

# **Evaluation from a gender+ perspective as a key element for (re)gendering the policymaking process**

Short title for running head: **Evaluation from a gender+ perspective**

María Bustelo (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)

[mbustelo@cps.ucm.es](mailto:mbustelo@cps.ucm.es)

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## *Abstract*

Gender and feminist theories have challenged the neutrality of both policy making processes and the outputs resulting of those processes. However, some elements of the policymaking have been less studied than others. In this article I explore the concept of evaluation from a gender+ perspective as an essential step for a complete gender mainstreaming strategy, which can help to identify gender issues that should be necessarily integrated in the content of evaluated policies, and to watch gender does not evaporate through the policy making process. This exploration is done both through the Feminist Policy Studies and the evaluation fields.

*Key words:* Gender sensitive policy making; feminist policy studies; feminist evaluation; gender-sensitive evaluation; gender mainstreaming strategies; evaluation of gender equality policies

## **Introduction**

Gender and feminist theories, as well as policy proposals from a gender perspective, such as the strategy of gender mainstreaming, have challenged the neutrality of both policy making processes and the outputs resulting of those processes. However, some elements of the policymaking as a process have been more studied and revisited from that gender perspective than others; thus, the articulation of problems as political problems, the agenda setting, and the policy formulation or production have started to be fruitfully analysed from a gender lens, as the Research Network on Gender and the State (RNGS) Project (McBride and Mazur, 2010), 'What's the problem represented to be' approach (Bacchi, 1999) or the policy frame and discursive analysis performed by the MAGEEQ and QUING projects<sup>1</sup>. The implementation stage has also kept the attention of scholars within feminist policy studies. For example, although the RNGS has focused on the agenda-setting and adoption stages, it has also studied the interactions between the women's movement and the state. Also within the mainstreaming literature, there are studies which have focused on implementation, especially on the failures of mainstreaming implementation (Rees, 2005; Verloo, 2005; Walby, 2005; Pruegl, 2009), some of them in the development field (De Waal, 2006). However, up to now, the evaluation stage has not generally attracted feminist policy scholars, in part due to the lack of actual evaluation of mainstreaming experiences. The few references which intersects gender and evaluation stem from the evaluation field –sometimes applied to development policies-, rather than from feminist policy studies (Seigart and Brisolaro, 2002;

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<sup>1</sup> See Lombardo et al. (this volume)

Podems, 2010; Espinosa Fajardo, 2011), with very few exceptions of interdisciplinarity between the two fields (Bustelo, 2003; Bustelo and Verloo, 2009). Thus, in the field of feminist policy studies, there is still a general lack of theoretical -and also empirical- works about what happens or should happen with gender+ equality<sup>2</sup> at the policy stage of evaluation. And the implications of what it means to do evaluation from a gender perspective still remain to be thoughtfully explored. Yet, public policy evaluation is not only the most underexplored stage of the policy making process, but it is also a practice, which is in clear expansion nowadays, and its review from a gender perspective is very much needed. Until now, most of the few developments at the intersection of gender and evaluation have been in the development field and made mainly by professionals and practitioners, so it is time for theorists and academics, along with those professionals and practitioners, to elaborate theoretically and create a critical mass on this issue. In this article I explore the developments in conceiving an evaluation from a gender+ perspective, and how both feminist/gender studies and the evaluation field and literature can fruitfully contribute to each other for developing theories and practices in order to (re)gender the policy making process.

I argue that evaluation from a gender perspective is needed as part of a complete mainstreaming strategy. It is not only an interesting stage in the policy making to focus on 'per se', but it is also a good way to 'bring back' and reconsider gender in the policy making process, as the evaporation of the gender component has been identified as a key problem by gender and feminist analysts. Thus, as the evaluation main purposes are learning from the experience to improve what it is being evaluated and enlightening future interventions (along with accountability of what is being done), evaluation from a gender+ perspective has an enormous potential to detect where, when and how the gender component was lost across the policy making process, and to propose how to re-include it.

The article is structured in four sections, apart from this introduction and the conclusions. The first two sections present what the evaluation studies, in the first place, and the feminist policy studies in second place, have contributed to evaluation from a feminist or gender perspective. In the third section, feminist policy and evaluation studies are discussed, with the aim of exploring how the combination of the two fields of study can be fruitful for an evaluation from a gender+ perspective with a feminist lens which engenders policy making. Finally and before the conclusions, the concepts of evaluation of gender policies, evaluation from a gender+ perspective and feminist evaluation are explored as a way to complete the gender mainstreaming strategy in its evaluation phase, and as a way to (re)gender the policy making process.

### **Evaluation and Gender: Contributions from evaluation studies**

Although there has traditionally been some attention to gender issues in evaluation practice (for example see Ryan et al., 1998; Mertens et. al., 1994), the idea of a gender sensitive or feminist evaluation has not produced a forceful theoretical or practical corpus 'per se' yet. There is a seminal book, *Feminist Evaluation*, (Seigart and Brisolaro, 2002), which set some first important concepts and principles for feminist evaluation. There have been some other recent contributions in the international development field which shows a growing interest: Podems, 2010; Espinosa Fajardo, 2011, a doctoral dissertation consisting on a metaevaluation on how gender issues are integrated in evaluations done by the official development policies of Sweden, United Kingdom and Spain; and the "Evaluating Gender and Equity" special issue on the *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* (Hay et al. 2012). In any case, these contributions stem rather from empirical analysis of international practices more than from theoretical models on how evaluation can contribute to a gender-sensitive policy making process. In

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'gender +' it is used to include an intersectionality perspective, that is, a recognition that gender is intersected by other inequalities, such as ethnicity, class, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc.

