



**Carol Bacchi & Joan Eveline**

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diversity mainstreaming?  
The politics of “doing”**

**FREIA**

Paper  
February 2009

**70**

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*Download:*  
<http://freia.ihis.aau.dk/Publikationer+og+skriftserie/Skriftserie0907-2179>

*Layout & word processing:*  
Cirkeline Kappel

ISSN: 0907-2179

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Carol Bacchi presented this paper to FREIA, Aalborg University, during her stay as Visiting Professor at the Universities of Aalborg and Roskilde in late September and early October 2008. She is grateful for the discussion and feedback received at this session. A significantly revised paper is forthcoming in NORA in 2009.

The authors of this paper see it as part of the learning that emerged from their involvement in a large research project on gender analysis in South Australia and Western Australia. Bacchi and Eveline have written extensively on theories of equality and on gender mainstreaming. Relevant publications include: Eveline *et al.*, (2009 forthcoming), 'Gender Mainstreaming Versus Diversity Mainstreaming: Methodology as Emancipatory Politics', *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 16(2); Eveline and Bacchi (2005) 'What are we mainstreaming when we mainstream gender?', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(4): 496-512; Bacchi *et al.*, (2005) 'Gender Analysis and Social Change: Testing the Water', *Policy & Society*, 24(4): 45-68; Bacchi and Eveline (2003) 'Mainstreaming and Neoliberalism: A Contested Relationship', *Policy & Society*, 22(2): 98-118. Professor Carol Bacchi is affiliated to the Politics Discipline, School of History and Politics, University of Adelaide. Associate Professor Joan Eveline is affiliated to the Business School, University of Western Australia.

# **Gender mainstreaming or diversity mainstreaming? The politics of “doing”**

Carol Bacchi & Joan Eveline

## **Introduction**

This paper engages with the large and burgeoning literature on mainstreaming to address two interrelated questions: is it preferable to refer to gender mainstreaming or to diversity mainstreaming? Which mainstreaming practices are more likely to encourage an ‘intersectional’ sensitivity (referring to the need to find ways to understand and respond to identified differences among women)? There is a good deal of attention to the concept of ‘intersectionality’ in recent feminist theory. Davis (2008) calls it a ‘buzzword’. This paper makes a contribution to these discussions by directing attention to the question of how feminists committed to recognizing intersectional oppression ought to conduct themselves in research practices and policy formulation. Our conclusion, in brief, is that it is more important to ‘do’ intersectionality than to talk about it.

To develop this argument we draw upon our recent experience in a large research project (described in more detail below) aimed at introducing gender analysis guidelines in the South Australian and Western Australian public sectors. Based on this experience we make three theoretical points:

- Since mainstreaming policies are open-ended and contested, it is crucial to emphasize the procedures and practices put in place to develop those policies.
- Transformative practices require a de-privileging of normative positions, which refers to dominant and accepted standards for social organization.
- To achieve this goal the views of marginalized women need to be privileged.

This position sits in some tension with the current tendency to condemn identity politics as essentializing and fragmenting. We argue that marginalized groups of women are best placed to decide when appeals to identity are useful politically and hence their views on this matter ought to be respected.

## **Background**

Gender mainstreaming is the most recent approach to equality policy for women. It has its genesis in development policy and can be seen as a reaction to the tendency to quarantine so-called ‘women's issues’ from mainstream policy. The shift from WID (Women in Development) to GAD (Gender in

Development) was meant to highlight the need to cease creating ‘women’ as the problem, as the ones ‘done to’ (Chant and Gutmann 2000).

As an equality policy, gender mainstreaming is meant to complement rather than to replace existing approaches to gender equality. In the UK for example the ‘gender perspective’ sits alongside ‘equal treatment approaches’ and ‘positive action or the women's perspective’. Gender equality is described as a “three-legged stool” with each approach [i.e. equal opportunity laws, positive/affirmative action, *and* gender mainstreaming] representing a support’ (Mackay and Bilton 2003: 4).

At the same time, however, a number of authors (True and Mintrom 2001) stress the innovative aspects of mainstreaming as an intervention. Rees (1998), for example, describes equal opportunity as ‘tinkering’, positive action as ‘tailoring’, and gender mainstreaming as ‘transformative’. The argument here is that equality approaches such as equal opportunity and positive action aim to fit women *to* existing institutional arrangements while gender mainstreaming *challenges* those institutions because it insists that all policies are scrutinized to ensure that they are gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive.

