



DISCOURSE, SUBJECTIVITY AND THE POLICY REALM:  
RECONCEPTUALISING POLICY WORKERS AS LOCATED  
SUBJECTS

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a radical reconceptualisation of policy workers. It does this by identifying and disrupting the pervasive discourses around the policy realm, policy workers and policy both in the academic literature and amongst a specific group of policy workers, South Australian women who have worked in the policy area of gender and education between 1977 and 2004. Traditionally, understandings of policy workers assume a structure-agency dichotomy: policy workers are either pawns to the bureaucracy or they are agents fighting against it. In either case, policy workers are conceptualised as humanist agents, separate and distinct from the policy realm in which they work. In contrast, this thesis argues for an understanding of policy workers as located subjects, formed through and in the policy realm in which they work. That is, it argues for an understanding of the ways in which discourses around and in the policy realm shape the subjectivities of policy workers. A concern with subjectivity directs attention to the thoughts, ideas and practices of policy workers, how they understand their place and role in the policy realm and how they perform policy work.

The thesis identifies two hegemonic discourses circulating within and around the policy realm – the logic of agency and the logic of rationality. Combined, these logics constitute policy workers as ‘rational agents’: people who believe they *can* (logic of agency) *objectively identify and solve* policy problems (logic of rationality). These discourses affect the ways in which policy workers perform their work, impacting upon substantive policy outcomes. Policy workers, as ‘rational agents’, perform policy work that:

- misses the impact of deeply-held shared values in the conceptualisation of policy problems;
- evaluates policies against their stated objectives instead of recognising their broad and discursive effects on people and social relations; and
- underplays the role of policy language, concepts and concerns in shaping policy goals and outcomes.

The thesis identifies, both in the literature and in practice, the presence of sub-dominant discourses that constitute policy workers as located subjects and policy as discursively constructed. It develops these understandings, arguing that reconceptualising policy workers as located subjects may produce substantially different and more beneficial types of policy practice and outcomes – outcomes that take account of the ways in which policy problems are constructed and the subsequent impacts on people and social relations.

## DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for photocopying and loan.

SIGNED:

DATE: 29-11-06

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# INTRODUCTION

The humanist agent of the Enlightenment takes centre stage in conceptualisations of policy workers,<sup>1</sup> both in the academic literature addressing policy workers, policy and the policy realm<sup>2</sup> and amongst those who practice policy. In both policy theory and practice, policy workers are conceptualised as unitary and rational individuals who arrive at the policy realm with pre-formed notions of selfhood or identity. This thesis attempts to displace or disrupt the privileged position of the humanist agent, calling instead for an understanding of policy workers as located subjects. This perspective insists that how policy workers understand themselves as policy workers and how they undertake their work is shaped by and through the policy realm. They do not arrive at the policy realm as separate agents but are located subjects, formed through the environment in which they work.

It is imperative to disrupt the conceptualisation of policy workers as humanist agents because such a conceptualisation restricts the ways in which policy workers undertake their work. The traditional understanding of policy workers as humanist agents is connected to limited understandings of policy, the policy realm, and policy work. Further, how policy is performed with respect to specific policy areas affects the shape particular policy proposals take. More specifically, conceptualisations of policy workers as humanist agents assume and entail understandings of policy as providing solutions to pre-existing problems and of policy work as a rational process through which pre-existing policy problems are identified and then solved. Such an approach to policy overlooks how policy problems are constructed in the first place, and that such constructions have lived effects on people and social relations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As explained in Chapter 3, the term ‘policy workers’ is used throughout the thesis so as to refer in neutral ways to people who work in government policy areas. These people are variously referred to in the literature as policy implementers, public servants, femocrats, street-level bureaucrats, policy entrepreneurs or policy activists. These other expressions tend to be associated with various theoretical understandings of policy workers either as agential or as pawns to structure, a dichotomy this thesis attempts to avoid (see Chapter 2).

<sup>2</sup> As with the term ‘policy workers’, the use of the term ‘policy realm’ is an attempt to avoid the theoretical connotations of the terms policy cycle or policy process, which are often used in the literature (see Chapters 1 and 3).

<sup>3</sup> Others have identified a range of discursive effects of policies from constituting subjects, differentiating between groups, limiting what can be said and by whom, and lived effects (Bacchi, 1999a, 45; Marginson, 1997, 225; Popkewitz and Lindblad, 2000; Popkewitz, 1998, 1; Ball, 1993, 14) (see also Chapters 1 and 7). As a means of capturing this broad range of the effects of the constructed character of policies the thesis refers to the ‘effects of policies on people and social relations’. Other phrases used within the thesis of relevance here are ‘the constructed and constitutive character of policies’ and ‘policy-as-discourse’, invoked to capture both that policies are shaped by, contain and reflect discourses and that such discourses have

Through disrupting the traditional conceptualisation of policy workers, therefore, the thesis also disrupts traditional modernist understandings of policy and policy work. Understanding policy workers as located subjects challenges the taken-for-granted status of the humanist agent, creating space for academics and practitioners to conceptualise policy and the policy realm in alternative ways, ways that may lead to policy workers performing their work differently. Ultimately, the goal is to encourage postmodern ways of understanding and performing policy and hence for postmodern policy outcomes. In particular, I call for an understanding of policy-as-discourse,<sup>4</sup> that is, an understanding of policy as constructing problems in particular ways that have effects on people and social relations (Bacchi, 1999a).<sup>5</sup> This approach to policy is elaborated in more detail below. If policy workers recognise this creative character of policies, they may undertake policy work of a sort different from that envisaged by the assumption that policy workers are humanist agents. In this new vision policy work would involve reflecting on the ways in which assumptions and presuppositions, or deeply-held values,<sup>6</sup> underpin constructions of policy problems, considering the effects of policy constructions on people and social relations, and hence debating visions for the future. It would involve understanding the role

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effects on people and social relations. In particular, the expression ‘policy-as-discourse’ takes on a particular meaning and usage within the thesis. The hyphenated form is used to distinguish this understanding of policy from Ball’s (1993) conceptualisation of ‘policy as discourse’, a distinction elaborated on in Chapter 2, and as such functions as a noun as well as an adjective.

<sup>4</sup> Policy is a notoriously difficult concept to define. This thesis adopts a broad understanding of government policy in two related ways. First, government is understood as encompassing elected representatives as well as public servants at all levels within the bureaucracy. Second, following Bachrach and Baratz (1963), policy refers to what governments do and do *not* do in relation to any specific area or issue (see also Edelman, 1988, 14). Purported government ‘non-intervention’ is support for the status-quo and hence ‘intervention’ of a sort (Olsen, 1985). Thus, for this thesis, government policy refers to the broad position or stance taken *or not taken* with respect to any issue by government, from official policy documents, to newsletters, discussions, talks, seminars, or how the government or its representatives talk about and act around an issue, to what they do not do, say, talk or think about. Going further than Bachrach and Baratz, as is clear from the text above, this broad government stance is taken to be discourses, ways of understanding, conceptualising, and acting, which have effects.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that the full details of all referenced sources can be found in Section 1 of the Bibliography, except for the interview transcripts, which are listed in Section 2. Section 2 of the Bibliography details the Primary Materials used for this thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Deeply-held values, here and throughout the thesis, are not simply attitudes. That is, they are not something that policy workers can be encouraged to identify and then defend or suppress, as is the case with some values, such as supporting the Republic or a particular political party. Rather, deeply-held values are values we do not immediately recognise, yet they nonetheless shape how we understand and act in the world. They lodge deep within us because of our embeddedness within Western value systems, for example. This thesis suggests that, while it may not be possible for policy workers to identify their deeply-held values and work outside of them, they can be encouraged to reflect upon the likelihood that they do hold values of this sort, which influence how they approach and understand policy problems. This suggestion is a call for reflexivity, discussed later in the thesis.

of language, concerns and concepts<sup>7</sup> in the construction of these policy problems and their effects. Such an approach to policy work would produce very different policy outcomes.

My hope is that this rethinking of policy workers as located subjects will provide space for specific policy workers to be reflexive about their location within the policy realm. Policy workers need to consider the ways in which they make assumptions about the policy realm, policy and about their own roles as policy workers that limit how they approach their policy work, with important repercussions for specific policy outcomes. Further, my hope is that this reflexivity may lead policy workers to think about alternative ways of performing policy, which will lead to progressive, postmodern policy outcomes – policies that take account of the constructed character of policies and the effects that follow, rather than looking to solve some assumed pre-existing problem.

In this thesis, therefore, I argue for a radical reconceptualisation of policy workers, their relationship to the policy realm in which they work, the ways in which they undertake their policy work, and their relationship to specific policies. In other words, I argue for an understanding of the policy realm as constructing policy workers' subjectivities, how they think about themselves and perform as policy workers. The policy workers' subjectivities, therefore, are part and parcel of the way in which they undertake their work and, hence, are implicated in specific policy outcomes.

The above is a broad schematic outline of the argument in this thesis, and the normative agenda of achieving alternative ways of conceptualising and performing policy. The remainder of this introduction serves three purposes. First, through introducing the main concepts used in this thesis, it elaborates upon the specifics of the argument that the policy realm constructs policy workers' subjectivities in ways that set limits on how they undertake their work and hence place parameters on the kinds of policy proposals envisaged and enacted. Second, it highlights two bodies of scholarship, the femocrat and policy-as-discourse literature, with which this thesis critically engages yet ultimately attempts to develop further. Third, it outlines the structure of the thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout this thesis I refer to policy language and concerns or focuses as a way of emphasising that policies extend beyond policy documents to practices. Further, I include the term 'concepts' as a reminder of the way in which discourses circulate around and within policy language and concerns.

## INTRODUCING THE ARGUMENT

The thesis contains a case study based on interviews with South Australian feminist women who have worked in the policy area of gender and education between the years 1977 and 2004. As such, my research originally engaged with the literature on Australian feminist policy workers (femocrats), those people who work within the middle ranks of government to achieve a better situation for women and girls in Australia. In some ways the thesis remains an analysis of femocrats, as elaborated below. Nevertheless, through the interviews with these policy workers it became clear that they made assumptions about the policy realm, policy, and themselves as policy workers, which reflected assumptions in the literature and set limits on how they went about their work. As a result, my research shifted slightly in its orientation, culminating in the current project: identifying and critiquing the hegemonic discourses about policy workers located in the broader literature on policy workers, the policy realm and policy, and amongst those who practice policy.

Drawing on insights from policy-as-discourse theorists who argue that policies are discourses that shape the ways in which we think about and act in the world, which has effects on people and social relations (Bacchi, 1999a; Marginson, 1997; Edelman, 1988; Watts, 1993/94; Yeatman, 1990, 158), the thesis argues for a conceptualisation of the policy realm as discourses.<sup>8</sup> That is, it argues for an understanding of the ways in which the policy realm itself is shaped by discourses that have effects on policy workers and society generally. It identifies two hegemonic discourses about and within the policy realm that create policy workers' subjectivities. I call these discourses the 'logic of agency', an understanding of policy workers as separate and distinct from the policy realm but able to manoeuvre within it, and the 'logic of rationality', a conceptualisation of policy workers as rationally involved in identifying and attempting to solve pre-existing policy problems. Chapter 1 argues that these logics represent different elements of the humanist agent of the Enlightenment and together produce policy workers as 'rational agents'; that is, people who believe they *can* (logic of agency) *identify and solve problems* (the logic of

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<sup>8</sup> The expression 'policy realm as discourses' serves a number of purposes. First, it mirrors the understanding of policy-as-discourse espoused in this thesis. Second, the plural emphasises the multiple and fractured character of discourses circulating around the policy realm. Third, this particular phrasing captures both that the policy realm is constructed by discourses and that it has effects on policy workers, how they do their work, and hence on specific policy outcomes.

rationality). In other words, the internalisation and interiorisation<sup>9</sup> by policy workers of the conceptualisation of the policy realm as rational process performed by rational agential policy workers produces policy workers as such rational agents.

The logics of agency and rationality depict particular types of policy workers, and are connected to and entail particular understandings of policy, the policy realm and policy work. The logic of agency assumes that policy is enacted by policy workers who arrive at the policy realm as pre-formed unitary selves with pre-existing values that are either usurped by the goals of the bureaucracy or achieved against the goals of the bureaucracy by strategically manoeuvring within and around this policy realm. But in neither case do policy workers form some of their values through their location in the policy realm. This logic produces policy workers as agential within, but separate from, the policy realm in which they work. It emphasises, therefore, moments of struggle within the policy realm. Consequently, the logic of agency draws attention away from the shared values and assumptions of policy workers and the broader policy realm in which they work, both with respect to the policy realm generally, such as that it is performed by ‘rational agents’, and with respect to specific policy areas, such as shared assumptions about the existence and nature of specific policy problems.

The logic of rationality assumes that the policy realm is a process through which pre-existing policy problems are identified and then solved by rational policy workers. It produces policy workers as rational people who undertake work directed at the identification and solving of pre-existing policy problems. Policy workers, then, look for better ways to understand this taken-for-granted policy problem, search for data and research that accurately understands this problem, assess policies according to whether they have solved the problem as stated, and in so doing pay insufficient attention to the role of policy language and concerns in shaping policy constructions and to the effects of these constructions. The logic of rationality draws policy workers’ attention away from the discursive character of policies and the effects that follow for people and social relations.

Nevertheless, the thesis also identifies, both in the literature and in the discussions with the policy workers of the case study, two less prevalent discourses within and around the

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout this thesis I borrow the term ‘interiorisation’ from Davies *et al.* (2006) as a way of capturing how the discourses of the policy realm shape who policy workers *are*, how they think about and act in the policy realm.



policy realm that constitute policy workers, respectively, as located subjects and as understanding policy-as-discourse. Within these conceptualisations, policy workers are formed within and are a part of the policy realm in which they work, sharing assumptions about the policy realm and specific policy areas, and they undertake policy work that takes account of the constructed and constitutive character of policies. Despite these sub-dominant discourses appearing, in the literature and in practice, at separate moments, they are related and both represent a challenge to the different elements of the humanist agent. Understanding policy workers as discursively constructed challenges the taken-for-granted character of the rational, agential policy worker, disrupting rational models of policy that assume this rational agent. Space, then, is created for policy workers to perform policy in ways consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse.

These sub-dominant discourses of the policy realm and their assumptions about policy workers and policy are as yet underdeveloped both in the literature and in practice, but nonetheless provide support for a challenge to the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm and the conceptualisation of policy workers as rational agents. With respect to understanding policy workers as located subjects, there is little such understanding in the relevant literatures, despite some insights by femocrats about the ways in which bureaucratic processes became implicated in policy outcomes and by those who theorise the bureaucracy as a normalising process (Chapter 2). In the interviews for this thesis there were very brief moments when the policy workers talked about the policy realm and policy workers affecting each other, particularly with respect to changing the culture of the bureaucracy (Chapter 5). More significantly, the case study itself demonstrates the ways in which the policy workers had internalised and interiorised the logics of agency and rationality and the ways in which this affected their work. Accordingly, the thesis argues for a much deeper understanding of the subject location of policy workers within the policy realm than that currently present within the literature and in practice.

With respect to understanding policy-as-discourse, there is a growing body of literature that espouses this conceptualisation of policy (Bacchi, 1999a; Watts, 1993/94), some of which attempts to incorporate this conceptualisation into an understanding of the policy realm (Ball, 1990, 1993, 1994a; Taylor, 1997, 2004; Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Bessant *et al.*, 2006; Yeatman, 1990). However, these attempts are limited due to an underlying assumption that policy workers are humanist agents. As a result, little attention is paid to

the ways in which policy workers are shaped by the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm. The tendency is to reflect upon how policy workers, as pre-formed individuals, deal with and shape policies (recognised as discursively constructed) instead of acknowledging that policy workers themselves are discursively located (Chapter 1 and 2). This perspective misses the ways in which the conceptualisation of policies as identifying and solving pre-existing problems shapes policy workers' subjectivities, how they understand and perform policy-making processes.

In practice an underdeveloped understanding of policy-as-discourse could occasionally be seen in the ways the policy workers understood values in policy, the significance of language and the discursive character and effect of policies (Chapters 6, 8, and 7 respectively), reflections which indicated some hope for an understanding of policy-as-discourse by policy workers. Again, the purpose of this thesis is to provide grounds for developing this sub-dominant understanding both theoretically and in practice. In this new understanding, policy workers would recognise and reflect upon the ways in which deeply-held shared values underpin how problems are represented in the first place, upon the effects of policies as discursively constructed, shaping understandings of people and social relations, and upon the key role played by language and concerns in constructing policy problems and their effects.

The thesis challenges the conceptualisation of policy workers as humanist agents for two inter-related reasons, one descriptive, and the other normative. First, the conceptualisation of policy workers as rational agents in the academic literature did not ultimately explain all that occurred in practice in the case study.<sup>10</sup> Far from being separate from the policy realm, which is implied in the conceptualisation of policy workers as humanist agents, the policy workers I interviewed had taken on board the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm, and acted as 'rational agents'. The implication is that the policy workers in this thesis were not humanist agents but located subjects: they were formed as policy workers through the discourses of the policy realm. Second, on a normative level, I challenge the conceptualisation of policy workers as rational agents because this understanding shaped the policy workers of this case study in limited ways. It affected how they thought about themselves, as policy workers, and limited the kinds of policy work they undertook in

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<sup>10</sup> This is not a claim to knowing the fixed and unchanging 'truth' about policy workers, but is rather merely the claim that the current theory on policy workers does not fit with my interpretation of policy workers at present. I elaborate this point in Chapters 2 and 3.

regards to specific policy areas, affecting specific policy proposals in these areas. In other words, the logics of agency and rationality produced particular types of policy work, which set limits on specific policy outcomes.

The logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) appeared at two levels in the interviews with the policy workers of this case study – in the ways they spoke about the policy realm *generally*, that is, the relationship between policy workers and the broader bureaucracy, and in the ways they described *specific policy areas* or the making of specific policies. With respect to the *general policy realm*, the logic of agency was more readily identifiable. It led policy workers to understand themselves as coming to the policy realm as unitary, separate individuals with pre-formed identities and often with pre-formed agendas (Part II). Specifically, the emphasis by the policy workers was on the times they strategically fought to achieve their agenda (logic of agency), an agenda they could always rationally identify (revealing the logic of rationality). While there were indeed occasions when the policy workers engaged in such struggle, I argue that there were also times when there were no ‘events’ of conflict because the policy workers reflected shared assumptions about the policy realm generally. That is, I am concerned with the way in which the policy workers of this case study had internalised and interiorised the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm, the logics of agency and rationality. Despite understanding themselves as separate and distinct from the policy realm, the policy workers talked about themselves in ways that assumed they were rational agents, an assumption which ultimately corresponds with the broader bureaucratic conceptualisation of policy workers and policy. Indeed, at times, these logics led policy workers to *perform* rational, agential policy work *with respect to specific policy areas*, looking to identify pre-existing policy problems and fighting to solve these (Part III). Far from being separate from the policy realm, then, these policy workers had internalised the major discourses of the policy realm, which affected the ways in which they undertook their work with respect to specific policy areas. My hope in identifying this assumption of the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) with respect to the policy realm generally is that room will be created for policy workers to become more reflexive about their location within this realm. That is, they will reflect upon their location as subjects who inadvertently accept the norms of rational agency and who perform these norms in ways that limit the kinds of specific policy outcomes they envisage. With this perspective, policy workers may look for other ways of performing policy.

As indicated above, then, the logic of agency was also reflected in how the policy workers approached *specific policies*. So too was the logic of rationality, but this is addressed below. In this instance the logic of agency led policy workers to conceptualise themselves as working for their own agenda with respect to specific policy areas irrespective of the agenda of the bureaucracy. Again, such a conceptualisation successfully drew attention to what was struggled over in the policy realm but it missed what went unaddressed or unchallenged. It eschewed the way in which at times the policy workers' agenda with respect to specific policy areas *corresponded* with that of the broader goals of the bureaucracy. It also drew the policy workers' attention away from the constructed and constitutive character of policies, an aspect of policies that reflects and shapes ingrained assumptions and presuppositions rather than easily identified and defended values that are struggled over.

The policy workers also internalised and interiorised the logic of rationality with respect to specific policy areas, assuming that there were pre-existing problems in the world that needed to be solved. Thus, combined, the logics of agency and rationality led policy workers to undertake policy work directed at identifying and fighting to solve policy problems, which were conceptualised as pre-existing. They understood themselves as owning and shaping specific policy concerns, as attempting to identify and understand accurately pre-existing policy problems, as fighting to solve these in ways consistent with their agenda, and as evaluating policies according to their stated objectives. Such an approach to policy work pays only marginal attention to policy language and concerns, the assumptions behind these, and their effects. Again, this sense of themselves as rational agents drew the policy workers' attention away from the discursive character of policies and the effects this produces on people and social relations.

Consequently, contrary to the commonsense valuing of rationality and agency, the thesis challenges these characteristics or ways of being as taken-for-granted desirable modes of behaviour, highlighting that they are discursive frameworks that set boundaries around what can be achieved in terms of policy outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Identifying the presence and consequences of the logics of agency and rationality within and around the policy realm

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<sup>11</sup> Feminists have long rejected rationality for its links with masculinity (see Lloyd, 1984). See Gatens (1998b) for a more recent rejection of the 'rational actor' in the context of institutional design theory. She identifies its gender-neutral assumptions, which obscures the sexed character of rationality. This insight could be a starting point for future research on the relationship between the logics of agency and rationality and constructions of gender in institutional settings.

disrupts their hegemonic status, creating space for policy workers to perform policy work that is consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse.

The suggestion in the thesis, then, is that policy workers need to become aware of their location within the policy realm generally, challenging the assumption of the humanist agent. To address this locatedness, policy workers need to become reflexive about their internalisation and interiorisation of the logics of agency and rationality with respect to the policy realm generally. This type of reflexivity would lead to recognition of the operation of the logics of agency and rationality within specific policy areas. These logics around the policy realm produce policy work, with respect to specific policy areas, that reflects rational agency. Becoming aware of the presence of the logics in specific policy areas may lead policy workers to look for alternative ways of performing policy. That is, understanding themselves as located subjects may lead to policy workers understanding policy-as-discourse.

The thesis offers three proposals as a first attempt at envisaging new and reflexive ways of doing policy, which are developed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 respectively. First, policy workers need to become reflexive about, or aware of, deep-seated values that affect how they understand policy ‘problems’ in specific policy areas.<sup>12</sup> Being aware of *holding* their own values does not imply an ability to work outside of those values, which is not possible, but may lead policy workers to seek to broaden the value base of their decision-making by engaging in deep consultation with people who hold different assumptions about the policy area in question.<sup>13</sup> The suggestion here is not that such consultation would help get closer to the truth, or closer to understanding the policy problem more accurately, as some understandings of consultation suggest, but that it would create a space within which different voices could discuss different visions of the future. Second, policy workers would reflect upon the discursive effects of policies. Rather than simply evaluating policies against the stated goals of that policy or according to the intentional actions of ‘policy

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<sup>12</sup> In this instance I am calling for policy workers to be reflexive with respect to a particular policy area rather than with respect to the policy realm as a whole. Ultimately, as is clear from the discussion above, if policy workers are reflexive with respect to the way the policy realm shapes them as rational agents, then they may perform the three proposals offered here, including being reflexive with respect to specific policy areas.

<sup>13</sup> This conceptualisation of deep consultation draws on Young’s notion of ‘deep democracy’ as entailing communication between groups in ‘situated positions’ (Young, 2000, 5-7) (see Chapter 6).

implementers', such as teachers,<sup>14</sup> being aware of the discursive effects of policies involves paying attention to the kinds of future the policies will create, who and what is seen as the problem, and which subjectivities are created in which people. Third, and relatedly, policy workers need to pay more attention to the way in which policy terminology and focuses create policy problems in particular ways. The argument in brief is that, if policy workers become reflexive about their internalisation and interiorisation of the logics of rationality and agency, space will open for these alternative ways of doing policy. In turn, policy work of this sort may lead to more progressive policy proposals and outcomes, a point developed later in the introduction.

While the case study of this thesis involves a specific group of policy workers – those who think of themselves as feminist 'activists' strategically fighting within the bureaucracy to achieve their agenda – the way in which these policy workers made assumptions common to the traditional literature on policy reflects the hegemonic nature of these assumptions and the need to challenge them. This case study of specific workers in a specific policy area, I argue, provides broad insights into the discursive character of the policy realm in general.<sup>15</sup>

## THE THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE ARGUMENT

The thesis engages with a number of different bodies of literature that either explicitly address policy workers, such as the scholarship on policy implementation, street-level bureaucrats, policy entrepreneurs, femocrats, bureaucrats, and social movements and government (Chapter 2), or that implicitly make assumptions about policy workers, such as the scholarship on policy and the policy realm (Chapter 1). It identifies and critiques the assumptions and presuppositions about policy workers, policy and the policy realm in those literatures. Two primary bodies of work, the femocrat literature and the policy-as-

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<sup>14</sup> As elaborated below and in Chapter 3, this particular case study is of the gender and education policy area and hence teachers appear in the interviews as those who 'use' policies in school settings (see Chapter 7).

<sup>15</sup> I am aware here that in critiquing the grand narrative of the humanist agent, it may appear that I am making a claim for a grand narrative of the postmodern subject. However, to be clear, I am not arguing for a true understanding of policy workers, but for my interpretation of policy workers. I return to this notion of offering an interpretation in Chapter 3. Further, my primary concern is critiquing the *effects* of the assumption of the humanist agent on policy work and hence on policy outcomes. Also, in Chapter 1, I make clear that this thesis is not a defence of postmodernism and all its tenets, but nonetheless accepts some of its insights.

discourse literature, require some comment at this stage in order to understand the overall intention of further developing this scholarship. The former needs a little less explanation than the latter.

While the femocrat literature is addressed explicitly only in Chapter 2, it is important to understand that the policy workers in the case study were feminist policy workers, or femocrats by common definition. They understood themselves as fighting for a better situation for girls and women in education. Further, much of what they said about their agential strategic work, which appears in Chapters 4 and 5, reflects the emphasis in the femocrat literature on strategy. Hence, the thesis offers a more nuanced approach to femocrats, and indeed to the literature on feminists working in organisations generally, rather than a broad sweeping rejection of what has gone before. Much has been written about the Australian femocrat experience (Eisenstein, 1996; Sawer, 1990; Yeatman, 1990; Watson, 1990; Hancock, 1999; Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989; Blackmore, 1995; Kenway, 1990). Other feminists have written about organisations and the difficulties faced by feminists working within them (Burton, 1991; Cockburn, 1991), offering insights that could be applied to the experience of working in bureaucratic organisations. However, both these literatures tend to focus on the external barriers and constraints experienced by feminists in attempting to achieve change. They identify ‘male’ organisational structures (Burton, 1991), the hierarchical bureaucracy (Eisenstein, 1996), and the resistance against feminist agendas (Cockburn, 1991) as *external* barriers – that is, external to the women themselves – that have constrained the achievement of change within organisations, including bureaucracies. While these factors are important, this thesis considers what it is about the policy workers themselves that precludes or makes difficult the kinds of deeply progressive change feminists desire (Brown, 1995). I argue that feminist policy workers, despite their self-conceptualisation as ‘activists’ within bureaucracies, internalise pervasive assumptions about policy workers, the policy realm, and policy that in the end limit the kinds of specific policy outcomes they can envisage. Importantly, while the lens is turned on the policy workers’ assumptions and beliefs, the purpose is not to locate blame or responsibility in individual policy workers, but to draw attention to the broader context, to the pervasive discourses of the policy realm that produce policy workers in particular ways.

The second body of literature that I am attempting to take further is the policy-as-discourse literature. This literature requires slightly more explanation. Policy literature has been categorised and characterised in a number of ways. For example, Dudley and Vidovich (1995) divide the traditional literature into three categories: the rational comprehensive model, the politically rational model, and the public choice model. Colebatch (2006) divides the literature into groups that espouse either an authorised choice, structured interaction, or a social construction perspective (see also Gill and Colebatch, 2006). Yeatman (1998b, 16-17) divides approaches to policy into those that understand policy as ‘decisionistic’ and executive-driven, and those that understand policy as a process where numerous participants are seen as policy makers. There are, no doubt, numerous other ways of dividing the policy literature.<sup>16</sup> However, for this thesis, the salient distinction in the policy literature is the one made by Bacchi (1999a, 21) between those who understand policy as ‘problem solution’ and those who understand policy as ‘problem representation’. My reference to a ‘rational approach to policy’ and a ‘policy-as-discourse’ approach parallels Bacchi’s distinction but broadens the focus to the entire policy realm rather than simply substantive policies, which are Bacchi’s concern. Bacchi’s point is that much of the traditional literature on policy assumes that there are pre-existing problems in the world to which policies offer solutions, whether this be through a systematic policy cycle (comprehensive rationalists, authorised choice and executive driven)<sup>17</sup> or through political struggle and compromises (politically rational, structured interaction, policy process). This she calls the ‘problem solution’ approach and I label the ‘rational approach to policy’. It is based on the positivist assumption that we can understand the world outside of the ways in which it is talked about and conceived of. In contrast, the problem representation approach or, using my terminology, the policy-as-discourse understanding of policy, sees policy solutions as embodying particular representations of the problem. This perspective contends ‘that every postulated “solution” has built into it a particular representation of what the problem is, and it is these representations, and their implications, we need to discuss’ (Bacchi, 1999a, 21). As such, ‘the objects of study are no longer “problems” but problematizations’ (Bacchi, 1999a, 2). This approach does not deny that there are

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<sup>16</sup> Other ways of categorising the policy literature, and some of the ways described above, are addressed in Chapters 1 and 2 with the specific goal of highlighting the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm and policy workers in the literature. At present, the purpose is to identify the main approach to policy espoused in this thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Of course, these different labels entail different theoretical claims. Nevertheless, others have addressed these differences, as indicated above, and the purpose here is to indicate where these groups fit within my understanding of the literature.



conditions in the world that have material effects on people's lives. What it is suggesting is that the way we talk about these conditions creates them as problems of a particular sort: policies create problems in particular ways. For example, to talk about 'youth unemployment' makes all sorts of assumptions about the category youth and what unemployment is (Wyn and White, 1997; Bessant, 1997). Or, to talk about the 'inequality' of 'girls' is to ignore the 'advantage' of 'boys' (Eveline, 1994). Some of the ways in which the gender and education policy area has constructed the problem of gender and education is addressed in Chapter 3. As Bacchi (1999a) suggests, it is crucial to understand the ways in which policies represent problems because ultimately these representations will set limits on what can be achieved and hence have far reaching effects on people and social relations. This thesis makes the next important step in this thinking – identifying what stands in the way of policy workers being able to identify the role and impact of problem representations in practice. Here it identifies as a key limiting factor in this task, the hegemonic understanding in the policy realm of policy workers as humanist rational agents. The hypothesis is that if policy workers can come to understand the ways in which policies construct 'problems', they have a better chance of developing policies that produce a better world for girls and boys. To move forward in the policy field, then, it is essential to disrupt the hegemony of the humanist agent and to reconceptualise policy workers as located subjects.

A word of explanation is required here on what it means to suggest, as I have done already on a number of occasions, that an understanding of policy-as-discourse in practice will produce more progressive policy outcomes or a better world for girls and boys. What is 'progressive' or 'better' is, of course, a subjective question influenced by one's judgements, assumptions, presuppositions, beliefs and values. And I do not shy away from holding my own particular views about gender and education, based on a desire to create multiple identities for both girls and boys. The observation that we all hold particular values and beliefs is hardly an original point. However, importantly here, the policy-as-discourse approach espoused in this thesis shifts the focus in the evaluation of policies to the broad discursive effects policies have on people and social relations. Policy representations both shape material decisions including questions of funding, the provision of services, issues of eligibility, and constitute subjects and social relations including what can be said and by whom, how people are categorised, excluded and silenced, and what goes unaddressed (Bacchi, 1999a, 10). The emphasis on the broad discursive effects of

policies draws attention to what futures they create. A policy-as-discourse approach, then, shifts debate from that between competing interest groups about accurate problem descriptions and solutions to debate about competing social visions (Bacchi, 1999a, 62-63). If feminist policy workers can take account of such broad discursive effects of policies, policies that produce better futures for girls and boys will be possible. Nevertheless, the thesis does not itself engage in discussions of specific substantive policies but rather makes the claim that such analysis, in this case by policy workers, needs to take account of the discursively constructed character of policies and the effects that follow from such constructions. Including this perspective within the policy realm will create the opportunity for competing social visions to be debated.

With a number of theorists (Ball, 1990, 1993, 1994a; Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Taylor, 1997, 2004 and Bessant *et al.*, 2006) I call for an understanding of the policy realm that takes account of policy-as-discourse. However, I insist that attempts to incorporate an understanding of policy-as-discourse into a conceptualisation of the policy realm must take account of the operation of the logics of agency and rationality in rendering difficult such an understanding of policy in practice. Other policy-as-discourse theorists fall short of this task, even assuming the logic of agency and rationality and thus ultimately limiting policy work and policy outcomes through reinforcing these hegemonic discourses (see Chapters 1 and 2). These theorists fail to apply their insights regarding discourses, with respect to policy, to policy workers and the policy realm itself. They fail to recognise the operation of constitutive discourses (of agency and of rationality) within the policy realm itself, discourses that shape the ways in which policy workers approach their tasks. In my view, it is crucial to identify these constitutive discourses and how they operate to restrict policy workers as a first step to progressive policy outcomes. A sustained challenge to the logics of rationality and agency will lead to a more developed understanding of policy-as-discourse. In turn, such an understanding may create space for the performance of policy work consistent with a policy-as-discourse approach, which recognises that policies construct problems in particular ways. That is, it renders possible policy work that demonstrates an awareness of:

- the role of deeply-held shared values and social visions in the conceptualisation of policy problems;
- the ways in which particular policy constructions have broad discursive effects on people and social relations; and

- the role that policy language, concerns and concepts play in constituting understandings of problems and their effects.

Indeed, none of the policy-as-discourse literature to date has undertaken a discourse analysis of policy workers' experiences, what assumptions and presuppositions underpin their understandings of policy, the policy realm and policy workers, and how this affects both their understandings of themselves and their work.<sup>18</sup> This is the task undertaken in this thesis. It is theoretically grounded through a broad range of scholarship arising out of a number of different disciplines, including policy studies, feminist poststructuralism, and social construction theory. Such a multi-disciplinary approach, as will become apparent in Chapter 1, provides insights into the discourses around and within the policy realm that would be difficult to discern in an approach that worked within the confines of traditional disciplinary divides.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part I introduces the theoretical basis of the argument and highlights the original contribution it makes to the literature, and in the process discursively analyses the academic literature on policy, the policy realm and policy workers. It also introduces the case study that grounds my analysis. Chapter 1 serves two

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<sup>18</sup> The organization theorists A. Linstead and Thomas (2002, 6) apply 'theories of language, subjectivity and social processes' to deconstruct the ways in which middle managers' construct their gendered identities. Further Pullen and S. Linstead's (2005a) collection offers a study of identity and organisations and espouses an understanding of 'identity as a process rather than product – a process which involves societal factors, psychological factors, interaction, reflection, practice and performance' (Pullen and S. Linstead, 2005b, 3). However, the focus in these works is on gender identity and management, or social identity and organisations, while my focus is on policy workers' subjectivities as policy workers. Hunter (2003, 332) notes that studies on social policy and identity have tended to focus on the recipients or 'users' of social policy while the conceptualisation of policy-makers remains implicit. She calls for a much-needed examination of the 'identities' of policy-makers (Hunter, 2003, 324, 332) within 'dominant policy discourse' (2003, 332). However, ultimately Hunter's concern is with the ways in which 'welfare professionals' or 'health and welfare practitioners' are not just deliverers of services but policy-makers (2003, 333). Furthermore, her concern with identity, like the authors above, is centred around issues of 'social identity' such as race, gender, sexuality, and so on. By contrast, the emphasis here is on the discourses around those people often conceptualised as policy-makers, identifying the ways in which these discourses shape the subjectivities of policy workers *as policy workers* and the limitations for policy work and policy outcomes. While, as noted in Chapter 1, other subject positions of the policy workers are important, it is also important to bring to light the logics of agency and rationality that shape policy workers *as policy workers*. Humes and Bryce (2003, 185) have accepted a need for *policy researchers* to be aware of the discourses implicit in research practices, but take for granted the 'practical world of policy-making' which requires *policy researchers* to be pragmatic if they are to foster relationships with *policy-makers*. In contrast, I argue that the 'practical world of policy-making' needs to be disrupted.

purposes. First, it elaborates the theoretical basis of the argument that conceptualisations of the policy realm construct policy workers' subjectivities, with effects on policy work and hence on specific policy proposals. Through pursuing this first purpose, it achieves its second purpose of identifying and elaborating the assumptions about policy workers that underpin the literature on the *policy realm and policy*.

Chapter 2 argues that the conceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects is a completely new way of understanding policy workers. It addresses a number of bodies of literature on *policy workers* and argues that, despite their differences, they all conceptualise the policy worker as separate and distinct from the policy realm – either as pawns to that realm or as activists fighting against it. Only the policy-as-discourse literature calls for an understanding of both structure and agency in the policy realm, but does not elaborate on how this occurs. The thesis takes off from this starting point, but turns its attention to how the notions of structure and agency construct the policy workers in particular ways, which has effects for policy work and specific policy outcomes. It argues that both the concepts of structure and agency are present within the policy realm because they both reflect and reinforce the discourses of the humanist rational agent.

Chapter 3 introduces the policy workers who were interviewed for the case study and elaborates the methodological approach I have taken to these interviews. It also provides a brief overview of the context in which these policy workers were working and of the changes in policy focus that occurred during the period in which they worked. This overview provides some background to Parts II and III of the thesis, which offer a close analysis of the interviews.

Part II of the thesis is directed at demonstrating the operation of the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) with respect to the general policy realm within the interviewed policy workers. The two chapters in Part II combine to argue that the policy workers understood themselves and performed as separate and distinct from the policy realm in which they worked. At the same time they saw themselves as manoeuvring within this realm to achieve their agendas. Chapter 4 draws attention to the fundamental background assumption that the policy realm was a hierarchical structure imposing external constraints on the policy workers. Nevertheless, as argued in Chapter 5, ultimately the policy workers conceptualised themselves as manoeuvring around and managing this hierarchical

bureaucratic realm, a realm they saw as separate from themselves, in order to achieve strategically their feminist agendas. In other words, the policy workers conceptualised themselves as humanist agents who are separate from but fighting against the policy realm. Importantly, however, I identify brief moments in the interviews where the policy workers understood themselves as intricately connected to and situated within the policy realm. These moments, I argue, need to be developed further in order to create space to think about policy workers as located subjects within the policy realm, as formed by and through the discourses of that realm. As argued above, such a conceptualisation of policy workers disrupts the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm creating the possibility of alternative ways of performing policy, which is the theme in Part III.

Part III turns to the way in which the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) shaped how the policy workers thought about and approached specific policy areas. In particular, it addresses how the policy workers conceptualised policy as solving pre-existing problems, and the policy realm as being about accurately identifying and solving problems. The hegemony of the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) could be seen in the policy workers' conceptualisation of values, policy effects and policy language, concerns, and concepts which led policy workers to undertake policy work directed at the identification and solving of pre-existing policy problems. Their understandings of policy values, effects and language are captured respectively in the three chapters that form Part III. In each of these chapters I argue that there was a hegemonic discourse of the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) that shaped the ways in which the policy workers understood themselves and hence their work with respect to specific policy areas. However, I also identify a sub-dominant understanding of policy-as-discourse that creates space to envisage alternative ways of doing policy.

Chapter 6 illustrates the operation of the logic of rationality in the ways that the policy workers understood and approached values in policy. While they explicitly rejected any notion of value-neutral policy, they tended to assume implicitly that pre-existing problems existed in the world outside of the way they were talked and thought about, suggesting a degree of value-neutrality in the construction of policy problems. Ignoring the ingrained values in policy tended to produce policy work directed at discovering the 'truth' about a policy issue rather than recognising how an issue is constructed in particular ways in the first place. Nevertheless, there were moments in the interviews when values were

acknowledged. Such moments, I argue, create space for policy work that takes account of the ways in which deeply-held values are reflected in how policy problems are thought about in the first place. The goal here is to draw attention to inbuilt values in policy constructions and the ways in which such values are commonly neglected. In this account policy workers need to become aware of the possibility that their own values and assumptions about specific policy areas are implicated in particular policy outcomes.

Chapter 7 directs attention to the ways in which the logic of rationality shaped the policy workers' conceptualisations around the effects of policy. In general the policy workers understood and approached policy effects in terms of their measurable, practical outcomes, which could be assessed against the stated objectives of policy proposals. Alternatively, policy consequences were understood in terms of the purposive practices of teachers. Both understandings directed the emphasis away from the broader discursive effects of policies, the ways in which policies shape social relations, exclude, categorise and silence some people, and leave some issues unaddressed. Nevertheless, there was a sub-dominant, but underdeveloped, understanding of the discursive effects of policies. In this less prevalent understanding of the broader effects of policy, space is created for recognising the need to analyse policies in terms of their discursive effects.

Chapter 8 focuses on the ways in which the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) led to an underestimation by the policy workers of the impact of policy language, focuses, and ideas. Policy language was conceptualised as either descriptively capturing reality or as superficial, something around which one could manoeuvre, or as capturing meanings that aligned in some straightforward way with particular articulated interests. Again, however, there were moments when the policy workers did turn their attention to the broader discursive effects of policy language and focuses. This sub-dominant understanding of the discursive consequences of policy words and focuses paves the way for envisaging new ways of performing policy, through paying attention to the discursive effects of policies and the futures they create for people and social relations.

In the policy realm of the case study, therefore, there was a sub-dominant understanding of policy-as-discourse. These passing insights create space for alternative ways of understanding and performing policy around policy values, effects, and language and

focuses. The thesis takes a tentative step towards further developing these alternative ways of conceptualising and practising policy work.

The primary purpose of this thesis, then, is to identify and disrupt the hegemonic discourses that shape the thinking and actions of policy workers. I call these discourses the logic of agency and the logic of rationality and trace how these logics act together to produce the 'rational agential policy worker'. These logics circulate in the academic literature on policy, the policy realm, and policy workers. They also, importantly, circulate around and within the policy realm itself and within policy workers, underpinning the performance in practice of rational agential policy work. That is, these discourses produce policy workers as humanist agents who attempt to identify accurately pre-existing policy problems and who fight to solve these problems according to their agendas. Humanist agents, I argue, do not turn sufficient attention to shared assumptions and presuppositions with the broader bureaucracy, both with respect to the policy realm generally and with respect to particular understandings of specific policy areas. Further, they undertake policy work that:

- conceptualises values in the policy realm as always readily identifiable and either as easily put aside or as purposively defended;
- evaluates policies against their stated objectives or according to the purposive practices of teachers; and
- conceives of policy language and focuses as describing reality, as superficial, and hence to be manoeuvred around, or as aligning in some straightforward way with particular articulated interests.

Such work leads to limited specific policy proposals. Identifying and disrupting these discourses locates the constitution of the subjectivities of policy workers within the policy realm and is the first step towards policy workers performing their work differently, which will create significant and progressive shifts in policy outcomes. While it could be said that the thesis is more critical than practical since its primary goal is to critique the hegemonic discourses that shape the policy realm and policy workers, there is also a reconstructive subtext. That is, it attempts to imagine alternative ways of understanding and doing policy work that are consistent with a policy-as-discourse approach. The goal is to achieve in practice a conceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects and of policy as

discursively constructed. It is imagined that such an understanding would produce policy work that:

- takes account of deeply-held shared values and social visions in the construction of policy problems;
- evaluates policies according to their broad discursive effects on people and social relations; and
- understands the full impact of policy language, concerns and concepts in shaping policy proposals and outcomes.

These ideas appear at times both in the academic policy literature and in the interviews, but they remain underdeveloped and hence marginal in impact. Since the ways in which policy workers understand themselves and their work has a direct effect on the shape of policies, a fully developed understanding of their subject positioning within the policy realm and of policy-as-discourse promises to produce important shifts in policy outcomes.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly, the proposals in this thesis may provoke discomfort (indeed they provoke discomfort for me), because the hegemonic ways of understanding policy workers, policy and the policy realm are so ingrained that it is difficult and hence confronting to think in alternative ways. This conventional characterisation seems like so much commonsense that it is difficult to think about policy workers differently. The suggestion that policy could be done differently than by rational agents who identify and then fight to solve policy problems is innovative and confronting. Nevertheless, I believe it is in these moments of discomfort that ingrained understandings of the world are being challenged and brought to light. Thus, I persist in this thesis to offer a complex and new way of understanding policy workers in the hope that it will be the beginning of a shift in the ways in which policy is understood and performed. In this sense this thesis is both grand and small in its purpose. While ultimately it envisages a radical reshaping of the policy realm, policy work and policy, it sees the small task of drawing attention to how these concepts are currently thought about as the first step towards this radical change. Before new ways of performing policy can occur we need to understand the ways in which the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm construct policy workers' subjectivities as rational and agential so as to disrupt their taken-for-granted character.

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<sup>19</sup> The phrase 'subject positioning' refers to a subject's location within specific discourses (Davies, 1994).



## **PART I**

### **POLICY THEORY: THE POLICY REALM, POLICY AND POLICY WORKERS**

# CHAPTER 1

## THE POLICY REALM AS DISCOURSES: CREATING SUBJECTIVITIES – POLICY WORKERS AS RATIONAL AGENTS

### INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the theoretical premises that underpin the thesis. The principal contention is that the policy realm is discursively constructed and constitutive, and hence shapes the subjectivities of policy workers as rational and agential, with significant effects for the policy work they perform. This contention rests on a postmodern conceptualisation of the world and how we understand and act in it. Of course, postmodernism can be characterised in many different ways. For my purposes it is a means of highlighting the way in which the world and people within it are constituted in various ways, depending on place, time and location, with lived material consequences. This particular understanding is expanded upon in this chapter through a discussion of some key terms: discourses, constructions, reality, power and subjectivities. With respect to the policy realm, this chapter argues that there are two hegemonic discourses that circulate within and about this realm – the logic of rationality and the logic of agency – and that construct it and policy workers in particular ways. In the process, this chapter engages with the assumptions and presuppositions about policy, the policy realm and policy workers in the literature on *policy* and *the policy realm*, leaving the literature directly addressing *policy workers* for Chapter 2. These discourses present in the policy literature also circulated in the understandings put forward by those policy workers I interviewed, which will become evident in the close analysis of these interviews in Parts II and III.

The first section of this chapter expands upon the contention that the policy realm is discursively constructed. It elaborates the claim that the policy realm is understood and acted in within an understanding shaped by hegemonic discourses. The concept of

discourse is introduced and the significance of understanding discourse as constructed – real but not fixed – and multiple is explained.

The second section of this chapter identifies three main approaches to policy and the policy realm: authorised choice, structured interaction, and policy-as-discourse. It then considers how the logic of rationality and the logic of agency appear in these approaches to policy. These logics, I explain, form the humanist agent assumed in the Enlightenment project. As a *rational agent*, the humanist person is someone who believes they can objectively understand and hence control the world. This section also suggests that while at present the policy-as-discourse approach assumes the logics of agency and rationality, it also provides some insight into how the policy realm and policy work could be conceived of differently.

The third section of this chapter explores the significance of identifying the logics of agency and rationality. It makes the case that discourses shape subjectivities with material, lived effects. Thus, these logics suggest both policy work that is directed at uncovering and solving pre-existing problems in the world and policy workers who are rational agents, separate from the policy realm in which they work. Policy workers are rational agents in the policy realm in the sense that they undertake policy work directed towards accurately understanding the ‘facts’ about problems in the world and strategically pursuing (their) solutions to these problems. Put bluntly, policy workers believe they can solve problems. As we shall see later in the thesis, in pursuing policy work directed at strategically attaching their solutions to pre-existing problems, the policy workers interviewed tended inadvertently to adopt the policy goals of the education department and/or government even when they understood themselves as activists strategically working against these wider policy goals. This internalisation and interiorisation of the goals of the broader bureaucracy brings into question the common conceptualisation of policy workers as separate and distinct agents working within and around bureaucratic structures.

The fourth section of the chapter asserts that the conceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects is more likely to achieve progressive changes in policy directions. This way of achieving change breaks with the language of constraint and agency commonly adopted by advocates for change, and which reflects the assumption of the structure-agency dichotomy. It insists that change can be achieved through recognising the discursive character of the policy realm and identifying the hegemonic discourses of this

realm. Such a recognition disrupts the hegemony of these discourses, creating space for a degree of reflexivity on the part of policy workers: if policy workers can become aware of their subject positioning as rational agents within the policy realm, they can contemplate other ways of doing policy that may allow for a deeper challenge to the substantive policy goals of the government.

### THE POLICY REALM AS DISCOURSES

The main focus of the thesis is policy workers and the policy realm, rather than substantive policies. As a result, I talk about the ‘policy realm’ rather than about the policy-making involved in a particular substantive policy. However, conceptualisations of policy-making and substantive policies are linked to how the policy realm is understood and performed, and vice versa. Other theorists tend to slip between talking about the policy process (what I term the policy realm)<sup>1</sup> and policy-making without making the connection explicit (Ball, 1990; Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Bessant, *et al.*, 2006). Understanding the way in which the policy realm creates policy workers’ subjectivities allows for this link to be made overt because policy workers, with particular subjectivities, are involved in making substantive policies. For example, if we understand the policy realm as a rational process of problem solving (Bridgman and Davis, 2004), then questions about how the policy problem is constructed in the first place are not asked (Bacchi, 1999a), debates about values or ethics do not occur (Bessant *et al.*, 2006), and the constitutive character of policies is not addressed (Bacchi, 1999a). This, in turn, affects the substantive policy ‘solutions’ offered. If we understand the policy realm as involving competing interests (Dalton *et al.*, 1996; Bessant *et al.*, 2006), then policy-making involves ethical debates among a broad range of participants about the substantive issues (Bessant *et al.*, 2006). However, once more, this approach may not address the discursive effects of policies, again affecting specific policies. Similarly, if we understand policy-as-discourse (Ball, 1993, 1994a; Taylor, 1997, 2004; Taylor *et al.*, 1997), policy as problem representation (Bacchi, 1999a), or policy as metaphor and talk (Bessant *et al.*, 2006), then policy-making involves discussions about meanings and the discursive effects of substantive policies, again affecting the content of policies. The point is that the way in which the policy realm is conceptualised constructs the way in which policy workers understand themselves and their work, which, in turn,

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<sup>1</sup> As I explain in more detail in Chapter 3, I prefer the term ‘policy realm’ so as to avoid the theoretical attachments held by terms such as ‘policy cycle’ and ‘policy process’.

affects specific policy proposals. In other words, the discourses of the policy realm and the subjectivities these discourses create and reflect are *implicated in* specific substantive policy outcomes. As indicated in the Introduction to the thesis, and elaborated below, the present discourses around the policy realm produce limited policy proposals, proposals that arise out of policy work that fails to take account of how policy problems are represented in the first place and the consequences that follow. More progressive policy outcomes can be achieved through identifying these policy constructions and their effects and debating the futures they create.<sup>2</sup>

Here, the insight by some policy-as-discourse theorists (Bacchi, 1999a; Ball, 1993, 1994a; Taylor, 1997, Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Watts, 1993/94; Marginson, 1997; Bessant *et al.*, 2006) that policy is discursively constructed is extended to a conceptualisation of the ‘policy realm as discourses’. This phrase captures the ways in which the policy realm is shaped by and reflects discourses, which has effects on policy workers and policy work. The term discourses refers to the frameworks<sup>3</sup> through which the world is understood and hence acted within. Accordingly, the discourses around the policy realm are formed by and replicated in the assumptions about and practices around policy, policy processes, policy workers, and policy work. The academic literature, the routines and procedures of specific policy realms, and the subjectivities, the understandings and performances (policy work), of policy workers all overlap and shape and reflect the discourses around and in the policy realm.<sup>4</sup> Discourses, in other words, are practices, words and ideas that create that which

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<sup>2</sup> The call for more progressive substantive policies is not a call for policies that *accurately* address policy ‘problems’, but ones that work towards creating the kinds of future I envision. For example, with respect to the specific substantive policy area of gender and education I do not want policies that solve the ‘problem’ of girls’ and boys’ education but policies that create the world vision I hold of boys and girls as interconnected and of both girls and boys being able to move between multiple masculinities and femininities. While my visions for the future may not be achieved, room to achieve such social visions is created by understanding the constructed and constitutive character of policies (Bacchi, 1999a, 62).

<sup>3</sup> Note, however, that the term ‘framework’ here has a different meaning to that in framework theory (see, for example, Benford and Snow, 2000). In this thesis, framework refers to deeply-held assumptions and presumptions about the world rather than the strategic shaping of policy proposals. See discussion in Chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup> All of these sites of the discourses around the policy realm contribute to the subjectivities, the understandings and performances, of the policy workers. Disrupting the discourses of the policy realm entails disrupting all of these instances of the discourses around the policy realm, though the emphasis in this thesis is on disrupting the subjectivities of the policy workers and, hence, their performance of their work. For heuristic purposes, the routines and procedures of specific policy realms are listed separately from the work of the policy workers even though these are both part of the discourses around the policy realm. The purpose is to emphasise the argument in this thesis that while *at present* there are routines and procedures (as discourses) that shape what policy workers do (which themselves need to be disrupted and replaced) the work practices of policy workers extend beyond these routines and procedures. Their work practices encompass the routines and procedures that they see as externally imposed on them (time constraints, directions from above) and what they see themselves as ‘choosing’ to do (such as strategically manoeuvring around the

they speak (Kenway *et al.*, 1994, 189; Bacchi, 1999a, 40; Marginson, 1997; Watts, 1993/94; Yeatman, 1990, 158; Burr, 2003, 64). Hence, how we understand, talk about and act in the policy realm are connected:

People's underlying assumptions about the way policy is made are powerful influences on how they go about making it. ... while ideas based on democratic participation result in highly consultative policy processes, recent governments drawing on public choice ideas see this type of process as one of capture by interest groups. (Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 106)

Similarly, Colebatch (2002) argues that the concept of policy itself needs to be explored because it 'reflects particular values' and is 'mobilised' in particular ways by various participants in the policy field (Colebatch, 2002, 20). My hope is that the conceptualisation of the policy realm as discourses elaborated in this thesis will produce policy work that recognises policy-as-discourse. How policy and the policy realm are understood also affects who policy workers are: '[t]he "bureaucratic" actor who practices social engineering in Sweden is a different bureaucratic "actor" in the current "problem-solving" context' (Popkewitz, 1996, 33). Below, I argue that there are two discourses in the policy realm – the logic of rationality and the logic of agency – that create policy workers as rational agents.

Importantly, discourses are constructions (Bacchi, 1999a, 43; Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 268-271). They take their meaning from and exist within particular social, cultural and historical contexts (Burr, 2003). To understand the policy realm as discourses, then, is to contend that the policy realm is shaped and configured in specific ways that could be otherwise (Colebatch, 2005, 21, Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 106-107). That is, the policy realm functions in the way it does because of the social, cultural and historical context in which it is located at present. As Dalton *et al.* observe:

... policy processes are not always the same; they vary over time, across different sectors, and with different governments. There may be conflicts about the way policy should be developed, so that not only the substantive

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policy realm), *as well as* what they take for granted (looking for the 'real' problem, assessing policies according to their stated objectives). Importantly, all of these work practices, and the discourses of the logics of agency and rationality they reflect, are interiorised by the policy workers in ways that perpetuate this work.

content of policies but also the process of developing policy may be contested. (Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 106)

Indeed, Colebatch notes that the dominant understanding of policy as the rational pursuit of known goals is ‘a quite recent reformist discourse, to which there are alternatives’ (Colebatch, 2005, 21). This understanding of the constructed nature of the policy realm fits with the wider insight by some authors that the state itself has been discursively constructed (Pringle and Watson, 1992, 54).

To argue that the policy realm is constructed is not to reject its existence. Rather, while the policy realm is extant, it is not fixed. This position of accepting the current reality of the policy realm and policy workers but rejecting its absolute necessity or ‘foreverness’ is made possible through postmodern insights about the real. Following Ball and Tamboukou, the real is extant but not ‘an originary force’ (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003, 10). Reality is understood here as the result, as what is constituted by a particular context, location, and time, ‘an effect of the interweaving of certain historical and cultural practices’ (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003, 10). Because reality is constructed in space and time it may be different in other locations or alter over time, allowing for an *at present* reality of the policy realm, but one that can change (Burr, 2003, 101)<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, Shore and Wright (1997, 17) call for an ‘anthropology of the present’ that identifies the ‘historical contingency and inventedness of our taken-for-granted *present*’ (emphasis added). This thesis argues that the *at present*<sup>6</sup> reality of the policy realm is that it is performed by rational agents but that this could be otherwise: policy workers could be reflexive, reflective, and critical located subjects. There is nothing intrinsic to the policy realm that necessitates it always being enacted by rational agents, but this is nevertheless the particular way (or ways) it is done now. The reader may well ask – why advocate for anything other than a rational agential policy worker? Indeed, it is hard to imagine any other type of policy worker. However, this almost intuitive acceptance of the rational agent and the discomfort provoked by the challenge to it merely serves to reinforce the argument about the hegemonic nature of the logics of rationality and agency. Further, as indicated

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<sup>5</sup> See Burr (2003, 88-103) for different approaches to the real within social constructionism. She concludes her discussion by suggesting a disruption of the way that the ‘reality-construction contrast pole’ gets mapped onto the ‘reality-falsity’ or ‘reality-illusion’ ‘contrast poles’. I follow Burr here in suggesting that just because something is constructed does not mean it is false.

<sup>6</sup> ‘At present’ here covers, at least, the 30-year period of the case study. This is not to suggest that there have been no changes to policy and policy work during this period but that the hegemonic discourses around the policy realm have nonetheless prevailed.

above, these logics are implicated in specific substantive policies. It follows that disrupting the rational agential policy worker will create space for more progressive substantive policies. The goal here is not to criticise policy workers for assuming a rational agential status, but to indicate the difficulties and challenges that accompany the embedded, taken-for-granted nature of this understanding of personhood.

Discourses can and do change (Kenway *et al.*, 1994, 189). They are multiple and fractured. Within the policy realm, sub-dominant discourses about policy workers as located subjects and about understanding policy-as-discourse circulate alongside the hegemonic discourses of the logics of agency and rationality. These alternative ways of understanding policy workers and policy are *at present* underdeveloped and hence have little impact upon policy work. Nevertheless, they indicate other ways of doing policy that are not necessarily attached to the logics of agency and rationality. Hence, a major goal in the thesis is to develop further these alternative understandings. Furthermore, and importantly, policy workers are not just located in discourses about the policy worker; they are also people with different gender, sexual, ethnic, cultural, and ability backgrounds, which will also affect their subjectivities (Yeatman, 1990, 164; Hunter, 2003, 333). These other subjectivities are not explored further in the thesis. The project here is to understand the subject position of the policy worker as policy worker. People are positioned in multiple ways and this thesis addresses one of the multiple positionings of policy workers. The goal is to explore the impact of a particular subject position: that of the rational agent. Nevertheless, an understanding of multiple discourses, captured in the plural of the phrase ‘policy realm as discourses’, allows for the rejection of any conflation of discourse with structure and the deterministic implications that follow from this. This conflation of structure and discourse is discussed in reference to some of Ball’s (2000, viii) work in Chapter 2. The multiplicity of discourses is pursued in this thesis, as indicated above, through the sub-dominant discourses around the policy realm.

Of course, the policy realm may be done differently *at present* in different locations and contexts, though, as noted in Chapters 2 and 3, the logics of rationality and agency seem to have prevailed over an extended period in a changing policy context. While these logics are not fixed, they are also not transient. A modified version of Gramsci’s (1971) notion of hegemony captures this consistency in the way in which different people understand the policy realm across a long period of time. Hegemony here refers to the internalised and



commonsense nature of beliefs about the world (Gagné and McGaughey, 2002, 819).<sup>7</sup> With respect to the policy realm, it is hard to think in ways outside the view that policy is performed by rational agents, rendering this view hegemonic. This difficulty in thinking otherwise is captured by the uncomfortableness, in myself as well as in others, of challenging the conceptualisation of the rational agential policy worker.

The idea of blending Foucault's notion of discourse with Gramsci's idea of hegemony may seem counter-intuitive. Foucault's description of dominant and sub-dominant discourses perhaps sounds less all-encompassing than hegemonic and captures the idea elaborated on above that discourses are multiple and contradictory. In the end, though, hegemony best reflects the commonsense nature of the logics of rationality and agency such that even those who are aware of or who explicitly articulate other discourses are still implicitly caught in these logics, as we shall see below in the discussion of the policy-as-discourse theorists (and in the discussion of the policy workers themselves in Parts II and III of the thesis). Further, the use of hegemonic here does not preclude multiple and fractured discourses, emphasising the unquestioning acceptance of ideas rather than the coherency of these ideas. Indeed, this thesis identifies the presence of sub-dominant discourses of the policy realm, policy and policy workers in the literature and in practice. Further, it refers to dominant discourses circulating around specific policy areas.

The significance of recognising the *at present* reality of the policy realm is that it has lived effects. Indeed, constructions are real in the sense that they can have material effects in the world (Butler, 1993, xi). Following Bacchi, the focus on discourses is not concerned with the sources of discourses, but with their effects (Bacchi, 1999a, 44). These discursive effects include constituting subjects, differentiating between groups, limiting what can be said and by whom, and lived effects (Bacchi, 1999a, 45; Marginson, 1997, 225; Popkewitz and Lindblad, 2000; Popkewitz, 1998, 1; Ball, 1993, 14). The primary concern in this thesis is the way in which the discourses of the policy realm constitute subjectivities, though these other discursive effects are identified with respect to specific substantive policies in discussions of understandings of policy-as-discourse throughout the thesis. The focus overall, then, is on how the discourses of the logic of rationality and the logic of

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<sup>7</sup> See Bocoock (1986, 17-19) for an argument that central to the Gramscian Marxist concept of hegemony is a 'coherent viewpoint' or moral and philosophical perspective of the world. However, adopted here is a modified notion of hegemony that emphasises peoples' acceptance of ideas, rather than the coherency of these ideas. Gagné and McGaughey (2002) appear to take this approach, as does Connell (2002) when discussing conceptualisations of hegemonic masculinity.

agency have lived effects, shaping who policy workers are and how policy is done. Drawing on Butler's (1999) notion of gender performativity, I understand policy workers as *performing* rational, agential policy not because they freely and consciously choose to do so, but because it makes sense to act in this way: the policy workers hold a rational, agential subjectivity. As I argue in a later section, these logics suggest a practice of policy that involves research and data collection and associated attempts to understand problems accurately, as well as strategic, opportunistic work. In all these ways policy workers *perform* as rational agents.

Once we understand the policy realm as discourses, we can consider the precise ways in which it is constructed. This question is addressed in the next section where it is argued that in the policy literature the policy realm is constructed through the logics of rationality and agency. This policy literature influences how policy workers think about and understand the policy realm and hence forms part of the discourses which shape that realm, an insight elaborated on in Chapter 2. Parts II and III of the thesis argue that these logics were also present in the policy realm of this case study.

## **UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE POLICY REALM: THE LOGIC OF RATIONALITY AND THE LOGIC OF AGENCY**

We saw in the Introduction to the thesis that the literature on policy and the policy realm can be categorised in a number of ways. However, to assist in elaborating the logics of agency and rationality, I draw here on Colebatch's (2006) distinction between authorised choice, structured interaction, and social construction approaches to policy and the policy realm.<sup>8</sup> The first two categories respectively capture the logics of rationality and agency well. The third category, social construction, parallels what I call the policy-as-discourse approach (see below). The current policy-as-discourse literature still assumes the logics of agency and rationality. However, I contend that it is this approach that offers some

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<sup>8</sup> Colebatch's categories correspond with Bessant *et al.*'s (2006, 259-265) distinction between the elite model and pluralist approaches to policy and their own emphasis on talk, metaphor, and discourse. However, significantly, Bessant *et al.* fit into both the structured interaction and the social construction approach. This is further evidence of my argument below that some attempts to incorporate understandings of discourse, or policy-as-discourse, in conceptualisations of the policy realm do not fundamentally change conceptualisations of this realm. Rather, the focus is shifted from struggles over competing interests to struggles over preferred meanings, leaving the logic of agency unchallenged. While these theorists wish to understand policy-as-discourse, they fail to understand the policy realm as discourses.

potential for moving outside of these logics and hence offers alternative ways of understanding the policy realm and of performing policy. Accordingly, this section concludes by offering Bacchi's (1999a) policy as problem representation model as an example of a policy-as-discourse approach that provides new ways of understanding policy workers and of doing policy work.

### **Authorised Choice and the Logic of Rationality**

The dominant understanding in the policy realm literature is what Colebatch (2006) terms the authorised choice model of policy. Here the policy realm is very much about policy from above: those with authority, or the elite, make policy. Policy workers fill two roles: either they provide policy analysis prior to the policy decisions of the elite, or they implement these policy decisions after they have been made (Gill and Colebatch, 2006, 238). Only the elite are true *policy-makers* (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 260).

In the Australian context, the influential Bridgman and Davis (2004) book, *Australian Policy Handbook*, is a good example of this traditional approach to policy. It espouses a policy cycle model in which there are set stages to policy-making, including problem identification, analysis, finding solutions, implementation and evaluation. Bessant *et al.* (2006, 260) observe that this model of policy-making 'is quite likely to be held by the policy-making bureaucrats themselves, and may not be inaccurate'. Indeed, Edwards (2001), once a policy worker herself, adopts a modified version of the policy cycle in the theoretical parts of her book (see Chapter 2). The policy workers in my case study also, at times, tended to invoke this traditional model of policy. Interestingly, the Bridgman and Davis book 'derives from a manual of instructions written in the cabinet secretariat for the guidance of officials' (Gill and Colebatch, 2006, 240). As such, it can be understood as an attempt by central agency to retain control over policy-making.

The authorised choice model of policy is a rational approach to policy. It assumes that policies are responses to pre-existing problems. Dalton *et al.* suggest that the rational model of policy was developed 'in the US in a social ethos in which all things were viewed as possible and within human control' (Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 16). The policy cycle involves a straightforward process of identifying problems, deciding on solutions, and implementing them. This process is seen as value-neutral. It rests on the assumption that the policy

decision-maker will act in society's best interest, as though this best interest can be known objectively (Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 17).

Some who write in this tradition are more aware than others of what it misses. For instance, while Edwards (2001, ix) adopts a modified version of the policy cycle, she acknowledges her values. Nevertheless, ultimately there is a real sense in Edwards' work of an uncritical acceptance of the framing of the problems that form the subject matter of her case studies. Indeed, Edwards tends to hold out her four case studies as serving the goal of social justice. Yet one of these case studies looks at the introduction by the Hawke Labor government of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)<sup>9</sup>, which has not gone uncriticised by others with a concern for social justice (Marginson, 1997; Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 316-334). Edwards avoids any discussion of available critique, claiming instead that HECS is 'one of the most successful policy formulations in Australia because it is both radical and enduring' (Edwards 2001, 97). There is a foreclosure here on any discussion about the appropriateness of HECS. Rather, the focus is on the process of how HECS was achieved. Edwards' (2001, 2-3) inference is that good policy is policy that achieves its aims (see also Bridgman and Davis, 2004, 2). By way of contrast, it can be argued that 'good' policy should be assessed against subjective values about desired futures. Edward's focus on successful *process* reflects the commitment of the authorised choice model to procedural, value-free policy-making. Within this model the policy worker with values becomes subsumed in the policy realm (or, here, policy cycle). Edwards' uncritical acceptance of the policies in her case studies is inextricably linked to her understanding of the policy realm as a rational process. Here, Edwards, or the policy worker, internalises the rational discourse of the policy realm at the expense of possible critique of substantive policies, demonstrating the deeply embedded nature of the rational discourse.

The rejection in the authorised choice model of the conceptualisation of a policy worker who holds values assumes what I describe as the logic of rationality. This term captures the view that policy workers can objectively identify and solve policy problems outside of the ways in which they understand the world. Under this approach, the role of policy workers is to provide impartial and objective advice (Bridgman and Davis, 2004, 48), or to

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<sup>9</sup> HECS abolished free higher education, which was introduced in 1974 by the Whitlam Labor government. The Whitlam government's premise for free education was that education was a public good and thus should be supported by the state. The introduction of HECS was premised on a 'user pays' principle and entailed students paying a contribution to the cost of their education, payment which was not due until they completed their degree and started earning over a certain income (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 316-318).

implement neutrally policy decisions handed down from above, again demonstrating the assumption of a policy worker capable of acting outside of their own values. The logic of rationality is based on a positivist understanding of the world: it assumes that policy problems exist outside of the way we talk about and understand them, and that policies aim to solve these pre-existing problems. The logic of rationality also assumes and creates a particular type of personhood. With respect to the policy realm, this logic assumes policy workers who can objectively know the world; they are rational and hence can identify these pre-existing problems in the world.

