GENDER, RACE AND THEIR INTERSECTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC POLICY WORK IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Race, gender and their intersections matter in public policy. In what ways they matter is explored in the policy work context of the West Australian (WA) public sector. My research examines how these concepts are understood by policy actors and enacted through practices and processes that can have life and death consequences.

My research draws on material from the gendered and racialised field of family and domestic violence (FDV) policy and service development in WA. A case study approach is taken to consider the policy development context of a major public inquiry known as the ‘Gordon Inquiry’ into government agency responses to FDV in Indigenous communities. Purposive conversations were held with experts in the field and thirty-five in-depth interviews were conducted with key policy actors engaged with policy development and service delivery in this field. ‘Deep listening’ (Carol Bacchi & Eveline, 2009) to accounts by policy actors and engaging in self-reflection has enabled a deeper understanding of underlying themes, issues and dilemmas.

Neither feminism nor anti-racist intentions have been sufficient to ensure gender- and racial-sensitive policy reform across the public sector. And despite policy activism, my research identifies that gendering and racialising remains poorly conceptualised or invisible in policy work within this highly politicised public policy arena. At the heart of the problem are ideas and their contestability. Within this public sector environment, ‘bleeding heart’ (Mumby, as cited in Lea, 2009, p. 7) policy actors are confronted with dilemmas and contradictions in their work resulting in considerable anxiety, risk-aversion behaviours, withdrawal and denial among other reactions. Gendered and racialised policy processes, structures and procedures often frustrate the good intentions of policy actors deeply committed to improving the quality of life experienced by the most disadvantaged Aboriginal peoples. Implications of sexism and racism for making and implementing ‘good’ or ‘bad’ policy in this context are not always clear to the policy participants. Some policy actors continue to operate with a primordial view of race and sex, and category politics contributes to disguise the interconnections between systems of oppression.

Using ‘the intersectional approach’ (Berger & Guidroz, 2009) with its multi-focal ‘lens’ to research ongoing ‘racing-gendering’ (Hawkesworth, 2006) in public policy work, my research contributes to the work on ‘inequality regimes’ (Acker, 2006). Illustrated by policy actors’ accounts, new information and insight reveals how environmental factors particular to the public sector affect policy performances aimed at equality. While my research has an Australian Indigenous focus, themes and issues dealt with speak to universal problematics of race and
gender. Conclusions are reached about the how, when, where and why of developing an intersectionality approach in public policy, a domain crucial to achieving anti-oppressive praxis. I conclude that the equality project can be enhanced by a new policy activism that takes greater account of reflexivity, collective engagement and public sector reform.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. 2

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................................. 10

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATURE ................................................................................. 12

ACRONYMS .................................................................................................................. 13

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................. 14
  The research context ............................................................................................... 14
  Determining the topic .............................................................................................. 16
  Policy context for the study ..................................................................................... 17
  Research goals ......................................................................................................... 18
  Overview of the thesis .............................................................................................. 19
  Language and terminology ...................................................................................... 21
  Presentation style ..................................................................................................... 24

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .......................................................... 25
  Introduction ............................................................................................................... 25
  The research journey ............................................................................................... 26
    *Researcher preparation* ......................................................................................... 26
    *Purposive research* ............................................................................................... 27
  Researcher conduct .................................................................................................. 28
    *Research ethics and sensitivities* .......................................................................... 28
    *Reflexivity and subjectivity* .................................................................................. 30
    *Responsibility and respect* ................................................................................... 31
  Theoretical framework ............................................................................................. 32
  Methodological approach ......................................................................................... 33
    *Feminist research methodologies* ........................................................................ 33
    *Critical theories: Critical race theory, Indigenous research methodologies and critical Whiteness studies* .................................................................................. 35
  Qualitative research ................................................................................................. 36
    *Data sources* ......................................................................................................... 38
    *In-depth interviews* ............................................................................................ 38
Written records ..........................................................41

*Interviews and conversations* ..............................................41

*Material from meetings and discussions* .............................41

*Journals, observational notes, workshops, seminars and conferences* ......................................................................42

Documentary materials ...........................................................42

*Government reports, publications, policy statements and public speeches* .............................................................43

Participants ..................................................................................43

*Identifying potential interviewees* .............................................44

*Negotiations and access* ............................................................45

*Pilot interviews and conversations* .............................................46

*Interview questions* .................................................................46

*Ethics of engagement* ...............................................................48

Analysis ........................................................................................49

Limitations ....................................................................................51

**CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW** ..................................53

Introduction .................................................................................53

Gender and race as contested sites ..............................................53

Tackling inequality through institutional change ...........................56

Gender mainstreaming and its critics ...........................................56

Gender mainstreaming limitations with regards intersectionality ........58

The contribution of critical policy analysis ......................................59

Engaging with the state ...............................................................60

Policy and the (new) public sector environment ............................63

Policy practice and the Australian context ......................................65

Driving policy change and development .......................................69

State intervention in domestic violence ........................................71

Conclusions ..................................................................................75

**CHAPTER FOUR: ‘RACE MATTERS’** ..........................................78

Introduction ..................................................................................78

Whiteness as race ........................................................................78

Whose whiteness? ........................................................................80
CHAPTER FIVE: ‘DOING GENDER’ ...........................................105

Introduction ...........................................................................105
The concept and relevance of ‘the gender stuff’ .........................107
Gender and Aboriginality .......................................................108
Gendered policy impacts .......................................................111
Gendered/ing staff .................................................................113
Gendered/ing clients ..............................................................115
Gendered/ing services ...........................................................116
Gender and leadership ..........................................................120
Feminist policy actors ...........................................................122
Gendered/ing texts ...............................................................124
‘Beyond gender’ ................................................................125
Gendered positions ...............................................................128
Gender at the margins; gender as invisible ...............................129
Conclusions ........................................................................134

CHAPTER SIX: INTERSECTIONALITY PRAXIS ............................137

Introduction ..........................................................................137
Appendix Six: Reflections summary from one interview ........................................293
Appendix Seven: Information Sheet and Consent Form ........................................296
Appendix Eight: Interview Questions ..................................................................299
Appendix Nine: The Duluth Model ......................................................................306
Appendix Ten: Publication ....................................................................................307
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STATEMENT OF CANDIDATURE

I hereby declare that this thesis is the author’s own contribution. All sources have been acknowledged and the author’s contribution is clearly identified.

This thesis has been completed during the course of enrolment in the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Western Australia and has not previously been accepted for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signed: ..............................................................................................................

(Karen Margaret Vincent)
LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALRC    Australian Law Reform Commission
ARC     Australian Research Council
ATSI    Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
ATSIC   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CEDAW   United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CALD    Culturally and linguistically diverse
CRT     Critical race theory
DV      Domestic Violence
EOC     Equal Opportunity Commission
FDV     Family and Domestic Violence
GAP     Gender Analysis of Policy Project
GI      Gordon Inquiry
GM      Gender Mainstreaming
HREOC   Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission
IE      Institutional ethnography
IR      Institutional racism
UNHRC   United Nations Human Rights Commission
USA     United States of America
WA      Western Australia
NPM     New Public Management
NTER    Northern Territory Emergency Response
OWP     Office of Women’s Policy
RCIACIC Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
UWA     University of Western Australia
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My thesis considers how policy actors engage with the concepts and practice of ‘gender’ and ‘race’; how these intersect in the policy context; and in what ways anti-oppressive praxis can be developed through understanding such connections. Because of my focus on gender and sexism, race and racism, personal values, judgments, knowledges and practices were implicated along with a range of issues concerning organisations and politics in particular. This is a case study of actors in the family and domestic violence system, not of organisations and other contextual influences per se. The significance of my research project lies in my search for ways to improve public policy work that affects participants in the process and that has broad consequences beyond immediate policy implementation for service delivery. Epistemologically, I am aligned with researchers for social change committed to ‘collaborative reflection, dialogue, and action’ (Villegas, Sullivan, Fuxman, & Dewhurst, 2007, p. 4) who work towards the development of shared values and action for change. ‘It is not a one-way delivery of knowledge and service’ (Villegas et al., 2007, p. 6). In this introduction chapter, I provide background to the study, the research context and reasons why I was drawn to the topic. I overview the ‘Gordon Inquiry’ (GI) to introduce the reader to the policy context for my research focus and this follows with an outline of each chapter. I conclude with notes to explain terminology and comments on presentation style.

The research context

This study was initially envisaged as complementing action research being conducted by my Principal supervisor in conjunction with the Office for Women’s Policy WA (OWP), as part of an Australian Research Council (ARC) funded project in both West Australian (WA) and South Australian (SA) public sectors. The early title of ‘Gendering Impact Assessment: a new framework for producing gender-inclusive policy’ became known in the departments involved as the Gender Analysis of Policy (GAP) project. The Doctoral-level study within the larger ARC Linkage Grant was envisaged as providing input to the knowledge base in the field by contributing an emphasis on Indigenous issues. This research was designed to complement current action research projects in WA public sector agencies to develop best practice Australian model/s of ‘gender mainstreaming’ (GM), defined by the United Nations as:

...the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that
women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetrated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 2002, p. v).

This study was supported by OWP during the period of the GAP project as a contribution to approaches in Western Australia (WA) by the State Government to addressing issues of inequality through the development of progressive policy, programs and practices. The OWP as ‘industrial partner’ to the GAP project contributed input and support in particular to case study work within the state public sector. It was fortuitous that Government agencies that participated in gender awareness projects with GAP were also involved in policy implementation relating to my topic. I was encouraged by early positive responses to my research proposal from OWP and GAP and the connections that were possible between GM action research taking place within locations simultaneously pursuing Indigenous service developments. Public sector structures and processes already in place for these two separate yet related policy practice areas potentially provided opportunities for access, research learning and synergy. Constraints, expectations, assumptions about gaining approvals and active cooperation, especially in relation to conducting interviews with staff in agencies, became a story in itself and will be covered later in the thesis.

The social context within which the broad topic is located was of critical importance; it was apparent from the beginning that the conduct and progress of the research were positioned within a particularly sensitive and highly political social context. That meant consideration of the wider environment from the earliest stages of deciding research questions, to the use of selected research methods and to the articulation of research findings. The topic demanded a research methodology that could make sense of the particular issues and challenges for me as researcher as I interacted with participating agencies, developed relationships with individuals and considered potential impacts of the research project further afield. I needed to be mindful of concepts of reflexivity, subjectivity and ethics in my dealings with these broader social factors influential on the research.

The thesis preparation continued beyond the completion of the GAP project and my University of Western Australia supervision moved from Organisational and Labour Studies within the UWA Business School to Social Work and Social Policy; the purpose and research topic remained unchanged during the second half of the research project. This study was able to benefit from complementary perspectives and insights from the two Schools at each stage, from the development of the research questions and data gathering to analysis and thesis writing.

The research plan and timetable was amended to take account of my relocation overseas and the need for distance supervision. Moving to live in the United States of America (USA) provided
further thought-provoking material that contributed, however indirectly, to continuing analysis of Western Australian data gathered prior to my departure. Everyday life in America reinforced key messages from the literatures and research participants – that matters of race, gender and inequalities continue to be of historical, political, economic, social and personal importance wherever I live.

**Determining the topic**

The topic of gender mainstreaming was a given, determined by my participation with the GAP research project, and my particular research interest in relation to GM was influenced by a number of factors. A case study within my locale met possible criteria: a field I had familiarity with (the public sector), something I wanted to learn more about (Indigenous matters), the service delivery area that was located at the very heartland of gender (domestic violence), and what I thought of as the hardest social policy problem facing the WA Government (the ‘Gordon Inquiry’) at the time. My early areas of research interest were validated as the research proceeded and themes were sustained throughout the project.

My early readings about GM revealed gaps in praxis: significant challenges were being posed by theorists and practitioners, especially in the developing world, were calling for new directions, models and activities because of concerns with limited outcomes and a range of practice problems. The struggle to deal with ‘intersectionality’ loomed as one of the major sites of difficulty and this proved irresistible to me as a research topic. I wanted to study the ways that gender and race (Aboriginality in particular) interrelated in a policy environment in such a way that could inform GM. This thesis however, went beyond GM in its scope and following chapters will reveal this development. A WA case study provided potential to gain a deeper understanding about the topic with local people, processes, and policies that also implicated me.

I was drawn to the issues because of my own experience and subjectivity – this was an opportunity to learn and deal with some of my own ‘unfinished business’ and become better equipped to play a stronger role in social change directed towards substantive equality. I was motivated by a growing conviction that the development of GM that takes account, and goes further than *just* taking account, of Aboriginality, has particular application to Australian social policy and practice with Indigenous people. I proposed that reconciliation efforts in Australia would potentially benefit from research that informs a whole-of-government approach about gender dimensions of policy implementation with Indigenous people.

Determining the particular research project was informed by literatures that in turn clarified and enabled my research methodology to find me. The sequence that evolved with setting up and
conducting the study, analysing data and reaching for conclusions was far from ordered and consistent with academy models of standard, that is, scientific and traditional research procedures. Opportunities for new learning and for re-learning, continued to present themselves at all stages, and understanding the positive gains of these ‘distractions’ became important. For example, as I will fully discuss later, Indigenous research methodologies were insightful about ethical and anti-racist ways of research on, for, about and with Indigenous peoples. Confronting issues and questions raised about divergent and contradictory approaches will be discussed later in the thesis as will the definitions and discussion of the concepts to be used here.

**Policy context for the study**

The Inquiry into the Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities became known colloquially as the ‘Gordon Inquiry’ because it was chaired by Aboriginal magistrate Sue Gordon. Established in 2001, the Inquiry produced a comprehensive and detailed final report of national significance in 2002, which resulted in a major Western Australian Government commitment and initiatives across seven key agencies to improve Government service delivery. The obligations, responsibilities and capacities of service agencies were evaluated using a wide range of materials and resources. The complex and long-standing problems of family violence and child abuse were reported as having become endemic in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. The future was presented as requiring a coordinated and well resourced, culturally sensitive system that should increasingly be under the direction if not control of Indigenous peoples. Well researched and evidence based best practice models were outlined and supported by the Inquiry to inspire Government agencies and Aboriginal communities together. The Government allocated $66million ‘new’ money to implement most, but not all, of the 197 recommendations and the bureaucracy reported against commitments in key structures and agencies. An outline of the conduct of the Gordon Inquiry and related policy processes including a list of relevant public documents is provided as Appendix One (page 262).

The Gordon Inquiry was selected as an appropriate case study because of its significance as a major policy ‘driver’ for services specific to Aboriginal communities experiencing family and domestic violence (FDV). Unveiling its response to the Gordon Inquiry’s reports and recommendations, the WA Government acknowledged failures in dealing with ‘the epidemic of sexual and physical abuse towards children and women in Aboriginal communities’ and announced commitments that represented, ‘drawing a line in the sand and saying enough is enough. This has got to stop’ (Gallop, 3 December 2002). FDV in Aboriginal communities was one of the major social policy challenges facing Government at that time. Concurrently,
mainstream FDV policy work which had particular relevance to Aboriginal women and men as indicated by alarming high rates of FDV was undergoing policy review and development. Therefore, the combination of Gordon Inquiry term-limited policy implementation focusing on the targeted Aboriginal client population and the ongoing mainstream FDV policy work which had particular significance for the high proportion of Aboriginal women and men involved, offered my research the chance to explore connections between gender and racial considerations in high profile policy development work.

At the time my research project was beginning, the Government had been engaged for two years already on policy implementation and funding allocations continued to support agency responses for a further two year period during my research. Policy actors were involved in different locations through that period and further during finalisation, evaluation and subsequent policy development. At the national level, related developments included the 2007 introduction by the Howard Government of The Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) to deal with similar issues of child sex abuse and FDV raised in a Northern Territory inquiry. Income management changes quarantining half of all welfare payment entitlements required the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act despite substantial opposition. The impact of this continuing intervention remains the subject of vigorous debate (Gibson, 2010; Langton, 2008; Lea, 2009; Pearson, 2010).

**Research goals**

The research topic took shape through the early stages of literature review when I learned that policy development and implementation issues of gender and race in the field of Indigenous family violence have not yet been fully investigated in Australia despite numerous reports (Ferrante, Morgan, Indermaur, & Harding, 1996; Hartley & McKee, 2000; Pettman, 1992). This was selected as an appropriate case study context for research into gender mainstreaming and the challenge of intersectionality. I wanted to understand more deeply than the text books could explain what was happening to shape policy and practice for the women and men employed at different levels and locations; I wanted to begin an interrogation of how they were involved in and affected by, their own gendering and racialising work within the public sector; how their own subjectivities affected public policy work; and I wanted to build on that information to explore blockages and opportunities for positive change. My research into this field has been stimulating, stressful and ultimately rewarding.

I accepted that because of its specificity, this could not be ‘one size fits all’ research project producing universal prescriptions for public policy improvement. Instead, here was an opportunity to study a major policy endeavour by a government at an important moment in time.
through the lived work experience of a select group of key players. Therefore, this thesis will not provide a detailed analysis of the Gordon Inquiry, FDV policy documents or implementation procedures usually undertaken with traditional policy analysis and evaluation research.

This thesis is supported with publication of research activity undertaken during the PhD involvement with GAP. Drawing on initial analysis of interview data, document analysis including the Gordon Report and FDV, and a Gender Policy Audit of FDV policy development, the publication provides additional insights and issues relating to aspects of this topic. I have not duplicated discussion here; the publication is provided as Appendix Ten (page 298).

My research objectives are directed at uncovering and understanding gender and racial aspects of public policy work that relates to equality policy which is intended to be anti-discriminatory and empowering. Specifically I inquire into how these policy actors perceive the concept and enact gender and racial practices in their work environment, how ‘the intersectional approach’ (Berger & Guidroz, 2009, p. 1) could inform policy work about the value of considering the gender-race matrix in this context, and what opportunities could be optimised for improved public policy for anti-oppressive practice.

**Overview of the thesis**

Chapter Two outlines my research methodology, providing an overview of how I conceived and conducted my work using a constructivist, interpretist approach appropriate to this topic. I explain how a substantial body of literature that traverses a range of critical approaches including critical policy analysis, feminist research, critical Whiteness studies and Indigenous methodologies has influenced my research.

In my thesis I draw on purposive conversations and interview transcripts as illustrative of my analysis, enabling the voices of policy actors to be heard, and encouraging ‘deep listening’ of the material. I express my voice as researcher and this chapter provides an outline of my research journey including how I met formal considerations required of the thesis. Discussion of potential limitations concludes this chapter.

Chapter Three substantially presents my literature review with emphasis on those fields of knowledge that give rise to the foundations of my inquiry. Particular attention is paid to those literatures concerning gender, race, intersectionality and policy practice. I explain how each of these fields came into sharper focus and inter-connections became more important to my
project, starting with a broadening of my research interests from an initial gender focus, too narrow to meet the needs of people experiencing multiple disadvantages. I explain my conclusions that race together with gender could work as cornerstones of a more inclusive way of tackling inequalities; thus an intersectionality approach to public policy work is explored.

The foundational knowledge presented in this chapter is reflected in research decisions taken, for example determining initial research questions, identifying early themes and issues, and learning about cross-cultural research protocols. Some of the literature also related to the case study discussed in later chapters, in particular publications relating to the Gordon Inquiry and FDV, and enabled continual building upon foundational knowledge. The literatures and material gathered through the research process also contributed to my analysis of conversations with people in the field and policy actors in more formal situations. I could critically examine inquiry documents for fresh insights into old problems, grasp new knowledge in evidence disguised as commonsense, and interpret and make sense of exciting surprises and confusing messages.

Chapter Four is the first of four chapters presenting analysis of the material gathered particularly from conversations with policy actors, this data deals with race, gender, intersectionality and policy work in the WA public sector. This chapter is concerned with racialising perspectives and practices in policy work, examined through accounts by policy actors reproduced from selected interview transcripts; however, the ordering of these four chapters is in some ways deceptive in that there is an artificial separation of interrelated subject matter. I begin with race in recognition of what many of the policy actors had to say about the primacy of racial concerns in their lives and policy work environments. Despite beginning my literature review with a gender focus, writing analysis of racial issues was a valuable first step to progress deeper understanding of all the related fields. New ways of thinking about gender, multiple disadvantage and inequalities were achievable by this sequence of analytical writing beginning with race. The relationship between these four fields is a major concern of the thesis and is discussed as connections emerge and issues are identified, gathering momentum across these chapters.

Chapter Five focuses on major findings in relation to gender content in the interview data and explores similar issues to those identified in the previous chapter including invisibility, the influence of stereotyping, power and privilege in public sector workplaces. I draw the conclusion that gender is not on the political agenda and that historical femocrat gains are fragile. The connections between race and gender are apparent in this chapter without specific attention being directed to these inter-relationships.
Chapter Six focuses on intersectionality as theory and practice, building on understandings about multiple identities and compound disadvantages gained from the previous analyses of racialised/ing and gendered/ing in public policy practice. Policy actors reveal tensions, contradictions and challenges associated with segmented, categorical and reactive policy work that can disguise and distort observations and experiences relating to gender combined with race. In this chapter I consider what intersectionality praxis could look like and how it could be envisaged in the FDV field.

Chapter Seven contextualises information gained in the previous three chapters by focusing on the policy work, specifically the environmental barriers, opportunities and successful strategies for change. Themes are explored through accounts by policy actors about policy practices and processes that involve them in activities related to the Gordon Inquiry and the field of FDV from big picture policy drafting to more fine-tuned details of implementation in the WA public sector environment. An intersectionality ‘lens’ is turned to public policy work and in particular I explore how intersections of micro, mezzo (or ‘meso’) and macro levels operate and impact on those involved.

Chapter Eight gathers together final discussion of themes and issues most strongly presented by the policy actors during interviews and presents summary findings from the body of data. Fail-safe conclusions are not provided, but a series of small conclusions are reached that support frameworks for action and point to potential areas where change could be achievable. Intersectionality is supported as an important analytic tool and frame of action in an intervention toolkit to advance gender- and race-awareness in policy work. Self-reflections continue through this final chapter and I conclude by offering ideas and suggestions for further research and action in relation to anti-oppressive praxis development.

Language and terminology

My use of terms ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Aboriginals’ is based on the definition by Aboriginal academic Judy Atkinson (2002):

The word refers to those of Aboriginal descent who are recognized as such by the community in which they live and who identify as Aboriginal. The plural terms peoples and communities acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and communities within Australia, all of whom have different histories, political dynamics, social situations, cultural characteristics, economic resources and administrative capacities. Indigenous people and Indigenous Australians are also used as inclusive terms for the traditional or first Peoples of Australia (as cited in Briskman, 2007, pp. 4-5).
The term ‘Aboriginal’ reflects the literature and is used unless an interviewee informs me of her/his tribal identity for example, Noongar. Rigney (2009) explains, ‘There are no neutral terminologies about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders… Generally speaking Indigenous peoples rather express their identities by kin, land, language and politics’ (cited in Gallaher et al., 2009, p. viii). I make a political statement by capitalising all racial groups including White to emphasise ‘significant social locations in the stratification system’ (Lorber & Farrell, 1991, p. 4). Original references and quotations however, will adhere to the author’s format. I use the term ‘Wadjela’ used by Noongar Aboriginal peoples to refer to non-Aboriginal peoples. And I adopt the spelling ‘Noongar’ according to the wishes of one of the Aboriginal policy actors, mindful that there are other spellings. I use the Australian slang terms ‘dinkum’ and ‘fair dinkum’ in this thesis to represent qualities such as genuineness and reliability, and in this context can mean honesty in policy practices.

I also treat gender as a social construction and use terms ‘gender’, ‘gendered’ and ‘gendering’, ‘women’ and ‘men’ rather than ‘females’ and ‘males’ unless the discussion concerns biological matters in which case ‘sex’ is used. Feminists have long been conscious of the significance of language and terminology; from the women’s movement came the conclusion that ‘women’s issues’ needed to be strategically reformed, therefore the agenda became broadened to embrace the concept of gender (Staudt, 2003). From the many definitions of gender, Scott (1986) raises issues that relate to themes in my thesis, ‘The core of the definition rests on an integral connection between two propositions; gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power’ (as cited in Acker, 1990, p. 145). I use the term gender mindful of recent arguments that the concept has been revealed as inadequate especially when applied to social action contexts, GM proving a target for criticism in this regard (Eveline & Bacchi, 2005).

Extracts from interview transcripts will be presented in italics for interviewee speech and original emphasis will be bolded for distinction. Other important concepts and terms used throughout this thesis include ‘public policy’, ‘policy actors’, ‘intersectionality’, ‘lenses’ and ‘substantive equality’. Less frequently used concepts and terms are discussed in the literature review chapter and additional comments provided where necessary in following chapters; once introduced, terms will not be encased in inverted commas. Like Briskman (2007), I use the terms ‘professional’ with some reservations and recognise that ‘the term ‘client’, although in common usage, can be problematic, but until a more egalitarian term is devised it is referred to sparingly’ (p. 5).

Even though my particular focus in this research project involves those key human services agencies involved with the Gordon Inquiry and FDV and traditionally seen as working with
social policy interventions relating to social problems (Fawcett, Goodwin, Meagher, & Phillips, 2010, p. 1), my research is influenced by gender mainstreaming and anti-racist concerns with the broader public sector bureaucracy and its mainstream policy workings, therefore I use the descriptor ‘public policy’.

The literature presents different labels for people engaged with public policy, including delineations between ‘policy actors’, ‘policy reformers’, ‘policy technocrats’ and ‘policy activists’. McClelland and Smyth (2006) draw on the term ‘policy practitioner’ for example, showing that practice in different settings can be involved and activated by different situations (p. 38). I adopt Considine’s (1994) term ‘policy actors’ for ‘any individual or group able to take action on a public problem or issue’ (p. 6). This definition is applicable as an umbrella term for my interviewees who participate in different ways with a range of perspectives on policy problems and solutions. They do not all claim policy expertise in what they see as specialist fields of gender and Aboriginal affairs, but these policy actors all have various opportunities, commitments, accountabilities and responsibilities in relation to Government policy work, even if they are positioned and enact their policy roles differently. I am also drawn to language of acting out, of performance in public policy work. Drawing on Yeatman’s (1998) analysis, I refer to ‘policy activists’ in the sense that these individuals articulate particular values and critique of policy that motivates them to working for socially progressive policy change; a number of research participants self-identify in this way. In addition, I refer to ‘policy advocates’ as participants located outside the formal system who play roles in relation to advocating for particular changes to particular policies. I connect the concept of activism however, with a wider set of ideologies and perspectives informed by progressive social theories and activist campaigns, for example the ideological and strategic feminist movement. I acknowledge that there are no simple divisions between practitioner, activist and advocate and at times the terms are interchangeable depending on the nature of a policy actor’s work in the policy domain.

I do not intend to debate notions of equality; however the term ‘substantive equality’ is of particular relevance to this project. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (the CEDAW Convention) provides a framework based on the three interrelated principles of equality, non-discrimination and state obligation which can be used as an advocacy tool for social development that aims at corrective interventions for substantive equality outcomes (International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, n.d.). I adopt the concept of equal outcomes rather than a more limited notion of equal opportunities and note that the WA Government uses the slogan ‘If you want to treat me equally, you may have to be prepared to treat me differently’ with its definition:
Substantive equality recognises that entitlements, opportunities and access are not equally distributed throughout the community and there may be barriers to service provision resulting in unequal outcomes for particular groups. It acknowledges that where service delivery agencies tailor their services to the needs of the majority group, other people with different needs may miss out on essential services. Equal treatment, therefore, is not about treating all people the same, it is about treating people differently in order to cater for different needs. (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2006, p. 42).

Presentation style

‘Research, ultimately, is a messy endeavor with competing values, needs, and beliefs. The challenge is to find one’s voice, develop it, and creatively use it. Responding to this challenge is a step towards extending what counts as research’, says Quaye (2007, p. 10). He further states, ‘I contend that writing should always be accessible, particularly if one is endeavoring to promote change’ (p. 7). I am also encouraged by Grey and Sinclair (2006) to write this research story in an unconventional way. They criticise much of the writing in organisation studies on aesthetic, moral and political grounds, saying that ‘it is often pretentious, obscurantist and dull’ (p. 445). They warn that exclusionary language and terminology can alienate readers and contribute to oppression by replicating the power effects of language. ‘We want writing to be taken seriously, as powerful and evocative performance, able to change peoples’ experiences of the world, rather than as a shriven, cowed and cowering path towards routinized, professionalized ‘publication’ (p. 452). Therefore, in the chapters to come, I will be ‘writing differently’ by employing the first person narrative, enabling multiple voices to be heard, and demonstrating reflexivity as a strong subplot that meets their goal of ‘offering a reasonably lucid and decently honest statement of authorial position’ (Grey & Sinclair, 2006, p. 447). I will not shy away from uncomfortable truths uncovered in a challenging topic, as Callero (2009) says, ‘The path to intellectual enlightenment is often a personal struggle that requires courage, the courage to confront long-held beliefs and traditions… we must never fear to examine new ideas – no matter how threatening’ (Callero, 2009, p. 10).
CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Specific research questions were not clearly seen at the beginning of my research project, which began with a focus on gender through my participation in the GAP project. This chapter will explain how my research journey progressed through the development of research questions and issues for examination, to the conduct of data gathering and analysis. I discuss the research methodology, process and activity of my project directed at the challenge of anti-oppressive praxis development, applying particular ‘lenses’ and methods appropriate to my project. I present my case study choice of the policy environment of the WA public sector in order to identify practices that contribute to anti-oppressive practice in public policy work. How do policy actors conceptualise gender and race? How do these perspectives influence government policy development? What gets in the way and what facilitates anti-sexist and anti-racist policy work? These are the sorts of questions that formed the backdrop and provided direction for my research.

This study is qualitative and draws on insights from a wide range of theory, the most important within a critical paradigm being feminism, critical discourse theory and critical race theory (CRT). The theoretical framework shaped for the purposes of this study includes insights from readings on topics that ranged across a wide horizon including gender and organisational studies, Whiteness studies, CRT, power and privilege, the (new) public sector, policy studies, social activism and Indigenous storytelling. Analysis also reflects poststructuralist and postmodernist thinking through examination of conversation notes and transcripts.

My understanding of various theoretical themes developed as the study proceeded and revealed each subsequent piece of the ‘knowledge jigsaw’. Crotty (1998) describes ‘scaffolded learning’ in which an initial framework begins to establish longer term structures as the often bewildered learner progresses through the array of possible methodologies and methods. He offers a likely chronological succession of research events that recognises the reality of different starting points in a research project that ultimately demonstrates a uniquely created methodology. My starting point had been skepticism about positivism; I rejected an objectivist view of knowledge and meaning; and I favoured constructionism. Lather (1991) distinguishes between postmodernism, described as ‘larger cultural shifts of a post-industrial, post-colonial era’, and poststructuralism, described as ‘working out of those shifts within the arenas of academic theory’ (p. 4). Adopting these theoretical frameworks encouraged my research to critically
challenge accepted truths and contribute to knowledge development that addressed hegemonic power manifest in oppressive regimes, structures, institutions and processes.

The fact that these theoretical frameworks could nurture different methodologies frustrated my early attempts to set out a logical map in advance for my research. Crotty (1998) advises that explanation is necessary, but that ‘Far from being a theorizing that takes researchers from their research, it is a theorizing embedded in the research act itself’ (p. 17). Therefore, at several stages along the research pathway, I was able to reflect on the process and understand that meaning had emerged, for example I saw how themes interrelated and concepts came alive during analysis of policy actors’ stories. This chapter reflects the demands of thinking through research methodology and determining investigative methods appropriate and effective for the topic involving a sensitive case study. The research methodology required significant new learning, as important to my development as a researcher as perhaps data analysis and project findings.

I now present an overview of my research journey and the concerns that were pertinent to me in my relationship with the research topic. Summary information is provided about the methods and materials gathered for analysis, and the specific tools used, before concluding with consideration of issues raised and potential limitations of the study.

The research journey

Researcher preparation

I put myself into this picture as more than a benign researcher because I learned from the literature and reflections that this is a story for, and about us, all. As a feminist researcher aware of my ‘outsider within’ position (Hill Collins, 1991, p. 17), I was aware of the need to actively engage in self-awareness as part of research that strives to deconstruct oppressive systems in which I participate. My own identity, status and privilege through Whiteness advantage (McIntosh, 1988) took longer to come into focus, but were revealed as intertwined and important to the research. Through a developing critical social consciousness, I became aware of a range of key indicators or ‘markers’ of my embeddedness in oppressive social structures and processes.

The importance of researcher preparation was particularly acute for me as a non-Indigenous researcher who sought to interrogate her own participation in hegemonic practices and to participate in new forms of emancipatory research activity. Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008)
say that, ‘a cartography of pain is required, with its markers of shame, destruction, abuse, self-doubt, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual violence, abuse in the kitchen, bruises on the soul’ (p. 27). Appropriating the pain of oppressed persons would have been one possible outcome of my deep immersion in the literature of Aboriginal life story-telling, and I needed to be alert to potential appropriation and self-indulgence.

A number of concerns and sensitivities needed to be considered, for example research preparation alerted me to sensitivities involved for staff, agencies and governments in relation to this topic. Research tools needed to be appropriate for this context and my research objectives. I aimed to support the building of progressive knowledge and understanding in the field in a non-threatening approach, and to contribute fresh insights and new evidence about gender and race than might otherwise be achievable within the constraints and activities of agencies and policy environments.

**Purposive research**

My research was informed by feminist theorists and Indigenous scholars that research aimed at social justice objectives required a specific approach (Adams & Jones, 2008, p. 14). The topic was itself reflection and product of my constructed research methodology, with epistemology that shaped and nurtured the progress of the study. The study was not intended to extend knowledge for its own sake, but was aligned with purposive research, as Christians (2002) outlines, ‘pedagogical, political, moral, and ethical, involving the enhancement of moral agency, the production of moral discernment, a commitment to praxis, justice, an ethic of resistance, and a performative pedagogy that resists oppression’ (as cited in Denzin & Giardina, 2008, p. 14).

My personal and professional experience, together with knowledge that resonated with the literature, led me to conclude that the field of family and domestic violence especially concerning Indigenous issues of policy, encapsulated the very challenges that gender mainstreaming was struggling with internationally. The study aimed to contribute to the development of inclusive gender mainstreaming by understanding Indigenous issues involved with public policy. Therefore, research that could contribute understanding about gendered and racial perspectives and experiences of policy actors and frontline staff designing and delivering services was an important goal for my study. The larger social forces shaping and perpetuating systemic sexism and racism needed to be seen and understood behind the people, processes and policies. I envisaged the research as playing a part in the development of a more comprehensive model for inclusive gender mainstreaming that could contribute to national and international praxis.
I needed a map or at least a sense of direction that was credible and reasonably trustworthy for a beginning researcher. ‘Most texts start with the assumption that qualitative data are accessible only via a researched understanding of all or some methodologies, and that a project must be located within a coherent methodology’ (Richards, 2005, p. xi). My research however, was not limited to one particular version of theory, method or set of rules governing research practice, what Richards refers to as ‘methodological ghettos’. ‘I retain a commitment to what I term methodological fit, the ways in which question, data, ways of handling data, ways of constructing an outcome and ways of justifying it fit together’ (Richards, 2005, p. xi) (italics in original). While my research shared Richard’s description, I cannot claim that in my case it was a carefully planned process that was faithful to a rulebook. My research journey instead took its own shape by drawing on a range of influential research methodologies, models and messages.

**Researcher conduct**

*Research ethics and sensitivities*

Lincoln and Cannella (2007) identify ‘startling differences between what is considered ethical practice for qualitative research and what counts as ethical practice for conventional research (usually governed only by federal guidelines and regulations)’ (p. 67). They are critical of a number of notions stemming from the origins of scientific research, especially illusions of objectivity and freedom from values. They urge an ontological transformation that, ‘may involve a radical reconceptualization that would reject major components of most forms of research as we have known them, whether positivist, constructivist, or critical (pp. 73-74).

Ethical research with this topic required more than adherence to minimum standards as articulated by research advisory committees and approval authorities. Institutional and research guidelines that served to signal important issues for consideration and provided models of ethical and anti-oppressive research practice were valuable resources. For example, particular attention had to be paid to cross-cultural protocols, communications and protections in relation to potential impacts of my research work on Indigenous peoples. Battiste (2008) advises, ‘Nor do culturally sensitive protocols and ethics provide an open door or a “superhighway” for those, however well intentioned, to take what appears necessary for their own purposes’ (p. 500). I accepted decisions taken by interviewees about what they were or were not prepared to share with me as researcher for example, information concerning their own experiences with racism and sexism in their workplace, and criticism of colleagues.
At the centre of concern was the potential for research process and research outcomes to be part of the problem rather than the solution, to represent a moral problematics. The research needed to be conducted in ways that did not reify the very power relationships, processes and structures that can marginalise particular women and men, groups and communities. I did not want to undertake research that disregarded the rights of the group being studied; I preferred conduct that embodied principles of feminist and Indigenous research methodologies including reciprocity and relationality. Research processes that re-position and privilege subjectivity and ways of knowing of oppressed groups were particularly applicable to my discussions and interviews with Aboriginal participants, and about Aboriginal peoples. Smith (as cited in Denzin & Giardina, 2007, p. 17) urges a moral agenda that emphasises decolonisation, healing, transformation, and mobilisation; I was informed about ways that my research could recognise my own moral ties and play a part in legitimating Indigenous worldviews.

The Gordon Inquiry reported that ‘considerable care to acknowledge and respond to cultural sensitivities, issues of gender and other related matters’ was taken in its investigations and report to government (Gordon, Hallahan, & Henry, July 2002, p.8). A ‘gender lens’ (Kolb & Myerson, 1999) on the Inquiry and related documentation was an important part of the research, but equally important was the need to ensure that any such ‘lens’ was coloured by sensitivity to Indigenous-led concerns and strategies. Cultural sensitivity was needed when examining existing and developing policies and listening to accounts of experiences for example, respecting the rights of interviewees to tell their stories in their own way whether that involved sharing personal background information first to establish trust and openness or answering questions in a formal bureaucratic style that established status and professional respect.

Adherence to ethical research protocols and procedures was critical to gaining public sector participation. Even though the PhD research project as part of GAP had been finely attuned to the public service environment in participating agencies, other political considerations relating to the Gordon Inquiry and Aboriginal affairs were also of concern to potential participants and will be discussed in later chapters. My own and my supervisors’ professional legitimacy, together with documented approval from the appropriate academic and research authorities, opened some but not all the necessary doors. Personal presentation, responsible behaviour and attention to detail in all communications also played a part in developing productive and respectful research relationships.
Reflexivity and subjectivity

Critical reflexive practice is central to feminist research. Instead of revealing universal truths hidden in the subject being studied, feminist research links theory as performance with practice that creates meaning during the process (E. Anderson, 2000/2010; Lather, 1991; Sprague, 2005). Actively interrogating and ‘troubling’ my own research journey involved continually confronting personal motives, values and attitudes. New ways of thinking about my experiences, knowledge and identity developed as I dealt with issues and dilemmas that arose. Reflexivity required critical personal narratives to challenge entrenched patterns and habitual ways of thinking. My commitment to un-learning meant questioning whether and in what ways my work participated, reproduced or resisted the ‘project’. This self-research was also a product; analysis was purposeful, and not a form of therapy or self-indulgence. I needed to approach local issues of gender and race with awareness of my own subjectivity, perspectives, and responsibilities, and achieve what Mumby describes as ‘a radical rethinking of the role we play in articulating accounts of organizational life’ (as cited in Ashcraft & Allen, 2003, p. 7).

The core of my research concerned public policy focusing on people and processes, and my past employment in a number of public sector environments provided me with a sense of confidence and familiarity as well as potentially negative subjectivity. There was a distinct risk that assumptions and assessments on my part could result in misinterpretations, misunderstandings and lost opportunities for learning. Participants’ accounts of public policy work had to be welcomed as rich material for research, not evidence of competence or otherwise in the WA public sector or any other setting. Similarly, I assumed previous exposure to women’s and gender studies would provide me with an entry point for those aspects of the research that looked at sexism. But my research performance at all stages was thoroughly embedded in my own gendered subjectivity, including communicating with supervisors, interacting with subject experts, interviewing research participants and analysis.

Research into the topic of FDV and the particular experiences of Aboriginal women and men, demanded I have historical and personal awareness of my own involvement, transparency about motives and openness to scrutiny. I had to be mindful of the ways that my own childhood experience with alcohol-fuelled domestic violence and child abuse affected my deep-seated images of these tragic events and prejudices about the women and men as gendered and racialised participants, perpetrators and victims. In addition, professional social work roles in casework, policy and community development contributed to my subjective understandings about the field, policy work and practice interventions. My generation of predominantly White social workers employed by various governments played key roles in removing Aboriginal children from their families; I had to acknowledge my part, however indirect, in the tragedy of
The Stolen Generation. My work experience included years as an academic teaching social policy to a range of human service personnel and consulting with agencies about services and staff developments in this field. The more I examined my experiences with FDV, the more obvious it became that so-called ‘scientific objectivity’ was impossible for me with this research. To be an authentic and principled researcher with social justice objectives, I needed to take full ownership and deal with my subjectivity.

Through the research process, I became increasingly aware of how I was shaped by particular experiences of privilege and power as a White Australian woman with little direct experience of Indigenous culture and a professional background in social work and administration. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000b) explains, ‘Our ability to know and our experiences are limited, therefore standpoints are partial and so are the knowledges we produce’ (p. 351). My foundational readings reveal that the history of Indigenous relations with non-Indigenous people in Australia remains contested and underscores contemporary ambivalent attitudes, as Manne (2001) summarises, ‘ever since the early 1970s Australians have been struggling to come to terms with the crimes committed during the settlement of their country and with the ways in which the Aborigines were treated by governments and society after the dispossession was complete’ (p. 102).

**Responsibility and respect**

Respecting and protecting participants in my research was central to moral ethics shaped by feminist and Indigenous research methodologies in particular. I was conscious of historical disempowering and exploitative research about Aboriginal people in Australia, and committed to a social justice project that viewed research as performative in the sense that I was mindful of the ways and means that my research performance could impact on all those involved directly and indirectly. I was constructing an ethical deliberative intervention, a sociopolitical act (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Pelias, 2007).

My respectful behaviour to research participants included interpersonal courteousness, adherence to agency protocols, discretion and acceptance of the limitations imposed and requirements for interview arrangements. In relation to conversations with Aboriginal people including those in roles as advisers and experts in the field, additional considerations and personal behaviours were required for respectful research conduct. The importance of Aboriginal life storytelling, culturally sensitive listening, voice and personal narratives influenced the choice of research methods including what Patton (2002) calls an ‘informal conversational interview’ (p. 342) that is semi-structured and yet purposeful, rather than impersonal questionnaires.
Theoretical framework

Questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm, which we define as the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105).

Naples (2003) credits Harding for distinguishing between epistemology (‘a theory of knowledge’), methodology (‘a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed’), and method (‘a technique for …gathering evidence’) and pointing out their important connections that inspired the development of new feminist frameworks. Naples goes on to foreground epistemological assumptions guiding choices of different methodologies, implementation of particular methods, and other research practices. Making explicit the theoretical assumptions implicated in chosen methods was an important message for my own research process.

My research preparation in epistemological terms travelled a long way from earliest introduction to feminism to the current configuration where theoretical frames informing my thesis feature different meanings and issues that are not always and altogether resolved harmoniously. No one theory or unique theoretical approach emerged from preliminary readings as sufficiently comprehensive or appropriate to direct all aspects and inform this particular research project through its entirety. A range of theories had potential application to this topic; such a wide array of conceptual approaches and critical methodologies was initially daunting. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) however, communicate a sense of excitement about theoretical and methodological developments in this field of critical and Indigenous inquiry. They summarise contemporary research and writings about methodologies and approaches with a contagious enthusiasm:

As decolonizing interventions, the theoretical performances… move in several directions at the same time, crisscrossing indigenous methodologies and worldviews, marginalized feminisms, moral activism, critical race, LatCrit, participatory action theory, critical pedagogy, and Marxist humanism. These variations on the critical paradigm embody specific ethical, epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions and practices. Fitted into an emerging decolonizing paradigm, they suggest that a Decade of Critical Indigenous Inquiry has arrived (p. 29).

It was reassuring to consider theory as performances and to develop confidence that selectivity did not automatically jeopardise final conclusions and research outcomes. With that awareness, I could identify a number of different yet related perspectives and approaches helpful to inform the selection and use of particular approaches at each stage of the research when different
methodological demands were experienced. My ability to deal with issues that arose was helped by the composite theoretical framework.

**Methodological approach**

Influential ideas and insights came from a wide range of theories and approaches including poststructuralist theory, postmodernism, critical discourse theory and constructivist grounded theory. Later analysis chapters explicate and demonstrate how different strands helped shape my research, particularly feminist research methodologies, CRT, critical Whiteness studies and Indigenous research methodologies.

When Naples (2003) reflects on feminism and research methodologies, she effectively captures my own journey through the demanding landscape of evolving research theory and method. She identifies challenges posed by postmodern and postcolonial scholars and discusses how ‘feminists have participated in these debates and responded with innovative methodological strategies such as reflective techniques, standpoint epistemologies, feminist discourse analysis, and activist and participatory research’ (p. 32). Her materialist feminist approach to research was ‘developed in dialogue with socialist feminist theories of the state and was subsequently transformed by incorporating the insights of feminist standpoint epistemologies and postmodern and postcolonial feminist perspectives’ (p. 32). My own research claims feminist underpinnings and has been enriched by research models and practices which I will reference through the thesis.

**Feminist research methodologies**

‘Postmodernism and other strong versions of social constructionism have made it clear just how untenable assumptions of objectivity and value-freedom are, but postmodernism, in the end, is also unsatisfactory to critical scholars, because it is weak in terms of serving social change’ (Sprague, 2005, p. 27). Feminist researchers forged new directions by using critical research both technically and politically in innovatory qualitative research. Feminist standpoint epistemology sought to examine inequalities with collaborative research agendas. Feminist scholarship has been both a major influence on this research and a major focus for research objectives concerned with gender mainstreaming development.

‘In its most general formulation, the feminist project aims to understand and remedy the misinterpretation of women’s experience and its translation into actions taken against them in patriarchal institutions, such as the courts and social agencies’ (M. L. Campbell, 1992, p. 505).
Feminist theorists have contested many of the traditional research concepts especially agency, subjectivity, discourse and identity, and have in turn been challenged by emerging theoretical and methodological developments, particularly in relation to intersectionality. Postmodernists and poststructuralists have raised questions about feminists’ use of ‘experience’ as a basis of knowing, and criticism has been levelled at normative White, heterosexual, middle-class feminism (M. Campbell, 1998, p. 56). More recently, women of colour, anti-colonialist researchers, and Indigenous research methodologies have been articulate in their critiques of much feminist theorising and organising. ‘Cannella and Manuelito observe that critical, feminist qualitative research, at the dawn of this new century, is a highly diversified and contested site’ (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 23). The fact that there is conflict and tension within the women’s movement articulated by feminist scholarship, for example Fonow and Cook (2005), is itself contributing to active research that continues to challenge norms and traditions in the academy.

My research embraces the critical approach central to feminist research methodologies and takes as starting points many of the working assumptions. What inspired my interest in feminist research was the purposive nature of the research endeavour – a deliberately active process whereby researchers themselves are engaged in conscious and ethical knowledge construction. As Lather (1991) summarises, ‘While feminist empirical efforts are by no means a monolith, with some operating out of a conventional, positivist paradigm and some out of an interpretive/phenomenological paradigm, an increasing amount operate out of a critical, praxis-oriented paradigm concerned with both producing emancipatory knowledge and empowering the researcher’ (p. 70). My research takes from feminist methodologies a shared critical theoretical approach committed to a social justice agenda that is often transformative in vision. My research aims to contribute to developing feminist understanding about intimate interconnections between gender and race in particular among categories of difference.

Poststructuralist feminists have injected awareness about research outcomes as constructions rather than reality reflections. Examples of recent research that adopted these new approaches have been particularly informative when directed at similar topics, ‘Feminist poststructuralism fuels my efforts to uncover the gendered and gendering mechanism (discourses, processes of subjectivity)…I take from poststructuralism the idea that meanings and subjectivities are social (rather than given) and in process (rather than fixed)’ (Binns, 2006, p. 4). Interdisciplinary feminist policy studies contribute a variety of perspectives and diverse methodologies, especially to research on gender and organisations that backgrounds GM. Because feminist research methods continue to evolve, the challenge for my research has been to be discriminatory and selective in decisions about which approaches and techniques to adopt.
Feminist scholars challenged the traditional social science approaches that ultimately privileged certain powerful interests and served to contain discontent (Sprague, 2005). Critical studies that explored differences between hierarchically related groups began to recognise the need to focus on class, gender and race as politicisation of the social sciences led to new understandings about power and privilege. Critical race studies builds on feminist research and moves the focus to methodological dilemmas. ‘[R]acial subjectivities, racial ideologies, and racial disparities have analytical, ethical, emotional, and methodological import’ (Fonow & Cook, 2005, pp. 2219-2220). The beginning of scholarship on ‘Whiteness’ as a cultural construct (Frankenberg, 1993) also contributes to new theoretical and methodological frameworks. These feminist research methodologies, CRT and critical Whiteness studies that influenced my research are informed by poststructuralism and postmodernism. Critical Whiteness studies challenged my own privileged position and reinforced the need for self-reflection and self-awareness in all aspects of the research for example, Gillborn (2005) is one of many writers who encourage examination of the routine, invisible and normalised privileging of White interests that represents a form of ‘tacit intentionality’ by White policy makers. Critical discourse analysis in particular, encouraged a problematising endeavour to unravel processes and institutions of oppression within which I was located together with research participants.

Indigenous research methodologies build from critical theory and cultural theory new and challenging positions that actively resist oppressive practice. These writers urge research using ‘a new set of moral and research protocols’ (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 14) that acknowledges Indigenous agency, and develops resistance and local struggle. Smith (2000) (as cited in Denzin et al., 2008, p. 9) poses eight questions about any research project that serve to interpret critical theory through a moral ‘lens’, through key Indigenous principles. Indigenist research respecting principles and a range of ‘moral matters’ (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 14) affected my own positioning in relation to the research topic and reinforced the need to ground my understanding of the topic in historical and political contexts. Aboriginal life-storytelling therefore became critical to my developing moral sense of purpose, obligations and responsibilities, the ways that I interpreted the material and discussed racial issues through the thesis.

These theoretical perspectives and methodologies urge an ethical stance to ensure Indigenous people are not disempowered and harmed through the process of research. Culturally sensitive procedures, protocols and methods, including the privileging of Indigenous voices, perspectives and texts were critical in order for my research to have credibility and value, to Aboriginal people of WA in particular. As Mutua and Swadener (2004) explain, these counternarratives
explore ‘the intersections of gender and voice, border crossing, dual consciousness, multiple identities, and selfhood in a … post-colonial and postmodern world’ (as cited in Denzin et al., 2008, p. 13).

My conduct as a White female researcher was an important marker for the contribution I wanted to make. Interactions with Aboriginal policy actors, and conversations about Indigenous peoples, needed to be conducted with awareness of self, history, humility, and cultural sensitivity in interpretative processes involved with hermeneutical research. Aboriginal researcher Bessarab (2006) recommends clearing away ‘bric-a-brac’, so that ‘we are able to view the world in a way that is attempting if not to be free from bias, to at least be aware of it when trying to reconstitute new meanings. To reconstitute new meanings is to understand the world from the lived experiences of the participants in the research process and not from the lived experience of researcher’ (p. 82).

My research selectively applied concepts and methods from the broad field of critical policy analysis including Smith’s materialist feminist standpoint theory (1987) with further development of Institutional Ethnography (IE) (2002, 2005). IE had appeal to my research into the FDV field with its theoretical understandings of ‘ruling relations’ played out in ‘institutions’ seen to be ‘coordinated and intersecting work processes and courses of action’ (Holstein, 2006, p. 293). In addition to drawing on theoretical approaches emphasising subjectivities, meanings and ideologies, my selective application of IE ideas enabled analysis of policy practice operating through linkages at different levels of power and authority in the public sector environment. As a point of entry for my research, restraining orders provided a suitable linking thread across policies, services, professionals, and agencies, thereby highlighting institutional processes, not as a ‘problematic’, but as the key link between FDV work across agencies. Discussion of restraining orders provided opportunities for participants to reveal everyday experiences of ‘ruling relations’ through ‘texts’, discourses and coordination activities that contributed to the picture of gendering and racialising processes.

My theoretical framework was developed to meet the needs of the research activity that I was engaged in and reflected my personal values and ideology with regards to the topic. Epistemologically, this is a constructivist interpretivist approach which involved selective research methods and techniques.

**Qualitative research**

I set out to explore the real life frames of reference and perspectives of policy actors in their own language. The focus needed to be on policy narratives that could illuminate the ways and
means that policy becomes, and is perpetuated as, gendered and racialised and so, qualitative research methods were identified as most appropriate to gather new information and a deeper understanding about gender and racism as contested fields of study. Qualitative techniques including interviews and case studies are especially suited to research on complex processes and diverse topics. By accessing experiences and subjective views of the actors, emerging theory is grounded in empirical detail. The flexibility of qualitative research can enable new dimensions of a problem to be revealed along with possible connections between different elements, as evidenced by Whipp (1998) who examined case studies of workplace culture, power and change. Along with Miller et al. (2004), Whipp concludes that there were more benefits from qualitative research methods in these contexts than from alternative quantitative scientific approaches that feature measurement and generalisation. Questionnaires and statistics would have had limited use in teasing out complex, underlying attitudes held by policy actors, perspectives about the policy process, identity, and the role that gender and race may play in the work policy actors perform in that environment.

While scholarship has increasingly focused on gendered organisations, sustained and systematic attention has not been directed at racial issues (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). I needed research tools capable of contributing a more complex account of organising gender simultaneously with race. Wellman (1993) found that methodological problems frustrated sociologists in their early attempts to investigate racism. He considered traditional large-scale survey instruments to be relatively insensitive to subtle, elusive and widespread manifestations of racism. Wellman chose a case studies approach using in-depth, qualitative interviews that could contextualise the issues and I recognised advantages for my research project.

Valuable to qualitative research methodology, the case study method is defined by Kelly (1999b) as ‘a thorough and planned investigation of a ‘real world’ phenomenon, which takes account of the contextual influences, and which draws on theoretical underpinnings in order to investigate systematically’ (p. 119). The diversity within case study research takes account of contextual influences and draws on theoretical underpinnings for systematic investigation into the dynamics and complexity of human behaviour (Kelly, 1999a). Stake (1994) distinguishes the single ‘instrumental’ case study as research for insight into a particular issue or to refine a theory within its real-life context. According to Punch (1998), going straight to measurement and quantitative mapping would not develop the fuller understanding of the phenomena and processes involved. I considered the Gordon Inquiry and FDV policy work as appropriate for using a case study approach because of their significance as gendered and racialised policy ‘drivers’.
Data sources

My literature review provided foundational knowledge for this research project and through the thesis I continue to make reference to the literatures relevant to the topic, especially the work of local researchers and experts in the field. This thesis pays particular attention to the accounts of interviewees, advisers and other research participants. Later analysis chapters will focus on these purposeful conversations and discussion of themes, issues and conclusions.

For this qualitative research, policy materials and other documents were seen as socially constructed; critical analysis was required to reveal complexities and perspectives underpinning and influencing policies and practices. Ellem (1999) describes a ‘dialectical process’ in which reader and subject work upon each other from selection through interrogation. He emphasises understanding of context, contingency and creation of inclusive documents that ultimately deal with values, politics and power.

In order to better appreciate micro, mezzo and macro levels of policy and the organisational context for policy development and implementation issues, I complemented Gordon Inquiry materials with examination of other relevant government documents including parliamentary debates, media statements, departmental policies and procedures concerning implementation plans and activities, operational guidelines for staff dealing with child protection and FDV, program outlines and reports. Becoming immersed in the field and developing a sense of being embedded through these materials contributed to a deeper understanding with analysis even while these documents do not form a chapter dedicated to their analysis.

In-depth interviews

In addition to written materials, individual interviews were undertaken with key policy actors and staff involved with the aspects of the Gordon Inquiry, and drawn from the FDV field. There is widespread use of interviews in social research as a valuable means of data gathering about people. ‘The critical, reflexive examination of various aspects of the use of interviews has enhanced this research tool and led to a broadening of its role and significance in research and certainly in research findings’ (Herzog, 2005, p. 26).

In addition to the instrumental function of interviews in research, Kezar (2003) draws on feminist and narrative traditions as a critical theorist to see the interview as an empowering opportunity with research participants, through ‘assisting them to develop self-awareness and perhaps examining alternative views of reality’ (p. 395) that has particular implications for disenfranchised individuals or groups. I wanted to gain an understanding of how particular
policy objectives were conceptualised as well as operationalised within departments, without making assumptions about the policy actors involved. I assumed a level of complexity and therefore, interviews were the most appropriate data-collection technique for the subject matter (Silverman, 1993, p. 12).

The interviews were designed to enable conversation covering specific themes and common issues, as well as to achieve a level of flexibility and responsiveness to provide additional perspectives on aspects of the policy process with regards gender and anti-racism issues. The questions ranged from structured to unstructured according to Gillham’s (2000) ‘verbal data dimension’ (p. 60), with the more specific information gathering ‘closed’ questions opening at the beginning of each section, leading to more open-ended discussions as more complex matters were raised for each key topic or category. Prompts and probes ensured that interviews kept reasonable pace, covered most pertinent questions and provided substantial research information. Despite being structured and practiced, my previous work experiences in public sector settings and in senior executive roles equipped me to achieve a comfortable collegiality. Assuming common knowledge however, had potential limitations in that an unquestioning and uncritical analysis could have resulted. These issues are considered later in analysis chapters. Interviewees appeared at ease on most occasions and were keen to contribute to the research for which they expressed support.

The questions drafted for interviews and other purposive conversations focused on the thinking and doing involved with Gordon Inquiry policy development and FDV policy processes. In addition, the policy instruments of restraining orders was selected as the most appropriate connecting thread after confirmation by experts in the field. This was seen as particularly pertinent to the research due to recent legislative and policy reform in the array of FDV policies, services and approaches. I envisaged policy-related tasks including writing, advocacy, delivery and evaluation; however the semi-structured interviews enabled a wide canvassing of issues and ideas. The approved list of open-ended questions focused on four major categories for a comprehensive framework with which to view the topic: professional experience, the Gordon Inquiry, service delivery and terminology. Formal interviews were at least one hour in length and additional conversations included telephone calls and emails.

Time considerations limited the field research to mainly ‘élite’ interviews (Kezar, 2003) with senior or middle level public servants in positions of authority and with extensive experience. Involvement in senior co-ordination activities with FDV and Gordon Inquiry policy implementation was a priority. Some interviewees were located organisationally at middle management level with responsibilities including policy together with direct client contact, so they were able to discuss policy matters and draw directly on frontline perspectives. Additional
interviews were conducted in the Perth metropolitan district with policy actors responsible for service delivery and a range of management roles including policy advocacy. Thirty-five individual interviews were conducted. Appendix Two (page 268) provides further detail concerning interviewee profiles.

Interviews were negotiated with the department/s involved in the study, and my memos, reflections, and analytical notes of the process were considered part of the research data. For example, telephone conversations and negotiations relating to the research and interviews offered additional information and clarification about the topic, legitimised the research process for agencies and gave coherence for interviewees. Privacy and confidentiality was respected and safeguarded through agreed ethics procedures.

Even though convenience for participants was an important consideration, I was keen to conduct the interviews on location in the workplace so that information was obtained within the public sector work environment. Even though my practice of allowing interviewees to determine arrangements was the accepted approach, Warren (2002) reports that the interview location ‘is not the result of a “well-defined methods procedure” but is affected by temporary circumstances as well as the fact that the participant who consents to being interviewed is raced, gendered and classed’ (as cited in Herzog, 2005, p. 27). A small number of interviewees suggested alternative arrangements for example, a quieter place without interruptions such as in the office grounds or corner of the cafeteria. On occasion, other staff joined the discussion and provided their viewpoint on topics in their domain, and on one occasion a departmental observer was present. These active interview situations proved to be locations where knowledge was being created, consistent with Herzog’s (2005) view, ‘the determination of interview location should not be viewed solely as a technical question. Rather, one should examine what takes place around the logistics of the interview and include this as part of the study, its results, and the social structuring of reality’ (p. 28).

By recording the interviews and producing transcripts, I gained an accurate account of all that was said and I could participate fully without the distractions of note taking. However, I made a note to write down key words when interviewees emphasised particular points that needed to be followed up. Often this practice bore fruit, revealed in other interview transcripts when the original concept was further explored or expanded in ways that ultimately provided a matrix for analysis.
Written records

Interviews and conversations

Interview transcripts were analysed in depth. Coding as ‘the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 p.3) was used. The data in this research are fractured, however in reforming the data I tell a particular story. I take care not to misrepresent what my research participants shared with me as I reintegrated the data embedded in the lived experiences discussed with these policy actors. Appendix Three (page 269) provides an example of a transcript including sections marked as initial coding of raw data. Underlining particular words and points raised in the conversations informed my understanding and shaped ideas about themes and issues worthy of further exploration and emphasis in the thesis. Key words and phrases highlighted commonalities, similarities and differences; I identified emotional tone and affective levels; and I examined the language and concepts used in these purposeful conversations. Previously identified themes and issues were able to be validated and extended using related texts that provided supplementary and clarifying information for analysis. Nuances and subtleties in the discussions were better understood and sub-themes were also revealed with the benefit of complementary information from a range of documentary sources. I also transcribed the emphasis which the interviewee used, as well as pauses, laughter and other non-verbal expressions as contributing to the analysis. These are noted in the text.

Material from meetings and discussions

Discussions were held through all stages of the research with individuals who were key contact people in agencies and organisations in the field and with experts in the topic working in a variety of locations including service providers and academics. Digital and tape recordings were made with agreement and notes taken. In early stages of the research, I consulted with a number of individuals for advice about potential directions and themes including research questions for interview, suggestions for potential interviewees, feedback about the suitability of restraining orders as a ‘thread’ and my perspectives or standpoint on the topic. These notes provided supplementary data, especially useful for clarification, confirmation or alternative interpretations when required. An example of notes made from one of my meetings with a key contact person is at Appendix Four (page 276).
Journals/observational notes, workshops, seminars and conferences

A detailed record of interview arrangements provided useful information about negotiation difficulties, resistances, and enthusiasm for the research, protocols and bureaucratic structures with commensurate procedures. Journals or field notes maintained through the research provided further data. Notes were taken whenever contact was made with potential participants, including phone calls and email communications. When time lapses made verbatim conversation notes difficult, I wrote about points of interest, new knowledge gained and further ideas for follow-up. An example of my record of contacts and accompanying notes about negotiations and arrangements with one department is at Appendix Five (page 282). Personal reflections were summarised immediately following each interview under such headings as: what were the major themes emerging? What did I learn that I didn’t know before? What didn’t I ask? What other documents do I need to examine? Who else do I need to see next? An example of my reflections following one interview is provided as Appendix Six (page 284).

Attendance at public speeches and lectures, seminars, workshops, rallies and conferences provided information across the topic broadly including: about the field of FDV, client and community services to women; Aboriginality and Indigenous issues; gender and organisations; men and masculinities; social policy in Western Australia; justice projects and criminality; child welfare and child protection; research projects in the social sciences. My criteria for attendance included whether or not I could learn anything relevant to my topic, make contacts in the field of my research, establish a profile for myself that could ease my way in agencies and develop skills in conducting higher level research.

Documentary materials

‘Qualitative researchers deal with, and revel in, confusing, contradictory, multi-faceted data records, rich accounts of experience and interaction’ (Richards, 2005, p. 3). The documentary data for analysis with this research were gathered from a variety of sources and in a range of formats. ‘In conjunction with other data, documents can be important in triangulation, where an intersecting set of different methods and data types is used in a single project’ (Punch, 1998, p. 190). Artefacts available were written materials from a range of meetings and discussions; Government reports, publications, policy statements, public speeches; and journals/observation notes, workshops, seminars and conferences. These documents provided what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) describe as a ‘rich vein for analysis’ (as cited in Punch, 1998, p. 190) and provided substantial background information and explanations about the broad topic, practices and processes in the field, contextual information about my research participants and
experiences, all of which expanded and shaped my understanding and critical analytic capacities.

*Government reports, publications, policy statements and public speeches*

In order to appreciate the complexities and perspectives underpinning and influencing policies and practices, relevant WA Government policy documents and reports concerning the Gordon Inquiry and FDV were analysed as an important first step. The Gordon Inquiry publications were considered as case study material as well as my initial literature review. Other Government publications relating directly or indirectly to the Gordon Inquiry included website information, Parliamentary speeches and debates, departmental documents including annual reports and policy papers made available to the public.

FDV policy related materials included departmental policies and procedures concerning implementation plans and activities, operational guidelines for staff dealing with child protection and family violence, program outlines, implementation and evaluation reports.

Very few internal, confidential papers were released for this research by departments, however this material when made available by staff was treated with respect and used as background or contextual information only. This thesis does not quote from confidential agency documents or other materials not approved for this purpose.

*Participants*

Participants were identified as significant players in the field, and selected purposefully according to their public sector positions and roles in relation to Gordon Inquiry and related FDV policy work. Appendix Seven (page 287) provides the background request to agencies for research participation with background information to potential interviewees, and research questions are provided as Appendix Eight (page 290).

Individual interviews were sought with agency staff and key policy actors in the field. ‘The value of the ‘practitioner’ telling it as she/he saw it, is to provide some insights across stages in the policy framework, insights into what is often otherwise seen as a ‘black box’ (Waller, 1992, p. 443). ‘Personal experience provides a glimpse of what policy participants actually do, and is something on which little has yet been written’ (Edwards, 2001, p. x). My focus was on policy practitioners working on public policy development within and connected with the WA public sector.
**Identifying potential interviewees**

Potential participants in the research were identified using a number of approaches. Firstly, various background documents especially the Gordon Inquiry, identified relevant agencies, organisations, groups and individuals. For example, the Department of Education and Training was regarded by the Gordon Inquiry as having potential to significantly improve the lives of future Aboriginal generations as ‘the most universal contact point between Aboriginal children and government services’ (Gordon et al., July 2002, p. 292). The literature pointed to particular sectors for example, police and welfare services are seen as important in public services with families and children experiencing violence and abuse (Lipsky, 1980, p.13). Other public sector developments provided potential research interest. For example, an inquiry into race discrimination in housing raised issues similar to Gordon Inquiry findings (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004).

An important way of identifying potential interviewees was through chain-referrals or the ‘snowballing’ method. This common technique generates a sample, as Davidson and Tolich (1999) describe, ‘a small band of likely informants having been identified, these informants are relied on to generate contacts with other people who share the activity that the researcher is exploring’ (p. 35). Emory and Cooper (1991) recommend the snowball technique as particularly relevant to situations when researching élite populations (as cited in Dyke & Murphy, 2006, p. 360), an appropriate description for my select group of participants. Adopting a broad definition of ‘policy actor’, I obtained feedback from key contacts about who was influential, well-placed and active in the field. Conversations that occurred as a result of the ‘snowballing’ technique created opportunities to gather data otherwise inaccessible and I gained a deeper understanding of the topic’s complexities through personal linkages. Nuanced pictures of gendered and racialised daily experiences would not have been revealed if I had taken a different route and, for example, posted questionnaires for random public servants to complete.

As previously mentioned, my attendance at professional development events, seminars and network meetings also provided opportunities to meet key contact people and discuss the topic. Some research participants self-identified at these times.

My requests for agency access and invitations to participate in interviews were directed to policy positions, not at particular people for a demographic balance: as women, men, Aboriginal persons or non-Aboriginal persons. My research avoided a focus that marginalised particular people as ‘others’ by taking guidance from the literatures concerning sensitive research practice.
across boundaries of race, gender and culture (Sonn & Green, 2006). I gathered data suitable for investigating dominance and privilege within the normative ‘mainstream’ public service.

The need to outline my research objectives and interests helped me to clarify and become more specific. As I reflected on and discussed emerging themes and ideas, suggestions and referrals for potential interviewees became more targeted and appropriate. This process of identifying potential participants and especially interviewees achieved a level of diversity that would not necessarily have been achieved otherwise. I was the fortunate recipient therefore, of a wide variety of perspectives, interpretations, insights, stories and experiences that made possible deeper analysis of the interview transcripts and other texts. For example, I was better able to draw out themes about public sector human resource practices, employment arrangements, organisational cultures and institutional issues for the achievement of equality agendas. As well as becoming more articulate about my research, I was enriched personally by the whole experience of active listening. Meeting with Aboriginal women and men working in the field as policy experts, advocates, and client service providers engaged me in deep discussions as starting points in developing research relationships that would enrich my life and continue beyond the research project.

**Negotiations and access**

Although historically seen as neutral research tools, interviews are increasingly recognised as representing active interactions between individuals that lead to negotiated, contextually based results (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The negotiations undertaken to gain permission to interview agency staff were themselves indicative of the public sector environment with its varied requirements, obligations, anxieties and expectations of social science researchers and research projects. Participation was voluntary once agency approval was granted. Key departmental contacts provided advice and instructions about procedures and letters of request to agency heads, and some began arrangements with potential interviewees. However, on occasions ‘entry point’ individuals restricted access, failed to follow-up within reasonable timeframes, and in one instance refused to cooperate despite lengthy negotiations and the agency head’s verbal agreement. I considered these problematic negotiations to represent research data.

Interview negotiations and arrangements were affected by issues and developments in the public sector. During the research period there was considerable instability with a change in Government, Ministerial portfolios and chief executive officers; agency functional and operational reviews; staff retirements and a death; and continued agency restructuring. Australian media coverage and government responses to Indigenous FDV has been described as ‘moral panic’ (Cripps, 2007) and my research project had to take account of intense public and
parliamentary pressure on the Government and policy actors. Anonymity and confidentiality were especially important issues to address with agencies and individual staff involved in such highly sensitive arenas.

Seven of the eleven departments agreed to grant interview access to staff and some of those agencies also provided additional and restricted documentation on the topic. All non-government organisations, consultants and advisers who were approached supported the research by participating with information and interviews where sought.

**Pilot interviews and conversations**

Draft interview questions were reviewed by key contacts in a number of agencies and two pilot interviews were held taking approximately two hours each. A number of lessons were learned from the pilot interviews and discussions – not least being to be doubly sure the recording equipment is working! Questions were refined and the word ‘draft’ clearly headed up the final sheets to reflect discussion rather than a rigid questionnaire format.

In these conversations and pilot interviews, the matter of context and researcher control was repeatedly raised. Traditionally, interviews were distrusted in research and regarded as problematic in that bias, errors, misunderstandings, and other conversational risks needed to be minimised. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) provide advice to disabuse researchers about ‘neutral’ interviews. They describe the difference between standardised survey interviews, minimally directive life story interviews, and ‘active interviews’ that involve interactive and interpretive activity (p. 140).

