Data, Anecdote and Metaphor in Gender Equality Policy-Making: merging ‘intellectual and real world mainstreaming’

Gemma M. Carney
Department of Political Science,
University of Dublin, Trinity College

Draft paper, please do not cite without permission
carneyg@tcd.ie

ECPR Workshop: Metaphor in Political Science
Granada, April 14-19, 2005

---

1 Mazey, S. (ed.) ‘Introduction: Integrating gender – intellectual and ‘real world’ mainstreaming’ in ‘Women, Power and Public Policy in Europe’ Journal of European Public Policy 7:3 (2000) Special Issue p. 333. Please forgive this draft of the paper, which is incomplete, and, as such, does not address all aspects of the paper title. Future drafts will elaborate on the role of data and investigate the possibility of anecdotal evidence more fully.
**Introduction: aims of this paper**

This paper stems from several years in an intellectual tussle with the elusive and over-used concept gender mainstreaming.\(^2\) The rise of neo-liberal policy paradigms and the focus on quantitative measurement of policy outcomes, have recently been identified as key challenges in developing gender equality policy (True, 2003; Carney, 2004). Arising from doctoral research investigating gender mainstreaming in the Republic of Ireland as one case of a proliferating global gender policy, this paper aims to define the use of metaphor in relation to gender mainstreaming policy, and to investigate the scope of metaphor as an explanatory category for policy-makers and political scientists developing the mainstreaming phenomenon in theory and practice. The development of awkward and/or meaningless jargon (e.g. gender impact assessment, gender mainstreaming, mainstreaming equality) and (mis)communication have already been identified as problems for those working with gender mainstreaming (Mossink, 2001; Carney, 2002). More recent studies have concluded that gender disaggregated data, gathered while implementing gender mainstreaming, has been used to justify the introduction of the policy, rather than to build a new, gender-equal policy base. New methodological approaches are needed to move the mainstreaming agenda beyond the circular “data as a justification for the policy” loop\(^3\) in which it is currently trapped.

Essentially this paper is a progression from conclusions reached in the doctoral thesis, the main conclusion being, that gender disaggregated data is not useful in understanding or eradicating gender inequality. So, the paper begins to explore other means of understanding gender mainstreaming – namely metaphor.

**Paper Context: an introduction to gender mainstreaming**

Political and institutional support for gender mainstreaming is unprecedented for any equality policy. Gender mainstreaming is being implemented across and within national

---

\(^2\) The most widely quoted definition of gender mainstreaming was used to launch the policy at the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995: ‘governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively’ (United Nations, 1996; 11). Essentially, gender mainstreaming means that rather than having women only policies for the eradication of gender inequalities, all policies should be developed with the consideration of possible gender inequities and devise plans to avoid them from the outset.

\(^3\) One of the main conclusions of my doctoral research was that gender mainstreaming policy-makers had to meet continuous demands to continually prove the worth of the policy. The result was that those charged with implementing gender mainstreaming spent most of their time gathering gender disaggregated data to demonstrate that women are at a disadvantage, and justifying their presence, rather than devising innovative policies that would produce gender-equal outcomes. See, Carney, G. M. *Intellectual and Real World Feminism: mainstreaming international gender norms in the Republic of Ireland* Unpublished PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2004.
government, supranational organisations and international institutions (Woodward, 1999; Mazey, 2001; 2) and has proliferated almost worldwide as the default gender equality policy at state level (True, 2001; 3). Why have governments decided to promote and develop strategies such as gender mainstreaming, and how do they interpret and develop such strategies? It is argued that a number of factors combine to operationalise international gender norms such as international influence, domestic political pressures and political cultural status of equality objectives (Beveridge, Nott and Stephen, 2000; 20). However, there are also arguments that governments only adopt gender mainstreaming as part of an image making exercise, with little or no resources assigned for the implementation of the policy (Beveridge, Nott and Stephen, 2000; 20). Is this the case in the Republic of Ireland?

