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### Gender Mainstreaming and Resistance to Gender Training: A Framework for Studying Implementation

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Gender Mainstreaming and Resistance to Gender Training: A Framework for Studying Implementation

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**ABSTRACT** *Resistance expressed by both organizations and participants in processes of gender training that are conducted to mainstream gender into policy-making poses a key challenge for gender mainstreaming. However, such resistance is relatively under-studied. This article explores resistance to gender training that emerges during the implementation of gender mainstreaming by determining the types and forms of resistance to gender training and by finding out just what this analysis of resistance tells us about the problems arising in the implementation of gender mainstreaming. We argue that analysing resistance to gender training—and identifying the types and forms of such resistance—can contribute to diagnosing problems in the implementation of mainstreaming and furthermore be used for improving this implementation. This study is based on data from participant observation in training processes and from the work conducted in two European research projects, QUING and TARGET, both of which debated the issue of gender training in expert meetings and forums made up of trainers, policy-makers, and academics.*

### Introduction

Resistance or opposition to gender initiatives can emerge during all the processes of gender mainstreaming implementation. This article argues that analysing resistance in gender training (GT) processes—conducted as part of a wider gender mainstreaming strategy—can provide useful insights into the problems arising during the implementation of such a strategy, insights which can furthermore be used to improve this implementation.

Mainstreaming gender into policy-making demands changes in institutional and organizational cultures across policy processes, mechanisms, and actors (Council of

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Europe 1998). A commonly mentioned problem occurring during this implementation, highlighted by Roggeband and Verloo (2006), is that mainstreaming requires policy-makers who are not gender experts to introduce a gender perspective into all policies, which assumes a rather high level of gender awareness and competence on their part. These skills, however, need to be formed within institutional structures that are mostly gender-blind. Gender training (GT) contributes to the reorganization of policy structures and processes by ensuring that the policy-makers and civil servants in charge of implementation learn how to incorporate a gender perspective into all public policies. In the context of this article, gender training refers to training commissioned by public institutions and targeted at public administration personnel, specifically civil servants, to teach them how to mainstream gender into their work (Pauly et al. 2009).<sup>1</sup>

Research conducted within the QUING and TARGET<sup>2</sup> European projects shows that a key challenge for gender training is the resistance to such training expressed by both organizations and participants. We are interested in exploring the phenomenon of resistance to gender training and want to relate this to the general issue of institutional resistance to change (Benschop & Verloo 2006) as one of the elements that contribute to understanding the ineffective implementation of gender mainstreaming. Our questions are the following: What shape does resistance to gender training take? What are the types and forms of this resistance? And what can the analysis of resistance to gender training tell us about the problems arising in the implementation of gender mainstreaming?

Our research on gender training draws on the experiences of some of the main actors involved, the trainers. Now, we do not assume that such knowledge can only come from trainers, as knowledge emerges from the interaction between trainees and trainers. We simply recognize that trainers' experiences are relevant to identifying the types and forms of resistance that occur during training processes, and the analysis in this article is thus mainly based on their experiences. The information about existing resistance to gender training was compiled through our participatory observation of training, expert meetings, conferences, and online forums about gender training, all of which were developed as part of the QUING and TARGET research projects. Our main roles have been those of gender expert and consultant, in some cases coordinating gender training programmes, in a few cases conducting training ourselves, and in most cases organizing gender training seminars to reflect collectively on training as one important aspect of gender mainstreaming implementation. The activities in which we participated included four formal face-to-face expert meetings on gender training that took place between 2007 and 2009, four informal expert meetings in 2007 and 2008, three online forums in 2010 (one of which specifically focused on resistance),<sup>3</sup> and one conference on gender training in 2011 that engaged practitioners, policy-makers, and academics from both European and American contexts in debates on gender training and quality criteria, with one of the panels specifically addressing resistance to gender training.<sup>4</sup> Participants in the expert meetings mainly included gender trainers and academics, and in some cases also civil servants who commissioned training. Additional insight was built up through the coordination of two gender training programmes conducted for the European Commission (DG Research and Innovation) that included 33 training sessions in 2009–2010 and 40 training sessions in 2011–2012, taking place throughout Europe.<sup>5</sup>

After selecting the relevant information on resistance to the processes of gender training, the data collected through participatory observation in expert meetings, training sessions, and online forums were processed through content analysis. This study also draws on research reports on gender training produced within the aforementioned European projects.