*Gender analysis* is generally put forward as the best way to accomplish this goal – submitting *all* policies to a gender analysis (all sorts of methods, guides, etc. are available).

### **The Debate: gender mainstreaming or diversity mainstreaming?**

Several theorists (Hankivsky 2005; Squires 2005) argue that ‘gender’ is essentialist and predicated on a male-female binary. They suggest that the more plural understanding of social relationships captured in the concept of intersectionality needs to be taken on board. In their view *diversity* mainstreaming will be more likely than *gender* mainstreaming to respond to an *intersectional* awareness or sensibility.

To an extent, this turn to *diversity* mainstreaming is a response to the concerns of some feminist theorists that the concept gender is invariably tied to a male-female binary. From the 1970s Black feminists have drawn attention to the tendency in feminist theory to treat all women as white women (Spellman 1988). Butler (1990) meanwhile argued that those who used the concept of gender not only universalized “women” but also essentialized “sex”. Accepting this argument Toril Moi (1999) recommends that feminist and other queer theorists abandon the concept of gender in favor of an account of the “lived body”.

In line with these views Hankivsky (2005: 996, 978) claims that ‘there is a clear disjuncture between GM [gender mainstreaming] and contemporary feminist theory’: ‘GM is inherently limited and limiting because it prioritizes gender as *the* axis of discrimination’. Hankivsky is particularly concerned to find a notion that recognizes *intersectional* oppressions, ‘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’. She believes the term ‘diversity’ best achieves this goal.

Judith Squires (2005) is also a proponent of diversity mainstreaming. In her view (2005: 368) ‘there are three analytically distinct ways of conceptualizing mainstreaming, informed by three distinct theoretical frameworks’, which she defines elsewhere (Squires 1999) as **inclusion, reversal and displacement**. **Inclusion** focuses on equal opportunities; **reversal** stresses the importance of *women's* perspectives gained through ‘consultation with women's organizations’; and **displacement** conceives of mainstreaming in terms of ‘complex equality (which recognizes diversity)’, achievable ‘via inclusive deliberation’. Each conception of mainstreaming, Squires suggests, has its weaknesses: **inclusion** ‘is constrained by its individualism and its elitism’, **reversal** ‘is constrained by its essentialism and fragmentation’, while displacement requires greater specificity, ‘practical and conceptual’ (Squires 2005: 375). She prefers displacement as a theoretical framework and suggests deliberative democracy initiatives such as citizens’ forums can assist in achieving this political vision. To the same end she prefers the idea of *diversity* mainstreaming rather than *gender* mainstreaming.

Now, other leading theorists in the gender mainstreaming field are ambivalent about the suggested shift to the language of diversity mainstreaming. Mieke Verloo (2006: 211), for example, is concerned by the trend in international organizations (e.g. the World Bank), the European Union and the UK to include ‘gender’ as one of a long list of inequalities in single equality instruments (such as the UK Single Equality Act). For example, EU directives require member states to promote equality in relation to **sexual orientation, age, and religion, in addition to race, gender, and disability** (Squires 2005: 367). These initiatives often embrace the language of diversity. For example, a five-year, EU-wide campaign, entitled ‘For **Diversity**—Against Discrimination’, aims to ‘promote the positive benefits of **diversity** for business and for society as a whole’ (EC Green Paper 2004: 13 in Squires 2005: 377). Verloo is concerned that these initiatives 1) assume an unquestioned similarity of inequalities and 2) fail to address the ‘structural level’ of change that, she argues, is needed – a point we’ll return to later.

## **The Gender Analysis Project**

The gender analysis project, funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant and partner contributions, commenced in late 2004 and has just recently been completed. Its goal has been to develop gender analysis guidelines appropriate to the contexts of the South Australian and Western Australian State public sectors. Guides for gender analysis are currently in the final stages of production in both South Australia and Western Australia.

From the outset in the project the term ‘gender’, as in *gender* analysis, created a number of challenges. In particular there was expressed concern from several quarters that the concept masked asymmetrical power relations based upon **race/ethnicity** and **sexual orientation**, echoing Spellman and Butler. In Western Australia the members of an Indigenous Election strategy expressed strong reservations about the usefulness of the concept ‘gender’ to their work. They (Elliott 2005: 3) stated that ‘gender’ remains a ‘western construction’. Similar qualms were expressed by the Aboriginal senior policy officers who provided feedback to assist the project team in South Australia. Gender in their view was understood to *privilege* male/female relations.

