

**Mainstreaming Politics: Gendering Practices and Feminist Theory by Carol Bacchi and Joan Eveline (2010)**

Dahl, Hanne Marlene

*Published in:*  
Journal of Women, Politics & Policy

*DOI:*  
[10.1080/1554477X.2012.696521](https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2012.696521)

*Publication date:*  
2012

*Document Version*  
Early version, also known as pre-print

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Dahl, H. M. (2012). Mainstreaming Politics: Gendering Practices and Feminist Theory by Carol Bacchi and Joan Eveline (2010). *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 33(3), 292-294.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2012.696521>

**General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

**Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [rucforsk@kb.dk](mailto:rucforsk@kb.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Mainstreaming Politics: Gendering practices and feminist theory* (2010) by Carol Bacchi and Joan Eveline. Adelaide: Adelaide University press (368 pages)

Available for free download at: [www.adelaide.edu.au/press/titles/mainstreaming](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/press/titles/mainstreaming)

This is not a manual on how to do gender mainstreaming in practice from A to Z. Instead it is an invitation to reflect on gender and gender mainstreaming, its relationship to other forms of mainstreaming such as diversity mainstreaming and how more lasting changes on the way gender analyses are carried out in public policy can be achieved. Bacchi and Eveline argue forcefully for a politics of movement involving the incompleteness and contested nature of all categories and interventions. The politics of movement reflects a metaphysics of process applied systematically to a project of engineering change in gender awareness that took place in two Australian states in 2004-2008 attempting to link university based research and practitioners in the field of gender mainstreaming. The relationship between experts and practitioners was not thought to be a simple transfer of scientific knowledge to policy practitioners. Instead a mutual learning process was envisaged which was supported by various research tools such as diaries written by practitioners and deep listening to those involved in the project with the most urgent needs – in this case the aboriginal women. Deep listening is coined by Gabb and McDermott (2007) and involves a self-reflective listening leading to action.

Self-reflection is highlighted throughout the book as a key virtue in doing mainstreaming. Surely, self-reflexivity is not a new theme in feminist research, so what is new? Self-reflexivity is often an empty concept, but in this book it becomes very alive through the questioning of concepts, positions and processes as another reviewer has pointed out (Rönnblom, 2010). Let me give one example. In two chapters the editors argue in a self-reflexive dialogue on what Bacchi has termed a *What's the Problem Represented* (WPR) approach (1999). WPR is a critical, social constructionist approach to the way problems are framed in public policies. In one of the chapters WPR is scrutinized concerning its limitations and power effects. This continuous contemplation of the tools, categories and understandings is one of its main achievements.

The book is comprised of already published and new chapters with short introductions linking the argument of a given chapter to the rest of the book. Linking chapters, however, doesn't remove overlaps between them. Both students and practitioners would find most chapters useful, but due to the prevalence of self-reflexivity some students will have problems following the arguments. The target group seems to be gender experts working in universities with issues of gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

However, self-reflexivity seems to have a limit. That concerns the Australian context. Bacchi and Eveline argue that effective consultation to 'outsiders' can be facilitated by femocrats in Women's Units. This leads them to question the dichotomy between technocratic and more participatory forms of gender mainstreaming. However, the Australian context is perhaps very unique concerning the prevalence of femocrats – despite the internal differences identified in Australia - and

consequently privileged. It would be interesting to discuss the different contexts of EU – and its different member states – in relation to Australia for mainstreaming.

Although gender mainstreaming is seen to take place on a contested terrain, more mentioning of the concrete struggles carried out would have given their politics of movement more flesh. The authors do mention disagreements in the project about gender initiatives relating to the aboriginal community and status differentials within the public organizations. However, I am curious about these disagreements and power struggles. I would like to know more. How did they surface? What kinds of resistance were articulated? How were they fought and on which terrain? In relation to power and struggles between different, competing ideas about gender equality I wonder about the relationship between this new form of gender analysis advocated (stressing the incomplete character of policy interventions) to the potentially already existing, institutionally layered form of gender analysis such as anti-discrimination and affirmative action in people's minds. Can they co-exist and/or is there a struggle between old and new concepts as well as between old and new practices? These questions are not raised, but they are targeted indirectly in the conclusion, where the authors conclude that available time and space are more important than the specific policy tool used:

‘Experience in the working groups for GAP (Gender Analysis Project) showed that *any* methodology, including the most common method of collecting sex and gender - disaggregated statistics, could produce useful political reflections and insights. It was not so much the *kind* of method (quantitative or qualitative) that proved the most important to understand the need for gender analysis as the *space* and *time* to reflect on the ‘information’ collected’ (337)

This is quite a provocative conclusion for a fellow poststructuralist (reader) concerned with the way analytical and everyday concepts create reality. In this way it is a great, unsettling contribution to the feminist discussion on gender mainstreaming. Not as a highflying theoretical exercise or arguing with pros and cons, but instead a grounded, theoretically engaged book raising difficult questions.

## References

Bacchi, Carol (1999). *Women, Policy and Politics: The construction of policy problems*. London: Sage.

Gabb, D. and D. McDermott (2007): ‘*What do Indigenous experiences and perspectives mean for transcultural mental health?*’ Conference paper, Psychology & Indigenous Australians: TEaching Practice and Theory. Adelaide.

Rönblom, Malin (2010): ‘Launching Mainstreaming Politics’  
<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/press/titles/mainstreaming/launch.html> (last access on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2011)