Seigart and Brisolará's book, the authors in the introductory chapter expose their central ideas to their collective conception of feminist evaluation. These consist on a central focus in gender inequities and some premises such as: gender inequality is systemic and structural; evaluation is a political activity (the contexts in which evaluation operates are politicized, and the personal experiences, perspectives, and characteristics evaluators bring to evaluations lead to a particular political stance); knowledge is a powerful resource that should be of and for the people who create, hold, and share it; knowledge is also filtered through the knower and, as values, is culturally, socially, and temporally contingent; and there are multiple ways of knowing; some ways are privileged over others' (Sielbeck-Bowen, Brisolará, Seigart, Tischler and Whitmore, 2002: 3-4). Although the authors recognise that each of them approaches feminist evaluation in different ways, as there is no one but several feminist theories, all of them have a concern for women, gender equality, and feminist principles. For them 'feminist evaluation implies a worldview, an understanding of reality, and a way of interacting in the world' (Seigart and Brisolará, 2002: 112).

Thus, the term 'feminist evaluation' has been recognized. In the Evaluation's Encyclopaedia (Mathison, 2005), not only there is an entry in 'Feminist Evaluation' (Seigart, 2005), but there is also one on 'Feminism', being this an indicator of the already recognized link between feminism and evaluation (Mertens, 2005). Important evaluation scholars and recent books also mention the term (Patton, 2008). However, the terms 'gender-sensitive evaluation' or 'evaluation with a gender perspective' are not so common in the evaluation literature.

In parallel to this yet scarce evaluation literature, but in a more vigorous way, the academic and professional evaluation community has recently reacted to gender issues. There is an active Topical Interest Group in the American Evaluation Association on Feminist Evaluation, and the first Thematic Working Group launched by the European Evaluation Society is one on 'Gender and Evaluation'. Both groups attract a lot of interest and activities – roundtables, paper sessions, meetings- around evaluation conferences. As another recent indicator of the interest in the professional community of evaluators, 'EvalPartners' which is a major global initiative organized by evaluation associations and networks, has a strong focus on integrating a Gender and Human Rights perspective in evaluation (<http://mymande.org/evalpartners>). In the last decade, some development in integrating gender in evaluation practice can be seen. As an example, Espinosa Fajardo (2011) shows slightly more positive and promising results than the review done by the OCDE-DAC Network on Development Evaluation- in the early 2000's, which concluded that 'more attention needs to be given to gender equality issues in evaluations of development activities, and policy commitments to gender equality need to be systematically implemented by donor agencies' (Hunt and Brouwers, 2003).

Why do the professional developments seem to go quicker than the theoretical ones? In part this is due to the fact that in the evaluation field there has always been a strong prescriptive nature about 'what and how to do it'. Moreover, in the evaluation field a good part of the theoretical work proposed by scholars, including different approaches, models and methods have been mainly constructed through struggles about how to deal with and solve practical issues in evaluation (Shadish, Cook and Levinton, 1991). Indeed, added to the academic realm, evaluation is a clear professional field where there is a lot of evaluation practice that claims for practical knowledge to apply in the professional evaluation practice. A good part of the practical developments in gender and evaluation come from international organizations related to development policies, like for example the Evaluation Unit of UNWomen which has elaborated an evaluation manual (UNWomen, 2010; Abarca, H. and Faúndez, A., 2011), and the United Nations Evaluation Group – UNEG- with a Handbook on Gender Equality and Human Rights in Evaluation which was conceived as an inter-agency effort to prepare guidance to the UN and other development agencies on how to integrate gender equality and

human rights into the evaluation of development programmes and interventions (UNEG, 2011). We should also mention recent efforts from other UN agencies (ILO, 2012) or some NGOs, such as AWID -Association for Women's Rights in Development- (Batliwala, 2011). This prescriptive and professionally applied tendency of evaluation has produced many useful and practice-oriented materials, guidelines, etc., but it also has a reverse side, which is a higher risk of 'technocratization' of gender-oriented evaluation approaches. That this happens also at the evaluation stage is not new as this 'technocratic' tendency has already been well documented in the analysis of the implementation of mainstreaming strategies (Jahan, 1995; Rees, 2005; Verloo, 2005). The 'application' of this technocratic tendency to the evaluation stage has led to oversimplified and content-empty interpretations of what it means to do a gender-sensitive evaluation, for example limiting the evaluation exercise to counting women as beneficiaries, or to rigid exercises of evaluation with pre-established and non-questioned indicators and evaluation criteria and methods, which resonates very little with the principles of feminist or gender sensitive evaluation. The sometimes obsession with 'easy-to-apply' recipes, and with pre-established sets of indicators and criteria, as if they were universal and permanent, matches badly with the context bounded, political, participatory, critical and reflexive principles of the feminist evaluation –and I would add of much of the available evaluation theory.

Moreover, in order to strategically introduce the commitment for gender equality in governments and institutions, feminist and gender experts have needed to use less threatening 'gender' (and not 'feminist') terms. Although probably this has been the best way in which feminist principles have been introduced into the mainstream policy making, it has also contributed, along with the structural and abiding character of gender inequality, to the depolitization and 'evaporation' of gender that will be seen in the next section.