The rest of this article is structured as follows: the first section introduces gender mainstreaming and resistance to gender training as conceptualized in the literature and identifies different types of resistance. Sections two and three present different manifestations of resistance to gender training and assess the findings, respectively. The concluding section draws up the policy and research implications of this analysis of resistance to gender training for the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

### **Theorizing resistance in gender mainstreaming processes**

#### *Gender mainstreaming and gender training*

Gender mainstreaming was launched in the 1990s as a key policy strategy to achieve gender equality. Governments and civil society actors participating in the Fourth UN Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 endorsed the strategy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all public policies in order to counter the gender bias in society and policies and to produce gender-equal policies (United Nations 1997: 1). Gender mainstreaming was intended to challenge androcentric norms and to promote gender equality in politics (Jahan 1995; Council of Europe 1998; Rees 1998; Verloo 2001, 2005; Squires 2005; Walby 2005). The mainstreaming strategy, as proposed by the Council of Europe (1998), implies a transformation of institutional and organizational cultures, a process that requires changes in the policy process, its mechanisms, and the actors who take part. Changing the policy process in gender-sensitive ways required putting in place gender equality machinery in all governmental departments to catalyse the mainstreaming work and to train policy personnel in gender equality. Scholars have discussed a variety of criteria necessary for implementing gender mainstreaming: the political will to address gender hierarchies in the organization (Mazey 2000; Díaz González 2001; Charlesworth 2005); a diagnosis of the extent of the gendering within the organization and an action plan to address this (Derbyshire 2002; Daly 2005; McGauran 2009); capacity-building of all actors (including resources); monitored implementation; the involvement of civil society and/or experts in the process (Squires 2005; Verloo 2005; Walby 2005); and holding people responsible for the actions undertaken and their results (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2009; Mergaert 2012).

One of the main problems in the implementation of gender mainstreaming is that it paradoxically requires a high level of gender awareness among policy-makers who are not gender experts (Roggeband & Verloo 2006). Gender mainstreaming also demands that civil servants have specific competences and approaches, for which they have not necessarily been trained. The gender training of public administration has thus emerged as a practice to build the capacity among civil servants and politicians to mainstream gender into policy-making.

By gender training we mean (Pauly et al. 2009: 6) “(1) the training planned, organized or/and commissioned by public institutions; (2) targeted at public personnel, and (3) aimed at facilitating the incorporation of ‘a gender equality perspective in all policies and at all levels and at all stages of the policy-making process’ (Council of Europe 1998: 15)”. The assumption behind this definition is that gender training is part of an overarching strategy to achieve gender equality through mainstreaming gender into policy-making, which includes the creation of gender equality policy competences.

Gender training is part of a process of organizational change towards greater equality. As gender training processes are emerging in different countries, reflections on how to improve such training as part of wider strategies to promote gender-aware policy-making are becoming more widespread among trainers, consultants, and development and policy experts (Mukhopadhyay & Wong 2007). The emergence of gender training and the introduction of gender knowledge in public administrations at different governmental levels, from the local to the national and intergovernmental (although not all these levels have yet seen systematic training programmes), are indicators that gender mainstreaming has achieved some results in terms of implementation. Resistance to gender initiatives, however, needs to be taken seriously, as it can hinder or even block the implementation of gender mainstreaming, and thus deserves attention from gender and politics analysts alike.

#### *Resistance to gender training: causes, reasons, types, and actors*

We define resistance as a phenomenon that emerges during processes of change—such as when gender equality policies are implemented—and that is aimed at maintaining the status quo and opposing change. This interpretation of the concept is different from the meaning of resistance that refers to the questioning of a particular dominant social order, which is the most common understanding. Both concepts, though, define resistance as a form of opposition, in this case to gender equality.

