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Gender, education and socialization: A proposed public policies with gender perspective

Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia*

I. Introduction

Historically Mexico has been a country that has tried to be a leader in education policies. Some of them have looked visions of gender mainstreaming to achieve an equation in which men and women play an equal role. Unfortunately in practice have not achieved full success in these policies. One reason is because many of the policies that it included women, they did a lopsided manner, rather than include it as an integral and independent part, was included as a complementary and sometimes subordinate part.

In this essay we propose and analyze several proposals for the creation of public policies with gender perspective, most of them are within the field of education. The main goal is to incorporate a gender perspective inside the educational public policies at all levels that represent the changes that have occurred in Mexico in the last ten years. Similarly it is intended to indicate the relevance for a country where formal education and education within homes have a generic perspective. It will emphasize the need

* Dr. Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia is now full-time research professor at the University of Houston. He received his Ph.D. and an MA in historical anthropology and cultural studies with specialization in colonial Mexico, the University of Pennsylvania. It also has an MA in U.S. studies and a BA in International Relations from the University of the Americas-Puebla. His publications are in the areas of gender, sexuality, civil society, secret societies and cultural studies.

for policies to eradicate the so high illiteracy, especially among Mexican women. This will contribute significantly in educational change and will be achieved that Mexico is at the forefront with the most developed countries and eradicate a extremely serious problem like illiteracy.

II. Clearing the ground

Before talking about public policies and political processes is important to be stopped at a concept of vital importance as is gender. Every government in the world must take this into account when developing public policies, Mexico is not the exception. The way in which this concept affects society on a daily basis is very important, since perceptions about going to regulate the manner in which each human being, in this case, every Mexican will understand and interpret this term consciously or unconsciously. These perceptions will influence decision making and public policies making.

Mexican society must free itself from the traditional concept of gender, where both the feminine and masculine elements are understood as natural and immutable. The historical study of gender shows us this as an analytic category, which is not determined by nature, but is a socio-cultural construction.¹

¹ This conception "constructivist" as it has been called "gender has been acknowledged by scholars from around the world as Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Trad. Robert Hurley. Vol. 1, Tran. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books Edition, March 1990. *The Use of Pleasure*. Trad. Robert Hurley. Vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*. Trad. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books Edition, March 1990. *The Care of the Self*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Vol. 3 of *The History of Sexuality*. Tran. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books Edition, March 1990. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, Longman, 1981. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990 (this book was published in Spanish under the title *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Mexico: UNAM & Paid, 2001), *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993, "Critically Queer." In *Playing with Fire: Queer Politics, Queer Theories*. Shane Phelan, Ed. New York, 1997. In Mexico, one of the pioneers of this new gender perspective is Marta Lamas. See *El género: la construcción cultural de la diferencia sexual*, México: UNAM/Porrúa, 1996. See also Marta Lamas. *Política y reproducción. Aborto: La frontera del derecho a decidir*. México, Plaza y Janés, 2001.

In the collection of essays entitled *The cultural construction of sexual difference*, edited by Marta Lamas, one of the most prominent scholars in the area of Gender in Mexico, appears a series of articles very useful to understand that gender is the result a series of socio-cultural processes. One article of the authorship of Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead learnedly summarizes new approaches regarding how to study the gender that scholars proposed for the study of societies. This approach could be applied in the field of public policy. Ortner and Whitehead argue that “which is assumed as a pattern of relationships between men and women are, among others, ideas that are not just ‘data’ biological, or are made exclusively from such information; on the contrary, they are largely a product of social and cultural processes.”² This definition clearly shows that gender cannot be determined biologically, as the existentialists came arguing for years. The perspective of biological gender as dictated by nature has been transmitting mainly on Mexican households, as well as primary and secondary schools. Outside the academic field and the specialized professional who study gender, there is very little conscience that cultural, historical, economic and social processes are part of the generic construction.

Understanding gender issues from a constructivist perspective will help us understand the generic differences of human beings as social constructions product of cultural history. This will help understand the constructivist vision of gender is not simply to differentiate between men and women and to classify them, but seeks to be seen as subjects that are the result of historical, social and cultural processes. Judith Butler defines this process as a kind of *social device* that construct the cultural, legal and social structures that regulate the ways in which the humans develop.

