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On: 03 September 2014, At: 23:49  
Publisher: Taylor & Francis  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number:  
1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street,  
London W1T 3JH, UK

## Impact Assessment

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tiap19>

# GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW INSTRUMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

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To cite this article: Mieke Verloo & Connie Roggeband (1996) GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW INSTRUMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS, *Impact Assessment*, 14:1, 3-20, DOI: [10.1080/07349165.1996.9725883](https://doi.org/10.1080/07349165.1996.9725883)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07349165.1996.9725883>

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## ARTICLES

**GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW INSTRUMENT  
IN THE NETHERLANDS***Mieke Verloo and Connie Roggeband*<sup>1</sup>

In the Netherlands—as probably elsewhere—policies at the national level are seen as gender-neutral; it is presupposed that needs and claims of men and women are not gender-specific and do not conflict. This paper shows that this presupposition does not hold. The assumed gender-neutrality of government policies is often closer to myth than to reality. And because government policies are not gender-neutral, they may have unintended, unforeseen but important and mostly negative effects on the gender relations in a society.

This paper introduces a new policy instrument intended to address this problem. *Gender impact assessment* is an instrument designed to analyze potential effects of new government policies on the gender relations in Dutch society. The Dutch government decided to create this gender impact assessment instrument in 1992. On the basis of the design and the theoretical framework, various policy reports have been analyzed on subjects such as chronic illness, labor and social security, outdoor recreation, and family policies (Verloo and Roggeband 1994). A Dutch policy plan in the field of education has been the first real experiment with the instrument. This first experiment will be presented in this paper after a short introduction to the instrument.

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## **Policies for Women**

From 1974 onwards policies for women have been on the political agenda in the Netherlands. In the last two decades there have been changes in the goals and instruments used in Dutch (so-called) “emancipation policy.” There are changes in the formal problem definition. Since the 1980s, the basic problem is no longer considered to be the unequal participation of men and women in the public and private spheres, but “the structurally unequal power relations between women and men,” as is mentioned in “Beleidsprogramma Emancipatie. Met het oog op 1995” (Ministerie van Sociale zaken en Werkgelegenheid 1992). In this redefinition of the basic problem as a problem of power relations, the unequal participation of men and women in the public and private spheres is seen as only one of the symptoms of the unequal power relations. Other symptoms are, for example, sexual violence and the low value of women’s unpaid work. At the level of the implementation of policy plans and programs in practice, however, many critical studies have shown that the basic problem seems to be more restricted and even simplistic (see Keuzenkamp and Teunissen 1990 for an overview of these studies). The basic problem that is implicit in policy plans is still that women lag behind men in public participation.

Policies for women were never meant to be restricted to “special” policies for women only. From the beginning it has been stated, even if only on paper, that a double strategy was needed: next to “special” policies for (certain categories of) women, policies for women had to be integrated in the overall government policies. In the past 20 years, however, it has proven to be extremely difficult to find instruments to improve the integration of emancipation goals in overall policies. Moreover, detailed analyses show that most government policies are often not as gender-neutral as they seem to be. As a result, these policies may have unintended and unforeseen, but important, effects on the gender relations in a society. Gender impact assessment is a policy instrument that is meant to address this problem.

## **Gender Impact Assessment**

The goal of any impact assessment is to analyze the potential effects of new policy plans or programs before they are implemented. Impact assessment studies have mainly been developed in the field of environmental problems. Environmental impact assessment, for example, is a well-established policy instrument, not only in the Netherlands, but in many countries all over the world.

Impact assessment studies are designed in five steps. (1) There is a thorough description of the actual situation before a new policy plan is implemented. (2) The study has to assess the probable development of this situation in the absence of any new policy. This is called the *zero alternative*. (3) A detailed analysis is needed of the content of the policy plan itself, its measures, time schedules, goals, and fields. This analysis of the current situation, the probable development of the situation, and the policy plan itself then make it possible to (4) describe potential effects, and (5) balance the positive and negative effects against each other. The steps are shown in figure 1.