The logic of rationality reflects and creates a particular way of doing policy. We shall see this in more detail in Part III where I identify the ways in which the logic of rationality appeared in the interviews conducted for the case study. It is enough here to point to what this logic suggests about policy work. Above, I argued that the focus in the rational model on the policy process prevents any discussion of values or ethics. It also prevents discussions about meanings and language. Relatedly, evaluation in this process considers only certain types of effects of policies, particularly those that are measurable. Consistent with such an approach to policy, the policy workers in the case study performed as rational beings. They concerned themselves with searching for ‘more sophisticated’ and ‘accurate’ understandings of the policy problems, with research and data collection, with evaluating policies against the stated goals of the policy and in terms of effectiveness, and with maintaining their agenda irrespective of language. There is little space in the logic of rationality for policy work that acknowledges values in specific policy areas, that considers the discursive effects of policies, or that understands how policy language, ideas and focuses construct policy problems in particular ways. Yet, such policy work would enable more critical and progressive substantive policies, policies that take account of their constructed and constitutive character. It is precisely because the logic of rationality creates a rational subjectivity in policy workers that they perform policy in limited ways, which in turn leads to limited substantive policies. Important alternative policy options are not even conceived of because how the ‘problem’ in a particular policy area is constructed, and the effects that follow, are not addressed.

### **Structured Interaction and the Logic of Agency**

The second understanding of policy in the traditional literature is what Colebatch (2006) calls the structured interaction approach. This understanding of policy does not deny the

role of the elite in the policy realm, but nonetheless wants to emphasise that there are many more participants in the policy realm, including academics, the media, social movement groups, unions and religious groups (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 261). Policy-making here is about contestation and struggle between competing interests, within and outside of government. Hence, policy workers, as one of these competing interest groups, play a central role in policy-making. Dalton *et al.* (1996) and Bessant *et al.* (2006) adopt this approach to policy analysis.

In the structured interaction approach to policy, values (of many social actors) play a central role in the policy realm. The acknowledgment of values can be seen in Bessant *et al.*'s call for ethical analysis and debate (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, ch6). However, the sense here is that policy workers have easily identifiable and consciously held values or beliefs that they argue for and defend within the policy realm. These easily identifiable values or beliefs are understood as formed prior to or outside of the policy realm. This sense of policy workers coming to the policy realm with preconceived interests can be seen in Bessant *et al.*'s discussion of agenda-setting:

The idea of agenda-setting invites us to see policy-making as a process involving groups and individuals who talk over issues, argue and struggle with each other to decide whose interests will be heard and served by politicians and state bureaucrats. (Bessant, *et al.*, 2006, 271)

This sense of prior consciously-held interests does not allow for the ways in which values and beliefs can be formed within the policy realm. It also misses the ways in which values and beliefs can be so ingrained that they do not seem like values at all. For example, adapting Edelman (1988, 13-14), people who in the past saw girls and boys as naturally different and unequal did not identify this perspective as a value, but merely adopted this assumption in ways that shaped how they understood and approached the situation of girls and boys in education. The point is that dominant discourses around substantive policies become naturalised and internalised by many (sometimes all) participants in the policy realm, including policy workers, such that there may not be struggle over these understandings. At times, then, some dominant discourses around specific policy areas do not get discussed at all. In calling for ethical debates, and hence implying that policy workers can step outside of their values and rationally discuss them, the structured interaction approach misses the silences in substantive policy debates created by ingrained values promoted by dominant discourses. Again, the point here is not to criticise policy

workers for uncritically making assumptions regarding specific policy areas, something we all do, but to identify the discourses about and operating in the policy realm, such as the logics of agency and rationality, that render difficult reflexivity with respect to the assumptions associated with and promoted by the dominant discourses circulating around specific policy areas.

The structured interaction approach assumes what I describe as the logic of agency. This term captures the idea that people can always readily identify and defend their values, and that these values are formed separately from the discourses in which people exist. Crucially, this logic also assumes that policy workers are able to exert influence in the policy realm and shape specific policy concerns, as long as they are clear about their beliefs. It is, of course, the case that policy workers do sometimes articulate values and sometimes successfully defend these values or make compromises around these values in specific policy areas. However, I argue that the logic of agency blurs the way in which policy workers sometimes take on board the broad policy objectives of the government without reflecting on how these policy goals limit the way the issue is understood and framed, and hence restricts policy outcomes. The structured interaction approach, therefore, also assumes the logic of rationality because its focus on struggles over competing interests leaves unchallenged the ways in which policy problems are understood in the first place and the effects that accompany specific problem constructions. The link between the two logics is elaborated further below. The concern here is with the ways in which the logic of agency obscures the role played by the deeply-held non-articulated values of policy workers.

As with the logic of rationality, the logic of agency assumes a particular type of policy worker: an agential one. As Popkewitz notes, 'power is deployed through multiple capillaries that produce and constitute the "self" as an agent of change' (Popkewitz, 1996, 29). That is, the logic of agency presumes a policy worker with interests and goals that are formed separately from the policy environment but that they fight for and defend within the policy realm so as to achieve the kinds of policy outcomes that align with these interests. As indicated above, this understanding of consciously-held values misses the way in which deep-seated understandings of the world may not be so readily identifiable, but still inform policy debates, or the lack thereof. More specifically, deeply-held values inform how the policy 'problem' is represented in the first place. Furthermore, the logic of

agency creates policy workers as separate from the policy realm, obscuring their locatedness within this realm and hence their deeply-held values shared with this realm.

The logic of agency is evident in Edwards' (2001) account of being a policy worker. There is an impression in her book of policy workers directing the policy environment. She talks about having the 'responsibility to have a major say over such a complex policy issue' (Edwards, 2001, 74); about policy advisers recognising political opportunities (Edwards, 2001, 54); about strategically conducting behind the scenes (behind the relevant committee) technical discussions based on research (Edwards, 2001, 154); about using 'careful strategy' to get people on higher levels to take 'ownership' of a particular approach (Edwards, 2001, 154); and about policy workers as policy entrepreneurs (Edwards, 2001, 188). Edwards also offers a list of interventions lower-level bureaucrats can make in order to have an influence, such as using the power of data to their advantage, being up-to-date with current research, being clear on policy objectives and invoking lateral thinking to solving problems and obtaining agreement (Edwards, 2001, 189). One is left with the impression that in order to have an influence a bureaucrat needs to be a particular type of person: willing to work at all hours, dedicated to the job, fast-thinking, flexible, up-to-date, and astute about the political process and politics. Paradoxically, Edwards captures this sense of agency despite her theoretical adoption of the rational approach to policy that emphasises the policy-making role of the elite at the expense of lower level bureaucrats. The uncritical acceptance of the logic of agency, and the logic of rationality, explains the tension here. I return to the operation of these logics in Edwards' work in Chapter 2.

The policy workers interviewed for this thesis also internalised the logic of agency and its conceptualisation of policy workers as agential, as could be seen in their talk about strategically manoeuvring around the bureaucratic structures of the policy realm to achieve their feminist agendas by being 'clever', 'sassy', 'mavericks' and entrepreneurial (see Part II). The concept of an agential policy worker creates policy work of a particular sort, as can be seen in the use of the language of constraint and agency. This logic suggests an overall structure, the bureaucracy, distinct from the policy worker but one against which the policy worker nonetheless struggles. The understanding is that policy workers manoeuvre within *externally imposed* bureaucratic constraints. At times, the policy workers in the case study of this thesis explicitly described their experiences using this language of constraint



(Chapter 4). There was also an understanding of policy work as directed at fighting for and defending the policy workers' feminist interests (Chapter 5). The understanding of policy as performed by independent and individual agents fighting *against* the bureaucracy produced fast, strategic policy work. Such policy work draws attention away from the shared assumptions policy workers hold with the bureaucracy as a whole, both with respect to the policy realm generally and with respect to specific policy areas. It also works against the creation of adequate time for policy workers to reflect upon holding these shared values and assumptions. In addition and importantly, the logic of agency, and the strategic agential policy worker it creates, draws attention away from the implications of the constructed and constitutive character of policies.

### **Policy-as-Discourse and the Policy Realm as Discourses**

As noted in the Introduction to the thesis there is a growing focus in the policy literature on an understanding of policy-as-discourse. Colebatch refers to this third understanding of the policy realm in the policy literature as social construction (Colebatch, 2006).<sup>10</sup> A policy-as-discourse approach to policy challenges the traditional conceptualisation of policy as responding to and attempting to solve pre-existing problems in the world. Rather, this approach emphasises that policy proposals contain within them particular representations of the problem, representations that have a range of significant effects (Bacchi, 1999a). However, some theorists who want to take account of the constructed and constitutive character of policies tend to slip back into a competing interests understanding of policy when theorising how policy is actually made (Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Taylor, 1997, 2004; Bessant *et al.*, 2006. See also Colebatch, 2005). These theorists differ from those in the structured interaction approach only so far as they want to highlight that various groups and individuals struggle over and debate *meanings* as well as *interests*. In effect, then, these authors slip from a policy-as-discourse understanding of *policy* to a structured interaction understanding of *policy-making* or of the *policy realm*. A good example here is how, despite Bessant *et al.*'s (2006) welcome emphasis throughout on the constructed character of *policies*, these authors divide approaches to *policy-making* into two categories

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<sup>10</sup> Colebatch (2005) adopts a particular understanding of social construction that emphasises intentional meaning-making. As a point of contrast, the concern in this thesis is not with the *who* question of meaning-making, but with the question of *how* policies and the policy realm are constructed and constitutive. Of course, such an emphasis is entirely consistent with many understandings of social construction (Burr, 2003). Nevertheless, I prefer to describe this understanding as a policy-as-discourse approach because the thesis is primarily concerned with the importance of identifying the discursive character of both discrete policies and of the policy realm.

– the elite model and the pluralist approach to policy (2006, 259-265) – which correspond to Colebatch’s authorised choice and structured interaction approaches, neglecting the role of discourses within the policy realm itself. Bessant *et al.* (2006, 249-272) emphasise the role of metaphors and ‘policy talk’ in policy-making but locate this in policy communities or policy networks who *use* discourses to serve their own interests (see especially Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 271; see also Colebatch, 2005). The idea of individuals within policy networks or communities *intentionally* constructing policy talk presumes the humanist political subject, an understanding of policy workers this thesis sets out to contest. The sense of agents *using* discourses can be seen, too, in policy-as-discourse theory that talks about the ‘politics of discourse’ (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 43) and in framework theory that talks about ‘reality construction work’ (Benford & Snow, 2000, 625), as will be seen in more detail in Chapter 2. Thus, some of this policy-as-discourse literature assumes the logic of agency, sometimes unabashedly (see Ball, 1994a, 4).<sup>11</sup>

The policy-as-discourse literature can also assume the logic of rationality. At times, this is explicit, such as when authors themselves ‘own up to a modernist commitment to the idea of “the real” and to the constraints of the material context’ (Ball, 1994a, 4)<sup>12</sup>. At other times it can be seen in the way they talk about ‘flawed’ assumptions behind particular issues (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 121, 109, 134) or about policies misdiagnosing the problem (Gill, 2005); or about policies needing to address ‘the basic causes’ of problems (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 127); or when they make a distinction between actual deficiencies and ‘presumed deficiencies’ (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 134); or when they describe policies as successful because they are based on a ‘sound analysis of the problems’ (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 134); or when they suggest that ‘myths’ about issues need to be exploded (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 136); or when they talk about ‘more sophisticated explanations’ of issues behind particular

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<sup>11</sup> Ball’s understanding of ‘policy as discourse’ is pursued in more detail in Chapter 2. The important point here is that he explicitly embraces the notion of agency for policy workers. More recently, Ball (2006, 3) has identified himself as an ethnographer and ethnography as privileging ‘the agency and meanings of actors’. However, it is important to observe that Ball also notes that his work has invoked a Foucauldian ontology. While he describes these two approaches as difficult to reconcile, he points to his and Tamboukou’s (Tamboukou and Ball, 2003) efforts to highlight connections, ‘possibilities and openings’, between the two methodological approaches (Ball, 2006, 3). I return to these themes in Chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> There are some tensions in Ball’s work around notions of discourse, poststructuralism, and the real, as is apparent from the above footnote. In the quote above Ball describes his commitment to the modernist notion of the real, which is opposed to the postmodern understanding of the real – as extant but not fixed – discussed in the previous section. Yet, elsewhere, as discussed, Ball talks about understanding the real not as an originatory force (Tamboukou and Ball, 2003, 10). The point here is not to pigeonhole Ball into some theoretical category but to understand the different ways discourse can be understood and the implications of these different understandings. Indeed, as indicated, Ball (2006, 3) identifies himself as invoking both Foucauldian and ethnographic ontologies.

policies compared to other (less sophisticated) understandings (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 137). Thus, while Taylor *et al.* (1997, 132, original emphasis) refer to the ways in which ‘policy issues have been *framed* or conceptualised’ and that there are different interpretations of causes of problems that serve different interests, some interpretations and conceptualisations are understood as closer to a clear or accurate understanding than others. Further, they suggest that while ‘we never reach the ideal situation – it always remains an aspiration. Research and better ways of conceptualising the issues in policy are developing all the time’ (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 171). This is the logic of rationality.<sup>13</sup>

In such an understanding, the consequence of an ‘inaccurate’ construction of a policy issue is that ‘the resultant policy is likely to be ineffective’ (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 52), revealing the assumption that there is actually a real problem to be solved. Such an approach misses the creative and constitutive character of policies: if one understands the discursive consequences of policy constructions as creating subjects and social relations in particular ways, the consequences of a policy are more than mere ineffectiveness. Taylor *et al.* do, in passing, refer to the constitutive effects of policies (1997, 52-53). However, their approach to policy analysis (1997, 26-53) makes a distinction between how policies construct issues and ‘an adequate understanding of the issues itself’ and suggests that the consequences of a policy should be assessed in terms of the ‘effectiveness of the policy’ against the adequate understanding of the problem rather than on the policy’s own terms (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 52). Assessing policies according to effectiveness, whether this is against one’s preferred construction of the problem or not, does not adequately take account of the broad discursive effects of policies. Though these authors acknowledge the constructed character of policies they do not adequately theorise the discursive effects of such constructions.

Even though some policy-as-discourse theorists slip into assuming the logics of agency and rationality, an understanding of policy-as-discourse can escape the confines of these logics (unlike the authorised choice and structured interaction models of policy). Bacchi’s (1999a) ‘What’s the problem (represented to be)?’ approach to policy is a good example of the policy-as-discourse approach I invoke in this thesis. Bacchi argues that, rather than understanding policies as solving pre-existing problems, policies create problems in particular ways because they contain problem representations (Bacchi, 1999a). She rejects

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<sup>13</sup> The appearance of the logic of rationality in authors who are otherwise attuned to the discursively constructed character of policies only attests to its strength in our culture. Indeed, at times, the logic of rationality appears in my own work (Gill, 2005).

the positivist assumption that problems exist in the world outside of the way we talk about and represent them. Critically, this position does not imply that particular conditions do not adversely affect people. Rather, it makes the claim that these conditions in the world cannot be understood outside of the way we talk (and act) about them. In effect the fact-value distinction is put in abeyance. Accordingly, we cannot so much 'solve' problems as change the way they are understood. This stance involves a rejection of the logic of rationality. Further, Bacchi is more interested in the '*effects*' of discourses than in their '*sources*' (Bacchi, 1999a, 43-44, original emphasis), shifting the question from the *who* of meaning-making and construction to the *how* of problem representations and their effects. Such a move involves a challenge to the logic of agency. The *how* question of discourses creates space for understanding the way in which policy workers occupy particular subject positions; that is, it allows an understanding of the policy realm as discourses and as peopled by located subjects.

The discovery of locatedness leads to a call for reflexivity among policy workers, as I suggest at several places in the thesis. Accordingly, it is important to be reflexive about my own assumptions and presuppositions. I, in concert with those authors critiqued above, believe that some education policies are better than others and procure more in terms of outcomes for girls and boys (Gill, 2004, 2005). However, this view is *my opinion* rather than truth. Furthermore, I hold this belief, not because I understand particular policies as closer to solving the problem, but because I hope they will produce a gender order more aligned with my ideals.<sup>14</sup> This is a crucial difference. It is one thing to say that a policy moves us closer to understanding a problem and quite another to make the point that a specific policy will, in my view, advance my particular social vision. Only the former position presumes the existence of a problem outside of the policy 'addressing' it. The latter position sees policies as constitutive. It moves the debate from understanding the causes of a 'problem' to discussions about the discursive effects of policies, and whether these effects fit with particular social/political visions. The point is that we have different visions of how the world should be. These competing visions need to be debated and contested (Bacchi, 1999a, 62). Importantly, there remains room for political action here but it is action at a different level. Instead of endorsing specific policy agendas we are impelled to bring our attention to how policies construct problems in particular ways.

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<sup>14</sup> As I noted in footnote 13, I have not always been aware of this distinction between supporting a particular policy because of the discursive effects I think it is likely to produce and supporting a policy because I think it accurately identifies and solves a pre-existing problem (see Gill, 2005).

It is clear, then, that the policy-as-discourse approach that emphasises the role of problem representations leads to an understanding of the policy realm as discourses and hence to a view of policy workers as located subjects. It also implies the need to focus attention on the ways in which this locatedness produces policy work, and hence policies, of a particular kind. It becomes imperative, then, for policy workers to reflect upon their location within the policy realm generally. Such reflexivity with respect to the policy realm generally may lead to particular kinds of policy work with respect to specific policies, policy work that takes account of the constructed and constitutive character of policies. Such policy work would demonstrate an awareness of the role of the embedded character of values, of the broad discursive effects of policies, and of the role of language, concerns and concepts in the construction of policy problems and subsequent effects.

In the policy realm of the case study there was not just one consistent practice of policy and hence one type of policy worker. The picture was more complex. As we shall see in Parts II and III there was a hegemonic understanding of policy as rational and as a result of competing interests and of policy workers as rational agents. Nevertheless, there were also less common understandings of policy workers as located subjects and of policy-as-discourse, which indicates alternative ways policy could be understood and performed. Parts II and III argue that the understandings of policy workers as located subjects and of policy-as-discourse were underdeveloped in the policy realm of the case study. There was not much of a conceptualisation of policy workers as located within particular subject positions but some acknowledgement of the constructed and constitutive character of policies. The thesis attempts to develop further these alternative understandings of policy workers and policy.

### **The Humanist Agent: the Logic of Rationality and the Logic of Agency**

To this point in the thesis the logics of rationality and agency and the ways they operate have been discussed separately. This has been done because they tend to be uncritically separated in the policy literature. The structured interactionist theorists reject the authorised choice model because of its focus on rational processes at the expense of the agency of policy participants. Similarly, the policy-as-discourse theorists discussed above explicitly reject the rational model of policy (despite, as we saw, slipping into assuming the logic of rationality) precisely because it distinguishes policy analysis from policy-making,

and hence does not allow for the agency of policy workers (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 17-21; Ball, 1990; Bessant *et al.*, 2006). For these policy theorists, the rational model of policy development, which I argue assumes the logic of rationality, puts the process above people in the policy realm. Consequently, for these authors the logic of rationality and the logic of agency are understood as separate and in competition.

However, the logic of rationality and the logic of agency are connected. Together they forge an understanding of the humanist person, a notion of personhood central to the Enlightenment project. As Bessant *et al.* (2006, 32-39) suggest, the Enlightenment project of the eighteenth century was based on the understanding that we could rationally control the world if we could accurately describe and understand it (see also Burr, 2003, 10-12). The scientific model seemed to offer the most promising way to accomplish this task. Unsurprisingly, therefore, in the policy realm this drive to know the world entailed the 'systematic collection of data' by experts, data that was then used to 'guide policy making' (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 32-39). Experts were those who could stand back from the evidence and assess it objectively. The assumption here is an agential person who can separate from and control the world they inhabit. In this way the logic of rationality and the logic of agency blend to form the humanist person.

Indeed, the logic of rationality presumes the logic of agency. The belief that there is a pre-existing problem that policy addresses assumes that there is a person who is separate enough from the world (and their understanding of it) to see this problem objectively. Further, the logic of rationality assumes policy workers who can play their part in policy implementation in a disinterested way and irrespective of their own values. Hence, the logic of rationality assumes a rational free agent both in those with authority and in policy workers within the policy realm. As the logic of rationality assumes agency, the logic of agency assumes rationality. To understand policy workers as separate individuals fighting against society suggests a sense of control of the irrational or emotional in themselves: they can rationally identify their values and beliefs and rationally pursue them. Ultimately, then, debates between authorised choice and structured interaction approaches to policy, which have thus far been aligned respectively with the logic of rationality and the logic of agency, circulate around *who* in the policy realm is given agency rather than what type of personhood is envisaged. By way of contrast, the target in this thesis is with the type of personhood assumed and presumed in both these models of policy.

Ultimately, therefore, the logic of rationality and the logic of agency are linked: they are both part of the humanist project. In a sense the logic of agency and the logic of rationality are respectively the ontological and epistemological elements of the humanist person, combining to suggest that as separate, unitary individuals we can objectively know and control the world. Together, they constitute the rational agent. However, because these logics are separated in the literature, they are separated in the thesis for heuristic purposes in order to demonstrate the ways in which they operate and the effects they produce. In general, Part II of the thesis addresses the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) with respect to the policy realm as a whole while Part III addresses the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) with respect to specific policies. However, the connections between the two will become apparent, particularly in Part III.

We have seen that the logics of agency and rationality appear in different ways in the three approaches to policy discussed above. Conventional policy models assume an Enlightenment person, albeit different elements of this person. The authorised choice model emphasises rationality, while the structured interaction model emphasises agency. By contrast, current policy-as-discourse theorists who theorise the policy realm attempt to reject aspects of an Enlightenment person, particularly assumptions about rationality, while retaining notions of agency (Ball, 1990, 9; Taylor, *et al.*, 1997; Bessant *et al.*, 2006). The power of liberal humanism is apparent here. Even those who embrace a deconstructionist approach to policy often accept the humanist person. While these policy-as-discourse theorists can see discourses in documents (and hence in specific policy areas), it is more difficult for them to see discourses in policy workers (and hence in the policy realm). Nevertheless, as we saw in the discussion of Bacchi (1999a) above, not all policy-as-discourse approaches preclude an understanding of the way in which people are positioned within discourses. This thesis calls for and adopts a poststructuralist<sup>15</sup> understanding of people as discursively constituted.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> While poststructuralism and postmodernism follow different scholarly trajectories, they share many understandings of the constructed character of the world and the consequences that follow. The thesis does not engage in a debate between the two traditions but accepts the insights offered by both about the locatedness of subjects.

<sup>16</sup> Ball (2003) has noted the ways in which teachers, researchers and scholars are discursively constructed through specific policy agendas. The focus in this thesis, however, is on the ways in which policy workers *per se* are discursively constructed.

Davies (1991) offers a comprehensive account of the difference between what she terms the humanist agent<sup>17</sup> and the poststructuralist subject. She suggests that central to humanism is a particular definition of the notion of human agency. Under a humanist ontology people are understood as having an absolute and unitary identity such that one can be 'true to oneself'. There is a 'notion of self-sufficient independence' and a 'separateness' associated with autonomy or agency (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 6-7). A person's identity is set up in contradistinction to the collective. Indeed, 'society' (and structure) is seen as something that threatens individual identity: a person is understood as exerting their agency *against* society or structure. I argue in Chapter 2 that this understanding of personhood, an understanding that expresses the logic of agency, is present in much of the literature on policy workers.

Within a humanist understanding, this achievement of individualism (against society) is privileged, and agency becomes essential to full personhood (Davies, 1991, 42). Significantly, only some people obtain agency and hence full personhood. Other participants become spectators to the 'main game'. Davies quotes Smith here:

It is like a game where there are more presences than players. Some are engaged in tossing a ball between them; others are consigned to the role of audience and supporter, who pick up the ball if it is dropped and pass it back to the players. They support, facilitate, encourage but their action does not become part of the play. (Smith, 1987, 32, quoted in Davies, 1991, 45)

Yet, those who are not seen as agential are still crucial to the functioning of the game. We can see this valuing of agency behind debates between authorised choice and structured interaction understandings of policy: it is about who gets to be part of the policy game, rather than what kind of personhood is envisaged.

Furthermore, and significantly, Davies argues that agency, within a humanist understanding, is understood as 'control', that is, as 'the rational controlling the irrational and emotional' (Davies, 1991, 44). Through rational thought a person can achieve their own individual identity. This, in turn, is closely connected to the conscious/unconscious dichotomy whereby the conscious, rational decision-making processes should be protected

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<sup>17</sup> Above I referred to the 'humanist person' rather than the humanist agent so as to avoid confusion when arguing that agency is a part of this humanist person. However, Davies talks about the 'humanist agent' and the 'poststructuralist subject' which nicely captures the way in which humanism assumes agency while poststructuralism examines forms of subjectivity, as will become clearer in the body of the text above. Thus, throughout the thesis I tend to refer to the humanist agent.



from all unconscious, emotional and irrational desires (Davies, 1991, 44). Of course, a good deal of feminist theorising is associated with challenging the dichotomies of rational/irrational, conscious/unconscious, showing how they are aligned with and reinforce the male/female dichotomy (Lloyd, 1984; Gatens, 1998a) and present rationality as gender neutral rather than sexed (Gatens, 1998b). It follows from this insight that the humanist conception of agency and rationality, with its connection to these dichotomies, is at best not helpful to women.<sup>18</sup> As Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000) observe, autonomy is viewed with ‘suspicion’ by feminists who tend to understand it as stemming from a ‘political tradition’ that has been ‘hostile to women’s interests and freedom’ (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 3). This scepticism amongst some feminists about autonomy stems from the links between the concept and notions of ‘individualism’ and ‘rationalism’ (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 3).

The point here is that these dichotomies, and hence this individualistic notion of agency, are constructions. They are themselves part of the discourses constituting contemporary social relations (Davies, 1991). Hence, all of our desires and wants, whether or not they are described as conscious and rational, are formed through the discourses in which we exist. Given the rejection by some feminists of this humanist agent as at best unhelpful to women, it is important to reflect upon the consequences that follow when policy workers who identify as activists pursuing feminist goals embrace and perform a conception of rational agency. The argument in the thesis is that this performance of rational agency limits the kinds of substantive policy options considered in a particular policy area, such as gender and education. My argument here takes seriously Brown’s (1995, x-xii) call for politically committed subjects to look at what it is within themselves, at the ways in which their subjectivity is constituted, that makes achieving emancipation so difficult. There is no essential individual identity that can be separated from its surroundings, context, or society. The poststructuralist understanding of personhood captures this well.

In contrast to the humanist approach, poststructuralism understands people as having a subjectivity. A person’s subjectivity is formed through being within discourses: ‘[w]e are constituted through multiple discourses at any one point in time, and while we may regard a move as correct within one game or discourse, it may equally be dangerous within

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<sup>18</sup> I reject Patai and Koertge’s (1994) criticism that such claims are dogmatic and broad sweeping. Their criticism assumes a lack of rigor to feminist critiques of the Enlightenment and notions of the individual and rationality.

another' (Davies, 1991, 47). Thus, a person's subjectivity is changing and contradictory (Davies *et al.*, 2006, 87-88). With this analysis an individual is not in a dichotomous relationship with the collective, but rather '[t]he individual is constituted through the discourses of a number of collectives as is the collective itself' (Davies, 1991, 43). Crucial to this conception is that there is no 'essential' self. A person's subjectivity, rather, is constituted through the available discourses (Davies, 1991, 42-43):

Choices are understood as more akin to 'forced choices', since the subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the 'chosen' line of action the only possible line of action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to *want* that line of action. (Davies, 1991, 46, original emphasis; see also Davies *et al.*, 2006, 91)

Along similar lines, Popkewitz points to the way in which governing is about 'historically specific practices through which individuals can think of, conduct and evaluate themselves as productive individuals' (Popkewitz, 1996, 28).

The poststructuralist understanding of personhood demands a reconceptualisation of autonomy. Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000) accept that, if autonomy is inseparable from individualism and rationalism, then it is problematic. However, they argue that it is possible to reconfigure autonomy so that it stands apart from these concepts. To this end they develop a notion of 'relational autonomy' (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 4), which is not one thing but 'a range of related perspectives'. They explain:

These perspectives are premised on a shared conviction, the conviction that persons are socially embedded and that agents' identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender and ethnicity. (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 4)

Under relational autonomy people's subjectivities (or in these authors' terms, 'identities') may change within a particular context; that is, subjectivities are situated. The point is that there is not a 'true self' outside of the situation in which the person is located (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 14-15). Whether we call it relational autonomy or the poststructuralist subject, the central thrust is that people are constituted within given discursive contexts.

In relation to the policy realm, then, this thesis develops the argument that policy workers are shaped by the logics of rationality and agency, discourses that pervade their working

environment and work practices.<sup>19</sup> In other words, they *become* rational agents. In this understanding, policy workers are constituted within the policy realm, rather than being distinct from it. Chapter 2 illustrates the uniqueness of this conceptualisation of policy workers. It shows that approaches to policy workers to date, including those approaches sensitive to the role of discourses within policy, end up supporting an image of policy workers as agential and rational. As indicated above and elaborated below, the ways in which the logics of agency and rationality construct policy workers as rational agents has implications for how they go about their policy work in the policy realm, which in turn limits the kinds of policy they seek and endorse in the area of gender and education. Because these logics direct attention away from the locatedness of policy workers and the discursive character of policies, policy workers tend to support, at times uncritically, the broader approach to issues taken by the department and/or government, failing to consider how problems are constructed in the first place. They may even take on these policies, and the problem representations they contain, as their own. Disrupting these logics, therefore, will create space for new types of policy workers and policy work that turns attention to the locatedness of policy workers and hence to deeply-held shared values in policies, to the discursive effects of policies, and to the role played by policy language, concerns and concepts in the construction of policy problems and their effects. In turn, such work will produce less bounded substantive policies in specific policy areas such as gender and education, that is, policies performed by located subjects who take account of the constructed and constitutive character of policies. The following section elaborates on what kinds of subjectivities are created in policy workers *at present* and the consequences that follow for policy work.

## SUBJECTIVITIES AND PRACTICES

### Subjectivities

This thesis is particularly concerned with the ways in which discourses constitute subjects (Davies, 1994, 3; Davies *et al.*, 2006) or, more specifically, with the ways in which the

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<sup>19</sup> As noted previously, but worth repeating here, the claim is not that the discourses of the logics of agency and rationality are the only discourses shaping the subjectivities of the policy workers (Yeatman, 1990, 164; Hunter, 2003), but rather that these logics are centrally relevant to the ways in which policy workers perform policy, which is the concern of this thesis.

logics of rationality and agency create particular subjectivities in policy workers. This idea links with Bickford's (1999, 106) observation, with respect to identity politics, that 'institutional contexts in which citizenship is performed are themselves (partially) formative of citizen identity'. Policy-as-discourse theorists are attentive to the fact that discourses, at least with respect to policies, have effects. However, there are some distinct differences between their understandings of peoples' relationship to discourses that need to be explored further here. These differences help to clarify my approach as well as indicating why some policy-as-discourse theorists slip into assuming the logics of agency and rationality.

Policy-as-discourse theorists tend to understand people either as in-and-of discourse or as outside of discourse. This distinction is captured well in Bacchi's discussion of the way in which policy-as-discourse theorists refer, at different times, to the *effects* of discourse and the *uses* of discourse whereby those with power tend to be understood as using discourse or as undertaking the 'agentic marshalling of discourses' and those without power are understood as being constituted within discourse (Bacchi, 2000, 51). The idea that political subjects *use* discourse aligns with the humanist understanding of personhood, and hence is rejected in the thesis. This perspective reduces discourse to a way of framing an argument, as can be seen in authors who talk about choosing whether to 'argue for a policy idea in the language and frameworks that are current' or to 'redefine the terms of the dominant discourse' (Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 113), or who invoke the notion of the 'politics of discourse' (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 43), or who call for ethical debates (Bessant *et al.*, 2006), as though discourses and values can be invoked at will.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, this thesis contends that both those with and those without (traditional) power are located *within* discourse (Hall, 2001, 79). In this analysis, discourse refers to deeply-held assumptions and presumptions about the world, which cannot necessarily be called upon at will. Foucault (1983, 216) has observed that the humanist agent is an historical concept. In Hall's words, Foucault understands the subject as '*produced within discourse*' (Hall, 2001, 79-80; see also Foucault, 1980, 93-94, 96). While policy-as-discourse theorists want to use Foucault's insights about discourse, they struggle with understanding the ways in which policy workers need to be understood as parts of discourse (see Chapter 2).

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<sup>20</sup> As seen in the discussion of the structured interaction approach above, Bessant *et al.*'s call for ethical debate assumes readily identifiable values and beliefs that can be defended, neglecting the ingrained values that affect the construction of policy problems.

In this understanding of subjects as constituted within discourses, there is a particular conceptualisation of power as *productive* (Hall, 2001, 77; Foucault, 1980, 93, 119). Traditionally, power has been understood in terms of a unidirectional linear force from above: those who hold power intentionally exert it over those who lack power (Hall, 2001, 77; Bacchi, 2000, 52; Dudley and Vidovich, 1995, 22-25). Power, in this sense, can include both the ability to make people do things and the ability to prevent things from happening. In policy terms this type of power exerted from above could appear in the power to make directive laws, or to shape policy agendas, or to prevent issues getting on the policy agenda in the first place. This type of power is generally concerned with intentional behaviours to control (Dudley and Vidovich, 1995, 22-25). While it is certainly the case that some people hold traditional power over others, this position of relative power is *produced* through discourses. Following Hall's (2001) analysis of Foucault (1980), the understanding of power underpinning this thesis is not that power follows 'a single direction – from top to bottom' – but rather that it circulates in society in ways that capture and influence both those with and those without traditional power (Hall, 2001, 77; see also Foucault, 1983, 213, 222-223, and 226; Foucault, 1980, 105-108). Consequently, the concern here is with the way in which 'ideas' become naturalised so that 'conflict is suppressed' because both the oppressed and the oppressor internalise these apparently commonsense understandings of the world (Dudley and Vidovich, 1995, 24). There is no sense of intentional power from above here. Instead, power is *produced* through discourses. Ideas and practices are interiorised and taken for granted such that they shape the way people understand the world and want to behave within it. In this understanding, all people are within discourses and act these out in particular ways, not necessarily because they are being forced to do so but because it makes sense to behave that way: people 'conduct' themselves in particular ways (Foucault, 1983, 220-221). In other words, to repeat Davies (1991, 46), people act in particular ways because 'one has been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to *want* that line of action'. People become 'self-forming' (Watts, 1993/94; Dean, 1998, 92).

In terms of particular policy areas, such as gender and education, productive power can be seen in the way in which feminist policy activists un-reflexively share with the government/education department some understandings of, or assumptions about, the problem of gender and education. As we shall see in Part III, this shared understanding of the problem was apparent in the at times uncritical acceptance by the policy workers of the

preferred language, concerns and concepts of the department/government and in their only partial consideration of the broad range of discursive effects that follow from such policy constructions. In fact, although the policy workers criticised certain approaches to gender and education as being driven by the government or the department, at other times they adopted these policies as their own. With respect to the policy realm, productive power can be seen in the way in which policy workers enact elements of traditional understandings of policy-making, even when they explicitly reject these traditional understandings. Put plainly, the discourses of the logics of agency and rationality produce how policy workers understand the policy realm and how they act within it (and vice versa). Parts II and III identify the ways in which the policy workers internalised and performed the logics of agency and rationality.

There is a clear connection here between understandings of power and understandings of personhood. Tamboukou and Ball (2003), in their discussion of the interconnections and differences between modernist ethnography and postmodernist genealogy, establish this point clearly. They draw on Popkewitz and Brennan's (1998) distinction between *power as sovereignty* and *power as deployment*. They suggest that the modernist ethnographic methodology adopts the view of power as sovereignty; the oppressed are dominated from 'above'. This notion of power reflects a particular view of personhood as agential: 'both social groups – oppressors and resisters – are, within the ethnographic project, active agents' (Tamboukou and Ball, 2003, 8). There are links here with the discussion above about understandings of policy workers that work within the agency-constraint dichotomy, which assumes the humanist agent. In contrast, a postmodernist genealogical methodology adopts a view of power as deployment in the sense that we are all within power. Tamboukou and Ball's sense of power as deployment here aligns with my understanding of power as productive;<sup>21</sup> people are shaped by discourses. This position reflects a very different view of the individual. Here, the subject or person is not so much agential as constituted:

Individuals circulate in a network of relations as both subjects and/or objects of power. Genealogy is not after the *who* or *whom* of power. It is the *how* of power that interests genealogy ... This focus on the *how* of power

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<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately the language of 'deployment' tends to suggest a sense of agency: power is being 'deployed' by someone. However, from the discussion above it is clear that these authors wish to distinguish the conception of power as deployment from the conception of power as sovereignty precisely because the latter presumes agency and the former does not. Nevertheless, I prefer to refer to power as productive rather than to power as deployment.

does not exclude people but rather seeks to analyze the complex ways they are constituted within historically and culturally specific sites where power, truth, and knowledge are interrelated. (Tamboukou and Ball, 2003, 8, original emphases)

This thesis asks the postmodernist question of *how* policy workers are constituted within the policy realm. I argue that the discourses of the logics of rationality and agency, embedded in that realm, produce policy workers as rational agents. These logics achieve this production of policy workers through creating policy workers' subjectivities.

Marginson (1997) offers a good example of the way in which discourses create subjectivities. In his discussion of higher education, he argues that, as the human capital approach to education became increasingly dominant, through policies like the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), students began (reasonably) to think of their education as an investment and acted accordingly. As Marginson writes,

When governments imagine students to be financial investors in their own economic futures, and consistent with this vision, provide student financing in the form of student loans repayable after education, forcing students to take into account their future earnings when choosing their course, more of those students *become* self managing investors in themselves. These economic behaviours are never as complete as the theory imagines. The student subjects also have other identities and behaviours, and no one is ever completely 'governed'. Nevertheless, the point is that joined to government, [the discourse of] the economics of education forms the objects of which it speaks. It produces itself as true. (Marginson, 1997, 225, original emphasis)

Marginson, and others (see, for example, Shore and Wright, 1997, 4, 6 and 29-34; Bacchi, 2004; Ball, 2003; Maclure, 2006), have shown how particular substantive policy discourses create specific subjectivities. However, little has been said about the ways in which the discourses that shape the policy realm also create particular subjectivities (in policy workers). While Marginson highlights the subjectivities created in students by human capital approaches to higher education, I argue that the policy realm that values rationality and agency creates particular subjectivities in policy workers. The question becomes, what sort of subjectivities are created by the logics of rationality and agency? In brief, the ideal policy worker becomes rational and agential or, to borrow Popkewitz's expression in a slightly different but related context, 'an active entrepreneurial self, a decentralized citizen who is active, self-motivated, participatory, and problem solving' (Popkewitz, 1998, 12). As Marginson points out above, subjectivities are never complete, nor are they necessarily

consistent. Policy workers are not, as the logics would suggest, *completely* rational agents. The significance of recognising that subjects have multiple and contradictory identities and behaviours is that these alternative subjectivities draw attention to how the logics of rationality and agency replace other ways of doing policy and other ways for policy workers to be. There are other subjectivities available for policy workers – as reflexive, reflective, and critical policy workers. Policy workers can be located subjects who understand policy-as-discourse. This alternative understanding of policy workers deserves support, I suggest, because in the long run it will encourage recognition of the constructed and constitutive character of policies. This will become clearer in Parts II and III of the thesis.

### **Discourses as Practices and Embodied Subjectivity**

To argue that the policy realm constructs policy workers' subjectivities is to say something about the way in which policy workers undertake their work. Discourses are found in and are formed by words and texts, as well as actions and practices. Words are important here as they reveal the ways in which we understand the world. But the way that the policy workers talk about policy reflects how policy is *done*. And looking at what they say tells us something about policy *practice*.<sup>22</sup> Though practice has not been the primary focus of the thesis, it is also significant, as practice is the material instantiation of discourses (Burr, 2003, 63). Understanding discourses as practices avoids the common question of whether practices come before discourses or discourses come before practices: they are part of the same thing.

Practices are understood here as embodied discourses. With Bacchi and Beasley (2005, 190), I wish to avoid a sense of 'talking heads' under which discourses are located in the symbolic realm and outside of the embodied person. Understanding discourses as practices (Burr, 2003, 63) clarifies the point. To claim that discourses (practices) create and reflect subjectivities is precisely to claim that discourses are embodied, that is, that they produce *embodied* subjectivity (Rothfield, 1992, 41, and 45-46), affecting the 'material body'

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<sup>22</sup> As would be clear from the discussions above, the policy practices (or policy work) of primary concern in this thesis are those that the policy workers are happy to do, that is, the practices that they take on as their own without engaging with how such practices impact upon policy outcomes in limited ways and could be otherwise. See footnote 4 for an elaboration on the heuristic distinction between the routines and procedures of specific policy realms and the policy workers' performance of their work, both of which reflect the discourses around the policy realm and hence are ultimately inextricably interrelated.



(Davies *et al.*, 2006, 90).<sup>23</sup> A person's subjectivity has consequences not only for how they think, but also for how they act: it shapes 'who they are' (Ball, 2003, 215). For example, policy workers who passionately search for more accurate understandings of the problem of girls' inequality or who pride themselves on being 'efficient' embody the logic of rationality: witness the 'burn out and stress' they experience (Eisenstein, 1996, 207). Understanding discourses as constructions that are real and practiced allows for embodied subjectivity. Discourses produce who we are, that is, how we understand ourselves *and* what we do (and vice versa). Accordingly, the discourses of the logic of agency and rationality shape policy workers as rational agents who perform policy work that reflects this rational agency.

My concern with practices differs from the way in which the issue of practice is addressed within traditional policy literature. We will see in Chapter 2 that the thesis steps outside conventional frameworks that pit agents against structural constraints and conceptualise policy practices as the result of either constraints or agency. 'Constraints' on practice, in this approach, would include the location of the gender unit within the department, the number of staff, the extent of available resources, and the processes of reporting. Practices described as 'agential acts' would include activities such as networking, framing arguments, and strategic manoeuvring. In my view, these 'constraints' and 'acts of agency' do not in some straightforward way shape what can be done. Rather, the conceptualisation of these practices as the result of either 'constraints' or 'agency' actively constitutes policy workers' subjectivities as rational agents, separate from and fighting against the policy realm. Subjectivities are formed through and reflected in small daily routines (Burr, 2003, 76) or social practices (Popkewitz, 1996, 28). These small daily routines and how they are understood *are* discourses of the policy realm.

The specific focus of the thesis is not the practices of the policy realm *per se* but the conceptual logics that inform those practices. For example, the logics of rationality and agency are enacted in such practices as the writing of briefing papers, seeking approval from those in authority, strategic manoeuvring, shaping policy focuses, networking, quantitative data collection, following instructions, working fast to time lines, evaluating policy against stated objectives, and working with policy language from above.

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<sup>23</sup> The argument here has links with the kinds of distinctions being made between disembodied and embodied citizenship (Beasley and Bacchi, 2000), though this theme is not pursued further in this thesis.

Importantly, these practices that reflect and shape the discourses of the policy realm include those practices traditionally separated into the result of either constraint or agency. This policy work reflects the embodied subjectivity or practices of the policy realm *at present*. Again, the importance of identifying this rational agential policy work is that it sets limits on the kind of policy outcomes envisaged by policy workers. This policy work entails attempts to understand accurately policy problems as though they exist outside of the way we talk and think about them, and to manoeuvre strategically around the policy realm so as to attach the policy workers' preferred solutions to these policy 'problems'. Such policy practices distract time and attention from considering the ways in which policy 'problems' are represented in the first place and the effects of such problem representations. Neglecting this creative character of policies sets boundaries on the kinds of policies envisaged by policy workers. The interview material (Parts II and III) provides a way into identifying the logics of agency and rationality and examining their effects, such as the kinds of subjectivities, the understandings and work practices, they produce.

## CHANGE AND REFLEXIVITY

### Other Ways of Doing Policy

The argument that the subjectivities of policy workers are shaped by the policy realm in which they work has implications for the issue of social change (Davies *et al.*, 2006). Many policy theorists who emphasise the role of policy workers are interested in change. They talk about achieving change (Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Taylor, 2004), or having a 'strategic edge' to policy analysis (Taylor, 1997), or about what can be done and where effort should be directed to achieve change (O'Malley, Weir, and Shearing, 1997, 504). They further locate the ability to achieve change within the psyches and abilities of individual policy workers. Policy workers are understood as having a 'real commitment to making a difference' (Edwards, 2001, ix), or to producing change (Taylor *et al.*, 1997), or as pursuing the goals of a social movement (see Malloy, 2003 and discussion of femocrats in Chapter 2). At times this tendency leads to a focus on policy workers as agents – on what they can do *against* the system to achieve change. Here, change is located within the language of constraint and agency, and is connected to a humanist understanding of personhood. Such an understanding limits these theorists to asking either how change happens when it happens or why change did not occur when it was desired and fought for

but not achieved. In my view it is necessary to ask an additional and quite different question – what kinds of change are not even thought about?

This version of social change moves outside the understanding of change suggested by the language of constraint and agency. The focus shifts from external constraints and individual agency to the importance of disrupting the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm. Identifying and critiquing, or deconstructing, these discourses will destabilise the logics currently shaping the subjectivities of policy workers. The hope is that such destabilisation may change policy workers' subjectivities, releasing them from the limitations imposed by the logics of rationality and agency and hence enabling deeper reflection on how the status quo is maintained (Davies *et al.*, 2006). I envision policy workers becoming reflexive about the ways in which the policy realm constructs their subjectivities. That is, if policy workers' attention can be drawn to the ways they have internalised and interiorised assumptions about the nature of policy and how policy is made, which in the long run limits the kinds of policies they endorse, then they may play with other ways of performing policy. The point is that the logics of rationality and agency form part of policy workers' commonsense understandings about how policy work is undertaken, which in turn precludes progressive policy proposals. The apparent naturalness of these logics needs to be challenged by theorists and policy workers alike in order to achieve these more progressive policy outcomes. The goal of the thesis, then, is to challenge the hegemonic conceptualisation of policy workers as rational agents in the hope of beginning to create space for policy workers to be reflexive about their location as rational agents within the policy realm, and for them to recognise that it could be otherwise. As Davies *et al.* (2006, 90, original emphasis) note, the 'poststructuralist transformative project' needs to both engage with the ways in which subjects are currently shaped by discourses, so we can make out '*what we are now*' and, through 'making visible' our current selves, imagine new kinds of subjectivities.

This conceptualisation of change has widespread implications for femocratic practice. For example, Burton (1991, 13) has argued that there is a 'mobilisation of masculine bias' in organizational processes. Others have identified bureaucratic rationality as masculine (Blackmore and Kenway, 1993, 10-11). If we can understand the ways in which this 'masculine bias' is not just a barrier to be removed but a factor that is internalised by those working for change, we may be better placed to suggest ways to disrupt practices that

evinced this bias. The argument here resonates with Brown's call for an understanding of how subject formation occurs within the world we are challenging, setting limits on the kinds of change we pursue (Brown, 1995, xii; Davies *et al.*, 2006, 92). To adapt Brown's words to my argument, I want to draw attention to the ways in which the 'ostensibly emancipatory' practices of feminist policy activism 'problematically mirror the mechanisms and configurations of power of which they are an effect and which they purport to oppose', mechanisms and configurations of power like individualised, rational policy work (Brown, 1995, 3). We can see this inadvertent mirroring of the practices the policy workers wish to challenge when they explicitly reject, yet enact, rational models of policy.

A particular understanding of resistance accompanies the emphasis on subjectivity offered by this version of social change. Many authors, as we saw above, understand change as being achieved through agential people 'resisting'. There is a limited understanding of resistance here: it is about force and pushing against. It assumes the modernist humanist agent who is separate from their environment and who has a distinct, fixed centre with which they can resist. This notion of resistance further presumes traditional conceptualisations of power from above. A different understanding of resistance opens up with the idea that the goal is to identify discourses, which is the purpose of this thesis. Davies (1994) talks about the power to resist discourses through the acknowledgment of their existence (Davies, 1994, 26-28; see also Davies *et al.*, 2006), shifting the focus to ways of disrupting discourses:

The question then becomes one of how resistance can best be organised and staged through collective shifts in discourses, and through positioning oneself differently in relation to those discourses rather than how any one solitary individual can pit themselves against forces that are greater than they are. (Davies, 1994, 34)

With Davies, then, I suggest that the recognition of the powerful, even constitutive, nature of discourses empowers us to disrupt them; identifying discourses (and subject locations) is itself a form of resistance. In line with this thinking, identifying the hegemony of the rational individual agent may help to subvert it (Davies *et al.*, 2006, 89). As argued above, while there are hegemonic discourses, they are not complete or all-encompassing (Yeatman, 1990, 164). There are multiple and contradictory discourses and this can create room for the kinds of resistance called for here. In Parts II and III of the thesis I argue that

there were sub-dominant, and underdeveloped, understandings and practices of policy workers as located and of policy-as-discourse present in the policy realm of my case study. In those parts I explain how these understandings and practices point towards and provide openings for new kinds of policy work that entail a deeper disruption to the political status quo.

In this thesis I have been arguing that since the policy realm is a construction that creates subjectivities, we need to talk about how we want the policy realm to work and how we want policy workers to be. In bringing to light the logic of rationality and the logic of agency within the policy realm, I am calling for other ways of understanding and doing policy. Traditional policy models based on these logics assume that policy involves problem-solving performed by agentic beings. By contrast, I advocate a policy realm based on an understanding of policy-as-discourse performed by located subjects. Policy workers engaging with or being reflexive about their location within the policy realm, a task assisted through the primary goal of this thesis of identifying the discourses of the policy realm and the subjectivities they constitute, may lead policy workers to look for alternative ways of undertaking policy work, ways that are consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse. At the heart of this thesis, then, is a call for a range of practices or new ways of doing policy: becoming reflexive about one's location within value-systems and hence specific problem representations, having genuine consultation, becoming aware of the discursive effects of policy and the constitutive character of language, and hence engaging in discussions about the meanings of policy concerns and their implications for policy outcomes. The goal, ultimately, is to produce more progressive substantive policy outcomes.

Of course, as indicated below, such reflexivity (with respect to the policy realm) is no simple task. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that existing work practices, themselves discourses, create policy workers as rational and agential. Even if some policy workers begin to recognise the ways in which these practices impact upon how they operate around and understand policy processes, it is difficult to see how policy workers on their own can implement whole scale changes to those practices. Such a scenario would reinstate the individualisation, implicit in the logic of agency, I reject (Chapter 5). Rather, the call for policy workers to engage with and reflect upon the ways in which they uncritically enact rational agency, is part of a broader campaign to challenge the 'anti-

intellectual' climate of the public sector (Bacchi *et al.*, 2005, 64), a campaign that necessarily involves a wide range of participants within and connected to the policy realm, including academics, consultants, and the elite within the bureaucracy and government. The call, then, is for a collective challenge to the discourses that shape policy workers and policy work. As Davies (2005, 2) notes '[i]n understanding the constitutive force of any discourse we can begin the work of seeing how to dismantle it'. The task of this thesis, elucidating the discourses, including practices, that shape the subjectivities of feminist policy workers in ways that limit how they envisage challenging bureaucratic goals, is an essential one in this broader campaign.

### **Reflexivity**

Central to this thesis, then, is a call for reflexivity in policy workers with respect to their positioning as rational, agential beings within the policy realm generally. The language of reflexivity is appearing more and more commonly in analyses that proclaim a progressive agenda. Some feminists, for example, have become increasingly sensitive to the need to interrogate mainstream feminism for its positioning of 'woman' as white, heterosexual, and able-bodied. The point here is the need to be aware of the ways in which we, as people, understand the world from a particular point of view or subject position and that others do not necessarily share this point of view. Being reflexive means reflecting on or engaging with our own 'vulnerability' to the processes that shape us (Davies *et al.*, 2006, 90), though this is no easy task. As Davies *et al.* (2006, 90) note, 'the deconstructive process is always partial, messy and incomplete'. With respect to the policy realm, for example, in order to get results in the bureaucracy, it would be difficult to turn on its head the discourses in which the bureaucracy is couched. I do not imagine policy workers in their location as able to say, for example, 'research will not produce truth'. Nevertheless, an understanding of the ways in which the policy realm constitutes policy workers is a small step towards challenging how they are constituted at present. Appreciating the constitutive character of the policy realm involves acknowledging its constructed character and disrupting the discourses (practices) that shape the policy realm, in the long run destabilising the environment in which the policy workers are located. Deconstructing discourses and the work they do renders them transformable (Davies *et al.*, 2006).

Suggesting that a form of resistance can be achieved through policy workers becoming reflexive about their location within the policy realm does not imply that they can simply

identify their subject position and then ‘move outside’ it. This interpretation would merely mimic the conventional models of the policy realm that conceive of policy workers as identifying their personal interests and then putting them aside (authorised choice) (Edwards, 2001), or agreeing to compromise these interests (structured interaction), or to Bessant *et al.*’s (2006) call for ethical debate, as though ethical positions are always consciously held and easily identified.<sup>24</sup> All such conceptions of values and policy workers assume the logic of agency and hence stop short of taking account of the role played by policy workers’ subjectivities in policy outcomes. The point about policy workers’ beliefs about and practices in the policy realm is that this makes up who they are; it is not separate from them. Nevertheless, attempting to draw attention to the discourses of the policy realm and the kinds of subjectivities they produce may mean in the long run that policy workers think about policy and the policy realm differently, do policy differently, and hence become different. Transformative projects involving the deconstruction of discourses and the ‘decomposition’ of the self are slow, ‘messy’, ‘vulnerable’, ‘ambivalent’, and ‘incomplete’ (Davies *et al.*, 2006, 101). Drawing attention to the ways in which discourses constitute subjects makes the work of discourses, the ways in which they shape how we think and act, ‘visible and thus more difficult to continue with’, making them ‘revisable’ (Davies *et al.*, 2006, 89 & 101). The alternative would be gloomy indeed. It would suggest that policy workers are stuck forever in a particular subject position characterised as rational and agential. The argument here is for precisely the opposite – a change in policy workers’ subjectivities and, hence, how they understand and go about their work. Consequently, while for Bessant *et al.* (2006) reflexivity means that policy workers need to identify the content of their own values, reflexivity in my view involves becoming aware that we are all located within discourses and that it is a difficult, though entirely possible, task to identify these discourses. One way of shedding light on the discourses that shape our subjectivities is through being confronted by different contexts (Davies, 2000, 9 & 15).<sup>25</sup> Relatedly, I suggest, others outside the immediate context or environment, with a

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<sup>24</sup> On the level of consciously held values, I too support Bessant *et al.*’s notion of ethical debate. However, the point here is to highlight the way in which some values are deeply-held understandings of the world that are not so readily identifiable and hence are not easily defensible within structured debate. Yet, these values play a role in how particular policies represent the problem. Accordingly, it becomes important for policy participants to become aware of their vulnerability to locating particular subject positions with respect to specific policies. In this account, the fact that policy workers hold specific values cannot solely be addressed through ethical debate. Rather, there needs to be discussions with people who occupy different subject positions. This argument is pursued further in Chapter 6.

<sup>25</sup> Davies (2000, 13-14) also suggests that the practice of ‘collective biography’ whereby groups of people remember and write their stories and pasts helps render visible constitutive discourses, ‘listening to others tell their stories helps to fill in the gaps and silences of knowing oneself as an embodied being’ (2000, 14).

range of subject positions, can help make visible particular assumptions and presuppositions circulating within the environment or context in question. A pertinent example here, as referred to above, is that mainstream feminism tended to understand 'woman' as a universal concept until challenged by Black, and other, feminists for its white western assumptions. With respect to the policy realm and policy workers' subjectivities, I contend that people outside the policy realm, such as theorists, can assist in disrupting the discourses around the policy realm which position policy workers.<sup>26</sup> In bringing to light the subjectivity of the rational, agential policy worker, the hope is that this thesis assists in drawing attention to ways future policy workers could think about themselves differently and hence understand their work in different ways. That is, the thesis offers alternative ways of conceptualising policy, the policy realm, and policy workers in the hope of further developing *within the policy realm* the already present sub-dominant discourses around the policy realm, which over time creates the possibility for alternative ways of understanding and practicing policy, including for policy workers.

Reflexive practices, then, are possible and advisable. Policy workers can become aware of and engage with the ways their subjectivities are constituted by the discourses of the policy realm, in particular the logics of agency and rationality. The impact of this reflexivity of policy workers with respect to their subject location within the *policy realm* will be significant for *specific policy areas*. It will open up opportunities for policy work that takes account of being located subjects (with respect to specific policy areas) and of policies framing and shaping policy problems in particular ways that have effects. Understanding themselves as *located subjects* (with respect to specific policy areas) may lead policy workers to reflect upon the extent to which they adopt broad policy objectives without adequately considering how these objectives frame policy problems in particular and limited ways. Relatedly, understanding *policy as constructed and constitutive* may lead policy workers to undertake policy work directed not so much at discovering and solving the 'real' problem as at understanding how policies shape problems in particular ways that have effects. More specifically, such alternative policy work would involve being reflexive

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<sup>26</sup> The call for academics, and other outsiders to the policy realm, to disrupt the discourses which position policy workers is directed at discourses around the *policy realm* generally. In Part III, I make a parallel call for outsiders of a particular subject position to challenge dominant discourses with respect to *specific policy areas*. Both calls are premised on the acknowledgment that it is difficult for located subjects to identify the environment or discourses in which they are located and that people with different subject positions can sometimes assist with disrupting these discourses and the subject positions they create. As will become apparent in Chapter 6, the latter call for a challenge to dominant discourses with respect to *specific policy areas* leads to a call for deep consultation.



about *holding* deep-seated *values* with respect to specific policy areas,<sup>27</sup> reflecting on the broad discursive *effects* of policies, and paying particular attention to the ways in which the *language* of specific policy areas create policy problems in particular ways.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter elaborates on a conceptualisation of the policy realm as discursively constructed. Understanding the policy realm as constructed and constitutive enables us to appreciate how the policy realm is constructed *at present*, with what consequences for policy workers' subjectivities, for their understanding and performance of policy. At present the policy realm is shaped by the discourses of the logic of agency and rationality and policy workers are produced as humanist agents. That is, at present policy workers are rational agents who undertake policy work directed at identifying problems and attempting to solve these in ways consistent with their agenda. Such subjectivities and policy work have far reaching consequences for policy outcomes.

Appreciating the constructed character of the policy realm opens up the possibility of ways it could be otherwise, with other subjectivities. In highlighting the logic of rationality and the logic of agency within the policy realm *at present*, I am calling for other ways of understanding and doing policy, ways that take account of the locatedness of policy workers within the policy realm and of the constructed character of policies and their effects. Such understandings and practices have been listed several times and include:

- an awareness of deeply-held shared values in the construction of policy problems;
- an understanding of the broad discursive effects of policies on people and social relations; and
- an understanding of the full impact of policy words, ideas and focuses in shaping policy proposals.

Through identifying how the policy realm is constructed *at present*, this chapter has also highlighted the assumptions and presuppositions underpinning the current literature on

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<sup>27</sup> As noted previously, the call here is for policy workers to be reflexive with respect to a particular policy area rather than with respect to the policy realm as a whole. Such reflexivity (along with being aware of policy language and effects) is made possible through policy workers being reflexive with respect to the way the policy realm generally shapes them.

policy and the policy realm. Traditional understandings of policy and the policy realm work within the logics of agency and rationality and hence render difficult the kinds of policy work called for in the thesis. By contrast, conceptualisations of the policy realm that attempt to incorporate an understanding of policy-as-discourse indicate ways in which we can move outside of these logics and hence perform alternative policy work. However, such a conceptualisation of policy is sub-dominant and, further, the current policy-as-discourse theory needs to be developed such that its insights about discourses are applied to the policy realm and policy workers, which is the task of this thesis.

Parts II and III expand on how these hegemonic logics of agency and rationality were present in the understandings and practices of the policy realm of the case study. These parts also identify the presence of a sub-dominant understanding of policy-as-discourse, which indicates that alternative ways of doing policy are already present in the policy realm of this case study, as well as in the literature. However, there was a distinct lack of attention to the issue of subjectivity within the policy realm. While there were brief moments in the interviews where the policy workers talked about a connection between the policy realm and policy workers in ways that signal a partial understanding of the idea of subject location, there was no sense that policy workers are shaped by and formed through the discourses of the policy realm. It is decidedly possible that this absence in the interviews is due at least in part to the lack of theorising around this topic, theorising which is itself a part of the discourses around the policy realm. The task in Chapter 2 is to show that the assumption that policy workers are agential beings separate from the policy realm exists in all bodies of literature that address policy workers. In so doing, the chapter signals the originality of the conceptualisation of policy workers offered in this thesis and further identifies the ways in which the hegemonic discourses around the policy realm are reinforced and reflected in the current literature.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **POLICY WORKERS AND THE POLICY REALM: MOVING BEYOND THE STRUCTURE-AGENCY DICHOTOMY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter argues that the existing literature on policy workers, in the main, assumes policy workers are humanist agents. That is, the current literature on policy workers presumes a policy worker who exists prior to and outside of the policy realm in which they work. Debates within the scholarship on policy workers are located within the structure-agency dichotomy: either policy workers are pawns to structure or they are completely agential beings. Although there are, of course, a range of views expressed in the literature, the various authors all tend to assume and locate policy workers as separate from the environment in which they work. In contrast, at the heart of this thesis is an understanding of policy workers as located subjects, situated within the policy realm. Policy workers are constituted by and are a part of the policy realm. Their subjectivities and, hence, work practices are shaped by and reflect the wider discourses in which they exist. Chapter 1 canvassed the theoretical basis of the argument that the policy realm shapes the subjectivities of policy workers. The current chapter elaborates on the originality of this argument. In the process, it identifies and critiques the underlying assumption in the existing literature on policy workers that policy workers are humanist agents. Disrupting the assumption of the humanist agent in the literature is an important task because the literature is a part of the discourses around and in the policy realm that constitute policy workers.

The first section of this chapter elaborates on the descriptive and normative elements of the claim that policy workers are located subjects within the policy realm. The second and third sections of this chapter illustrate the originality of the argument, identifying the ways in which assumptions about policy workers as humanist agents underpin the existing literature on policy workers. Indeed, and in concert with themes developed in Chapter 1, we will see operating within this literature the logic of agency and the logic of rationality. In these later sections I group the literature on policy workers into two broad categories,

with numerous sub-categories within each. The first broad category, addressed in the second section of this chapter, is the existing *policy literature* on policy workers. This literature is directed at understanding the policy realm and policy generally and, almost incidentally, the role of policy workers. I identify in this policy literature a distinction between scholarship that assumes traditional understandings of policy as a rational response to policy problems – scholarship I label the ‘implementation’, ‘street-level bureaucrat’ and ‘policy entrepreneur’ approaches – and scholarship that understands policy-as-discourse. While there are clear differences in understandings of policy between the traditional rational policy literature and the policy-as-discourse policy literature, they both assume policy workers are humanist agents. For the traditional policy literature, this understanding is required, whereas for the policy-as-discourse scholarship, it is incidental.

The second broad category in the literature that addresses policy workers, discussed in the third section of this chapter, is that which speaks to policy workers *without necessarily directly addressing, although making assumptions about, the nature of policy or the policy realm*. In other words this section deals with the literature on policy workers that does not fall within the first broad category of *policy literature*. This second category is sub-divided into the literature on ‘femocrats’, ‘policy activists’ and ‘those working for social movements’.<sup>1</sup> Again, each of these approaches to policy workers assumes a humanist agent, conceptualising policy workers as distinct from the policy realm and fighting against it.

In the last section of this chapter I argue that we need to take seriously the hegemonic assumption of the humanist agent in the literature to date on policy workers because the literature itself is (a part of) the discourses circulating around the policy realm. Rather than merely reject this conceptualisation in the literature as inaccurate, we need to address how the understanding of policy workers as rational agents shapes policy workers (*at present*) in ways that limit their policy work. That is, the hegemonic discourses around the policy

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<sup>1</sup> In some ways these categories are arbitrary or, at least, the lines between them are somewhat blurred. For example, the literature on policy activists is located within the broader literature on the bureaucracy, which of course says something about the policy realm. However, as will become clear, the emphasis in the discussion on this literature is what it says about bureaucrats as activists, rather than what it says about the bureaucracy as a whole (though links are made to the policy literature so as to locate this work). The point of the distinction between the two categories is to draw attention to debates *within policy literature* about policy workers and then, for completeness, to address what other bodies of literature say about policy workers. In any event, as argued, all assume the humanist agent.

realm shape the subjectivities of policy workers in limited ways and hence need to be both identified and critiqued.

### THE RELEVANCE OF THE ARGUMENT

The significance of the argument that the subjectivities of policy workers are shaped by the discourses around the policy realm is twofold. First, on an *at present* descriptive level<sup>2</sup>, understanding the policy workers as constituted within the policy realm helps explain the interview material of the case study in ways that are not possible through the assumption present in the traditional literature of the separation of the policy worker from the policy realm. This traditional conceptualisation of policy workers lends itself to a study of constraint and agency within the policy realm. While, on one level, constraint and agency are important, they do not tell the whole story. In terms of the discussion of power and personhood in Chapter 1, conceptualising policy workers as agential or as constrained works within a traditional understanding of power from above and assumes a unitary, pre-formed, agential person. It misses the ways in which the policy workers in this thesis embraced and were a part of much of the policy environment, internalising and interiorising the logics of agency and rationality. In contrast, this thesis understands power as productive and conceptualises personhood as located. In terms of the policy workers in the case study, then, it is not only the moments of struggle and conflict, but also the moments of inadvertent agreement that need to be addressed. In particular, at times, the policy workers, who identified as activists, adopted the prevalent understandings of the policy realm generally (the logic of agency and the logic of rationality) and of specific policy areas (how the problem was represented in the first place). This thesis, therefore, challenges the limits set by the assumption of the structure-agency dichotomy through identifying the ways in which the policy realm constituted subjects, including through the *concepts of agency and constraint*. Following Bickford's (1999, 88) call for linking studies of the production of meaning and subjectivity with 'social scientific thinking about worldly

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<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on the *at present* explanatory grip of the conceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects is to make clear that the claim is not to some objective truth about policy workers. Indeed, the account in this thesis of the thoughts, ideas, and practices of the policy workers is my own interpretation affected by my own subject positioning (see Chapter 3). Further, how policy workers are constructed may change over time and location. Nevertheless, because the discourses around the policy realm have an effect on the subjectivities of policy workers and hence on policy outcomes (see the normative concerns elaborated in the text) it is important to identify how policy workers are constructed *at present* in the policy realm of this case study.

“things” like social structures and political institutions’, this thesis theorises how the subjectivities of policy workers are created in the policy realm.

Acknowledging that the logics of agency and rationality constitute the subjectivities of policy workers helps explain some tensions in the interview material. The policy workers described both the constraints set by the hierarchical character of the policy realm and their strategic manoeuvring within and around this realm to achieve their objectives with respect to particular policy areas. In either case, the policy workers conceptualised themselves as arriving at the policy realm with separate and distinct interests, which were either constrained or agentially achieved through fighting against the interests of the bureaucracy as a whole (Part II). This perspective suggests that policy workers were separate and distinct from the policy realm in which they worked. Yet, at times, the policy workers adopted, as their own, policy directions and concerns that they themselves, at other moments, identified as reflecting wider government or departmental objectives. That is, they inadvertently shared understandings of particular policy problems with the government or bureaucracy as a whole, yet they talked about themselves as strategically fighting against the bureaucracy to achieve their feminist agenda. Furthermore, as this thesis demonstrates, the policy workers internalised and enacted the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm. Recognising how the logic of agency directs attention to moments of struggle and conflict between competing interests, and that this logic contributed to the subjectivities of policy workers, helps explain the ways in which the policy workers skimmed over these moments of consensus.

Further, when directly addressing the character of policy and the policy realm, the policy workers were clear that policy was value-laden, political, and contested. In their view, policies served particular purposes and reflected particular interests. This perspective suggests that policies do not capture some objective, universal truth. And yet, when the interviewees addressed specific policies, they assumed research was helpful, not only in supporting their goals but also in better understanding the problem. The passion with which many of them worked was connected to a sense that they could get closer to understanding and hence *solving* the problem. This perspective implies that there is some independent problem that could be solved, outside of values. Consequently, the policy workers evinced both an (articulated) understanding of policy as serving particular interests and an (implicit) understanding of policy as solving problems (Chapter 6). Being

aware of the assumption of the logic of rationality by policy workers helps explain why, even when they explicitly reject rational notions of policy, they enact it. Conceptualising the policy worker as separate from the policy realm, as occurs in the existing policy literature, cannot explain this contradiction.

The second significant element to the argument is normative. I contend that the logics of agency and rationality limit the performance of policy by policy workers. These logics prevent policy workers from reflecting on the significance of embedded *shared values* (about the policy realm and about specific policies) in the construction of policy problems (Chapter 6), the role of *language*, ideas and concerns in shaping policy proposals (Chapter 8), and the *effects* of specific policies on people and social relations (Chapter 7). As a result, the policy outcomes the policy workers imagine are always already bounded and the policy proposals they fight for, support and accept can have deleterious effects. Ultimately, therefore, by challenging the logics of agency and rationality, the thesis envisages alternative ways of performing policy, insisting that these very facets of policy (values, language and effects) which are offered only passing attention in current policy practices, need to be more adequately addressed. This alternative policy work can be achieved through taking account of the locatedness of policy workers in the policy realm and of the constructed character of policies and the effects this has on people and social relations. Going further, it is argued that identifying the ways in which subjectivities are formed, exposing how the logics of agency and rationality construct the subjectivities of policy workers *at present*, assists in disrupting these subjectivities (Davies, 1994; Davies *et al.*, 2006). This thesis, therefore, exposes how policy workers are constructed as rational agents so as to provide a challenge to the discourses of the humanist agent and to create space for policy workers to be reflexive about their subjectivity and hence to find other ways of performing policy work. The conceptualisation of policy workers as humanist agents, as occurs in the literature and in the policy realm, does not allow such a challenge to the performance of policy, leaving in place the current practices of policy work and the associated rational understanding of policy.

