An Analysis of Gender Equity Policy Mechanisms Through Fraser’s Remedies of Injustice

By Heather Syme Anderson

This paper will analyze the extent to which Marshall’s (2000) gender equity policy (GEP) mechanisms act as affirmative or transformative remedies to gender injustice. It will rely on Fraser’s (1997a) conceptualizations of remedies for injustice as those that redistribute, recognize, affirm, or transform injustice. The purpose, then, is to answer this question: To what extent are GEP mechanisms useful for transforming or affirming gender equity through gender equity policy?

GEP mechanisms and Fraser’s framework

Marshall’s (2000: 360) work on GEP posits seven mechanisms for use in educational policy. These are:

1. Altering, equalizing, or targeting finances: controlling how education funds are distributed and how human and fiscal resources are allocated to the schools.
2. Developing and regulating curriculum and training materials: controlling the development and/or selection of textbooks and other instructional materials.
3. Student testing and assessment: fixing the timing and consequences of testing, including subjects covered and the distribution of the test.
4. Training and certification of personnel: controlling the conditions for getting or keeping various jobs in the school system.
5. Defining program requirements for the curriculum: controlling program planning and accreditation or otherwise specifying what schools must teach and how long they must teach it.
7. School organization and governance: the assignment of authority and responsibility to various groups and individuals.

Marshall notes that these seven policy mechanisms are useful for educational policy. She goes on to elaborate on which GEP mechanisms were most efficacious in the national GEP circumstance of Australia in the 1990s. My purpose in including these GEP
mechanisms is to analyze these GEP mechanisms for the extent to which they act as affirmative or transformative remedies to injustice.

Fraser’s (1997a) work on the redistribution-recognition dilemma of injustice is fundamental for underpinning the concepts employed within this analysis. Fraser (1997a: 70) discusses two distinct analytic understandings of injustice. The first is socioeconomic injustice and includes exploitation of labour, economic marginalization, and deprivation. The second analytic understanding of injustice is cultural injustice and is characterized by cultural domination, nonrecognition, and disrespect (71). Fraser proposes two fundamental remedies to socioeconomic and cultural injustice. She (1997a: 72) broad-stroke categorizes these as redistribution and recognition remedies.

Within each remedy context, Fraser distinguishes many aspects. Before distinguishing each, however, Fraser is careful to detail that these concepts are inseparable. She argues that it is for analytic purposes only that she disentwines economic injustice from cultural injustice (1997a: 72). Likewise, Fraser details how her proposed remedies are necessarily intertwined and how for explicitly analytic purposes, she is forging a distinction between redistributive and recognitional injustice remedies.

Fraser (1997a: 72) notes that economic injustices are remedied from some style of political-economic restructuring. Specifically, she (1997a: 71) discusses reorganizing how labour is divided, redistributing income, and transforming other fundamental economic structures. Fraser describes the remedy approach to cultural injustice as cultural or symbolic change which she broadly refers to as recognition. She (1997a: 72) characterizes recognition as an upward revaluing of previously disenfranchised groups, and holding cultural diversity in positive esteem. At its most radical end, recognition
would fundamentally transform the social reality of everyone to the point where entirely new, and just, social patterns emerged (1997a: 72).

One point Fraser makes clear is that justice, much like injustice, cannot be attained without the fusion of, and remedies to, both the economic and cultural realms. She (1997a: 75) discusses how most of the social dilemmas are bivalent. What Fraser means by bivalent is collectivities that exist in neither extreme of socioeconomic or cultural injustice. Bivalent collectivities, argues Fraser, experience injustice from both axes. These collectivities are marginalized both by socioeconomic distributive forms and by cultural nonrecognition forms. In this way these collectives are bivalent. Examples of such bivalent social injustices include, and are certainly not limited to, gender and race.

Of the bivalent nature of gender, Fraser (1997a: 79) states how the economic and cultural sources of gender inequity “intertwine to reinforce each other dialectically because sexist and androcentric cultural norms are institutionalised in the state and the economy, and women’s economic disadvantage restricts women’s ‘voice’, impeding equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres and in everyday life”. The same could certainly be said of other groups marginalized via gender such as homosexuals and the intersexed.