In South Australia the challenge, therefore, became designing a Guide that reflected the perspectives of Aboriginal women. In response the draft Guide, called SAGA (South Australian Gender Analysis), offers a unique blending of theoretical perspectives. The introductory section specifies that gender analysis in South Australia is informed by ‘race and cultural analysis’, explained in the following terms:

Race and cultural analysis broadens the ‘gender based’ framework to include and reflect the multidimensional experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. All discussions about equality, equity or disadvantage must be inclusive of discussions about diversity and human rights.

(Government of South Australia 2008: 6)

Our research on mainstreaming and our experience in the gender analysis project have led us to draw several conclusions.

First, our research indicates that either reform – gender mainstreaming or diversity mainstreaming – is invariably subject to the whims of politics. For example, in some places the introduction of mainstreaming has meant the curtailment of funding for dedicated (i.e. specific) women's policy units. In other places it has meant an attack on women-specific interventions, including



positive/affirmative action. There are some concerns then that the reform can actually *detract* attention from a range of issues considered central to women's equality (see *Feminist Daily News Wire* 2006).

On the other side, while the idea of diversity mainstreaming is still in the realm of conjecture, there are definite moves at the national and international levels, as seen above, to cluster forms of 'inequality' under a single rubric. Discussions about the possible benefits of using the new language of 'diversity mainstreaming' ought to reflect carefully on the intents and possible effects of such developments.

In addition the idea of diversity has a heritage in the notions of diversity management (or 'managing diversity'), a heritage which signals some need for caution. In the United States, for example, where diversity management appears to have had its genesis, there is considerable disagreement about how the approach should be understood (elsewhere Bacchi [1999a] describes the concept as contested). There are (at least) two quite different political agendas associated with the term "diversity": (1) an **individual differences** approach and (2) a **social justice** approach. In the **former**, which has become the dominant approach, there is an emphasis on the multitude of characteristics that mark each person as unique, supporting an *individualistic approach* to business practices and government policy. In this case diversity becomes a key term in *human resource management*. In the **latter, social justice** approach there is an attempt to incorporate sensitivity to the experiences of diverse *groups* of underrepresented people. Equity groups are commonly targeted. So, it is at best unclear whether a turn to diversity will mean redressing group-based injustices.

Verloo's (2006) concern that diversity approaches 'fail to address the structural level' is relevant here. It becomes very important to clarify how equality is theorized in mainstreaming approaches. Hankivsky (2005) and the EC documents quoted earlier endorse an **anti-discrimination** model of political change. It is at best uncertain if anti-discrimination law can redress *structural* inequalities, referring to deep-seated asymmetries of social influence and authority. Anti-discrimination as a concept can tend to focus on individual prejudice rather than on systemic issues. Even when anti-discrimination law attempts to attend to organizational practices that harm specific groups, as in indirect discrimination cases, the process is complaint-based and hence depends upon individuals having the will and resources to press claims (Bacchi 1999b, Chapter 5). Duclos (1993: 26) also identifies the way in which the concept of discrimination "conceives of difference as an inherent characteristic of the non-dominant group rather than a feature arising out of the relationship between groups". Because of this, as Crenshaw (1989: 151; emphasis in original) states, "the *privileging* of whiteness or maleness is implicit".

Those who wish to defend the transformative potential of diversity mainstreaming need therefore to be much clearer about what kind of transformation is intended and how it is to be achieved. Specifically, which practices and which processes need to be put in place to engage diverse groups of women in developing mainstreaming policy?

This leads to our second conclusion.

Since the content and meaning of either reform – gender mainstreaming or diversity mainstreaming – depends in the end on politics, it becomes crucial to redirect attention to the *processes and practices* that give an initiative shape and content, which we call the politics of ‘doing’. By this phrase, we mean *how you actually go about developing the reform initiative* – how it is developed? Whom do you speak to? How do you decide whom to speak to? How do you decide whose voices get to be heard? How do you set up the conditions for this discussion? How do you decide which voices should carry more weight?

Our third conclusion is that, in developing any such reform initiative, the voices of marginalized women need to be privileged. That is, conditions need to be put in place so that their views on what to call the reform and how to implement it are heard and respected. In South Australia, as mentioned earlier, these processes led to a guide titled South Australian Gender Analysis (SAGA) within which gender analysis is mediated by race and cultural analysis. This particular form for the policy reflected the views of the senior Aboriginal policy officers consulted for the project.