The ‘mainstreaming’ phenomenon is global, but its application reflects local cultural norms. What is the capacity of gender mainstreaming to be a transformative policy tool in the Irish case? In answering the research question, this doctoral research applied itself to considering Mazey’s (2000) view that “‘intellectual’ and “real world” mainstreaming of gender are interrelated rather than parallel developments,’ (Mazey, 2000; 334). Mazey (2000) implies that research on mainstreaming informs its manifestation in practice, and vice versa. In addressing this observation, the thesis tried to access the radical potential of gender mainstreaming, by highlighting the implications of the concept for knowledge production in policy-making and in feminism. Central to accessing the ‘transformative potential’ (Mossink, 2001) of gender mainstreaming, is the argument that ‘control over knowledge and information is an important dimension of power’ (Haas, 1992; 2). Specifically, the potential of mainstreaming lies in how information about gender issues is gathered in the process of ‘mainstreaming gender,’ and the role of feminism in educating mainstream policy-makers. Language plays an important role in communicating gender mainstreaming, though, the argument that gender mainstreaming is incoherent and, therefore, policy-makers cannot understand it, is dismissed as too simplistic as the thesis develops. Rather, the failure of gender mainstreaming is identified as symptomatic of the incompatibility of economic and equity priorities, based on more profound ideological divisions between mainstream bureaucracy and feminist proponents of gender mainstreaming. It is argued that current dilemmas surrounding the collation of gender disaggregated data, and how it is used to produce gender mainstreaming, are central to debates on knowledge and power between feminists and mainstream policy-makers. A level of technical expertise, available within feminist

---

4 The issue as to whether gender mainstreaming is a policy, a concept, a tool or a method is hotly debated in the literature and amongst policy-makers implicated in making gender integral to policy development. These debates are key to the central arguments of the thesis and are dealt with in Chapters 2 and 3. Throughout the thesis, I have explicitly referred to ‘gender mainstreaming’ or ‘mainstreaming’ as either a policy or a concept. The concept refers to the idea that policies should be conceived and developed without gender prejudice and the policy refers to the process of achieving this via gender impact assessment, gender disaggregated data and the use of feminist expertise.

5 The potential of gender mainstreaming to achieve radical re-structuring of the policy agenda is, perhaps, the main reason for such widespread interest in the phenomenon amongst feminists. Its potential to be transformative is hotly contested, and generally refers to ‘the capacity… for questioning, undermining or transforming gender relations and the structures of subordination’ (Young, 1993; 156 quoted in Molyneaux in Jackson and Pearson, 1998; 75).

6 For a fuller discussion of the issue of language and communication with regard to gender mainstreaming see: Carney, G. (2003) ‘Communicating or Just Talking? Gender Mainstreaming and the Politics of Global Feminism Women and Language Special Issue Spring 2003.'
communities, is necessary to translate data about women into mechanisms to effectively mainstream gender concerns into everyday policy. It is at this juncture that intellectual and real world mainstreaming must interact, through feminists, employed by mainstream government (femocrats) to produce gender sensitive policies. The thesis used Haas’s (1992; 2) concept of ‘epistemic communities’ or ‘networks of knowledge-based experts’ to investigate the implications of this new feminist practice for feminist theory. These arguments are investigated through an in-depth analysis of the adoption and implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Republic of Ireland.

In the Republic of Ireland, the advent of gender mainstreaming policy establishes gender equality as a legitimate principle of government, regardless of whether political cultural values fully reflect equal status for women (Galligan, 1998). The fact that policy-makers and government must systematically consider gender, in order to comply with international norms, is the beginning of an important normative shift regarding gender relations in the Republic of Ireland. In the thesis, the role of feminist experts, and the production of knowledge about gender amongst Irish policy-makers are discussed in terms that establish the significance of gender mainstreaming for policy-making in the Republic of Ireland. However, the means by which gender mainstreaming is being operationalised presents problems for the policy. These problems, manifest in confused meanings, language barriers and obscure vocabularies, are rooted in the liberal democratic framework of Irish policy-making, combined with the ‘depoliticization’ of gender mainstreaming by its quantification as ‘gender proofing’ by mainstream institutions (Sutton, 1999; 8). Haas’s (1992) conceptualisation of ‘epistemic communities’ is significant because it demonstrates how ‘networks of knowledge based experts’ (Haas, 1992; 2) can influence policy when their knowledge is deemed useful by government. The thesis concludes that by establishing a link between knowledge and power in the feminist pursuit of liberation through mainstream institutions, gender mainstreaming has the potential to produce a radical politics in the future.