Young (2004: 41) also discusses the complex nature of oppression as one that cannot be solely attributed to injustices of distribution. She (2004: 42) states that, “different factors, or combinations of factors, constitute the oppression of different groups, making their oppression irreducible”. The significance of what Young describes as oppression and what Fraser terms injustice as being irreducible to a single element underscores the complexity of social injustices. The double axis source of gender
injustice necessitates a more complex remedy. Such a remedy exists in Fraser’s (1997a) framework through cross-cutting remedies.

Fraser (1997a: 82) discusses how bivalent social issues require remedies that cut across economic redistribution and cultural recognition. The two cross-cutting remedies offered by Fraser are affirmation and transformation. She (1997a: 82) describes affirmative remedies as those that work to correct social and economic inequalities without altering the social context, structures, and frameworks that produce the inequalities. Transformative remedies, conversely, are remedies that target the sources of inequalities for the purpose of transforming them into sources and structures that produce equality (1997: 82). To illuminate the nature of cross-cutting redistribution and recognition between affirmative and transformative remedies, Fraser (1997b: 129) states, “they give expression in distorted form to genuine tensions among multiple aims that must be pursued simultaneously in struggles for social justice”. Further, Fraser (2001: 22) argues that contemporary justice cannot be attained without both redistribution and recognition. These cross-cutting remedies, then, stand to do much more than simply redistribute or recognize injustice; they stand to perform as total remedies to social injustice.

The question of this paper is to analyze the extent to which Marshall’s (2000) seven GEP mechanisms work to affirm or transform gender inequity as a bivalent social injustice. I will use Fraser’s (1997a) framework to analyze the seven GEP mechanisms noted in Marshall (2000) to determine whether these mechanisms act as affirmative or transformative remedies to gender inequity. I will then discuss the implications of this analysis as it applies to policy as a method for promoting gender equity.
An analysis of Marshall’s GEP mechanisms through Fraser’s framework

As figure 1 illustrates, none of Marshall’s (2000) GEP mechanisms aims at transformation of the underlying structures that reify gender inequity.

Fig. 1 Analysis of primary functions of policy mechanisms according to Fraser’s (1997a) remedy framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Redistribution</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Affirmative</th>
<th>Transformative</th>
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<td>1. Finance</td>
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<td>2. Curriculum</td>
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<td>3. Assessment</td>
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<td>6. Facilities</td>
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<td>7. Governance</td>
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This figure needs parsing in order for the connection to Fraser’s work to be clear. Despite the notion that all of these mechanisms necessarily must address both redistribution and recognition in order to be cross-cutting remedies to the bivalent issue of gender injustice, each mechanism services a primary intersection as applied to education. Each GEP mechanism targets either redistribution or recognition as its primary mode of equity facilitation. All mechanisms, save one, have a singular primary mode. Only governance has a dual primary mode in that only governance as a mechanism explicitly aims at both redistribution of power and authority as well as recognition of those who were previously undervalued and misrecognized (Fraser 1997c: 280) as having authority and power in educational governance.

The first mechanism, that of finance and controlling the distribution of funds, is clearly a mechanism aimed at distributive justice. It works to affirm the notion that inequality exists between how resources and educational finances are distributed. As applied to GEP, it affirms that funding allocations have a genderedness to them that
needs to be altered. The insufficiency of this mechanism, though, rests in its absent transformative agenda. Yes, following the dollars to ensure they are evenly distributed to genders is important. It fails, however, to get to the heart of the inequity. Why are the dollars unevenly distributed in the first place? The mechanism of redistributing finance acts as an affirmative remedy and not as a transformative remedy to gender injustice.

The second GEP mechanism, that of developing curriculum and training materials, can be both redistributive and recognitional. I will argue here, however, that this mechanism works primarily as a recognition remedy since by controlling the development and selection of textbooks and curriculum you control who is included and represented and how they are included and represented. Further, to control the development of textbooks and curriculum is a key manner in which to ensure more accurate, comprehensive, and inclusive recognition of groups. Portrayals of groups can be respectful and communicated by authorities from within the group. This mechanism acts as affirmation of injustice, but does not work to transform the structures which engender injustice. Changing textbooks and curricula to more accurately represent and recognize groups in different ways is a stop gap approach to gender equity. The social premises under which previous textbooks and curricula were produced remain unaltered. This indicates that no transformation of those premises is even attempted by this mechanism. Useful in affirming that gender representations in textbooks and curricula are inequitable indeed, this mechanism acts as an affirmative remedy and not as transformative.