Organizational change, like any process of change, is likely to trigger resistance on the part of the actors involved. Processes of mainstreaming gender into organizations are likely to face particular resistance—argues Díaz González (2001)—because the changes that gender mainstreaming requires actually challenge the norms, practices, and assumptions concerning the relations between women and men that work at the level of individual and institutional actors. In processes of gender training that are part of a mainstreaming strategy, resistance is thus likely to appear, either overtly or covertly, among the main actors involved in a training programme, whether these are the policy-makers commissioning the training, the civil servants who participate in the training, or the trainers themselves.

Despite the relevance of understanding the phenomenon of resistance in gender training processes to a better understanding of implementation problems with gender mainstreaming, the issue of resistance has been relatively under-studied in academia. In the discussion that follows, we will draw on some of the existing theories on resistance in other gender mainstreaming processes, as these can shed light on resistance in training processes.

Benschop and Verloo (2006) highlight organizational resistance to change as a key reason for the ineffective implementation of gender mainstreaming. Resistance to change is likely to appear “when the existing organizational culture, norms, beliefs, attitudes and values are affected by the change efforts”, which tends to be the case in processes of gender training (Mergaert 2012: 57). Within gender-biased institutions, conflicting interests and goals coexist within the same institution, resulting in a more or less explicit struggle in which “bureaucratic principles demand implementation”, while “patriarchal principles demand evaporation” (Longwe 1997: 151).

A typical example of organizational resistance emerges from Benschop and Verloo’s (2006) experience in a gender mainstreaming initiative with civil servants in Human Resource Management at the Ministry of the Flemish Community in Belgium. The authors found that their attempts as gender experts to work on and expose the gendered nature of the organization were faced with resistance on the part of the high-ranking civil servants who controlled the agenda and preferred to frame the issue as one of gender neutrality, which was less threatening for the gendered status quo. As the civil servants controlled the agenda, the transformative attempts of gender experts were resisted, and their labour became one of Sisyphean sisters pushing a stone (symbolically representing the transformative project of gender equality) up the slope of civil servants’ resistance over and over again without result. As becomes clear in a study of their work in gender impact assessment at the Dutch ministries, Roggeband and Verloo (2006) encountered resistance to this gender mainstreaming method on the part of civil servants here as well. This resistance manifested itself when it became clear that civil servants considered gender mainstreaming a non-priority in policy-making, rendering gender impact assessments both unimportant and costly to them.

Van Eerdewijk’s analysis of gender mainstreaming implementation in Dutch development agencies, meanwhile, shows that a consideration of institutional resistance helps to clarify why mainstreaming ends up integrating “gender, but not in a transformative way” or even with policies evaporating entirely (van Eerdewijk 2009: 22). In the development case that van Eerdewijk analyses (2009: 22, 20), institutional resistance is expressed in the “disconnection between the organizational and the operational level” of policies, whereby “program officers are left with the responsibility to meet set gender targets, in a context that lacks the necessary strategic choices that would allow them to meet these objectives”. Studies of resistance such as this identify civil servants at different levels of the hierarchy as key actors resisting gender mainstreaming, especially its transformative goals, and conclude that research on the ineffective implementation of mainstreaming should not only place civil servants’ resistance centre stage but also consider it to be both a cause and a manifestation of the flaws in the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

Civil servants can express resistance to gender initiatives both by acting and by non-acting. In either case, resistance is a manifestation of power, which Lukes (2005) argues is at work not only when policy-makers make decisions, but also when they make non-decisions, or in this case take non-action, on issues that would not benefit them. The individual and the institutional-organizational levels are interconnected in this kind of ineffective gender mainstreaming implementation because the negative power of inertia on the part of individuals in an organization can have effects at the



institutional level, so that “collective non-action translates into an effective form of resistance” (Mergaert 2012: 57). In this light, it is important to distinguish between implicit individual resistance, which manifests itself through non-action or inadequate action and whose causes lie in an incapacity caused by a lack of resources (knowledge and skills, time, financial resources, power), and implicit institutional resistance, which occurs when this incapacity is detectable at a collective level and connected to policy decisions about resources that are taken in the higher ranks of an organization. The latter type of institutional resistance is also recognized by Stratigaki (2005), who draws attention to institutions dedicating insufficient economic and human resources to gender equality policies.