**Figure 1. Five steps of gender impact assessment studies**

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Description of current gender relations</li> <li>2. Description of probable development without new policy</li> <li>3. Description and analysis of the new policy plan</li> <li>4. Description of potential effects on gender relations</li> <li>5. Evaluating the positive and negative potential effects on gender relations</li> </ol> |
|---|

To develop the instrument of gender impact assessment, a theoretical framework for gender relations is needed. Where are the structurally unequal power relations between women and men to be found? How do they function, and how are they to be evaluated? The theoretical framework refers to these three questions in its three main elements. The first element, *structures*, shows where the core of the gender power relations is to be found, and what institutions and organizations are most important. The second element, *processes*, emphasizes a formal theoretical level: what are the mechanisms that produce and reproduce the unequal power relations? And the third element, *criteria*, is the normative element, which is necessary to decide whether a certain situation is to be positively or negatively judged.

### **Theoretical framework: structures, processes, criteria**

#### *Structures*

In establishing the main structures of gender relations, a valuable document is already available in the Netherlands. In 1981 the government adopted a

theoretical analysis as the starting-point for its emancipation policy. This “analysis of the women’s question” was commissioned by the government and written by a team of feminist researchers (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, Directie Coördinatie Emancipatiebeleid 1981). This is the analysis that redefined the problem as “the structurally unequal power relations between women and men.” Two structures of these unequal power relations were considered most important: the division of labor and the organization of sexuality in terms of masculinity and femininity. Basically, research has shown that this analysis is still supported by experts in women’s studies in the 1990s (Keuzenkamp and Teunissen 1990, see also Young 1994). Only minor adaptations are necessary.

The *gendered division of labor* is a concept that refers to a complex of values, norms, rules, and practices in the field of labor, where an asymmetrical distinction is produced between women and men, between paid and unpaid labor, between work inside and outside the home, and between male and female tasks and professions. An important substructure is the division of tasks between women and men in political organizations. The division of labor is a gendered structure because women as a group hold lower positions than men; women work in sectors of the labor market where perspectives and payment are worse than those of men; women are paid less for the same work; women do a great deal of useful work without any payment at all; the system of paid labor (with a majority of men) can only exist because of the simultaneous existence of a system of unpaid work (with a majority of women); and, finally, because caring is an individual responsibility of women and not a collective or shared responsibility.

In “The analysis of the women’s question,” the second structure was called “the organization of sexuality in terms of masculinity and femininity.” As a concept, this referred to norms and institutions around sexuality, extending to the social organization of personal relationships, procreation, and motherhood: a much broader field than sexuality alone. We will refer to this second structure as *the organization of intimacy*: a complex of values, norms, rules, and practices in the fields of sexuality, procreation, and personal relationships among adults and children. In the contemporary organization of intimacy, women and men have different roles and positions. Women and men are considered to be two different kinds of human beings that are sexually dependent on each other. This heterosexual norm or compulsory heterosexuality is the foundation of social organizations and institutions. Not only sexuality, but also personal relationships and

motherhood/fatherhood acquire a specific meaning and value in this structure.

Both structures can have a different meaning for different groups of women. Groups of women also differ in the way these structures define their position. Class and ethnicity are the most important differences within the category of women. Age, sexual orientation, and educational level can also be of importance.

### *Processes*

The description of the main structures made it clear that gender relations are not about men and women only. The specific signification and the different values attached to masculinity and femininity are also part of the structurally unequal power relations between the sexes. In women's studies the concept of gender was introduced to stress that the meaning of *man* and *woman* is neither fixed nor a biological or natural given, but a social construction. The questions to be asked then become: How is gender constructed, produced, and reproduced? How does gender work? In what ways is gender related to power? Feminist scholars such as Scott (1986), Harding (1986), and Hagemann-White (1989) all present theoretical perspectives on gender that distinguish several aspects, levels, or dimensions. An attempt to integrate these analyses can be found in Verloo (1992).

A starting-point in the analysis of power and the various dimensions of gender is the proposition that the power relations between women and men are not of a distinct kind. Power in relation to gender is not a different kind of power. Concepts from Giddens' (1984) structuration theory have been used to analyze power. Power is directly related to gender because gender is a primary way of distributing and using resources. Power is indirectly related to gender in the operation of rules. These two relations between power and gender refer to the two most important processes that produce and reproduce gender: the distribution of resources and the operation of rules.

Gender is an important factor in the access to, and distribution and use of, *resources* such as money, time, positions, goods, relations, and information. Resources are unequally distributed between men and women. Gender is not the only distributive principle; class and ethnicity are very important too. As a result, differences between women can be very great. Resources are essential in actions, and the structurally unequal distribution of resources is essential in the reproduction of the power relations between the sexes.