² Sherry B. Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, “Indagaciones acerca de los significados sexuales” Marta Lamas, ed. *Gender: the cultural construction of gender difference*. Mexico: UNAM/ Porrúa, 1996, 128. It is worth mentioning that the ideas of gender as biological studies were reinforced by Talcott Parsons published between the fifties and sixties. See Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bayles, *Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process*. Free Press, Glencoe, IL, 1955.

For the American scholar, gender is a chain of repeated acts which are developed within a given regulatory framework, which with time is paralyzed “to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”³ Butler proposes static ideas regarding male and female subject must subvert and to question the mechanisms that have been created, especially to dismember the patriarchal structure that has served as a reference to the concept of gender in Mexico. Likewise, other theoretical as Hill Conway, Susan C. Bourque and Joan Scott (the latter one of the pioneers of the inclusion of generic aspect in the area of history) argue that “the reasons for a change in the already prescribed social norms for temperament and sexual behavior are equally complex, and social types resulting there from cannot be understood as a simple binary divisions or reflections of biological sex differences.”⁴ That is, these scholars suggest that gender be seen beyond the heterosexual framework and the binary that has caused deep inequities throughout history. In addition to these different definitions we need to supplement that gender, as said Marta Lamas, “is a kind of ‘filter’ cultural with which we interpret the world, and also a kind of armor with which constrain our life ... Of the logic of gender give off the kind of logic is clear the current regulations (legal and symbolic) on sexual and reproductive the use of the body, and since that logic, taken by ‘natural’, induces repression and oppression.”⁵ This perspective helps us understand that the “tool” gender is essential to our society, and understanding it for what is will contribute to the destruction of prejudices and misconceptions in this regard.

The discussions described above on the concept of gender have a gender perspective is applied to public policies. Several decades of study on the issue have not been in vain, since many of these theoretical ideas have been implemented and they are presented in this paper having in mind the Mexican case. Nor is it tried to give them to read to the citizens (female and male) the

³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Mexico: Paidós and UNAM, 2001, 67.

⁴ Hill Conway, Susan C. Bourque and Joan Scott. “El concepto de género”. In Marta Lamas, 1996, 23.

⁵ Marta Lamas, 1996, 18.

books of Bultler, Joan Scott, Simone de Beauvoir, Marta Lamas or Foucault, what is proposed is that people who are in positions of decision making and/or who have the capacity to legislate and regulate public policies are informed and updated about what is being published on the matter so that it is reflected in public policies proposals.⁶

Once people have the capacity to legislate and create public policies are well informed on the subject, the next step would be to analyze in a qualitative and quantitative way, which is the perception that Mexico has about gender. Due to the socialization process with respect to gender has been taken in Mexico and the asymmetry that this process has suffered since the creation of the Mexican state, it is possible anticipate that there is a vision of a male subject on a female subject due to the Darwinian concept that takes the genre in which a man is biologically superior to women.

III. Public policies with a gender perspective

Often, although the State has tried to cover the gaps in gender inequality, the Mexican social imaginary still promotes socialization in which men and women have two different levels, not just generic difference levels for the different factors affect each individual, but differences in inequality. Therefore, a proposal to establish a dialogue between the state, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and society itself (it would take the family as the representative of society). Such dialogue would promote a consistent vision on the participation of men and women in society. It would also help eradicate stereotypical visions of gender and therefore public policies need to consider gender equality at every moment. It is noteworthy that we don't understand equality with men and women see them as identical entities. Trying to see it from absolute equality would be a waste of time. What it

⁶ In this connection, a bridge between people and public policymakers and academic scholars could be productive. Several academic institutions in Mexico and UNAM, Colegio de Mexico, Universidad Metropolitana, among others have centers devoted to gender studies that could be helpful and could work with who have to create policies with a gender perspective.

must do is to see the ways we can offset this difference, making a more equitable relationship and interaction.

The issue of gender parity has been discussed widely in industrialized countries. So much in Canada, the United States and the countries of the Western European call, we can see a series of discussions and proposals that have attempted to solve inequalities. These proposals have had different degrees of success. According to the specialized critic the Swedish case has been the most successful. Thus, public policies in Sweden started four decades ago (though they were fully developed in the eighties) have been the model to follow. The Swedes have developed a series of government policies giving all individuals the opportunity to participate equally in schools, workplaces, community and family. This policy was given the name “jamstalldhet”, which in Mexico has been translated as “public policies with gender perspective.” One of the first practices that implemented was to do in the engineering workshops and cooking were mandatory for both sexes, to prevent the typical vision of women in the kitchen and men in the mechanical shops. These policies have contributed significantly to the disappearance of generic stereotypes in Swedish society and other countries that have accepted them.