As it has been discussed in this section, we can conclude from the evaluation studies that although there is a growing interest in the matter, there is only an incipient literature on evaluation and gender. This article wants to contribute to that needed theoretical underpinning by bringing together into the discussion both evaluation and feminist policy studies theoretical issues for approaching gender sensitive and feminist evaluation in a more sounded and thorough manner.

### **Gender and evaluation: Contributions from feminist policy studies**

As early as the 70's, some works started to pay attention to the absence of women in the field of international development policies. From then, although with different perspectives and approaches –a focus on women turned into a gender one in the late 80's, although this does not necessarily mean that a feminist focus is always clearly present-, a field of what we can call 'feminist policy studies' (Mazur, 2002; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2013) has developed over the last decade.

As pointed out by Lombardo et al. (2013) this broad field of feminist policy studies have produced knowledge from different perspectives: from pointing out the male bias of the policy context and process (Hawkesworth, 1989, 1994) and the blindness of development planning about women's role and their interests first (Boserup, 1970; Benería, 1982; Molyneux, 1985), and later of gender relations (Moser, 1993), distinguishing between the approaches 'Women in Development' and 'Gender in Development' (Cornwall et al., 2007), to studies on Comparative State Feminism and the responsiveness of political systems to feminist requests (Stetson and Mazur, 1995; Outshoorn and Kantola, 2007, MacBride and Mazur, 2010), gender mainstreaming studies as the strategy for integrating a gender perspective in policy making (Council of Europe, 1998), as well as a more recent discursive approach on gender and policy making (Lombardo et al., 2009).

What has all this literature to say about the evaluation stage of a gender sensitive policy making? One of the most important theoretical and practical developments, which is directly related to evaluation, is the idea -widespread and formally assumed by many governments in the IV Women Conference in Beijing in 1995- of **gender mainstreaming (GM)** as the strategy to reach policies and policy making with a gender perspective. Since then, the concept of bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society was clearly established as a global strategy for promoting gender equality. As “Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and *at all stages*, by the actors normally involved in policy-making” (Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming, EG-S-MS, Council of Europe, 1998, *emphasis mine*), the evaluation stage is directly involved in this concept.

However, the literature on the application of GM strategies refers mainly to its formulation and to implementation problems and limitations, not that much to how those strategies are or should be evaluated. Why has evaluation not been enough considered in feminist policy studies, when in fact it has to contribute to gender equal policymaking (and GM in particular) as least as much as the other stages do? As already mentioned, GM experiences have not been evaluated as such, and the analysis performed so far about their formulation and implementation have not been done from an evaluation point of view, which would emphasize learning and its use for improvement, accountability, and enlightenment for future policies. To the lack of evaluation experience, I would like to add also a traditional disinterest towards the evaluation stage from the policy studies field.

In spite of the scarce references to the evaluation stage, in the area of feminist policy studies there is an important theoretical (including the analysis of GM implementation problems – among others, and not exhaustively Hafner-Burton & Pollack, 2000, 2002, 2009; Mazey, 2000, 2002; Rees, 2005; Squires, 2005; Walby, 2005; Pruegl, 2009) and practical corpus (including gender analysis and planning tools, mainstreaming strategies, such as the Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) tool – Verloo & Roggeband, 1996; Roggeband & Verloo, 2006), which might contribute enormously to develop a gender-sensitive evaluation.

Feminist policy studies point at three challenges that should be assumed and revisited also from an evaluation perspective: 1) policies are not gender neutral and policy making, including evaluation, is gendered; 2) the way in which gender is framed in those policies has its consequences; and 3) there is a recognition of the difficulties and complexities of GM, including a process of ‘gender evaporation’ through policy making.

Firstly, at the core of the mainstreaming strategy, there is the important assumption of the structural nature of gender inequality, which led to this strategy proposal going far beyond other strategies, such as equal opportunities and positive actions. Gender inequality is not only the result of a different opportunity structure for men and women; it is embedded in institutions and social structures, which maintain and reproduce it. Generally speaking, there has been a constant evolution towards a more complex concept of gender inequalities, based mainly on structural roots. Gender differences are rooted on social constructions of gender roles –based on male dominance and male norms- and unequal power relations, more than on biological differences between women and men.

Due to this structural character of gender inequality, policy making and policies, including the evaluation stage, are never ‘gender neutral’. Some examples and empirical studies have helped us to understand the preponderance of male dominated norms which operate –many times in an invisible form- in public policies. In sum if a gender lens is not purposely and systematically used through the policy making process, the most probable result is that not only policies will not do anything for overcoming the gender gap, but rather maintain, reproduce and reinforce it. Take, for instance, urban transportation systems where if data of

the different use of women and men of public (more used by women) vs. private (more used by men) transportation are not taken into account, the benefits of transport policies might not be only different for men and women, but they might keep on augmenting the gender gap. Or drug prevention policies for youth, typically being extremely sharp in distinguishing interventions by age (proposing different programs for 12, 14 or 16 year old youngsters) but not taking into account the different consumptions and motivation of consumption of girls and boys, taking boys as the implicit standard, and contributing to make invisible girls' specific problematic.