**Interview questions**

Questions were used as prompts for discussion; the aim was to encourage an open account of experiences and assumptions that could reveal gendered and racialised perspectives and practices in policy work. Spradley (1980) suggests ‘grand tour’ questions followed by ‘mini tour’ questions as a taxonomy that begins with the general and progresses to the more specific (as cited in Punch, 1998, p. 34). For the purpose of gaining a ‘big picture’ view of the topic, I considered semi-structured interviews encouraged more flexibility and responsiveness given that the interviewees were senior staff, likely to be well-informed and articulate about their work and the policy field, as well as being involved in a wide range of functions and roles not easily captured in a structured questionnaire approach. Kezar (2003) refers to these under-
researched élite interviews as ‘researching up’ and requiring interview protocols that recognise the interviewees’ specialised perspectives and power with access to information not necessarily public knowledge. I was also aware of advice from Bygnes (2008) concerning ‘sensitising considerations’ (p. 1) to take account of structural and situational contexts. Flexibility was also needed to adapt the perspective for frontline interviews with less emphasis on questions related to higher level policy design and conceptualisation and more encouraging of descriptions of the daily reality of operational aspects of policy implementation, details often invisible in the larger script.

I noticed that when talking with Aboriginal women or men, conversations included more life storytelling that served a number of purposes and went further than my initial goals that had included setting the interviewee at ease, gaining demographic information, and establishing the ‘safety parameters’ of the interview before progressing to more potentially difficult questions.

Instead of interviews designed and structured to achieve what Gorden (1987) describes as ‘maximizing the flow of valid, reliable information while minimizing distortions of what the respondent knows’ (as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 141), my semi-structured interview conversations took account of previous knowledge of the interviewee’s circumstances to focus on aspects particular to the individual. However, in some situations agencies had requested, and it was mandatory for the agency research committees, the list of questions prior to approvals. One of those agencies had gone further and provided the potential interviewees with the list of questions. Despite my labelling the list ‘draft’, there were interviewees in that agency who insisted that printed questions be strictly adhered to.

There was a common core of inquiry across questions designed for ‘big picture’ policy actors and the frontline staff, especially concerning gender and race considerations. But once the interviews began, it became apparent that the big picture questions were sufficiently wide ranging with some additions taken from the frontline questions when necessary. Most variation concerned involvement with the Gordon Inquiry during its policy formation lifetime; some interviewees had not played a role directly, for example by being involved in drafting a department submission, and had not been in policy implementation positions. In those cases, my questions took a different focus, for example by asking about their awareness of community perceptions, their perspectives on the broader impact on public sector and agency activity of the Inquiry, and if they had been allocated to such a task how they would have proceeded.
**Ethics of engagement**

UWA ethics approval had been communicated to all agencies approached for permission to interview, and potential interviewees were provided with information sheets and consent forms which were signed prior to the interviews commencing, and interviewees retained their copy. Interviewees were assured that the decision to participate was theirs alone once their agency had agreed to their possible involvement, and permission could be rescinded at any time during the research. Their permission was sought for the interviews to be recorded; in all but one situation, permission was immediately granted.

All interviewees were informed of the procedures ahead of time and reminded at interview that a draft transcript would be made available for their corrections and additions. While I did not want to encourage a never-ending interaction where interviewees could re-write original words, this step was designed to lessen doubts about participation, communicate my preparedness to be responsive to their concerns, and encourage more openness. I also suspected that this step could be reassuring and from feedback I received, this strategy helped me gain access. Two agency research committees also specified procedures to protect their staff and agency, especially by anonymity and the right to read the final draft. Pseudonyms have been used for policy actors throughout the thesis.

Less than half the interviewees responded to my emailed and/or posted hard copy of their transcripts and less than half of the returned transcripts required changes. On three occasions the changes requested were significant in terms of content, either additional replies to the questions or further explanations based on later developments. Follow-up communications provided further data for analysis and again I sought interviewee permission to treat that additional text as part of the agreed transcript; all agreed. Where efforts to locate interviewees for the purpose of gaining feedback were unsuccessful, I allocated a ‘final’ status to their transcript. Warren et al. (2003) encourages analysis of the time between ending the formal interview and leave-taking rituals that illuminate interpretations and processes, highlight aspects of the meaning of the topic, and of the interviewer and the respondent. My experiences with interactions both ‘off’ and ‘on the record’ confirmed that, ‘the ways in which the respondent shapes the content of the post-interview strip is related to the type and location of the interview, and to the commitments, agendas and feelings of the respondents’ (Warren et al., 2003, p. 107).
Analysis

My approach to data analysis was influenced by a range of theories and methodologies, as previously discussed. Analysis was also informed by the breadth of initial readings supplemented and deepened during the course of thesis writing. Just as the data were gathered from a range of sources using a variety of methods, my analysis drew on an array of examples at different points as required. Data analysis was not conducted as a once-off stage in the research process, a stage that was structured according to a rigid set of rules, as Richards (2005) states, ‘In all qualitative methods, data making and analysis are simultaneous, not sequential, stages’ (p. 5). Charmaz (2005) also captures my experiences of analysis as an ongoing process, ‘simultaneous data collection and analysis, with each informing and focusing the other throughout the research process’ (p. 508). My analysis represents an iterative interpretive approach.

I brought to my analysis a determination to adopt approaches that could help me achieve a deeper understanding of the topic. For example, my use of critical ‘lenses’ initially came from feminist methodologies, in particular the ‘gender lens’ (Kolb & Myerson, 1999), and expanded with my literature review of GM, anti-racism, critical Whiteness studies and other contributions.

This project drew on the literature about unmasking Whiteness and included such writers as Frankenburg (1993) who acts as an ‘insider’ reporting on ‘white on white’ by looking at and listening to lived experiences and everyday racial encounters for discursive ‘repertoires’. I was conscious of needing to be inclusive in order to gain an understanding of all voices, as well as to develop research practice that demonstrated awareness of past exploitation, appropriation, and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples. I wanted to avoid decontextualisation in my analysis and to develop respectful insights into the perspectives of all the ‘players in the game’.

From the literatures I selected relevant theoretical approaches that could extend my foundation knowledge of policy work and public sector agencies. For example, I was influenced by Banks’ (1995) description of ‘historically situated conditions of power relationships, including such structures of domination as social class, race, and sex biases’ in organisations (p. 292); and Acker’s (2006) body of work, especially ‘inequality regimes’. My research project was not an evaluative study of particular public policies and programs, or the Gordon Inquiry, but policy actors engaged in gendered/ing and racialised/ing processes. I wanted to hear the narrative of the policy environment from policy actors themselves. In order to develop ideas about praxis development in this environment, I turned to writers such as McClelland and Smyth (2006) for a framework for policy analysis and activism, and Fawcett et al. (2010) for analysis of social
policy for social change. I was not seeking to generate a new model but using a critical policy approach, identify elements that could contribute to an anti-oppressive policy framework.

An issue of relevance to my research project was Brah’s (1996a) exploration of points of identification that enable shared actions for social transformation. Brah writes of ‘experience’ referring to everyday ‘lived’ experience and to ‘collective’ experience, and the ways in which groups/communities are positioned in already existing historically evolved and evolving discourses. She discusses the two notions of experience as intricately interlinked and in so doing, uses ‘experience’ as an analytic to break down the dichotomy between the ‘macro’ and the ‘micro’. Relationships between identities, identifications and socially constructed boundaries around groupings or categories dividing ‘us’ and ‘them’, relates to such themes in my material as marginalisation and power. This indicates too, how the themes I selected for discussion in this thesis relate as much to the dynamics involved in the material as the frequency or commonness of points raised by my research participants.

The literature on data analysis highlighted various ways to proceed particularly in relation to the written word. Halliday (1978) contrasts discourse analysis and text analysis with the aim of separating the study of underlying theoretical structures from actual linguistic performance (as cited in Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 7). I was informed by both formal and informal spoken interactions with interviewees. For example, additional information was provided that helped to ‘expose contradictions between the official line and actual practice’ (Whitfield & Strauss, 1998, p. 290).

I was aware of a wide range of methods and techniques available and, as previously discussed, I was particularly influenced by feminist epistemology of methodologies. Snow and Benford (1988) refer to the ‘conceptual scaffolding’ at the heart of framing approaches that have become increasingly adopted in social movement research (as cited in Koenig, 2004 August, p. 2). Naples (2003) takes issue with various ways of gathering, perceiving and analysing data including social movement framing. Her concepts involve a distinctly different ‘discourse’ in her materialist feminism. She promotes a discursive analytic approach that involves diverse methodologies and self-reflection which was important to my research. Naples describes the advantages of approaching interview material to review recurring as well as unique themes (p. 147). Both commonalities and the once-off were important here because they offered illustrations of complexities, contradictions, straight-forward information and confirmations of possible interpretations.

The research did not use grounded theory practice that prescribed a systematic, rigorous and comparative analysis of data as Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe. However, I was influenced
by the benefits of a system of coding and conceptual ordering that could achieve analytic depth and contribute to the work of conceptual development. My use of goading and coding the data helped me make sense of what had been collected. Coding as ‘the analytic processes through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 p.3) helped me identify dominant discourses and explicate themes, however there were significant challenges. Hurtado and Stewart (1997) warn, ‘analytic tools and research methods that helped us understand systems and experiences of oppression may not be as appropriate for understanding privilege’ (p. 298). In order to more clearly see issues related to power and privilege, my research therefore used methods including critical reflection, especially self-reflection, as encouraged in the literature (Eveline, 1994; McIntosh, 1990; Wildman & Davis, 1995).

**Limitations**

The need for flexibility and opportunism was a constant through my research. Whenever developments occurred that were not consistent with my initial hopes and ideals for the research, I was reminded of Kelly’s (1999b) advice that ‘planning does not mean setting objectives, theory and processes in fixity and order. Good case study design and planning is a dynamic process. The investigator is constantly checking between the theory, the literature, the focus questions, the analytical framework and the programme for the case study itself. This is essential’ (p. 126).

This research was informed and shaped by epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies based on a critical paradigm that diverged significantly from normative scientific and medical research standards. I was aware however, that my research would be evaluated against criteria sourced from a history of the scientific method, what Christians (2007) calls ‘verification standards of an instrumentalist system’ (p. 62). Lincoln and Cannella (2007) disparagingly refer to ‘modernist, colonialist, patriarchal, and hypercapitalist conceptualizations of research’ that attempt to ‘discredit qualitative and/or critical inquiry as not rigorous or informative’ (p. 80). I had to take account of issues raised by the nature of my research to answer anticipated questions about validity, replicability, and evidence. I had some experience of this challenge during agency negotiations when one ‘gatekeeper’ rejected qualitative research involving open-ended questions because ‘We can’t have our staff saying whatever they want...we have proper research here, quantitative measures’.

This research was mindful of issues related to representation and dilemmas and difficulties that faced me a White, female, social worker in a research role in a particular social and institutional
context. I attempted to avoid circumscribed interactions based on socially constructed categories of race and gender as much as possible by working in ways that Bell (1996) calls ‘relational’ and ‘connected’ with my research participants as opposed to ‘boundary maintenance’. But I was nevertheless aware that ‘the practice of giving research subjects a “voice” in academic texts, whether by speaking for them or by letting them speak for themselves, is always and inevitably a textual device that retains and reinforces, rather than weakens, the academic author’s authority’ (MacMillan, 1996, p. 141). Research practice and authorial responsibilities have been made explicit and efforts taken to fulfill my commitment to best practice research standards, for example respecting and adhering to protocols, protecting participators’ identities, and ensuring security of confidential materials.

I did not set out to conduct such exhaustive research that no stone would be left unturned or question unanswered. To some extent limitations are inevitable in a PhD thesis for example, I could not include the study of classism despite literature on gender and organisations that urges an analysis of gender, class and power in organisations (Bradley, 1999) and the intersectionality literature that urges analysis of gender, race and class (Acker, 2000). Emerging Latino critical race theorists point out that inequality is sustained by more than race as an exclusionary force and that adopting race as central analytical focus means a systematic analysis of class remains underdeveloped. The lack of critique concerning capitalism ‘renders little to the emancipation of colonized people’ (Darder & Torres, as cited in Dunbar, 2008, p. 94). I see these fields of inquiry as important for potential future research and in particular, developing conceptions of an intersectional framework remains ‘unfinished business’ that can build on the rich data from this research.

Formal requirements influenced a number of other decisions taken for example, the extent of information gathering, number of interviews conducted, and the breadth and depth of analysis. The thesis does not pretend to be a completed jig-saw puzzle or a stand alone source of data upon which policy actors should base future developments in the field. To the extent that the topic is ever-changing, this thesis represents my research journey at a particular time and place. Rather than deny or defend limitations, I have embraced the frustrations, difficulties and restrictions as opportunities to meet challenges and develop my knowledge and research skills. This research project has been as much about my journey as a final product.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, the relevant literature is critically examined to determine what is known about the subject matter, identify gaps in knowledge and set the scene for the research topic. I treat the literatures as fields of knowledge providing foundational information for my research and this chapter will focus on those ‘landmark’ studies and approaches that informed the focus and shape of my research as it progressed. I draw on this material together with a wider range of literatures in later analysis and discussions chapters, and particularly privilege Indigenous voices in recognition of principles of Indigenous research (E. M. Brown, 1995; Denzin et al., 2008; L. T. Smith, 1999), as discussed further in my chapter on research methodology.

There are many strands and complexities in the fields of theory and practice related to this research topic. I concluded from my initial literature review that the challenge of drawing together what could look like separate and disparate fields of research and writing into one coherent literature review in many ways was similar, mimicked, or at least contributed to what I subsequently learned about the separateness of the fields of practice.

In this chapter, I concentrate on selected works that were most influential, especially through the developmental stages of the research project. The literature review therefore, will focus on mechanisms and approaches to achieving equality in relation to gender and race, the public sector context for my research from the ‘big picture’ to writings about staff engaged in policy work, and knowledge about relationships, issues and connections between these fields of research and praxis.

Gender and race as contested sites

The history of feminism and feminist politics is well written even if the practice of equality and inclusion remain elusive (Chappell, 2002; Freedman, 2002; Grown, 2007; McDowell & Pringle, 1992; Neuwirth, 2003; Sawyer, 1999; Woodward & Woodward, 2009; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). Consciousness of ‘multiple and interlocking oppressions’ as described by Yeatman (1995), only became possible with further challenges to feminist assumptions, categories and priorities. In addition, postcolonial feminist analysis injected a critique of Australian power ideologies and dynamics. Rather than predicting the demise of collective social action by disparate Australian feminists, Maddison (2002) argues that ‘the conflicts and dilemmas over
theory, ideology, strategy and difference have not and cannot ever be finished’ as these continual processes are a sign of vitality (p. 11).

Parallel with the women’s movement during the surge in 1970s social activism, separate developments were taking place in the examination of issues related to race and ethnicity. Sociological theories of racism challenged narrow paradigms that equated racism with prejudice. Since then, significant work has been done to understand the cultural and structural underpinnings and personal dimensions of racism (Clark & O’Donnell, 1999; Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998; Lipsitz, 1998; Ware & Back, 2002; Wellman, 1993). Social identity theorists moved away from analyses of identity as unitary and fixed (Brah, 1996a) and began to take account of broad contextual elements influencing individual identity, including issues of power relations. Relationships between cultural groups/communities increasingly began to be described as fluid and situated in a broad national and historical context. Processes of growth, decline and transformation of particular collectivities helped explain changing relations between dominant/minority groups.

Over the last decade, the literature marks a shift to consideration of changing forms of racisms in diverse contexts and to take account of the political engagement with policies and practices that influence and impact on the treatment of particular communities and their interrelationships (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994) and with regards to gender and colonial practices (Eveline, 2001). Most recent literature encompasses theories about comparative global racisms, transnational white identity, postcolonialism and Whiteness as an institutionalisation of imperialism (W. Anderson, 2002; Johnson, Huggins, & Jacobs, 2000; Rasmussen, Klinenberg, Nexica, & Wray, 2001).

Cohen points out that gender and race are not the same with respect to outcomes of discrimination in the USA. ‘Loose discussion of white male privilege often conflates women and blacks as being subordinate groups sharing a victim status relative to white males. Both of these groups do have real problems, but the issues facing women and blacks are different. Women have made real strides in eliminating the wage and employment disadvantages between them and men. Black progress has been much more limited’ (Cohn, 2000, p. 25). Aware of the notion of a hierarchy of disadvantage, a number of writers have warned against category politics as a potential threat to combined efforts to tackle inequalities across as well as within groups. Wiegman (1995) claims that ‘in the how of race and gender there is still a great deal to be told’ (p. 2) – rather than studying these two constructions as oppositional, hierarchical or unrelated, the terms need to be interrogated to understand the multiple meanings and the various processes involved. Bottero and Irwin (2003) argue that issues in the shaping of difference and inequalities in the domains of gender and race need to be firmly located within relational
accounts of social practice. The content and patterned nature of social relations including procedures and unreflected assumptions and biases can be actively counteracted according to these authors, by making imbalances, assumptions and normative behaviours more visible.

Increasingly the workplace began to be identified as important for further research into institutional processes of social stratification marked by continuing occupational typing and status segregation for both women and for non-white populations. ‘In an extremely fundamental way, much of the race and gender inequality that we observe in modern life has its start in the managerial policies of firms and corporations. If we want to understand inequality, then, we need to understand managerial logic’ (Cohn, 2000, p. 26). Issues of privilege and power exercised in organisations and embedded in institutional behaviours have become the focus of much research internationally; and the literatures on male privilege (McIntosh, 1988), Whiteness privilege (McIntosh, 1990), and institutional racism (IR) (M. K. Brown et al., 2003; Essed, 1991; O’Grady et al., 2005) have increased in recent years, including publications drawing on case study material in Australia (Eveline, 1994; Hollinsworth, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2000a, 2004). In addition to institutional racism, research is also focusing on wider aspects whereby the system perpetuates racism including but not limited to individual institutional and organisational operations (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd, 2005). A relatively new theme emerging in this field is the workings of a ‘racial government’ (Bessant, 2001; Lea, Kowal, & Cowlishaw, 2006) identified by characteristics of inequalities through public policy and service delivery.

The increasingly sophisticated definitions of IR developed especially in legal systems reflect growing recognition and understanding of the dimensions and extent of the problem. For example, Korn (1995) refers to ‘those acts or institutional procedures that help create or perpetuate sets of advantages or privileges for the majority group and exclusions or deprivations of minority groups, a principle which is so embracing … that it no longer requires conscious or even overtly racist acts to sustain it’ (p. 94). Moreover, Korn notes that recreation of discriminatory institutional patterns is so inbuilt that malice is unnecessary.

Korn (1995) describes institutional or systemic racism, as well as sexism, as widespread discrimination affecting many people, which works as a system for maintaining oppression, in explicit contrast to discriminatory action taken by an individual. ‘[W]hether or not the discriminatory practice is formalized in writing, the policy is deeply ingrained, the differential treatment is an accepted practice, and its effect is widespread. Moreover, the discriminatory policy bears the imprimatur of the institution, either because of the powerful effect of being written down or because it is so deeply ingrained within the institution that it appears to be a part of the institution’ (p. 94). A number of writers have analysed organisational resistance and
denial to diagnoses of institutional or systemic sexism and racism. Korn (1995) for example, explains how sexist political intent can determine the application of a diminutive label, ‘used as a way to avoid responsibility for eliminating discrimination’ (p. 94), and Rowe (2000) says ‘the universalization of “White” as an “unraced” social location and the deflection of critical gaze’ secures White privilege within particular contexts (p. 65).

**Tackling inequality through institutional change**

While organisational change is a target to address inequality, it is seen predominantly through gender (Acker, 1990; Ferguson, 1984; J. Fletcher, 1999; Gherardi, 1994; P. Y. Martin, 1992) and race to a less extent (Katz & Moore, 2004; J. W. Murphy & Choi, 1997). Research has shown that organisation members ‘do gender’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2003) in a range of ways especially everyday communicative practices that continually produce, reproduce and resist dominant, institutionalised gender relations. A wider, intersersectional focus has been increasingly argued, ‘Most studies of the production of class, gender, and racial inequalities in organizations have focused on one or another of these categories, rarely attempting to study them as complex, mutually reinforcing or contradicting processes’ (Acker, 2006, p. 442).

‘The transformative capacity of feminism’ (Mumby, 1996, p. 264) increasingly directed to understanding institutional and organisational behaviour, has turned towards examination of the state and its role. Within the international women’s movement, Australian feminist praxis has been increasingly and intimately engaged with governments, as Dwyer captures, ‘In England feminists write books, … in America they set up businesses, and have campaigns about laws, and in Australia they set up services and attempt to change … the apparatus of the state’ (as cited in Eisenstein, 1996, p. xi). In this context, the ‘gender mainstreaming’ (GM) framework developed through the United Nations is said to have capacity to provide a new direction for gender equality taking gender into account in all policy development processes.

**Gender mainstreaming and its critics**

There have been a number of important international actors in this field whose work has focused on clarifying concepts, legislative change and development of appropriate national mechanisms (Verloo, 2000). For example, the Council of Europe has produced a range of materials relating to gender mainstreaming concepts, methods and best practice guidelines drawn from experts, projects and seminars (Directorate General of Human Rights, 2004). Helpful stratagems drawn from case studies of gender mainstreaming projects continue to add weight to the growing research literature, especially drawn from GM development projects in ‘developing’ nations. Thorvalsdóttir sees that GM is given special attention as ‘a foundational
policy on which successful expansion must be built’ (Thorvaldsdóttir, 2007, p. 1). GM has become important as a public sector policy tool. ‘Although its origins are in feminist activism, the proliferation of gender mainstreaming in public sector agencies has seen it become most visible as a practice of governance’ observe Eveline and Todd (2009, p. 542).

Despite its increasing importance, Walby (2005) describes GM as ‘a new and essentially contested form of feminist politics and policy, existing in the tension between the mainstream and interventions to secure gender equality’ (p. 463). Eveline and Todd (2009) summarise criticisms that, ‘range from its ineffectiveness against institutional and legislative obstacles, as well as attitudinal, ideological, structural and political barriers that sustain gender inequality, to a lack of clarity as to how it should be done, coupled with a lack of interest or resources for monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness’ (p. 544). Francisco (September 2003) warns of GM being interpreted and emerging out of narrow, instrumentalist and managerialist understandings of gender by governments. Agreeing that GM is highly contested in its meanings and efficacy, Eveline and Todd (2009) note conclusions reached by Bacchi and Eveline about strategic practice, ‘assess in which contexts this policy tool can prove useful for advancing a change agenda, as opposed to those in which it might undermine gender equity’ (p. 538). They examine why GM has not been successfully utilised as a policy tool for addressing the gender pay gap and draw particular attention to the challenges posed by the public sector as a monopsonistic employer. McGauran (2009) explores the nature of these challenges further and concludes that GM and the public policy implementation process in fact resembles ‘round pegs in square holes’. Looking at public sector organisational characteristics affecting policy implementation, McGauran (2009) argues that ‘the ways in which policies are usually implemented in public sector organizations is contributing to the weak implementation of gender mainstreaming’, suggesting ‘integrationist’ rather than ‘transformative’ implementation with ‘an emphasis on expert-bureaucratic processes rather than on greater participation with civil society’ (p. 215).

Concern at the potential for cynical abuse of GM has been expressed by a number of writers, including Australian feminists. Osborne, Bacchi and Mackenzie (2008) reinforce a number of writers when they spell out the risks involved with mainstreaming, ‘There is particular concern that the trend within new public sector management (an institutional reform associated with neo-liberalism) to disperse accountability for gender equality across government departments can provide the justification to downgrade or disband specialized women’s policy units within government bureaucracies’ (p. 149). Bacchi (2007) provides justification for concerns about political co-optation in her report of the closure of dedicated women’s equality units in several European countries because of the new focus, and in Australia the abolition by the Federal Coalition Government of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) also in the name of ‘mainstreaming’.
In addition to a degree of cynicism about government motivation, political strategic differences reflect existing tensions between gender equality approaches as first priority and broader human rights approaches which address structural inequalities in all forms, what Verloo (2006) refers to as an overreaching ‘one size fits all’ equality strategy (as cited in Thorvaldsdóttir, 2007, p. 1). While GM has been supported for its transformative potential in policy development for gender equality (Rubery et al. (2005), Magnusson et al. (2003), and others, as cited in Eveline & Todd, 2009; Squires, 2005; Walby, 2005a), the ambivalence that is more often expressed by feminist critics (Beveridge & Nott, 2002) is particularly in the context of diversity, where the model is seen by most critics as representing a significant challenge. Squires (2003) notes the tendency of mainstreaming practices to become ‘narrow technocratic tools that are insufficiently attentive to diversity and democratic participation’ (p. 33). She urges theoretical and practical development before assuming that gender mainstreaming could simply be extended to the mainstreaming of all marginalized group identities.

**Gender mainstreaming limitations with regards intersectionality**

Some critiques of GM have their roots in critiques of ‘White’ feminism by women of colour. Black feminist writings have successfully challenged feminism’s universalism and imperialism (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996, p.5), to the extent that feminist equality debates in the literature are increasingly reflecting acceptance of the need to integrate notions of diversity among women. Historically, mainstream feminist struggles for gender equality focused on the interests of White, middle-class, Anglophone and heterosexual women and ‘stand-alone’ feminism that exclusively focuses on the goal of gender justice remains a preferred position for many Western women. This debate has carried over to the GM literature from writers calling for a greater recognition of the heterogeneity of women and adoption of new praxis informed by the concept ‘intersectionality’ developed by Black feminists in the USA such as Hill Collins from 1986; hooks from 1981; and Crenshaw from 1989. Continuing developments in this field have also been made by Acker with publications on the topic from 2000; McCall from 2001; and other writers (Grillo, 1995; Grillo & Wildman, 1991; Maynard, 2001; Weber, 2001; Yeatman, 1995).

Crenshaw explains how the term ‘intersectionality’ helps ‘describe the location of women of color both within overlapping systems of subordination and at the margins of feminism and antiracism’ (as cited in Rojas, 2009, p. 27). Crenshaw (1989) presents a Black feminist critique to demarginalise the intersection of race and sex, arguing against dominant thinking about discrimination along ‘a single categorical axis’ (p. 139) that distorts analysis of multidimensionality. Hill Collins (1986) proposes a ‘matrix of domination’ to analyse the impact of several systems of inequality and shows how gender, race, ethnicity, and class
systems of action and meaning intersect and interlock. The outcomes are routinely reproduced into particular types of experiences. Hill Collins (1999) reinforces the need for theoretical development to expose and extend earlier restrictive notions, ‘viewing gender within a logic of intersectionality redefines it as a constellation of ideas and social practices that are historically situated within and that mutually construct multiple systems of oppression’ (p. 263).

Dhruvarajan and Vickers (2002) describe the various intersecting and interlocking dimensions of social status that women experience as relational. These differences are transformed into hierarchies and get built into institutional structures, belief systems legitimise these inequalities, and unequal relationships are routinely reproduced within daily life to become a part of commonsense knowledge. Accepting that differences across such dimensions as race, class, sexuality, and ability manifest themselves in power disparities is central to this approach. ‘Only when these disparities are clearly understood can light be shed on viable oppositional and liberatory struggles’ (Dhruvarajan & Vickers, 2002, p. 302). This is extended to the field of FDV by Josephson (2005) who is mindful that women’s social locations influence their experiences of satisfactory interventions. A number of writers however, express cautionary notes about intersectionality including a tendency to ahistoricise and acontextualise (Hankivsky, 2005; Knapp, 2005; Thorvaldsdóttir, 2007; Verloo, 2006).

The contribution of critical policy analysis

‘Femocratic strategy’ (Eisenstein, 1996) and experience has informed the development of GM particularly research on gender-specific effects of public policy undertaken by feminists using critical policy analysis. Drawing from critical theory that focuses on power relations, critical policy analysis has looked at ways that policies and structures serve to restrict access to power. Through specifically feminist analysis ‘understanding the patterns of dominance and subordinance that exist between men and women can help us to comprehend the subtleties of power and control within bureaucracies’ says Ferguson (1984, p. 5). Marshall (1999) promotes feminist critical policy analysis that melds critical theory and feminism to challenge traditional, mainstream approaches to policy analysis reflecting the assumptions, worldview, and values of those in power. She takes issue with policy research that has been dominated by methods and theoretical frameworks developed and implemented overwhelmingly by White, male, and well educated policy makers (as summarised by Shaw, 2004, p. 58).

Critical policy studies continue to challenge ‘simple solutions to complex problems in Indigenous affairs’ (M. Moran, 2009, p. 1) through research that interrogates ideological and often neo-liberal economic policy drivers (Craig & Porter, 2006; Hamilton & Maddison, 2007) and supports empirical evidence incorporating contextual and socio-cultural realities including
frontline and local community perspectives (M. Moran, 2008, 2009). The daily realities of many Aboriginal people coping with racism can be seen reflected in much contemporary research across sectors. For example, Aboriginal health researchers in South Australia note ‘93% of people reporting experiencing racism at least sometimes and two-thirds reporting experiencing it often’ which the researchers linked to Aboriginal participants’ lower levels of trust in Australian people and institutions compared to non-Aboriginal participants in a companion study (Gallaher et al., 2009, p. xi). Beresford (2001a) traces institutional discrimination against Aboriginal families in Western Australia through the 1990s and reveals ambiguity between direct and indirect discrimination in the field of housing as well as limited capacity of legal processes to deal with the issues. And in the field of education there is significant evidence of destructive connections between racism and schooling outcomes in Australia as elsewhere (Aveling, 2007; Beresford & Partington, 2003; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Groome, 1995; S. Mellor & Corrigan, 2004). The fact that Indigenous women have remained marginalised in policy development and service delivery to their communities is raised as a particular issue in the literature, and Libesman, Pearce and Kelly (1999) focus on the way that Aboriginal affairs policy influenced by ongoing racism has had ‘a profound influence on Indigenous women’s relations with the state’ (p. 144).

Engaging with the state

Taking an historical perspective of the gains and losses through equality work, particularly feminist activism within governments, has been important to many writers projecting future issues and planning strategic directions (Bielski, 2005; Bulbeck, 1997; Franzway, Court, & Connell, 1989; Maddison & Franzway, 2006; Sawer, 1996; Yeatman, 1990). Many feminist activists see inherent limitations and potential distractions of working within the system (Auer, 1990; Epstein, 2001; Ferguson, 1984), however Eisenstein (1996) credits lasting achievements to femocrats supported by grassroots activists in a women’s movement described by Maddison (2002) as ‘working with a unique strain of feminist discourse combining international influences and local factors’ (p. 4). Modelling their engagement with the state on achievements by other groups with well-established claims, feminists established positions within the powerful machinery of the state and gained skills and strategies that extended to wide(r) social policy visions including equal opportunity and affirmative action programs. However, the vulnerability of Australian progress towards gender equality has been identified by a number of writers (Maddison & Franzway, 2006; Miles, 2005; Summers, 2003, 2004) and divisions were revealed concerning effective stratagems and approaches that could meet diversity needs among women, increasingly highlighted by Aboriginal women writers (Atkinson, 1990; Moreton-Robinson, 2006a; O’Shane, 1976).
Development of collective identity as a sisterhood by the women’s movement has been impacted by issues of difference, in particular ‘race’, ethnicity and cultural differences. Rowe (2000) pushes for ‘more reflexive White feminist theory and praxis’ (p. 64) to reveal racial privilege that compromises the possibility of feminist alliances. A number of writers point out that the goals and processes of the women’s movement, consisting of relatively privileged White Australian feminists, seem irrelevant to Aboriginal women ‘more interested in liberating their own people’ (Lake, 1999, 2003). Moreton-Robinson (2000a) explains that ‘Indigenous women give priority to the collective rights of Indigenous people rather than the individual rights of citizenship’ (p. 160). Rojas (2009) reflects that for civil rights activists, highlighting their racial consciousness did not mean retreating from recognising community needs, and similarly in the Australian context, Indigenous women articulate a commitment to strengthen and improve their communities from within, especially in relation to child sexual abuse (p. 16). Rojas points out that the intersection of race and gender affects women of color in diverse ways, making more difficult their challenges to confronting racism and misogyny. ‘Most women in the 1960s and ‘70s found it more feasible to address gender issues within their communities than to struggle with white, middle-class feminists against race and class issues’ (Rojas, 2009, p. 27).

The history of inequitable and discriminatory social policy and provision of human services with respect to gender and racial issues in Australia has been documented, yet remains marginalised within the overall body of publicly funded contemporary research. Aboriginal communities continue to struggle to be heard and respected in mainstream politics (Maddison, 2009) which focuses on ‘the Aboriginal problem’ (Fredericks, 2008; Maddison, 2009; Morrissey, 2006; O'Donoghue, 2008). Whatever difficulties exist in the making of Australian public policy, the field of Aboriginal affairs is particularly challenging for governments expected to ‘do something about it’ (Morrissey, 2006, p. 347). The media has drawn public attention to the issues with dramatic effect on policy development (Anti-Discrimination Board of New South Wales, 2003; Roberts, 2007 updated 2008). The power of dominant media platforms has been criticised in relation to coverage of Indigenous issues and a number of writers have examined the role of media in facilitating and/or resisting protectionist/development discourses (Avison & Meadows, 2000; Osuri, Dreher, & Laforteza, 2009). Langton (2008) critically notes, ‘everyday suffering of Aboriginal children and women, the men who assault and abuse them, and the use of this suffering as a kind of visual and intellectual pornography in Australian media and public debates’ (p. 145). Watson (2009) describes a continuing colonial project in Australia in which the media uncritically promotes assimilation and ‘protection’ policies. ‘A comprehensive analysis of the sources of Aboriginal community violence from a diversity of Aboriginal perspectives is rarely made by the mass media or given space for communication and conversation’ (Watson, 2009, p. 1).
Indigenous Australian voices have in recent decades been contributing to critical historical analyses with their descriptions of destructive racist policies and practices (Beresford & Omaji, 1998; Broome, 1994; Haebich & Delroy, 1999; Kidd, 1997; Markus, 1990; Read, 1998). O’Donoghue (1997) expresses concern about the capacity of the public sector to implement a rights initiative for Aboriginal people. ‘In a country where “bureaucracy” is a dirty word, in indigenous affairs it is particularly so... For Aboriginal people bureaucracies are often seen as existing on the other side of a cultural divide, as enforcing the rules and values of the dominant society’ (O’Donoghue, 1997, p. 8). Staunton (2000) identifies the critical role played by public servants by acknowledging that, ‘positive progress in the implementation of rights initiatives can be, and more often than not is, undertaken under the auspices of a public sector administrative framework’ (p. 6). Dockery (2009) posits that, ‘a lack of commitment brought about by a collective mentality within the bureaucracy that assimilation was the inevitable solution’ (p. 4) was responsible for program evaluations that virtually ignored objectives of community capacity building, cultural preservation and self-determination for Aboriginal peoples. A number of other writers criticise the role of public servants in policy implementation through a number of oscillating stages (Dillon & Westbury, 2007; Kidd, 1997; Manne, 2001; Markus, 1990; Mason, 1993) and Briskman (2007) focuses on developing progressive professional social work mindful that ‘in past times, social work was accused of complicity in the oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia’ (p. 1). Pearson (2010) explains that ‘Governments across the country continue to deliver passive welfare, and the bureaucratic industries… are the norm rather than the exception… most people would not be glad to have government service provisioning dominating their lives in the way Aboriginal and other like disadvantaged people’s lives are’ (p. 2).

A considerable literature is available on such subjects as genocide, Aboriginal deaths in custody, trauma of ‘The Stolen Generations’ (Read, 1982), and continuing interpersonal and IR (Ack & Bloodworth, 1998; Beresford & Omaji, 1998; Brock, 1993; Choo, 1993; Dodson, 2000; Grossman, 2003; Rintoul, 1993). Dockery (2009) emphasises that wellbeing measures should be seen as symptoms rather than causes of indigenous disadvantage. Dockery (2009) references Trudgen’s documentation of the many causal factors that have resulted in these symptoms including the loss of control, loss of meaning, feelings of helplessness, accumulated effects of past treatment and the alienation that arises from the loss of one’s own culture and attempts to comply with a new and bewildering dominant culture (p. 23). Indigenous writers have willingly shared their cultural tradition of life storytelling, also valuable as part of their efforts to come to terms with the past, present and future. ‘Aboriginal autobiography is passionately polemical in its impulses’ says Longley (1992, p. 372) who welcomes ‘the new autobiographical counterhistories’ that contribute to Australia’s postcolonial understandings. Collard, Crowe,
Harries and Taylor (1994) describe storytelling as ‘crucial to the oral tradition. It is an information system ...which is interactive rather than moralistic, discipline based or legalistic’ (as cited in D. Bessarab, 2000, p. 88). Some of this literature represents strategic activism, part of an ongoing Indigenous resistance. Briskman (2007) describes ‘Indigenous fightback... Despite a flawed discourse that portrays Indigenous peoples as passive, from the time of colonisation there is evidence of Indigenous actions to reverse the political trends and to gain control’ (p. 136). What is not as well documented are the stories, explanations and experiences of government officials who performed duties that have since been found wanting according to the standards of contemporary Australian society.

Policy and the (new) public sector environment

Managerial and economic solutions to complex problems have become an obsession of public administration internationally (Jun, 2009) and changes to the nature and delivery of public services have been re-directed by the growth of managerialism characterised as ‘New Public Management’ (NPM). Models of private sector management practices have transformed the public sector with a variety of impacts including on relationships between governments and their agencies and their employees. For example, increased competition and casualisation of the workforce (Teicher & Barton, 2002), has increased the exclusion and marginality of those at the lower end of the job market scale and forged greater privileges for those at the top (Ferraro, 2003; Mendes, 2003); new contractualism (Yeatman, 1996) has effectively reduced government leverage over public policy because of escalating fragmentation and loss of expertise (Di Francesco, 2001, p.104); and organisational pressures from restructuring have affected staff, services and programs across sectors (Deverteuil, 2003; Nittoli, 2002). Thomas and Davies (2005) reveal a micro-politics of resistance to NPM through discourse analysis with public service professionals in the police, social services and secondary education fields.

McGauran (2009) says that ‘features impacting on GM implementation are in fact key aspects of the public sector ‘institutional context’ …they cause problems particularly for GM, but are also problematic for wider public policy implementation. I believe that there is significant learning for those implementing GM from considering the characteristics of public sector institutions that cause difficulties for the implementation of a range of policies’ (p. 218). These features include, ‘a culture that focuses on policy inputs (eg staff, funds) rather than on outputs and outcomes; budget management frameworks that are inadequate for reprioritization and reallocation of funding; a relatively weak role for citizen input to policy implementation; weak horizontal coordination and networking between public sector bodies; and inadequate accountability structures’ (p. 218).
The critical literature on ‘new’ public sector and policy processes is increasingly focused on ways and means of tackling inequalities within complex and potentially hostile environments. Hill (1997 and 2005) describes how critical policy analysis, informed by postmodern theory recognising ‘competing discourses in which interests and values are embedded’, has increasingly identified and confronted problematic assumptions. Critical feminist policy analysts consider public policy as imbedded in ‘inequality regimes’ (Acker, 2006), ‘interlinked organizing processes that produce patterns of complex inequalities’ (p. 459) that vary in different organizations at particular times. The public sector is increasingly being revealed as neither gender- nor race-neutral. Nor are they distinct systems or structures with their own separate and unrelated dynamics. Watkins-Hayes (2009) questions the lack of research about the significance of race, class, and gender in street-level bureaucracies and suggests that institutional processes are influenced by not only inter-racial but also intra-racial politics. Increased numbers of people of color in government and quasi-government employment in the USA raises previously unexplored questions that Watkins-Hayes explores, finding that ‘most caseworkers and supervisors of color conceptualize and operationalize welfare reform in ways that link their goals and experiences as agency employees, members of racial communities, and implementers of social policy. They identify with the circumstances of their clients, but interpret the politics of welfare through not only racialized but also classed and gendered lenses’ (p. 285). Acker (2006) also rejects a categorical approach, and she combines ‘gendering’ and ‘racialization’ as ‘mutually constituting processes’.

The critical literature of the human services suggests that policies and programs to date have often been poorly designed and are unlikely to be successful without full knowledge of the client group and implementation issues. A key group that can contribute that knowledge is the frontline staff responsible for service delivery. Lipsky (1980) describes these ‘street-level bureaucrats’ who provide direct client services as important social and political actors serving a variety of symbolic and substantive functions. The profile of frontline staff, as individuals, groups and professions, is changing in Australia as a result of demographic changes, public sector reforms and legislative requirements such as policies for equal opportunity. Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women today work alongside each other in larger numbers to deliver a new generation of policies and programs to Aboriginal clients, many of whom are descendents from families whose histories reveal what is increasingly being described in the literature as symptoms of a legacy of intergenerational trauma resulting from government intervention (McKnight, 2002; D. Mellor & Haebich, 2002; Read, 1998).

One common response to tackling identified discrimination problems across the public sector has been staff training and development. During the United Nations Decade for Women,
Australia among many member states adopted governmental machinery to monitor government activity for impacts on women. The institutionalisation of gender concerns included gender-awareness training and women’s development courses introduced by the reformist Federal Whitlam Labor Government in the 1970s, and particularly accompanied the entry of ‘femocrats’ (Sawer, 1990, 1996; Yeatman, 1990) into government agencies. More recently, a large body of material for cross-cultural training purposes has been developed and refined for public sector application, including in the human services field. Even though the effectiveness of pedagogy has been questioned and limitations of relying on diversity training alone in the workplace identified (C. L. Bacchi, 2001; B. Cox & Blake, 2002; Eveline & Todd, 2002; Hemphill & Haines, 1997; Litvin, 2002), nevertheless the need for consciousness-raising has been confirmed as important. Within the field of education, Eichler (1992) criticises ‘bogus teacher development’ that discourages critical awareness by isolating teachers from the social context of teaching and preventing the asking of ‘questions related to the broader purpose of education in a democratic society’ (as cited in Smyth, 2010, p. 197). Fredericks (2008) draws on the views of Aboriginal women in her research into the effectiveness of cross-cultural training across sectors and concludes that anti-racism training and addressing White race privilege is required to address inequities, marginalisation and disempowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Fredericks calls for knowledge ‘to be more than awareness and that knowledge should encourage and instill the will for change and action’ (p. 81).

Policy practice and the Australian context

The literature traces how racial and ethnic conflicts, exploding in international and local contexts, are forcing governments to reassess how institutions and structures built on dominant White, European values and principles can become more inclusive and responsive. In Australia, reconciliation, social justice and the construction of a multicultural society have become major political issues for governments at all levels and for their public sector machineries (O’Donnell & Simons, 1995, p. 294). Consequently, the history of Aboriginal struggle for recognition, resources and more recently restorative justice, is also being reflected in the reshaping and development of policies and programs.

The ongoing lack of connection between white administrators and Indigenous cultures was described by Tatz in 2001. He regarded the task as ‘to overcome what appears to be a fear of intervening, or trespassing, into an “Aboriginal territory” for which they have no invitation, no training and no culturally appropriate qualifications’ (cited in Hunter, 2002, p.146). What research has been done on the impact of professional education and training with police, social
workers, psychologists and health workers has confirmed the need to address both individual and organisational cultures.

Research into violence rehabilitation programs with Indigenous offenders has included interviews with human services workers in Western Australia to seek their views on how cultural factors might impact on programs. The findings were significant in the range and scope of feedback about principles underpinning good practice, existing approaches and suggestions for future directions. The researchers were encouraged to recommend further research to build on the findings, stating ‘it is clear that we still lack basic knowledge and information about what the needs of this group of offenders are and how best they can be remedied’ (Howells, Day, Byrne, & Byrne, 1999, p.7).

In contemporary Australia, research into how gender issues intersect with racism is not plentiful. And this research has not been directed at the public sector institutions themselves. Leading Aboriginal feminist writers have identified historical patterns of White privilege and continuing colonialism with implications for further study of the point of connection of gender and race (Atkinson, 1990; Huggins, 1996). The critical literature points to a politics of Whiteness which needs to be confronted. For their part, Whiteness studies conclude that listening to the voices of Indigenous peoples is critical to this process (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999; Graham, 1994; Kincheloe et al., 1998; Lipsitz, 1998; Rasmussen et al., 2001).

While frontline staff in agencies has generally been under-researched in comparison with the policies and programs they deliver, there have been a handful of studies relevant to issues of racialised and gendered services. Longitudinal research into training outcomes with New South Wales police officers found that ‘female participants were generally less ethnocentric and authoritarian than males’ and that particular policing experiences undermined the benefits of anti-racist training (Wortley and Homel, 1995). Racial prejudice was found to develop as a result of the day-to-day field experiences and recruits were negatively influenced by environmental and occupational pressures once stationed in the community, particularly in districts with large Aboriginal populations in conflict over ‘undesirable’ behaviour. Wortley and Homel (1995) conclude that ‘an attack on police prejudice requires changes to the inequality experienced by racial minorities in society, and to the policies and practices of the police organisation in responding to that iniquitous situation. There is a danger that, in emphasising the role of police training, attention will be diverted from examining the social, occupational, and organizational factors that engender racist attitudes among police’ (p. 315).

Critical literature about frontline work especially police and welfare, encourages the development of community-based services with grassroots Aboriginal community input and
training, and improved policy and guidelines (Samuelson, 1993). Action research conducted in the WA Police Service explored gendered work cultures (Eveline & Harwood, 2002) and built on research into gender issues in organisations (Bradley, 1999; Cockburn, 1991) particularly male dominated occupations. Cross-cultural training has been identified as a critical issue across human service agencies in particular (Cushner & Burslin, 1997; Quina & Bronstein, 2003; Raffoul & McNeece, 1996; Vicary & Bishop, 2005; Yan, 2008). Young (2005) however, raises issues about language and cross-cultural training that are ‘part of an institutional web of practices, which are racialized and actively discriminatory towards the very people who are the subjects of the learning’ (p. 6) because of neo/colonial processes that include knowledge appropriation and essentialising of Indigeneity.

Recent research on ‘diversity’ as a concept and as an objective for practice purposes is also beginning to sound alarm bells for a number of feminists and Indigenous writers (Carol Bacchi & Eveline, 2009; Brah, 1996b; Hazeur & Hayman, 2005; Hemphill & Haines, 1997; Squires, 2003). Gender mainstreaming debates are also beginning to include critics of the use of ‘diversity’ terminology and focus rather than ‘gender’, as practice experience contributes to the development of alternative approaches (Eveline, Bacchi, & Binns, 2009). Similarly, reconciliation has been criticised on a number of grounds, including ‘badging’ for cynical political distraction and diversion from substantive equality goals (J. Altman & Hinkson, 2007; J. C. Altman, Biddle, & Hunter, 2008), constructing a discourse of benign Whiteness (Standfield, 2004), and colonialism (Short, 2003, 2005). Langton (2008) says ‘the reconciliation rhetoric offers hope of “kindness” to Aboriginal people trapped in nightmarish conditions from which escape seems unlikely’ (p. 154). Beresford and Beresford (2006) observe how reconciliation ‘unleashed forces of racism that derailed each stage of the process’ in Australia and argue that reconciliation advocates require a more explicit strategy that can take into account such mechanisms as ‘historical denialism’ that maintains dominant White interests (p. 77). Senator Ridgeway in his 2001 address to the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) referred to the process of reconciliation as largely symbolic rhetoric, referring to a ‘terra nullius of the mind’ that did not require concessions from white Australians (Ridgeway, 2001). Rowse (2009) presents a critique of the Australian Reconciliation Barometer that was established to measure progress, as itself a flawed ‘intervention into our understandings of “reconciliation”’(p. 11). Taylor (2008) discusses culturally insensitive equality goals, ‘As Peterson (2005) has pointed out, without a common agreed view of different and shared perceptions of well-being, the danger is that indicators become ethnocentric and the notion that Indigenous people may have their own life projects is obscured by the pressing moral and political objective of achieving statistical equality that comes with the policies of practical reconciliation and mainstreaming’ (p. 117). The concept and practice of mainstreaming Indigenous services has also not been embraced by all writers, as Murphy (2000) explains:
If Aboriginal people can only see themselves through the eyes of mainstream social, legal and political institutions, then we ourselves will perpetuate the myths they have about us. If we continue to stand in front of white mirrors accepting white explanations for ‘Aboriginal’ problems, failings and solutions then we will only see distorted reflections. The only honesty to be seen in these images is that Australia has never truly departed from the Benelong experiment. A true reflection of Aboriginal realities can only be achieved in a context that recognizes Aboriginal people as Aboriginal people. However, under existing arrangements the only equality mainstream Australia is prepared to offer us is theirs (p. 88).

Despite reservations about reconciliation and related policies and programs, the call for staff development and training from frontline to senior executives continues (S. Young, 1999). Research that can inform and progress antiracism as anti-categorical and non-competitive approaches and pedagogy has been called for (Dominelli, 2004; Hattam & Atkinson, 2006). Young (2005) identifies an emancipatory project based on the perceptions of research participants that there is ‘potential provided in engaging in the messy contested and contradictory terrain inhabited by social workers and their clients’ (p. 12). Young supports ‘dialogical performativity’ through learning that incorporates changing relationships between social workers and their clients to develop understanding and insight for moving beyond the potential immobility of oppression or guilt, beyond the ‘double binds’. Purposive training towards reconciliation through features including what Nakata (2007) calls ‘the cultural interface’, Indigenous knowledge and storytelling, and White race privilege are some of the potentially transformatory methods proposed by a number of writers (Fredericks, 2008; S. Young, 1999). Leadership programs are also promoted in the growing body of literature directed to the development of anti-racist and anti-sexist institutions and public sector environments.

A significant and diverse body of literature describes the historical legacy of the racist White Australia Policy on all Australians, governments and institutions (Martinez, 1999; Willard, 1923/1967; Windshuttle, 2005; Yarwood, 1961), and points to underlying tension in public policy and practice aimed at development of a (more) tolerant population. Hage (1998/2000) questions benign modes of behaviour, goodwill and the popularity of a transformative intent, arguing that non-Whites especially migrants and Aboriginal people are constructed within a white multiculturalism of national practices grounded and guided by a White nation fantasy that is effectively exclusionary. He says Australia’s dominant white culture is characteristic of all societies with a European cultural tradition imbued with notions of ‘tolerance’ and ‘cultural pluralism’. Hage observes that ‘many of those who position themselves as “multicultural” and “anti-racists” are merely deploying a more sophisticated fantasy of white supremacy (p. 23). Reflecting on more immigration and related public policies, Hirst (2009, 20 October) provides a contrast to negative criticisms of government policy intentions and outcomes, ‘Racism is a
strong force in human affairs. Within the circumstances I have outlined, some designed, some not, Australians were brought to set aside racism and create a harmonious, multi-racial society. The puzzle is why some people in the face of this success, think Australians have a particular problem with racism’. Policy changes in the field of racial and sex discrimination are but some of the fields where social activists have directed their attention, yet further development remains contested as the literature demonstrates.

Driving policy change and development

At the national 2005 conference of the Institute of Public Administration Australia, National President Andrew Podger addressed contemporary challenges for efficient, effective, equitable and ethical public services. He diagnosed equity problems, the biggest failure being Indigenous health, and spelled out that the equity agenda needed to tackle complex, ‘wicked’ problems with solutions requiring joint effort by both Commonwealth and State governments and a considerable degree of personal and community responsibility. He called for additional resources to underpin new approaches and indicated contextual difficulties in social reform. ‘There is room here for good research and experimentation away from ideological battlegrounds’ (Podger, 2005, p.9).

In the face of a community outcry or perceived crisis in public services, governments are prone to look for quick solutions that promise a new approach with radical policy solutions to rectify old mistakes. The influence of the media as a major public opinion shaper and policy driver has been acknowledged. Under extreme pressure, one increasingly popular method for governments to respond is to hold an inquiry, review or Royal Commission into the presenting problems. Examining the literature on inquiries provided a framework useful for critical analysis of the Gordon Inquiry and related policy documents. The literature reveals how inquiries as political tools of governments frame and participate in the policy process. In the context of the Australian public sector, the history of inquiry contributions to public policy, programs and services reveals a mixed reputation. Most research effort is engaged at the end point of the inquiry, with utilisation (or not) of the evidence presented by the inquiry report. The effectiveness of inquiries in terms of contributions to policy development is measured by the changes and achievements made by governments after the inquiry has reported. Weller notes a lack of research directed to the inquiry contribution within a policy cycle (Weller, 1994). The potential impact of inquiries has been widely acknowledged in critical terms, however Schofield and Goodwin (2005) write about ‘positive policy outcomes’ (p. 43), and Lowe (2003) defends the use of inquiries with an optimistic argument that ‘the effects of inquiries are unpredictable but may lead to significant changes’ (p. 395). ‘The varieties of inquiries are as diverse as the
legal and political couplings from which they emerge’ says McKay (1990, p. 30). Despite
differences, the literature about inquiries in general and specific inquiries particularly relevant
to my research concerning the Gordon Inquiry reveals common concerns with purpose,
procedures and political outcomes.

In the human services field, child protection has been especially prone to government and/or
public inquiries (Littlechild, 2008; Lonne & Thomson, 2005), and critical analyses of Australian
and New Zealand social justice inquiries (Brunton, 2005; Hobbs, 2001; Marchetti, 2005)
contend that a variety of errors undermine efforts at reform in these fields. Governments have
been accused of initiating inquiries as a political reaction which, as a risk management strategy,
produces little chance of genuine success and represents a lack of learning from crises (Baker,
1988; Elliott & McGuinness, 2002). Hobbs (2001) says, ‘there is an excessive reliance on the
value of risk assessment and a poor understanding of limitations of prediction, prevention,
responsibility and blame’ (p. 156). And Salter (2000) describes how serious incident inquiries in
the field of mental health serve a role beyond providing explanation, ‘inquiries are, in fact,
attempting to answer questions about fear, stigma, morality and personal responsibility, areas
where rational inquiry has a poor record of satisfactory results…To the Government, inquiries
into the minutiae of local service provision provide welcome distraction from the simple fact
that psychiatric services have always been neglected’ (p. 196).

The conclusion I draw from the literature on inquiries as vehicles for potential social justice
reform through policy development is that supporting Australian research is significantly
lacking. There are lessons to be learnt from the existing body of knowledge, however practice
wisdom about ways to identify, maximise and tap opportunity power of Australian inquiries has
not been sufficiently recorded. Critical analysis of public inquiries could heighten awareness
and appreciation for the part played by the public sector in social development. The idea that
the policy cycle begins and ends, or is contained within agency responsibilities and
accountabilities, does not recognise the role and impact of public inquiries. More research is
called for to understand ways and means that inquiries can and do create, reproduce, contribute
or challenge social problems.

High profile committees of review and commissions of enquiry are not the only ways that
external experts and independent advisers can be engaged in advocating for change usually on
so called ‘wicked’ policy problems that have persisted over time and at times plagued
governments (Australian Public Services Commission, 2007; Podger, 2005; Ramsay, 2007).
Other external triggers of relevance to this research project include strong media campaigns and
social movements including from within government that gather political energy to drive policy
development.
The concept of ‘reconciliation’ has been adopted as a framework for policy change and development in Aboriginal affairs by Australian governments and in the public domain, however reconciliation efforts have been proceeding with mixed success (J. Altman & Hinkson, 2007; Morrissey, 2006; Paradies, 2006; Sanderson, 2008). A number of writers have criticised conservative government approaches to policy development through an official decade marked by projects and programs of ‘practical reconciliation’ with Indigenous Australians focused on the measured reduction of deficits via strategic intervention aimed at individual behaviour change within a framework of shared responsibilities’ (John Taylor, 2008, p. 114). There have been calls for a whole-of-government approach to policy implementation that engages with Aboriginal people and incorporates their perspectives for example, Aboriginal considerations of how the gender dimension should be addressed (D. C. Bessarab, 2006). From the perspective of Indigenous practitioners and researchers the importance given to gender issues may set different priorities and directions to those set by institutions reflecting White, Western concerns. Issues of privilege and power influence more than policies and services - research itself is implicated.

Anti-oppressive practice (Berry, 1995; Hazeur & Hayman, 2005; Quina & Bronstein, 2003) has increasingly become a goal in social welfare interventions, however the focus has mainly been on individual sexist and racist prejudicial behaviours rather than the role and processes of institutional sexism and racism. In their research using discourse analysis of interviews and focus groups, Green and Sonn (2006) identify a critique of Whiteness within White Australians’ discursive negotiations of reconciliation, and they conclude that engaging with Indigenous knowledges is ‘a necessary part of the critique of whiteness’ (p. 478). The work of feminist critical policy analysts and critics of GM have identified a challenge for researchers to adopt a ‘gender lens’ that is thoroughly imbued with a ‘racial or race-sensitive lens’, not simply an additive.

A number of writers examine the concept and practice of policy activism in the Australian context, in broadly defined policy arenas, policy processes and policy instruments (Edwards, 2001; Fawcett et al., 2010; Phillips, 2006; Yeatman, 1998). Ramsay’s (2007) summary of different ideas and research into policy activists has particular relevance to my own project. In her analytical narrative of feminist policy activism involved in the making of ‘the first body of Australian domestic violence policy’ (p. 11), Ramsay focuses on the edges or the boundaries of the policy process to illuminate policy activism that involves insider/outsider identities and relationships, strategies, confusions and opportunist leaps. Ramsay is influenced by Jones, Lee and Poynton (1998) for their insistence that ‘policy texts are also incitements to action’ and the two key policy activist strategies of ‘vigilant readings’ and ‘strategic retelling’ (p. 9).
State intervention in domestic violence

Domestic violence (DV) is one field of public policy in which awareness and analysis of a gender dimension could be expected given the legacy of femocrats and feminist praxis, especially in the Australian context. However, domestic violence policymaking does not appear to accord priority to issues of gender and IR.

Despite ‘significant policy shifts over the past thirty years in relation to both policy and practice around domestic violence’ (p. 32), Murray (2005) expresses concern at the gap between the rhetoric of government intention and reality in policy implementation, the competing discourses in policy operations, and the lack of gender-based understandings of domestic violence. While the alarmingly high costs of DV have been estimated (Access Economics, 2004), there remains much that is not known about the full extent of abuse, prevention and successful interventions. The public policy rhetoric of DV reflects its location within a range of policy contexts across Australia. Particular problems identified include government funding models based on competitive categories, poor inter-agency co-ordination and program integration, and the lack of cultural appropriateness of services available to Aboriginal victims (Chappell, 2001; Dawson, 2009; Marcus, 2009; Murray, 2005; Otter, 1986; Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Taskforce, 1999; Phillips, 2006; Wood, 2008).

Australian Indigenous women in some areas are forty-five times more likely to experience domestic violence than non-Indigenous women and ten times more likely to be killed as a result of domestic violence (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence, 2001). Amnesty International reports that in the USA, Indian women suffer two and a half times more domestic violence, and, compared with a national average of 18 per cent, one in three Native American women are raped, by 86 per cent non-Native men (as cited in Haines, Herold, Mantilla, Rodgers, & al, 2007, p. 5). Similar themes of domestic violence are reported by Canadian researchers: colonisation effects on Indigenous men, family violence issues, Indigenous women are disproportionately imprisoned, and subsequent abuse or neglect of others as an outcome of the victimisation of women (LaPrairie, 1989).

The Australian Law Reform Commission (1994) refers to Indigenous women as ‘the single most legally disadvantaged group in Australian society’. The statistical evidence of abuse suffered by Indigenous women in Australia is overwhelming, yet there is agreement across the field that the picture is incomplete because the total extent of the problem of DV is not recorded. There is significant under-reporting of DV, and it is estimated that up to 80 per cent of women who experience domestic violence do not seek help from any service (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996). Aboriginal women in particular are over-represented in official
statistics for women experiencing assault and death (Office for Women's Policy, 2006). Half of all the DV incidents in Western Australia reported to police in 1994 related to Aboriginal women, even though they number only about three per cent of the adult female population. Ferrante et al. (1996) report that Aboriginal women in Western Australia are more than 45 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be a victim of domestic violence. The Aboriginal Justice Council 1999 reports that 69 per cent of all assault cases against Aboriginal women were carried out by the spouse or partner (as cited in Mulroney, 2003, p. 10). The Office for Women's Policy (2005) reports that 22.6 per cent of Indigenous women in Western Australia perceived family violence as a problem in their community, despite their continued calls for improved safety and protection (p. 57).

A growing number of writers take up the issue of IR in the way governments deal with Aboriginal people (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd, 2005). Aboriginal peoples have been problematised by portrayals of Aboriginality as the source of a wide range of social problems, especially FDV (Blagg, 2008; Cripps, 2004). Critics maintain that public policy interventions that are based on a chronic or recalcitrant ‘Aboriginal problem’ serve to reinforce negative stereotypes that ultimately threaten the sustainability of Aboriginal communities. Bessarab (2000) stresses that ‘workers cannot continue to work in isolation, ignoring the cultural, socio-economic, political and gender histories of Aboriginal people’ (p. 90). These writers reflect an international body of literature critical of public policy and service provision that represents a post-colonial project.

Mtezuka (1996) is one of a large number of international writers whose work reveals how stereotypical views of women and men in black families compound problems in FDV for example by affecting help-seeking from white service providers. ‘The dual dimensions of racism and sexism add to their difficulties’ (Mtezuka, 1996, p. 173); classism presents another contextual oppression. Indigenous writers have been critical of system interventions including perpetrator treatment programs and crisis management that have been based on Western interventions and imposed by social institutions in epistemic and post-colonial ways (Duran et al 1998). Theories of domestic violence have been increasingly challenged by Indigenous critics who point out how Western (White) interventions, also referred to as a Eurocentric value base (Mtezuka, 1996), have historically operated as tools for social control. For example, programs that serve to pathologise Indigenous men and focus on such parallel factors as alcohol and drug abuse exacerbate problems. Violence is presented as symptomatic of general community deficiency in these simplistic conventional solutions. Duran et al. (1998) concludes that ‘authors maintain a definition of the problem that masks the issues of domination and subjugation, issues which must be considered given the historical context of this problem’ (p. 98).
Criminal overrepresentation of Aboriginal people has been linked to public policy that prioritises crime responses at the expense of preventive approaches, racist discrimination and gaps in civil or family law services (Schwartz & Cunneen, 2009). Criminal justice responses to domestic violence have not always been appropriate to Aboriginal people because of historical experiences with policing and imprisonment (Blagg, 2008). These experiences mirror international reports that illustrate the pervasive nature of various forms of violence that surround black women’s lives in particular. For example in the USA, underreporting of DV has also been linked to historical racism, as explained by Rojas (2009). ‘Many black women have suffered by not speaking out. …Many black women are reluctant to report sexual assault because they feel compelled to protect the men in their communities and families. They are also wary of an unjust penal system and recognize the potential damage to families in removing men from their households. However, as women, their dedication to their community is often overlooked or taken for granted. More often, their race is emphasized against their gender and sexuality, which are both disparaged or ignored’ (p. 46). Discrimination and prejudice is perpetuated by conventional wisdom surrounding racial and gendered categories that separate according to what is acceptable and unacceptable and based on historical precedence (p. 71). Rarely are racist and sexist stereotypes challenged through the work of mainstream agencies that continue to relate to Aboriginal women and men according to everyday familiar stereotypes that justify mistreatment. In the USA, INCITE! Women Against Violence, a national activist organization, concludes that ‘mainstream social service agencies frequently pathologize, or typecast as abnormal, women of color who experience violence and the communities where these acts occur. At the same time, the daily forms of violence to which many women of color are exposed remain overlooked’ (as cited in Rojas, 2009, p. 92). These overseas experiences are reflected in Australian research including the reports of a number of commissions of inquiry, including the Gordon Inquiry, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), ‘The Stolen Generations’ (Read, 1982), and the ‘Little Children are Sacred’ (Wild & Anderson, 2007) report.

An increasing body of literature is describing experience at individual level with continuing racism as well as providing accounts of racism at broader levels identified as societal, systemic and institutional. An increasing array of literary genres over time has come to include young people and children (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002), and shows that in their dealings with agencies, Indigenous women experience racism as an everyday occurrence (Baldry, Green, & Thorpe, 2006; St. Jean & Feagin, 1998). ‘One in five Indigenous women experienced discrimination and or racism in 2002’ (Office for Women’s Policy, 2005, p. 58). Research into IR in Australia include an inquiry into housing for Aboriginal people that reported ‘ Aboriginal women and children escaping domestic and/or family violence experience a higher degree of disadvantage than non-Aboriginal applicants’ (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004, p. 179). Schwartz and
Cunneen (2009) report that everyday racial discrimination was an ‘entrenched reality’ for Aboriginal people in their research, and that ‘the capacity for ongoing, racist discrimination to provoke a response that can lead to criminal law issues is clear’ (p. 18). Beresford (2001a) summarises a range of social, legal and political issues highlighted as similar findings from earlier research, especially in the education field (2001b) and the housing sector (2001a) where discrimination against Aboriginal families perpetuates historic injustices and points to systemic racism in government policies and practices (Mangurie/WACSS (1994), as cited in Beresford, 2001a). It is clear from the literature that Aboriginal women and men continue to be affected by the traumatic legacy of historical IR and that racialised public services continue to express and reinforce intergenerational trauma.

Indigenous identity has been promoted as a political pathway by activists seeking policy attention to Indigenous issues of disadvantage and improved government interventions. Aboriginal women have written about their primary concern for the wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples that involves dealing with racism, rather than gender discrimination, as the primary struggle (O'Shane, 1976). Huggins (1996) explains that gender ‘sometimes detracts from my other work as an Aboriginal activist in terms of wanting to do something in the wider context’ (p. 5). She considers White feminism ‘a colonial discourse of oppression for Aboriginal people’ (p. 6) and focuses instead on Aboriginal women’s feminism. ‘There are some issues where Indigenous women can form alliances with non-Indigenous women, but that the form of feminism that is available to Indigenous women is not the model they prefer. Instead, they have their own brand of feminism that's all-encompassing’ (as cited in R. Jones, 2005). Non-Indigenous feminist activists, disagreeing with gender neutral or de-gendered policy responses to intimate partner violence, are concerned with alternative responses promoted by Aboriginal women. Murray (2005) sees that a gendered violence framework is currently under challenge by ‘understandings of Indigenous family violence’ (p. 300) that feature family and community healing models. Feminists are struggling to reconcile the dilemma that intimate partner violence and gender discriminatory effects on women and men potentially become secondary to cultural identity when family violence is linked with wider social impacts.

**Conclusions**

The literature illustrates historical and continuing discrimination on the grounds of gender and racial identity internationally and in Australia despite increasing awareness of the negative consequences. Research has been focused on program evaluation and policy outcomes rather than the feedback of clients, advice of experts and experiences of staff, agencies and government administrations as they strive to address particular criticisms and work to change historic destructive conditions, long-standing oppressive policies and discriminatory practices.
Traditional policy studies and policy processes based on narrow models of policy cycles have not taken account of such policy development activities as government and public inquiries. The experience and expertise of policy actors, including frontline staff, have not been sufficiently researched in the Australian ‘new’ public sector. Of particular importance for my research, has been the largely unexplored territory of gendered and racialised policy making. The literature review points to the need to build on the work of GM with further investigations into policy praxis that can illuminate how contemporary policy processes are shaping experiences of gender and Aboriginality at the level of service delivery. Policy for action frameworks (McClelland & Smyth, 2006) can provide significant direction for critical policy actors. Success in policy and service delivery should be measured in terms of ‘substantive equality’ (Barnard & Hepple, 2000), the equality of outcomes, rather than mainstream (White and male) standards of achievement. Feminist and Indigenous activists are calling for transformative change including at the point of engagement between agents of the state and Aboriginal women and men (Dillon & Westbury, 2007).

From the literature emerges the conclusion that one of the most important and difficult challenges for gender mainstreaming is to develop greater potential to achieve equality of outcomes that reach beyond gender to address other forms of inequality. Continuing criticism of public policy practice with regards current efforts to remove gender and racial inequalities has not proven a deterrent or detracted from the significant contributions made by feminist and anti-racist praxis. But new approaches are needed for gender mainstreaming to become more inclusive of differences within the social categories of women and men. I became aware that making intersectionality more visible through the policy process could contribute to the developing field of gender mainstreaming and strengthen public policy efforts at substantive equality. How to develop and bring multiple feminist perspectives to the study of policy practice is a central question arising from the literature.

In my literature review, I was looking for theory and research that potentially contributes to a reframing of theory and practice, the fields of knowledge that could inform policy praxis to take account of gender and racial dimensions and connections. I found gaps in the literature pointing to a need for further research about policy practice that looks at policy actors themselves doing policy work, in particular gendered/ing and racialised/ing policy processes. The literature review equipped me with a beginning awareness of the topic with all its strands and complexities and contributed understanding to data analysis of the policy documents and related materials for my case studies. Analysis of the Gordon Inquiry and related policy material on FDV was included in the literature review for background information about policy development within the local context and in addition the documents provided valuable data to support later analysis of interview transcripts and related material.
The history of feminist social action and Indigenous resistances in particular, ‘writing back’ through Aboriginal life storytelling, continue to inspire me with humility and insight. While I can see that important gains have been made, in many ways the same dilemmas and difficulties remain. For example, Richie (2005) traces the 70s mainstream social movement organising ‘in response to an emerging consciousness that regarded gender violence as the most extreme point along the continuum of women’s oppression’ (p. 51); the literature reasserts this issue as a continuing challenge. My focus on FDV as particularly appropriate for research in the field of gendered public policy, contributed to a clearer profile of the challenges presented by intersectionality. The use of ‘lenses’ to reveal multiple, compound and complex disadvantages as well as invisible privileges is helpful for analysis, as well as intervention. The literatures also reveal that everyday lived experiences of policy work within the new public sector are largely unexplored with regards processes and influences that provide and shape opportunities and oppositions to tackling inequalities.
CHAPTER FOUR: ‘RACE MATTERS’

Introduction

A large body of academic writing addresses how ‘race matters’ (Frankenberg, 1993). Race continues to shape experiences of oppression and privilege in very concrete ways in Australia, as elsewhere (L. de Plevitz, 2007a, 2007b; Edmunds, 1989; Gallaher et al., 2009; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Hollinsworth, 1998; Hunyor, 2003; Ridgeway, 2001; D. Riggs, 2004; D. W. Riggs, 2004; Westbury & Dillon, 2006). Scholars informed by CRT, critical Whiteness studies, post-colonialism and other frameworks that turned attention to social mechanisms of power and privilege, have increasingly focused research attention upon the hegemony of Whiteness to explore how race is one of, possibly the primary, intersecting systems of oppression (Aveling, 2004; M. J. Green & Sonn, 2006; Hovane, 2006; S. Moran, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2006b; Riggs & Selby, 2003; Standfield, 2004; Tascón & Ife, 2008). My research project pays attention to issues raised in the literature that help identify possible interpretations, contribute understanding and clarify various meanings in interview narratives and the research process itself in respect to racialised experiences, perspectives and practices.

