

RECONSTRUCTING POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY
ELIZABETH J. ALLAN
SUSAN VAN DEVENTER IVERSON
REBECCA ROPERS-HUILMAN



Reconstructing Policy in Higher Education

Reconstructing Policy in Higher Education highlights the work of accomplished and award-winning scholars and provides concrete examples of how feminist post-structuralism effectively informs research methods and can serve as a vital tool for policy makers, analysts, and practitioners. The research examines a range of topics of interest to scholars and professionals including: purposes of Higher Education, administrative leadership, athletics, diversity, student activism, social class, the history of women in postsecondary institutions, and quality and science in the globalized university.

Students enrolled in Higher Education and Educational Policy programs will find this book offers them tools for thinking differently about policy analysis and educational practice. Higher Education faculty, managers, deans, presidents, and policy makers will find this book contributes significantly to their own policy analysis, practice, and discourse.

Elizabeth J. Allan is an Associate Professor of Higher Education at the University of Maine where she is also an affiliated faculty member with the Women's Studies program.

Susan Van Deventer Iverson is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration and Student Personnel at Kent State University where she is also an affiliated faculty member with the Women's Studies Program.

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Foreword

Judith Glazer-Raymo

The growth of policy analysis as a field of study in higher education has paralleled federal and state involvement in the allocation of resources and the regulation of educational institutions. Over the decades, the policy process has taken many forms but as events occurring in the first decade of the twenty-first century continue to make obvious, traditional modes of policy analysis using the tools of micro-economics and decision science have only limited relevance for colleges and universities in a rapidly changing and often volatile global environment. The educational and cultural missions and purposes of public and private higher education are being contested on many levels. Feminist scholars have long questioned the gender-neutral stance of policy-makers. Two major challenges continue to be: first, how to sustain more interpretive ways of conducting policy analyses that heighten public awareness and action on issues affecting women, and second, how to convey the complex interrelationships among multiple factors guiding the implementation and evaluation of higher education policies and programs.

A historic gender policy breakthrough occurred with the passage of the omnibus Higher Education Act of 1972, prohibiting sex discrimination and calling for affirmative action in higher education employment, compensation, and admission of students to undergraduate and graduate programs. The possibility of sanctions for non-compliance and a series of class action lawsuits by women's groups motivated colleges and universities to re-examine existing policies and practices (Glazer-Raymo, 1999). Liberal feminism dominated the discourse throughout the 1970s based on assumptions that if male-female representation and support could be equalized, the underlying problems that characterized discriminatory practices and unequal treatment would be resolved. Women soon learned that protection of the status quo made change difficult in entrenched gender hierarchies, and that statistical and comparative demographic analyses had only limited impact on the policy agenda. Nevertheless, sustained demands by women and other under-represented groups, coupled with external intervention by state and federal regulators, judicial rulings, and support from women leaders led to the adoption of more equitable policies and the implementation of gender-equity programs and practices. The development of women's studies courses and their institutionalization as gender studies, ethnic studies, cultural studies, and gay and lesbian studies paralleled these advances, engaging new generations of students and faculty in the creation and use of theoretical and methodological perspectives that facilitate critical feminist policy analysis.

The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis

In *Speaking truth to power*, Aaron Wildavsky (1979) asserted that policy analysis is both an art and a craft that has as its purpose the clarification of values that inform the decision-making process and the forms of knowledge used to fulfill analytical objectives. In this text, he sought justification for the systematic training of graduate students in public policy analysis as a subfield of political science. Many such schools now operate, variously linked to public administration, public and international affairs, and government (as in the case of the Kennedy School at Harvard University). However, policy analysis continues to be a field in ferment, struggling with the fundamental incompatibility between technocratic (bounded rationality) and democratic (incremental, pluralistic) models of decision-making; the appropriate tools (quantitative or qualitative, cost-benefit or risk-benefit) for conducting policy research and the relative interests and purposes of policy-makers and stakeholders.

It is unlikely that gender plays other than a supporting role in these schools that operate on a national and international stage and are concerned with mainstream economic and political theory and practice. After eight years of experiencing the ungendering of public policy at the federal level (2000–2008), and in a period of deep economic recession, the continuing challenge for women policy analysts in addressing women's issues is how to obtain a hearing for improvements in gender-related policies and practices, and how to reverse the systematic dismantling of programs such as affirmative action. Since 1996, ballot initiatives banning public institutions from using affirmative action programs that “give preferential treatment to groups or individuals based on their race, gender, color, ethnicity, or national origin for public employment, education or contracting purposes” have been approved in four states (California, Washington, Michigan, and Nebraska).¹ Narrower challenges to the consideration of race in college admissions have been mounted in Texas on the grounds that race-neutral alternatives are working.²

Higher education decision-making and policy analysis generally occur in environmental contexts that differ from governmental and business organizations. However, governmental intervention into the policies and practices of higher education systems is blurring these distinctions. Public and private institutions now compete for state and federal support through student aid programs, programmatic and research subsidies, and capital construction funding. This competition for resources extends into the global marketplace through student exchange programs, scientific and technological partnerships, and entrepreneurial projects limited only by the imagination of their developers. As Charles Lindblom (1965) observed at the time of passage of the first Higher Education Act, “By operating in the political arena, [institutions] are forced to consider a much broader social reality than [their] own interests” (p. 192). In the current political and economic climate, it is therefore not surprising that

critical policy analysis is an inevitable outcome of increased public scrutiny. Persuasive cases will have to be made by feminist scholars in reasserting gender priorities in the face of competing domestic and foreign policy agendas.