The argument, therefore, offers much in terms of understanding what occurs *at present* within the policy realm, the limits this sets on policy work and hence on policy outcomes, and on ways of changing this present practice of policy. Conversely, the current literature on policy workers that assumes a humanist agent does not sufficiently explain what occurs

in practice, nor how this can be challenged. Furthermore, as elaborated on in the final section, this literature shapes and reflects the hegemonic discourses present *in* the policy realm. It becomes imperative, then, to identify the assumptions and presuppositions present in the literature on policy, the policy realm and policy workers and to highlight the consequences that follow for policy workers and policy work. The task of disrupting and deconstructing the discourses around the policy realm and their effects is rendered possible through the reconceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects. This task, begun in the last chapter on the literature on policy and the policy realm, is pursued in the following two sections with a close reading of the literature on policy workers. Then Parts II and III analyse the interview material, illustrating the presence of the discourses around the policy realm (identified in Part I) in the particular policy realm of the case study and the effects of these discourses on policy workers and policy work.

### **POLICY LITERATURE AND POLICY WORKERS**

As mentioned above, I begin my close reading of the literature on policy workers by focusing on the *policy literature* on policy workers. While much of the existing policy literature tends to focus more on the policy realm than on what the policy workers in that realm actually do (Colebatch, 2002, 121)<sup>3</sup>, there are a few policy scholars who do turn their attention to policy workers. These are addressed below under two approaches: that which understands policy in traditional rational terms and that which understands policy-as-discourse. The traditional rational approaches to policy, which are discussed first, are further divided into three streams of scholarship on policy workers: the ‘implementation literature’ stemming from Pressman and Wildavsky’s (1973) work<sup>4</sup>, of which Hill is a relevant contemporary example (Hill, 2003, 267); the literature on ‘street-level bureaucrats’ stemming from the work of Lipsky (1980); and the scholarship on ‘policy entrepreneurs’ stemming from Kingdon (2003)<sup>5</sup>. All these approaches conceptualise policy workers as separate individuals existing outside of the policy realm. Hence, they adopt a

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the discourses within the literature on the policy realm generally and associated assumptions about policy workers.

<sup>4</sup> Colebatch (2005, 16) argues that Wildavsky (who published later editions of his and Pressman’s *Implementation* book after Pressman’s death) gradually moved away from an ‘instrumental’ perspective of policy that assumed that the implementation of policies involved the pursuit of government objectives. However, according to Hill’s (2003) summary, the body of literature labelled the ‘implementation literature’, derives from Wildavsky and Pressman’s work and assumes a rational approach to policy.

<sup>5</sup> Kingdon published the first edition of his book in 1984.



humanist understanding of personhood and the associated separation of structure and agency.

### **Traditional Rational Policy Literature and Policy Workers**

The implementation, street-level bureaucrat, and policy entrepreneur literatures, despite their slightly different approaches to the nature of the policy realm, all assume a rational understanding of policy. Furthermore, they all take the policy worker to be distinct from the policy realm, accepting and replicating a separation between agency and structure. They assume, therefore, that policy workers are humanist agents. Each of these approaches is addressed in turn.

The central question behind the policy implementation literature, according to Hill's summary, is 'why policy does, or does not, occur as its authors intended' (Hill, 2003, 267). While this literature argues that numerous factors influence whether a policy is accurately implemented or not (Hill, 2003, 267), the ultimate goal for the implementation literature is to ensure that policy workers do what those in authority desire. The assumption is that policy-making and policy implementation are distinct areas: policy workers implement, whether accurately or not, policy intentions. This literature reflects, therefore, the authorised choice model of policy that assumes the logic of rationality and ignores the values held by policy workers (see Chapter 1). In this view, the beliefs, desires and understandings of policy workers are not relevant. Policy workers become pawns who rationally and objectively implement policy made by others. Further, the concern is with *accurate* implementation of policy intentions, with no attention to how policies represent the problem in particular ways, which have effects on people and social relations.

The policy implementation literature, then, assumes that policy workers are humanist agents, *separate* enough from their environment and their own values to implement *rationally* the policy intentions of others. In contrast, the conceptualisation of policy workers developed in this thesis insists that the values, beliefs and understandings of policy workers are central to how policy workers understand themselves, how they perform their work, and how they approach specific policy areas. Indeed, the women in the case study of this thesis identified as feminists and had clear goals directed at achieving some form of justice for girls in education (Chapter 5). Further, they conceptualised themselves as maintaining their feminist agenda irrespective of the intentions of the government and the

wider bureaucracy. Of course, as indicated above, the thesis addresses how at times these concerns of policy workers did overlap with those of the bureaucracy as a whole but, importantly, *this is in the context of the interviewees being avowed policy activists*. Thus, while the implementation literature suggests that the values and beliefs of policy workers are irrelevant to policy outcomes, I contend that these values and beliefs are central to how they go about their work. Importantly, however, included in the values, beliefs and understandings of policy workers are their conceptualisations of policy, the policy realm and policy workers, as well as their understanding of specific policy areas.

To be fair, recent policy implementation scholars, such as Hill (2003, 267-8), do call for recognition of the ways in which the understandings of policy workers about policy intentions can explain 'implementation outcomes'. Superficially, this could indicate some awareness of how the beliefs, values and understandings of policy workers shape the ways in which they perform their work. However, Hill assumes these beliefs and understandings of policy workers relate to particular policy areas rather than to the policy realm generally, missing the role of the discourses of the policy realm in specific policy outcomes. Furthermore, Hill conceptualises the understandings and thoughts of policy workers as easily changeable so as to accord with those of the official policy-makers. She suggests that, because non-state consultants, scholars and experts often influence policy workers' (inaccurate) understandings of specific policies, policy workers should be educated by the state (or, at least, that such education be monitored by the state) so as to ensure a shared understanding of policy intentions (Hill, 2003, 266). Hill's goal, like the implementation literature generally, is to improve implementation so that it accords with government objectives (Hill, 2003, 269). Even forms of implementation scholarship, then, that attempt to deal with the beliefs and values of policy workers ultimately assumes policy workers who can be shaped to act consistently with policy intentions, reducing policy workers to pawns of and, hence, distinct from the policy realm.

The assumption in the policy implementation literature, then, is that policy workers can either work outside of their values that differ from those of the policy realm, or have individual values that influence their work but that can easily be changed to accord with the values of the policy realm. In either case values are conceptualised as consciously held or articulated beliefs (or intentions) with respect to specific policy areas. Unaddressed are the ingrained assumptions about specific policy areas and about the policy realm itself and

the role of these assumptions in specific policy outcomes. Thus, this literature ignores the construction of policy problems and their effects. It assumes the humanist agent with respect to the policy realm, a person who, irrespective of their own values, rationally and with neutrality implements the solutions of others to (pre-existing) policy problems. This person is pawn to, but separate from, the policy realm, reflecting the separation of structure and agency implicit in the assumption of the humanist agent. By contrast, this thesis conceptualises policy workers as located subjects. Such a perspective demands attention to the deep-seated assumptions of policy workers about the policy realm and about specific policy areas. It contends that the discourses of the policy realm, the logics of agency and rationality, shape and reflect the understandings and practices of policy workers in specific policy areas and that these discourses are taken for granted and hence difficult to move outside of. It also contends that, while some understandings of specific policy areas are easily identifiable and readily shaped, others are deeply held and difficult to change by direction from above. In other words, while the implementation literature is concerned with improving implementation through achieving shared understandings, the purpose of the thesis is to draw attention to unacknowledged shared understandings. It is concerned with the ways in which policy workers internalise and enact hegemonic discourses of the policy realm itself and the dominant discourses of specific policy areas.

The body of scholarship that has stemmed out of Lipsky's (1980) work on street-level bureaucrats also conceptualises policy workers as humanist agents, though it offers some useful insights about the role of policy workers in policy. Street-level bureaucrats are generally understood as service level workers who deliver the final policy (Ricucci, 2005, 111; Checkland, 2004, 951; Lipsky, 1980, 3) and who have a 'substantial discretion in the execution of their work' (Lipsky, 1980, 3).<sup>6</sup> As Lipsky states:

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<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to address the literature on street-level bureaucrats because of what it suggests about lower level public servants and their relationship to the broader policy realm and policy, even though the policy workers of this case study were not the final deliverers of policy. While the policy workers of this case study are one step removed from the service delivery side of education, in that they are not teachers or education administrators, they nevertheless had some degree of discretion in how they interacted with various schools: which ones received professional training, which were involved in which projects and benefited from funding, and what advice on gender issues was given. Further, Lipsky's (1980, 18-23) talk of street-level bureaucrats 'processing large amounts of work with inadequate resources' and hence developing 'shortcuts and simplifications' that are 'unsanctioned' by higher levels resonates with how the policy workers of this case study conceptualised themselves as strategically achieving their goals within a hierarchical bureaucracy (Part II). Hence, the assumptions underpinning such a conceptualisation need to be addressed here.

Street-level bureaucrats are interested in processing work consistent with their own preferences and only those agency policies so salient as to be backed up by significant sanctions. (Lipsky, 1980, 19)

Lipsky goes on to claim that, while such work processing practices are unsanctioned paradoxically they form the de facto policies of the agency and are needed for the agency to survive (Lipsky, 1980, 19). His emphasis, then, is on the 'working conditions and priorities' of street-level bureaucrats/policy workers that influence policy outcomes (Lipsky, 1980, 25). In opposition to the way in which the policy implementation literature relegates policy workers to the role of mere implementers, Lipsky usefully locates policy workers as playing a significant role in the policy realm.<sup>7</sup> Any worthwhile approach to policy workers needs to retain the insight that the work practices of policy workers need to be addressed in order to understand the policy realm and specific substantive policy outcomes. However, this thesis makes the further point that these work practices are connected to the thoughts and ideas of policy workers about the policy realm. These thoughts, ideas and practices comprise the subjectivities of policy workers and are sites of the discourses around and in the policy realm.

It is here that the thesis departs from Lipsky's conceptualisation of street-level bureaucrats. He assumes these people are humanist agents separate and distinct from the policy realm. He describes street-level bureaucrats as having a relationship of conflict with those above them (Lipsky, 1980, 25). This relationship is depicted as a tussle between street-level bureaucrats attempting to maximise autonomy and managers attempting to minimize the discretion of street-level bureaucrats, reflecting the distinction between structure and agency. While Lipsky suggests that there is a degree of reciprocity, or mutual dependency, within this relationship because the organisation functions as a result of street-level bureaucrats maintaining some degree of autonomy, he nevertheless characterises this relationship as a tussle over the individuality of policy workers. He assumes, therefore, that street-level bureaucrats have a centre core or essential self that holds fixed interests they struggle to protect within the bureaucracy. Further, the constructed and constitutive character of policy is not addressed. Lipsky's street-level bureaucrat, therefore, is a humanist agent.

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<sup>7</sup> Hill (2003) includes Lipsky as support for her argument for taking into account the beliefs of policy implementers. However, I read Lipsky differently here as making a theoretically distinct point about the significant role policy workers play in *making* policies, as opposed to leaving policy workers, as Hill does, as mere implementers.

The scholarship on policy entrepreneurs stemming from Kingdon (2003) also assumes policy workers are separate from the policy realm in which they work, though it too takes the role of policy workers seriously. Kingdon is often quoted for his work on policy entrepreneurs (see Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 111; Edwards, 2001, 188), who he describes as ‘people who are willing to invest their resources in pushing their pet proposals or problems’ (Kingdon, 2003, 20). They take advantage of the opportunity provided by ‘policy windows’ created by the ‘policy system’ to ultimately push these pet proposals onto the agenda (Kingdon, 2003, 165). The picture Kingdon paints is one of policy entrepreneurs lying in wait for the opportunity to promote their own agenda/s, which is/are distinct from that/those of the policy system. This conceptualisation of policy workers reflects the structured interaction approach, which conceives of policy as capturing competing interests struggled over in the policy realm. Chapter 1 argued that this approach assumes the humanist agent and, in particular, the logic of agency. It, too, accepts the separation of agency and structure. Indeed, Kingdon refers to the ‘personality versus structure’ debate, arguing that the policy entrepreneur ‘takes advantage of the opportunity’ that arises through factors out of their control, such as when problems, policy proposals and politics coincide within the policy system (Kingdon, 2003, 181). Policy entrepreneurs, therefore, maintain their own separate and distinct agendas, which may be achieved if the right opportunity arises through the structures in which they work. Like street-level bureaucrats, policy entrepreneurs sit outside the policy system they try to influence and shape. This is the logic of agency.

Further, Kingdon assumes the logic of rationality, despite rejecting elements of a rational approach to policy.<sup>8</sup> He does dismiss the notion of a direct link between policy problems and solutions (2003, 78, 166, 172) and notes that there is an interpretive element to policy problems (2003, 94, 109-110). Nevertheless, Kingdon assumes the prior existence of problems that policy workers identify: he talks about decision-makers in policy using ‘indicators’ of problems ‘to assess the magnitude of a problem and to become aware of changes in the problem’ (Kingdon, 2003, 91); he points to his interviewees referring to

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<sup>8</sup> Kingdon perhaps straddles the categories of this chapter. He explicitly rejects elements of the rational approach to policy but falls short of understanding policy-as-discourse. He is included in the traditional approaches to policy because, as is clear from the text in the body of the thesis, he ultimately takes for granted the logic of rationality. While he rejects some of the procedural elements of an authorised choice approach to policy, he still assumes that policies respond to pre-existing problems, working within Bacchi’s (1999a, 21) ‘problem solution’ approach to policy discussed in the Introduction of the thesis.

‘more or less objective indicators of problems’ (Kingdon, 2003, 93); and he suggests that ‘people often pay attention to a problem rather straightforwardly because there actually is a demonstrable problem that needs their attention’ (Kingdon, 2003, 93). Kingdon’s concern, then, is more about which issues make it onto the agenda, and which solutions are attached to which problems, rather than with how particular problems are represented and their effects. Consequently, Kingdon’s policy entrepreneurs are humanist agents, that is, pre-formed people who arrive at the policy realm and attempt to attach their pre-formed preferred policy proposals to the pre-existing problems that make it onto the agenda.

The policy literature on policy workers that assumes a rational understanding of policy, therefore, conceptualises policy workers as separate and distinct from the policy realm, mirroring the distinction between structure and agency. In such an approach attention is drawn away from how policy workers are located subjects who perform the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm. In the next section I argue that, somewhat more surprisingly, even those theorists who understand policy-as-discourse continue to conceive of the policy worker as separate from, as outside of, the policy realm.

### **Policy-as-Discourse Literature and Policy Workers**

The existing policy literature on policy workers that conceptualises policy as discursively constructed (Ball, 1990, 1993, 1994a; Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992; Yeatman, 1998b; Taylor, 1997, 2004; Taylor *et al.*, 1997), like the rational approaches just discussed, assumes a policy worker distinct from the policy realm. While this literature locates discourses in policies it fails to locate discourses in the policy realm or to identify policy workers as discursively constituted within this realm.<sup>9</sup> The policy-as-discourse theorists

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<sup>9</sup> More recently Ball (2003, 215-216) has identified how the ‘policy technologies’ of ‘the market, managerialism and performativity’ have replaced ‘professionalism and bureaucracy’ associated with state-centred welfare agendas and have changed ‘who’ people ‘are’. This suggests some changes in the nature of bureaucracy associated with current policy discourses (or technologies) and identifies certain people as discursively constructed. However, Ball’s focus is on the specific policy agendas often associated with new public management and on ‘educators, scholars and researchers’ (albeit as public servants) while my focus is on the logics of agency and rationality that circulate around the policy realm and the effects they have on policy workers not so associated with the service delivery side of education. Furthermore, despite the coincidence of the language of ‘performativity’ in our work, and the associated recognition of people being discursively constructed, Ball’s (2003, 222-223) emphasis is on the tensions, ‘fabrications’, ‘schizophrenia’, and ‘inauthenticity’ performativity produces within teachers who are torn between their ‘beliefs’ about teaching and the pressure to ‘maximize performance’ and achieve measurable outputs, implying a person who stands *outside* of the discursive pressures *on* them. By contrast, while I accept Ball’s insights as important, the emphasis in this thesis is on the ways in which the subjectivities of the policy workers, produced by the discourses around the policy realm, led to moments of consensus. We concur, however, in

remain attached to a notion of the humanist individual formed outside of their environment. However, as argued in Chapter 1, unlike the policy literature on policy workers that assumes the rational model of policy, the conceptualisation of policy-as-discourse does not necessitate an understanding of the humanist agent. Indeed, the thesis shows how a further theorised policy-as-discourse approach encourages recognition of policy workers as discursively constituted. Accordingly, this literature is addressed at some length and the points of agreement and departure between it and the thesis are identified. While this thesis retains a conceptualisation of policy-as-discourse, it offers a more nuanced understanding of discourses and conceptualises the policy realm, in addition to specific policies, as discursively constructed.

The policy-as-discourse literature understands discourses in and around specific policies as shaping that which they speak (Bacchi, 1999a, 40; Marginson, 1997; Watts, 1993/94; Yeatman, 1990, 158), leading to a tendency to focus on policy documents and how they have discursive effects.<sup>10</sup> Yet, at the same time, policy-as-discourse theorists who theorise the policy realm are concerned with the role policy workers play in shaping policy outcomes (Ball, 1990, 1993, 1994a; Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992; Bacchi, 2001a; Yeatman, 1998b; Taylor, 1997, 2004 Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Jones, Lee and Poynton, 1998). The difficulty for these theorists becomes how to capture the discursive effects of policy texts and documents, while retaining a role for policy workers. Traditionally, authors tend to assume implicitly a polarisation of this dilemma: it is either policy texts or policy 'implementation' that matters, which creates an omission or tension in their work (Bacchi, 2000). Such an approach is caught within the same agency-structure distinction that characterises the traditional literature on policy workers discussed above.

Ball (1990, 1993, 1994a), Taylor *et al.* (1997), and Taylor (1997) attempt to address directly this dilemma of how to deal with the relationship between policy texts and the 'agency' of policy workers. They criticise the tendency to work with dichotomies such as the structure/agency, state/policy cycle, macro/micro debate (Taylor, 1997, vii and 33;

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our concern for the ways in which discursively constructed subjectivities change who we are and the nature of our work (Ball, 2003, 226).

<sup>10</sup> Similarly, O'Malley, Weir and Shearing (1997) note that the governmentality literature tends to focus on the terms used to govern and the rationalities of rule and thus 'concern with politics as social relations is sidelined in favour of examination of texts' (O'Malley, Weir and Shearing, 1997, 502). However, similar to Taylor and Ball, O'Malley, Weir and Shearing tend to create a distinction between text (with discourse) and what actually happens (social relations). I question this distinction, suggesting that discourse is also about social relations, including practices (see Chapter 1).

Bowe, Ball, and Gold, 1992, 6-7; Ball, 1994a, 15). In an effort to challenge these dichotomies, they offer the insight that there is a relationship between structure and agency.<sup>11</sup> In so doing, however, as will become apparent, these authors evoke a sense of agency and constraint as fixed and forever central to the policy realm rather than as concepts that form part of the discourses of the policy realm, which are changeable. Further, they fail to theorise how the *concepts of structure and agency* themselves shape policy workers as separate from the policy realm. Hence, in the end, they remain attached to the humanist agent. Ball (1990, 1993, 1994a), Taylor *et al.* (1997), and Taylor (1997) are addressed here, with Taylor and Taylor *et al.* grouped together.

Ball, like Kingdon and Lipsky discussed above, emphasises the role played by policy workers in the production of policy. For his book *Politics and Policy Making in Education*, Ball interviewed ‘key actors, participants in the policy process’, including public servants (Ball, 1990, 2, emphasis added). He argues that this type of research offers insights often neglected in theoretical work:

Abstract accounts tend towards tidy generalities and often fail to capture the messy realities of influence, pressure, dogma, expediency, conflict, compromise, intransigence, resistance, error, opposition and pragmatism in the policy process. (Ball, 1990, 9)

Ball’s project is to ‘explain policy making via what it is that individuals and groups actually do and say in the arenas of influence in which they move’ (Ball, 1990, 9) and he invokes the language of ‘actors’ throughout (for example see Ball, 1990, 9). However, Ball is also concerned to capture the constructed character of policies. In order to explain the connection between the discursive character of policies and what is actually done, Ball calls for an understanding both of ‘policy as text’ and of ‘policy as discourse’<sup>12</sup> (Ball, 1993, 10; Ball, 1994a, 15). ‘Policy as text’ describes the multiple interpretations possible of any policy document/proposal. The intention here is to capture the role policy workers play in any policy outcome and is about maintaining the agency of policy workers. ‘Policy as discourse’ describes the way that policies embody meanings that restrict how an issue

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<sup>11</sup> This approach to agency and structure reflects a growing desire in most areas of social sciences to ‘blend both agency and structure’ (Goodin, 1996, 17-19; see also Harker and May, 1993, 177).

<sup>12</sup> Ball’s notion of ‘policy as discourse’ is not to be confused with the concept of policy-as-discourse invoked in this thesis. Both Ball’s ‘policy as text’ and ‘policy as discourse’ fit within my concept of policy-as-discourse, since I am concerned with the ways in which both policies and policy workers are constituted in discourses.



can be discussed. It reflects the view that we are all inside discourse and therefore that what we can think is constrained. In calling for both conceptualisations of policy, then, Ball is suggesting that the policy realm involves both agency and constraint (Ball, 1994a, 21; Ball, 1990, 14): policy workers are simultaneously pawns and agents.

Ball, then, describes contradictory understandings of ‘policy as text’ and ‘policy as discourse’ and asserts that they are ‘implicit in each other’ (Ball, 1993, 10; Ball, 1994a, 15). However, he fails to theorise how this is the case. He does not explain theoretically how ‘policy as text’ and ‘policy as discourse’ both exist within the policy realm or what is the relationship between these conceptualisations of policy. Responding to Henry’s (1993) criticism that he avoids the relationship between text and discourse, Ball reflects:

I do not want to simply explain away, the messy, complexity of the institutional formation and realisation of policy by always retreating into the abstract, cleanliness of the ‘bigger picture’ ... If that leaves me with contradictions to deal with and epistemology difficulties (like how to be a poststructuralist modernist), then so be it. (Ball, 1994b, 109, original punctuation)<sup>13</sup>

This ambivalence is unsatisfying.

This thesis, following Ball, acknowledges both agency and constraint within the policy realm but, extending Ball, locates agency and constraint as *concepts* that are *at present* realities of the policy realm, which reinforce and reflect the humanist agent. The understanding of policy workers as located subjects theoretically explains this *at present* reality of the policy realm. The concepts of constraint and agency are part of the logic of agency, which circulates around and in the policy realm, and is internalised and performed by policy workers. However, rather than attempt to retain a humanist notion of agency, the purpose of this thesis is to displace the centrality of agency (and constraint) within the policy realm, turning attention to the ways in which policy workers are constituted in the policy realm and the limiting consequences that flow from this constitution. Consequently, while Ball’s ‘theoretical commitment’ is to ‘embracing agency and the ideological category of the individual’ (Ball, 1990, 9), in other words retaining the humanist agent, this

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<sup>13</sup> More recently, Ball (2006, 3) has again described his work as invoking both a Foucauldian ontology and an ethnographic ontology and acknowledges the tensions between the two. However, he also points to his work with Tamboukou (Tamboukou and Ball, 2003) on attempting to identify the connections between these ontologies and the ‘possibilities and openings’ created through such work (Ball, 2006, 3).

thesis explores the *role of the concept of agency* in forming the subjectivities of policy workers and how they perform their work. The point is that ‘[o]ur (*liberal humanist*) belief that we are the architects of our own consciousness and our consciences is as much the result of discourses we have been subjected to (constituted by) as anything else’ (Davies, 1994, 3, original emphasis). Policy workers, as well as policies, are discursively constituted.<sup>14</sup> The hegemonic discourse of the logic of agency (and the structure/agency dichotomy it assumes) circulates within and around the policy realm, and hence does, *at present*, shape who policy workers become. But, this does not always have to be the case: these discourses are constructions and hence are not fixed (see Chapter 1). As already stated, this thesis advocates moving outside, or at least opening for scrutiny, the logics that currently shape the ways in which policy workers conceive of themselves and perform their work. This challenge to the discourses around the policy realm will produce important outcomes in policy work with respect to specific policy areas and is not possible so long as the humanist agent is assumed and maintained.

Central to the difference between Ball’s position and the position developed in this thesis is divergent understandings of discourse. In fact, Ball tends to be a little contradictory here. At times, his conception of ‘policy as discourse’ emphasises that discourses shape the way we think, which is closer to my view:

The essence of this is that there are real struggles over the interpretation and enactment of policies. But these are set within a moving discursive frame which articulates and constrains the possibilities and probabilities of interpretation and enactment. We read and respond to policies in discursive circumstances that we cannot, or perhaps do not, think about. ... Thus, in these terms the effect of policy is primarily discursive; it changes the possibilities we have for thinking ‘otherwise’. (Ball, 1993, 15)

Here Ball is invoking the Foucauldian notion of discourse as creating that which it speaks. Discourses, in this sense, influence what can be said and thought (Ball, 1993, 14). And I agree with Ball here, though he, of course, is referring to discourses around specific policies rather than around the policy realm or policy workers.

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<sup>14</sup> As indicated in footnote 9, Ball (2003) has recently identified teachers, scholars and researchers, though not policy workers, as discursively constructed. Further, as elaborated in that footnote, Ball still tends to assume a distinction between people and the discourses that shape them.

Ultimately, however, Ball tends to conflate discourse with structure (and in opposition to policy workers). For example, consider his introductory discussion of the main themes in the sociology of education:

...running through this body of work is, once again, the fundamental tension between *structure* and agency; that is between the abstract effects of economic, political and *discursive* forces and the interpretational possibilities available to social actors. (Ball, 2000, viii, emphases added)

This collapsing of discourse and structure is evident, too, in Ball's conceptualisation, elaborated on above, of 'policy as discourse' in contradistinction to 'policy as text'. Reducing discourse to structure in this way overlooks the ways in which discourses have practical/material effects and form subjectivities (Marginson, 1997, 225): social actors are part of discourses. Thus, Ball's construction of 'policy as discourse' and 'policy as text' re-creates an agency-structure distinction, one he is happy to straddle. Yet the concepts of agency and structure invariably position the policy worker as separate from the policy realm. Consequently, Ball assumes the humanist agent. In contrast, understanding policy-as-discourse, as I suggest, avoids the agency-structure dichotomy in theorising policy workers, highlighting instead the shared taken-for-granted assumptions behind policy proposals. The concepts of constraint and agency foreclose the possibility of policy workers understanding themselves as located subjects within the policy realm, making difficult any kind of reflexivity with respect to their location as agential rational policy workers who share assumptions about specific policy areas and who perform policy work in particular limited ways.

Like Ball, Taylor *et al.* (1997) and Taylor (1997) attempt to incorporate an understanding of discourse in the policy realm while retaining a sense of agency for policy workers. They reject the rational model of policy for its distinction between policy analyst and policy advocate and its assumption that policy analysts separate themselves out from the moral questions about policy and simply address the question of whether a particular policy can achieve a particular goal (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 18).<sup>15</sup> Rather, these authors, like Ball, wish to emphasise the active role policy workers play in forming policy (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 31).

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<sup>15</sup> Taylor and Taylor *et al.*'s conceptualisation of the 'rational model of policy' parallels the authorised choice approach to policy described in Chapter 1. As explained in the Introduction to this thesis, I refer to both the authorised choice and structured interaction models of policy as rational approaches to policy because they work within Bacchi's (1999a, 21) 'problem solution' rather than 'problem representation' approach to policy. However, in this section on Taylor and Taylor *et al.*, I follow their usage of the term 'rational model of policy'.

Indeed, in their vignettes about people working at various levels of the policy realm, Taylor *et al.* emphasise that ‘what is subsequently produced in practice often bears little resemblance to the original intentions’ (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 7). Accordingly, they argue that, rather than assume that in ‘perfect conditions’ a ‘desired’ result can be achieved, as the rational model does, policies can ‘be expected to be ignored, resisted, contested or rearticulated to suit local circumstances’ (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 7). Yet, Taylor *et al.* also suggest that there are structural limitations on what can be done in the policy realm. They want to capture both this sense of constraint and the agency of policy workers:

Thus state policy actors are not simply neutral conduits for policy pressures placed upon them, but are involved in micropolitics inside the state. ...Our view, then, is that *both state structures and state policy workers* rearticulate policy pressures in the move from the articulation of a problem on to the policy agenda to the generation of the policy text. (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 31, emphasis added)

Taylor, too, talks about the relevance of ‘*culture* as well as *practice*’ (Taylor, 1997, 25, original emphasis). Thus, like Ball above, we can see an attempt to capture both agency and structure. Unlike Ball, however, Taylor and Taylor *et al.* explicitly theorise the relationship between structure and agency. Unfortunately, as developed below, they still assume the humanist agent.

Taylor (1997) and Taylor *et al.* (1997, 27-29) use discourse to theorise the relationship between policy texts and consequences in specific policy areas. Taylor suggests that discourse analysis can assist in understanding the cultural, economic and political contexts in which policy documents arise (Taylor, 1997, 28-29), highlighting the multiple and competing discourses within policy documents. This perspective leads her to claim that discourse analysis then can be used to understand the policy ‘implementation’ stage:

discourse theory can be applied to policy implementation case studies. Given that contradictory contexts and competing interests are reflected in policies as competing discourses, policy effects are by no means certain or predictable. Discourse theories are useful for investigating how policies are *read* and *used* in context; in other words, for documenting the politics of discourse during policy implementation. (Taylor, 1997, 29, original emphases)

The implication, then, is that during policy implementation, policy workers in particular policy areas can *use* the fact that multiple discourses are present in policy texts in some

straightforward political move (see also Taylor, 2004, 445-446). Indeed, Taylor (1997) employs terms such as 'playing the agenda' and the 'politics of discourse'. Similarly, while Taylor *et al.* rightly emphasise that discourses can influence how texts are interpreted (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 28), their focus too is on the *use* of discourses. They draw on Fulcher (1989) who talks about the 'tactical' use of particular discourses by different interest groups, concluding that 'policy texts represent the outcome of political struggles over meaning' (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 28). This thesis also invokes discourse to theorise the presence of agency and structure in the policy realm, but in very different ways. While Taylor and Taylor *et al.* conceptualise discourses as circulating around specific policy areas and as within the control of individual people, this thesis asserts that people are located within discourses, both with respect to the policy realm generally and to specific policy areas.

In Taylor and Taylor *et al.*'s approach, the concept of discourses renders the policy realm as the mere location in which the 'politics of discourse' (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 43), with respect to specific policy areas, is played out. It also assumes that policy workers, as well as other people within the policy arena, are agents who *use* at will competing discourses to achieve their goals within particular policy debates. In this perspective the policy realm and policy workers are separate and distinct, revealing the assumption of the humanist agent. Erased here are the ways in which discourses circulate around and in the policy realm generally, shaping policy workers in particular ways. The emphasis on what Bacchi (2000, 51) terms the 'use' of discourses ignores the embedded, taken-for-granted character of discourses and that policy workers are themselves located within these, both with respect to specific policy concerns and to the policy realm generally. While on one level, or at least sometimes, the policy workers of the case study in this thesis did fight for their own interpretations or preferred meanings, there is another level at which they were shaped by the policy realm, assuming and enacting the hegemonic discourses of the logics of agency and rationality. As a consequence, there were moments when the policy workers unquestioningly shared with the government or the policy realm generally commonsense understandings of policy and the policy realm, as well as of particular policy areas. Far from being humanist agents *using* discourses (of specific policy areas), the policy workers were located subjects, interiorising and enacting the discourses of the policy realm and of specific policy areas.

Taylor and Taylor *et al.*'s account constitutes policy workers not only as agential, but also as rational. The focus on policy workers (and others) actively interpreting texts misses how policy documents (as discourses) have effects – not necessarily in framing interpretation but in constituting subjects. Similarly, Chapter 1 argued that Taylor and Taylor *et al.*'s emphasis on the role of policy workers/implementers in the consequences of particular policies neglects the constructed character of policies and their discursive effects, leading them to suggest that policies are ineffective, rather than harmful to people and social relations. Their approach to policy workers, then, limits what kinds of substantive policies policy workers conceive of because the full implications of policy-as-discourse are not addressed. Policy workers are rendered rational advocates within the policy realm.

It is worth noting here that Taylor and Taylor *et al.* invoke a particular limited understanding of the relationship of people to values, which is connected to their conceptualisation of discourses as external to people and always intentionally usable or 'utilisable' (see Taylor, 2004, 446). They assume a policy worker able to be separated from the policy realm and whose values always represent distinct and identifiable agendas that can easily be captured by using the right discourse. Taylor *et al.* ultimately claim that because 'values cannot be avoided in policy analysis ... they ought to be declared and argued for up front' (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 19). While identifying values, such as my acknowledgement of a desire for an understanding of policy-as-discourse, is important on one level, there is a level at which a person's own values are not so readily identifiable. The argument here is not that policy workers can be separated from values, as the rational model claims, but rather that policy workers are themselves so much a part of the discourses that shape the policy realm that they tend to adopt and internalise as commonsense some of the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm generally and of specific policy debates. Some values do not look like 'values' at all but like mere commonsense, and hence are difficult to identify and 'declare'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This acknowledgement of the difficulty of identifying and 'declaring' values reflects the discussion in Chapter 1 about the complexity for policy workers of being reflexive about their location within the discourses around the policy realm. As discussed there, such reflexivity is 'messy', 'vulnerable', 'ambivalent', and never complete, though distinctly possible (Davies *et al.*, 2006). Identifying values with respect to specific policy areas is likewise a difficult task, which is not sufficiently addressed by the literature. This consideration leads to a call in Chapter 6 for deep consultation with respect to specific policy areas.

In summary, my position coincides with the policy-as-discourse theorists who recognise the discursively constructed character of policies and the operation of both agency and structure in the policy realm, but departs from their position with the argument that these *concepts* of agency and structure constitute policy workers in particular ways which could and should be otherwise. Implicit in the policy-as-discourse theorists' conceptualisation of the policy realm is the humanist agent. In contrast, I contend that policy workers are located subjects, rejecting any absolute distinction between policy workers and the policy realm. Rather than accepting agency and structure in the policy realm as being about the oppression (or not) of the natural, independent policy worker, my view demands attention to how these concepts are part of the discourses of the policy realm that constitute the policy worker *at present*. Such an approach rejects notions of discourse as structure or as something simply to be *used* by policy workers at will. Rather, discourses are constructed and constitutive but multiple and contradictory (see Chapter 1). Further, discourses are present within the policy realm generally as well as in specific policy areas. Part II of the thesis addresses agency and structure in terms of how they shape and reflect the hegemony of the logic of agency in the policy realm.

To this point this chapter has argued that, of the *policy literature* that assumes a rational understanding of policy and addresses policy workers, either the policy worker gets subsumed by the bureaucracy (implementation literature) or is set up as an agent fighting against the structure as a whole (street-level bureaucrat and policy entrepreneur literature). Neither approach conceptualises policy workers as an integral part of, and shaped by, the policy realm. Nor, to date, does the policy-as-discourse literature that addresses the policy realm and policy workers locate policy workers as located subjects, though the lapse here is not so much because of theoretical necessity (as it is with rational approaches) but due to an under-theorising of agency and structure and of discourse. This thesis retains an understanding of policy-as-discourse while rejecting the humanist agent. It does this through emphasising that discourses are present within the *policy realm*, as well as within *specific policies*, and that they have *constitutive effects* but are, nonetheless, multiple and contradictory and hence *disruptable*. The following section turns to the literature on policy workers that only indirectly reflects on policy and the policy realm, and argues that this literature also assumes a rational, agential person.

## FEMOCRAT, POLICY ACTIVIST AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT LITERATURE: THE ROLE OF POLICY WORKERS

The second broad category in the literature on policy workers is that which directly addresses policy workers, either as femocrats, as policy activists or as those working for social movements in government, but that does not necessarily directly link this analysis to understandings of the policy realm, despite making assumptions about this realm.<sup>17</sup> This section assesses how this literature constructs policy workers and whether it assists in explaining the case study material. Again, it argues that these accounts of policy workers function within an agency-structure dichotomy. This way of conceptualising policy workers tends to mean that they are understood as separate from or outside of the policy realm. Indeed, we see titles of books such as *Inside Agitators* (Eisenstein, 1996), *Activism and the Policy Process* (Yeatman, 1998a) and *Between Colliding Worlds* (Malloy, 2003). These titles capture the assumption in this scholarship of the independence or separateness of the policy worker from the policy realm that, I suggest, leaves part of the story untold. Specifically, this literature does not address the ways in which policy workers are constituted *within* the policy realm. Furthermore, the assumption of the humanist agent in the literature serves to reinforce the prevalence of this discourse. Nevertheless, there are some insights in this scholarship I wish to retain, which are indicated as they arise. The femocrat, policy activist and social movement literatures are addressed in turn.

### Femocrat Literature

The term ‘femocrats’ was coined in Australia to describe those feminists who work within the state ‘to enhance policies and services in women’s interests’ (Hancock, 1999, 4).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Much has been written over the last three decades on femocrats and their experience of working within the bureaucracy (Eisenstein, 1996; Sawyer, 1990; Yeatman, 1990; Watson, 1990; Hancock, 1999; Franzway *et al.*, 1989; Blackmore, 1995; Kenway, 1990; van Acker, 2001). More recently some have written on policy activists (Yeatman, 1998a) or those committed to social movements (Malloy, 2003), or on collective action frames and social movements (Benford and Snow, 2000). The policy workers in the case study of this thesis are femocrats in the broad sense of the term. They are people with feminist ideals working in the state bureaucracy. Further, they are working in an area specifically directed at girls and women, although over recent years attention has turned to boys or gender. They are also ‘policy activists’ in Yeatman’s terms, in that they seek to intervene in policy rather than politics (Yeatman, 1998b, 1). They can similarly be understood as working in ‘special policy agencies’ in Malloy’s terms (Malloy, 2003, 3), as they are public servants working in the area associated with a particular social movement, feminism. It is therefore vital to consider what this literature says about policy workers.

<sup>18</sup> See also Sawyer (1990, 22), Yeatman (1990, 65-67) and Franzway *et al.* (1989, 133-134). For a slightly different definition see Eisenstein (1996, xii) and for debate over definitions see Eisenstein (1996, 68-69).



Feminists have written widely about the experiences of femocrats working within state bureaucracies. One of the main points of contention in this literature, particularly early on, centred on the question of whether femocrats represented ‘the “bureaucratisation” of feminism, its co-option and depoliticisation, or the creation of a feminist bureaucracy capable of effecting social change’ (Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989, 134; see also Eisenstein, 1996, xv). This debate reflects the discussion above about the role of policy workers as implementers or as entrepreneurs, as it assumes the agency-structure dichotomy; it is about femocrats fighting *against* the bureaucracy and questioning which/who will win. Despite the qualms about co-option, generally the femocrat literature would not deny that feminists have had an impact on the agenda of Australian governments (see Hancock, 1999, 4). However, this impact is talked about in terms of feminist ‘strategy’ within the bureaucracy:

In the case of the femocrats, they drew on a strong historical tradition of organizing on behalf of women’s economic independence. They shaped their claims on the state, as I will argue, in terms that were recognizable and acceptable to the political culture in which they operated, by constituting as a sectional interest. They embraced women’s difference, defined as women’s economic disadvantage, as a means of justifying state intervention. And they deliberately linked gender, and femaleness, to a tradition of social justice. This cluster of ideas about women was a matter not of biology, but of strategy. (Eisenstein, 1996, xx)

Here, to be strategic means acting as an ‘interest group’ fighting to achieve an interest within the bureaucracy. The assumption is of a structured interaction understanding of the policy realm discussed in Chapter 1 and reflects the logic of agency. While there were moments in the case study when the policy workers talked in very similar ways about strategically manoeuvring around the bureaucracy to achieve their agendas, I contend that this perspective reflects the hegemony of the logic of agency and misses much of what occurs in the policy field. What are missed, I suggest, are the shared assumptions and presuppositions by policy workers and the government/bureaucracy both with respect to the policy realm generally and to specific policy areas.

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This thesis takes a broad definition of femocrat as a feminist working within the bureaucracy. Narrower definitions tend to suggest that femocrats are only high-level bureaucrats. While the interviewees in the case study saw themselves as feminists, some of them indicated they did not see themselves as femocrats because they were not in higher-level public service positions. Nevertheless, all demonstrated a passion about their work and their desire to achieve equality for girls (whatever that meant to them). Thus, they fit the broad definition of femocrat.

There were, of course, compromises over competing femocratic and bureaucratic interests in the policy realm of this case study at the level of consciously-held values. However, there were also moments of unacknowledged agreement because the policy workers had internalised the broader objectives of government both with respect to the policy realm and to specific policies. These shared assumptions, with respect to the policy realm, are demonstrated in the thesis through the ways in which the policy workers internalised the logics of agency and rationality. Shared values, with respect to specific policy areas, can be seen through the way the policy workers understood particular policy focuses, at different times, as coming from the bureaucracy/government and as part of their feminist push (see Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 8). This contradictory notion of policy origins could be explained in terms of policies reflecting compromises between competing interests. However, at times, the policy workers owned the broader objectives of government as their own. Malloy also notes the pride ‘special policy agency’ workers felt in their achievements (2003, 181). This inadvertent acceptance of government objectives with respect to particular policy areas is the result of the internalisation and interiorisation of the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm, the logics of rationality and agency. Because the policy workers understood policy as responding to pre-existing problems in the world, they shared assumptions about these ‘problems’ with the government/bureaucracy, even when they were competing for a particular solution to this ‘problem’. However, because the policy workers understood themselves as separate from the policy realm and hence as agents fighting for their preferred solutions, they took the policy focuses on as their own, blurring the way in which their shared understanding of the ‘problem’ limited substantive policy proposals in specific policy areas. Consequently, rather than understanding policy workers as strategically shaping proposals in, say, social justice terms, I am interested in how they take on this government-driven focus on social justice as their own and what this assumes about the policy realm and hence their work.

To be clear, the purpose of this thesis is not to criticise femocrats for being strategic. Rather, it is to explore why the particular femocrats in the case study thought of themselves as being (and were, at times) strategic and the consequences of this positioning. The current discourses circulating around and in the policy realm construct policy workers as agents strategically manoeuvring within the hierarchical constraints of the bureaucracy. The current femocrat literature reflects and contributes to these discourses. The concern of the femocrat literature with the ‘daily struggles of femocratic politics’ and what

‘constituted the barriers to action’ (Eisenstein, 1996, 170) work within the structure-agency dichotomy assumed in the logic of agency. The focus is on what battles are won or lost and what compromises are achieved at the expense of understanding what gets missed in specific policy debates because of shared assumptions. The focus on ‘agency’ (or femocrats’ activism) and ‘constraint’ (or barriers to action) does not explain the shared values and assumptions within the policy realm and reinforces the ways in which these shared assumptions are eschewed. Eisenstein gets closer to my position when she talks about the bureaucratic culture rewarding particular types of activities, such as the act of putting up winnable proposals, but we part ways again when she describes the bureaucratic culture as a ‘roadblock’ for femocrats (Eisenstein, 1996, 170-171). The language of constraint and agency misses part of the picture of policy workers *qua* policy workers and hence how they understand and go about their work.

Franzway, Court and Connell (1989, 142) rightly question the emphasis in the femocrat literature on strategic work within the bureaucracy, as its concern is with ‘individual attitudes, and of individual feminist sincerity’ (Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989, 142): is the individual femocrat more loyal to feminism or to the bureaucracy? Franzway, Court and Connell argue, rather, ‘that the workings of the state constitute very real structures which shape femocrat actions’ (Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989, 143), noting that the whole nature of the bureaucracy entails particular types of behaviour:

As an organisational form, bureaucratisation suggests adaptation to Weberian principles of hierarchical authority, functional rationality, objective expertise and regulated impersonal structures. (Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989, 143)

Accordingly, the concern in this thesis is not with feminist strategy and individual feminist commitment and ability but with the role of the policy realm in shaping feminist action within the state.

Importantly, however, the state is not a unitary, omnipotent, ahistorical phenomenon (Pringle and Watson, 1992), as is implied, perhaps unintentionally, in the language of structures in Franzway, Court and Connell above. Rather, the conceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects rests on an understanding of the state as a ‘diverse set of discursive arenas which play a crucial role in organizing relations of power’ (Pringle and Watson, 1992, 70, quoted in Eisenstein, 1996, xviii; see also Kenway, 1990, 63; Franzway,

Court and Connell, 1989, 149-150). The state, then, is not fixed nor unitary but is nevertheless, as Franzway, Court and Connell note, active itself in determining policy outcomes:

The notions of an omnipotent state and of the inevitability of co-option must be scrapped. In their place, we argue for recognising a state which has its own concerns. The state interprets demands in terms of its own solution strategies aimed at reconciling its internal mode of operation with conflicting constellations of interests. The state apparatus does not simply reflect whichever demands are successful in the contest, but is *implicated in the determination of success*. (Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989, 154, emphasis added)

This shifting of emphasis from a focus on competing interests reaching a compromise that is neutrally reflected in specific policies to a focus on how the state is implicated in particular policy outcomes is the starting point for the focus in this thesis on the policy realm, how its processes, procedures and practices construct subjects and are present in the policy directions taken.

Some femocrat work has made links between femocrats and the policy realm. Blackmore's (1995) study of 'seven top-level female bureaucrats in a state education bureaucracy' focuses on the 'process of the production of policy' and how these women understood policy and policy-making (Blackmore, 1995, 295). She found that these feminist bureaucrats talked about policy in ways contrary to how it is traditionally conceived of within the bureaucracy:

...what was significant about these feminist educators was the dialogic way in which they spoke about policy. Their view of policy was one based upon communication and 'connectedness' between themselves as educational policy-makers and the educational communities they were serving (Clichy *et al.*, 1985). In taking such a view of policy, these women often were working outside, even against the policy model which has become orthodoxy within the bureaucracy since the late 1980s. (Blackmore, 1995, 295)

Blackmore's reference to the orthodox policy model is to economic rationalism and new public management (Blackmore, 1995, 293). Her alternative is an understanding of policy as serving the community, while my alternative is an understanding of policy-as-discourse. Nevertheless, Blackmore, like me, emphasises that policy workers had particular understandings of policy-making (or the policy realm) that affected their work. However,

the implication in Blackmore's analysis is that the policy workers were fighting for their understanding of policy as serving the community *against* economic rationalist approaches to policy-making. Indeed, in the quote above she describes these women as 'working outside' or 'against' the orthodox policy model. Blackmore assumes policy workers are humanist agents, separate from the environment in which they work. In contrast, this thesis is concerned with the ways in which the policy workers interviewed for the case study ultimately took on board the logics of rationality and agency and, hence, while rejecting explicitly a rational notion of policy, still enacted it. While occasionally they did understand policy-as-discourse, they did not seek to practice such a conceptualisation against the mainstream policy environment but rather internalised and interiorised the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm. Blackmore's attention to the thoughts and ideas of femocrats about policy and policy-making is welcome. However, her emphasis is on consciously-held understandings and how the policy workers fought to defend these, whereas my focus is on the taken-for-granted and shared assumptions of policy workers about policy and the policy realm and what consequences follow.

While it may appear that my position aligns with some early femocrat scholars who suggested that femocrats are co-opted by the state, that is not the argument here. Such a position assumes a unitary, omnipotent state, a notion rejected above. Watson (1990, 11) observes that '[c]ritiques of feminist intervention as leading to co-option or dilution' rest on a number of assumptions including 'that rather than being constituted in the interaction with, or arenas of, the state, these interests exist autonomously and prior to feminist intervention'. With Watson, therefore, I reject this notion of the pre-formed, fixed feminist policy worker. Rather, the policy realm constitutes subjects, who are an integral part of the policy realm. What they do and say contributes to what the policy realm is, just as what the policy realm is contributes to what they say and do.

Feminists who understood femocrats as being co-opted by the state also offered very different proposals to those offered here. These theorists, as Kenway (1990, 57) observes, tended to suggest that feminists should reject the state altogether, whereas the argument here is that we need to understand the discourses of the policy realm that shape policy workers. And, in turn, femocrats need to be more reflexive with respect to the discourses of the policy realm that constitute their subjectivities as policy workers. Understanding policy workers as part of the policy realm allows for this realm to change too: policy workers and

the policy realm are a part of each other. If policy workers understood themselves not as rational agents but as located subjects, and policies not as 'solving' pre-existing problems but as constructing 'problems', then they may do policy work differently. Such alternative work would, in turn, change the policy realm such that it was not just directed at 'addressing' policy problems but was about deconstructing the way in which policies shape problems in specific ways.<sup>19</sup> This vision of a changed policy realm is indeed different from some feminists' suggestion of rejecting the state altogether.

Understanding the constructed and constitutive character of the policy realm becomes even more important in the Australian context where women's policy machinery is being dismantled (Hancock, 1999, 5; Sawer, 1999; van Acker, 2001).<sup>20</sup> Femocrats are no longer located in high profile positions or in units specifically targeting women's or girls' policy issues. Indeed, some go so far as to suggest that Australia has experienced the death of the femocrat (Donaghy, 2003), though such claims may be based on a narrow definition of femocrat as feminists occupying high positions in the bureaucracy. There is ample evidence, even within this thesis, that those with feminist ideals can be found in small policy units within line departments.<sup>21</sup> Understanding the ways in which the policy realm is constitutive of the policy worker is all the more important in this context, with femocrats much more deeply embedded in this policy realm. Yet, as argued, the femocrat literature tends to conceptualise femocrats as separate and distinct from the policy realm, strategically manoeuvring within this realm to achieve their feminist agenda. They assume the humanist agent within the policy realm.

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<sup>19</sup> As noted in Chapter 1 responsibility for the change process does not rest solely with individual policy workers. Rather, change stems out of identifying and disrupting discourses of the policy realm, sites of which encompass policy workers, as well as academics, the processes and procedures of the policy realm, and the elite within the bureaucracy and government.

<sup>20</sup> Sawer (1999) chronicles a number of elements of the women's policy machinery that have been dismantled under the present Howard Liberal Government. Of particular note is the Women's Budget that required government departments to articulate the effects on women of their programs. Also, specialist women's units have been moved out of central locations within government and budgets have been significantly cut. Further, Sawer suggests that women's policy structures in education at the federal level were some of the worst hit in the major restructuring of the Howard Liberal Government (Sawer, 1999, 44). The Gender and Curriculum Section in the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA), and its publication *The Gen*, were abolished in 1996 (Sawer, 1999, 44). Significantly, Sawer notes that two officers were retained to work on boys and literacy (Sawer, 1999, 44). Similar trends have occurred in the South Australian Education Department (see Chapter 3).

<sup>21</sup> As Dowse (1984, 147) points out, it needs to be remembered that even in their heyday, femocrats had a low standing in the context of the whole bureaucracy, particularly in terms of their numbers, the resources available to them, the level of their job classifications and their overall power.

## Policy Activist Literature

The existing literature on policy activists within bureaucracies likewise assumes the humanist agent. This literature can best be understood in the context of the literature on the bureaucracy generally, which reflects the policy literature discussed in the previous section. The bureaucracy has traditionally been understood as being about ‘hierarchical accountability, reliance on technical expertise, impersonal relationships, uni-directional communication, and the like’ (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987, 293). It is often seen to be a ‘neutral’ conduit through which policies are implemented (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987, 295), reflecting the Westminster system’s ideal notion of ‘responsible government’, whereby government makes decisions that are implemented by the bureaucracy (van Acker, 2001, 63; Bridgman and Davis, 2004, 12). The emphasis is on the process at the expense of the policy worker, aligning with the authorised choice model of policy discussed in Chapter 1 and the policy implementation literature discussed above. This traditional conceptualisation of bureaucracy sits uncomfortably with common understandings of democracy and human agency, as it erases the participation of individual policy workers (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987, 293-294). As a consequence, the new public administration movement of the 1970s promoted a different understanding. This group defended a more democratic version of the public service, in place of the old executive model of government. In their view public servants (and other policy participants) are as much *policy-makers* as the authorised elite (Yeatman, 1998b, 26). Yeatman<sup>22</sup> suggests that the new public administration movement argued that those who work in the bureaucracy have a good deal of influence in the shape which policy takes and how it is brought into practice:

This is an insistence that the work of implementation of policy was itself a creative exercise demanding skill, judgment and value commitment. Thus, it was not that the discretion of public servants in undertaking this work of implementation should be curbed; rather their agency in this type of policy work was to be recognised and understood. (Yeatman, 1998b, 26)

Those theorists concerned with policy activism and the work of social movements within bureaucracies have adopted this approach. The call to take policy workers seriously is

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<sup>22</sup> Yeatman tends to be a theorist who crosses the ways in which the literature is categorised in this Chapter. She could be discussed in the policy-as-discourse literature, in the femocrat literature and in the bureaucrat literature. For heuristic purposes I have placed her in the last category, though I also refer to her in the other sections.

refreshing. However, there is a tendency to talk about policy activists as coming to the policy realm with values and goals always distinct from this realm (authors in Yeatman, 1998a). For example, even though Dugdale (1998, 105) talks about ‘the impact of the institutional environment on the subjective experience of insider activism’, he does not address the ways in which this institutional environment becomes internalised and interiorised. Rather, his focus is on how ‘insider policy activists’ can both use and are constrained by the policy realm in attempts to achieve their activist goals. On the one hand the language is that of constraint:

There are certain constraints on the activities of employees of government agencies which have implications for what aspects of policy activism they can pursue. They should not publicly undermine the government of the day. They should not criticise existing government policies in the field in which they work, except as part of government instigated reviews of those policies. They should not provide opposition parties with the means of political advantage, except through formal government channels using official processes of communication. ... People who ignore these constraints risk being formally disciplined (including being demoted or sacked) or informally kept away from policy processes. (Dugdale, 1998, 111)<sup>23</sup>

And, on the other hand, Dugdale’s language is of deployment and strategy:

The ability to deploy contemporary debates is useful for enabling the activist network to strategically tune itself for maximum relevance and effectiveness. The knowledge of how to chart a course through the policy process can help convert activist energies into social change. (Dugdale, 1998, 112)

Talking about constraints, deployment and strategy suggests a policy worker who arrives in the policy environment as a fixed and contained entity who does not change within the policy realm, except when forced (against their will) to do so or when they consciously choose to do so for their own purposes. By contrast, this thesis contends that people are a part of the policy realm without there necessarily being any question of force or choice, as was evident in the discussion in Chapter 1 of the productive character of power. The subjectivities of policy workers – how they think about and act in the policy realm – are formed and shaped by the discourses about and within that realm. While I accept that the notions of agency and structure are a part of the policy realm *at present* (see Chapters 1, 4 and 5), they, *as concepts*, are not necessary to the policy realm and, indeed, construct

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<sup>23</sup> As a point of interest and concern, the institutional penalties and monitoring of femocrats has increased over recent years (Donaghy, 2003). Even consciously-held feminist values are difficult to achieve.



policy workers in limited ways. The focus on policy activism, the sense of agents fighting against the constraints imposed by structures, constructs the policy worker as separate from the policy realm. Such a conceptualisation renders difficult any reflection on how the logics of agency and rationality are implicated in specific policy proposals. Only a conceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects, formed in and through the policy realm, allows for an understanding of how the logics of agency and rationality shape policy workers' understanding of themselves as policy workers and hence their work, which in turn affects specific policy outcomes. An emphasis on the agency of policy workers (and the constraints they face) in the policy realm misses the ways in which policy workers internalise discourses such that at times they unwittingly share assumptions with the bureaucracy they are supposedly fighting against, both with respect to the policy realm generally (where they assume the rational agential policy worker) and specific policy areas (where they uncritically accept particular problem representations).

Rizvi and Kemmis provide a useful insight on this point when they describe bureaucracy as a form of normalisation. However, they also talk about the imposition of rules and about policy workers conforming to roles, which implies that bureaucratic practices are undertaken against policy workers' wishes and perhaps contrary to their 'true' identity, an approach that misses part of the picture:

As a form of social relationship, bureaucracy expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing various rules and routines which (taken together), on the one hand, define a concept of due process in the treatment of people and issues, and, on the other, have the effect of normalising the members of the bureaucracy so that they conform to the roles and patterns of behaviour required of them. As a social system, bureaucracy establishes and maintains social acts of a particular kind, and orients its members in a particular way, so that certain social objects are valued, certain types of behaviour are required, certain language is found acceptable and certain motivations are encouraged. (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987, 296)

It is these notions of normalisation and orientation that are explored further in this thesis with respect to the discourses of the logics of agency and rationality, and the effects they have on the subjectivities of policy workers and, hence, on their work practices.

Given that the concern here is with how policy workers sometimes uncritically accept the norms and values implicit in the bureaucratic practices of the policy realm in which they

work, it is important to address how I take account of the changing bureaucratic world. Undeniably, the bureaucracy has changed over time, particularly with the move towards new public management (NPM) (not to be confused with new public administration). We saw reference to NPM in the discussion of Blackmore's work above and her distinction between female bureaucrats' understanding of policy-making and the economic rationalist approach (Blackmore, 1995, 296-7). Others have observed the introduction of NPM to the public service and the constraints this has imposed on public servants who have a change agenda (Hancock, 1999, 5-7; Eisenstein, 1996, 184-194; Sawyer, 1999). While these changes are irrefutable, the conceptualisation of the NPM as solely a constraint external to the policy workers requires further reflection. In this thesis NPM becomes part of the discourses that produce a particular type of policy worker (Ball, 2003).<sup>24</sup> Understanding the policy realm as creating subjectivities allows for such changes in bureaucratic procedures, as the subjectivities of policy workers are not understood as fixed but rather as dependant on the policy realm in practice, which itself changes (Chapter 1). Nevertheless, despite significant changes in the bureaucratic culture, with an increased emphasis on efficiency, a smaller state, and greater accountability, the logics of rationality and agency have remained pertinent over the entire case study period (1977 to 2004), beginning well before the arrival of NPM. That is not to deny that other logics may arise over time, and hence policy workers may change. The policy realm is discursively constructed and can be conceptualised differently in different contexts. Indeed, a changed policy environment, and hence changed policy workers, is precisely the outcome advocated by this thesis. However, while others, such as Yeatman (1998b, 16-35), suggest that change can be achieved through a particular type of policy activism directed at and against the policy realm, this thesis contends that change needs to be achieved through the slow process of identifying and disrupting the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm, including policy workers becoming reflexive about their location within this realm.

It is worth noting here that NPM strengthens the logics of rationality and agency and hence, in my view, reduces the likelihood of reflexive and reflective policy workers. For instance, it requires more reporting by policy workers (Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 51), increased caseloads and work pressures, and a focus on budgetary accountability rather than policies with a longer-term view (Hancock, 1999, 6-7; Sawyer 1999, 42; see also Ball, 2003). Policy

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<sup>24</sup> As discussed in more detail in footnote 9, Ball's (2003) concern is with the ways in which recent approaches to education produce the subjectivities of researchers, teachers and scholars (as public servants) rather than of policy workers *per se*, which is the focus of this thesis.

workers must now be more efficient, work faster, and reflect less, points that are antithetical to the policy-as-discourse approach I endorse. Furthermore, Marston and Watts (2003) note that the push for effectiveness and efficiency in public administration has seen a move towards 'evidence-based policy' (148), which they describe as 'a catch phrase for "scientific", "scholarly", and "rationality"' (144-145) and is directed at finding objective evidence of the causes of particular policy problems.<sup>25</sup> The increasing emphasis on evidence-based policy demonstrates the prevalence of the rational model of policy, and the logic of rationality assumed and reflected in this model. The specific impact of the NPM is not pursued in the thesis. It is enough to indicate that the direction encouraged by the NPM, intensifying the logics of agency and rationality, is opposite to the direction that, in my view, needs to be encouraged to produce a reflective, reflexive, and critical public sector.

In summary, the literature on bureaucrats works within an understanding of policy workers as humanist agents, separate from the policy realm. It misses the ways in which the hegemonic discourses about the policy realm go largely unchallenged and become assumed in how policy workers go about their work, even when they understand themselves as activists. This acceptance of the logics of agency and rationality, in turn, limits the kinds of substantive policies produced. The discourses of the policy realm are implicated in substantive policy outcomes, and understanding policy workers as distinct from this realm obscures the connection between the policy realm, policy work and substantive policies.

### **Social Movement Literature**

Recent scholarship on social movements, such as that of Malloy (2003) and Benford and Snow (2000), again work within a limited understanding of policy workers as arriving at the policy realm as pre-formed unitary selves. Malloy and Benford and Snow are addressed in turn.

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<sup>25</sup> See Davies (2003) for a related discussion of 'evidence-based practice as a product of new managerialism' (98) and the way it turns attention to achieving measurable outcomes at the expense of critique of these desired outcomes (100).

Malloy (2003, 3) studies 'special policy agencies', which are agencies that are established to represent particular social movements or groups.<sup>26</sup> He characterises these agencies as living an 'ambiguous existence', bridging the divide between the two conflicting worlds of public administration and social movements (Malloy, 2003, ix-x). Ultimately, his question is whether these units are a useful means of achieving social movement goals (Malloy, 2003, x), which reflects the femocrat concern with co-optation discussed above. This is not the question driving this thesis. Rather, of interest here is how those working within such agencies are constituted in limited ways when these agencies do exist. Nevertheless, Malloy makes assumptions about policy workers or special policy agencies that need to be addressed.

Usefully, Malloy acknowledges how the environment in which people work affects their identity. He describes public servants within special policy agencies as holding 'distinctly different normative values and understandings of policy making and governance' than policy activists external to the bureaucracy (Malloy, 2003, 8), while nevertheless holding sympathies with social movements. Further, he talks about special policy agencies 'developing ambivalent identities to cope with their uncertain and shifting loyalties' (Malloy, 2003, 9). However, the overall impression is that special policy agencies are either acting under administrative norms *or* social movement norms (depending on what they decide is appropriate at the time), rather than reflecting both. He conceptualises special policy agencies as the bridge between these two worlds, and policy workers as 'brokers' for social movements within government (Malloy, 2003, 181) and, hence, as being strategic: being 'patient, flexible and prepared to make compromises and trade-offs' (179), 'doing what they can' (179), and leaking information (181). The sense is that policy workers (or special agency workers) are consciously *using* the bureaucracy for their own purposes, which links with Taylor and Taylor *et al.*'s notion of *using* discourses (of specific policy areas) rejected above. In contrast to Malloy, this thesis locates policy workers as embedded in the policy realm, as shaped and influenced by the discourses around and in this realm. With this understanding it is too simple to see policy workers as merely 'using' the bureaucracy for their purposes because this kind of approach assumes policy workers who are distinct from the policy realm in which they work.

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<sup>26</sup> While Malloy tends to talk about special policy agencies as a whole rather than policy workers, much of his evidence comes from individuals working within these agencies.

Sociological framework theory, such as that of Benford and Snow (2000), also assumes the humanist agent. These theorists describe how social actors, usually social movement actors, frame arguments to advance their particular cause. The 'framing literature' is directed at understanding the 'generation, diffusion, and functionality of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings' (Benford and Snow, 2000, 612). For these authors framing is about 'meaning work – the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings' (Benford and Snow, 2000, 613). The emphasis on the effects of meanings is welcome. However, Benford and Snow's focus on 'meaning-making' work is again about *using* particular framings: there is a sense in which framings can always be 'mobilized'. The emphasis is on 'agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning' (Benford and Snow, 2000, 613) and undertaking 'reality construction work' (Benford and Snow, 2000, 625). To say that meaning is constructed in this way emphasises that someone is doing the constructing. This sounds similar to Taylor *et al.*'s (1997) 'politics of discourse'. The policy workers of the case study also adopted this notion of meaning-making work (Chapters 6-8). This understanding and practice bypasses the need to consider how people are themselves shaped in the processes that suggest taking up particular frameworks or discourses. Benford and Snow do recognise that framings need to be culturally compatible in order to be taken up, which is some acknowledgement that 'culture out there' limits 'framing activity' (Benford and Snow, 2000, 619-622, 629). However, Benford and Snow (2000) tend to suggest that these cultural constraints need to be taken into account when deciding how to frame an issue, rather than considering that such cultural contexts may affect how social movement activists see and understand an issue in the first place. The language is one of unabated agency.

Much of this literature on femocrats, bureaucrats and social movement activists is about achieving change. I, too, am concerned with creating change but do not accept that change can be achieved without understanding the complexity of the processes that make policy workers who they are, how they understand themselves and what they do. Individual policy workers cannot institute significant policy change by fighting against, manoeuvring around, and using the bureaucracy, albeit from within, without acknowledging the shaping impact of policy practices on those who perform them. We are more likely to achieve meaningful social change if we understand the way hegemonic discourses around and in

the policy realm constitute policy workers and are implicated in specific policy outcomes. Yet, the broad range of current literature on policy workers fails to take account of the construction of policy workers, assuming instead the humanist agent. Furthermore, the conceptualisation in the literature of policy workers as rational agents separate from the policy realm functions to reinforce and produce this humanist agent within the policy realm, an insight missed in the current literature and pursued in the following section.

### **POLICY THEORY AND POLICY PRACTICE: TAKING POLICY THEORY SERIOUSLY**

This chapter has outlined the ways in which the diverse range of existing literature on policy workers conceptualises policy workers as separate and distinct from the policy realm, assuming the humanist agent. This literature works within the structure-agency dichotomy, constructing policy workers as either pawns to or agents within the policy realm. In the process, this chapter has highlighted the ways in which this thesis offers a very different account of policy workers. It insists that the structure-agency dichotomy that underpins much theory on policy workers and, indeed, shapes the way in which policy work is undertaken *at present*, needs to be replaced by a view of policy workers as produced within and by the discourses in and around the policy realm, including the policy practices they perform. This perspective disrupts the structure-agency dichotomy by taking both structure and agency as part of the logic of agency and hence as constituting the policy worker as a pre-formed agential person who fights within bureaucratic constraints to achieve their agendas. While structure and agency are main elements, *at present*, in constituting policy workers, this need not be so.

The rejection of the structure-agency dichotomy could be reasonably understood as an outright rejection of the literature that assumes this dichotomy and its conceptualisation of policy workers, policy and the policy realm. While moving beyond the assumption of policy workers as humanist agents contained in the literature is ultimately my goal, I contend that to achieve this movement it is important first to understand the approach to policy workers, policy and the policy realm contained within this literature and the effects it has on how policy workers understand themselves as policy workers and enact their work. That is, we need to take seriously the current policy literature because it is a part of

the hegemonic discourses around and in the policy realm and hence has effects on policy workers and how they approach specific policy areas.

Colebatch (2002, 2005), likewise, wants to explore what role traditional rational accounts of policy play in shaping policy work, rather than ignore these accounts. As he suggests, we need to understand how the concept of policy ‘shapes practice’ (Colebatch, 2002, 20, see also 2005, 14). And, at present, the rational concept of policy is the dominant construction (Colebatch, 2005). This rational concept of policy

reflects particular values: instrumental rationality and legitimate authority. It presents action in terms of the collective pursuit of known goals, so that it becomes stable and predictable. And it sees these goals as being determined by some legitimate authority. (Colebatch, 2002, 20)<sup>27</sup>

This perspective is consistent with the argument in this thesis that there are hegemonic discourses around and in the policy realm itself that shape the subjectivities of policy workers, how they understand and act in the policy realm. Indeed, Colebatch suggests that the ‘organisational construct’ of the rational model of policy is retained as an important element in understanding policy and what policy people do: ‘policy emerges from an organizationally complex process in which the decision model plays an important part’ (Colebatch, 2002, 126).<sup>28</sup> In particular, he talks about the symbolic importance of the rational model in making policy ‘acceptable’ and giving it force (Colebatch, 2002, 128). He also talks briefly about how the traditional concept of policy puts the focus on the stated goals of policy such that ‘[p]olicy units seek to identify and compare alternative policy objectives, and evaluation teams assess whether the desired objectives have been achieved’ (Colebatch, 2002, 129) and that the public service has “‘performance-based’ contracts, with remuneration being tied to the achievement of specified outcomes’ (Colebatch, 2002, 129). It is these types of (rational) policy practices, as discourses, that

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<sup>27</sup> As with Taylor (1997) and Taylor *et al* (1997) above (see footnote 15), Colebatch’s conceptualisation of the rational concept of policy parallels the authorised choice approach to policy discussed in Chapter 1. To reiterate, in this thesis I tend to refer to both the authorised choice and structured interaction approaches to policy as rational approaches to policy because they both fail to acknowledge the discursively constructed and constitutive character of policies. Consequently, while Colebatch tends to want to include the role played by the authorised choice approach to policy in policy practice, taking the structured interaction approach for granted, I want to understand the role played by both authorised choice and structured interaction approaches to policy, and the logics they both presume and shape, in producing the subjectivities of policy workers. However, in this discussion of Colebatch (and Edwards, Dalton and Bacchi below), I follow his use of the term rational approach to policy, indicating where the structured interaction approach plays a role.