Gender and Metaphor

“Metaphor is a key concept, whether it is defined as peripheral to social science (and so implicated in the definition of scientific terminology as ‘non-
metaphorical’), or as central to a ‘constructivist’ social science (as has been argued, particularly in methodological debates in International Relations, but not as yet established)” (Carver and Pikalo, 2004)

The definition of metaphor, particularly in relation to the central purpose of this paper – to explore new methodologies for uncovering the implications of gender mainstreming for policy-making and feminism – is most clearly related to the second conceptualisation of metaphor above – that metaphor is central to a ‘constructivist’ social science. In the case of this research, that constructivist social science is feminist theory and scholarship which aims to make sense of gender mainstreming as a new form of gender equality policy-making and as a new means of feminist engagement with mainstream political institutions. My approach sees gender mainstreming as a twofold metaphor. Gender is a metaphor as described by Nelson (below), and mainstreaming implies the metaphorical movement of women and feminist ideas from the margin of policy-making to the mainstream. ‘Mainstreaming’ suggests that policies for the eradication of gender inequity should be moved from ‘women’s ghettos’ to central bureaucracy.10

This paper begins by identifying gender as a metaphor. Gender is identified as a means of constructing metaphorical hierarchies from biological characteristics. Nelson (1996; xi) identifies how gender is not only socially, but metaphorically constructed. Her definition of gender relies on the identification of metaphor as a central conceptual tool in establishing gender hierarchies:

‘Gender is primarily analysed in terms of how it structures our cognition: that is, how the distinction masculine/feminine is metaphorically related to long lists of other characteristics and qualities. The culturally dominant conception of gender distinctions as hierarchical, with “masculine” on top, leads to high value being attributed to subjects and methods perceived as masculine, and a parallel devaluing of subjects and methods metaphorically associated with femininity. Science, for example, is associated with qualities like “hard” and “tough” (and masculine), in contrast to (inferior) feminine-associated qualities like “soft” or “emotional.”’

It is arguable that Nelson means “metaphorically related” in the sense that these differences are not real but constructed. The hierarchy between male and female is the elaboration of a metaphor where male and female biology are used as means to dichotomise roles and ascribe identities with differential status in order to associate one gender with strength, the other with weakness, one with leadership, the other with deference, one with fruitful labour (productive work), the other with natural obligations (motherhood/reproductive life). The effect over time is to create a hierarchy of gender identities where a newborn’s life path is effectively predestined according to the abilities/identities metaphorically associated with his/her biological characteristics. The power of such metaphors to naturalise and de-problematise difference and inequality is recognised:

---

10 For instance, in the Republic of Ireland, the Ministry for Women’s Affairs (1980s) has evolved into the Gender Equality Unit (2000 onwards).
‘Those metaphors which turn out to be successful establish a privileged perspective on an object or constitute ‘the’ object and by doing so, disappear as metaphors (Maasen, 1995; 14-15).

It precisely this facility of metaphors, to construct, legitimate and eventually naturalise inequalities that this paper seeks to investigate. The paper analyses the concept of gender mainstreaming as a development from previous gender metaphors. Specifically, can metaphors operate to ultimately de-politicise and weaken the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming?

Nelson, quoted above, is an economist, but her sentiments resonate with the work of anthropologist Martin (1991: 489), who critiques biologists’ descriptions of human fertilization. Martin notes how cultural belief structures about the supremacy of potent maleness over passive and subordinate femaleness are transposed onto biologists’ ‘objective’ accounts of human fertilisation:

‘The more common picture – egg as damsel in distress, shielded only by her sacred garments; sperm as heroic warrior to the rescue – cannot be proved to be dictated by the biology of these events. While the “facts” of biology may not always be constructed in cultural terms, I would argue that in this case they are. The degree of metaphorical content in these descriptions, the extent to which difference between egg and sperm are emphasized, and the parallels between cultural stereotypes of male and female behaviour and the character of egg and sperm all point to that conclusion’ (Martin, 1991; 492).