Secondly, feminist policy studies have also pointed out at how gender equality is defined or represented; who is participating –and who is not- in the 'gender agenda'; and which is the interaction between gender and other axes of inequality. To abound in the idea on how the structural nature of gender inequality very frequently ends coming to the surface of the policy making process, even constructing a gender bias along this process, Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach (Bacchi, 1999; 2009) helped us to understand that there are non-neutral assumptions and beliefs embedded in policies about what are the problems to be solved and the solutions proposed. In the same manner, the more recent discursive approaches developed by the European Comparative research projects (such as MAGEEQ and QUING) have demonstrated, developing the Critical Frame Analysis methodology, that even the policies especially aimed at fighting against gender+ inequality are sometimes unconsciously maintaining and reproducing inequalities, and that equality aims can be stretched, shrunk or bent in order to fit in existing policy frames (Lombardo et al, 2009). In this way, in gender violence policies battered women are considered the responsible ones for stepping out the violence cycle through denounces, but at the same time they tend to be victimized instead of empowered (Bustelo et al., 2007); women need to be 'promoted' and trained for political participation implying that the problem resides in their lack of interest and training instead of an andocentric political system (Lombardo, 2007); they are also the ones who 'need' to reconcile work and family life implying they, and not men, are the exclusively responsible ones for caring (Peterson, 2007); and lesbians are completely 'forgotten' in equality and reproductive policies (Platero, 2007). Following this discursive approach, there are some references on the need of a different type of evaluation, from what it is normally applied, adapted to the discursive nature of policies (Bustelo and Verloo, 2009).

Related to the importance of how gender is framed, some studies in the international development field have concluded that although 'gender measures' are nowadays part of the political discourse, very few of those really tackle the structural character of gender inequality. Actually, under the label 'gender' there is a predominance of the 'add women and stir' approach (Benería, 2005). Although the international development agenda has grown tremendously on gender issues since Beijing, gender inequality still remains on being considered as a special issue not linked to the central political proposals. For example, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) pay attention to gender issues as these contribute to a major good –the eradication of poverty- and not as something that should be integrated in all policies. In the Paris Agenda, gender is not included in the debates about the efficacy of aid policies. So gender equality is seldom considered a priority goal and it is frequently perceived as an imported principle (Espinosa Fajardo, 2011).

Thirdly, the feminist policy studies literature has also pointed out several difficulties, including that the GM strategy supposes a series of assumptions, which are quite revolutionary and make a full implementation of it difficult, being not a 'harmonious' proposal as the state feminists and feminists scholars strategically presented it to be in the late 90's (Verloo, 2005). GM is not only about questioning gender neutrality of programs and public policies and challenging the existing norms, the power relations and the status quo. It questions the overall policy making process and requires changes in the institutional and

organisational cultures that should involve policy processes, mechanisms, and actors. Thus, GM confronts all kinds of political and organizational difficulties and resistances in the everyday practice, and it is consequently a long run, long-term strategy, and 'bad' implementation results might be expected to a certain extent. As we will see later in this article, this recognition of the difficult nature of GM has to do a lot with evaluation, which quality criteria to use and how to value success of GM strategies.

Following upon these difficulties, there is another theoretical idea which is also directly related to evaluation: the evaporation of the gender approach or component along the policy making process which is a way to describe the phenomenon by which gender become 'denaturalized', 'depolitized' and 'diluted' through the policies' implementation process (Cornwall et al 2007; Espinosa Fajardo, 2011). By way of this phenomenon, gender might be present in the formulation or planning stage, but gradually disappears along the implementation phase. It is obvious then, that gender is hardly found in evaluation stages due to this evaporation. Feminist scholars from the development field give different explanations for that phenomenon, some of them shared by the policy science scholars explaining the failure and implementation problems of the GM strategy, like the technocratic approach, which has reduced GM to a set of procedural techniques (Squires, 2007). This technocratization is in part linked to the prescriptive tendency of the feminist policy studies which not only make a diagnosis of what is wrong (in developmental planning or in mainstreaming processes) but also put forward a prognosis of what to do. This tendency, which is positive and also very much related to the applied nature of evaluation, 'is one of the pillars of later trends in feminist policy studies' (Lombardo et al., 2013). However, the feminist aim for integrating gender in the political agenda, due to this prescriptive nature, has also encouraged time and use efficiency over human rights approaches, which have 'produced a strong technical development –through procedural techniques, guidelines and databases- at the expense of other more invisible long-run processes of cultural and organizational practice change' (Espinosa Fajardo, 2011: 72). In any case, evaluation is a privileged stage to struggle with this evaporation and to bring back gender into the policy making, as it is the stage in which the whole policy making process is reviewed and recommendations for improvement are suggested. But for that to happen, the evaluation should be conceived and conducted from a gender perspective. Moreover, if evaluation is conducted without a gender lens, this important step of the policy making process would keep on representing and valuing a world which keeps on being genderly segregated.

### **Combining feminist policy and evaluation studies for an evaluation from a gender+ perspective**

The former two sections have pointed out what each tradition of studies –evaluation and feminist policy studies- has to say about gender and evaluation. This section aims at identifying some other issues in the two fields that can be combined and explored for a fruitful incorporation of feminist principles and gender+ in evaluation and for engendering and bringing back gender into policy making.

