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Introducing "What's the Problem Represented to be?": A work in progress

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- https://carolbacchi.com

What's the Problem Represented to be? (WPR) approach (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 20)

- **Question 1:** What's the problem (e.g., of "gender inequality", "drug use/abuse", "economic development", "global warming", "childhood obesity", "irregular migration", etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policies?

- **Question 2:** What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem" (*problem representation*)?

- **Question 3:** How has this representation of the "problem" come about?

- **Question 4:** What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?

- **Question 5:** What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?

- **Question 6:** How and where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or can it be disrupted and replaced?

- **Step 7:** Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.

Iterations of WPR

- C. Bacchi, *Women, Policy and Politics: The construction of policy problems*. London, Sage, 1999.

- C. Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to be?* Frenchs Forest, NSW, Pearson Education, 2009.

- C. Bacchi and S. Goodwin, *Poststructural Policy Analysis: A guide to practice*. NY, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

- C. Bacchi, Introducing the "What's the Problem Represented to be?" approach. In A. Bletsas and C. Beasley (Eds) *Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic Interventions and Exchanges*. Uni of Adelaide Press, pp. 21-24.

Innovative analytic interventions:

- using "proposals" or "proposed solutions" as starting places for thinking about problematizations (the forms themselves); and

- insisting that we as political subjects are governed through problematizations (the forms themselves), rather than through policies.

Key argument and goal:

- Proposals (or proposed solutions) contain *implicit* problem representations.

- The goal of a WPR analysis is to explore these problem representations (or "problematizations"), considering their presuppositions, limits and effects.

- See Research Hub entry 11 June 2018; https://carolbacchi.com

From constructionism to performativity

- In *Women, Policy and Politics: The construction of policy problems* (1999), I engaged mainly with constructionist scholars - Edelman (1988), Gusfield (1989) and Stone (1988).

- I tended to refer to representations of "problems" as competing "interpretations" (Bacchi 1999: 9).

- From 1999 there is a shift in theoretical perspective to performativity – see John Law and Annemarie Mol

- Key claim: problem representations form the "realities" through which we are governed.

- The focus shifts from individual to governmental problematizations.

Widening the Ambit of WPR

- Technologies – the means by which governing becomes practicable;

- Governing beyond conventional government institutions;

- Buildings, ceremonies, organizational cultures (see "Buildings as proposals", Research Hub 14 Jan. 2018)

- Theoretical propositions

Widening the ambit of WPR

- Application to media texts:

Research Hub entry, 30 April 2021

- Application to interview transcripts:

Research Hub entry, 31 May 2021

- Application to legislative debates and official Government pronouncements

Research Hub entry, 30 June 2021

https://carolbacchi.com

Analytic tasks:

- excavate the "forms of problematization themselves" for underlying, deep-seated assumptions or presuppositions (Question 2);

- trace the genealogical emergence of specific problematizations (Question 3);

- reflect on silences in these problematizations and consider alternative problematizations (Question 4);

Analytic tasks (continued)

- focus on how identified problematizations shape what is possible, constitute "subjects" in specific ways, and translate into lives (Question 5);

- examine the practices involved both in supporting and contesting these problematizations (Question 6); and

- subject one's own proposals to self-problematization (Step 7) (see Chart from Bacchi and Goodwin 2016: 20).

How to generate alternative problematizations:

- engage with critical literatures;

- adopt a critical ethnographic approach to draw on the "discourses of oppositional groups" (Larner 2000: 14) (see Research Hub 28 Feb 2019 and 31 March 2019); and,

- compare problematizations across time, across "cultures", or across geophysical "spaces" (Bacchi 2012: 6).

- Others?

WPR as an assessment tool:

- *Discursive effects* highlight how the terms of reference established by particular problem representations place limits on what can be thought or said.

- *Subjectification effects* involve reflection on how "subjects" are constituted in discourse.

- *Lived effects* capture the impact of problem representations in people's lives.

Critical exchanges: some key issues

- the place of "subjects" in the critical enterprise
  – Questions of "agency" (Research Hub 31 Jan. 2020)
  – What about "emotions"? (Research Hub 29 Feb 2020)

- the place of "texts";

- the suggested need to consider "implementation" alongside policy "formulation"'

- "assembling" and/or "deconstructing"?

- Insufficient direction on how to proceed?

Conclusions

- long list of WPR applications included on the Select Reference List and the Supplement List;

- these applications differ widely in their theoretical perspectives – some include WPR with frame analysis, others recommend its use alongside Critical Realism, some use Foucault – others not;

- the challenge: to keep open channels of communication and exchange;

- goal of this session and subsequent events – to encourage exchange.