<sup>28</sup> The ‘decision model’ refers to Colebatch’s rational model of policy whereby those in authority make official policy decisions.

contribute to the constitution of policy workers, as do the (structured interaction) policy practices of fast thinking/action, deadlines, flexibility, political opportunism, strategy and choices about language that circulate in the policy realm. These practices constitute particular types of subjects: rational, efficient, and agentic. However, despite Colebatch's emphasis on the role of the traditional model of policy in policy practice, he ultimately implies that this model does not accurately capture policy workers' experiences (2005, 22; 1998, 44), whereas I suggest that it plays a central role in shaping their subjectivities.

Colebatch's (2002, 62-64) discussion of the 'sacred' and 'profane' explanations of policy offered by participants in the policy realm provides insight into his theoretical approach. The 'sacred' is the official language about how policy is formed. It is a normative account of how things ought to be. It follows the rational model. The 'profane', by contrast, is the empirical; it reflects the realities of policy-making and suggests multiple participants with competing interests. It follows the structured interaction approach to policy. To borrow Colebatch's example, if a Minister signs a policy after reading the first page, under a 'sacred' account the Minister made the policy. Such an account may be given in parliament. This same event may be described in, say, a planning meeting in 'profane' terms as 'a decision of those affected, to which the minister [sic] has assented' (Colebatch, 2002, 62). The picture in a sacred account of policy-making is of 'the rational pursuit of legitimately chosen objectives' (Colebatch, 2002, 62) whereas the picture painted in a profane account is more of a 'contest between agencies, about process and ambiguity' (Colebatch, 2002, 62).<sup>29</sup>

But for Colebatch it is clear that the sacred (or rational) is not what actually happens: it is the (undesirable) normative while the profane (or structured interaction) is the empirical. Colebatch describes the sacred as a myth or story told about policy. Here, Colebatch uses myth to mean, in Yanow's terms, 'a narrative created and believed by a group of people which distracts attention from a puzzling part of their reality' (Yanow, 1996, 191, quoted in Colebatch, 2005, 20). In contrast, the profane is what actually happens. In my view it is

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting here that this thesis rejects both the sacred and profane accounts of policy. These accounts correspond to the authorised choice and structured interaction understandings of policy discussed in Chapter 1 and assume the logics of rationality and agency. Nevertheless, the point here is that these accounts demonstrate the way in which Colebatch makes a distinction between public accounts of policy-making and what really happens in practice as though the public account of policy is false or inaccurate. In contrast, I explore how both the sacred and profane accounts of policy, as parts of the discourses of the policy realm, affect the subjectivities of policy workers.



important to step outside this dichotomy of narrative and reality, and to suggest that the ‘myth’ of rational policy development itself, or at least the logics of agency and rationality assumed in this ‘myth’, are what happens in the policy realm in the sense that they are constitutive of the subjectivities of policy workers and hence of policy practice. To contend that the logics underpinning the rational approach to policy are constitutive of policy and of policy work is not to suggest that the rational model of policy *structures* policy work in some straightforward way, as the rational model itself suggests. Indeed, as argued in Chapter 1, these logics also underpin the structured interaction (or profane) account of policy, which is also instantiated within the policy realm. Furthermore, the discourses of the policy realm are multiple and contradictory (Chapter 1), allowing for change in this policy realm, in the subjectivities of policy workers, and in policy proposals. Consequently, both Colebatch’s sacred and profane reflect and affect the *at present* reality of the policy realm: the empirical is not separate from normative statements. In other words, *at present* both the rational model of policy (or the authorised choice approach) and the structured interaction approach to policy, and the discourses of the logic of agency and the logic of rationality they assume, are part of the policy realm and policy workers.

Other authors also want to take the rational model of policy seriously, whether they support it or not. However, they tend to suggest that it is *used* by policy workers to achieve their goals. For example, Dalton *et al.* (1996, 106), while rejecting the rational model of policy, note that ‘rational arguments and research’ are used in the policy realm to justify policy directions:

The position adopted in this chapter is that developing policy is a process of contest which calls upon the *use* of rational arguments and research but is shaped at all stages by power at all its levels, debates about values, and organisational opportunities and constraints. (Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 106-107, emphasis added)

We shall see below that Edwards (2001, 175-176), who espouses a rational approach to policy, also invokes this sense of government and policy workers *using* this model to suit their purposes. We also saw this focus on *using* discourse in the discussions of Taylor *et al.* (1997), Benford and Snow (2000), and Malloy (2003) (though the former two referred more to using discourses about specific policy areas rather than the policy realm generally). In contrast, I argue that rational arguments and research are not only used by policy workers, but form how they understand themselves and what they do, as do

practices associated with structured interaction approaches to policy. Edwards' (2001) attempt at marrying policy theory and policy practice offers a good example of the implications of my approach.

In the Australian context, Edwards' book stands out in its attempt to incorporate her personal experience of policy-making with a theoretical understanding of the policy realm. Her approach is worth considering closely because she has herself been a policy worker, a femocrat, as well as academic, and because the tensions that occur in her book are reflected in the case study of this thesis. There are two aspects to Edwards' book: her diary entries (which are interspersed throughout the book) and her theoretical discussion. The tensions between these accounts are useful pointers to the insights provided by the kind of analysis advanced in this thesis. Edwards' diaries talk about events making a 'mockery of the whole process of review' (Edwards, 2001, 34); of 'low morale' and a 'lack of clear policy functions'; 'lack of staff'; other people's vetoing power; and Ministers only reading part of discussion papers (Edwards, 2001, 41). Overall, these entries tend to give the impression of the policy field as a fast-moving environment, people changing objectives, demands from all levels, tight deadlines, resistance from all sides, with big personalities involved. But, somewhat surprisingly, Edwards' theoretical discussion adopts the 'policy development framework', which is a modified version of Bridgman and Davis' (2004) policy cycle model discussed in Chapter 1. Such an approach to policy does not allow for an understanding of how the practices of policy workers recounted in the diary entries contribute to the policy realm and to whom policy workers are (that is, how their subjectivities are constituted). Edwards' theoretical approach is a rational approach to policy that understands policy as occurring in set stages from identifying issues, to policy analysis, to consultation, to decisions, to implementation, to evaluation (Edwards, 2001, 4). This staged development does not explain the pace, manoeuvring, and lack of systems within the bureaucracy reflected in Edwards' diary entries.

Further, Edwards is contradictory in her analysis of policy workers. The policy development framework is based on the assumption that the people working in the policy realm are rational agents. It builds on the view that some, those involved in decision-making, can objectively identify the policy problem and others, those involved in implementation, can put these policy decisions into practice. The assumption here is that policy workers work outside of their own values, that they can objectively identify policy

problems and can carry out in some neutral way their limited role in implementing solutions from above. The policy development framework aligns with a 'top-down' notion of policy-making (Dalton *et al.* 1996, 16). It accords with the responsible government system that differentiates between policy analysis and policy-making (Bridgman and Davis, 2004, 12). Yet, Edwards' diary extracts, interspersed in the theoretical discussion, refer to policy advisors recognising political opportunities (Edwards, 2001, 54, 157, and 188), having the 'responsibility to have a major say' over policy areas (74), manoeuvring behind the scenes and using 'careful strategy' (154). And, even theoretically, Edwards draws on Kingdon's (2003) notion of the policy entrepreneur: that is, someone who has pet policy proposals and attempts to attach these to the issues of the day (Edwards, 2001, 188). All this, again, seems contrary to the policy development framework, which suggests a much less involved policy worker.

We can see that the adoption of the rational approach to policy sits uncomfortably with the accounts of Edwards' personal experiences of the policy realm, and at times Edwards (2001, ix) appears aware of this. Nevertheless, Edwards asserts that 'the policy process is useful in descriptive terms' not because it describes the actualities of practice but because governments tend to 'follow the rigour of the framework even if only superficially or rhetorically, for political reasons' (Edwards, 2001, 175-176). To support her position that governments present as rational, she quotes Cockfield and Prasser, who write:

modern governments are supposed to be "rational", in the sense that their proposals are based on some theory of cause and effect, and are backed by evidence, especially in the form of numerical data. Even though decisions are made for quite obvious political reasons, governments will attempt some post hoc rational justification. (Cockfield and Prasser, 1997, 101, quoted in Edwards, 2001, 176)

As Bacchi (2001b, 126) observes, Edwards' acknowledges the presence of values in the policy realm through her diary entries of agential policy practice but uses the policy development framework which, as we saw in Chapter 1, forecloses discussions of values in the policy realm. Indeed, despite Edwards acknowledging her own values while working in the bureaucracy (Edwards, 2001, ix), she states that she does not want to enter the debate about the rational model of policy (2001, 3). Bacchi observes that the reader is given the impression that governments are supposed to be rational:

In this explanation, a policy development framework which delineates separate stages does not describe policy processes at all; it describes the *gloss* put upon policy processes by those who wish to appear rational. The message seems to be that putting this gloss upon policy development is necessary to achieve one's objectives. (Bacchi, 2001b, 126, emphasis added)

This is indeed the impression in Edwards' work, but there is more going on here. Rather than conceptualising the rational model as false we need to ask why Edwards adopts this model despite such contradictory personal experience or, rather, why she adopts, at different times, both the rational and structured interaction conceptualisations of policy. This, too, is the question asked about the policy workers in my case study: why is it that they talk about policy in rational terms when there are times when they just do not experience it that way? The rational approach to policy is not an inaccurate description of reality, which is the implication in the analyses discussed above of Colebatch (2002; 2005), Dalton *et al.* (1996), Edwards (2001), and Bacchi (2001b), whether they reject or embrace this model. Rather, both the rational model and the structured interaction model, and the logics they assume, are part of the policy realm and policy work.

The rational process, therefore, is not just a *gloss* that does not reflect reality, but itself contributes to whom policy workers become. Policy workers *are, at present*, rational because of the presence of the logic of rationality. They, of course, *are* also agential (as evidenced in Edward's diary entries) because of the presence of the logic of agency. Furthermore, the focus on policy workers *using* the rational model by Edwards and others seems to be driven by a desire to give policy workers agency or by the assumption of the humanist agent. Policy workers are understood as *choosing* to use rational models to achieve their own values, which is again the logic of agency. A particular type of power is assumed here: focusing on policy workers' *use* of approaches to policy presumes that people have power over these approaches, and sometimes this is the case. But it is also the case that people are *produced* by the discourses of the policy realm. While there may be times when policy workers consciously invoke the rational model of policy to achieve their ends, there are also times when they unconsciously perform rationality, that is, look to identify and solve policy problems, because that is the way they understand the policy realm. This is the sense of power as *productive*, as discussed in Chapter 1. Edwards' account, and the policy workers in my case study, reflect the traditional models of policy precisely because the logics behind these models are hegemonic and produce subjectivities.

These models of policies are discourses that are enacted within policy settings. And, as such, they create particular subjectivities. Thus, I argue, it is no surprise that we see much of the traditional models of policy in Edwards' book and in these particular policy workers.

## CONCLUSION

The existing literature on policy workers assumes the structure-agency dichotomy when conceptualising policy workers. It understands policy workers as coming to the policy realm with a pre-fixed centre or sense of who they are and what they believe and as fighting against bureaucratic structures to achieve their agendas. In this perspective the policy worker is a humanist agent. Conceptualising policy workers within the structure-agency dichotomy draws attention to what has been achieved through moments of struggle at the expense of considering times of consensus within the policy realm and the implications that follow. By contrast, this thesis contends that to achieve change academics and practitioners alike need to understand a different level of the policy realm and policy workers than that of constraint and agency. We need to address how policy workers are shaped by and through the discourses around and in the policy realm, which, in turn, affects their work and hence policy outcomes. A rational, agential policy worker looks to discover and solve policy problems, rather than looking at how policies frame and shape problems in particular ways with consequences for the range of solutions offered and for people and social relations. Without considering this constructed and constitutive character of policies, substantive policy objectives that challenge the status quo are missed. Understanding policy workers as located subjects creates space for policies that provide a deeper challenge to the current state of play, questioning the way in which problems are represented in the first place.

Thus, this thesis asks a different question to the agency-structure or agency-constraint question that dominates much of the policy literature. It asks: what are the subjectivities of policy workers? How do they understand the policy realm, policy and policy work? How do they perform policy? And what shapes these understandings and performances? Acknowledging that the policy worker is constructed within the policy realm draws attention to the discourses of the policy realm and allows for these questions to be addressed. Agency and structure become relevant for this thesis in understanding how

policy workers think about the policy realm, policy workers and policy, revealing the assumptions and presumptions of policy workers and the effects of these on policy work.

Identifying the discourses of the policy realm entails taking the traditional accounts of policy seriously, but not as fixed. That is, traditional accounts of policy, and the logics that are assumed by them, are *at present* constitutive of the policy worker. But these accounts are not the only possible reality for policy workers. The act of recognising the constitutive nature of these accounts, and the logics behind them, in effect puts them under erasure. Drawing attention to how the policy realm shapes the subjectivities of policy workers creates space for policy workers to be reflexive about their subject positioning in the policy realm and hence to slowly disrupt it (Davies *et al*, 2006). Ultimately, my hope is that such reflexivity by policy workers about their locatedness in the policy realm will produce different types of policy work, which takes account of the discursive character of policies.

Parts II and III of this thesis look at the ways in which the policy workers in the case study understood and enacted the policy realm. They demonstrate that the assumption, identified in the literatures just examined, of a humanist agent who is separate and distinct from the policy realm, was also present within the policy realm of the case study. Present too were the logics of agency and rationality implicit in this assumption. However, Parts II and III also identify other, less developed, discourses operating within the policy realm. That is, circulating within and around this policy realm were sub-dominant discourses that posited policy workers as located subjects and that recognised policy-as-discourse. These sub-dominant discourses reflect those brief moments in the literature on policy workers, identified above, of recognition that the processes, procedures and practices of the policy realm are implicated in specific policy outcomes and normalise particular behaviours, and that the thoughts, ideas and practices of policy workers about and in the policy realm play a role in policy outcomes. In effect, these sub-dominant discourses draw attention to how policy work and policy workers could be different and, therefore, these discourses need to be further developed. Before exploring these themes it is necessary to address the methodology used in the case study of this thesis and to offer a brief summary of the context in which the policy workers of the case study worked. Chapter 3 takes up these tasks.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MEETING THE POLICY WORKERS: INTERVIEWS, METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 3 introduces the thesis case study. This thesis offers a discourse analysis of the thoughts, ideas, and practices of people (policy workers) who have worked in the policy area of gender and education in South Australia between 1977 and 2004. The previous two chapters in Part I have, respectively, laid the theoretical groundwork of the argument that the policy realm creates particular subjectivities for policy workers and distinguished this argument about policy workers from that of others. These chapters also identified and critiqued the hegemonic discourses circulating around the literature about policy, the policy realm, and policy workers. Parts II and III of the thesis identify the ways in which these discourses also circulated within and around the policy realm of the case study and shaped the subjectivities of the specific policy workers involved in this study. Chapter 3 provides some context for the discussions in Parts II and III of the thesis. First, it elaborates on the method of research undertaken for the thesis, addresses some possible limitations to the research, and introduces the policy workers whose thoughts, ideas and work practices form the subject matter for interrogation. Second, it describes the shifting context in which the policy workers worked over a nearly 30-year period. Last, it establishes for the reader the shifts in policy focuses during this period.

#### **RESEARCH, INTERVIEWS AND THE POLICY WORKERS**

The research for this thesis is based on interviews with a specific group of policy workers. Before conducting the interviews, I needed to familiarise myself with the policy environment in which they worked. To accomplish this goal I researched both secondary, and some primary, sources on the federal approach to gender and education, and primary sources on South Australian policy in this area. With respect to the South Australian

approach, I first reviewed the Annual Reports for the education department<sup>1</sup> for the case study period. These Reports provided insights not only into the ways in which this policy field was talked about but also into the location of the various gender and education policy units<sup>2</sup> within the overall structure of the education department over the years. They also offered some indication of the different levels of priority the policy field was given in the department over the case study period. These insights pointed to the significance of the state and federal political climates, the overall structure of the department and its priority areas at any particular time, all of which are outlined below. Second, I studied the policy texts of the time, from newsletters and discussion papers, to curriculum statements, to broader action plans and frameworks in the area of gender and education. These policies confirmed the impression from the Annual Reports about the general ways in which the gender and education policy area was constructed at particular times and added a more nuanced understanding. While appreciating the context and texts of the policy field in question was crucial for effectively engaging with and understanding the interviewees, it is important to explain that during the research process the thesis changed direction. It moved from being about how the policy field of gender and education was approached and constructed in South Australia, to the ways in which these particular policy workers conceptualised policy workers, the policy realm and policy, what discourses underpinned their understandings and practices, and what effects these discourses had on the subjectivities of policy workers and on substantive policy outcomes. Basically, I set out to understand how these particular workers responded to shifts in the policy environment only to find that how they described their experiences provided a wealth of material for reflecting on the nature of policy work. These unexpected outcomes provided the basis for the insights in this thesis.

Having gained my own understandings of the context and texts of the gender and education policy field in South Australia, I interviewed the people who had worked in this area during the case study period. While the interviews were in-depth, semi-structured, and qualitative, the methodology of this thesis should not be mistaken for a 'traditional

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<sup>1</sup> The 'education department' in South Australia has undergone numerous name changes and restructures. The term 'education department' (lower case) refers to the generic department responsible for education in South Australia. Future research could consider how the name changes and restructures of the education department reflect broader changes in policy focuses and approaches to policy.

<sup>2</sup> The group of people working in the policy area of gender and education is labelled 'the units' even though it was only in the 1980s that they gained official 'unit' status, which was then lost in later years when they became a small part of a wider equity unit.



qualitative interview approach' (Burr, 2003, 174). This thesis offers a discourse analysis of the policy realm, with a focus on subjectivities and, relatedly, on practices that instantiate, or are, these discourses (Burr, 2003, 150 and 169-174).<sup>3</sup> Rather than accepting the interviewees' thoughts and practices around the policy realm as reflecting some fixed truth, I contend that these understandings and practices are situated within a current historical and social location. The thoughts, ideas and work of the policy workers fit into, draw on and add to the discourses around the policy realm discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. This perspective challenges what is taken for granted in the understandings and practices of the policy workers (A. Linstead and Thomas, 2002, 6) and links with the discussion in Chapter 1 about the *at present* reality of the policy realm, yet one that can change. Further, it locates the researcher as centrally involved in the production of knowledge (Kvale 1996, 2; A. Linstead and Thomas, 2002; Burr, 2003, 152). Kvale's (1996, 3-5) metaphor of interviewer as traveller, as opposed to the metaphor of interviewer as miner, captures the role of the interviewer well. Where the interviewer is understood as miner the purpose is to unearth the truth of a situation. What the interviewees say reveals a truth about the world. In contrast, the metaphor of the interviewer as traveller captures an emphasis on interpretation and the interviewer's personal journey. Here, the interviewer interprets how the interviewees interpret the world. Indeed, as Taylor *et al.* (1997, 1) observe, policy studies is a 'highly contested field': the way we understand it reflects our own values about policy and education.

This thesis, then, presents my interpretation of the policy workers' interpretation of the policy realm. Despite offering my personal interpretation of the policy realm, this thesis is still based on sound argument (Burr, 2003, 158-159).<sup>4</sup> It identifies the operation of two hegemonic discourses, the logic of agency and the logic of rationality, within the interview material. Based on this analysis it offers a new and challenging reading of the understandings and practices of policy workers, that these understandings and practices are produced by the discourses within and around the policy realm. This reconceptualisation is supported on the grounds that traditional accounts of the policy realm cannot explain some

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<sup>3</sup> See Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001) for an introduction to different types of discourse research. This thesis adopts a specific understanding of discourse, as is clear from the previous two chapters. Broadly, the words, understandings and practices of the policy workers are understood as shaping and reflecting commonly held assumptions and presuppositions about the world, which could be otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> There are difficulties with justifying research that does not make truth claims (Burr, 2003, 158-159). Burr surveys a number of suggestions by theorists such as 'sound argument', 'general coherence', 'rigour of research', 'usefulness' and 'fruitfulness'. I contend that all these grounds are met by this thesis.

of the tensions in the policy workers' approach to policy and the policy realm, and because these traditional understandings of policy place limits on the kinds of specific substantive policies envisaged by policy workers. The thoughts, ideas and practices of the policy workers reflect the traditional models of policy precisely because the logics behind these models are hegemonic and form subjectivities. These models of policy, the policy realm and policy workers embody discourses that circulate within and around the policy realm. My purpose, then, is to challenge the reader to think differently about the policy realm and policy workers (Kvale, 1996, 4). The hope is that these alternative understandings may trickle down to policy workers, encouraging them to think differently about themselves and what they do.

The interviews followed a general structure. The policy workers were asked about their experience of policy in the gender and education policy area: what their goals were, shifts in policy focuses, and working with these shifts in focus. They were then asked some more theoretical questions about policy: what drives it (what it is a response to), where/who it comes from, and whether it is value-neutral. Despite this overall structure, the individual interviews varied to a considerable extent, following the lead of particular interviewees. In addition, as indicated above, the shift in focus in the thesis entailed some slight variations to the questions asked. But, as suggested, it was precisely reflecting on unexpected outcomes from the interviews that provided such beneficial insights into the policy realm. The responses of the policy workers produced two interesting insights.

First, with my background in the literature on policy workers (discussed in Chapter 2), I had expected the interviewees to see themselves as agitators or resisters to the government policies. While there was an articulated sense of conflict between the stated agenda of the feminist policy workers and the constraints they experienced relating to the hierarchical structures of the policy realm, the policy workers tended still to take pride in and own specific policy focuses, ideas and language. I had expected to see some sense of unease with respect to some of the terminology and policy focuses at the time they had worked in the unit: that there would be tension between the education department's policies on gender and education and the goals of the policy workers. However, it soon became clear that the women who had worked in the area were profoundly attached to the policies in certain ways. The policy workers understood themselves as creating and owning policies that, at other times, they acknowledged as reflecting the broader objectives of government.

This tension, it is argued, speaks to the ways in which policy workers are embedded in the policy realm. They had assumed the logic of agency, that is, that they acted independently from government.

Second, when the policy workers were asked theoretical questions about the nature of policy they explicitly talked about policy being value-laden. Yet, in their answers about changes in policy focuses and how to manage these changes, there were implicit assumptions about the truth of the matter, suggesting that they believed it was possible to produce *value-free* policy that responded to pre-existing problems. The point here is not to berate these policy workers for being contradictory (something we all are at times) or to 'catch them out' as rationalists, but rather to demonstrate the pervasiveness of a rationalist worldview. Despite explicitly rejecting the view that policy is a rational, neutral process, the policy workers sometimes talked about policy in exactly that way. The policy workers had assumed the logic of rationality. The tensions apparent, then, in the understandings of the policy workers demanded attention to the understandings and practices of the policy workers and the assumptions underpinning these, the logics of agency and rationality.

It could appear that the argument in this thesis is based on some claim about better understanding the interviewees and their job: that in the moment of critiquing their belief in the 'truth', I am arguing I can speak the truth about their work. Such a claim would sit uncomfortably indeed with the postmodern commitments discussed in Chapter 1. Rather, this thesis offers my interpretation as a contribution to a wider, ongoing discussion about policy workers. Nevertheless, I am located in the practices of researching and writing a thesis in the academic realm just as the policy workers are located in the policy realm (Pullen, 2006, 280). While the emphasis is on my specific interpretation, rather than 'truth', it is at times difficult to convey and defend such a position within academic norms. Further, the attempt has been to capture the changeability of the policy realm by referring to the policy realm *at present* (Chapter 1). However, we do not currently have the language to describe adequately a changing situation, such as the discourses of the policy realm. Instead, language 'is subsumed by a realist ontology, which so informs the structures of language that it is difficult to shake off in its expressive forms even when the explicit content of the message is non-realist' (Pullen, 2006, 279). Therefore, despite at times slipping into what Pullen (2006) describes as a 'positive language', the argument in this thesis is non-realist in intent. The difficulty of finding alternative language only illustrates

my central claim that we are all in the discourse of rationality and that it is difficult to engage in reflexive practices.

It should be acknowledged, however, that I am freer to engage in reflexive practices than the interviewees. Reflexive practices are acceptable to a degree in academia in a way they are not in the bureaucracy. In order to get results in the bureaucracy, it would be difficult to step outside of the discourses in which it is couched. Indeed, the argument that the interviewees are caught within particular discourses around the policy realm is not a criticism of the interviewees. In fact, these women command respect. They at times achieved much, worked with passion under difficult conditions, and were well informed and up-to-date about the area in which they worked. The argument is rather a claim about the difficulty of working outside of the discourses circulating around and shaping the policy workers. As indicated in Chapter 1, the expectation is not for policy workers to say 'research will not produce truth'. Rather, the act of identifying the hegemonic discourses around the policy realm and highlighting the effects on policy workers and policy work, is intended to change gradually the ways of thinking about policy, the policy realm and policy workers in theory and in practice, which may in the long run make the task of reflexivity easier for policy workers.

Having just noted that academics have more freedom than bureaucrats to be reflexive, it is apposite to note that this is changing. The move towards private funding in higher education and related consequences for independent research and intellectual property (Trioli, 2000; Marginson, 2000, 204; Davies, 2003, 96) raise important issues about so-called academic freedom. The logics of agency and rationality are also present in the move towards research as a 'managed economy' in higher education: the 'entrepreneurial' academic is appearing, as is a homogenisation of research based on scientific models (Marginson, 2000, 199 and 204-207; see also Davies, 2005). As such, my conclusions about the pervasiveness of the logics of rationality and agency and how they create certain types of subjectivities have far-reaching significance. The experience of those working in the policy realm contains warning signals for those working in academia.

There are some difficulties with a study dependant on interviews. First, obviously some of the interviewees were remembering back a long way and it cannot be clear whether they were imposing their present understandings onto their past experiences. However, this

possibility is not necessarily problematic for the argument. Even if the policy workers understood the past through the lens of the present, it shows how pervasive the logics of rationality and agency are today. Furthermore, if anything, the people who worked in the earlier years appeared more caught in the logic of agency and rationality than the later workers, questioning whether they are in fact looking to the past through distorted glasses.

Second, Taylor *et al.* (1997, 42) warn of the tendency for interviewees to place themselves at the centre of their accounts, possibly resulting in a 'magnified perception of their role'. This could mean that what I call the logic of agency may just be a level of 'navel gazing'. However, there is more going on here. These women were self-deprecating in many ways. Further, the way they talked about other key players indicates that it is not just themselves that they see as having agency in the policy realm: they were saying something about policy workers in general and about the policy realm itself.

Third, it could be argued that the policy workers were offering me a particular account of policy and would describe it differently at other times and in different situations. The interviews were informal in character and hence the policy workers could have been offering, in Colebatch's terms, a 'profane' account of policy, which does not sit well with the official, 'sacred' language of public policy (Colebatch, 2002, 62-64; see discussion in Chapter 2). On one level the interviewees did offer a behind-the-scenes account of the policy realm. However, this explanation does not account for why at times the policy workers used the 'official' language or 'sacred' account in discussion. It misses the embedded character of some of the 'sacred' account or of the logic of rationality. As argued in Chapter 2, both Colebatch's 'profane' and 'sacred' accounts were present in the policy realm in the case study, and shaped and reflected the logics of agency and rationality.

Fourth, the interviews are, of necessity, interpreted by an 'outsider' to the gender and education policy realm. There are negatives to researching from the outside. In some ways I cannot do justice to the complexity of the policy realm because I have not been present for the whole case study period. No one observer can offer a full and comprehensive account – someone else studying these same people, whether an insider or an outsider, could draw completely different conclusions to the ones I draw: there are other possible interpretations of what the policy workers said, thought and did. For example, the thoughts

and practices of the policy workers could be read as confirming conventional models of policy. After all, the policy workers described policy work as rational and agential, and performed it accordingly. However, as indicated above, while these are my interpretations they are based on sound theoretical argument and offer a deeper understanding of all that occurs in practice within the policy realm than that allowed for in conventional models of policy. Furthermore, one of the factors that has enabled me to identify the logics I have and the ways they shape the subjectivities of the policy workers is that I am an 'outsider' to this policy field and hence occupy a subject position different from that of the policy workers.

The case study in this thesis is limited to the policy area of gender and school education. This policy area is labelled in the thesis as 'gender and education', though, as we shall see below, it could alternatively be described as 'girls and education' or 'boys and education'. It is important to note that all the interviewees understood themselves as working for (their version of) girls' equality within the policy field of school education, even if this meant a need to talk about 'gender' or 'boys'. Indeed, the term 'gender' in some sectors has become synonymous with 'girls', whereas 'boys' is used to mean just that, which has meant that girls have become gendered and hence problematic, while boys have remained un-gendered and normalised (Gill, 2004, 12; see also Chapter 8). Nevertheless, the intention in referring to 'gender and education' is to highlight the constructed character of both masculinity and femininity and to create a relationship between boys and girls (Gill, 2004, 2005).

Seven interviews were undertaken with women who have worked in gender and education at various times in the case study time frame, often with overlaps. While not a comprehensive list of people who have worked in the area, the interviewees nevertheless are a broad and important representation of the policy workers in this field. Most of the 'big names' who had worked in the area were interviewed, with the exception of one who was unavailable. The interviews have provided ample material for a close consideration of the ways in which the policy realm was understood and practised and the ways in which it constructed the subjectivities of the policy workers.

All of the interviewees in the case study identified themselves as feminists, though not necessarily as femocrats. Those who rejected the latter label tended to talk about femocrats as holding higher-level public service positions. All, however, demonstrated a passion

about their work and their desire to achieve equality for girls (whatever that meant for each of them) and, accordingly, this thesis defines these policy workers as femocrats (see Chapter 2). This is a study, in any event, of policy workers who self-identify as activists of some sort. Their activist commitment is important because, despite this commitment, they tended to take on some of the broader departmental policy focuses as their own and shared with the bureaucracy as a whole assumptions about the policy realm, policy and policy workers.

These women are labelled 'policy workers'. The intention is not to imply that they busily, but without independent thought, followed instructions from the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, but rather that they are people who participated in the policy realm. The phrase 'policy workers' is preferred to Yeatman's (1998b) term 'policy activists', as the latter assumes a separateness from the policy realm that this thesis attempts to challenge. The term 'implementers' is also avoided as it assumes a separate stage of the policy realm that is often distinguished in the literature from the policy creation stage (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992, 10). 'Policy managers' as a label also assumes too much – both pre-existing policy to be managed and a separateness of the 'managers'. The term 'workers' is meant to be benign: they are people who participate in, are part of, the policy realm. For similar reasons, Colebatch (2002, 26) rejects the term 'policy-makers', tending to refer to 'practitioners' or 'participants' within the policy field, and Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992, 15) use scare quotes (") around 'implementation' and prefer terms such as 'policy-in-use', 'policy practice' and 'policy in practice'. I, too, refer to 'policy practice' and 'policy work'.

The policy workers are referred to in the thesis as working within the 'policy realm'. This phrase captures the multiple areas within the arena in which policy is made, including policy, policy practice, and policy workers. The intention is to distinguish the 'policy realm' from substantive policies in particular policy areas, but to avoid the terminology of 'policy cycle' (Bridgman and Davis, 2004) or 'policy process' (Ball, 1990 and 1994a; Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Yeatman, 1998b), and their theoretical attachments. 'Policy cycle' tends to be associated with a rational approach to policy while 'policy process' tends to be used by those policy-as-discourse theorists who want to retain the agency of policy workers through all stages of the policy realm. Throughout the thesis reference is made to the discourses circulating around the policy realm, which is intended to capture

understandings and practices around policy, the policy realm generally, policy workers, and policy work. As argued in Chapter 1, all these elements are connected because policy workers, with particular subjectivities shaped through the discourses around policy and the policy realm, perform policy work. Furthermore, these discourses around the policy realm shape and reflect the policy literature, the institutional procedures and processes in the policy realm, and the subjectivities and work practices of the policy workers and others within the policy realm.

The interviewees appear in the text of this thesis as **A** to **G** (in bold), in no particular order. This labelling protects anonymity, a consideration which also leads me to say little about each interviewee. Their individual backgrounds are not crucial to the argument, as links are not drawn between each interviewee and what they say about the policy realm. As noted in Chapter 1, it is recognised that the policy workers came to the policy realm with different backgrounds and hence various subjectivities, which are relevant to a complete picture of this policy realm. However, consideration of the intersection between these subjectivities and the logics of agency and rationality is not the focus here. The primary concern of the thesis is the ways in which the logic of agency and rationality appeared in each of the interviewees' understandings and practices, irrespective of their backgrounds and when they worked in the unit. Nevertheless, for clarity, it is necessary to provide some general details about those interviewed. **A** and **E** were working in the early years (1977 to mid-late 1980s), while **G**, **D** and **F** worked in the area in the middle years (early-mid 1980s to around 2000), and **B** and **C** in the latter years (around 1990 to 2004). While **A** worked in the policy area of employment issues for women teachers, she saw this as intricately connected to gender and education issues and worked closely with gender and education people. She was generally considered a significant contributor in the area (particularly given that her job prior to moving to the education department had involved working closely with the education department's Women's Advisor). **A**, **E**, and **G** moved from the gender and education area to other higher positions within education bureaucracies in South Australia and interstate or to high level positions in the tertiary education sector, while **B**, **D**, and **F** moved back to schools either as teachers or researchers.

As indicated, my reading of the understandings and practices of the policy workers is based on an interpretation of what is implicit in their statements. Consequently, I have chosen to quote them at some length in order to capture the nuances in what they say. This



approach has been influenced by the work of others in the field who effectively use lengthy extracts from interviews or diary entries.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this format, other policy themes are necessarily raised in some of the quotes but are not taken up in this thesis. Also, some quotes are repeated between chapters because they raise matters that speak to a number of areas. As a guide to reading these quotes the attempt has been to leave them intact as far as possible. However, extracts from interviews are at times too difficult to follow when transcribed word for word. Thus, for the purposes of clarity, on occasions words have been deleted or added. Mumbles, ‘ums’ and ‘arrs’ have been deleted. Other filling words such as ‘you know’ and ‘like’ have been replaced with three ellipsis points (...) to indicate some speech has been erased, as is the case when longer comments have been left out. The square brackets [with words inside] indicate either an added or explanatory word, or part of word, for clarity. Parts II and III are a lengthy excursion through how the policy workers conceptualised and performed policy, the policy realm and themselves as policy workers. Before turning to these words, ideas and work practices, it is necessary to provide some context.

## **THE CHANGING WORK CONTEXT**

In some ways the research for this thesis lent itself to a history of the South Australian education department’s policy approach to gender and education. Doubtless, a history of this kind would offer its own insights into this policy realm. But this thesis is not an historical account and, hence, misses some significant and interesting historical events. The purpose of this thesis is to consider the ways in which policy workers in a shifting policy environment understood the policy realm and their role in it.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand a little of the history of gender and education in South Australia during the case study period and the ways in which the policy environment changed, so as to understand some of what the policy workers say. This information was gained, as indicated above, from an in-depth analysis of the education department’s Annual Reports for the case study period, the policy documents of both the education department

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<sup>5</sup> See Ball (1990) in the context of interviews and Edwards (2001) in the context of her own contemporaneous diary entries.

generally and the gender and education units, secondary sources and policy documents on gender and education at the federal level, as well as the interviews.

In 1977 the first Women's Adviser was appointed in the South Australian Education Department, with responsibility for both widening choices for girls and boys, and for providing advice on the status of women teachers.<sup>6</sup> Since then the title of the person with responsibility for this policy area and the units in which they were located have undergone numerous changes, reflecting changes in focus. This case study generally followed those who worked in the area of girls' education rather than issues for women teachers, though there was some overlap particularly in the early days. With respect to girls in education, the unit has undergone numerous changes in name, location within the education department, resources and personnel. In the early years, the Women's Officer/Equal Opportunity Officer reported directly to the Director-General of Education. Over time, this direct line of communication was lost and by the 2000s there were a number of levels of authority between the CEO of Education and the Gender Equity Officer (G)<sup>7</sup>. The name of the unit in charge of this area of education moved from (with some overlap) Women's Adviser (education of girls); Equal Opportunity Unit (Equal Opportunity Advisors/Education of Girls Advisor); Education of Girls' Unit; Girls Equity Team; Gender Equity Unit; to Equity Unit (possibly with gender equity as a sub-unit of this).<sup>8</sup> The number of personnel working in the various units steadily increased in the early years to a significant number in the mid-1980s (one interviewee thought there were about 13 women state-wide (D)), but by 1994 this was reduced to about one or two officers (G). In 2004 there were two people working on Gender Equity (one on boys and one on gender). At the end of 2004, the gender job was advertised as being a 'policy and program officer (learning inclusion)', and the job specification talked about 'boys' and 'gender' but not 'girls' (C). C suggested that girls would have to be 'read in' under 'gender', which suggests, as indicated above, that girls are gendered while boys are not (Gill, 2004, 12). From all of this, it is clear that the gender and education policy field had a steady increase in position, influence

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<sup>6</sup> This summary of the context in which the policy workers worked comes from the education departments' Annual Reports and numerous policy documents, including curriculum materials, published by the units. The exact documents are not referenced here, as I am attempting to capture an overall impression from a huge amount of primary research. The material is collected in the bibliography under Primary Material.

<sup>7</sup> As discussed above, this reference to (G) is to indicate that this information comes from discussions with G.

<sup>8</sup> The picture is by no means clear from the Annual Reports (as overall departmental maps were sometimes supplied but sometimes not). This is as best as I could understand the name changes from the Annual Reports and from discussions with the interviewees (particularly G).

and resources until it reached its 'heyday' in the mid-1980s as the Education of Girls Unit. Since then, it has been steadily reduced and dismantled, reflecting a wider national trend towards the dismantling of women's policy machinery (Sawer, 1999; see also Chapter 2). These changes make this study all the more important because it offers a close analysis of women working for equality, even without wider institutional supports. Understanding how these women become embroiled in the policy realm will contribute to envisaging the ways in which they can best achieve change.

Over this almost thirty-year period, there have been a number of changes in federal and state governments, both of which were referred to by the policy workers as having differing impacts. In Australia, while primary and secondary education is technically the domain of the states, in practice the federal government has significant influence over the shape of education. It accomplishes this influence through various methods including providing funding systems that encourage developments in particular directions, commissioning reports, and setting up national advisory bodies (Yates, 1993, 11-12). The federal government has played a significant influence with respect to gender and education policy. In fact, the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* (Australian Education Council, 1987) was the first national education policy. South Australia has also played a significant, perhaps at times even a leading, role in national gender and education policy directions. Reference to these different levels of government is made when relevant.

### SHIFTING POLICY CONCERNS\*

The research for this thesis could also easily offer itself to a discursive analysis of the shifting policy focuses in the particular gender and education policy field. While such an analysis has been offered on a national level (Yates, 1993 and 1996; Gilbert, 1996; Bacchi, 1999a, 112-129; Taylor *et al.*, 1997) this is not the case on the micro level of South Australia. However, the primary purpose of this thesis, as stated above, is to say something about how the policy workers talked about, understood, and practiced policy and the policy realm. Nevertheless, it is also important to understand, in general terms, the shifting policy

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\* This summary of the shifting policy realm is based on an earlier piece written by me for a shared publication with Hal Colebatch (see Gill and Colebatch, 2006). See the asterisked footnote in the Preamble to Part II for more details of this process.

environment of this case study because in the quotes in Parts II and III of this thesis the policy workers often refer to particular policy shifts. Further, I argue that the interiorisation by the policy workers of the logic of agency with respect to specific policy areas can be seen in the ways they took on specific policy focuses as their own, despite at other times describing these focuses as originating within the broader department or government.

Two key streams of changes in focus occurred during the period covered in the case study. One was a move away from a focus on girls towards a focus on gender and then boys. The other was a change in understandings of ‘equality’ from a question of access and participation to outcomes and equity. The language in the first theme moved from ‘education of girls’ to ‘gender inclusive’ to ‘gender constructions’ to ‘gender equity’ to ‘boys’ issues’. The language describing equality or the lack thereof shifted from ‘equal access’ to ‘equal opportunity’ to ‘equality’ to ‘educational outcomes’ to ‘social justice’ to ‘equity’. Because the interviews discussed the micro policy focuses, and in particular questions of language, the words used reflected a particular state flavour to the policy directions. However, they do, in general terms, reflect the phases at the national level identified by others (Gilbert, 1996; Yates, 1993 and 1996; Bacchi, 1999a; Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Gill, 2005; Hayes and Lingard, 2003).

Gilbert (1996) suggests that there have been three main phases to the understanding of gender and education at a national level:

- an initial struggle to achieve equity and access to orders of power and privilege;
- a concerted effort to value women’s knowledge and experiences, and to integrate them into the curriculum; and
- and [sic] a recognition of the construction of “gender”, and a commitment to challenge and critique gendered social practices and stereotypes. (Gilbert, 1996, 11 direct quote; see also Yates, 1996 and Taylor *et al.*, 1997, 137)

Gilbert identified these three phases in 1996. I suggest that since 1996 something like a fourth phase of focusing on boys and education has emerged (Hayes and Lingard, 2003; Gill, 2005). I take up this theme below.

The first phase was ‘underpinned by an equality of opportunity approach’ and tended to concentrate ‘on increasing participation and retention rates, and improving outcomes for girls’ (Taylor *et al.* 1997, 137). Little concern was given to the structures of schooling. In practical terms, particular attention was given to increasing girls’ participation in the maths and sciences and broadening their career choices (Taylor *et al.* 1997, 137-138). As Taylor *et al.* suggest, this emphasis was based on a ‘deficit’ model of girls. Girls became the problem while the norm – of boys, their career options and the school structures – was left unquestioned. Gradually other areas, such as the curriculum and school structures, began to be problematised as well (Taylor *et al.* 1997, 138).

The second phase, therefore, placed emphasis on re-valuing women’s knowledge and experience. There was an attempt to incorporate ‘women’s perspectives’ into the curriculum, reflected in the concept of the ‘gender inclusive curriculum’ (Taylor *et al.* 1997, 138). A further significant outcome of this shift in focus was the attention given to the school environment and sexual harassment (Taylor *et al.* 1997, 138). Lastly, this phase also entailed recognition of differences amongst girls, reflecting the new sensitivity to diversity issues in feminist theory (Taylor *et al.* 1997, 138-139).

The third phase in gender and education policies at the national level was concerned more with the processes of schooling (Yates, 1993, 5), which is captured in the focus on the ‘construction of gender’. Concern about sexual harassment and violence precipitated this emphasis (Taylor *et al.* 1997, 139). This phase allowed for a genuine problematisation of masculinity, and the emergence of the argument that ‘attempting to deal with the education of girls without also considering boys’ issues was misguided and that a relational theoretical approach was necessary’ (Taylor *et al.* 1997, 139). This focus coincided with the ‘what about the boys debate?’ in the media (Gill 2005).

This last theme has produced what may prove to be a fourth phase. It involves the belief that boys are the new disadvantaged (Gill 2005, Hayes and Lingard 2003, 2). This position has been driven by concerns about boys’ retention rates, their poor academic performance in specific areas, especially reading and literacy, and some hazardous behaviours such as dangerous driving and high suicide rates. Since the late 1990s there has been a number of government reports on boys and education as well as much media coverage of this issue (Gill 2004, 2005; Lingard, 2003). This particular shift in policy focus formed the basis of a

large part of the discussions in the interviews because it was seen as topical. There was much concern among the policy workers that this shift in emphasis on boys was driven by a recuperative politics (Lingard 2003) that blames feminism for the situation of boys and aims to reinforce traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity at the expense of various other ways of being for both boys and girls. Elsewhere (Gill 2005), I have argued that the current policy focus tends to essentialise both boys and girls, pit them against each other, and ignore the relationships between them. Most of the interviewees tended to share similar views.

Importantly, these shifts in focus reflect different understandings of the problem (Yates, 1993; Bacchi, 1999a). The problem is seen variously as girls themselves, as curriculum content, as school structures, as processes of schooling, as dominant masculinity, as feminism itself or as a de-valuing of traditional masculinity. The language used, and the correlating focuses, entailed very different policy solutions to what were represented as very different policy problems. How the policy workers understood various terminology will become clearer in the following two parts of the thesis.

It is worth noting here that after extensive research into the Annual Reports of the education department and the education of girls policy documents, I understood these shifts as being part of wider departmental shifts in focus. For example, the education of girls did not start referring to social justice (early 1990s) until well after this theme appeared as a departmental focus (1987), which was itself a result of a state government-wide focus on social justice. Similarly, several of the interviewees identified the focus on the education of boys as being initiated by individuals within the government of the day. Lingard, Henry, and Taylor (1987, 139) similarly highlight the significance of the wider political climate with respect to policy directions. Consequently, I had come to the interviews with a preconceived assumption that particular policy focuses within the gender and education policy area reflected wider departmental goals. While this preconception needs to be acknowledged, it is not central to my argument. Rather, what is important is that, while the policy workers *themselves* talked at times of the policy shifts as coming from elsewhere (research, the government, those with authority in the department), they tended to take pride in those very policy directions and to own them as their own.

This distinction is important because if I were relying on the difference between my interpretation of where policy focuses came from and that of the policy workers, my argument would rest on an accusation of false consciousness in policy workers about the origins of policy focuses. I would be arguing that policy workers falsely believed the policy focuses were their own when in actual fact they reflected broader government goals. Such an argument would also fall back into an 'agency or constraint' conceptualisation of policy workers and the policy realm, with the policy workers aligning with the former and me with the latter. As indicated in Chapter 1, this thesis is premised on a rejection of the notion of absolute fixed truth. To be clear, this thesis is not accusing these policy workers of false consciousness but rather noting that they are located in particular subject positions (Burr, 2003, 83-84; Bickford, 1999, 97). It argues that the policy workers are caught within the logic of agency such that they take on as their own the broader governmental policy objectives, drawing attention to the *contradictions* this logic produces in policy workers' understandings of the policy realm: contemporaneous with identifying policy shifts as government-driven, they adopt these concerns as their own. To reiterate, this thesis is an interpretation of the policy workers' interpretation of the policy realm.

Bacchi has also identified this phenomenon of policy workers' different understandings of policies in her studies of managing diversity (Bacchi 1999b) and affirmative action (Bacchi, 2004). However, she tends to explain this variously in terms of there being contested concepts with competing discourses (of managing diversity) available to policy workers, or policy workers as caught within a dominant understanding of a specific policy area (in this case affirmative action as preferential treatment). In both cases, the multiple understandings are explained in terms of discourses around specific policy areas. In contrast, I explain this phenomenon more in terms of the ways in which policy workers become embroiled in the policy realm and with the logics of agency and rationality: they become rational agents. My perspective again points to the link between the policy realm and substantive policies.

## CONCLUSION

From the above it is clear that the gender and education policy realm has undergone numerous changes over the case study period. However, what is significant is that over the

whole 30-year period of the case study the logics of agency and rationality have remained pervasive in the ways in which the policy workers conceptualised policy, the policy realm and themselves as policy workers. The subjectivities of the policy workers, their understandings and practices, reflected and shaped these hegemonic discourses circulating in and around the policy realm. These understandings and practices delimited policy work, with deleterious consequences for specific policy areas. Accordingly, the presence in the policy realm of the case study of the logics of agency and rationality and the effects of these logics on the interviewed policy workers and their performance of policy work need to be identified and disrupted, which is the task of Parts II and III of the thesis.



## **PART II**

### **POLICY WORKERS AND THE POLICY REALM: THE LOGIC OF AGENCY (AND THE LOGIC OF RATIONALITY) WITH RESPECT TO THE POLICY REALM**

## PREAMBLE\*

Part I of this thesis identified and elaborated the meaning and content of the two hegemonic discourses in and around the policy realm: the logic of agency and the logic of rationality. It also showed how the logics underpinned a wide range of literature on policy, the policy realm, and policy workers. Parts II and III of the thesis, through a close analysis of the interview material, identify how these logics operated to shape and reflect the subjectivities, the understandings and practices, of the policy workers in the case study. More specifically, Part II traces their effects with respect to the policy realm generally, with an emphasis on the logic of agency, while Part III examines them within specific policy areas, with an emphasis on the logic of rationality.

A reminder about the relationship between the logic of agency and the logic of rationality is required here (Chapter 1). They represent different elements of the same humanist agent and are implicit in each other. The logic of agency assumes a person who can rationally identify and defend their interests, while the logic of rationality assumes a person who is separate enough from the policy realm to identify rationally and neutrally pre-existing problems or to implement neutrally the policy intentions of others. Furthermore, as is apparent from the discussions in Chapters 1 and 2, how the policy realm is conceptualised affects how specific policy areas are approached, and vice versa. Accordingly, the policy workers assumed both the logics of agency and rationality with respect both to the policy realm generally and to the specific policy areas within which they worked. For heuristic purposes, however, Part II emphasises the *logic of agency* with respect to the *policy realm generally* and Part III focuses primarily on the *logic of rationality* with respect to *specific policy areas*. As foreshadowed, however, the two logics and the spaces within which they operate – the wider policy realm and specific policy areas – interweave at every turn, making any enforced separation difficult to sustain. For this reason I use references to the

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\* A word of explanation is required regarding the origins of Part II. The part is based on, and further develops, an original draft written by me earlier in my candidature. That original draft has subsequently been used as the basis for two different works, one being this part and the other a co-authored chapter with Hal Colebatch in *Beyond the Policy Cycle: The Policy Process in Australia* (Gill and Colebatch, 2006). As such, the ideas and words in this part are mine. Any words or ideas of Hal Colebatch's that have arisen from our work together are acknowledged in the usual way through the use of quotation marks and referencing. The Politics Department, University of Adelaide and the Graduate Centre, University of Adelaide have approved this process, as has Hal Colebatch.

‘logic of agency (and the logic rationality)’ and the ‘logic of rationality (and the logic of agency)’. While at times this approach might appear to be clumsy, it is necessary in order to resist the tendency to create the identified logics as separate and in competition. Ultimately, the argument in this thesis is that these overlapping logics assume and produce a humanist agent.

As indicated, this thesis argues that the logic of agency and the logic of rationality shape the *embodied* subjectivities, the understandings and *practices*, of the policy workers. Accordingly, throughout Parts II and III there will be references to the actual practices of policy workers – how they behave on a day-to-day basis. These practices, I maintain, match and sustain particular ways of conceptualising the nature of policy, policy work, and policy workers. They are part and parcel of the discourses identified as hegemonic in the policy realm – the logics of agency and rationality. Because the liberal humanist understanding of the world predominates our language and distinguishes practices from understandings, conceptualisations, and assumptions, it is difficult grammatically to capture the ways in which these thoughts and practices are part of the discourses of the policy realm. Hence I refer, perhaps somewhat awkwardly, to ‘understandings of and practices around’ aspects of policy, or I attempt to capture both these understandings and practices through referring to the ‘conceptualisations’, ‘assumptions’, ‘constructions’, ‘perspectives’ or ‘emphases’ of policy workers.

Part II, then, argues that the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) with respect to the policy realm generally, shaped and reflected the subjectivities of the policy workers in the case study. To summarise, the logic of agency assumes people separate from the world they inhabit – in this case, the policy realm. More specifically, it constructs policy workers as separate and distinct from the policy realm: policy workers arrive as pre-formed individuals with already shaped agendas separate and distinct from the policy realm in which they work. The logic of agency was present in the case study in the ways in which the policy workers conceptualised what being a policy worker meant in relation to the policy realm. In particular, it could be seen in their understandings and practices around where policy came from and/or who shaped policy focuses in the policy realm.

Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that the policy workers constructed either themselves or the broader bureaucracy or government as shaping the policy agenda, suggesting that the

policy workers experienced both constraint and agency within the policy realm. Chapter 4 identifies those places where it was assumed that the bureaucracy imposed *external constraints* on policy workers. In these moments, policy workers were produced as mere advisors or implementers of policy, as ‘busy little workers’ but not as *policy-makers*. This perspective appeared in the policy workers’ understandings of policy as coming from elsewhere and directing their work, and of changes in funding requirements, departmental structures and policy focuses coming from above and hindering their work, as well as in their work practices of seeking approval and following directives from above. Chapter 5 points to instances where the policy workers were conceptualised as strategically manoeuvring around the policy realm to achieve their feminist agenda. In these moments policy workers were produced as the agential shapers of policy. They were ‘sassy’, ‘opportunistic’, ‘clever’, ‘mavericks’, ‘fleet of foot’ and ‘activists’. This perspective appeared in the policy workers’ understandings of themselves as getting things done and making things happen, in the ways in which they fought for and defended their feminist interests against the policy realm as a whole, and in how they used the bureaucracy for their purposes. Policy workers, therefore, became simultaneously ‘busy little workers’ *and* ‘activists’ within the policy realm. In both instances policy workers are portrayed as agents separate from the policy realm, either constrained by (Chapter 4) or manoeuvring around (Chapter 5) the bureaucracy. This understanding of agency versus structure, as illustrated in Chapter 2, underpins the logic of agency, and its separation of policy workers from the policy realm.

While it may appear that there is a distinct tension between these two understandings – of constraint and of agency – this way of thinking about policy workers in the policy realm appears commonly in the structured interaction approach to policy (see Chapter 1) where policy outcomes are seen in terms of compromises between these (separate) competing interests. But compromise was not a theme in the interviews. Rather, the policy workers saw themselves, or feminist policy workers more generally, as owning particular policy focuses that they, at other times, described as coming from the bureaucracy/government. This thesis explains this apparent contradiction, therefore, not in terms of competing interests but in terms of the logic of agency: in both the accounts of the hierarchical bureaucracy imposing external limits on policy workers and the accounts of policy workers maintaining their own agendas, policy workers are conceptualised as pre-formed individuals separate and distinct from the policy realm in which they work.

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is not to take a 'side' in the structure-agency debate. As elaborated in Chapter 2, with Ball (1990, 1993, 1994a), Taylor *et al.* (1997), and Taylor (1997), I accept that both structure and agency exist within the policy realm. Indeed, both these concepts can be seen in the understandings and work practices of the policy workers. However, by understanding structure and agency as implicit in an underlying logic of agency that forms an *at present* reality of the policy realm, the thesis offers a new way to think about just exactly what is happening within the policy realm and how this could and should change. It is the logic of agency that creates the tendency to think in terms of contest and struggle, a tendency that appears both in the policy workers themselves and in those who write about them. The emphasis on moments of struggle or 'events' of contest misses the ways in which policy workers take on the discourses of the policy realm – the logics of agency and rationality – and end up thinking and performing in precisely these ways, assuming constraint and agency in their taken-for-granted understandings and daily practices. Understanding policy workers as located subjects within the policy realm – the central premise and argument of this thesis – means understanding the ways in which the logic of agency affected how the policy workers in the case study understood and performed their work *in terms of* constraint and agency.<sup>1</sup>

Only rarely did the policy workers conceive of themselves as intricately connected to the policy realm, in the sense of changing and being changed by departmental processes. These brief moments are captured and elaborated on at the end of Chapter 5. These sub-dominant discourses provide pointers to a new way of thinking about policy as performed by located subjects. As discussed in Part I, the thesis emphasises the sub-dominant discourses circulating in and around the policy realm because they open up a space for reflection on the implications that follow from assuming that rational agents perform policy work. While recognising the tension and ambiguity in the call for (rational) reflection on (assumed) rational practices, the thesis contends that it is possible to identify and reflect upon the discourses that (almost) shape us. Such reflexivity by the policy workers may render the performance of rational agency difficult to sustain. To this end, Part II identifies the ways in which the policy workers in the case study assumed the logic

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<sup>1</sup> Understanding policy workers as located subjects also means understanding the ways in which the logic of rationality affected how policy workers understood and performed their work in terms of identifying and solving pre-existing problems, which is the theme in Part III.

of agency (and the logic of rationality) with respect to the policy realm and hence were located subjects within the policy realm.

## CHAPTER 4

### WORKING WITHIN THE *EXTERNAL* CONSTRAINTS OF THE POLICY REALM: 'BUSY LITTLE WORKERS' AND PAWNS TO THE 'MEDIOCRITY' OF THE BUREAUCRACY

#### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 argues that the construction of policy workers as humanist agents was present in the policy realm in this case study. It appeared in the policy workers' assumption that the policy realm is a hierarchical structure imposing external constraints on policy workers. Both the conceptualisation of policy workers as working within the external constraints of the hierarchical bureaucracy and of policy workers as strategically manoeuvring around these constraints to achieve their agendas assume the humanist agent: policy workers are understood as separate and distinct from the policy realm. In other words, as argued in Chapter 2, a conceptualisation of the policy realm in terms of the structure-agency dichotomy locates policy workers as independent of the policy realm, expressing the logic of agency. This chapter emphasises the structure or constraint side of this dichotomy. It identifies the ways in which the conceptualisation of the bureaucracy as a hierarchical institution imposing external constraints on policy workers formed a backdrop to the work of these particular policy workers, reflecting the logic of agency.

The assumption of a hierarchical institution located the elite in the bureaucracy as the official *policy-makers*. Indeed, at times, the policy workers were produced as 'busy little workers' and pawns to the 'mediocrity' of the bureaucracy, workers who provided advice to and implemented the decisions of the 'real' *policy-makers*. Thus, there were moments when the policy workers described times when they had little personal control over policies. Yet, these constraints experienced by the policy workers were conceptualised as contemporaneous with the very same policy workers attempting to do otherwise, that is, to manoeuvre around these constraints. The restrictions of the policy realm, therefore, were assumed to be *external* to the policy workers. Furthermore, ultimately, the policy workers saw themselves as shaping policy focuses despite or against these bureaucratic structures,

an understanding expanded on in Chapter 5. Both the concepts of constraint and agency, therefore, circulated around the policy realm.<sup>1</sup> The logic of agency, and the distinction between structure and agency underpinning this logic, draws attention to moments of contest and struggle by policy workers, obscuring the ways in which they shared assumptions with the wider bureaucracy and the government of the day both with respect to the policy realm generally – the logic of agency and the logic of rationality – and with respect to specific policy areas – particular constructions of specific policy problems. Part III draws out the deleterious consequences of shared assumptions around specific policy areas. Of primary concern in Chapters 4 and 5 are the shared assumptions of the discourses of the policy realm generally. There was little acknowledgment of the ways in which policy workers were located subjects who had internalised and interiorised the logics of agency (and rationality) with respect to the policy realm. Those brief moments when this understanding was evinced are discussed in Chapter 5.

The primary purpose of Chapter 4 is to illustrate, through a close textual analysis, the operation of the logic of agency within the understandings and practices of the policy workers in the case study. As indicated above, the logic of agency circulated within and around the assumption of the policy realm as a hierarchical institution imposing external constraints on policy workers. This assumption could be seen in the ways the policy workers, at various times, understood policy as coming from elsewhere (other than policy workers); described policy as coming from above, with those located higher in the bureaucracy or (state and/or federal) government changing funding requirements and departmental structures, or changing their preferred policy focuses; followed directives issued by those in authority; and sought approval from above for policy proposals. The point here is not to deny that, at times, the policy workers did indeed seek approval or follow directives from above; there were certainly moments when the policy workers performed as ‘busy little workers’ and pawns to the ‘mediocrity’ of the bureaucracy. The point is to identify how these *at present* understandings and practices became part of a

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in Chapter 2 the organisational procedures in the bureaucracy have changed during the case study period, most notably with the introduction of the New Public Management (see also Pusey, 1991). Such changes could be seen as differentially affecting the extent of the influence of the policy workers in policy-making. For example, **G** talked of a ‘big shift from a public service to a Ministerial support structure’ (**G**), implying an increase in governmental control. And **D** referred to changes in federal funding such that university-connected consultancy groups, rather than state departments, tendered for funding, again reducing policy workers’ involvement in policy-making. Nevertheless, there was a common impression throughout the case study period (1977-2004) of a hierarchical bureaucracy standing outside of and against the agency of policy workers.



taken-for-granted way of conceptualising the policy realm and the place of policy workers within it. Such conceptualisations, or subjectivities, reflect and reinforce the logic of agency, the conviction that policy workers are separate and distinct from the policy realm, obscuring the ways in which the discourses of the policy realm, and constructions of specific policy problems, were internalised and interiorised by the policy workers.

### POLICY FROM ELSEWHERE

At times the interviewed policy workers stated clearly and unreservedly that policy directions came from elsewhere, from outside somewhere, and guided their work. For example, research and data were seen as driving policy (see also Part III). According to F, the policy she was working on, which defined her job description and directed her work, was an inevitable response to the ‘reality’ of the situation revealed through research and consultation:

The focuses came from the policy and the *policy came from the consultations* with everyone about what the key issues were. ... And I think *it was the research that was available at the time* too. ... maths, science had a far greater focus because of the low representation of girls at the time. ... And similarly the thing about the environment – there were other studies about the extent to which girls felt unsafe in school environments. ... And curriculum to address that was seen as a priority. Here, elsewhere, and I think coupled with the research, that’s where it then was *written into policy* and then the positions were developed around the focus points [of the policy]... *The outline for that policy was in existence because that’s how come the job became what it was* and was described and advertised and then I applied for it. ... [T]he plan and the materials to support it were all *distributed and implemented*, and that was what our job was. (F, emphases added)

F’s conviction that consultation and research led to a specific policy response implies that policies are responses to pre-existing problems – problems that can be identified through consultation and research. Connected to this understanding is the assumption that decision-makers, located elsewhere, had arrived at the only possible policy focus, given the research presented to them (presumably by policy workers). The logic of rationality and its assumption that policies respond to and solve pre-existing problems was taken for granted. F also understood this policy as shaping the work of the policy workers by specifying their job descriptions. Under such a conceptualisation, policy workers either provided advice

through conducting and presenting research and consultation, or they implemented the policy, reflecting the authorised choice model of policy discussed in Chapter 1. Here, the values and beliefs of the policy workers were understood as external to the policy realm (and having no influence), revealing the logic of agency. Thus, both the logic of agency and the logic of rationality were reflected in the words of this interviewee: the assumption of F's separateness from the policy realm led her to accept research and data as revealing policy problems. Policy workers were constructed as humanist agents.

The sense of policies, which came from elsewhere, directing the work of the policy workers, was present too in E's references to the policy document, *Girls, School and Society* (Schools Commission, 1975), as the 'bible' that guided a lot of her work. Further, E understood this policy as identifying a number of problems that *needed* to be addressed. She did not turn her attention to how *Girls, School and Society* constructed the problem of gender and education in particular ways, which had effects on people. She did not consider, for example, how that policy document assumed that all girls experienced 'disadvantage' in similar ways, producing girls as a homogenous group (see Chapters 5 and 6). Again the logic of rationality was in operation here. The assumption of the policy workers' separateness from the policy realm obscured the ways in which they shared with the broader bureaucracy assumptions around the logic of rationality, taking the 'problems' addressed by specific policy proposals for granted (see also Part III).

My impression was that F and E felt positive about these policies that directed their work because the policies corresponded with the broad feminist focus on girls and education. As indicated, there was little sense of contestation to these policies and the ways these policies framed issues. Rather, the policy workers became mere implementers. Authors that assume and endorse either the authorised choice model of policy, such as Bridgman and Davis (2004), or the policy implementation literature, such as Hill (2003) (Chapters 1 and 2), may wish to interpret F's and E's understandings as support for their traditional approach to policy, the policy realm and policy workers. In contrast, I argue that these conceptualisations by the policy workers demonstrate their internalisation and interiorisation of the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm. Furthermore, the policy workers' assumption of the logic of agency – that policy workers are separate from the policy realm – meant that the policy workers here accepted the logic of rationality and hence did not consider how the policy in question produced a particular understanding of

the problem of gender and education. They did not turn their attention to the constructed and constitutive character of these policies. Clearly, the logics of agency and rationality are interrelated; combined they form the humanist agent.

In contrast to F's and E's ease with policies from above directing their work, C felt annoyed and frustrated that the federal House of Representatives Report on boys and education, *Boys: Getting it Right* (Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002), was 'driving' a lot of her 'life' at the time of the interview. This Report had recommended a review and rewrite of the existing federal gender and education policy document, the *Gender Equity Framework* (Gender Equity Taskforce, 1997), and this meant that C was assisting, or attempting to inform, the consultants undertaking the review and rewrite. This federal policy direction, that she had no part in, was steering much of her work agenda. However, it was also clear that C opposed such a rewrite and thus was attempting to have some influence over what direction the rewrite took. It is encouraging that C was attempting to challenge the ways in which *Boys: Getting it Right* constructed the problem of gender and education, a challenge I support. The resistance to the preferred policy priorities of the government/bureaucracy is important on the level of consciously-held values around specific policy areas and provides some relief to the erasure of policy workers' values in the approaches discussed above.<sup>2</sup> However, the backdrop to C's agency or pursuit of her interests was a hierarchical bureaucracy imposing *external* constraints, such as preferred policy directions, that C fought *against*, which reinforces the logic of agency. There was still no recognition here of C's locatedness within the policy realm and how this affected her practices and understandings, *including her performance as an agential policy worker*. As will become clearer in Chapters 6 and 8, in regards to specific

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<sup>2</sup> There are different types of values circulating around the policy realm (Chapter 6). I argue throughout this thesis that the values of policy workers play a central role in policy and policy consequences. Importantly, however, these values are not always easily identifiable or consciously held and hence are sometimes difficult to defend purposively. These *deeply-held* values are shaped by discourses both around specific policy areas and the policy realm generally. As such policy workers share with the broader bureaucracy or government both dominant understandings of specific policy problems and the logics of agency and rationality. Part II emphasises the role of the policy workers' own values around the policy realm generally – of the logics of agency and rationality – in shaping policy. Or, more specifically, it emphasises how, because the policy workers see themselves as outside of the policy realm, they do not recognise the ways in which they 'play along' with policy-making processes. Part III turns attention to the ways in which the values of policy workers around specific policy problems, which are also shaped by dominant discourses, play a role in policy outcomes. Of course, as argued, the logics of agency and rationality with respect to the *policy realm generally* influence how policy workers approach *specific policy areas*, which in turn affects their values around those specific policy areas. This thesis is concerned with drawing attention to the role played in policy-making processes by these deeply-held values, or assumptions, with respect to both the policy realm generally and specific policy areas.

policy areas, one consequence of C's assumption of the logic of agency was that while the values underpinning the policy focus on 'boys' in *Boys: Getting it Right* were vilified as political and hence biased, C's own personal values around the 'construction of gender' were not seen as political in the same way and hence were not opened to scrutiny, particularly with respect to their discursive effects. Such an approach masks the ways in which all policy proposals are underpinned by social visions that have discursive effects and which need to be debated (Bacchi, 1999a and Part III). This masking reveals the operation of the logic of rationality and its assumption that some (in this case C's) policy proposals solve pre-existing problems. Emphasising the agency of policy workers *against* the external constraints of the bureaucracy assumes the humanist agent and obscures the locatedness of policy workers, their internalisation and interiorisation of the logics of agency and rationality.

B captured the sense of policy being made elsewhere by other people when she talked about how she expected the rewrite of the *Gender Equity Framework* (Gender Equity Taskforce, 1997) to proceed:

I mean the process will be some consultants will come in and they will interview particular people and they will formulate something and they will get paid and they will go off. And that's where the policy [comes from]. (B)

As with the policy workers discussed above, we see here the assumption that policy comes from elsewhere and directs the work of policy workers.

In these examples of 'policy from elsewhere', policy workers become policy *implementers*, or perhaps *policy advisors*, but not *policy-makers*. Even in the case of C above, she saw herself ultimately as strategically *responding* to and fighting *against* policy directions from the federal government. In these accounts policy workers are produced as pawns to the agendas of a policy-making elite. They are portrayed, in the main, as able to function outside of their own values or, at best, as working within policy directions from above so as to defend their articulated values. By contrast, I contend that policy workers cannot separate themselves from their *deeply-held* values. Indeed, the values highlighted in this thesis – those created by the logics of agency and rationality – permeate the whole analysis of how to do policy work. The ways in which policy workers see themselves as separate from 'policy from elsewhere' means that they do not see how they are bound up in policy-making processes by enacting rational agency. In the process, the conviction that policy

workers are separate from the policy realm and that they rationally implement (or rationally struggle against) the preferred policy objectives of the elite draws attention away from their implicit acceptance of the problem representations in specific policies.

### **POLICY FROM ABOVE**

The policy workers tended to conceptualise policy as shaped and controlled by those who had authority and a distinctly higher place in the bureaucracy. This was apparent in the policy workers' discussions around, first, resource issues, restructures and the resistance of others to the policy workers' agendas and, second, the government and the elite in the bureaucracy shaping policy focuses and concerns. Further, these elements of the hierarchical bureaucracy were understood as *imposing external constraints* on the policy workers, producing policy workers as separate from the policy realm.

#### **Resources, Restructures and Resistance**

The policy workers in the case study understood both federal and state governments as having a large influence on policy directions through providing or withdrawing funding and support for specific projects and personnel. There was a sense of working in a hierarchical policy realm and that this had the potential of constraining what policy workers could do. For example, **G** talked about how in the years when there was the Equal Opportunity Unit and the Education of Girls Unit there were 'more resources': 'And that's a fair bit of leverage: when you are out spruiking something, to have some money that goes with it' (**G**). Further, she felt that equity issues suffered with cuts in funding: 'with progressive cuts in the public sector, equity got less and less and less and less' (**G**).