Resistance can also be expressed more explicitly, such as when decisions are taken that go against the goal of promoting gender equality. This overt resistance can take the form of policy discourse that expresses ideas and aims that distance themselves from the goal of promoting gender equality, or it can take the form of actual policy actions that go against that goal. An example is offered in Stratigaki’s (2005) account of how gender mainstreaming was used in the EU to counteract gender advocates’ demand for binding positive action measures in decision-making. Resistance in this case manifested itself through patriarchal opposition to the feminist goals implied in the mainstreaming strategy.

If the causes of resistance lie in the gendered norms deeply rooted in institutions and organizations, the reasons for it vary a great deal, and analysts thus need to consider a combination of factors. One reason concerns the fact that gender mainstreaming in general and gender training in particular challenge both people’s personal identity and their beliefs. Gender mainstreaming provokes reflections about people’s own gender roles and their stereotypes, sometimes making them feel exposed to criticism or suggesting a need for changes in their own personal identity. This questioning of the personal sphere can trigger reactions of fear and self-protection that can move people to develop attitudes of resistance to gender mainstreaming activities (Pauly et al. 2009). Another reason can be that people resist the emphasis on the part of gender mainstreaming actors or gender trainers on the goal of transforming gender relations, as they consider this goal to be feminist and thus excessively based on arguments that are ideological and emotional, rather than rational, scientific, or legal. Finally, a reason for resistance that is not gender-specific but rather related to persuasion strategies in general is one which in psychology studies is named reactance, meaning an attitude of resistance to the change advocated by a particular speaker if a person feels that the speaker is trying to change their attitude or manipulate them in some way (Brehm & Brehm 1981). The reaction to a perceived attempt to steer the actor in a certain direction can in this context be to try and safeguard one’s own freedom through a negative attitude towards the change advocated by the speaker. In sum, the combination of numerous gender-specific and general reasons makes resistance a complex phenomenon that deserves more attention in the gender literature.

Scholarly discussion of resistance against the implementation of gender mainstreaming suggests a number of conclusions: firstly, to understand resistance to processes of change in gender norms it is important to address causes, reasons, types, and actors, as well as the interactions between these aspects. Secondly, it is



necessary to take into account the role of civil servants, as part of both the problem and the solution. Thirdly, there are different types of resistance: individual, institutional, implicit, explicit, gender-specific, or more generally related to processes of change. And, finally, identifying different types of resistance and considering the distinction and interrelation between the individual and the institutional levels is important both to understand resistance in gender training processes that target public administration personnel, and to find an adequate response to the particular type of resistance detected and thus possibly improve the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

### **Forms of resistance to gender training**

Resistance appears in gender training processes in a multiplicity of forms. In this section, we present different forms of resistance that can be related to the types previously discussed (individual, institutional, implicit, explicit, gender-specific, or more generally associated with change). The examples given here focus on resistance from participants in gender training sessions and also, though to a lesser extent, on resistance from commissioners of training.

#### *Resistance from trainees*

As reported by gender trainers, manifestations of trainee resistance tend to be similar across different contexts. The main forms of trainee resistance that recur in the trainers' accounts are "denial of the need for gender change", "trivializing gender equality", and "refusing to accept responsibility for solving the problem".

A number of forms of resistance are gender-specific and appear to be targeted at gender equality as a goal. Gender trainers from contexts as different as Spain and Sweden have all pointed to a form of resistance that one trainer named the "mirage of equality", or the feeling that as we already live in a gender-equal society there is no need for a change in gender norms. The perception that equality is no longer a problem is described by Agócs (1997) as the "denial of the need for change" and, according to another trainer, a typical manifestation of this type of resistance is a statement such as: gender equality "is an old-fashioned issue since women and men are equally situated in employment, social life... so a gender equality debate is useless".