Martin’s account of the implicit sexism of metaphors used to explain workings of the human body, suggests that the gender metaphor as outlined by Nelson, may be mapped onto many social scientific and scientific explanations or descriptions of our world. Are similar metaphorical constructions of gender and masculinity/femininity observable in the discourse of gender mainstreaming? Specifically, we wish to uncover these metaphors because

‘becoming aware of their implications, will rob them of their power to naturalize our social conventions about gender’ (Martin, 1991; 501).

Within this context, there are two central aims of this paper. Firstly, to identify that the concept of gender is constructed using the metaphorical association of masculinity with legitimacy, and femininity with illegitimacy/irrelevance. Secondly, how the movement from a male v. female dichotomous and discordant ‘battle of the sexes’ metaphor to a conciliatory ‘gender mainstreaming’ metaphor represents new means of ‘othering’ women, a form of ‘revisionist stereotyping’ (Martin, 1991) where the target of sexist critique is feminist engagement with bureaucracy (i.e. gender mainstreaming).

**Defining Metaphor (this section still needs some work)**
How do these dichotomous metaphors relate to ‘mainstreaming’ as a metaphor?

If social organisations are plants (e.g. branches of government/the company/the family tree) and arguments are war (we won the debate/the women’s movement/feminazis) – then gender mainstreaming is a mix of metaphors that doesn’t work – fighting plants? Planting fights? The latter would seem to have more potential as a metaphor for the elaboration of gender mainstreaming as the ‘radical potential’ of gender mainstreaming may rest in its ability to plant a cell structure of fighters within mainstream bureaucracy. This would certainly seem to be a clear articulation of what some early commentators hoped it would be: Woodward saw gender mainstreaming as holding promise as ‘a Trojan horse’ within mainstream bureaucracy (Woodward, 2001; 133)

“…a metaphor functions almost like a pair of glasses through which the metaphoric object is observed, i.e. reorganised” (Massen, 1995: 14-15).

This articulation of the use of metaphor resonates with the commonly used metaphor of the ‘gender lens’:

‘the power of gender:’ how gender is a category of our mental ordering (a filter or lens) that has consequences for practices, processes and institutions that we think of as world politics’ (Peterson and Runyan, 1999; 10).

Sight/light metaphors are often used by feminists. The metaphor of the gender lens is well established in the feminist literature as the an interpretation of the social and political world which reveals gender hierarchies and disadvantages in a way that ‘gender neutral’ or ‘gender blind’ (often a pseudonym for male/mainstream) interpretations do not. Viewed in this way the idea of a gender metaphor seems to have broader implications - we have been using gender as a very expansive metaphor, with multiple applications, without explicitly recognising it as such. Neither have we considered the limitations of such a conceptualisation of gender and gender relations. The case of gender mainstreaming would seem to suggest that when the gender metaphor then has to be translated into an environment where it is competing with other established metaphors. The metaphorical construction of gender and gender identities is no longer recognisable as a metaphor and so becomes less and less prominent, relevant or meaningful as it’s domains, signifiers and even contexts for its use are continuously questioned, boundaries re-drawn and core concepts re-defined.

Fox Keller (1995; 79) quotes Kalmus on the gene, offering a good idea of how a metaphor is constructed, at least in biology where the image of a gene as an inter-generational message gives substance and meaning to the abstract concept of the gene:

‘A gene, we may say, is a message, which can survive the death of the individual and can thus be received repeatedly by several organisms of different generations’ (Kalmus, 11 quoted in Fox Keller, 1995; 79).

---

In this sense, metaphors can be constructive as well as constructed as they can be used to attribute meaning and substance to invisible or non-existent entities like ‘gene’ or ‘gender mainstreaming.’ The argument that metaphors have a constructive capacity can be developed to demonstrate that many of the ideas we take as ‘hard’ scientifically proven facts, are in fact built on a house of cards, as the ideas which form their foundation are themselves metaphors or social constructions. Such multiple constructions can lead to meaningless concepts, particularly if the metaphor on which it is constructed is spurious, inappropriate or too closely related to its predecessor – i.e. the fact that gender is revealed as a metaphor in this paper sheds some light on the discussion that gender mainstreaming is often deemed meaningless as it establishes that gender mainstreaming is comprised of two metaphors – the gender metaphor and the mainstreaming metaphor – one meaning the metaphorical association of value and attribute to biological characteristics and the other as a the metaphorical association of moving this category towards a central position. But these two metaphors become mixed up because the centre is actually male, not really the centre (which doesn’t actually exist) so really mainstreaming just means moving men and women into one ‘male’ metaphorical location/category.