**D** talked about changes to funding decisions at the federal level having a huge effect on policy development:

In the past, states would bid for it, bid for this commonwealth money and they would run the projects. That was before the stipulation that you had to have a university [tender] and I have forgotten what the term that was thrown around a lot as to why that stopped, "user-bias" I think it was called. So teachers weren't ... possibly ... able to research their own practice, you need someone much more important out there to do that. That made a significant difference to the development of policy and the ability to fund

positions within the education department, because that was no longer possible. So you only had [South Australian] state money to do it, which made a *huge* difference to all of that. (D, original emphasis)

Further, D felt that government changes to funding whereby money went directly to schools, rather than to central office or districts, restricted coordinated action. Thus, the policy workers conceptualised state or federal government changes in funding criteria as constraining their actions.

Cuts in funding and hence positions in the unit were also understood as shaping the direction policy workers took, because they had less personnel and hence less time. C, B, and F referred to the limitations set by the reduction in personnel working in the area. F also talked about attempting to use resources in the most 'efficient' way, perhaps with a tint of pride in the policy workers ability to be 'efficient':

so then the priorities ... were determined by what could be managed in the time, what was going to be the most efficient thing to be doing to support students in schools and to support teachers working with students in schools. And so curriculum programs became the focus work, we weren't able to do the kind of advisory work that we had done before, we weren't able to visit individual sites to such an extent ... I think that was agreed that those sorts of things, the development of those sorts of programmes and curriculum initiatives, which is what [C] did an awful lot of, were the things that were going to be able to be picked up by teachers and were more tangible, in a sense, given the lack of other sorts of resources to help make a difference. (F)

Similarly, as is apparent below, C suggested that one of the reasons for focusing on curriculum was that the policy workers were able to 'access funding for curriculum development' (C). There were also other reasons for concentrating on curriculum, such as the belief that all students needed to learn about gender relations and a conviction that an emphasis on curriculum content, rather than discreet programmes, was a way of ensuring that gender issues were taught in schools to all children (C). But most significantly there was an impression from the policy workers of not being able to achieve everything they would like to achieve *because of* limits to funding and personnel.

F also understood different degrees of support for gender and education both from federal and state governments and from the department as affecting how much work could go into particular policy areas, due to constraints on staffing and funding:

I think change of government and change of CEO did have significant impact on the way in which those policies are supported and the way in which then people are in positions and able to do the work required by the policy too. And I think that on all levels that's made a difference. Because each government, each federal government, each Liberal federal government ... has had a significant impact. And that's not to say that there wasn't an impact felt by state Labor governments as well as by the Liberal government too. And it just depended then on the Minister at the time too. How much support they gave to something like that. So [the Minister], for example, was not very keen on the gender equity team and that sort of work that was going on. ... And, really, commonwealth funding did help make a big difference to the work that was able to be done. And was then supported through, and the state was pushing that much more strongly than other states too at the beginning. But then the commonwealth maintained some of that far longer as well, kept that going too. As well as a whole lot of individuals who were deeply committed to it, I reckon. (F)

Similarly, C talked about how different state and federal support and funding affected which areas gained the attention of the policy workers:

The current [federal] government. It didn't come out in their time, the *Gender Equity Framework*<sup>3</sup> didn't. They inherited both that big sample survey<sup>4</sup> and the *Gender Equity Framework*. That's another reason, they've got no vested interest in it, they don't understand it, it was nothing to do with them, you know. ... Anyway, in South Australia we decided to stand on the *Gender Equity Framework* here ... curriculum, teaching and learning was one of the directions in the *Gender Equity Framework*. So, I mean it certainly was a document that we felt we could get a lot out of. The problem, there was no resourcing from the state for it. We did it on whatever resources we had at State offices. Which is \$5000 dollars each. I think it was \$3000 at that time. And ... [there's] no other [money], unless you win some kind of federal thing ... We had nothing except funding for curriculum. We were able to access funding for curriculum development. So that was another reason of course we went for curriculum development. We got funding for it. (C)

Other constraints the policy workers talked about included multiple restructurings, especially restructures that affected the location of the gender and education unit within the bureaucratic hierarchy. Of particular note was when C talked about the restructuring of the department that resulted in the dismantling of the Education of Girls Unit and the reduction of staff levels from between ten and twelve (as well as people in the districts) to two

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<sup>3</sup> This was a reference to *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* (Gender Equity Taskforce, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> This was a reference to *Gender and School Education* (Collins et al., 1996).

people. She referred to the difficulty of two people trying to implement the *Three Year Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1992-1994* (Education of Girls Unit, 1991) and to play a role on the state-wide curriculum development:<sup>5</sup> ‘they were very hard days’ (C). While, as we shall see in Chapter 5, C talked about the ‘cleverness’ of the policy workers in strategically managing this situation, there is a backdrop to this picture of the policy workers having to respond to the constraints imposed by the restructuring and the reduced status of the unit.

There was also a sense of lack of institutional support for and departmental and personal resistance towards the gender and education policy area. A talked about needing to be pragmatic and strategic ‘given that you are in a position that your employing authority largely doesn’t think needs to exist, that has very little legitimacy and authority in terms of the mainstream structures’ (A). And G talked about the department being male-dominated. A also referred to the resistance feminist policy workers faced within the department, though she tended to want to emphasise the achievements of the policy workers despite the resistance they encountered, a point I return to in Chapter 5. Cockburn (1991) has also identified the resistance to gender equality agendas by men in organisations. Similarly, E referred to people located above her offering a ‘surface’ support to the gender and education policy area. And other policy workers referred to individuals such as the Director-General and the Minister, as well as the government more generally, being hostile to the gender and education policy area. They suggested that the work of the policy workers ‘wasn’t regarded in the same way as it had been previously’ (F), that there was a lack of ‘respect’ for gender personnel who did not have ‘a place in the sun’ (C), and that they faced ‘systemic violation’ (B). Along these lines, Eisenstein (1996, 172-174) identifies the ways in which femocrats had a limited degree of power within the bureaucracy. Conversely, there were instances when D and C referred to occasions when the support of those located above them in the bureaucracy assisted the policy workers in achieving their goals, again emphasising the hierarchical nature of the bureaucracy. In both cases, the policy workers were conceptualised as separate from the policy realm in which they worked, whereby their agenda and interests were either resisted or supported by those located above them. The policy workers assumed the logic of agency.

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<sup>5</sup> This was a reference to the development of the department-wide curriculum document, *South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) framework* (Department of Education, Training and Employment and Catholic Education, 2001)



## Shaping Policy Focuses

The conceptualisation of the hierarchical bureaucracy was also captured in the way in which the policy workers understood people who occupied positions above them in the department or the government as shaping particular policy focuses. Many of the policy workers described how the government or new Directors/CEOs of the department decided on a particular focus or ‘flavour’. **E** felt that the *general* policy focus came from above while the *specific* focus was shaped by the policy workers:

the policies change because in the end, you know people like Don Dunstan<sup>6</sup> say we have to change. He was very important, there is no doubt that government was very important here in South Australia in terms of bringing issues like this onto the agenda. But the specific program for change never really came from anything like that. That largely was dependant, it seemed to me, on the particular constellation of people who came together, in our case (**E**).

The latter reference to the role of policy workers shaping the specific focus is returned to in Chapter 5. But what is significant here is that the general policy focus is seen as coming from above. Indeed, the role of the Premier was seen as significant in shaping the culture of the department and what those higher in the bureaucracy would accept. In fact, **E** inferred that people located in high positions in the department were not necessarily supportive of a ‘leftist’ agenda but were ‘opportunist lefties’ in the sense that the culture at the time made it necessary to support such agendas if they wanted to be successful in the bureaucracy: ‘like this was the Dunstan era, it was important to wear safari suits and have left of centre kind of views’ (**E**).

Similarly, **D** and **F** identified a particular Minister as ‘a major influence as Education Minister here’ (**D**) with respect to the policy focus on ‘boys’. Likewise, **C** referred to both the Minister, who was ‘very strong’ and ‘very hands on’, and the CEO, who was ‘right at the top’, as having a ‘huge influence’ on policy focuses. Similarly, **B** talked about the various CEOs bringing their own particular policy ‘flavour’:

what I have noticed with ...[a] change in structure and staff in the department [is] it [is] often a new bloke coming in and marking their territory ... through, you know, ‘we will do this’. So very individualistic

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<sup>6</sup> Don Dunstan was the Labor Premier of South Australia from 1970-1979 (and 1967-1968) and is generally considered to have presided over an era of considerable social reform in South Australia (Parkin and Patience, 1981).

based on what they think they know ... so at the moment we've got a very Victorian policy flavour (**B**).

The sense of hierarchy flowed through the lower levels of the bureaucracy too. For example, **E** mapped out the particular hierarchy during the time she worked in the department. And **C** had to get briefing papers approved by her Line Manager, Director and Executive Director before they finally went to the CEO and the Minister. Further, **E**, **A**, and **G** described the significance of having the education of girls advisor in a Superintendent role, being on the Senior Executive or having direct access to the Director-General/CEO. **G** also talked about how, with respect to the gender and education unit, over time 'progressively the level goes way down and there's no senior anything. Hasn't been for a long time' (**G**), which she understood as making the work of the policy workers more difficult.

There was a backdrop of a hierarchical bureaucracy, therefore, to much of what the policy workers said about where policy came from, with the CEO/Director-General, Minister, and Premier at the top who shaped policy focuses and affected the extent of funding and support for particular policy areas, as well as for gender and education generally. Other theorists have written in detail about the constraints (see Eisenstein, 1996) and resistance (see Cockburn, 1991) faced by feminist policy workers in their efforts to achieve their desired goals. Undoubtedly, these factors were occurring in the policy realm and significantly affected what the policy workers could achieve. The point here, however, is that focusing solely on these types of limitations, these changes in funding requirements and associated personnel cuts, restructuring, lack of support and indeed active resistance, emphasises the *external barriers* that the policy workers had to face and fight against or manoeuvre around. Missed in such an emphasis are the shared assumptions (both with respect to the policy realm generally and with respect to specific policy areas) by the policy workers and the wider bureaucracy/government, assumptions that themselves set limitations on the policy agendas pursued by policy workers – a theme elaborated upon in the remaining case study chapters.

In brief, as will become apparent in the following chapters, the emphasis on the bureaucracy *imposing external constraints* on policy workers, and the associated separation between policy workers and the policy realm, led the policy workers to

emphasise the ways in which they ‘managed’ these constraints to protect their interests *against* the interests of the bureaucracy (the logic of agency), obscuring the ways in which the policy workers shared particular values with the broader bureaucracy (Chapter 5). For example, the policy workers talked about particular policy focuses, such as the emphasis on ‘social justice’, as government-driven. However, through emphasising their agency within the policy realm they ended up taking pride in these policy focuses and owning them as their own. Furthermore, the uncritical acceptance of particular policy focuses draws attention away from their discursive character (the logic of rationality). Indeed, the focus on ‘social justice’ in the South Australian context constructed the problem in gender and education as the ‘retention’ and ‘attendance’ of girls within lower socio-economic groupings (South Australian Education Department, 1993a, 13; South Australian Education Department, 1993b, 13). This construction created particular groups of girls as problematic and left school structures and processes and the ways these construct masculinity and femininity unproblematised, policy effects that need to be debated (see Chapter 7). We can see here how both the logics of agency and rationality are assumed by the policy workers and are interconnected: the emphasis on the policy workers’ agency in the face of external constraints directs attention to what has been struggled over and achieved, rather than to what has gone unaddressed, such as the discursive character of policies, and to the discursive effects that follow.

What I am interested in exploring in this thesis, therefore, are the ways in which the emphasis on the external constraints imposed by the hierarchical bureaucracy constructs policy workers as distinct from the policy realm and hence misses some of the shared assumptions and values that are *not* debated, resisted, or struggled against by the policy workers. In particular, this emphasis obscures the ways in which the policy workers inadvertently accepted the logic of rationality and the logic of agency with respect to the policy realm and the consequences that followed for the ways in which they went about their policy work in specific policy areas. Part II is directed at demonstrating the ways in which the policy workers assumed the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) with respect to the policy realm generally. We have begun to see in this chapter the ways in which the policy workers assumed the logic of agency in the emphasis on the separation between policy workers and the policy realm and that this was connected to the assumption of the logic of rationality. Chapter 5 expands upon the implications of this perspective. Part III argues that these logics produced policy workers who paid insufficient attention to the

role of deeply-held shared values in the construction of policy problems, to the broad discursive effects of policy, and to the role of policy language, concepts and concerns in the constructed and constitutive character of specific policies. Furthermore, these hierarchical structures or constraints, as discourses, are only *at present* realities of the policy realm, that need themselves to be disrupted – a task commenced through the challenge to the discourses of the policy realm espoused in this thesis.

### FOLLOWING DIRECTIVES

Linked to the notion that people located higher than the policy workers of this case study affected resources and support for gender and education and shaped policy focuses, is the way the policy workers followed directions from above. This infers that policy workers implemented policy made by others. For example, **A** described some policy language as being ‘pushed upon us’ and the government saying ‘social justice is the thing’. While **A** suggested that policy workers needed to be ‘fleet of foot to keep the agenda and the priorities as we saw them’ this was in the context of ‘the government or the department of the day ... deciding ... the way it wanted it framed. And accepting a broadening frame, a broadening terminology as unfortunate but a reality that we had to work with’ (**A**). Similarly, as indicated above, **B** referred to the way a new person in the higher levels of the department would push their individual policy ‘flavour’, sometimes in no uncertain terms, issuing directives such as ‘we will do this’. Likewise, **C** described those located above her, such as the Executive Director, issuing commands with respect to gender and education:

there is to be a week of professional [development] next year that’s been planned and that is to do with inviting a certain speaker that [the Executive Director] thinks very highly of, and I think very lowly of ... *So we were told, not asked, we were told, my line manager ... was told* (I was away on long service) ... *[T]hey were told* that they would have [the speaker] for a week of professional development including in all regions and also to give a big conference for at least 500 people ... *Command*. And my name has to go on the bottom because I am the gender person. And I don’t like that, I don’t want it, I don’t want to be associated with his name and his low-level understanding of things and I can’t do a thing about it. I, I mean I could have. I haven’t got my name, but my email is there unfortunately. At least my name wasn’t there. So ... if you’ve got people above you who think they know it all and they don’t want to ask their gender personnel. *So I would say gender is being treated with a huge amount of disrespect at this time.* (**C**, emphases added)

Similarly, **B** talked about the Director-General issuing directions about writing the new state-wide curriculum document:

anyway the work in the unit ... I think we felt like we were doing the best we could, we were really frustrated at times, the time-lines were just horrendous. [The Director-General] had said, 'this thing will be done' and we just were all working our little butts off. It was just phenomenal. The amount of work. But people got there. In some ways I kind of admire us. Because he said, 'it's going to be short and sweet and fast so it's not too painful' which ...[was] traumatic. There were some nasty meetings though ... and fights, big fights. I didn't get to them because it was that next level up where you went and had to put cases about stuff. (**B**)

There was a clear sense of needing to follow directions here. Of course, **B** also referred to fights occurring at the level in the bureaucracy where people 'put their cases', capturing the way that people fought for their particular interests, which is elaborated on in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, the sense of a hierarchical bureaucracy issuing directions from above functions as a scene-setter for the policy workers' struggles for their interests. The notion of policy workers fighting *against* directions from above evinces the logic of agency, that the policy realm is distinct from policy workers and imposes constraints on them from above. The practices of policy workers, of going about quickly implementing policies from above, become separated from the values, the beliefs, and the understandings of the policy workers. Conceptualising policy workers and the bureaucracy in this way denies the locatedness of policy workers within the policy realm and the role their locatedness plays in shaping their values. The beliefs, understandings *and* practices of the policy workers form the subjectivities of the policy workers and are produced by, and shape, the discourses around and in the policy realm. Indeed, as is clear from the quote above, **B** was proud of and embraced the policy workers' ability to work fast to short time-lines, an aspect of policy-making associated with following directions from higher within the bureaucracy. Yet, such work leaves little time for reflection or reflexivity by policy workers, particularly regarding their own values and assumptions and locatedness both with respect to the policy realm and to specific policy areas. Indeed, as we will see later, at different times this fast work produced policy workers either as 'busy little workers' who followed instructions or as agents manoeuvring around the policy realm, that is, in either case, as separate from the policy realm. **B** had internalised and interiorised the logic of agency in the very instance she assumed her separateness from the policy realm.

## OBTAINING THE APPROVAL OF THOSE IN AUTHORITY

Many of the policy workers referred to needing to get approval from those in authority in the policy realm and that this created an obstacle they manoeuvred around. A talked about needing to get policy agendas ‘up’. And in the following quote the ‘they’ that A talked of as potentially restricting the agenda of the policy workers are clearly those in authority in the bureaucracy:

[A] huge part of the policy process in the area we are talking about is getting it [i.e. our concerns] up as a policy question in the first place. Now sometimes because no one gives a damn, they just say ‘oh all right’, because they never really think it’s going to happen, so it’s like treating you like a child that can go and play in the corner. ... that was more so in some years than in others ... it was just kind of a token agreement and they probably didn’t really engage until the policy itself started to develop and debates about the policy [started emerging]. And then sometimes to stop you they’d say, ‘well, you’re stirring up political trouble and this is no good and you know the Minister won’t be pleased’, so you might have to actually do some political work in the sense of making sure there was support from the government as well, whether officially or unofficially. (A)

Of course, there was also a sense here of the policy workers being able to get around the potential restrictions imposed by those in authority by procuring the support of the government, who held even more authority in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Nevertheless, the notion that there were people in the policy realm around whom the policy workers had to manoeuvre formed a backdrop to their work, constructing the hierarchical structures of the bureaucracy as an *external barrier* to be ‘managed’ by the policy workers. Obscured here were the ways in which the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality), parts of the hierarchical policy realm, became internalised and interiorised by the policy workers, setting internal limits for policy work. The ways in which these discourses of the policy realm were taken for granted, and the consequences that followed, will become more evident in the following chapters. But, briefly, the policy workers tended to uncritically emphasise their own agency within the policy realm (Chapter 5) and to pay only marginal attention to the discursive character of policies (Part III). Furthermore, somewhat paradoxically, the acceptance by the policy workers of their separation from the policy realm, which is implicit in the emphasis on the ways in which the bureaucracy imposes only external constraints on policy workers, *evinces* the *very internalisation* of the logic of agency obscured by this emphasis. The logic of agency formed the subjectivities of the policy workers, how they understood and performed their work, and, as such, created

internal limits to this work. Again, when conceptualising limits to policy work, the focus is drawn to moments of struggle within the policy realm, rather than moments of consensus.

**F** also referred to the difficulties imposed by needing to get approval from those above. She described how with particular Director-Generals and Ministers the policy focus had shifted to a focus on ‘boys’ and that it was difficult to get approval for paying attention to issues surrounding ‘girls’: ‘some of that work was hard in terms of ensuring that those issues were picked up. When things had to go through’ (**F**). Again, however, there was still a sense in the discussions with **F** that the policy workers ‘maintained a focus on girls’ despite these difficulties, emphasising the externality of the hierarchical structure that formed a backdrop to their work.

**G** similarly indicated the need to take proposed policies ‘through all the processes’, and to get proposals past senior management:

And you'd put up proposals and they'd be won. All policies always had to go through senior management. And so, for example, the sexual harassment policy did and the training programme and all of that had to be approved and resourced and. ... But basically it was both a mixture of be good enough and be sassy enough to get the in-principle approval and then roll really fast with it. Not dither around and decide what you were going to do. (**G**)

**G** went on to describe the strategy needed to get the in-principle approval from above and then ‘running and knitting it into something as you went along’ (**G**), which again suggests a sense of influence by the policy workers in the specific policy focus, a point returned to in Chapter 5. It is enough here to observe that policy workers needed to move fast and be ‘good enough and sassy enough’ to achieve the desired approval of their preferred policies, which again locates policy workers as agential within, though manoeuvring around, external barriers imposed by the policy realm. Yet, as an undercurrent to this quote, like **B** above, **G** held a sense of pride in the policy workers’ ability to work fast and gain the approval from above: she had partly embraced the policy-making processes of a hierarchical bureaucracy and her ability to ‘win’ within these processes.

These references by the policy workers to getting policy agendas ‘up’, ‘when things had to go through’, and getting approval from above, all assume institutional processes of getting proposals endorsed by people with authority in the department and government. These institutional processes were conceptualised as external barriers imposed on the policy

workers, highlighting moments of struggle and conflict within the policy realm. While not wishing to deny the ways in which the *at present* processes and procedures of the bureaucracy currently constrain policy workers, I suggest that there is more going on here than the policy realm merely imposing external constraints. Some limits of the policy realm, such as the hegemonic discourses of the logics of agency and rationality (reflected, amongst other sites, in the bureaucratic processes and procedures of the policy realm) and the dominant discourses within specific policy areas, are internalised and interiorised by the policy workers. All these discourses have deleterious effects for policy work. Yet they go unchallenged because the logic of agency produces a focus on the external constraints imposed on policy workers and on their agential response to these constraints. Indeed, at times, the policy workers uncritically accepted the emphasis on the separation between policy workers and the policy realm, taking pride in their ability to work fast, to succeed, and to ‘win’ within the hierarchical policy processes. The acceptance of this perspective of the policy realm evinces precisely the kinds of internalisations and interiorisations of the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm obscured by the assumption of the hierarchical bureaucracy imposing only external constraints on policy workers.

As well as the need to seek approval of the elite within the policy realm, the policy workers described the ways in which those with authority made the final decisions and had vetoing power. Sometimes the policy workers could not effectively ‘manage’ the hierarchical structures to their advantage, though these structures remained external to the policy workers. C talked about preparing materials for the Minister and him holding them back until she had put in more about ‘boys’:

Now my materials were called ‘gender perspectives’<sup>7</sup> to be strategic. That was, it was a focus on ‘education of girls’ in there, with the position of women in society and so on, but of course it was about men and boys as well. But he [the Minister] had them for almost a year, and he went over every bit of them, and he really liked the format ... of having everything with it like a pack, but there was not enough about ‘boys’ in there. ... I mean it was a fact of bringing out some of the things that were already there and emphasising them more so that was ok. Anyway it got it out, it was published then. (C)

The authority of those located higher in the department limited what C could do. Of course, there is also a sense of C presenting her position in the materials, rather than a

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<sup>7</sup> This was a reference to *Gender Perspectives – How the individual, school and society shape status and identity based on sex* (Curriculum Corporation, 1997).



briefing paper that evenly presents all sides. Hence, there were conflicts about meaning, though not conflicts set on an equal footing. **C** still needed to manoeuvre around the policy realm, shaping proposals according to the preferences of those above her. Again, in some ways **C** appeared comfortable about working with the preferred framings of the Minister because doing so allowed for the documents to be published. Such an approach rendered difficult an engagement with the ways in which the policy focus on ‘boys’ constructed boys as a homogenous and fixed category, revealing the operation of the logic of rationality. **D** similarly talked about more highly located people holding documents on their desk and not signing their approval. She referred to this as a ‘major holding back’ of the policy workers’ agenda.

A further example of this vetoing power from above was apparent in **B**’s and **C**’s experience with the consultancy group writing a new main curriculum document for the department. The institutional setting for producing this document was hierarchical:

there was a consultant ... writing it. They had charge, we had our kind of levels, we had our expert working groups, we had our sort of another group sitting *on top of that* that *fed up* into it, and then there was this group *at the top*. (**B**, emphases added)

Further, those located further up this hierarchy had the capacity to veto information supplied to them. A number of different groups within the department ‘put together a kind of framework that they thought the writers should take into consideration ... so these writers got professional development’ (**B**). However, a member of the consultancy group rejected the gender paper before it could go to the group as a whole because it focused too much on ‘gender and violence’ (**B**). Again, we can see the conceptualisation of external bureaucratic constraints. The understanding of the hierarchical character of the bureaucracy whereby those in authority make policy was present in the references to presenting papers to those who made the decisions. But there was also a sense of struggle over meaning, as with the material produced by **C** discussed above. Indeed, groups within the department, including the gender and education policy workers, were given the opportunity to present to the consultants ideas they considered important. Further, the struggle over meanings was evident in the fact that the rejection of the paper was on the basis of it being ‘old-fashioned’ in its focus on ‘gender and violence’ (**B**). Thus, the policy realm involved contests over consciously-held meanings in a context where some people had more decision-making power than others. The emphasis was on the external

constraints imposed on the policy workers' articulated agenda by the hierarchical bureaucracy.

The hierarchical nature of the bureaucracy and the fact that the approval of those in authority, who had vetoing power, was needed to achieve the goals of the policy workers affected the way in which briefing papers were framed:

So they [CEO and Minister] do influence, they influence like mad because we've got to get briefings up, we have to get it through their minders. Like I go through my line manager, then the director of learning outcomes and curriculum, and then it goes to the Executive Director ... before it goes to the CEO, before it goes to the Minister. ... So in a briefing *you've got [to] put in things that won't get crossed out*, obviously. So you've got to be clever – still got to let them know what you want to let them know. *There is certain language they like, you've got to find out what they like*, you know, ra ra ra. But [the Executive Director] ... is pro 'ed[ucation] of boys' and my things have to go up to him before they go anywhere else, before they go to the CEO. (C, emphases added)

There was a clear sense in C's comments of the limitations set by a hierarchical institution in which policy workers needed to get the approval of those above. There was also clearly a backdrop of a policy process in which policy workers provide information through briefing papers to the final decision-maker. However, these briefing papers were understood, not as neutral documents providing neutral information, but as ways in which to strategically present the policy workers' preferred agenda through 'cleverly' framing issues in the preferred language of the time. I return to this notion of strategic policy work in Chapter 5 and to the consequences of using the preferred framings of the government/department in Chapter 8. Briefly, I argue in those chapters that emphasising the policy workers' agency obscures the ways in which the strategy of working with the preferred framings of those in authority reinforces the status quo, revealing shared assumptions around the construction of specific policy problems. It becomes apparent that the policy workers assumed both the logic of agency and the logic of rationality with the deleterious effect of reinforcing the current state of play. Further, and importantly for the argument in this chapter, the conceptualisation of the policy realm as involving hierarchical structures that set external limits on policy workers around which they manoeuvred, constructs policy workers as separate and distinct from this policy realm. The logic of agency underpins this conceptualisation, producing policy workers as humanist agents. Yet, paradoxically, the policy workers' acceptance of the separation between policy

workers and the policy realm, and their work directed at fighting *against* the external constraints of the policy realm, reveals their assumption of the logic of agency and hence their locatedness within this realm.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued that the conceptualisation of policy workers as humanist agents was present in the understanding of the policy realm as imposing constraints on policy workers in some straightforward way. Policy workers were constructed as distinct from the policy realm, which expresses the logic of agency with respect to the policy realm. Such a perspective was evident in the ways in which the policy workers understood who directed and shaped policy concerns, revealing a backdrop to the policy realm of bureaucratic structures in which those with authority issued directions and made final decisions, and where policy workers provided information and advice and implemented policies. The policy workers described the ways in which their work was directed by policy (from elsewhere) and how they responded to directions from above. Further, their work involved providing research and data (see also Chapter 6) to assist decision-makers and putting up proposals and briefing papers that those in authority either approved or vetoed.

At times, then, the policy workers were conceptualised either as implementers of policy from others and elsewhere or as policy advisors, but not, at these times, as *policy-makers*. Indeed, despite comments to the contrary at other times (and which I address in the following chapter) C talked about being a pawn to the ‘mediocrity’ associated with the bureaucracy:

Being a public servant means that it is difficult to be a critical activist or actor and that you can get bogged down in mediocrity. For example, if the Executive Director tells you something must be done, and doesn’t ask for advice from the gender policy officer, then whatever he wants, happens, of course. (C)

Policy workers were conceptualised as caught within and constrained by the hierarchical bureaucracy, of which this mediocrity was a part. However, this policy realm was seen as external to the ‘true’ identity of the policy workers, which was ‘critical activist or actor’.

The conceptualisation of the policy realm as a hierarchical institution and of policy workers as implementers or advisors produces policy workers as fast and flexible, responding to demands from above.<sup>8</sup> For example, when the gender paper informing the curriculum consultancy group was rejected, **C** became aware of the rejection at 5pm the night before. She had little time to change the focus of the paper so as to obtain approval for it, something she somehow managed to do. Further, as we saw above, **G** talked about moving fast once the policy workers achieved approval from those in authority. Similarly, **B** described the way in which she felt more like a ‘busy little worker’ than a policy-maker. With respect to being involved in the writing of the state-wide curriculum document, the *SACSA Framework* (Department of Education, Training and Employment and Catholic Education, 2001), **B** said:

It hardly seemed like policy because you were so busy just trying to shape some ideas about curriculum standards and outcomes and indicators of successes ... that ... the policy notions, I never really felt like I had a grip, or any clear kind of input into shaping that. It was more you were so busy being a little worker. (**B**)

At times, then, the hierarchical structures of the policy realm constructed policy workers, *at present*, as ‘busy little workers’ and pawns to the bureaucracy. Further, it allowed for little time for reflection within the policy realm. Yet, as we saw, in some ways the policy workers were proud of their ability for fast policy work. They had enacted and embraced the policy work associated with the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) in the very moments in which they described the external constraints of the policy realm. This inadvertent acceptance and interiorisation of the discourses of the policy realm become even more apparent in Chapter 5 where we see the policy workers’ pride in their ability to negotiate the bureaucratic realm.

The point here is to recognise how the conceptualisation of policy workers as mere implementers or advisors in the policy realm constructs policy workers as separate from the policy realm. In so doing, it ignores or denies the shared assumptions of the policy workers and the broader bureaucracy. The emphasis on contest and struggle makes it difficult to think about the shared assumptions both about the policy realm generally – the

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<sup>8</sup> I argue in Chapter 5 that the conceptualisation of policy workers as strategic manoeuvrers within the policy realm also produced fast policy work. Given that both these conceptualisations of policy workers assumed the humanist agent, it is no surprise that there is some overlap in the kinds of policy work produced.

logics of agency and the logics of rationality – and about specific policy areas – the dominant discourses around that policy area. Part III elaborates on the consequences of shared assumptions around specific policy areas. Part II is directed at drawing out how the policy workers have assumed, along with the broader bureaucracy, the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) with respect to the policy realm generally. The policy workers conceptualised themselves as separate and distinct from the policy realm, rather than as located subjects. This conceptualisation can be seen, as argued in this chapter, through the emphasis on policy workers working within external hierarchical bureaucratic structures and constraints. In the next chapter this sense of separateness is seen in the emphasis on policy workers as strategic feminist activists.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **STRATEGICALLY MANOEUVRING AROUND THE POLICY REALM: AGENTS MAINTAINING THEIR AGENDA**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter illustrates the ways in which the logic of agency (with respect to the policy realm) operated in the policy realm in the case study to shape the assumption by the policy workers that they moved strategically around the bureaucracy to achieve their feminist agendas. This construction of policy workers as active feminist agents sat alongside the understanding, identified in Chapter 4, that the bureaucracy imposed external constraints on policy workers. As argued, both these understandings assume policy workers are humanist agents, pre-formed individuals who arrive at the policy realm and struggle against and around the constraints of that realm. This perspective assumes the distinction between agency and structure implicit in the logic of agency. While Chapter 4 focused on the structure ‘side’ of this distinction, this chapter draws attention to its agency ‘side’, identifying the ways in which the policy workers in this case study directed their own work and maintained their own agendas, which were distinct from those of the broader bureaucracy.

The first three sections of this chapter show that an assumption that the policy workers had agency and were separate from the broader policy realm was evident in the ways they respectively understood themselves as owning the policy focus, fought for a feminist agenda against the bureaucracy as a whole, and manoeuvred around and managed the policy realm. The fourth section elaborates the ways in which these understandings and practices of the policy workers constructed the policy workers as agential, and makes the case that this construction functions to individualise responsibility for policy work. It also displaces other ways for policy workers to be. The last section of this chapter draws attention to brief moments in the interviews when the bureaucracy and the policy workers were understood as connected, as a part of each other. I argue that the recognition of this connectedness provides the basis for the reconceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects within the policy realm, a reconceptualisation recommended in this thesis. In Part

III I develop this understanding by drawing out in more detail how the policy workers performed the logics of rationality (and agency) with respect to specific policy areas, how these logics shaped the ways in which the policy workers understood and approached policy values, effects, and language, concerns and concepts. By highlighting the ways in which the subjectivities, the understandings and practices, of policy workers reflect rational agency, I hope to destabilise this construction, opening up alternative ways for policy workers to understand the policy realm, policy and themselves as policy workers. The purpose here is not to berate policy workers for assuming the logic of agency, but to emphasise the hegemony of this logic and hence the difficulty of thinking and acting otherwise. The argument is that exposing the operation of this logic and the work it does renders it unstable, facilitating contestation.

### OWNING THE POLICY AGENDA

The assumption that policy workers were separate from and had agency within the policy realm was apparent in the policy workers' sense of ownership of the policy agenda. They understood themselves as able to direct their own work, take advantage of opportunities within the policy realm, use the policies of the policy realm to achieve their ends, and hence to achieve change. In these understandings the policy workers were constructed as the shapers of policy.

**D** captured well the sense of agency of the policy workers:

why wouldn't we be able to do things rather than your just doing this sort of job? ... like, for example, [name], as Superintendent, didn't come back from the department and say, 'this is what you are going to do, go and research it'. It was much more about teamwork and interdependence... [S]till new ideas that people would come up with, but the idea of people ... working together rather than being there to do a job that someone else determines, which made quite a difference to people's view of their own agency, I suppose. To do anything. (**D**)

**D** did associate this sense of agency with the particular management style of a specific superintendent, as well as the significance of a large number of people working in the unit at the time: 'at that time it was an extremely strong, you know thirteen people state-wide employed, there's one [now], no there's two I suppose if you take the bloke doing gender

equity' (D). However, as we shall see throughout this chapter, D's focus on agency appeared in the reflections of many of the other policy workers, whether they worked in this period or not.

The assumption that they were (free) agents of a sort led policy workers to feel that they could achieve the kinds of changes they desired. For example, G referred to being able to identify and fix problems:

I think in the education of girls ... the definition of the problems is complex and making the policy is complex and getting it out and about is complex. But I think the transaction is pretty simple, you know. Kind of a bit of a caped crusader in that area. You can see that ... [there are] problems in the system, problems in how the world works, you go '*oh, I can change that. Me and my mates*'. ... I don't think it's magic, policy. I think it's pretty ordinary. (G, emphasis added)

The reference to pre-existing problems that could be identified and solved indicates the operation of the logic of rationality, pursued in Part III of the thesis. This current chapter (and part) of the thesis highlights the logic of agency, captured neatly in the metaphor of policy workers as 'caped crusaders' who could achieve their preferred policy outcomes.

According to G, for policy workers to influence the shape of the policy agenda, they had to take advantage of periods of uncertainty within the policy realm:

Just trying to get more opportunistic really. And I am not using that pejoratively, really. I mean that's your job: read, construe, pull together and go for it. And one of my maxims was always fill the vacuum. ... Fill the vacuum. You know, if there's nothing, no one knows quite what they're [doing or what is] happening, well then 'here's the way to go'. (G)

A also conceptualised policy workers as opportunistic. She talked about making the most of a 'powerful policy opportunity' when the wider political context coincided with the agenda of the policy workers. This perspective mirrors Kingdon's (2003, 20) notion of the policy entrepreneur who, as we saw in Chapter 2, seizes the policy opportunity, created by the wider climate in which they are working, to push their 'pet proposals'. Edwards (2001, 188) also invokes the concept of the policy entrepreneur. As argued in Chapter 2, in the focus on opportunism the policy worker is conceptualised as holding an agenda separate from the system they are trying to influence, evincing the logic of agency.



The construction of policy workers as shaping the policy agenda was also present in the ways in which the policy workers talked about *using* (and, indeed, *used*) policies rather than policies *directing* their work (see Chapter 4). **C** referred to *choosing* the parts of the *Three Year Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1992-1994* (Education of Girls Unit, 1991) that helped policy workers ‘get going’ in hard times. Similarly, **G** invoked a sense of policy as a tool to be used to assist policy workers in achieving their goals:

Policy. Policy’s a platform for action, that’s all. So when you see there’s a need for action you pick up a policy. You think there is a need for action by seeing gaps or holes, seeing inequities, seeing a dysfunction. (**G**)

While these references to pre-existing policies link with the notion discussed in the previous chapter of policy as coming from elsewhere, **G**’s focus in this quote was not so much on being directed by policy but on *using* this policy for her particular purposes: she directed what happened in the policy realm through using the bureaucracy’s policies to achieve her goals. This sense of separateness from the wider bureaucracy assumes the logic of agency. Furthermore, according to **G**, the policy was to be used to fix problems that existed and needed to be addressed, revealing the logic of rationality (and its connection to the logic of agency). In Chapter 6, I argue that policy workers need to be reflexive with respect to their own values in regards to specific policy areas as this may expose the ways in which these values underpin how policy problems are represented in the first place, opening up these representations to scrutiny. For present purposes, however, the important point is that the logic of agency is assumed in the understanding that policy workers *use* the policies of the policy realm to achieve their own goals.

The construction of policy workers as ‘agents’, ‘caped crusaders’, and ‘opportunists’, who can ‘do anything’ and shape the policy agenda reflects the agential policy worker in the structured interaction approach to policy (Chapter 1) and in the femocrat, policy activist, and social movement literatures (Chapter 2). It sits in stark contrast to the conceptualisation of the policy realm, elaborated in Chapter 4, as a hierarchical structure where those with authority are the *decision-makers* and policy workers are mere implementers, which reflects the authorised choice approach to policy (Chapter 1) and the implementation literature (Chapter 2). The point here is not to reconcile this contradiction by attempting to delineate which account is more accurate. Rather, with theorists such as Ball (1990, 1993, 1994a), Taylor *et al.* (1997), and Taylor (1997) (see Chapter 2), I take

both these constructions of policy workers as *at present* realities of the policy realm: policy workers are both agential and constrained within the policy realm.

As argued in Chapter 2, this thesis makes an original contribution by showing how a conception of the humanist agent (and the logic of agency implicit in this assumption) underpins both sides of this apparent contradiction. In both the understanding of policy workers as agential and in the understanding of policy workers as facing external bureaucratic constraints, the policy worker is separate from the policy realm in which they work. In the conceptualisation of the policy realm as a hierarchical setting (Chapter 4) the assumption was that policy workers could either put their own values aside or, more commonly, were constrained in achieving their values. In either case the policy workers became pawns to the bureaucracy but were nonetheless distinct from it; they were rationally implementing policy decisions from above. In the construction of policy workers captured by this current chapter the policy workers are agentially and successfully manoeuvring around the policy realm to achieve their agendas, which exist irrespective of the policy realm. In both instances the policy workers are constructed as separate from the policy realm, reflecting the logic of agency. Importantly, the hegemonic status of the logic of agency with respect to the policy realm makes it difficult to recognise the interconnectedness of policy workers and the policy realm. It suggests struggle and contest, denying the possibility of complicity. Within this conceptualisation it is not possible to identify how the concepts of agency and constraint, implicit in the discourse of the logic of agency, form the subjectivities of policy workers, affecting the ways in which they understand and perform their work.

### **FIGHTING FOR A SEPARATE FEMINIST AGENDA**

The assumption of the logic of agency, of policy workers as separate from the policy realm, circulated in and around the ways in which the policy workers fought for their feminist agendas *against* this realm. This perspective can be seen in the ways in which the policy workers described themselves as feminists and their goals as being directed at improving the situation for women and girls, fought for their own interests, and conceptualised policy and the policy realm as sites of contestation between competing interests.

### The Policy Workers as Feminists

The policy workers understood themselves as fighting for broad feminist interests. The influence of the wider feminist movement was mentioned by most of the interviewees. For example, **A** referred to the wider feminist movement increasing in theoretical sophistication with this sophistication being reflected in policy concerns. Further, all the interviewees said they would describe themselves as feminists, though they generally shied away from talking further about what kind of feminist they might be. Only **E** and **C** labelled themselves as social democratic and poststructuralist feminists respectively. Nevertheless, most of them talked about reading feminist texts, being part of a feminist network, or just having a sense as a teacher of the inequality of girls at school. As **E** put it, the feminist movement influenced in a general way how the policy workers viewed the issues:

We didn't come to these notions in a sense independently. Like there was a literature that people were reading and debating. There were huge debates taking place in Adelaide at that time between ... the radical feminists, who quite rapidly became radical lesbians largely ... the Marxist feminists who were very, very strong. ... And then the kind of social democratic feminists.  
(**E**)

Relatedly, the policy workers' goals centred on girls and women. These goals varied from hoping that the world would change (**D**), to keeping the issues of the inequality of girls and women on the agenda (**A**), to 'promoting gender equity and understanding gender as a social, cultural and historical construction with an emphasis on transforming curriculum, pedagogy and schooling ethos' (**C**), to envisaging 'just fairness, just justice, just respect' (**B**), to hoping for 'equality for women in the department' and that girls could know themselves, be 'confident' and make 'informed', 'strong choices' (**G**), to hoping to change women's life expectations (**E**), and to 'improving educational outcomes for all girls, all groups of girls' (**F**). Hence, the policy workers in this case study can be understood as feminists attempting to further the interests of 'women in the department and girls in the schools' (**G**).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Importantly, Eisenstein (1996, Ch. 8) notes that femocrats have generally tended to represent and fight for 'white' women's interests. This important issue is not pursued further here, though I note that a number of the interviewees referred to particular issues for non-English speaking girls and Aboriginal girls.

### **Fighting for Feminist Interests**

The logic of agency is evident both in the ways in which the policy workers articulated a separate feminist agenda and in their efforts to achieve this agenda. To this end, they attempted to ensure feminist perspectives were included in numerous areas within the bureaucracy. They espoused their particular views on gender and education to schools and did their best to ensure a presence on different committees within the department. For example, **B** talked about the work of communicating the policy workers' understandings about gender and education to schools as a type of 'brokering', echoing one of Malloy's respondents who described themselves as a 'broker' for Aboriginal people within government (Malloy, 2003, 181). In both cases the policy workers undertook work directed at advocating for a social movement, for a specific feminist perspective in the instance of the case study.

As a means of strengthening their advocacy role the policy workers attempted to ensure that there were feminist policy workers on as many decision-making bodies as possible. **G** captured this practice well:

Also, any decision-making body, we would be on – one or other of us. And [we] would operate on a couple of principles. One was you always had more than one bite of the cherry. So you put as many people as you can on whatever. For policy/strategic reasons. But also because there were mainly all men groups. So there was no voice, or no perspective. There was not that. So there was 'practice what you preach' kind of feeling. But also it gave an opportunity to make change. (**G**)

Similarly, **B** described the way in which the two people working in gender and education during her time in the unit attempted to be involved in as many decision-making areas as possible:

Because there was only the two of us we had to kind of share ... I'd do middle years and senior years kind of stuff and [**C**] would do the early years and primary years stuff. But we were working across all the learning areas because there was only the two of us. ... Any project we just sort of, [mumble] 'whose going to do that? You? Me? Right you do that one'. So we kept ... keeping in everything. But it's just a phenomenal amount of work, really, phenomenal. (**B**)

In these hard times, policy workers had to be efficient and hard-working but continued to advocate for a feminist agenda. Indeed, **B** talked about attempting to get an understanding

of gender into as many areas as possible during the writing of the department-wide curriculum document:<sup>2</sup>

[C] and I were working flat out on as many groups as we could be on so we had positions as equity reps on all the writing groups. ... they were huge ... days, all your life we were just doing it. We were writing, we were responding, we *were trying to shape curriculum with emphasis* with these things, these essential learnings *that we were trying to work up with the notions of having gender and justice and equity as part of these* ... not just a ... nice feely touchy bit on the side. ... Anyway, so we were flat-out and ... we were almost providing PD [professional development] in all those forums because we were highlighting issues and writing papers and bringing data together and all of that kind of stuff. So it was a fairly intense time. (B, emphases added)

It is apparent in B's description that the policy workers were attempting to incorporate their understanding of gender and justice in as many areas as possible, by being advocates on committees, providing professional development, writing and circulating papers, and providing data to support their approaches. They also clearly responded to others, again reflecting the ways in which they were fighting for and defending their perspectives and interests.

It is timely to highlight here that in order to achieve the inclusion of their preferred understandings the policy workers needed to work hard and to be fast and efficient. Like G and B above, D emphasised the need to be quick to be involved in writing curriculum documents, referring to 'getting the stuff done because stuff would come out really quickly and there would only be two days to respond' (D). It needs to be acknowledged that the speed and efficiency required of agential, strategic policy workers fighting to achieve their own agenda leaves little time or space for policy work that provides a challenge to the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm: such pressures make difficult for policy workers the kind of deep reflection about the constructed character of policies or the kind of reflexivity about their subject location within the policy realm that would provide such a challenge. This difficulty indicates the depth of the limits set by the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality). Disrupting these logics, and the fast policy work produced by them, is no easy task. Nevertheless, identifying these logics and their effects on policy workers and the policy realm is a small step towards disrupting them (Davies, 1994).

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<sup>2</sup> This was a reference to the *SACSA Framework* (Department of Education, Training and Employment and Catholic Education, 2001).

Bringing these logics to light and making them ‘visible’ renders them ‘revisable’ (Davies *et al.*, 2006). One of the effects of these logics of particular concern in this thesis is the ways they shape policy workers who at times uncritically embrace and enact this fast efficient policy work. Despite instances when the policy workers identified time pressures as *external* constraints that made their work difficult (Chapter 4), they also, as signalled in Chapter 4, appeared proud of their ability to be fast and located this ability as one of the features of a good policy worker. For instance, G talked about policy workers needing to ‘be “good enough” and be “sassy enough” to get the in-principle approval and then roll really fast with it’. Similarly, E described the way in which she was a fast worker, allowing her to ‘bombard’ other people in the policy realm with ‘stuff’, which she saw as assisting her in achieving her agenda. An entrepreneurial, opportunistic policy worker is efficient and fast. This thesis, then, is concerned with this apparent internalisation and interiorisation of the ‘need for speed’, with the effects that follow for how policy work is performed.

The policy workers also tried to achieve their agenda through shaping meanings. For example, C talked about writing a curriculum document on civics and citizenship because that was where the resources were in the department. Directing attention to areas where resources are available often implies being guided by the priorities of the department as a whole, as we saw in Chapter 4. However, the approach here is slightly different as it was also an attempt to rewrite and reframe notions of citizenship itself:

then the next lot [of materials we wrote] was ... *we will take part, civics and citizenship*.<sup>3</sup> ... and that was the ‘civics and citizenship’ about the time ‘discovering democracy’ came out and it was an attempt to ... use the publicity of ‘discovering democracy’ *but at the same time work from a maximal kind of model of what citizenship means so to bring it more into the social and cultural domains than a narrow kind of minimalist civics and citizenship*. So it was looking at citizenship identity and so on. ... I got invited to do things at various ‘civics and citizenship’, because they had money. ‘Discovering democracy’ had money.

But by coming in at the same time as the federally funded ‘discovering democracy’, it meant that schools here were trialing ‘discovering democracy’ and at the same time we would have our own South Australian materials that ... *intersected with those but drew on a whole lot of other ways or additional ways of thinking about civics and citizenship*. It’s more

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<sup>3</sup> This was a reference to the teaching resource materials, *Civics and Citizenship: We will take part* (Department of Education, Training and Employment, 1998a; see also Department of Education, Training and Employment, 1998b; Department of Education, Training and Employment, 1999).

like the social capital ideas or an ethical kind of society ... that we must draw on ideas that the good of each and all, so we do it in a big picture stuff whereas the other was about ... the kid must know the history of Australia. And there was a bit of a white banding of it too because [F] and I wrote a unit of work at the same time for the 'discovering democracy' people, which was Curriculum Corporation. Now we did a unit of work called – for years fours and fives – I think called 'rights and rules'. Now at one stage we got a phone call from the person ... from Curric Corp<sup>4</sup>, managing the primary school materials, saying to us, 'do you realise it's civics and citizenship materials and not social justice?' [laughs] 'hang on' [laughs] so we had a different approach. ... 'Oh, yes' we said [laughs]. (C, emphases added)

While one of the purposes of attaching the work of the policy workers to the national government's 'discovering democracy' agenda was to get resources, C was also attempting to challenge the very notion of citizenship and democracy being promulgated at the time. There were clear tussles over meanings here, as is apparent in the phone call from the federal Curriculum Corporation and their assumption of a distinction between citizenship and social justice. I elaborate on this sense of policy workers working to achieve their own interests through meaning-making work in Chapter 8, where I argue that the policy workers conceptualised themselves as fighting for and defending particular meanings in policies. This approach reflects the emphasis on meanings in framework theory (Benford and Snow, 2000) and in the work of Bessant *et al.* (2006), Taylor (1997) and Taylor *et al.* (1997) discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. I argued in those chapters that, while the emphasis on contested meanings was welcome, the processes of policy-making remained conceptualised in terms of struggles over competing interests. Such a perspective draws attention away from the deeply-held and shared values that are not readily identifiable as interests to be argued for and defended in the policy realm, but nonetheless shape understandings of policy problems. That is, the focus on the agential struggle for interests (or preferred meanings) obscures the shared assumptions within the policy realm that shape policy agendas in important ways.

### **The Policy Realm as a Site of Contestation**

The distinction between policy workers and the policy realm was also present in the case study in the moments when the policy workers conceptualised policy and the policy realm as sites of struggle and contestation between competing interests or perspectives. E

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<sup>4</sup> This was a reference to the federal Curriculum Corporation

suggested that policies were sites of contestation between policy workers and those holding political power. Her answer to being asked whether she understood policies as value-neutral reveals how she conceptualised the policy realm as a site of contestation between public servants and the government:

Absolutely not. Of course they're not ... because they're captive of whoever's got the political power ... First of all the broad policies come out of the political, a political party that's won an election. They then seek ... within the departments, to implement their agenda ... I think that's more deliberately driven now than it was thirty or forty years ago in terms of democracies. And then they're contested by the public servants in all kinds of ways ... for example all the leaks that are suddenly coming about letters the Prime Minister has written to people.<sup>5</sup> I mean that's about contestation within public service, within the public bureaucracy about government policy ... [So], no, it's not [a value-neutral process], and the policies are never value-neutral, they're a site of contestation. (E)

E's understanding of values is addressed in Chapter 6. Here, it is enough to point to the way E understood the policy realm as a site of contestation between, on the one side, the government/bureaucracy as a whole and, on the other side, public servants. Similarly, C described policy as being driven by competing demands from 'just futures-orientated perspectives and from more narrowly focused perspectives' (C) (see Chapter 6). Again, policy is conceptualised as being about competing perspectives or interests, reflecting the structured interaction approach to policy discussed in Chapter 1 and which encapsulates the logic of agency. When policies and the policy realm are seen as sites of contestation or struggles over competing perspectives, the assumption is of a separateness between the policy worker and the overall organisation. Policy workers are conceptualised as fighting a contest with the wider bureaucracy to achieve particular, in this case feminist, interests. This conceptualisation misses the ways in which policy workers are shaped by and contribute to the policy realm. Hence it overlooks the values and goals shared by policy workers and the department/government, with respect to both the policy realm generally and specific policy areas.

G also reflected this sense of the separateness of the interests of the policy workers and of the department in the way she emphasised that the policy workers in the gender and education area had a fixed agenda irrespective of the goals of the bureaucracy:

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<sup>5</sup> E was referring here to a series of leaked documents in Prime Minister John Howard's second term (for example, see Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).



It's blatantly evident from everything I have said that I think the education of girls is a value/political/philosophical position that is either in tune with or completely out of step with the values, culture that it's operating in. (G)

Similarly, this distinction between policy workers and the policy realm, and their respective interests, was reflected in the description of policy workers as the 'enemy within' (G) and 'activists' (A). This language mirrors the titles in the policy literature on policy workers discussed in Chapter 2: *Inside Agitators* (Eisenstein, 1996), *Activism and the Policy Process* (Yeatman, 1998a) and *Between Colliding Worlds* (Molloy, 2003). As argued in that chapter, such descriptions encapsulate the assumption that policy workers are distinct from and fighting against the policy realm. As in that literature, the logic of agency shaped the way in which the policy workers conceptualised themselves.

The policy workers in the case study, therefore, fought within and against the policy realm to achieve their feminist-oriented perspectives. They thought of themselves and performed as separate and distinct from the policy realm in which they worked, revealing the operation of the logic of agency. There are links here with Eisenstein's Australian femocrats who, she argues, 'combined establishing a claim on the state for a sectional interest, with a modern, feminist-inspired ideology that directly challenged the patriarchal status quo' (Eisenstein, 1996, 82). While Eisenstein suggests that such an approach was historically located within the unique Australian social compact and its assumptions about the role of the state in protecting sectional interests (Eisenstein, 1996, 81-82), she also emphasises that this was an 'original femocratic strategy' (Eisenstein, 1996, 82), suggesting a large degree of agency in the femocrats with respect to the shape of their engagement with the state. The impression is that the femocrats *used* the structures of the state for their purposes. In contrast, I argue that the logic of agency shaped how the policy workers in the case study conceptualised themselves – as separate from the policy realm in which they worked but nonetheless as fighting against this realm from within to achieve their interests. That is, at times, due to the hegemonic status of the logic of agency, the policy workers (understandably) took the humanist agent for granted – as indeed does Eisenstein.

## MANOEUVRING AROUND AND ‘MANAGING’ THE POLICY REALM

The logic of agency was also present in the ways that the policy workers manoeuvred around and managed the hierarchical structures of the policy realm to achieve their agendas. Chapter 4 elaborated on the understanding of the hierarchical policy realm imposing external constraints on policy workers. This section highlights the moments when the policy workers were constructed as agential *despite* these constraints. This construction of policy workers could be seen in the ways they shaped the specifics of policy concerns, maintained their agendas in hard times, and were strategic in the policy realm so as to maintain their own agendas irrespective of bureaucratic processes.

### Shaping Policy Specifics

The logic of agency was present in the ways in which the policy workers shaped the specifics of policy focuses. At times the policy workers acknowledged that the government/department played a role in policy directions either by creating the environment to which the policy workers needed to respond or by shaping the broad agenda (see also Chapter 4). However, despite this backdrop of the hierarchical bureaucracy, the policy workers often understood themselves as shaping the specifics of policy agendas. For example, A identified two elements that shaped the policy priorities of the day – the policy workers’ strategy to survive, and advances in feminist theory:

what were the priorities of the day were determined by two things. [First], what was required to survive and advance ... and that connects with ... sometimes I say it’s opportunism, but it’s the pragmatics of the policy process that given that you are in a position that your employing authority largely doesn’t think needs to exist, that has very little legitimacy and authority in terms of the mainstream structures, *then you do a whole lot of strategy around mainstream credibility to get an impact*. So you sometimes find yourself having to do ... mainstream work.

... [T]he second part to ‘what’s the policy priority of the day?’ was *as our understandings and our own consciousness moved forward*. ... I mean you can see that our own understandings are going from completely evident ... then you get into more and more and more and more I suppose they’re subtle. ...*[S]o the policy priorities for us in ideological terms*, I suppose – as opposed to the strategy of survival – moved with our own understanding, and you’d probably find some international resonances there. So it’s how a major movement moves forward and increases in sophistication. (A, emphases added)

Both the strategic focus and the ideological focus in this quote were conceptualised as coming from the policy workers themselves, who were representing the feminist movement. Even though the strategic focus was depicted as developed in the face of resistance within the department, the impression was that actual priorities came from the policy workers themselves. The emphasis on survival was an effort to highlight the policy workers' success in the face of resistance rather than focusing on their failures. A captured this well when she called for a focus on the resistance experienced by the policy workers from within their work environment:

if I was working in the field I would be wanting to put into the policy discourse the politics of resistance. The progress on these issues always seems to be why the people in the jobs haven't achieved more. And we normalise and we make invisible those who are fighting to stop it. It's a little bit like the discussion we're having. It's not, 'why did we change?' but 'how did we survive against the resistance?' that is still not problematised. ... And it's still hard to get people to recognise the major part of your job in these positions is to deal with that resistance and then find a way to progress the agenda. As I said just a moment ago, survival first and then progressing the agenda and moving it along. (A)<sup>6</sup>

At first glance, focusing on resistance could be seen as being about what could not be achieved by policy workers, as was sometimes the case in the interviews (see Chapter 4). However, the focus was often, as is the case in the above quote, on survival in the face of resistance and was about policy workers' agency and what they did accomplish. A's emphasis was on how the policy workers managed to advance their agenda *in spite of* the resistance they faced. Similarly, G talked about encountering 'animosities' in their work but that the policy workers maintained their focus 'despite' this (G). This emphasis on the resistance faced by the policy workers constructs policy workers as separate from the policy realm: the femocrat is pitted *against* the bureaucracy.

While A above made a distinction between the strategic and ideological policy focuses, E distinguished between the general and specific policy focuses. She felt that while the general policy focus on girls came from the wider climate, and in particular from the Premier of the day (see Chapter 4), it was the policy workers who framed the *specific* focus of the policy agenda:

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<sup>6</sup> A was drawing on Cockburn's (1991) work here.

But the specific program for change never really came from anything like that [the government]. That largely was dependant, it seemed to me, on the particular constellation of people who came together, in our case. ... the way we went [was] probably quite strongly driven by my interest in curriculum and ... my interest in education: my view in the end that what and how you're studying has a huge impact on who and what you are. ... So I felt that quite strongly. And we were probably more curriculum focused and certainly we were seen at that stage as being the major curriculum focus for non-sexist curriculum in Australia. So the things are mixed. I mean the general thing to do something about women in a sense came from out there, pushed from under there by a lot of women in the department being deeply pissed off about their circumstances. ... But the actual program. I don't believe, which sounds very funny now, I don't believe that anybody asked me for a set of annual performance objectives as the Women's Advisor. I mean, I just decided what should be done. ... [B]ut then nobody ... told me how to use the policy process either ... I didn't ever have a mentor in the department, I just went in. It was a marvellous piece [of] learning. Many of the women who worked in those jobs have gone on to other jobs because you just learnt so much about how to manipulate an organisation. If you were good at it, which I turned out to be, it just taught me so much about how organisations work. And you can generalise about that. (E)

Even though E felt that the government and the social context drove the broad policy agenda, she, or the 'constellation of people' in the unit, guided the 'specific program for change'. Not only did E and the other policy workers shape and guide the policy agenda, they did this by 'manipulating' the bureaucracy so as to achieve their goals. Indeed, when I asked E about how she felt regarding the achievement of her goals, her answer revealed the overall sense of her agency within the policy realm:

I feel very good about the three years I spent in there. I think I did profoundly well, with getting other people, I mean I didn't do it by myself, but in a sense I did it by myself in that I found other people to do it. ... I eventually got permanent staffing in the unit, there were people in there. And that was [name], the Deputy Director-General of resources, because he decided I was a good egg. And in the year of the worst budget they'd ever had in the education department I was the only person who got staff. And they all kept on saying 'how did this happen?' and I said, 'you kept on trying to persuade the wrong person'. I cottoned on to the fact of who held the money and was lovely to [the Deputy Director-General] and wrote him a beautiful speech to talk to the Primary Principles Association about ... girls' education. So I reckon we did a lot. Certainly the positive discrimination thing was important legally and historically, it was highly contentious.<sup>7</sup> The range of initiatives that there were in relation to maths and science education, to subject choice, to what readers we used in the early years of school. A whole lot of things changed there. We had somebody

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<sup>7</sup> This was a reference to s47 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (SA), which allows schools to employ women teachers in specified circumstances.

permanently working on the big project for the secondary social science curriculum, somebody permanently working ... on the maths curriculum, about trying to work through ... where there were probl[ems] ... I mean that whole issue of, is maths itself inimitable to girls? Or, is it the kinds of examples that are used? Should you be teaching differently? We did quite a lot of ... on the ground research about teaching practices. And certainly by the time I left, there was a unit, I mean there was a group of people whose job it was to be ... working in the curriculum development processes of the education department. Well, that's not bad in three years. (E)

E had effectively manipulated the hierarchical structures of the bureaucracy by gaining the support of key people, so as to increase staffing levels, which in turn allowed the unit to focus on a number of areas. Further, the areas E decided to focus on were at her discretion. E conceptualised herself as an agential policy worker manipulating the bureaucracy for her purposes. However, there was no reflection on how the areas or questions that were addressed were constructed in the first place. As argued in Chapter 3, many of these areas listed by E – ‘positive discrimination’, ‘maths and science’, ‘subject choice’ – construct the problem of gender and education in particular ways (Bacchi, 1999a). The logic of agency draws attention away from the construction of policy problems, revealing the operation of the logic of rationality and its interrelationship with the logic of agency.

Like E, G talked about the policy workers shaping the specific policy focus or agenda, once having the in-principle approval from those above:

But basically it was both a mixture of be ‘good enough’ and be ‘sassy enough’ to get the in-principle approval and then roll really fast with it. Not dither around and decide what you were going to do. Without being careless, at one level it was make it up as you go along. Because we were clear about the principles – what we wanted. But it had never happened before. So you had to move fast ... It felt a bit like you were pulling together lots of things and running and knitting it into something as you went along. But with a lot of background understanding and background knowledge of what the issues were and what you thought you ought to be aiming for. ... E and [name] were sassy and just said [what should happen], really. It was a lot of assertions. (G)

There was a real sense in this quote of the speed needed by policy workers. As indicated above, such time constraints can prevent both in-depth attention to the theoretical underpinnings and meanings behind policies and reflection upon one's own location within the policy realm. Indeed, G tended to suggest that getting something done was more important than the theoretical underpinnings of a policy:

I don't mind a theory but – and I am quite good ... [at] being theoretical and I am quite proud of the ones I made up even – but. It was a real mixture of both things: if this is what the theory says, if this is what the research says, if this is the scenario in which you're working, how do you put those two things together so that there is a difference for – and we wanted it to be for women in the department and girls in the schools. (G)

G also had a sense of ownership of and pride in particular theories that underpinned some policies, revealing the assumption that policy workers shaped the policy agenda.

The sense of policy workers shaping the specifics of policy irrespective of the department/government could also be seen in the way the policy workers talked about shifts in policy language, concepts and concerns. I address the way the policy workers talked about policy terminology and focuses in more detail in Chapter 8, primarily with a focus on the logic of rationality. However, the policy workers' approach to policy language, concerns and concepts also reveals the presence of the logic of agency. In brief, the policy workers tended to believe they could maintain their own agenda despite shifts in policy focuses from above. For example, A referred to government-driven shifts in policy language as 'superficial' and to policy workers as being 'fleet of foot to keep the agenda and the priorities as we saw them adapted to whatever the government or the department of the day was deciding was the way it wanted it framed' (A). This suggests that policy workers maintained their own agenda irrespective of policy language and ideas. Furthermore, shifts in terminology and focuses that were seen as significant by the policy workers were understood as originating from the policy workers themselves. In this case shifts in focus/terminology were about 'our own intellectual tradition as well as our own ideological, increasing sophistication' (A). Consequently, it was assumed that shifts in focus that made a difference came from the policy workers or, at least, from the wider feminist movement. The logic of agency led policy workers to pay insufficient attention to the impact of policy language and concepts in the constructed and constitutive character of policies (see Chapter 8, Part III).

In summary, then, even though broad policy directions were conceptualised as coming from those with authority in the policy realm, the policy workers understood themselves as shaping the specifics of policy agendas, revealing the logic of agency. In this understanding, policy workers are constructed as separate from the policy realm. Such a perspective draws attention away from the internalisation and interiorisation of the logics

of agency (and rationality) with respect to the policy realm and from the shared understandings of policy problems, evident in the lack of attention to policy language and concepts.

### **Maintaining the Agenda in Hard Times**

Some of the quotes above suggest that at times the wider political and departmental cultures supported a focus on gender and education, which would explain why the policy workers understood themselves as achieving much and shaping the specific policy agenda. However, the policy workers conceptualised themselves in very similar terms during hard times, when the department and government were *not* supportive of their agendas. A number of the policy workers referred to structural, financial and personal constraints in working to achieve feminist objectives in the department (see Chapter 4). Even at these times, the policy workers emphasised their hard work in maintaining their agenda. C, who was the sole person working in gender and education in the department when I interviewed her<sup>8</sup> and was in the unit when the number of personnel fell from double figures to two, described the ways that policy workers maintained their agenda in hard times:

so we had to set to and plan. We were in the targeted population unit. There were two of us, ed[ucation] of girls, there were two students with disabilities, there were two poverty, which was called Commonwealth Literacy Program and then there was the Disadvantaged Schools Programme people who were on another site. That was the targeted populations. But we had a really brilliant person, line manager, [name], who was really a great thinker ... and someone who said, 'ok, we can get going'. And one of the things we decide[d] we could do. ... [W]e ran some sessions, training development sessions. We invited people from schools to write up some materials that never ever saw the light of day except circulated amongst the schools, and so on, in the working out of how to do this. And then very early in the piece, and this came out of the *Action Plan*<sup>9</sup>, we focused on the curriculum because curriculum to support teachers and kids to understand what was happening for girls and for boys in schools was something that we had in the plan ... So then I had a curriculum brief which, and if you can get curriculum out, it goes to all schools and it has a component of professional development. So we thought this is what, this is the way we go. (C)

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<sup>8</sup> There was also a man employed by the department to address boys and education issues at the time of interviewing C. However, C was clear that he approached gender from a very different theoretical position to herself.

<sup>9</sup> This was a reference to the *Three Year Action Plan for the Education of Girls 92-94* (Education of Girls Unit, 1991).

We saw in the previous chapter that the move to a focus on curriculum was also guided by funding pressures. And there was also a sense in **C**'s words above of working around the structural constraints of the bureaucracy, such as reduced personnel and justifying focuses through existing policies or plans. Yet, ultimately, the policy workers took pride in this focus they had achieved in hard times. Malloy (2003, 181) also notes the pride public servants working in the area of social movements (or special policy agencies) took in their work. The sense is that in hard times the policy workers needed merely to concentrate more effort into working out how they could make a difference.

Similarly, **B** talked about policy workers maintaining their agendas even in the face of deep resistance from within the policy realm, echoing **A**'s comments above. In regards to the policy shift towards 'gender', discussed in Chapter 3, I checked with **B** my impression that while some concerns were expressed that the turn to 'gender' could lead to a focus on boys, there also appeared to be a sense of hope in bringing in 'construction of gender' (see also Chapter 8) and **B** replied:

Yeah, I mean that's the thing about *being mavericks* and [**C**], I mean some of these people, these women, they're just outstanding ... [P]art of it's you get punch-drunk, it's like being violated all the time, you get hit from so many sides and you just kind of get so confused that you keep on going. So, there's a systemic violation all the time about people, women mostly, doing this work. It's *so* hard work. ... [T]here's this amazing resilience that goes on with the women that work in this field all the time because we're absolutely, it's part of us, it's not part of a job, it's not going to get you up any career pathway ... you get there and you get your head chopped off because you're too outspoken, too loud, too rude ... you just rub everybody up the wrong way, you can't let go, can't have a joke ... *I just think there's a lot of cleverness about turning something into something that's going to work, for the young men and women that we care about for the future. ... [T]here's always that hope that we can turn it to our advantage.* And I used to find that outstanding working with some of the people. (**B**, emphases added)

**B** conceptualised policy workers as 'mavericks' who could achieve their agenda, or turn things to their 'advantage', if they were 'clever' enough. Further, policy workers were conceptualised here as being able to maintain their agenda and achieve their interests in the context of very deep resistance from within the policy realm. Even in difficult times, policy workers were understood as distinct from the policy realm, but nonetheless fighting against it. **B** also individualised this policy work by naming **C** and referring to 'some of' the women. I return to this individualising of policy work below.



The policy shift to a focus on ‘boys’ is perhaps the area where there was less of a sense of ownership of the policy focus. We saw in the previous chapter that various policy workers described not being able to talk about ‘girls’ in the same way as they could do in the past and feeling a push from above to focus on boys (see also Chapter 8). Nevertheless, ultimately **F** felt that the policy workers managed to maintain a focus on girls: ‘We had to work within it but we also ... maintained a focus on girls and groups of boys and what we did was continue to maintain that, and groups of girls’ (**F**). Similarly, **C** talked about needing to ‘tap-dance and do a whole lot of really hopefully cunning and, you know, steps to support ... the education of girls and gender equity’ (**C**). Again, the impression was that in hard times policy workers just needed to work harder to achieve their agendas.

The policy workers in this case study, therefore, thought of themselves as maintaining their own agendas even in the face of having to work within bureaucratic processes and a lack of support, emphasising the separateness between policy workers and the policy realm.

### **Strategic Practice: Using the Bureaucracy**

The assumption of the agential policy worker was also present in the way in which the policy workers in the case study undertook strategic policy work. Throughout this chapter we have seen glimpses of how the policy workers strategically manoeuvred around the policy realm. This type of policy work is elaborated on in this section. Such conceptualisations construct policy workers as separate agents fighting against the department – they were using the departmental structures to achieve their own agenda. This conceptualisation reflects the logic of agency.

