
ORIGINAL ARTICLES

Gender Mainstreaming and the Discursive Politics of Public Service Values

Stephanie Paterson and Francesca Scala

Concordia University

In this article, we argue that the introduction of gender mainstreaming invites tension between key public service values, such as fairness, equity, and responsiveness, on one hand, and efficiency, accountability, and neutrality, on the other hand. Using a Canadian case study, we further argue that, to reconcile this conflict, public servants deploy a number of discursive strategies, which shape the meanings of both gender mainstreaming and values. These tactics, we suggest, serve to both trouble and reinscribe traditional bureaucratic discourse in ways that might offer opportunities for transforming administrative practice and policy outcomes.

Feminist politics throughout the West has undergone significant changes in the past few decades. Among the many changes, the emergence of gender mainstreaming has established the bureaucracy as a central site of gender politics (Caglar, 2013; Walby, 2011). Emerging from a long history of feminist activism and advocacy in the international arena, and taking form at the Fourth UN Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, gender mainstreaming is based on the feminist/intersectional understanding that all policies have the potential to impact social groups differently, thereby creating and sustaining unequal power relations (e.g., Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). Thus, public servants are increasingly expected to not simply respond to feminist knowledge(s), but also to incorporate it(them) into policymaking and bureaucratic practice (e.g., Bustelo, Ferguson, & Forest, 2016; Squires, 2005, 2007; Walby, 2011).

The introduction of gender mainstreaming followed significant bureaucratic reform in many jurisdictions, particularly the emergence of New Public Management (NPM), raising concerns about its affinity with neoliberal discourse and analogous administrative practices (e.g., Bacchi & Eveline, 2003). The irony that a gender-integrative policy analytic was introduced just as state discourses constituted gender politics as “special interests” has not gone unnoticed. As a result, considerable debate has focused on the technocratic bias of gender mainstreaming and the potential co-optation of gender equality goals by an administrative machinery aimed

at individualizing and responsabilizing citizens in the name of efficiency (e.g., Bacchi & Eveline, 2010; Meier & Celis, 2011; Prügl, 2011; Woodward, 2004). Indeed, studies of the successful adoption of gender mainstreaming in Europe have illuminated the role of strategic framings that emphasize efficiency and coherence with bureaucratic discourse (Lombardo, Meier, & Verloo, 2009; Pollack & Hafner-Burton, 2000).

Such studies point to the potential of public service values discourse in facilitating (or hindering) support for gender-mainstreaming initiatives and in shaping meanings therein. The NPM era witnessed the emergence of public service values discourse that emphasizes newer public service values such as efficiency, equity, and fairness, which at times seemingly conflict with enduring, traditional core values such as accountability, neutrality, and transparency (Kernaghan, 1994, 2003). As a result of both the proliferation of values and the potential tensions between them, there is a renewed focus on the ethical dimensions of the bureaucracy. The emergence of values discourse has had significant implications for bureaucratic practice, as codes of ethics and values statements have become important managerial tools aimed at guiding administrative behavior and decision-making, particularly with respect to reconciling competing or conflicting values (for an overview, see Davis & West, 2009).

Values are part of the discursive terrain in which bureaucratic practice is constituted and performed, and, as such, value conflict is unavoidable (see also Wagenaar, 1999). Indeed, public service values are often ambiguous (e.g., Rouillard & Giroux, 2005) and are potentially competitive and contradictory (e.g., Rose, Persson, & Heeager, 2015), which results in both situational and discursive conflicts for bureaucrats. Situational value conflicts, where, for example, two or more values collide, might be easily resolved by prioritizing some values over others (e.g., Molina, 2009, 2015). Discursive value conflicts, however, center on divergent understandings of particular values, where actors must reconcile multiple and, in some cases, incongruent meanings. In both cases, particular values can be interpreted in ways that ensure discursive continuity between values and affirm one's identity within the broader public service. For example, femocrats engaged in equality work within the bureaucracy might be more likely to interpret values in ways that support their feminist identities and goals, and that, in turn, shape and support their roles as feminist bureaucrats, as observed in the literature on representative bureaucracy (e.g., Dolan, 2000). As a result, such conflicts invite alternative interpretations of core public service values and have the potential to change bureaucratic discourse and practice in ways that lead to more socially just outcomes.

It is against this backdrop that gender mainstreaming must be interpreted, adapted, and operationalized. Despite a great deal of literature documenting the promises and pitfalls of gender mainstreaming, the role of bureaucrats in interpreting and applying gender-mainstreaming frameworks remains largely unexplored. Yet the literature on policy implementation and street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Schofield, 2001) tells us that local bureaucrats help shape policy in how they perform their work "on the ground." Indeed, as it operates in and on bureaucracies, gender mainstreaming must be interpreted, adapted, and operationalized by bureaucrats within the contexts in which they operate. This is a particularly challenging task, since bureaucratic discourse, structures, and practices have historically excluded, obscured, and silenced diverse voices, as observed by feminist public administration scholars (Burnier, 2003; Ferguson, 1983, 1984; Hutchinson & Mann, 2004; Stivers, 2002). At the same time, however, gender mainstreaming presents a challenge to traditional bureaucratic discourse, since it is premised on the assumption that traditional policy analysis, despite claims of impartiality, neutrality, and professionalism, is a key source of gender and social inequality. Complicating matters

is the fact that gender mainstreaming is a nebulous concept, often lacking substantive guidelines for expected outcomes (e.g., Meier & Celis, 2011), where it “can mean all things to all people” (Caglar, 2013, p. 337; Lombardo et al., 2009; Meier & Celis, 2011). Thus, how bureaucrats interpret and apply gender mainstreaming, as well as the role of bureaucratic discourse in helping or hindering gender mainstreaming’s transformative potential, remains an important matter of inquiry.