The third mechanism, that of testing and assessment, is much like the second. Indeed, altering tests to so that they are more widely applicable and more widely distributed can be instrumental for promoting equity. It is not instrumental, however, for
addressing why tests were not equitably distributed, or the manners in which they were used against groups. Marshall (2000) describes this mechanism as one where the timing, distribution, consequences, and topics covered are altered so as to be “fixed”. What is not fixed is transforming the underlying sources and structures that set testing and assessment up to be inequitable to genders. That this fundamental concern is left untouched indicates that the possibility for testing and assessment to relapse remains probable.

The forth GEP mechanism is training and personnel certification. This mechanism works to control the conditions under which individuals and groups attain and maintain jobs in school systems. At its core, this mechanism is aimed at redistribution. As Fraser (1997a) points out, redistribution is primarily concerned with economic injustice. Since training and personnel certification exist as efforts within labour, they necessarily connect to economic justice. Training and personnel act as a mechanism through which to attain gender equity as an affirmative remedy to gender injustice. It does so by ensuring that equal opportunities in employment are granted to those involved. What this mechanism lacks is transformative agency (Stromquist and Fischman 2009: 470). To ignore the structural underpinnings of why changes to training and personnel are necessary ensures that these structural underpinnings persist. In this way, then, GEP as afforded through the training and personnel mechanism acts as an affirmative, but not transformative remedy.

Mechanism five, or defining program requirements for the curriculum, focuses on controlling program planning and accreditation (Marshall 2000: 360). Marshall specifies that this mechanism outlines what schools must teach and for how long it must be taught. According to Fraser’s (1997a) framework, this mechanism is recognitional because it takes in to account that what is taught, and for how long, is somehow inequitable to
genders. This mechanisms recognizes that what is taught and the amount of time granted
that subject influence perceptions of inclusion, acceptance, power, and equity. That
schools are mandated through this policy mechanism to plan for, and have accreditation
rest on, the extent to which they meet gender equity based curricular outcomes is an
excellent feature. What is not so excellent, however, is that this policy mechanism
addresses the window dressing of an insidious underbelly. Changing what and for how
long content is taught will not alter the structural, socially embedded notions of gender
inequality. By ignoring the “why” of gender inequality, these five GEP mechanisms are
all affirmative and not transformative remedies. In lay terms, these GEP mechanisms help
in some ways, but fail in more significant ways.

The sixth GEP mechanism is buildings’ and facilities’ standards. This mechanism
is concerned with ensuring equitable distribution of upkeep and facility maintenance. As
Marshall (2000: 377) notes, few of her participants thought this mechanism applied in a
significant way to the GEP movement in Australia. It does, though, address a deeper
societal tint: That of who counts (Fraser 2009). If inequities exist in buildings’ and
facilities’ standards, and this indicates unparallel standards for genders, then this reveals a
much deeper issue. If we read the state of a facility or building standard as a report of
who counts and in what capacity they count, then buildings’ and facilities’ standards are
imperative to a complete understanding of gender justice. This mechanism acts as an
affirmative remedy. It affirms by way of recognition that environments can indeed be
gendered geographies (Buckingham and Kulcur 2009) in which gender specific inequities
manifest in the physical and environmental space. Buildings’ and facilities’ standards as a
policy mechanism fail to question the rationales behind these standards as being
inequitable toward genders. By way of recognizing this inequity but not exposing the root cause, gender inequity will remain untransformed.

The final mechanism is school organization and governance. Marshall describes this mechanism as who has been assigned authority as individuals and as groups. This is the only mechanism that is both redistributive and recognitional. The reason this mechanism is both is because it serves to redistribute authority and governance by recognizing those who may not have been recognized previously. In other words, in addition to ensuring that school authority for organization and governance is distributed according to gender equity, it must first recognize the previously held inequities. By doing so, this mechanism acts as both redistributive and recognitional. It does not go so far, unfortunately, as being a transformative remedy. Sadly, school organization and governance as a policy mechanism acts only as an affirmative remedy to gender injustice. The reason this mechanism, like all its predecessors, fails to be a transformative remedy is because it works to affirm that equity is a target. It does not address the societal premises embedded in school organization and governance that perpetuate gender inequity. By failing to question the foundations of education and its complicity in reification of gender inequity, this policy mechanism ensures that gender equity remains a surface level plan.

