." (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) Moreover, as Jhappan (1996) has noted, our best efforts will never be able to include all relevant factors. These challenges, however, should not undermine efforts to displace GM with diversity mainstreaming. Diversity mainstreaming would allow for broader 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 the relative positions of women and men, a more complete and sophisticated analysis can be developed, one that better captures the ways in which public policy is experienced by various groups of women and men who may experience multiple discrimination. Policy makers may be persuaded to incorporate this approach into their work if they understand that it has the potential to lead to more effective, responsive and therefore efficient policy decisions.

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 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 a 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, complex 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, contribute an important conceptual advancement in expanding policy discourse in relation to social justice.

Notes

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.
2 United Nations ESCO (E/1997/L.30 Para Adopted by ECOSOC 14.7.97).
3 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).
4 Sex can determine differential propensities for certain health conditions or diseases, different risk
   factors and treatment requirements (Greaves, Hankivsky et al., 1999).
5 Section 75 (1) of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*

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