Within this context, discursive politics is crucial in shaping gender mainstreaming and influencing its outcomes. According to Lombardo et al. (2009, p. 10), discursive politics refers to “the intentional or unintentional engaging of policy actors in conceptual disputes that result in meanings attributed to the terms and concepts employed in specific contexts.” From this definition, Lombardo et al., (2009) establish a toolbox to explore how meanings become fixed, shrunk, stretched, or bent in ways that support or hinder transformative politics. In this article, we apply this framework to Canadian gender mainstreaming, examining the ways in which gender analysts within the federal government situate gender mainstreaming—Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), as it is known in Canada—within a public service values discourse.

The Canadian experience offers an important case study on the role of bureaucrats in shaping the meanings of gender mainstreaming. The Canadian federal government is a Westminster system premised on an independent, professional public service that advises and serves a usually strong executive. Within this context, GBA+ has experienced a number of issues, including a weak lead agency (Grace, 1997), conceptual limits (Burt & Hardman, 2001; Grace, 1997; Hankivsky, 2005; Paterson, 2010), and design and implementation issues (McNutt, 2010). Moreover, as observed by Rankin and Wilcox (2004) and Paterson (2010), the technocratic bias of the GBA+ tool privileges “expert bureaucrats,” thereby squeezing out diverse voices. In the era of neoliberalism, these expert bureaucrats, answerable only to their ministers, have become increasingly indispensable in shaping gender politics.

The questions we ask here are, how do these experts implicate public service values in their interpretations and applications of gender mainstreaming? Do their interpretations accept or trouble conventional understandings of public service values? How do they reconcile the potential tensions between gender mainstreaming and bureaucratic discourse and practice? In particular, we argue that in a context where the unexamined referent tends to be male (Ferguson, 1984; Stivers, 2002), gender mainstreaming challenges public service values discourse. First, in privileging values such as fairness and equity, it creates potential situational conflicts with both old and new values, such as neutrality and efficiency. Second, in asking public servants to apply a gender lens to all policies and programs, gender mainstreaming results in potential discursive conflict. In challenging hegemonic understandings of all public service values, gender mainstreaming renders them amenable to feminist interpretations. As such, gender mainstreaming in general and gender analysts in particular deploy public service values discourse in ways that both reinscribe and transform bureaucratic practice, thus creating the potential basis for more socially just outcomes.

The article is organized as follows: First, we offer a brief overview of gender mainstreaming in Canada, situating it within bureaucratic discourse. Then, we turn our focus to our methodological framework, discussing the role of discursive politics in reconciling competing and, at times, contradictory values. Finally, we report our findings, demonstrating the various discursive strategies at play in making GBA+ amenable to bureaucratic politics and illuminating the ways in which bureaucratic discourse is disrupted, though not transformed, by these interventions. We conclude with suggestions for future research.

GENDERING PUBLIC POLICY: CANADA AND THE EMERGENCE OF GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS(+)

Despite a long history of women's activism and presence in the Canadian bureaucracy, the idea that women's interests should be incorporated into the policy process is relatively new. It has only been since 1995 that federal public servants have used gender-based analysis to analyze the potential impacts of policy outcomes on women.¹ Prior to that, gender politics in Canada was largely represented by the "Women's State." Established in the wake of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in the early 1970s, the Women's State represented a multipronged approach to women's issues that included women's policy agencies, an advisory council, and support programs for community groups. As much of the gender equality policy architecture of the Women's State was gradually dismantled, in its place emerged an "integrated" approach to gender politics that aims to apply a gender lens to all policies and programs to expose and remedy potential disparate impacts.

As part of its international commitment to gender equality, the Canadian federal government signed on to the UN Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, which included adopting a gender-mainstreaming strategy. The result was GBA, an expert-bureaucratic approach that mirrored the rational "decision process" outlined by Lasswell (1956), which includes identifying a problem, analyzing options, and determining the "best" alternative (Paterson, 2010). Gender-based analysis was initially organized around a hub-and-spoke model, in which Status of Women Canada (SWC), a standalone women's policy agency, occupied a central position with respect to development, implementation, knowledge mobilization and transfer, and evaluation, and where analysis was conducted by bureaucrats at the departmental level. As of 2007, GBA was required for all cabinet submissions and was overseen by the Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS).

Since its implementation, GBA has undergone considerable changes. First, the organization and administration of GBA has shifted from a hub-and-spoke model to a more integrationist approach where all public service employees, beyond just gender experts, are expected to be trained in and apply gender analysis. Second, to accommodate this expectation and expand its reach, GBA training is now offered mostly online. Third, in 2011 GBA was renamed GBA+ to reflect a newly adopted intersectional approach inspired by the research of Europe's Quality in Gender+ Equity Policies (QUING), a project that sought to compare gender policies across Europe using an intersectional lens (see <http://www.quing.eu>). GBA+ requires analysts to examine the ways that "intersecting identity factors," such as gender, age, education, ability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, marital status, language, culture, income, and geography, shape the ways in which policies are experienced (<http://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-ac/index-en.html>).