In relation to this manifestation of resistance, Agócs distinguishes between resistance that challenges the credibility of the change message and resistance to the change agents themselves, that is, the trainers. The former appears in situations where resistant trainees deny or undervalue the data on existing gender inequality, claim it is exaggerated or biased, and demand from trainers more or different data to be persuaded of the need for change. As one trainer put it, "the most basic level of resistance is that trainees are not willing to/do not consider it possible that they can 'learn' anything about gender inequality", all but ensuring that any factual data presented by trainers are not believed. The trainees' contestation of factual data about gender inequality shows—this same trainer suggests—how complex gender training processes are. This is due to the fact that (paraphrasing the trainer's words)

norms are hidden behind such facts as well; even training that is supposedly “about transferring knowledge” and not “about attitude change” is in fact “about political positions towards gender equality”.

The second kind of resistance Agócs distinguishes poses a problem for the credibility of the trainer. In the words of one trainer, this is a “resistance to learn something from a feminist”, in which gender issues are categorized as ideological rather than being considered as scientific knowledge, either due to the perception of excessive politicization or to stereotypes against feminism. Gender trainers are in a difficult position, as their audience will often be ill-disposed towards any message simply because of their role as gender trainers. Taking this to its paradoxical extreme, they would need to convince their audience of their message before even speaking the first word.

The “denial of the need for gender change” can be articulated in trainees’ resistance discourses through reference to (traditional) gender roles as natural and “innate”—reports another trainer. During a debate on equal pay, a trainee argued that it was perfectly fair that professional sportswomen were paid less than professional sportsmen because the most important sports in the world were male sports (examples given were football and tennis) and these supposedly required male physical strength, thus justifying unequal pay between women and men. Trainees can also overtly articulate resistance by directly confronting the trainer, as in the example of a participant in a gender session who underlined the needlessness of gender training (explicitly commenting what a waste of time the gender session was), showing resistance through his low opinion of gender knowledge. Trainers suggest that the context in which gender training occurs is extremely relevant in gauging resistance, that is whether the trainees sign up voluntarily for a specific session (which could minimize resistance) or whether the gender session is mandatory or part of a larger training programme on issues different from gender (which could maximize resistance).

Other forms of verbally manifested resistance are: “trivializing and minimizing the importance of gender equality” and the “refusal to accept responsibility” for dealing with gender equality issues (Pauly et al. 2009). Trainers report that this kind of resistance manifests in utterances such as:

“We can’t afford to deal with this issue now. There are more pressing priorities.”

“It is not relevant for our work.”

“It is not my problem. I’m not responsible because I didn’t create it.”

“Time will fix the problem.”

“The issue is too complex. There is no quick-fix solution.”

“It is very difficult to apply this.”

“You convinced me, but I wouldn’t know how to pass on the message to my colleagues...”

These expressions of resistance show that equality is not a priority for the resisting person and nobody feels directly responsible for the problem, thus justifying non-action. They are also evidence of a perception that change will come naturally, that the natural development of society (a community based on individual merit and

gender-neutral capacities) will solve the problems of inequality without the need for intervention, and that introducing a gender perspective would only complicate things (Ferguson et al. 2011). The last two utterances of resistance—dealing with the complexity of the issue and the difficulty of transferring the message—could also be seen as the preparation of an excuse for non-implementation. However, such manifestations can also be expressions of insecurity and incapacity about the trainee's advocacy skills, which would need to be further explored by placing these manifestations of resistance into the training context to understand what lies behind the specific oppositional attitude. The issue of resistance is fraught with complexities, and its forms of expression often require an in-depth analysis of the context in which a specific form of resistance occurs in order to understand what motivates the resistant behaviour.

Under-estimating the issue of gender equality can also occur in less discursively articulated ways, through trainees' laughter that directly derides the issue or through diverting the discussion to more simplistic debates. Both are ways for participants to signal that gender cannot be considered a serious issue to which they need to pay attention. This can also be expressed by attitudes that show a lack of interest in the subject, such as when trainees continuously look at their iPhones and notebooks, do not participate in the discussion, or leave more motivated (often female) participants to do the work in groups.

A variation of the specific manifestation of the "refusal to accept responsibility" reported by one trainer is the assumption that "gender equality is a problem owned by and thus to be solved by women, not men", thus denying the structural aspect of the problem. The same point was raised in the evaluation questionnaire of a female participant in a (voluntary) gender training session: "Even if we had some men who attended the course as well, it was still obvious that the topic is meant to be solved by women. [...] I doubt that women need the training more than men do" (Mergaert 2010: 18).