My interview data provided opportunities to explore Whiteness in the context of a racialised public sector environment and my own experience as a non-Indigenous researcher added a further, personal dimension. Seeing parallels between me and interviewees who struggled with racialised policies and practices in the policy arena added further insights and validated self-reflection as more than simply indulgence. By including self-reflection, the material was alive in more meaningful ways for my research. This chapter draws further and builds on my initial literature review to clarify and support analysis of issues that emerged through ‘deep listening’ to research participants. My application of ‘deep listening’ is informed particularly by Bacchi and Eveline (2009) who describe a way of engaging with people that shows respect through the process. They quote from Gabb and McDermott (2007) who as transcultural mental health practitioners, understand the need for a ‘tuning in with the whole being’; ‘Deep listening entails “an obligation to contemplate, in real time, everything that you hear – to self-reflect as you listen, and then, tellingly, to act on what you’ve registered’ (as cited in 2009, p. 13).

Whiteness as race

Race is defined in Australian legislative and judicial law as a set of measurable and immutable factors, summarises de Plevitz (2000), with an underpinning set of beliefs about race as ‘inherited, innate, universal and binary. … the statutory definitions fix on colour, descent and
She sees that sociological theories concerning race as socially constructed seem less popular than biological descriptions of racial differences. Rather than revisit the substantial literatures about race, racial differences and racism, which usually focus on ‘others’, I selected as my entry point for this chapter the often invisible topic of Whiteness. Whiteness is described by Frankenberg (1993) as a socio-cultural ‘terrain’ constituted by three linked dimensions: ‘a location of structural advantage’; a White ‘standpoint’, that is, a White worldview or perspective of self, society and other; and ‘a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed’. Whiteness, as a socially constructed racial identity, achieves its normativity and universality through processes and practices that reproduce inequality including institutionalised structures and everyday patterned behaviours (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Feagin & Vera, 1995; McIntosh, 1990; S. Moran, 2004). Moran (2004) discusses Whiteness in the Australian context:

As a social construct whiteness is constituted, contested, normalized, naturalized and concealed within numerous discursive domains…This range of positionings within whiteness means that the privileges with which it is associated are not evenly distributed or experienced by all those considered white. As a social category whiteness is a complexly constituted heterogenous grouping. It encompasses numerous interests, and intersects with other categories of social significance such as class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, and sexuality. Yet in relation to non-whites in Australia, whites as a group do occupy a position of privilege. …we can conceive of whiteness as a type of currency that smooths one’s daily passage through social life in Australian contexts. Social and cultural capital is thus linked to the power a subject has to transform and direct their own social praxis. This can also be linked to their power to impact upon or transform other’s practices, and in doing, so, to effect structural change (pp. 4-5).

Although it can present an array of politics and problems, says Moran (2004), researching Whiteness can move beyond race as an axis of inequality by undertaking the difficult task of convincing Whites in Australia to relinquish their privilege and power. By focusing on the daily lives of White Australians, ‘the complex entanglement of white subjectivities, social praxis and privilege’ (p. 1) can be better understood. Moreton-Robinson (2004) similarly challenges White feminists to ‘theorise the relinquishment of power’ which can contribute to changing the racial order (p. 186). Moran (2004) provides a succinct question for researchers when he asks, ‘how do the ways white Australians live their lives and think about themselves and the nation help to reproduce racialised inequality?’ (p. 2). And of relevance for my project, Riggs (2004) suggests that an appropriate starting point is ‘the need to engage with privilege on a personal level’ (p. 4).
Whose Whiteness?

Informed by the literature, my research looks at the racialised context of public policy work and in particular, the ways that Whiteness might affect policy actors through ‘everydayness’ of ordinary activities, for example in professional roles, relationships and policy drafting experiences. Aveling (2004) advises, ‘to think in terms of a continuum that moves from dys-consciousness at one end of a continuum and consciousness at the other’, acknowledging that ‘no matter how aware we might be, we fall somewhere along the continuum’ (p. 8). I wanted my research performance to be open-minded and non-judgmental using an iterative approach, prepared for a range of findings that might mirror some of my own policy work experience and also possibly challenge personal opinions and beliefs. The invisibility of Whiteness to Whites is described in the literature, so my own racialised position and perspective had to be taken into account together with non-Indigenous research participants in this situation. I saw an outstanding task of developing ways to explore complicity, mindful of Nicoll’s (2004) descriptions of how non-Indigenous people are implicated in practices of oppression, despite denials and defiance. Larbalestier (2004) explains that White accounts of historical events such as the colonisation of Australia are invested and structured to legitimate White hegemony. Rather than report the truth about White invasion, White privilege controls the context of interpretation and Indigenous Australians continue to be told how to understand their own experiences. Interrogating dominant racialised perceptions of Aboriginal peoples, perpetuated through such means as public policy, could therefore reveal ‘symptoms’ of White supremacy what Pérez Huber (2009) calls a ‘deeper disease’ (p. 709) at work.

The literature review ensured that my reading of the data should be ‘thick’ analysis beginning with what the material communicates for, and about, the self and others. This promised a challenging exercise, necessary for the development of praxis that could recognise opportunities for strengthening anti-racist and anti-oppressive public policy work. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) write about the complexities, dangers, and profound benefits facing Western scholars and cultural workers and describe the risks of ‘walking the well-intentioned road to hell’ (p. 141). The benefits however, are made clear in Watson’s (1992) qualified invitation, ‘If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, let’s work together’ (as cited in D. W. Riggs, 2004, p. 3).

Conversations about race with policy actors
Conversations varied widely about the concept and practices of race and racism in connection with policy work. Some participants volunteered examples of racism and discrimination; some interviewees struggled to connect immediate workplace demands and priorities with racial explanations; some shared practical proposals for tackling racial bias; some avoided discussion on the grounds they were not fully informed on the topic; and others denied racism in their organisation. These conversations provided contextual information that helped me understand why some agencies denied my request to interview staff. Phoenix (1994) notes that, ‘It is rare to be given insights into any ideological reasons respondents might have for not taking part in a study. However, issues of “race” and racism tend to evoke these where other issues (such as gender and sexism) may not’ (p. 50). I learned about some aspect of racialised public policy from each conversation; even negotiations and communications with agency staff who did not agree to participate provided information about how race was framed within agency discourses. Most of my research participants talked about race in connection with Aboriginal affairs and policy challenges; Whiteness was considered separately, at times superficially and often not at all.

**Racial stereotypes**

Grace provided an appropriate starting place to explore ways that race matters to policy actors. Grace introduced many of the issues and themes by giving voice to common sentiments, ideas and concerns. As a non-Aboriginal woman in a senior management role responsible for mainstream health services, Grace described complexities and frustrations confronting the plight of Aboriginal clients as one special needs minority group with service claims on ‘her’ agency. Grace based her views about prospects for improvement on a deficit model that was a stereotyped cultural script about Aboriginal peoples. Grace believed that for success, ‘there must be engagement from the Aboriginal community, the Aboriginal elders themselves...high level engagement and ownership and involvement’. However, working against success were complexities such as: unequal representation in ‘all of those mainstream sort of power structures’ particularly due to their smaller population base; historical social injustice ‘the poverty, the entrenched unemployment and disease rates’; and the mainstream that ‘is not necessarily accommodating their own special needs’. For Grace, racism did not happen in her agency ‘not in a systematic entrenched manner’ or, at least, she hoped not. ‘I would think that we’re all aware of the special, you know, needs of Aboriginal people, and would like to be much more accommodating and to be able to offer say just special facilities and to bring on Aboriginal health workers and case managers’. Various explanations were given of extenuating circumstances that impeded agency desires to meet ‘the different needs of, of say Aboriginal groups as indeed other minority groups’.
Grace struggled to recall policy documents that demonstrated how the problem of racism had been addressed through a recent review process in the FDV field. She was connected to the production indirectly through committee participation; she referred to an inter-agency body of senior executives representing human service agencies working on FDV, not an agency or unit or policy machinery that I expected to be involved in anti-racism activities. The source and status of this initiative was unclear, however the public availability of the publication indicated official status and commitment. I was interested in this development exercise for what it could reveal about roles, responsibilities, conditions and resources to address racial issues.

Grace’s summary, ‘we would like to be much more accommodating’ indicated that mainstream government agencies’ awareness of Aboriginal peoples’ needs was identified and managed through competitive resource allocations. ‘We’ indicated an identity not shared with Aboriginal people, that of a White public sector and governmentality. Aboriginality and Indigenous sovereignty carried no status recognised over and above disadvantaged groups staking their claims. Grace worked at communicating that ‘we’ are not racists here and did not connect poor policy outcomes with IR. Despite frustrations stemming from particular management challenges, it seemed that a central problematic of blame was worrying Grace’s ability to find or develop solutions to the recognised problems.

Grace demonstrated what Dominelli (1997) identifies as the ‘avoidance strategy of omission’ (p. 72) in her explanation, ‘I think we’d all love to recruit more Aboriginal people in all the mainstream services, you know social work, medically. But unfortunately there’s just not a large pool. We have some Aboriginal health workers on this site of course and that’s great’. The fact that Aboriginal staff were desirable but scarce and that Aboriginal elders themselves needed engagement, ownership and involvement, added qualification to Grace’s sympathetic assessment. Grace was not alone in expressing concern about the lack of Aboriginal staff in government agencies. Taylor (2008) notes, ‘there has been a trend of declining recruitment levels and falling retention rates for Indigenous employment in the Australian Public Service and this is considered a critical issue as it reduces the ability of policy and program agencies to draw on the perspectives and abilities of a diverse workforce that reflects the needs and view of Indigenous peoples’ (p. 118).

**The ‘Wadjela’ system**

In the course of his management and policy role, non-Aboriginal policy actor Lionel had a more direct relationship with Aboriginal clients and was comfortable talking about how the Aboriginal community might have perceived the Gordon Inquiry.
Lionel: Most Aboriginal people I talk to, they only believe things when they happen. We say lots of things, but nothing happens, no change.

Karen: ‘We’ meaning who?

Lionel: We, we - meaning the community, the wider community. The wider community or the White community if you like, Wadjela community. We often say things but we actually don’t know how to follow them through ourselves. And then we say we’ll consult with the Aboriginal community. But they don’t know either, that’s why they came to us in the first place. We don’t know. We don’t know how to solve some problems.

Lionel and I were both non-Aboriginal policy actors and represented the ‘we’, ‘the community’, ‘the wider community’ that Lionel referred to. The Aboriginal community being discussed represented a ‘them’, not ‘the community’, not ‘the wider community’, a differentiation through language. Even though he used language that differentiated ‘us’, Lionel spoke emotionally, with empathy and goodwill about Aboriginal peoples, and expressed frustration with mainstream intervention that he also identified with. Not knowing solutions to help ‘them’ was a common theme with Wadjela policy actors who participated in my research project. That they, ‘we’, were well-intentioned was not in question, but what to do with this ‘other’ race of peoples was.

Do Aboriginal peoples really come to the Wadjela community because they don’t know? This is not the picture that emerges from the literature, especially Aboriginal storytelling, and interviews with policy actors who are Aboriginal. And what would such an approach signify in terms of relationships? This extract also raised issues of knowledge, such as whose knowledge? And what kinds of knowledges are involved here? Riggs (2004) refers to ‘the invasive discursive practices through which white people have come to “know” Aboriginal Australia’ (p. 2) and reminds me that researchers and activists need to ‘be mindful of the theoretical and historical legacies upon which we draw in our work’ (p. 4). Perhaps my initial reading of negativity was misguided, because if Aboriginal communities are prepared for active engagement with government in the form of individuals like Lionel, that could indicate a level of trust that would not have existed in past decades. I could have been listening to an account about an exercise of agency and a set of reconciliation attitudes and efforts. Perhaps a deeper reading could reveal a kernel of change. Hartley and McKee (2000) summarise that ‘historically, European narratives have given agency to Europeans, construing ‘natives’ as passive recipients of good actions (development) and bad ones (extermination or coercive control), but only rarely and grudgingly giving agency and a ‘speaking part’ to the ‘other’ of their imaginings. This does describe the history of Indigeneity in Australia, but here too change is rapidly occurring’ (p. 4).
This issue of agency became clearer when Alice discussed Aboriginal women’s experiences with FDV interventions. Alice rejected the notion of Aboriginal women seeing themselves as victims and believed that they preferred prevention; she maintained the issue was rather one of access to resources, ‘they really don’t want to be saying, “We have to be a victim in order to get access to services.” Alice was an Aboriginal policy actor and her question, ‘Do you know what I’m saying, Karen?’ was an appeal for my understanding. She checked that as a non-Indigenous researcher, I was really listening to her feedback on behalf of Aboriginal women clients of an unresponsive White system. ‘They actually accept that, you know, it’s a temporary thing. As well too, they don’t want to sever that relationship with this person, what they do actually want is they want that person to be fixed because they see that person as actually having a problem and they’re sick and they need help’.

Alice’s comments indicated ideological differences rather than ignorance. The literature would also dispute Lionel’s reasoning; for example, in tracing the history of government knowledge about Aboriginal child sex abuse, Butler-McIlwraith (2007) says that this long-standing issue ‘has been poorly addressed across federal and state domains by all political parties. Aboriginal concerns that no positive action will be taken in response to this particular cycle of reportage cannot therefore be viewed as unfounded’ (p. 3). Further, Lionel presented the case that this lack of knowledge was shared with Aboriginal peoples. If so, then by extension Lionel saw Aboriginal peoples sharing responsibility for problem solving. Again, this view is problematic and contested by the literature, especially Aboriginal life storytelling which contains many accounts of non-Aboriginal people using knowledge against Aboriginal peoples. If I follow the thread of Lionel’s explanation, whatever problems had been identified in the first place, remained with ‘them’ and ‘we’ become absolved. If some problems are unsolvable, as he seemed to conclude, where does that leave the Aboriginal community? The Wadjela and Aboriginal communities would still appear dis-connected, so the praxis terrain appears resistant to improvement. Whatever happens, Lionel and I as non-Aboriginal people could walk away from ‘those’ problems; our privileged position remained intact. Perhaps Lionel could ask if the very exercise of racialising the problem and the problem-solving context itself contained an opportunity for change. Or, perhaps, change was actually happening within this scenario, despite his expressions of disappointment verging on despondency.

Themes of difference and otherness

The possibility of change through Aboriginal women’s agency, and themes of difference and otherness were clear to non-Aboriginal policy actor Bella. She insisted that awareness of issues and statistical knowledge of FDV did not equate with the experiential knowledge of Aboriginal
lived experience. She noted that most of the policy staff working on policies affecting Aboriginal people were not Aboriginal, yet she realised that ‘the person in this State who is most likely to be a victim of homicide is an Aboriginal woman living in a remote community. That’s the sort of thing that you actually deal with... you cannot set yourself up as an expert or ever, ever claim that you have any personal understanding of what it’s like to be an Aboriginal person living in those communities. You can be aware of the issues that affect them’.

The fact that it was Aboriginal women who sought government intervention was meaningful to Bella and other policy actors. This indicated that women’s leadership or help-seeking agency did not conform to government expectations; possibly Aboriginal women were not the community members that government and policy actors are accustomed to as communicants, conduits and informers. Her comments that ‘the whole need for government to be doing something’, indicated that doing, rather than achieving, was a rationale for a policy response to equate with action. If the ‘dialogue about the constitutional, cultural, and political future of Australia is centred on Indigenous issues’, as Hartley and McKee (2000, p. 6) say, then much more would be required for successful problem-solving in a partnership relationship. After all, White Australia has been ‘doing something’ to Aboriginal people for a long time.

Bella was consciously managing her racial difference from the Indigenous women and their communities and her separateness in structural terms; she worked at being enlightened and aware of her positionality. Bella did not identify with the Aboriginal women on the basis of shared gender; it was as if Aboriginality was as different as to render irrelevant, or less relevant, other characteristics or features in common. Bella’s Whiteness was not invisible to her; race mattered to her work. But what her Whiteness contributed to, in terms of difference between women, was not emphasised. For Bella and most of the policy actors, issues of privilege were singularly related to racial dimensions, privilege was not identified along multiple intersections.

**Racialised vulnerabilities**

In contrast to Bella, Rowena drew on extensive practice and immersion in the everyday lives of many Aboriginal families in contact with her agency. This conversation was peppered with sighs and sounds as non-Aboriginal Rowena reflected aloud about difficulties resolving complex questions of policy development and service delivery. Rowena explored issues relating to protective interventions according to a hierarchy of vulnerability, beginning with children and women, and especially Aboriginal children. Despite acknowledging ‘many shades of grey’, she argued a ‘hard line’ – that in the field of FDV, Aboriginal men should be equally punished, that Aboriginality was not excuse.
Rowena: I don’t think that I have a particularly like punitive nature ... But... I still feel quite strongly that men you know, who have perpetrated that violence towards women and children have to, should be dealt with, like in the same way that everyone else should be in our society...and if treatment is a part of that, that’s fine, I’ve got no problem with people being treated but I just don’t think that being Aboriginal is an excuse for doing that. You know?

Rowena’s views had changed as her policing experience grew and awareness of racial issues developed. She clearly saw herself as opposed to racism and its destructive effects, yet her comments about FDV reproduced negative racial stereotypes, specifically about Aboriginal male perpetrators of violence against women. Macmullan (2009) explains how White racism can contradict personal intention, ‘many of our problems regarding race are not rooted in conscious racial hatred, but in unexamined behaviors and impulses that lead people to say and do things that are at odds with the ideals of equality and humanity that almost all people hold’ (p. 3).

Rowena indirectly spoke to a plethora of government inquiries and reports into the enduring overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system as victims and offenders. For example, available data indicate that Indigenous people are 15 to 20 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to commit violent offences (Wundersitz, 2010). However, whether or not Aboriginal men receive lesser punishment in the justice system than non-Aboriginal perpetrators of violence is contestable, a subject extending beyond existing research and statistical evidence. Hartley and McKee (2000) observe that ‘Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians ‘speak’ to each other via media coverage of Aboriginal affairs’ (p. 6).

Using her Whiteness as contrast, Rowena argued that because of their ‘construct with the community’, Aboriginality made FDV intervention more ‘difficult’. Especially puzzling to her was when, in communities, ‘you have women abusing you for locking up their sons even though their sons have had, have beaten their like, daughters-in-law are beaten black and blue and these are women who are beaten up by their own husbands (chuckle in an exasperated tone). It’s very, it gets very difficult’. Rowena was not alone in expressing frustration about behaviours and FDV patterns observed in Aboriginal communities, but there were a small number of policy actors who articulated explanations consistent with research findings that fear of intimate partner violence is not as great for many women as the fear of White authority and Indigenous community destruction (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005; Broken Hill and Menindee Rural Crisis Intervention Projects, 2001; T. Libesman & Cunneen, 2002).
Rowena assumed that a ‘White upbringing’ and all that is constituted as a contemporary non-Aboriginal lifestyle in Australia was understood implicitly by me and that we shared common values about ‘these kinds of problems’. This represented another of the conundrums of Whiteness, often invisible to people like Rowena and me within normalised, White privileged ways of thinking and living. Disbelief and disapproval were emotional responses Rowena described to the differences between her upbringing and the behaviours of Aboriginal clients she encountered through FDV policing work. Despite professional training/education and extensive interaction with Aboriginal peoples, Rowena remained frustrated that most vulnerable clients were unappreciative.

Together with comments about frontline difficulties working in this context, Rowena said that, ‘all the agencies have’ racism. She did not identify herself as implicated or expand on connections between frontline policing experience and wider departmental racism, perhaps that too was taken as a given. Talking about racism was not difficult or awkward; possibly the term was openly discussed in the department, and policy staff have familiarity with the issues. She explained that staff were not ‘inherently racist’; nevertheless, duties were performed differently according to the racial profile of the community. Aveling (2004) raises a question in my mind about different understandings or measures of the concept of racism, ‘the common-sense ways through which we understand racism and position ourselves as ‘good whites’ (who are not implicated in racism because we do not commit acts of racist violence)’ (p. 3). Rowena noted the challenges facing well-intentioned staff performing difficult work in challenging settings such as those in predominantly Aboriginal remote communities. These workers, ‘do really fantastic work with those people... they’re picking people up out of gutters and taking people’s split heads to hospital and doing you know; running blue light discos for their kids and they’re doing things that a lot of people wouldn’t do. And it’s hard work’. This was in contrast to those who ‘sit around and talk about racism and stuff wouldn’t go out there and do that work’. Even then, she reflected, ‘I don’t think they are inherently racist but I think it wouldn’t necessarily be out of order to say that they police people in those places a lot differently from how they’re going to police somebody in Claremont (chuckle) because they’re a different group of people’.

**The invisibility of White supremacy**

Rowena’s account of the pragmatics of difficult policing could rationalise potential racism. She accepted potential for a benign racism to develop when individuals worked under certain conditions. Rowena was in effect asking for understanding; she did not believe in condemnation for a racism developed under duress by well-meaning and hard-working non-Aboriginal police. Rowena would most likely disapprove however, if her argument were to be interpreted to mean that Aboriginal peoples brought racism upon themselves by invoking difficult policing
conditions. ‘Most white folk nowadays readily, and I think honestly, condemn the idea of white supremacism’ says Macmullan (2009, p. 3) (italics in original). Wanting to address racism was a message communicated through all interviews; what varied were ideas and opinions about the nature and extent of that racism and about how to progress anti-racism. Macmullen says that the disconnect between ideas and habits indicates how White supremacism continues to influence even the most well-intentioned individuals and ‘not only is disturbing on its own terms, but should also elicit concern for what it signifies about our ability to address and solve real problems as a public body’ (p. 3).

Rowena identified her upbringing in a racist town which she was unable to recognise until she had left. Moran (2004) captures implications and consequences of White unseeingness that Rowena remembered before developing awareness of racism:

> For most whites, oblivious to their structural location of privilege or to the causes of their social positioning, ignorance is bliss. This ignorance, or repressed awareness, is a central mechanism in the reproduction of racialised systems of knowledge, power and privilege. Naturalizing such knowledge systems, and the social structures with which they are entangled, helps to maintain them as simply commonsense orderings of the world, justifying the entitlements that flow from them: ‘it’s just the way things are’. …Through ordinary social practice, as social subjects go about their daily lives, they participate in the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage along numerous social axes, not necessarily knowingly (pp. 4-6).

Rowena adopted an attitude of optimism to mark improvements over her twenty years in the workforce by believing that ‘we’ve made some fairly significant moves’ in her workplace and this positive, hopeful outlook was shared by other interviewees inside the system. Rowena was unusual in that few non-Aboriginal interviewees talked about their own personal development. Most interviewees were motivated by values about broad social betterment through policy reform informed by a dialogue about racism that did not necessarily apply in their own private lives. Wildman and Davis (2000) explains that ‘whites do not look at the world through a filter of racial awareness...The power to ignore race...is a privilege, a societal advantage. The term racism/white supremacy emphasizes the link between the privilege held by whites to ignore their own race and discriminatory racism’ (p. 56). One of the exceptions was Dylan, who gave an impassioned account of his struggles to learn and develop personal ‘best practice’ that takes account of both race and gender.

**Aiming for racially-sensitive best practice**

Dylan appreciated the opportunity to learn about cross-cultural work from experience in an Aboriginal organisation early in his career. This conversation canvassed many workplace issues including perceptions of fairness, especially in the area of employment where specialty
designated positions (50D) for Aboriginal staff remained contentious. Dylan believed in the importance of experiential learning from Aboriginal peoples, having gained confidence himself through that process. Questions about who had authority to speak had implications for policy development especially where consultations and cross-cultural communications were involved.

He had worked out how to operate with clear objectives, ‘I have to be sensitive, I have to be supportive of Aboriginal colleagues, I have to have my eye on the end game, the end product, and an eye on a good process’. Contributing knowledge and expertise to a debate easily polarised as ‘Black and White’ was particularly emphasised.

Many non-Aboriginal staff were unwilling and unprepared to engage in advocacy work according to Dylan’s account; issues were political and process was important. As a White man, Dylan worked to develop his capacity for advocacy and he gained confidence measured by his ability to engage in debate with Aboriginal peoples about ways to proceed and not avoid the ‘the complexities’, because that ‘is actually still opting out’, something that he has learned not to do. Other lessons learned included, ‘how much white people speak in the meeting. It needs to be when who’s invited, and it needs to be the right space for Aboriginal people to speak. What I’m saying is it’s about balance’.

Dylan took care to adopt a ‘middle road’ that maintained his integrity yet challenged extremes of ‘Black and White’. He referred to non-Aboriginal colleagues who became cynical about unachievable development goals. In such a negative environment, it was difficult to remain focused and positive about both process and outcomes, but Dylan had come to believe it possible and necessary because Aboriginal people could not ‘do everything’ without non-Aboriginal involvement and activism.

Dylan expressed frustration and disdain at aspects of the work. He said, ‘this is not a quiet voice’. He justified disagreeing and disobeying, ‘Aboriginal people who say “You shouldn’t be talking on this. You shouldn’t be here. You shouldn’t be in this job”’. Dylan had strong opinions about what should be done, in contrast to many of the interviewees who said they lacked answers; not knowing what to do for the best bothered most of the policy actors. Dillon and Westbury (2007) also observe contradictory perspectives and a lack of consensus in mainstream (non-Aboriginal) Australia about policy directions in Aboriginal affairs, ‘a widespread and deep seated puzzlement in the face of an intractable and apparently insoluble policy quandary’ (p. 3).

Dylan was distressed by policy implementation and program failures that had a range of consequences. Examples he cited included Aboriginal staff leaving because of disparities between policy and practice in departments. ‘And so policy after policy can come out; it’s in its implementation where the worth of the policy comes’. Policy support ‘from the highest level’
was no protection against the problems of policy implementation. Dylan provided examples that demonstrated the gap between policy intent and policy outcome for Aboriginal peoples. Traditional policy writing was criticised in this policy context. As he reflected, ‘two non-Aboriginal young women have sat in a room and written a program for Aboriginal men – you know like, bizarre’. Resource allocation for culturally appropriate policy development was another major issue and even when consultations were supported with funding, time constraints rendered those consultations ineffective, ‘you’re going to have to compromise’.

Driven by ‘political imperatives and the timelines’, the department came ‘crushing down’ on Dylan’s attempt to practice ‘authentically’ by including quality consultations as part of the policy process. He concluded that compromises were imposed in this political and organisational environment of competitive priorities.

Dylan: It’s been a learning experience for me even in this role with Aboriginal staff, walking alongside Aboriginal staff, is to see the space that they have lived in, which is the Aboriginal priorities come second or third or fifth to whatever the prevailing political wind is or the priority. So if it really was the most, the biggest priority, things would be different.

The competition for resources

A number of interviewees discussed how political interests or ideological policy commitments determined resourcing and support for a particular population group. Aboriginal policy development was affected in this environment as competition for funding across categories of need impacted funding initiatives, program developments and institutional supports. All of the policy actors considered that Aboriginal peoples generally, and Aboriginal FDV clients in particular, were extremely socio-economically disadvantaged; policy actors differed however, in their diagnoses and prognoses of underlying reasons and appropriate policy responses. In an example of how a lack of service co-ordination discouraged Aboriginal responsibility, non-Aboriginal policy actor Lionel described how ‘up to 17 agencies have been involved with the one family’. Having ‘very little clout at the bottom’ of the system made it virtually impossible for the family to manage and agencies did not understand when clients disengaged, ‘So you wonder why they don’t turn up at a particular day. They’ve already got all these people on their back telling them what to do’. Lionel constructed the problem as ‘their low socio-economic status...poverty in itself, of all kinds, is a very difficult. It’s a controller isn’t it? rather than differential treatment on the basis of Aboriginality. He resisted racially based explanations for the situation and did not engage in conjecture about continued structural conditions of racial and colonial oppression that could be produce poverty traps.
Lionel rejected the notion that IR impacted on the Aboriginal families that he sympathetically described. He preferred an explanation rooted in classism, ‘Well I would like to think so’ rather than racism. Lionel presented racialised poverty as solvable – disadvantaged Aboriginal peoples could be helped by being lifted out of their comparatively poor positions to become middle-class through education intervention, Lionel’s policy domain. ‘This is a moment when economic, social justice and multicultural agendas are making significant claims on the provision of education’ (Freebody & Wyatt-Smith, 2004, p. 38) and Lionel is not immune to the broader issues playing out in the public sector environment. ‘Schools, along with other education sites, are thereby centre-staged as regions of economic activity, also enjoying their traditional status as forces for cultural cohesion and personal betterment’ (Freebody & Wyatt-Smith, 2004, p. 31). Lionel was reluctant to admit to a more substantial systemic racism that could be beyond his policy boundary. Drawing on his own life experience and family history, Lionel concluded that knowledge and having power could be obtained; such critical resources provided ‘clout’ to uplift Aboriginal people. It was so important to Lionel that a purposive education system should prevail, that taking advantage of those opportunities was the best solution, the only option. Yet, by framing the issues differently and centering the focus on lived experiences of people of colour, the CRT literature includes numerous examples of the ways that racism and other forms of subordination mediate educational trajectories (Pérez Huber, 2009). Rather than competing explanations, Acker (2000) urges analysis of class within intersectionality theory and research.

Contradictions, confusions and avoidance

Despite Lionel’s confidence in the rescue mission of education, he demonstrated what Rowse (2009) describes as a ‘baffled willingness to help’ (p. 10) disadvantaged Indigenous people. Contradictory positions and an attitude of confusion were communicated by a number of interviewees using explicit language, metaphors and narratives about their own frustrated efforts to bring about change. They talked about protocols and procedures in relation to working with Aboriginal peoples and there was an awareness of the need for respect and courtesy, yet anxiety about dealing with differences lingered, and some questioned these practices as insufficient.

Lorna spoke about using a conduit to assist cross-cultural communications and was clearly moved by some of her experiences, such as being invited to a bush camp consultation with Aboriginal women, ‘we sat in a dry creek bed and talked. It was just the most, I feel so privileged to have had that experience’. Her emotional account of that meeting indicated long-lasting impacts from that rare interaction. Lorna (and I) seemed swept along by a romantic image of a White woman privileged with special treatment by Aboriginal women in ‘real’ location. As the conversation continued, Lorna switched off her awed tone and it was unclear
how this experience and the insights and information gained influenced her policy work back in
the office.

Lorna: But it is just, it is just so important and that they, the incidence of domestic
violence in Aboriginal communities is much, much higher than, than the White
community and the injuries, the injuries are really severe.

Karen: Well the statistics tell a dreadful story but they don’t tell the whole story do
they?

Lorna: No. And something, something that I don’t understand is why it’s accepted.
Why, why other men don’t protect their sister or their daughter or, I don’t
understand that. It’s just so accepted, it’s just so. (sigh) What we’re looking at is,
we have to, we have to find a way to change attitudes.

Lorna struggled to understand what was happening with FDV in Aboriginal communities and
assumed that violence was accepted. She did not explore the gendered nature of the violence,
but saw the need for shared responsibility to be taken by ‘them, everyone’, for attitude change.
The idea that she could have witnessed what Solorzano and Villalpando (2005) would label
forms of ‘community cultural wealth’ developed to ‘survive, adapt, thrive, and resist within
racist institutions and social structures’ (as cited in Pérez Huber, 2009, pp. 710-711) would have
been most challenging given the dominant FDV framework of deficit perspectives.

Lorna seemed to have second thoughts about revealing frustration, disappointment, and anger at
perpetrators of violence and victims themselves. Perhaps this indicated that Lorna was operating
in a context that disapproved of such expressions; perhaps there was an approved discourse
about these matters; perhaps Lorna did not feel safe venting personal emotions on such a topic.
Avoiding the label ‘racist’ seemed a common response of interviewees, which Nicoll (2004)
explains, ‘…in the six or so years of Howard’s campaign against ‘political correctness’ – the
very idea of suggesting that someone might be racist has been elevated into a crime to rival (if
not displace) racism itself’ (p. 5). This avoidance by interviewees is similar to disagreement in
Australia concerning the use of ‘genocide’ to describe historical events, which as Larbalestier
(2004) explains, ‘whether considered to be inopportune or salutary, generates comparative
evaluation of oppression and oppressors. Such a comparison is seen to reflect on the Australian
character and national identity’ (p. 7).

The vocabulary of racism

92
Hage (1998/2000) analyses common statements including ‘I am not discriminative’ and ‘I believe all people are equal’ by the same participants in his research who went on to attack multiculturalism, migrants and immigration. ‘The difficulty arises because once the category “racism” becomes an object of struggle in the social world, it becomes far more imperative sociologically to understand the way each specific meaning arises rather than aim at producing a more ‘sophisticated’ theory of racism’ states Hage (p. 184). ‘People see racism as something ugly and bad, and they do not perceive themselves as ugly and bad. To somehow propose a different understanding of what racism is in order to convince them at any cost that they are ‘ugly and bad’ is not only bad academic practice, but, it seems to me, also ridiculously bad political practice’ (p. 184). Wildman and Davis (2000) consider wider problems associated with the vocabulary and point out how the language used to discuss discrimination and subordination obfuscates power systems, contributing to the problem of invisibility and regeneration of privilege.

Calling someone *racist* individualizes the behavior, ignoring the larger system within which the person is situated. To label an individual a racist veils the fact that racism can only occur where it is culturally, socially, and legally supported. It lays the blame on the individual rather than the forces that have shaped that individual and the society that the individual inhabits. For white people this means that they know they do not want to be labeled *racist*. They become concerned with how to avoid that label, rather than worrying about systemic racism and how to change it (p. 52) (italics in original).

Riggs (2004) says, ‘it is important to look at how racism is perpetuated under the guise of ‘good intention’ rather than ascertaining who is and who is not racist in a society that privileges racialised understandings of subjectivity’ (p. 3). Without further questioning the intent of Lorna’s comments, I take the call to find a way to change attitudes as a personal challenge and opportunity to take a measure of on my own racialised thinking. In theorising through recognising, holding up and criticising these (White) policy male and female actors, I could be interpolating them within a discourse of Whiteness that situates me. Wolf (1992) sees implications in the way that researchers however well intentioned could be perceived as élitists perpetuating colonialism, ethnocentrism, racism, and imperialism. Despite taking care and being sensitive, Wolf says that researchers could be resented as ‘Others’ to the ‘objects’ of our research. She quotes Bodo:

> It is impossible to be “politically correct”. For the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion … are played out on multiple and shifting fronts, and all ideas (no matter how “liberatory” in some contexts or for some purposes) are condemned to be haunted by a voice from the margins already speaking (or perhaps presently muted but awaiting the conditions for speech), awakening us to what has been excluded, effaced, damaged (as cited in Wolf, 1992, p. 13).
Reading race in self-reflection

Moran (2004) analyses his tendency to write himself ‘out of the paper’. ‘This very tendency could be read as a mechanism for the management of my own personal investments in whiteness’ (p. 1). He confronts this insight and recognises ‘race insinuates itself into the texture of daily life’ (p. 5) in subtle and non-conscious ways. Both the daily life of policy practice as articulated by my research participants and my own research journey reveal racialised texture that represents meaningful data.

When I analysed interview transcripts and other texts related to my research project, I was struck by parallels between that material and my own perspectives, attitudes and experiences. I saw a range of influences on my thinking and behaviour from relationships, responsibilities and roles including policy actor, social worker and student. I saw ways in which I resisted, recognised, and related to racial issues - as a White woman enmeshed and often unaware. Certain themes emerged from the conversations that reflected my own concerns, anxieties and explanations. Firstly there was denial of personal racism and acceptance of the possibility or likelihood that it existed in another department, or section, or process. Isolated incidents of racial prejudice were clearly recognised, but policy actors consoled themselves with the knowledge that legal mechanisms existed to deal with rogue individuals. Similarly, IR was recognisable – elsewhere. I could recognise my own denial in these sentiments and reactions; I was both appalled and sympathetic. Then there was the issue of hope, common across interviews, for example the oft-quoted phrase, ‘things are much better now’. I continue to hope that things are not as bad as they seem, that my research won’t be dismissed as distorted by racism and sexism and any other -ism. I conclude that hyper-sensitivity to the topic was indeed shared and that more parallels probably exist between interviewee responses to my probing questions and my own responses to self-reflection. Probyn (2004) takes up the need for self-reflection that is ethical, instructional and activist.

White feminist critics of whiteness need to write better histories of our complicity rather than our liberation… Complicity not as injury but as starting point and the condition of ethics itself. Complicity as a reflection of the mutual implication of domination and resistance, as a critical interest in the effects of one’s praxis and as a mode of mutual recognition itself. Complicity as a way of understanding the universal and particular so that one is not seen as the antidote for the other. Complicity as form of critique that does not seek to ‘get over’ the challenge of paradox so zealously. Complicity as a shared language and as a condition of dialogue. ...Complicity as a guide to the movement of power, the giving and taking that it necessitates (p. 10).

My own situation as a student provided evidence of racialised experience and I note that tertiary education contexts are increasingly research subjects in this respect. Nicoll (2004) writes that,
‘[Increasing] numbers of teachers have begun to use the literature on whiteness with students – both Whites and students of colour – to help them see themselves and each other differently: not as individuals whose relation to racism must be either “innocent” or “guilty” but as participants in social and ideological networks’ (p. 1). This approach has been particularly appreciated in my case. My research was supervised by four highly competent and well regarded academic practitioners in the fields of industrial relations, sociology and social work, and I also benefited from a number of supportive relationships external to the university environment. Similarities as well as differences existed between my supervisors, all women; however the issue of race deserves particular mention. It was particularly my relationship with Anna, my one Aboriginal supervisor that provided me with immediate and direct material for studying some of the complexities of White privilege and power.

**The racial dimension in relationships**

Undertaking a PhD was not easy, but grappling with issues related to race was in many ways difficult and often the most unpredictable. I concluded that this was where the most significant learning could be found for me personally and for praxis development. While I gained a cross-cultural dimension to my work, I could not say with confidence that Anna similarly gained from our relationship, thus I saw an important issue of mutuality and reciprocity. Westcott (2004) spells out some of my concerns when he notes:

> The issue of audience has passed largely unremarked in ‘canonical’ writings on whiteness. … However, if confession is to be intuited as a ‘reciprocal process, a form of dialogue and a writerly/readerly exchange’ (Gill 2001, 90), there is an apparent absence of work responding to revelations of white self interest from a non-white perspective. …the possibility of a sympathetic white audience accommodating and validating confessional whiteness is both real and possible (p. 5).

My student/supervisor relationship with Anna had a particular significance for my research project. Here were two middle-aged female social workers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, with historical, political and professional connections before we had even met. My literature review brings into sharp and immediate focus what our different racial backgrounds could potentially mean for my research. Briskman (2003) urges (White) social workers to ‘recognise their race privilege, to validate Indigenous wisdom and to adopt a professional approach that acknowledges Indigenous rights’ (p. 92). This had a particular impact on me because I still vividly recalled troubling engagements with Indigenous clients during my first field placement in child welfare as a social work student in 1972. I was in effect carrying old ‘baggage’ that needed to be identified, theorised and used purposively, for instance as source material for a ‘problem posing pedagogy’. Briskman traces a ‘fraught’ relationship between social work and
Indigenous peoples in Australia and welcomes gradual improvement as critical social work perspectives gain from frameworks ‘that reject traditional theorising on citizenship, which recognise whiteness as a form of privilege and which embrace an overtly anti-colonialist stance’ (p. 93).

My situation as student, however, complicated a straightforward story of White privilege that ignored Anna’s agency and subject position of relative institutional power. Martin’s (2008) examination of historical texts of North Queensland white settlement reveals that ‘Aboriginal agency is somewhat simplified because it is theorized and constructed in terms of race relations and it is the non-Aboriginal agency that is inevitably centered’ (p. 50). Martin sees continuing problematic constructions in contemporary research. Drawing on frameworks including CRT, she explores issues in racialised relationships between researchers and Indigenous peoples including how research protocols and processes underpinned by power relations perpetuate exploitative relationships, erode and deny Aboriginal agency. From Martin’s work, I reflected on how I had been representing my relationship with Anna, the ways that I had been interpreting policy actors’ conversations about racialised practices and processes, and my objectives relating to praxis development. For example, I asked myself if I had turned Anna into ‘the researched’, probably because of a Western model of collaboration and participation. In asking if I had misrepresented Aboriginal agency as powerlessness, I reviewed my analyses of critical incidents as told by policy actors. I recalled my discomfort during creative writing exercises in supervision sessions designed to help introspection, especially one requiring me to speak in the voice of an Aboriginal woman at the interface with policy implementation. Revisions led me to further examine my student/supervisor relationship with Anna, subject positioning and subjectivity.

There were complexities and opportunities in our relationship that reflected ‘critical challenges that whiteness studies raises for the white subject, both student and educator’ (D. W. Riggs, 2004, p. 3). Nicoll (2004) captures some of the complexity involved in simultaneity when she says, ‘Foucault’s critique of the ‘repression hypothesis’ (1979) can be used to explain that power does not simply repress Indigenous people through the agency of ‘racist’ white people. It also and simultaneously produces the contours, possibilities and privileges of white subjectivity….a capacity to understand themselves simultaneously as agents and objects of power’ (p. 3) (italics in original).

Moran (2004) traces the contestation of White hegemony in Australia, examining policy development in response to political claims and challenges from marginalised groups, and concludes that ‘race still holds social currency and that perceived threats or challenges to whiteness and its centrality arouse responses indicative of anger, anxiety, and fear’ (p. 9).
Acknowledging my own discomfort and ambivalence became important to raise with Anna and she encouraged my reflections. Nicoll (2004) advises that ‘it’s important to resist a tendency to try to ‘resolve’ our discomfort at the recognition of whiteness into individual(ising) affects of shame and/or guilt. Ultimately the aim of critical whiteness theory should be to unsettle white subjectivity’ (p. 7). My non-Aboriginal supervisors also supported honest, meaningful and respectful exploration of racial privilege as part of the research topic. ‘In a variety of ways, white subjects negotiate and manage an often simultaneous knowing/unknowing awareness and protection of this privilege, at both collective cultural and personal subjective levels. This seemingly contradictory simultaneous knowing and not knowing, and its implications, need to be further explored’ (S. Moran, 2004, p. 8). Examining questions about knowing and knowledge/s, power and privilege, agency and ethics, required directed readings and discussions in supervision.

**Racial assumptions**

Despite goodwill and good intentions, and informed by the literature, I nevertheless found myself committing cultural trespass by questioning Anna about private matters, as if our relationship justified my intrusion. Anna’s privacy was invaded, without invitation, and in contrast with the way I conducted myself with other supervisors. I could not claim naivety or familiarity; the limits of my racial understandings were exposed. I learned that ‘a progressive understanding of race can be just as shortsighted and pat as a conservative one’ (Caramanica, 2010, p. 1). ‘Knock before you enter’, Martin (2008) advises. ‘This is not to assume you are entering a ‘frontier’, or to perpetuate the fiction of terra nullius (ideological, physical, or intellectual), but to work from a paradigm of relatedness to self and to all involved in the research study’ (K. L. Martin, 2008, p. 148). ‘Forming collaborative research partnerships with Indigenous people signals a message to participants that they are viewed as knowledgeable potential partners, as keepers or guardians of treasured cultural and personal information and as worthy advisers’ (Gibbs as cited in Bennett & Zubrzycki, 2003, p. 63).

I failed to treat Anna with respect when I asked if her mother was a ‘good’ mother during a conversation ostensibly designed to further my understanding of Aboriginality. It was disturbing that, as a White student, I used ignorance as an excuse during my hasty apology. The very question showed a potential negative stereotype of mothers who are Aboriginal and disrespect for a mother and her children. Butler-McIlwraith (2007) writes about ‘the pervasiveness of the demonisation of Aboriginal masculinity coupled with conceptions of flawed Aboriginal motherhood’ (p. 1). I realised that my question was also gendered; my questions about parenting focused on Anna’s mother and I had not even thought about her father.
I also held Anna answerable in ways that I did not expect in return whenever I sought her views as if she represented all Aboriginal peoples. ‘Constantly being made aware of one’s difference from the socially valued norm and being held accountable for, or representative of the rest of ones racial grouping is a burden that most white Australians don’t have to face on a daily basis’ says Moran (2004, p. 5). Research by Bennett and Zubrycki (2003) involving stories of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers reveals ‘a complex range of cultural and professional challenges’ as they ‘juggle multiple identities and practice within a framework that is informed by the history of the oppression of Aboriginal Australians and the daily realities of disadvantage experienced by their own families and communities’ (p. 61). Where appropriate and to communicate cross-cultural awareness, my interview processes included mutual storytelling and explored influences and impacts of *our* personal, professional, family and community histories on *our* work. Yet I came to see that this same sensitivity had not been practiced during supervision, and I lost opportunities to enhance my supervisory relationships in thoughtful ways. The use of self emerges and is confirmed as a particular theme for the practice of Indigenous social workers in Bennet and Zubrycki’s research. ‘The participants spoke about using self-disclosure, carefully recognizing that it is often necessary to share their stories in order to enhance working relationships and establish credibility’ (Bennett & Zubrycki, 2003, p. 67).

‘The purpose of research is not the production of new knowledge per se’, says Christians (as cited in Denzin et al., 2008, p. 14) and his conclusions and advice regarding moral codes of conduct for researchers heightened my sense of guilt. ‘Rather, the purposes are pedagogical, political, moral, and ethical, involving the enhancement of moral agency, the production of moral discernment, a commitment to praxis, justice, an ethic of resistance, and a performative pedagogy that resists oppression’ (p. 14). I developed a heightened self-consciousness about my racialised thinking and behaviour. Cochran-Smith (1995) notes that when race and racism are made explicit in a learning environment, ‘responses are often strongly emotional, and resistance, misunderstanding, frustration, anger, and feelings of inefficacy may be the outcomes’ (p. 542). Banks (2009) comments that ‘people do not like to admit to “bad” behaviour’ (p. 10), and Stephenson (1997) says that although we Australians like to see ourselves as non-racist, ‘racism is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Australian society and, as such, racist practices may be routinely enacted by people who do not consciously accept racist views’ (as cited in Aveling, 2007, pp. 69-70). Again, parallels between my own reluctance at self-reporting and the self-protective language used by some research participants were apparent. I agreed with Anzaldua’s (1990) comments that racism is ‘the word nobody likes. …Racism is a slippery subject, one which evades confrontation, yet one which overshadows every aspect of our lives’ (as cited in Aveling, 2007, p. 69).
Despite an increasing body of writing about Indigenous research methodologies and about how to draw Indigenous knowledge into pedagogy being available to provide direction for my research project, I had not paid sufficient attention to the implications for my research relationship within supervision. Osuri et al. (2009) talk of the importance of ‘negotiating protocols for conversation, alliance and action’ (p. 8), yet I took for granted a reciprocity and reactivity based on my previous work experience, all based in White privileged environments and where I was well placed in relatively powerful positions. I took for granted that my own needs were of greatest priority in my relationship with Anna and that she could provide powerful insights into the lives of Aboriginal peoples and their views on issues relevant to my research. As Bennett and Zubrzycki (2003) highlight:

Fundamentally Australian social work has historically developed as a ‘white’ profession hence our practice standards reflect the assumptions and realities of the dominant culture. This research challenges these assimilationist principles. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers clearly articulate a different practice reality in which their cultural, personal and professional identities converge (pp. 68-69).

Their research speaks to more than the professional social work identities that Anna and I shared; Bennett and Zubrzycki have much to offer in regards supervision relationships. I learned that cultural supervision can and should exist around professional supervision. Understanding diversity also means being engaged in lifelong learning about differences within and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Creating a safe space for speaking, according to Osuri et al. (2009), ‘requires complex, power-sensitive and self-reflexive interplay of speaking and listening’ (p. 9). The writings of Nakata (M. Nakata, 2002; Martin Nakata, 2004, 2007) about ‘cultural interface’ also take account of contested space between Western and Indigenous knowledge systems, where ‘things are not clearly black or white, Indigenous or Western’ (Martin Nakata, 2007, p. 9); this has relevance to my/our situation. He says that the academy re-presents and re-configures Indigenous knowledge for consumption – by students like myself. Anna took risks in accepting the task of sharing aspects of Indigenous knowledge with her students, most of whom are non-Aboriginal, in this academic context. There is the possibility of disintegrations and transformations in transference of this knowledge, as outlined by Nakata (2007), ‘we are screening it through a filter that positions it to serve our educational objectives, and which draws on our own prior theoretical investments in knowledge and knowledge practice’ (pp. 9-10).

With a new awareness about dualities and stereotypes, I continued to discuss with Anna matters raised by policy actors who are Aboriginal, and appreciated her viewpoint and perspective when I was trying to understand different responses between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous
interviewees. Merton provides an explanation for some of my difficulty as a non-Indigenous researcher, ‘the outsider has neither been socialized in the group nor has engaged in the run of experience that makes up life and therefore cannot have the direct, intuitive sensibility that alone makes intuitive sensibility that alone makes empathetic understandings possible’ (as cited in Minniecon, Franks, & Heffernan, 2007, p. 28). As an example, I was struck by the stories told by one particular interviewee who was an Aboriginal policy actor, drawn from her previous experience as a caseworker. It seemed that Edna was constantly involved with her Aboriginal community, in public and private, whether at a football match or an official intervention, and that her roles and relationships were totally entwined. Bennett and Zubrzycki (2003) note that ‘Our research highlights that the cultural commitments of Indigenous social workers permeates all practice experiences’ (p. 66) and they recommended further research into balancing professional and cultural demands. This situation appeared to me as a suffocating, stressful, demanding professional and personal lifestyle. Edna, however, spoke about the needs and problems experienced by her relatives, community members, and clients in a protective, compassionate and connected way that was comfortable in its complexity. It was Anna’s simple statement that ‘it is because Aboriginal people live this everyday’ that enabled me to grasp why Aboriginal policy actors interviewed for my research connected in intimate ways with the topic and were articulate about racism in all its everyday nuances and forms. This was a significant contrast to many of the non-Aboriginal interviewees who were reticent to engage themselves and their agencies in analysis. A number of department representatives acted as tenacious gatekeepers during negotiations, did not want the subject of racism researched, and ultimately denied staff the opportunity to participate.

Research at the cultural interface

Nakata (2007) says, ‘educators need themselves to develop their scholarship in contested knowledge spaces of the cultural interface and achieve for themselves some facility with how to engage and move students through the learning process’ (p. 13). My supervisors faced this challenge and shared my commitment to social justice principles, which contributed to our awareness that within this educational objective, research relationship processes are themselves important. Research principles important to us included recognising Indigenous knowledge in the modern academy (Martin Nakata, 2007, p. 8) and privileging Indigenous epistemologies and voices. Heffernan’s (2007) experience as a non-Indigenous researcher has meaning for me, ‘I know that perhaps the most important thing for me to do is to “listen deeply”. This involves listening deeply to the experiences and wisdom of Indigenous women; the echoes of a colonized history; and the echoes of my own cultural heritage’ (writing in Minniecon et al., 2007, p. 29). During supervision discussions, particular attention was given to identifying opportunities for developing anti-racist best practice relevant for both research and supervision. Minniecon
(2007) concludes that ‘as researchers we need to seriously consider how we position ourselves, how we relate to each other (and the tensions that inevitably exist) and how we position Indigenous people and communities within the practice of research and knowledge production’ (p. 31).

Through a process of self-reflection and informed by re-reading of key writings on the topic, I came to terms with the necessity and benefits of this constant struggle, this problematic. A more comfortable position was reached where I could talk openly and less anxiously with my supervisors about these emotional reactions and what had been learned. I understood that by entering into supervisory relationships, sharing my writing about these matters and discussing the issues through all stages, we were actively negotiating the sharing and ownership of these knowledges and accountabilities, and also (re)positioning our selves within our professions, our communities and our academy. I came to respect that my supervisors including Anna, could be operating under a range of rules of authorship, ownership and authority (Longley, 1992), and juggling multiple combinations and obligations. My supervisors went beyond minimum requirements in their work with me and I am grateful they embraced this particular research topic in ways that resemble the teaching objectives of Tatum (1994),

The role of the ally is to speak up against systems of oppression, and to challenge other whites to do the same. Teaching about racism needs to shift from an exploration of the experiences of victims and victimizers to that of empowered people of colour and their white allies, creating the possibility of working together as partners in the establishment of a more just society (as cited in Aveling, 2004, p. 4).

**Setting limits to the confessional**

The literature provides warnings about aspects of Whiteness studies; of relevance are concerns about the politics of self-disclosure and the trap of ‘white fetishism’ (Clark & O'Donnell, 1999, p. 5). I need to ask whose interests would be served by my self-reflexivity, and who would be privileged as an outcome. I identified with the problematic ‘a white studying whiteness trying not to reinscribe whiteness’ (Probyn, 2004, pp. 1-2). Purging old baggage, experiencing discomfort and articulating a racial conscience as possible restitution might feel cathartic, but involves risks. Westcott (2004) supports Butler’s position that taking account of race is itself a racial position.

This willful act of self-reduction is sanctified as public self-declaration, and this culminates, paradoxically, in the production of the saintly white person, the responsible white person, the politically accountable white subject. In the place of a thoroughgoing analysis of race or racialization, we witness – obscenely, yet another self-glorification in which whiteness is equated with moral rectitude (p. 5).
Given the warnings, I was somewhat reluctant to continue the process of self-reflection, however a number of writers present a criterion that moves beyond the limitations. Drawing on the writings of Moreton-Robinson, Riggs (2004) argues for ‘importance of thinking through the ways our work articulates with Indigenous intellectual and political agendas by taking on board and engaging with the theories of power and subjectivity that are outlined by Indigenous people’ (p. 6). Riggs supports new approaches that engage with the complexities of privilege that shape White hegemony, arguing that ‘...we need to engage in critical studies of whiteness in order to better understand the machinations of how race is talked about, researched and engaged with, and how this continues to inform practices of privilege and oppression’ (p. 6). Westcott (2004) urges that research be transformative:

The confessional text, albeit produced with the best of political intentions, is historically static and tends, at best, to assist a literal inversion of the moral (metaphysical) status quo; the good are revealed as bad, the innocent as guilty, those who “know” are rendered transparent etc. …it fails to engage a transformative impulse (p. 6).

I will no doubt continue to wrestle with and confront inelegant and uncomfortable truths about the ‘problem of (my) Whiteness’ (Morrison as cited in Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sookraj, 2009, p. 899) long after my research project has concluded. I have learned much about the difficulty of taking personal responsibility for being complicit and compliant in a racial system that privileges me at the expense of others. Tatum (2000) spells out the costs and benefits of racism for me, ‘White people are paying a significant price for the system of advantage. The cost is not as high for Whites as it is for people of color, but a price is being paid. …the dismantling of racism is in the best interests of everyone’ (p. 82).

The importance of taking a measured account of the political utility of White guilt was given much thought in the context of American anti-racist protest in the 1970s. Rustin (1971) questions the ‘efficacy and the social utility of an attack that impels the attacked to applaud and debase themselves’ (p. 5). He doubts that the sinner can benefit from self-flagellation but more importantly:

I am absolutely certain it can never produce anything politically creative… On the other hand, it could well happen that the guilty party, in order to lighten his uncomfortable moral burden, will finally begin to rationalize his sins and affirm them as virtues. And by such a process, today’s ally can become tomorrow’s enemy. Lasting political alliances are not built on the shifting sands of moral suasion (p. 5).
Conclusions

My reactions to potentially being criticised in these ways and having my research resented, reflect the fears demonstrated by many of my interviewees at the prospect or risk of being labeled a racist. Wolf (1992) articulates the continuing problematic and also provides my research with an implicit approval to continue, ‘They ask what we give in exchange, and we are hard put to give them answers, or at least answers that do not sound defensive or self-serving. Nonetheless, I do not think we need to hang our heads in shame. I do not apologize for the research I have done’ (pp. 13-14). Dealing with my own array of privilege remains unresolved, but I have gained much insight from self-reflection and heeding warning signs. Instead of thinking that I could with hard work ‘get it right’, I saw the wisdom in Dillow’s (2009) description of scholarly ‘growing up’ as a journey toward understanding ‘akin to a growth spurt – sometimes painful and always surprising... Like all good learning, the process was important’ (pp. 1348-1349).

This chapter charted my research journey of exploration into racialised and racialising work drawing on conversations with policy actors who shared challenges, confusions and personal conflicts encountered. Davis (2006) says that ‘Indigenous rights are largely dependent upon the goodwill of the government of the day’ (as cited in Maddison, 2009, p. 240). My conversations revealed that in this policy work environment, race did indeed matter to these policy actors. As I will further discuss, these policy actors articulated a necessary goodwill yet were often caught up in practices and processes that continued to serve the interests of a dominant White system.

Appreciative of all that was learned through this race chapter, I wondered if gender would prove as challenging to examine. I hoped that my longstanding familiarity and connectedness with gender as a concept-in-action would stand me in good stead and that the next combination of analysis and/through writing would prove relatively peaceful. After all, I reasoned, all the difficulties in coming to terms with sexism would surely have been encountered. This confession reveals that, like many of my research participants, I separated, compartmentalised, categorised, measured and in a range of other ways treated differently race and gender, gender and race. I also compared sexism to racism in an analogous way that Grillo and Wildman (1991) point out, ‘makes the analogizer forget any difference and allows her to stay focused on her own situation without grappling with the other person’s reality’ (p. 398). They explain that when progressive White feminists with anti-racist politics analogise sex discrimination implicitly or explicitly to race discrimination, the unintended result is the perpetuation of racism based on White supremacy.
Mindful of the problems that have been associated with taking race as an isolated site of inquiry, nevertheless I pursue my plan for the next chapter to focus on gender within its own borders and overarching concerns. I plan to adopt a brave and purposeful exploration of the concept of gender and gendering that is informed by, and does not undermine, my (partial) understandings of race, and challenges my thinking in new ways. I set out to gain the kind of understanding that will contribute to solidarity-producing insights and praxis development, through deep reading and deep listening to how interviewees as policy actors are doing gender and perceiving gendering processes and issues in WA public sector environments.
CHAPTER FIVE: ‘DOING GENDER’

Introduction

This chapter deals specifically with the concept and practices of gender in policy work in the WA public sector. Again in this chapter, I draw on illustrative accounts by policy actors to highlight particular themes and issues. I examine policy actors’ accounts of how they made sense of gendering in their workplace, in their policy work and in regard to the populations being served by FDV and related public policies. I am particularly interested in how gendered perceptions of policy actors influence and impact their public policy work.

My way of approaching this chapter is similar to work by Hercus (as cited in Miles, 2005, p. 39) who looks at various and diverse ways in which women ‘do’ feminism, ‘know’ feminism and ‘be’ feminist, taking an historical perspective to examine current issues facing gender-conscious policy practitioners. My foundational knowledge extends an initial feminist focus to substantial literatures relating to gender and especially research into the gender-organisations relationship, the ways that ‘gender is entrenched in organisational cultures, structures, policies and daily practices that produce unequal outcomes for women and men’ (Hutchinson, 2008, p. 2). From my initial literature review, I have an appreciation that FDV as a policy field is seen as gendered and gendering, and how understandings about the gendered nature of FDV are changing, for example, ‘the shift towards a belief in domestic violence as gender-equal is evident particularly among men’ is noted in the National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009 (2009). Insights and information shared by the policy actors in this research project will contribute to the growing body of knowledge about processes and practices involved in ‘doing gender’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987, 2003).

A number of researchers have used case study approaches in their examination of gendered power relations. Research by Hollway (1996) has particular relevance to my project because of setting similarities. She saw benefits in looking at a social services department, a large bureaucratic organisation structured in a hierarchy, a ‘relatively non-violent setting (that is, in a setting where inequality and discrimination are usually reproduced without the use of what would be called violence, in common-sense terms)’ (p. 72). She talks of differing potential for change in specific circumstances; her work provides a perspective on the multiplicity and resulting contradictions of gendered power in that setting.

As an introductory overview to the material considered in this chapter, I note that interview questions related to gender and sexism seemed relatively easier to approach with participants
than the subject of race and racism; I experienced and interpreted less fraught conversations. That does not mean that gender was not a difficult topic to engage with, but that the level of anxiety did not seem as high as when policy actors spoke of policy and service delivery problems and frustrations in relation to Aboriginal peoples. One explanation could be in the comment by Noella that agencies were mandated to tackle the perceived crises in Aboriginal affairs, but that ‘gender is not on the agenda’. Gender as a concept related to daily policy work seemed ‘slippery’ compared to the more topical and politically volatile racialised issues. Phoenix (1994) notes that, ‘issues of “race” and racism are particularly uncomfortable or thought-provoking for many respondents and that, as a result, colour differences may be more salient than shared gender for some…It is, therefore, important to recognize differences and commonalities between people who are socially constructed as belonging to the same group as well as across groups, a project which is consonant with feminist concerns over the last decade’ (p. 70).

Some research participants described blatant gendering processes; some could not see how discrimination on the basis of gender was a concern in their particular workplace. Gender as a term seemed to be treated as synonymous with women, and few considered implications of the essentialising category of ‘gender’ (Squires, 2005). A small number of policy actors spoke passionately about their difficulties in achieving strategic change objectives in relation to services for women. My research reaches conclusions consistent with Eveline and Todd (2009) that, ‘gender itself is a continuous, effortful and political process’ (p. 536). In this chapter, I take up issues of gender-sensitive praxis within the public policy field of FDV and in later chapters I discuss how gender and racial concerns relate to themes of intersectionality.

The scene is set for my discussion by comments made by Enid, who remained optimistic despite concerns about the scarcity of gender policy analysis, hoping for gains within five years. She described gender analysis in policy work as ‘sprinkled’ and FDV work ‘the only spaces’ for gender consideration.

Enid: In terms of the gender stuff, really the only spaces where that sort of gets picked up a little bit is in the family and domestic violence. But there’s no actual specific gender based area where, you know area that says “We’re making sure that gender is picked up”. It’s kind of like pepper and salt sprinklings. You know, there’s gender stuff sort of sprinkled. … I don’t know how much gender analysis we do in this country. I mean like I said “pepper and salt stuff”. Some people do it here and there and you know, you get the word ‘gender’ being popped up all over the place.
The concept and relevance of ‘the gendered stuff’

Definitions matter, as De Plevitz (2000) says, ‘in order to attack racism anti-discrimination legislation must be able to identify it’ (p. 84). My interest in how policy actors related to gender in their policy work led me to raise the issue in a variety of ways, mindful of how gender as a concept was seen as contested and confused in the literature. For example, Hutchinson (2008) reports in her research into Australian public sector bullying that, ‘most interviewees remained disinclined to discuss gender, much less offer any gender analysis’ (p. 176). The difficulties were captured by Isabel as she defined gender and its relation to her work; she was comfortable with the topic yet was aware that colleagues struggled. ‘I think it’s really hard for people to… to grasp a knowledge of gender and how it’s actually perceived or working with that concept. You know, just to try and understand it basically. Because gender is a strange word’.

Thinking about gender meant for most interviewees a consideration of women’s needs. Bacchi and Eveline (2009) argue for ‘the importance of understanding gender as a social principle rather than as a synonym for women, or as a shorthand for “men and women”’ (p. 3). Bella talked about gender through her emphasis that women must ‘merit’ policy attention. ‘It’s being upfront and saying “Because something is happening to women”. I mean it is important. It’s not sort of thinking, “Well it’s something that happens to women so it’s of lesser importance”. It is ensuring things that things that affect women are given the importance and prominence that they, that they merit’. Briony worked in a department that also related to gender in terms of women’s relative disadvantage, which was seen as a lower priority than racial issues, for example cross-cultural training. ‘There’s less training around gender issues. There is less focus. It is pretty much a male business in that most offenders are men so getting engagement around gender issues is a bit challenging in this Department’.

Isabel said that despite difficulties with the idea, gender had to be understood, and she explained the relevance for policy work.

Isabel: I can see it as a differential impact on men and women for the services provided and the need for policies to take account of both men’s and women’s circumstances to influence the outcome of, to improve their lives. And it needs to be done separately and carefully but also with the awareness that there’s an inequity in structures of society and often in relationship between the sexes… Just to have that analysis is very useful when you come to evaluate services or policies across what you’re doing. Because you immediately think, how does the assumptions that you’re making affect where you’re going within the development of your policy.
Enid was another policy actor who did not see gender as restricted to women’s issues. She spoke insightfully about how the matter of gender and gender differences connect with public policy. Enid was an Aboriginal woman whose senior policy work in a mainstream department benefited from her gender awareness.

*Enid: I also sometimes look at it from a gender perspective. You know, what is this? Sometimes you find that there’s a lot of focus on women, say particularly in the area of family and domestic violence and that’s OK but from an Aboriginal or cultural perspective there’s not much in relation to men. And if we look at the cultural issues around Aboriginal people then you know Aboriginal people are, we have been saying for the last 15, 20 years in relation to domestic violence it’s no good just talking to the women, we also have to include the men in this because they’re part of the equation... there are complexities there. So, in terms of the policy stuff, I would be commenting or making comments in relation to the gendered stuff.*

**Gender and Aboriginality**

Enid talked about how feminism with its gendered notions drawn from White positions, presented issues for Aboriginal peoples.

*Enid: Part of what we’ve been coming up against is the feminist model. And I’m not saying that the feminist model is wrong but sometimes it’s been problematic, because it’s assumed that men are the perpetrators and we know that from the stats that men you know usually are, but what Aboriginal women are saying in terms of the feminist model is that our issues with our men wasn’t about a fight for equality. Our issues, our men’s issues and our issues are the same because our issues are about equality within a non, in a ra... a White system. And so it’s just that, you know, in terms of the victim stuff. Sometimes our men are caught up in that too and we want to be able to work with them to overcome that stuff.*

Enid voiced many of the same concerns published by Aboriginal women in Australia (Huggins, 1996; O'Shane, 1976) about gender complexities in relation to Aboriginality and problems stemming from White notions of universal womanhood. Feminism was not rejected outright by Enid; she was critical of inadequate feminism. She was clear and confident about the foundations of her beliefs, values and approach that she contributed to policy development. She did not separate gender and race in her thinking and being; gender issues related to women and men together; Aboriginality connected in the deepest ways for Aboriginal women and men...
living in a White system. Her comments also raised questions about intersectionality as a potential way of capturing the complex nature of gendering experiences of Aboriginal women and men. Enid brought up the concept herself later in the interview.

The primacy of gender as an explanatory model of FDV with White feminist intervention models was also challenged by Eric, an Aboriginal policy advocate. He said that Aboriginal women and men supported each other with mindfulness about ‘smaller battles for the bigger war... discrimination and alienation and keeping us from our rightful position in this country’. He explained why Aboriginal women were more protective than White women who experienced FDV, ‘it could even be fear, maybe loyalty or fear that makes them protect their men. But they do. I think there’s just bits and pieces of all that, loyalty, fear, but definitely that bigger picture stuff are the reasons why they do’. His comments echo a body of international writings on the subject. In the USA, Ford (2010) talks about ‘the fraught relationship between black and white feminists, who share a commitment to women’s equality but have clashed because many black women have seen feminism as a distraction from the struggle for racial justice and a threat to an embattled black masculinity’. However, it is also relevant that ‘chauvinistic men have exploited this concern’ (p. 18), indicating gendered power dimensions in the field of FDV.

How other forms of inequality and oppression intersect with sexism is becoming important in FDV research. Developments include addressing the challenges of effecting change by giving voice to women victims/survivors from a wide range of formerly excluded communities, advocating culturally competent interventions and strategies grounded in greater structural equality (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

The issue of discriminatory public policy was given shape by Enid who saw policy development as gendered through processes including consultations in which the relative power of men and women become shaped by White policy practices. Enid raised concerns about the cultural impacts of such gendering policy work conducted by public servants, non-Aboriginal in the main.

Enid: What’s happened in the past in relation to like anthropological type consultations is that only the men ever get consulted and there is this assumption that only men could speak for land and that women have no voice. And even though on another level you know, people say “oh women need to be included” in practice it doesn’t happen. …it’s a very male dominated culture they often forget to ask the Aboriginal men “where are the women?” They will just assume the elders are the men and that if the woman is there – great, but most of the talking and discussion will take place with the men. I think that tends to be a bit of a blind spot.
And my meanings for that I suppose is because we do work within a very patriarchal hierarchical system which is very male dominated and male biased. So it just happens. People don’t think about it unless you actually put it on the table and say, “We have to start thinking about gender, gender issues here”. So yes, you know my role would be to make sure that, where are the women’s voices in that?

Enid’s advocacy was crucial to inject consideration of gender into policy and practice in her department with non-Aboriginal staff. Uncertainty about gender protocols in cross-cultural situations had practice consequences including client disempowerment, a human rights issue.

Enid: Sometimes people get confused about only men can work with men, women can work with women. Well I actually challenge that a little bit because I think that sometimes we can become a little too essentialist in saying that only men can work with men and women can only work with women and I think that sometimes that might take away choice… I think you have to allow the individual choice and to ask them “Look I’m a male here and is this going to be problematic for you working for me? Because at the moment we have a shortage of resources and I’m it. If it’s going to be problematic then perhaps I’ll have to try and get someone in to work with you but I need to put this on the table now because I’m a male and you’re a female. Is it going to be difficult for you to work with me?”. And most people will either say “Yes it is” or “No it won’t”. But if you don’t put it on the table and you just assume I can’t work with this person, then you’re not really allowing that person choice, you’re actually telling them, “Because I’m male, you can’t work with me”. You’re deciding for them and I think sometimes there’s a fine line between when do we have the right to make decisions for someone and when do we need to advocate for someone.

Enid was blunt about her assessment that gender-based policy had been ineffective, ‘…even though on a level where government policy is talking about gender equity and gender based policies it still doesn’t filter into actual practice of people’. Like most interviewees, Enid’s insights into gender issues were influenced by her own private study triggered by curiosity, frustration and questions throughout her career. Even though the public sector had not provided professional development relating to gender awareness, Enid considered that taking up issues of gender discrimination were part of her professional role. She had struggled with what gender means and recognised that the term, ‘can mean a lot of different things to different people’. She described how gender awareness affected her work including seeing gaps in policy practice and questioning the nature of gendering services.
Enid: Working in the field where women very much dominate the welfare field, you very rarely see the men coming through the door, it’s always the women coming through the door either for, you know, for relief funds or child protection or domestic violence and it’s like well, where are the guys? We know that there are men around because there are all these kids running around. So what role are they performing?

Gendered policy impacts

During my interview with Eric, he spoke at length about gender differences between Aboriginal women and men, highlighting how some public policy had unintended consequences. Focusing on the experiences of Aboriginal men, he spoke about gendering issues that had particular impact because of historical racism.