Gender-Based Analysis, then, has introduced significant changes to the public service. Such changes, involving processes, structures, and/or policies affecting the public service, as Kernaghan (1994, p. 615) observes, often result in or exacerbate value conflicts. Indeed, one might argue that the feminist bases of GBA+ bring it into tension with public service values, leading to both situational and discursive value conflicts. Where some have argued that bureaucracies are by their very nature "masculine" organizations (Ferguson, 1984; Stivers, 2002) that embody masculine values (e.g., Limerick & Field, 2003), GBA+ requires analysts to consider—and remedy—the gendered and gendering effects of public policy through an intersectional lens. In effect, GBA+ asks analysts to be both reflective and reflexive in considering how policy problems come to be and what to do about them.

As an approach to policy analysis, GBA+ underscores the importance of a number of public service values, such as fairness, equity, and responsiveness, leaving analysts to reconcile these values with neutrality, impartiality, and efficiency. Consider, for example, the description of GBA+ offered by the Status of Women Canada (SWC) Website:

Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an *analytical tool* the federal government uses to *advance gender equality* in Canada... GBA+ is used to assess the *potential impacts* of policies, programs or initiatives on diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys, taking into account gender and other identity factors. GBA+ helps *recognize and respond to the different situations and needs of the Canadian population*. (SWC, 2013, emphasis added)

This passage highlights the potential emphasis given to the values noted above, particularly fairness, equity, and responsiveness. For example, fairness is implicated when it is noted that policies are not experienced equally across social groups. Similarly, equity is emphasized when GBA+ is promoted as a “tool to advance gender equality.” Finally, responsiveness is noted when it is claimed that GBA+ helps “recognize and respond to the different situations and needs” of various groups throughout the Canadian population.

That these values might conflict with other values, particularly neutrality, impartiality, and efficiency, is also noted. For example, SWC takes steps to minimize situational value conflict by dismissing notions that GBA+ is a political project that undermines central public service values such as neutrality and impartiality. Specifically, it is noted that “GBA+ is not advocacy for anyone. It is an analytical tool designed to ensure that potentially different impacts for different people are discovered and taken into account during the development and review of policy, programs and initiatives” (SWC, 2013). Similarly, SWC attempts to dispel the myth that GBA+ is biased against men: “GBA+ is about fully analyzing impacts and options for everyone, not about promoting one group over another” (SWC, 2013). Concerns for efficiency and effectiveness are also addressed, particularly with respect to workload. It is claimed, “The use of GBA+ is simply part of good policy making, which requires the consideration of many complex factors. By learning more about GBA+, you may find that you are already doing this type of work” (SWC, 2013).

Although SWC attempts to minimize the number of situational value conflicts resulting from GBA+, it does not control how GBA+ is actually interpreted, adapted, and operationalized across analysts. Given that GBA+ is rooted in feminist advocacy and theory, which stand in stark juxtaposition to bureaucratic discourse, the potential for conflicting interpretations of key values is significant. How these tensions get resolved is key to understanding whether or not GBA+ is—or can be—transformative. To answer this question, we draw on the literature on discursive politics.

DISCURSIVE POLITICS: STRATEGIC AND NOT-SO-STRATEGIC DISCURSIVE INTERVENTIONS

Bureaucratic discourse is not simply handed down; it is also enacted and embodied and, as such, is fluid and permeable (e.g., Hajer, 2005). Reconciling both situational and discursive tension between or within values requires analysts to essentially “make sense” of GBA+, often by rendering it amenable to bureaucratic culture, or vice versa. To understand how analysts make

sense of GBA+, reconciling tensions between it and bureaucratic discourse, we turn to the literature on discursive politics.

Discursive politics approaches have a long history in frame/framework theory originating in linguistics and sociology (Bacchi, 2009b). Although frames have been defined in a number of ways, including as inner structures, boundaries, interpretive schema, and so forth, the emphasis in feminist applications has tended to focus less on what frames “are” and more on what frames “do.” For example, state feminist research, influenced by hermeneutic approaches to frames, demonstrates how “frame fit” enables alliances between women’s policy agencies and women’s movement groups (e.g., McBride, Mazur, & Lovenduski, 2012). In contrast, Bacchi’s (1999, 2009a) What’s the Problem Represented to Be approach and Verloo and Lombardo’s (2007) Critical Frame Analysis explore the discursive constitution of policy problems and subjects therein. These works differ with respect to the role of power in framing, particularly concerning the role of intentionality and the strategic elements of frames (Bacchi, 2009b).

By emphasizing what frames “do,” this literature brings to the fore important concepts that help in identifying the types of processes at play in meaning making. Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo’s (2009, pp. 3–5) work on the discursive politics of gender equality identifies four discursive processes that shape meaning. First, the process of *fixing* serves to temporarily freeze meanings (p. 3). For example, meanings can be frozen in formal statements, legislation, and regulations. Second, *shrinking* refers to “reducing its meaning to something that is confined to a particular policy area or specific interpretation of an issue... [Shrinking] often involves a simplification of social problems and of the required solutions” (p. 4). For example, representing gender equality as an issue of labor market activity reduces the problem to an economic issue and obscures its social dimensions. As observed by Lombardo et al. (2009, p. 4), the concepts of shrinking and fixing are examples of the ways discursive politics can depoliticize issues.