*Rules* as a concept refers to interpretations, definitions, and norms. On the level of interpretation, men and women are considered as two very important social categories. There are only two positions possible in these categories, and there is a clear division between them. People can be either men or women. Identity is interpreted in the same dichotomous categories. People rely on these distinctions to interpret behavior as male or female. Behavior has a less rigorous gender label; it can be male or female to a greater or lesser extent, and it can lose its gender label (as, for instance, with driving or smoking). Change and variation according to place and time is possible. As people behave in line with collective definitions of reality, they reproduce the definitions, or (slightly) alter them. When masculinity or femininity acquires a new meaning, the structural signification of gender changes too. The interpretation of people, identity, and behavior in terms of gender makes the operation of gender norms and sanctions possible. What is considered to be correct behavior for men and women may differ, but it is related to symbols of masculinity and femininity. Norms about masculinity and femininity operate not only in social interaction, they are an integral part of social institutions and organizations as well.

As we have seen, rules operate to give people a gendered social position and identity, to label behavior in relation to gender, to measure people in relation to gendered symbols, and to sanction gendered norms. The relation between power and gender is indirect: rules have an effect on the power potential of people. Four mechanisms can be distinguished. The first is that rules function as a site for potential power. What is not part of the interpretation cannot be part of any action at all. The second is that rules structure the access to resources. Rules in the sense of norms can have effects on the distribution of rights and obligations, and thereby a differential power effect. Not all people have the same opportunity of being able to fulfill the norms, and this is the third mechanism. The fourth mechanism is that rules about gender or related to gender have a different effect on the power potential of men and women.

There is a mutual relation between the two power processes that have been distinguished above. The unequal distribution of resources legitimates the distinct gender norms, and the distinct gender norms act as a legitimation of the unequal distribution of resources. Interpreting people and identities in two dichotomous gender categories, and labeling behavior in gender categories, have necessary functions in this process.

### *Criteria*

So far, the theoretical framework has identified two structures and two processes that constitute the structurally unequal power relations between women and men. If a gender impact assessment is to analyze the effects of new policies on the structurally unequal power relations between women and men, we can now be more specific. A gender impact assessment should analyze effects on the gendered division of labor and on the organization of intimacy, and in doing so it should pay attention to effects through the distribution of resources and through the operation of (gendered) rules.

One last element needs to be elaborated: How are we to evaluate these effects? Criteria are needed. Implicit goals of emancipation policy in the Netherlands are equality, autonomy, and multiformity. *Equality* is a necessary condition for improving the position of women, but as a criterion it is controversial (Meehan and Sevenhuijsen 1991). There is consensus regarding the necessity for the removal of discrimination, but, in view of the inequality of the different starting points for men and women, unequal treatment is sometimes advocated in order to bring about an “equal” outcome. Elements of the criterion of equality include: opportunities which are really equal, equality of all people before the law and equal treatment in similar circumstances. However, equality should not mean that women and men should become the same or that women have to change according to a male norm.

In connection with these questions, it is often said that equality presupposes difference. If people were identical, the whole issue of equality would be meaningless. Differences between people only lead to inequality if different values are ascribed to the differences. As a criterion, equality must account for the relevant differences in such a way that the differences in the balance of power between men and women are reduced. In juridical discourse two kinds of equality are distinguished: formal and material equality. Formal equality requires that people are given the same rights, and that they are treated as if they were equal. Material equality requires that equal cases are treated equally, and unequal cases are treated unequally according to the differences. Equality can be an important criterion in the matter of the distribution of resources.

Another criterion, already used in Dutch emancipation policy, albeit in the specific case of development policies, is autonomy. *Autonomy* is “the possibility for women to set conditions and priorities to decide for themselves how they can have a say in their social and personal lives” (Ministerie

van Buitenlandse Zaken 1990). Autonomy as a criterion emphasizes differences between people. Women should be given possibilities to shape their lives according to their own standards. For that to happen, a wide and real choice in behavior alternatives will have to be available. Knowledge of these alternatives is essential to be able to use them. On the level of society as a whole, the result would be *multiformity*: a society with many differences that are not hierarchical.