**G** emphasised the strategic nature of the policy workers’ work, suggesting that policy workers were astute about how the bureaucracy functioned and were flexible in how they approached their work. They were prepared to do whatever was necessary within the bureaucracy to achieve their agenda:

You did whatever worked, really. And, again, multi-strategy. I am very cautious about anyone who thinks they've got the one way. Because bureaucracies are like big amoebas ... Whenever you think you've got it within your grasp, it shifts and changes because it's not in its interests to change. And so you've got to be really scouting the edges a bit. And I think one of the things that probably all of us share is we came in as kind of like

the enemy within. And so our understanding how organisations worked and how people worked had to be really sophisticated. ... You had to understand how all that worked in order to be strategic about how you did your job. And it was kind of like, 'keep your eyes on the edges of this thing'. It amazes me how bureaucracies are so fluid for all that, the rhetoric about ... they are very hierarchical, and stodgy, and predictable, and stuck. I think they are very fluid and depend very much on people and personal relationship[s] and the weight of opinion, which could be external or internal, or the latest fad ... You have to kind of know how fluid it is really to get in there. (G)

Interestingly, in G's emphasis on the bureaucracy's dependence on personal relationships, there is some rejection of the conceptualisation of the hierarchical bureaucracy imposing external constraints we saw in Chapter 4. I return to this interdependence of the bureaucracy and people below. Concurrent with this rejection of the fixed hierarchical character of the bureaucracy, however, G conceptualised policy workers as strategically fighting against the bureaucracy. She referred to policy workers as the 'enemy within' and the bureaucracy as changing shape to protect its interests, which were contrary to those of the feminist policy workers. We can see also that G emphasised the need for policy workers to understand the organisational structures in which they worked so that they could use these structures to their advantage. A similarly captured this sense of the astute policy worker. She described the way policy workers needed to understand the structures of the department and to be familiar with what was current so as to find ways to maintain their agenda against the department as a whole:

So from the moment that you are appointed it's about defending your right to be there, then your right to change something. And then finding a way, you know the loopholes in what's happening around you, what the department structures are saying and doing, what the policy movements are in the department, put your oar in there and create something positive, to facilitate change out there in the schools. (A)

These comments of G and A captured the emphases on strategic policy work by all the policy workers. Despite G's reference to multi-strategy and being flexible, there were some common themes concerning what strategic policy work looked like in practice. Such work could involve breaking bureaucratic rules when appropriate, working with people who had official authority within the department/government, giving the impression that there was more support from above than actually existed, and framing proposals in the current preferred language. This strategic work revealed the operation of the logic of

agency, the assumption that policy workers were separate from the policy realm in which they worked.

### *Breaking the rules*

Often the policy workers in this case study ignored the bureaucratic processes where appropriate. E described using the bureaucracy for her purposes, notably by ignoring the normal hierarchical procedures of the policy realm:

The education department was then highly bureaucratic, I presume it still is, perhaps not as much as it was. I was extremely adept at *working* the bureaucracy, and, partly by defining myself as different and therefore ... *breaking all the rules* ... just assuming I had access to whoever I wanted to, sending memos to whoever I wanted to and ... nobody ever kind of [questioned this]. Because I did it, people thought that's what Women's Advisors do. ...[A]t some point somebody was going to cotton on that I was actually a Senior Education Officer ... [A]lso, I work fast ... so they were constantly being bombarded with stuff, you know. So they never kind of got me completely. And they always thought I had political power, which I probably did. (E, emphases added)

This sense of using or 'working' the bureaucracy for feminist purposes mirrors Malloy's (2003, 179 and 181) emphasis on special agency workers using the bureaucracy (Chapter 2). As argued in Chapter 2, this perspective separates policy workers from the policy realm, even if they are agential within it. Similarly G referred to policy workers being 'naughty' and challenging the bureaucratic rules:

So you were never predictable in a meeting. Not necessarily formal. Every now and again I might say something totally informal and inappropriate. Just get that edge back. And it's quite deliberate. All of us did it ... It's not eccentric, it's just choosing not to play in that mould all the time as defined. And you do pay a price for it at some levels but also you certainly feel like a more complete person for not holding into someone else's rules – [not being] captured by it. ... That you actually can reframe ... So that's how we dealt with the bureaucracy – by being naughty, as much as anything. (G)

G's reference to getting the 'edge back' emphasises the sense of conflict between the interests of the policy workers and those of the bureaucracy as a whole.

A similarly described policy workers as not abiding by bureaucratic procedures:

it's very tricky work because it's not like being a good girl working for your boss and pleasing your boss and ... fitting in with the department and ... following the negative and positive sanctions. We had to break rules, so you might collude with the feminists in the union or you might be working behind the scenes with political advisors, which the Director-General in education would think was disloyal. (A)

This notion of working with political advisors links with the common strategy of working with people who had influence within the policy realm, a practice elaborated on below. For present purposes, it is clear that in these passages policy workers are conceptualised as distinct from the policy realm, breaking its rules to achieve outcomes.

The policy workers also ignored the normal processes of the policy realm by circulating documents without the required consent. The purpose was to get broad support for the policy workers' agendas and to place pressure on the department in order to achieve these agendas:

we circulated [the report] to every school in the state before the Director-General knew I had done it. And so it was right out there and people were quoting it back to the department. So then they started saying what we knew had to be done, like why don't we have appointment on merit. (E)

Similarly, C described the 'cleverness' of the policy workers in circulating an Action Plan, even though it had not yet gone through the required procedure of obtaining approval from above:

we were restructured ... [T]he ed[ucation] of girls unit disappeared, was demolished. That was in '91, end of '91. ... End of '91 we also launched the Education of Girls' *Three Year Action Plan '92-94*.<sup>10</sup> So it was going to be heralded and go through with only two officers instead of a unit with nine, ten, eleven people ... so none of those supports. But what had been clever – now this is not anything to do with my cleverness, this is the cleverness of [name] and F and G, those three in particular – was that [the] Education of Girls' *Three Year Action Plan* that was actually launched in 1991 had been in draft form for at least three years ... So what they'd done, *even though it hadn't been okayed, hadn't ... gone through the process of being okayed by Executive Directors ... But it was there, it was circulated and while there were people to support it with professional development*. Everyone went for it like mad and so we used about three or four different drafts of that plan which was so damn smart because when it was launched, when it was signed ... the infrastructures went and the personnel went down to two so

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<sup>10</sup> This was a reference to the *Three Year Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1992-1994* (Education of Girls Unit, 1991).

what I say is that was such great foresight to actually get the drafts out around because that really gave it a profile. (C, emphasis added)

Such strategic policy work constructs policy workers as ‘naughty’, ‘clever’, ‘smart’ astute and flexible ‘rule breakers’. This strategic policy worker who manoeuvres around the hierarchical bureaucratic structures sits uncomfortably with the sense of constraint imposed by these structures captured in Chapter 4. However, to reiterate, rather than reconcile these understandings of constraint and agency, this thesis emphasises the consistency in both conceptualisations of constructing policy workers as separate and distinct from, but fighting against, the policy realm. The logic of agency constructs policy workers as both agential *policy-makers* and constrained *policy implementers*, but in the process obscures the presence of the discourses of the policy realm that shape the subjectivities, the understandings and practices, of the policy workers in precisely these terms.

#### *Gaining the support of those in authority*

The agential, strategic policy worker also was apparent in the policy workers’ efforts to gain the support of influential people within the policy realm and government. While there was a backdrop to these discussions of a hierarchical bureaucracy where those located above had more authority, the overall impression was that the policy workers could get around such constraints by working with ‘key people’. E described working with people who had authority within the department and ensuring that these people obtained an increased profile in return for their support:

there was no support ... so what I actually knew was that I would need to be very, very careful if I was actually going to get anything done. And I had to get agreement to do things, or, at least, agreement of key people. Now basically what I did was pick things to do and work on individual senior men in that policy area to agree to work on that issue. So it was a quite deliberate strategy of endlessly picking the things to work on, trying to get, I mean it’s pretty obvious stuff, trying to get things that made them look good. Certainly they got a lot of feedback after I spoke at a national education administration conference ... about how wonderfully ... inclusive and just and modern they were in their thinking about these issues. So, I mean, I was quite careful not to bag them ever publicly and always to behave as though I had their support, though of course I knew I didn’t. So, I mean, the idea was to constantly behave in such a way that they would see themselves as getting kudos from being involved with me. (E)

Further, we saw above that **E** talked about getting financing in hard times because she obtained the support of the person in charge of finances. Similarly, **D** described realising that it was important to be ‘more strategic’ and get ‘powerful’ people in the bureaucracy ‘on side’ rather than being hostile to them. Another example of achieving support more generally, and hence reducing resistance, was a technique called ‘ball cuddling’ (**A**). **A** described this as another policy worker’s term for her ‘policy priority, or her strategy priority’ of ‘managing’ the ‘discomfort’ of men in the department (**A**). One of Eisenstein’s (1996, 174) respondents also referred to this technique of ‘ball cuddling’. Again, the overall impression from this strategy of getting people located higher in the bureaucracy to support the policy workers was that in so doing the policy workers could achieve their agendas in a hierarchical organisational context.

### *Creating the illusion of support*

A further strategy referred to by some of the policy workers was that of giving the illusion that there was support for gender and education from the department as a whole or from the government. In the quote above, **E** referred to giving the impression of having the support of those with authority in the department while being aware that in reality such support was not forthcoming. Similarly, **A** referred to maintaining the unit’s agenda through creating the impression of support from those located higher in the department/government:

First of all to survive, now that is always right at the forefront, that everything that you do and every issue that you take up is about making sure this position and this funding and this policy frame remains because at every moment it’s like a big river that wants to wash it away. So for it to be there at all, I used to say we do it with mirrors, we create the impression that ... there’s a far greater commitment from the Minister, from the Director-General, from the authorities. We had to legitimise the teachers in the schools to raise the issues as they saw them in the classroom, in the staffroom by giving the impression that (loud voice) ‘Oh, everyone thinks this is important, the Director, the Minister’. Except it was always us with cardboard cut-outs, you know, sort of Alice in Wonderland with writing the speeches for them and getting, wheeling them out to look impressed, to look important and to, as it were, give the positive sanction to the activists, the teachers who daily saw what the issues were that they needed to take up. (**A**)

Again, the assumption was that the policy workers could shape the agenda and give the illusion of governmental/departmental support. Creating this impression of support

involved policy workers undertaking a huge amount of work themselves such as speechwriting, while those with authority were ‘cardboard cut-outs’ or mouthpieces for the cause. Here, the logic of agency constructed policy workers as the shapers of policy agendas.

*Using the preferred framings, concepts and focuses of the time*

A further practical technique of *being strategic* common within the case study was attaching the policy workers’ agenda to what was happening in the wider climate: that is, framing their agenda according to current departmental, government, and public priorities. We saw this in Chapter 4 where C referred to using the preferred language of those above her in briefing papers, yet still needing to be ‘clever’ and ‘to let them know what you want to let them know’ (C). She further described attempting to be ‘smart’ by attaching an action plan the unit supported to the social justice plan because ‘social justice’ was the priority of the department and government at the time:

when the Ed[ucation] of Girls’ *Three Year Action Plan*<sup>11</sup> was out and there was just [F] and I, how we did that too. It was piggyback with the *Social Justice Action Plan*<sup>12</sup>, which came out at the same time. So that’s how we, as well as the curriculum strand which we went on, we also talked about the plan by working with social justice action plan personnel because there were more of them. So that was an attempt to be smart too. (C)

Yet, as elaborated in Chapter 7, ‘social justice’ was understood as connected to a policy focus on measurable ‘outcomes’, which renders difficult considering non-measurable consequences of policies, such as their constitutive effects. This strategy of adopting the preferred language of the time therefore draws attention away from how problems are constructed in the first place and the consequences that follow, a theme pursued in Part III.

A also enacted this strategy of using the preferred language of the time. She understood her work as gaining problem status for the issues she was concerned about, suggesting a level of agency in gaining this problem status. While she felt that there were many issues that could be addressed, once she had decided on one, a way of gaining problem status for this

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<sup>11</sup> This was a reference to the *Three Year Action Plan for the Education of Girls 92-94* (Education of Girls Unit, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> This was a reference to the education department’s *Social Justice Action Plan* (Education Department of South Australia, 1992).

issue was to use ‘what at that time everyone sees as the burning issue ... and what it’s possible to get up’ (A). She continued:

But of the many issues that you could adopt and bring to the forefront in terms of girls, it’s a whole wash of those things, the pragmatics and the realities of what you see as the most important thing to tackle and then to get an acceptance that there’s a need for a policy, you have to make that issue a problem and how you do that depends on what that issue is and who it is you are dealing with *and what officially everyone is meant to care about at that moment in time.* (A, emphasis added)

A worked with and around bureaucratic structures to maintain her own agenda, even if that meant using the current concerns of the department/government at the time. Again, this strategy effectively draws attention away from how issues, which gain problem status, are constructed, as well as which issues are not addressed at all. Similarly, in a discussion of the new policy focus on ‘boys’, A suggested that policy work involved continually rewriting policies in new contexts such that while using the language of boys, the current policy workers could maintain the focus on girls:

You’ve just got to write some new ones [laughs]. You do ... taking us around in a circle, what drives policy, the realities of the current political situation demand that it be reframed and re-written in a new way that acknowledges current, whatever the policies on boys are, but uses them very wisely to reframe and re-communicate and give new legitimacy to the education of girls. (A)

Policy workers, here, are constructed as being able to do anything, despite the political and public focus on boys. If policy workers are clever enough, it seems, they can maintain a focus on girls irrespective of the language used. For example, A suggested:

you would want there to be many statements that said ... ‘we have concerns about boys ... this does not mean that we have reduced our commitment to the education of girls’. And that second part is like having a new policy statement (A).

Ailwood and Lingard (2001) argue that, despite the language of ‘construction of gender’, the emphasis on ‘boys’ in current policy agendas signals the ‘endgame’ for the education of girls. However, and by contrast, the interviewed policy workers assumed that they were able to control and shape policy concerns irrespective of the language used. Chapters 7 and 8 contend that policy workers need rather to pay more attention to the broad-ranging effects of policy language, concepts and concerns. The logic of agency (in this case with



respect to specific policy areas) leads policy workers to focus on what has been achieved, such as the inclusion of a reference to girls, rather than the effects of particular policy focuses, such as the emphasis on boys.

Conceptualising the adoption of the preferred framing of issues of the government/bureaucracy as effective strategic work draws attention to what is achieved by policy workers in specific policy areas, revealing the logic of agency with respect to specific policy areas. While I accept that at times policy workers do attempt to attain, and sometimes succeed at attaining, their own consciously-held interests and values in specific policies areas, I contend that this success is only part of the picture. Missed here are the shared values and interests of the policy workers and the bureaucracy/government with respect to specific policy areas. That is, there are important issues here that do not get debated at all. The emphasis is on maintaining the policy workers' agendas irrespective of the ways specific issues are framed. Yet, as the policy-as-discourse theorists have identified, the ways in which a problem is framed constructs that problem in particular ways, which has effects. The argument is not that policy workers can easily reject mainstream framings of issues, but that they need to reflect more closely on the effects of these framings. The logic of agency (with respect to specific policy areas), and its emphasis on strategic successes (no matter how small), draws attention away from the need for this kind of reflection, with possible deleterious effects in terms of policy outcomes.

**B** described preserving and retaining work the policy workers had already undertaken by adapting it to the present departmental focus, which in this example was the major department-wide curriculum document, the *SACSA framework* (Department of Education, Training and Employment and Catholic Education, 2001):

[C] and I did deliberate stuff. ... I reckon we ran I don't know how many sessions ... [S]upposedly you had to work about implementing the SACSA so we did it always in the framework of implementing the SACSA but we focused on gender and disadvantage or gender and poverty or language and gender. ... And then what we did, we brought in the curriculum materials that we had written before. [C] had written three lots of materials, I'd done my maths and science stuff. So we used to bring those in and weave them into, 'you can use these curriculum ideas in this new framework. Don't just chuck it out.' So ... there were interesting times about trying to carry the old into the new. [C]'s really, I think, quite *clever* politically with some of that stuff. With, you know, *managing* some of it. Because it just used [to] make me really angry ... *But we just used to work within and sort of shape around it.* So you [are] still almost doing, not the same work that you were

doing before, but you are using a lot of the same resources and the same data. (**B**, emphases added)

**B** understood the policy workers in this instance as maintaining their agenda irrespective of the requirements of the bureaucracy, but under the guise of implementing the department-wide agenda. Bowe, Ball, and Gold (1992, 93) also referred to the practice of their respondents of ‘accommodating’ new frameworks but maintaining commitments to established work practices. Again, the assumption is of a separate policy worker ‘managing’ the demands of the wider department, without sufficient reflection on the possible consequences of framing existing practices in the new language of the department. This strategic policy work reflects the logic of agency with respect to specific policy areas.

This notion of framing issues or policy proposals in the current preferred language or maintaining the policy workers’ own agenda while appearing to be complying with departmental goals captures the backdrop to policy work, discussed in Chapter 4, of people located above, and who hold more power than, the policy workers within the department. Nevertheless, the policy workers conceptualised themselves as ‘strategic’ and able to *use* the official language of the time. It needs to be acknowledged that, at times, the policy workers did fight battles over terminology rather than accepting the preferred language of the time. However, as we shall see in Chapter 8, these battles tended to continue to reflect the logic of agency and were about capturing the favoured meanings of the policy workers at the expense of considering the constructed and constitutive character of policy language, concerns and concepts. For present purposes the important point is the ways in which the policy workers were constructed as using the bureaucracy to serve their purposes. As indicated above, such a construction reflects Malloy’s (2003) work and the femocrat literature (Chapter 2), sharing their assumption of pre-existing fixed policy workers with pre-formed agendas distinct from those of the bureaucracy as a whole. Such a perspective draws attention away from shared assumptions within the policy realm generally and within specific policy areas.

Going further, with respect to specific policy areas, the focus on framing policy agendas in terms that reflected the current climate meant that policy workers were inadvertently restricted to accepting and working within imperatives shaped by the status quo. Because the emphasis stayed on what could be achieved, the downside of working within accepted

frames of reference was neglected. A captured this in her emphasis on what it was possible to change:

I always say there's this much to change and you go into the job and you've just got to find ... what it's possible to change at this moment in time, what seems the most important thing to change or the most possible thing to change and also what are your strengths and what can you best do and that latter part is how you do it more than what you do I think. So everyone will do the job differently and they'll do different things. (A)

Similarly, E talked about working with areas where she felt she could 'get some movement'. I asked E specifically about subsequent policy focuses since she left the unit. I asked her if these issues had surfaced during her time in the unit and whether she felt a sense of frustration for not having addressed them.<sup>13</sup> E was pragmatic in her response:

there always is. But you have to be sensible about any kind of job. I mean you can't, you can't possibly do everything. ... You have to kind of work out ... what are the important things to do, *which are the ones of them where you can actually get some movement*. (E, emphasis added)

There is a clear connection here to the observation by one of Eisenstein's respondents that sometimes femocrats would be caught up in the bureaucratic 'ethos of "getting things up"' (Eisenstein, 1996, 171). In both cases, policy workers are conceptualised as fighting for a particular interest group but also as working within a bureaucratic system that rewards 'winners' (Eisenstein, 1996, 171). Such a system creates policy workers as advocates for particular interests distinct from those of the policy realm, obscuring the ways in which focusing on areas that were possible to 'change', to 'get some movement on', or to 'win' or 'get up', limited the proposals pursued by the policy workers to those which corresponded with the broader agenda of the bureaucracy. In other words, such a system and its emphasis on the structured interaction of (agential) competing interests obscures deeply-ingrained shared assumptions within the policy realm, reflecting the assumption of the logic of agency. Furthermore, this focus on achieving something (or anything) in the bureaucracy not only draws attention away from what is not achieved, but also from the specifics of what is achieved. Not addressed in such a perspective is the deeper question of how

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<sup>13</sup> The question I posed to E here itself assumes the logics of agency and rationality in its emphasis on *frustrations* of policy workers in not *addressing* particular issues. Indeed, at times in the interviews I became part of exchanges that assumed the logics of the policy realm, demonstrating the pervasiveness of these logics. As expanded upon in Part I, it was only through the research process that I began myself to identify the hegemonic discourses circulating around the policy realm.

policies construct problems in the first place and what effects policy constructions have on people and social relations. These concerns are returned to in Part III of the thesis.

The policy workers, therefore, were assumed to maintain strategically their own agendas, irrespective of the hierarchical policy realm in which they worked. They were constructed in this policy realm as shaping the policy agenda according to their interests, which were contrary to those of the policy realm generally. This construction of policy workers assumes the logic of agency and the separation of the policy worker and the policy realm. Consequently, attention is drawn to the moments of struggle and conflict within the policy realm, rather than moments of consensus with respect both to the policy realm generally and to specific policy areas. Understanding policy workers as located subjects turns attention to these moments of consensus within the policy realm. In the final section of this chapter I argue that there were brief moments in the interviews when the policy workers did conceptualise a connection between the policy workers and the policy realm in which they worked. Such a conceptualisation, I suggest, needs to be built upon and developed to acknowledge the ways in which policy workers are located subjects within the policy realm. But first, I turn to the consequences of constructing policy workers as agential individuals.

### **CONSTRUCTING POLICY WORKERS**

We have seen so far in this chapter that the logic of agency constructs policy workers as owning and shaping the policy agenda, fighting for their feminist interests and strategically manoeuvring around and managing the policy realm. Not only are policy workers created as agential by the logic of agency, they are made responsible for policy work. Policy work becomes the individual responsibility of the policy worker. Connected to the centrality of agency in humanist understandings of personhood is the contingent notion of responsibility:

Embedded within the dominant humanist discourses ... is an understanding that each person is one who has an obligation to take themselves up as a knowable, recognizable identity, who 'speaks for themselves' and who accepts responsibility for their actions. (Davies, 1991, 42)

Indeed, **D** talked about the department being made up of individuals:

There were constraints with individuals. When people sit in schools and they talk about “the” department. The department is made up of people who can support or who can significantly hinder whatever it is that people want to do. I think there were lots of constraints at different times. (D)

While D’s comments were partly about the department generally, this individualising of policy workers appeared in the talk about the feminist policy workers. G spoke about her individual role in achieving particular policy focuses. For example, she talked about the policy focus on social justice as a ‘strategic approach to improving educational outcomes, achieving equality, giving equal opportunity and equity for particular groups within groups’ (G). When I asked where this strategy came from she answered the ‘department’ but then in a whisper added: ‘Me, of course, because I was Assistant Director thereof’ (G). We also saw at the beginning of this chapter that E talked about the way she had achieved a lot in the gender and education policy area. Likewise, B talked about the individuals she worked with in the unit affecting the ease with which she could maintain her own agenda. Further, most of the policy workers identified other individual policy workers as ‘clever’ (C, B), ‘dedicated and committed’ (D), the people responsible for a particular policy (G), doing a ‘really good job’ in a policy area (C), influencing policy on a national level (F, D), being ‘key people’ involved in a particular policy focus (D), or as undertaking ‘incredibly influential’ research (D). Thus, the success, or not, of particular feminist policy agendas appeared to be dependant on the ability and characteristics of individual policy workers. Indeed, as is clear from the above, policy workers were constructed as particular types of people: they were ‘clever’, ‘smart’, ‘sassy’, ‘opportunistic’ and ‘mavericks’ who were ‘fleet of foot’, had ‘strategic nous’ and could ‘tap-dance’. A suggested, with a sense of pride shared by the other policy workers, that to work in the gender and education policy area ‘you need intellectual engagement as an educationalist and strategic nous and courage and bureaucratic and policy adroitness’ (A). Much emphasis was placed on the individual policy worker’s strategic manoeuvring within the policy realm to achieve their agendas. Other ways of being have no place in this conceptualisation. There is little space (or time) here for the reflexive and reflective policy worker who considers their own location within the policy realm and then considers the discursive character and effects of policies, which is the kind of policy worker imagined and defended in Part III.

Interestingly, A lamented the individualising of gender and education policy workers by those in the department who resisted a concern for gender and education:

So they didn't like us. What they would have said was, I mean they used to complain to me about what [one of the policy workers] wore. And I don't mean to bring that up for any reason other than how superficial that is, no doubt each one of us would have been problematised: ... 'it's not that we're against equal opportunity or education of girls, it's these difficult women that are appointed to these jobs'. And there was something wrong with us but they didn't know that actually their discomfort, their deep discomfort, was that we were challenging the world as we know it and that they are comfortable in. (A)

Despite this rejection of the individualising of policy work by those who resisted such work, the policy workers conceptualised themselves, as we saw above, as agential individuals distinct from the policy realm.

The emphasis on individual policy workers' agency produces policy workers as responsible for what is and is not achieved in the policy realm, rather than locating what occurs in the policy realm within a wider context (Rizvi and Kemmis, 1987, 41).<sup>14</sup> This placing of responsibility on individual policy workers can be seen in how A answered the question of what influenced a change in policy focus:

it's probably a combination of what is happening in the wider structures ... who's running the department, how it's being run, who's the government, what their priorities are and *who are the activists in the bureaucracy, who happens to be there and how they do their job*. Because some people are more interested in the more theoretical questions than others, I suppose, and how much they're keeping in touch with developments in the wider field ... in the rest of Australia and in other countries. And ... whether times are such that just survival is all that can be managed or whether, let's, let's move this agenda forward. The combination of the two. *Because you wouldn't just go off and decide to be terribly... theoretically fascinating and interesting at a time when it was going to fall flat on its face or no one really cared and ... the priorities should have been more pragmatic.* (A, emphases added)

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<sup>14</sup> In recent times in Australia we have seen the consequences of an emphasis on the responsibility of individual public servants in the Howard Government's refusal to take Ministerial responsibility for the circulation of misinformation to the public (the 'children overboard' affair) (Weller, 2002, 60-61, 95-102), departmental knowledge of corruption (the AWB wheat scandal) (Hatcher, 2006), and basing decisions on incorrect advice (the Iraq War). This is not to deny the increase in power of the executive by the Howard Government, nor overall reductions in the public service and increased government control of the public service (Kelly, 2006). Rather, it is to note that, paradoxically, there has also been a decrease in Ministerial responsibility at the expense of an implied increased responsibility for public servants. I note that Weller not only criticises the government for its tendency to rely on the "we acted on advice" defence, but also the lack of readiness in public servants to offer information they were not asked for. Nevertheless, I suggest that Ministers' abrogating responsibility by saying they acted on advice or they did not act because they were not advised in effect leaves public servants with increased responsibility, if not with increased influence.

While **A** was aware of the wider context, there was a clear focus here on how the individual policy worker understood their work and whether they were appropriately strategic for the time. Nevertheless, **A** was conscious of the difficulty of placing responsibility with the individual, wanting to acknowledge both the individual and the context in which they are working:

I mean I don't ever like to reduce these things to personalities ... but there are very interesting personalities always that are carrying things forward. And how they're carried forward because [that] – [in] the[se] positions in particular when there's only a few people – is influenced by whose doing it. On the other hand they are linking with a much wider movement, or ... the positions are created by the demands of a much wider movement. And they are legitimised by the demands of a much wider movement. ... [I]t's like any movement in history, they say in teaching history, which I used to do, 'is it the man or is it the moment', it used to be the man you see ... I think that's the discussion we're having here. (**A**)

Clearly, **A** was attempting to avoid laying responsibility on individuals, drawing attention instead to the broader departmental culture and structures and political climate of the time. However, there was still a sense in this quote of the difficulty of conceptualising policy workers outside of a presumed logic of agency. The difficulty of talking about policy workers in terms other than agency demonstrates the hegemony of the logic of agency.

Importantly, the focus in this thesis on the ways in which the discourses of the policy realm are internalised and interiorised by policy workers does not in any way imply blame or place individual responsibility on policy workers for bounded policy work, which of course would be counter-intuitive given the argument just advanced. Rather, the purpose of this thesis is to highlight the impact of the discourses of the policy realm on policy workers and policy work, drawing attention to the importance of disrupting these discourses.

### **POLICY WORKERS AS LOCATED SUBJECTS**

To this point the two chapters in this part of the thesis have closely documented the operation of the logic of agency, the sense of separateness of policy workers from the policy realm, within the interviews conducted for the thesis. It is important, however, to draw attention to the brief moments when this way of thinking was challenged. Uncovering gaps, silences and contradictions within hegemonic discourses is a necessary step to

disrupting them. There were occasions in the interviews when the policy workers clearly understood a close connection between policy workers and the policy realm. We saw above that **G** described the bureaucracy as being fluid and dependent on interpersonal relationships. She also suggested that the bureaucracy and policy workers affected each other. She talked about policy workers ‘changing the systems that made things work’ (**G**). Further, **G** spoke of policy workers changing the bullying male culture of the bureaucracy:

And in lots of ways I think it [that is, the presence of the gender and education policy workers] changed the culture of the department. It was a very bullying department. I mean it was normal for a male director, or assistant director ... [to] call you into the office, stand you at the doorway, hurl files, ... scream, bellow, yell, go red. ... [T]hat culture of bullying was just endemic. Very much old school, old male, old. They'd all come up as principles and 'run a tight ship' and [then] all these sassy, naughty gals [arrived]. (**G**)

Eisenstein (1996, 213) also referred to the success of the femocrats in ‘push[ing] the state from within’ by institutionalising feminist analysis of policy,<sup>15</sup> gaining access to a degree of decision-making within government, and effecting ‘a remarkable process of education within the government’. These achievements speak to the ways in which the policy realm itself changed, rather than changes in specific policy areas.

Conversely, **G** felt that the bureaucracy affected the ways in which the policy workers behaved:

And what was scary though, for me, was I found myself acting like a naughty girl. I'd be really cheeky, and just naughty. You'd get really – I used to wear a suit, the kids used to call it the clown suit ... I'd wear that to work. I mean I look back on it! (**G**)

In contrast to some of **G**'s statements about choosing to be naughty so as to strategically manipulate the bureaucracy, there was a sense in **G**'s quote above that she had become a ‘naughty girl’ because of the ways in which policy workers were constructed as agitators in the department. This sense of the interrelationship of the policy worker and the policy realm, I argue, needs to be developed further to address how the discourses around and in the policy realm itself, the logics of rationality and agency, shaped policy workers.

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of how some of this institutionalisation has been eroded.



There was also awareness among some of the policy workers of being interconnected with, and responding to, broader departmental processes. This awareness was apparent in the brief moments of questioning whether ‘strategic focuses’ were in fact a victory or not. For example, A talked about when she first started working in the department and those above her had changed the job from ‘Women’s Advisor’ to ‘Equal Opportunity Officer’ and how she worked strategically within the new office to maintain a focus on girls:

But how could you argue against that? There are other students that are disadvantaged and so you would be on the wrong foot if you said, ‘oh, we only care about girls’. ... So we just thought well we’ve got to take on it all but we could absolutely see the agenda that girls would then get lost because the intention was that poverty and disability and other issues that are very much more obvious, I suppose, as the disadvantaged, would take over. So then the policy and political challenge was to maintain an emphasis on the education of girls while being described as an equal opportunity officer. And so part of our strategy was to spend quite a lot of time and energy on saying each of these groups deserves their own specialist attention. It’s a cop-out to ask one person to look at it all. ... So that was sort of part of our policy push, to say, ‘yes, these other groups are disadvantaged and they do need specialist attention, they need their own specialist attention, it’s a cop-out to ask one person to be able to attend to all of that’. *So in a way, was that a victory or was that diluting our time and attention, [which] was put into getting that off the ground?* (A, emphasis added)

A also, at times, talked about how it was ‘unfortunate’ that policy workers had to work with mainstream framings of issues, even if they were strategic in how they undertook this work. I argue there needs to be more of this type of reflexivity about the policy workers’ location within the policy realm. But this reflexivity needs to extend not only to shared assumptions in particular policy areas, but to the more general assumption that policy work is performed by rational agents. To achieve this rethinking requires recognition of the locatedness of policy workers. By talking about the locatedness of policy workers, the thesis means to recognise policy workers as embedded within the policy realm and hence shaped by the hegemonic discourses of that realm – the logics of agency and rationality. Together these construct policy workers as rational agential people. Exposing the operation of these logics puts them under erasure, strengthening the possibility of challenge and change.

## CONCLUSION

This and the previous chapter have argued that both the construction of the bureaucracy as imposing external constraints on policy workers and the construction of policy workers as strategically manoeuvring around and ‘managing’ the bureaucracy work within the distinction between structure and agency implicit in the logic of agency. Policy workers generally are produced as separate from and fighting against the policy realm. This perspective drew attention to what the policy workers in this case study achieved in the policy realm. While I accept that on one level policy workers are struggling against the bureaucracy to achieve their articulated preferred goals and are sometimes successful at achieving these goals, I argue that this way of thinking about the relationship between policy workers and the policy realm misses part of the picture because the concepts of constraint and agency eschew moments of consensus. The assumption of the logic of agency obscures its very operation. What is missed, then, is what is *not* struggled over, the shared assumptions about the policy realm, such as the logics of rationality and agency, and about substantive policies, such as how particular policy problems are conceptualised. We have seen in this Part that at times the policy workers took pride in their ability to be entrepreneurial, strategic, and to work fast, all essential elements of rational, agential policy-making. Further, this part has identified the policy workers’ inadvertent assumption and interiorisation of the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) regarding their role in the policy realm generally. Of particular note was the way this logic led to strategic policy work. Yet, a focus on strategic work, especially the strategy of using the preferred language of the time, draws attention away from the broader discursive effects of specific policies, how they create subjects and social relations in particular ways (see Chapters 7 and 8). These shared assumptions of policy workers and the bureaucracy/government with respect to specific policy areas are drawn out in more detail in Part III, which details the operation of the logic of rationality. There I argue that the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) led policy workers in the case study to pay insufficient attention to ingrained values in policy, to the broader effects of policy and to the impact of policy language, concerns and concepts. If policy workers become reflexive about their location within the policy realm, conceiving of themselves as located subjects instead of as rational agents, space would be created for policy workers to reflect more deeply on policy values, effects and language. The goal of the thesis is to encourage such reflexivity through identifying

and disrupting the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm and reconceptualising policy workers as located subjects.

## **PART III**

### **POLICY AND THE POLICY REALM: THE LOGIC OF RATIONALITY (AND THE LOGIC OF AGENCY) WITH RESPECT TO SPECIFIC POLICY AREAS**

## PREAMBLE

I had no idea what policy was. ... I had no theory about policy and you don't get any induction. ... and I used to think 'is this policy, is this how policy gets developed?' This mysterious thing. (B)

Part III of the thesis argues that the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) with respect to specific policy areas, was pervasive within the policy realm of the case study. The logic of rationality, as we have seen, assumes that policy workers can solve pre-existing policy problems. This logic is based on a particular conception of policy as solving objectively identifiable, pre-existing problems. This conception underpinned much of how the policy workers understood and approached policy, despite the moments of ambivalence about the nature of policy, captured in the quote from **B** above.

Part I of the thesis identified the ways in which the logic of rationality and the logic of agency underpins much of the academic literature on policy, the policy realm and policy workers. Part II demonstrated the ways in which the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality) circulated around and in the particular policy realm in the case study, shaping the policy workers' subjectivities, their understandings and practices, with regards to their relationship to or role within *the policy realm generally*. We saw that the logic of agency produced agential policy workers who fought against the policy realm generally, obscuring their locatedness within this realm. Part III, then, turns to the ways in which the logic of rationality also shaped the subjectivities of the policy workers in the case study. It identifies the operation of the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) in relation to *specific policy areas*. Of course, as noted in the preamble to Part II, there are overlaps between the policy realm and specific policy areas and between the logic of agency and the logic of rationality, overlaps that are indicated as they arise. Part III, therefore, considers the ways in which the policy workers understood policy and how they performed their work, so as ultimately to understand the ways in which they were constructed as rational policy workers within this realm.

The logic of rationality can be seen in the ways in which the policy workers understood and approached values in policy (Chapter 6), the effects of policy (Chapter 7), and policy language, concerns and concepts (Chapter 8). Different understandings of policy values,

effects, and terminology and focuses align with different understandings of policy and the policy realm, which, in turn, suggest different policy work. Further, as argued in Part I, these different types of policy work assume different types of policy workers. As indicated in the Introduction to this thesis, the two salient understandings of policy and the policy realm for my thesis are that of policy as solving pre-existing problems in the world (the rational approach to policy) and that of policy as constructed and constitutive, that is, as creating problems in particular ways (a policy-as-discourse approach to policy).

The rational approach to policy rests on the assumption that problems in the world can be understood outside of the way we think and talk about them. Thus, as we saw in Chapter 1, values are seen as either irrelevant in the policy realm (Bridgman and Davis 2004) or as readily identifiable and hence either easily placed to the side in the policy-making process (Edwards, 2001) or purposively argued for (Bessant *et al.*, 2006). Also, in the rational approach to policy, the effects of policy are seen as easily identifiable and measurable. They are about the material changes policies create such as resource allocation, changes in selection criteria and so on. The consequences of policies are understood in terms of either the stated objectives of policies or the purposive actions of 'policy implementers'. Relatedly, under this understanding of policy, the terminology and concepts present in policy are not considered as particularly relevant, provided they accurately capture the problem and convey the intention of the policy. This understanding of policy aligns with the logic of rationality. It suggests a policy worker who can work outside of values (or, at best, can easily articulate and debate them), who can measure effects and who pays little attention to the constructed and constitutive character of language, concerns and concepts and, indeed, of policies. Here policy work is about searching for accurate understandings of the problem, through research and data collection, assessing policies according to stated objectives and purposive actions, and either ignoring policy language or fighting to achieve policy language that accurately captures the problem (or the interests of the policy workers). Such policy work renders difficult attention to the constructed character of policies and to the related effects on people and social relations.

In contrast, understanding policy-as-discourse means that values, effects and terminology are all understood very differently from the above approach. The policy-as-discourse understanding of policy is based on the assumption that there is no objectively knowable world outside of the way we talk about it. Hence, policies create that which they speak. In

this understanding of policy, values play a central role. But, as we saw in Part I, these values are understood not only as consciously-held, readily identifiable ethics that can be negotiated and compromised but as deep-seated assumptions about the world that seem commonsensical (and hence unquestionable). Also, because policies are conceptualised as creating that which they speak, they are understood as having discursive effects, such as creating who can and cannot speak, how and what we can know, who is included and excluded, and particular subjectivities, which are lived. Conceptualising policies as creating discursive effects still allows for material and lived consequences of policies, but insists that these lived consequences of policies make sense within a wider discursive schema. A way in to understanding the discursive effects of policies is to pay attention to the language and concepts of policies (Reekie, 1994). Deep-seated values or beliefs about the world are reflected in and created by the language and focuses of policies. Hence, a policy-as-discourse approach to policy understands policy terminology, concerns and concepts as having lived effects. Under a policy-as-discourse conceptualisation of policy, therefore, policy work involves being reflexive about holding ingrained values in specific policy areas, being aware of the broader discursive effects of policies, and paying attention to policy language and focuses and how these construct subjectivities and social relations. Policy workers under this conceptualisation are located subjects who are concerned about how policies shape the world.

In this Part of the thesis, I argue that both these understandings of policy are present in the policy workers' understandings and practices around values, effects and language. However, I suggest that the logic of rationality is pervasive, rendering the rational approach to policy prevalent and leaving the understanding of policy-as-discourse underdeveloped. Nevertheless, the presence of the sub-dominant discourse of an understanding of policy-as-discourse provides some insight into ways of doing policy outside of, or at least of disrupting, the logic of rationality.

Chapter 6 argues that while the policy workers rejected explicitly an understanding of policy as value-neutral, they then tended to enact practices to *better understand* the objective problems in the world. Chapter 7 argues that the policy workers described the material, measurable effects of policies and evaluated policies according to stated objectives. Less often, they referred to the discursive effects of policies. And Chapter 8 argues that the policy workers approached policy terminology and concerns predominantly

as a surface issue around which they could readily manoeuvre. However, they also conceptualised policy language, concerns and concepts as reflecting meanings and as creating people and social relations in particular ways. It is in the policy workers' understandings and practices around policy language, concerns and concepts that the policy-as-discourse understanding of policy was most common. These understandings and practices provide some insight into alternative ways of doing policy. However, the logic of rationality operated to limit these understandings and practices such that the attention to meanings in policy was often related to capturing particular interests. Only very rarely did the attention to policy language and meanings extend to an emphasis on the productive character of policy terminology and focuses. Further, Chapters 7 and 8 together draw attention to how this conceptualisation of policy language was not linked to the understandings and practices around *policy effects*, rendering policy language and ideas as separate from the effects of policies. The policy workers' understandings and practices around policy values, effects and language and concepts highlight the hegemony of the logic of rationality with respect to specific policy areas in the case study policy realm and the ways in which this logic constructs the subjectivities of policy workers.



## CHAPTER 6

### VALUES AND POLICY: PRE-EXISTING PROBLEMS OR PROBLEM REPRESENTATIONS?

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter argues that the logic of rationality creates a paradox in the ways in which the policy workers conceptualised values in the policy realm. Even when the policy workers rejected an understanding of policy as value-neutral, they looked for ways to *solve* policy problems as if this could be identified outside of values and perspectives. On the one hand the policy workers acknowledged explicitly that values played a role in policies: policies were not simply objective solutions to particular policy problems but were statements about subjectively preferred policy goals. Yet on the other hand the policy workers presumed implicitly that there was an objectively correct solution to a readily identifiable policy problem. These two positions are in tension. If policies are value-laden, as policy workers attested, then they are subjective documents/acts that represent a subjective understanding of the world. As such, they cannot offer objective solutions to pre-existing problems as these supposed 'pre-existing problems' are subjective understandings of the world. This paradox is explained through the way in which the logic of rationality shaped the policy workers' understandings of and practices around values and policy, which limited policy work. Either policy workers overlooked values altogether or they located values as consciously-held and easily identifiable and as playing a role only in the decision space of the policy realm.

This perspective came at the expense of policy work that takes account of the ways in which policies construct problems in particular ways, which have effects on people and social relations. Such policy constructions are underpinned by *deeply-held* values, or assumptions and presumptions, which need to be addressed. As a tentative attempt to envisage ways in which this task could be achieved, this chapter argues for policy work that is reflexive about how shared values around specific policy areas underpin the construction of policy problems and that undertakes deep consultation to disrupt some of these values. 'Deep consultation' is directed at addressing the ways in which policy

workers are located within specific policy discourses through ensuring that multiple social visions are discussed in the context of the constructed and constituted character of policies. It sits in stark contrast to ‘procedural consultation’, which is directed at revealing the truth of a situation through soliciting information about people’s experiences. This idea is elaborated on later in this chapter. Overall, this chapter calls for attention in policy work to the role of shared deep-seated values in the constructed and constitutive character of policies in specific policy areas.

The policy workers of this case study, then, both identified values as central within policies, and ignored values altogether. The first section of this chapter outlines the ways in which the policy workers referred explicitly to policies as value-laden: that is, as reflecting particular understandings of the world and particular desired outcomes for the world. However, it argues that this acknowledgement of values was limited by the logic of rationality. The logic of rationality was present in the ways in which the policy workers conceptualised policies as sites of contestation between competing consciously-held and identified interests, described their own values as perspectives and the values of others as biased and political, and made a distinction between what were ‘real problems’ existing in the world and which problems made it to the political agenda. While the logic of rationality limited the policy workers’ conceptualisation of values, this section argues that the understanding of policy as value-laden is the first step towards a policy-as-discourse approach to policy. It indicates the ways in which a more developed understanding of the role of values in policy than that possible within the logic of rationality would produce more reflexive policy workers, the performance of deep consultation, and work around the constructed and constitutive character of policies in specific policy areas. However, in the case study policy realm, the logic of rationality was hegemonic and shaped policy workers who responded to pre-existing problems in the world, directing attention to uncovering the ‘facts’ about particular substantive policy areas. Indeed, the second section of this chapter highlights how the logic of rationality led to an ignoring of values in the policy workers’ understandings of and practices around policy as responding to pre-existing problems. The policy workers undertook procedural consultation and identified ‘needs’, followed feminist theoretical understandings of the problem, and pursued research and data collection in their attempt to understand accurately the ‘real’ problems in gender and education.

## VALUE-LADEN POLICIES

The policy workers of the case study explicitly described policies as value-laden. The acknowledgement of values within the policy realm provides some disruption to the logic of rationality and its positivist assumptions. However, this understanding of values within the policy realm remained sub-dominant, as will become apparent in the following section that identifies the presence of the logic of rationality in the occasions when the policy workers neglected values. Further, the understanding of values within the policy realm was underdeveloped due to the logic of rationality. As elaborated in this section, the logic of rationality limited the policy workers' understandings of and practices around values in policies to readily identifiable and consciously-held values, directed attention away from the constitutive effects of policies, and drew attention to the 'bias' of others. How the acknowledgment of values can be further developed to accord with a policy-as-discourse approach to policy is explored in this section.

### Values, Politics and Sites of Contestation

Policy-making is contextual and values-laden and sets out the goals and principles that articulate a desirable position and in the interests of someone – rarely transformative in practice but can move the status quo forward or backward. (C)

When I asked the policy workers whether the policy realm was a value-neutral process, all the interviewees rejected such a notion outright. There was a suggestion in the responses, of which the quote above is indicative, that this was a naïve question – of course the policy realm was not value-neutral.

While all the policy workers described policies as value-laden or political, this was understood in different ways. E described policies as sites of contestation over meaning. When I asked her whether policies were value-neutral, she said:

Absolutely not. Of course they're not ... [B]ecause they're captive of whoever's got the political power ... First of all the broad policies come out of the political, a political party that's won an election. They then seek ... within the departments, to implement their agenda ... I think that's more deliberately driven now than it was thirty or forty years ago in terms of democracies. And then they're contested by the public servants in all kinds of ways, ... for example all the leaks that are suddenly coming about letters

the Prime Minister has written to people.<sup>1</sup> I mean that's about contestation within public service, within the public bureaucracy about government policy ... [S]o, no, it's not [a value-neutral process] and the policies are never value-neutral, they're a site of contestation. (E)<sup>2</sup>

As argued in Chapter 5, the structure-agency dichotomy underlies this quote. E, here, wanted to capture the way in which both those with official authority (i.e., the government) and those working on the ground level (i.e., public servants) struggle over meaning. This sense of struggle between competing interests aligns with the structured interaction approach to policy, which is underpinned by the logics of agency and rationality. It assumes policy workers with articulated agendas (logic of rationality) fighting against (logic of agency) the government. The assumption of the distinction between structure and agency was addressed in Part II. What is important for the current chapter is the assumption that policy workers are fighting for *consciously-held* and *readily identifiable* values. We saw this assumption that values can always be easily identified and consciously defended in the discussions of Bessant *et al.* (2006) and Taylor *et al.* (1997) in Chapters 1 and 2. Such a conceptualisation of values misses the ways in which some values (in this case about specific policy areas) are deeply-held commonsensical understandings of the world, such that they are not readily identifiable as values. It is difficult to see how these types of ingrained values can be consciously and strategically argued and fought for within the policy realm. Yet, importantly, these deeply-held values shape how we understand and conceptualise policy problems. Conceptualising policy as reflecting competing interests obscures the role of shared taken-for-granted values in specific policy areas.

While C, like E, tended to suggest that policies reflected competing perspectives, she mentioned less about the possible origins of those perspectives. In her words, policies were driven by:

Multiple demands from both just futures-orientated perspectives and from more narrowly focused perspectives. Policy is developed when it is considered that direction needs to be provided to ensure compliance to certain values can be made more a possibility. Currently, the economic imperatives seem to be the biggest drivers. (C)

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<sup>1</sup> E was referring here to a series of leaked documents in Prime Minister Howard's second term (for example see Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004)

<sup>2</sup> This quote was used in Chapter 5 to demonstrate the presence of the logic of agency in the understanding of policy workers fighting *against* the policy realm. Here, I draw out the ways in which this quote also reveals the logic of rationality. As indicated, throughout the thesis the same quotes are used in different chapters to expand upon different points.

Despite the fact that **C** talked about competing perspectives, revealing the logic of agency (Chapter 5), she seemed to be suggesting ultimately that policies are discursively constructed: they create compliance to certain values. This emphasis on the productive character of policies provides a challenge to the logic of rationality and its assumption that policies neutrally respond to policy problems.

Likewise, **A** conceptualised policy in ways which challenged, but were ultimately limited by, the logic of rationality. This can be seen in the reasons for her preference for the term ‘political’ rather than ‘values’:

Even the word ‘value’ is a bit strange so it’s not politically neutral. And the only reason I emphasise that is that everybody would say equality is a good thing, we share that value, it’s just whether we are going to accept that equality currently doesn’t exist. (**A**)

The assumption of a lack of consensus about the current state of the world acknowledges a degree of politics (or values) at the level of how the policy problem is represented in the first place. Questioning whether there are objectively identifiable, and hence easily agreed upon, pre-existing problems in the world disrupts the logic of rationality. Nevertheless, at the same time, **A** took the ‘value’ of ‘equality’ for granted. In contrast, I contend that those who support the market view of the world accept that there is inequality but that it is determined by merit, effort or worth and hence is ultimately fair. Further, **A** constructed the problem of gender and education as ‘inequality’ rather than, say, ‘advantage’ (Eveline, 1994). This is no mere word game. A focus on ‘inequality’ and ‘disadvantage’ tends to focus attention on girls and creates them as the problem. A focus on ‘advantage’, by contrast, puts the lens on boys. Nevertheless, there was a sense of disruption, no matter how underdeveloped, to the logic of rationality in the view that the world can be understood differently.

Disrupting the fixedness of understandings of the world creates space for contests over meanings. Indeed, **B** talked about the opportunity of being on one of the curriculum policy development committees and being able to discuss ‘what you believe in and what your philosophy is and what your theory is. So it was a wonderful opportunity’. Similarly, **A** felt that, in the area of gender and education, policy work included convincing people that there was inequality in the world. Her efforts here she saw as ‘counter-hegemonic work as

it acts against what has been normalised' (A). Her point was that discrimination is normalised in society and hence working in the gender and education area meant attempting to problematise this normalisation, to give another meaning or interpretation to the current state of play. Such work was about 'making the everyday seem strange and in need of explanation' (A). However, while this disruption to the taken-for-granted character of the world is welcome, the focus in counter-hegemonic work, as will become clearer in the discussion of agenda-setting, is on achieving agreement with respect to the definition of a policy problem rather than on the effects of such problem representations. Furthermore, as we saw above, the acknowledgement of values and contests over meanings can be limited to discussions of readily identifiable values, an approach I challenge because it assumes the policy worker can always rationally argue for their interests. Like the policy-as-discourse theorists discussed in Chapter 1, at times the policy workers talked about policy as meaning-making but fell back into talking about policy work in terms of the logics of agency and rationality: rationally and strategically fighting for their preferred meanings. In contrast, understanding policy as value-laden at the level of how policy problems are conceptualised heralds attention to the constructed and constitutive character of policies and reflexive policy workers, a point elaborated on below.

Policies, therefore, were variously understood by the policy workers as sites of contestation, as governing certain behaviours and as advancing a particular understanding of the world. There was a sense in these understandings that policies reflect meaning: they offer a particular interpretation of the world and a particular desired outcome for the world. Yet, at the same time, in understanding policies as sites of contestation, policy workers were conceptualised as *purposively* fighting for their *articulated* interests, which reflects the logics of rationality and agency. Obscured in this perspective are embedded values about specific policy areas. Furthermore, while the conceptualisation of policy work as counter-hegemonic work highlights the political character of understandings of the world, it draws attention away from the constitutive effects of different problem representations. The claim here, to be clear, is not that contestation over meanings and interests does not occur within the policy realm nor that such contestation is not important when values are consciously identified. The claim, rather, is that the conceptualisation of policy work as contestation over meanings fails to direct attention to the deeper level of intrinsically held values, which influence how policy problems are conceived of in the first place, with lived consequences for people and social relations.

### Policy Workers' Perspectives and Values and the Politics of Others

While the policy workers explicitly referred to themselves, and others, as holding values, they described these values in uneven ways. The policy workers described their own values as less controversial, questionable or biased than those of others. The ways in which their own values were depoliticised reveals the logic of rationality, as there is an inference that there can be objective knowledge about the world.

A was perhaps the most explicit about the values she held:

where I am describing feminist activist[s] ... trying to get an agenda that recognises the way in which girls' education has been framing them for inequality and inferiority and saying that ought to change – they're our values in which we say women deserve equality and will contribute to the wider society and to their own lives if they have equal opportunities and outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

However, as stated, the way in which the policy workers talked about their own values differed significantly from the ways in which they talked about the values of others. For example, when C was asked whether she felt she had achieved her goals, she replied:

[Do you mean i]n promoting gender equity and understanding gender as a social and cultural and historical construction with an emphasis on transforming curriculum, pedagogy and schooling ethos? No, it seems that there is a retreat from these goals and that the political power relations supporting retrospective, recuperative education of boys is moving ahead.  
(C)

While C could articulate her own understandings, and there was an element of 'promoting' these, they sounded much less political or value-laden in nature than the focus on the 'education of boys', as seen in the following:

It's a disgusting report ... But that House of Reps<sup>4</sup> report is a political document of those who came from various groups like those who believe in biological determinism and boys' education. Those who believe in the recuperative, that there was a golden age, essentialism ... individualism. What they commonly don't understand, or want to believe in, is anything

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<sup>3</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, the language of policies, such as 'equal opportunities' and 'outcomes', constructs the problem in particular ways that need to be addressed. This theme is returned to in more detail in Chapter 8.

<sup>4</sup> C was referring here to the Report on boys and education by the Standing Committee on Education and Training, House of Representatives (2002), *Boys: Getting it Right*.

like construction of gender because they'd see it as a feminist plot. And some of them even say that out loud, but not all of them do ... [V]ery little of the ... kind of people who are credentialed in academia about gender are in there. Some of them are in there. But what you've got are people like [name] who loudly says she doesn't believe in gender, she doesn't think gender has got anything to do with it ... I mean they've got particular agendas and while ... I don't think many of them would say they were a misogynist, there is a huge amount of misogyny and a huge amount of anti-feminism, fear and loathing really ... But that kind of House of Reps report looks at boys issues from a variety of ways barely concealing its dislike of construction of gender and its anti-feminist agenda, barely concealing it. (C)

In contrast to the way C described her own views, as almost obvious good sense, the education and boys focus was seen as being supported by 'political power relations'.

I happen to agree with C about the dangers of the ways in which the current focus on boys is shaped (Gill 2004, 2005). However, the point here is that the policy workers derided the views of others and other perspectives as political and serving particular agenda, whereas they saw their own views merely as a particular perspective (though as we see later even this acknowledgement was not always made) but not as political in the same way. The point is that the denial of the values which framed the policy workers' perspectives is exactly how mainstream politics operates, only in reverse. Others have written about how in Australia under the present Howard Government 'special interest groups' have been belittled and problematised for being value-laden (Johnson 2000; Sawyer, 1999, 36). In this case, 'special interests' are portrayed as biased and uninformed, and are thereby discredited. Further, the inference is that the mainstream is objective or value-free. In the case of the interviewed policy workers, mainstream politics was called political with the implication that the views of the policy workers stood outside of politics. In either case, having an 'interest' or values is tantamount to being biased, uninformed, and discredited. This derision of values assumes the logic of rationality, that there can be an unbiased position. I contend that if all players acknowledged the embedded nature of their values, then policy might be approached differently.

Recognising the role of values in the policy realm is not so much about ensuring that they are articulated and argued for (though this is important on the level of consciously-held values) but that it leads to reflexivity in policy workers in regards to their subject location in specific policy areas. Such reflexivity may lead to deep consultation with other people who are themselves located subjects, such that various deeply-held values or social visions



can be brought to light. A call for deep consultation is not a call for consultation so as to help us get closer to the truth, or closer to understanding the problem more accurately, which would be mere procedural consultation. Rather, it is a call for consultation so that different effects of policies on people and social relations can be identified and discussed. My call for deep consultation has links with Young's argument that 'deep democracy' entails communication between groups in 'situated positions' (Young, 2000, 5-7). The point is that people do not debate simply from a 'self-regarding interest' but from constructed positions (Young, 2000, 7) and that contributions from multiple situated positions can help 'pluralize and relativize hegemonic discourses' (Young, 2000, 7).

Some indication of what deep consultation might look like in practice can be found in the South Australian policy document, *Female Futures* (Dellit, 1986). There, the author describes the way in which consultation in that project moved from a mere attempt to understand the problem to a richer approach of engaging in deeper conversations (despite the reference to 'problem solvings'):

When we began, we thought we were engaged in an exercise of information gathering and processing in order to make plans and recommendations. In fact, we found ourselves engaged in a complex set of dialogues, problem solvings, in-service and relationships. (Dellit, 1986, 1)

Further, the intention was to consult with a diverse range of girls, parents and teachers from different backgrounds (Dellit, 1986, 2). However, interestingly, the author refers to departmental constraints making the intended consultation difficult to undertake in practice:

Unfortunately, within weeks of setting the consultation in train, there were only two members within the Equal Opportunities Unit and the Education of Girls Unit whose work briefs enabled them to participate. When this became evident Margaret Wallace and I modified and changed plans to make the exercise physically possible. (Dellit, 1986, 1)

And:

Our concern to make sure the structure of the Department was accommodated prevented us in initial stages from maximising the contribution of Aboriginal women, the disabled and women of non-English speaking background. While our process was able to rectify some of this, some of the discussions still occurring will not be ready for publication for some time. (Dellit, 1986, 2)

It is apparent from these quotes that the policy workers in this instance saw time pressures and resource and personnel issues as imposing constraints on performing deep consultation. Further, they conceptualised themselves as achieving their (albeit altered) agenda despite these constraints, reflecting the logic of agency discussed in Part II. But, significantly, these particular policy workers recognised the worth of deep consultation, which, as elaborated below, was not how consultation was always conceived of in this realm. Admittedly, this consultation was framed in terms of revealing girls' 'needs', as indicated in the policy's full title: *Female Futures: Report of the Consultation into the Needs of Women and Girls in the S.A. Education Department*, 1985. Nevertheless there was still some recognition of consultation moving beyond mere information gathering and involving deep dialogues and a broad range of people. Hence, this consultation process points to the kinds of policy work consistent with a conceptualisation of policy-as-discourse because, through broadening the range of social visions brought to policy discussions, it acknowledges that some of the policy workers' values are deeply-held such that they do not appear like values at all. Deep consultation is facilitated through policy workers being reflexive about their location within specific policy areas. That is, it is facilitated through policy workers accepting that they sometimes unthinkingly share with the broader bureaucracy dominant discourses around particular policy areas and that these shared assumptions can be brought to light by discussions with people in different social locations than the policy workers.<sup>5</sup>

The policy workers interviewed for this thesis did talk about a need for a degree of reflexivity in teachers and policy workers with respect to their location as women:

And in policy in new areas, counter-hegemonic areas, areas that are challenging the status quo, challenging inequality, challenging the privilege and advantage of one group, problematising the disadvantage of another group, particularly when you are a member of that group [laughs], you've got to take yourself through it as well. (A)

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<sup>5</sup> In parallel to the argument here that the policy workers' locatedness with respect to the dominant discourses *around specific policy areas* can be highlighted by outsiders to the policy realm, Chapter 1 argued that the policy workers' locatedness within the *policy realm generally* could be made visible by academics, and other outsiders to the policy realm, drawing attention to the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm (the logics of rationality and agency) which position policy workers. Both calls, as indicated in Chapter 1, are premised on the acknowledgment that it is difficult for located subjects to identify the environment or discourses in which they are located and that people in different social locations can sometimes assist with disrupting these discourses and the subject positions they create.

Similarly, **D** talked about people being ‘channelled into looking at their own lives as well’. While there was still an overall sense that policy workers’ own positions and beliefs were less ‘political’, these moments in the interviews and in the policy documents of a deeper recognition of the role of embedded values in the policy realm indicate ways in which the logic of rationality can be disrupted and ways in which policy work can be further developed to accord with an understanding of policy-as-discourse. However, as indicated, at present the logic of rationality led policy workers to downplay their own values compared to those of others.

### **Policy Problems and Agenda-Setting**

The logic of rationality also shaped the way in which the policy workers distinguished between real issues that existed in the world and which of these issues made it onto the policy agenda. What was seen as political or value-laden was what made it onto the agenda; what were real issues existing in the world was at times seen as self-evident. This approach reflects the policy literature in which discussions about values centre on the decision space or the agenda-setting stage of the policy realm (Bacchi, 1999a, 21-27). Policy work here is directed at achieving problem status for the policy workers’ own issues of concern and fighting for a particular solution. What is seen as a problem is taken for granted and not conceptualised in terms of values, revealing the logic of rationality. In other words, the focus on the decision space assumes that policy problems are objectively identifiable and misses the way in which values, or assumptions and presumptions, are also involved in how the policy problem is represented in the first place (Bacchi, 1999a). In contrast, the policy-as-discourse approach to policy acknowledges the role of ingrained values in the construction of policy problems. In this perspective policy work involves discussions over the construction of meanings and the discursive effects of policies. It is this level of values that the policy workers talked less about, which speaks to the hegemony of the logic of rationality.

**E** and **A** tended to suggest that, while the specifics of a policy focus were influenced by their own value systems and by the political climate, the actual overall policy area (of gender and education) was a pre-existing issue. **E** remarked that there were real problems in the world, but only some of them were addressed through policy. Politics, she believed, resided in determining which ‘problems’ were addressed:

Yeah, it's a complex kind of process. ... There are certainly plenty of real problems out there. I mean you could spend your time doing something about them all the time. So there are real problems out there, but some real problems out there are problems that catch political attention and get political airtime and others don't. The 1970s got a little bit of airtime for women's issues, not much, 1980s a bit more. (E)

The assumption was that there are 'real problems' existing outside of politics and that politics only comes into play with respect to which real problem gains status as a policy focus. As indicated, such an approach to policy assumes the logic of rationality and draws attention away from how what is seen as a 'real problem' is also value-laden.

Further, in conceptualising 'real problems' E (of course) was making particular assumptions and value judgements. As we saw in Chapter 5, E understood herself as shaping the specific policy focuses during the period she worked in the unit. She was working at a time when gender and education was seen in terms of 'girls and education'. As we saw in Chapter 3, this policy focus created a deficit model of girls: they became the problem. Further, one assumption in this perspective was that all girls tended to be similarly 'disadvantaged', whereas in subsequent policies, girls were recognised as a diverse group with the situation for some girls (e.g., Indigenous girls or non-English speaking background girls) being different from that of other girls (e.g., white, Anglo-Celtic girls). Also a child's gender was initially conceptualised in policies as fixed and attached to their sex. Since then, femininity and masculinity have been seen as much more complex entities that can be performed by both girls and boys. Both femininity and masculinity have been problematised. These changes in policy focuses and understandings of the problem are captured by the name change of the unit from 'girls and education' to 'gender and education'.

The point here is not that one of these constructions is old and inaccurate and one newer and more accurate, but rather that they are different constructions of the problem with different discursive effects: the earlier focus on girls and education created girls as the problem, essentialised and homogenised girls, and created them as separate from boys. In contrast, the focus on the construction of gender created boys and girls as moving in and out of masculinities and femininities and being interconnected. The debate needs to centre around these effects, directing attention to how we want to create boys and girls, rather than on whether we have accurately described the 'problem' (Bacchi, 1999a, 62). Policies

construct problems in particular ways, reflecting particular value systems or social visions. Missing this level of values in the policy realm means that the discursive effects of policies are not addressed.

E was not alone in describing actual issues as simply existing but the question of which of these actual issues gained policy attention as political. A said:

The policy area we are talking about, issues aren't a problem by definition, that's the point about them. The *inequalities*, the *discrimination*, the way in which *girls' needs and problems* are overlooked by the society are part of the position of women and girls *so you have to decide which of the many issues you are going to make a problem ...* and that's a combination of what at that time everyone sees as the burning issue and that's a combination of what other educationalists and teachers and practitioners see and what it's possible to get up, and probably your own understandings of the world influence that, of course. *But of the many issues that you could adopt and bring to the forefront in terms of girls*, it's a whole wash of those things, the pragmatics and the realities of what you see as the most important thing to tackle and then to get an acceptance that there's a need for a policy, *you have to make that issue a problem* and how you do that depends on what that issue is and who it is you are dealing with and what officially everyone is meant to care about at that moment in time. (A, emphases added)

Although, as we saw previously, A described constructing an issue as a problem, she referred here to there being 'many [pre-existing] issues that you could adopt', that these speak for themselves, but that a policy worker needed to use their knowledge about the specific policy realm in choosing which issue to make a problem (which here meant getting it onto the policy agenda). This sounds similar to Bridgman and Davis' identifying issues stage in the policy cycle, where the focus is on which issues make it onto the agenda rather than how an issue is understood (Bridgman and Davis, 2004, 34). As with E above, A was naturally making assumptions about the problem of gender and education, as is evident through her references to 'inequality', 'discrimination' and 'needs'. Conceptualising gender and education in these terms constructs these supposed pre-existing issues in particular ways, which have effects. Most notably, such understandings of the problem of gender and education construct girls as problematic and leave boys as the norm. Locating 'real issues' outside the focus on values obscures the constructed character of these issues and the effects that follow.

As is apparent, the emphasis on the decision space or agenda-setting stage of the policy realm has implications for policy work. Much energy becomes directed towards

strategically achieving problem status for issues rather than considering how those issues are constructed in the first place, revealing both the logics of agency and rationality. Such policy work could be seen in A's description of counter-hegemonic work and its emphasis on gaining problem status for issues previously normalised:

Well, the policy process is a political process, in this field, not in all fields, ... I am saying that the policy process is first to establish the need for the policy and that is a very, very political act because it is going to be an issue that's been neglected and normalised. ... How do you get that as a policy issue in schools? Well you find all the data yourself, you get together with people who know the issue outside of education, you ... relate to people in classrooms and in schools who know something about it happening, how it works itself out and what the educational implications are so you are well informed. And then you fight a strategic battle, depending on the personalities and the structures and ... how powerful is the current position of these issues in the wider agenda, to get it accepted that there is a need for a policy. And then you recommend the policy process again depending on structures and you ... get the right people involved to make sure the policy is accepted. And they might be the people who know nothing about the issue as well as the people involved who know a lot about the issue. (A)

Counter-hegemonic policy work was about meaning-making and constructing problems in particular ways. Despite this welcome disruption to the taken-for-granted character of policy agendas, counter-hegemonic policy work is driven by a belief in finding the accurate data about and experiences of the 'problem' and is undertaken by a policy activist who strategically fights for their consciously-held values and interests within the decision space of the policy realm. The assumption is of policy workers as rational agents. I call for more than this, envisaging policy work that focuses on how policy problems are constructed and the discursive effects that follow. Values need to be recognised as embedded and as influencing the way in which policy problems are understood.

We have seen, thus far, that the policy workers in the case study explicitly acknowledged values as playing a role in policy. They saw policies as political, as revealing a particular value system. However, there were some limits to this understanding of the value-laden nature of policies in that the policy workers saw policies as reflecting readily identifiable and consciously-held values, obscuring the embedded character of some values; conceptualised the values of others as more 'political' or 'biased' than their own, neglecting the role of their own values in specific policy areas and rendering difficult reflexivity by policy workers; and, located values within the decision space of the policy

realm, taking for granted the existence of policy problems and obscuring the constructed and constitutive character of policy. These understandings of and practices around values in policies and the policy realm revealed the logic of rationality. In other words, this logic shaped the subjectivities of the policy workers in this case study, revealing their locatedness within this realm. The logic of rationality was even more evident in the moments when the policy workers did not acknowledge values at all and directed their work towards discovering the ‘real’ problems in gender and education, which is the theme in the following section.

### **POLICIES AS SOLUTIONS TO PRE-EXISTING PROBLEMS**

The logic of rationality circulated within and around the policy realm of the case study in the assumption of policy as responding to pre-existing ‘facts’ in the world, obfuscating the presence of values in policies. When asked whether policy responded to problems that existed in an objective world or whether it was something different from this, F acknowledged the complexity of the issue but ultimately felt that there were real issues that needed to be addressed:

[F]rom where I sat and sit, there were a number of national reports that were really important that *identified* that girls weren’t participating, weren’t having the same outcomes as boys ... *they were just big sort of facts* that were *revealed* through these studies and clearly someone who initiated the studies was already working on a *whole lot of information that had been coming forward about the fact* that girls and women were not there in terms of school outcomes, post-school options. And all of that stuff was happening in light of other movements that were going on in relation to feminism ... And so I think they all came together ... so there was the support ... for those issues to be raised and addressed. ... And then the people who worked in those areas, who would have contributed to the *fact* that they ... *needed* to be dealt with, then those people furthered the whole idea of ‘the policy’. *Because clearly there needed to be something done because the whole situation was completely inequitable.* (F, emphases added)

Not only were there assumptions in F’s comments about policies responding to pre-existing ‘facts’ that had been ‘identified’ and ‘revealed’, but these ‘facts’ were unquestioningly talked about in terms of ‘participation’, ‘outcomes’, and ‘post-school options’ of girls. While the ‘problem’ was constructed in particular contestable ways, it was presented as an unquestionable fact.

This positivist assumption of a pre-existing problem in the world, implicit in the logic of rationality, was clear too when the policy workers described more directly what drove policy or what policy was a response to. They referred to procedural consultation and needs, advances in theoretical understandings, and research/data as influencing policy directions, some of which can be seen in the quote from **F** above but are pursued, in turn, below. The assumption behind this conceptualisation of the influences of policy was that reality drove policy and that information gained from these areas would assist in achieving a deeper understanding of the ‘real problem’ or the ‘facts’ of the matter. Indeed, the policy workers performed policy work directed at identifying these ‘real problems’ that ‘needed’ to be ‘responded to’ through policy.