A third discursive process is *stretching*, which represents a “broadening of the concept ... by developing a larger meaning that expands on its previous understanding in a given context” (p. 5). Like shrinking, “stretching can reflect a lack of reflexivity, ... often dilutes or blurs the previous meanings” (p. 5). Finally, *bending* is “a process that shapes meaning at the expense of the goal of gender equality. Bending occurs when the concept of gender equality is adjusted to make it fit some other goal other than the achievement of gender equality itself” (p. 5). In the gender-mainstreaming literature, fears of co-optation reflect a concern with frame bending. For example, as noted by Verloo and Lombardo, a study by Pollack and Hafner-Burton (2000) observed that gender mainstreaming had been “bent” to fit efficiency rather than equity discourse. More recently, Meier and Celis (2011) note that in the absence of substantive guidelines regarding the goal of gender equality, gender-mainstreaming initiatives are reduced to procedural interventions, or “rules and tools.” In such cases, the meanings of gender mainstreaming are bent to share discursive affinity with bureaucratic and technocratic impulses.

These concepts are useful for thinking about how bureaucrats reconcile competing or incongruent values, which will in turn shape the content and processes associated with GBA+. This article demonstrates the ways in which gender analysts engage discursively with various public service values (PSV) to reconcile value conflicts resulting from GBA+. Under the previous hub-and-spoke model, gender analysts were gender experts who were responsible for developing and applying GBA+ to policies and programs. Under the more recent integrated model, in which all public servants are expected to be trained in and apply GBA+ in their own

work, gender analysts, or focal points, offer assistance and support for bureaucrats engaging in gender analysis. The position is not an official title within the government and, as a result, has not traditionally been associated with much influence. Our analysis focuses on both individual and group interviews with public servants conducted during 2013 and early 2014. We recruited our sample in three ways. First, personal contacts in the federal public service, as well as the Government of Canada Employment Directory (GEDS), provided a partial list of individuals working on GBA+. Second, we used the original list to recruit others by means of the snowballing method in which individuals were asked to provide the names of others they thought might be interested in participating. Finally, we asked the director of the gender-based analysis unit at SWC to send a generic invitation to participate across their intergovernmental network. In total, we interviewed 13 participants,² including representatives from both central agencies and line departments at various stages of their careers.³ Length of service ranged from four to 40 years. The representatives were involved in different dimensions of the GBA+ process, including development, training, and application. All of the participants had postgraduate degrees and about one third had either a doctoral or a law degree. Names were changed and identifying references were removed to protect the identity of participants.

The interviews, which lasted 90 minutes on average, were semi-structured and conversational, focusing on the role of analysts and their experiences in using the GBA+ tool. Due to scheduling issues, two interviews were group interviews that included three participants each, and one person completed the interview questionnaire in print. In addition, to extend the conversation, we returned interview transcripts to the participants, inviting revisions or additions to the text. Only two transcriptions were returned with corrections, which included typos and clarifications for those sections of the text that identified inaudible parts of the recordings. All of the final transcripts were then coded and analyzed with respect to public service values and the discursive concepts identified above. Participants' names have been changed to protect their identities.

MAKING SENSE OF GBA+ : RECONCILING SITUATIONAL AND DISCURSIVE VALUE CONFLICTS

As argued above, GBA+ challenges hegemonic values discourse in two ways. First, it privileges PSV such as fairness, equity, and responsiveness, seemingly at the expense of neutrality, impartiality, and efficiency, opening space for situational value conflicts. Second, in applying a gender lens to all policies and programs, GBA+ invites alternative interpretations of core values that could lead to discursive value conflict. This section demonstrates the discursive strategies, not all of which were obviously intentional (for a discussion, see Bacchi, 2009a), to reconcile these conflicts. In effect, these strategies both troubled and reinscribed traditional bureaucratic values discourse.

Neutrality

Neutrality and impartiality are traditional public sector values that continue to resonate in the new era of public administration. Neutrality refers to nonpartisanship among bureaucrats, while

impartiality requires “objective” analysis or service delivery that does not favor any one group over another (Aucoin, 2012; Sossin, 2005). These values, in particular, enable public servants to offer “fearless advice” and to “speak truth to power.” Problematic, however, is that these meanings invoke reference to formal equality, whereby everyone is to be treated equally before the law. Feminist critiques of formal equality demonstrate the limits of this concept, exposing the ways in which it typically neglects and obscures dimensions that serve to limit substantive equality, such as race, class, gender, and ability (for a discussion, see Hankivsky, 2004). Thus, formal equality potentially exacerbates substantive inequality.

The tension between neutrality and impartiality, on one hand, and equality and fairness, on the other hand, was pronounced in the authors’ discussions with GBA+ analysts.⁴ Several of the analysts observed how GBA+ is perceived to undermine neutrality and impartiality in the name of gender equality. Robyn explicitly noted this challenge when she explained, “Now, for a big part of employees, GBA+ is more a kind of pain in the foot or ... a kind of pro-feminist stuff against men!” Similarly, Sarah explained:

I think there is an anti-feminist backlash: “All those gender specialists, they have so much power”—you know. I think we’re not going to challenge them directly on this, because that would be politically incorrect, because we’re progressives, but I do feel that there is an underlying sentiment around this, that people don’t voice, but is nonetheless there.