Obviously, a model of a country cannot copy and try to implement it identically in another. In the case of Mexico, they have tried to implement public policies in a pattern similar to Swedish. These policies known as “public policies with gender perspective” conceived the specific characteristics of men and women to take into account according to its particular situation and according to how they affect its generic function. Within this perspective it takes into account socio-economic rolls that individuals have in society, which will result in a more equitable policy.

1) Proposals on education: socialization

A proposal that can be applied to the Mexican case with regard to public policies with a gender perspective would be the

socialization through education. In agreement with the known American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, education is one of the agents of political socialization, which is given to an individual from an early age, both formal and informal types.⁷ So from childhood if you begin to educate the infant in non-binary terms, or extremists it is possible have a better result. One should talk to children (male or female) in terms less exclusive and traditional for to avoid creating stereotypes such as “the children’s dressed in blue and play with cars” and the girls “dressed in pink, play with dolls and are delicate”. These constructions of gender that have been wanted eradicate because they are seen as polarizing, yet continue to have great influence on Mexican society. Stop polarizing and promote the virtues of the infant in a more global way is proposed here. Thus, the infant will be able to value and experience their environment, which will allow not be a polarization, nor an extreme binary.

This type of socialization models could be implemented through television campaigns to help citizens understand that biological differences between men and women are not more important, especially at a young age when children do not see any generic difference among they. At first glance, this may seem a proposal that goes against the “Mexican tradition” or the Mexican Catholic imagery, which define very drastically the difference among the sexes. However, that “Mexican tradition” is what has contributed to such an unequal situation that exists in Mexico. In fact, everything that does not follow the patriarchal hetero normative model, spends to second or third place. An example of modernizing campaigns can contribute to a substantial change can be observed in campaign that was implemented a few decades to stop the population explosion through family planning. It was initially feared that a campaign to promote birth control (in other words, the use of contraception) would be counterproductive in Mexico because the Catholic religion (which is the majority) do not accept the use of contraceptives. However, the success of the campaign, “the small family lives better,” shows the opposite. After a titanic task,

⁷ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

with a campaign thought well, in which they studied the Mexican values like family and its importance in society, instead of doing a campaign that openly say “use contraceptives to avoid having children,” which be read as an attack on that value so important in Mexico as the family, they decided to say that the family is good, if small, is even better. This campaign succeeded in reducing the population explosion in Mexico and today we are 3.1 children per family in the country.

2) Socialization in the educational classroom

In addition to social campaigns, it would be important to review the textbooks of primary and secondary, in which one learns that history has been written by men; great artists are men, and scholars and scientists are also members of this sex. New methodologies have been developed for the study of history, literature and other disciplines. These new methods show that the reason that men had a greater role in the issue was historical, because males had more opportunities. This new perspective could be added in the textbooks, so students can recognize that women had no access to education, nor the potential to contribute as the man did. This will help create a sense of solidarity between students (male or female), which would help to foster an understanding of gender.

In summary, recognizing the qualities and achievements of great men is important, but it does not forget that women despite the hardships and vicissitudes that have had throughout history, they have achieved to leave footprint. It is not to attempt to put one over the other, but to balance the accomplishments of the individuals so that students have role models of both genders and not only of the “dominant sex”.

3) Socialization outside the classroom

Another public policy with a gender perspective on the process of socialization would be the formation of joint sports teams at primary, secondary and preparatory level. This would allow greater interaction between different participantes and could

appreciate that there are men good in gymnastics and women good in soccer. Not necessarily disappear sports teams that are exclusively for men or women, but to promote diversity in which both men and women have the sports facilities on the same team and interact with them. This would contribute greatly to the disappearance of stereotypes, in which certain sports are seen as exclusively female and other male-only or as members of a genus as strong or as good and another less skilled or weaker.