If none of these policy mechanisms works toward transformation of the social world in which gender inequity no longer exists, why bother trying to access gender equity through policy? Keddie’s (2009) analysis of the current state of GEP in Australia highlights the limitations of the policy mechanisms discussed here. She notes (2009: 21) that gender equity policy in Australia has been undermined by economic belt-tightening
and antifeminist discourses. Given this state, then, one can wonder whether gender equity policy can ever move beyond an affirmation of injustice toward a transformation. Hassim (2008: 104) likewise notes that affirmation remedies alone are insufficient for ending social injustices. She concludes that state policies alone cannot infiltrate into households and communities where the transformational lived experience of gender justice begins. Similar to Keddie’s (2009) Australia findings, Hassim (2008) found that what started as strong gender equity policy in South Africa ended up watered down, filtered, and eventually encumbered by economic circumstances.

As Fraser (2008) points out, the dynamic context of gender is multifaceted and one in which interests and definitions of who counts (Fraser 2009) are ever changing and overlapping. Such multiplicity makes “fixing” the gender dilemma arduous at least. Perhaps a transformative approach would be to adopt what Stromquist and Fischman (2009: 470) propose. They propose a transformation to men and women, moving away from traditional gender constructions, and changing the social structures that are deeply embedded into our psyches. In other words, Stromquist and Fischman argue for an undoing of gender in education.

**Undoing gender in education: from affirmative to transformative remedies**

In what capacities, then, can Marshall’s policy mechanisms be adjusted so as to be transformative remedies for gender justice? In other words, can Marshall’s policy mechanisms target an undoing of gender in education in order to transform the social schema that presently perpetuates gender inequity? To be clear, transformative remedies are those that target the sources of inequalities for the purpose of transforming them into sources and structures that produce equality (Fraser 1997a: 82). Some mechanisms are
GEP mechanisms through Fraser’s remedies

better suited to transitioning to transformative remedies than others. These include curriculum, personnel, program requirements, and governance. The mechanisms of finance, assessment, and facilities are also capable of being transformative; however, they are less likely to initiate the level and type of change expected from a transformative policy mechanism. As such, they will not be included in the discussion about how to transition GEP mechanisms from affirmative to transformative remedies.

The GEP mechanisms which are more likely to act as transformative remedies to gender injustice are curriculum, personnel, program requirements, and governance. This is because these four mechanisms are most commonly visible and embedded within the social fabric of people’s daily experiences in education. As Fraser (1997a: 82) points out, a distinction between affirmative and transformative remedies rests in the end-state outcome versus the processes by which those outcomes were created.

Curriculum, for example, can move from an affirmative to transformative remedy by including within curricula a problematizing of the binary orientations and social constructions of gender. Further, by moving beyond redress of representation, curricula can also act as a platform through which gender constructions and socializations can be deconstructed. In these ways, curriculum as a policy mechanism for gender justice moves beyond affirmation of injustice to transformation of gender injustice.

Personnel and training, similarly, can move from an affirmative to transformative remedy. By deconstructing the social milieu in which conditions for attaining and maintaining employment in education are exposed for the ways in which they are gendered, and the ways in which genders are positioned inequitably within that milieu, this mechanism becomes transformative. As Fraser (1997a: 83) points out, the intent is to
destabilize fixed identities. By deconstructing who counts as an educator, a successful student, a marginalized student, an administrator, a superintendent, a school board member, and as a parent council representative, for example, we can expose and transform the structures that support the stabilization of these identities. Much more than simply redistributing the response of who counts, by destabilizing the structures which produce hegemonic and reified visions of who counts, this policy mechanism acts as a transformative remedy for gender justice.