Eric: There’s been this really concerted effort to denigrate not only Aboriginal culture but Aboriginal men. …I know a lot of men who have rang me and almost broken down and cried, you know, “We’re now seen to be the worst sort of human being there is and, and I wish I wasn’t born black”. And horrible things like that. So there is this really internalised feeling happening among Aboriginal men about this whole abuse stuff and there are a lot of fine husbands and fathers and uncles and brothers and that that are out there. It’s just unfortunate that we have some of our men that perpetrate those crimes.

Further examples of gendered and racialised policy outcomes by Eric included his view that Aboriginal women accessed public policies in ways that further disadvantaged Aboriginal men. He evaluated public policy outcomes in terms of capacity to facilitate, reduce or eliminate suffering by Aboriginal peoples. Gender infused the experience of suffering by Aboriginal peoples; suffering was experienced differently between women and men, suffering was hierarchical in intensity and impacted on gendered identities.

Eric: I think that Aboriginal men in particular have suffered. I know our women have too, and they suffer at the hands of Aboriginal men now too, but in general, looking at what’s happened in this country, Aboriginal men have taken the brunt of invasion and colonisation both through not needing to be here, not needing us to…People needed women and took women and used women. Men were totally you know, totally disregarded including some might say a very privileged place in Aboriginal society, and I’m not going to argue against that. I think that traditional Aboriginal society certainly favoured senior older Aboriginal men, there’s no doubt about that. But you know, you got disempowered, not only were you, not only
your position in the big picture but position within your family and stuff, was thrown out of the window. Our women, I don’t know what it’s like now, but our women certainly, certainly took advantage in the ’60s and ’70s of education opportunities that left the men behind. So now in the 2000, 1990s, 2000 and for the next ten years or so there will be a much more evidence that our women have accessed earlier than men and has created a problem for men.

Eric spoke as if exploitability by White people determined gendered survival rates, wellbeing and capability to engage with contemporary White policy. He spoke of Aboriginal women and men in competition to access government benefits; pregnancy rates were related to welfare payments; Aboriginal women were more skilled in engagement with bureaucracy.

Eric: Yes, they saw the opportunity and went for it. It may have been a way to complement a dwindling economy like young girls have kids now to help you know develop an economic base that they wouldn’t have any other way. And that’s a terrible indictment, but that’s how it is. And I think you know the whole TAFE education and tertiary education through Aboriginal study grants, although all of that in the last five to ten years has been mainstreamed, but I’m talking about late 60s, 70s and 80s when there wasn’t. There was this opportunity and there was Abstudy and stuff around and people grabbed hold of it. Women grabbed hold of it much quicker and accessed it better than the men.

The long-term consequences of Aboriginal women gaining better access to beneficial public policies was seen by Eric as affecting the relationship between Aboriginal women and men in terms of gendered roles and behaviours.

Eric: I think once again, that jealousy stuff which some men, a horrible part of what the, who we are, has come to play with, and of course you know, being the bread winner or the person with the economic power just adds to the frustration that Aboriginal men have got through what we’ve talked about. None of this of course is any excuse for domestic violence or bad behaviour. I certainly think it has had an affect on our men’s position in society.

The idea that public policy has differential impacts – gendered and racialised – is supported by the literature. The Gordon Inquiry provides local evidence of ill-conceived or poorly implemented public policy impacts on Aboriginal women and men. Critical policy research in the field of Australian FDV claims mainstream approaches based on individualised explanations for social problems can result in further victimisation of the Aboriginal community; criminalisation of Aboriginal men is said to be one clear outcome of FDV policy; and
Aboriginal women victims are indirectly blamed for violence they suffer (Blagg, 2007; Cripps, 2004, 2007; Murray, 2005; Osuri et al., 2009). Hearn (1996) draws attention to an absence in the critical literature of explicit enquiry and deconstruction of men and other ‘superordinate’ categories and groups including the rich, White people and physically able. Hearn describes agencies as gendered with gendered problem definitions and understandings that directly relate to policies and practices, and concludes that ‘changing the internal gendering of agencies is essential in the development of better agency policies against violence’ (p. 110).

**Gendered/ing staff**

Noella described how the staff profile does not necessarily reflect understanding of gender at work. She reacted with bemusement to questions about where to find gender awareness in her department.

Noella: *We’re a very gendered department if you like (chuckles) because they’re overwhelmingly females working with overwhelmingly male clients. We’ve got lots of young females working with violent males. I find it fascinating. Yes. (chuckles) I don’t know where they’d look. I don’t know where they’d look. Would they? I don’t know where they’d look. They’d listen to conversations…. It’s such a good point. I am a feminist. How can I have not thought of these issues? (loud laughter).*

Noella also raised the possibility of differences between male and female staff preferences to explain sex segregated employment practices; she expressed the desire for more ‘good’ men.

Noella: *I don’t so much use my gender as I use my experience of being a woman in the world. I see it as an advantage. I don’t see it as a problem. I do see it as a problem that we don’t have more good male workers working with these males in this agency not just here (in this section) but all through the department.*

Her explanation for the lack of men employed in the department included the possibility of low pay and gendered role perceptions. ‘Maybe it’s something about women feeling the need to rescue which would not be so good. I don’t know. But I don’t think it’s about women pushing good men out. I think it’s actually good men just not seeing this as their vocation’.

Staff and clients shared gender stereotypes that affected FDV interventions. Noella says, ‘there’s a gendered understanding of domestic violence that operates within the contracted service providers, the programs that they run, there’s that’s intrinsic within all our training’. She outlined how gendered understandings of FDV were built in to legal processes and support programs, ‘so much of the work is to get guys to shift responsibility from, for seeing the victim
as, as being responsible for the violence to seeing themselves. But in my experience when we work with women not only do they experience themselves as being responsible for being victimised they also see themselves for responsible not only for, for his violence as well as their own’.

On the frontline, sex differences were important to both staff and clients. Noella discussed being female in FDV practice with male violence perpetrators, and how male colleagues interpreted client explanations for FDV differently because of gendered stereotypes. Where her male colleagues lacked self-awareness about the influence played by dominant masculinist ideology, she was prepared to see them as innocent and misguided. Noella presented a balance sheet of factors and processes that affected casework and client relations.

Noella:  I don’t know many males who have had heaps of experience in working with victims. … if you’re a male you’re soaked in dominant ideology of masculinity whether you know it or not, whether you want it to be or not. So it’s easier to be seduced by male stories of you know sort of “She asked for it. I didn’t mean to do it.” All that sort of stuff. … if you’re solid and you’re grounded in your work and you’re a female it’s actually much easier to spot the invitations to be seduced and actually they’re not going to try as hard anyway, because you know, you’re not a man anyway. So I feel there’s a real bonus. This is actually, you know, during the face to face client work I feel there’s a real bonus in working with perpetrators, male perpetrators of violence to be female and to be experienced, older, and solid. Because to be female and to be younger and to be fearful is actually, you know, (chuckle) sort of counts out all the bonuses, those other bonuses, about being female.

The interview process itself served to highlight what it meant for Ruby to be a woman dealing with the nuances of gendered stereotypes in the workplace. We talked at her desk in a cubicle in an open-plan workspace close to the office of her male boss.

Ruby: My gender? It depends very much on who you’re talking to. Inside the Department, no, it doesn't make any difference because there is a lot of really strong women here and they have been here for a really long time. But out in the field, if you’re talking to the seasoned professional, the men....Now I know you’re listening to what I’m saying (spoken to another person at another desk) It’s a head office field thing more than anything. But it’s not a gender thing necessarily.

Ruby called out and asked other person: “Why is our evaluation team all female?”
Male colleague: “Why is our statistics team all male?”

Ruby: Well there you go (laughter). Because men can count and women are all ‘touchy feely’? (More laughter)

Ruby and her male boss continued to banter; they recognised but did not seriously question sex segregation and the gender division across types of work in the department; they therefore denied a gender dimension to staffing, and a gender profile of professional groupings was humorously dismissed. This extract revealed a little of how their relationship was negotiated and maintained. Ruby was self-conscious of her lack of privacy; she repeatedly told me that there were ‘a lot of strong women’.

Bob discussed gendering in policing work and attitudinal blockages to prioritising FDV, including organisational culture in an environment ‘no different to army and to paramilitary establishments’.

Bob: Traditionally 40 per cent of people from those organisations have a propensity for domestic violence in some form themselves by the very nature of the individual, like, is working in those organisations... It's attitude. It's an ingrained police, it's an attitude. Look, police officers have the view that they are there to deal with serious crime and that's understandable. But they don't want to become involved in protracted and prolonged domestic violence incidents that are resource intensive.

Xena also presented an example of gendered/ing at the frontline of FDV services, in this case police staff at a women’s refuge.

Xena: Classic is - police call outs... We had one worker and she was young, attractive, bubbly, a typical blonde blue-eyed. We always used to get her to go out to all our police call outs and arrange the police. Four to five cars would come out and they would all be sitting chatting to her, while we’re having to go in and do the work of, we’re allowed to do whatever we want. Smash the window, we haven’t got the key, they’re too busy talking.

Gendered/ing clients

Freda talked about policy work being underpinned by gendered notions about women and men in their capacity as parents; she took issue with gendered attitudes towards mothering and fathering that centred on women as instrumental in child protection casework. Focus on male violence perpetrators in FDV work meant invisibilising women victim’s experiences and needs;
by not listening to the women’s voices service delivery was effectively anti-women. It was through such mechanisms as inter-agency communications and co-ordination structures that such attitudes and approaches as such anti-victim/anti-women became institutionalised and systemic whether intentional or not. Her experience supported what a number of Australian writers (Miles, 2005; Summers, 2004) have said about assaults on feminist policy gains and blatant anti-women policies in Australian public policy.

Freda: ...It’s sort of a very sympathetic attitude to the perpetrator, which is what I see. And when I see those inter-agency groups working, I mean in theory, you would think that everybody comes along and takes off their hat and for it to work it really almost has to be like that. They take off their hat and they move things around and think about things differently. Well in reality I don’t think they do. They come along wearing their Justice hat or their DCD hat and they stay very firmly within that. And when we were at a thing about the Child Safety Team, (welfare agency) actually said, “Well we haven’t changed, to be honest we haven’t changed our dealings of any of these cases from being part of this group.” Which I think is kind of telling. You know the stuff that Ellen Pence talks about in terms of - the ideological frame basically, to me that makes it very hard for people to talk across agencies.

...It came through loud and clear in the Safety Audit about the role of women and the role of women to protect children. I mean, when you look at it closely you see all sorts of gender stuff. You see the role of women and she should be “protecting her children”; “she lies”; “they are a bit emotional”; and “fickle, funny little creatures these females”; “She really just wants a man’, you know, that kind of thing...“It’s not his responsibility. It's her responsibility to sort of keep him in line and him away from the kids”; “They seemed to be quite scared of him”; that macho kind of thing.

Gendered/ing services

Notions of efficiency in policing had consequences for service delivery in Bob’s account. When victims repeatedly disbehave, that is, fail to co-operate by giving evidence in court and not requiring repeat interventions, those women could easily become seen as resource wasting, problematic for the department. Internal policies, manuals of instruction and service directives would need to be very explicit to frontline staff for them to understand cost-effectiveness issues and quality service delivery in gender-sensitive terms. Bacchi’s ‘what’s the problem represented to be?’ approach (C. L. Bacchi, 1999) is helpful to my interrogation of the policy frameworks that claim to address FDV ‘problems’. Bacchi’s policy problem analysis provides a tool for my
examination of how these policy actors think about and communicate the ‘problem’ they perceive, that of reluctance in victim reporting. Bacchi’s approach enables my critical analysis to see that underreporting can be influenced by social dynamics including gender and that these dynamics can render particular realities of FDV invisible to those involved in policy implementation. Misconstruction of the ‘problem’ has consequences in that the FDV policy could be seen as having failed, especially for those victims who do not seek or refuse official intervention. Issues of blame, responsibility and accountability can in this way become heightened in policy development.

Eva provided a frontline explanation for the reticence associated with FDV victims; Aboriginal women in particular were frightened of the system. If they do take out a violence restraining order, they withdraw it due to pressure.

Eva:  You know, “He’ll be good, he’ll do this, he’ll” or whatever, but the behaviour continues. We’ve worked with one Aboriginal woman I think for 15 years and it’s just now that she’s got her own strength back to be able to make quality choices in her life. But, it's great to see but it took 15 years. So much abuse. She'd be in her late 30s now. Eight children. Great mother; great mother. And it was just his behaviour. So and that’s as I was saying, one man affected this whole family and the system really has let her down.

Eva saw ‘a big difference’ between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women who had not one but two reasons for fear. ‘Your non-Aboriginal, they are frightened of the system but they haven’t got so much of that pressure from family, outside the family, putting that added pressure on them. Aboriginal families have’.

Noella provided an example of how gendered stereotypes were embedded in service delivery.

Noella:  It is an intrinsic undeniable factor in violence between couples. I see that whereas Aboriginal women are somewhat more likely to fight back, Aboriginal women just like non-Aboriginal women are far less able to create the fear, intimidation and, and actual physical harm that, that men who perpetrate violence are able to. So gender is, is you know is an absolute in violence. You know sort of men have more capacity to terrorise women than vice versa…. And usually the victim who’s never reported her victimisation but when she retaliates in defense or actually when she finally just can’t bear it anymore and is physically violent towards the other, because he’s not fearful of her reactions if he reports, he goes off and reports and she gets charged. So, the law would see her as the aggressor but in actual fact her primary identity is as a, victim of some standing. So you can’t
provide the intervention to her which I, see this is interesting, because it’s like if we were to fit those women into a DV program it wouldn’t fit anyway.

Like most of the policy actors, the fact that welfare services have traditionally been feminised services was considered by Freda to be ‘a real problem isn’t it?’, but she was cautious about suggesting that a more balanced approach would be achievable simply by employing more men.

Freda: I’m about to make a generalisation, a sociological generalisation. Perhaps they wouldn’t be as intimidated by the macho kind of thing; they might see through it. I mean it would be good to have men in there that had training around domestic violence, but that’s working on the presumption that men are going to pick it up as domestic violence. I mean none of these cases were being treated as domestic violence in the first place. You know they weren’t; they were just child protection cases.

Freda revealed how FDV policy practice implemented by a mainstream welfare agency preoccupied with other policy priorities could undermine the capacity of gender-sensitive approaches. In this case, the link was not being made between child protection and FDV; staff experienced practice tensions. ‘They were just protecting the children and that was their focus. I think again, that’s a real problem. It’s like, well if your job is to protect the children and it’s your arse that’s on the line when the child doesn’t get protected. How do you then also represent the interests of the, you know obviously there’s a long way to go’.

The relationship between staffing profiles and client services was discussed by Bob whose own conclusion was that the nature of FDV services eliminated any potential gender differences over time.

Bob: Some victims have said males respond better because the females are judgmental. You know, “Why can’t you get your bloody act together?” But on the other hand, we’ve got the other specter as well, saying the female police officers are far more empathetic to their position. So there’s no one single corner that we’re seeing.

Briony, a non-Indigenous senior executive, explained more about how gender came to be organisationally framed as problematic; for female staff there were particular risks, and gender with the added dimension of Aboriginality combined to pose pragmatic difficulties. Her account showed how gender issues affected staff management, frontline tasks and recruitment in her predominantly female area.
Briony: *It is a real problem because, particularly if you’re dealing with dangerous sex offenders who, people who stalk and get fixed on some of the female staff, the risk to them. Sometimes we need to have men working with those people because it’s just too high risk. Sometimes with the Aboriginal community, it is important to have men as well as women. Sometimes the men are not allowed about particular things or are not comfortable.*

Briony said that some female staff gradually built relationships with Aboriginal people in communities and became well respected enabling them to travel there. However, ‘it’s difficult’ when male staff were unavailable for risky supervision of dangerous offenders and managers sometimes had to be directly involved. ‘Most of the branches now have one or two, but the majority of our staff are female. We are in fact, contemplating whether or not we need to do a ’male specific’ (chuckle) drive or a recruitment drive but I don’t know if we can’. This department formulated or defined the problem in gender terms, and in this case the solution of seeking additional staff resources reproduced gendered and sexualised stereotypes. Relationship development was ‘key with Aboriginal people’ as if relationships were not elsewhere required. Services were provided and resources allocated on the basis of gendered needs assessment and intervention models.

More information about gendered practices was provided by Lindsay who was involved at policy levels and frontline in the non-government sector with FDV. In the context of inter-agency co-ordination, she had found police personnel unprepared for the reality of Indigenous family violence where Aboriginal women behave differently to White norms. Her own services were developed mindful that in the mainstream, non-Indigenous FDV dictated service models, resulting in a lack of appropriate support for Indigenous women.

Lindsay: *She just sort of looked at me and said “oh, I hadn’t thought about that”. I mean that, given that they’ve got ( ) for men, they’re certainly not going to have priorities for women further down the track. And that’s arguments you know, how well are police trained to know whether she’s protecting herself, whether she started it, what level of fear did she have. Police don’t have the skills or the time or the inclination to try and work out any of those dynamics but the reality is that there are Indigenous women for a whole range of reasons who are violent or who perpetrate violence and I don’t know what we’re going to do with them. I don’t think they’re going to do programs with them.*

In discussions about services relating to crime and sex abuse, Briony and Edna saw gender imbalance as representing inequity for women in the case of law and order matters, and poor
interventions and preventive help for men in the case of sex assault. Briony and Edna confronted competitive difficulties staking a claim for scarce resources in an environment where resources were directed toward women as victims not criminals. Services to men were based on their profiles as violence perpetrators unlikely to be deterred by early ‘soft’ interventions that were not punitive responses. The question here concerned whether or not gender equality in resource allocations meant equal provision of programs for women and men across mainstream services.

Briony: *In terms of programs, I think women suffer a bit, because what works (in the) literature says you run programs for high risk offenders; women are not a high risk so they are not eligible for programs, programs for women specific. So I think we’re not all that good yet.*

...

Edna: *I’m very disappointed that (department) didn’t really think it was important enough for us to have two people attached to (service section dealing with sex abuse) especially for the gender balance to have male and females because it would just move mountains really. There are men’s groups all over the metro area. Accessing them is just, the guys are always saying, “Have you got a male, have you got a male to come out and speak to us, come and speak to the boys?” “Well, no.” “Well, why not?” Of course it wasn’t appropriate for me to go and speak to them but that was a really big gap and I identified it really early that we needed to have a male person.*

**Gender and leadership**

The influence of personal attitudes and values affecting policy work was demonstrated clearly by Xena whose work in the women’s refuge movement included policy advocacy and government advisory work. She laughingly described her attitude of preference for females yet was shocked at how her own daughter had not been inspired by Xena as her role model. Her workload involved self-sacrifice; personal relationships suffered because of her work.

Xena: *Do you know what, the other day I said to her, “Aren't you glad you've got me for your mother?” And I nearly died when she turned around and said, “What? Oh puleeze. You work too hard; you're at meetings all the time; you're never here.” And she said, “You're stressed out and you don't have any fun and pah, you haven't*
even got a boyfriend. No thanks.” I started crying. (laughter) And I think she saw that she upset me. Oh, I was really shocked.

Karen: Well, if they’re the costs of leadership, you talked about, if that’s all the cost of leadership, do you still want and expect the Aboriginal women to take up the leadership spots? Do you want to curse Aboriginal women this way?

Xena: (Much laughter) Exactly, I know.

A number of policy actors spoke about leadership in gendered stereotypes. That Aboriginal women took action to highlight FDV and child abuse, was spoken about frequently. Aboriginal men in particular saw that agency as unusual and indicative of a crisis: that these women would turn to government in their help-seeking about, and for, Aboriginal male perpetrators of violence. Yet the critical leadership literature challenges narrow gender and racial stereotypes. ‘Women of color have been leaders from the time that the world began. They have guided and sustained families, nurtured and encouraged communities, created and cultivated social movements and institutions, instilled faith, and, whatever the circumstances, inspired hope in the possibilities of social change’ (Gardella, 2010, p. vii). Filling ‘gaps in the existing literature and emphasizing culturally based leadership paradigms of women of color’ is important to Vakalahi, halaevalu and Peebles-Wilkins (2010, p. xii). My interview with Xena contained significant material supporting their call for ‘dispelling myths, misunderstandings, misconceptions, and misrepresentation of the phenomenon of women of color as leaders and administrators’ (p. xii). She had not planned to be a leader, and her narrative about the experiences of Indigenous women leaders considered issues of mobilisation, connection and collective action.

Karen: Well you’ve been at the organisation level; you’ve been at a regional level; you’ve been at the State level; you’ve been a national player, so what's the next obvious body or launching pad?

Xena: You know that’s not all been deliberate, don’t you? You know I’ve not gone, “Oh I want to do this.” Because I've never thought I want to be this, I want to do that. I've just basically kept my nose in and pegged and just worked, worked and worked. ...I love what I do and I'm courageous and I'm not afraid. I think they are good elements. I'm not afraid to speak up and I'm not afraid like I see in some services – too scared to speak up because they might get de-funded. My attitude is, “Well, come on, do it.”
Xena saw need for bravery in dealings with government, and not being intimidated by funding issues. These institutional challenges carried particular gender implications for women’s shelters and other services for women by women, especially where competitive funding models encouraged equal provision for men’s services.

**Feminist policy actors**

Xena shared stories about gendered experiences in her professional roles and noted that her perspectives were shaped as an Indigenous woman. Bella shared with Xena a firm identity as a feminist which was reflected in her employment choices within the public sector.

*Bella: Well I’ve worked (sigh and silence) in everything from when I was working at the (department) and I was the human resources policy person who did all the work around reinstating permanency to women who lost permanency when they got married. It informs all of my work.... I can only work in an organisation where I actually agreed with what the organisation is doing. ...So I’ve always worked in an area that has always had a very sophisticated attitude towards women’s issues. To me working in a feminist environment is the norm....I’ve only ever been a feminist (chuckle). I don’t know what it’s like to not be a feminist.*

Asked about the difference in policies written by feminists, Bella identified implied assumptions, the potential for unintended consequences, language used and the range of examples used to illustrate or support particular policy.

*Bella: I mean I was at a training course last week where they were just talking about informal networking... I know that one of the strongest networks in this city are book clubs which are predominantly... exclusively women. And there are a lot of very senior women in the public sector who are in book clubs and yet it is not recognised as being a network the same way in which golf clubs are.*

Policy actors who identified themselves as feminists were more likely to express firm views about the ways in which women were disadvantaged relative to men in service provision and a range of program considerations, but that awareness did not automatically translate into descriptions of different ways of working in the sense of conscious activism or advocacy. For some it could be simply that action does not necessarily follow enlightenment, as Hage (1998/2000) says, ‘The trouble with the concept of “racist practices” or with “racially motivated” practices, is that the belief in races or cultures, is not in itself a motivating ideology. Racism on its own (like sexism in this regard) does not carry within it an imperative for action’ (p. 32). For some of the feminist policy actors, their strategic feminism took priority or was the
entry way to broader social concerns, yet for most, feminist ideology was located, and at times buried within, a wide social justice framework. Policy actors responded to a given policy priority rather than proactively engaged with policy for gender equality. One exception was Xena whose analysis incorporated language of ‘power imbalance’, ‘different privileges’ and ‘reality of a woman’ in ways consistent with the literature on anti-oppression practice for example, Wildman and Davis (2000),

The very vocabulary that we use to talk about discrimination obfuscates these power systems and the privilege that is their natural companion. To remedy discrimination effectively we must make the power systems and privileges they create visible and part of the discourse. To move toward a unified theory of the dynamics of subordination, we have to find a way to talk about privilege. When we discuss race, sex, and sexual orientation, each needs to be described as a power system that creates privileges in some people as well as disadvantages in others. Most of the literature has focused on disadvantage or discrimination, ignoring the element of privilege. To really talk about these issues, privilege must be made visible (p. 52).

Gendered and sexualised practices at all levels in the FDV field represented ‘gender politics’ for Xena, regardless of race or ethnicity. When she compromised her ideological beliefs by participating with gender stereotypes, it was instrumental to achieve desired outcomes for women and children.

Xena: There is always that **power imbalance** (laughter) just because they are a man (emphasis in original). So it's **different privileges**; different - that are afforded to them for the simple fact that they are a man. And that's why they cannot understand the reality of a woman and particularly women with children and that's another added reality, perspective. Already we're one step behind with the power imbalance. It's already a written rule, an unwritten written rule out there...I'll go and mix with all the CEOs in the banks. I reckon they won't be looking like me. (laughter) And my **classic** is when we are going out to corporate, I always, this is an awful thing, but I always make sure it's our slim, attractive looking workers go out to open the doors, because I know as soon as they see me, as a woman of power and a big woman (snap). I've **seen it over the years** and now I have to do things like that and it's an awful thing to do. Because I see them shut off. I see them looking and their attitude is, “Well, you don't take care of yourself, you've obviously got these issues because you're big.” ...Executive White women? Yes. And because I'm moving towards the business sector because we're trying to get funding, I've noticed that I've had to do these things. It goes against me because there are certain things that I believe in but this is the compromise. I think “women and children, yes”. It's awful.
The impact of strong, articulate female leaders working on behalf of women victims was also discussed by Freda. She opposed the exclusivity of male bias in FDV services and spoke admiringly about other feminist advocates who worked to counterbalance that effect.

Freda: *I don't actually know her position but she's their DV specialist I guess. But she's very, she’s got a very strong, like the stories that she tells, are much the same whatever committee I've seen her on, I've seen her in the case management kind of thing. And then I saw her at the child protection one. And both times it's very much this, “You know I've worked with this guy for a long time and he's got a history of, a shocking childhood history. It's not his fault. He's had a bugger of a childhood. We're working on him and we're really making some ground with him.” You know that kind of stuff. There's very little attention paid to the woman at all. It's very much on the perpetrator. I mean it is their focus. However the victim's voice wasn't coming through.*

Issues of voice and power in the leadership role were particularly important to Freda; effective work could be achieved by these women despite government intervention.

Freda: *You know, when I was going around and I was getting really disillusioned I suppose, the thing that reassured me was that you come across some really strong, generally women, who are just doing it anyway...you know they just do it, despite the system.... A lot of it just comes down to ‘go getting’ type people who think, “Stuff it, I'm doing this for the sake of the women. But, I don't even care about the whole thing”, you know.*

Gendered/ing texts

Research in organisational discourse studies point to the difficulties of hegemonic communications and controls. Smith (1999) considers technologies of social control to be increasingly and pervasively textual and discursive. Her IE focus on the ‘textually-mediated social organization’ extends the notion of texts used for the purposes of ruling relations played out in ‘institutions’ seen to be ‘coordinated and intersecting work processes and courses of action’ (Holstein, 2006, p. 293). This has relevance for public sector work environments in which texts and discourses involved with policy development, co-ordination and implementation could be seen as gendered/ing. Gabriel (2004) discusses the way organisations mobilise formidable resources that can stand in the way of sense-making and inhibit narratives of analytical import, listing ‘rule-books and manuals, recipe books and reports, instructions and orders conveyed by word of mouth, paper and electronic means, circulars, and so forth’ and spelling out the risks when ‘instructions are followed, procedures are adhered to and information is assimilated without a call for such narrative elaborations’ (p. 70). Numerous
other means are available to organisations to render gender and other fields of oppression invisible including time management, staff movement, physical space and location, privacy and speech restrictions. Shaw (2004) demonstrates how the state deliberately and systematically ignores or marginalises the feminist critique through public policy. ‘the state has a clear role in gender politics even when it is not overtly discussed in official documents’ (p. 56). Gabriel (2004) also reports that massive resources are devoted to the ‘creation and propagation of corporate fantasies for both internal and external consumption… turning storytelling into another management tool of control and performance… Those with power can attempt to dictate their own sense-making on others. They may use propaganda, officially-sponsored texts which usually come not as stories but as slogans, logos, lists of values, images, etc., to this effect’ (p. 71) (italics in original).

Gender neutral narratives in official policy texts were accepted unquestioningly by most policy actors. Freda was an exception; she expressed dismay and frustration at government policy statements and documents that communicated contradictory policy imperatives, competing policy interests and changing priorities to confused policy actors ill-equipped to develop gender sensitivity in their work. Ashcraft (2004) says, ‘discursive activity continuously creates, solidifies, disrupts and alters gendered selves and organizational forms’ and concludes that a shifting relationship, ‘points to the possibilities for revising relations of power’ (p. 275). As a policy analyst employed in consultancy work with organisational development goals, I am hopeful of Freda’s influence on the FDV system. She yearned for feminist consciousness within the system and practitioners able to draw from gendered experience and knowledge to understand the connections between fields of practice involving men, women and children despite the given policy frameworks within which they operated.

‘Beyond gender’

Ian, an Aboriginal policy actor, discussed gender awareness in cross-cultural situations. While the literature reports contemporary reshaping of masculinity/ies including in public sector organisations (Davies and Thomas, as cited in Hutchinson, 2008, p. 191), Ian presented images of men and women as more fixed and immutable. Ian argued that his personality, professional reputation, experience and skills could overcome or transcend difficulties posed by cultural gender sensitivities.

Ian: The way you do things and the way you interact with people, it's governed by your personality so that cuts across gender. And my networking throughout the State is very strong and people recognise who I am. Regardless of what I've done, because I've worked in a range of different areas… but I need to relate to you in the area.” ...If I was a woman, had had those same sorts of contacts, it would be
the same thing. So it's really your personality and your knowledge and your experience, that's all. It's beyond that gender stuff. And that could differ depending on what areas you go to where your gender is going to make a difference. So going to a women's meeting for example there might be some difficulty because a woman may have had some problem with a man, a Noongar man in that community there. So I have to be very much involved or be aware of the local politics around that stuff, and make sure there's a local woman who introduces me, “Hey, listen to this Noongar man he knows what he's talking about.” So you've got to be, that cultural safety stuff is integral to that. And I've never perceived to be a problem in that regard in talking to women's groups.

Yet Ian’s examples evidenced careful practice mindful of the ‘touchy’ nature of gender and respectful of culture.

Ian: I worked in (agency) as well which probably has helped me to be aware of some of the gender issues. I mean I'm extremely mindful of my own, the way I do things. Because Aboriginal men are very touchy. And that's fine when you're in a community setting and in a work situation like this people want their space. But Aboriginal people are a bit different like that, they're a bit like Italians eh? So I'm mindful that I'm not encroaching on people's thing and that's a different culture for me. It's a bit of a culture shock. And in some cases where I've done it, I've thought about it after and thought, “(Ian), that was quite inappropriate.”

Jill specified that Aboriginality could be an essential requirement (identified as ‘50D’ positions), although it did not apply to her own position. She was satisfied that although not mandated, gender balance existed unintentionally and worked well in the section under her management in the education sector.

Jill: We haven't taken a gender approach. Gender's never been an issue here because we seem to come always out with a balance. And I don't know - it's certainly not conscious - it may be sub-conscious, but at the end of the day I want the best person for the job in the team...We have identified the positions that we target as 50D positions because there are some jobs that only an Aboriginal person can do.

Jill’s view was that ‘people will always look past… colour and gender’. Personal attributes and preparation could overcome cultural protocols with specific gender requirements; her Department’s policy regarding cross-cultural work did not consider gender. ‘It can be difficult for me as a non-Aboriginal woman going to meetings when I'm dealing with Elders of the
community who are male.... I think you just do your best to get on with people and to know what you're doing and to know your job and to be respectful.... you have to earn your ‘spots’. You have to earn respect from anyone doing their work’. Individual preparation involved questioning, gaining knowledge and travelling to regions with an Aboriginal staff member as per Departmental policy that specified racial background but not gender.

Jill, like most of the policy actors, talked about women protectively from a deficit model in the same sense as she discussed ‘any group that you consider disadvantaged’. Jill responded to my question about departmental accountability and work on gender related matters by talking about affirmative action and women’s readiness for merit-based appointments. Acknowledging the system’s desire for statistical profiles that satisfied equal opportunity measures including for Aboriginal peoples, she wanted to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes and save women from demoralising and stressful employment experiences.

Jill: As a woman I've actually, I’ve done OK (laughter).... while I understand there was a need for affirmative action in terms of gender, I think you should have the best person for the job. I think you should always have the best person for the job. And that there should be equal pay whether you’re male or female...I think anybody that's put into that position is stressful and it's demoralising. It can’t end well for anyone and it actually does harm in the bigger picture because you build on a stereotype.... for any group that you would consider a disadvantaged group, like to put people in a situation that (a) they are not ready for and don’t have the skills for and (b) you are not prepared to provide the appropriate support to mentor them through it if that's the case, then you are heading for disaster. I mean personally it would be demoralising, it would be stressful, it would be all of those things. And then it sends the message, it reinforces the stereotype that “oh well, what did you expect?”

The need to prove employment readiness was directed to women, Aboriginal peoples and other minority disadvantaged groups; such people could achieve the same promotions to the senior executive level as Jill – after attaining the required skills rather than by benefiting from affirmative action programs. Fletcher (2009) offers a non-judgmental way for me to analyse Jill’s contribution, to see wider implications and recognise evidence of institutional relations that structure these careers:

Problematising the nature of merit provides a new lens to focus on the organizational and societal constraints on women and individuals from diverse groups. New perspectives, such as looking at discourse and performance, lead to new appraisals of gendered identity and uncover issues at organizational and social levels of discourse that are often hidden under the cloak of gender neutrality (p. 408).
Gendered positions

Mapping everyday activities that include gaining policy jobs and promotions would help to shift the issue to see the way systems organise by gendering and racialising employees. This relates to Acker’s (Acker, 2006) work on inequality regimes examining systemic disparities achieved through organisational practices and processes. The approach of IE also has relevance here with the standpoint for research being an individual’s location in the everyday world (D. E. Smith, 1987). While my research project is not designed to explicate and explore employment practices and policy activities articulated across the WA public sector, the literature does point to issues relevant to my conversations with Jill, including gender politics and the employment of women (Acker, 1990; Alvesson & Billing, 1992; P. Y. Martin, 1992, 2003), Black women and discrimination in employment (Cohn, 2000; St. Jean & Feagin, 1998). Most of the interviews began with an opener question about the personal pathway into the current policy job; these examples constituted identity work done over years by interviewees and included examples of gendered experiences such as sex stereotyping in occupations, professions and departments and a range of encouragements and obstructions to women and men according to gendered perceptions of abilities and capabilities.

I faced uncomfortable truths about my intuitive responses to Jill’s comments. I noted a tendency, an eagerness, to impose my own ideas of an enlightened stance regarding gender, race, policy work and political activism – the list lengthens alarmingly. To reflect on my reactions begins with an acknowledgement that I am as complicit in the systems of oppression as Jill and other research participants and we all shared the same goals of better understanding and policy practice. Wildman and Davis (2000) remind me that a more generous and accurate starting point is to assume ‘each of us is more complex’.

Generally whites think of racism as voluntary, intentional conduct, done by horrible others. Whites spend a lot of time trying to convince ourselves and each other that we are not racist. A big step would be for whites to admit that we are racist and then to consider what to do about it. I also work on not being sexist. This work is different from my work on my racism, because I am a woman and I experience gender subordination. But it is important to realize that even when we are not privileged by a particular power system, we are products of the culture that instills its attitudes in us… while we work at seeing privilege, it is also important to remember that each of us is much more complex than simply our race and gender. …Privilege can intersect with subordination or other systems of privilege as well. Seeing privilege at the intersection is complicated by the fact that there is no purely privileged or unprivileged person… The presence of both the experience of privilege and the experience of subordination in different aspects of our lives causes the experiences to be blurred, further hiding the presence of privilege from our vocabulary and consciousness (p. 56).
Issues of employment were further taken up by Melinda. Gender considerations were ‘not officially’ addressed in her department, but structural responses to deal with women’s relative disadvantage was seen as synonymous with gender awareness by Melinda. ‘It is in our Equity Diversity Initiatives that are managed by our Human Resources Directorate, or Branch of the Directorate’. Melinda was a member of the Equity and Diversity Committee that monitors ‘gender and well certainly women, and disability, and race, and so on, different you know, a number of CALD and Aboriginal people being employed, those sorts of employment issues’. Formal monitoring indicates government intentionality yet it was not clear how everyday activities across departmental functions were directed or influenced by such committee work. Melinda explained that her Department responded to higher level government policy in terms of priorities; gender as a result was ‘subsumed’.

Melinda: On the radar at the moment is the Substantive Equality and the Aboriginal issues which of course include gender issues, but they are subsumed under rather than on the radar as a separate initiative, if that makes sense.

Gender at the margins; gender as invisible

The literature informs me to question Melinda’s assumptions about gender being implicit. There was no indication in my conversations that gender neutrality achieved gender sensitivity in policy work. Only a small number of policy actors expressed concern about gender not being ‘on the radar’ and ‘subsumed’. As Young explains, ‘group differences cut across individual lines in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different respects. Only a plural explication of the concept of oppression can adequately capture these insights’ (I. M. Young, 2000, p. 37). Rendering any category invisible has consequences; Fenstermaker and West (2002) point out that social categories provide the basis for allocation of social goods and social opportunities (p. xv). I question how gender equality could be achieved without explicit reference to gender, and how intersectional inequalities could be attended to under conditions of categorical approaches.

As in a number of interviews, what was not spoken by Melinda communicated potentially more than what was. For example, policy staff were allocated to identified portfolios; she assumed I understood the meaning of this allocation and shared her disapproval that equal gender concerns did not result in a men’s portfolio.

Melinda: Women have been clearly a focus and I think that one of my friends holds that portfolio more than I do and is often looking at carer issues,
‘women as carers’ and championing women’s issues. Does that make sense?
As for men, well that’s another issue (chuckle).

Developing specialist knowledge in allocated fields not necessarily connected to other policy briefs could result in poor policy co-ordination and Melinda drew on her experience in the disability field to draw parallels with gender considerations in policy. Melinda reflected on what could be helpful to advance progressive causes in such environments, arguing for structural representation, advocacy and accountability.

Melinda: People will champion things they believe in but I don’t think that’s sufficient. I think really we actually need a government that’s committed to social issues, human rights and you know through the Office of – have we got an Office of Women at the moment? I don’t even know.... they need to be clearly paving the way, just as I’m very aware of the Aboriginal and the CALD issues and what’s happening. As I said I think I’ve actually got a watching brief on women’s initiatives. And I know they send out brochures and so on, but I don’t think there are any initiatives at the moment like the Substantive Equality one for gender, that are placing expectations on departments, except Equity and Diversity in Employment. Do you see what I’m getting at?

Melinda was initially unclear about the existence of a specialist women’s bureau and her own responsibilities, nevertheless she quickly assumed a critical stance. The specialist bureau had little impact on her watching brief activities and she used the interview as an opportunity to vent frustrations about ineffective policy development by departmental and governmental machinery. Further commentary on issues of accountability for gender equality were made by Ned who was similarly placed to Melinda in that he was not fully cognizant of what his organisation was doing with regards gender matters. Ned emphasised how funding was consequential; formal monitoring and auditing of service delivery could stimulate specific gender analysis and planning.

Ned: It’s probably one of those retrospective planning that once a year say, “Oh we’ve got to do a little bit of a report on what are we doing with Aboriginal clients? What are we doing with women? Okay, well let’s have a look at the stats and we’ll write up a paragraph about it and make it up on the spot and there you go.... I don’t think we’ve been very good about even looking at, or examining, those sorts of stats in terms of doing some planning. Different interests groups at times have said, “Oh (agency) doesn’t help them or it does help women but it doesn't help men”. I don’t think we really monitor that to a tremendous extent to see what’s there. It means
you could perhaps end up with hiding and obscuring areas of need without sort of picking them up.... I don’t think we are that accountable, to be honest.

Pru was located in the health sector in feminist and women-directed frontline service delivery. Like Ned, she could see how macro policies impacted at the micro level on clients. She objected to recent organisational decisions that jeopardised her work, specifically the naming of a new department with gender in its title. Her objections demonstrated contested ideological understandings about gender. She said, ‘it just feels a bit cold’ and resisted redirection of resources from funding that targeted women to a generic gender category. Pru was conscious of powerful interest groups within the health system/sector and how male privilege manifested itself and operated. As Wildman and Davis (2000) summarise, ‘White privilege derives from the power system of white supremacy. Male privilege and heterosexual privilege result from the gender hierarchy’ (p. 54).

Pru: men are and women are different and the needs of women are different and I think historically lots of research and evaluation and particularly more medical and more in many ways the research has been around you know, men, not the specific impact that it has on women. I mean there are you know services that have to be quite specific to respond to women and women’s needs. …it’s looking specifically and people, I mean politically there was, for a while there it was very uncomfortable. There was this whole notion around, you know, men’s health, men have a need and of course. I mean no-one has said they don’t have a need but the women’s movement has been, you know, has had a voice and said “Look, you know, there are issues around domestic; there are issues around sexual assault; issues around women and depression. We’re not medical beings – we’re social beings. And we want a social model of health. And we want people to see us as social beings. And we actually want to be treated respectfully and we want to have equality in terms of how we receive our health information and be more in partnership not a professional telling us they know everything about our health and needs and tell us what to do.” It’s not how women like to get information. So for me this is a place where people are respected and they come away informed and they can make decisions about where they want to go and what life decisions they may like to take rather than that model of, you know, men telling women (chuckle).

Pru was suspicious about the concept of gendered health which had not been explained and its meanings were unclear in the field. Where the change originated from in the Department was unknown. Frontline adherence to policy was assumed. ‘I mean I don’t know what it means. I
don’t know what they make of it, to be honest’. Pru was informed by ideology and political experience; she took pride in the historical struggles of the women’s movement to gain improvements and women-centred health services. She saw that reduction in funding for women’s services could be manipulated or justified by men using the language of gender. Pru identified with the organisation’s women clientele, speaking on occasion as if the services provided were of a self-help nature; there were combative elements in her comments. This sense of adversity speaks to or echoes feminist literature, for example Weedon (1997) says that, ‘As feminists we take as our starting point the patriarchal structure of society. The term ‘patriarchal’ refers to power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interests of men’ (pp. 1-2) (Italics in original).

Looking further at how policy actors talked of frontline experience, most of the non-Aboriginal interviewees expressed frustration and concern at their lack of knowledge about positive interventions with Aboriginal clients; gendered policy outcomes were less distressing. Gwynn expressed views about Aboriginal women and men that largely drew on historical White accounts. The narrow sex-based stereotypes reproduced here did little to provide Gwynn with the basis for gender-sensitive policy practice. Like a number of policy actors, she despaired of finding solutions to what she saw as overwhelming policy problems – Aboriginal peoples living in dreadful situations. Gwynn was initially reluctant to expound on the topic, like a number of policy actors who seem hesitant and at times embarrassed about their own lack of expertise. ‘Well I mean (sigh) I’m not right up on it’. She implied there was a body of knowledge unavailable or not accessed.

Gwynn: What first comes to mind is the men’s loss of a place you know as, I mean traditional Aboriginal people they had men’s business and they had women’s business and men were powerful. Women did the traditional hunter gatherer sort of small animals sort of thing and the men hunted sort of not so often but the big kills and all the rest of it, so they all had their role. But I think with welfare you know, and also the fact that women often were single mothers with kids or receiving benefits and independent of the men, has sort of altered the power relationships and power dynamics in the society. But alcohol is one as well and substance abuse is the other thing. I mean it’s just, and then poverty you know, all of the stresses of poverty, ill-health, you know? All of those sorts of things, I guess that’s not a very good analysis but...

Gwynn agreed with what sounds like an unhappy chuckle, to my conclusion that ‘It’s a bit depressing isn’t it?’ She sympathetically focused on changing power relationships that impacted most negatively on men. Essentialising women and men as an issue was taken up further by
Bella whose ideas about best practice was informed by her feminism and her grasp of the implications of policy work as a non-Aboriginal senior executive.

Bella: *I mean one of the things you always have to remind yourself of in this role as well is that Aboriginal people are as diverse as European people, as diverse as Asian people. We use 'Aboriginal' to describe what would be the equivalent of different nations you know...We use 'Aboriginal people' which in a way masks the fact that there are so many Aboriginal nations. I mean in Canada the Indigenous people are referred to as 'First Nations' plural. Having said that, because one of the dangers is that every Aboriginal person is seen as being a spokesperson for the entire Aboriginal or representative of the entire Aboriginal population. But people such as myself are never, I, we have never experienced life as an Aboriginal person. We can try and empathise as much as we can. We can try and put ourselves in their situation as much as we can but we have never experienced it. And the same arguments for why you needed to have more women, why you needed to have people from non-English speaking backgrounds, that you are bringing diversity of views and things like that.*

Without specifically identifying institutional racism, Bella used feminism as an empathic tool to understanding. She objected to specialist tokenist positions as consequence of using generic stereotypes. She wanted mainstream policy work to benefit from both female and male perspectives in the Department, and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Bella: *We suffer, when we do have a manager of Aboriginal policy here but the span of things that she has to deal with, it’s quite great. But also, a lot of Aboriginal people are sort of seen as, well they are working in roles which are designated as Aboriginal roles. I think what would be really useful is just to have someone as an Aboriginal person working just in general policy roles. So the same way as I bring my feminist perspective to everything I’m working on, they are bringing their Aboriginal perspective to everything they are working on whether it is specifically about Aboriginal people or not because that is their viewpoint. That’s why we need to have Aboriginal people working in areas like this because they are a part, as part of the community and their voice should be heard the same way as everybody else’s voice is heard in all the different variations. As I say, it’s not just about Aboriginal people dealing with Aboriginal issues, it’s making sure that we always have the Aboriginal perspective on everything we do.*
Bella was supportive of the broad array of tasks performed by special advisers as experts with lived experience, and wanted as well, mainstreamed Aboriginal policy expertise in her Department rather than marginalised Aboriginal staff. She conceived of her feminism as equating with Aboriginality in terms of focus on particular matters especially to do with disadvantage; she did not talk about Aboriginal policy actors with feminist views. Bella’s feminist perspectives represented a generalised approach to doing the best for all women clients, as explained by Weedon (1997), ‘If feminism is a politics, it is also a theory, or rather a range of theories. Whether acknowledged or not, every form of feminist politics, and there are many, implies a particular way of understanding patriarchy and the possibilities of change. Theory, in this sense, is often implicit’ (p. 4).

Conclusions

In this chapter, I explored how policy actors engaged with the concept of gender in their daily practice, treating gender as a verb rather than a noun (Eveline & Bacchi, 2005) in order to more clearly identify and understand practices of gendering. Feminist writings contributed insight into these accounts of gendering practices in the work of public policy actors.

From policy actors’ accounts I saw how a politicised policy climate shapes problem definitions and interventions; equality policy work was contentious, confusing and often frustrating particularly for the feminist policy actors. Gendering processes were often invisible and implicitly shaped and maintained within ruling relations. Cynicism was expressed by many policy actors about political rhetoric and government policy initiatives in a public sector environment insufficiently responsive to advocacy, advice and consultations. Ways that policy actors have dealt with challenges and difficulties in developing and implementing gender-sensitive policies included risk-aversion behaviours, strategic withdrawal and denial among other reactions. Most common was the practice of subsuming gender under other policy frameworks, effectively rendering gender issues invisible.

A number of writers have identified problems with a gender-neutral approach achieved through such methods as neutralising policy language for example from ‘women and men’ to ‘family’, rendering gender invisible and subsuming gender equality within broader policy objectives such as human rights. Gender blindness under the guise of gender neutrality has been shown to have particular consequences for disadvantaged women (Sharp & Broomhill, 1988), and in the field of FDV the consequences of not explicitly analysing gender relations could assume life and death dimensions. Yet the issue of sameness and difference in policy impacts on women and men that appeared in my research related not to differential impacts, but most often to the overall disadvantaging aspect of policy outcomes. A shift in gendered power relations between
women and men was noted in the interviews; policy actors were sympathetic about suffering by Aboriginal men from a loss of status and role in relation to Aboriginal women, whose emerging leadership was acknowledged and applauded. Being able to influence societal gender relations is an important feature of public policy according to Connell (2006) who notes that the principal goal of a gender-neutral public sector workplace limits that steering capacity of the state. The connection between gendered and racialised public policy is clearer in this context, for it has historically been White public policy delivered as mainstream government intervention that imposed changes with outcomes such as gendered role impacts.

The competitive nature of category politics was most notable in comments by policy actors about funding and resource allocation of programs directed to women and men as distinct groups with different needs and capacities. In some ways, the attitude of policy actors towards women’s and men’s rights groups were indicative of gender awareness in that for some feminist policy actors, men’s activist groups posed threats to women’s services, yet for other policy actors it was men’s loss of relative power over women and children that rendered them more vulnerable and deserving of policy attention. Some policy actors were articulate about how specific public policies potentially impact differentially on women and men, and a number of policy actors expanded their descriptions of how gendered roles and relationships are affected at times because of unintended consequences of public policies once considered progressive. What is identified as policy priority affects the likelihood of gender awareness and gender-sensitive policy work in a reactive political climate. Self-identifying feminist policy actors were more likely to be exposed to, and be participating in, praxis development in various forms including women’s collectives in the community, women’s studies at the academy, research literature about gender inequalities and gender expertise in the field.

When asked if gender still matters in terms of political power, Australian politician Maxine McKew (2009) said, ‘I think the short answer is “less than it ever has, but still more than it should”’ (p. 5). She refers to the topic of gender roles in Labor Party politics as ‘galvanising’, and reflects that ‘I’ve acquired a lot of scar tissue in terms of confronting this topic… as we all have’ (p. 1). On the basis of these conversations, it would seem as if only a few of my research participants have seen themselves as being in roles or situations which would see the necessity of acquiring scar tissue on account of activism for gender equality. Most policy actors were not as articulate and knowledgeable about the concept and practice of gender as they were about social justice and disadvantage; they assumed progress towards gender equality to have already been significantly if not sufficiently achieved, despite outstanding needs of Aboriginal people – as women and men. However, there were interviewees who identified themselves as feminists and spoke passionately about political and strategic action to advance the diversity of women’s issues and resist backlash to gains in women’s services, drawing on historical knowledge and
experience of, or from, the women’s movement. Those interviewees were especially focused on resource allocation issues and actual or potential discriminatory departmental activities. Women’s leadership in policy activism was valued, although social activism was seen to carry significant personal cost and potential professional consequences.

Questions remain about how to progress gender equality through public policy work, and the environment described by these policy actors could hardly been seen as conducive, save for isolated and at times marginalised feminist organisations/services, vulnerable to mainstreaming approaches. The implications of this contested public policy terrain for a GM approach, let alone one that incorporates diversity principles and practices, are challenging, confronting and point to the need for urgent praxis development. My interviews accord with arguments by Bacchi and Eveline that, ‘it is impossible to “script” reform initiatives such as gender mainstreaming”. They suggest instead, ‘thinking about such policy developments as fields of contestation, shaped by on-the-ground political deliberations and practices, including the discursive practices that produce specific ways of understanding the “problem” of “gender inequality” ’ (Carol Bacchi & Eveline, in press).

The WA public sector’s current substantive equality approach focusing on race and racism does not necessarily advance a gender-awareness if gender is subsumed in the way that policy actors have described. An intersectionality approach appears to offer benefits over category politics for equality work that takes up multiple disadvantages. Making ‘good’ policy with substantive equality goals that are expansive could represent ‘best’ practice to progress an anti-oppressive agenda. In the following chapter, I explore what an intersectionality approach could mean for anti-oppressive work in such contexts as White and masculinised public policy environments.
CHAPTER SIX: INTERSECTIONALITY PRAXIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on developing my understanding of intersectionality as theory and practice. Previous chapters focused separately on gender and race; this chapter is about ‘integrationist’ research (Rockhill, 1994) that sees simultaneity of gender and race and pursues potential synergy. In my thesis so far, I have identified through GM literatures an inattention to multiple disadvantages and complex inequalities, and learned that focusing on disadvantage is potentially problematic in that those groups themselves can come to be seen as the problem. Bacchi (2006) observes that studying particular problem representations can reveal different driving factors that ‘…involve investments, conscious and unconscious, in deep conceptual and epistemological schema and, hence, are not always obvious’ (p. 3). Through studying gendering and racialising perspectives, processes and practices including what Yosso et al. (2009) describe as ‘incessant, subtle, yet stunning assaults, or microaggressions’ (p. 660), I have expanded my knowledge about connections between politics, power and privilege, and appreciated how self-reflection is a necessary part of this research project.

My initial literature review introduced me to the seminal writings on intersectionality and its place in the ecology of the women’s movement. I noted GM project reports of difficulty making effective connections with diverse forms of social inequality reflecting similar, and often the same, complexities and challenges identified and explored in the writings of women of color concerning intersectionality. Calls to develop effective connections and address intersectionality are becoming more pressing in the writings of prominent feminist activists and especially in the field of FDV relevant to my research, for example, ‘although woman battering occurs within individual people’s lives and is experienced as a personal event, it is culturally produced out of intersecting relations of gender, race, social class, and sexuality’ (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005, p. 1). This chapter is supported by further readings and intends to engage more deeply with the material to provide some answers to my outstanding questions about intersectionality praxis.

In her promotion of intersectionality as an analytical tool for describing the experiences of individuals, Hill Collins (1998) places those individuals within a system of interlocking hierarchies. Yeatman’s (1995) definition of intersectionality as ‘multiple and interlocking oppressions’ also has resonance by emphasising the power of oppression and that the interlocking nature of the particular oppressive forces would require simultaneous or synchronistic attention to each. Despite helpful definitions, I have experienced difficulties grasping the demands of intersectionality as concept and practice. Yet, a number of writers
address the subject with confidence. ‘Looking at the interlocking nature of gender, race, and class was the perspective that changed the direction of feminist thought’ says bell hooks (hooks, 2000, p. xii). Hooks writes that early resistance, from mostly White and privileged feminists, has passed and that individuals doing feminist work nowadays evoke gender, race, and class as commonplace practice. My research has not yet provided me with sufficient WA evidence to agree or disagree with hooks’, however my readings raise doubts in my mind about ‘commonplace’ intersectionality praxis in Australian public policy.

What I see as the need for a new tool for praxis becomes reinforced when I read the growing body of writing by critical Whiteness theorists. Moran (2004) explains how and where Whiteness operates:

> Culture is dynamic and changes through, amongst other things, the agency of subjects. Yet, power relations and hierarchies also continue to be reproduced, despite contestation. Race is one axis around which power relations continue to be configured, and whiteness continues to be its dominant organizing principle in Australian society. Thus whiteness operates in both localized/situated contexts and at a more generalized collective/structural level’ (p. 4).

The focus on power, privilege and positionality appeals as a way of envisaging levels or layers of disadvantage with competing, hierarchical and politicised categories. Based on her reflections as a black feminist antiviolence activist, Richie (2005) calls for analyses and organising strategies that acknowledge ‘the race of gender and the gender of race’ (p. 50) and demonstrates how the assumed race and class neutrality of gender violence threatens essential values of inclusion, equality, and anti-oppression work.

Some writers however, have become resigned to an impossible praxis, having found intersectional theories of oppression too difficult. In my literature review, I recognised problems experienced in GM practice with reference to intersectionality including the difficulties of dealing with government tendency to fuel competition between inequalities assumed to be similar (Verloo, 2006) and neoliberal policy impacts on the lives of diverse groups of women (Teghtsoonian, 2004). It appears from the literatures on GM and intersectionality that the ways that some positions can and do exist simultaneously is difficult for activists, for example the simultaneous existence of agency and victimisation, as Fiandt (2006) explores in autobiographical and activist narratives.

My research participants challenged my own ability to think of simultaneity, for example in the following extract, Aboriginal policy actor Alice argued for a proactive FDV approach more responsive to what Aboriginal women wanted, rather than (White) feminist solutions.
Alice: I think they’ve been saying for a long time that “We want to deal with this thing differently. We want you to shift your focus to deal with the men because it’s the men that have got the problem here. We don’t, we don’t want to be victims or we don’t see ourselves as victims. The men have actually got a problem here. We want you to deal with them.” I had a senior Indigenous female bureaucrat actually said to me once she said, “I reacted to this question. They said ‘Oh what shall we do about Aboriginal violence?’ and she said “Well give the money to the men”. And she said “the reaction I got from that, people were horrified”. But that’s exactly what we’re talking about. Just shift the focus around from the victim mentality to shifting the focus to the perpetrator... when they use these services, they use them differently and they don’t intend to end the relationships, they just want their partner to stop doing what it is that he’s actually doing, whatever the conduct might be, or this child or this relative or whatever.

Alice had to repeat her explanation for me and chuckled with my struggle to understand. She understood my continuing difficulty to develop ‘a different mindset’ and again I was reminded that the hurdles confronting anti-oppressive praxis begin with personal change. Intersectionality is increasingly being identified as a concept with potential to build GM praxis, yet from my own experience I wonder at the capacity of intersectionality to provide performative and transformative tools that could easily and quickly be embraced by policy actors (like myself) working for broader human rights/substantive equality goals through best practice in FDV. And should it be Alice’s responsibility to continue trying to educate ‘us’ with our ‘partial knowledge, vagaries and unclear boundaries associated with deeper causal processes’ (Kamps, 2009)? Just as gender has been seen as a confusing concept creating attendant difficulties for practitioners (Eveline & Bacchi, 2005), my own early foray into intersectionality raised further questions for praxis.

**Is the concept of intersectionality performative?**

Questioning how the concept of intersectionality could be applied in practice is taken up by a number of writers. Fiandt (2006) reaches conclusions through examining the work of Morales, who disagrees with intersectionality used to describe identity-based privileges and oppressions. Morales explains that ‘social categories don’t intersect like separate geometric planes. Each one is wholly dependent on all the others for its existence’ (as cited in Fiandt, 2006, p. 571), and proposes the term ‘saturate’ for its potential to interpenetrate institutional systems of power in a more organic way. However, Fiandt (2006) expresses reservations:
Her idea that any one theory can integrate everyone seems challenging to put into practice in a world still fractured by racial, class, and gender divides. Until these divides can further heal, it may be necessary to use intersectionality and standpoint theory while still challenging the historical frameworks of gender, race, and class. Chela Sandoval’s theory of differential consciousness acknowledges the power and complexity in tactically shifting between several informative theories (p. 572).

Tension between strategic approaches and contested focal points is also apparent in the observations of Probyn (2004) about, ‘…uses of power which entrench inequity differently, through an appeal to the particular rather than the universal’ (p. 2). But from her research into the connections between gendered experiences of DV and welfare reform, Josephson (2005) argues that using intersectionality as a lens helped avoid being co-opted into simplistic modes of thinking, therefore leading to ‘a more complex and nuanced analysis’ (p. 98).

Mindful of earlier readings of the literature identifying obstacles to building coalitions between feminists with/across differences (Moreton-Robinson, 2000b), I look for more insight about ‘the development of a decolonized anti-racist and inclusive feminism’ (Pettman, 1992, p.34). Hill and Riggs (2004) question whether or not multiraciality issues regarding Whiteness and racism can actually offer potential for new collective formations. Yet, a number of Indigenous writers are hopeful about improvement in social relations and social development shaped by feminist connections. Martin (2008) for example, offers instructive advice that research based on Indigenist principles can build positive relationships, and she concludes, ‘With relatedness as the premise and impetus, there is no such thing as Outsider, or Other, but of Another’ (p. 148).

Bacchi and Eveline (2009) identify processes and practices involved in ‘the politics of doing’ as key sites for social change, and propose ‘coalitions of engagement’ and ‘deep listening’ practices that make for an activism that is inclusive and democratic. Based on their GAP research into the development of GM models for Australian public policy, they highlight the importance of privileging the views and respecting the perspectives of marginalised women. In their experience, the practice of privileging means specifically respecting the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) women about the usefulness of appeals to identity, which Bacchi and Eveline identify as an important disagreement among GM theorists. Through these approaches, intersectionality could be seen as performative; however the literature also raises issues about transformative social change.

Can intersectionality be transformative?

Brodkin (2004) argues for the benefits of intersectionality as an analytical tool that can extend the equality agenda:
To the extent that studies of whiteness attend to social change (and not all do), they
do it as part of a project shared with critical race theories, feminisms, queer
theories and marxisms. All these perspectives take the question of political subjects
as anything but predetermined or natural. They also presume identities to be always
works-in-progress, constituted on multiple axes, and part of a contradictory
repertoire of possible identities. Studying whiteness this way directs our attention
to whites’ ambivalence about what racial privilege and entitlement costs them in
terms of identities not lived. Likewise, understanding identities as constituted on
multiple axes reveals a hidden life at the heart of whiteness about preserving a set
of specifically white constructions of masculinity and femininity, which have
undermined anti-racist efforts (pp. 1-2).

My research project seeks to benefit from the use of a concept that is more likely to achieve a
multi-layered critique. Intersectionality could safeguard against a predisposition to think in
terms of binaries, of racialised identities that are essentialist in nature and blind to issues of
power, privilege and positionality. Identifying metaphors that relate to racialised assumptions
and perceptions could be more achievable if intersectionality informed my text analysis, and my
understanding of the way language represents deeper issues could be further developed.
However, intersectionality as a concept does not translate in a facile way into a research
method. There are no guarantees that an awareness of intersectionality will provide insightful
reading of interview transcripts and research data. Intersectionality will not necessarily produce
evidence, for example analysis of critical incidents will not necessarily produce revelations of
racialised and gendered power relations in public policy. Intersectionality could instead
contribute to an anti-positivist approach to research by raising yet more questions, issues and
dilemmas in ever-widening and deepening circles, layers or levels. Transformative potential
perhaps rests on the potential of intersectionality to threaten traditional and historical beliefs
about peoples as individuals and as collective agentic identities.

**Intersectionality as a concept-in-progress**

Intersectionality was a concept-in-progress at this stage of my thesis and my understanding was
largely dependent on the literature. I wondered if looking at intersectionality with fresh eyes
could stimulate my work in a variety of new directions, for example taking the concept back to
linguistic roots and looking at related terminology could show intersectionality as more than a
singular concept defined in a static tense. I could start thinking of intersectionality and research
processes by thinking of intersections in methodologies, especially urged by qualitative
researchers who fuse different approaches when engaged in collaborative work with Indigenous
communities (Evans et al., 2009).

Thorvaldsdóttir (2007) talks about *feminist* theories of intersectionality (italics as emphasis in
original), and she says that the term ‘…can be applied to a broad range of research topics, both
at the micro and macro level’ (p. 2). Darling (2007) summarises this person-process-context model, generally known as the ecological systems theory, referred to by Thorsvaldsdóttir. The individual is located in the centre of concentric circles representing microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems; these are connected by multiple arrows linking contexts within systems and linking contexts across systems. The social ecological systems perspective has informed a range of professional fields of practice and applied across different sectors; its utility as an analytic tool can be seen in examples such as Bond’s (2008) writing on the importance of addressing organisational diversity:

[S]he explains that the foundation of her approach is rooted in a social ecological (systems) perspective that considers the context of the problem, examines the problem from multiple levels of analysis, and views all elements of the situation (individuals, groups, organizations, environment) as interactive and evolving (as cited in Boisnier, 2009, p. 337).

The ecological systems perspective has relevance to my thinking about new ways of using the concept of intersectionality in the context of policy work. Policy development can address micro, mezzo, or macro levels; analysis at any particular level can create policy implications for the other levels; and interventions as policy implementation can be directed at any or all of these levels. Burch (1999) summarises that ‘for better or for worse, it’s all in one piece. Indeed, one can make a good case for synergy: the simultaneous action of separate agencies which together have greater effect than the sum of their separate individual effects’ (p. 6) (Italics in original). Intersectionality could complement an eco-systems perspective, a ‘systemic theory described by Uri Bronfenbrenner, which details the circles of influence that surrounds each of us...’ (Phelan, 2004). This complementarity could involve aiming at broader and deeper understandings of persons in context and any number of focus points, thereby resolving limitations of individualism with restricted focus on such features as identity, subjectivity and profile.

A range of other theories and approaches also utilise ideas of interrelatedness, of ways of looking at meeting points, crossings, joinings, synthesising process and outcomes. An example of the many different applications of the concept of intersections is Resko’s (2007) work following ‘an intersectional approach’ to test hypotheses about the etiology of intimate partner violence across racial and ethnic groups, particularly African American women. Resko examines two theoretical explanations, the backlash hypothesis and the bargaining model of intimate partner violence, that take into account both gender and class, and investigating possible racial and ethnic differences in these models. She concludes, ‘The implications of intersectionality are highly relevant to the provision of social services and the field of social work’ (p. 13) because of its value in expanding critiques that focus exclusively, or separably, on class, race and gender, yet fail to extend to further dimensions.
Looking for a model that could be sensitive to cultural issues brought me to Nakata (2002) who talks of the contested terrain of competing knowledge systems, referring to Indigenous/non-Indigenous or Western. Reading of Indigenist research methodologies informed me that understanding Aboriginal realities requires me as a non-Aboriginal researcher to respect principles and practices such as those outlined by Bessarab (2000), ‘The bird’s eye view is based on the concept of widening the aperture on a camera lens. When we look through a small opening on the lens we see a certain picture, by widening the lens the view widens, including more detail in the picture, and consequently providing more information’ (p. 80). Intersectionality has certain parallels in that the researcher is encouraged to broaden and deepen the focal point beyond one category or identity to recognition of that one identity to identity based on multiple axes. Nakata’s (2007) comments about standpoint theory also has relevance to my examination of intersectionality; he summarises criticisms of standpoint theory as:

...defeatism of what some call the tendency to epistemic relativism, endless fragmentation across categories of difference, an unfortunate emphasis on “who can know” rather than “what can be known”, the preoccupation with politics of identity & location that reify boundaries between groups who also have common concerns; and containment of politics and action to recognition and location rather than redistribution and transformation (p. 12).

It is important not to essentialise by relating ‘cultural issues’ with Aboriginal peoples, as if culture is not in the domain of non-Aboriginal peoples. I also want to extend the notion of culture to a wider understanding of the concept, for example by taking into account relevant theory and research on organisational culture. Intersectionality could have relevance to work being done on organisational culture development and as a further example, organisational change programs involving staff development and training. Bond’s (2008) diversity research identified how ‘awareness about gender and racial identity often led not only to expected positive outcomes but to some negative outcomes as well… in initial stages of awareness of gender and racial inequities, individuals can experience increased anger, resentment, and dissatisfaction’ (as cited in Boisnier, 2009, p. 339). While Boisnier (2009, p. 339) suggests that models of racial and gender identity development could usefully explain such findings, I also consider that intersectionality could encourage an objective of drawing together examination/exposure of separate/d identities in ways that can constructively assist individuals experiencing these initial stages of awareness.

The impacts of ‘diversity awareness’ on organisational culture is a subject outside the scope of my own work, however I am interested to the extent that the relationship between organisational culture/s and policy process/es can inform my research. For example, an agency culture can interact with another agency’s culture, within a wider system of organisational culture such as
the public sector; individual organisational identity as shaped by that culture can intersect with other identities such as a professional profile; professional values and practices can intersect with personal beliefs and attitudes; and in these ways multiple intersections could be experienced and implicitly or explicitly shape policy work.

360 degrees of what?

Looking at how other theories can interact with the concept of intersectionality reinforced my concern that intersectionality risks preoccupation with the challenge of developing a 360 degree picture and pointing its ‘lens’ towards an individual(ised) equality that is in other respects limited. Intersectionality encourages me to look past how an Aboriginal woman is positioned with respect to her Aboriginality and also see her gender, her disability, her sexuality, her age and any other combination of factors. But the language that mirrors or structures a process of thinking and doing of ‘looking past’ contains the core of the issue for me. It is in the etceteras that I find unanswered questions with regards the use of intersectionality as a concept with transformative potential beyond the individual to such formations as the group, collective and culture. Does intersectionality help me understand racialised group experiences in a way that facilitates collective and collaborative activism?

Briskman (2003, p. 95) draws on historians including Reynolds to draw attention to the way that historically, individual(ised) equality has been translated into assimilationist policies for Aboriginal peoples in Australia. Williamson and Dalal (2007) refer to a ‘consistent unsettling’ to describe tensions between individual, collective and societal levels. I am keen to explore this issue in relation to intersectionality, and I note that despite her optimism, Thorsvaldsdóttir (2007) is interested in similar questions. She says that equal rights as pursued by feminists are struggles for gender equality, whereas broader human rights activists are struggling against any/all forms of structural inequalities. That distinction is important for Thorsvaldsdóttir; her assessment of intersectionality as an analytical/theoretical tool for all equality struggles is based on its performative potential and its transformative potential. I also note issues raised by Hancock (1999) in seeing distinction between tools that serve a purpose in terms of identity politics, and analytical concepts that serve little purpose beyond the academy.

I am also interested in whether or not the feminist concept of intersectionality is a discourse exclusive to equality agendas. Who could or should be using the concept and for what purpose, has relevance to my research topic. For example, taking the word back to its roots could enable analysis of different kinds of intersections located in the public sector context, in the public policy process, and in any number of critical incidents and accounts of behaviours, experiences, perceptions. Intersectionality could help me see beyond (merely) individual positionality,
identity, and category. Within a particular policy development exercise, a continuum of policy practice could exist or I could find a space where policies fail to/do not connect. Could intersectionality inform critical analysis of interview transcripts in these new ways? I think of examples of how stereotypes can insinuate themselves into a policy process at any/all points in a policy cycle or continuum and, if such points of connection were to be identified as intersections of risk or opportunity, this could relate to the concept’s performativity and transformativity. The idea of an intersecting risk/opportunity could be extended to envisaging intersections of power and influence, privilege and disadvantage, and multiples of competing requirements.

For an example of how another approach to intersectionality could be envisaged, I return to FDV literatures. Dasgupta (2005) writes about women being victims of an ‘unholy alliance’, a nexus of culture, institutions, and the individual abuser:

Violence against women is a phenomenon that seems endemic in every society. Researchers and activists alike, however, generally emphasize the violence that is perpetrated by the individual; the husband, father, brother, or male relative physically chastising his wife, daughter, sister, or other woman in his family. Rarely are we aware of the abuse that occurs beyond this intimate circle. Needless to say, the individual abuser and the victim does not operate in a vacuum; rather, they are nested within the supportive circles of social institutions and culture. Ubiquity of both institutions and culture encourages and maintains abuse and victimization at the individual level (p. 59).

Dasgupta draws on the Duluth Model, a diagrammatic representation of processes and practices, institutions and systems that position individuals involved with FDV at the centre of ever-widening circles. The Duluth model is provided as Appendix Nine (page 297). This feminist model takes account of cultural factors and has been exported from the USA to be adopted in other countries including Australia.