Here it is important to emphasize that the idea of bringing in ‘race and cultural analysis’ in this way is not intended as a blueprint for what should happen elsewhere. Rather, this is what happened in South Australia. What happens elsewhere depends on the particular institutional, historical and power relations that shape a particular historical moment. However, we are suggesting as a general principle that in all contexts the voices of marginalized women need to be privileged. A proposal such as this one necessarily takes us into the deep and troubling political waters of ‘identity politics’.

To deal with this topic we need to return to Judith Squires’ work and her distinction between inclusion, reversal and displacement mainstreaming strategies. There you may recall Squires describes the **reversal** view, which stresses the importance of women’s perspectives gained through consultations with women’s organizations, as ‘constrained by its essentialism and fragmentation’. She elaborates that in this perspective ‘mainstreaming becomes delimited by an *identity politics* approach that pursues equality via the

recognition of authentic voices, often at the expense of redistributive concerns'. While such an approach might, she admits, 'create new political opportunity structures that would empower the spokespersons of particular groups', 'its weakness would be that it reduces the incentive for people to speak across groups and thereby makes the pursuit of genuine diversity more difficult'. As a way forward Squires (2005: 384) endorses a 'non-Habermasian dialogic ethics' based on 'dialogue with diverse social groups' and facilitated by such institutional reforms as mediation, citizens' forums, and citizen initiative and referendum (Squires 2005: 381-83).

Squires' critique of identity politics is unsurprising. Indeed, identity politics has been 'on the nose' for some time in contemporary social and political theory (Butler 1990; Mouffe 1992). Few (see Bickford 1997) seem to have a kind word to say about it. According to Phoenix and Pattynama (2006: 187), all intersectionality approaches 'critique identity politics for its additive, politically fragmentary and essentializing tendencies' (see Yuval-Davis 2006: 195).

However, among mainstreaming theorists, there are different points of view about who to include as primary contributors to the development of the reform. Verloo (2005: 351), for example, wants mainstreaming proposals to 'give voice to the feminist movement' and 'to those suffering from gender inequality'. According to Verloo (2005: 346) and using Squires' typology, **displacement** is not the only way to produce meaningful change: 'the strategy of **reversal** also implies a need for fundamental change', and hence can be described as potentially transformative. The emphasis, according to Verloo, needs to be placed, therefore, on creating the opportunities for 'women's voices' to steer the transformation: 'To be transformative, gender mainstreaming should then be not only a strategy of displacement but also a strategy of empowerment by organizing space for non-hegemonic actors to struggle about the (promotion of the) agenda of gender equality' (Verloo 2005: 348).

The key issue that surfaces in this debate is disagreement about which groups to consult or involve in policy development – should they be identity groups or some more amorphous collection of citizens? Intersectionality theorists, like Crenshaw, make a major contribution here, challenging Squires' contention that identity politics is necessarily essentialist (Crenshaw 1991: 1296 fn 180). To the contrary Crenshaw insists that 'to say that a category such as race or gender is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in the world.' Rather she emphasizes the importance of recognizing 'the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others' (Crenshaw 1991: 1296-97). Crenshaw notes that 'identity continues to be a site of resistance for members of different subordinated groups' (Crenshaw 1991: 1297).

In Crenshaw's understanding, then, claims to identity are **political** rather than **essentialist** in character (see Bacchi 1996: xii). You simply have to recognize that politically there are times when it is more useful and appropriate to *challenge* constructed identities, and that at other times it is necessary to *accept and work with* established identity categories. For example, to challenge the practices of racialized oppression involves working *through and with* the category "race".

Our argument is that members of marginalized groups, those who live the effects of 'differencing' practices (see Bacchi 2001), are best placed to know which strategy – either challenging or working through racial categories – is appropriate politically in which situation. Hence, their views on this issue ought to be respected. This is the basis of our claim that the voices of marginalized women should be privileged in developing and naming mainstreaming reforms.

Going further Crenshaw suggests that, in her usage, intersectionality provides a basis for 'reconceptualizing race as a coalition between men and women of color', and/or a coalition 'of straight and gay people of color'" (Crenshaw 1991: 1299). Thinking about intersectionality as a basis for identifying potential coalitions highlights the **political** dynamics of identity formation. In this model, coalition means the cooperation of those who *choose* to align politically around a particular political commitment, rather than because one is born Black or female (see Bickford 1997). We capture this notion in the phrase 'coalitions of engagement'.