According to some trainees, women *choose* to stay out of the labour market because they *want* to care for their children and women *choose* not to enter politics. The main reason these resisting trainees provide for the under-representation of women in political institutions is that political parties cannot find enough competent female candidates. A different example is that of trainees who believe that, as they already know everything about gender equality, they do not need to learn or do anything more. The trainer who reported the last example called this type of resistant male trainee the "cool men", who when a trainer starts to talk about gender equality frequently comment that they "already do the washing up" (Lombardo & TARGET Team 2009).

Another variation of the refusal to accept responsibility that then legitimizes a denial of the need to change is the culturalization of the problem of gender inequality. These resisting trainees believe, as one trainer put it, that "gender inequality only concerns other cultures, so gender inequality is alien to our domestic context/citizens". In this form of resistance, somebody else is blamed for the problem, responsibility is shifted, so that it is not "us" but "them" who have an inequality problem; it is "other" cultures, not "ours", that are at fault. This again serves to legitimize the claim that a change in gender norms is unnecessary.

Table 1. Forms of resistance by trainees related to examples and types.

Form of resistance	Example	Type of resistance
Denial of the need for gender change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mirage of equality</li> <li>• Disbelief about gender data (message)</li> <li>• Refusal to learn from a feminist (agent)</li> <li>• Challenging trainer (agent)</li> <li>• Defending traditional gender roles as natural (message)</li> </ul>	Individual, explicit, gender-specific
Trivializing gender equality and refusing to accept responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are more pressing priorities</li> <li>• It is not relevant for our work</li> <li>• It is not my problem</li> <li>• Time will fix the problem</li> <li>• The issue is too complex</li> <li>• It is very difficult to apply this</li> <li>• You convinced me, but I wouldn't know how to pass the message to my colleagues</li> <li>• Gender equality is a problem for women, not men</li> </ul>	Individual, explicit, gender-specific
Trivializing gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laughter, diverting the discussion to simplistic debates, showing lack of interest (looking at iPhones and notebooks, not participating in discussion)</li> <li>• Gender inequality only concerns other cultures, not us</li> </ul>	Implicit, individual, gender-specific
Refusal to accept responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender inequality only concerns other cultures, not us</li> </ul>	Explicit, individual, gender-specific

These forms of resistance and the examples that substantiate them show different overlaps in the types of resistance that we spelled out earlier. Most of the encountered forms are individual, gender-specific, and either explicitly or implicitly expressed, as [Table 1](#) shows.

#### *Resistance by commissioners*

Many gender trainers consider support from top levels in the organization to be a condition for success in dealing with resistance when implementing gender mainstreaming and during gender training processes. Endorsement from senior levels of public administration personnel is considered to be a “precondition for success in dealing with resistance”, because “the support from higher levels gives legitimacy, as it establishes an obligation and shows commitment on the part of leaders that may help ease resistances” (Pauly et al. 2009: 24). Commissioners of training can be “allies in the master’s house”—as one trainer put it—so that gender trainers can build networks and alliances to promote processes of change within organizations (Lombardo & TARGET Team 2009; Ferguson et al. 2011). Yet it is important to be aware of the fact that the (direct) commissioners might also be

caught between the different forces at play in their organization, notably when support from the highest hierarchical levels is lacking. It is therefore relevant to consider what space different actors at the various hierarchical levels actually have to promote gender equality. The resistance that trainers perceive on the part of gender training commissioners might be due to these commissioners' struggle for the achievable, while the gender trainers, who do not necessarily know all the institutional specifics, might want to push for more.

Indeed, in working and negotiating with commissioners, trainers sometimes also experience resistance on the part of the actors commissioning gender training. As we have seen in the theory section, implicit or explicit institutional resistance can and does occur. Institutional resistance can be expressed in several ways, ranging from dedicating insufficient funds, time, and personnel to gender mainstreaming (specifically to training processes), the exclusion of non-hegemonic voices, to the refusal to make certain pieces of information public. These may place different constraints on gender trainers, not only when negotiating training activities with the commissioners, for example when it comes to agreeing on modalities such as the length of the training (in relation to the objectives to be achieved), but also for the delivery of the training.