Policy as Discourse

The authors of this text recognize this challenge and argue convincingly that the poststructural premise of “policy-as-discourse” can reveal the ambiguities and contradictions of policies emphasizing accountability, productivity, and the status quo, and can facilitate the reconstruction of policies that translate into more equitable practices in the academy. Their case studies and their critiques are grounded in feminist poststructural theory, viewed from the standpoint of women’s experiences and how policy shapes “both discourse and, within discourse, lived experience” (Allan, Iverson, & Ropers-Huilman, p. 3). The authors are consistent in their adherence to feminist poststructural concepts and methods, avoiding counterproductive debates that sometimes lead feminists into blind alleys where the theory becomes more important than the problem being addressed. Instead, their analyses demonstrate that when women are the categories of analysis, the ways in which the policy agenda is constructed and issues are represented, reframe both underlying meanings and the policies and practices emanating from them.

In their introduction, Allan, Iverson, and Ropers-Huilman distinguish between the poststructuralist feminist approach to scholarly inquiry and liberal feminist or enlightenment approaches, contrasting “the relationship between discourse and subjectivity” and “how language and meaning produce dynamic and contradictory subject positions” with “the rational, fixed, individual subject(s) of enlightenment humanism.” Thus, they acknowledge the multiple, often competing discourses and methodologies that feminists have applied in critiquing existing policy positions and the production of knowledge within their disciplines.³ Rather than rely on data collection, legal precedent, or universal truths, which, as they state, are generally supported by adherence to traditional practices, these authors draw on feminist poststructural perspectives to inform the readers’ understanding of dynamic policy processes.

Allan defines poststructuralism as an academic branch of postmodern thought, or in her words, as “a loosely connected group of theories predicated upon a critique of structuralist approaches” (p. 12). Her observation that language is socially constituted and shaped by the interplay we have yet to discover, lays the groundwork for the essays that follow. Some authors are influenced by Michel Foucault, particularly his work on power relations and resistance, and by Jacques Derrida and the methodology of deconstruction. Both Foucault and Derrida expressed the changeable nature of the meaning of elements in world cultures and the multiple and competing discourses that mutually reinforce one another. It is of some significance that women were not

an integral part of their formulation. However, as Harland Bloland observed in his essay on postmodernism and higher education: “Derrida’s powerful attack upon hierarchies in the modernist world can be used with great effect in challenging higher education’s hierarchies and illuminating its exclusions” (1995, p. 527). Allan and other contributors demonstrate in their poststructural analyses that “[d]econstruction provides reasons and arguments supporting the accusations that excluded groups make against institutions of higher education” (Bloland, p. 528).

The ensuing chapters of this text show how feminist poststructural critique can be a productive mechanism for contesting, disrupting, and illuminating programs, policies, and commentary about women in higher education. It can also be a useful tool for ameliorating conflicts that arise from adherence to identity politics in feminist thought, bringing greater clarity to gender discourse and its intersections with race, ethnicity, social class, and sexuality. In working within the frame of feminist poststructuralism, critical policy analysts view policies not as linear stages from issue definition to agenda setting, selection of alternatives, and problem resolution. Rather, they reveal four clusters that highlight the issues raised in this text: (1) the ambiguities and contradictions of the language used to propose or evaluate institutional policies and practices by external arbiters with limited stakes in the long-range consequences of their words and actions; (2) the inadequacies of decontextualized analyses and methodologies that focus on costs and benefits, means and ends, goals and objectives; (3) the multiple meanings of theoretical constructs that (perhaps unintentionally) perpetuate partial solutions or untenable situations; and (4) the significance of power relations and resource dependence in determining the extent of political influence on institutions and their constituencies. In Chapter 2, Allan proposes a series of questions as “prompts” for chapter authors, asking them to consider the “subject positions” emerging from policies, the underlying assumptions of problem selection, the regulation of discourses and subject positions, and the outcomes of policy-making and policy analysis.

Policy Issues

How and why policies are selected for analysis has been a frequent subject of debate among scholars of public policy. Wildavsky (1979) somewhat facetiously likened the selection of problems for analysis as occurring in a crowded space where existing policies collide with each other, vying for attention from decision-makers. Carol Bacchi applies a “What’s the Problem?” approach to issues affecting women as a means of thinking about “the interconnections between policy areas” and policy issues that may be excluded from the discourse, depending on how problems are defined or represented (1999, p. 2). This interpretive approach to policy analysis is defined by Bacchi as “the language, concepts, and categories employed to frame an issue” (p. 2).