**Exploring intersectionality in policy actors’ accounts**

In the two previous chapters, I looked at gendered/ing and racialised/ing perspectives and policy work practices using illustrations drawn from accounts by policy actors; the earlier material indicated a wealth of material appropriate for a further exploration of intersectionality. I begin this analysis by focusing on two policy actors who challenged my thinking immediately by presenting complex and interactive images extending beyond a solitary core of gendered identity and connecting with what I learned about racialised/ing policy work. ‘Critical race theory brought race and the concept of a complex racial subject squarely into qualitative inquiry’ (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 25).
Firstly, Edna provided a multidimensional picture of agency interactions, policy interactions, and individual service providers and client interactions. Edna was an Aboriginal woman employed in the mainstream (that is, non-Aboriginal specific) public sector environment. The ecological systems perspective has relevance to the issues highlighted by Edna, as does feminist policy analysis and a range of other approaches. In addition, this account of a critical incident provided ample opportunity for me to reflect on my own gendered and racialised thinking in ways that contributed to my attempts to better understand the topic. Such exploration of policy practice that draws on critical incident analysis and self-reflection is consistent with Denzin et al. (2008).

Secondly, I focus on Clark, a non-Aboriginal man in the policing field who raised a range of issues related to professionalism and identity, organisational context and public sector demands, personal and family connections. Policy development and service delivery were discussed by Clark in the second section with particular relevance to the field of FDV.

**Edna’s critical incident**

Edna: My interpretation of racism? Basically there are many different forms of racism, many different levels of racism. I’ve seen it quite a bit. Anyone that is not appreciative of anyone’s culture and bases that on servicing them or speaking to them or anything. I’ve seen it in different forms I suppose. Not so much within the system. Within the legal system I’ve seen it. I’ve had a few clients at (agency name) that have been locked up as victims of sexual abuse and that the police probably wouldn’t have locked up that victim if she was a White middle-class woman that lived in Dalkeith or Claremont or even Subiaco. But because she was Aboriginal, you know, that she had a stealing charge against her or something else that they would prefer to lock her up. I’ve seen that happen and I’ve also advocated for the policy to be changed between (agency) and the police. The police are very resistant to have that changed. And I’ve raised that they have a Duty of Care to the Aboriginal woman as much as to the non-Aboriginal woman. But enforcing Bench Warrants or urgent enquiries or whatever takes it a little bit too far, especially if they have that role of the victim at that stage…. A Bench Warrant is a warrant that is issued by the court for non-appearance at the court. So if that lady was charged with stealing and she had a court date to appear and she didn’t actually go, a Bench Warrant would’ve been issued for her arrest. In particular one lady that came to (agency), was dropped off by the police, she had a Bench Warrant in existence. They left her there for seven hours, came back, after we told her she could go get her stuff. They didn’t actually inform us. They came in, they picked her up; they got her in the car; they didn’t tell anyone at (agency) that this lady...
had a Bench Warrant, kept it to themselves; they got her into the car and told her they were taking her straight to the East Perth Lock Up, not to collect her children and her things after she had been sexually assaulted at these premises. So we were pretty. She spent a Saturday, Sunday and Monday morning in there until she was able to go to court.

Karen: So her criminal record overrode her other (?) with domestic violence?

Edna: Overrode basically her human rights. Yes, so we were, yes. So it was very. Just one of those situations. We’ve been told by the police that that’s the law and they have to enforce it. We’ve tried in our, but basically if the police had told us, we probably would’ve had her admitted to hospital, maybe had her under hospital guard for her own emotional wellbeing.

Karen: In that time, no physical help, no emotional help, no nothing? There was no health service for all that time she was locked up?

Edna: No. She was basically put into the Lock Up in East Perth. She could’ve committed suicide; she could’ve done anything depending on what her mental state was at that time. That was one of my concerns when I was told about that and followed it up obviously. Our service and our director had gone into our legal unit to find out if there were any avenues that we could take and apparently we could’ve had her admitted to hospital and had her under hospital guard until she was able to go into court on the Monday which would’ve been a much better situation.

Karen: So because she was Aboriginal they acted by the letter of the law and didn’t exercise any discretion?

Edna: No.

Karen: And you would see that as a case of institutional racism?

Edna: Yes. And it’s so common. And I’ve even had Aboriginal women that are victims that have walked into police stations and reported that they’ve been assaulted and they’ve been turned away or, you know, because they’ve had a little too much to drink but haven’t received any medical care after they’ve been assaulted. That’s really a Duty of Care that they have to you know, that person.
Karen: All those examples were Duty of Care? (?

Edna: Yes. But basically it needs to have been written into certain policies or procedures into police I think because so often, Aboriginal women in particular leave it until the last moment when they can’t escape or they can’t get out. The police are often the last avenue for them that they try to access or the first people they go to for help.

**Discussion of Edna’s account**

Edna provided an account of a critical incident that made a lasting impression on her, and some additional background information helps to contextualise my summation and comments about ‘facts’ as described by Edna. Few Aboriginal families live in the middle-class western Perth suburbs of Dalkeith, Claremont or Subiaco. Aboriginal families are found residing in concentrated numbers in lower socio-economic areas in all Australian cities including Perth; these areas tend to have negative public reputations and greatest need for financial government support and welfare assistance. Police are at the frontline of emergency services that are stressful and demand capabilities in dealing with potentially distressing situations and distressed individuals. It is generally lower ranking police personnel that get called out of the station to attend a range of incidents including sexual offences.

Edna described one particular occasion where police were involved with an Aboriginal woman who sought help after being sexually abused. Statistical indicators of these incidents reveal multiple factors, including the fact that a common misconception is that abuse is generally by Aboriginal men. On this occasion, the police arrived with an Aboriginal woman client at the government organisation which provided services to victims of sexual assault and rape, and left her at the centre to receive appropriate assistance. This ‘drop off’ indicated service availability and other relatively recent developments in government policy terms including professional awareness and inter-agency interaction and cooperation. ‘Whole-of-government’, ‘connected services’, ‘joined-up services’ and other political slogans and commitments including multi-function centres in Aboriginal communities in rural and remote Western Australia, were part of the modern array of government service provision. The staff attending to clients on that day included Edna whose Aboriginality indicated an increasing level of employment of Aboriginal women and men in mainstream agencies.

The police departed and the Aboriginal woman victim of the assault was assessed as being in an emotionally vulnerable condition. The centre learned that the woman needed to retrieve her personal belongings from the premises where the assault had taken place as well as collect her
children. Seven hours after having left her at the centre, police officers arrived back for the woman and the centre assumed that the client would be taken care of. Instead, she was taken to the police vehicle and rather than transporting her to retrieve her children and belongings, the police took her to the East Perth Lock Up. Conjecture about this apparent subterfuge on the part of the police could include an explanation that their strategy was ‘means justifies the ends’ in that an outstanding Bench Warrant had not been disclosed previously and took priority for the police intervention. The woman remained imprisoned for the weekend pending court appearance scheduled for Monday morning. This procedure could have been standard requirement or this could indicate that the Aboriginal woman had fewer resources to deal with her situation than non-Aboriginal or wealthy incarcerated prisoners who gain bail pending their hearings.

Upon learning of the woman’s situation, Edna said that the centre protested unsuccessfully to the police who insisted that their actions were lawful; they had to enforce the law. The centre director consulted subsequently with the departmental legal unit and learned of an alternative casework strategy. The woman could have been admitted to hospital by the centre on the basis of her condition and status as a victim of sexual assault. Hospital admission could have involved a hospital guard for the duration of her wait until court which would have satisfied legal requirements for secure containment. The centre considered that alternative to be a better situation for the woman who could have been experiencing mental health issues yet received no health service for physical or emotional needs during her time at the Lock Up.

This focus on legal matters rather than the woman’s wellbeing appears to contradict the findings of a number of inquiries into Aboriginal affairs, in particular the RCIADIC. That is not to say the police failed to attend to the woman during the weekend of her incarceration, however Edna as an Aboriginal caseworker and her employing agency took issue with what they saw as an inappropriate intervention by one government agency against the professional advocacy of another whose expertise was the subject of the client’s request for assistance. This indicated a hierarchy of policy and service provision that ranked legal above health/welfare, and in terms of professional officers the police ranked above medical/welfare.

Edna considered the woman’s human rights to have been violated and that the treatment was an example of racism within the legal system that would not have imprisoned a white woman under the same circumstances. I had instigated the question of racism, including reference to racism within the system, yet it was Edna who raised the issue of human rights being violated in the context of systemic racism. A rights framework for accountability is increasingly being used by Indigenous peoples in social activism, and in the Australian context the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) and state counterparts have played an important
role. Edna could not have been aware at the time however, that the Australian government would lay aside its own legislation against race discrimination in order to intervene in Aboriginal affairs in the Northern Territory. Such is ‘policy flexibility’: governments are capable of disregarding legislation at times to justify their own racial policies, yet in Edna’s account it seemed that discretion was not exercised by frontline staff in the best interests of an Aboriginal woman.

It is obvious from her selection of this particular story in response to the open ended question about racism, and the highly emotional way that Edna told this story, that she continued to reflect on this particular case. She related this experience to other, similar incidents that she believed indicated different forms and levels of racism. ‘I’ve seen it quite a bit’, she said. Edna took these experiences, and the meanings she made of such critical incidents, with her into subsequent interactions with policing staff and the justice system in general. She had since then been promoted into policy work from that earlier casework period of employment and her experience of unsuccessful interagency ‘collaboration’ probably inform her own contributions to developments in the field.

There is little in the literature about Indigenous people working in public sector jobs but participants who are Aboriginal policy actors in my research project raised a number of issues worthy of further research. Being connected with her Aboriginal community was important to Edna and she intended to develop her strategic knowledge in order to progress the human rights of Aboriginal peoples especially women. Edna did not specifically articulate the terminology of intersectionality, yet this critical incident demonstrates the way that Aboriginality and gender are enmeshed in policy terms and practice for policy actors. Intersectionality affected both personal and professional life for Edna; there seemed little distinction between the two.

Our conversation hopefully benefited us both in that Edna’s account helped me to see how gendered and racialised policies and practices can become operationalised at the frontline and in return for her contribution to my research, I would like to think that telling her story proved cathartic for Edna in addition to it reaching a wider audience than this thesis. More opportunities for policy actors to give voice to issues of concern seem indicated. This incident raises more questions than could possibly be answered here by the staff involved and my analysis, for example concerning the role and function, attitude and possible prejudice of the police personnel involved.

Without the benefit of contact with the police officers in this incident, I consider my own perceptions and assumptions that have been raised in Edna’s telling. Perhaps the police men and women have been socialised through their organisation to perform particular masculinities, to
perform particular policy implementations, to personify a particular Whiteness. These officers could simply have been trying to do their jobs in ways that they understood would lead to promotion in a system rewarding conformity and obedient behaviours. Laws and regulations that determine authority and power distributed throughout the system do change over time and perhaps reasons for the flexibility are not immediately apparent to those involved on the frontline. Staff probably would be trained in accordance with the latest best practice in policing and through various communications they would be made aware of wider government aspirations like inter-agency collaboration. Privilege can take many forms according to the literatures and it could be through the commonsenseness of everyday transactions such as transporting individuals in a police vehicle, that the gendered and racialised nature of the work could be rendered invisible to staff. In these ways, roles and relationships could become affected, for example between women and men as clients and colleagues.

Despite best intentions, police staff could nevertheless engage in practices that produce inequitable and unequal outcomes for the very Aboriginal women that both Edna and the police target for helpful interventions. Dominelli (1997) describes how institutionalised sexism combines with racism to subordinate Black family forms to the White, middle class, heterosexual nuclear norm and how social workers as agents of the state promote assimilation by problematising and pathologising minority families through casework that systematises clientisation.

But perhaps my viewpoint is too negative, too simplistic and too much a figment of past praxis as reported in the literatures. My own narrow one-dimensional writing should be challenged. I am aware that ‘when you author a script, often more about you is revealed than is revealed about the person(s) about whom it is written’ (Dunbar, 2008, p. 93). This is where the second transcript excerpt serves its purpose to provide opportunity for deeper understanding of the issues involved.

My second exploration of intersectionality through analysis of discussions with policy actors draws from an interview with a non-Aboriginal male police officer. As with other transcripts used, where the question asked does not contribute significantly to the analysis, the interviewee’s words are provided in continuous format as narrative. Rather than an account of a critical service delivery incident similar to Edna’s excerpt, more detail concerning the agency context and broad public sector environment is presented here. Both extracts from this interview with Clark allow my analysis of policing and policies in practice to be extended beyond the picture gained by Edna’s account and through my own hypothetical comments. Clark was not frontline; he had progressed through the ranks to become an active policy actor within the State and was therefore at this period of time more deliberately and consciously engaged with policy
work at higher levels in his agency and across Government departments especially in relation to FDV. Two issues of particular concern are human resources and stereotypes affecting service delivery.

**First contribution from Clark**

Karen: Are you at the level that you know you think you should be at? Do you think you’ve made good progress through the Service? Do you think that if you were in the ‘hard line’ all the way though at your age you’d be any higher?

Clark: I think I’m about right, I think I’m about right. Although I think my promotions came if anything slightly quicker. But I don’t attribute that to where I’ve worked because the promotion system within (agency name) is I don’t apply for a particular position I apply for the rank. And then they place me. So they promoted me on the strength of the work that I’ve done and then they’ve placed me back in the same areas again, that’s their call. But I would say if anything, slightly quicker, I’m about right for where I should be. If I make inspector in the next few years then it’ll be seen by a few people to be a bit quick. Not everyone, there are other people coming up around my speed but there’s some, some people would say “It’s been a fast track”. Although twenty years (laughing aloud) it’s not that fast. Ha ha twenty years to get to low level executive. Yes, if I was working for Coles, I’d be running it.

Karen: Yeh. Now this will be really crude but if you had’ve been a woman, would you have been on the fast track?

Clark: It depends. If I had’ve had to take five years off to have kids, probably not. And that’s not flippant either; that’s an acknowledgement of some of the barriers that people sort of see. Because I mean, I’m 39 now so by now I’ve got two kids in my life. Now I would’ve been the one that had to have them that would’ve ha ha that would’ve...

Karen: So ... career is going to be affected by that [maternity leave]? ... it’s possibly going to cost her for that?

Clark: There’s both ways it depends how well you play the system. There certainly would have been some advantages opened up to me if I had’ve been female but there would’ve been a lot of and that’s to do with policy particularly within public
service roles. In Australia at the moment there are certain advantages to being a woman um but unfortunately they don’t offset the natural disadvantages (chuckle). So I don’t know, probably not. I think if I’d put the same amount of effort in, in the same amount of years I probably would’ve been at the same level. I don’t think there would be a huge difference.

Karen: Okay now put yourself as an Aboriginal person? Would you be here? I don’t see too many Aboriginal people in these sorts of jobs.

Clark: Well see that’s hard, that’s so, that’s a really difficult question.

Karen: I’m sorry to be so crude about it.

Clark: No that’s fine. If you simply change my race but leave me with all of the skills that I have now. All of the family supports that I have, then yes I would see that I’d be at the same rank. But unfortunately my experience has been that ethnicity or the race comes with baggage as well, and comes with barriers. So would I still be living in my five bedroom three bathroom double storey house in (suburb name) with my beautiful wife and no mental illness, no history of alcoholism and a stable family life - and if I had all of that then absolutely. But unfortunately and a number of the Aboriginal people that I’m friendly with in their jobs have a lot of barriers in their way as well that are really starting to manifest themselves about now. And that’s guys that are at the rank of sergeant or trying to get to the rank of sergeant.

Karen: So is that about, some Aboriginal people I’ve interviewed have talked about a ‘glass ceiling’ that they fear there’s a glass ceiling somewhere. Would that be about the level?

Clark: I’ve not, I’d have to be and to be crude again, I think it’s self imposed. In a lot of ways but it is you do see that. You do see that ceiling there but it does, it seem to be a, self-destruction at about that point, at about that 15 to 20 years service.

Karen: How would you self-destruct in the Police Service? What sort of things would you do to kind of to make sure you don’t go any further?

Clark: To not gain a promotion? You stop the education process. So you stop attending university; you stop attending external education; you start to put too
much focus on home life and you get distracted. But that’s the same with all public service life because the higher the rank the more time they need.

Karen: Can I ask you about your education then because you’ve raised it.

Clark: Yes. I’m a year 10 school leaver. Ha ha but since then though I’ve returned to university and I’ve got a number of diplomas and associate diplomas.

Karen: So you haven’t gone for the full

Clark: No, I haven’t gone for a degree.

Karen: Undergraduate degree.

Clark: No. I started a Bachelor of Business and got eleven units into it and then found that it wasn’t going to help me anyway. So completed then the, what do I have now, I have a Diploma in Policing and an Advanced Diploma in Investigation an Advanced Diploma in Business Management and a couple of other things that they just throw you as bones. But internal and associated courses with Edith Cowan University and the Police Academy are more beneficial to me than seeking something external now. If I was to ‘jump’ and go somewhere else I may find that it will be a barrier not having a full degree.

Karen: So if you were thinking of jumping in a few years now is the time to start something more generic?

Clark: I think I’m probably only about six units away from a lot of them anyway so I could probably do it in a year and a half.

Karen: It’s still hard when you’re working and you’ve got a family. I’ve been down that route.

Clark: The balance because this role where I’m at now wants me 60 hours a week so that’s kind of what (?)

Karen: Does your partner work?

Clark: Yes she’s part-time, part-time in the (policing agency name)
Karen: Is that common with police officers?

Clark: It’s more than it used to be, more than it used to be now because there’s more women in the job... Yes it’s interesting; you raise some interesting points there. But it’s almost a catch 22 – they want at this level an extremely high level of commitment, essentially on the call seven days a week.

Karen: Well for the purpose of the tape we’ve had one mobile, we’ve had what, a couple of emails that you’ve had to answer and we’ve been talking

Clark: Ha ha yes, and I’ve turned the phone off now and 15 minutes in. No, but it is, and it’s a public holiday. And I’m here. I’m not at home with my kids. But that’s, no I’m happy with that, I’m happy with the level that I’ve put in. And in some ways I think I should put in more. I make more sacrifices to my family than I do to my job at the moment. But it is a bit of a balance and it’s a bucket load of travel too at the moment. I had seven interstate trips work related last year, you know average duration four to five days and it’s a long time to be away. Now intrastate trips as well I think I had nine. So sixteen times last year I picked up either in the car or in the plane or an interstate trip to go. So you spend a lot of time at hotels, lots of time at conferences, which is really fun the first year you do it, but really starts to drag after a few years. And it’s a reasonably big commitment. So the next level for me from here is the MOSC course which is Management of Serious Crime which is a five week live-in course in Canberra. So yes, they’re reasonably big commitments. And getting back to what the original question was, if you have those call them ‘family distractions’, if you have a full family life, that’s often when they, self-destruction at those incomes, because you no longer dedicate all of the time that you intended to dedicate and this job doesn’t reward that. This job wants you to be available.

K: Now you’ve talked about; I just have to make this comment to reflect back on what you’re saying for my tape too. You’ve talked about ‘baggage’ and ‘self-destruct’, would you think it is in turn, the opposite of that continuum is privilege?

Clark: Yes absolutely.

Karen: So do you feel yourself privileged in what you’ve got to support you being able to do the sorts of things you do?
Clark: *Oh absolutely, yes, I’m very, very lucky. Lucky, but also a lot of it is by design.*

Karen: So you know how to actually maximise your privileges?

Clark: *Mm but we’ve also structured everything including the birth of our children around these requirements.*

Karen: This is a man with self-control then (laughter).

Clark: *It’s one of those things. We, that’s life, that’s life now. It is a bit sad but when the average mortgage now for people entering a home market is $350,000. Yes you need to come home with $1,100 a fortnight to service that mortgage. So you’ve got to be a little bit smart about how you do it which means you also have to become a little bit cut-throat. I don’t mean to come across, I see all of the other sides as well, but you’ve got to get a little bit cut-throat about how you’re going to do this. You’ve got to cap the number of children you’re going to have if you want the privilege that you get at the other end.*

Karen: Yes the rewards.

Clark: *Yes drive the new car, lead the executive lifestyle, then you’ve got to be prepared to not to have seven kids.*

Karen: Would they be the sort of rewards that Aboriginal people or women would be looking for? That sounds like something...

Clark: *Traditionally not. That’s making a lot of assumptions and stereotyping people but in my experience no, that would not been traditionally what people would say as being “Gee I’ve got a great life”. I know I at the moment would say “I’ve got a great life” but that’s what I wanted. I don’t know that it’s a great life for my wife. I think that she thinks she’s got a good life. I don’t think hers is great because if it was going to be great by definition for her I’d work 30 hours a week less and we’d probably have two more kids. So, but that gets very philosophical then, doesn’t it?*
Karen: Now I’m going to get back to the groundwork that you’ve laid for me in helping me understand the sort of situation and the pressures and the challenges.

Clark: Why all the people in Western Australia who are designing domestic violence policy are White middle-class men? Ha ha.

**Discussion of extract one from Clark**

Clark described a work environment that demanded a level of sacrifice within a supportive family life that shares his dedication. There was a level of sex role stereotyping accepted despite the fact that his partner was also engaged in policing work. Clark expressed awareness that his partner had a less satisfactory lifestyle than he had achieved, and that her aspirations were lower than his. The demands of the job result in gendered participation and also racial differences according to Clark’s description. Clark presented these outcomes as the result of decisions taken by women who are wives and by Aboriginal persons.

Clark did not seem to be criticising the structural requirements of policing work that results in these different outcomes at particular points in an officer’s career. While there was an implicit understanding in the interview that the organisation was constructing the ideal worker, there is no acknowledgement that one mechanism was privileging Clark’s image of masculinity (Davies and Thomas, as cited in Hutchinson, 2008, p. 43), which he demonstrated as commitment to his work at the expense of aspects of his private life. It would appear as if Clark had a career, but not necessarily female police officers who were wives and mothers with ‘family distractions’ and Aboriginal people whose traditional cultural backgrounds stereotypically limited their undertaking of additional development opportunities. Pocock (2003) and other researchers urge Australian workplaces and government agencies to acknowledge dual roles of work and family and implement family-friendly policies. Clark used relatively more emotive and judgmental language for example, ‘baggage’ and ‘self-destruct’ in relation to Aboriginal police who don’t plan for ‘executive lifestyles’ in the way that he and his wife did.

I summarise that Clark had awareness of restrictive work conditions and impacts on family life yet his own privileges were viewed as individually earned rather than structurally enabled for unattached males and especially non-Aboriginal police officers. Even when Clark himself lacked some of the academic qualifications that would ensure highest promotions, he had attained what he considered an appropriate level in policing. Clark acknowledged ‘some of the barriers that people sort of see’ yet he credited initiative, additional sacrifice and strategic decision making as ways to overcome perceived limitations. There was no sense of challenge and resistance in Clark’s account of workplace practices and expectations; Clark had been
rewarded for his compliance, his wife had been rewarded less, and his Aboriginal colleague has been rewarded least. I was not surprised therefore, when Clark acknowledged that WA DV policy was designed by people such as himself – White, middle-class men.

The literature contributed to my understanding of Clark and the issues facing men and women in these positions. The structure of the gendered division of labour, status and material privileges continues to be of interest to researchers most recently through studies looking at work-life balance. The normative models of male and female workers have been seen to be influenced by a wide range of factors, but particularly commitments in the form of gendered ‘encumbrances’ (Acker, 1990) and ‘competing devotions’ (Blair-Loy, as cited in Halrynjo, 2009, p. 100). Yet, Halrynjo (2009) concludes from her research into men’s work-life reconciliation that, ‘even if the number of available work-life adaptations open to men rise, this change will not necessarily contribute to alter the hierarchical distribution of career and care, privileges and costs in society’ (p. 98). Halrynjo confirms that privileges in their working life correspond to the high amount of paid work men undertake and to the low amount of care responsibilities; this research makes visible gendering at work even as globalisation and social change is interrupting traditional employment patterns and economic participation. ‘The findings indicate that whilst the men in the different positions experience and voice diverse forms of privilege, the explicit – and implicit – ‘rules of the game’ in working life still favour the unencumbered worker’ (p. 118).

In addition to concerns of gender, I see intersectionality issues in these findings when Clark implied that Indigenous staff were more likely to be ‘encumbered’ that is, influenced and possibly conflicted by competing cultural values and engaged in meeting their particular cultural commitments. ‘The idea of the unencumbered worker with ‘zero drag’ is not only the universal image of a worker, it could also be seen as one of the main structuring principles of the distribution of material privileges in society’ (Halrynjo, 2009, p. 119). Listening to the language that veils existing systems of privilege is important, especially for White people living lives segregated by race, say Wildman and Davis (2000). ‘Normalization of privilege means that members of society are judged, and succeed or fail, measured against the characteristics that are held by those privileged. The privileged characteristic comes to define the norm. Those who stand outside are the aberrant, or “alternative” (p. 53). ‘Members of the privileged group gain many benefits by their affiliation with the dominant side of the power system. This affiliation with power is not identified as such. Often it may be transformed into and presented as individual merit’ (p. 53). Halrynjo (2009) looks at gendered outcomes of working life for men in positions that correspond closely to the profile of many of the policy actors in my own research, especially Clark:
All positions hold their privileges and costs, related to different value hierarchies. The men in the career position have the privilege (to a greater or lesser degree) of fulfilling the symbolic capital of the work devotion scheme, including time-intensive, emotionally absorbing dedication to their employer and career advancement. In return they receive career opportunities, financial independence and security, social status, interesting work, collegiality and positive appraisal. They pay the costs in terms of having very limited time off work to care for their children and engage in family life, leisure activities and social life’ (pp. 117-118).

**Second contribution from Clark**

Karen: If I can then move onto some of the issues that you brought up about, you know, the ‘family violence’ and the fact that in 2001 ‘family violence’ became the way it was conceptualised rather than ‘domestic’ violence, listening to Aboriginal people... is that something that you agree with, the fact that you know, within Government, we’re now talking about ‘family violence’?

Clark: Yes I do, I like that and particularly looking at it from a point of view as a police officer as well, there is a very negative connotation about the term ‘domestic’. And it comes with a lot of history and a lot of baggage, as far as police officers are concerned. And I would like to remove it from our terminology completely. It’s very, very negative... Police officers would run a mile to avoid. ‘Family violence’ is much better for us. Well ‘family protection’ to me is different from ‘family violence’. And then the terminology of (Department) said this as well, ‘family protection’ encompasses family and domestic violence and child protection. So it’s an over-arching for everything that comes within my area of control. ‘Family violence incident’ is now just a ‘domestic violence incidence’ in the past. But we are learning to understand and appreciate that what we used to class as a ‘domestic’ is a lot more intricate. ‘Domestic violence incident’ to me indicates that it’s going to be interpersonal violence between people in an intimate relationship and that’s not the case with ‘family violence’, we’re looking for a much wider scale. We’re looking to capture everything essentially, every violence incident that involves people who are in that family relationship. Now the best definition of ‘family relationship’ that I’ve seen and the one that I like to stick with, is the one in the Restraining Orders Act. I think it’s really good, it’s nice and wide. So it includes intimate partners, but it also includes family groups all the way through to ex-partners. You know, it gives you a really wide term and it would also include violence against elders, it would include violence against children. You know, if you were in that relationship, if the offender and the victim have a relationship that can be described as a family relationship then that’s a ‘family violence incident’. Whereas ‘domestic’ has a negative connotation to me and I think to every other
copper out there, about husband and wife having a barney which to me trivialises what’s going on and leads to a lot of sort of misconceptions and preconceptions about what they’re going to see when they arrive. Now coppers will run a mile before they’ll attend a domestic. There are, every other task in the book almost, they would rather attend than a domestic. So we’re looking about, I mean, part of that is about cultural change I suppose for our organisation. Yes, so there’s a few things. Domestics are dangerous. We don’t like going to them because coppers get hurt at domestics. They’re very volatile. We don’t know what we’re going to see. They take a long time to deal with.

Karen: So all the statistics bear this out?

Clark: Yes all the statistics as well bear this out.

Karen: It’s not just the image that’s there?

Clark: No they take a long time to deal with. They’re difficult. They don’t have a clear answer. Often you’re unable to resolve them satisfactorily anyway as far as the copper is concerned you’re unable to resolve them. They’re very now in the police response, prescriptive, your response and that’s complicated. So there are a number of pieces of paperwork that come with attending a domestic that don’t come with attending a disturbance. So if a neighbour is fighting a neighbour you can get out of there a hell of a lot quicker than you can if the neighbour is fighting his wife.

Karen: And getting out is important?

Clark: Absolutely.

Karen: For what reason?

Clark: Because they don’t want to be there. There’s no glamour in going to a domestic. You don’t get to chase anyone. You don’t get to drive fast. It’s not considered real police work. Real police work is capturing burglars um or robbers. So a lot of it comes with that, what a police officer sees as his role and going to domestics is not what a police officer sees as his role. Now I think it, I’ve not done this, but if you were to poll applicants to the police I’m pretty sure that attending
domestics is way down on their list of what they want to do. It’s not what they want to do.

Karen: Both male and female officers? Would females polled have that view at entry point?

Clark: *I would say what would change then if you were to poll males versus females in the job as my experience that female officers are far more comfortable with the processes and the systems that we’ve put in place. They’re more familiar with the computer systems. They’re happier to complete the paperwork and they complete the paperwork at a better, at a higher level, and their attention to detail is far higher. But the fear factor for attending them would be a lot higher as well. So the sense of the physical danger and also their level of comfort with going to Aboriginal domestics would be a lot lower. But again, I think that would come from that physical safety point of view as well. And that’s, you know, I make a lot of assumptions on that, so I’m just telling you what my observations would be. I would be quite comfortable to stand by that. I think that that would be very, very stereotypical of what you would see. I mean obviously there are going to be people that would be different. But*

Karen: So what do you think the stereotype, okay let me ask then, the male police officer who goes and he’s called out to an Aboriginal family and he knows there’s a domestic. What’s the stereotype that that male officer has of the Aboriginal woman and man that he’s going to deal with?

Clark: *I think it’s better now than when I first joined. It’s far better now because there’s a lot more I think general understanding among the population.*

Karen: Alright so – old stereotype and new stereotype? What would that look like?

Clark: *Okay, well, I think a lot of it is common too. Alcohol will be involved. There will be a history of family violence. It’s likely that there’s a history of child abuse. Both of the parties will be affected by alcohol and both of the parties will be violent. There’s very little inter-agency support available. And we’re not going to be able to solve the problem anything beyond the short-term for example.*

Karen: Okay so those stereotypes are there and they’re built on fact? You know, they’re supported by the statistics?
Clark: *I think a lot of them are supported by experience and then what we see as well, because I mean*

Karen: I’m diverting you, sorry. That’s the male officer’s view?

Clark: *Yes.*

Karen: And you’d say that that understanding or expectation is going to be common to male and female police officers?

Clark: *I think so, yeah.*

Karen: So the difference when you talk about the fear factor - the stereotype would be more about the level of violence? The male is going to feel a lot more comfortable in confronting the violence than the female officer?

Clark: *Absolutely. Absolutely.*

Karen: And they both think that there’s the same level of violence? Do you think that the female will expect more violence?

Clark: *Well see the male officer’s also going to be a lot happier to act proactively and by that I mean lock someone up. The female officer may not be that comfortable with that because if there’s a solution that can be imposed that avoids throwing someone on the ground and putting handcuffs on them um then I find that you probably go to the area that you’re most comfortable. Now two officers attended a situation, they feel physically dominant over an offender that arrest will occur very quickly. If they arrive and they don’t feel physically dominant over the offender then the arrest won’t occur very quickly and that’s just common sense. So there’ll be a situation where the police officer then is required to think, “I need backup before I can affect an arrest here or we’re going to get hurt”. The process of obtaining backup sometimes then provides you with two options: “Well, can I have another solution? What about I issue a police order?” and he will leave then and I won’t have to wrestle him. So once you start to get into that area over the person that you need to enforce the law over, then you get confronted with a, the number of easy way/hard way choices ha ha.*
Karen: I’m just going back to the stereotypes – do you think if, you know, here am I, White female police officer, do you think I’d expect more violence from you as a White person I’m going to see in the house or the Aboriginal man?

Clark: I would say they would expect more violence in the Aboriginal house.

Karen: Do you think that’s based on reality or do you think that’s based on perception?

Clark: I think it’s based on reality. And the level of violence is far more severe. The level of injury that’s inflicted in Aboriginal relationships is on average I would say far higher.

Karen: Well the stats are there aren’t they, yes.

Clark: You know, but then you also get into socio-economic. If I’m working at (police station name) I get called to a domestic in (suburb name) I’m probably not expecting that someone’s had a king brown smashed over their head - a large beer bottle, a full size large bottle, a king brown. Whereas if I get called to the (hypothetical Aboriginal name) family in (suburb name with high concentration of households with Aboriginal people) then I am expecting that it’s likely and I won’t be surprised if I arrive and there’s a fight in progress, someone has been badly injured and an ambulance will need to be called. But again if I go to (list of western, middle class Perth suburbs) I’m thinking probably someone’s going to have some rudeness to the eye or bruise mark to the arm or a level of force has been applied. Now often, you see the danger of being a police officer is making, being guided by the assumptions too because you arrive and all of a sudden your world is turned upside down. But a lot of it is saying too at the end that we do have to work off our previous experiences. Now if I’ve been to that home in (suburb associated with Aboriginal households) three or four times and the gossip around the station is about, “Oh went there again last night there was another one you know someone had been hit with a tomahawk in the arm and the ambulance had to come”, then clearly I’m expecting a far higher level of violence and you get a different response. First they’ll get there a lot quicker ha ha, and they might arrive en masse so you’ve have backup arriving and again then, all of a sudden you’ve got that imbalance, the power imbalance because the officers attending do have physical superiority, higher likelihood that you’re going to get an arrest whether
Karen: It sounds very stressful work.

Clark: Oh it’s incredibly stressful work, I mean it’s horrific.

Discussion of extract two from Clark

This lengthy extract provides a sympathetic and detailed picture of the daily working life of personnel, male and female, at the frontline of ‘horrific’ FDV policing work. This real experience shapes police stereotypes of clients as victims and perpetrators of intimate and family violence. As my own comments indicated, statistical profiles confirm a good deal of this personal and professional perspective shared by Clark. Expertise and skills development in this field of practice requires knowledge of the characteristics of FDV, substantial experience performing potentially dangerous interventions, vigilance, self-protection, reliance on colleagues and a host of other systemic supports but particularly power and legal authority. These are probably some of the qualities that attending officers brought to the ‘call out’ remembered by Edna. Clark was primarily concerned with the socio-legal aspects of interventions and had an insider’s appreciation of the duties and tasks undertaken by frontline policing personnel. But Edna had her sights clearly on the Aboriginal woman who had been sexually abused, and systemically abused in her opinion, by the police intervention.

Service delivery cannot but be affected by commonly held perceptions of Aboriginal women victims of FDV and sexual abuse and the intersection of gendered and racialised processes visible in Clark’s narrative. The intersections of gender, race and class are apparent in this extract, although these issues are only recently being considered in the literature as Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) point out. ‘Despite the long-standing tendency within the feminist movement to minimize the significance of socioeconomic class as a contributing factor to domestic violence, a substantial body of work links socioeconomic factors with violence against women in the family’ (p. 2).

Policing can look and feel different for male and female officers said Clark, including preferential differences in tasks, problem-solving approaches and execution of intervention options. Essentialising male and female characteristics also applied to clients, and negative stereotypes were outlined by Clark in relation to anticipated behaviours by Aboriginal clients involved in FDV. Whether or not differences are real or based on perceptions, such knowledges or attitudes play important parts in the policy process from problem definition to determination.
of practice models and service delivery methods; ultimately ideas and opinions can potentially produce self-perpetuating outcomes. Clark recognised that police officers need to be appropriately equipped to perform roles and functions expected of them and he supported legislation that enabled their performances to be effective in meeting certain objectives. The lack of inter-agency cooperation and other organisational and structural limitations that set up service delivery for short-term success at best. These issues will be further explored in my next chapter, on policy.

Using narratives to see intersectionality in common threads

There are points of convergence as well as differences between the two interviews; a multiplicity of issues arises from this collated dialogue. I see threads common to both Edna and Clark. Edna’s account was vividly descriptive of how legal processes and policing practices failed to take account of a woman’s needs as a victim and as an Aboriginal person. Clark’s interview contained a range of opinions and ideas about ways and means for improved service outcomes that focus on policing, justice and corrections; gendering and racialising aspects of the work seemed accepted as a given. Yet perspectives and insights shared by Edna and Clark were not sufficiently connected to current practice across micro, mezzo or macro levels, from non-government to the government system, and from frontline experience through to higher level policy development. The issue of voice is particularly relevant to my research interests and other underlying concerns include the place of power, privilege, positioning and agency.

Tanggaard (2009) raises problematics that implicate Edna, Clark and me as three participants. ‘The voice of one group may be authoritative and hegemonic, suppressing other voices, but in any society, there are counterhegemonic voices that may weaken and subvert the more authoritative ones’ (Bahktin, as cited in Tanggaard, 2009, p. 1505). Tanggaard identifies potential limitations of ‘textual empiricism’ (p. 1508) that could apply if I focus only on what can be seen in the text records of my interviews. He writes about striving to avoid a strict discourse analysis that could eliminate or disguise ‘undercurrents, understories, more complex stories’ and the importance of retaining ‘contested meanings’ (p. 4). These issues have been confronted in feminist practice that values oral history and I reflect that in the selection and description of the critical incident, Edna essentially told her own story just as Clark made his decisions about versions of realities to share. As another issue for me to consider, Tanggaard (2009) raises the cultural specificity or location of information provided and interpreted. ‘Each personal narrative produced as part of a research interview needs to be seen as located within the wider structures of discourse and power, which frame storytelling in the context of what is considered important in life within a specific culture. Our stories are closely intertwined with
those of others and must...be analysed as such....’ (p. 1504). There is much said in the literature about the value of narrative and I am reminded about the potential role that my interviews play in the work/life consciousness of Edna and Clark.

Dauite and Lightfoot (2004) say that, ‘narrative discourse organises life – social relations, interpretations of the past and plans for the future. The way people tell stories influences how they perceive, remember and prepare for future events’ (as cited in Dillow, 2009, p. 1344). The way my interviewees told their stories, and I imagined other unspoken stories, was our way of making actions intelligible; we were making sense and sharing our sense-making about these issues.

In this chapter, I struggled to find a respectful voice and tone to present content. I have optimism that in the telling and re-telling of these stories, themes, priorities and strategies revealed themselves to all of us. Respecting Edna and Clark’s stories, and all my participants rights to their own perspectives, contributes in some small way to an anti-colonial project. In order to further develop ideas about how intersectionality can provide tools for greater understanding of my interviewees’ stories, I turn to Eric.

Walking in other shoes: Eric’s story

In the following extract, interviewee Eric provided an example of how intersectionality can reduce invisibility; deep listening to Eric enabled me to see the intersections of his professional position in the FDV field – the person shaped in environment by racist history and gendered performance. Analysis requires attention to the macro, mezzo and micro levels of this situation, and I see how extending ‘messages’ from these conversations can encompass wider targets and draw discrimination as a colour tint across a crowd rather than a solitary figure in profile.

In Eric’s extract I saw the impact of negative stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples generally and Aboriginal men in this particular example. Eric could have been seen as relatively privileged as a male in a high status, influential, leadership position in the policy field – until his Aboriginality was factored in. Eric did not share all normative characteristics of White, Anglo-Saxon male policymakers; his roles and relationships with other Aboriginal men and women were affected by this reality. Eric’s policy work became more complicated, multidimensional and stressed. I saw Eric differently, and more sympathetically, through an intersectional ‘lens’. Where once my feminist preoccupation would have been on ‘...the need for more recognition of the power of gendered archetypes...’ (C. Fletcher, 2009, p. 409), pedagogical study of intersectionality makes visible plurality in destructive hegemonic archetypes.
Eric: I grew up in a violent family life and have grown up on and have lived in some violent remote communities where you get caught up in it. You become a part of that oppressive cycle and I’m not immune from it and I’m not innocent from it and it’s been a difficult journey for me personally but I don’t think that I ever let it get to me to the stage of making me feel sick and ill.

Life storytelling communicated who Eric was and where he came from; this contrasted with other impersonal and business-like interviews. Eric’s personal and professional achievements indicated that he had developed critical navigation skills and empowered himself to reach the policy development world far removed from his early years. Yet, as he proceeded, it was clear that he remained deeply connected to community, and ‘certainly being very angry about the attack on Aboriginal men’.

Eric: But I’ve seen so many acts of violence against women and where I’ve intervened or whether I’ve turned away from, that have absolutely sickened me and have had an effect on me that probably isn’t realised on a day to day basis but come out from time to time when you’re talking to other people. Like the guy who came in and said “I don’t know what I’ve done wrong other than being born black and I wish God didn’t make me a black man”. I mean the person didn’t really mean it, but that’s how, you know. What could I do other than shed a tear with him? I think that’s when it comes when you’re actually confronted by it and then you have to confront your own inner feelings and it does become quite traumatic and maybe that’s what’s needed. Maybe you need to have a good cry now and then about some of the things you see.

Eric confronted traditional masculine stereotypes and was caught between the trauma and the pity; he cried, he identified with both women and men caught up in the cycle of violence; and in his professional persona he disguised his intense emotional reactions to these situations. Being ‘absolutely sickened’ had power to drive policy advocacy and social activism.

Eric: I don’t think people understand what it means to be Aboriginal in this country. They don’t understand that every day of the week you’re going to expect that what’s in the papers or on the news today, what’s going to happen walking down the street or whatever. ...If people understood the daily oppression of being black in this country, people would have a different view of Indigenous people and sometimes it would be good for people to be able to walk in those shoes.

Karen: You mean White people walking in those shoes?
Eric: Yes.

Eric spoke with raw emotion and at some cost to his composure and self-image as a controlled, experienced and capable organisation head. Carrying responsibilities and performing a critically important role as a male Aboriginal leader in his community meant that his stories drew material from deeply personal experience as a policy actor at critical intersections in White and Aboriginal worlds. I recognised the possibility of ‘contested meanings’, however, Eric told his own story in his own words, not a White revisionist version.

In her writings as an Aboriginal academic, Butler-McIlwraith (2007) adopts an unapologetically subjective approach that is important to self-determination, ‘where Aboriginal people are neither victims nor problems, but social and political actors struggling against material and philosophical disadvantage’ (p. 2). This serves as an example for my research approach to be strength focused and avoid the objectification of Aboriginal peoples. Evans et al. (2009) argue that ‘refocusing the object of research inquiry directly and specifically on the institutions and structures that indigenous peoples face can be a particularly effective way of transforming indigenous peoples from the objects of inquiry to its authors’ (p. 893). However, the issue of agency continued to raise particular contradictory tension in my mind as I reviewed Eric’s descriptions of FDV experienced by Aboriginal women and men. As Sokoloff and Dupont (2005) note, ‘It is difficult to simultaneously draw attention to and evoke sympathy for women’s victimization while underscoring the strengths and resilience of battered women’ (p. 3).

My previous working experience had not prepared me for the emotional impact made by these unfolding stories. These participants were creating shared meanings about their policy worlds and trusting my ability to represent their perspectives and insights when presenting the data. Listening to their narratives enabled me to reflect their human experiences and make sense of my own learnings. While I do not use narratives as such here, this approach is encouraged by a number of writers including Dillow (2009) who says that storytelling ‘can help to evoke drama, urgency, and intense emotion in a way that traditional research reports do not’ (p. 1345). Dillow (2009) delights in Clough’s use of ‘shards and splinters of data, real events, and conversations to create stories that could be true’ and Caulley’s advocacy of the use of creative nonfiction to write ‘a research report that creates emotion in the reader and has a sense of realism, truth, authenticity, and authority’ (p. 1345).

Giving voice to challenges confronting intersectionality is a possible contribution, voices from caseworkers with women victim/survivors of violence, police officers operationalising manuals
of law and order, researchers listening to Aboriginal people’s experiences and non-Aboriginal policy workers seeking knowledge about cultural protocols. I was pleased that I could see more of these intersections and their locations in the connected personal professional lives of policy actors. In order to explore other performance issues of intersectionality, I draw on my conversation with Lindsay, an FDV activist practitioner who operated within framework/s that took account of intersectionality concerns.

**Looking at the intersectional approach in Lindsay’s practice**

I was directed to Lindsay by a number of policy actors. Lindsay was a non-Aboriginal woman operating in the non-government sector, recognised for her expertise in service delivery, policy advice and advocacy to governments. Her critique of the FDV system was of ‘doom and gloom’, and she identified complexities and challenges for policy development. The language of intersectionality and oppression was not used; however this conversation enabled me to see how the intersectional approach complemented the eco-systems perspective. We discussed policy analysis at micro, mezzo and macro levels and I was stimulated by Lindsay’s ideas for praxis development, in particular to meet the needs of Aboriginal women experiencing FDV.

In her powerful descriptions of system failures, Lindsay revealed ways that an intersectional approach in practice could meet significant opposition. She described blockages that were frustrating to her as an experienced and insightful practitioner. Lindsay set the scene with comments about entrenched, systemic, intergenerational ‘appalling stuff’ happening in Indigenous families not receiving the long-term, committed interventions, ‘a huge will of government’ and significant resources required. FDV, effects of racism, and ‘fundamental problems’ experienced by Aboriginal women and men ‘physically, emotionally, psychologically impacted in such a way that repairing that work, that damage is very, very difficult’. Lindsay presented a sympathetic account of Aboriginal parents struggling against a backdrop of multiple disadvantages when they encountered helping agencies. Lindsay implicitly questioned solutions such as Lionel’s educational escape and anti-violence perpetrator programmes when she talked about how Aboriginal families she worked with experienced multiple disadvantages, and how their capacities were often jeopardised by factors beyond their control.

**Lindsay:** I don’t have a lot to do with Aboriginal men...all that stuff you know, shortened life span, really poor health, dropping out of school early, parenting you know really erratic parenting, children being exposed to lots of other abuse around them. Even when they’re not necessarily being abused directly they’re living in communities where the level of violence, and the level of physically, emotionally,
verbally, sexual violence is extraordinarily high. And they’re not getting messages, clear messages, that that is not OK.

Lindsay described the ‘intricacies’ of Indigenous experience with insights from the frontline of women’s refuge services and she gave careful consideration to her part in the lives of women who used her service organisation. When she said, ‘All of that stuff sits in this big mess that’s going on for them’, her summation was supported with evidence and informed by an eco-systems perspective that was feminist and anti-racist. Her descriptive analysis revealed Indigenous women with unmet needs stemming from dual axes of inequality.

Lindsay: It’s a two layered thing... Indigenous women come in here in terms of escaping violence and the person they’re escaping from could be from a lot of different people. It might be their mother. It might be a whole range of extended family people so it’s family violence in that sense. They also see it really clearly and I think it’s absolutely accurate in terms of the colonisation and the dispossession and the Stolen Generation....90 per cent of the non-Indigenous people coming in here they’re escaping violence from someone they had an intimate relationship with. The Indigenous women probably have that to some degree, they may be escaping violence from his family or her family and him, or you know him and a couple of cousins that have been lobbed up on the doorstep and they’re being arseholes as well. You know, a variety of people. ...And to take action against that, “I can’t do action against that. I can’t you know do anything, because if I take a VRO against him, his sister will come out and do this or his mum or his brother or you know, my cousin is married to his cousin”, and that of course, it’s so intricate.

Lindsay was not the only policy actor who could present the plight of Aboriginal women and men in both gender- and racial-sensitive descriptions. However, she could also give an account of some of the implications for service delivery and some of the ways that her own practice responded with an intersectional awareness. Essentially, Lindsay adopted a ‘slightly more tolerant and slightly less critical’ approach to Indigenous women clients. Having Indigenous staff and taking advice from them was ‘a crucial thing’ with consequences for staff as well as clients. For example, it could be learned that extended family relationships in that particular refuge created pressure, and further disruptions and complications relocating the women to alternative refuges was preferable. Such policy issues, service dilemmas and management complexities would not necessarily affect White women’s usage of FDV mainstream services; Lindsay was committed to achieving equal service outcomes therefore attention to additional factors in the lives of Aboriginal women was important.
I could identify the intersectionality approach operating through Lindsay’s conversation: at the micro level for example with client casework, mezzo level for example dealing with organisational service delivery issues, and macro/higher level policy concerns for example FDV policy advocacy work through inter-agency networks and advisory roles with government. Contacts built over time during casework management and problem-solving could resolve specific issues but did not disguise that, ‘systematically it’s just a shambles’. Gordon Inquiry outcomes were rated as ‘Two out of five. It’s just crap, absolute crap, that’s going on’. There had been no change to intervention frameworks and improvements in services because of gendered case management processes in government agencies that focused greater resources on male violence perpetrators than women victims. ‘I believe really strongly that the work for the victim support should be done by a non-government agency, that it’s too much of a conflict’. A ‘much more holistic’ approach to FDV was needed rather than the current focus that ‘undermines completely the notion that the whole purpose of the court is to improve victim safety and perpetrator accountability’. Lindsay extended that negative example of gendered outcomes to explain her cynicism about other gendered and racialised decisions by the Government.

Lindsay: Which is why my argument is that, and I’ve been arguing that for ages and people are sick to death of me here for saying it, but the roll out at the courts that is happening now which is actually Indigenous money, in theory it is to keep Indigenous men out of jail, that is going to be watered down because it’s not going to be an Indigenous response. It’s going to replicate that, so we’re going to have these five other courts set up and some of them are in highly populated Indigenous areas. ...there’s a high Indigenous population who are going into court for VROs and maybe under criminal charges too, the response that the women are going to get, the Indigenous women, is not going to be holistic. It’s not even going to be focused on the healing families stuff which is, most of that push from Indigenous people is, it’s you know, that work with the whole family stuff. They’ve got no programs and targeted or tailored for Indigenous men to use as perpetrator programs. ...we’ve just had to fight tooth and nail to get Indigenous positions in the victim support.

Lindsay marked future equality in the system as one where ‘Indigenous people can apply for any job that they want to apply for’. She argued for such changes as increased service flexibility, Aboriginal staff and Aboriginal services so that Aboriginal people had options.
Lindsay: *Like having an Aboriginal refuge and some women will say, “I don’t want to go to the Aboriginal refuge” and other people will say “I want to go”. And the same with counsellors, people can say “I don’t want to see an Aboriginal counsellor, I want to see a non-Indigenous person”. The option needs to be there, and those services that are focused on Indigenous service delivery has to be much better supported by the funding bodies because it’s not easy, not easy, to get the staff and it’s not easy to manage their issues that come up for Indigenous services. But until we systematically have eliminated a lot of that bloody disadvantage, you can’t mainstream everything because you’re just reinforcing that disadvantage for people.*

Lindsay’s specialist knowledge was acquired over an extensive period, and her stability in this field contrasted with many of the public sector interviewees whose demographic profile and employment history featured mobility across agencies, often but not automatically in connected fields, and usually via promotion. Despite aiming for ‘best practice’, Lindsay like most, if not all, interviewees did not claim to have the answers; she expressed emotional reactions to the problems she confronted in this field, especially frustration, irritation and disapproval of the system she saw as ‘a shambles’ and policy implementation of Gordon Inquiry recommendations, ‘just crap, absolute crap’.

Lindsay’s organisation was mainstream, providing services that are mostly used by non-Indigenous women and their children; this was not a service specifically catering for Aboriginal clients, and Lindsay was concerned about consequences. The organisation provided individualised services and in addition, Lindsay was sensitive to differences related to collective experiences. She described some of the difficulties meeting uniquely individual needs of Aboriginal women already disadvantaged because of Aboriginality by mainstream policy frameworks, programs and practices. She recognised significantly greater challenges facing Aboriginal women experiencing FDV, therefore service delivery must be responsive to needs that are distinctly different and possibly more difficult to address within mainstream agencies. Like other policy actors, Lindsay attributed some of the Aboriginal women’s problems to negative experiences for example an unhealthy early model of Aboriginal family life, and she was sympathetic to the needs of those family members. She put into practice what Evans et al. (2009) advise, that ‘The gaze should emanate from the site of aboriginal people themselves but the direction of this gaze be concentrated externally through an explicit interrogation of Whiteness’ (p. 900). In addition, Lindsay saw Aboriginal women’s lives as gendered which had implications. As Rojas (2009) points out, the intersection of race and gender affects women of color in diverse ways, making more difficult their challenges to confront racism and misogyny.
Her organisation was striving to avoid being simplistic in service delivery by simultaneously struggling with complexities. Even partial gains were satisfying, such as the achievement of a positive one-on-one relationship with a government welfare worker and approval of emergency financial relief for a client.

The meeting point of policy intentions and implementation was the place where Aboriginal women arrived when they exercised agency and in some situations turned to White systems for respite from FDV. Lindsay said that these women’s similar and different needs required similar, and different, services and supportive interventions. Lindsay was striving as a feminist to respect individual rights and collective freedoms for example to understand Aboriginal women’s attitudes in service access and usage.

She was critical that the system at the mezzo and macro levels perpetuated category politics through funding decisions that weighed services for women against services for men against services for Indigenous peoples – despite public policy rhetoric and reputable advice to Government. This was a competitive maze of intersectional and intersectoral politics that needed to be seen at all policy levels affecting the lives of Aboriginal women and men.

Lindsay demonstrated that ‘policy does not exist in a vacuum’ (Burch, 1999, p. 7). Lindsay was located in multiple policy performances and saw benefits in having professional autonomy, ‘I couldn’t manage working in government... I have too much flexibility, too much, but as you respond to the needs of people, in government you just respond to somebody above you’. Perhaps Lindsay’s values-driven practice came at a cost to the organisation, but that was not raised. Listening and learning from relationships was critical to Lindsay’s practice and the decisions she took about service delivery and policy advice. Whether at interpersonal or interagency level, Lindsay performed the role of conduit between the worlds of mainstream human services, the women’s movement and Aboriginal community contexts.

Lindsay did not automatically assume ‘sisterhood abroad’ essentialism, and Aboriginality was not represented by a simplistic victim identity or a stereotype involving a series of violent relationships. Rather, survival and recovery depended on each Aboriginal woman’s ways and means of dealing with her particular disadvantages and vulnerability. In this way, Lindsay was acting from the position that Aboriginal women were not a homogenous grouping, as Weedon (1997) explains:

One problem with the idea of essential womanhood is that it could only surface in a pure form outside of the structures of patriarchy. Another is that the structures of patriarchy are not independent of other forms of power – racism, class and heterosexism – which are not reducible to each other. There are both theoretical
and political objections to ideas of essential womanhood... an adequate feminist politics, and the theory by means of which we formulate it, must take class, racism and heterosexism into account, and must be accountable to the forms of oppression and interests which divide women as well as those which women share. These requirements are guiding principles for an adequate feminist politics. Its details cannot be specified in advance since the precise configuration of power relations in any situation will determine how best we can act (pp. 10-11).

Lindsay described complex practice issues that resisted simple solutions. Challenges she identified have relevance to the broader women’s refuge movement including victim support services in Western Australia. Lindsay’s comments support Yeatman’s (2008) description of individualisation and the delivery of welfare services as contested and complex. Milner (1996) also identifies problems pertinent to Lindsay’s service delivery. ‘The way in which social work is currently organized around client groupings is divisive, concentrating on what separates rather than the commonalities of class, race and gender’ she says (p. 115). Butler-McIlwraith (2007) problematises an historical Black/White dichotomy that serves to demonise Aboriginal families while ‘empowering White authority as the objective arbiters for change’ (p. 4). Rather than Aboriginal families being intrinsically abusive, she says ‘The realities are far more complex’ (p. 4). On the basis of her work with Indigenous survivors of sexual assault, Cox (2008b) says that ‘I’ve come to the conclusion that one size doesn’t fit all, and that it will always be a continual learning process for everyone involved’ (p. 1). Butler-McIlwraith says that ‘We remain within a “raced” framework that inculcates fear’ (p. 5) and she seeks community strengthening discourses that recognises history in order to address inequality. The commonsense intrusiveness of stereotyping is captured by Cohn’s (2000) comments that ‘everyone knows that stereotypes about women and blacks are often false. Stereotypes about stereotyping are also false, however, and these need correction as well’ (p. 2).

Lindsay’s contribution to my research project is a further confirmation of the literature, that cultural sensitivity on the part of policy practitioners and organisations as a whole is essential to enable cultural appropriateness and cultural security. In her work, Lindsay was addressing such issues as pervasive negative stereotypes of Aboriginal women and recognised that she herself was as much in need of learning as other service providers. Lindsay’s feminist practice could be seen as consciously strategic at the intersection of roles that could offer particular opportunities for change. Cox (2008b) too, reflects that her observations and interpretations as a professional Indigenous woman are made from within different spheres of influence that create different approaches or responses. Cox refers to membership of family, community and wider society, as each having power ‘to enable or disable the ability of a survivor to heal from sexual assault and other unresolved traumas’ (p. 1). She says that ‘Indigenous women continue to remain a marginalized and isolated group’ (p. 3). Connecting and building relationships that make a real
difference between policy actors and the women and men involved with FDV services is therefore in many ways indicative of the challenge of intersectionality in practice.

**Categories and competition: barriers to intersectionality practice**

Lindsay’s interview throws into sharp relief ways and means that intersectionality perspectives and practices could be thwarted, including negative stereotyping of clients and structural limitations. In order to learn more about how intersectionality can be affected by category politics and related policy development problems, I draw on two interviews that revealed particularly clearly how gendered and racialised considerations are competitively positioned in policy work. Enid was a senior policy adviser reflecting on (her) Aboriginality and Eva was a non-Indigenous feminist frontline policy advocate. Enid said, ‘You’re kind of really, always fighting, to get the Aboriginal card, to keep it constantly on the agenda. And I guess the issue is the same sometimes for women in relation to gender’. Eva’s position was that gender was the over-riding issue in FDV in that, even though Aboriginal women experienced FDV victimisation differently to non-Indigenous women, Aboriginal men were not subjected to the same degree of multiple disadvantage by the FDV system.

Enid said she would be working on gender analysis of policy in her role but that ‘Whether it gets taken on board of course would be another thing’. Race and racism, she said, are ‘Not even picked up’. Enid raised the concept of intersectionality herself and presented a sophisticated analysis of multiple, simultaneous disadvantage when she talked about the system’s responses to different categories of disadvantage or need. She said she had even less chance to influence racialised policy than gendered policy.

Enid: *There are some people who talk about ‘intersectionality’. You know, the intersection of race, class and gender and that it’s really important to consider that in your analysis of policy. And a lot of our service delivery programs and policies don’t look at the intersections of race, class and gender. They may just look at race but they don’t consider how class or gender may impact on that. So for instance an Aboriginal woman, a policy, her race can have a very, and her class, can impact on how she receives the service you know because one she’s female which is already behind the eight ball and if she’s Aboriginal then she’s Black and then if she’s poverty, she comes from a very lower class positioning she’s already triply marginalised. But policies normally come in at a certain level which sometimes looks at homogenising a whole group of people without considering, and usually they’re pitched at a class level, which is assuming that everyone has a middle class orientation and that they can, everyone is literate, everyone can read and write,*
everyone can access these services. And so it misses those people who perhaps are not educated and who don’t have the income so they don’t have the self-esteem and the confidence to be able to challenge the system. And they’re female - they’re women who may have three children and they’re not married, so already the way in which they’re classified or framed, by a service provider who may not be aware they’re coming through their White middle class bias, already disadvantages that woman.

Eva also talked about multiple disadvantages and outlined how the legal system treated Aboriginal women and men differently. While gender was seen by Eva as the over-riding issue in DV, Aboriginal women dealing with the system as victims experienced added difficulties, ‘It does, it really does. It’s such a disadvantage’. Her conclusion was that gender presented the greatest barrier, more than or rather than racial background, because institutional sexism had greater impact; the system could mistreat Aboriginal women more than Aboriginal men.

Karen: So the legal system you think is probably colour blind towards domestic violence, but it's still sexist?

Eva: Yes, it is. It really is. And the thing is you know, if Aboriginal women want to come and get a violence restraining order, they are too frightened to come into the court because there are people there that they know, and they'll go and tell the family, “I've seen her in court today.” They just don't want to come. It's the consequences of taking out a violence restraining order preventing your partner coming in and when you’re making phone contact, that from him plus the family. And even if she got a violence restraining order, he makes contact with her; she will not come up here and report that to the Police. Because, hey, he'll get into trouble and go to Court. She'll be blamed if he goes to jail. Because she believes that's her responsibility all over again. She's been told that it is; it's her fault and you know, “You're putting him in jail if you make a complaint to the Police.” I've heard it twenty million times. …sometimes I think she feels that she is not going to be believed when she goes to court. She's not going to be believed at all. A lot of times victims always minimise and blame themselves. And that comes out within the court as well. …plus you know, like you know it's all right, fine if you get ex parte restraining order, that's the easy part. But if he objects she's got to come back to court and she's got to face him. He could bring the whole family. That would prevent her from coming back. The restraining order could get cancelled.

An intersectionality ‘lens’ has helped me understand that Eva’s account concerns operations of different mechanisms producing and reproducing inequalities and privileges. The policy actors
in this chapter revealed ways that government interventions and policy practices have influence, come to be shaped, and contribute to the maintenance of powerful stereotypes. White hegemony and male privilege have factored through these stories and intersectionality has enabled a deeper understanding of these ‘interlocking oppressions’ as they operate in the public policy domain. Lindsay enacted what Bacchi and Eveline (2009) refer to as ‘coalitions of engagement’ and ‘deep listening’ (p. 2) and much has been learned from an eco-systems perspective.

**What could contribute to praxis development?**

Indigenous methodologies can be seen as a set of approaches that ‘simply rejects research on indigenous communities that use exclusively positivistic, reductionist, and objectivist research rationales as irrelevant at best, colonialist most of the time, and demonstrably pernicious as a matter of course’ (Evans et al., 2009, p. 894). My research project benefited by being informed by Indigenous writings and by accounts from research participants who were Aboriginal policy actors. By studying racialising and gendering synchronously, I could see that interacting, intermeshing and interlocking policy practices represented more than a simplistic merging of two separate concepts. Consciously and unconsciously, policy actors described risks involved and blockages working against anti-oppressive practice, reinforcing the central message from the literature – that intersectionality is an important, if elusive, concept. Intersectionality as a concept informing practice requires more than ideas as an analytic tool and Lindsay provided encouragement to find a way forward that builds on the kind of relationships, with Aboriginal women in her particular example, which inform praxis. Intersecting research methodologies helped me to theorise Lindsay’s account for example, praxis that incorporates a ‘bird’s eye view’ as per Indigenous methodologies, adopts an eco-systems perspective from social work frameworks, participatory democracy as promoted by GM, and various other relevant approaches.

My own feminist ideology and practice as a beginning researcher locates me in the frontline of praxis development. Evans et al. (2009) summarise, ‘Feminist research is no longer about placing women’s experience at the center of investigation, but feminist social scientists concerned with social justice are now being called on to engage in antisexist (e.g., Harding, 2001), antiracist (e.g., Collins, 1990), antiheterosexist (e.g., Butler, 1990), anticolonialist (e.g., Trinh, Minh-ha, 1989), and antiableist (e.g., Oliver, 1990) projects in an effort to transform social relations’ (p. 897). I see benefits in the development of intersectionality praxis and the literatures of Indigenous methodologies have contributed significantly to my exploration of intersectionality as performative and transformative.
Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) urge researchers to adopt critical Indigenous pedagogy by working within the spaces of borderland epistemologies that focus attention on the ways knowledge is produced, legitimated and taught. I have maintained my commitment to facilitate the voice of marginalised groups through my research, and my critical approach seeks to disrupt normative ways of viewing and behaving in the world. Denzin and his colleagues endorse the work of Kincheloe and Steinberg who ‘assert that these standpoint epistemologies and the knowledges they produce can be used to resist those oppressive structures that produce human suffering’ (pp. 26-27). Intending that their research practices could move policy to transform practice, Evans et al. intentionally set up a project fusing wide disciplinary representation with a wide range of methodologies. Although they see that this deliberative framing and operationalising of the project has much potential, they experience a level of tension and express qualifications. ‘We recognize that the routes to transformation require that we speak truth with, as well as to, power’ (Evans et al., 2009, p. 905). This confronting of truth and power speaks to me as a social worker who is engaged in research practice. Evans et al. (2009) question how researchers engaged with Aboriginal people can not reproduce racialised identities and colonial representations of the ‘other’ when the research is conducted in a society imbued with, and often structured by, racism. ‘[M]ight research agendas founded on these produced identities actually reinforce the dominant social structures the research proposes to dismantle?’ (p. 899) My future professional practice must also take up the baton identified by Green and Baldry (2008), ‘Although Australian social work is committed to enhancing the individual and community lives of Indigenous Australians, these values are interpreted and mediated by social workers themselves. There is a limited body of work, and very few social workers, available to educate social workers for working together with Indigenous peoples’ (p. 393).

Praxis development requires significant expansion of knowledge and skills that build upon the genealogy of critical approaches. Intersectionality praxis can benefit by drawing on policy practice analyses and I would argue that the gendered and racialised field of FDV is particularly appropriate. In the following chapter, I relate issues raised in this chapter to what policy actors communicate about the public sector policy environment. I explore some of the ways and means by which policy work shapes and is shaped by perspectives relating to the concepts and practices – the doing – of gender and race. Self-awareness will continue to contribute to my analysis; I consciously include consideration of my own self and what I bring to analysis. I make matter my racial profile of Whiteness, femaleness, able-bodiedness, heterosexuality, middle-ageness, middle-classness – a host of features that reflect a unique structure of enduring and flexible intersections. The contextual significance of what policy actors experience in their daily work is just as important to their ‘toolkit’ as my own student research environment, and each of us has a particular story to tell, a version of events and interpretation of policy worlds.
In the next chapter I look at contextual significance to questions about what can contribute to anti-oppressive practice informed and inspired by intersectionality praxis.
CHAPTER SEVEN: POLICY WORK IN THE WA PUBLIC SECTOR

Introduction

In previous chapters, I looked at the concepts and practices of gender, race and intersectionality in turn and drew on a number of conversations with policy actors to illustrate particular themes and issues. My examination of racialised/ing practices and gendered/ing practices in separate chapters reflected and drew on the mostly separate literatures concerned gendering and racialising in organisations. What the two chapters produced was helpful in developing more detailed and personal pictures of often invisible and contradictory racialising and gendering practices within the daily workings of policy actors. This distinct group of operators has not been fully explored in their organisational settings; this chapter sets out to contribute to this field of knowledge.

What I recognised as gendering and racialising mechanisms and processes that reflect and reproduce inequalities were more identifiable as inter-connected through the next chapter, on intersectionality. Policy actors spoke about their policy objectives, underpinning values and ideas, and professional frustrations in accounts that revealed the difficulties of seeing, understanding and intervening in multiple axes of inequality experienced by Aboriginal women and men involved with FDV. Some of the more powerful blockages to multi-dimensional gender- and racial-awareness were revealed as well as (partial) gains as a result of strategic opportunities and committed activism. Using an intersectional ‘lens’ for this analysis therefore extended my knowledge about the inequality/equality work of policy actors, my own subjectivities and positioning in relation to the issues involved, and furthered my grasp of the theoretical aspects of the topic, for example the applicability of Acker’s (2000, 2006a, 2006b) work on intersectionality and inequality regimes to my research project.

In this chapter, I strive to make a helpful contribution to the field of intersectionality praxis by examining new information and developing insight into those environmental particularities of the public sector that have relevance to equality efforts. I focus more deliberately on the specific context of the public sector environment of WA in order to explore the ways that these practices and processes affect and enmesh, knowingly and unknowingly, the policy actors and their public policy work. I maintain the intersectional approach, continue to draw on the relevant literatures, and enable the voices of my research participants to contribute examples, explanations, clarifications and challenges.
I avoid making evaluative comments about particular policies, programs, policy processes and particularly policy actors themselves. Villegas et al. (2007) say, ‘if reflection and dialogue are two key goals of research for social change, researchers have a responsibility to engage in reflection and dialogue with our peers – both researchers and practitioners’ (p. 5) and most of my interviews with policy actors resembled shared struggles for understanding, insight and wisdom. Policy actors spoke with passion and many expressed dedication to human rights and social justice principles in their work despite a lack of organisational and policy support and at times opposition for their ideas and values. A range of emotional reactions to the topic were apparent, for example anxiety and frustration were openly voiced as well as demonstrated non-verbally during conversations. A number of the non-Indigenous policy actors sought advice and information from me about solutions to social problems that resisted their best efforts. Ruby for example, said she was, ‘just horrified by everything. And continue to be horrified. It’s just beyond belief, what’s going on... so if you can help shed some light on that, that would be great’.

Expressions of helplessness and worry by policy actors were directed particularly to the plight of Aboriginal peoples without relating themes of gender and race to their descriptions and explanations. Policy actors seldom connected factors affecting their (multiple) disadvantaged clients to themselves; with their sights firmly set on policy subjects, their own subjectivity and organisational frames was largely unseen. This chapter will look at this invisibility or dis-connect, and what that could mean for efforts to address inequalities.

My perspective is that (external) public policy cannot make a difference at the micro, mezzo and macro levels without (internal) gender- and racially-sensitive public policy people practices. I take aim at finding spaces and opportunities to interject and establish connections that could better equip policy activists for anti-oppressive praxis development from the important public sector locale. My research needs to look beyond and beneath a superficial account of the how, when, where and why of policy making to the ways and means available to policy workers in public sector environments for improving anti-racist and anti-sexist praxis. I am interested in what influences policy actors directly and/or indirectly, consciously and/or implicitly in their work in relation to the particular and mutually reinforcing inequalities of gender and race.

A number of policy frameworks contribute to my analysis in this chapter in recognition that this complex and broad research topic requires flexibility, responsiveness and a range of approaches and perspectives. Of particular relevance is Acker’s (2006) work on inequality regimes. Acker sees organisations as production sites of complex social inequalities and I apply her concept of inequality regimes to the organisational settings within which policy is developed in the WA public sector. This analytic approach builds on the intersectional approach in research by
avoiding categorical separateness and enabling a focus on mutually reinforcing processes. I anticipate that public sector agencies in WA will share with other organisations in having inequality regimes operating as ‘interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities’ (p. 443). Acker defines inequality in organisations as ‘systemic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations’ (p. 443). This framework can help me identify or confirm the existence, severity and other aspects of such disparities in my case study public sector environment that is itself connected with the wider policy context of FDV in WA.

Introductory sections of previous chapters set out my intentions with regards the material being explored, presented and analysed sequentially. In this chapter, my analysis is less exploratory in the sense that I am building on a number of cumulative conclusions from an already substantial base of information. I have reached a point in this thesis where the questions that will be most useful for my analysis are: what is it that is working against policy actors achieving anti-oppressive policy? And what examples from my research contribute to the development of anti-oppressive practice? Some further pieces of the puzzle are needed and I use the experiences of one senior policy actor, Richie, to start to answer these questions. Other voices join his to illustrate issues raised and themes associated with inequality regimes: accountability (audit society), power (forms, acquisition, display, purpose and spread), agency (discretion, decision-making capacity, resistance), communication (who with and who is excluded, means and methods, cultures), coordination (across agencies, between individual staff, links between departments that can facilitate or block change), vision (purposive, social activist, knowing what to do and not do), leadership (notion of hero, charismatic change agent), networks (within and without for example the Aboriginal community, women’s movement, advocacy contacts).