When trainees are aware that the support from top officers is just “a rhetorical statement with no real political will behind [it], they will not implement” the gender initiative or they will be more likely to resist the training (Pauly et al. 2009: 24). A trainer reporting on institutional resistance on the part of commissioners gave the example of gender policy implementation being reduced to only one isolated training activity. This is done, in her view, so that “the institution can say they have done something on gender and that’s it”, when in fact this is only lip service, as there is no continuity in the gender training activities and the training is not part of a broader gender mainstreaming strategy. Mergaert and Demuyneck describe a similar situation that occurred when the European Commission shrank its gender mainstreaming approach from a quite comprehensive one in the era of the Research and Technological Development (RTD) Framework Program 6 to a narrow approach with an isolated gender training initiative under Framework Program 7—a decision that was criticized by participants in gender training (Mergaert & Demuyneck 2011). In the words of the aforementioned trainer: “You can have a sense of that [merely rhetorical support by commissioners] from the beginning, because in that case it happens that any reference to transformation, processes, future support that you as a trainer/consultant could offer to implement [gender equality] is considered as useless or not fitting to the needs of the organization, or simply overlooked”.

While we agree that the latter is an example of implicit institutional resistance, we argue for the need to (try to) distinguish layers in the organization (high-, medium-, and lower-ranked personnel) and to be careful not always uncritically to blame the direct commissioners of training. The exploration of institutional resistance, however, deserves further empirical analysis of specific institutional contexts where resistance to the implementation of mainstreaming manifests itself (Braithwaite 2000; Stratigaki 2005; Lombardo & Mergaert 2013).

### **Assessing the findings on resistance to gender training**

In this section we assess the findings that came out of the analysis of the different forms of resistance to gender training performed in this article. We argue that they provide opportunities to deepen the understanding of what hinders the implementation of gender mainstreaming, although they also show a number of limitations to what this particular study of resistance to gender training could achieve.

Gender training is a fruitful area to study resistance to gender mainstreaming, especially because gender trainers experience such resistance daily. This everyday experience has helped trainers (and us as analysts) to detect specific types and forms of resistance. These findings have enabled us to identify “individual”, “explicit”, “implicit”, and “gender-specific” types of resistance, meaning resistance manifested by individuals, expressed either explicitly or implicitly, and resistance that seems to be targeted at the goal of gender equality. The main forms that the examples of resistance described in the previous section have revealed are the “denial of the need for gender change”, “trivializing gender equality”, and “refusal to accept responsibility” for the problem of gender inequality, all of which go back to a sort of justification for not taking action to promote gender equality. Institutional resistance could not be detected through our empirical analysis, which is an issue we will return to in the next few paragraphs. Most of the forms of resistance that trainers encountered, then, are strongly related to the definition of resistance that we spelled out at the beginning, which entails maintaining the status quo and opposing change. Given the reported resistance, any support from commissioners of training appears crucial for trainers to legitimize the change in gender norms that is promoted in the training practice.

Our findings suggest that the analysis of resistance to gender training can provide insights into what exactly it is that people and institutions are resisting, be it the message of changing gender norms, the agents of the promoted change, gender equality as a goal, or the gender training course itself. It is important to establish this before diagnosing what factors are hindering the implementation of gender mainstreaming in a given context. Once the issue of resistance is located at the centre of analyses of the implementation of mainstreaming, empirical studies can explore the organizational context in which the training takes place. This can then help analysts to distinguish between individual and institutional resistance.