The purpose of such metaphors is to give substance and meaning to the abstract and non-existent. The question arising for gender mainstreaming is that it only exists when we observe it, but by the time we get to observe it in policy-making is it still gender mainstreaming? It then becomes a more theoretically challenging question, not what is gender mainstreaming, but what should gender mainstreaming be?

The ‘Battle of the Sexes’ V. ‘Gender Mainstreaming’

The introduction of gender mainstreaming represents a movement away from the discourse of women’s rights and towards a discourse based on gender equality. This move removes the explicit focus on women from previous feminist discourse (i.e. the ‘battle of the sexes’ discourse). By calling ‘the movement to end sexist oppression’ (hooks, 2000; 18) gender equality rather than women’s rights has a number of effects. It would seem that one possible benefit is that gender mainstreaming becomes endowed with some of the legitimacy ascribed to masculine traits and metaphors as outlined by Nelson above. The conflict between feminists and the mainstream, the war on inequality, has always challenged convention and looked at ways to beat the system. As such, the principles of feminist politics within a women’s rights framework are anathema to a conciliatory, almost flaccid approach like gender mainstreaming which mentions nothing of conflict/rights/movements/social unrest/protest/strike etc. This point was noted by some of those working with gender mainstreaming, particularly those with many years experience in the Irish women’s movement:

‘I think women’s rights are stronger than gender equality. I would prefer to be standing on the streets fighting for women’s rights. I don’t know why that is exactly. I

12 For instance, genes rely on the concept of DNA which itself is a constructed image of a combination of proteins which no one can ever actually see. Likewise, gender mainstreaming is built on two metaphors – gender derived from socially ascribed identities based on different sex organs, and mainstreaming – a facility for becoming central.
suppose it (gender equality) is very watery. I mean what on earth is it? Women’s rights sounds like something that is needed, that you have a moral right to them. That in some way society is oppressing what belongs to you. Whereas gender equality sounds like an aspiration you should hold on to. It is vaguer. You feel like you could put women’s rights down on a page and onto it, its clear. I suppose the thing about gender equality though is that it does imply equality between men and women and recognises that; whereas women’s rights only come from a female perspective. Gender equality is more balanced because it includes men’ (Author Interview, R16, August 2002).

The sense that gender equality is more balanced, as it includes men, raises questions for feminist discourse. Many of the metaphors that we use to describe sexist oppression are based on a ‘battle of the sexes’ metaphor where women are seeking to gain access to male privilege and status. As feminists, we have tended to employ dichotomous metaphors in this discourse, as is clearly evidenced in Ann Tickner’s recent (2005) review of the contribution of feminism to International Relations. Tickner quotes Reinharz on the primary aims of feminist IR:

‘Making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men – all continue to be elements of feminist research’ (Reinharz, 1992; 248) quoted in Tickner (2005; 7).

Tickner’s synopsis of the work of feminist scholars of International Relations demonstrates the use of metaphors to describe relations between the sexes. A number of the metaphors relate to sight/light:
“Making the invisible visible”
“putting the spotlight on women as competent actors.”

Location metaphors are also often used, one of the most common being that identified by Tickner:
“bringing the margin to the center,

It is also interesting to note how feminist metaphors tend to be defined relationally, particularly, the status of women in relation to men/male categories. Feminists, therefore, are involved in:
“rendering the trivial important”
“understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men’ (Reinharz, 1992; 248) quoted in Tickner (2005; 7).

All of these metaphors are in some way sensual, relating to sight, light, visibility, feeling included, or being constructed as a sex object. Each one implies a desire for admission under the umbrella of male-associated status – to the center, or the mainstream. ‘Mainstreaming’ is a progression on this idea as it makes this ambition an action word, a verb: to become part of the mainstream. How does Nelson’s (1996) comment on the
metaphorical association of separate gender with opposing characteristics apply to gender mainstreaming? Given the focus on quantifiable evidence and data in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, it would seem that the policy gains some of the ‘hard’ data-driven credence of male stereotyping through its association with performance management techniques. The question, though, is whether in this quest for credibility and admission to the formal seats of power, the feminist ideals which provided the political purpose for gender mainstreaming become lost.