### *Summary of the theoretical framework*

The core concepts of the theoretical framework are:

1. Structures
  - ▶ Gendered division of labor: paid and unpaid work, decision-making and organization
  - ▶ Organization of intimacy: sexuality, procreation, relationships between adults and children
2. Processes
  - ▶ Distribution, use and access to resources
  - ▶ Rules relating to gender
3. Criteria
  - ▶ Equality
  - ▶ Multiformity/autonomy

### *Design*

As stated earlier, the basic design of a gender impact assessment consists of five steps. Now that we have a theoretical framework, a checklist can be made. More detailed questions can be asked that have to be answered for the particular field of the policy plan that is analyzed.

1. **Description of current gender relations.** Are there differences between men and women in the division of labor? in the organization of intimacy? Is there an unequal distribution of resources? What gender rules are present? How can the current situation be evaluated in terms of equality? in terms of autonomy?

For the description of the current situation, the availability of data can be a problem. The current situation can be described using statistics on labor participation, caring labor (for children, dependents, relatives, neighbors), political participation, all on a formal or informal level; personal relationships and sexuality. Data on attitudes can be used as an indicator for describing rules. Rules can also be found in laws and regulations.

2. **Description of probable development without new policy.** The description of probable development when there would be no new policy is very difficult. Methods that can be used are extrapolation of current trends and scenario methods. For the purpose of the gender impact assessment, this step will not always be possible, because the availability of longitudinal data is often a problem.
3. **Description and analysis of the new policy plan.** The new policy plan has to be analyzed in detail. An important part of the analysis is the analysis of policy theories. Aspects of policy theories are the causal relations (what is considered to be cause and consequence), final relations (what are the goals, and which means are supposed to bring these goals about) and normative relations (what values and norms are part of the plan). A lot of attention has to be paid to implicit notions of causal, final and normative relations. In that sense, the policy theory has to be reconstructed, or perhaps even more to the point, deconstructed. The analysis, re- or deconstruction of the policy theory can make clear not only what the intended effects of a certain policy plan are, but also what unintended or unforeseen effects can be expected.
4. **Description of potential effects on gender relations.** The potential effects of generic policies on gender relations will usually be unintended. Needless to say, it is very difficult to assess the potential effects of a certain policy plan. However, the problem is not that we are mostly interested in unintended effects. This makes no difference for the identification of effects. To simplify the matter it was decided that policies would be analyzed as if their implementation were perfect, and that little or no attention would be paid to contextual variables. What will be taken into account is the character of the policy instruments, from specifically forceful (as in legal requirements) to very weak (symbolic policy). Attention will also be paid to the specific groups that policy measures are aimed at. It can be useful to examine the results of similar policies in the past or in a different context. However, in using this material the contextual differences have to be taken into account.
5. **Evaluating the positive and negative potential effects on gender relations.** In this final step the criteria are used to assess and value effects.

## **First Experiment: Reorganization of junior secondary and prevocational education in the Netherlands**

The first gender impact assessment was commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sciences in December 1994. The ministry asked for a gender impact assessment on the policy proposal of the Committee van Veen, a proposal on the reorganization of junior secondary education (MAVO) and prevocational education (VBO). The Ministry of Education always asks a committee to prepare a proposal before deciding on a policy. The gender impact assessment will be described in the following sections after a short description of the policy proposal. Finally, the paper will describe how the gender impact assessment was used by the government.

### *Proposal of the Committee van Veen: "Acknowledging diversity"*

The main goal of the committee's proposal is to provide a better connection between junior and prevocational education and follow-up education like senior vocational education. (See figure 2 for a diagram of the educational system in the Netherlands.) The committee proposes a reorganization in which both MAVO and VBO disappear, and four sectors are created, parallel to an existing classification in senior vocational education. The four sectors are economy, technology, services, and agriculture.

The committee also introduces a reshuffling of study programs: consumptive technology is to move from the technology sector to the services sector, and so is fashion and clothing. Furthermore, common subjects are to be streamlined and three new subjects are introduced: NASK—a mix of physics and chemistry, technology, and customer-related services.

In addition, the new proposal means to acknowledge different styles of learning, both theoretical and practical. Therefore, three routes of learning are proposed: theoretical, practical, and a mixed route. An individual route and a labor-market route will be created for a small number of pupils who would otherwise not be able to finish education.