For example, an analysis of a specific organizational context can reveal that participants’ resistance during training is triggered by a feeling of incapacity (due to insufficient resources, time, knowledge, and so on) rather than any resistance to the very goal of gender equality. Such incapacity may then be an indication of resistance on the part of the institution in which the trainees work and a signal to provide sufficient resources and support for the implementation of gender mainstreaming. This distinction is helpful to identify those actors who are really resisting the principle of gender equality (often the ones who take decisions), rather than those who implement decisions in a situation of insufficient provision of skills, resources, and support on the part of the organization. It might be difficult for a trainer empirically to distinguish this kind of incapacity from “genuine” resistance to gender equality



during a training session, but it is possible when considering the elements included at the planning stage of a specific gender mainstreaming initiative. If the resources (e.g. funding, personnel, time) or skills (training, expert consulting) needed to implement gender mainstreaming within an organization have not been foreseen in the planning of the action, actors are likely to feel ill-equipped to perform their tasks and thus prove resistant to gender change.

In conclusion, despite the relevance of identifying institutional resistance and distinguishing it from the individual type of resistance, our findings do not enable us to map this distinction. This article explores the issue of resistance in gender training and, by drawing mainly on trainers' perspectives, aims to define resistance and identify the most prevalent types and forms that are found in gender mainstreaming processes. As they do not address specific political cultures and institutional contexts where gender training takes place, our findings do not show the presence of the institutional type of resistance that we discussed in the theory section. Institutional resistance was only partially explored in the subsection on "Resistance by commissioners", and future research will thus be needed to deepen the study of institutions as places where resistance to gender mainstreaming manifests itself. Moreover, the identification of this type of resistance requires an in-depth study of the context of each example. In our study, we discuss manifestations of resistance in examples of gender training whose nature and contexts are very different, without entering into the analysis of such specificities. We present our reflections in this article as possible pathways for further examination and research into specific training contexts in which resistance occurs.

Our study therefore almost exclusively addresses the first layer required to analyse resistance, i.e. pointing out the "problems" manifested during gender training that can be indicators of resistance. The second layer of analysis, which goes beyond the scope of this article, could then more specifically identify in each of the analysed training contexts what the gender training participants believe the problem to be, whether it is the training itself that they oppose (e.g. because of its format or inadequate balance between theory and practice), the gender mainstreaming strategy, or the principle of gender equality itself. Future empirical studies focusing on specific gender training contexts might develop more specific analyses of the different types of individual and institutional resistance that manifest among civil servants, and might differentiate between a variety of reasons for resisting, depending on trainees' context and level of government.

## **Conclusions**

In this article, we have conducted a first exploration of the phenomenon of resistance to gender training as part of processes of gender mainstreaming. Discussing the different types and forms in which resistance can be expressed, we argue that the analysis of resistance to gender training can contribute to diagnosing problems in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, which can then be used to the benefit of this implementation.

The analysis of resistance to gender training shows that difficulties in implementing gender mainstreaming are often related to the resistance posed by individuals and



institutions to changing gender norms and roles. This suggests that policy-makers would need to take resistance into account in the design of gender mainstreaming strategies. Gender scholars should also pay more careful attention to the phenomenon of resistance. Our study is limited in terms of the analysis of training contexts and institutions, but it identifies a need to conduct case studies on different resistant institutions, be they governments, academic institutions, companies, or international organizations. Such future studies could map the different types and forms of resistance in each specific context and in the process draw a clearer picture of what hinders effective implementation of gender mainstreaming within organizations.

In conclusion, despite its often unpleasant consequences for gender trainers and consultants, resistance is a learning opportunity for gender experts, policy-makers, and scholars alike, one that, if embraced with openness and preparation, offers a chance to engage with entrenched patriarchal (and other) norms, values, and stereotypes and deal with the inevitable problems that any process of changing the gender norms of institutions and individuals is bound to create.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>“OPERA” is the name of the research activity that addressed gender training issues within the QUING project.

<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/TARGET/aboutus2.htm>.

<sup>3</sup>A total of 53 individuals registered to participate in the forums, coming from different European and American countries, and international organizations such as the UN and EU (Ferguson et al. 2011: 25).

<sup>4</sup>Of the 126 participants in the 2011 conference, 50 were gender trainers or practitioners, 37 were academics, and 39 were policy-makers or commissioners of gender training (Ferguson et al. 2011).

<sup>5</sup>See [www.yellowwindow.be/genderinresearch](http://www.yellowwindow.be/genderinresearch).

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