Beside in sports is extremely important to create public policies with gender perspective in the field of professions. This can be implemented with campaigns to raise awareness to the students since they are in high school, so they do not consider that certain occupations are exclusively for men or women only. The idea of a woman who is to be maintained by a man and that man must be the maximum family support are taboos that must be dismantled. In a secular state such as Mexico, where divorce is an option, it is important to take the letters in the subject and also consider women as potential sources of income in a family, and it is clear that both, a man or a woman, can provide the main income for their home. Today, there are many cases of divorce where women are homeless because they are not prepared, to support his family.

This will not only help create jobs designed for both men and women with salaries that are equivalent and that they have nothing to do with the generic question. Currently, the average salary of women is 30% less than men. This is by the great tradition which the men are the mainstay in the home, but when seeing that society is changing by leaps and bounds, it is necessary to begin to make fundamental changes not only as patches to cover errors. By them it is proposed the project of educational socialization as public policy with a gender perspective.⁸

⁸ See Susan Wendy Parker and Claudia Pederzini. "Gender Differences in Education in Mexico." Working Papers in Education, World Bank, 1999.

4) Gender and language

Another important aspect is that of the language. It's no secret that the Spanish language is sexist, it's no secret that lawmakers and politicians can not change it directly. However, they yes can propose changes and exhort to the regulators of the language so that they continued the linguistic changes. Public policy and campaigns for a more egalitarian language is a seemingly unimportant aspect, however, they can have a significant impact on the tireless way for equity.

There are still people in reference to women of a certain profession say ["she lawyer"] or ["she engineer"] and the rationale is that so specified by the Royal Spanish Language Academy. Another more complicated example is the "poet" and "poetess," today a majority of the women writers of poetry are called to if same poets. Therefore, why not to promote the use of the word "poet" to refer to the poet and the poetess and words as (she) engineer, (she) lawyer, (she) scientific, (she) medical, etc. Feminists in the countries of Hispanic talk are doing a lot of lobbying in order to reduce sexism in language, for that reason it is necessary that regulators and legislators to support this effort. A way to initiate this change is to use this terminology in the processes of development of public policies. In the last years it has tried to use less on the general male form (which argues that it is the neutral) in referring to a group of men and women, on the other hand, the only way we used only the feminine form is if they are only women. If the children are becoming aware of this from an early age, achieve a breakthrough in this field.

5) Gender and literacy

Also within the framework of education comes the question of literacy. Studies show that "the mental processes of encoding and decoding of symbols and meanings are not difficult for themselves as is the answer for the huge number of people who can not develop the skills of reading and writing. It would be more correct to see the literacy as a manifestation of inequitable distribution

of power and resources in society.”⁹ As Stromquist says, illiteracy is a problem that is directly related to the bad distribution of the wealth and opportunities to learn to read and write. For example, most people are illiterate in rural and marginal urban areas. Women are suffering more this problem by the few opportunities open to them.

On the other hand, people who do not speak Spanish as their first language are also victims of this problem. Thus illiteracy does not happen by accident, but something that is typically experienced by people with few resources and marginalized. Those who have no access to the power are typically the victims of this inequality. The women are mostly suffering from this problem by being doubly discriminated against, so much by the socio-economic issue, like by the generic question. Even worse is for Indigenous women who do not speak Spanish, and that therefore they suffer a triple discrimination. To try to solve this endemic problem should be a priority in public policies with gender perspectives.

The researches of the economists and other social scientists show that in recent decades, societies where the women have achieved opportunities majors obtain a level of faster development. The higher education have resulted in fewer children per family, lower mortality rate of infants, marriage at a later age (which reduces the rate of divorce and domestic abuse), better health for sons and daughters and encourages educating them¹⁰. It is very important that literacy programs have a gender perspective, because otherwise we would be repeating the traditional model in which we would have an unequal division in the labor area.¹¹

⁹ Nelly Stromquist. “Women and Illiteracy: The Interplay of Gender Subordination and Poverty.” *Comparative Education Review*. Vol. 34, No. 1, 1990: 95-111.

¹⁰ See Stromquist, 97, Susan Cochrane, *Fertility and Education: What Do We Really Know?* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979.

¹¹ A study by Samora Gaborone, criticizing some policies created by international agencies which offer literacy for men and women equally. In their case study of Botswana realized that literacy programs included courses and workshops on domestic issues, not prepared to women in the workplace, which promoted inequality. Samora Gaborone. “Gender and Literacy: The Case of Botswana. Paper presented at the symposium” Women and Literacy “, Stockholm, Sweden, June 1989.