Andrea similarly commented, “... one of the challenges is, and I think it’s quite evident that ... the biggest challenges with GBA is that it is associated with gender, and I think that maybe that’s one of the biggest challenges, just overcoming that label.” For many of the analysts, one of the challenges around GBA+, then, is to reconcile this value conflict.

The interviews revealed that one discursive strategy deployed by gender analysts to reconcile the perceived politicization of analysis, which potentially compromises neutrality, is to shrink the values of fairness and equality. This was obvious in discussions around training and getting buy-in for GBA+. For example, Li, who has been involved in GBA+ in a number of capacities, including training and application, explained how this has influenced GBA+ training:

[GBA+] comes from a feminist theory. So a lot of the people who don’t know about that assume that. They go in to take GBA training. We do provide—at the beginning of our manual is the Beijing Platform, and it goes on to Canada’s commitments and et cetera. So there’s some of the history there. The tricky thing with that, though, is you’re also setting off this platform of, like, it came from feminist theory, so they think that’s what it is. But it’s evolved since then. So that was tricky for the GBA unit, because you want to sell it, and you want to sell it to people who don’t know how to do GBA, particularly men—I will say, I have no problem saying that—and old school. So you have to kind of separate that notion of feminism from GBA... Maybe we need more representation buy-in from men. And to tell a story that means it’s not just about women now. Like I said earlier, labor market, youth, men, boys, huge impacts.

This was echoed by Tallah when she noted:

People see gender and they think “women,” and they think, “This is completely irrelevant to do my bridge-building, or whatever I’m doing.” That’s why training and so forth is important. Because when people realize that gender is not a synonym for women, that maybe opens people’s minds up a little bit more with the diversity aspect as well.

Sophia also noted:

Sometimes it's better to avoid those labels, because then people—with all due respect—when you say the word “feminist,” people get a little confused about its meaning. In the training, and when we do awareness sessions, and that kind of thing, we often just make the point that you're doing this already. We just want to give you the tools to make sure that you are doing it consistently, and make sure that you are aware of your obligations.

In these passages, GBA+ is constituted not as a “special measure” from which women will benefit or a transformative approach to social equality, but rather as a policy for everyone. In so doing, GBA+ is discursively aligned with formal rather than substantive equality. In muting its feminist dimensions, this shrinking privileges the technocratic elements of the analysis. Indeed, a number of participants described GBA+ as simply “good policy analysis,” echoing the position of SWC outlined above. For example, Tallah reflects this position in the following comments:

I think that GBA is a feminist policy in the sense that the impetus for it and the justification for it comes out of a feminist critique of government and of society. The objectives of GBA are to ensure equal outcomes of government policy for all Canadians. That's a feminist goal. It's also an anti-racist goal; it's a human rights goal; and it's the goal of good policy analysis. That's what GBA first and foremost [is]—good policy analysis. So, yes, it's a feminist goal, but it's not exclusively or primarily a feminist process. It is, and it isn't: It draws on feminism; it traces its development from feminist thought, but, within government, it's just good policy.

Amrita similarly notes:

Am I an advocate for equity? Yes, because I think that supports the best possible evidence... . [M]y personal beliefs do not always align with the policy direction of the government for which I'm working. But I have an important role, which is to advocate for the best possible advice [It's] the fearless advice part that I think has taken a hit. We tried that, right? It's up to the minister to decide what direction they want to take. But if our best possible advice is something the minister doesn't like, that's not my problem. It's the minister's problem.

This is reiterated by Andrea when she claims, “It's about good policy analysis, and not necessarily about doing intersectionality or doing GBA. It's about what you need to do to have policies and good programs. That's a good entry point for us—just common sense.”

Although shrinking was a common discursive strategy, some analysts engaged in stretching the meanings of neutrality and impartiality to capture feminist epistemological understandings of objectivity. Tallah, for example, noted:

Neutrality does not mean not taking a position; it means getting and giving the best advice possible. If the best advice is that we have to look at all of these different communities or all these different groups and the intersecting factors of diversity, then you're doing your job. I would argue that if you're not doing what we call intersectionality, then you're probably not doing your job very well. You can advocate for a particular type of analysis; you're still neutral, though, because the reason you are advocating for an analysis is in order to achieve efficiencies and maximum impact. In theory, you're not doing it to promote a particular agenda.

This is reflected in Rose's comments as well, which challenge the orthodox understanding of neutrality and objectivity as unbiased:

I definitely had examples where I'm like, you kind of know what the GBA is going to tell you, you know where you're supposed to go with the proposal, and when they conflict, that's usually where—well actually, that's usually where you'll see the GBA being done at the last minute, because we don't need an analysis to be informed where we're going to go, because we already know where we're going to go. So it's more about making the analysis fit where we want to go, either by being neutral—we don't have impacts, which is almost never the case, but that tends to be the line that's put in there, or they're kind of—maybe not brushed over, but it's done so quickly that it's just like: well, we know where we want to go, so it's already informing how we're going to write our answers, right? So there's that unconscious bias.

Similarly, Amrita observed the potential damage done by orthodox analysis:

[S]imple disaggregation can create inequity. Right? ... simple disaggregation can reinstate structural violence. Because it essentially—it describes populations in such a way, completely free of context... And that in itself is [pause] how problematic on how many fronts? Why these variables, what do these data mean? Nothing! Nothing! Simple disaggregation: report the data. Data are not there to be harvested like apples off a tree. They do not speak for themselves; they are always mediated.