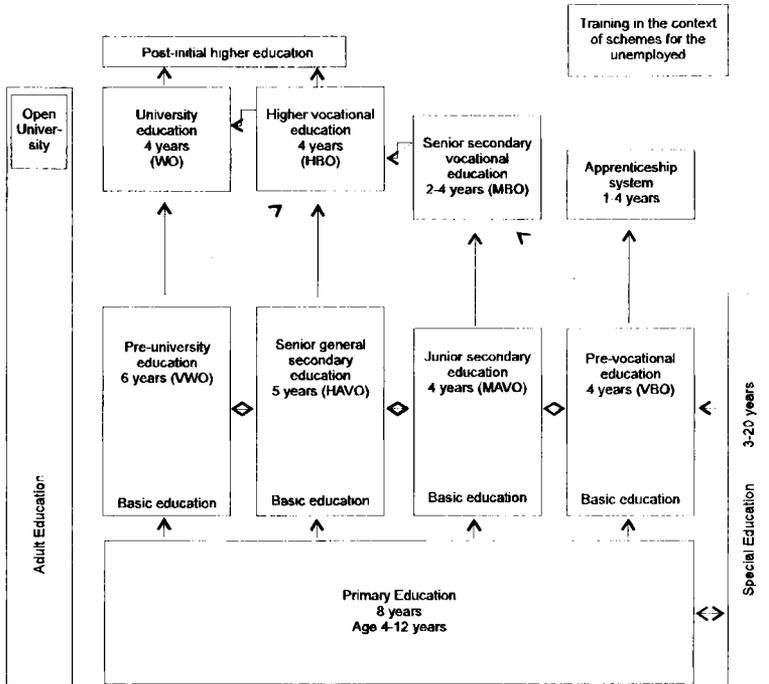
## **Gender Impact Assessment: Description of current gender relations and developments**

### *Structures*

Are there structurally unequal power relations in the field of education? This is the first question to be answered in the gender impact assessment. Starting with a description of the structures, we can see that there is a connection

with both the gendered division of labor and with the organization of intimacy. The connection with the gendered division of labor is twofold: education is not only a part of the labor market, but also a specific preparation for the labor market.

Figure 2. Diagram of Dutch education system



While there are many women working in education in the Netherlands, men and women have a very different position in this part of the labor market. There is segregation: women have lower-paid and part-time jobs, they teach other subjects, and they work in different sectors of education. The segregation in the labor market is preceded by segregation in the education system itself. The most significant elements of this segregation are that there are “male” and “female” sectors; that these male sectors prepare for higher (both higher-paid and higher-status) jobs and the female sectors prepare for lower (-paid and -status) jobs; and that career prospects differ significantly. Girls tend to be overrepresented in care, customer-related services, sales, administration, and they tend to be underrepresented in technology. This

gender segregation in education is changing, but at a very low rate. There is not so much vertical gender segregation: girls and boys can be found to attain virtually equal levels of education.

Because education also prepares for the future in a more general sense, there are connections with the structure of the organization of intimacy too. Ideally—as stated in the Dutch Policy on Equal Opportunities in Education—education should be a preparation for a future life with paid labor, unpaid labor, and participation in society. Research shows that girls conceive of a “double perspective” for themselves: girls want to combine a career with motherhood (and unpaid labor). In the Netherlands, the perspective of girls has changed. Only some 10 years ago, many of them wanted to get out of paid work permanently when they entered motherhood. Now, they intend to quit for just a few years when the children are young, after which they plan to re-enter the labor market. Boys, on the other hand, still predominantly have a perspective of becoming breadwinners, and consequently absent fathers.

### *Processes*

Rules in education are related to the different study programs. Technology is—and not only in the Netherlands—a world of men, or, to put it differently, there is a gender rule on technology. This rule says that technology is masculine and also that technology is what men do. Cutting and connecting pieces of metal is called technical; cutting and connecting pieces of textile is not technical. Drilling machines and concrete mixers are more technical than sewing machines and blenders. This gender code of technology is both the result and the cause of the gender segregation in education and the labor market. Similarly, care and services are a woman’s world, which means that caring and ‘serving’ are feminine, and that caring is what women do. Both gender rules are obstacles to changes in the unequal power relations between men and women.

Education is a major field of distribution of resources, especially the resources of knowledge and skills. In the Netherlands, the level of knowledge and skills at this moment is virtually equal between boys and girls. Boys and girls have different kinds of knowledge and skills, however; and these different kinds of knowledge and skills are unequally valued.