Program requirements access recognition more than redistribution in their affirmation of gender justice. Where this policy mechanism falls short as being a transformative remedy is by failing to deconstruct the contexts in which programs, curricula, and accreditation modes engender social injustice. Recognizing such injustices as existing is a healthy step towards gender justice. It is insufficient, however, for ending such injustice. What is required is a transformation of the social conditions that accept and promote education programs, curricula, and accreditation modes as being socially unjust. In order for program requirements as a policy mechanism to become transformative it must do as Fraser (1997a: 89) suggests and deconstruct the deep structures that keep intact programming, curricula, and accreditation as sites of gender injustice. Only then will this educational policy mechanism act as a transformative remedy to gender injustice.

School organization and governance is the last policy mechanism with the most probability of moving from an affirmative to transformative remedy. This is because school organization and governance, once deconstructed, hold the most significant capacity for transforming who counts in education. As Marshall (2000) describes this
mechanism, school organization and governance service both redistribution and recognition as its primary mode. Because of this cross-cutting orientation, this policy mechanism is the one through which the most significant transformation of education and undoing gender may happen. Presently, how school years are organized is based on gendered frameworks such as when men and boys historically would have been working in the fields. Educational governance, too, is gendered through its hierarchical frame where someone, research illustrates this to historically and presently be filled by men (Rusch and Marshall 2006), is at the top with trickle down delineations of power from that main source. Research also confirms that those involved in English language educational governance are almost exclusively white, European descended males (Shakeshaft 1999; Glass 2000; Wallin 2009). What this suggests is that beyond schools being organized around historically male orientations of the year, also who has the authority and right to govern education is equally gendered. If it is males who have authority over the planning, organization, and institutional level governance over education, and thereby policy creation, then it makes sense that the choices made regarding education are necessarily skewed favourably to white, heterosexual, able bodied, males and unfavourably to females, anyone other than heterosexual, the intersexed, people with disabilities, and people who are not white. This othering (Hall 1997) in school organization and governance makes it seem like transformation of the structures that create and perpetuate this system is unnecessary. It is, instead, the others who need to be transformed, or so it seems. That the present systems of school organization and governance can be framed in dichotomous “us and them” language is indicative of the dire need for a transformative remedy. By deconstructing the nature and
notions of who counts in educational governance, and why these groups count while others do not, it will begin to remedy the gendered inequities within school organization and educational governance. Further, by both redistributing power and authority for educational governance and recognizing the sociological and constructed causes of misrecognition, this policy mechanism can be a transformative remedy towards gender justice and all social injustices.

**The final analysis of gender justice through policy mechanisms**

Gender equity policy mechanisms, despite having failings, are still particularly useful for moving the field of education towards gender and social equality. The power of GEP as a mode of attaining gender justice exists in that each of the seven mechanisms services an axis, or more, of the remedies to social injustice. Fraser (1997a) describes redistribution, recognition, affirmation and transformation as remedies to injustice. Despite only a few of Marshall’s GEP mechanisms holding the probability of transitioning to be transformative, *all* of the mechanisms presently exist as some style of remedy to gender injustice. Affirmative remedies are remedies still. Indeed, and as elucidated here, affirmative remedies are insufficient for transforming the social contexts that will continue to generate gender injustice. Regardless, an affirmative remedy necessarily works to alleviate some angle of gender injustice, which is the point of gender equity policy. Each of these GEP mechanisms has purpose and is efficacious for facilitating an avenue of gender justice.

Given a somewhat unfavourable analysis of the ability of Marshall’s GEP mechanisms to act as transformative remedies, possibility for change remains. As Stromquist and Fischman (2009: 473) point out, “Since gender is a social construction, it
is amenable to change, but as a deeply embedded social variable, gender also tends to resist modification.” It is the affirmative remedies that will initiate the changes that will eventually lead to social amenability to transformative remedies. Marshall’s GEP mechanisms, then, are useful for moving policy forward that redistributes, recognizes and affirms aspects of gender justice. As they presently exist, however, the policy mechanisms are insufficient for acting as transformative remedies for gender justice. To conclude, Marshall’s GEP mechanisms are insufficient for transforming the contexts in which gender inequities originate, but they are sufficient for acting as redistributive, recognitional, and affirmative remedies for gender justice in educational policy. As such, Marshall’s seven GEP mechanisms, and GEP itself, should be used in order to facilitate the creation of gender equity policies in education.
GEP mechanisms through Fraser’s remedies

References