### **Consultation and Need**

**A**, **G**, and **F** described consultation as assisting in understanding the ‘real’ issues in gender and education. **A** talked about how sharing women’s experiences meant that women could ‘understand it ourselves’. Once they could understand the supposed real problem, it was a matter of finding words to explain this problem and then working out how this could be framed in a way that would be accepted in the education department. With respect to the introduction of sexual harassment policies, which **A** took great pride in and credit for, she said:

you know there was the consciousness movement where women sat around in groups and learnt by sharing their individual experiences to see what the common problem was and this is the same thing today and when we get to the policy process I think it’s exactly the same thing. That ... to move from women and girls experiencing something as ‘my problem’, ‘this is just what’s happened to me’, ‘maybe its my fault’ is the next thought, ‘what do I do to solve this problem’. Let’s say I’m being sexually harassed at school or at work and I come home and I feel bad and ‘what should I do about it?’ I think, ‘what have I done to cause this?’ Now with consciousness-raising, and we’d use a different term today, you say ‘but I’ve had the same experience’, ‘but I’ve had the same experience’, ‘but I’ve had the same experience’, ‘oh maybe the problem is not me but what’s happening to us and we haven’t got a name for it’. So all we can do is have this long narrative where we tell each other our experiences and then we try and frame first some terminology that will express the problem, the problem being external to what the girls and the women are experiencing ... And so we set up a committee and then on the committee we sort of read and we thought and we were both attaching meaning to experience in our own lives and pulling on language and pulling into a policy framework something that



would, in the first instance, say this thing exists, secondly, it's a problem, and thirdly, you can do something about it. (A)

The 'hidden text', to borrow Evelyn's (1994) term, was that there were real problems to be revealed by sharing experiences. The sense here was that consultation would get us closer to the truth.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, there was a sense in the quote above that consultation would lead to consensus.

G, likewise, talked about attempting to understand the world accurately through consulting people and listening to their experiences:

how do you make [relevant policies], when you are ... working at a largely theoretical level really, policies – pretty theoretical. How do you maintain that *close, accurate and kind of hands on and connected understanding of what the world's like?* I mean that, for me, was one of the reasons why I thought it was very important to be out and about as much as you could, and listen and talk, and not talk actually, listen and hear. So you try and get that sense through it. But it's pretty hard to hold on to. (G, emphasis added)

F also talked about consultation driving policy directions:

The focuses came from the policy and the policy came from the consultations with everyone about what the key issues were. And that was in schools and communities. So there was that element to it. And I think that was the research that was available at the time too. (F)

These areas identified by consultation and research were then 'written into policy' (F). This idea of research also driving policy focuses is returned to below. The point here is that these policy workers invoked a notion of consultation as uncovering the reality of the situation in gender and education, that is, of procedural consultation. Procedural consultation is based on the assumption that consultation will help in achieving 'a solution more likely to "stick" because it reflects the realities of the problem and the competing interests of those involved' (Bridgman and Davis, 2004, 78). In this approach to consultation the policy worker stands outside of the consultation process and rationally identifies the reality described by others. In contrast, as we saw above, I argue for 'deep consultation', which pluralises hegemonic discourses through including in policy

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<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, the above quote needs to be placed in context. A was talking about a time in feminist theory when consciousness-raising was very popular. This has since been criticised by many feminists as assuming all women's experiences are the same. And, A did refer, in the quote above, to a different language being used now. However, as we see later, the way she talked about developments in feminist theory influencing policy directions also indicated a sense of getting closer to the real problem.

discussions a diverse range of people in various subject locations. As indicated, deep consultation stems from policy workers becoming reflexive about having ingrained values around specific policy areas, about the ways in which they inadvertently take for granted the dominant discourses around specific policy areas.

We have seen throughout this chapter that the policy workers commonly conceptualised gender and education in terms of the ‘needs’ of girls. Likewise, **B** referred to policy as sometimes being ‘needs-driven’, again revealing the assumption that there are real issues, or needs, to which policy responds:

policies ... are responsive to particular needs and it's almost the most powerful group at the time, in a way, is where they come from. I mean some of it you could say is needs-driven so this mental health business, you know we've got *issues that are smacking you in the face* in regards to people in mental health, and there's a policy come out about it. But it seems so ineffective as far as actually changing the situation for people. (**B**, emphasis added)

Interestingly, the area **B** gave as an example of needs-driven policy was not an area she worked in, whereas the area she worked in she described in far more value-laden terms. Nevertheless, she conceptualised some policy as needs-driven. Conceptualising policy in these terms misses the way in which needs are constructed in particular ways. Fraser (1989, 153-154) has highlighted that needs are ‘highly political interpretations’ yet are often ‘rendered immune from analysis and critique’. Again, the logic of rationality shaped the ways in which the policy workers assumed there were pre-existing problems that could be revealed through consultation and the identification of needs.

### ‘Advanced’ Theoretical Understandings

The logic of rationality could also be seen in the way the policy workers understood the particular policy focuses as coming from developments in feminist theoretical understandings. These developments were seen as more complex and accurate understandings of the world, rather than particular value-laden perspectives. **C** described discovering feminist poststructuralism and finding that it more accurately captured what she *knew* the situation to be for girls and boys:

But then coming to feminist poststructuralism ... I was able to take into account this messiness and this difficulty and the fact that I *absolutely knew*

all girls were not the same and I *knew* all boys were not the same as I struggled with my ... year six and seven classes I was taking during that time at school. ... I *knew* it was far messier and so discovering feminist poststructuralism ... was a beginning and this was my chance to have a bit of a go at it when I was writing up things from the schools. (C, emphases added)

Likewise, others talked about increased sophistication in their theoretical understandings of the issues. For example, A talked about developments in feminist theory influencing policy directions:

The second part to ‘what’s the policy priority of the day?’ was as our understandings and our own consciousness *moved forward*.<sup>7</sup> So, for example ... starting with school books ... counting up the number of girls and boys in the primary school readers, which they did in the early days ... You know making evident to people that what we’re teaching the children is teaching them inequality and gendered roles. *Moving forward* and looking at maths and science and physical fitness and confidence, self esteem. Then looking at the subtleties of classroom interaction. I mean you can see that *our own understandings are going from completely evident* ... then you get into more and more and more and more, *I suppose they’re subtle*, ... to issues of public occasions of the school and what the messages are that they give. Then to an issue like sexual harassment that really had to be first understood and then named. ... So the policy priorities for us in ideological terms I suppose – as opposed to the strategy of survival – moved with our own understanding, and you’d probably find some international resonances there. So it’s how a major movement *moves forward and increases in sophistication*. (A, emphasis added)

Underlying these references to gradually understanding the ‘subtle’ areas of concern, to ‘moving forward’, and to ‘increases in sophistication’ was the assumption of a more accurate understanding of the depth of the problem, despite the reference to ideology. Similarly, at other times, A talked about policy workers ‘advancing’ their understandings of the issues. The assumption was that the policy workers were closer to understanding the real problem, not just that changes in feminist theory, reflected in policy directions, offered different perspectives of what was seen to be the problem (Yates, 1993; Bacchi, 1999a).

Similarly, F talked about the focus on ‘constructions of gender’ assisting in dealing with the deeper issues that other policy approaches did not address; and then of feeling deflated

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<sup>7</sup> As elaborated in Chapter 5, A understood the first factor contributing to what the policy priorities of the day were as ‘policy pragmatics’, what could be achieved within a departmental and political climate that was not sympathetic to such work.

because the policy focus was going backwards in terms of its theoretical understanding with the move to a policy focus on ‘boys’:

**Zoë:** One of the big shifts was ‘construction of gender’, why that change?

**F:** That was the theory that had developed from a whole lot of work done by all sorts of people. ...*[I]t also gave us a way to understand better what was happening for girls and women and it gave us a way to move forward, like the policy, The Gender Equity Framework,<sup>8</sup> ...was a big step forward in terms of working out what it was that needed to be addressed, how we understood it, and how then you work within a teaching and learning framework to change things for girls in schools, and for boys. ...[B]ecause the previous [policies] ... and I think that’s part of the reluctance for dealing with some of the boys’ issues, is because the way they are trying to conduct the debates about boys’ issues goes back to the way in which we *first started*, when we were *learning about it all*, for girls, and it would be the special programs for girls and the leadership camps for girls and ... a whole lot of things that, in the end, didn’t make the difference that we thought it would. ... And what we discovered was that through working on the construction of gender, that understanding ... *helped take us further, much further than previous approaches*. But they were all important steps along the way and that’s why it seems so silly to be going back and doing that now for the boys *because it isn’t the way it works*. (F, emphases added)*

This sense of going backwards again revealed a presumption of the previous ‘construction of gender’ policy being closer to the truth or addressing the real issues in the world and the current policy focus on ‘boys’ as being far less likely to be effective or to make a difference because it was inaccurate. As we saw in Chapter 2, the consequences of policy constructions are more than mere ineffectiveness (see also Chapter 7). The concern for some feminists about the boys and education policies is not simply that they will be ineffective but that they create girls and boys as fixed and in competition (Gill, 2004, 2005). The logic of rationality and its emphasis on accurately understanding the problem draws attention away from the discursive effects of policies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This was a reference to the national policy, *The Gender Equity Framework* (Gender Equity Taskforce, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> There were moments in the interviews when the policy workers did talk about some policy focuses, and their theoretical basis, allowing for discussions of what we want for the future. This is in contrast to those policy workers, quoted above, who talked about changes in theoretical understandings as more accurate, advanced or sophisticated. I return to this understanding of the constructed and constitutive character of policies in Chapters 7 and 8. Generally, the policy workers talked about particular theoretical underpinnings of policy as assisting in more accurately understanding the (pre-existing) problem, revealing the logic of rationality.

## Statistics, Data and Research

The policy workers also referred to statistics, data and research as ‘identifying’ or ‘revealing’ pre-existing problems in gender and education, as though these problems existed outside of the way they were discussed. I pointed to this emphasis on research revealing truth in the discussion of **F** above. **B** also assumed the objectivity of research and data, as was apparent in her description of one of the criticisms of a paper on ‘gender and violence’:

one of the opponents to this who’s got no idea about things ... I think, like, so dangerous. ... [T]his is really horrible stuff. This paper, now it got termed as being ‘old-fashioned’. Now you can’t tell me when a hundred and what twenty-eight women are murdered every year in Australia by their partners, that gender and violence isn’t an issue. That more women, Aboriginal women, die through domestic violence than men die in custody, that gender and violence isn’t a problem. (**B**)

This perspective misses the way in which statistics and research shape issues in particular ways, which in turn influences the way in which policies are framed. The inference in **B**’s comments was that gender and violence was the only way to understand the data. Yet, perspectives influenced by, say, an emphasis on class or race issues could also be invoked to interpret this data. The uncritical acceptance of research identifying real issues can also be seen in Edwards (2001, 53). However, the same statistics can be used to mean very different things, depending on what story one wishes to tell (Reekie, 1994). Marston and Watts (2003, 151-152) also draw attention to the way that ‘evidence’ is constituted by the assumptions, practices and arguments of the researcher (see also Davies, 2003, 99-100).

Furthermore, some indicators that used to be deployed to ‘demonstrate’ girls’ disadvantage, such as retention rates and academic performance, are now being used to ‘demonstrate’ boys’ disadvantage. Yet the same people who supported this data as identifying girls’ disadvantage want to question its relevance for demonstrating boys’ disadvantage. **A** suggested that one needed to respond to the current trend of focusing on boys by being more detailed in the data used:

I don’t want boys to be underachieving against their potential, I just think ... there is a great deal more that has to be done about that ... And there was a lot of quantitative data and some qualitative data as well, and it showed that the girls were studying many, many more hours per week, they were also in paid labour many more hours per week, and they also performed

unpaid labour in the home many more hours per week. You need that data as well, and then you say 'is it a surprise that they're doing marginally better? In fact they should be doing tremendously better if they were perhaps not also doing all the unpaid labour and paid labour. On the other hand they're very mature, competent people with huge life skills'. Now, I would then start to say 'if life is so gendered that boys, that it's not noticeable either to the school, the society, the families, that boys are lying around doing just about nothing for hours in great big shoes and emitting grunts now and again'. You know we've got to make that a problem. (A)

There was a sense of a war of statistics and data here. There was also a sense of A's belief in the real inequality of girls. However, A's approach to data was ambiguous because she also felt that solely concentrating on data did not completely capture social inequality:

it's a problem because they [boys] will still be advantaged when they leave school despite their inadequacy, despite their inadequate preparation, despite their inadequate performance, they will still have a social cultural power that girls don't have. ... So you know the socially prescribed superiority is there *regardless of the tangible indicators in the data*. And probably more of a problem. I mean the gap in qualifications now in Australia between men and women, women are generally more qualified than men, therefore women are generally marrying people who are less qualified than them. And we still have domestic arrangements that mean women will generally sacrifice their careers for the men's. Now this builds up to a massive social problem. (A, emphasis added)

Perhaps this contradictory approach to data can be explained by A's belief in the inequality of girls. The point is that data and research can be interpreted and understood in numerous ways, depending on one's deep-seated values. One person can passionately believe in the truth of them, whereas someone else may read a different story from them. As Marston and Watts (2003, 151-152) observe, research 'evidence' does not stand outside of values. This observation is particularly important given that evidence-based policy is becoming the norm in many policy areas in Australia and overseas (Marston and Watts, 2003, 146-150). Davies (2003) makes a similar point in relation to evidence-based practice, questioning the link between research, policy and practice. Indeed, Marston and Watts (2003, 150) see the shift towards evidence-based policy as 'part of a "modernising" agenda where policy-making scholars and practitioners aim to be more scholarly, scientific, and above all else rational'.

Dalton *et al.* (1996, 106) similarly question the understanding of ‘rational arguments and research’ as non-political. However, they tend to suggest, as argued in Chapter 2, that such argument and research is consciously ‘used’ by policy workers:

The position adopted in this chapter is that developing policy is a process of contest which calls upon the *use* of rational arguments and research but is shaped at all stages by power at all its levels, debates about values, and organisational opportunities and constraints. (Dalton *et al.*, 1996, 106-107, emphasis added)

This perspective suggests that rational policy work is external to policy workers and can be used at will. Granted, at times, the policy workers did attempt to challenge the rational focus on measurable outcomes but felt constrained by a policy realm that valued rational policy work. **B** talked about the way it was much harder to gain acceptance of the ‘construction of gender’ policy focus, as it was not consistent with the focus on measurable outcomes in the current policy paradigm:

I think ... [construction of gender is] much more playful, much more meaningful, but it’s harder for people to grapple because ... you can’t grab it and hold, you can’t go ‘well I want this many girls to be engineers’. You can’t do that to it. You’ve got to go ‘well, you know, I want the engineers to be, you know, flowing gender performers’. You know [dismissive sound]. It’s not as easy for people to ... get their heads around. That was easy [indicating equal opportunity on a list] really. It’s kind of like numbers. (**B**)

A policy realm that is talked about and understood in terms of measurable outcomes or indicators rather than values precludes the kinds of deeply radical and progressive policy approaches such as the ‘construction of gender’ and the room it creates for multiple ways of being in the future.

The rational policy realm and its uncritical acceptance of research and data, however, is not merely *imposed upon* policy workers so as to constrain what they do, nor do policy workers always *choose* to adopt rational approaches to achieve their goals. Rather, at times, the rational policy realm is internalised and interiorised by policy workers as what they do. Policy workers do not merely pose as rational; they *are* sometimes rational *at present*. The hegemonic logic of rationality forms rational people. To say that policy workers ‘use’ rational arguments and research neglects the way in which policy workers are formed through what they do. They are not simply using this research to achieve their interests; rather, they understand it as revealing the truth. As such they perform policy

work that looks for better understandings of this truth. It is this level of the policy realm and policy work that forms the concern of this thesis.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that there was a degree of reflexivity in the use of qualitative data by the policy workers. **C** described taking a feminist political position that valued qualitative research as well as quantitative research. She talked about the risk of being ‘besmirched’ for doing ‘soft’ research rather than ‘hard’ research (see also Marston and Watts, 2003, 151) but insisted that both qualitative and quantitative data were needed given the complexity of the issues involved. In accepting qualitative research there was a degree of disruption to the dominant rationalist understanding of ‘truth’ as easily measurable, but there remained the sense of being able to get closer to the truth in the talk about needing both types of data to capture the complexity of the situation.

The larger point here is that the current rational approach to policy-making, reflected in a focus on benchmarks and outcomes, removes values from the policy realm. **B**’s comment, quoted in Chapter 4 but worth repeating here, captures poignantly the way the emphasis in the rational approach on indicators and benchmarks and disaggregated statistics robs the policy realm of values:

It hardly seemed like policy because you were so busy just trying to shape some ideas about curriculum standards and outcomes and indicators of successes and so sort of like this, that you know, the policy notions, I never really felt like I had a grip, or any clear kind of input into shaping that. It was more you were so busy being a little worker. (**B**)

Chapter 4 discussed the assumption in this quote that the policy realm imposed external constraints on policy workers, revealing the logic of agency. Relatedly, the values of the policy workers are rendered irrelevant in a policy realm focussed on notions of indicators and benchmarks, revealing the logic of rationality. This downgrading of values reflects the authorised choice approach to policy and its assumption that the personal values of policy workers can be (identified and then) ignored. This perspective is present in Edward’s (2001) acknowledgement of her own values and then foreclosure on normative discussions about the substantive policies of her case studies, and in Bridgman and Davis’ (2004, 2) focus on the process of policy-making rather than on the content of policies (see Chapter 1).



While the policy workers conceptualised policies as coming from different sources – consultation, needs, theoretical understandings and research/observation – they all assumed that policies responded to an objectively knowable reality, revealing the logic of rationality.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that there was a contradictory conceptualisation of values and policy by the policy workers. On the one hand, they saw policies as value-laden, as presenting a particular view, representing a particular interest, as sites of contestation and articulations of particular goals. On the other hand, they saw policies as responses to peoples' experiences, to their needs, to advances in understandings of issues and to research findings, all of which were seen as getting closer to understanding the real problem. This contradictory approach to values has been explained in terms of the hegemony of the logic of rationality. Even though policy workers explicitly rejected a notion of policy as value-neutral, they understood policy problems as pre-existing, as outside of the policy realm, and searched for better, more accurate understandings of the problem. Furthermore, on closer analysis, even when the policy workers acknowledged the role of values in policy, this recognition was limited by the logic of rationality. The policy workers tended to assume values were always consciously-held and readily identifiable, that their own values were more objectively accurate than those of others, and that questions of values arose in the decision space of the policy realm rather than in how problems were constructed in the first place.

The logic of rationality produced policy workers as rational, with deleterious consequences for policy work. The policy workers searched for data/research that would reveal pre-existing problems and undertook procedural consultation. The emphasis in such policy work was on responding to pre-existing problems, rather than on paying attention to the construction of particular policy problems and their effects. Furthermore, the policy workers attempted to gain problem status for their identified and consciously-held values or interests. As indicated, such work neglected the ways in which some values are deeply-held and taken-for-granted but nevertheless influence the construction of policy problems, which have effects. Both policy work directed at identifying pre-existing problems and

policy work directed at achieving rationally held interests or values fail to take account of the role of deeply-held shared values, or assumptions and presumptions, in the constructed and constitutive character of policies. Identifying the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) with respect to specific policy areas draws attention to the limits these logics set on policy work, which is the first step to disrupting them. It also highlights the way in which policy workers are located subjects who share the assumption of the logic of rationality with the broader bureaucracy.

This thesis calls, therefore, for a more developed understanding of the role of values in the policy realm and policy. There needs to be an understanding of the deeply-embedded level of values about specific policy areas, how they become assumed and taken-for-granted by policy workers and how they construct problems in particular ways, which have effects. If, as I suggest, all policy involves multiple deeply-held values and worldviews, injecting this understanding into the policy realm would entail policy workers being reflexive with respect to specific substantive policies, creating space for deep consultation to take place. Furthermore, attention needs to be paid to the constructed character of policies and the effects that follow, which are the themes in Chapters 7 and 8.

## CHAPTER 7

### **POLICY EFFECTS: MOVING FROM POLICY INTENTIONS AND PURPOSIVE ACTIONS TO THE DISCURSIVE EFFECTS OF POLICY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter argues that the logic of rationality shaped the ways in which the policy workers of this case study conceptualised the effects of policies, limiting the kinds of policy analysis they undertook. Policy consequences were understood in terms of either the stated objectives of policies or the purposive practices of teachers, but rarely in terms of their discursive effects. The logic of rationality shaped the policy workers' subjectivities, their understandings and practices, around the effects of policies. In contrast, this thesis calls for an understanding of the effects of policies consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse. We have seen that policies, *as discourses*, have lived effects on people and social relations. Accordingly, this perspective demands a focus, not so much on measurable outcomes, or on evaluating policies for their ability to 'solve' problems, but more on what kind of world, what subject positions, what silences, what categories of people, what authority, what norms of practice, what social relations and what ethics these policies create (Marginson, 1997, 224-225; Ball, 1994a, 22; Bacchi, 1999a, 45; Popkewitz and Lindblad, 2000; Popkewitz, 1998, 1; Edelman, 1988; Yeatman, 1990, 158). Importantly, these discursive effects of policies are lived and felt by real people (Bacchi, 1999a, 43-44) and therefore need to be addressed in any analysis of policies. Understanding policies as constructed and constitutive, as reflecting and shaping particular world visions, opens space to debate these deeply-held world visions (Bacchi, 1999a, 62). There were only brief moments in the interviews when the policy workers conceptualised the effects of policies within a policy-as-discourse approach. Nevertheless, these brief moments need to be embraced and further developed so that the broad discursive effects of policies are included in the analysis of policies.

The first section of this chapter identifies the logic of rationality in the ways in which the policy workers understood and approached the effects of policies either in terms of the

stated objectives of the policies or the purposive intentions of teachers. This perspective affected the ways in which policy workers undertook their work. The emphasis on the stated objectives of policies led the policy workers to evaluate policies according to whether or not they accurately identified and effectively solved problems, facilitated the implementation of the stated objectives of the policies, and achieved measurable outcomes. At other times, the emphasis on the discretion of teachers to take up and use policies for their own purposes provided a welcome move away from the stated objectives of policies, but led to an underestimation of the broad effects of policies, including that they shape how ‘policy implementers’ understand and approach specific policy areas. The second section of this chapter identifies the sub-dominant understanding of policy-as-discourse in the policy workers’ understandings of and practices around policies as reflecting meanings and hence as achieving cultural change and problematising the status quo. However, this section argues that this understanding of policy effects was sub-dominant and underdeveloped, moving the attention of policy workers to agential meaning-making work but not to the constructed and constitutive character of policies.

## THE LOGIC OF RATIONALITY AND THE EFFECTS OF POLICIES

**Zoë:** And what kind of effects do policies have?

**G:** Symbolic: the times have changed. Practical: ... selection processes [for teacher appointments], you would not believe the number of phone calls I got. Because one of the selection criteria was knowledge and understanding of education of girls and equal opportunity. That’s pretty practical. Major crash courses going on all over the shop. Material: resourcing in schools, publications.

As reflected in the quote above, the policy workers interviewed for the case study saw a number of different types of consequences of policy. However, the logic of rationality, the assumption that policies solve actual problems, was present in much of what the policy workers said and did around this topic. The logic of rationality circulated around the ways in which the policy workers conceptualised the effects of policies either in terms of their stated objectives or in terms of the purposive intentions of teachers, which are addressed in turn.

## Evaluating Policies Against Stated Objectives

The emphasis on the stated objectives of policies could be seen in the ways in which the policy workers talked about policies as identifying and attempting to solve problems, looked for ways to facilitate the accurate implementation of policies, and espoused the articulation of measurable ‘outcomes’ for policies.

### *Effectively Solving Problems (or Not)*

The hegemony of the logic of rationality within the case study policy realm can be seen in the way the policy workers understood the effects of policies in terms of whether or not they effectively solved problems. For example, E described policies as having a significant impact quite simply because they identified the problem:

I mean clearly, identifying what were the problems in women’s access to promotion and things like that had a profound effect on the South Australian education department over time. I mean, we identified what some of the problems were. (E)

The inference here was that by accurately identifying the problem, policies had a significant impact through solving this problem, revealing the logic of rationality.

Similarly, as we saw in Chapter 6, F referred to the national policy document, the *Gender Equity Framework* (Gender Equity Taskforce, 1997), as assisting in more accurately understanding the problem of gender and education. In describing this policy in such terms, she implied that previous policies had not accurately understood the problem of gender and education and hence had not been effective in solving the problem:

it also gave us a way to understand better what was happening for girls and women and it gave us a way to move forward, like the policy, the *Gender Equity Framework* document, was a big step forward in terms of working out what it was that needed to be addressed, how we understood it, and how then you work within a teaching and learning framework to change things for girls in schools, and for boys. Because the previous [policies] ... the way in which we first started, when we were learning about it all, for girls, and it would be the special programs for girls and the leadership camps for girls and a whole lot of things that, in the end, *didn’t make the difference that we thought it would*. Some did and the whole thing about affirmative action and having a focus on a particular group and the issues for that group does, I think, move things forward. *But ... it didn’t get to ... some of the things that it needed to. And it didn’t mean that change was necessarily*

*something that was maintained on that basis. And what we discovered was that through working on the construction of gender, that understanding, I think, helped take us further, much further than previous approaches. (F, emphases added)*

The assumption here was that a policy could solve a social problem if it accurately captured the cause of that problem. Conversely, if there was an inaccurate understanding of the cause of the problem, then the policy was conceptualised as ineffective; it did not make the difference it ought to and did not sustain change. We saw this emphasis on the effectiveness of policies in the discussion of Taylor *et al.* (1997, 52) in Chapter 1. The focus on the effectiveness, or not, of policies works within the logic of rationality and turns attention away from consideration of the constructed character of policies and the effects of such constructions, including creating subjectivities, giving authority, categorising people and shaping what can be said, thought and done.

### *The Implementation of Policies*

The logic of rationality also circulated around the ways in which a number of the policy workers emphasised the implementation of policy objectives. While the policy workers differed in opinion about whether policies were being effectively implemented or not, the goal remained the accurate implementation of policy intentions, taking for granted the worth of the stated objectives of those policies. For example, F understood policies as effectively guiding their own implementation:

*and the practicalities, the implementation of them [policies], and that's where people helped and other supporting materials about what this means in practice. I think a policy directed our work in that area and it was very important for all of that. (F)*

Clearly, such policies were understood by F as worth implementing accurately as there was no sense in this guided action of constraint or frustration: the focus was on the accurate implementation of stated objectives, not on engagement with these policy objectives. F also understood policies as producing practical outcomes within the education department: 'and the place of policy, I think, is very important as far as then what ends up happening in practice and that it did inform a lot of practice and structures, processes within the department' (F). Further, while F suggested that perhaps not all policies had effects in practice, her experience of policies in the area of gender and education was that they 'guide

a whole lot of action that will make a difference' (F). F's emphasis on the practical effects of policies did not address the wider discourses in which these effects occurred.

A word of explanation is required here about the emphasis on discursive effects of policies. The intention is not to suggest that policies do not have practical or material consequences, such as changes in resources and structures. As argued in Chapter 1, discourses are words, thoughts and *practices*, thus policies can affect material resources and practices as well as (embodied) subjectivities and social relations. Importantly, however, within the logic of rationality these changes in resources, structures and so forth are just that, whereas within a policy-as-discourse approach these practical consequences of policies are part of a bigger story, a bigger worldview, while remaining multiple and contradictory.

In contrast to F's confidence that the stated objectives of policies were being implemented in practice, B, who had returned to working in schools, felt that while education department policies contributed to the professional development of individuals, they ultimately had little influence on the school setting. With respect to the main curriculum document of the education department at the time (the *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) framework* (Department of Education, Training and Employment and Catholic Education, 2001)), aspects of which B understood as addressing elements of gender and education, she said:

And that's that part where you are talking about the effects of policies. I mean curriculum can be so fantastic but to change people's headsets, a document like the SACSA doesn't. But for people who were involved in the writing of it, it was a wonderful PD [professional development] because you got to hear all the stuff and listen and talk. ... I think it was quite good. But, you know, dare I say it, sacrilege: I've hardly used the SACSA since I've been back in a school. For planning or programming or anything, I am just so busy trying to keep my head above water. ... I mean I know I am using the philosophy of stuff and the theory but as far as actually using it as an outcomes-based document? I'm not [using it] enough (B)

Interestingly, B acknowledged that she used the ideas and the 'philosophy of stuff and the theory' behind the SACSA document. She also emphasised the significance of the way policies provided professional development for individual teachers and policy workers. There was a gesture here to the way policies affect ideas or understandings, a point I return to below. However, B's frustration was with the way policies were not taken up as

‘outcomes-based documents’ in school settings.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, then, the focus in this quote was on practices in schools, which could be assessed through measuring outcomes against the stated intentions of the policy. Missed here was that policies need to be assessed in ways that take account of how particular constructions of the problem underpinning specific policies shape the ways in which people, including teachers, conceptualise and approach specific policy areas (Ball, 2003), which have effects on girls and boys in schools. Indeed, **B** was concerned here with ‘solving’ the policy ‘problem’ and was frustrated that there were still ongoing issues in schools. The interview continued:

**Zoë:** I suppose you are saying there isn’t that practical filter-down effect in a way. But is there some kind of symbolic significance in having those [policies]?

**B:** Oh absolutely, I mean there is the [need to] have it on paper, you need some reference to it ... it’s not as easy to dismiss if it’s written down, but it is still very easily dismissed as not important. I mean the school here, we’ve got significant numbers of Aboriginal girls and boys, and significant numbers of kids who have learning difficulties. Like, how long have schools been going? *These aren’t new issues and yet we seem to stumble around how to deal with it. I go, ‘what’s so hard, why is it so hard?’*

... you know we’ve got issues that are smacking you in the face in regards to people in mental health and there’s a policy come out about it. *But it seems so ineffective as far as actually changing the situation for people.*

**Zoë:** Why do you think that is?

**B:** Oh there is so much business about making policy and not enough practice, you know. ...[T]hat’s my post-bureaucracy syndrome at the moment. Such a lot of crap goes on up there – talking and meetings ... And I know it’s important and I don’t want to sound disparaging because it is important. But ... there’s so much funding around it, so much and ... *it’s hard to see how it impacts and affects and supports the change at the coalface.* (emphases added)

**B** understood policies as important but could not quite capture why, lacking the words or perhaps conceptual framework through which to express this understanding, supporting the call in this thesis for other ways, outside of the logic of rationality, to discuss policies and policy effects. **B** returned instead to lamenting the ineffectiveness of the implementation of policies in the school setting. Overall, **B** was sceptical about the practical effects of

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<sup>1</sup> It will become apparent that **B** had an ambiguous approach to policy ‘outcomes’. In the example above, **B** laments the lack of outcomes-based consequences of policies. Yet, at other times she referred to the ways in which a policy emphasis on measurable outcomes rendered difficult a focus on the ‘construction of gender’, though those comments did not occur in the context of discussions about the effects of policies.



policies, implying that ultimately policies were ineffective in terms of solving problems: old issues remained unresolved. Behind **B**'s comments was the assumption that something was blocking the effective implementation of policies because there was no practical difference being felt in schools; 'problems' were not being 'solved'. This hunting for signs that a problem has been solved evinces an understanding of policy as rational problem-solving, revealing the logic of rationality. Furthermore, the validity of the stated objectives was taken for granted. Yet, these stated objectives of policies construct problems in particular ways that have discursive effects, which need to be addressed. While **F** and **B** take different sides on the question of whether or not policies are accurately implemented, ultimately both embraced the need for the accurate implementation of the stated objectives of policies, leaving these objectives and their consequences unexamined.

The focus on the effective implementation of the stated objectives of policies guided the policy workers' attention to how policy was developed in the first place, such as through professional development and consultation. The assumption was that certain processes of policy development would facilitate the successful implementation of policies, assisting, in turn, in their effectiveness in solving policy problems. For example, **F** described the significance of having many people involved in the policy process because this affected whether or not specific policies were taken up:

And, I am just trying to think, there would be policies that people don't pick up and use to the same extent too. ... Why is it that people pick up on policies? ... I think the whole thing about developing policies comes into this ... [T]here were so many people involved in developing policies like this, [it] wasn't something that was just delivered to people, it was something that an awful lot of people across the system, and in communities, were involved in developing and therefore had an investment in seeing implemented and in supporting that implementation, actively. And then, because of that, it becomes part of a whole lot of other policies and actions within the system that then means that ... it gets extended through that, even if those people weren't necessarily involved initially in the development. (**F**)

We can see in **F**'s reference to policies becoming 'part of a whole lot of other policies and actions' an understanding that policies contain ideas and meanings, which can be maintained and passed on in the policy realm. There is a sense of policy-as-discourse in this reference to the meanings underpinning policies. However, the logic of rationality guided **F**'s attention to whether or not a policy was adopted in school settings and to how a policy was developed, rather than to the ways policies shaped subjectivities and social

relations. Policy work, under this perspective, becomes directed towards facilitating the implementation of stated policy goals rather than towards some engagement with or critique of the broad effects of these policy objectives.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Measurable 'Outcomes' of Policies*

The logic of rationality also circulated around the policy workers' emphasis on the demonstrable 'outcomes' of policies. The assumption was that the success of a policy in solving particular policy problems could easily be judged through measuring the practical consequences of the policy against the stated objectives or desired 'outcomes'. Accordingly, the policy workers thought that policies needed to provide direction on what 'outcomes' were expected. For example, **F** referred positively to the curriculum policy document outlining 'what we should be able to see in terms of an outcome with this curriculum development' (**F**). The focus on 'outcomes' is again about guiding the accurate implementation of policy objectives. For example, **D** described the 'clear government shift' to a focus on 'outcomes' as important because it allowed for greater change, or better implementation, by holding people 'accountable':

all of education is about outcomes rather than inputs [now]. ... And so the social justice action plan was about *setting targets* and reporting on how you meet your own targets. So that was much more *a focus on outcomes whereas in the past people used to talk about what they had done but there would be no change so this was meant to be holding people accountable* ... Whereas a huge amount of time in the education of girls is spent on awareness-raising, you know raising people's awareness that wasn't necessarily linked to *being able to report any discernable change that was held by any discernable data*. So I think the social justice action plan did that. (**D**, emphases added)

The emphasis here was on the need to report change, evidenced by data or specified targets. This approach reduces the effects of policies to practical measurable outcomes, eschewing the discursive frameworks in which these practical outcomes occur. Furthermore, understanding policy-as-discourse, as I am espousing, includes attention to

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<sup>2</sup> I argue in Chapter 8 that some critique of the content of policies came out in the policy workers' discussions of policy terminology and shifts in policy focuses. However, such critical engagement did not arise in the context of discussions of the effects of policies, revealing the assumption that policy terminology, concerns and concepts were about accurately capturing specific problems rather than creating particular effects. The logic of rationality limits a broader understanding of the effects of policies.

policy effects that are difficult to measure, such as the subjectivities and social relations policies create. Indeed, as elaborated below, the ‘outcomes’ or solutions that specific policies espouse construct the problem in particular ways that have effects (Bacchi, 1999a).

**G** similarly emphasised the importance of accountability in assessing the effectiveness of policies:

What I think is ... important is accountability: ‘Well, this is what you are meant to be doing, show me where you have. Why don’t you? What’s stopping you?’ So I think accountability is a very important part of the policy cycle. (**G**)

This focus on accountability assumed the need to be able to measure policy results so that compliance with policy directions could be demonstrated. This approach presumes the modernist notion of ‘power over’, missing the ways in which power produces self-regulation and self-formation (see Chapter 1). The purpose here is not to suggest that policies which include accountability requirements do not direct action, but rather to highlight that such an emphasis can lead to the underestimation of the effects of policies that do not include accountability requirements, and indeed of the broader effects of policies that do include such requirements. The discursive effects of policies and their productive character become overshadowed by an emphasis on the measurability of the outcomes of policies and accountability in achieving these outcomes.

Evaluating policies against their stated objectives or ‘outcomes’ and emphasising ‘accountability’ in the effective implementation of these ‘outcomes’ misses the way in which particular policies construct the problem of gender and education in particular contestable ways, revealing the logic of rationality. For example, **D** described the policy emphasis on ‘outcomes’ as a way of addressing teacher bias about the ability or desire of girls in lower socio-economic areas to succeed in the valued curriculum and go onto higher education:

The thing about outcomes is really important because if you look at teachers’ beliefs ... if you talked about access ... judgements are made ... say, for example, what girls from the northern suburbs or students from the northern suburbs would study ... [The] view that more girls ... who have been in poverty need to go to university if the world’s ever going to change, is met with huge amounts of scorn as if they [the girls] don’t want to do it and they’re not capable and class divisions will always exist. So you could have had a situation ... where people have the view that this is what these

kids need which is still based on their views of class or gender or whatever, which means ... [the kids] ... don't get access to getting the valued curriculum which in turn doesn't lead anywhere. **(D)**

The problem is understood in this quote as teachers' bias that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are not capable of succeeding at, or do not want to succeed at, the sorts of subjects that would gain them university entrance. Further, the assumption is that a policy that articulates the 'outcome' of more students from lower socio-economic backgrounds achieving high marks in such subjects, or going onto university, will get around this teacher bias. What this leaves unaddressed and unchallenged is that this focus on 'outcomes' locates the problem in the academic results of girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds and in teacher bias, leaving unaddressed the 'valued curriculum' and who benefits from this curriculum.

Furthermore, a focus on measurable 'outcomes', captured through targets, benchmarks and indicators, restricts policies that envisage whole new ways of being and are antithetical to numerically measured 'outcomes'. For instance, when talking about policy focuses generally, **B** indicated that an emphasis on the measurability of policy 'outcomes' made it difficult to justify a policy concern on the 'construction of gender':

The focus for gender construction was great because that meant we could bring in ... talking about notions of gender and young women and young men together, you know working together for a future. It was really useful for that ... and so we did a lot of stuff with future in regards to ... what kind of future do we want ... So I think it's much more playful, much more meaningful, but it's harder for people to grapple because ... you can't grab it and hold, you can't go 'well I want this many girls to be engineers'. You can't do that to it. You've got to go, 'well ... I want the engineers to be ... flowing gender performers'. You know [dismissive sound]. It's not as easy for people to ... get their heads around. That was easy [indicating equal opportunity on a list] really. It's kind of like numbers. **(B)**

Despite these comments by **B** in the context of discussions around changes in policy focuses generally, comments explored further in Chapter 8, in the specific context of discussions around the effects of policies **B**, like the other policy workers, called for an emphasis on practical outcomes (see above). Apparent here are unacknowledged shared assumptions around specific policy areas, revealing the ways in which policy workers are located subjects within the policy realm. Indeed, this ambiguous approach to outcomes can be explained through the ways in which the logic of rationality limits conceptualisations of

policy effects such that the language and meanings of policies become separated from the effects of policies (see Chapter 8). Nevertheless, we can see in **B**'s comment the ways in which the policy focus on the measurable outcomes of policies rendered difficult discussions around fluid visions for the future. In contrast, an understanding of policy-as-discourse, as we saw in the Introduction and Chapter 1, demands that multiple social visions be discussed in the context of the constructed character and discursive effects of policies (Bacchi, 1999a, 62). This task is facilitated through deep consultation with those in diverse subject positions (Chapter 6).

It is important to note here the way that **D**, and the other policy workers, clearly felt some sense of pride and ownership of the policy focus on 'outcomes'. This may be partly because **D** understood **G**, who was seen as a femocrat within the education department, as playing a role in this focus. Yet **D** also indicated the focus on outcomes was part of a whole department push, particularly because it was connected to the government-wide focus on social justice.<sup>3</sup> This sense of ownership and pride in the policies, reflecting the logic of agency discussed in Part II, led to an unquestioning acceptance that these policies contained useful objectives and proposals for girls and boys in education. Yet, this focus on 'outcomes' problematised girls, made difficult a conceptualisation of effects as discursive, and limited discussions around visions for the future. The logic of agency in specific policy areas directed policy workers' attention towards what they had achieved, drawing the focus away from the commonalities and shared assumptions of policy workers and the department as a whole. We can see here how the logics of agency and rationality are interconnected. In the assumption of their own agency, the policy workers took the stated objectives of policies for granted.

We have seen to this point that the logic of rationality circulated around the ways in which the policy workers evaluated policies according to the stated objectives of those policies. They addressed the effectiveness of policies in terms of solving problems, looked for ways to facilitate the successful implementation of policies, and embraced articulated 'outcomes' or objectives of policies. These understandings of and practices around the

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<sup>3</sup> My research of the Annual Reports of the education department supports the notion that the gender and education units' policy focus on outcomes was part of the wider government's focus on 'social justice' (Education Department of South Australia, 1988, 6; South Australian Education Department, 1993b, 13) and a department focus on 'outcomes' (Department for Education and Children's Services, 1997, 1).

effects of policies in terms of the stated objectives of policies reflect the authorised choice approach to policy in the literature (Chapter 1). For example, despite recognising the politics involved in policy evaluations, Edwards (2001, 6-7) asserts that in the four case studies of her book:

the evaluation objective was to assess the extent to which the policy objectives originally set were actually met and met efficiently. Questions asked here include: How successful was the policy and how was it judged? What reviews were undertaken and were they external or internal to the department or government? Why? How important was politics in the process? (Edwards, 2001, 6-7)

Edwards, like the policy workers discussed above, assumes that the effects of policies can be evaluated against policy intentions. Further, for Edwards, the consequences of policies can be measured. Indeed, she unquestioningly talks about the ‘empirical analysis of the effects’ of HECS, suggesting that this analysis demonstrated that a move away from free higher education did not affect the participation of disadvantaged groups (Edwards, 2001, 134). Some would want to challenge the assumption of the objectivity of this ‘evidence’ (see Chapter 6). But more importantly for present purposes, in evaluating HECS Edwards gives no attention to, nor reports other policy workers addressing, the discursive effects of this policy. Compare the evaluation questions Edwards lists in the above quote to the types of questions demanded by Marginson’s evaluation and analysis of HECS within a policy-as-discourse approach (or what he terms a ‘power-knowledge critique’):

The power-knowledge critique enables a new kind of research program in relation to the economics of education; in which the focus of investigation becomes, not its inconsistencies as doctrine, nor the tabulation of its empirical applications, but the power knowledge effects that it produces. In particular, this critique makes it possible to focus more directly and closely on the effects of the economics of education in systems of power: *on the kind of human relations and social systems that it creates; on the kinds of education that it enables, values and promotes; on the educational practices that it excludes and reworks.* (Marginson, 1997, 224, emphasis added)

It is clear here that understanding the discursive effects of policies leads to very different questions in the assessment of policies than allowed for within the logic of rationality. The ways in which the policy workers briefly conceptualised the discursive effects of policies is returned to below.

### Policy Consequences and the Purposive Actions of Teachers

At times the policy workers did provide some challenge to the centrality of the stated objectives of policies, emphasising instead teachers discretion in *using* policies for their purposes. However, the logic of rationality continued to limit the policy workers' conceptualisation of policy effects so that the constructed and constitutive character of policies remained neglected. The policy workers saw policies as important in terms of giving legitimacy to those who wanted to follow a particular course of action, emphasising the agential *use* of policies. For example, F felt that policies provided legitimacy for teachers, who were pursuing change in schools:

a policy document is also a very important platform for people to use who are trying to initiate change within a particular setting where that might not have been something that was a priority. The policy gave teachers, for example, a lot of support to change things within their own school setting, within their own classrooms and in working with their community. And so I think they can be a very strong source of change, support for it. And in, in the case of ... the *Social Justice Action Plan*<sup>4</sup> and the girls and gender policies, I think they've been very significant in supporting that work, that a lot of those people were doing, but in order to take some of that further, the policies have been instrumental in that. ... [Policy] [r]aises the issues, causes the discussions to occur in a whole lot of different places. (F)

F conceptualised teachers as *using* specific policies for their purposes, revealing the assumption of the logic of agency with respect to 'policy implementers', in this case teachers. This emphasis on the ways in which teachers strategically *used* policies to support their goal of achieving change in schools overlooks the ways in which policies shape how teachers (and policy workers) understand and approach policy problems in the first place. Obscured here is the discursively constructed character of policies and the effects that follow. Indeed, in the South Australian context 'social justice', referred to by F in the above quote as an example of one of the policies that supported and developed positive change, tended to be associated with an emphasis on socio-economic disadvantage (South Australian Education Department, 1993b, 13), drawing attention to 'retention' and 'attendance' issues in order to achieve the goal of 'improving educational outcomes' for students traditionally disadvantaged by schooling (South Australian Education Department, 1993a, 13). We saw this focus, too, in the policy workers' discussions around 'outcomes'. This policy focus placed the emphasis on specific targeted girls who had low

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<sup>4</sup> The *Social Justice Action Plan* (Education Department of South Australia, 1992) was a department-wide policy.

retention and attendance rates, such as pregnant girls. Such an emphasis leaves school structures and processes and the ways these construct masculinity and femininity unproblematised. It also rendered particular groups of girls as problematic. An understanding of policies as symbolically supporting and developing change that is already occurring misses some of the consequences of the creative character of policies. The logic of agency with respect to specific policy areas, therefore, directed attention away from the discursively constructed and constitutive character of policies, revealing the logic of rationality.

A also talked about policies providing legitimacy for teachers, particularly if they were in hostile environments:

What do policies do? ... To have a policy on non-sexist education says sexist education exists, it's not good, we, the authorities in these matters, recognise that it exists and that it's not good and we have an expectation that something will be done about it. So ... *the words of the policy are important but the having of the policy is more important. It legitimises those who are fighting the battles about that issue at every level, you know, you are alone in a classroom in a school that doesn't give a damn, with a domineering, bullying principal and to say 'well the Minister for Education wants us to do something about this issue. I would like to ... report to the department about how this school is implementing this policy, which is important to the government'. So instead of being one lone voice you have a tool to implement [progressive practices]. So it has, certainly has practical reality. It has a symbolic, they are the same thing for me because the symbolic value is what gives you the legitimacy to act.* And it also takes away, say all the hard work to get this policy question up on the agenda is now done for all the people who also see it as an issue. Without that policy, without that *symbolic legitimacy* every time somebody wants to do something about sexual harassment in the classroom they have to fight from ground zero, as it were. (A, emphases added)

A's reference to policies providing 'sanction to ... the teachers who daily saw what the issues were that they needed to take up' implies that policies allowed teachers to take up issues around gender and education in the way they saw fit, echoing F's emphasis on teachers *using* policies. A's stress on the teachers' discretion is consistent with her focus on the importance of the existence of the policy, irrespective of the words of the policy. While at the beginning of this quote A talked about policies as constructing problems, she moved to emphasising that the existence of a policy was more important than the words of the policy because the policy *qua* policy provided legitimacy for action. This perspective



shaped policy work. Indeed, A described the effort the policy workers put into fostering the illusion of government support for a particular policy area:

I used to say we do it with mirrors, we create the impression that ... there's a far greater commitment from the Minister, from the Director-General, from the authorities. We had to legitimise the teachers in the schools to raise the issues as they saw them in the classroom, in the staffroom by giving the impression that (loud voice) 'Oh, everyone thinks this is important, the Director, the Minister'. Except it was always us with cardboard cut outs ... sort of Alice in Wonderland with writing the speeches for them and ... wheeling them out to look impressed, to look important and, to, as it were, give the positive sanction to the activists, the teachers who daily saw what the issues were that they needed to take up. ... So, [our goals were] first of all, keep the policy agenda fire going, keep the positions, keep the funding, keep the structures and legitimise what the teachers were trying to do was the bare minimum. (A)

A continued, suggesting that the second element to the goals of the policy workers was providing a useful framework for teachers, indicating the assumption that the importance, and hence effects, of policies was that they fed ideas and understandings, a point I return to below. For present purposes, this quote highlights how the emphasis on the symbolic legitimacy of policies directed the ways in which the policy workers worked to maintain the illusion of support for a specific policy agenda. Such work assumes that the words of the policy are separate from policy effects, obscuring the ways in which the language of policies, and the concepts behind the language, creates problems in particular ways that have effects, such as labelling and categorising people (see Chapter 8). The focus on the way policies legitimise teachers' actions provided a welcome challenge to the emphasis on the stated objectives of policies and its eschewing of teachers and their values. However, this focus needed to be accompanied by attention to how policies create effects through rendering commonsensical some understandings of the 'problem' of gender and education. In other words, what needs to be addressed is the ways in which particular problem representations shape how people, including teachers, think about (and accept) those 'problems' and hence how they go about attempting to 'solve' or 'address' those 'problems' in practice.

C, too, was ambivalent with respect to the uptake of policies in practice, again drawing attention away from stated policy intentions. While she, like others, talked about supporting implementation of policies through workshops and conferences with schools,

she was sceptical about whether the original intentions of policies were observed in practice or even whether policies were taken up at all:

So much stuff goes to school, that the best, the best way is to actually run a conference or to run a series of workshops. We did that ... [W]e know that so many people came to the workshops, we didn't know how they were being used at school. ... *But with any set of materials like that, whenever teachers pick them up, they change them, they use them according to their conditions, what they want to do, what their school thinks is important and so on, but we wanted enough in there to support teachers to have a go at a hard subject like sexual harassment. So while they would have been used, they may have been used in a whole lot of ways, or, they may not have been used at all, I am sure they weren't in some schools.* (C, emphases added)

C's equivocality with respect to how policies are taken up in practice reveals a sense of policies containing multiple meanings that can be *used* by teachers. This perspective echoes Taylor (1997) and Taylor *et al.*'s (1997) approach that moves the assessment of policies away from a focus on policy intentions to an understanding of the consequences of policy (Taylor, 1997, 24), and Ball's (Ball, 1990, 1993, 1994a) emphasis on the multiple interpretations available of any particular policy, captured in his conceptualisation of 'policy-as-text' (Chapter 2). As stated, this rejection of the primacy of the stated intended objectives of policy documents is refreshing. Nevertheless, as argued, this focus on the uptake of policies in practice does not pay attention to how policies construct problems in particular ways that have lived effects. The focus is moved from the policy makers' intentions to the teachers' purposive intentions, rather than to the discursive character of policies and how people (including teachers and policy workers) are located within discourses (in this case) around and within specific policy areas. My call for reflexivity with respect to specific policy debates (see Chapter 6) acknowledges and attempts to address the embedded nature of discourses around specific policy areas and that they produce effects.

An emphasis on how specific policies are taken up in practice, therefore, needs to be accompanied by an understanding of how policies shape the ways in which people understand and approach issues. Thus, in understanding the effects of policies, attention needs to be paid to the words and concepts of the policy, not so as to accurately implement their stated objectives in order to effectively solve problems, but because these words and concepts create problems in particular ways (Chapter 8). Furthermore, and this reflects the overall argument in this thesis, in order to understand the full impact of specific policies,

we need to understand the effects of the discourses of the policy realm – the logic of agency and the logic of rationality – on how policy workers undertake their work in specific policy areas. More specifically, for the purposes of this chapter, we need to understand how the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) limited the ways in which the policy workers conceptualised the effects of policies and, therefore, how they went about evaluating and analysing policies.

### THE DISCURSIVE EFFECTS OF POLICIES

While the logic of rationality remained hegemonic with respect to the policy workers' understandings of and practices around the effects of policies, there was a sub-dominant and underdeveloped conceptualisation of the broader discursive effects of policies. In the above section, we saw moments when the policy workers understood policies as containing meanings with various effects. **B** referred to the philosophy and ideas underpinning policies, and **F**, **A**, and **C** talked about the ideas behind policies being passed on, maintained and used. However, we have also seen how these conceptualisations of the meanings behind policies tended to stop short of an understanding of the discursive effects of policies. Such a perspective was present, however, in the brief moments when the policy workers conceptualised policies as producing cultural change and problematising the status quo, though this again was limited by the logic of rationality. For example, **F** saw policies as giving people a language to talk about issues:

What [the gender and education policies] did was provide a basis for the sorts of things that people were seeing and trying to deal with in various ways. It gave that a structure through the policy documents and the materials. Gave it a structure and gave it ... almost a language too, to be discussing some of those things. ... [W]e didn't have a language for describing sexual harassment. That evolved and was developed and is used and for students, you know, girls and boys, talking about that now in schools is quite a different thing. (**F**)

This quote gestured towards the discursive effects of policies. There was a sense in which policy language, and hence ideas and meanings, were taken up generally, such as the way 'sexual harassment' had become a problem discussed in schools. Indeed, as we saw above, **F** also talked about how policy 'raises the issues, causes the discussions to occur in a whole lot of different places'. There was at least some sense of the deeper effects of

policies, such as causing discussions of issues and ideas and changing understandings of the world. However, again, this understanding of the discursive character of policies and their effects was limited by the logic of rationality, apparent in F's assumption that policies gave language to pre-existing problems that people were 'seeing'.

A also emphasised the ways in which policies circulated meanings. After referring to how policies offered symbolic legitimacy for teachers, as we saw above, she continued:

And then [policies] provide them [teachers] with policy frameworks that were helpful or resources that were helpful, or opportunities to communicate and to ... disseminate between themselves, so the conferences were very important. We had big conferences. ... [W]e both advanced our understanding of the issues, but also gave each other support ... [S]o feeding ... policy ideas ... legitimacy for the teachers, support, information flow. (A)

There was clearly an understanding here of policies reflecting ideas and concepts. However, the implication was that the stated ideas of the policies or interests that they represented were passed on, through conferences and establishing networks, not so much that they constructed problems in particular ways that had effects. Indeed, A described some policy ideas as being 'advanced', turning attention back to the accurate understanding of problems. Here policy work involved agential meaning-making where policy ideas were consciously included in policies and *explained* to others. This approach echoes Bessant *et al.*'s (2006) emphasis on the meanings behind *policies* but slippage into a structured interaction approach to *policy-making* (Chapter 1).

An underdeveloped understanding of the discursive effects of policies was also present in A's description of working in the policy area of gender and education as counter-hegemonic work. This was discussed in detail in Chapter 6, but is worth briefly revisiting here. A emphasised the way in which policies problematised conditions in the world:

People used to say to me 'why have a policy', say ... 'against racism, it's quite evident that racism is bad, why do you need a policy?' And you need a policy for the same reasons. It's been normalised, its victims are inaudible or not believed, the people who do it don't believe that they do, the people who don't do it don't recognise it. So part of the policy trick is to find the *language to convey the fact that this thing exists, when everyone's trying to say it doesn't exist*, inequality of girls let's say, and secondly, *show that it's wrong or bad or it's a problem that needs to be solved*, and then thirdly that *there is something that can be done about it and allocate responsibilities*.

... [Y]ou're actually changing people's consciousness so that those who experience discrimination or inequality come to recognise that rather than just personalise it, those that perpetuate and contribute to it, we hope, begin to see that they have responsibility not to or to do otherwise and that there has to be some practical mechanisms attached to it about what this means and what's going to be done about it.

So a very interesting thing happens. Only a tiny number of people may be involved in the policy process but at the same time, *you've got the change in understanding and consciousness going on in a much wider group.* (A, emphases added)

This quote raises two points. It suggests, first, that policies are about constructing problems and spreading ideas and, second, that spreading ideas can still entail material/practical policy mechanisms. With respect to this notion of policies circulating ideas, A understood policies as changing meanings, as changing the ways in which we understand and think about an issue: what was normalised becomes problematised. Policies moved conditions in the world from individual bad luck to a social problem and in raising awareness, people's behaviours would change. On one level this discussion raises the discursive effects of policies as it is about how policies can affect peoples' ways of thinking.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, this sense of policies being about ideas and meanings does not go far enough. The focus in A's quote above is very much in terms of 'consciousness-raising' or 'spreading the word', which assumes a modernist understanding of 'power over'. It assumes that people have a false or incorrect way of understanding the world that needs to be fixed. Relatedly, A was clearly focusing on the ideas she wanted to spread through the policies, revealing the assumption of the logic of agency (and the logic of rationality). What was missed here was the ideas and understandings that were not necessarily intended but assumed nevertheless, such as constructing the problem of gender and education as 'girls' inequality', rather than, say, as boys' advantage (Eveline, 1994). Importantly, these embedded understandings and ideas have effects, in this case problematising girls. Again, both the logic of rationality and the logic of agency circulated around the policy realm, limiting a developed understanding of the discursive effects of policies. Nevertheless, the suggestion that policies construct meanings and circulate ideas and understandings needs to be embraced and expanded upon so as to take account of the effects of such constructions on people and social relations and in shaping policy workers' own understandings of specific policy areas.

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<sup>5</sup> However, as we saw in Chapter 6, ultimately A's focus on problematising is about the agenda-setting stage of policy.

The second point about **A**'s quote above is that ideas and concepts in policies are not seen as distinct from practical actions and structures. Similarly, **G** talked about policies producing cultural changes, which were apparent in practical consequences such as changes in selection criteria or affirmative action laws. While we saw above that **G** emphasised accountability in producing intended policy outcomes, she immediately followed up by emphasising the 'cultural shift' affected by policies:

Yeah I do think [policies are] important – but I have to because I worked there. Not perfect, but important. And that policy alone would make a cultural shift – with all the other things that were going on at the same time. Like sexual harassment, like affirmative action, like changed selection. I mean a whole lot of things changed again. (**G**)

This perspective captures the broader discursive effects of policies in changing the ways we understand and behave in the world, as well as how discourses are practices, words and thoughts. That is, in **A** and **G**'s quotes the practical effects of policies are understood in terms of cultural changes, as part of a bigger story than the mere change itself. This approach to the practical consequences of policies provides a challenge to the understanding of effects of policies within the logic of rationality, which we saw above in the way **F** described the practical and material changes produced by policies without locating these within a wider discursive framework.

The understanding of the discursive effects of policies, therefore, could be seen in the policy workers' conceptualisation of policies as containing meanings and hence as problematising the status quo and producing cultural change. But this view of the effects of policies was far less common than the understanding of the effects of policies within the logic of rationality. Furthermore, this alternative perspective needs to be developed in ways that further challenge the logic of rationality, ways that take account of the constitutive character of policies.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued that the logic of rationality circulated around and within the ways in which the policy workers understood and performed around the effects of policies. Ultimately, they assumed that policies could be evaluated according to whether or not they

had effectively solved pre-existing problems or by the purposive actions of teachers. This perspective did not allow for an understanding of how policies construct problems in particular ways that have lived effects on people and the shape of society. There were moments when the policy workers understood policies as creating meanings, which was evident in the policy workers' talk of cultural shifts and problematising normalised behaviours. However, while the emphasis on the circulation of meanings indicated the ways in which policies shape how we understand the world, it did not go far enough. Along with this focus on meanings, there needs to be an understanding of the way policies construct problems in particular ways, which has effects on subjectivities and social relations. The pervasiveness of the logic of rationality rendered difficult such a deeply developed understanding of policy-as-discourse.

The logic of rationality set limits on policy work, restricting policy workers from addressing the broad and far-reaching effects of policies and from considering whether these effects corresponded to their visions for the future. The reference by **B** to the policy focus on the 'construction of gender' creating space for discussions for the future was a rare example of the kind of policy-as-discourse approach, and the associated understanding of the discursive effects of policies, that I advocate. It suggests that such an approach to policy is possible and indicates the extent of the challenge and change I envisage. However, notably, **B**'s comments did not occur in the context of explicit discussions of effects of policies but rather in discussions of policy language and concerns. The logic of rationality, and the associated limited understanding of the effects of policies, restricted the policy workers from understanding these discursive consequences of language and concepts in terms of the effects of policies, which is the theme elaborated on in Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 8

### **POLICY LANGUAGE, CONCERNS AND CONCEPTS: MAINTAINING THE AGENDA, MEANING-MAKING AND SOCIAL VISIONS**

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter argues that the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) operated in the case study policy realm to limit the type and extent of attention given by the policy workers to policy language, concerns and concepts. The policy workers understood policy language at different times as describing reality, as insignificant, or as capturing meanings that reflected particular interests. This chapter makes the case that these ways of understanding language obscures the productive character of policy language, concerns and concepts, neglecting the constructed and constitutive character of policies. Words and associated concepts, as part of policy discourses, shape the ways through which we make sense of the world (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 305; Bacchi, 1999a, 41-42).<sup>1</sup> Hence, policy language and focuses, and the concepts and understandings they contain, are important in identifying the wide-ranging impact of policy documents, talk and practice. There were promising moments in the interviews when the policy workers did acknowledge the broad discursive effects of policy language, concerns and concepts. These moments will be highlighted, with attention drawn to their potential usefulness in reconceptualising the policy realm and policy work.

The first two sections of this chapter demonstrate the ways in which the logic of rationality, the assumption that policies respond to pre-existing problems, led policy workers to conceptualise in limited ways the role of language in policies. The first section reveals instances in the interviews where policy language was seen either as descriptive or as superficial, something around which one could manoeuvre. This perspective rendered

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<sup>1</sup> As I have argued in Chapter 1, practices, as well as language and concepts, form and reflect discourses. The emphasis in this current chapter, however, is on policy language. Still, while this emphasis remains, I tend to refer throughout to policy focuses and policy concerns, as well as to policy language, as a reminder that policy language is often part of a broader policy approach underpinned by common concepts, ideas and meanings (or discourses).



policy language as, at best, irrelevant or, at worst, as innocuous. It tended to separate language from concepts or meanings. The second section of this chapter identifies the ways in which policy language and focuses were understood as containing meanings that reflected particular interests. This perspective provided welcome attention to policy language, indicating some challenge to the logic of rationality in its acknowledgement that meanings underpin policies. However, it led to meaning-making work directed at defending language that was seen as representing the policy workers' particular interests or at resisting language that was seen as representing the interests of the wider bureaucracy. These approaches – both the dismissal of policy language and the emphasis on meaning-making work – failed to notice or reflect upon the ways in which policy languages and concerns, as parts of discourses, created discursive effects on people and social relations. This oversight is significant. As I have argued throughout, any comprehensive analysis of policies needs to take account of the ways in which policies, as discourses, shape how we understand and act in the world.

In the final section of this chapter we will see, however, that there were moments in the interviews – albeit few and transient – when some policy workers recognised the discursive effects of policy language and focuses. There were instances when the ways in which policy language creates subjectivities, problematises some people and areas, and silences others were acknowledged and considered. These sub-dominant understandings and practices provided the most significant insights into how policy and policy work could be understood and done differently to the ways entailed by the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency). However, as will become apparent, the logic of rationality still operated to make difficult a fully-developed recognition of the role of policy language and concerns in shaping how policies construct problems in particular ways that have discursive effects. The acknowledgement of the role of policy language needs to be extended in ways consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse so that policy workers pay more attention to how specific policy language shapes subjectivities and social relations through creating categories, excluding and silencing some people, and shaping how we understand and approach specific policy problems.

## ESCHEWING THE IMPACT OF POLICY LANGUAGE

At times the policy workers in the case study conceptualised policy language as innocuous, as merely a means of describing reality. At other times, they considered policy language to be just one more obstacle around which they had to manoeuvre. Both these perspectives underestimate the role of policy language, and the concepts it contains, in representing policy problems in particular ways that have effects on people and social relations. Obscured here is the creative character of policies, reinforcing the assumption, implicit in the logic of rationality, that policies respond to pre-existing problems.

### Descriptively Capturing Reality

Policy language was rendered harmless in the moments when the interviewed policy workers conceptualised policy language as capturing reality. For example, **G** saw some language as a description of pre-existing policy problems:

See 'educational outcomes' isn't a different concept. That was always part of *the language of defining*. How can you tell what's going on? ... you see two-thirds more boys than girls retaining to Year Twelve in 1983, say. So then you say, 'well, that educational outcome means something else is going on in the school'. *So it's just a descriptor really. It's not a, not an aspirational thing*, I don't think. Whereas 'social justice' is, I suppose. (**G**, emphases added)

**G** was suggesting here that the policy focus on 'educational outcomes' was about defining the problems that policies needed to address. Further, these problems were taken to be pre-existing, as is clear from **G**'s emphasis on the statistical data that identified the problems. Operating here was the logic of rationality, which obscured the ways in which a policy focus on 'outcomes', and the associated uncritical acceptance of statistics, represented a particular worldview: the existence and objective measurability of 'reality' and that girls and boys are distinct and fixed categories in competition (see Chapters 6 and 7). Notably, **G** did understand some policy concerns, such as 'social justice', as reflecting goals for the future, as being 'an aspirational thing', and I return to this understanding below. Here, however, it is clear that **G** understood some policy language and concerns as capturing and neutrally describing a pre-existing problem. Other policy workers made similar assumptions, as elaborated on in the final section of this chapter. In brief, while at times the policy workers acknowledged the discursive effects of policy language, the logic of

rationality led them to infer that some policy language and focuses misdiagnosed the ‘real’ policy problem. This emphasis on policy language as merely descriptively capturing reality reflects the authorised choice approach to policy. Indeed, those authors who adopt this approach to policy, such as Edwards (2001) and Bridgman and Davis (2004), pay little attention to policy language. When policy language is seen as merely reflecting or describing reality, little discussion occurs around policy language, let alone around the discursive effects of policy language, how it affects subjectivities and social relations.

### **Strategically Maintaining the Policy Agenda**

Policy language was also conceptualised as harmless by the policy workers in their emphasis on strategically maintaining their agenda, irrespective of policy language. Indeed, the policy workers were often ambivalent about policy language. They tended to describe some shifts in policy terminology, those that came from government, as ‘superficial’ or as providing ‘opportunities’ for policy workers to use this language for their own purposes. Yet, the policy workers would describe as significant those shifts in policy language and concerns that they understood as originating with the feminist policy workers.

A saw shifts in policy language as coming either from the government or from feminists’ ‘own intellectual tradition’. She included as government-driven shifts in policy language the second stream of changes in policy terminology<sup>2</sup> identified in Chapter 3 (‘equal access’, ‘equal opportunity’, ‘equality’, ‘educational outcomes’, ‘social justice’, ‘equity’). She understood these government-driven shifts in policy terminology as insignificant or as ‘superficial’. In addition, she talked about how policy workers handled these shifts in strategic ways, being ‘fleet of foot’ and ‘working with’ policy language coming from the government/department, in order to maintain the policy workers’ own policy priorities:

I think the terminology was more pushed upon us and it was a reaction to we’re going to lose the job otherwise. So I don’t see that linking with increased understanding. ... terms like ‘Equal Opportunity’ as opposed to

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<sup>2</sup> As argued in Chapter 3, these changes in policy terminology reflect changes in the conceptual underpinnings of policies and hence in representations of the problem in gender and education. In this discussion of A, however, I refer simply to policy language so as to capture the ways in which she, at times, did not connect policy language with ideas and meanings, underestimating the significance of policy language. Ultimately, the argument in this chapter is that policy workers need to take account of the ways in which policy language is part and parcel of wider policy discourses, representing policy problems in particular ways that have effects.

‘education of girls’ or ‘non-sexist’ or moving to ‘social justice’, that was because the government had said ‘social justice’ is the thing. ‘Equity’ I always thought was a meaningless term although I became the director of it ... [B]ecause it ... takes away the inequality. ‘Equity’ sounds like fairness and evenness to me. *But you just work with those terms. I always saw them as fairly superficial matters* ... [M]ost of this change in terminology I think is about shifts in government terminology, having to be *fleet of foot to keep the agenda and the priorities as we saw them adapted to whatever the government or the department of the day was deciding was the way it wanted it framed*. And accepting a broadening frame, a broadening terminology as unfortunate but *a reality that we had to work with*. (A, emphases added)

A assumed a distinction between the policy agenda or priorities successfully maintained by policy workers and the framing of policy coming from government or the department. Similarly, as we saw in Chapter 7, A felt that the ‘having of the policy’ was more important than the words of the policy. The specific policy agenda (maintained by policy workers) was understood as distinct from the language of the policy, reducing the relevance of policy language. Indeed, policy language appeared to be separated from the concepts and meanings it contains.

In contrast, if the push for a shift in terminology came from the policy workers themselves, A saw this new language as important and as corresponding to a shift in which issues in the gender and education policy area received attention within the policy realm. She included the first stream of shifts in terminology discussed in Chapter 3 (in particular, ‘education of girls’, ‘gender inclusive’, ‘gender constructions’) within those she understood as originating with the policy workers themselves. Further, she conceptualised these shifts in policy language as reflecting an ‘increased sophistication of understanding’. As a result, she tended to see these shifts in policy language as far more significant than those originating with the department/government:

Meanwhile, with some of these terms – ‘gender inclusive’, ‘gender construction’, ‘education of girls’ – in parallel and working with others both in and out of the bureaucracy, actually trying as educationalists to do better. To do better than just say, ‘it’s not fair, girls aren’t well treated’. ... [Y]ou’ve got to actually understand what are we talking about with the curriculum? What are we talking about in educational policies? What are we talking about in how we teach and how we run the schools? What does it mean? And what might it mean for teacher educators? So ... we’ve got to be part of our own intellectual tradition I suppose. So some of this is about our own intellectual tradition as well as our own ideological, increasing sophistication. (A)

Clearly, A conceptualised only those shifts in terminology that she understood as originating with the policy workers themselves as being important in affecting a substantive shift in how gender and education was understood and approached in practice.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as we saw above, when A understood shifts in policy language as being imposed on policy workers by the government/bureaucracy, she implied that, provided the policy workers were strategic enough, they could achieve their policy agenda *irrespective* of the policy language. A described this strategy of working with the preferred framings of government as ‘policy pragmatics’, depicting the personal characteristics required by policy workers who are successful at such work: ‘intellectual engagement as an educationalist, strategic nous, courage and bureaucratic and policy adroitness’. In operation here was the logic of agency with respect to specific policy areas.