Sarah also noted, “I mean, from when I was in policy, there is no—at least not that I could see, there isn't this truth to power or evidence-based policymaking.” These examples challenge the notion of feminism and equality work as political or partisan work, stretching the understandings of neutrality and impartiality to accommodate these nuances. In doing so, these values are discursively aligned with values such as fairness, integrity, and equity.

Efficiency

A number of participants observed the conflict between the enduring value of efficiency and the values heightened by GBA+. In particular, some noted the tension between efficiency and effectiveness, which was cast as a concern for professional ethics (see also DeHart-Davis, 2009). For some, this was something that could not be easily reconciled. Sarah, for example, reflects this concern in her explanation of the decreasing space for analytical work in the government:

That space [for analytical work] is getting squeezed more and more, for—at the program/project level, resources, all those issues at the policy level, and even for going into the project level,... not just for gender, but for analysis across the board. And the reason for what we were really seeing was—it's almost like two contradictions coming out, because while you had the Auditor General's report coming out, which gave us strength ... TB [Treasury Board] at the same time is coming out with directives for efficiency and streamlining, and these two kind of butted heads. So I think you had that kind of pressure, which those which didn't—I would say didn't want to see some of this analysis and such—could really use this efficiency and streamlining as an excuse, but that, I think, it was a very real pressure.

Paula couched these changes within the context of changing technology and how policy analysis is conducted:

And that stock paragraphs will suffice, you know? It's like you could create a dropdown menu for your gender analysis—I don't think—hopefully, that's not where they're going, but certainly,

I'm thinking about even TB submissions, right? Before we used to help write those sections, and towards the end, we couldn't even get a copy of what was sent to TB, and certainly, I would use that when talking to programs to reinforce how important GBA was—in all cabinet memos, in all TB submissions, there's gender analysis. But then what we were seeing at one point years ago was sort of stock paragraphs that would just be listed—so there was no real analysis being done. And with the reduction of the number of people who could do this work, and our ability to really do the work, it was becoming more and more difficult to do that.

Carole also explained:

I think in the government, particularly with this government, the emphasis is not necessarily on evidence, and the culture within the government is very—turning things around really quickly, and being able to provide enough of a rationale but not necessarily doing the full due diligence; so, whereas I think a lot of people who are really invested in GBA see it as being important in terms of being able to provide really robust rationale and to sort of paint both sides of the equation, a lot of people who come from a really bureaucratic approach would look at it more as a box to tick, and that, I think, is the primary challenge with GBA. It's perceived as something that takes a lot of time and a lot of adjustment.

In these examples, efficiency undermines the effectiveness of “good analytical” work.

This concern was reiterated by those participants who saw gender analysis as a specialized knowledge. Jesse, for example, suggested:

This is a specialized area... People would say, “Oh, you know, we have a lot of specialized advice.” I said, “Yes, you do; this is a skill like any other. You don't do water and sanitation projects without a water and sanitation engineer; you don't do projects with human beings without having someone who can do social and gender analysis, or whatever, to make sure we're reaching the right people, in the right way, that's culturally appropriate but that moves the agenda.

Sarah similarly noted:

In the Policy Branch, again, everything is generic. So where there was the notion of some expertise, it's really more that generic policy analyst ... no expertise, no substantive expertise, whereas before, you'd have some years of experience working in general equality, maybe some academic background in gender equality, some of those substantive issues versus the skill set.

To reconcile this value conflict, some of the participants used the discursive strategy of stretching the meaning of efficiency to accommodate GBA+. One of the participants from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), for example, demonstrated the ways in which gender-blind analysis leads to inefficient and ineffective outcomes:

And the government of Pakistan sets up an earthquake rehabilitation and reconstruction agency, and they put it under the command of the general. And CIDA decides that it would provide technical assistance in the form of two gender equality advisors, one Canadian and one locally engaged Pakistani. Because that's often the combination that works well, when the people work well together. And they go to meet the general, and he says: “I don't want you. Just go do social welfare work. This is ridiculous. I don't know why this is being imposed on me, I've got other things to do. I've got to rebuild.” So they say to him, “Give us six weeks. We'll come back and talk to you.” And they came back in six weeks, and said, “What's happening, because you don't have any female staff, and you're not targeting, is that all the female heads of household, either

where they didn't have a male member before the earthquake, or their male died as a result of the earthquake, are being helped by the local Taliban equivalent, and they're losing their loyalty, cause you can't get any assistance from the state, because you haven't put any mechanisms in place."

Speaking of domestic policy, Rose echoed this point, "which right now to me—it's just, it saves you money if you do it right at the beginning.... I'm like, 'Really?' If they'd done a GBA, they would have known that we needed it, so they wouldn't have to buy it and order it and bring it to us two months later. It probably would be cheaper, too." This is perhaps best articulated by Tallah, quoted above, "The reason you are advocating for an analysis is in order to achieve efficiencies and maximum impact." These examples demonstrate the ways in which efficiency is recast, stretched, in ways that accommodate GBA+. In these examples, conducting GBA+ leads to better and more efficient outcomes.