Although shared somehow by the two fields, these issues can be identified as coming from one tradition or the other. From the evaluation studies, I elaborate on the 1) concept of justice, 2) the applied nature of evaluation, 3) its political nature, 4) the need of stakeholders' involvement and participation, and 5) methodological diversity. From the feminist policy studies I highlight 6) the concept of intersectionality, and 7) the need of critical self-reflection. Firstly, the evaluation community –both expressed through evaluation theory and practice and by evaluators, experts and commissioners- has been traditionally concerned with issues of justice and the betterment of human lives through policies and interventions which aim not only at solving complex problems and improving quality of life, but also at making a better

and more just world for the human kind. This concern is expressed repeatedly in the literature, being a constant in evaluation handbooks (see for example the ‘Evaluating with integrity’ final chapter in Weiss, 1998 or the illustrative initial words of dedication in Patton, 2011<sup>3</sup>) and through ethical codes, guidelines or standards to be followed by field experts and evaluators (Bustelo, 2006). Although this type of concern is not exclusive from the evaluation field, being also important in other well established professions such as the health or legal sector, the constant appellation to the evaluator’s responsibility in struggling for a better world is quite specific to the evaluation community. Feminist evaluation has been defined as an approach with “a central focus in the gender inequities that lead to social injustice” (Sielbeck-Bowen et al., 2002: 3). So it is also reasonable to conclude that a preoccupation for regender the policy making process and for conducting gender sensitive evaluations which can help to make visible inequalities resonates quite well both with the evaluation and the feminist policy studies community.

Secondly, evaluation has a clear applied nature that is it is an especially prescriptive endeavour. Indeed, evaluations are practical and prescriptively oriented as they aim at the improvement of the evaluated programs and policies, the accountability of those programs and policies, and the enlightenment for future interventions. Also as Lombardo et al. (2013) recognize feminist policy studies present also a prescriptive tendency which has led to present ‘solutions’ such as GIA (Gender Impact Assessment), gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming. It has been already pointed out that this prescriptive stance poses also challenges, including a feminist rejection to give concrete guidance instead of general ideas about being reflective, hearing different voices and acting depending on the context. It has already been argued that this applied and professional orientation makes the field more prone to technocratic approaches which can be a temptation for governments and international institutions for having the illusion of an already equal policy making without questioning the *status quo* at all. However, this prescriptive nature has also produced practices which can be critically examined and help to develop better gender-sensitive evaluations and policy making. Thirdly, it was quite a long time ago that the evaluation field recognized and later introduced as an important feature of evaluation theory the inevitably political nature of evaluation. Moreover, there is an early and vast literature on this specific issue (as examples but not only Weiss, 1983; Palumbo, 1987; House, 1993) and this characteristic is stressed in practically every evaluation handbook. Emphasizing this political character is one of the feminist evaluation principles, and in feminist policy studies the political character and nature of the policy making process is also an important idea.

Fourthly, related to the political nature of evaluation, I would like to mention that in the evaluation field there is an important general accepted principle about the importance of the context and the need of context-bounded evaluations which is parallel also with recognition of the importance of involving different stakeholders in those evaluations and hence, the need for and the importance of participatory approaches in evaluation. This resonates with the feminist principles of the inevitable political nature of evaluation and that both knowledge and values are culturally, socially, and temporally contingent. It also resonates with the importance given, from a feminist perspective, to participation and to who has a say in the interventions and who has not, and whose voices are heard or not heard (Sudarshan and Sharma, 2012).

Apart from both these characteristics –context and stakeholders- to which generally speaking every evaluation expert adheres to, there are also other ones which are not present in all

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<sup>3</sup> “To professional evaluators around the world. It is an honor and a privilege to be part of this complex, adaptive, dynamic, and still emergent profession and transdiscipline. Many people worldwide have dedicated themselves to social innovation and making the world a better place. Those who evaluate also serve” (Patton, 2011)

evaluation approaches, but which are also shared by many scholars and practitioners. The feminist principle of recognising that there are multiple ways of knowing and that some of them are more privileged than others, resonates with the parallel recognition that knowledge created by evaluation processes has power itself, and should be a resource of and for the people who participate in those processes (among others, Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Mertens et al., 1994; Fetterman et al, 1996; Ryan et al, 1998; Mertens, 2009). As another example, some evaluation approaches have also emphasized the importance of attention to particular cases and persons for deeply understanding what is happening in the program or policy evaluated (Stake, 1995, 2003, 2010). Gender mainstreaming processes, applying gender analysis for identifying which is the differentiated impact of policies in women and men, centres the policy making process in the people and the understanding of those different impacts which require a look at the context, the community and the people of the evaluated cases.

In the fifth place, the evaluation community, although always in a polemic way, has been increasingly recognizing the need of methodological diversity for dealing with the always complex evaluation endeavour. Feminist principles claim for a situated knowledge in research –and evaluation–, and feminist research has moved from feminist empiricism, to standpoint theory, and finally to post-modern feminism (Podems, 2010; Seigart, 2005; Harding, 2004). Post-modern feminism acknowledges the use of multiple perspectives in research and evaluation and ‘utilizes poststructuralist notions that challenge assumptions of universal concepts and essential categories and acknowledges that ‘reality’ is socially constructed’ (Hood and Cassaro 2002: 28). The positivistic paradigm has already been criticized by many evaluation authors as the feminist epistemology has criticized the positivistic scientific dominant approach. Important new approaches to evaluation started to generalize since the 80s and 90s, which were critical to objective oriented and experimentalist approaches, clearly dominant from the 50s and 60s. These approaches claimed that for having more sound and useful evaluations, and authors like Scriven started to pay better attention to valuing, like Cronbach, Stufflebeam, and Weiss to decision making process and Stake to stakeholders and professionals (Stufflebeam and Shinkfied, 1985), use a flexibility of methods and even paradigms (Patton, 2008), or orient the evaluation processes towards the participation of stakeholders (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Monnier, 1995) and their empowerment (Fetterman et al., 1996). Those new trends continued to develop in many different theoretical and methodological proposals, being one of the most accepted approaches in the last two decades, the so-called called Mixed Methods evaluation, which claims for the integration of not only methods and techniques, but also epistemologies and paradigms (Greene and Caracelli, 1997). For integrating gender+ into evaluation, I argue that feminist epistemologies and their critical perspective should be inspirational, but that the acceptance of a real methodological diversity means the critical use of mixed methods at the epistemological, methodological and technical level, including also the possible use of quantitative data and positivist perspectives if the evaluative context and situation claim for it. Although it is clear that qualitative methodologies seem frequently more adequate to capture context and people’s lives, numbers and statistics might also identify important gender+ differences.