In this chapter, Richie illustrates how a number of the features identified with inequality regimes can be attributed to the policy arena, especially in relation to such organisational matters as power and control. In addition to the practices, processes and actions involved with inequalities, Acker (2006) raises ‘meanings’. Building onto Richie’s contributions, my research participants provide further weight to this aspect of ‘meanings’ in the policy environment, informing me that ideas and their contestability are at the heart of policy formulation, implementation and practice.

Fraser (1989) also helps explain implications of competing values and interests for policy processes. Using a three ‘moments’ analogy, Fraser discusses the ‘politics of need interpretation’, the ‘interpretation of the need’ and the ‘struggle over the satisfaction of the
need, the struggle to secure or withhold provision’ (as cited in Fawcett et al., 2010, pp. 26-27) to show how contestation is integrally involved in social policy, through players and influences on the process at different stages. Fawcett et al. find Fraser’s approach useful, ‘Most importantly, it reminds us that the way social needs and social problems are politicised and interpreted are just as important as the actions taken to address them’ (p. 27). They examine Fraser’s contribution and other policy frameworks that also concentrate on the meanings accorded to social problems and subsequent policy development, however identify potential limitations including restrictions imposed by participatory mechanisms and shifting modes of governance.

I am interested in how such ‘moments’ might operate in the WA public sector context, especially how the policy environment could be implicated in contesting values and ideas in relation to gender and race. Fawcett et al. (2010) conclude that, ‘institutional arrangements structure the interactions that take place and provide organisational locations or ‘policy spaces’ where these interactions can occur’ (p. 28). It is timely to draw on my conversations with policy actors who provide rich accounts of interactional ‘moments’ in public sector operations.

Richie was well placed to provide insights into change projects across the public service. He talked about the public sector and policy environment as a whole from ‘big picture’ structures to specific intervention models and processes of fieldwork. His narrative about enacting change was a high level perspective confirming and describing particular features of systemic disparities. Richie’s examples of what was helpful and what was obstructive to (his) objectives of progressive policy reform through structural and procedural improvements provided important organisational insights. Richie spoke from his senior executive position in a central coordinating agency and it was this location with its sophisticated overview of the policy environment that enabled me to see policy change efforts directed at intersecting levels of micro, mezzo and macro. He worked in a volatile position within, or at least in close vicinity to, the political and administrative powerhouse of Government.

**Policy contestation at Richie’s social planning level**

Richie was committed to whole-of-Government policy co-ordination and development under the broad ambit of the Government’s social justice objectives, including the Gordon Inquiry and FDV as specific priorities. He showed how power/s and control/s connects in the exercise of determining and prioritising policy problems and directing the conduct of solutions – who, how, when, where and why. The literature on work and power relations in organisations were of relevance and in particular Acker’s (2006a, 2006b) analysis of systemic disparities relating to gender, class and race. Richie talked to a number of themes raised through many of my
conversations with policy actors, such as politics and ideologies, roles and boundaries, responsibilities, mechanisms, structures, relationships, decision-making and best practice, all of which provided fertile ground for inequality regimes to manifest.

Richie showed how the complexity and influence of organisational structures and arrangements can produce, intensify or resolve issues identified at different policy locations from the political arena to policy actors in service delivery ‘line’ agencies. Vertical as well as horizontal relationships between agencies, policy actors and policy practices can produce blockages and also facilitate progressive policy change. Restructuring, described negatively by other policy actors especially in the health sector, was an especially powerful tool for policy reform in Richie’s account, and ironically his own position was potentially vulnerable to those same change processes. Both internal and external forces shaped the structures and operating models, driven by ideology, pragmatic politics and at times interpersonal dynamics. His enthusiasm about the potential for service delivery improvement was dimmed by a sense that whole-of-Government approaches to policy development such as those recommended in the Gordon Report had ‘lost direction... the ship is rudderless’.

‘Good’ power for change

Richie looked and acted the part of a powerful policy agent overseeing public sector business, ‘I just keep a pretty good eye on the whole thing’. He was accommodated in a privileged private upper floor office with a breathtaking view, and he used powerful metaphors of war. However deceptive appearances can be, I felt envious of Richie’s apparent power to affect change within the bureaucracy. Despite his seniority and centrality to major decision-making, however he provided a number of examples of lost arguments about structural reforms and policy debates. I concluded that no one individual had absolute power within this hierarchical bureaucracy and political accountability was of primary importance. He openly expressed doubts about objectives and achievements; success was contingent on an array of factors. At whatever level within the system, institutional operating capacity was in direct relation to power produced and reflected by a number of factors including staffing resources, hierarchical position and functional authority.

For Richie, structure was important for whole-of-government policy development but structures in themselves were contentious, reflecting politics and ideology. Richie’s work was vulnerable and accountable in different ways at different levels, within his department as well as the wider sector. Criticism of his policy work had resulted in losses of staff and funding for the unit, but Richie’s work continued with a sense of righteousness and confidence because firstly, Gordon implementation tasks were ‘the Premier’s priority’ so his overall objectives were politically
supported at the highest level, and secondly he was prepared to be answerable, ‘my butt is
kicked’, if he didn’t produce the results expected. He may have been determined to persist,
however he did not have full control over the situation and was frustrated with obstruction that
was often nuanced and indirect but always difficult to counter. Richie used his personal powers
of persuasion and vision for social reform to educate and influence others as much as possible,
mindful that his public sector power was relative.

Despite the discomfort of being ‘caught betwixt and between’ competing expectations about
management of policy implementation across agencies, Richie remained motivated and directed
by his ideas of ‘the spirit of Gordon’. He took comfort in sharing a custodian identity, ‘I think of
myself and one or two others, as still the custodians of the Gordon spirit’. Shoring up
institutional capacity for change was critical to his success but under the sort of conditions he
described, Richie’s efforts to fight inequality sounded rather ‘lonely’.

**Getting the system to work for policy reform through structures and processes**

Richie was committed to overcoming structural limitations to public sector policy reform, a
focus urged by the Gordon Inquiry. His narrative showed that policy work encompasses
numerous processes beyond (simply) the drafting of a policy statement and involves wide
policy networks not limited to the immediate policy writer/s.

Richie explained that organisational structures were established or continued to exist for a range
of reasons, including historical priorities, ‘policy offices that are still hanging there due to
various prerogatives of previous governments’, and change was achieved through different
processes for example, ‘we’re about to go through another functional review, part of which is to
I think cut free the rest’. Creating committees, setting agendas and driving change were
contentious and reflected the values, ideas and power of the players involved including Richie,
external consultants, organisational reviews and inquiries, ‘This group endorsed it. It came out
of a review… a few people that didn’t like scrutiny through that, convinced the consultant to
move for its abolishment…The fear was that this group was getting too bogged down in micro-
detail more than anything else. The solution for me was to become more strategic not to abolish
the group… It was getting a bit like it was everyone’s business but no-one’s business sort of
thing’. Drawing diagrams to illustrate his preferred models and co-ordination mechanisms,
Richie presented a social planning approach to social policy development that reflected and still
depended on political priorities of the government of the day. I note that government terms are
time-limited and the literature points to a troubled history of government commitment to social
justice projects, so I am not surprised that Richie sounds ambitious for change within his
particular period of influence. O’Donohue (1997) reflects on ‘unique difficulties in this
particular area of public administration. Benevolent but naïve intervention was never going to
work quickly on problems that have been so long in the making’ (p. 10).

Richie identified power and control issues that related to and resulted in systemic inequalities at
agency level across the bureaucracy. Agency territoriality was a theme raised by a number of
policy actors and Richie described getting ‘caught up’ in ‘squeeze politics’, a central versus line
agency division. Such public sector dynamics had a range of consequences especially for policy
work requiring institutional and structural support. The current organisational culture had
dangerous dynamics, ‘it was all sorts of politics really... some CEOs see collectivism “win
win”, you know “Let’s work together, win win”. Some see it as intrusiveness over their
domain’. He supported the policy intent of joined-up government, ‘Well at the height of the
game plans, we had this sort of master plan’ and encouraged senior staff to by-pass obstruction,
‘Since that’s been cut adrift these guys have been struggling’, by taking initiative to improve
the effectiveness of high level inter-agency and regional communications, ‘I’ve said to them,
“You should meet anyway. You need to collaborate as a region’. Richie saw the problem as
‘80s silo-ed structures’ inappropriate to achieve the public sector reforms and competing
models, for example differences between clusters or pyramidal approaches to inter-agency
collaboration. ‘I think at the moment we’re struggling with that as a Government as a whole’. In
the face of existing unproductive performance for example, ‘if only your social suspects meet on
Aboriginal affairs, you never get around to the solutions’, he intended to experiment with
developmental approaches, ‘I would like something fresh to arise from the ashes and I think it’s
maybe an social economic interface’. Instead of a collaborative approach intended by ‘joined-
up’ Government, the Gordon Inquiry became ‘a ‘Trojan horse’ for Indigenous disadvantage,
Indigenous affairs’. Other unforeseen problems were produced by systemic failures such as
uncoordinated activity, ‘what we’re creating is another holistic silo. We’re all trying to be
holistic in our structures but we were working in isolation’.

Change had been blocked by agency ‘gatekeepers’ who resisted Richie’s interventions aimed at
improving communications, ‘we’ve got this parallel universe going on in these areas’ and his
efforts to get agencies synchronised, ‘The problem is when one acts without the other one
knowing. Head office doesn’t talk to their regions, I mean the leadership in any department,
between head office and their leadership’.

Networks of policy change agents were valuable for pushing particular agendas; Richie also
identified ‘relations in the system’ and communities which could be useful, ‘it depends which
part of the agenda you want to push, you know’. Having positive relationships with ‘good
passionate people...people that you can talk to’ was important and he praised many staff at
middle-management level, ‘the public service has got a lot of good people in there’. His list of
attributes for policy change also included ‘good collaboration and collegiality’ at officer level; this group of policy actors could affect policy change with micro, mezzo and macro outcomes. Here Richie illustrated the importance of being able to oversee and co-ordinate these networks.

‘Good spirits and good hopes’ could not by themselves avert policy difficulties; Richie showed how plans could go awry for even the most experienced and well-connected policy actors when politics intervened. Collaborative planning and development of improved FDV services and engagement at regional and inter-governmental levels as a ‘sort of joined-up approach’ was pursued. However, ‘when ATSIC got abolished the whole things went “down south”’, he said, and further, State funding for Gordon implementation was insufficient to maintain the momentum. Inter-governmental issues, jurisdictional distinctions and the vagaries of politics could jeopardise progress. Unfavourable comparisons were made at times between policy processes and problems experienced by other jurisdictions, ‘A lot of what the Feds are attacking in the Northern Territory, they can’t attack us. Because they say, “Well you have put in your law and order stabilisers, you have done all this.”’. Richie took pride in achievements shared, ‘We’re still the best practice in Australia, the Gordon Inquiry. I think it’s recognised nationally that the State Government response to the Aboriginal violence is still the best jurisdictional response’.

‘Knowing what to do’

Richie voiced a common concern, that of knowing what to do and knowing how to do what needs to be done. From the highest levels of decision-making came the difficulty of working out the policy practice that could produce the desired policy outcome, as Richie said, ‘I still think most of the politicians are really passionate about doing something about Aboriginal disadvantage. ...The issue is how, the issue is not so much why, that tell us there’s a problem, it’s how’. The benchmark of success was for Richie Indigenous women’s perceptions of personal safety, complemented by statistical evidence of positive outcomes of interventions at micro, mezzo and macro levels. ‘To be fair it’s very difficult work ... longer term issue of effectiveness [and] are Indigenous women feeling safer? Is there less violence? Now that would be the Holy Grail evaluation of Gordon, which then has to reach out beyond the Gordon initiatives through your Restraining Orders [etc.]’.

Richie captured the very public moral dilemma for the WA Government when he reported a common attitude of, ‘We don’t want to create another Stolen Generation but we don’t want to be hands-on either’ and expressed resolve to find sensitive interventions, ‘You’ve got to intervene and for whatever reasons for Aboriginal people no matter how many times we change the names it’s still ‘the welfare’. It’s just reality so you’ve got to find the third way’.
Colebatch (2000) finds through research that ‘participants in policy processes constantly complain about the lack of fit between official maps of policy making and their own experience’ (as cited in Fawcett et al., 2010, p. 24). Richie’s experience shows that those engaged in developing ‘the third way’ face enormous complexity and pressure becomes intensified by repeated statistical and frontline reports of need that attract media scrutiny and public dismay. ‘Some of the players in Indigenous affairs in particular have been running around in circles telling us the problem you know, report after report of indicators. Well I know there’s a problem’. The Gordon Report was received into this environment of continual dynamic with its own shortcomings and strengths that contributed to the puzzle for policy actors including Richie. Solutions need to take into account the dynamic produced by multiplicity of players, ‘on one level it’s complex, on another level it’s not’.

Are policies inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’ or both? One policy could mean different things to different people. Richie seemed ambivalent when he described law and order policy decisions in contradictory ways. Without consultation, ahistorical policy could result and be insensitive, for example an immediate forensic policy response successful in some areas, was often inappropriate in Aboriginal communities. Yet Richie also provided positive comments about the potential for law and order policy responses to tackle inequalities at a different period in that policy lifetime.

Richie: I think when they started looking at the bush they started looking at the dysfunctionality of remote communities and what turned out to be I think a very good and a master stroke in Gordon is the multi-function police facilities. They were good in two things, it meant a community of 400-800 deserves a cop shop but it also brought in other Government services. But it’s like what’s going on in the Northern Territory, it provided that law and order stabilising on which now you can build your infrastructure around service delivery.

Richie referred to research and social indicators including the Indigenous Disadvantage Indicators as guide for future planning, ‘I think anything that’s to do with safety of Indigenous people, and that’s the outcome area and we actually aim for outcome areas’. Continuity and statistical information could support anecdotal evidence in FDV work, and departmental reviews provided a source of information about policy implementation including problems revealed by agency comparisons.

Richie: They got very few dollars out of Gordon but they used it very cleverly.
What they did was they looked at their response to child abuse and family violence
and then created Family and Domestic Violence sections or whatever they called it, in every cop shop region. So that’s people that have expertise in that area and they’ve got a statewide network. Going back to your Restraining Order example I am confident that at the Police end of the system there is a fairly consistent response in that. At the (welfare department) end of the system it’s a very ad hoc response in domestic violence and possibly some lean child protection.

**Change and the Gordon Inquiry from Richie’s vantage point**

Richie made mostly positive comments about the Gordon Inquiry’s contribution to policy development, although his optimism at times sounded like a personal statement of faith. He was critical of ‘tick, tick, tick’ evaluations and measured the strength of Government commitment by budget allocation. Taking issue with characteristic ‘cut and paste’ measurements of social reform, Richie saw himself as a change agent acting from within the environs of the powerful central agency with its high profile for policy steerage. Accepting the unending nature of reform work, he concluded, ‘I think we pushed the envelope quite a bit. At officer level we had good collaboration and collegiality. I think we moved a few things in certain areas especially the remotes….So it pushed a lot of things in the system’. He was satisfied that systemic changes recommended by the Inquiry were largely achieved, and that awareness of the need to overturn structural barriers was growing. ‘Gordon has done a lot of good in that sense but there’s more that we can do’.

Without identifying the ‘one or two “naughty” agencies’, Richie was confident that resources had been expended appropriately, ‘Gordon money has been spent on Gordon for Gordon things’, and he turned to other issues requiring attention – ‘outcomes, effectiveness’. Once he satisfied himself that the Auditor Generals’ requirements were largely met, Richie returned to his theme, ‘the problem in all of whole-of-Government stuff, is that we haven’t worked out how to do whole-of-Government performance’.

‘Piggybacking’ on other reforms indicated a resourceful policy actor who seized opportunities to address gaps and inconsistencies in an arena of policy contestation and challenge. Yet, as a senior bureaucrat within the policy hierarchy, Richie could do no more than suggest a policy review of departmental initiatives following the Gordon Inquiry when he saw policy ‘spaces’ as opportunities for reform being lost. He took issue with intervention models in one frontline department, and without specifically identifying gender issues, he saw contradictions in the performance of the ‘state as parent’.
Richie: I think Gordon needs to be taken more on board, the mainstream child protection DV services. Because that’s where the new resources are, on top of Gordon. You know, we’ve got to stop seeing Gordon as ‘Gordon troops’. I actually am quite critical of (department)’s use of Gordon money and I’ve suggested they should go back and review ... There is still a big challenge in working with Aboriginal people at that statutory interface and working out that there is a time for charging and whatever and there’s a time for building the family’s capacity to do whatever...Because the reality is there is a police rottweiler interface which is probably between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of what you do and most of it is about the state as parent for whatever reasons but mainly not child abuse and not sex abuse, but more about neglect and other abuse that people come into care.

**Added complexities of race and gender**

Richie’s narrative presented connections of race and gender as complicating government interventions to address complex issues of violence to Aboriginal women and children. He raised essentially political issues relating to power and position when he discussed Aboriginality and gender for example, themes of differential access to resources, involvement in consultation, voice and agency, and effects of stereotyping. His big picture analysis mirrored concerns and solutions raised by other policy actors, indicating common perspectives and understandings, if not stereotypes, in relation to gendered roles and relationships between Aboriginal women and men and how policy needed to take these matters more into account. Other than commonly gendered images of typical FDV victims and perpetrators, consultation practices as part of policy development seemed the most recognizably gendered aspect for most policy actors.

Richie, like other policy actors, did not automatically relate the concept and practice of gender and race to mainstream bureaucratic practices and processes. My research interest in these more abstract matters, was not of strong interest despite preliminary information sheets. Some research conversations provided opportunities for me to expound on the principles of GM to interested participants, including Richie whose awareness of GAP projects operating in some departments was limited. Hawkesworth (2006) attributes ‘the manifold ways in which gender power and disadvantage are created and maintained not only through law but also through institutional processes, practices, images, ideologies, and distributional mechanisms...organizational practices play a central role in recreating and entrenching gender hierarchies, gender symbols, and gendered identities’ (p. 213).

Gender was at times accorded credence when women’s needs were considered among characteristics of disadvantage; it was particularly feminist policy actors who prioritised sex
discrimination as a policy issue. For Richie, intersectionality added weight to gender considerations. ‘Gender is still the big issue’, Richie said, ‘because I think it’s a big issue in Indigenous Affairs’. Richie described gender stereotypes that were institutionalised, for example responses to need based on ‘infrastructure of crime as sort of more men’s culture and family violence is more the women’s problem’, and agencies including Indigenous organisations themselves where gender politics reflected male control, ‘Most of the political governance structures out there are male dominated’. Richie credited the Gordon Inquiry with challenging gendered patterns of policy development, ‘I think even the Gordon Inquiry was forcing ATSIC to be a bit more consultative of Indigenous women’. But mainstream agencies presented a continuing problem in that, ‘in developing solutions and working better in Indigenous communities, government agencies need to be quite aware that quite often they don’t interact with Indigenous women’.

Richie employed an Aboriginal woman in his unit to develop communications and consultations with Aboriginal women. The benefits were that, ‘she could actively build up that network and start to hear what their opinions were, because they were the ones that had to break the silence, so to speak’. Relationship building was part of Richie’s policy ‘toolkit’, ‘You actually have to work a bit more with the women and know how to give them a voice’. Empowerment was seen as a proactive policy response, yet there was no parallel sense of redistribution of (male) privileges. Listening to Aboriginal women required a cultural sensitivity conscious of gender issues:

Richie: I would do another round around that Aboriginal healing and stuff and that’s very much a gendered thing. I think we need more of that kind of stuff. You’ve got to listen to the women; you want to get that bit. You want to get to that bit, not easy sharing that stuff. It was very hard for them, for women, coming out with that. And they don’t necessarily want specific Aboriginal counselling services. In some ways you don’t want that, it’s family. But you need to be able to send them somewhere. I think that’s a problem generally, our therapeutic services.

Richie’s initiatives to strengthen the position of Indigenous women in particular, supported the premise of the WA Substantive Equality Policy Framework, ‘If you want to treat me equally, you may have to be prepared to treat me differently’ (2004). Political leaders played an important part in raising awareness and promoting women’s issues.

Richie: I think it raised it, in the sense that because of the profile and the mainstreaming, I remember that Women’s Policy or someone had a big Indigenous gig and (Premier) turned up for it and he basically got treated like a bit of a hero
(laughter). He was really chuffed. Because the Indigenous women said by him championing the issue they felt that, and the same with Sue Gordon, that gave a lot of confidence to people to speak up.

Richie described dissention around policy options in the post-Gordon period; differences of opinion about responses to FDV reflected gender dynamics and power relationships. In addition, contestation of ideas and values reflected differences between traditional White responses and Indigenous worldviews:

Richie: Particularly in the (northern region) there was a few things that got spawned, quite interestingly in the (region) that women’s groups sprung up ...The community almost got split into three, the ones that took a hard line where you want people sent to jail, the ones that said that’s too extreme and don’t want anyone sent to jail and the people that wanted some sort of half-way house cultural intervention. So they didn’t want the men punished, they wanted them to stop abusing but they didn’t want them to go to jail. So it created that whole dynamic and in remote communities the power structure of some of the abusers is linked to the governance and the men are also in charge of the Indigenous Corporation.

A picture of gendered power relations emerged in discussion of racial issues in FDV.

Richie: There’s also a racist ‘lens’ on child abuse... any perpetrator that gets himself in a position of power it’s like less powerful people are not going to speak up. It doesn’t mean they didn’t want to stop the abuse. People disclose because of privacy and safety and all that. So saying to Aboriginal people in these communities that, “You’ve got to stand up and out your men”, well why don’t we say that to every (country region) towns?

K: So you think that’s an example of racism in the system?

R: I think that. And I put that more on (Federal Minister) and the Feds in response to this issue. I really think we didn’t do it that way maybe because Sue Gordon helped to set the tone or something. So you could argue maybe we might’ve gone too soft on the structural stuff and all that. You’ve got to strike that balance you know. Some Indigenous people say to me, “We’ve got to get some scalps”....Some of the abusers are the main leaders of the town but who wants to ‘take them out’, you know? So we’ve gone in with the cops and just through presence and support for governance and training and all that sort of stuff, things are getting into a
normalised sort of setting. But we haven’t had any high profile child abuse scalps so you do still get some people saying, “Are they still in town? Have they left town?” I don’t know. I’m not an expert. But then again, it’s been a response that has given the community some pride to say, “We’re getting our community back together again”. …You start wondering what’s the pros and cons of your approach.

There seemed to be a lingering desire for retribution and public revenge in this account and the language of ‘scalps’ resembles war talk that in the USA would have additional racial overtones. Fear leads to unreal expectations of government; expectations especially those held by Aboriginal people created difficulties, and Richie expressed lingering doubts about policy decisions under these conditions. Government officials faced the prospect of dealing with Aboriginal male leaders who were abusers; power and violence was present in a variety of forms in this account. Fear was an emotion conveyed in many of my interviews; fear for victims of FDV was often accompanied by protective attitudes towards Aboriginal women victims. Anxiety also accompanied issues of cultural sensitivity, as Richie referred to in the context of staff training, ‘they just didn’t know how to sit down and deal with Aboriginal people. Whether it was fear or prejudice I wouldn’t know, a bit of both’. The call for increased frontline-informed experience, research knowledge and confidence about policy prescriptions was a common feature across interviews for policy actors caught in a web of competing claims. This policy field is complex and the consequences of ‘bad’ policy can be the difference between life and death.

Despite the difficulties including gender politics, political sensitivities and competing service delivery models, Richie reported positive outcomes and supported service agreements between Government and Indigenous organisations in the form of strategies and memoranda of understanding. Normalisation for Richie included certain standards applying to all locations and populations, achieved by ‘institutional push’ addressing reasons for service delivery gaps ‘many agencies are not probably delivering as much service delivery to Indigenous communities as they should for all sorts of reasons’, and problems, for example the lack of cross-cultural awareness training.

Acker’s (2006) descriptions of practices, processes, actions and meanings producing and reproducing inequalities in particular organisations all connect with Richie’s account, particularly his particular experience with the exercise of power and control. Inequality regimes operating within the WA public sector have been seen to be linked with history, politics and culture, and to be responsive to external and internal developments such as changing ideas about models of intervention and best practice.
'The way bureau-professionals embody and inhabit their world, the meanings they attribute to things, the emotional texture of their daily experiences, all matter in terms of how they engage with each and their others’ says Lea (2009, p. 9). As an aspiring architect of social development, Richie shared his vision and ideals, his stories of change efforts and his ambivalence towards policy achievements. Richie was not alone with his reform imperative; my research with policy actors supports the literature attesting to the strength of commitment and resilience of policy activists. Many of the challenges experienced by Richie were also encountered by other policy actors in different locations; variations in analyses and solutions offer further insights.

Policy actors’ narratives as sites of struggle

Mumby (2004) sees narratives as ‘sites of ideological and discursive struggle where different, conflicting interests get played out. If we see narratives not as fixed texts but rather as living, embodied performances that are contextualized politically and culturally, then they become open to appropriation and articulation within various discourses’ (p. 245). When Mumby (2004) argues for more research into ‘narrative as the site of complex ideological struggle’ (p. 246), I see Richie’s dialogue as a performance that contributes to ‘evidence’, that can help illuminate and critique multiple government progress reports, FDV policies, agency manuals of instruction and a range of other texts that represent political sites and dialectical struggles between competing ideologies and groups. Richie drew on discourses of family for example, that justify and organise state interventions in ways that the literature tells me can render silent gendered and racial dimensions. Richie constructed ‘reality’ that required him to deploy language at times aggressive and masculinist such as the description ‘a police rottweiler interface’. Jayasuriya (2002) draws attention to how complex racist ideology underpinning public policy discourse has created a ‘new racism’ in Australia. This ideology interacts with ‘the cross-cutting reality of class and gender relations’ (p. 43) and needs to be confronted by the development of ‘a constructive politics of opposition’ (McNamara, as cited in Jayasuriya, 2002, p. 43). Richie’s strategic use of language as part of everyday agency represented his activist policy speech directed at the public sector with its ‘parent’ public policy discourse/s. Richie was not the only research participant who treated the interview as purposive in the sense that talking to an external researcher could be seen as a potential intervention, an opportunity for influence, a mechanism for change, part of a ‘tool kit’ or a puzzle piece.

There is a vast literature on gender communication differences that has relevance here. Ashcraft (2004) summarises that much of the literature depicts men and women as inhabiting distinct communication cultures, painting a binary or dualistic picture of discursive proclivities.
Essentialising and dividing male and female policy actors according to their individual communications however, denies complexities shaped and influenced by such organisational and institutional factors as legislative requirements, career trajectories, financial enticements and incentives, and work/life constraints and restrictions. Yes, discourse was performance for Richie, and as feminist activists point out, ‘discourse (dis)organizes gender identities’ (Ashcraft, 2004, p. 279), so deeper analysis of Richie’s sub-text could add further insights into the policy environment and point to potential to undermine or disrupt normative, hegemonic performances. These challenging issues remain for future possible research, along with a raft of other loose threads, or puzzle pieces, many identified in the previous chapters. Related to the issue of gendered discourses are themes arising from a number of the interview transcripts about organisational cultures within which policy actors operated.

Fear and anxiety about a range of issues was expressed by a number of policy actors, most commonly perceptions of unsolvable social problems and a lack of definitive policy solutions to horrible social and living conditions of disadvantaged Aboriginal peoples and victims of FDV. They revealed agencies unable to answer public demand and meet political expectations, yet my interview with Richie was energising where others were exhausting. While personality and professional experience could explain this difference, I sensed that Richie’s resourcefulness, closer access to government and greater potential policy power were primary factors in the way he addressed the same issues. As much as was possible in his particular policy environment, Richie practiced critical policy work by connecting inequality as outcomes with larger social, environmental, political and economic forces – hegemonic powers. Identifying himself as a social activist guided by social justice principles could strengthen Richie’s fortitude to penetrate the system and maintain commitment to policy reform.

Richie served as a minor case study for this chapter showing that policy work appears a contradictory, contested terrain requiring passion, ideology, knowledge and optimism on the part of change agents. Richie talked mainly to the first of Acker’s disparity markers, namely ‘power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes’ (Acker, 2006, p. 443); other policy actors talked about their experiences in relation to other markers of inequality in their public sector locations.

**Richie was not alone: more research for more stories, more themes, more ways of doing**

A number of themes can be further explored by listening to other policy actors’ narratives, stories that supplement, dispute or complement conclusions about policy work reached by
Richie in his eyrie. Within the considerable body of literature about policy analysis and development, the work of a number of Australian policy writers contribute frameworks for policy analysis and policy activism for change relevant to my localised research (Edwards, 2001; Fawcett et al., 2010; Hutchinson, 2008; McClelland & Smyth, 2006; Yeatman, 1998). Yet matters of highest emotional content, agreement and disagreement articulated by my research participants do not sit neatly within frameworks and borders. Themes are interrelated, contradictory and at times at odds with best advice from the literatures including the Government’s own policy frameworks for practitioners in this field, which was not surprising given GM experiences and conclusions about the need for improved practitioner guidance. The WA Policy Framework for Substantive Equality (2004) identifies four key drivers of change required for implementation: needs assessment, monitoring, organisational performance appraisal, and learning and development. Yet, it is questionable if these broad categories or elements sufficiently serve retrospective policy analysis or guide prospective policy planning. In particular, the inter-relatedness and complexity of policy processes and practices are difficult to capture in such frameworks.

Hage (2009) urges public conversation about the cultural doing of discrimination and inequality and I am interested in public sector culture involved with the production/reproduction of multiple forms of discrimination. This is where Lea (2009) makes an important contribution to praxis development. Lea turns the focus to Australian policy actors themselves and conducts anthropological and biographical research behind the closed doors of Northern Territory public sector to ‘witness live policy/inaction’ in the health arena. This provides a rare opportunity to learn from the reflections of an academic with substantial public sector experience, a self-proclaimed ‘worried white’ (p. vi), in the field of Indigenous public policy. She examines a ‘culture of remedialism’ geared to its own reproduction, achieved by self-replicating processes created and nourished within ‘the cultural bloodlines of service delivery’ (p. 10). It is through the under-conceptualised and idealised postcolonial interventions of helping Whites as ‘bleeding hearts’ that she sees ‘the continual press of the state into the lives of those it seeks to govern’ (pp. v-vi). Her work addresses a number of themes raised by my research participants, and her interrogatory model and case study set in the Northern Territory shows repetition across jurisdictions, including ‘the unifying aesthetic of failure in these cycles of argument and debate, point and counterpoint’ (p. 10). Lea reaches conclusions about public policy work that are both ‘harsher and more empathetic than standard one-sided accounts’ (p. 10) of this inhabited socio-cultural bureaucratic domain. Lea poses simple and morally testing questions as tools of analysis including: What is failure? What is success? What works? Like Hage, she says that understanding questions asked is not the same as providing the answers. I also find a series of questions drawn from my material can be used as a structure similar to the ways that particular policy frameworks have developed my understanding of the material. By setting out these
questions, the inter-relatedness of key themes becomes clearer as do important connections, intersections, contradictions and facilitations. Links can be made to more of Acker’s disparities markers and build up the picture gained from Richie. The most consistent and strong thread throughout this material is the very humanness of the public sector environment, the human emotional content of policy work that Lea so clearly communicates.

The starting point is asking Whose problem? And whose responsibility? Laying blame and roles are two major themes. By asking whose ideas? And whose agendas? I can more fully grasp how leadership, authority, accountability and compliance play out. Relationships and communications can be explored through the question who’s listening? Next I ask what do ‘we’ do about it? as an entry way to what policy actors had to say about knowing what to do and how to do it. Also, functions, structures and organisational arrangements as important elements come to the fore with this question. I can reach a deeper understanding of policy actors’ perspectives on IR with the questions who’s benefiting? And who’s losing out? And finally, asking who wants to change? can enable me to grasp issues of resistance in policy work as well as the theme of making a difference.

The details of daily policy work that emerges by approaching the material in this way do not always directly evidence inequalities as framed by Acker. It is the composite or bigger picture that enables conclusions to be reached about systemic inequalities. Gendered and racialised ‘workplace decisions such as how to organize work’ are often nuanced, contradictory and disguised, as are ‘opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect’ and particularly ‘pleasures in work and work relations’. In some ways this reflects the need for praxis development of the intersectionality approach beyond the largely theoretical. My research contributes to this project by claiming connections between the inequality regimes that impact directly and indirectly on the people in those organisations and the work outputs, the final products of those practices and processes. I trace a continuum from the doing of gender and race in organisations to gendered and racialised policy outcomes produced by those organisations on behalf of hegemonic social oppressions. Gendered and racialised public policy products are hard enough for policy actors to see, but their own enmeshing in those outcomes is less visible and correspondingly difficult to address.

**Whose problem? Whose responsibility?**

*Laying blame*
Warhurst (2010) criticises policy failure scapegoating and urges greater individual and collective responsibility rather than blaming government ministers, ‘In rushing to criticize them we often let ourselves off the hook too easily. Widespread community values are the deeper problem’ (pp. 1-2). Interviewees in my research blamed a variety of factors for poor policy including flawed policy processes designed by those individuals with greater institutional power. Despite rhetoric of shared social responsibility, taking social action to affect change in gendered and racialised policies was seen to be the purview of particular jobs.

Jill shared with a number of policy actors an attitude of defensiveness and protectiveness of her department and its policy development processes. She is a non-Aboriginal woman working in a key role in relation to the implementation of Gordon Inquiry recommendations. ‘Nobody is ever going to come up with a perfect policy or there may well be something that slips through but that’s human nature. You can’t expect any agency to be 100 per cent right and do the right thing 100 per cent of the time. You’re dealing with human beings and human beings make mistakes’. She didn’t want an agency or staff to be hung ‘out to dry’ even though she was aware of ‘a couple of agencies that have gone through a really hard time and it’s brought some justifiable issues to light’. I do not believe Jill to be condoning public servants acting with impunity, but she could be expressing sympathy for the way that agency staff comes under scrutiny when caught in public criticism; there are potential hazards for Jill herself in this policy work. The department too could instill loyalty because the system traditionally cannot or does not defend itself in the public arena for a range of reasons including privacy requirements in relation to clients, an issue highlighted by the Gordon Inquiry. Under pressure from the news media, governments at times look for ‘scapegoats’, often heads of agencies. In the lifetime of this research project, considerable organisational restructuring has resulted in a number of senior positions being changed, transferred, demoted, abolished and outsourced. Jill was not alone among the policy actors interviewed to avoid discussing specifics of accountability processes, preferring to speak in generalities about the concept of accountability and responsibility, accepting or perhaps rationalising that mistakes continue to be made in the policy arena.

Squires says, ‘Policymaking is always an imperfect process, generally large scale, crude, and aggregate in its intentions and targets’ (as cited in Lovenduski, 2009, p. 294) and Burch (1999) is another of the many policy theorists who take a similar stance to Jill in respect to the inevitability of limitations and policy inadequacy. ‘In social policy, nothing is etched in stone. It is always imperfect, evolving, and contingent upon circumstances’ (p. 364). He sees the application of values and principles in specific social policies of specific societies at specific times to be ‘always imperfect (due to incomplete knowledge, limited self-awareness, and rationalizations of self-interest) and impermanent (due to changing social, economic, geophysical, technological, and other circumstances)’ (p. 364) (emphasis in original).
Human limitations identified included a lack of specialised knowledge for the complex and difficult field of FDV. Most government agency staff held appropriate professional qualifications, undertook field experience in the lead up to senior roles in policy drafting and some continued with further education, yet it was not enough. Olive, an Aboriginal policy adviser from the non-government sector, expressed a lack of confidence in the knowledge base of the public sector, ‘We had a good rapport with the service even though at times we were sort of frustrated because they didn’t know how to deal with matters. And we were under the understanding that they were the appropriate service to deal with that type of problems’.

Organisational and structural limitations were blamed more frequently than human limitations; policy ideals and aspirations were unmet due to factors beyond individual control. A disconnection in communications between policy writers and policy implementers was particularly frustrating and difficult to resolve organisationally. Another example was the imposition of inadequate time for policy drafting which was a common concern because it compromised ‘best practice’. Policy actors described working under a variety of restricted conditions with outcomes that included preventing some from achieving satisfaction with the task, frustration with the policy process and looking for strategic opportunities to compensate for limitations.

Roles and boundaries

Roles and responsibilities, boundaries and coordination – these themes connected with others at a number of levels. Interviewees described career building that implicitly involved identity construction including for example, government employee, non-government activist, internal or external change agent, dutiful practitioner. Different pressures and opportunities accorded to being within the system or an ‘outsider’ and it was possible to see gendered and racialised stereotypes of policy activism. Wanda was an Aboriginal woman who recently moved from the government system to an external position; her professional identity had been shaped by her experiences as a policy activist in the mainstream system. She recognised limits to her capacity as an individual change agent – limits imposed on particular professional roles, and influenced by personal relationships, kinship and tribal connections. She talked about educating ‘her’ community about her role, encouraging and supporting their self-help, and efforts to avoid feeling overwhelmed at the system that goes ‘steamrolling ahead’.

There were issues of relationships between internal policy actors, policy networks and external policy advocates. ‘I’m an Aboriginal person first before I became a public servant’, said Ian, and like other Aboriginal policy actors interviewed, his conversation with me took the form of an educative interaction. He spoke of ‘sort of sensitising Whitefellas to Aboriginal issues’ using literature on White privilege (McIntosh, 1990) to improve cultural security in the agency. A variety of roles were performed within different kinds of relationships. Ian repeatedly provided
dualistic responses, firstly speaking from his personal perspective and experience as an Aboriginal man and secondly as a public servant with a professional identity, for example, ‘The perception out there with our target group and particularly with Aboriginal people, “Hey buddy you work for the government, you must know about that mob, eh? What them mob doing?”’ I asked Ian about frustrations in the work that he did and he replied, ‘Oh just coming into an office with Whitefellas but I get used to that’. His two distinct identities required flexible performances, and he took pleasure in maximising information flow between each, using the pronoun ‘we’ to refer to both his public service and Aboriginal identities. ‘I applied for the job and got it and I was thrilled’ (emphasis in original). Thrilled more so, because of what the work entails is really challenging for the Aboriginal community because it’s not on the radar. I mean it wasn’t on my radar’, said Ian.

Being on the ‘radar’ and ‘on the agenda’ represented positionality; these were ways that policy actors located their place and status within the system, measured opportunities for influence and especially policy resources. Roles and boundaries related to policy focus as much as policy actors’ job descriptions. Ian worked to extend the policy radar of his department within the overall government system by extending his focus as broadly as possible, ‘Everything I do, even though it may not look like its part of my policy and practice plan, it will fit’. Ian and other Aboriginal policy actors did not individualise Aboriginal policy work, they spoke of impacts on Aboriginal people as collective bodies. I did not hear policy actors talking in this way about focusing on gender; in most interviews, gender was regarded as an individual characteristic mostly associated with women.

The metaphor of a picture to be completed came from the Gordon Report (July 2002) and the concept of a jigsaw puzzle was used with interviewees to identify roles and relationships, connections and communications. But policy actors were often unable to envision a completed picture, or saw only some big pieces and some small pieces; even establishing the number of missing pieces was difficult.

Constant organisational restructuring caused disruption, as Amanda explained of her policy work in the health sector, “We’ve had so much restructuring that people are still working out their roles. It’s all a bit of a work in progress”. Carol said, ‘we’ve just been in quite a lot of disarray for the last month or so’ as a result of organisation change that was quite demanding. ‘I’m just still familiarising myself with what goes on’. Hutchinson (2008) says, ‘Organisational restructuring represents a recognizable manifestation of the new public sector organisational culture’ with detrimental effects across issues including gender equity, race and discrimination (pp. 35-36). I question the possibility of developing an anti-oppressive agenda when restructuring results in politicisation and competitive working environments (Hatcher and
McCarthy, as cited in Hutchinson, 2008, p. 38). The pace of change and the impact of uncertainty were raised by Isabel, whose specialist women’s policy area appeared vulnerable in discussion of roles and responsibilities. ‘Like any organisation unless changes are happening very quickly, you find that you get caught in other kinds of things that happen around uncertainties. And I think a lot of people have been uncertain for a long time about their roles and responsibilities…. maintaining focus is the big thing. And relationships’.

A number of policy actors described how roles and functions changed over time and became more politicised. Freda expressed cynicism about public servants who, lacking expertise, fulfill political expectations at the expense of client services. The consequence of what Freda called ‘generic public servants’ was the perpetuation of problematic policy practice that satisfied the minister, ‘as long they’re keeping the strategic plans looking right and stuff, it’s more about being seen to do stuff’. Freda’s frustrations could be related to her role as an external, and critical, advocate and I also wonder about the quality of her working relationships with those same public servants she dis-respects. Clark also expressed dissatisfaction about policing staff ill-equipped to perform certain roles with shifting professional boundaries. ‘Now in the past we took on a lot of social service roles. But it’s not our job and we don’t have the people to do it. We don’t have the resources to do it’. Like Richie, Clark identified issues in relation to poor co-ordination between departments and impacts of role confusion between departments, emphasising client outcomes at the frontline. He expressed frustration and disagreement with the performance of ‘others’ – dysfunctional and inflexible departments.

**Whose ideas? Whose agendas?**

**Leadership**

In this case study of FDV, as with other contested policy fields, the role of the state influenced the way the problem was defined and the way interventions were policy prescribed. The impacts of decisions made by the leadership were raised as issues by policy actors at all hierarchical levels and positions in the policy continuum. Organisational leadership was important to both problem identification and solution; political leadership was seen as essential for policy reform. Policy actors watched their backs as well as looked ahead for whoever was standing tall in front – the most blatant match to Acker’s research into inequality regimes.

Gendering in leadership practices was apparent even though the policy actors were largely unaware that their comments revealed gendered assumptions and stereotypes. Hollway (1996) examines the metaphor ‘glass ceiling’ that captures the invisibility of obstacles facing women in
senior positions in public sector hierarchies. ‘Typically, neither the women nor the men working in such hierarchies understand the nature of those obstacles’ (p. 74) she says of the gendered workings of power. Grace represented a disproportionately small number of women promoted to senior executive positions in large organisations only to find themselves positioned poorly in relation to a gendered, informal organisation described by Hollway as ‘places where power circulates inevitably through the micro-social relations of individuals who call on all modes of power at their disposal, every minute of the day, to be effective and advance themselves’ (p. 76). Grace as a non-Aboriginal woman was relatively isolated in the health system compared to other women in management positions I met with, especially Xena and Freda who provided powerful models of women in leadership roles. A number of interviewees referred to how Aboriginal women had been outspoken about FDV and had triggered government action and the Gordon Inquiry itself was referred to in the context of women in policy development activities.

Opinions held of the media were largely negative and there was little recognition of an alternative viewpoint that the media could play a constructive role in stimulating government action in response to publicised policy failures, flaws or limitations.

Clark described the qualities of leaders and ‘champions’ in the field of policing. ‘The people that were in those roles were very, very much plugged in and understanding and true believers of what they were doing. There was no rhetoric with those people. You know, having those people in place enabled our agency to move forward in leaps and bounds’. His leaders were found, not made; they needed power in their roles to be able to realise their vision, and they needed to be rewarded by the system, for example recognised through promotion in the hierarchical system. Clark talked about shared achievements and requirements on individuals to be cohesive. ‘I think the other big thing that we’ve done is that in an environment that no longer had the champions we’ve kept our voice which was important as well’. Powerful departments, those with independent voice, authority and resources could privilege senior staff in a variety of ways and potentially correspondingly disadvantage staff in less powerful departments that lack voice.

The benefits that accrue for later staff following pioneers and reformists could be seen in Jane’s reflections about changes in police staffing. Jane referred to statistical evidence of increasing women’s participation in policing and of improved understanding of women’s capabilities. She was somewhat unsure about reasons for a widespread change in agency attitudes towards gender over time, suggesting, ‘It’s a whole community culture thing isn’t it, it’s not just Police. It’s a whole, whether women can do certain jobs’. Women still have to take care, for example in policing work FDV could be detrimental to women’s careers. Jane’s comfortable familiarity with the language and concept of gender and its relevance to policing work, she explained is
probably due her involvement ‘in a couple of the women’s networks’, possibly connected to gender awareness initiatives through GAP and action research (Harwood, 2006).

Policy actors conveyed a range of heroic behaviours. Ian spoke reverentially of client advocacy by the head of his department across jurisdictional and agency barriers, ‘It comes from a committed DG as well, who is in this agency and who is across all the issues and really fought hard for it. He really fought hard for it and understands…’. I wonder about how relational leadership (Binns, 2006) within the confines and restrictions of the public sector. Alice pointed to courage required to ‘take on’ FDV, seen as an Aboriginal cultural issue and ‘too difficult’. But courage has a historical and political context; Alice said the Gordon Inquiry and subsequent developments could not be undertaken now.

Authority

Discussing recent legislative reforms in policing, including the provision of extended legal options for frontline responses in FDV, Clark outlined what constitutes a policing ‘tool kit’: a continuum ranging from ‘administrative procedures’, ‘band aids’, ‘very, very soft’ interventions, to enforcement of legal sanctions. ‘When a police officer attends a family and domestic violence incident we have four or five options for intervention. That’s all we can do’. Police officers determine appropriate responses by assessments of situations they confront in terms of potential for violence escalation and criminality. Greater discretion and flexibility would enable police responses to be preventative. He revealed a sense of humour about favouring legal powers and was amused at the ‘very very hard’ evaluation tasks required of qualitative research, ‘you can’t measure satisfaction. Well you can, we don’t’; statistical profiles of interventions were more achievable measures given the nature of FDV policing work.

Frontline policing relied on legal authority and being equipped with inadequate ‘tool kits’ would frustrate best practice. According to Clark’s account, the frontline of policy implementation was particularly well placed to experience policy limitations such as ‘dysfunctional service partners’ who could undermine service delivery.

Clark: I arrive and I’ve only got four options. That’s all I’ve got to tailor my response. Now the thing that makes the difference perhaps for me between a bad intervention and a good intervention is my personal skill and the way I apply those things. Do I take the extra half-hour to stop and have a cup of tea and explain to someone what I’m doing and provide some other connections or do I just do the job and go to the next one.
Awareness of daily realities of FDV police frontline interventions was critical to his capacity to contribute to policy development as a senior executive at times representing his department’s perspectives at inter-agency communications and negotiations. His opinions and ideas about clients, staff and departmental issues, and legal provisions had obvious significance for the direction of policy. Clark had the voice, the power and privilege and opportunity associated with policy practice as well as risk in highly sensitive policing FDV work.

In addition to legal authority, policy actors canvassed other forms of authority including collaborative capacity, used to gain influence and achieve policy objectives. Gaining confidence in using authoritative voice and influence for most policy actors was achieved over a long career through such factors work experience, relevant academic qualifications, formal and informal legitimacy and credibility. While political party allegiance was not a talking point for these policy actors, having access to political resources was for some an unspoken advantage. Personal connections could therefore be a help or a hindrance depending on the seniority of the post, as evidenced by changes in agency personnel following parliamentary elections and changes in government.

**Accountability**

The issue of accountability was a ‘hot topic’ across human service agencies during the research interview period because policy implementation relating to the Gordon Inquiry was being audited and findings, largely critical of key agencies, were being publicly reported. Jill said that agencies’ desire to admit wrongdoing was limited and lacked necessary funds. The pattern instead was, ‘across the public service generally, there’s a tendency to take out a scapegoat or two and I don’t know that the problems then actually get fixed…’. She said ‘everybody is accountable’ to ensure that a tragedy (like the suicide by child sex abuse victim Susan Taylor, that led to the GI) would not be repeated. But she was optimistic, ‘I don’t think it’s “business as usual”’ and committed, ‘not reacting, not responding, not changing is the wrong answer’. Freda as an external policy consultant had a different viewpoint when she talked about accountability. Freda saw potential for public servants to lose sight of their clients when scrutiny itself could undermine human rights.

All the policy actors shared Jill’s strong support for existing formal mechanisms to control staff and deal with misbehaviour including concerning gender and race. Responsibility for staff was located at multiple levels and Bronwyn approved of professional consequences for discriminatory activities. It was unclear what ‘performance management’ meant in the case of racist and sexist behaviours yet Jill trusted and had faith that the system would be effective in such situations. These policy actors did not see themselves included in any way with rogue staff that needed to be ‘dealt with’.
Jill mentioned initial opposition to her appointment as a White woman in a policy management role with Aboriginal services. She projected an air of acceptance and imperviousness to criticism and I question at what point in a professional career this develops and whether this is gendered and racialised in high profile policy jobs. In the gender chapter, Xena spoke about personal costs yet it seems as if the senior policy actors located within the public sector departments are less inclined to be forthright on this issue. If the way you project yourself matters more for career and promotion in government departments, then it is not surprising that policy actors develop philosophical explanations for what is happening to them in personal and professional ways, including the gendered and racialised politics of ‘merit’ appointments.

Clark revealed with pride how FDV became higher priority once departmental senior staff was held accountable for improved outcomes, thus connecting accountability with issues of motivation and rewards in policy work. Quantitative performance measures had significant effect in the field of policing where individual accountability projected to the level of agency accountability and thence to the overall public sector. Accountability processes reinforced with rewards as well as punishments established and maintained a pervasive and self-conscious system of control within an extreme environment where accountability gained priority for itself, and a number of the policy actors spoke about the stressful impact of expectation and scrutiny.

The fields of judicial, legal, corrections and policing were most often identified as needing greater accountability. Policy work designed to address ‘the Aboriginal problem’ seemed to involve considerable concern and anxiety. I noted that few policy actors were familiar with the developmental GM and substantive equality projects and did not accord responsibility for these outcomes to any particular area of government.

**Compliance and resistance**

Compliance was an issue related to accountability and power; a number of interviewees described instances of coercion and control whereby their organisations achieved loyalty and adherence to norms and rules governing behaviours and performance. My research saw how individuals and groups within organisations ‘engage in hegemonic struggle through discourse as a social practice’ (Mumby, 2004, p. 239). Organisational narratives and everyday talk carried power in constructing a culture of obedience and acceptance of status quo (Witten, 1993) and policy actors’ accounts supported research findings that team-based structures appear to exercise ‘concertive control’ greater than more traditional bureaucratic processes (Barker, 1999). Limits and constraints on policy practices created a sense that there was a right or natural way to perform in the job, however I recognised conflicted reactions to such constraints.
For Gramsci (1971), the ‘smooth and efficient running of societal institutions depends on, for the most part, a common commitment to the principles and organizational structures on which they are based’ (as cited in R. S. Smith, 2003, p. 154). Descriptions of ‘smooth and efficient’ were noticeably absent, and my interviews also contain numerous expressions of disquiet, cynicism and tension concerning a range of practices within public sector agencies, yet I did not hear substantial opposition to the foundations and principles of public service and agency functions.

Mumby (2004) points out that ‘resistance and domination are not simple binary oppositions’ and my research found complexity in struggles over meaning. He reports that researchers increasingly accord ‘much greater sensitivity to social actors as knowledgeable agents who have insight into the discursive and political conditions that shape the ways in which they engage with the world’ (p. 242). Clark did not use the language of compliance and control in the context of his policy work in policing; he talked about issues of accountability in the context of supervision and quality assurance. ‘Everyone has now been trained. We’ve embedded, ‘embedded’ is a really good word’. Like the other senior staff I interviewed, Clark communicated with confidence, using professional jargon, imagery and terminology to describe maneuvers that achieve policy goals. Comfortable in his role and identity, Clark expressed no doubts about ‘top down’ approaches and hierarchical structures that ensured compliance in policy implementation, his own included.

Not all policy actors reported compliant attitudes and behaviours, and those who did describe incidents of compliance were not unquestioning and uninformed about those situations. Gwynn spoke about acting ‘from integrity and not fear’ when she successfully stood up for her junior casework staff against instruction by the head of agency, ‘You draw a line in the sand that you won’t cross’. She had sufficient information and support from professional and industrial sources as well as a level of financial security to make possible her decision to be non-compliant. In that she was performing a supervisory role at the time, Gwynn was exercising leadership as a role model for the staff in her team, demonstrating courage in her professional judgment. However, those conditions of support for her resistance to authority cannot be assumed for all public service personnel, especially those on the frontline in junior and insecure positions marked by less pay, impermanence and marginal status, common conditions experienced in sex and racially segregated occupations. This area particularly connects with Acker’s inequality regimes.

discrimination legislation is seen as lacking credibility and therefore authority. She notes a
general lack of confidence in the workplace discrimination policy framework, which was ‘in
danger of being feminised and marginalised’ (pp. 126-127), as a direct result of mainstreaming
of equity units. In an environment not regarded by potential users or participants as sufficiently
protective, proactive, and able to deal with a broad range of causal factors for gender
inequalities, compliance could potentially have different faces across the public sector. Freedom
from fear could be a strong motivation for policy actors’ not seeking legal redress and in effect
validating policy compliance. Cockburn (1991) describes equal opportunities as a relatively
‘short agenda’ that fails to address the wider and deeper issues of gendered power relations or
the structuring of labour.

Thomas and Davies (2005) oppose ‘the dualistic debate of “compliance with” versus “resistance
to” ’ and their research in the United Kingdom public service presents a more generative
understanding of the micro-politics of resistance. Stan and Ian, both Aboriginal policy actors,
said demographics produced different attitudes in policy work. These two men are the same age
as I am, but there are dramatic differences in health and mortality statistics between our gender
and racial backgrounds. They were conscious of time limitations for their own contributions to
social change, exercising initiative and eager to make a real difference. ‘I’d like to think my
grandchildren, that by the time they’re adults they will have a better life chance’, said Ian.

Who’s talking? Who’s listening?

*Relationships and communications*

Formal relationships in policy work in this research were structured, historical, hierarchical and
at times imposed. Trust, respect and protectiveness were highly valued qualities in workplace
relationships. However, most discussion about relationships concerned FDV clients, their
family members and community. Explanations for FDV were often framed around gender and
racial profiles; gender and racial identities were reduced to biological differences; and most
associated race with ethnicity and with Aboriginal peoples. Policy actors were aware of the
outlines of policy debates and issues around gender, policy assumptions and negative
stereotypes about FDV clients, although few related the specifics to themselves. Not all policy
actors cared about definitional matters, but some recognised policy contestation. Not all could
see micro, mezzo and macro dimensions to FDV and where definitions of power were relevant.
Only a small number of policy actors could articulate ‘the systematic character of women’s
subordination within the dominant patriarchal social forms’ (Hollway, 1996, p. 74) and then
make connections with their own work environment, relationships and policy practices. When
Noella talked of her dilemma as a White feminist in the ‘naming’ of FDV, she was making comments that echoed the literature.

Noella: From my feminist understanding I’ve always not been comfortable with family violence because in, you know, in my mainstream non-Indigenous thinking I felt that that’s excused, that’s neutralized the gender aspect of it and, and the sort of, you know, sort of covered over the fact that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators are male and the overwhelming majority of victims are female. Yeah…. now I really understand about, from an Aboriginal perspective about the family and domestic violence. I don’t have a problem anymore. I mean I have a problem if that term is used for non-Indigenous family violence. I think we need to be naming, calling a spade a spade.

Alice revealed how power and privilege are gendered and racialised, ‘If I was a White male, Karen, it would be very different for me’. As an Aboriginal woman working at the senior executive level in male dominated fields within government agencies, Alice had ‘always been mindful of that’.

Alice: When you get to senior levels you actually say okay, you have a certain role to play, in lots of ways that role has been diminished, because I, if I’m seen to be too assertive or too, it’s the terminology that’s used is too aggressive, and I’m constantly sort of having to modify how I, how I actually conduct myself, how I actually speak to people, even though I’ve got the same level of power that some White male may have in my position. The expectation on me is much lower.

Alice was expected to work with limited resources, manage staff differently, and was exploited, ‘take on a lot more and be doing jobs that I would not normally be expected to do if I was a White male in my same job’. This speaks directly across all of Acker’s inequality regimes. An intersectional ‘lens’ reveals how Alice was demonstrating ‘multiple consciousness’ of her position in the public sector work subjected to conditions of ‘multiple jeopardy’ with King (1988).

As an Aboriginal staff member, Ian strategically tackles invisibility issues in racialised relationships, ‘It doesn’t worry me that there are all these Whitefellas around the building. I make myself heard. They see me and I try and get to every floor every day just to I make sure they see me’. This sounds like repetitive, effortful work, but necessary, as explained by Hutchinson (2008); in addition to gender being a factor, ‘race also appears in the literature as a risk factor for workplace bullying’ (p. 11). Stereotypes of clients were mirrored in working relationships. Ian described how a racialised and gendered working environment became
intolerable for an Aboriginal woman whose culturally appropriate professional conduct was subject to bullying in the form of ‘riding’. ‘She was talking to her clients. She had to leave in the end. She was talking to clients, she was code switching and talking Noongar English and her manager thought she was having these personal calls … in the end he saw but she just got jack of it’. Ned, a non-Aboriginal policy actor, said, ‘There are still endemic issues with institutionalised racism, bullying, marginalisation and exclusion of Aboriginal staff and a broader Indigenous perspective’.

The presence and exercise of power existed in all working relationships; dealing with issues related to authority, support and obstruction could connect individuals and groups. Stereotypes of passive, trapped subjects within a top-down hierarchy of bureaucratic dominance did not apply to these policy actors. They responded to various forms and degrees of power in the workplace, prepared for changes associated with policies, people and processes. Inclusion and exclusion from decision-making was one example provided by Ned. He was punished for advocating greater women’s participation in key policy advisory activities and attempts to over-ride the committee’s decision to exclude him/his organisation were unsuccessful. The rejection from that government consultation body communicated a changed relationship, both utilitarian and symbolic, with consequences that extended beyond the immediate round of meetings – for Ned, his organisation and the women’s refuge movement he had supported. Compston (2009) explains that access to policymaking can be measured through a range of opportunities including:

...inclusion on distribution lists for relevant government communications and documents; two-way communication with officials and/or members of the political executive in forms such as letters, emails, phone calls and meetings; inclusion on relevant advisory committees; and/or the opportunity to submit arguments in the knowledge that they will be considered… In some cases access to the policymaking process is mandated by law. Otherwise the power to grant or deny access is the prerogative of the public actors who possess the legal power of decision in any given policy area: they can choose whether to deal with outsiders or not (pp. 27-28).

Despite disadvantages, Ned’s organisation also benefited at times from a ‘fringe dweller’ position. ‘We’re in this beautiful twilight zone where we can duck our heads and hide sometimes when the flack is going to hit Government, because we’re not Government sort of when it suits us (laughter) and public service when it does’, he said. ‘One of our benefits as a small agency is that you actually can implement change without some of the barriers from large scale’. Relationships were included in examples of powers, mechanisms and strategies used to achieve or oppose inequality regimes. For some policy actors, policy statements and directives were divorced from their practice. Eva valued relationships above policy, ‘Even though you might have policy procedures in place, that's nothing… it is based on relationships. …they can sprout that they’ve got policies and procedures but then, who really looks at them? Who really goes by
them? You know we’ve got policies and procedures. I’ve tried, but I just do my work. I want to do my work’. Interpersonal relationship building was proposed as the starting point for equality work by a number of policy actors, particularly Aboriginal women and men.

While ‘network boundaries may not always be clear-cut’ (Compston, 2009, p. 19), policy actors participated in policy networks with relationships maintained through time and across locations. Feminist policy activists were particularly clear about the desirability of supportive work teams, collegial relationships within the wider public sector and links with other feminists/feminist groups. Aboriginal policy actors spoke of the importance of culturally respectful working relationships involving ethics, considerations, responsibilities and obligations. Their public sector identities were connected with Aboriginal extended family and community relationships, and their public sector roles and functions were understood and appreciated as purposive. They were conscious social change agents performing duties as per job descriptions, but interpreting their jobs as social justice opportunities to advance the lives and well-being of others. Working relationships in policy networks were often described instrumentally or mechanistically.

Historical social policy was an active obstructive participant in maintaining service delivery disparities. Eric talked about the continuing ‘difficult relationship’ between his Aboriginal organisation and the Government’s human services agencies because the history of Aboriginal child removal ‘is still a real issue for us. No matter how much we talk to them, no matter how much we try to have protocols in place, (welfare agency) is still basically waiting around a maternity bed for a woman to take her baby’. Agencies were driven to meet policy directives at the expense of human rights, which created barriers to developing improved relationships with Aboriginal communities. Eric described a problematical policy environment largely unchanged despite inquiries and legislative intervention. He wanted ‘fundamental changes’ but expressed deep seated disenchantment. Ned too, despaired that substantive equality could not be achieved without transformative change to the public sector, ‘fundamental changes to structures, processes, attitudes and cultures within government departments’.

Having, gaining and using one’s voice was a major issue pointing to disparities; power was shaped and reinforced through communications. Grace said that ‘a real, real issue’ was how the mainstream disadvantaged Aboriginal peoples by ‘not accommodating’, thereby reinforcing images of Aboriginal clients as unengaged and uninvolved in the process. Despite ambivalence towards mainstreaming of services, Ned said that, ‘At least Aboriginal specific services are able to retain an important voice and culturally specific focus that just isn’t happening in the mainstream’. The special language and jargon of policy talk was thoroughly imbued in all conversations and policy actors commented on challenges facing staff communicating across different languages and cultures. Ian, for example, said that ‘we as Aboriginal people switch
from, when communicating with ourselves, we talk differently from when we talk to White people’. Isabel described racialised processes as laziness in policy work. ‘A lot can be done if we've got people willing to take the time and drop the bullshit and communicate about what the client needs’. Noella saw how communications could confront a ‘White way’ of working. ‘I don’t know if it’s inability, unwillingness or just not thinking nous of doing it the White way rather than taking the time to sit with Aboriginal people and do it the Aboriginal way’. Noella was one of a number of non-Aboriginal policy actors who spoke about the consciousness-raising benefits of having Aboriginal colleagues; her understanding of FDV had changed; ‘I need more conversations with Aboriginal people’ to further work it out in her mind. However admirable, Mtezuka (1996) shares a word of caution when she advises ‘social work as a profession should engage in a critical analysis of theory and practice in child abuse issues as they affect black families, and not depend solely on black professionals’ (p. 176). Mtezuka recommends that cultural differences be explored within the context of socialisation that involves racism and sexism, thereby strengthening mainstream practice currently marked by inappropriate assessments and interventions.

Wanda talked about developing her empowered voice through experience working in mainstream public sector agencies where Aboriginal staff and advisers were routinely ignored. ‘I was in a permanent position on $72,000 a year and decided that I did not want to work in that environment and I would not work in that environment’, she said. Wanda was an Aboriginal woman who elected to work in the non-government sector as a result of her highly qualified professional advice was disregarded and disrespected; she saw resistance to Aboriginal advice as widespread.

Wanda: Essentially White structures …run by White people for White people …they do what White people think ought to happen. And so they implement Aboriginal strategies and programs the way White people think they ought to be implemented as opposed to working with Aboriginal people, their Aboriginal staff, the community and so on. And that’s I think that's behind a lot of why things fail to reach, you know, Aboriginal strategies, fail to reach the grass roots level.

Her work for government had developed her capacity as an activist, for example she knew more about interrogating Government policy, ‘one question further rather than just accepting at face value that, “Yes, we’re doing this great, wonderful thing”’. Her emotions were intense and quickly engulfed us both when she described how she could not stop a misappropriation of funds designated for Aboriginal services. ‘Despite strong representations from myself and another Aboriginal woman community member’, the department refused to dedicate any Aboriginal places on the basis that wastage was inevitable, thereby producing poor participation results. ‘I was just in despair, I could cry. Because we’re talking about a substantial amount of
money. (Deep sigh). She disapproved of the lack of accountability when I asked about ‘usual ways of pulling a department into line’ and provided further evidence of how her efforts were blocked. This critical incident spoke to a number of Acker’s groupings, in addition to systemic disparities in power and control over goals, resources and outcomes. This example reflected workplace decisions, respect, and pleasures in work and work relations. No pay and other monetary rewards could retain Wanda’s employment in government policy work.

Within the context of communication the part played by consultation in policy processes was raised by many policy actors as of symbolic and practical value, representing an important means of gaining voice particularly for Aboriginal peoples and women as victims of violence. Freda proposed an alternative model for mainstream FDV multi-agency interventions starting with consultation. ‘We need to stop this agency defensive bullshit you know, we actually need to discuss this from the perspective of the people that are using the agencies’. The literature supports consultation as a concept but is largely critical of consultation practices, like Ruby who was new into the policy research and evaluation area and expressed shock at some of her findings:

Ruby: The fact that you still get, the people on the ground who find out that things are going to change, and that policies are being implemented after the fact. They weren’t involved in the policy process. Which is still unbelievable. So it’s that political policy making as opposed to the well thought out strategic policy making.

Identification of vulnerable peoples, consultation processes and policy responses to those targets have been described as gendered and racialised in the literature (Eveline et al., 2009; Judy Taylor, Cheers, Weetra, & Gentle, 2004). The fact that Aboriginal peoples (D. F. Martin, 2009, p. 51; John Taylor, 2008, p. 111) and too many of Australia’s remote Aboriginal communities (D. F. Martin, 2009, p. 51) are in a ‘parlous situation’ was accepted within policy circles, and a number of policy actors pointed to consultations that failed to really listen to Aboriginal peoples, thereby perpetuating the marginal status of Indigenous people in decision-making. ‘That’s been part of the problem and not only actually for Indigenous issues but for Indigenous women’, said Alice. Olive, an Aboriginal woman elder providing policy advice, revealed gendered and racialised experiences with consultation mechanisms.

Olive: I think they wanted communities to, I suppose get themselves into regions, and form their own like, consultative committees, so that they could be a voice you know, to the Government. But I think our people just sort of lost touch. I mean I suppose feelings of apathy and that....I understand, because the men, you know fortunately with ATSIC was a good structure for them. But unfortunately, it didn’t
have the right people there. They looked after their own interests and families and they didn’t look at the Aboriginal issues on the whole. So unfortunately, they’ve lost that now. … And then you’ve got other leaders you know, elected and there are stories going around in the community and more stories (laughter) But nobody wants to open that ‘can of worms’ for fear of retribution as well as...

These structures reflect competing discourses and ‘category politics’ (C. L. Bacchi, 1996; Pettman, 1992). Olive’s feedback could help development of consultation protocols including what not to do, such as one-off events, and allocate insufficient time for deep consultation with all participants as with the Gordon Inquiry.

Olive, like many other policy actors interviewed, saw answers in culturally competent best practice that did not necessarily prescribe a particular gender and racial background but did benefit from stable respectful relationships established over time. ‘Rather than just focus on the problems I would be looking at solutions. And looking at like how we could better, I suppose, train people, you know workers to deal with issues like that…you need to get the right people…you’ve got to be really, very careful and very sensitive you know’.

What do ‘we’ do about it?

Responsibility

Knowing what to do and how to do it was a recurring conversation that played at the edges and came to a head with the issue of responsibility. Policy actors expressed disapproval at other individuals, units, organisations and governments who avoided policy and practice responsibility. At the same time they demonstrated anxiety about responsibility they personally carried, frustration with systemic failures and dysfunction, Alice demonstrated a sense of futility that policy priorities were not where they should be – with Indigenous children and women. ‘What are we doing? We’re sitting in government and we are saying “Well I’m not responsible for this because this is not part of our core business”. Well, “and I can’t do anything about this is because we have a minister that is actually wanting to say “This is a priority” and Indigenous children and women are not a priority. What do we do? I’m, it’s frustrating, it’s very frustrating for me. And I don’t know what the answer is (small chuckle) (short silence)’.

The responsibility of clients was a matter of ambivalence across interviews. Grace referred to the need for ‘high level engagement and ownership and involvement from the Aboriginal community’ and she was not alone in arguing that clients themselves, especially as beneficiaries,
should share responsibility for policy and government programs. This racialised perspective also echoes a ‘blame the victim’ approach identified in the FDV field by feminist activists defending women victims from accusations of self-inflicted vulnerability. Gwynn was one of the few policy actors interviewed who talked of sharing responsibility. She saw that policy workers had options in what to see as need, needier and neediest and then determine how to respond individually as well as collectively. ‘But it requires that (sigh) I guess as a community for us to say “We’re ashamed of this and we need to do something” and then politicians make that part of their platform and we put it into practice. And the thing that we do is to point out that it is an issue’. Gwynn chose to see racism and ruminated that research into unintended discriminatory consequences on marginalised people could point to IR in that lack of access could mean no service at all, and policy outcomes could have negative impacts.

**Functions, structures and organisational arrangements**

Richie contributed a ‘top end’ perspective reflecting his responsibilities to address organisational limitations identified by the Gordon Inquiry and establish improved mechanisms for policy development across agencies. Other policy actors offered additional information and critiques drawn from their experience at middle-management and the frontline of service delivery. Structures and organisational arrangements were regarded as critical to successful policy practice and achievement of policy objectives, but views differed about the appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of structures in the FDV field and Gordon Inquiry policy implementation. Institutional mechanisms gendering and racialising policy work, although policy actors were most articulate about the exclusion and marginalisation of Aboriginal women, and Aboriginal peoples to a lesser extent.

Alice, an Aboriginal woman experienced in policy advisory roles within government as well as external organisations, addressed difficulties achieving gender equality in policy participation, including through Aboriginal representation on policy and funding committees. Acker’s inequality regimes in organisations can be seen to apply at the community level here with processes that feed into, confirm and reinforce unequal involvement along gendered and racial divisions. Alice was disappointed she, ‘came up against some male elected members that actually said, “Well we do actually do have a process and it’s through elections and if Indigenous women don’t actually stand for elections and that’s bad luck”’. Alice was, ‘a bit skeptical about where it’s actually going to go’. Development of gender equality policies depended on government resources for implementation, continuity of policy expertise and determined leadership; points repeated by most policy actors. Most policy actors described leadership in terms of a personal characteristic and little effort was involved. It was not seen as ‘a structural asset exercised through a social network’ (Hutchinson, 2008, p. 63).
There was a dis-connect between what could be described as frontline-informed policy advisers and ‘high level’ policy decision-makers. Grace as a senior executive for example, relied on the professional knowledge of middle-level policy actors and frontline service delivery personnel. Like other interviewees, especially those involved with policing, procedural documentation for policy implementation and quality assurance was valued highly, even though in Grace’s health setting, guidelines could require ‘years’ of development. Policy making and policy implementation were assumed to be separate stages or cycles, and few policy actors challenged that model. Acker’s identification of how workplace decisions about work organisation can be a characteristic or component of inequality regimes has relevance here. The possibility that policy documents including practice guidelines could be gendered and racialised was not an issue for most policy actors; in these organisational ‘texts’ lay the potential for significant achievement of ‘ruling relations’.