However, emphasising the *source* of particular policy language as central to its significance comes at the expense of paying insufficient attention to the *effects* of specific policy language (Bacchi, 1999a, 43-44; see also Chapter 1). The logic of agency obscures the overall impact of policy language, revealing its interrelationship with the logic of rationality. For example, A distinguished particular policy language from how specific policy areas were understood and approached in practice, masking the impact of policy language. Policy terminology, and the meanings or concepts underpinning it, shapes and reflects how we understand and approach conditions in the world: we ‘think in and with language’ (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 305). Eschewing how policy language is part and parcel of policy discourses renders difficult any acknowledgement of the broad discursive effects of policy and policy language. Furthermore, A understood the policy workers’ agenda (which may or may not correspond with shifts in policy terminology) as reflecting deeper feminist understandings of the problem, which she saw as becoming increasingly accurate (Chapter 6). This perspective echoes the emphasis on descriptively capturing reality discussed above. The hegemonic discourses of the policy realm, therefore, led A to conceptualise herself (with respect to specific policy areas) as maintaining attention (logic of agency) on the ‘real issues’ (logic of rationality), irrespective of the framing of the specific policy focus. These logics, then, led to a downgrading of policy language in particular policy

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<sup>3</sup> I return to the acknowledgement by the policy workers of the significance of some policy language in the following section. Here, the purpose is to highlight the ways in which the logic of agency went hand-in-hand with the logic of rationality with respect to specific policy areas so as to render some policy language (that preferred by the government/bureaucracy) as insignificant, and other language (that chosen by policy workers themselves) as useful, even decisive.

areas and the effects that follow from its usage. As policy-as-discourse theorists have identified, policy language shapes the way in which we understand the world and ourselves in it, and hence how we interact and function in the world (Bacchi, 1999a, 41; Reekie, 1994; Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 300-315).

**D**, too, downgraded the impact of policy focuses that came from above within the bureaucracy, emphasising the strategic ability of policy workers to manoeuvre around such impositions. She preferred talking about government-driven shifts in policy focus as ‘an opportunity not a stifling’. In the context of discussing the *Social Justice Action Plan 1992 (SA)* (Education Department of South Australia, 1992), **D** felt optimistic about what could be done with the state government’s emphasis on ‘social justice’:

in terms of people being strategic it was about taking ... what [policy focus] exists and doing what you can with it rather than saying, ‘nup, that’s no good’. So the idea is to engage rather than sit back and criticise. (**D**)

The impression here was that policy workers were limited only by their attitude to government-driven shifts in policy focus: they could be positive and achieve much, or they could be negative and achieve little. Apparent here were the individualising effects of the logic of agency discussed in Chapter 5. There was also a sense here of the superficial nature of policy language and the concepts it contains. **D**’s emphasis on ‘taking ... what exists and doing what you can with it’ reflects **A**’s references to working with the preferred framing of issues from above: the assumption was that policy workers could ‘choose’ to work with a preferred policy focus in ways that ultimately supported their own purposes, ignoring the way in which policy focuses shape how we understand and approach specific policy problems in the first place. The impression from **A** and **D** was that, with enough of these opportunistic characteristics that enable creative strategic work, policy workers could successfully maintain their own policy agenda through strategically using the preferred policy language and concerns for their own purposes. Indeed, the policy workers ended up being proud of and taking ownership of these policy focuses. The emphasis was on the agency of the policy workers at the expense of failing to pay attention to the discursive effects of policy language and concerns, reinforcing the logic of rationality.

Both **A** and **D**, therefore, conceptualised policy language and focuses as superficial when imposed on the policy workers from above. However, **G** even understood policy language that she saw as originating with feminist policy workers as being in itself of little

significance. She rejected the understanding (recounted in Chapter 3) that changes in policy focus from, say, 'education of girls' to 'gender inclusive', reflected very different understandings of the problem of gender and education (see Yates, 1993; Bacchi, 1999a). She felt that the terms themselves were just different ways of talking about the same thing:

Now, 'education of girls', 'gender inclusive' ... 'construction of gender'... Again I would see those as subsets of education of girls. ... In order to do what you want to do for education of girls, you need to think in gender inclusive ways, you also need to understand the construction of gender. (G)

Here, again, policy language was about accurately capturing the problems that needed to be addressed in the gender and education policy area. Furthermore, G, like the policy workers discussed above, emphasised strategy rather than the meanings or concepts within policy language and focuses. At these times she understood changes in language not in terms of different understandings of the problem, nor in terms of producing different discursive effects, but as a strategic way to maintain the agenda of the policy workers:

People, I think, made a big mistake about 'social justice' when they assumed that it overrode everything else. In my mind it was a strategic approach to improving educational outcomes, achieving equality, giving equal opportunity and equity for particular groups within groups. (G)<sup>4</sup>

Yet, as argued in Chapter 7, the policy workers generally understood 'social justice' as going hand-in-hand with a focus on 'outcomes', which produced disadvantage as measurable and drew attention to access and retention of particular groups of students, drawing attention away from curriculum content, pedagogy and school structures. Focusing on outcomes and the statistics to measure these outcomes also produces different groups in competition. Reducing policy language to a 'strategic approach' neglects the wider effects of this language and hence of policies.

The overall impression on these occasions in the interviews, therefore, was that policy workers needed merely to be strategic when it came to working with policy language, linking with the discussion of the logic of agency in Part II. Policy language, in these instances, was reduced to the sidelines of the policy realm, where the main goal was

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<sup>4</sup> G had moved out of the gender and education unit and was superintendent of curriculum around the time 'social justice' was a policy concern and, unlike the other policy workers, she understood herself as involved in the shift to 'social justice'. She was clearly giving little import, therefore, to policy language and concerns originating from herself or the policy workers generally.

maintaining a policy agenda that solved the pre-existing problems in the world, reflecting the logic of rationality. Policy work, in these accounts, had little to do with language, except for strategically getting around it. Obscured here was the way in which language is a part of policy discourses. It represents the problem in particular ways, shaping the way we think about, understand, and act with respect to conditions in the world. Indeed, if policy workers do not turn their attention to language and how it constitutes the world then they risk perpetuating the status quo:

Without attention to language and the processes by which meanings and categories are constituted, we perpetuate conventional and over-simplified understandings of the world, rather than opening up new interpretive possibilities. (Reekie, 1994, 462)

This reinforcing of current problem constructions could be seen in the strategy, described by **A** and **D** above, of working with the preferred framings of the government/bureaucracy (see also Chapter 5). The logic of rationality and the logic of agency, therefore, at times operated in the policy realm to shape in limited ways the policy workers' subjectivities, their understandings and practices, around policy language such that its significance and impact was neglected.

### **POLICY LANGUAGE AND MEANING-MAKING**

Despite the ambivalence towards policy language captured above, there were encouraging instances in the interviews when the policy workers saw changes in policy terminology and focuses as centrally important, as reflecting changes in meanings, and paid attention to policy language in their work. As argued in Chapter 7, there is a sense of policy-as-discourse in the references to meanings underpinning policy – or, more specifically in this case, policy language and focuses. However, ultimately, as will become apparent, the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency), with respect to specific policy areas, operated to limit this attention to policy language such that the discursive character of language went largely unexamined.



## Policy Meanings

The welcome recognition of the importance of policy language could be seen in the way some of the policy workers described attempting to shape meaning through language. These tended to be policy workers who worked in the gender and education unit during the later years of the case study period, perhaps indicating that poststructuralism, and its focus on language, had started having an influence on how policy and policy work was understood within the policy realm. For example, **C** said:

we have always been concerned about language, coming from a feminist poststructuralist position of language making meaning ... And we did try to use the term 'subjectivity' instead of 'identity' but ... we weren't able to make that discourse a powerful one. (**C**)

Indeed, **C** saw it as highly significant that she succeeded at including the term 'construction of gender' in the title of curriculum materials:

then the next lot [of curriculum documents] I did was *Girls and boys come out to play*<sup>5</sup>, and that was teaching about 'construction of gender'. It actually said 'construction of gender'. I had [the term] in the previous one, but not in the title, whereas this one I did. (**C**)

Similarly, **B** described the way in which policy workers would 'come up with these words, try to shape the language, trying to shape some kind of new meaning', highlighting the attention given by some policy workers to terminology and the concepts it contains. In a similar vein, after recording had finished, **F** talked about terminology as sometimes being helpful and sometimes as hindering her goals, but always as significant because it shaped the way issues were thought about.

The conceptualisation of policy language as reflecting particular meanings was also evident in some of the emphasis on the theoretical underpinnings of policy focuses. For example, **B** talked about over time realising the importance of having clear theoretical underpinnings to policies:

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<sup>5</sup> **C** was referring here to *Girls and boys come out to play: Teaching about gender construction and sexual harassment in English and Studies of Society and Environment* (1996), which was a part of teaching and learning materials (Curriculum Resources, 1996).

I also got clearer about the theoretical underpinning [of] the policy and having a common theory being so important and people haven't – policies are ad hoc (**B**)

Despite **B**'s assertion that policies are often not theoretically grounded, she talked about a policy-making process in which thorough discussions occurred about language and its meanings. With respect to the process of writing the department-wide curriculum policy document, **B** said:

But for people who were involved in the writing of it, it was a wonderful PD [professional development] because you got to hear all the stuff and listen and talk and some school people ... they were hilarious, I remember one day they said 'we've talked about one word all morning', I think it was 'critiquing'. We talked about one word. They said, 'this is unbelievable'. ...[I]t's ok, though, isn't it? ... because we don't in schools get time to talk about anything let alone what you believe in and what your philosophy is and what your theory is. So it was a wonderful opportunity. (**B**)

There was a sense here of policy language reflecting broader meanings and concepts: language was important because it reflected a particular philosophical underpinning to the policy. And, as a result, policy work involved discussions of language, meanings and the theoretical basis of the policy. This work is different indeed to the policy work associated with an understanding of language as superficial, providing some disruption to the logic of rationality.

Other policy workers also talked about reflecting deeply upon theoretical underpinnings of preferred policy language and understandings. **C** referred to theoretical discussions occurring within the gender unit: 'And I remember ... feminist poststructuralism was something we talked a lot about in the education of girls unit' (**C**). Indeed, **D** credited **C** as bringing poststructuralism into the gender and education unit, which **D** saw as offering 'the theoretical language to describe the way that you were trying to interpret or view things'. This deep theoretical reflection about the meanings of particular language and understandings was captured by **B**'s musings on 'gender':

that confusion that people have with 'gender' and 'sex' ... you read a form and they say 'what gender are you?' and I say 'oh, I feel male today, I'll tick male'. ... [P]eople do not understand 'biological sex' and 'gender' so it's ... confused a lot of people ... I think it took me a long time to [understand] ... like, what am I talking about? What do I mean when I'm talking about this ... gender thing we talk about? And I still think I'm learning about it in regards to the practice and the diversity of it and the ...

flexibility of it and ... the whole thing, the whole complexity and the change and the, one minute it looks like this and then it looks like that and you go, 'what happened?' (laughs), 'what am I?' So it's ... so much harder to ... describe or understand than 'sex'. 'Sex' was 'biological sex'. So easy. 'We'll have a girls' school'. 'We'll have a boys' school'. ... [S]o easy for people to do that. ... Whereas 'gender' is not easy to talk about or work with but it's ... much more creative. It gives you much more hope. That's what we always said. Much more hope to work with it as a performance, that it can change rather than being stuck with this biological thing. You are stuck there. So it gave us more scope I think ultimately. But a lot of people, you ask them what they understand by 'gender' and I think you will get for every person a different understanding. (B)

As well as B's understanding of 'gender' as a construction that can be performed and changes over time and place, there is also a sense of the multiple meanings of gender, a point I return to below.

The emphasis on the importance of policy words, concepts and meanings and the thoughtful, in-depth reflection of the policy workers around policy language and meanings is welcome indeed, particularly in light of the eschewing of the importance of language above. However, as argued in Chapter 6, often the policy workers conceptualised their own theoretical understandings behind policies as capturing *accurately* pre-existing conditions in the world, assuming that some meanings behind policies identified and solved problems. Such theoretical discussions must extend beyond this positivist assumption to include an awareness of the discursive character of language and policies, which have effects. Unfortunately, however, the hegemony of the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) operated to limit policy work around language and meanings such that the discursive effects of these terms and concepts were rarely addressed, which is illustrated below.

### **Meaning-Making and Capturing Reality**

Policy work around policy language and concepts often became about agential meaning-making rather than paying attention to the discursive *effects* of policy words, focuses and associated concepts. The emphasis in meaning-making work was on defending or resisting specific language that was seen as reflecting particular articulated interests. Further, the preferred policy language of the policy workers was often seen as capturing reality. Also, even when the policy workers lost battles over policy language, they attempted to include their interests through reconceptualising policy language. The assumption was that policy workers could rationally identify and agentially defend their interests (or resist the interests

of others) that were captured in particular language, revealing the logics of agency and rationality. Obscured in this perspective were the effects of deeply-held assumptions that did not appear to be interests but that nevertheless made it into policy documents and concerns (Chapter 6 and Part II). Furthermore, neglected here were the ways in which policy language and concerns, and the concepts and meanings behind these, shape subjects and social relations. Within meaning-making work, then, policy workers' strategic ability again became important, highlighting the ways in which the logic of agency (with respect to specific policy areas) operated to draw attention away from the discursive character of policy language, reinforcing the logic of rationality.

*Struggles between competing meanings/interests*

The understanding of language and associated meanings as reflecting particular interests was captured in **G**'s description of the 'fights' around the policy shift to a focus on 'social justice'. While **G** supported, and indeed at times took ownership of, this policy focus, she described her impression that '[b]ecause the political emphasis had changed to social justice' some of the feminist policy workers 'felt that their world would disappear in that clash', suggesting that policy language and focuses were understood as reflecting particular interests. Similarly, the policy workers' descriptions of attempting to resist particular policy terminology and focuses emphasised the association between policy language and concerns with particular interests. Indeed, **D** described policy workers as resisting the shift to a focus on 'gender' because it was seen as representing the interests of those who supported a policy emphasis on 'boys' rather than on 'girls':

South Australia hung out for a very long time and was given a lot of criticism about wanting to maintain 'education of girls' rather than 'gender equity'. People were fairly ... [certain] several years ago that what has happened now would happen with the term of 'gender'... that's when there became more of a focus on the need to look at basically if anything is going to change for girls, things have to change for boys and that as well ... obviously. But there was that fear, and that concern quite rightly that the focus would swing over to boys. (**D**)

Likewise, **C** referred to the presence of a 'power imbalance' in the policy realm, which served to threaten the feminist policy workers' interests:

we also knew we were on a slide because given the power imbalance, if the focus was going to 'ed[ucation] of boys', they weren't going to be looking

at 'girls'. ... [S]o we knew it would be 'boys' when it became 'gender equity'. We were fearful about the 'girls'. The language was there about 'girls and boys' but we knew where the power lay. We knew we're still in a patriarchal society. And so we tried to, you know, claw in and get along. (C)

Like **D** above, **C** understood the shift in policy focus to 'gender' as a threat to the interests of the feminist policy workers because, despite references in the policy focus to 'girls and boys', it would move the agenda to 'boys' at the expense of 'girls'.

**C** also described attempting to achieve her particular theoretical perspective in the rewrite and recast of the national *Gender Equity Framework* (Gender Equity Taskforce, 1997).<sup>6</sup> The consultancy group undertaking this rewrite were not familiar with the term 'gender' and hence sought assistance from the working group, of which **C** was a member. **C** described preparing for a meeting with one of the members of the consultancy group by compiling notes on the theoretical understanding of 'gender' as a construction:

None of them know one blind thing about 'gender' and in a sense expect the working group and the jurisdictions to teach them about it. ... And it's when [X], who's my line manager here ... When he and I had a meeting with [Y] as a consultant, [Y] took notes. He didn't record. [X] and I had notes in front of us. We had met beforehand and made our point about our policy position. Yes, on the theoretical position of social and cultural and historical construction of gender da de da. And because this person didn't know anything about it, when we got his notes back to check, we might have been at two different meetings. And [X] and I did a huge job, in fact it wasn't just re-writing, we sent in all our notes, we sent three sets of papers, to inform ... I mean we got a huge shock. I actually thought that he might have been more careful about writing down various terms we used and so on, but he didn't. He changed it into language he knew, so there was a completely different set of notes. And that language, they clearly don't know anything about the language that supports understanding social construction of gender as a very hopeful platform. That means, you know, human-making, we can change things, change has happened, change can ... well, we're hopeful. (C, emphases added)

The attention paid by **C** to the theoretical underpinnings of her position and of particular policy language was refreshing indeed. Nevertheless, this quote reveals how **C**'s policy work involved attempts to give a particular meaning to 'gender' which reflected her preferred theoretical approach. It also shows how terminology can be slippery and take on

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<sup>6</sup> The rewrite of the *Gender Equity Framework* was initiated by the Report, *Boys: Getting it Right* (Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002).

different meanings in different peoples' hands. Policy work here was directed at meaning-making and struggles between competing meanings and theoretical positions. In other instances C also described circulating material on her preferred language and the meanings behind it: 'we wrote bits and put things out' (C). This work captures the sense of policy workers as brokers for particular interests and understandings in specific policy areas (see Chapter 5).

Meaning-making work assumes, therefore, that policy workers can always rationally identify and fight for their own distinct interests, an assumption underpinned by the logic of rationality and the logic of agency. While actively advocating specific preferred language is reasonable on the level of consciously-held beliefs or articulated interests, it comes at the expense of obscuring deeply-held assumptions that *influence decisions around preferred policy language*. As argued throughout this thesis, policy workers are located within discourses, including discourses around specific policy areas. Further, the emphasis on fighting for or defending feminist interests captured in policy language and concerns can lead to an ignoring of the wider discursive effects of policy language. For example, C described fighting to name a seminar series in a particular way:

It was my idea to have this 'ed[ucation] of boys and gender equity seminar series'. ... had to use the term 'ed[ucation] of boys'. I had a lot of resistance from our 'ed[ucation] of boys' project officer about putting 'gender' in. He said it would turn everybody off and they wouldn't come. I thought 'no, I am going to have it'. And so we had a, it had to be mediated just about. But we got in 'ed[ucation] of boys and gender equity seminar series'. (C)

C saw this tussle over the inclusion of the term 'gender equity' as a victory in defending her interests. However, the combination of 'education of boys and gender equity' leaves 'girls' as the absent presence in 'gender equity', rendering girls as 'gendered' and 'boys' as naturalised. Indeed, at other times, as we will see below, C lamented precisely this gendering and hence problematising of girls. The emphasis on struggles over various language that reflects competing interests obscures the broader discursive effects of particular policy language and policy workers' location within dominant discourses around specific policy areas.

Similarly, paying attention to some language and fighting to achieve the inclusion of specific words, say, in the introduction of a document may draw attention away from the

rest of the document and how it constructs policy problems in particular ways that have effects. For instance, with respect to the main curriculum document at the time, the *SACSA Framework* (Department of Education, Training and Employment and Catholic Education, 2001), **B** said:

I ... [was] assured by the fact that it had that introduction that the rest of it was ok, but the rest of it isn't always ok. So there's this ... [assumption that] if you can put a patch on something, or a bit of light, use a couple of those words that are right, then everything's right and it's not. (**B**)

Emphasising agential meaning-making work can come at the expense of deeper critique within policy work, in particular at the expense of awareness of shared assumptions, of what areas do not get addressed, and of the role of language in the constructed and constitutive character of policies.

Contests over language were also often about a desire to reflect reality accurately. Indeed, **B** described some policy workers fighting to include the expression 'particular groups of girls and boys being disadvantaged' in curriculum documents 'because they didn't want "all groups of girls and boys" because of this thing about ... some girls are going really, really well now' (**B**). **C** also worked on the curriculum document. Her comments about the language of focusing on 'particular boys and girls' similarly captured this searching for more accurate language that reflects the reality of boys' and girls' lives:

and trying to get better at how you would deal with the complexity, like we still don't have the language for being, and even the ideas, haven't got either, really. We've got some ideas! About how you deal with the complexity that you've got to be able to think of more than one thing at a time ... Like lately the catchcry has been 'gender jigsaw' and Jane Kenway's term the 'which boys, which girls'.<sup>7</sup> *As long as it doesn't mean leaving out gender.* If you say 'it's poor girls and poor boys, it's Aboriginal girls and Aboriginal boys', there is a tendency to look at 'Aboriginality' and the 'construction of poverty' and not at the 'construction of gender'. I mean 'gender' is such a slippery thing, it just doesn't get picked up in the same way. *So how ... do you talk about these complexities, and this unfixed moving thing that absolutely sticks kids in places, sticks pins in them, in places even though it's dynamic and their acting it out differently in different ways. Like, how [do] you do it?* (**C**, emphases added)

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<sup>7</sup> The emphasis on 'gender jigsaw' and 'which girls, which boys' directs attention to different groups of girls and different groups of boys. See, for example, Collins, Kenway and McLeod (2000) and Teese *et al.* (1995).

While the beginning of this quote could be seen as addressing the discursive effect of how issues are conceived and addressed, underpinning this quote is the logic of rationality and its emphasis on trying accurately to reflect and capture reality; in this instance, what it is that ‘sticks kids in places’.

Similarly, A understood ‘counter-hegemonic’ policy work as using language to draw policy attention to previously unaddressed pre-existing problems. To recap briefly the discussions in Chapters 6 and 7, A’s focus in counter-hegemonic work was on policy workers achieving their preferred emphasis at the agenda-setting stage of policy. Furthermore, A understood her preferred agenda as capturing pre-existing problems in the world, edifying the operation of the logic of rationality. Missed in such a perspective was the way in which A talked about her preferred agenda in terms of the ‘inequality of girls’, drawing attention away from the ‘advantage’ of boys (Eveline, 1994). Again, the logics of rationality and agency shaped the subjectivities of the policy workers. They purposively fought for their articulated interests, which were understood as capturing reality, obscuring their shared assumptions with the broader bureaucracy with respect to specific policy areas and obscuring the discursive effects of those shared assumptions.

### *Multiple meanings of language*

We have seen above that at times the policy workers understood terminology as aligning with theoretical meanings and interests and hence went into battle over language. Nevertheless, lost battles were not necessarily cause for despair. Some of the policy workers saw room to reconceptualise and reframe terms they had resisted. They recognised that language was not fixed and could take on different meanings. For example, C, like B above, referred to the multiple meanings of ‘gender’. She felt that when ‘gender’ was first introduced within the mainstream it meant drawing attention to ‘boys’. Then ‘gender’ became understood as meaning attention to issues for ‘girls’ at the expense of ‘boys’. And during both these phases it tended to be used in essentialist ways to mean biological ‘sex’ rather than ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ and the ‘performance of gender’:

But lately what’s happened because I’m now Gender Equity, I am the only one left with Gender in the name ... I am automatically assumed to be girls. So ‘gender’ now means ‘girls’. Whereas in 1995 when it began to increasingly take over as a term it was ‘boys’, people thought more ‘oh, lets get the boys in’. And the understanding of gender as a social construction



was not high. People used the term ‘gender’ then and they use it now to mean a whole number of things. (C)

The term ‘gender’, therefore, took on a number of different meanings in this one policy area.

On one level the multiple meanings of terms makes it very difficult for policy workers whose work involves a focus on meaning-making, as we saw above in C’s attempt to achieve her theoretical understanding of gender in the rewrite of the *Gender Equity Framework* (Gender Equity Taskforce, 1997). Somewhat paradoxically, however, it is through this contested meaning of language that there is room for change in the way we understand issues; it creates space to reconceptualise terms. For example, C talked about needing to ‘reconceptualise’ terms such as equity so as to ensure that gender was understood as socially, culturally, and historically specific. She also talked generally about attempting to reframe terms the policy workers had been unsuccessful at resisting – just as gender had been reframed:

language has been very important and we’ve tried to stay in that game of language but we haven’t always been successful so that has meant we have had to take the terms and then work again on trying to pack more into them or undo them, you know deconstruct them, to get more out of them as it were. (C)

There is an important difference here between working to reconceptualise a term and the notion of strategically using the preferred policy language and focuses to maintain one’s own policy agenda, which, as was captured in the first section of this chapter, renders language irrelevant. In trying to reconceptualise a term policy workers are *engaging* with language and are attempting to recreate meaning rather than ignoring it. It is in this space that lost initial battles over terminology may not necessarily be a reason for despair. However, there are dominant understandings of specific terms that make reconceptualising language a difficult task. Further, reconceptualising terms is still working with language on a meaning-making level, not taking the next step of looking at the discursive character of policies and their effects. Indeed, the logics of rationality and agency led to an emphasis on the policy workers’ articulated interests. Nevertheless, recognising the multiple meanings associated with specific terms is an important step towards policy work directed at disrupting the discursive effects of particular policy focuses. It allows for recognition of the constructed character of policy language, creating space for attention to *how* policies

constitute problems in particular ways that have effects on people and social relations, a point gestured towards in C's reference above to 'undoing' or 'deconstructing' language, and taken up in more detail below.

This section has demonstrated that the policy realm in this case study involved policy work directed at language use and the meanings given to language. Such work was refreshing for its attention to policy language, indicating a tentative move towards an understanding of policy-as-discourse. Nevertheless, this work was often constrained by the logics of rationality and agency such that policy work around policy language was frequently limited to strategic meaning-making work and searching for the *accurate* theoretical understanding of the problem (see also Chapter 6). This approach to policy reflects the work of Taylor (1997), Taylor *et al.* (1997) and Bessant *et al.* (2006), discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, which while acknowledging meanings and discourses in policies lapses into a structured interaction approach to policy-making. Such policy work came at the expense of failing to pay attention to the discursive impact of policy language and policy workers' location within specific policy discourses. An emphasis on meaning-making work draws attention away from policy workers' own assumptions and presuppositions with respect to particular policy areas. The emphasis on the theoretical underpinnings, or meanings, of policies, therefore, needs to be combined with some reflection by the policy workers on their own location within particular substantive policy debates, which affects their (apparent) choice of preferred policy language. Such reflexivity, as argued in Chapter 6, could lead to deep consultation and a broadening of the social visions debated within policy work. Furthermore, the discursive effects of policy language, concerns and concepts (that is, policies) need to be included within any such reflections, such that debate moves from whether policies accurately capture the policy problem to the discursive impact of policies and how they fit with a broad range of social visions for the future.

### **THE DISCURSIVE EFFECTS OF POLICY LANGUAGE, CONCERNS AND CONCEPTS**

While the logic of rationality (and the logic of agency) remained hegemonic in the case study policy realm in regards to the ways in which the policy workers conceptualised

policy language, there was a sub-dominant and underdeveloped conceptualisation of policy language consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse. There were moments in the interviews when the policy workers conceptualised policy language, concerns and concepts as having wide-ranging discursive effects. They talked about particular policies as problematising girls, creating them as deficient; creating silences by leaving some issues unaddressed and restricting what could be said; and, creating the future. Further, and most promisingly, the policy workers undertook policy work directed at addressing *how* policy language constructed policy problems in particular ways. These moments indicate ways of conceptualising and performing policy consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse, and hence are explored in some detail here. However, this perspective remained sub-dominant. As will become apparent, contemporaneous with such discussions were often assumptions of the logics of rationality and agency, drawing the policy workers' attention away from the full impact of the discursive character of policy language and focuses. Furthermore, as stated (see Chapter 7), the policy workers did not apply the insights they made about the discursive effects of policy language to their conceptualisations of the effects of policies per se, rendering policy language as separate from policy.

### **Policy Problematisations, Creating Subjects and Misdiagnosing the Problem**

The understanding of the discursive character of policy language was present in the interviews when the policy workers emphasised that policy language, focuses and concepts represented particular problematisations, which had discursive effects on individuals and social relations. For example, while **D** overall felt positive about the 'social justice' policy concern as it allowed for specifying different groups of girls, she was concerned about a possible problematising of people in a policy focus that entailed a search for indicators of disadvantage:

So that idea of people needing to show that they are worse off than anyone else was I think where some of the focus was supported for just looking at the person as being the problem. So the girl was seen as problematic. (**D**)

Further, **D** was aware that one possible consequence of addressing diversity amongst girls and of broadening the focus beyond girls, was that the various targeted groups would be reduced to being in competition:

So what often happens with the notion of ‘multiple disadvantage’ ... [is] the idea that the different layers of disadvantage just built up so ... if you are an Aboriginal girl with one leg and from a certain suburb you were much more disadvantaged than if you were a white middle-class girl. Now, in effect, that could be true through some people’s experiences. But the idea of piling them on top of each other rather than how they interact together often meant that the way you tried to get people to take up your ideas or to do anything really was to show how badly off people were. So the way [you] tried to convince people in schools was to show, ‘look at the levels of rape’, ‘look at the levels of da de da. So to paint a really bleak picture *so then what happened or still happens is you get the people who are looking at racism in competition with the people who ... may be looking at disability* (D, emphasis added)

There was some sense in these quotes of the discursive effects of policy concerns: that emphasising different groups could create competition between groups as well as problematising the members of specific groups. Further, D also understood this policy focus as shaping the way people undertook policy work: policy workers used statistical data to try to achieve a positioning of a group as the most disadvantaged. There was recognition here of how a particular policy focus shaped social relations and subjectivities.

C similarly talked about wanting to reject a policy focus on ‘sex-role socialisation’ because it located the problem in parents and in the media:

sex-role socialisation was still a favourite thing with people, people would slip into that quite easily. ... But the sex-role socialisation is comfortable because it doesn’t [challenge schools or the system of schooling]. It’s always someone else ... the wrong role models, the media ... [I]t doesn’t look at ... the kids themselves, the teacher, the institution of schooling. ... [Y]ou can push things away and blame the parents because they’re wrong. Still do, they still do. (C)<sup>8</sup>

Here, C understood the policy focus on ‘sex-role socialisation’ as blaming the parents and the media, evincing a recognition that it is crucially important to reflect upon how policies problematise an issue. C also had a clear concern about how particular policy focuses contained silences, a concern returned to below.

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<sup>8</sup> This comment from C was interesting as most of the policy workers talked about the sex-role socialisation theory as creating girls as the problem and asking them to change, something the policy workers rejected. Nevertheless, we can see here an understanding of policy-as-discourse, as problematising people and leaving structural arrangements unaddressed.

The discursive effects of particular policy concerns were also captured by the policy workers in the brief moments when they understood policy language and focuses as empowering or disempowering particular groups of people. **G** identified a ‘kind of fight back about victimhood’ as affecting the preferred policy agenda of the policy workers and leading to new types of language:

**G:** [A]nother [factor affecting the policy agenda] was a kind of fight back about victimhood. If you are defined as a member of a group, is this pejorative or not? Is it empowering or not? ... [H]ow does that work in policy terms in ways that sustain and maintain people, not define them down or out. So I think people were grappling with that, hence some of the new, newer language.

**Zoë:** Like trying to move away from the deficit model?<sup>9</sup>

**G:** Well, people called it a deficit model. I never knew if it was that or just descriptive. I was never clear. But I do think the terms that we used like ‘aggregate of disadvantage’ is a little bit deficit ... more than a little. But that grappling with trying to say what’s a cumulative impact. Is there a cumulative impact? What does that feel and look like in your life? It’s really hard to find that language. And then use it in policy terms because if your policies aren’t based on an understanding of those things, well then they’re no use to anybody. So, they were really big things, I think.

In this quote **G** slipped from talking about the discursive effects of language to referring to language as descriptive, revealing the hegemony of the logic of rationality. She started by asking what it meant to define people in groups and whether this empowered particular people or not, yet then proceeded to suggest that if the policy language did not accurately capture the reality of people’s lives the policy would be of ‘no use to anybody’. Ultimately, the assumption was that language was ‘descriptive’ and needed accurately to capture the issues, rather than that it was constitutive, creating girls as deficient or as disempowered victims. Such constitutive consequences render a policy as harmful for particular groups of people, rather than being merely of ‘no use’.

A number of other policy workers talked about how specific policy concerns created a deficit model of girls and consequently produced girls as problematic, yet fell back into assuming the existence of pre-existing problems. For example, while, as we saw above, **A** talked about seeing shifts in terminology generally as ‘superficial matters’ directed by the

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 3, and below, for a discussion of the deficit model of girls in some policy approaches. Briefly, this term captures the way in which some policies directed attention towards ‘fixing’ girls (to be more like boys) as though girls were the problem.

whims of government, she made a few exceptions. She described how the policy shift to ‘gender inclusivity’ was a means through which the policy workers addressed how previous policy focuses had problematised girls:<sup>10</sup>

I think it was Jean Blackburn.<sup>11</sup> I can remember when we all went away to somewhere, Victor Harbour, and she said ‘look we just can’t keep saying this is just about girls and as if girls have got a problem, you know there’s “girls and maths” and “girls and this” and “girls and that” ... [W]e’ve got to get back to a wider understanding’, and I think ... that the notion that it was about ‘gender inclusivity’ which we saw [as being] about putting girls back into the curriculum ... it was more about saying ‘let’s move, try and move from a deficit model to’ ... it was also to problematise maths. So is it the problem is ‘girls’, and maths is a neutral thing? Or, is it that ‘maths’ has been constructed in a certain way that makes it a problem for girls? ... So that’s what we were trying to achieve. (A)

A understood particular policy focuses and policy language, therefore, as creating girls as deficient and hence problematic. She was concerned, too, that some issues, such as the content of curriculum, had not been addressed in the previous policies, a point I return to below. Yet, at the same time, the logic of rationality operated to direct A’s attention to the accuracy of the policy focus. Indeed, A immediately went on to talk about some shifts in policy focus, including the shift to ‘gender inclusivity’, as reflecting an ‘increased sophistication of understanding’ of the problem. In contrast, I argue that it is important to recognise that particular policy concerns do not simply misdiagnose pre-existing problems, because we cannot understand a problem outside of the way we talk about it. What is significant about the policy-as-discourse approach I espouse, and which is captured momentarily in the quote from A above, is that these different policy languages (and the discourses of which they form a part) have different *effects*. Of the policy concerns in the example above, the policy focus on ‘girls’ located the problem in the individual while the policy focus on the ‘curriculum’ located the problem in broader systems of schooling. The

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<sup>10</sup> See the first section of this Chapter for a discussion of how A’s internalisation and interiorisation of the logics of agency and rationality led her to assume that only those policy focuses she saw as originating with the policy workers corresponded to significant shifts in policy concerns or attention.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Blackburn was a well-known South Australian influential within education, at both the federal and state levels (Allen, 2002). Most notably, she was involved in the writing of the federal Australian Schools Commission’s report *Schools in Australia* (Karmel, 1973), which is generally understood as initiating progressive changes in education around Australia (Allen, 2002). Further, with respect to girls and education, she was involved in writing the federal *Girls, School and Society* (Schools Commission, 1975), which is credited with changing the shape of the education of girls agenda across Australia. Interestingly, Allen (2002, 257) suggests that Blackburn was a Marxist feminist, hostile to postmodern and radical feminisms.

question becomes – do we want to blame individuals or society for social/educational problems? And what effects would this attribution of responsibility have on people’s subjectivities and on social relations? Addressing such questions moves debate away from whether language presents the problem accurately to the ways in which it contributes to shaping the future, and whether this fits with our particular social vision (Bacchi, 1999a, 63).

Similarly, **D** described the way that the gender and education unit attempted to move the policy focus from sex-role socialisation theory because this theory made girls the problem:

That was the dominant view ... ‘sex-role socialisation’ theory. ... It was very much that if we have more women doing things then the world will change because girls will want to do it. ... *The focus of a lot of people was on changing girls. OK that the problem’s girls.* ... So ‘broadening post-school options’, for example, was a priority and ... I even did them at Port Augusta High when I started teaching, you ran TAFE programs for girls to come and try TAFE stuff, they would supposedly take them up. Whereas there was understanding, certainly in the girls’ unit and other people, but not necessarily widespread, some of the research said that girls are only going to become apprentices really if they’ve got a father or a brother who’s done it and that’s not about role modelling, well it is but it’s not about same-sex-role modelling. So that was being questioned but you did it in strategic ways because it was still useful to keep Section 47<sup>12</sup>, obviously. (**D**, emphasis added)

In this quote, policy focuses again were conceptualised in ways consistent with both the understanding of policy-as-discourse and policy as problem-solving, despite the tensions between these ways of understanding the workings of policy. To recap briefly, as indicated throughout, understanding policies as problem solving assumes that there is a pre-existing problem in the world to be identified and solved, while a policy-as-discourse understanding of policy maintains that any policy solution contains within it a particular construction of the problem, which has effects on people and social relations (Bacchi, 1999a). When **D** talked about the way in which the policy focus on ‘sex-role socialisation’ theory represented girls as the problem, she could have been talking about policy-as-discourse. However, the logic of rationality led **D** to look for research that supported her alternative policy emphasis. In such policy work, policy focuses become about accurately identifying and solving problems. Indeed, when we look further at **D**’s references to

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<sup>12</sup> **D** was referring here to Section 47 of the South Australian *Equal Opportunities Act 1984*, which allows for the appointment of women teachers partly in order to provide positive role models for girls.

research that identified household role modelling as important, **D** was rejecting the policy concern with 'sex-role socialisation' not because it problematised girls but because she saw it as a misdiagnosis of the 'real' problem. **D** had internalised and interiorised the logic of rationality. Indeed, her attention to the role modelling that fathers and brothers provided was still about changing girls, leaving the norm (the valuing of traditionally male professions) unchallenged. Furthermore, **D** proceeded to endorse the strategy in the gender and education unit of emphasising role models, despite **D**'s and the unit's private rejection of the accuracy of such an emphasis. This strategy involved an attempt to retain Section 47 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* (SA), which allowed for the appointment of women teachers partly on the basis of providing role models for girls. **D**'s endorsement of this strategy reveals that she, and the unit more broadly for that matter, understood the policy focus on 'same-sex role models' as inaccurate only, rather than damaging to girls.

In summary, the policy workers at times acknowledged the ways in which specific policy focuses created particular types of subjects and problematised some people. They also undertook policy work directed at addressing the effects they identified as problematic. Present here was a welcome conceptualisation of policy language consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse: policy language and focuses were understood as containing particular concepts or constructions of the problem, which had discursive effects. However, the logic of rationality operated to create the assumption that in the end policy focuses with these effects simply misdiagnosed the *real* problem. This perspective echoes Taylor *et al.*'s (1997, 52) emphasis on the ineffectiveness of some constructions of policy problems (see Chapters 1 and 7). However, as argued in Chapter 1, understanding particular policy focuses as misdiagnosing the problem and hence as being ineffective in solving problems overlooks the full impact of the discursive effects of particular policies on people and social relations.

### **Policy Silences**

The policy workers also captured the discursive character of policy language in their attention to how particular policy focuses created silences, limiting what could be said and restricting which issues were addressed. The awareness of these consequences of policy language and focuses could be seen particularly in the policy workers' discussions of the policy focus on 'boys' and 'gender'. Perhaps the policy workers were most aware of the discursive effects of policy language when it came to this particular policy focus because



the policy workers felt that, within the other policy concerns, they had managed to maintain an emphasis on girls (whatever the terms of that emphasis were), which tended to be seen as corresponding to the policy workers' feminist interests (see above). When it came to the move to a policy focus on 'gender' and then 'boys', the policy workers started to refer to the way these terms made it difficult to talk about girls. **F** described

starting to feel, be very conscious of the fact that it was difficult to mention 'girls', it was starting to get difficult to talk about that in that way, you could talk about 'gender', and you could talk about 'boys', but not 'girls' in the same way. (**F**)

Similarly, while we saw above that **G** did not place much emphasis on the words of policy documents, she did tend to relate the policy focus on 'gender equity' to an emphasis on 'boys' at the expense of failing to pay attention to issues for 'girls': "Gender equity" I think marks a shift in, well a backlash I would say. "Boys issues" marks the winning of the backlash' (**G**). Further, she felt that the policy focus on 'gender' made it difficult to address particular issues for 'girls':

Because ... ['gender'] meant 'boys and girls'. It meant the focus changed from 'education of girls'. And so then the arguments become, 'but, look, all these boys don't succeed in year twelve'. The fact that girls might succeed in year twelve and their employment prospects [are limited] is never a topic. So, they use the outcomes language because we taught it to them very well. But then [they] don't do the next level of analysis about 'well, yes there are more girls at university. What are they studying? What are their incomes? And what happens five years down the track?' Or, 'yes there [are] more women working ... [but] how casualised is their work?' (**G**)

**G** here was highlighting that policy focuses and language set limits on what was addressed by particular policies. But **G**'s response to these restrictions was to attempt to search for the type of research data that would support her prior position that girls were disadvantaged in comparison to boys, which she talked about as the 'truth'. Obscured in such policy work were **G**'s own values and the effects of a policy focus on statistics and outcomes (see Chapters 6 and 7). We can see here that despite the recognition of the silencing achieved by some policy focuses, the logic of rationality produced policy workers as rational, undertaking policy work directed at discovering the truth.

The policy workers were also aware that the status quo was often left unchallenged because of the ways in which particular policy concerns limited what was addressed as a

problem. For example, **B** did not like the focus on ‘gender inclusive’ education because she saw it as being about including outsiders (i.e., girls) within the mainstream, leaving the mainstream unchallenged:

I think it’s that thing about ... here’s the mainstream and let’s include them in, it’s that same notion about ‘social inclusion’<sup>13</sup> now ... like you poor people out here who haven’t got any jobs ... we’ll just bring you in to the main fold as if ... you have been left out there. ... [I]t’s patronising, I think, and it doesn’t ever question anything. (**B**)

We can see here that **B** understood policies as constructing people in particular ways, as abnormal, while leaving widely accepted social conditions unexamined.

In an attempt to disrupt the status quo, **C** endeavoured to move away from a deficit or needy model of kids, which labelled particular groups of children as problematic, and instead to turn attention to the curriculum. In discussing the department-wide curriculum policy, the *SACSA framework* (Department of Education, Training and Employment and Catholic Education, 2001), she said:

[W]e knew the language was all-important, so when we had a role on getting a group together, an equity role, and this group was called, I think it was ... ‘curriculum justice’, and in the eyes of other policy officers and our leaders in here it was supposed to be about how you cater for, you know, negotiated education plans for students, gifted and talented students and for students with disabilities, it was about ESL, to get non-English speaking learners into the English language and into the curriculum. All extremely important, all extremely important things but at one level of focusing on, in a sense, *still deficits in kids*. ... *It’s all sort of ‘these kids are not the norm’*. What we wanted ... to do in this is to expand it to say it’s not only about these pathways in some kids to slide along and then get in to what is still, still that kind of academic, competitive curriculum, Western. *What we want to do is change, transform curriculum, transform all curriculum so it is for all kids. So this is another thing altogether. So we changed the terms of reference of that group and the Equity Futures<sup>14</sup> material is sort of the end thing out of that*. ... while it’s been accepted, it’s not gained a place in the sun yet. ... But we’re talking about big things ... *We still get mainly this kind of thing about the needs of kids, which is ... they’re needy. Like, all kids need things. We want to go bigger and within that, if we look at everybody, students are socially and culturally diverse, which would include a whole lot of different ways of expressing gender, a whole lot of*

<sup>13</sup> **B** was referring here to the South Australian Rann Labor Government’s emphasis, following the British Blair Labour Government, on ‘social inclusion’ (see, for example, South Australian Government, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> **C** was referring to the professional development materials, *SACSA Framework: Equity Futures – Professional Development* (Department of Education, Training and Employment (undated, circa 2003).

*different intersections with different things, different sexualities and so on. So that's what we are trying to do. (C, emphases added)*

Again there was a sense here that policy language and focuses create subjectivities for people and leave some areas unaddressed. Further, **C** was clear that such discursive effects of policy focuses needed to be addressed in policy work, which is a theme returned to below.

**F**, too, talked about specific policy focuses constructing the problem in particular ways that limited possible initiatives. She felt that a focus on 'same treatment', captured in terms such as 'equity' and 'equality', created the problem as 'different treatment', and limited attention to 'differences' amongst groups:

But when people just wanted to talk about 'equity', and 'equality', they wanted to talk about everything being the same and everyone being treated the same and what that didn't allow for was that there needed to be quite different initiatives in relation to different issues and different groups. ... Treating everyone the same does not achieve equality. And that was one of the things that we were constantly grappling with, that understanding. Because I think that still exists. That 'if I treat them all the same, everything will be fine, so that's what I do'.

So some of those [terms], I think, did work against us, slowed things down. And perpetuated that thing about 'well, if I do it all the same well that's it, that's all I have to do'. (**F**)

For **F**, policy terms that emphasised 'same treatment' ignored differences and hence precluded different treatment, perpetuating present inequalities within society. Of course, **F** was also assuming that her understanding of current inequalities was accurate. Yet, treating people differently, which was her call, comes with its own discursive effects, such as problematising categories of people. We saw above how **D** understood policies that focused on the differences between groups of girls as often creating those groups in competition. Indeed, feminists have long referred to the 'dilemma of difference' (Minow, 1990) created by wanting neither to reinforce the current state of play nor to categorise women as different and hence problematic. The point is that there is no easy answer to this dilemma because both 'same treatment' and 'different treatment' have constitutive effects, a point eschewed by **F** in regards to her own preference (see Chapter 6). I argue, therefore, that we need to acknowledge that *all* policy focuses have discursive effects and that these effects need to be debated with reference to a broad range of social visions.

## Creating the Future

Infrequently the policy workers linked their acknowledgement of the discursive character of policy language to the future, emphasising the productive character of policy language. We have seen a few references in the above quotes to poststructuralism and an emphasis on ‘construction of gender’ as being more positive in terms of achieving change for the future. Similarly, we saw that **G** conceptualised some policy focuses as ‘aspirational’. **B** too understood particular terms as reflecting particular goals or visions of the world. With respect to the term ‘gender equity’, she said: ‘I don’t know, do we want gender equality? I don’t know if this is really what we want so I don’t know if that helped’. Here, **B** had turned her attention to the particular future she desired and was considering whether a policy focus would lead to that social vision, rather than assessing whether the policy focus accurately described the problem.<sup>15</sup>

Further, **B** saw the policy focus on ‘construction of gender’ as allowing for an understanding of how the world can be created:

The focus for ‘gender construction’ was great because that meant we could bring in ... talking about notions of gender and young women and young men together ... working together for a future. It was really useful for that ... and so we did a lot of stuff with future in regards to, you know, ‘what kind of future do we want?’ About ... no violence, about respect for relations, you could do a lot of stuff using that and it was really hopeful so I think it was good. Much perhaps more than ‘equal opportunity’, I mean ... it’s hideous, really, become a boy. That’s all that was about. You know? And no pleasure. Because we used to be able to talk about pleasure and ... dressing up and doing all these things, it’s ok ... you play, you put on different performance[s] for different occasions and that’s fine. So it was much more sort of playful kind of philosophy and theory than ‘equal opportunity’ ... So I think it’s much more playful, much more meaningful, but it’s harder for people to grapple because ... you can’t grab it and hold, you can’t go, ‘Well, I want this many girls to be engineers’. You can’t do that to it. You’ve got to go ‘well, you know, I want the engineers to be, you know, flowing gender performers’. (**B**)

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<sup>15</sup> Note, however, that **B** did skim over the term ‘equity’, describing it as a ‘misnomer’, and moved to talking about ‘gender equality’. This approach reflects Pateman’s (1981, 21) tendency to conflate equity and equality. Such an approach misses the ways in which ‘equity’ often takes on different meanings to ‘equality’ (Macintyre, 1981, 39) which, I suggest, is the case in the changing focuses in the gender and education policy area discussed in Chapter 3.

**B** understood the policy focus on ‘construction of gender’ as creating space for discussions of the future for girls and boys. Further, **B** understood not only gender but also policy problems as constructed, which was evident in the way she talked about the policy emphasis on ‘equal opportunity’ creating ‘boys’ as the ideal, and hence problematising ‘girls’. This emphasis on the future should be embraced because it emphasises the creative character of policy language and focuses. Such a perspective creates space for the social visions underlying problem representations to be debated (Bacchi, 1999a, 62), a debate which needs to include people from a broad range of social locations (Chapter 6). However, it is significant that this deep critique of specific policy focuses occurred in the context of discussions of *policy language and focuses* rather than in discussions of the *effects of policies* generally (Chapter 7) because it reduces the significance of such insights. Obscured here is the way in which policy language and focuses and the concepts, or understandings of the world, they contain form particular policy constructions. The discursive effects of *policy language and focuses* are not separate from the discursive effects of *policies*.

### **Addressing the Discursive Effects of Policy Language**

As is apparent, understanding the full extent of the creative character of policy language means moving attention from accurately diagnosing the problem to recognising the constructed and constitutive character of policy focuses. Very occasionally such recognition led to policy work directed at *addressing* the discursive character of policy language, concerns and concepts. For example, **C** understood the language of ‘disadvantage’ as leaving unaddressed the ‘advantaged’ in society, those who benefit from the status quo, and attempted to redress this silence in her policy work:

I just want to say that commonly the term ‘disadvantage’ is used without saying ‘advantaged’. What we want to do is say ‘advantage/disadvantage’. That we need to be looking at the ‘advantaged’ as well as the ‘disadvantaged’. In that the ‘advantaged’ are only ‘advantaged’ to carry on the same kind of inequitable, unjust society that always has been. ... [T]hat divide between ‘advantaged’ and ‘disadvantaged’ in any kind of group or situation needs to be explicitly understood.

... some people ... only want to focus on, and they do focus on, a ‘disadvantaged’ group, but it’s looking at fixing them up, it’s looking at the deficit group. (C)

Here, C was pointing out that there were silences in particular policy constructions of ‘disadvantage’, such as a lack of attention to the ways in which some people benefit from current social and economic arrangements. She also highlighted the ways in which some people became problematic or the deficit group. Rather than asserting what the ‘real’ problem was, as sometimes happened when the policy workers identified silences accompanying particular policy focuses, C attempted to draw attention to the *work* done by a particular policy language. She drew attention to the silencing achieved by the particular construction of ‘disadvantage’ through highlighting ‘advantage’.<sup>16</sup> Focusing on the discursive effects of language and emphasising *how* these consequences are achieved creates space to disrupt the ways in which an issue is understood. As Reekie notes, ‘A focus on language and *how it constructs social reality* allows us to analyse the ways in which social problems are written, and hence re-write them’ (Reekie, 1994, 462, emphasis added). However, this is not a simple matter of policy workers attempting to recreate meanings that reflect the policy workers’ interests, which would fall back into meaning-making work. Rather, there needs to be attention to *how* policies take on particular meanings, which have discursive *effects* on people and social relations.

Many theorists have drawn attention to the significance and techniques of language, words and talk in policy (Bacchi, 1999a, 41; Reekie, 1994; Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 300-315). Language labels and categorises – talking about ‘girls’ or ‘boys’, for example, distinguishes between different types of ‘students’. Conversely, language can silence and erase some key issues – referring to ‘girls’ erases the differences amongst those who fit within this category. Similarly, through the use of metaphor, connotations are attached to concepts (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 305-315). For example, debate in Western society is described and talked about through the metaphor of war such that we *win* or *lose* arguments, take a particular *line of attack* and so on (Bessant *et al.*, 2006, 306). This metaphor produces argument and debate in terms of people from competing sides protecting their interests, indeed an understanding that has appeared often in the policy workers’ discussions about strategically making and ‘fighting for’ preferred policy meanings. This categorising, labelling, silencing and shaping produced by language has effects in constituting subjects and social relations, yet language often appears neutral or commonsensical. It is crucial, therefore, for policy workers to be aware of these functions

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<sup>16</sup> Eveline (1994) has highlighted the ways in which a focus on ‘disadvantage’ can hide ‘advantage’ and privilege.

and techniques of policy language in order to address the full range of the consequences of policy. Furthermore, as stated, this attention to how policies construct policy problems, which have discursive effects, needs to be combined with discussion of and debate around a broad range of social visions (Chapter 6).

While dominant understandings of terminology make deconstructing language a difficult task, this task is rendered entirely possible through two factors. First, there needs to be recognition of the constructed and hence changeable character of language, recognition assisted through the acknowledgment of the fractured and multiple meanings available in policy language and of the discursive effects that follow from particular meanings. Drawing attention to the constructed and constitutive character of discourses, such as language and policies, disrupts the meanings, subjectivities and social relations they create (Davies, 1994 and 2005, 2). Second, there needs to be the kinds of policy work called for in Chapter 6, which looks to disrupt hegemonic discourses through taking account of the policy workers' locatedness in specific policy debates. This disruption is achieved through deep consultation with a broad range of people who hold alternative social visions.

At times, therefore, the policy workers understood policy focuses as constructed and as constituting particular subjectivities, social relations, and silences. Further, this perspective directed the policy workers' work, particularly in terms of attempting to move away from specific policy problematisations. However, such understandings often sat alongside the assumption that particular problem representations misdiagnosed the real problem, at the ultimate expense of failing to pay sufficient attention to the discursive *effects* of such problem representations. Apparent here is the hegemony of the logic of rationality and the limits it sets on a fully developed conceptualisation of the impact of policy language and focuses. Nevertheless, the moments in the interviews when the policy workers turned their attention to the discursive effects of policy language, the social visions underlying policies, and the techniques of policy language indicate how policy workers could understand and approach policy language in ways consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that the logic of rationality circulated around the policy realm of the case study to limit the ways in which the policy workers understood and approached policy language. There were three conceptualisations of policy language at various times in the interviews. Firstly, language was seen either as descriptive or as superficial, as something around which one could manoeuvre, missing the concepts or meanings associated with policy language. Secondly, language was understood as containing meanings that reflected particular interests that needed to be either resisted or defended. While this understanding was welcome for its attention to policy language and associated concepts, it came at the cost of paying insufficient attention to the discursive *effects* of policy language. The logic of rationality underpinned both these understandings of and practices around policy language. Thirdly, language was conceptualised as having a range of discursive effects – problematising some individuals or groups, silencing important issues, creating subjectivities and social relations. For example, C explicitly drew attention to the ways in which policy language constructed policy problems with a range of important effects. In my view, it is this third perspective that needs to be embraced and developed.

In these brief moments the policy workers understood and approached policy language and concerns in ways consistent with an understanding of policy-as-discourse. They saw specific policy focuses as shaping subjects and social relations and silencing particular perspectives. However, the acknowledgement by the policy workers of the discursive effects of policy language, concerns and concepts also often coincided with attempts at accurately understanding the problem, impeding the kinds of insights that accompany an emphasis on discursive effects. Furthermore, this and the previous chapter combine to illustrate that these references to the discursive effects of policy language and concerns did not arise in the context of discussions of the *effects* of *policies*. There needs to be more discussion in the policy realm about the discursive effects of policy language and focuses in the context of how policies shape the future and whether these future subjectivities and social relations match our social visions. Further, this needs to occur in the context of policy workers being reflexive about their own assumptions and presuppositions so that a broader spectrum of social visions are included in such discussions.



## CONCLUSION

Conventional understandings of policy workers as humanist agents need to be challenged. As argued in this thesis, such understandings have deleterious effects for the ways in which policy work is performed and, hence, ultimately for substantive policy outcomes. As an alternative starting point for thinking about policy processes, this thesis advocates the idea of policy workers as located subjects who form part of the constructed and constitutive policy domain. Recognising policy workers' locatedness, it suggests, is a first step towards doing policy differently.

Central to this argument, as developed in Chapter 1, is an understanding of the policy realm as discourses, as constructed in particular ways that could be otherwise. More specifically, this thesis argues that there are two hegemonic discourses – the logic of agency and the logic of rationality – circulating around the policy realm, policy workers, and policy both in the academic literature and in the policy realm of this case study. These logics shape the ways in which policy workers are theorised, as is apparent in Part I of the thesis. They also, importantly, shape policy workers' subjectivities, contouring how policy workers think about and perform their work. This theme is developed in Parts II and III of the thesis where it becomes apparent that the policy workers in this particular policy realm performed policy work underpinned by the assumption that they *could* (logic of agency) *identify and solve* (logic of rationality) policy problems. They undertook policy work directed towards accurately understanding the 'facts' about problems in the world (logic of rationality) and strategically pursuing (their) solutions to these problems (logic of agency). Working within, rather than critically reflecting upon, these logics of rational policy making prevents policy analysis that addresses the ways in which policy workers are located subjects and policy proposals are discursively constructed, with particular effects for people and social relations.

In other words, the ways in which the hegemonic discourses of the logics of rationality and agency constructed policy workers as humanist agents restricted the type of policy work undertaken by policy workers. This subjectivity led the policy workers to conceptualise themselves as separate from, though strategically manoeuvring around, the external constraints imposed by the hierarchical policy realm (Part II). This perspective meant that

the policy workers focused on moments of conflict between policy workers and the policy realm generally, on moments of constraint and agency. The emphasis was on what the policy workers could fight to achieve, or at best what compromises they had gained. Such an emphasis on the struggles by the policy workers to achieve their feminist interests drew attention away from the internalised and interiorised constraints of the policy realm. Indeed, there were moments when at the same time as emphasising their feminist activism within and against the policy realm the policy workers took on as their own the limited policy goals of government. At times they uncritically accepted the discourses circulating around and within both the policy realm generally (the logic of agency and the logic of rationality) and specific policy areas (particular constructions of policy problems).

For example, in Chapters 4, 5 and 7, it became apparent that while at times the policy workers understood some changes in policy agendas as government-driven, such as the shift to a focus on 'social justice' and 'outcomes', at other times they took pride and ownership of these very agendas. Similarly, in Chapters 4 and 5, we saw that the policy workers' emphasis on their separateness from the policy realm masked the ways in which the policy workers became proud of their capacity to function successfully within the hierarchical policy realm, of their ability to be flexible, clever, strategic, entrepreneurial and to work fast, all essential features of rational policy-making. Furthermore, Chapter 5 elaborates the ways in which the emphasis on the policy workers' activism led them to focus on areas where they could 'get some movement', limiting the proposals pursued by policy workers to those which corresponded to the preferences of the broader bureaucracy. There was a tendency for policy workers to emphasise their successes in moments of contest and struggle against the broader bureaucracy/government, rather than further explore instances of consensus. This tendency evinces the logic of agency in regards to the policy realm generally. Again, in Chapter 8, we saw that at times the policy workers conceptualised their preferred policy language as influencing policy directions while the favoured framings by government were seen as superficial and easily manoeuvred around. The emphasis on the agency of the policy workers, on the *source* of policy terminology and focuses, directed attention away from the far-reaching *effects* of particular policy constructions, evincing the logic of rationality. The link between the logics of agency and rationality become apparent, reinforcing the argument in this thesis that they are part and parcel of the same humanist agent. Somewhat paradoxically, therefore, the very act of emphasising their separateness from the policy realm highlighted the policy workers'

internalisation and interiorisation of the logic of agency and the logic of rationality, revealing their locatedness within the bureaucratic realm.

Identifying the policy workers' locatedness within the policy realm highlights their (inadvertent) role in particular policy outcomes. It allows for an understanding of how the policy workers performed policy work in ways that uncritically assumed that policies responded to pre-existing problems. This was apparent in the ways in which the logic of rationality circulated around the policy workers' understandings of and approaches to policy values (Chapter 6), effects (Chapter 7), and language, concerns and concepts (Chapter 8). With respect to values, the logic of rationality masked the role of embedded values in the construction of policy problems and produced policy work that was generally directed at discovering the 'truth' about a policy issue rather than attempts to assess *how* an issue is constructed in particular ways in the first place. In regards to policy effects, it led policy workers to evaluate policies according to either the stated objectives of policies or the purposive practices of teachers, rather than according to the discursive effects of policies. The logic of rationality also operated to prevent policy workers from sufficiently addressing the productive character of policy language, concerns and concepts, neglecting the constructed and constitutive character of policies.

Importantly, then, the assumption of the logic of rationality around policy values, effects, and terminology and focuses led policy workers to perform policy work in ways that assumed that policies identified and solved pre-existing problems. The policy workers' only marginal attention to the discursively constructed character of policies meant that the policy workers ended up inadvertently reinforcing particular government policy constructions and the effects that followed from them. The task of this thesis has been to disrupt the hegemonic discourses of the policy realm so that these understandings and practices become unstable and so that policy work is performed in alternative ways, a theme I return to below.

This fundamental insight about the relationship between the policy realm, policy workers and policy work was made possible through an inter-disciplinary approach to policy. Extending the insights of policy-as-discourse theorists (Bacchi, 1999a; Ball, 1993, 1994 a; Taylor, 1997, Taylor *et al.*, 1997; Watt, 1993/94; Marginson, 1997; Bessant *et al.*, 2006) about the discursively constructed character of policies, facilitated an understanding of the

ways in which the policy realm is constructed and constitutive (Chapter 1). Similarly, some of the femocrat literature (Pringle and Watson, 1992, 70; Eisenstein, 1996, xviii; Kenway, 1990, 63; Franzway, Court and Connell, 1989, 149-150 and 154) on the non-unitary, non-fixed character of the state created space for this conceptualisation of the processes, procedures and practices of the policy realm playing a role in policy outcomes (Chapter 2). Then the policy-as-discourse theorists' (Bacchi, 1999a, 45; Marginson, 1997; Popkewitz and Lindblad, 2000; Popkewitz, 1998, 1; Ball, 1993, 14) insights about the effects of policies as discourses, particularly Marginson's work (Marginson, 1997) on the effects on people of policy discourses, indicated ways in which the discourses of the policy realm could create policy workers as particular types of subjects. Davies' feminist poststructuralism and her emphasis on the poststructuralist subject and subjectivities, Butler's (1999) work on performativity, and Foucault's (1980, 1983; Hall, 2001) conceptualisation of the productive character of power assisted in elaborating the ways in which the policy workers had particular subjectivities, affecting the ways in which they performed their work. Such an interdisciplinary approach draws attention to aspects of the policy realm and policy workers, and indeed consequences of policy work, that would be difficult to identify through an approach that worked within traditional categories in the policy analysis literature.

As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, the logics of agency and rationality circulated around the traditional policy literature on policy, the policy realm and policy workers. More specifically, we saw in Chapter 2 that the broad range of literature on policy workers assumed the structure-agency dichotomy implicit in conceptualisations of the humanist agent, preventing an understanding of policy workers as located subjects. Only the policy-as-discourse literature calls for an understanding of both structure and agency when theorising policy workers, but does not elaborate how this occurs. This thesis took off from this starting point, turning its attention to how the notions of structure and agency construct policy workers as arriving at the policy realm as pre-formed individuals. Its major contribution is to highlight the limitations of this conceptualisation.

Building on this insight, the thesis makes the case that opportunities need to be created for policy workers to reflect upon their location within the hegemonic discourses around and in the policy realm. The thesis initiates the creation of these opportunities through disrupting the taken-for-granted status of the humanist agent and reconceptualising policy

workers as located subjects. As argued in Chapter 2, how the policy realm and policy workers are theorised forms a part of the discourses around and in the policy realm that constitute policy workers. The position, here, rests on the assumption that fleshing out the discourses that shape our subjectivities is the first step towards destabilising these discourses (Davies, 1994; Davies *et al.*, 2006). The hope is that by conceptualising policy workers differently, policy workers will be encouraged to think of themselves differently. That is, the goal is to open up room for policy workers to become reflexive about the ways their subjectivities as policy workers, how they understand and go about their work, are constructed in the policy realm, with possible deleterious effects for policy outcomes.

There were only brief moments in the interviews when the policy workers recognised that they were more than just separate individuals fighting against the broader bureaucracy from within. In these instances, as identified in Chapter 5, they recognised that they had deeper connections with the policy realm. It was these moments that make entirely plausible and possible the vision of policy workers understanding themselves as located subjects. Furthermore, there were also brief moments when the policy workers conceptualised policy as discursively constructed. Most notably, there were instances, as seen in Chapter 8, when the policy workers recognised and acknowledged the ways in which specific policy language shaped subjectivities and social relations through creating categories, excluding and silencing some people, and shaping how we understand and approach particular policy problems. For example, several policy workers recognised the impact of the deficit model on girls and the ambiguous effects of the term gender. It is precisely these kinds of insights into the discursive effects of language and focuses the thesis hopes to encourage and develop. With this end in sight, the thesis encourages policy workers to reflect upon the ways in which they share assumptions of the logics of agency and rationality with the broader bureaucracy/government both with respect to the policy realm generally (Part II) and with respect to specific policy areas (Part III).

Such reflexivity by the policy workers, then, may destabilise the taken-for-granted character of the performance of rational agency in policy work, creating space for other ways to perform policy. I have in mind here policy work that pays attention to the constructed character of policies and the effects that follow for people and social relations. While the thesis does not offer a developed feminist vision for the gender and education policy area, it is premised on the conviction, shared with other policy-as-discourse theorists

(Bacchi, 1999a; Watts, 1993/94; Marginson, 1997; Yeatman, 1990), that discussions around particular policy areas must take account of the discursively constructed and constitutive character of policies. Understanding and analysing policy in this way moves policy debate away from that between competing interest groups about accurate understandings of the problem to debate about the discursive effects of policies, about the social relations and subjectivities they produce. In other words, more progressive feminist outcomes will be imagined, supported, and produced, if feminist policy workers enact an understanding of policy-as-discourse in practice.

The perspective offered in the thesis, therefore, provides an opportunity to re-imagine the nature of policy work. Through the chapters in Part III, the thesis sketches an outline of what it would look like if policy workers took account of the constructed character of policies and their effects. It envisages policy work that:

- acknowledges that deeply-held values underpin all policy constructions, and undertakes deep consultation with a broad range of people so as to trouble the assumptions and presuppositions circulating around and within current policy proposals;
- takes account of the broad discursive effects of particular policy constructions in the evaluation of policies; and,
- engages with the ways in which policy language and concerns shape how we understand and approach policy problems in particular ways, with effects for people and social relations.

In summary, then, by identifying the impact of the logics of agency and rationality the thesis has made a major contribution to thinking about why we get the policy outcomes we do. With respect to specific policy areas, the logic of agency and its emphasis on moments of contest and struggle directed attention away from how the logic of rationality produced moments of consensus in specific policy areas, with deleterious effects for policy outcomes. With respect to the policy realm generally, the emphasis on conflict between policy workers and the policy realm entailed by the logic of agency, drew attention away from the shared assumptions of the logics of agency and rationality and their effects on the subjectivities of policy workers, how they understood and acted in the policy realm. Identifying these logics is the first step to disrupting them, a task initiated by this thesis. Some preliminary ideas for further developing the approach espoused in this thesis are outlined below.

First, as noted in Chapter 1, policy workers come to the policy realm with different backgrounds and hence various subjectivities, which are relevant to a complete picture of the policy realm and policy workers. Some recent research, such as Pullen and S. Linstead's (2005a) collection, turns attention towards social identity as a *process* within organisational locations (Pullen and S. Linstead, 2005b, 3). The ways in which the logics of agency and rationality intersect with constructions of social identity, such as gender, race, ethnicity and class, within institutional organisations need to be explored further. As a starting point here, with respect to gender, feminists have long identified the sexed character of rationality (Lloyd, 1984) and, more recently, the assumption of the 'rational actor' in the context of institutional design theory (Gatens, 1998b). These insights indicate links between the logic of rationality and gender constructions that merit investigation.

Second, as indicated in the Introduction and Chapter 3, my identification of the discourses circulating around and in the policy realm arose out of the research process for the thesis. Consequently, my argument is supported by a close discourse analysis of the interviews, focusing on what was implicit in the discussions with the policy workers. In future research I would like to take these interpretations back to the policy workers who so generously gave their time, and invite them to reflect upon the understanding of policy workers as located subjects and policy as discursively constructed. I have no doubt that such discussions would provide fertile material for moving the ideas of this thesis forward.

Third, this thesis has concentrated on the ways in which policy workers are part and parcel of the policy realm, internalising the logics of this realm and performing in limited ways particular types of policy work. It has called, as stated, for a reconceptualisation of policy workers as located subjects. However, the task of broadening policy practice does not lie solely with policy workers. Work processes and procedures, academics, policy workers, consultants, and the elite within the bureaucracy and government are part of the discourses of the policy realm that produce limited policy work. Of particular note are the *at present* bureaucratic or, indeed, technocratic, processes and procedures of the policy realm. Chapter 2 signalled the ways in which the move in the public sector towards new public management, with its increased emphasis on efficiency, performance and accountability, further entrenches the logic of rationality and agency. The links between institutional

changes in the public sector and the logics identified in this thesis need to be developed further.

Finally, the thesis has suggested that the logics of rationality and agency are embedded within current academic approaches to policy analysis (Chapters 1 and 2). Hence, it is unsurprising that those trained in these approaches have difficulty in seeing alternatives to them. Policy researchers therefore have some work to do on identifying and analysing their own subject positioning and how this affects the analyses they produce. The thesis offers policy workers a new way to think about themselves and the policy realm. Additional contributions to this project are much needed.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*This bibliography is separated into two main sections. Section 1, Referenced Sources, contains all references specifically referred to in the text of this thesis. Section 2, Primary Materials, includes all other primary material.*

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## SECTION 2 – PRIMARY MATERIAL

*This Section includes all primary material, namely, the transcripts of interviews, the Annual Reports of the Education Department of South Australia, South Australian Policy Documents, National and Other States Policy Documents, and Legislation. These primary materials are organised chronologically within each category. Note that some of this material also appears in the Referenced Sources above.*

*Please note that the nature of these documents is such that 'publication' details are sometimes minimal. All available information has been provided.*

### Interviews

Transcript of interview with **C** on 2 December 2003. 25 pages.

Transcript of interview with **D** on 3 December 2003. 20 pages.

Transcript of interview with **B** on 4 December 2003. 24 pages.

Transcript of interview with **A** on 5 February 2004. 23 pages.

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## **Legislation**

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