The methodology of deconstruction is employed effectively in the chapters that follow this Foreword, revealing the contradictory, ambiguous, and exclusionary discourses of organizational statements (Iverson, Suspitsyna, Stromquist); the decontextualized use of theoretical constructs (Gordon et al., Talburt); the unanticipated consequences of policy on women students (Hart & Hubbard, Hoffman et al.) and the silences about women's role as change agents (Nidiffer, Ropers-Huilman). In their analyses, these scholars reveal the ambiguity permeating institutional statements which illustrate organizational inattention to gender in official documents about diversity, globalization, and accountability in higher education. Contradictions also arise in the disjuncture between policy premises and formulations. Some exemplars follow.

In her discourse analysis of 21 diversity action plans, Iverson displays the problematics of designing and implementing “diverse, inclusive campus communities” in crowded policy spaces where diversity has multiple meanings and applications that can be measured through a variety of approaches. Her critique illuminates the contradictory discourses of “access” and “disadvantage” in portraying minority students as at-risk victims of discrimination and/or outsiders to “particular arenas within the institution, and the dominant culture” (p. 200). She also reveals the ambiguities of the market model of education with its emphasis on competition and students as commodities, at the same time that universities assert their commitment to change, inclusivity, and equality. In revealing the unquestioned assumptions of policy problems, she highlights the multiple meanings of diversity and the unanticipated consequences for students as objects of implementation.⁴ Suspitsyna's analysis of 144 official statements by the Secretary of Education and her staff between 2005 and 2007 focuses attention on the conservative discourse of the federal bureaucracy, and its preoccupation with the language, but not the substance, of access, affordability, and accountability. In this context, she reveals contradictions implicit in the dominant themes of quality assurance, student consumerism, and institutional competitiveness at a time when the unanticipated withdrawal of resources by the states and by private loan agencies increases institutional vulnerability to political intervention.

The market model that is so prevalent in higher education, blurring the lines between non-profit and for-profit universities, is highlighted in the chapter on Title IX policy and intercollegiate athletics (Hoffman et al.). Here again, operating below the radar screen, the Department of Education has sought to deregulate the one piece of legislation that has made it illegal for educational institutions to discriminate on the basis of sex “under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance”⁵ (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005, p. 3). In their analysis of the impact of Title IX policy on intercollegiate athletics, Hoffman et al. show how the market model of “big-time sports” contradicts the equitable use of resources for women's athletics. A recent report issued by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) compares salaries of full

professors and football coaches of Division IA institutions. In commenting on the disproportionate base salaries and other income of head football coaches (all male), the AAUP reports that “head football coaches, on average, earn more than twice the salary of full professors in every conference” and that “the base salaries and other income of 50 head coaches are \$1 million and higher” (Committee on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2008, p. 12). As Hoffman et al. state in their chapter, the marketplace discourse of Title IX policy “gives rise to images of the athlete as a commodity” (p. 139).

Gordon et al. pose an interesting question in their chapter on the discursive framing of gender and leadership in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. They ask whether “dominant discourses” eclipse alternative conceptualizations of leadership precisely because normative models are not “sufficiently exposed and disrupted.” Here again, the market model is part of the discourse on women and leadership, a possible consequence of the fact that the dominant discourse on leadership is derived from scholarship conducted mainly in male-dominated schools of business, organizational management, and public administration. The chapters I have cited make visible the “marketplace discourse” that creates tensions in the support and continuation of gender-sensitive policy-making.

I continue to believe that we are witnessing the ungendering of public policy in higher education and in the larger society. The potential demise of affirmative action policies constitutes a critical turning point in coordinated efforts to reverse many decades of exclusion and under-representation. Women are now the majority of undergraduate and graduate students, and are achieving parity with their male counterparts in executive and managerial positions. Glass ceiling metaphors and feminism writ large are discredited by those who assert that gender equality has been achieved and it is time to “move on” to more immediate concerns. And while we can list accomplishments, large and small, that have been made by women in higher education and in the larger society, much work remains to be done. As the essays in this text show, feminist poststructural policy analysis provides fresh perspectives on taken-for-granted assumptions of existing policies and practices. The strength of their arguments on gender-related policy issues warrants close attention from every reader with a stake in the outcomes.

Notes

- 1 The language cited here is contained in the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, a state constitutional amendment approved as a ballot initiative in November 2006 (Glazer-Raymo, 2008, p. 14).
- 2 *Hopwood v. University of Texas Law School* (1995) was overturned in 2003 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Grutter v. Bollinger* that “the educational benefits of diversity constitute a compelling interest that can justify the consideration of race as a factor in admissions” (electronic communication with Janice Robinson, February 27, 2009).
- 3 See, for example, Alcoff and Potter (1993) on the intersection of feminist philosophy and epistemology.

- 4 The discourse of diversity played a prominent role in the *Grutter* decision; see Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) for a discussion of their research on the positive outcomes of diversity policies under affirmative action in contributing to students' academic experience.
- 5 See Glazer-Raymo (2008, pp. 17–22) for a discussion of recent efforts to deregulate Title IX.

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