In the sixth place, and coming from the feminist policy studies tradition, feminist theories and scholars, in their recognition of women’s heterogeneity, have been the ones putting the intersectionality issue in the political agenda, recognising that gender is always intersected by other axes of inequality, being that class, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, etc. The entry of ‘Feminism’ in the Encyclopaedia of Evaluation claims that “Feminism examines the intersection of gender, race, class, and sexuality in the context of power” (Mertens, 2005: 154). Moreover, many evaluators work in the development field or other social areas evaluating social programs which struggle with all kinds of inequalities. Very frequently, evaluators do ‘on site’ evaluations, gather data, observe and talk to people in the programs

they evaluate where frequently different inequalities interact. Also the preoccupation for Human Rights has been a key issue in the international development field which has contributed so much to the evaluation field. I would like to think that these characteristics can probably make evaluators especially sensitive to gender+ issues.

Lastly, a final issue coming from the feminist policy studies, but that could easily resonate with at least part of the evaluation community, is the critical and self-reflective characteristics of any feminist thinking. As Michael Q. Patton poses in the *Feminist Evaluation* issue ‘we are challenged by both feminist and post-modern critiques of knowledge to be clear about and own our authorship of whatever we propound, to be self-reflective, to acknowledge biases and limitations, and to honour multiple perspectives’ (Patton, 2002: 105). Indeed, feminists recognize that their own and particular experiences and perspectives lead to a concrete standpoint that they bring with them to the research or evaluation process -and that self-reflective position is not always so consciously active for others-. This feminist tendency to be critical and reflective is shared by many evaluation colleagues, as the evaluation nature calls to question what it is evaluated, and to be clear about which criteria are used to evaluate, acknowledging biases and limitations of the conducted evaluations.

### **Evaluation of gender policies, evaluation from a gender+ perspective and feminist evaluation**

During the last years many efforts, energies and resources have been devoted to formulate and implement policies and programs for tackling and preventing inequalities and problems created by gender inequality and gender discrimination. This has been done in two directions: through specific gender policies and through gender mainstreaming strategies mainly adopted after the IV Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995. Thus, there are different and every day more complex ‘gender’ interventions and, many times the term ‘gender evaluation’ is used for referring to the evaluation of gender policies or the evaluation of gender components of interventions. However, it is necessary to distinguish between evaluation of gender policies (both specific and mainstreaming interventions) and evaluation of any other policies or interventions (not necessarily aimed at gender equality) from a gender perspective:

1. *Evaluation of gender policies:* As a policy tool, the evaluation might be especially fruitful for capturing the important changes and shifts the policies might have produced. It is important, then, to evaluate all those gender policies and interventions, for improving them, as well as for answering to what extent these policies are successful. Also as an important part of the policy cycle, and as in any policy or sector, evaluation contributes to accountability and to guide developments, further needs and new areas for development. As part of this evaluation of gender policies, the evaluation of gender mainstreaming strategies should also be considered.
2. *Evaluation from a gender perspective or Gender-sensitive Evaluation:* As part of the policy making process, and following the aim of the gender mainstreaming strategy, which is to integrate a gender perspective in that policy making process, evaluation is an important stage to be conducted under a gender perspective, as it is problem definition, agenda setting, planning or implementation.

The evaluation of gender policies is very much needed for understanding and improving gender policies and policy making specifically aimed at fighting discriminations and promoting gender+ equality. As the structural and dynamic characters of inequalities have led to increasingly more complex and comprehensive interventions, the evaluation component is an essential one for keeping on improving our ways to fight against those inequalities. Indeed, as gender policies have evolved towards a better recognition of the structural and systemic roots of inequality, they aim not only at ‘solving’ a specific or discriminatory situation, but

also at addressing the situation which produces the discrimination and at making visible invisible inequalities which are maintaining and reproducing discriminations. Thus, they should be careful and constantly evaluated in a comprehensive way, not only trying to capture policy results and impact, but also the implementation processes and their surely difficulties and limitations, and the planning and policy design, as gender policies themselves construct meanings and might be representing inequalities in many different –at times contradictory or inconsistent- ways-, as the Critical Frame Analysis developed by the MAGEEQ and QUING projects has demonstrated.

The evaluation of gender mainstreaming strategies is also an important component of the evaluation of gender policies. Unfortunately, as it is also the case in much of the evaluation practice, some basic and key issues which come from evaluation theory, such as the political nature of evaluation and the consequent need of attending to context, as well as the different types of evaluation that should be performed to have a comprehensive assessment, are frequently not applied and this type of evaluation is rarely performed. Concretely, there is a tendency to not addressing gender mainstreaming strategies and processes as an evaluation object 'per se', in which both its conception and design of the strategy, its process of implementation and its results and impacts are evaluated (Bustelo, 2003). On the contrary, there is a tendency to identify good practices with no systematic evaluation about the context, the conceptualization of the mainstreaming practice and their process of implementation, and when very frequently the criteria for considering a practice as 'good' are not clear enough. This results in the fact that some innovative 'practices with potential' might get lost in the selection process. From my point of view, these tendencies are due to the frequently scarce evaluation background and expertise of both commissioners and evaluators themselves who, in the best of the cases, have some gender but not so much evaluation expertise. Some exceptions like the evaluations done in 1999 and 2001 to the Gender Impact Assessment tool implemented by the Dutch government (Roggeband & Verloo, 2006); or some evaluations of equality plans performed by the Basque Country and Catalonia governments in Spain (Alfama & Cruells, 2013), are promising and worth mentioning of this necessary type of evaluation.