Policy actors were ambivalent about specialist units to deal with women’s policy and Aboriginal issues, concerned about marginalisation. The goal of increasing the number of Aboriginal people across the public sector was difficult to achieve and in a number of ways troublesome. Grace’s solution relied on Aboriginal peoples to have special responsibilities as communication conduits for ‘big government bureaucracies’. Isabel revealed the sensitivity of the issues, ‘There’s huge discrimination still happening that (Aboriginal woman’s name) has uncovered but was hamstrung about to a certain extent, about saying that, because of the (department) services staff would get really anti about any criticism about how they were handling their Aboriginal staff’. This group of staff performed gate-keepers roles for an organisation resisting change; the staff participated in institutional and possibly systemic discrimination independently or through complicity.

As policy actors outlined different structural arrangements operating, I saw few opportunities for whole-of-agency, let alone whole-of-government, focus on policy priorities underpinned by the social justice considerations Richie was pursuing. Grace talked of a ‘work in progress’ and Isabel referred to ‘opportunities for lots of miscommunication... tokenism has come out of the silo effect which has come out of the idea that to get things done in the Department you have to focus on things that are of absolutely major importance, and they have to be project focused, and initiative focused, in order to get anywhere’. Both of these policy actors expressed optimism and faith, like Richie, in structural facilitators of policy change. Isabel also endorsed policy development as reaction to identified need, ‘I think that policy work has a fantastic opportunity if managed, as you say, within the structures properly, to set parameters of some of the issues that are happening and to pick up on the gaps in services that are out there’. She saw as inevitable a distance between policy and frontline practice, and accepted the challenge of working for change within existing structures, frameworks and policies. Isabel faced a daily
struggle for her social activist identity and practice within a system that seeks her co-operation as an operant, and was aware of professional literature that tries to address these dilemmas for policy practitioners (Lipsky, 1980).

Who's benefiting? Who’s losing?

Institutional discrimination

Policy actors were satisfied with legislative and administrative provisions for dealing with individual staff who demonstrated overt racial and gender prejudice; uncovering and removing IR and systemic discrimination was more difficult. Australian research points to a general lack of understanding and fluctuating political will. De Plevitz (2000) says that belief in equality of opportunity underpins our national (White and patriarchal) myths, and that flawed anti-discrimination legislation is to be expected given Australian jurisdiction. ‘Australian law does not deal with substantive equality, that is, equality in fact’ she says (p. 14). She sees no incentive on the part of those with power to change the drafting and administration of institutionally racist law because ‘nothing disrupts or disturbs their world picture’ (p. 93) and is not surprised that provisions for dealing with indirect discrimination have barely been used by Indigenous people. Formal complaints about discrimination in employment on the basis of gender is most common as a result of feminist activism, yet de Plevitz reports ‘institutionalised discrimination against women is still denied by many in the community’ (p. 365). Noting how little understanding there is about systemic discrimination, and doubting that current provisions ‘are an appropriate model to address power imbalances’ within indirect discrimination, de Plevitz concludes that ‘legislation as an expression of political will and commitment to policy change provides fruit for further research’ (p. 365).

Alice as an Aboriginal woman saw IR enacted through resource allocation decisions entrenched by the privileged position and power of the White population of voters. Clark made similar comments that IR was evident in policing policy and mainstream law and order interventions. Funding was absorbed by the non-Indigenous population within the metropolitan region and another issue was the lack of voting or voice power of minorities. These are examples of service provision that maintains asymmetrical experiences of disparity and disadvantage. Clark looked critically at statistical measures to perform his own outcomes-based research and acknowledged that avoiding IR was hard work within the legal/corrections/policing policy framework and across different jurisdictions. Government priorities for policing services were developed in response to sensationalised images of crime in different communities and among categories of potential offenders. He disputed priorities such as burglary and speeding. ‘It’s because of we’ll
tackle the problems that we think we can tackle. You know? And that to me is just very skewed. You know the result, the long term results, of family violence are a lot more severe’.

Clark addressed the supposed gender- and race-neutrality of policing practices, arguing that statistical profiles of crimes committed and resource allocations revealed ideological dimensions. Policies focused on the crime of burglary (of particular concern to non-Indigenous, relatively wealthy householders) and the search for perpetrators (most likely statistically to be relatively poor Aboriginal young men) correspondingly fail to focus on the crime of FDV (most likely to involve Aboriginal people) and lose the opportunity to assist victims (most likely to be Aboriginal women). Clark was ‘quite despairing’ and this contradicted a public image of unsympathetic public servants. He did not try to present himself as a solitary enlightened hero facing policy adversity; Clark recognised that he was embedded in a regime that produced inequalities, however unintended. His commitment to a career within the system involved reform.

Jane saw progress in dealing with IR, ‘I’m sure it’s still there within pockets. I think it’s much better than it used to be’, using the human resources area as example. ‘There used to Aboriginal police liaison officers... they’re mainstreaming them now and they’ll actually all be police officers. I don’t know what they think of it but I guess from my point of view is, a lot of them work out in the country, they do pretty much the same job as police officers and they’re getting paid $20,000 less. It just doesn’t seem fair you know’. Thus well-intentioned policies can have unintended discriminatory consequences. ‘Policies are courses of action, whether intended or unintended, that are deliberately adopted or can be shown to follow regular patterns over time’ (Tropman, Dhuly, and Lind as cited in Burch, 1999, p. 6) (Italics in original). Policy actors could all refer to historical gains but most expressed the view that the pace of progress was too slow.

Who wants to change?

Making a difference

‘There are empires being protected. There are funding sources that are being protected. There are differences of opinion’, said Clark. My research found the policy environment fraught with risk, frustration, anxiety and obstruction for the policy actors who often retreated into self-preservation and preferred personal and career safety to policy activism. Those policy actors who articulated ongoing commitment to social justice principles and anti-oppressive practice voiced considerable concern about the difficulties of achievement in their particular policy work environments. Freda formed her opinion that ‘nothing bloody changes’ based on working
relationships with staff doing their best under difficult conditions. She remained disapproving and unsympathetic as an external policy consultant, sustaining her values and ideas while/by contesting policy development.

Policy actors on occasions expressed pride and satisfaction with what they saw as real gains in their policy arena. For example, Carol said, ‘We really did fulfill the recommendations of the Gordon Inquiry. We did what we were supposed to do and we actually could see results. And I think that we did incredibly well. We did a lot of grass roots work. We opened up, to try and access Aboriginal people’. Gains were not always straightforward, however. For example, increased Aboriginal participation and usage of mainstream services was controversial. Ian credited an Aboriginal colleague with improving service delivery at a regional office, yet described how such gains could be accompanied by backlash from a largely White public service. ‘Their office is now being accused of being an Aboriginal centre because the Aboriginal people have become really confident with the work that this government agency is doing’. That did not deter him from his change project within the service; he wanted to make a difference like other policy actors I spoke with, but not all articulated their values and aspirations and linked their vision for change to social justice, a feminist cause and/or anti-racism.

Most of the interviewees ‘told tales’ on the political system, the policy practices of others, the media, even clients to a certain extent and there were few evaluative remarks that could be considered positive about public policy, especially with regards Aboriginal affairs. Despite numerous concerns about partial achievements and limited outcomes, to some of the policy actors the Gordon Inquiry served an important function, for example consultation substantiated what had already been known for a long time within the sector, and government funding was validated to the disputed arena. ‘Going forward’ was what all interviewees were looking and working for, faster travels without accident and injury. A ‘spinning wheel’ metaphor was used by Ned to describe how motion for policy reform was triggered by the Inquiry.

Ned: A lot of it, for mine, was a sense of fairly non-controversial sort of ‘motherhood’ stuff in terms of pointing to problems and deficiencies and the way government departments work. It talked about lack of coordination between government departments; the lack of an holistic approach. And that's something people working in the DV area are pretty familiar with and you know it all rings true (emphasis in original). And they were working towards that and I think you ‘spin around on a wheel’ and you go backwards and forwards, but eventually you’re moving forward. I always think of DV - it’s not a straight line moving forward. But eventually you’re going forward. But you know, there's plenty more than can be done.
Conclusions

Thomas and Davies (2005) express concern that ‘insufficient attention has been paid to the lived experiences of public service professionals, despite a central tenet of the NPM discourse being the promotion of new professional and managerial subjectivities’ (p. 683). My research project agrees that more theorising is needed, especially research that challenges some of the simplistic, deterministic portrayals of public policy actors. Ailwood (2003) describes policy as a process of ‘uneasy, messy settlements, requiring strategic compromises, resistances and defences’ (p. 29). This seemed particularly apt in the policy field of FDV. My conversations with WA policy actors support Lea’s (2009) findings that this is ‘not a crudely tyrannical, mindlessly administrative or openly racist governmental environment, nor are its actors oblivious to or naïve about the contradictions embedded within their …noble, beleaguered and oft-times thankless task’ (p. 11).

Ian said, ‘Anything you do in the Aboriginal community, it relates to politics, some sort of politics, whether internal black politics or competing with the dominant culture’. In many ways, gender consciousness in policy work also involved policy actors travelling through political terrain without maps and compasses. A level of desperation could be heard in many of my interviews, as Ruby revealed in her comments as a non-Aboriginal woman about cultural sensitivity and human rights:

Ruby: And I think in Australia, across the board, we’ve got that balance so wrong. And it’s just. I don’t understand how it’s gone on so long. Do you? I mean, you know more about this than I do. I don’t understand how we’ve got this situation. How has it gone on so long? And I look at me, and I know nothing. And I think. I would love to do something but I have no idea what I can do. I mean, what, the average White Australian, if they have any idea of what’s going on, what can they do? I don’t know what to do and I think the best thing I can do is the stuff that we do here because we do a lot of stuff with programs that are designed to improve the situation in Indigenous communities. But short of that, I don’t know what else to do. Because I think about it a lot and I have no idea. Because it’s, it’s just despicable.

Ruby represented what Lea (2009) would label a ‘bleeding heart’ – Ruby was committed to making a difference by tackling inequality, yet was enmeshed in the system that was frustrating her best efforts. Commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal peoples was universally articulated, but tackling IR was not always seen as the way forward. Passion about gender
inequalities was rarely expressed unless by policy actors with feminist identities and articulations.

Policy actors revealed blockages, frustration, disagreement and denial as well as successful interventions, strategic maneuvering and hopes for future change opportunities. In reaching conclusions about policy praxis, I was most struck by the ambivalence, complexities and anxieties openly expressed as well as indicated through nuance and metaphor. These policy actors were not mindless operatives or technicians performing functions and routinised tasks, according to a traditional policy cycle, in an ahistorical vacuum and with deliberately destructive policy directives. These policy actors were actively engaged as intellectuals and cared deeply about policy outcomes; these were well-intentioned, qualified and experienced professionals, if at times confused and dismayed. I learned a good deal about public policy work environments that opened my eyes to the pressure on contemporary policy actors, to the fraught nature of Aboriginal affairs in WA and to the invisibility of gendering and racialising practices in these contexts.

I considered ways for policy actors to think and perform as more ‘knowing actors’ (McDonald, 2006, p. 137) in order to make progress towards social justice goals informed by intersectionality praxis. I realized that assuming these professionals had not been down this path themselves was similar to the arrogance of ‘empowering’ Aboriginal women assumed to have no agentic capacity themselves. But I could see how easily policy actors can become caught up in interiorising forms of understanding that perpetuate postcolonial interventionist thinking in relation to the gendered and racialised disadvantaged client. Being critical in this environment could mean problematising policy work in new ways that involve ‘moving outside the assumptions and practices of the existing order, and struggling to make categories, assumptions, and practices of everyday life problematic’ (Popkewitz, as cited in Smyth, 2010, p. 191). As a test of this problematising approach, I looked at Alice’s comments and saw that spaces did exist within which policy actors could exercise agency to develop improved praxis.

Alice: The structures that we actually have to work with are completely sort of at odds with how Indigenous people actually work and operate, and how we actually establish our networks, how we actually going about developing some sort of rapport and for us relationships are really, really important and unless you actually have those relationships and building those relationships and that trust, then you’re really not going to be able to get I guess developing good policy or developing some stuff up around or resolving some of the issues that we need to resolve. And I guess while we’ve got a requirement to sort of do some consultation, from my experience, we do consultation but that’s what we actually do – we
Binns (2006) talks about power as ‘a productive force circulating through all social relationships’ that has relevance to the comments Alice makes about relationships. Binns sees that power can open up ‘possibilities for practices... that are empowering and enabling, rather than exploitative and destructive’ (p. 306). Smyth (2010) argues for ‘scoping out a different imaginary’ informed by critical praxis in the frontline work of teaching; this too has relevance for policy actors including for their own subjectivity.

Teachers can exercise agency, through the way they can work with young people to unveil and unmask how power works and puncture the mythology that individualism, competition, and consumerism are the only, or indeed the best, alternative that is available. Such approaches are not “quick fix” solutions in the way that neoliberalism presents itself, but rather they are long-term ideals or aspirations to be worked toward to create a more tolerant, equitable, and just society. …the forces operating to construct teachers as technicians and docile servants …are pervasive, persistent, and unlikely to go away of their own accord any time soon (p. 188).

Smyth (2010) develops the critical actor through collective and collaborative processes, knitting together ideas about ‘a certain skepticism, or suspension of assent, towards …established norm or mode of doing things...’; ‘not taking things for granted …also involve a constructive, positive, and proactive aspect of allowing for alternative possibilities through “a search for a more satisfactory insight or resolution of a troubling situation”; and ‘stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came to be’ (p. 193). Smyth says that Shor’s ‘developing ways of “extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary”, involving such questions as “why are we doing this?” and “where will it get us?” might involve disturbing and uncovering the way domination acts in our daily lives and becoming increasingly vigilant about the contradictions we live’ (p. 194).

Policy frameworks for social action support a problematising of policy work, to unveil invisible and enticing practices and processes that produce and reproduce inequality regimes. Just as IE encourages an investigation of the everyday, I see starting points in instances of policy work that perplexed, confused and worried policy actors. Understanding ruling relations to inform social action requires research that can locate and situate these accounts or critical incidents in relation to wider change forces with an eco-systems perspective. Bringing anti-oppressive praxis to the centre of policy work in the public sector could include challenging such practices as gender-neutrality and blindness in policy documents, developing cultural competence and racial sensitivity about White advantage, and a host of other transformative deliberative actions.
Policy actors need to be recognised and supported as active agents who construct critical perspectives, make conscious choices and perform progressive actions.

Writing about how Australian schools reproduce inequalities, Connell (as cited in Smyth, 2010, p. 194) considers that the system itself is designed, through the gatekeeping work of teachers, to deliver differential privileges that remain unchanged through tinkering reforms. He argues the need to move beyond compensatory approaches for targeted groups in education and instead address the way dominant interests are served. Smyth (2010) reports that ‘schools and classrooms are deeply entrenched in a pervasive ideology that frames modes of thinking and acting exclusively in terms of measurement and assessment, school discipline and behavior management, competencies, standards and the like’ (p. 196). Policy work in this NPM environment benefits a status quo based on inequalities, for example by discouraging power sharing, redistribution of resources and democratic participation in decision-making.

My exploration of policy work in the WA public sector has helped me to better understand the ways I have been a beneficiary of the system, as have many of these policy actors. Being a participant in existing forms of domination seems difficult to avoid or resist in policy work and I see merit therefore, in disrupting normative thinking in policy work and research into policy development, in the vein that critical theory encourages critique. I can see that dominant interests have been, and are still being, served in policy work nevertheless I want to conclude my research project on a proactive and constructive note. This could be symptomatic of what Lea (2009) refers to as ‘the cunning of remedial logic’ (p. 10). In my final chapter, simplistic conclusions or tidy and prescriptive recommendations will not be offered. I have developed through this research preference for approaches like ‘complicating gender’ (Holvino, 2003, p. 91) and problematising issues, drawing on reference points for further consideration and continued self-reflection.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND IDEAS FOR FUTURE PRAXIS

This is not a ‘tick the box’ finale

In this final chapter, I pull together my thoughts, conclusions and suggestions. Questions at this stage of my research include: how much more do I understand now compared to initial readings and early development of research questions? Does my writing communicate, critique and subvert in ways encouraged by Grey and Sinclair (2006)? Can I be sure this thesis will not be a self-indulgent end in itself but will sufficiently contribute to further scholarship? Policy actor Stan affirmed that summing up should not become a checklist measuring wins and losses, but a gathering of information for reviewing and planning. He talked about integrity in his policy advocacy centred around training and development, ‘This stuff here is not cultural awareness because you can get a lovely spiel about being culturally aware. This is about dinkum down-to-earth working with people’.

Being ‘dinkum’ involves more than good intentions and more than rhetoric about reconciliation. My alternative to a checklist was my conversation with Wanda because she essentially probed my own sensitivities, understandings and intentions; the challenges she presented as an Aboriginal policy actor required deep listening, theoretical appreciation and rhetorical commitment to anti-oppressive praxis – as starting points.

Wanda: I guess I have an assumption that most people ought to understand where Aboriginal people fit in relation to White people in society. (Laughter) Perhaps I'm being a bit generous, I don't know. But I just assume that most people have a bit of an understanding. They certainly say they do in my discussions with people. But when I've actually had conversations with some of my non-Indigenous colleagues …and raised the issue that when you start looking at DV in the Aboriginal community, it's not the same as DV in the White community. Because, you know what? When we were talking about DV in Aboriginal communities, it's not just about men's oppression of women. We’re also living within a context that includes White people's oppression; White men's oppression of Aboriginal men and women, and White women's oppression of Aboriginals. And that's quite challenging for particularly people who consider themselves to be feminists, to actually say, “Well, my picture of oppression is different to yours, because it also includes your oppression of me.” Yes, so that's quite challenging and yes, I'm not sure people really understand that.
Wanda did not need to use the term intersectionality; her lived understanding of multiple systems of oppression was clear, just as I did not need to urge feminist policy actors to discuss gender inequalities. Wanda did not have to struggle like I did to understand what Crenshaw (1989) has to say about a ‘problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis… the multidimensionality of Black women’s experience with the single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences’ (p. 139). From whatever starting point of awareness however, most of the policy actors I talked with were seeking elusive information, knowledge and skills for policy practice in public sector environments preoccupied with wicked policy problems. This is about feeling knowledgeable, equipped, accompanied and emboldened. Their descriptions of competing public sector ideas, values and meanings represented ‘moments’ of obstruction as well as opportunity, which they faced as policy actors engaged in daily battle to make a difference. As a beginning researcher, I shared these emotional responses to the dilemmas and challenges associated with this topic. I recognise that in my self-reflections and the narratives of my research participants, are multiple and complex issues that endorse, challenge and extend the current literatures.

It is timely to take stock of where I have come from in this research and where I see the future for this project. As Stan recounted his story of developing a new type of program, he talked transcendentally, of moving beyond limitations of racial differences, experiences and inequalities. Stan talked in verbs for taking action facing, examining and surpassing racial barriers, just as GM objectives aspire to doing away with gender inequalities.

Stan: *I got tired of non-Aboriginal people saying it was too hard to work with Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people like Noongars here saying “These Wadjelas don’t know how to work with us.” Well, how can we expect Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people to work together or to work with each other if you like, if we don’t teach each other how to do that? That’s what drove me.*

**Seeing big pictures through small puzzle pieces**

Like my research participants, I have much to share about this research topic: viewpoints, stories, questions and some conclusions. My first steps were as a participant in the GAP project; from GM literature comes a range of praxis lessons, including that sites of struggle and negotiation can be contained in everyday organisational rules and norms, formal and informal processes that shape institutions from within and without. The whole picture of institutionalised gender inequality requires a ‘lens’ that can see the invisibility of power and privilege disguised through discourses such as gender neutrality in policy. International experience has shown that the introduction of the GM paradigm can present major challenges for women’s policy agencies
when diversity displaces a specific gender equality mission. Lang (2009) concludes in relation to the European Union that institutionalisation of gender infrastructure has not been a guarantee for successful gender politics, and feedback from participants in my research project confirms this outcome for WA. GM projects in WA together with anti-discrimination and affirmative action policies have altogether been unable to shift gender onto the agenda or keep it there, especially in the face of such competitive policy drivers as public moral panic about child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. This is the context that presents blockages to nuanced discussions at contested policy sites strengthened by images of the ‘gender jigsaw’ (Collins, Kenway and McLeod, as cited in Ailwood, 2003, p. 29), a developed picture of how gender intersects with a range of other factors. The application of Bacchi’s policy analysis paradigm with its central question ‘what is the problem presented to be?’ can uncover discriminatory policy by challenging assumptions about absolute and fixed social problems that governments must solve through policy operatives.

All of these messages send signals about potential frustration and marginalisation of other specialist units, staff and rhetoric designed to address inequalities, and I see strong connections between gender advocacy issues and the problems articulated by policy actors in the particularly fraught policy field of Aboriginal affairs. From critical Whiteness studies and writings on gender advantage are demands that I stand still and become immersed in order to understand more deeply my own position in relation to other peoples.

From my examination of intersectionality, categorical treatment of race and gender as separate and distinct has been shown to be restrictive, competitive and ultimately unhelpful to substantive equality goals. The ways and means of interlocking systems of oppression, power and privilege, which have been rendered invisible, will remain impenetrable without transformative change. Throughout this thesis, policy actors have referred to transformative change to achieve desirable institutional structures and processes in the public service and wider networks. They envisaged change of the kind Rees (1998) provides as example in her discussion of GM potential ‘to transform organizations and create a culture of diversity in which people of a much broader range of characteristics and backgrounds may contribute and flourish’ (p. 27).

I urge policy actors to embrace existing frameworks that, when combined and informed by their own experiences of policy practice, can provide for critical analysis and tools for action. I agree with Crenshaw’s (1989) argument for a ‘bottom-up’ intersectional approach; by putting Black/Aboriginal women in the centre or as the starting point, feminist analysis and anti-racist analysis can both be broadened; seeing compound discrimination can reveal layers of privileging that counters single-axis frameworks. Policy actors need support for their efforts to
challenge the status quo, in particular the descriptive and normative views and policy discourses that perpetuate negative racial and gender stereotypes. Policy actors are well positioned to broker conversations about tackling gendering and racialising practices and other invisible ‘elephants in the room’ (Wesley Mission, 2009, p. 17). Policy activists, however, need supportive relationships, political strategies and strong coalitions to deal with multidimensional opposition and realise synergetic potential. Policy frameworks that contribute to a way of doing anti-oppressive practice by providing improved analytic and practice tools and approaches for policy practitioners could be emphasised in professional pedagogies. Learning to recognise and grasp opportunities for change, policy actors in an ever-widening social movement of stakeholders can contribute to policy discourses and practices that develop anti-oppressive praxis.

I do not intend to simplify or trivialise tensions, contradictions, challenges and struggles involved with everyday policy work, but to celebrate achievements that policy actors identify in this research, encourage gender and racial agency, and build further collaborative capacity. Signposts for change are not ahistorical, impersonal and unchanging but they are often difficult to see and comprehend. My objective is to encourage movement beyond the view that things are getting better but…

**Seeing possibilities and facing challenges**

Tatum (2000) uses a conveyor belt analogy to explain how racism can be invisible, especially to people of privilege within a system of advantage, and serves to highlight for me how taking personal responsibility as a change agent can involve significant challenge.

I sometimes visualize the ongoing cycle of racism as a moving walkway at the airport. Active racist behavior is equivalent to walking fast on the conveyor belt. The person engaged in active racist behavior has identified with the ideology of White supremacy and is moving with it. Passive racist behavior is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those who are actively walking. Some of the bystanders may feel the motion of the conveyor belt, see the active racists ahead of them, and choose to turn around, unwilling to go to the same destination as the White supremacists. But unless they are walking actively in the opposite direction at a speed faster than the conveyor belt – unless they are actively antiracist – they will find themselves carried along with the others…. (p. 81).

Looking through a ‘lens’ of intersectionality to explore what is often invisible in gendering and racialising public policy work reveals more complexity and potential confusion about sharing movement and momentum in moving walkways. ‘Seeing privilege at the intersection is complicated by the fact that there is no purely privileged or unprivileged person. Most of us are
privileged in some ways and not in others… The presence of both the experience of privilege and the experience of subordination in different aspects of our lives causes the experiences to be blurred’ (Wildman & Davis, 2000, p. 56). The invisibility of privilege has impact on a wide range of groups and has important implications for improved policy practice. ‘Power systems that interfere with building community have no quick fix, but building community needs to be our life – all of our lives. A white person can recede into privilege and not worry about racism whenever she or he chooses. People of color cannot. Men and heterosexuals can ignore the system of gender hierarchy, if they choose. Women and gay men cannot’ (Wildman & Davis, 2000, p. 58).

Drawing on this analogy, I reflect on my learnings along walkways, struggling to find directions and read signs. As a White woman, I straddle competing categories relating to my race and gender, influenced in my insights and struggles by my experiences and knowledge, privileges and relative disadvantages.

Findings from this research project include forms of gendering and racialising that I can see demonstrate injustices that Young refers to. Young says that ‘only a plural explication’(p. 37) can adequately capture insights of intersectional oppressions. ‘Applying these five criteria to the situation of groups makes it possible to compare the oppressions without reducing them to a common essence or claiming that one is more fundamental than another… thus with these criteria one can plausibly claim that one group is more oppressed than another without reducing all oppressions to a single scale’(p. 48). Time and again, these issues were articulated in my conversations with policy actors and discussed in the literature.

Intersectionality can help reveal privilege, especially when we remember that the intersection is multi-dimensional, including intersections of both subordination and privilege. … Societal efforts at categorization are dynamic… Even naming the experience “race” veils its many facets because race may be a whole cluster of strands including color, culture, identification, and experience. …No individual really fits into any one category; rather everyone resides at the intersection of many categories. Categorical thinking makes it hard or impossible to conceptualize the complexity of an individual. The cultural push has long been to choose a category.
Yet forcing a choice results in a hollow vision that cannot do justice (Wildman & Davis, 2000, p. 57).

The policy work environment impacted on the capacity of policy actors to think in intersectional ways. They resided within a complexity of identities, experiences and aspirations not explicitly recognised, welcomed or dealt with in their public sector workplace. My previous chapter examined how implicit assumptions and stereotypes fed enduring White male hegemony in the policy world. Hearn (1996) captures some of the contextual difficulties facing efforts to change gendered agencies, ‘The main feature of patterns of agency response is the diversity and spread of those agencies, each with their own agenda, purpose and organization. And yet, while there are many agencies involved with men who have been violent to women, few specialize in, or have men’s violence to women, as their main concern’ (p. 111). A great deal of everyday gendering and racialising business was nuanced, confused and contradictory in processes, procedures and practices, frustrating the willingness and professional expertise of policy actors committed to policy reform based on social justice principles. Interrelated practices and processes at organisational and wider public sector levels rendered invisible the inequality regimes that caught up policy actors together with their policy population targets. Gender and racial stereotypes inflected policy work concerning FDV victims and perpetrators, and were mirrored and mutually reinforced in the policy work environment with policy actors themselves.

I learned how much I shared with many of the non-Aboriginal policy actors interviewed who demonstrated that gender, or race, or class, or combinations could recede in consciousness when positions of power and privilege provided opportunities. In most of the interviews that were conducted as relaxed conversations, it was not the interviewee who raised the matter of gender or race, or identified issues of gendering or racialising. This was despite the fact that these topics were explicitly introduced as the research purpose was documented and discussed during agency negotiations and in preliminary information sheets provided to all interviewees ahead of time. Connections were only made by a few and those interviewees were in most cases not at the most senior levels of policy work. It felt exciting for me when those interviewees volunteered the subject and pursued the detail with enthusiasm compared to other anxious and in many ways reluctant respondents.

Just the terms gender and race were enough to reduce the comfort level for a number of participants. I heard a number of apologies and some policy actors behaved as if they were being tested at school. Guarding the confidential nature of the policy work for some interviewees was a particular stress; the level of political sensitivity surrounding policy work in this field of FDV in Aboriginal lives added considerably to their anxiety levels. Some policy actors commented on gender and race as intellectual subjects and therefore harmless concepts divorced from real politics in the workplace or government agency.
Talking about policy work contradicted traditional images of policy being produced from impersonal processes in a logical sequence of procedural stages in a cycle with objective expert preparation. Policy work involves gender and racial issues for those involved in a range of ways including drafting, delivering and accounting for policy. The interviewees were all aware of FDV policies in broad and specific ways, were all conscious of their place in the schema of things, and a number expressed frustration, cynicism, disapproval and concern at policy outcomes. Inter-connected themes have been identified in public policy work in the field of FDV in particular, yet I see how these themes have generalisability to other policy fields once I complement the interview data with the literature and my own public sector experience. That leads me to the question of how the study of gendered and racialised policy practice can be of benefit to wider public policy work.

In terms of organisational change, I note how research into racial inequalities has not developed to the same extent as gender. Change programs and mechanisms linking gender equity and organisational effectiveness have gained some credibility, however Ely and Meyerson (2000) present a sobering observation that ‘losing gender’ can occur when forces conspire. In the language of my policy actors, ‘core business’ takes priority – that does not equate with gender equality in this setting. Line management has traditionally been resistant to equality initiatives involving women’s career development (Cockburn, 1991) and there is little sustained training and development in this field, just as anti-racist efforts have not gathered a strong profile here. And silo departments favouring competitive categorical funding arrangements currently discourage collaborative and collective activities such as whole-of-government training for anti-oppressive practice informed by a ‘bird’s eye view’ and an intersectional approach.

One starting point for me has been understanding the place and significance of history in this field, not only gendered and racist public policies but other developments such as the impacts of NPM informed by neo-liberalism. Intersectionality brought into focus what McRobbie describes as a sense of ‘disarticulation of feminism and the dissociation of theory, form, practice and lived experience’ (as cited in Woodward & Woodward, 2009, p. 5). I am optimistic that contemporary feminist theorising and activism has capacity to better mesh multiple feminist perspectives that go beyond adding cultural awareness to foundations of ‘plural explication’. Moreton-Robinson (2000b) investigates what she calls ‘this very troubling and risky business’ of putting a feminist politics of difference into practice and concludes that more will be required than (simply) including voice or making space for Indigenous women in Australian feminism. The socially constructed images of Aboriginal peoples as ‘other’ in most of the policy actors’ narratives reflecting historical racial relations could undermine efforts to build coalitions across differences. Yuval-Davis (2009) summarises the challenge as, ‘the boundaries of the dialogue
should be determined by common political emancipatory goals while the tactical and strategic priorities should be led by those whose needs are judged by participants of the dialogue to be the most urgent’ (p. 57). Questions about which participants make judgments, about what and for whom are issues found the heart of my research. Rojas refers to ‘intersecting strategies of resistance that jointly address race, class, gender, and sexuality’ (Rojas, 2009, p. 75). While not presenting a blueprint for how to attain ‘intersecting strategies of resistance’, Australian researchers Bacchi and Eveline (2009) urge greater attention to contentious issues involved in ‘the politics of doing’. Their examples include privileging the views of marginalised women, respecting their perspectives on the usefulness of appeals to identity, and of particular relevance to my own writing, ‘“doing the document” is a crucial part of “doing” change’ (Carol Bacchi & Eveline, 2009, p. 3).

Even though my criticisms of the practice limitations of currently configured GM, my entry point to this research project, have been confirmed, optimism can be found in the work of a number of writers. Harding argues for, ‘exhilaration felt in differences in women’s perceptions of who we are and of appropriate politics for navigating through our daily social relations’ (as cited in Woodward & Woodward, 2009, p. 6). My research has revealed a good deal about navigating through daily policy work in the WA public sector in the field of FDV, however it is apparent that there is still much more to be revealed to researchers and policy actors alike. Studying gendering and racialising policy work has much to contribute to the development of public policy by injecting critical insights and goals for an anti-oppressive praxis that recognises entrapment in the form of such partial achievements as distracting celebrations of cultural difference (most appreciated for gastronomic value) that disguise unequal policy impacts, and individualised ‘anti-discrimination’ campaigns that lull the mainstream (White) population into false comfort that mechanisms exist to deal with isolated racist bigots. Woodward and Woodward (2009) set out the challenge as ‘problematising and awareness of diversity that recent feminist theory raises, yet not allow this to lead to a fragmentation of what feminism is’ (p. 7). My interviews with policy actors have similarly stressed how fragmentation, politicisation, competition, complexity and other contextual bedevilments can thwart even the best intentioned, experienced, networked and knowledgeable policy workers.

My aim has been to focus on an intersectionality capable of enabling deeper understandings of gendered and racialised public policy in particular, to advance the cause of anti-oppressive praxis. FDV as experienced by Aboriginal women and men stands out as representing a significant test for policy actors operating in a highly charged political climate and has provided substantial material for a case study approach. My research is not a tidying up process – just like policies are not created in a vacuum and become finished off, never to be reviewed, undone, redone or done better. The policy cycle has been revealed as an imperfect model in my analysis.
of the Gordon Inquiry, conversations with policy actors involved in human services, stories told by Aboriginal peoples and frontline accounts. Staff in the field of FDV confirm that public policy practitioners are engaged in difficult, deeply provoking and often worrying work. Tensions and contradictions exist between theory and practice; personal values and ideals are constantly challenged or under threat; and strategic planning is often essential, unconscious and implicit in the ways and means personnel make sense of their workplace demands and opportunities. Social activism is not easy in an NPM public sector nurturing systemic, institutional and personal blockages.

**Propelled for activism**

In his public lecture, Hage (2009) speaks to me about the heart of the matter:

> When we say there is a culture of racism in this country it means back to the basics. It means do we think of others instrumentally, whether we think of them as good or bad. If you think of them only instrumentally you’re still steeped in racist culture. Do you think of them as a life force, a life force. That is very important in racism, in existential racism. That is, when another person or another being, is next to me do I feel that their life is important for my life, does their life propel me or do I look at their life and I feel that it is diminishing my life simply by mere presence. That is core existential racism and this seeps into all kinds of policies, all kinds of very nice policies as well as nasty policies. It is to my mind where we want to start to deal with racism as culture, this is where the game starts, and we’re nowhere near, nowhere near dealing with this issue.

The personal and the professional dimensions of this research are commonly separated components yet I have come to appreciate their indivisibility for tackling this topic. I have learned much about myself as an active participant in oppressive systems; gendering and racialising public policy practice has implications that enfold us all. I have come to realise that I epitomise much of that same potential for change that has been articulated or disclosed by the many well-intentioned, conscientious policy actors I interviewed who daily engage, develop and deliver public policy.

My journey from starting point to where I position myself at the end of this thesis reflects many of the significant ‘findings’ about pathways of doing gender and race across the WA public sector and public policy work in the field of FDV more particularly. I often identified with the struggles of my participants as they experienced and strategised in gendered and racialised environments and I have been sympathetic to the plight of well-meaning staff, some of whom sought advice from me about what to do in the face of complex and seemingly intractable and overwhelming social problems. I admit to struggling at times with judgmental attitudes and a sense of self-righteousness even though self-gratulatory emotions were hardly deserved. But
this is not about owning up to personal and professional demons or a therapeutic account of guilt, complicity, insight or character development. This is not about individuals caught or exceeding ambitions at the frontline, middle-management or senior executive levels. This is about valuing identified links between people, processes and practices that enable existing knowledge to be critically investigated and developed. This is about developments and improvements in praxis that can more effectively address oppressive processes and practices that are often invisible, implicit, malleable and politically instrumental. This is about a praxis that has integrity, insight and courage that can address a default option that non-Aboriginal policy actor Noella described.

Noella: When you’re soaked in the privilege of the dominant culture you will always be, be susceptible to, you know, sort of playing out those privileges to the disadvantages of the, you know, subservient culture. That’s a fact. You know, threaded through everything including, you know, sort of thoughts about Aboriginal programs. They all come from the dominant White view. So everything, as I see it, is imbued with a view which by default is, could be, racist because we don’t give Aboriginal, we don’t give Aboriginal workers the space for a voice. And then when they do have the voice, we don’t respect their different voice. We still think that our dominant voice should prevail. ...I think we’re very good here at saying “We’re not racist” and the big hand coming down if you do something that’s overtly sort of racist and, you know, insisting that everyone do cultural training. So the intent, the intent, is to be culturally appropriate and non-racist. But how it plays out in practice I think is somewhat different to that.

Noella wanted a system that ‘does what it says on the tin’ (R. S. Smith, 2003, p. 140), but ingenuous rhetoric, unintended consequences and other policy problems confront policy actors whether alone or as a group. Some exercise courage against opposition as they struggle for progressive policy that can provide relief from social distress. Noella said that she was beginning to be seen as a ‘trouble maker’ because she was opening her mouth and expressing opinions, but her determination was clear. Some of the policy actors spoke as reformists aiming for policy improvements that could be labeled ‘band-aids’ at best, and other policy actors spoke more ambitiously about working for transformative change. Whatever their motivations and capabilities, these policy actors sacrificed time out of busy working lives to share their hopes, fears and everyday realities about policy work in FDV. They did not all identify as members of a collegial group, or partners in a network, but they were linked in policy practice on a continuum from problem identification to program implementation, and all sought improved policy outcomes. Pearson reminds Australians of the urgent need for social change in Aboriginal policy with words drawn from Prime Minister Rudd’s historic apology to the Stolen
Generations, ‘Unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong’ (Pearson, 2010, 11 February, p. 2). My research participants distinguished between rhetoric and results; it was the doing that was difficult.

The potential for social change persists at any or all points along such a continuum which includes my own research position, therefore I regard this thesis as a site or form of resistance. The connections and puzzle pieces of this project point to the need for more research that can build from multiple starting points as foundations, just as early feminist activists and civil rights revolutionaries before us acted as role models and mentors. Their prowess was not imperfect but it served to fire my imagination and nurture my commitment. So too, I would like this research project to encourage and support the policy actors who steadfastly participate in social change and pursue anti-oppressive praxis. Noella should not stand alone as she confronts intent and deals with outcome. Perhaps she will be connected with Indigenous policy activist Xena at the frontline of leadership. Xena has both humility and ambition, despite the personal costs from her heavy involvement over a number of years building non-government service delivery and feminist organisations.

Xena: *I feel like I've not really said anything to you.*

Karen: You've said an awful lot. Where are you going to be in five years time?

What do you think?

Xena: *Well, I'll be straight up. I'm hoping to be one of those leaders (laughter) coming up in the ranks.*

Karen: You are a leader now …

Xena: *Well you know, I'm planning on global level. Bigger level. I can't, I have to try and limit myself to certain things otherwise I'm too distressed.*

From an analysis of the power of collective action, Callero (2009) rejects reductionist explanations for social outcomes. Callero identified and drew inspiration from ‘examples of how triumphant social movements have shaped social policy and moved governments toward more egalitarian and democratic practices’ (p. 166). He urges a sociological perspective to examine and respond to social issues more complicated than recognised by simplistic individualistic explanations. Callero offers hope when I sense a quiet despair in the voices of frustrated and cynical policy actors, because he extends the concept of overwhelming ruling relations to a social action framework that I can believe in:
When we adopt a sociological perspective we come to appreciate the complex web of social relationships in which we are all connected. Finally, a sociological orientation warns against simple explanations that fail to consider the complexity of social life. Thus, when contemplating the pervasive influence of social forces it can be tempting to think of society as a giant puppet master that secretly controls our movements from behind a curtain. This would be a mistake. Social forces do not have complete control over our behavior and society does not exist independent of our own actions. We inherit social conditions from generations before us, but these conditions are never permanent. The patterns of social action that produce harm, reinforce economic inequality, and sustain discrimination can be altered. Removing the blinders of individualism is a first step toward achieving this change (p. 166).

Noella expressed a frustration and cynicism common to my participants, as was a watchfulness of governments and hopefulness about particular agencies’ performances. Fear and hope were constant balancing acts performed by many policy actors. As an Aboriginal policy actor, Ian criticised political rhetoric at the same time extending praise for improved policy practice in his employing department, in this instance cultural sensitivity evidenced through genuine consultation processes.

Ian: They’ve done it the right way. They’ve actually talked to Aboriginal people, sought out what the problems were, and from recommendations that were worked through with that target group and developed some recommendations that since, has resulted in a Policy. And I haven’t seen that anywhere before….I believe I'm working in an agency that is, that is making all the right noises about being committed to a process. So they've committed to Gordon. And I suppose for me it's still testing time as to how dinkum.

Getting ‘fair dinkum’

Ian’s hopefulness connects with my own desire for proactive conclusions as I reach my own ‘testing time’. Striving to be as comprehensive as possible in my research, to do it ‘the right way’, has meant recognising the importance of the what, how and why in this FDV field of policy practice, and the need for analysis at macro, mezzo and micro levels. Smith (2003) refers to the practicality of theory, saying that examining implicit theories informing everyday strategies and practices in the field of youth justice, whether articulated or subjected to critical scrutiny, helps develop understanding of how systems develop in particular ways and forms. He shows how a number of different theoretical levels correspond to distinct system levels, distinguishing the definition of the problem, the machinery and processes by which it is addressed, and the underlying rationale. It has been important to listen to stories and narratives that connect as themes, for example the roles and relationships of key policy actors, in order to develop a deeper understanding of how the public sector influences their perspectives and their
work in public policy in ways that are not straightforward or one-way. The systemic and institutional context of problem identification, policy response and service delivery has been critical to the ways and means that policy actors make sense and meaning of daily tasks and higher level responsibilities, obligations, challenges and accountabilities. I found a marriage of professional and personal values and ethics articulated and actioned more strategically by those policy actors who self-identified as social activists. Those who passionately expressed commitment to social justice principles and ideological positions seemed more engaged in addressing oppressions relating to sexism and racism. Alice explained, ‘once you’ve become involved in some of the Indigenous issues and having a very strong sort of social justice sort of conscience, I think that’s the sort of driving factor for me’. Some policy actors were driven to work on gender equality, for some others racial equality took priority and a small number of policy actors did not separate the two fields of focus for their practice.

Policy actors were often emotional during more relaxed conversations; even more formal interview formats were at times marked by passionate statements about injustice, disadvantage and erroneous policy decisions taken by others. The policy environment can be summed up as fraught, confused, competitive, territorial and captive. Uncertainty, doubt, anxiety and fearfulness were emotive themes that resembled policy drivers for many of the remaining policy actors in the ‘firing line’ of FDV policy. Brownlee (2010, February) describes governmental politics as ‘very tribal’ and often the language expressed by policy actors experiencing high stress and heavy workloads resembled combat.

Policy actors were more likely to be struggling to achieve small gains than proud of substantial policy outcomes of their own authorship. Across participating departments, Aboriginal affairs claimed policy priority, attention that concerned a number of policy actors, not because the need and the cause were unsubstantiated, but because public policy reactions became characteristically misdirected, uncoordinated and culturally disrespectful as knee-jerk reactions to media fuelled public moral outrage. Some policy actors spoke ahistorically about policy while others were familiar and articulate about policy development over a substantial period of time. Policy actors who were Aboriginal women and men were quietly angry. Aboriginal clients and policy actors were related through families and communities, histories and policies; their stories shared and meaningful. Cultural competence in service delivery was described by Ian in the form of advice for government agencies as he recounted an incident, ‘… recognise that a big part of their client base are Aboriginal, so include it in your radar and don’t be like people that work in the post office in Kalgoorlie, that every time the Wongai people walk out there, they get the air freshener out. True story. True story’.
Gender was not the omni-relevant category in these discussions; gender was clearly ‘not on the agenda’ in the policy work of most of these public servants. Gender, as with any marginalised policy field, would be unlikely to achieve policy profile with accompanying sufficient resources without significant change for example increased public attention and political leadership. But structural marginalisation did not necessarily silence or render ineffective all policy actors; at times being outside core business and relatively free from politically dangerous scrutiny provided its own set of change opportunities. Perhaps it was because these particular participants were more likely to enjoy collegial support and encouragement within their enclave, gaining comfort through sharing policy campaign successes, or because beneficial external networks and community connections could be maintained more successfully in more autonomous locations.

**Progress in a public policy environment**

Some of the policy actors who performed their roles as critical policy actors operated within a model of ‘bounded rationality’ (Perrow, as cited in McDonald, 2006, p. 137), making decisions as they went along according to the circumstances at the time, on a case by case basis at the frontline, instruction by instruction at middle-management, and policy mandate by policy basis at more senior levels in the bureaucracy. Despite the often difficult conditions within which these policy actors operated, they remained committed to consolidating and maintaining momentum wherever progress had occurred and extending whatever gains had been made over time. For some feminist activists that meant going underground and developing survival tactics. For some anti-racist policy actors, that meant manoeuvring between agencies, across committees and with community connections to build cross-cultural awareness if not competence, and policy sensitivity. I heard of many methods and mechanisms, often as immediate as accessing a meeting and as significant as legislative reform, by policy actors who were determined to keep working on the puzzle; they inspired me with an ‘ever onward’ determination.

Not all their colleagues were supportive or all agencies permissive, so external policy networks were important, as evidenced by policy actors in the most senior executive positions who looked above their position including from heads of agencies and government ministers for alliances where closer support was unavailable. Some of the policy actors were strongly opposed to the work of other policy actors including other individuals who participated in my research project. The principles and rhetoric of discretion and privacy were employed in a variety of ways, including at times to exclude policy intrusion and to avoid policy transparency. Policy processes such as consultations were seen instrumentally; the work of inclusion or exclusion for example, reflected attitudes towards clients and stakeholders. Populist political
players were seen as part of the problem and only on a few occasions did these policy actors applaud insightful and courageous political leaders. To some extent, cynical attitudes expressed by some policy actors interviewed reflected contemporary public political concerns. Brownlee (2010, February) outlines a populism theme using religious metaphor, ‘The practice of western democratic politics … relies heavily on competing faiths, on card-carrying followers, and yearns cyclically for a messiah to lead its true believers’. Having a hero, a champion, for a ‘good’ cause provided milestones for major policy advances in a number of accounts, including the example of a feminist change agent who facilitated the way for later female policy actors in frontline policing, and a non-Indigenous government leader credited with instituting the influential Gordon Inquiry.

Callero (2009) talks about ‘cultural capital’ and the ways that it, ‘functions as a resource that advantages some families and hinders others’ (p. 166). I see parallels with how a systemic and institutional capital could help some change processes and hinder others. Policy actors inherit, learn and in turn contribute to public sector capital, and I envision a developmental capital that possibly consists of such features as cultural competence, critical policy approaches and other potentially measurable characteristics. Anti-discrimination policies and supporting operational guidelines exist alongside inquiry reports and I recall the ambivalence of policy actors interviewed about the ‘texts’ they dealt with. Policy paperwork had significance in policy development terms, yet policy actors described some policies as diversionary and obstructionist. The literature points to difficulties of overcoming problems associated with departmentalism and achieving joined-up and whole-of-government policy, therefore learning experiences through such projects as GAP and implementation of the Substantive Equality Policy Framework deserve attention.

Anti-discrimination legislation that equates sexist behaviours with individualised prejudice subverts efforts to eliminate sexism rooted in patriarchal systems and institutions. Similarly, counselling a recalcitrant White frontline official who makes a racist statement to an Aboriginal colleague or client is unlikely to address IR that condones and structures differential impacts. It is questionable whether existing anti-discrimination policy and legal provisions can construct the cultural capital necessary for intersectional awareness of policy needs and solutions. Policy actors who expressed doubts about the substantial equality goals and statements by governments indicated that they believed much more is required.

While a ‘one size fits all’ approach to policy was criticised by many policy actors, targeting was also seen as problematic in the literature by critical policy analysts who saw little achieved from often short-term policy attempts to deal with finely differentiated groups. Squires (as cited in Lovenduski, 2009, p. 292), supports a transformative process for gender equality that is not one-
directional but involves changing institutions, processes and policies. Three strategies identified in particular are legislative and party quotas for women, women’s policy agencies, and gender mainstreaming, representing presence, voice and process respectively. Wider application of these strategies initially appeared promising, however potential risks of essentialism, assimilation and intersectionality need to be considered. ‘Intersectionality provides the most difficult challenge’, says Lovenduski (2009, p. 293), because of the privileging of identities that diminishes political capacity based on common interests. Difficulties she identifies echo comments made to this research, that, ‘Research shares with political practice the two problems of the difficulties of hitting the moving target of multiple and changing subjects and the impossibility of obtaining enough resources to do the work as practitioners would like’ (p. 293).

**Interrupting the dynamic**

The ways and means that anti-oppressive policy work gains traction or loses ground becomes clearer through analysis of policy actors’ accounts informed by the literatures and self-reflection. It is difficult to determine the significance or relative strength of influence of factors such as human resources practices or agency restructuring. However, category politics, whereby categories are given meanings, could be clearly seen to threaten the work of policy actors committed gender and racial equality projects. Continuing, habitual or traditional institutional operations were seen as barriers by some policy actors and as facilitators by others, just as policy could be reformist or produce harmful unintended consequences at other times. Most of these policy actors acknowledged that policy gains had been made over time, however policy fragility was equally thematic. Having policy reform in FDV interventions through improvements to restraining orders was a thread through interview questions that often helped policy actors to recover a motivating sense of social change and achievable policy intent. Helping policy actors see a way forward is important to me, and this thesis could be seen as my own social action contribution. Discomfort, I have found through this research project, can be enabling and constructive, as Mishra (2010) points out, ‘as… practitioners of postcolonial postmodernism have stressed – ambivalence, doubt and confusion are essential to forming dynamic new hybrid selves’ (p. 11).

‘My own approaches …seek to engage teachers in recognizing and extirpating inappropriate pedagogies and ideologies. Instead of the toxic practices being pressed upon schools from the corporate sector that are producing such distortion and disfigurement, schools need coherent theories about teaching crafted by teachers themselves’ (Smyth, 2010, p. 204). Smyth envisages a number of ‘layered moments’ within activities of describing, informing and confronting that serve as examples for frontline educators in creating counter-hegemonic resistance to neoliberalism. Cochran-Smith (1991) celebrates interrupting conservatism, producing critical
dissonance and involving the process of collaborative resonance in education. Working ‘against the grain’ includes ‘critiqu[ing] the cultures of teaching and school, research[ing] their own practices, articulat[ing] their own expertise, and call[ing] into question the policies and language of schooling that are taken for granted’ (as cited in Smyth, 2010, p. 199). These writers inspire me to review the accounts by policy actors of their daily policy work where resistance and agentic behaviour was part of their strategic policy performance, or could have been or should have been. The voices of these policy drafters, implementers and advocates are strong and clear with me during research interviews, however their roles often limit or preclude public statements and identifiable social action. Policy actors have been carrying weighty responsibilities for decisions in public policy including which clients are consulted, whose worldview is privileged, whose interests are served and which groups are marginalised. Policy actors inherit, make and fight for opportunities to affect policy change, and the policy actors who participated in my research spoke emotionally about social justice and what they saw as good and bad policy practice.

Pathways ahead

There remains a substantial gap between theories of social change and everyday policy practice as voiced, witnessed and experienced by policy actors, myself and a population full of clients, patients and victims of the system. Rojas (2009) says, ‘The most important thing we can do as a generation is to see our new positions as power and weapons to be used strategically in the struggle rather than as spoils of war. Because this shit is far from finished’ (p. 150). Aboriginal policy actor Alice sees her activism taking a variety of pathways forward. When asked about her policy development plans, Alice shared that she would not be continuing in her current position. She did not mean non-engagement with policy work, but a strategic role in advocacy from a different base. Despite her critical analysis of policy practices within mainstream agencies, Alice remained positive and humble about her personal experiences, development and contribution.

Alice: I’m not going to be around. This is my last week. I’ve been offered something better, (laughter). …sort of sitting slightly outside of the system. So I guess for me, working for government, while I’ve done it for a number of years, I just, I think sometimes you, it can be very frustrating and I need room to sort of move and to have flexibility to actually move to do things because I think I’m probably a doer (small chuckle). While it’s been good and I’ve really enjoyed it I think it’s time for me to sort of step outside for a while and then perhaps in two years time I might actually come back in, but whether it would be in health or
whether it will be in law and justice, I don’t know….I’ve always got involved in things that I feel really passionate about anyway. How you actually get people to get the experience and do the sorts of things I’ve done, I don’t know. I think it’s their loss (laughter).

In comparison with Alice’s continuing journey, my research into GM led me along what I saw as a straightforward pathway to racism, then intersectionality and finally anti-oppressive practice as a satisfactory destination. I was beginning to think that the next piece of the puzzle was at my fingertips; I was confident that with an extra powerful multi-focal ‘lens’ in my seeing glasses and friends by my side, the full image would be formed. Such falsities have been exposed, because I now understand that this puzzle will remain un-bordered and in-complete. There are no formulaic prescriptions and unassailable methodologies here. Rather, Bessarab’s ‘bird’s eye view’ requires an ever increasing number of pieces of all shapes and sizes, pieces that enable wider and more colourful pictures to emerge, pieces that reveal essential details and spread to continually widening edges.

Aiming for a long agenda

Concluding this thesis on a positive note mirrors the cautious optimism expressed by many of the policy actors. That does not mean accepting that only partial gains are achievable; I urge the kind of change that is revolutionary rather than reformist in intent and outcome. I do not want substantial equality efforts to be labeled another ‘short agenda’ (Cockburn, 1991). My concern at the malleability of gender equity policy informs a more ambitious goal-setting. ‘It’s kind of like pepper and salt sprinklings…. Some people do it here and there’ said Enid, and other interviewees talked despairingly about how gender awareness in policy work had become reduced as higher priority problems of moral urgency assumed almost total focus. I heard from a number of participants that they as feminist activists and critical practitioners felt the need to develop strategic ways of operating in uninterested and oppositional environments. By exercising even subtle advocacy and delicate representations, they risked their very survival in the public policy domain. But they were less aware of risks of becoming complicit and compromised in mainstream policy work that primarily benefits dominant forces and maintains masculine hegemony and Whiteness supremacy. I do not elevate myself as a judge of ‘the probity of their efforts’ (Lea, 2009, p. 10) because I am also a character in this story. Some policy actors spoke in hushed terms about practicing cultural protocols and depending on cross-cultural experts in the field, while at the same time their agency was ‘racing-gendering’ (Hawkesworth, 2006) internal staff. This was more than short-sightedness; Ortega objects to many White feminists who, ‘claim to be concerned about women of color while at the same time being fully engaged in production of ignorance about the lives of these women’ (as cited in
Rojas, 2009, p. 143). Taking a positive attitude leads me to encourage policy actors to attend to the politics of doing policy that is interpersonal as much as structural and institutional.

Encouraging a critical awareness that encompasses one’s own practicing self is part of a way forward I believe; this is similar to the popular saying about being the change you want to see (attributed to Gandhi). Instead of waiting for the next inquiry, opportunistic policy moment or change champion to arise or appear, I would encourage policy actors to recognise their own relational leadership positions and the value of their own mentoring and nurturing of future policy activists committed to anti-oppressive praxis. Just as it is no longer enough for White feminists to operate in self-seeking enclaves, Aboriginal activists have the right to expect cultural competence in social action collectives and networks. ‘Coalitions of engagement’ (Carol Bacchi & Eveline, 2009) represents a compatible intersection of these two.

These insights are not unique to my thesis; the literatures are plentiful for any critical reader looking for anti-sexism and anti-racism materials that challenge ‘commonsense’ knowledge about women and men, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Suggestions I make for praxis development have been influenced by a number of frameworks helpful to my critical analysis. For example, a what is the problem presented to be? approach helped show how policy practice comes to construct significant barriers to anti-oppressive praxis. IE provided a way of looking at everyday policy practice and especially revealed how restraining orders serve to illustrate ruling relations. Through the reflections of policy actors who use such policy instruments as restraining orders to create change, I could better appreciate their commitment, capacity and opportunity to be change agents. Acker’s ‘inequality regimes’ served my further analysis of systemic disparities in organisational practices and processes.

I had been aware from my own feminist activism that, ‘Feminism alone cannot shape change’ as Rojas (2009) says. ‘Similarly, although women may be at the center of the issues, the activism that takes place does not always fall under the category of feminism’ (p. 74). I had known with a ‘knowing ignorance’ (Ortega, as cited in Rojas, 2009, p. 143) and had not been ‘deep listening’ (Carol Bacchi & Eveline, 2009) to advice about understanding multiple layers of identity that continue to shape the lives of Aboriginal women and men. For example, a number of policy actors expressed concern at their marginal positions as feminists and/or Aboriginal policy actors, reflecting and resulting in less policy ‘pull’ as advocates for (their) particular issues. Whichever policy matter was of greatest public concern (Aboriginal affairs at this time) and which policy actors were uppermost in public policy influence (central coordinating and funding agency staff) – both markers represented competitiveness in the public sector domain that blocked collaborative efforts, activist networking and intersectional policy development.
Ambivalent attitudes towards the media could be turned around to thinking of policy collaborators and communicants in wider relationships, in much the same utilitarian ways that the Gordon Inquiry was seen by many of the policy actors. If the combative nature of competitive policy work could be seen clearly by policy actors as mechanisms and features of neo-liberalism, the chances of successful resistance and sabotage could increase. Therefore, I would encourage policy pedagogy to embrace political education that questions functions, purpose and values in public policy and addresses issues of power, privilege and control in equality work.

**Successful strategies**

Social change need not be so conflictual as to frighten off policy activists many of whom are already expressing fearful emotions. Callero (2009) states firmly that false assumptions, prejudice and intolerance for diversity undermines the achievement of democratic political solutions aided by social theory. Nevertheless, he believes that social progress is achievable. ‘Working collectively we can avoid the Orwellian nightmare. Indeed, history is a testament to the triumph of democratic resistance’ (p. 10). Like a number of my interviewees, Callero points to big picture gains. ‘In the United States, for example, we have seen the abolition of slavery, women have achieved greater equality with men, child labor has been mostly eliminated, and civil rights have been extended to a greater number of people. On the international stage we have seen the defeat of the apartheid system of racial discrimination in South Africa’ (p. 10). He leaves a ‘testing time’ qualification when he concludes, ‘Still, immense challenges remain’ (p. 10). Concluding that obstructions and blockages to substantive equality exist in some form in policy work in the FDV field does not negate or disregard the accounts of productive, constructive and creative policy work, or deny that gains have not been made over time. Hirst (2009, 20 October) sees progress and outstanding tasks when he answers the question in a public forum about what more can be done, ‘I think when there’s blatant racial behaviour, that’s attacked and people go to court for it. And I think that’s pretty good. We could do better and I think we’re set up to go on doing well’. I heard similar optimism from policy actors that the institutional capacity for progressing an anti-racist agenda exist, nevertheless it is important to look more closely at the complexities, challenges and difficulties to see why inequalities remain ubiquitous in this field.

Challenging repressive policy and dominating policy powers is obviously risky business when policy actors needing to pay their rent are tempted to play safe. Pearson’s comments that there is ‘…too much glib thinking in Australian thinking about indigenous policy’ (Pearson, 2010, p. 3) could reflect simplistic policy solutions. But policy actors themselves revealed successful strategies. Eva for example, reflected on her pioneering work from a non-government location in FDV and presented the connection between government and non-government policy work.
She traced twenty years of victim advocacy work with police officers and court officials at times in oppositional roles and relationships. Transformation came about when assumptions and stereotypes, often gendered, were turned around and staff were forced to be accountable.

Eva: *It's not about reading domestic violence in a book and you're going to get that. You've just got all that experience - twenty years you know it's a long time. So, yes, it was really hard and frustrating, and don’t worry, it's still hard and very frustrating. ...I was a refuge worker employed by a refuge, we're usually lesbians or our nick names were the 'hairy armpit brigade’. And to think that, because when it was Police it was us and them. There was never any talking, You'd know they'd bag us and we'd bag them. But when they actually seen that we were working for the same goal, the same purpose, it was quite amazing the change. It wasn't about us and them any more. It was about - what can we do: prevention, intervention. And how are we going to make everyone accountable. And it worked well. ...This is the first time ever in Australia that we had any intervention project. And we adapted it and so that took me a long time there. And even at the court house, because I went to the court every day and did restraining orders and I also track and monitor DV cases coming through. And it took the magistrate five years just to acknowledge me, that I specialized in that area, and he wouldn't refer women to me. But it took five years for him to do so. So I'd sit in there for five years and be there all the time. Bit it did, yes it took five years with the Court and a couple of years with the Police. So it's been a real battle, but I think it's a battle that's been won ... So it's been very beneficial for victims of domestic violence, but it's been hard work. It's been frustrating. We had a lot of barriers we had to get through. But we've got through them.*

Eva maintained a determinedly high profile in policy advocacy grounded in frontline practice and inspired me with her seemingly tireless campaigns.

Eva: *We raise our concerns, the trends, you know, making accountability and the safety component. We then identified all these things so then we did those three submissions. We did one right, which was really good. But then all these other issues came up so we did another. Then all of a sudden these other issues came up! So we had to end up doing three and because the Attorney General actually wrote to me requesting that I have input into the review and he's never done that before. I was quite chuffed about that one. ...We sent all our submissions straight to the Attorney General. We didn't send it through anything else. Straight to him and he always wrote back to us acknowledging our submission. It was his handwriting you*
So Xena and Lindsay are joined by Eva and other policy actors I have cited in this thesis who were enthusiastic about social change and their place in that progress. Pearson could be reassured that glib practitioners do not have monopoly over this FDV field in WA. The Victorian Government too focuses on ‘policy enablers’ in its policy work in FDV, ‘Building organisational capacity and engaging and supporting champions for change is part of influencing attitudes and social behaviours’ (Morand, 2009, November). There are other instructional stories about ways of doing progressive policy work. Even though my research project was not looking to evaluate, criticise or congratulate individuals as rogues or heroes, through these stories it can be shown that opportunities do exist and opportunistic activists can be encouraged.

Adopting a strength-based approach, part of my social work professional ‘tool kit’, has relevance here. It would be all too easy for me as researcher to unquestioningly echo or regurgitate the views and opinions of my interviewees however, that would in many cases result in a deficit model being perpetuated. Similarly, it is possible that social action preoccupied with anti- approaches could become lost opportunities for more constructive and transformative change. By concentrating on anti-sexism and anti-racism, perhaps attention and energy is directed more to dismantling, reducing and negating destructive impacts of dominant forces in society rather than to building positive foundations for progress at collective levels. Policy actors spoke with ease about their practice being underpinned by social justice principles and other professional jargon was used to describe motivations, values and theories in public policy. Perhaps the policy discourse of social justice is safer, more politically acceptable and translatable than the contested and personally challenging language of sexism, racism and oppression.

**Thinking in new, unconventional ways**

Perhaps there is value in an approach that sees love as an igniting force for social change by encouraging us to seek a new location away from conflict by creating a new mythos, ‘a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves and the ways we behave…A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness…finding within these borderlands very different ways to treat each other’ (Anzaldúa, as cited in Rojas, 2009, p. 140). A changed consciousness, a ‘conscientization’ that involves deeper self-awareness, has relevance to the development of policy actors’ networks and a range of working relationships. Marshall (2001) talks about self-reflective practices as ‘a necessary core for all inquiry’ (p. 44).
and my own research experience supports this. Eisenstein asks feminists to remain sensitive to their different positions, to produce ‘institutional kinship systems’ and a ‘praxis of alliance’ (as cited in Carol Bacchi, 1991, p. 395).

My own early feminist vision and objectives have been under constant revision during this research project, just like Noella, ‘I am a feminist. How can I have not thought of these issues?’ No longer do I limit myself to seeing women as shorthand for social justice, White women as entry points to a universal sisterhood, or womanhood as a solitary focus and product. I recognise that historically Indigenous women experiencing FDV have not benefited from the support of White sisters and I appreciate why Aboriginal women would argue strong reasons to downplay gender as a strategic approach to substantive equality. Nurturing future policy actors in the face of many unresolved challenges will not be easy but as with feminism, ‘we need to recognise how much needs to get done as much as how much potential we have to be the ones to do it’ (Rojas, 2009, p. 150). Many of the policy actors in my research would say that it is not a question of wanting to, but knowing how to.

Gender as an analytical category, standpoint as an analytical tool, and intersectionality as a mechanism for preserving analytic complexity constitute three of the primary methodological innovations of feminist inquiry. Their deployment in concrete research contexts demonstrate how feminist political commitments can contribute to heightened objectivity by identifying new questions for investigation and illuminating dimensions of social life and institutional practices rendered invisible by traditional disciplinary approaches (Hawkesworth, 2006, p. 141).

My research began with a feminist consciousness that proved insufficient and I have argued for an intersectional approach that is more than a mechanism but an essential framework for research and action that is necessary for equality work aimed at substantial equality outcomes against multiple inter-locking systems of oppression. Much more theorising and research is needed to reconcile contradictions and tensions about gender, race and their intersections as issues in the work experiences and multiple realities of policy practitioners. On the basis of this research project, I see benefits in further qualitative research that involves such methods as ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984, p. 102). More exploration is required that looks at how aspects of gender, race and organisation are intertwined; how meanings are construction and taken for granted; and how inequality regimes in public policy could be problematised for participants. Public policy work that addresses intersectionality can benefit all public policies and their participants. ‘When they enter, we all enter’ (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 167).
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APPENDICES:

APPENDIX ONE: THE GORDON INQUIRY
APPENDIX TWO: INTERVIEWEE PROFILE
APPENDIX THREE: CODING
APPENDIX FOUR: NOTES FROM ONE MEETING
APPENDIX FIVE: RECORD OF CONTACTS WITH ONE AGENCY
APPENDIX SIX: REFLECTIONS SUMMARY FROM ONE INTERVIEW
APPENDIX SEVEN: INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX EIGHT: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
APPENDIX NINE: THE DULUTH MODEL
APPENDIX TEN: PUBLICATION
APPENDIX ONE: THE GORDON INQUIRY

The Gordon Inquiry and policy development

*Putting the picture together: Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities* commonly known as the ‘Gordon Report’ was the final report by the Gordon Inquiry set up by the State Government to provide advice on how best the Government should deal with widespread sexual abuse and violence within Western Australia’s Aboriginal community. The Inquiry followed the State Coroner’s report on the death on 12 February 1999 of Susan Taylor, a teenage Aboriginal girl at the Swan Valley Nyungah Community. The Coroner related her death to the endemic nature of sexual abuse of children in Aboriginal communities throughout Western Australia. In announcing the formal Inquiry, the Premier acknowledged the Government’s ‘shock and disturbance’ about allegations and identified a number of questions for the Government relating to the Swan Valley community but also to the broader Aboriginal community. The structure and process of the Inquiry was intended to reflect an inclusive approach to dealing with the perceived problems: ‘We intend to ensure that indigenous people play a central role in the inquiry. This is not an attack on their communities; it is an attack on child abuse’ (*Premier’s Statement* November 2001).

The Gordon Inquiry produced an *Interim Report* (April 2002) and then its final document which contained conclusions against the three Terms of Reference and substantiated 197 recommendations. The Inquiry process lasted over six months and adopted approaches to consultation and communication, research, whole-of-Government analyses, and cross-cultural sensitivity that were reiterated in the recommendations relating to service delivery and best practice by and across Government agencies. The Inquiry contributed a substantial body of knowledge concerning family violence and child abuse, including causality and prevalence among Aboriginal communities, and detailed critical accounts of system responses to family violence and child abuse, both supportive and problematic. Past patterns of interaction between Government bureaucracies and Indigenous clients were identified as destructive and unhelpful, however the Inquiry identified a number of valuable models of intervention and local level program initiatives of relevance to ‘the way forward’. Focusing on the communities rather than the individual agencies that deliver services to the Aboriginal communities was the preferred approach, as was community
development models of capacity building for whole communities rather than using scarce resources on uncoordinated casework services that were inadequate to meet the need, especially for isolated and remote communities. Definitional problems took considerable time to resolve and ‘positioning’ the individuals involved with family violence required cultural awareness. For example, the commissioned researchers informed the Gordon Inquiry of the preference in Indigenous communities for violence not to be seen as a ‘women’s issue’ but as a community issue that takes into account intergenerational issues (Appendix 13, p 8). A range of staff support, training and retention activities were explored and recommendations made across each department. Awareness-raising about Aboriginal family violence and child abuse and neglect had wide application and the importance of Aboriginal peoples’ involvement in the development and implementation of programs throughout the State was emphasised.

The Government strongly endorsed the major thrust of the Report and in its document The Western Australian State Government’s Action Plan For Addressing Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities (November 2002) acknowledged that the Inquiry was challenging. The Government funded initiatives aimed at improving the safety and security of Indigenous children and women within the context of its commitment to working in partnership with the Aboriginal community. The Government accepted the Inquiry’s call for the development of collaborative relationships with Aboriginal communities based on consultations, cross-cultural sensitivity, involvement and empowerment to be agreed in formal terms. The Inquiry detailed interconnections and interagency obligations and responsibilities to tackle problems such as alcohol and substance abuse, youth suicide, mental illness, depression and despair. The Government accepted the recommendations requiring increased funding to enhance the capacities of seven key agencies to develop policies, provide services appropriately and address systemic weaknesses. The Premier declared that the $75 million committed over five years to implement the Inquiry recommendations represented a ‘watershed’ in the Government’s dealings with family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal families and communities. Parliamentary debate (WA Parliament, Hansard) and official press statements reiterated the Government’s political will and genuine intent to tackle the escalating rates of family violence and child abuse described by the Inquiry with a community focused systemic response. Public sector reform was seen as essential to achieving outcomes identified and agreed by Government agencies and Aboriginal communities. The focus on communities and new ways of ‘doing
business’ was accepted by Government and reflected in three subsequent reports of implementation progress. The reports outlined a range of formal structures directed and established to manage, monitor, report and advise the response and implementation stages for the Government.

The Government’s Action Plan listed responses against each recommendation, including where existing funding allocated to address homelessness, drug abuse and strengthening families had relevance to the recommendation (Action Plan, November 2002). The Government developed a Strategic Response Framework which was presented in a pyramid beginning with at its base: Strengthen the governance, confidence, economic capacity and sustainability of communities; Strengthen the safety of communities; Strengthen responses to vulnerable children and adults at risk; and Strengthen responses to child abuse and family violence. Enablers were identified parallel to the pyramid: Staff as a major agent of change; Across-government collaboration and coordination, engagement and participation; and Information sharing (First Progress Update, P 4). The Government also reported on the success of a new process for engagement with Aboriginal communities articulated in Statement of Commitment and mechanisms for collaboration using a Roundtable approach. The Premier and relevant Ministers met with members of the ATSIC State Council and other Aboriginal leaders to discuss long-term approaches and a shared commitment outlined in a Communiqué (December 2002).