### *Criteria*

There is inequality in education. Education as a part of the labor market shows a gendered division of labor. Gender segregation is both horizontal and vertical. Girls have caught up with boys as far as the level of education is concerned. But the gender segregation in the different types and study programs of education leads to inequality in payment and status in the labor market. The choices that boys and girls make are partially “constructed” by gender rules about the masculinity or femininity of study programs. This limits the autonomy of girls.

### **Gender Impact Assessment: Detailed analysis of the policy proposal “Acknowledging diversity”**

#### *What the proposal is not about*

While the proposal has as its goal the link with senior vocational education, or more generally the possibilities for moving on in education, no attention is paid to the current presence or absence of possibilities for moving on from different starting positions. At this moment, the possibilities for moving on depend very much on the choice of subjects. Our analysis showed that especially the girls’ choice of subjects did indeed limit their possibilities for moving on. The proposal does not recognize this problem.

#### *Structures and processes in the proposal*

The proposal does not take a multifaceted future for pupils into account. There is only attention for education as a preparation for the labor market, but not for unpaid and caring labor.

The analysis of the presuppositions in the proposal exposes rules connected with gender: rules for what technology is, what services are, and the different value of both. The proposal redefines what *technology* is and what *services* are.

What is technical? Some study programs are removed from the technology sector, not because they are less technical, but—in the words of the proposal—because the motivation of pupils for these study programs has more to do with services than with technology. If it is indeed the case that pupils’ motivation for these study programs in which there are more girls is different, it can also signify an appropriation of these professions by girls in terms that fit their own gender rules. Moving these study programs into another sector does not have a “factual” base in that case, but is a conformation to existing gender rules: technology is what boys do.

The redefinition of services follows a similar argumentation: the emphasis is on the motivation of pupils, not on the character of the professions. It is striking that car repairing, for example, is not seen as services, but as technical. Here too, moving consumptive technology and fashion and clothing is a conformation to gender rules: services is what girls do. Therefore, it is not to be expected that car repairing could be moved to services, as it is most often chosen by boys.

The proposal not only redefines technology and services, but also gives different values to each. As a course subject, services is less important than technology. Technology is introduced as a subject in all routes and all sectors, whereas services is considered important only in one route and one sector. The old rule that “what men do has more status” (Sullerot’s law) acquires a new meaning because “only what men do is technical.” However, by introducing technology in all sectors, technology can become something that everybody does, and that can help to demolish the gender rule on the masculinity of technology.

A second point that decreases the value of the services sector is the absence of a real main subject in that sector. A subject like social psychology could be very useful in the field of services, but it is lacking. The absence of a main subject is bad for the status of the sector, because it suggests that the sector is more about an attitude than about knowledge and skills. The absence of a main subject can also limit the possibilities for moving on.

### **Gender Impact Assessment: Impact of “Acknowledging diversity”**

There is some positive impact. Improving the possibilities for moving on has a positive impact on both boys and girls. For girls it can improve their opportunities for economic independence. Nevertheless, the proposal will strengthen the gender segregation in education and the existing gender rules. The proposed reshuffling of study programs will move study programs with more girls out of the technology sector and into the services sector, thus creating an even stronger gender segregation. Moreover, these proposals reinforce the masculinity of technology; consequently, they limit the real choices for girls and strengthen inequality in education.

It is a missed opportunity that the proposal views education as a preparation for the labor market only. There is no follow-up to the broader perspective in the earlier years of education.

## **The Impact of the Gender Impact Assessment**

The gender impact assessment described in this paper was sent to Parliament (in a slightly adapted version) as an appendix to the final government proposal. The responses of two women's movement organizations to the proposal were added to the assessment. In the final proposal, the minister explained which points of the van Veen proposal will be taken up. Further, on the basis of the gender impact assessment, the distribution of subjects in the different sectors will be reconsidered in such a way that aspects of technology and services will be built into all routes and study programs. The classification into four sectors will be maintained, but the services sector is to be renamed health. The place of the study programs of consumptive technology and fashion and clothing will also be reconsidered. Moreover, extra attention will be paid to a broader orientation on the future for all pupils, not only with respect to the labor market. In the further development of the policies, the minister will make sure that expertise on gender questions is available in the working group. In fact, the gender impact assessment has been the cause of a major reconsideration of the proposed policies.

## **The Relevance of the Gender Impact Assessment Instrument**

The previous sections have outlined what a gender impact assessment is and also elaborated on a concrete example. Impact assessment, of course, can be used in a much broader way. In fact, gender impact assessment could be used to analyze the effects of current policies and current projects. In that case, the gender impact assessment can also have the goal of monitoring the effects and use mitigation strategies to deal with the effects.