Certainly, research has revealed that bureaucracies seem resistant to accepting gender mainstreaming. What is it about bureaucratic discourse that makes it so resistant to accepting, assimilating or constructing a new concept like gender mainstreaming? Kramerae (in McConnell-Ginet, Borker and Furman, 1985; 58) identifies how other feminist ideas have faced a similar fate in trying to gain a foothold within established lexicography:

‘Men have largely determined what is labelle, have defined the ordering and classifying system, and have in most instances created the words which are catalogued in our dictionaries and which are the medium of everyday speech. Thomas Hardy’s heroine in Far from the Madding Crowd observes that “it is difficult for a woman to define her feelings in language which is chiefly made by men to express theirs”.

Kramerae (in McConnell-Ginet, Borker and Furman, 1985; 61) also argues that:

‘Many people have argued that our perception of social reality is shaped by our particular language; we will not see, hear, or think concepts except as our language allows. Whether or not language determines thought in any significant way, it seems plausible that language can at least constrain concept formation, and that gender-biased language may constrain the perception and expression of women, as well as men who do not conform to heterosexual male norms or are in other ways outside the “mainstream.”

The extent to which the articulation of feminist ideas within bureaucracy is constrained merits further investigation. However, for the time being let’s consider some of the vocabulary associated with gender mainstreaming.

Table 1 lists the vocabulary of gender mainstreaming, as published by femocrats in the Republic of Ireland, for use by ordinary policy-makers involved in the implementation of gender mainstreaming. The meaning of most of the words in this table is not immediately obvious. Rather, ideas are cloaked in the apolitical and dry language of bureaucracy. The only political term is ‘positive action,’ which is possibly included merely to demonstrate what gender mainstreaming is not! Compare the bureaucratic language of table 1 with that of table 2, which lists vocabulary of the women’s rights movement – the discourse

13 The vocabulary in both of these tables was taken from Commission of the European Union (1998) One Hundred Words for Equality: a glossary of terms on equality between women and men at http://www.eu.int
of gender equality which preceded gender mainstreaming. Do these contrasting vocabularies demonstrate how the shift to gender mainstreaming has removed the fight from the feminist agenda and replaced it with the more acceptable discourse of performance management gender neutralism?

**Table 1: Gender Mainstreaming Vocabulary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>A concept that refers to the social differences, as opposed to the biological ones, between women and men that have been learned, are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender mainstreaming</td>
<td>The systematic integration of the respective situations, priorities and needs of women and men in all mainstream policies with a view to promoting equality between women and men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender neutral</td>
<td>In policy terms, a policy which has no differential impact, either positive or negative, for equality between women and men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender blind</td>
<td>Ignoring or failing to address the gender equality dimension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender disaggregated data</td>
<td>The collection and separation of data by gender to allow comparative gender analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>The concept that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender proofing</td>
<td>A check carried out on a policy proposal to ensure that any potential gender discriminatory effects arising from that policy have been avoided and that gender equality is promoted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender impact assessment</td>
<td>Examining policy proposals to see whether they will affect women and men differently, with a view to adapting these proposals to make sure that any discriminatory effects are neutralised and that gender equality is promoted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive action</td>
<td>Measures targeted at a particular group and intended to eliminate and prevent discrimination or to offset disadvantages arising from existing attitudes, behaviours and structures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [http://www.ndpgenderequality.ie](http://www.ndpgenderequality.ie)