In the second year of implementation, the Government’s focus moved beyond mainstream government services to Aboriginal communities, to engagement and on to joint planning as the next stage of partnership responses to the Gordon Inquiry. Key planks in the Government’s commitment to ‘New Ways of Working Together’ at inter-agency levels were identified as: Streamline the number of existing high-level management and coordination structures; Skill and support regional and local managers to plan, manage and deliver local integrated services; Ensure local managers and workers actively engage and develop relationships of trust with community leaders and members; and Set in place processes to improve case management and the provision of integrated services to families (Second Progress Update, December 2003). Progress with regards other initiatives including recommended legislative reform were also reported. The Government remained focused, ‘The commitment to Aboriginal child abuse and family violence is a long term one, and requires strong leadership from both
the Government and the Aboriginal community. New needs and challenges will emerge, but the partnership between Government and the Aboriginal community is now strong and will meet these challenges’ (Second Progress Update, p. 16). The last report presented a tabulated picture of funding allocations for specific funded initiatives being implemented per region and expenditures by each of the key agencies including joint activities and progress with initiatives.

In 2005 the Auditor General for Western Australia reported on Government agencies’ progress with implementation of Gordon Inquiry recommendations and was critical that reporting, monitoring and oversight was not being supported by authoritative information and that while progress was being made with some initiatives, others were behind schedule. The report urged active management for sustainable change, concluding that, ‘It is important that the impetus for change is not lost and the opportunity forgone’ (Auditor General for Western Australia, November 2005, p. 4). Information about further progress and final policy implementation has not been published on-line during the research project, however media and anecdotal evidence points to successful continuity of projects and agency developments for example, construction of multi-purpose inter-agency functional centres in key remote locations.

Since my research project began, the policy context of anti-discrimination and equality programs has experienced interruption due to political, bureaucratic and administrative changes. The Australian Labor Party Government came to power in 2001 and was led by Premier Alan Carpenter following the resignation of Geoff Gallop in January 2006. In September 2008, the Liberal Party won the State election and formed a minority government with the Nationals and independents. At the national level there has also been a change of government. Despite these changes, in both national and state jurisdictions there has been a general continuity of Aboriginal affairs policy. Following her work as Chairperson of the Gordon Inquiry, retired WA Children’s Court Magistrate Susan Gordon also became involved in policy development at the national level through a range of activities. Most notable has been her role as Chairperson of the Federal Intervention Taskforce initiated under the Howard Liberal Government facilitated with suspension of the Federal Anti-Racist Discrimination Act and maintained by the incoming Rudd Labor Government. The links between state and national policies in relation to Aboriginal peoples can be seen through the movement of key policy actors across political parties and legal frameworks. Policy development in
WA in relation to gender- and racial-awareness obviously continues to be affected by a wide range of factors, political engagement with the social justice agenda being of particular importance. At the completion of my thesis, the Equal Opportunities Commission of WA through its Substantive Equality Unit was maintaining its policy framework for anti-racism projects in WA State agencies; the Office for Women’s Interests located in the (new) Department for Communities retains its focus on gender analysis and gender mainstreaming activities including the production of an annual Women’s Report Card that can inform policy planning; and the co-coordinating FDV unit continues to operate in the (new) Department for Child Protection.

**Government Publications Concerning the Gordon Inquiry**

*Reports*


Government of Western Australia (2002), *Putting People First: The Western Australian State Government’s Action Plan For Addressing Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia, State Law Publisher.

Government of Western Australia (2003), *First Progress Update on the Implementation of “Putting People First”: Addressing Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia, State Law Publisher.

Government of Western Australia (2003), *Second Progress Update on the Implementation of ‘Putting People First’: Addressing Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities* Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia, State Law Publisher.

Government of Western Australia (2004), *Gordon Implementation – Regional Update*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia, State Law Publisher.

Ephemera


Government of Western Australia (2002), Violence and Abuse is NOT OK!: Putting People First: Government’s response to the Gordon Inquiry into family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities, Brochure, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia.


Parliament of Western Australia, Hansard Daily Transcripts, Questions and Debates relating to the Gordon Inquiry from website http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au

Other relevant publications relating to the Gordon Inquiry


## APPENDIX TWO: Interviewee Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Aboriginal Women</th>
<th>Aboriginal Men</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal Women</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal Men</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Highest level of policy work as ‘big picture’ policy actors including</td>
<td>2 Alice</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8 Grace</td>
<td>2 Richie Clark</td>
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<td>inter-agency representatives on Senior Officers’ Groups for Gordon</td>
<td>Enid</td>
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<td>Lorna (with Tracey)</td>
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<td>High level policy advocates in non-government agencies, consultants and</td>
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<td>Operational and project level working face-to-face with clients and/or</td>
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<td>responsible for client service delivery in local offices with a focus</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
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APPENDIX THREE: CODING

EXAMPLES FROM ONE TRANSCRIPT

‘The most consistent and strong thread throughout this material is the very humanness of the public sector environment, the human emotional content of policy work’ (Chapter Seven, page 196). The following extracts from my interview with Diane highlights emotional aspects of the policy work for her.

Coding exercise one

Karen: You speak with pride about that work.

Diane: Yes.

Karen: Feels good?

Diane: It’s very good. It’s good work. It’s made – we’ve made quite a few steps forward since 2001 and that’s great. The way I see it it’s always a couple of steps forward and maybe a step back and then you keep going and there’s a lot more to do.

Karen: So what takes the step back?

Diane: It could be a change of – often things will be really supported for a period of time and then something else becomes suddenly a priority perhaps of government or whatever. And so people’s attention will be more drawn to that. So the trick is trying to keep focus on an area so that there are not too many steps backwards.

Coding: Underlined words indicate positive emotions in relation to policy development: pride, pleasure in achievements, satisfaction, success, accomplishment, support, attraction, commitment, strategy.

Coding exercise two

Karen: And how did it come to you?

Diane: Because at that stage in 2001, I’d picked up the Aboriginal portfolio. Basically because a policy needed to be written and I was asked to do it so therefore I started the whole process of
developing policy in that area which is something I might describe to you because it’s been a
good process.

Karen: So how did it happen that you got asked to do that?

Diane: Someone was leaving in our section and it needed to be transferred to another person. I put my hand up for it.

Karen: Why did you put your hand up?

Diane: Because I was very interested in that area; in the Aboriginal area.

Karen: Why is that?

Diane: Well at a personal level I’m very interested in Aboriginal culture and reconciliation and just the, basically the strengths from the Aboriginal culture that can be brought into Australian society basically. And I’d done some travelling in the Kimberley and other areas and was interested to really be in more contact with Aboriginal people. So I had a personal interest in it and I also acknowledge that it was ...timely for us to take on board.

Coding: Underlined words indicate personal motivations in relation to policy development: initiative, interest, seizing opportunity, desire, justification, vision, curiosity, fascination with the ‘other’ seen as external to Australian society, acknowledgment

Coding exercise three

Diane: But my guess is that it was adequate because there’ve been so many reports into Aboriginal welfare and issues. And my guess is that many informants knew a lot of the issues that were relevant to address. It’s not the issues that we don’t know; it’s actually getting something that’s effective to address them. That’s really the issue. And a lot of recommendations came out that I’m sure could have been generated easily because a lot of people would have known that these were key issues, a lot of stakeholders. And there is a huge plethora of recommendations aren’t there?

Karen: 197.

Diane: You know if we could do, if we could implement appropriately just the key priority ones we’d be getting somewhere.
Coding: Underlined words relate to knowledge and knowingness in relation to policy development, what is known, what is not known, and the fact that lack of knowledge about what to do is not the reason that policy actors are not ‘getting somewhere’

**Coding exercise four**

Diane: *One initiative* ... *trying to look at is appointing at least an Aboriginal person in that district who can have their own caseload of any culture; they don’t have to be working with just Aboriginal people, but can move across* as well. Advising other staff and being able to work with Aboriginal people in another area *if it was necessary*, if that’s what the family preferred. *So there’s an example. Another example that’s happened at the moment is – and we’re trying to pull some of these under the Substantive Equality Framework so they can be evaluated.*

Karen: Right, so the evaluation is important to you?

Diane: *Oh yes, absolutely.* Even, although I’m *using that term loosely and it would be very qualitative,* I think what I’m meaning is if we take stock of where we’re at in some of these initiatives where people have been appointed and for one reason or another they might have left and look at, *how did that go? What impact did it have on clients, staff, and the person themselves? Could we have supported them better? What might we do next time? That’s what I’m talking about. Taking stock and looking at whether these initiatives that we’re trying are working and having the right outcomes.*

Coding: Underlined words indicate that Diane and her colleagues are trying to make a difference, trying different ways, practicing, reviewing, evaluating, assessing, responding, considering, listening, watching, wondering, thinking, taking initiative, taking action, drawing on examples

**Coding exercise five**

Diane: *So it’s being very well received and the researchers were very interested in it as well, so I think at a national level people have been asking me to send packages over to them and asking about the policy development.*

Karen: So what do you mean exactly when you say they were impressed with it, what aspects of it? What do you think has put that Policy into their minds?
Diane: I think people have been impressed with the process that we’ve used. So the evaluation, the consultation was very intricately tied to policy and practice development, it wasn’t done separately and I thought that was a very key thing. I mean it happened more by accident than design as things often do but looking back I think that the fact that (name) and I both had a strong involvement whilst we were doing that and were able to influence Policy and Services within the (department) as the thing was done and unfolding.

Karen: The action/research component?

Diane: Yes and because we knew the (department) so well and we knew how to translate back that information to the key personnel, whereas I think if we were just an external body doing the research it would be very difficult to do that. Often there is an end point and then the report is presented and that’s it.

Coding: Underlined words set out a successful policy process undertaken by Diane and her colleague, policy steps, policy tasks, policy stages, unintended consequences, reflected learning, factors and components responsible for success, benefits of certain approaches, difficulties of alternative approaches, strategies, conclusions, feedback, evaluation, consultation, involvement, influence, translation, communications, internal relationships, identification of key players, link between policy and practice, confidence, unfolding processes

Coding exercise six

Diane: The testimonials were Aboriginal people just saying what was important to them and what’s needed and encouraging other Aboriginal people to go and get help if they need it. But they need it as much as anyone else and they have a right to it, basically and there were some examples given. …with Aboriginal people and say, “Look this is what it’s about, it might be a Western concept, but this is what it’s about. And you have a right to be well supported as well as anyone else and here are some options. Don’t feel backward in coming forward.” At the same time, we have to as service providers make sure that when people do come into the office we do respond appropriately and don’t send them away feeling unsupported, which is one of the key issues that was raised in our consultations which really comes from the history of former Aboriginal policies and you know, removal and relocation of Aboriginal people. There’s a long history and how they’d been formerly treated by Government agencies and policies had been very poor and it’s translated through the generations and a lot of Aboriginal people are still very fearful of the Government services. So if we are encouraging them to come forward, we have to make sure our staff is culturally aware and we’ve done a lot of work in that area. We have to make sure we’ve got some Aboriginal staff. You know, we’ve got to make our
services welcoming. We’ve developed some lovely big posters from our work as well and they are in all of our offices now; beautiful posters of getting services right that signal to Aboriginal people that ‘this is the place that you can come to.’

Karen: Can I ask a really blunt question here? Do Aboriginal people have anything to fear from coming into (department) now?

Diane: Fear?

Karen: Well you said that they were fearful of government services…Do you think, would Aboriginal people still be fearful and have they got anything to be fearful of?

Diane: Not that I could possibly pinpoint. I’d say that the, Fear is the wrong word. What the errors that can be made, the barriers that can be in place, are that our services are not culturally appropriate. That we’re not enough aware of kinship systems and family systems and the role they play and how important they are for example. Therefore who we need to talk to and how we talk to them, we’re not so aware of language barriers and differences in expressions, colloquial. We need to be very aware that our, often our middle class therapy services and so on are able to be translated into a way that is appropriate, culturally appropriate. So the barriers – I fear the barriers and so it means that as an organisation, not just ours, any organisation, doesn’t just have to work on getting Aboriginal people in the door, but also have to make sure that all of the range of services, right from the receptionist at the desk right through, their forms, the form requirements; everything is not fearful or doesn’t present barriers to Aboriginal people. Does that make sense? Because yes, everything, from using the telephone may be difficult to assuming people can sit down and read forms to assuming that they understand the process for referral and how long it takes. Often a lot of those things are taken for granted when they can’t be.

Coding: Underlined words here are concerned with actions, doing words that indicate expectations, requirements, insistence, what is to be done and not done, what should happen and not happen, rules and understandings about what needs to happen to ‘getting services right’ for Aboriginal clients, all the things that policy actors have to consider and be sure about, the dos and don’ts, all the factors that potentially create pressure and anxiety.

Coding exercise seven

Diane: 50D positions or even positions where we want their expertise. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a 50D.
Karen: What does 50D actually mean? Where does the label come from?

Diane: I don’t know. I’ve no idea, no idea, ... I don’t know. I just know that there is provision for selecting a person with particular expertise, background. Look, given where Aboriginal people are at the moment in our society, then the type of people that we would be appointing to positions, tend to be again strong people within their families. There are issues for them, always and they maybe to do with – there are a lot of Aboriginal people who are ill or need support within their families, or there will be funerals to attend which they must attend; they’ll have carer responsibilities as well being employees and somehow we have to get to grips with that and work out how can we best support and work with our Aboriginal employees. And it’s not easy. And also they find themselves within a sea of non-Aboriginal faces and may not be well equipped to do the job yet and need training and development as well. So there are a lot of issues that need to be really thought through more carefully and in fact I was involved in a meeting recently where we would really be doing it, in terms of before appointing another person to a job.

Coding: Underlined words connect with stereotypes, this non-Indigenous policy actor is struggling with her limited knowledge about Aboriginal peoples, identified issues reflect the level of understanding about Aboriginal peoples, Aboriginal staff members operate within a White system, public sector context is ‘a sea of non-Aboriginal faces’, Aboriginal expertise

Coding exercise eight

Karen: Right. So how do you find out what they really need? Do you have Aboriginal people who are part of that?

Diane: Yes, that’s my thought. One recommendation that came out of this meeting that we had; well one idea I thought was possibly viable was, you know, the (department) is trying to increase it’s profile with the Aboriginal community and we take the best guess we can about how we might do that. But even in supervising that, we are not that clear how to do it. So maybe the way to do things is in the early stages is have a reference group for that purpose and have some Aboriginal people on it with a supervisor on it – an egalitarian structure where, as issues are identified, whether there are staff issues, or client issues or whatever, there is a way of identifying them and discussing them through so it’s almost like a formative evaluative isn’t it? I thought that might be a way to go because we don’t know what we don’t know. And we’ll only know as they come up. So I’d be interested to know whether we actually, for when we appoint this position we might set that up.
Coding: Underlined words are concerned with acquiring information, needs assessment, consultation practices, developing understanding, getting answers, filling in gaps, using Aboriginal people, processes and structures for gaining knowledge, communicating with Aboriginal peoples as clients and staff

EXPLANATION OF USE OF CODING

The coding in this Appendix indicated how I identified ideas, issues and themes in the raw data using one interview as an example. These extracts from my conversation with Diane also indicate how I gained information that further informed my ability to analyse and continue revisiting other interviews. The understanding gained from coding contributed to how I thought about the themes and structured the thesis.
APPENDIX FOUR: NOTES FROM ONE MEETING

Personal journal notes of conversation with Helen

Meeting held 5 September and notes made 9 September 2005. Helen was quite embarrassed to have initially forgotten our meeting. Her explanation? The Department had been ‘so busy this week it was crazy’.

Documents shared and discussed

I provided to Helen:

- a copy of my PhD research proposal
- an academic publication about whole-of-government activities:
- information about the work of an Aboriginal academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson
- information about a forthcoming conference in Queensland, ‘Whiteness and the Horizons of Race’.

Helen provided to me:

- (internal policy) paper
- (internal policy) paper

Main topics of discussion

*Structure & resources*

The transfer of Helen’s work unit from (name) Department to (name) Department was a complete surprise. There was no consultation with staff. Helen said this was like what happened with the Gordon Inquiry – they ‘just got it given to them when it was all done’. This referred to the action and implementation plans developed. She had commented in our previous meeting that the Government response had not involved the key agency staff and Inquiry members.

Helen spoke warmly about Richie and his continued support for her work; ‘he listens’.

Helen as an Aboriginal woman had little positive to say about her employing agency which is mostly staffed with Whites; ‘look for a black face’. She described one (who was White), and
possibly a few, senior staff, as ‘blockers’. She said (under her breath) that the Department should be closed.

The Department was under great strain, there are a lot of changes happening.... Staff shouldn’t be seen as going into Aboriginal communities with ‘a big stick’ like some people have said. She saw the need for an information provider, a ‘stimulus’. Disadvantaged Aboriginal communities shouldn’t just be expected to know what to ask for. ‘If you don’t have the information how can you know?’ She said it was the same for other people (like her) and gave the example of if she wanted a home mortgage she’d need the information, she wouldn’t be expected to know which one was the best, without finding out. But how could an Aboriginal community know what they want if they don’t know what they could ask for. ‘Consultations like that aren’t good’, but assessments of need are done that way, just as evaluations of outcomes could be wrong.

She couldn’t say anything positive about the work of (name) Department in relation to Indigenous issues and couldn’t suggest a name for me to follow-up.

‘The Unit is marginalised’. She also said the Indigenous section in (name) Department was ‘marginalised’.

Helen was most disappointed that (name) was transferred out of the position as (Aboriginal specialist policy and services position). She said he had developed the area and had done ‘great work’; ‘his’ policy was ‘wonderful’. ‘He listened’ and was prepared to debate the issues. He wasn’t scared to take up issues and he talked to Aborigines. ‘Lots of people are afraid to talk about the issues’ with Aborigines.

Helen was not familiar with the Substantive Equality Unit within the Equal Opportunities Commission, and was determined to find out more. She was generally concerned about marginalisation of Aboriginal units and people who were sole representatives on government committees. They became ‘Uncle Toms’.

She was on the (name) Reference Group and talked about the Indigenous Women’s Council being reviewed at the moment. The structure runs the risk of having the women marginalised. (name) Unit doesn’t have the expertise relating to Indigenous issues, Indigenous women.

What’s happening with Gordon implementation?

‘There’s a lot happening’, Helen said. ... She doesn’t get out (travel to the areas she’s responsible for) as much as she should. Place Management is ‘the gel to the Gordon programs’
with its brokerage concept, in partnerships with Aboriginal communities, as per the diagram model shared with me by my key contact with the (name) agency.

Identifying key stakeholders in an area is part of the job. Who do we engage with is a good question. The Gordon Inquiry ‘enabled us’ to resist simply ticking the boxes, the usual way that departments answer questions and evaluations and do their program work.

She confirmed an evaluation of Gordon Inquiry implementation. Evaluation was always built into the Gordon implementation plans, a whole-of-government evaluation to see what difference has been made. ‘What is the real outcome of all the money?’ ‘How are agencies doing it differently, doing it better?’ All the agencies have to look closely at what they’re doing now and this is an opportunity that ‘shouldn’t be wasted’.

The Gordon Inquiry had made ‘a great impact’ and ‘made a lot of things possible’, thanks to the Premier’s full support too. If there had been a change of government at the last election, this work would have… (shaking of the head).... There was a lot of anxiety. Most of the ATSIC people are now unemployed – ‘gone’. ...

**Other policies to consider**

The State Strategy being developed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet in partnership with Department of Indigenous Affairs is important. (name) is the contact. No other State has a total big-picture strategy. Representatives of various departments meet twice a week. (name) represents (name) Department; ‘she’s young’. ... Opportunities came about because ‘Gordon was an enabler’. This policy development was identified as potentially appropriate for my PhD research on a policy pathway. Linked to the development of a strategy is bilateral work to ensure that ATSIC funds ‘are not lost’ and opportunities are increased; negotiations are currently underway with Canberra about these funds and initiatives.

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle is another policy that Helen suggested might be of relevance to my research. The policy has already been in place but the implementation issues are problematic and this could be worthy of further study and review, an audit.

**At the national level**

She was in agreement that ATSIC needed to be closed and we discussed the National Indigenous Council (NIC). Her approach is to positively respond to opportunities that exist and
in relation to ATSIC demise, she saw NIC members as worthy of support instead of personal criticism. ...Mostly the members were hand picked for their expertise. NIC is not a body that represents the community. She made positive comments about Sue Gordon, who had also indicated that she would contribute, ‘do her bit’. ‘She was prepared to play a role’; ‘she’s strong’, ‘she says what has to be said’, and ‘she listens’...

**Gender**

Helen said an Aboriginal male staff member was critical of her being selected to participate in an intergovernmental project and highly successful conference. He said that Aboriginal men should be involved too with family and children’s areas, which she agreed with. But she said that ‘these women would just not have been able to go if men were present. Do you want women to attend or not?’

She said good male role models are needed. Like Noel Pearson, who is great and has charisma. She agreed that it was a great pity that at the national level, politicians selectively supported what Aboriginal leaders had to say if it supported the government position. She has appointed an older male Aboriginal staff member. ‘You need to have a man in these positions’, even though it’s not proving easy.

**Making a difference**

She was concerned that the various models, structures and methods of the 1980s were tried but despite best efforts, didn’t work. These ideas ‘didn’t work’, ‘didn’t make a real difference’. Her mum ...says that ‘things weren’t that bad’ and she shouldn’t be so negative about past efforts and activities. Helen is intent on ‘making a difference’.

We discussed how change processes, methods and ways of trying can be appropriate, the best possible under the circumstances, but as times and opportunities change then new ways of doing things are needed.

Helen has a clear and articulate vision. She credits her parents with her ability to think outside the square. She also said she had worked for a long time in the public service.

She emphasises to new staff and at meetings of Indigenous workers that they are employed as public servants not as community members; the distinctions need to be understood. There are responsibilities and obligations.
**Names and contacts**

We discussed the idea of key advisers, people who could be helpful to my research and with expertise to share with me to ‘avoid big mistakes in this field’ and ‘keep me on the straight and narrow’. She said the names already suggested (listed on the Action Sheet) were all ‘intellectual’ and maybe I needed some other views and experiences. Getting a group together wouldn’t work because in any case ‘you’d be flat out getting all these women together in one room at one time’. So for pragmatic reasons, a concept and formal structure such as (unspoken) Reference Group would not be as useful as talking at particular times with people who can think critically and are well placed with an overview of these issues. She warned that these Aboriginal people would ‘probably have lots of different ideas’ and disagree; they had different perspectives from each other.

She recommended four women (names) at different locations. And of a fifth woman in a Government department who had been suggested to me: ‘I don’t know if you’ll get much from her’. She suggested an Aboriginal male heading up an organisation of relevance to my research.

Helen gave generously of her time (over an hour) and said she’d be pleased to keep in touch with my research and meet again to talk about developments with Indigenous affairs and implementation of the Gordon Report.

**Final reflections**

There were some key words/information from this meeting of relevance to an institutional ethnography.

Helen seemed to value people/processes who/that really listen, debate the issues, tell it how it is.

She referred to some people as ‘blockers’.

She did not present herself as someone with power at the top/primary level who could determine overarching policy (eg the Gordon Response, location of units) and emphasised the process of being presented with a decision already made. To that extent she spoke like a frontline officer. Yet she spoke actively and with commitment as someone who could make things happen, as a manager/senior official who can shape policy development and influence policy implementation. So she straddled a divide. She was determined ‘to make a difference’
and influence others (including whole agencies) to make that difference, but the location and
resources of her employing agency was critical. She seemed to speak as an informed system
insider/outsider.

She repeatedly identified marginalisation of Indigenous people on committees, working in units,
being consulted, as an issue.

Her vision of change was more about concepts and new ways of thinking to take up
opportunities, than dependent on policy documents. However, the Gordon Report was
obviously a powerful stimulant, and policing policy was an excellent model.

EXPLANATION OF USE OF NOTES

These notes from one meeting were valuable during the ‘scoping’ stage of my research. Helen
was an important player in the public sector policy environment and my meeting
with her contributed significantly to the development of my overall research objectives
and specific interview questions. Helen’s perspective and overview of the Gordon
Inquiry implementation process, progress and policy players provided me with early
contacts that started the ‘snowballing’ of further research participants and informed me
about political and other issues to be aware of during my communications across
agencies and in the wider FDV sector.
APPENDIX FIVE: PERSONAL JOURNAL RECORD OF CONTACTS MADE WITH THE (NAME) DEPARTMENT AND NOTES ABOUT UNSUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS TO INTERVIEW KEY POLICY ACTOR/S

- Voicemail message left 27 November 2006, but no reply. Wait until (key contact person) sends an updated list of SOG members.
- Rang again 5 December 2006, but the receptionist told me to phone tomorrow.
- 7 December 2006, given message by receptionist that the department contact person for my research request should be (Joe) who has responsibility for (mainstream service delivery) since agency restructuring. He’s in meetings so call back tomorrow.
- 12 December 2006 spoke with Joe. He was initially quite laidback and said he could make the arrangements, but I talked about formal protocol and he then thought it best to write to the Director General who would pass the approval and request to Joe. Joe not taking leave so will be available in New Year for interview. He will also advise regarding regional staff for the frontline interviews – Regional Manager for Northern Metropolitan includes Joondalup; Broome will change in February to a different person previously from a rural and remote region, so this person has a lot of experience; Kalgoorlie is covered by (woman’s name). Letter sent to Director General on 12 December 2006. I will wait for his next contact.
- Letter of reply 28 December 2006 signed by (Fred from specialist Aboriginal section of the Department) – refused permission to interview Department staff. I rang Joe on 11 January 2007 to explain situation. He had been expecting me to phone re interview arrangements and was surprised with news about the letter. He agreed that probably the request had gone to the Aboriginal area automatically & he suggested I phone Fred to explain background and seek reconsideration. Joe thought that there was a good deal of anxiety about the subject matter and that could be the reason for reluctance to participate. Joe said that he himself would still be agreeable to an interview. I rang Fred’s office but he’s on leave.
- Rang 16 January 2007 and was told Fred was travelling up north, so I should call back next week.
- 22 January 2007 Fred’s secretary said she’s “pretty sure it’s next week he’s back”.
- I’ve tried another couple of times to call Fred and got put through to a non-extension today 1 February 2007.
- “He’s not at his desk” 5 February 2007.
- I left a message on Fred’s voicemail 12 February 2007.
- I emailed Fred on 14 February 2007 as suggested by his Personal Assistant.
- Tried again unsuccessfully to contact Fred on 16 February and 20 February 2007.
• I rang Joe and asked him to discuss my request with Fred with a view to at least gaining permission to interview Joe, in another division, who is still agreeable to an interview. I will phone Joe in April.

• There has been no further development with my request so I concluded that this attempt to interview policy staff in this Department was unsuccessful.
APPENDIX SIX: REFLECTIONS SUMMARY FROM ONE INTERVIEW

Personal journal notes on my interview with Clark, with reflections and reactions to the material

Key words and phrases used by Clark during the interview:

- Dysfunction
- Ownership
- Decision-making
- Empowered
- Re/labeling – defining
- Intricate → capture everything
- trivializing
- climate → topical
- personalities – true believers
- voice
- catalyst
- continuity
- political landscape
- Definition of Insanity
- ‘rock and a hard place’
- ‘piss and wind’

Immediate post-interview reflections

This was a long and intense interview in his office on a public holiday. The building was busy and he kept his eye on his mobile and emails the whole time. The tape recorder ran out but a further half-an-hour of conversation continued. In fact he was on a roll and probably had another few hours worth to say.

The first half of the interview was excellent background information about operations in the field of FDV, Aboriginal client needs, inter-agency issues, the Gordon Inquiry and restraining
orders with some good material on gender and race. But as the end of the hour scheduled loomed he opened up even more to my questions about what he’d like to see in the organisation, how to fix the problems with the dysfunctional system etc. Many of the themes and key words and phrases that I’d been drawing out of the interviews so far were raised by him and expanded on and pulled together. So I’m increasingly of the view that the delay in getting approval to interview staff in this agency was not a disadvantage at all. I’m now in a better position to ‘massage’ my list of questions in the categories, to get to the specifics and captured on tape with agreement.

The most interesting thing that happened in my two hours with him actually happened in the last few minutes – just as we were about to stand and pack up so I could be ushered out of the secure building. He became fixated on one of the emails he’d been monitoring as we spoke. He made sure I knew this could not be used in the research. ...He was clearly shaken about the email instruction as he saw me off the premises and went quickly back inside with final comments about ‘Good officers toiling away…they don’t get promoted. They just keep going. The best ones who are here to stay.’

As I was leaving I asked what would happen if he was holidaying with his family which he’d previously said was happening soon. Would he still have contact and be accountable? But he was in ‘another place’ and didn’t really hear what I was saying. This final incident reinforced what he’d been saying about structures, powers, authority – staff being told what to do and how to do it along a chain of authority. He wasn’t taking issue necessarily, arguing with the email but more caught up in curiosity about the development, a player in the ‘big game’ above and beyond his level – a level he presumably aimed to join.

The interview was really useful I thought at the time, particularly for his experienced overview and insight about operationalising legislation with policy and services. No-one else had talked to me about the need for a phone and a car if you’re an Aboriginal woman experiencing family violence. Lots of interviewees would’ve known those basics but maybe the senior staff had long forgotten their early frontline jobs or they’d moved on to other priorities. But He was very mindful of the practical matters on the frontline and in people’s lives – as a policy drafter himself, one of the small group of White men who meet on all the committees, talk and plan. He was prepared to name up the key Aboriginal organisations as unhelpful, part of the problem in fact especially with financial matters.

I was surprised he wasn’t pushing statistics and reports on me this time like he’d previously been keen to do when I met him at public meetings and FDV conferences.
What did I learn?

Well, most important was that I was again being educated about personal commitment. Clark challenged my negative stereotypes about ‘cops’.

What didn’t I ask?

After two hours I hope I asked all the most important questions, but maybe I need a little more time to reflect on the interview. Maybe then I could feel curious for more explanations about some of the issues or questions; often this happens when ideas continue to play on my mind afterwards. Mostly my curiosity was piqued about his email. Perhaps with more time I could’ve asked him to spell out the process for his policies (‘small policies’ he called them), that he’d initiated and felt were positive developments. It might’ve been more informative to find out how such initiative could be blocked. But after all, I can’t just do a lobotomy and steal all the brains of my interviewees. I have to be asking, listening and analysing as a researcher with central research questions as priority. Now I have to undertake a strategic gathering, refining and organising of this data I’ve gathered today, knowing that there would be many PhDs in this material today.
APPENDIX SEVEN: INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROJECT: INDIGENOUS ISSUES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING OF PUBLIC POLICY

Background Information about the research project
The aim of this research is to explore policies, processes and practices in the field of family and domestic violence and child abuse. The particular focus is on gender relations, institutionalised racism, and how interconnections between gender and race affect public policies and services delivered to Aboriginal communities by agencies and organizations.

The researcher is Karen Vincent. Karen’s research methodology includes a literature review, individual interviews, and analyses of policy and procedural documents. The overall project will contribute to a PhD to be completed in 2008.

Interviews will be conducted with key government advisers, policy actors, senior agency staff and frontline workers in agencies working in the field of family and domestic violence and child abuse. Potential participants in the research project were identified with assistance from senior agency staff, although such senior staff will have no access to the names or transcripts of the eventual volunteers. Questions will relate to your knowledge and experience with policies, processes and professional practices in the field, and include aspects of the Gordon Inquiry that may be connected to your work.

Participation will be totally voluntary. Each interview will take approximately one hour. Interviews will be taped and transcribed, but will remain confidential to the researcher. Quotes from interviews will be used only with the permission of the person quoted, and names and other identifying information will be removed unless the person expressly wishes otherwise.

Protocols and protections
Every precaution will be taken during this research to minimise any risks that may cause participants the possibility of emotional distress, anxiety or embarrassment. The researcher will respect your position and behave in a professional, courteous manner. There will be no coercion and your participation in the research will not be professionally prejudicial to you. Your responses will not be provided to any other parties and will not be discussed with any staff or clients.

Your support for this research project would be appreciated. The possible benefits of the research will include an opportunity for participants to contribute information and build understanding of the policy process especially in the field of domestic violence and child protection. The completion of the Consent Form is taken to constitute your consent to participate.
If you have any questions regarding this research project, you may address them to the Field Researcher Karen Vincent or to the Chief Investigator, Associate Professor Joan Eveline at the addresses below. A copy of this Information Sheet and Consent Form is provided for your own records.

Associate Professor Joan Eveline  
School of Economics and Commerce  
The University of Western Australia  
35 Stirling Highway  
Crawley WA 6009  
Phone: 6488 3466  
Fax: 6488 1055  
Email: jeveline@biz.uwa.edu.au

Karen Vincent  
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Email: vincek02@student.uwa.edu.au
INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM Cont’d

RESEARCH PROJECT: INDIGENOUS ISSUES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING OF PUBLIC POLICY

Consent

I (the participant) have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may withdraw at any time without reason and without prejudice.

I understand that all information provided is treated as strictly confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to by law. I have been advised as to what data is being collected, what the purpose is, and what will be done with the data upon completion of the research.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

Participant Name __________________________________ __________________________

Participant
Signature__________________________________________ _________Date____________

Researcher
Signature__________________________________________ _________Date____________

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Australia requires that all participants are informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively, to the Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Registrar’s Office, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009 (Telephone number 6488 3703). All study participants will be provided with a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their personal records.
APPENDIX EIGHT: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

‘Big Picture’ Interviews with Senior Policy Actors

Draft Interview Questions

A) Experience
I am interested in the work you do with policies, your involvement in the policy process, how you experience the work and the issues for you.

1. How did you come to be working in this position, what background have you had for this work?
2. What is your official position, eg your title, the level of the job?
3. Can you tell me about aspects of the work that you find most rewarding and enjoyable?
4. What is the accountability in your job, who are you answerable to?
5. Can you describe for me the sorts of support you get for your work?
6. Where do you get your information, guidance or direction for this work?
7. Can you tell me about some of the stresses, the challenges for you?

B) Gordon Inquiry
1. What activities have you been involved with that relate to the Gordon Inquiry?
2. What do you think the Gordon Inquiry has achieved?
3. What stage is the Gordon implementation at in your work, is it ongoing or reached the final stages?
4. Can you tell me what your first expectations were, the ideas you had about the Inquiry when it was set up?
5. The Foreword commented on skepticism about the Inquiry, for example ‘another whitewash’, ‘short timeframe’, ‘restricted powers’, ‘limited Terms of Reference’. Did you think these views were legitimate?
6. If so, can you explain what limitations there were on the Inquiry and how these affected the outcomes?
7. The Report presented 197 recommendations to the Government. The Gallop Government set up a Task Force and the subsequent Action Plan promised a $75 m package which included $66.5m over four years in new allocations to government agencies. Was the Government’s response appropriate?
8. What did you first think it meant for your area of work?
9. In the Foreword, Aboriginal women and men were encouraged to stand up against family violence and child abuse. How did the Aboriginal community respond to the Inquiry and its Report?

10. Do you think the attitudes around you about the Gordon Inquiry affected the way you could put the recommendations into policy actions?

11. The findings, recommendations and responses to the Terms of Reference were presented in an issues focused approach. The 197 Recommendations were presented in general order of sequence by agency. What did you see as the overall priorities for Government action?

12. High level collaboration and coordination structures were set up to manage implementation across agencies. Can you explain to me how these structures have been working?

13. The Auditor-General’s Report was critical of implementation progress, reporting and monitoring in the agencies involved after three years. Were the comments related to any of the activities you’ve been involved with?

14. Do you agree with the comments made? If so, what would you suggest should be done about it?

15. To what extent has there been a whole-of-government take up of the findings? Have agencies been working together for the sorts of changes recommended in the Report?

16. What do you think has helped, or hindered, progress since the Report?

17. What still needs to be done, developed and/or resolved?

C) Recommendations and Implementation

1. Have the Recommendations from the Gordon Inquiry been supported by policy makers in agencies? If so, what kind of support and where from?

2. How do policy makers usually communicate their endorsement or agreement with policy directions and proposals? Eg Can you describe for me how I could tell that a policy response was positive, even enthusiastic?

3. Is there other work being done in agencies that could help agencies implement the Gordon Inquiry recommendations? For example, the work of the Substantive Equality Unit in the Equal Opportunity Commission?

4. What were the challenges you confronted with your work to implement the Gordon recommendations? EG problems with obstruction, lack of information, cooperation, or resistance?

5. Could you describe for me how you dealt with these difficulties?

6. If the Inquiry could happen over again what, if anything, should be done differently?
7. Could you tell me how working in this area has affected you personally, positively and/or negatively?

D) Terminology
1. What do you understand by the terms ‘racism’ and ‘institutional racism’ (also called institutionalized, systemic or structural racism)?
2. Is racism something that gets considered in the policy work that you do? If so, do you talk about it explicitly? Or is racism something that can’t be written about or emphasized in policy work?
3. Could you relate these concepts to the Gordon Inquiry?
4. If you have come up against racism yourself, could you tell me an example of what happened?
5. What influences the way this subject gets dealt with in the work that you do?
6. What do you understand by the concept of ‘gender’?
7. Do issues related to gender have any relevance to your work? If so, what sort of issues and how do the issues get discussed?
8. What are the influences on how gender issues get dealt with in written policies and documents?
9. If you have come up against gendered power relations yourself, could you give me an example of what happened?

E) Service delivery issues
The Report of the Gordon Inquiry discussed the difficulties of forming a view on any ‘correct’ definition of ‘family violence’ or ‘child abuse’ and urged the Government to consider Indigenous, and gender, perspectives on these issues in policy development and the delivery of services.
1. What is your understanding of how gender contributes to Aboriginal family violence and child abuse?
2. Anyone reading the Report could get the impression that policies and agency services were gender neutral. Is that accurate? If so, can you explain what the policies are trying to achieve?
3. Has gender been an issue for the way that Inquiry Recommendations have been actioned?
4. Could you give me any examples of how gender issues could affect the way that agencies operate?
5. Does gender get the same sort of approach at all levels of work and in all types of agency documents eg policies, manuals, instructions, guidelines, practice etc?
The Report made a number of comments about different experiences and needs of Aboriginal women and men. Recommendations were made about service delivery to take account of cultural sensitivities, for example additional employment of women to policing roles.

1. Did you think racism could be a factor in Aboriginal family violence and child abuse? If so, could you give me an example?
2. Has the Gordon Inquiry made a difference to the way your agency relates to Aboriginal women and men? If so, could you give me an example of the different way of operating?
3. Has there been any history of institutional racism in policies and services?
4. Could you give me any examples of how agencies can avoid the problems of institutional racism?
5. What is your view about ‘mainstreaming’ of government provision for Aboriginal peoples?
6. The Government funded extra staffing to agencies in response to the Recommendations. Have these extra positions made a difference?
7. What else would you like to see done before the Government officially ‘signs off’ on the Gordon Inquiry?
8. Would ‘gender mainstreaming’ be appropriate to deal with issues raised by the Inquiry as ongoing for Indigenous women and men?

The Inquiry considered restraining orders one of the quantitative indicators of domestic violence. The historical under-reporting by Aboriginal women was examined to understand why, despite the efforts of agencies, the current service system is inadequate (page xxvi). The Report identified that Aboriginal women victims experienced particular barriers and difficulties accessing support services.

1. What do you consider to have been the main problems with restraining orders?
2. What elements would be important for agencies to successfully implement restraining orders with Aboriginal women and men?
3. Since the Inquiry, the new restraining orders system has been introduced in WA. What role have you played with these developments?
4. Can you give me your thoughts on how the new system has been working?
5. What else could be done to improve the system?

F) Research Advice

1. Who else would be a useful person to interview to get a ‘big picture’ of the policy work in the field of Aboriginal family violence and child abuse?
2. I have provided you with a list of the main documents I have compiled relating to Aboriginal family violence and child abuse and the Gordon Inquiry. Can you suggest other documents I should be asking about and reading to follow the policy process and understand the issues?
Questions for Interviews with Frontline Staff

G) Experience
I am interested in the work you do, the way your work is organised to implement policies, and how you experience the work and the issues involved.

1. Can you tell me how you came into the job, what background have you had for this work?
2. What is your official position, eg your title, the level of the job, is it permanent?
3. What were your expectations when you first started here, what did you think the job would involve?
4. What are the functions of the job, the role that you play?
5. Can you tell me about aspects of the work that you find most rewarding and enjoyable?
6. What is the accountability in your job, who are you answerable to?
7. What sorts of tasks are required mostly in the job?
8. Can you tell me about any hurdles that you experience in doing this work? Do you experience any ongoing problems in undertaking this work, for example obstruction, lack of information or cooperation, resistance?
9. Can you give me some examples of ways that you have dealt with these difficulties?
10. Where do you get your information, guidance or direction for this work?
11. What could be done to help you achieve more with this work?
12. What factors most affect the work of frontline staff across the agencies you connect with?
13. Has working in this area affected you personally? Have there been particular stresses and challenges? Any negative consequences? In what ways has your work been recognised positively?

H) Gordon Inquiry
1. What activities have you been involved with that relate to the Gordon Inquiry?
2. What do you think the Gordon Inquiry has achieved?
3. Can you tell me what your first expectations were, the ideas you had about the Inquiry when it was set up?
4. What would you still like to see developed and/or resolved?
5. If the Gordon Inquiry could happen over again what, if anything, should be done differently?

I) Terminology
10. What do you understand by the terms ‘racism’ and ‘institutional racism’ (also called institutionalized, systemic or structural racism)?
11. Is racism something that affects the work that you do? Can you give me an example?
12. How would issues related to Aboriginality get talked about here and dealt with?
13. If you have come up against racism yourself, could you describe an example of what happened?
14. What do you understand by the concept of ‘gender relations’?

15. Do issues related to gender have any relevance to your work? If so, what sort of issues and how do the issues get discussed, and written down?

16. If you have come up against gendered power relations yourself, could you give me an example of what happened?

J) Service delivery issues

The Gordon Report urged the Government to consider Indigenous, and gender, perspectives on the issues of family violence and child abuse in policy and service delivery.

6. What is your understanding of how gender contributes to Aboriginal family violence and child abuse?

7. Do gender issues affect the way that frontline staff operate? Can you describe an example for me?

8. What do you think would be appropriate ways to deal with issues raised by the Inquiry about Indigenous women and men?

9. What is your view about ‘mainstreaming’ of government provision for Aboriginal peoples?

10. Do you think racism could be a factor in Aboriginal family violence and child abuse? If so, could you give me an example?

11. Could you give me any examples of how agencies can avoid problems with racism?

12. What do you consider to have been the main problems with intervention services in family violence and child abuse?

E) Restraining Orders

1. Since the Gordon Inquiry, the new restraining orders system has been introduced in WA. Can you give me your thoughts on how the new system has been working?

2. What experience have you had with restraining orders in your work? Could you explain the activities you have been involved with?

3. Can you describe any problems with restraining orders in the field of family violence and child abuse?

4. What elements would be important for agencies to successfully implement restraining orders with Aboriginal women and men?

5. What else could be done to improve the system?

K) Research Advice

3. Who else would be a useful person to interview to get an understanding of your frontline work in Aboriginal family violence and child abuse?

4. Can you suggest documents I should be asking about and reading to follow your work processes in policy implementation?
APPENDIX NINE: THE DULUTH MODEL

The Supportive Circles of Social Institutions and Culture. Source: Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota, USA.
APPENDIX TEN: PUBLICATION

The invisibility of gendered power relations in domestic violence policy

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ABSTRACT
This exploratory study seeks to illustrate how the policy context shapes the way policy actors engage with concepts of gender and practices of racism. The paper draws on two case studies in the context of family and domestic violence (FDV) policy and service development in an Australian State Government context. The first case study uses document analysis of a major public inquiry into Government agency responses to FDV in Indigenous communities. The second uses a policy audit tool to examine a policy development process in a department responsible for coordinating human service agencies, services and funding of community-sector FDV projects. These case studies reveal that both Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal women can disappear from the concerns that FDV policy purports to solve. To demonstrate our argument, we show how the policy terminology of both 'domestic violence' and that of 'family violence' can render gender and racism invisible.

Key words: gender; racism; family and domestic violence policy; public sector

'The above statement was made in a speech announcing a program titled 'No more homes during domestic violence call-outs, violence: We're breaking the silence' by the State West Australian Government Minister with Children and young people live in up to 85% of these homes.' (Templeman 2006)

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1. This is an edited version of a paper presented at the Gender, Work and Organization 5th Biennial International Interdisciplinary Conference, Keele University, England, 27-29 June, 2007. The research was funded by an ARC research grant.
the policy area of family and domestic violence (FDV). The speech was one of many over recent years by government about a subject once considered taboo: family and domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. The Western Australia Parliament has engaged in numerous debates and the Government has responded to frequent media reports about the subject. Increasingly these have been about FDV experienced in Aboriginal communities. In contrast to a history of silence, the past five years has seen the policy context of FDV become highly politicized to the issue. Public sector agencies are under immense pressure, as the Australian public expresses ‘moral outrage’ (Cripps 2007) about endemic abuse against Aboriginal women and children.

Such outrage is overdue. Indigenous women are 45 times more likely to experience domestic violence than non-Indigenous women and 10 times more likely to be killed as a result of domestic violence (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2001). In this context, the pressure is on departments most closely responsible for dealing with family violence against women and children – police, justice and community welfare – to counter and curtail the problem.

This paper examines the complexities and challenges of the public policy process in a fraught and challenging field at a time of turmoil and public visibility. We describe the research as exploratory since it draws on two case studies in one Australian state to examine the extent to which intersectionality is ignored in domestic violence policy. The paper suggests that although the issue of family violence is now much more visible to public scrutiny and departments alike, the crucial issue of the gendered power relations that underpins this family violence remains as invisible as ever when it comes to policy development.

Our two case studies are drawn from the field of FDV in Western Australia. Our analysis of these case studies shows two different ways in which gendered power relations become invisible. The first case, commonly called the ‘Gordon Inquiry’, shows how gendered power relations can be omitted from family violence policy when the emphasis of the report is on institutionalized racism. The second shows how Indigenous women disappear in the departmental high-level policy for FDV, but so also does gendered power relations. Both of these public policy documents indicate a lost opportunity to explore intersectionality. Despite this similarity, the capacity of each to confront the white ethnocentrism of family violence policy is quite different.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The historically and socially contingent nature of policy is particularly relevant in the field of Aboriginal affairs where policies have been critically affected by recent media and public attention. At the same time feminist studies point to the need for projected gender outcomes to be taken into account in all policy development processes. For some feminists the answer lies in what is now termed ‘gender mainstreaming’ (Walby 2005). However, as Eveline and Bacchi (2005) noted, that approach to policy is highly contested and subject to being infused with inadequate understandings of gender. As Bacchi (2005: 184) stated, ‘the task is to examine how gendered concepts are applied in the lives of diverse groups of men and women’.

Domestic violence is a field of public policy in which one would expect that a gender analysis would be ubiquitous. Yet neither gender nor institutional racism is necessarily given priority in such policymaking. Once considered a taboo subject, domestic violence has become a subject for public and political attention, with the World Health Organization estimating that between 15% and 71% of women have experienced physical or sexual assault from an intimate partner (World Health Organization [WHO] 2005: xiii). Despite gathering pace in the last decade, much domestic violence research has neglected or ignored Indigenous experience. There is significant under-reporting of FDV for all population
groups, but particularly for Aboriginal women experiencing FDV. Nonetheless, statistical indicators reveal considerable over-representation of Indigenous women experiencing assault and death (Office for Women's Policy 2006). Aboriginal women are 10 times more likely to be murdered than non-Aboriginal women (Duff 1994: 38). In Western Australia, Aboriginal women 'make up only about 3% of the adult female population (yet) they accounted for half of all the domestic violence incidents reported to the police in 1994 ... (they) are more than 45 times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be a victim of domestic violence' (Ferrante et al 1996). The Office for Women's Policy (2005: 57) has reported that 22.6% of Indigenous women in Western Australia perceived family violence as a problem in their community. Despite their continued calls for improved safety and protection, Indigenous women have been described as 'the single most legally disadvantaged group in Australian society' (Australian Law Reform Commission 1994).

The full picture of FDV and its impacts on the social, emotional, physical and financial well-being of Indigenous women and communities is currently unmeasured and program evaluations report mixed success with efforts at prevention, intervention, punishment and treatment. The 2007 Social Justice Report (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 2007) identified concerns with research and evaluation methods, including the privileging of statistical data by government that ultimately serves to reinforce negative stereotypes. 'One of the challenges that this demonstrates is to listen to communities and ensure that evaluation is conducted in a situational and culturally appropriate way' (HREOC 2007: 22). Understanding the components for ‘best practice’ is still under-developed. However, common elements at community level include the importance of Aboriginal leadership and Aboriginal women project self-management. It has been of critical importance for the sustainability of Aboriginal communities to resist racist assumptions that problematise Aboriginal peoples by portraying Aboriginality as the source of FDV problems and presenting a chronic or recalcitrant ‘Aboriginal problem’ (Blagg 2008; Cripps 2004).

Aboriginal women and men continue to be affected by the traumatic legacy of historical institutional racism, expressed and reinforced by individual acts of racism by agents of the state. Conventional wisdom surrounding racial categories perpetuates discrimination and prejudice. Mainstream agencies continue to relate to Aboriginal women and men on the basis of racist stereotypes that are so familiar they are rarely challenged.

Institutional racism infuses domestic violence policy. Perpetrator treatments and crisis management systems have been based on Western interventions and imposed by social institutions in ways described by Indigenous writers as epistemic and post-colonial (Duran et al 1998). Western (white) theories of domestic violence have been increasingly challenged by Indigenous critics as tools for social control. Simplistic conventional solutions that exacerbate the problem include programs that pathologise Indigenous men, focus on parallel factors such as alcohol and drug abuse and treat violence as symptomatic of a general community deficiency. Duran concluded that ‘authors maintain a definition of the problem that masks the issues of domination and subjugation, issues which must be considered given the historical context of this problem’ (Duran et al 1998: 98).

The literature shows that Indigenous women dealing with agencies experience racism as an everyday occurrence (Baldry, Green & Thorpe 2006; St. Jean & Feagin 1998). ‘One in five Indigenous women experienced discrimination and/or racism in 2002’ (Office for Women's Policy 2005: 58). In 2004, an inquiry into housing for Aboriginal people examined institutional racism and reported that ‘Aboriginal women and children escaping domestic and/or family violence experience a higher degree of disadvantage

In an attempt to place Indigenous issues on policy agendas, activists have promoted and supported a politics of Indigenous identity. Pat O'Shane (1976), for example, showed how and why the primary concern for Aboriginal women was racism, not gender. Jackie Huggins (Huggins cited in Jones 2005) explained that 'there are some issues where Indigenous women can form alliances with non-Indigenous women, but that the form of feminism that is available to Indigenous women is not the model they prefer. Instead, they have their own brand of feminism that's all-encompassing'. In short, Aboriginal women's writings have stressed as their primary struggle the survival of their people, the recognition of their cultural identity and what those needs dictate for government policy. In this context gender discrimination becomes secondary to cultural identity. The extent to which this much-needed emphasis on institutional racism can sustain a gender analysis has been strongly debated. Stubbs (2004: 4), for example, abhorred the backlash against gender policy and argued that 'denouncing domestic violence as a crime has been an important gain of feminist activism after a history of neglect and should not be undermined'. Others have argued that neither gender nor race should be the primary focus, but rather how the two intersect in different situations. Led by black feminists in the United States, Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (1998), this concern for intersectionality has had very limited attention in Australian policy. It is that concern, coupled with the need to recognise the racism that underpins Aboriginal women's struggles, that provides the analytical starting point for this paper.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative methodology was considered most appropriate to gather new information and a deeper understanding about gender and racism, contested fields of study. Exploratory in its design, the research sought to gain an understanding of how particular policy objectives are conceptualized as well as operationalised.

We used a case study approach and the techniques of literature review, policy audits, document analysis and interviews with a number of key players. Case study is valuable for gaining a greater depth of understanding of the topic (Yin 1989). The two case studies in this research were designed to provide triangulation for the research question of when and how gender and racism are rendered invisible. We used issues and themes arising from document analysis of the two case studies to develop the interview questions and analyse the transcripts. Both case studies analysed Western Australian policy documents and reports.

The first case study examined in-depth a major inquiry report to government (Gordon, Hallahan & Henry 2002). The Inquiry that developed the report was instituted by the Western Australian Government in 2001 as a response to media accounts of widespread sexual abuse and violence within the Aboriginal community. We selected the Inquiry for its significance as a major policy 'driver' for what it calls 'family violence' services specific to Aboriginal communities. We complemented content analysis of the 'Gordon Report' and other Inquiry publications by examining other relevant government documents. These included parliamentary debates, media statements, departmental policies and procedures concerning implementation plans and activities, operational guidelines for staff dealing with child protection and family violence, program outlines, implementation and evaluation reports.

Our second case study used a policy audit method. Techniques involved an initial meeting with senior policy staff, analysis of relevant policy documents, interviews with the staff who worked on drafting the policy, and a further meeting with this group to discuss and revise our policy audit draft report. Phone conversations and email communications were also sources of information.

The policy audit was undertaken during a review of the existing Government 'mainstream'
FDV Policy in order to appreciate experiences and perspectives of policy actors during the development process. Commencing the policy audit process during policy review was an opportunity to learn about the early stages of the ‘policy cycle’ rather than following policy adoption and implementation. The policy audit was conducted as part of a larger Gender Analysis of Policy research project, the stated goal of which was to refine existing models and develop gender analysis processes appropriate for application in the Australian public sector context (Bacchi et al 2005).

Insights gained from semi-structured interviews as part of the policy audit contributed to a picture of the strategic thinking and motivations involved in policy development within that politicised environment. Interview questions were drawn from Status of Women Canada (2001) material to describe the policy context, question the extent to which the policy expresses intention to be gender-inclusive and culturally inclusive, and the extent the FDV policy achieved gender-equitable and culturally-equitable outcomes.

Case study one: ‘Gordon Inquiry’
The inquiry that we examine in our first case study is known colloquially as the ‘Gordon Inquiry’ because it was chaired by prominent Aboriginal magistrate Sue Gordon. The Inquiry was triggered by several incidents of sexual and physical abuse of Aboriginal children, which received significant media attention and resulted in a public outcry. The findings of a coronial inquest questioned Government services and professional practices and prompted Government action. Previous reports, Parliamentary debates and media profiles revealed a highly political policy context within which public servants were delivering services to vulnerable, disadvantaged Aboriginal communities. Prior to the Inquiry, independent research and government reports had criticised a range of structural, organizational, administrative and human resource factors impeding progress in responding to the needs and problems experienced by Aboriginal people.

The Gordon Inquiry worked within established Terms of Reference, with restricted time and resources, and in a climate of political and public pressure. The Committee of three heading the Inquiry received submissions, heard personal evidence, traveled throughout the State for consultations, drew on a comprehensive contracted literature review, and engaged in dialogue with key human service agencies. Their report (Gordon et al 2002) made over 190 recommendations for change to support successful local initiatives by Government at community level and to address perceived problems at agency level and across inter-agency structures.

The approach taken by the Inquiry reflected Aboriginal views that sustainability for Aboriginal peoples was dependent on finding ways to counter substantial intergenerational trauma, disadvantage and disempowerment in the face of white mainstream systems and practices that were destructive at their worst and negligent at their most benign. Dealing with substantial disadvantages was the challenge and theme throughout the report. The Inquiry had a mandate to examine public services that Aboriginal people identified as problematic, identify how the extensive disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal communities could be dealt with by mainstream agencies, and areas for reform of FDV services was the task (Gordon et al 2002: xx–xxi). The experiences of actual or potential Aboriginal FDV service users provided the material that informed recommendations for agency change. Public policy was viewed as having responsibility for Aboriginal disadvantage either directly or indirectly, immediately or historically; Aboriginal disadvantage was portrayed as being a causative factor which was intensified by FDV.

Institutional racism
The Inquiry reported that racism was one of multiple contributing factors to the endemic violence against Indigenous women and children. A composite account of institutional racism was provided by the Inquiry’s examination of policy
The invisibility of gendered power relations in domestic violence policy
outcomes experienced by Indigenous clients. Intergenerational trauma was described as a legacy of colonization, genocide, dispossession, forced removal of children, loss of land, destruction of culture, and persistent racism. Indigenous communities were reported to have become increasingly vulnerable to symptomatic family violence and white government interventions, potentially more destructive than beneficial. Within the picture of violence in Aboriginal communities presented by the Inquiry, violence against women and children was perpetrated by potentially multiple abusers connected by extended family relationships located within the community. The Inquiry concluded that future policy and service developments required a coordinated and well-resourced, culturally sensitive system that would be increasingly under the direction, if not controlled, by Aboriginal peoples themselves (Gordon et al 2002; Kovacs 2002).

The Government strongly endorsed the major thrust of the Gordon Inquiry's report (Government of Western Australia 2002). Subsequently, over a period of four years, Treasury injected major funding to the key agencies to implement recommendations for program initiatives, infrastructure development, and departmental projects to strengthen service delivery (Gallop 2002). Interim evaluations have been critical of implementation progress and monitoring, and comprehensive evaluations are underway (Auditor General for Western Australia 2005).

**Gender dimensions of FDV in Indigenous communities**

In making its recommendations, the Committee encouraged human service agencies to ensure cross-cultural sensitivity and develop inclusive practices, such as promoting the language of family and community instead of violence against women. The report noted that for Aboriginal women and men, white mainstream agencies delivered FDV policy that effectively denied the history of oppression, genocide and systemic abuse of Aboriginal people. It also acknowledged that ethnocentric definitions, understandings and approaches created difficulties for intervening in family violence in Aboriginal communities.

There were two elements of FDV policy that the Inquiry did not examine: (a) the structural arrangements whereby public sector institutions operate as systems of social control to protect and perpetuate inequalities, and (b) the intersections of gender and racism in family violence policy and what they might mean for that policy's capacity to protect Aboriginal women.

The Inquiry's conclusions drew on a growing body of literature by Indigenous authors, especially Aboriginal women, which reveals the history of sexualised racist abuse by Anglo-Australians since white settlement and rebukes the role of the state and its agents for white ethnocentrism. In turn, several Aboriginal women who spoke to the Inquiry rejected mainstream approaches that individualised social problems, arguing that these further victimised the whole Aboriginal community, criminalised Aboriginal men and indirectly blamed Aboriginal women for the violence they suffered.

In the light of such discussions, those leading the Gordon Inquiry decided to adopt the terminology of 'family violence' in place of the usual 'domestic violence'. However, this shift in terminology did not altogether resolve the definitional problems, and indeed raised voices of concern from Aboriginal women. These were subsequently reported in the community consultations: 'I would prefer to see family/domestic violence called "Violence against Women". "Family Violence" makes it sound nice!' (Gordon et al: 29).

In dealing with this debate among Aboriginal women the report of the Inquiry added an appendix showing how definitions differed across Australia, and in the FDV sector, organizations and sections within agencies. The report advised that in light of these wide variations in terminology and categories used there was a call for a term which could capture the need to respect Indigenous calls for a focus on the broader experience of violence within extended Indigenous families.
Karen M Vincent and Joan Eveline

(Gordon et al July 2002: 29). ‘For many Indigenous people the term family violence is preferred as it encompasses all forms of violence in intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support’ (Gordon et al July 2002: 26). The report also argued for a singular, shared definition for the purpose of ensuring ‘collaborative and coordinated responses’ (Gordon et al July 2002: 27).

Case study two: Western Australian Family and Domestic Violence Policy

The FDV Policy was intended to provide a framework for the guidance of department staff and the development of responses to individuals, families and communities affected by family and domestic violence. From the framework would follow documentation for policy implementation including departmental operational guidelines and training manuals. The department involved carries responsibility for policy coordination across human services agencies. Unlike the Gordon Inquiry analysed above, the FDV Policy is not meant to provide a vehicle for the department to influence the broader FDV field (including inter-governmental, inter-departmental and the community services sector). Rather, it establishes the principles for how a department internally works with family and domestic violence. To establish what was needed for this task, the policy group drew on documents that had been available in the field for some years to outline principles for ‘best practice’ in service delivery across government and non-government organizations.

The policy development process was conducted according to a schedule of regular policy reviews across government departments. The review and development process updates and amends policies to reflect best practice developments, provide for changes such as organizational and structural requirements, meet new service needs and take account of expectations for policy responsibility and accountability. The FDV Policy was initially developed in 1996. A relatively limited review was undertaken in 2000, so a substantial revision of the Policy was involved in 2005–2006. The goal was to meet the requirements of recent legislative reform and to be forward thinking with holistic policy that was informed by the latest statistical data and research. Injecting more evidence and information into policy and practice has become more important in response to an increasingly ‘audit culture’ (Power 1999), where measurement and accountability identifies particular outcomes.

The political environment within which policy development took place was of primary importance to the review. The department’s strategic plan reflected the breadth of focus and challenge of new directions experienced by the department from Government planning, new legislation, implementation of new policies and a new Indigenous ‘vision’. The department’s structure reflected the wide range of functions and a number of policy units informed and supported the work of core regional and local fieldwork.

In tune with a government sensitive to media coverage of child abuse, most intense visibility was directed at children’s welfare. Accountability for the agency against a primary objective of child protection was producing considerable pressure on department staff across functional areas. The department’s service delivery based on community development approaches was being challenged by calls for a ‘law and order’ response that required increased crisis intervention with casework. The ‘best practice’ model for programs for victims of domestic violence had been criticized for its ‘colour blindness’, and policy development that considered Aboriginal perspectives was called for by the FDV field (HREOC 2002). And many departments were facing the challenge of allocating FDV funds to meet increasing demands for perpetrator education and violence prevention programs on the one hand and the needs of ongoing and new refuge and victim services for women on the other. The intensity of political sensitivity and media scrutiny created a degree
of vulnerability and anxiety that affected the policy development. Subsequent to the case study period, the department experienced considerable instability with repeated restructuring and staff changes at the senior levels.

Some years earlier, observers viewed the fore-runner of this department as dealing with 'women's issues' as a major part of its agenda. In the current climate, government departments had adopted a strategic approach and terminology of 'gender neutrality'. Consequently, the gender focus of policies across the department has in most cases been implicit rather than explicit. Policy actors expressed awareness of the need to be strategic in promoting particular concepts and approaches to specific audiences and participants in the policy process. A number of gender-based insights drive the department's operations, and it was explained that the high level policies need to be deliberately broad in order to allow for gender as well as other kinds of diversity to be taken into account at the point of implementation.

Within this context, FDV policy was presented as 'even-handed' to achieve a 'political balance' in policy statements. The approach was designed for public reassurance using policy language that was carefully pitched to sustain a gender-neutral tone. Policymakers explained during interviews that 'more ambiguous or neutral terms ... would enable current trends and findings to shape the services'. References are made in policy documents to 'individuals', 'families', 'communities' and 'young people'. The department's charter was presented in a way that was deemed acceptable to the broader community, that is, as inclusive (of men) rather than being concerned exclusively or predominantly with women's issues and needs. A focus on domestic violence which had come to signify violence against women was shifted over time to a broader focus onto family and domestic violence. The policy document states that FDV 'impacts on all sections of the community, cutting across race, gender, age and social status'. The shift was explained as the department's responsiveness to feedback from Aboriginal women (Hovane 2006; Nancarrow 2006) and advice from government Aboriginal policy experts.

Despite this apparent concern for culturally sensitive policy, the Gordon Inquiry did not feature in the FDV Policy review. Nor was the Inquiry and its recommendations raised as a policy driver by the policy actors in discussions, interviews or documentation. The fact that such a major inquiry, which was being implemented during the period of the audit, did not feature prominently during the review could be seen as indicative of functional separation. Here was a major inquiry into FDV in Aboriginal communities, but it did not immediately provide a backdrop for policy actors reviewing existing policy statements. Rather, political and agency imperatives shaped the framework for policy review. Yet the lack of integration within and across agencies, policy and services was a central conclusion reached by the Gordon Inquiry, and one that its implementation was meant to challenge. We might conclude that the policy process seen within the department during the FDV Policy audit could be considered an example of that compartmentalisation.

Given the gender-neutrality of high level policy, these policy actors saw their task was to effectively translate abstract policy statements into the tacit understandings of gender and diversity dynamics so that implementation is sufficiently equipped for FDV service delivery. What may be understood implicitly by experienced senior policy drafters needs to be effectively communicated to operational staff.

However, the fact that the department identifies itself first and foremost as a child protection system, has particular implications for that capacity to translate gender-neutrality into effective FDV implementation. To the extent that gender relations are considered, paramount attention is to the care and safety of the children in situations of FDV. Here the primary focus on women and men is not as battered and batterers in domestic violence situations, but as ungendered and potentially dangerous parents and ineffective carers as
part of risk aversion priorities in child protection work. Thus the capacity of frontline staff to meet service expectations and deliver policy goals may be weakened by policy concepts and language that render gendered power relations invisible and cultural sensitivity an empty promise.

DISCUSSION
Our study shows that the field of FDV is politically sensitive. In such an environment the high profile and sharp criticism accorded government intervention means policy actors adopt ways and means to do their work that will bring them as little public attention as possible. The case studies show how power dimensions in gendered relationships as well as those in institutional racism, can be rendered invisible through the daily reality of work in public policy development. In trying to highlight how white racism produced the bedrock of FDV in Aboriginal communities, the Gordon Inquiry submerges the gendered power relations underpinning contemporary violence against women and children. In trying to meet the need for an overriding child protection agenda, the FDV Policy makes gender and gendered power relations at best implicit and at worst irrelevant and outdated. That Policy also shows that when the emphasis is not on institutionalised racism, then the discussion of racism as an aspect of policy also goes missing.

In the Gordon Inquiry the unintended consequence of defining the violence against women in ‘inclusive’ ways represented a lost opportunity to investigate gendered power relations involved in processes and interactions (eg between women and men at interpersonal points of connection) within the wider community and in relation to state interventions. The Inquiry did not look at the dynamics, complexities and impacts of gendered power relations on community leadership as affected by FDV, or at how those relations might affect patterns of family responsibilities and obligations for caring, law and education practices and a host of cultural traditions and ceremonies.

By not focusing on gendered power relations involved in the violence between women and men, the Gordon report effectively represented all the different forms of violence being experienced in Aboriginal communities as indistinguishable. The inference was that all forms of violence operated on the same plane in terms of occurrence, severity and consequences. Some Aboriginal women warned the Inquiry that opting for a single definition of ‘family violence’ risked losing sight of the damage being done to women. By failing to show how ‘family violence’ could incorporate an understanding of the ways in which racism intersects with gender, the Gordon report deflected attention from the power differentials based on gendered notions of masculinity and femininity, roles and responsibilities.

Blagg (2007) argued that reaching agreement on a single definition is inappropriate and homogenizing of Aboriginal peoples:

Let us dispense with the notion that there is, or can be, a unitary definition of family violence and explore the construct in its diversity. There is no settled, one-fits-all definition and the meanings associated with the term shift from region to region in the light of local history, circumstances and concerns. They can also shift over time as new issues emerge.

(Blagg 2007: 10)

Taking account of gender, Pease and Camilleri (2001) argued that a ‘one size fits all’ definition that captures a range of forms and relationships within families and communities hides the reality that overwhelmingly women are the victims of male violence. Domestic violence is the most common form of violence perpetrated against women (United Nations Population Fund 2005: 66) Statistical evidence confirms what Bolger (1991) and other writers have revealed for years that the most common form of violence taking place in Aboriginal communities is violence against women who are most at risk from their husband/spouse/partner.
The invisibility of gendered power relations in domestic violence policy

The department which instituted the revised FDV Policy also missed an opportunity to get to the heart of the problem. This department is well-placed with its leadership role within the larger policy framework of whole-of-government responses to FDV to influence wider public policy. By opting for a gender-neutral approach, the department’s high level FDV Policy falls silent on the issue of women’s greater vulnerability. Rhonda Sharp and Ray Broomhill (1988) argued that most claims to be gender-neutral are indeed gender blind. A gender-neutral policy approach that assumes that women and men are affected by policies in the same way is inadequate for FDV where the consequences of not explicitly analyzing gender relations can be a life and death matter. The stance taken could inadvertently weaken or undermine the capacity of the department to deliver gender sensitive field services. Connell (2006: 449) has noted that the principal goal of a gender-neutral public sector workplace limits the state’s steering capacity in regard to societal gender relations.

Although experienced feminist policymakers may fully intend to rectify this façade of gender-neutrality by ensuring that the operational guidelines are sufficiently gender specific, that solution must be unreliable in terms of dealing with a vast majority of cases, inevitably short-term in an ageing labour market, and destined to dissolve without structural backup and leadership direction. Moreover, if the department presents its policies as gender neutral, it could be assumed that the department operates internally as gender blind.

The potential dangers of poorly informed public policy and broad definitions that disguise vulnerability predictably fall upon Aboriginal women and their children. Interventions that can be equally directed to elder abuse will fail to address the gendered nature of FDV, described by David Indermaur (2006) as ‘domestic terrorism’. Donaghy (2003) criticised the lack of informed decision-making when gender-disaggregated statistics are available but largely underutilised in policy development, and the United Nations reported that data collection on this topic remains largely ad hoc and has not been incorporated into the regular statistical work programs of national statistical offices (Grown 2007: 205). Kurz (1993) criticised definitions of violence that fail to show how the context of domestic violence is the inequality and power differences between women and men.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) would offer a more inclusive approach to policy development by enabling the multiplicity of connections to be addressed simultaneously. The moral and political imperatives prompting and guiding intersectionality theory also lead us to conclude that the two policy developments we describe here are quite different in terms of their capacity to put institutionalized racism under the spotlight in domestic violence discussions. The Gordon Inquiry confronts head-on the contemporary race relations that render past and present racism invisible in domestic violence policy, and it draws on those with expertise in critical race theory and practice in order to do so. There is no sign of such theory, practice or indeed intervention by Indigenous women into past policy inadequacies evident in the Western Australian Government’s FDV Policy Framework. Indeed, since the interviews with policy actors in this study indicated, they experienced a degree of anxiety about the concepts of gender and racism (and their relevance in terms of agency and government priorities). It would seem that much more needs to be done to bring the processes and insights of the Gordon Inquiry into everyday policy development.

The present study intimates that policy domains that are traditionally reactive, subject to backlash from political and community directions, and imbued with unrecognised institutional racism will provide at best limited support for the gender and racialised dimensions of FDV to be adequately seen and challenged. The promise initiated with the Gordon Inquiry shows that this fear and neglect does not have to remain the case. There is already evidence in the Western Australian context that, in other policy fields, inter-
ventionist efforts by Indigenous women have produced a collaborative approach to challenging and reshaping the particular context of culture and community in which they need to operate. It is through such collaborations, designed to make the best of local experience and knowledge, that Aboriginal women can begin to realize their political, economic and community goals (Eveline, Bacchi & Binns 2009). For future research in domestic violence policy what these case studies suggest is that more attention be paid to how mainstream policy actors can support the lead taken by discrete and experienced Indigenous women's groups in their endeavours to combat domestic violence.

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