What is the potential of the gender impact assessment as a new policy instrument? How can the gender impact assessment play an innovative role? First of all, the idea of a gender impact assessment shows academics and practitioners interested in impact assessment an important variable that has not been considered as a possible impact to be assessed.<sup>2</sup> In fact, gender impact assessment can be relevant for academics, IA practitioners, policy

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<sup>2</sup> Nowhere in "Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment" by the Inter-organizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles, published in 1994 in *Impact Assessment* (volume 12, pp. 107-152), does the committee suggest that gender relations might be affected. Same goes for *A Conceptual Approach to Social Impact Assessment*, Rabel Burdge (1994).

makers, politicians, and feminist organizations. It is a logical way to expand interest in gender studies just as environmental impact assessment led to a greater interest in environmental issues. By using such studies, academics can help to professionalize emancipation policies and incorporate a gender perspective in general policies. Further, gender impact assessment can be of use in providing a clear structure for political decision making and increasing the effectiveness and appropriateness of policy.

### **Professionalization of Emancipation Policies and Integration of a Gender Perspective in General Policies**

The women's movement in the Netherlands is no longer active primarily as protest movement; it has become both more professionalized and more institutionalized. The government draws on the professionalism that has arisen in women's studies. Thus the Dutch government addresses studies that are critical of its own policies (Keuzenkamp and Teunissen 1990; Mossink and Nederland 1993). The gender impact assessment is also an instrument that serves to professionalize emancipation policy, as it is based on the results of women's studies. Therefore, the introduction of gender impact assessment is a way of professionalizing emancipation policy.

An important advantage of the gender impact assessment is that inconsistencies or contradictions between general policy and emancipation policy can be signalled at an early stage. The experiment carried out for the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science was a good example of this. While the educational emancipation policy attempted to counter sexual segregation and advocated that a higher number of girls participate in education, the general policy proposed simply served to reinforce the existing segregation. This insight led to the decision to adapt the proposed policy. Both the quality and effectiveness of the policy benefited considerably as a result.

### **Increased Clarity in Political Decision Making**

A gender impact assessment aids the process of decision making because it serves to clarify the possible effects of certain policy on emancipation processes before the decision to implement the policy is finally taken. In this sense a gender impact assessment can contribute to increased clarity in political decision making. In the field of emancipation policy, for example, it is currently very difficult for politicians to establish for themselves the relationship between many different kinds of policy and the emancipation processes. A gender impact assessment makes it easier to take the various facets of emancipation into account. Furthermore, the way in which the

gender impact assessment is set out serves to prestructure a discussion of the subject: Are we talking about different structures or processes? Or are we using different data to describe the same processes? Is it possible that different criteria are being used, and if so which ones? The result is that political choices are clearer. In this sense, the gender impact assessment can also help to facilitate clearer communication on the subject between government organizations and other actors.

Groups and organizations outside of parliament can also employ gender impact assessment to their own advantage. They can use gender impact assessment in their lobbying activities, but they could also carry out a gender impact assessment themselves.

Above all, discussions on the basis of a gender impact assessment can raise the level of debate on emancipation structures and thereby increase the effectiveness of policy. In this respect the gender impact assessment commissioned on the report produced by the van Veen Commission was a missed opportunity. The instruction was issued too late to effectively exploit this possibility of the gender impact assessment. By the time that the instruction was issued, a broad discussion of the proposed policy was already under way. In 30 or so regional meetings and by means of a telephone survey the report was already being discussed. If the gender impact assessment had also been available at that stage, the emancipation aspect could have been systematically included in the discussion.

### **Gender Impact Assessment: An instrument for innovation?**

As a policy instrument, gender impact assessment has innovative potential. But if the potential is to be realized, the instrument will need to be applied on a broader scale. Gender impact assessment is supported by the government, although it is not compulsory. A number of departments, led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science, have expressed an interest in working with gender impact assessments. Demand for lectures and workshops on the subject suggest that there is also interest at municipal, provincial, and international levels, where, in fact, the first gender impact assessments have been initiated. The first experiments have clearly revealed that gender impact assessment is an innovative instrument, particularly because it can serve to facilitate the integration of emancipation policy and general policy and thus increase both the quality and effectiveness of both.

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