The evaluation of gender policies is then different from the evaluation from a gender perspective, also called gender sensitive evaluation<sup>4</sup>, and which is also closely related to feminist evaluation. Here the program, policy or intervention evaluated could be of any kind, not necessarily gender policies, but still the evaluation is conducted with a gender perspective or a feminist lens through the whole evaluation process. The evaluation with a gender perspective pays special attention to gender relations and to gender+<sup>5</sup> issues and how they intervene in the policy making process in different policies and topics. An evaluation from a gender perspective is guided by feminist and gender theories and by the mainstreaming assumptions on the structural and non neutral character of interventions. Are those interventions helping to reduce the gender+ inequalities, or, on the contrary, sometimes unconsciously helping to maintain or even reinforce them?

As already pointed out, gender mainstreaming strategies formally adopted by many governments, are very clear in that a gender equality perspective should be incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages (including evaluation), by the actors normally involved in policy-making (including evaluators). However, the evaluation stage has received little

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<sup>4</sup> Although I like better the term 'evaluation from a gender perspective' than the one of 'gender sensitive evaluation', mainly because its more pro-active character, I use indistinctively both terms for the purpose of this article. 'Gender sensitive evaluation' is more widely used in the international development sector which is the one which has produced more literature and practical resources on gender and evaluation.

<sup>5</sup> As the intersectionality component is not explicitly present, I would like to add the '+' as a way to recognize that gender inequality always intersects with other types of equalities and this is widely recognized by a majority of feminist theorists.

attention in mainstreaming studies. As it was already mentioned in the former section, this might be due to the lack of evaluations of GM strategies (and this being a consequence of GM not being implemented effectively in general), but also to the general lack of attention to the evaluation stage from traditional policy studies -and not only feminist policy studies. In the same way policy analysts might have as object 'non issues', if a policy does not get into the planning stage, it is analyzed as a non-policy. Also an already planned policy which is not implemented also keeps the attention from policy analysts. But analysing a non-evaluated policy is almost the norm and the evaluation stage attracts very little descriptive attention from policy analysts. As mentioned before, some experiences, like the Dutch Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) can be considered an exception (Verloo & Roggeband, 1996; Roggeband & Verloo, 2006). However, although related to evaluation, it was conceived as an 'ex-ante' analytical tool to apply for planning and not for 'ex-post' evaluations with learning and accountability purposes about already applied policies.

However, evaluation from a gender perspective can be especially useful for bringing back to the policy making process the gender component that most probably has been lost, watered down or evaporated in an earlier stage. Following the example posed already in this article, in an evaluation done in Madrid (Spain) during the 90s of a drug prevention program for youngsters which was not planned with any gender perspective, it was precisely in the evaluation stage that gender blindness was made visible and the genderedness of the policy making process identified. In this case, this identification did not come spontaneously but was possible due to the gender expertise of some evaluators in the team; that is, because someone helped to wear the gender lens to the evaluation team, leaving very clear the importance of gender training of professionals working through the policy making process. I do not agree with the extended idea that a policy which has not been conceived, planned and implemented with a gender perspective cannot be evaluated with that gender perspective. On the contrary, I argue that evaluation is precisely the most adequate stage to bring back gender issues into the policy making process if the others have failed allowing for the gender perspective to evaporate.

Doing evaluation from a gender+ perspective has components of both content and process. Content is necessarily related to doing and using a gender analysis in each of the sectors in which the gender+ perspective is applied. Thus, apart from gender+, context and evaluation expertise, content-sector expertise is also required for applying a gender+ perspective in evaluation. There are few specific publications about gender+ or feminist evaluations applied to concrete sectors: in the international development field (Bamberger, 2005; World Bank, 2005); European Social Fund (European Commission, 2011); and in the Education, Health and Microfinance sectors in India (Jandhyala, 2012; Ramachandran, 2012, Khana, 2012; Kamala Murthy; 2012).

As evaluation is conceived as a process by itself, it is important to keep and apply a gender perspective throughout the whole process. Espinosa Fajardo (2011) has identify key issues for mainstreaming gender in the different evaluation components: terms of reference (inclusion of gender equality as a key issue and requirement of experts on gender); criteria and evaluation questions (revision of classic criteria and formulation of gender-sensitive questions); use of gender-sensitive indicators; use of mixed method and participatory methodological approaches and tools and apply techniques in a gender sensitive way; reporting findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned from a gender perspective, design a gender-sensitive communication plan, and ensure the use of the report for improving gender equality. Katherine Hay has done also an excellent analysis on how the Feminist Evaluation principles inform five evaluation stages: 1. Evaluation questions or what gets examined?: At this stage, Feminist evaluation allows to identify and test the theories underpinning policies and programmes, identifying gaps in a programme theory that weakens opportunities to

address gender inequities, and offering opportunities to critique dominant discourses and hold them up for scrutiny; 2. Evaluation design: Here, feminist evaluation works as “a lens or standpoint that influences the choices made in design and methods” (Hay, 2012:329); and Mixed Methods and the transformative evaluation paradigm (Mertens, 2009) are mentioned by Hay; 3. Evaluation judgements: Feminist evaluation does not suggest which definition of success is ‘right’, but recognizes that there are different and competing definitions and criteria of success and proposes to bring them to the surface for debate and critique); 4. Evaluation practice: Feminist evaluation claims for a critical self-reflection or situating the self within the evaluation process, done together with evaluators and program implementers; and 5. Use of evaluation: Feminist evaluators should take responsibility to take action on findings and pay attention to the evaluations findings which are useful for the implementing partners, and not only the funder (Hay, 2012. 327-337).