Although efficiency is often thought to undercut gender-mainstreaming initiatives, particularly in the absence of substantive guidelines for gender equality (e.g., Meier and Celis, 2011), the authors' findings reveal a potential stretching of the meanings associated with efficiency. In other words, in this case, it is not GBA+ that is being stretched to accommodate efficiency, but rather efficiency to accommodate GBA+. This discursive strategy serves to trouble commonly accepted notions of efficiency within bureaucratic culture. While it does not dismantle the privileged position of efficiency among public sector values and ethics, it does reorient it to capture a feminist interpretation. Although efficiency, and therefore GBA+, becomes no less technocratic, it is more aligned with equality politics.

Accountability

As a traditional PSV, accountability has endured as one of the key values shaping administrative structure and culture. Indeed, accountability is one of the central values, along with neutrality, that gives the convention of ministerial responsibility in Westminster systems its shape. At the same time, however, accountability has undergone tremendous pressure in the wake of public sector reform, particularly due to the emergence of NPM as an administrative imperative. For example, in line with the corporate foundations of NPM, the focus of accountability has shifted from processes to results (Kernaghan, 1994). In addition, new modes of service delivery implicate nonstate actors in the processes of policymaking and service delivery, raising questions about responsibility. Moreover, efforts to streamline processes, as well as an increasing emphasis on collaboration and partnerships across departments and, indeed, governments, have resulted in a somewhat flatter bureaucratic structure (Kernaghan, 2003; Savoie, 2004). Such reforms have complicated traditional understandings of vertical accountability, and introduced newer understandings around horizontal or shared accountability (see also Thomas, 2008).

Despite these reforms and their implications, accountability continues to be associated with responsibility (Thomas, 2008, p. 37). The study participants, however, stretched accountability to include not only responsibility, but also responsiveness.⁵ This stretching echoes the feminist public administration theorist Camilla Stivers's (1994, p. 366) call for "listening bureaucrats" who are relational, responsive, and more accountable and effective because they are attuned to, acknowledge, and accept difference. Listening, in heightening responsiveness, also

facilitates effectiveness by deepening analysts' understanding of complex situations, establishing more nuanced problem definitions, and thereby helping them to synthesize as well as analyze (Stivers, 1994). She cautions, however, that "responsibility is laudable, grounded in law; responsiveness connotes improper bias" (Stivers, 1994, p. 367).

In the present study, accountability was stretched to accommodate responsiveness as an important element of equality. For example, Paula articulated the idea of accountability as both responsibility and responsiveness in the following passage:

I think what really would be interesting would be to look at what accountability means in this current government, and how it's being viewed within possibly different government departments or within government departments, because one of the things that was clear was how accountability was perceived at the very senior political level, and then at the middle-management level, and there was a real aversion to being held accountable for anything, and how far could we pass the buck on this, and what we saw—I mean, and I really have no idea how this is played out, but certainly what we saw—what I saw toward the end, was all the accountability for any kind of compliance with any kind of policy came down to one clause on "do no harm." ... What does that mean? As gender specialists, that means that you've got to ensure that there has been rigorous GBA, that you're looking at the impacts on the poor, or whatever.

Rose articulated a similar understanding of accountability:

I mean, for me, I mean, I'm told as a public servant, I work for the government, but I work for the people, in my head anyways. When I get up in the morning, when I harass people about GBA, it's because I understand that what they're doing has a direct impact on the population. Therefore, you'd be crazy to not want to make sure that what you're doing is responding to the specific needs, or going to help—whatever the issues are, even if they're not going to solve them.

This understanding was echoed by Carole:

I did see myself [as an advocate]—I mean, I always laugh about this, but when I was working at [department] people knew who I was, and when people would see me come into a meeting about [a memorandum to cabinet], they would kind of groan, because they knew that I was going to ask them, "Did you do your gender-based analysis?" So I did see it as being an advocate, that this was still a relevant lens and an important lens to apply to our policy work and our programs.

While these passages demonstrate the ways in which accountability is stretched to include responsiveness, it was also clear that the more common understanding of accountability as responsibility has not been abandoned. Tallah explained the importance of accountability in defending GBA+:

There are certain things program analysts are supposed to be doing as program analysts, things they are supposed to be looking at. One of those things is GBA. Managers and senior management are responsible; they are the ones who are accountable for ensuring that analysts are aware of their responsibilities, ensuring that they have the tools in order to fulfill their responsibilities, and ensuring that the program and policy cycle incorporate those elements, be it GBA, or official languages, human rights considerations, and so on. In that sense, the lines of accountability are very clearly indicated and strong.... We're not accountable to the Canadian public, in general terms—it doesn't matter if we're talking about GBA or whatever. From a strictly technical standpoint, we're not accountable, and we can't be accountable to the Canadian public, because

that would create a situation where we would be trying to serve different masters at the same time. It would make it impossible for bureaucrats to operate in an ethical fashion.

In addition, a number of participants explained the ways in which they had used accountability measures to defend and push forward GBA+, which has been discursively aligned with traditional accountability through both the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) Report and departmental Management Accountability Frameworks. These reports, as well as other accountability mechanisms, have been used as levers or “hooks” to keep GBA+ on the agenda. For example, Li explains the role of the department accountability framework in GBA+ training: “I think that people always thought they had a responsibility to do it, but, somehow, no knowledge of their accountability to do it.” Lisa reported on the role of the OAG Report and internal reporting on GBA+:

We have the Auditor General’s review of application of GBA; we had a corporate review of how we applied our own gender equality policy inside. So we had some fairly interesting and visible opportunities to begin enhancing what we were doing, and actually an external push when the Auditor General wanted to improve your performance. That’s a very serious push in the government system, an external push to begin doing things.