**Table 2: FEMINIST VOCABULARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>The process of gaining access and developing one’s capacities with a view to participating actively in shaping one’s own life and that of one’s community in economic, social and political terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminisation of Poverty</td>
<td>The increasing incidence and prevalence of poverty among women as compared to men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Based Violence/Sexual Violence</td>
<td>Any form of violence by the use or threat of physical or emotional force, including rape, wife battering, sexual harassment, incest and pedophilia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass Ceiling</td>
<td>The invisible barrier arising from a complex set of structures in male dominated organizations which prevents women from accessing senior positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights of Women</td>
<td>The rights of women and the girl child as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights and including the concept of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Invisible Barriers</strong></td>
<td>Attitudes and their traditional assumptions, norms and values which prevent (women’s) empowerment/full participation in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quota</strong></td>
<td>A defined proportion or share of places, seats or resources to be filled by proportional representation allocated to a specific group, generally under certain rules or criteria, and aimed at correcting a previous imbalance, usually in decision-making positions or in access to training opportunities or jobs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recognition and Valuation of Unpaid Work</strong></td>
<td>Measurement, in quantitative terms, including by assessing and reflecting its value in satellite accounts, of remunerated work that is outside the scope of national accounts (UN system of national accounts) such as domestic work, caring for children and other dependants, preparing food for the family, community and other voluntary work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refuge</strong></td>
<td>A safe place for women and children who are victims of violence in the home (shelter, crisis center).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reproductive Rights</strong></td>
<td>The right of an individual or couple to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Satellite Account</strong></td>
<td>An official account that is separate from but consistent with core national accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>The biological characteristics which distinguish human beings as female or male.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex discrimination - direct</strong></td>
<td>Where a person is treated less favourably because of his or her sex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex discrimination - indirect</strong></td>
<td>Where a law, regulation, policy or practice, apparently neutral, has a disproportionate adverse impact on the members of one sex, unless the difference of treatment can be justified by objective factors (Council Directive 76/207 of 09/02/76, OJ L 39).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex/gender system</strong></td>
<td>A system of economic, social and political structures which sustain and reproduce distinctive gender roles and attributes of men and women (see Gender Contract).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex Trade</strong></td>
<td>The trade in human beings, largely in women and children, for the purpose of sexual exploitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Harassment</strong></td>
<td>Unwanted conduct of a sexual nature or other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of women and men at work including conduct of superiors and colleagues (Council Resolution 90/C 157/02 of 29/05/90, OJ C 157).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Violence</strong></td>
<td>See gender and sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Use Survey</strong></td>
<td>A measurement of the use of time by women and men, particularly in relation to paid and unpaid work, market and non market activities, leisure and personal time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trafficking/Trading in Human Beings/in Women and Children</strong></td>
<td>The trade in people, primarily in women and children, for the purposes of modern slavery or cheap labour or for sexual exploitation (see Sex Trade).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wife Battering/Beating</strong></td>
<td>Violence against women by their partner (see also domestic violence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women’s Studies/Gender Studies</strong></td>
<td>An academic, usually interdisciplinary approach to the study of women’s situation and gender relations as well as the gender dimension of all other disciplines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While more detailed comparison of these two policy-making lexicographies is merited, for the purposes of this paper suffice to introduce them as means of demonstrating the more technocratic, apolitical tone of the ‘vocabulary’ of gender mainstreaming versus the more old-fashioned but obviously political tone of the feminist discourse in table 2. It is easy to see how the metaphor ‘battle of the sexes’ emerged from the confrontational conceptualisation of male/female relations typified by images or wife battering, sexual harassment, glass ceilings and empowerment discourse of the women’s rights era. The
metaphorical association of gender mainstreaming is less clear. Terms like gender disaggregated data, gender impact assessment and gender proofing are more clearly associated with the proofing and accountability requirements of performance management policy-making than feminist politics. How feminism and performance management discourses combine to produce a new development on Nelson’s dichotomous gender metaphor is illustrated in table 3 below.

**Table 3: Dichotomous metaphors of GM.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td>Soft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate</td>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender mainstreaming (centre)</td>
<td>Feminism (margin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data (proof)</td>
<td>Political Rhetoric (speculation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Management (gender proofing)</td>
<td>Anecdote/metaphor (experiential politics)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tracing from bottom of this table back up to the top one can see how Nelson’s gender metaphors to overlap. Gender mainstreaming may be seen as a legitimate form of policy-making by governments because it subscribes to the superior qualities of good policy-making i.e. it is evidence-based, it relies on data and results, it is quantifiable, tangible and precise. Feminism, on the other hand, relates to the soft side of the gender equation. It represents political rhetoric, not fact, there is no evidence to support feminist ‘claims’ which tend to rely on ‘women’s lived experience’ and anecdote as sources of evidence. In terms of metaphors, it would seem that gender mainstreaming represents a cross-over from ‘soft’ feminism to ‘hard’ science in that it applies masculine logic to make feminist ideals into public policies. The problems that this mixing of metaphors brings for gender mainstreaming are outlined elsewhere.14 For the purposes of this paper, suffice to say that


the application of Nelson’s gender metaphor is a useful means of illustrating the fate of
gender mainstreaming.