We see the SAGA Guide as an example of Crenshaw's model of coalition that focuses on the cooperation of those who *choose* to align politically around a particular commitment, which we call a coalition of engagement. The emphasis in a coalition model such as this one is on **the intellectual, emotional and political work involved in coalition**. That is, one cannot assume that people will align around a particular position because they are born a 'woman' or a member of a particular 'racial'/ethnic grouping, for example. Rather, political positions have to be developed and defended in coalition. They involve practices. On one issue I may claim to be a woman; on another I will claim to be 'different' in some other way, **depending upon the politics of the situation**. As developed in Foucault (1982) and Butler (1989), 'political collectivities and movements rest not on extra-political justifications and foundations, but on action and practice' (Simons 1995: 110).

There are links here with Yuval-Davis's (2006: 205 fn2; see also Yuval-Davis 1997) notion of 'transversal politics', which she describes as 'a democratic practice of alliances across boundaries of difference'. In transversal politics,

The boundaries of the dialogue should be determined by common political emancipatory goals while the tactical and strategic priorities should be led by those whose needs are judged by the participants of the dialogue to be the most urgent.

(Yuval-Davis 2006: 206; emphasis added.)

The suggestion here that tactical and strategic priorities should be led ‘by those whose needs are judged by the participants of the dialogue to be the most urgent’ coheres with our proposal to privilege the views of marginalized women. Note that there is no suggestion that it will always or ever be obvious just which views ought to be privileged. Yuval-Davis is clearly aware of the kinds of discussion that will need to take place to judge ‘whose needs’ are ‘most urgent’. In South Australia the power imbalances between white and Aboriginal populations are indisputable. Hence participants had little difficulty judging whose needs were most urgent.

To make this decision is, however, only part of what needs to be accomplished. As with the focus generally on *practices* in this paper, attention needs to be directed to the conditions that need to be put in place for the appropriate kinds of discussion to occur. Squires’ conviction that a deliberative model is preferable to forms of consultation/engagement with identity groups rests on her premise that institutional reforms such as mediation, citizens’ forums, and citizen initiative and referendums ‘would be sensitive to diverse citizen perspectives without reifying group identities’ (Squires 2005: 383). Here she neglects the prospect, supported in the literature (Hill 2003: 9), that such reforms are susceptible to capture by the wealthy and the powerful.

A more promising way forward, we suggest, is the concept of ‘deep listening’ developed among transcultural mental health practitioners (Gabb and McDermott 2007; see also Bickford 1996). We are not talking here about consultation in any conventional sense. Deep listening is a way of engaging with people. By listening (‘tuning in with the whole being’) you are showing respect by what you are doing. Deep listening entails ‘an obligation in common to contemplate, in real time, everything that you hear – to self-reflect as you listen, and then, tellingly, to *act* on what you’ve registered’ (Gabb and McDermott 2007, p. 5; emphasis in original).

## **Conclusion**

We noted above that what occurred in South Australia – i.e. adding ‘race and cultural analysis’ *within* guidelines called *gender* analysis – is not being put forward as a blueprint. The idea of a blueprint would go against the political

perspective outlined in this paper – *the need to respond to on-the-ground political developments and the specific arrangements that are worked out in coalitions of engagement*. That is, different coalitions elsewhere might very well come up with different models.

At the same time we believe that it is possible to take some ‘guiding precepts’ for political practice around mainstreaming from the case material developed in the South Australian and Western Australian gender analysis project. These include:

- a caution against blanket generalizations about how to label mainstreaming, i.e. as either *gender* mainstreaming or *diversity* mainstreaming;
- a willingness to hold our categories in abeyance until the views of those whose needs are most urgent are heard;
- creating the conditions for situations of deep listening with participants from a wide variety of backgrounds;
- ensuring that those whose needs are judged to be most urgent get the opportunity to shape the policy in ways they see as politically useful;
- respecting how these groups choose to represent their identity.

To those who are concerned at our lack of attention to questions of implementation and the many obstacles that may mean that the actual ‘impact’ of the SAGA Guide is minimized or minimal, we wish to make the case that a **good deal has already been accomplished politically simply through the practices involved in the production of the Guide**. In our view the coalition of engagement established between the research team and Aboriginal spokeswomen counts as a political success story, as does the blending of ‘race and cultural analysis’ with gender analysis. The ‘politics of “doing”’ means that the politics involved in **producing** a policy proposal – in this case the politics of engagement among women – is **as important** as the possible effects of this policy through implementation.

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