Sarah reiterated the importance of these reports:

... we had this greater hook from the Government of Canada accountability requirements.... So we leveraged it up—so our middle management was willing to carry it up. And I think if we didn’t have this Government of Canada requirements, forget it. But because we had this thing—and trust me, we used it—it was phenomenal: like, it was our hook. And that was just a huge thing as a means to push up, at the end of the day, but it kept it legitimate.

Amrita similarly explained the use of external reports on government outputs:

But there is that inequality report ... but when it does get out there, will be—it will provide the hook for others to hold the government [to] account: these inequalities are increasing. They’re not even staying steady. What are we doing about it? Right? And that doesn’t make them go away, right? Doesn’t make the inequalities go away, but it’s another chance for a mechanism of accountability.

Thus, while there was some (perhaps unintentional) stretching of accountability to reflect feminist understandings of responsiveness, other very clear strategic discursive interventions serve to potentially fix the meaning of accountability to responsibility.

CONCLUSION

In performing their duties, gender analysts often experience situational and discursive value conflicts resulting from GBA+ and the public sector context in which they operate. As GBA+ analysts, individuals are asked to apply the principles of fairness, equity, and responsiveness in their analytical work. These values, however, often run counter to the values of neutrality, efficiency, and accountability that are to guide all public servants. Moreover, the ambiguous nature of public service values enables multiple, and potentially conflicting, meanings for specific values. This article has illuminated the various complex discursive strategies with which GBA+ analysts engage in their attempts to reconcile these conflicts.

Exploring the micro-level and discursive strategies of analysts facilitates a better understanding of the factors that help or hinder the transformative potential of gender-mainstreaming approaches within and beyond Canada (see also Eyben, 2010, 2013). These findings also have implications for other social justice initiatives that become bureaucratized, such as those attentive to race and diversity politics (see Malloy, 2003). As the analysis reveals, using the strategies of stretching, shrinking, bending, or fixing, GBA+ analysts carve out a discursive space to make sense of their work to themselves and to others within their organizations. These discursive interventions have the potential to alter the meanings of public service values typically thought of as antithetical to feminism (e.g., Ferguson, 1984) in ways that advance social justice within bureaucracies. At the same time, however, by strategically using the terms of reference handed down by the government of Canada, especially in documents and reports, the meanings of some values shrink or are potentially fixed. Thus, the discursive strategies used by gender analysts both challenge and reinscribe traditional bureaucratic discourse.

Yet the potential for these interventions to alter the discursive field in which bureaucratic practice operates should not be underestimated. From the perspective of critical feminist scholars, such discursive interventions open possibilities for reimagining policies that transform and liberate rather than oppress (e.g., Bacchi, 2010). Gender analysts remain important resources for information and advice for bureaucrats conducting GBA+; they therefore have potential to influence how GBA+ is understood and practiced across the public service. Introducing new understandings of traditional concepts invites reflection and dialogue about who the public service serves and to what effect, opening new possibilities for change.

The discursive strategies and discursive resources available to GBA+ analysts are not fixed; rather, they are expected to change as the practice of GBA+ becomes mainstreamed across all policy analysts. To be clear, our study focuses on individuals who are, or who have been, explicitly involved in equality work in the public service. They are, in short, gender analysts. Given their nuanced understanding of GBA+’s origins and background, in addition to the feminist knowledges that give it shape, it is perhaps not surprising that their discursive interventions often trouble bureaucratic orthodoxy. Future work should examine how generalists reconcile the value conflicts resulting from GBA+. Given that there are now more of these types of analysts involved in interpreting and applying GBA+, their discursive strategies will be an important dimension in the transformative potential of GBA+.

NOTES

1. Prior to 1995, gender analysis was conducted only in the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).
2. Unfortunately, since gender analyst is not an official job description, the government does not track the number of public servants who undertake this role or who identify as such. Thus, it was not possible to estimate the total pool of analysts working in the government at the time.
3. Central agencies are horizontal departments that primarily serve the executive and coordinate priorities across government. Line departments are vertically organized departments mandated with specific issue areas and/or program delivery.
4. This was also a concern represented in early femocrat literature. See Findlay (1997) and Sawyer (1996).
5. It should be noted that some scholars of public service values suggest that responsibility and responsiveness are often associated with accountability, although not unproblematically (e.g., Thomas, 2008). In contrast, feminist scholars claim that traditional conceptions of accountability invoke reference to responsibility, neglecting the importance of responsiveness in being accountable (e.g., Stivers, 1994).

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Stephanie Paterson is an associate professor of public policy in the Department of Political Science at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Dr. Paterson specializes in feminist and critical policy studies, with an emphasis on policy discourse and transformative politics. She has written and published numerous articles and book chapters in the areas of state feminism and gender mainstreaming, gender and public policy, reproductive politics, and motherhood.

Francesca Scala is an associate professor of public policy in the Department of Political Science at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Dr. Scala has written and published in the areas of gender and public policy, citizen engagement, and the politics of expertise in science and health policy. Her current research examines the gendered dimensions of policy implementation in work-family reconciliation policies in Canada.

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