Besides creating literacy programs for women, or rather, reformulate the literacy programs should also strengthen programs that promote education of women in all levels. Theodore Shultz mentions that there are very few studies devoted to analyzing the consequences of the promotion of women education and women returning to the classroom education¹². Perhaps to foment the study of this problem could help public policies makers to have better arguments to support these campaigns.

Women with higher levels of education would help to end the subordination that exists in Mexico of women towards men. This subordination is not only a social problem, but also politician and economic. Patriarchal models that not describe the woman as a zero to the left, yes define her as individuals who depend of the man and complement him. The idea of women as wives and mothers should stay at home is necessary to redefine and reinterpret it. This does not mean that women are no longer being mothers or wives, but to redefine its role to stop considered subordinate to male subjects. A global education would contribute significantly to the destruction of stereotypes, the control of the women of its sexuality and many other aspects which are colonial and nineteenth-century practices that must be eradicated. For example, the idea of virginity, the criminalization of abortion, female mobility are just some examples that show that even in Mexican society, despite the best efforts of many NGOs, the government itself and some members of civil society, see the women as individual subordinate. One possible solution is to strengthen education in all levels, redefining the role of women and men.

A study of Kathleen Rockhill on Hispanic women in the United States (mostly Mexicans) shows that there were a lot of women do not learn English, not only because in their countries of origin have not had a formal education, but because spouses or partners do not let them learn it. Part of this is because they do not leave them out of the house to take classes¹³. In fact, even

¹² Theodore Shultz. *Return's to Women's Education*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 1989.

¹³ Kathleen Rockhill. "Gender, Language, and the Politics of Literacy." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 8, no. 2 (1987): 7-36.

women who work outside the home, husbands do not allow them to be out of the house within hours of rest (obviously this is the result of a partial survey, although not very far from reality). This shows clearly an example of the subordination of women toward the man and control of husbands over them, many times even though they were the economic livelihood of the household. It is therefore necessary to create policies to change these dynamics, which should help boost equity in the generic question and solve many problems of socio-economic nature also would create a better lifestyle.

The problem with many governmental projects of education for women is that no one thinks of working women, typically is considered only as mothers or potential wife. Also, women need not only education to make them understand and decode the messages imposed by patriarchal society, but also need access to knowledge and opportunities to make suggestions and information necessary for emancipation. NGOs have been a good counterweight in many areas in the patriarchal hegemony that has prevented the full development of certain sectors. Alternative models have been proposed to help women to develop more fully and give you the knowledge and tools to achieve a political agency, which is so necessary for women. (It is also necessary to see women as citizens, not thinking of who are mothers or wives. The men not are measured under the watchful eye of parenthood or marital status). In short, you observe some major changes if the higher education are achieved in society: 1) a better understanding of family dynamics, 2) the creation of effective programs for women in different fields, 3) greater equity within the political, social and professional atmosphere.

IV. In conclusion

In addition to a radical educational change, will have to create other policies that contribute to a new lifestyle fair. An example of a public policy with a gender perspective is to propose that both men and women should have a reasonable time period before or after a maternity or paternity leave. Typically, only given to

the mother this time, however, if given also to the father, it could help the mother in the nurturing process of the newborn. It also would redefine the concept of fatherhood, doing participant to the father in the development of their son(s) and daughter(s). The establishment of nurseries and childcare centers as well as elementary and secondary schools, within strategic areas, would favor much to couples with sons and daughters. Is undeniable that women in the last twenty years have incorporated to the labor force in Mexico, is for that reason that is necessary to create institutions that support working mothers with childcare. The role that was supportive extended family of the support to take care of the grandchildren, nieces and others are being transformed. Therefore, it should create public policies that are adapted to the radical changes in society.

In Mexico there have been important changes in this aspect, for example, until the nineties only men could include his wife unemployed in social security benefits, only she could be like this. Today, working women also may include your spouse unemployed.

New technologies and practices related with them are not going disappear, is more will have transformations that will move away of the traditional models, therefore we can not stand idly by waiting for the changes when we have the pressure, it is important to plan to future. It is necessary to guess what new things will emerge and that public policies are necessary to so Education of society can be a good element to help us to guess and prevent these changes, as well as will help create appropriate public policies. An educated society will contribute to real development that will transform our society positively achieving fairness and balance to ensure development, peace and welfare.

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