However, the proliferation of technocratic, ‘tool kit’ and depolitized gender approaches to evaluation, as well as many personal and institutional resistances against feminist ideas and labels in most of the organizations which promote evaluation from a gender perspective, have obliged some authors to distinguish between feminist evaluation and ‘gender approaches’ to evaluation (Podems, 2010) But what are then the differences, if any, of ‘evaluation from a gender perspective’ and ‘feminist evaluation’? As Podems (2010) recognizes they are complementary, but not the same. Following Sielbeck-Bowen et al (2002: 110), being a feminist evaluator ‘requires ongoing and continuous examination of personal values and the intentional creation of approaches to evaluation that are consistent with and actively advance personal feminist values of equity, agency, and voice’. Then, we cannot pretend all evaluators being feminist advocates and evaluators, but we can demand them to be gender sensitive and include a gender perspective in evaluation. As the same authors recognize, ‘all evaluators, male and female, are challenged to examine the role of sex and gender in society, as well as to ensure that andocentric norms are not automatically incorporated into our evaluation practice’ (Sielbeck-Bowen et al, 2002: 110). Probably this challenge can be made, instead of demanding them to become feminists, with some sort of guidance by gender sensitive and feminist evaluators who can show evaluators to be critically attentive to gender+ issues.

Feminist evaluation should be there not only to constantly inform gender+ sensitive evaluation but to watch out that gender perspective is not watered down or lost for accommodating to dominant frames and patriarchal institutional structures. A translation of the feminist principles into mainstream evaluation should be done to assure that evaluation is done from a gender+ perspective. Feminist evaluators should be a sort of critical watchdogs for that process, as gender+ sensitive evaluation should be informed, in a continuous manner, by feminist theory and principles. As gender+ inequalities are structural and systemic, as well as dynamic and they should be constantly identified and critically scrutinized and explored to struggle with them, feminist evaluation is needed to apply a critical and reflexive view of a still andocentric world with certain power structures. Feminist evaluation should also critically analyze and challenge dominant approaches, and where they come from, in evaluation. Also, it is necessary that there continue to be feminist critiques to ‘gender approaches’: we need them as it is not so easy to transfer feminist knowledge into practical interventions, and even the most probably good will intents for fighting against inequalities should be constantly reviewed.

Moreover, feminist evaluation can be especially important in certain contexts. As Hay argues in her article on engendering policies and programmes through feminist evaluation in India, “in the context of persistent gender inequities, feminist evaluation must play a stronger role in understanding how societies change and what policies and programmes show promise in shifting norms and inequities” (Hay, 2012: 321).

## Conclusion

This article has shown that there is an incipient but strong development in the professional practice of evaluation from a gender+ perspective. However, although there are a few studies at the academic level, there is still a long way to run in this realm. As it has been seen, most of these developments, theoretical and practical references come from international development evaluation. This is to a certain extent quite logic as there is a long tradition of gender analysis in that field from the 70s. Also, it is the policy sector where probably more evaluations are actually conducted, so more developments can be expected where there is more practice. Yet, I argue that it is urgent to develop the idea of evaluation from a gender+ perspective as a crucial part of gender+ mainstreaming strategies and as part of the policy making process, in all the different policy sectors. Many ideas and developments can be brought from the international development field, and there is a need to ‘translate’ them to other contexts and start to create a critical mass also outside that sector. In my view there is a need to spread the debate outside the development field, and for that, feminists and gender experts in the academia, the professional, and the civil society fields from different policy sectors are crucial.

The traditions of feminist policy studies and evaluation studies should be fruitfully combined for this purpose. I have argued in this article that there are many issues and elements in both traditions which resonate. Feminist policy studies can contribute with a critical analysis of the policy making process helping us to understand where and why gender is lost in that process. It also helps us understand the structural and systematic basis of gender+ inequality and how policies should be evaluated for advancing towards a more equal world. Evaluation studies count with a strong theoretical corpus to illuminate empirical and theoretical work on quality criteria to assess progress in policy making from a gender+ perspective, which is a research concern in feminist policy studies (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, this volume). It can also help to introduce evaluation in gender+ mainstreaming strategies. I think we also need a joint effort by feminist academics, feminist evaluators and policy makers, and feminist movements to introduce a gender perspective in evaluation. Feminist evaluators should assure feminist movements are heard and actively participate in evaluations, and share their work with academics jointly creating together a critical mass. Governments and institutions, including international institutions and donors should be better supported and informed by this theoretical work.

Finally, as it has been pointed out that the gender component and perspective gets easily evaporated through the policy making process, evaluation is crucial for bringing back gender into that process. If this is consciously done, it might be a way to re-genderized the policy making process. In sum, evaluation has potentially the important role of unravelling the invisibility, the non attention to gender & other inequalities and the evaporation of sex/gender along the policy making process.

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