**Conclusion: Significance of the Gender Metaphor?**
One significant characteristic of the gender metaphor is that it implies that gender is
always conceived of as relational.\(^\text{15}\) The gender categories we have socially constructed,
politically endorsed and institutionalised (male/female, hard/soft etc.) have rendered it
impossible to be female without reference to what is means to be male. Throughout
history, women have always been referred to as a male’s relative – daughter, wife,
mother, sister - rarely as an individual with her own name and distinct identity. It is not
surprising, then, that feminist critiques have constructed metaphorical oppositions
between men and women as resistance to the patriarchal heritage where femininity is
associated with weakness and/or ineffectiveness in comparison with the (male) ideal. The
old metaphor of the ‘battle of the sexes,’ constructed as a means to replace perceived
wisdom of “female = inferior” with one of “female = equal but different” has since been
diluted with the replacement of women with an inclusive concept of ‘gender,’ where male
and female differences are recognised, but the implicit assumption that women are
always the underdogs, has been removed. Does this suggest a re-construction of the
gender metaphor outlined by Nelson, where new reasons are given for accepting the
inferior status of the feminine? In the case of gender mainstreaming, the lack of
availability of substantive evidence (gender disaggregated data) is identified as a barrier
to producing gender equality.\(^\text{16}\) Rather like anti-biotic resistant bacteria, new feminist
ideas are continually met with equally powerful critiques and revisionist sexist strategies.

Attempts to remove sexual stereotyping from metaphors used to discuss human biology
have revealed a similar tendency to resist non-sexist conceptualisation. Martin (1991;
498) identifies how revisionist accounts of human fertilization ‘cannot seem to escape the
hierarchical imagery of older accounts.’ In more recent (1980s as opposed to 1940s)
accounts of conception, images of female gametes are based on new, but equally
derogatory female stereotypes. The damsel in distress image of the female gamete is now
replaced with an aggressive, man-eating cultural stereotype:

‘…the egg ends up as the female aggressor who “captures and tethers” the sperm
with her sticky zona, rather like a spider lying in wait in her web’ (Martin, 1991;
498).

Similarly, for some commentators, gender mainstreaming represents an opportunity for
wholesale revisionist stereotyping, where policies like gender mainstreaming are
identified as the new enemy of men in the battle of the sexes. Well-known columnist,
Kevin Myers, writing in Ireland’s most respected broadsheet, the *Irish Times*, mocks

---

\(^{15}\) In general, identifying gender as a relational category is deemed useful (Peterson, 1992), particularly if it is seen as
related to other categories such as race, class, age etc. in terms of identifying how disadvantage privilege can be
compounded.

\(^{16}\) See footnote 3.
gender mainstreaming as ‘yet more mumbo-jumbo from the feminist language factory,’
dismissing gender mainstreaming as anti-democratic, despotic ‘ideological brain-washing’:

‘This year-zero ideological nonsense isn’t happening after a revolutionary take-over by a gender Khmer Rouge, otherwise known as the Sex Pots, but within a democratic society which apparently slumbers while the Sex Pots investigate, interrogate and politicise the entire civil service’ (Myers, *Irish Times*, April, 23, 2004).

As such, gender mainstreaming represents the battle of the sexes by another name. In many ways, it is easier for people like Myers to engage in conflict with an idea (that just happens to benefit women), than to engage with women directly. On this note, the metaphor of gender mainstreaming would seem to be an abject failure in terms of instituting feminist aims. Its interpretation suggests that it doesn’t remove the male-female conflict from feminist politics, but merely re-packages the conflict as something more palatable to 21st century gender politics as it moves women out of the position of victim and men out of the role as perpetrators. It achieves this by adding a confusing, but ultimately useless data requirement to the feminist agenda, where issues must be weighed, women counted and a quantitative basis for gender equality policy established.

References


