



Nobody puts Baby in a corner

HUVUDENTRÉ

International Symposium on Critical Policy Studies

EXPLORING THE PREMISES AND POLITICS OF CAROL BACCHI'S WPR APPROACH

International Symposium on Critical Policy Studies
Exploring the Premises and Politics of Carol Bacchi's WPR Approach
Abstracts

Department of Political, Historical, Religious and Cultural Studies
Karlstad University, Sweden

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A WARM WELCOME!

Finally, we will meet in Karlstad for our symposium on critical policy studies. After postponing this event for more than two years, we are so happy to welcome you all to this event – both on-site and on-line – an event we believe is the largest gathering of WPR scholars to date.

After receiving more than 70 abstracts, we are looking forward to intense conversation about the WPR approach, and we sincerely hope that together we will create a stimulating environment that facilitates future collaboration.

This symposium is a follow up from an event held at Sydney University in November 2019, and is a joint collaboration between The University of Adelaide, the University of Sydney and Karlstad University. Thus, we also would like to welcome those of you who were present at that event to Karlstad University, along with members of the research group Critical studies on

power and politics and our Political Science community. Our group consists of scholars using different critical perspectives but is held together by a mutual quest to make space for, and to develop, post-structuralist approaches in the study of politics. Do not hesitate to ask any of us about our research or about any practical matters as they relate to the Symposium or your stay here in Karlstad.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Riksbankens Jubileumsfond which has made this event possible.

Let's start the conversation!

We are here to help!

The team from political science at Karlstad University (KAU)



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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



CAROL BACCHI

Carol Bacchi is Professor Emerita of Politics, University of Adelaide. Elected as a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia in 2000, she has a significant national and international record in feminist scholarship and policy studies.

She has written books and articles on gender equality strategies, gender mainstreaming and conceptions of gender. Carol is best known for her innovative analytic strategy called “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” or the WPR approach. The perspective developed in WPR has been applied most recently to conceptions of knowledge and problem-solving (“Problem-Solving as a Governing Knowledge: ‘Skills’-Testing in PISA and PIAAC”, *Open Journal of Political Science*, 2020, 10: 82-105). With Susan Goodwin, Carol has published a book outlining a poststructural form of policy analysis and, with Jennifer Bonham, a poststructural analytic strategy for interview analysis (*Poststructural Policy Analysis: A Guide to Practice*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). She applies Foucault’s concept of governmentality to critical policy studies in a forthcoming *Handbook on Governmentality*, edited by William Walters and Martina Tazzioli (Edward Elgar).

The WPR approach: Key premises and new developments

Carol sets out in this paper to explain the theoretical background to the “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” (WPR) approach. She identifies four key premises

in the approach and examines their interconnections: first, that policies produce “problems” as particular sorts of problems; second, that problem representations are implicit in policy and other proposals; third, that policies produce “subjects”, “objects” and “places”; and fourth, that we are governed through problematizations.

From this starting point Carol reflects on the insights she has gathered from numerous exchanges with researchers (understood broadly to include policy workers, political activists, etc.) over the last few years to consider aspects of WPR that may require elaboration or clarification. The following themes are addressed: the place of a performative perspective in WPR thinking; how to develop a genealogical sensibility; the importance of considering objectification practices; how to operationalize Question 6 of the approach; how to practice self-problematization; and possibilities for bringing WPR to “real world” situations.

The presentation concludes with several suggested alterations to the existing WPR questions. Carol invites comments on these suggestions and ideas on other possible changes. The hope is to offer a novel approach to theory generation, one committed to the non-fixity of meaning and to WPR as a collective enterprise.



ELISABETH PRÜGL

Elisabeth Prügl is Professor of International Relations and Co-Director of the Gender Centre at the Geneva Graduate Institute. Her research and teaching focus on feminist International Relations (IR) and gender politics in international governance.

She has published on topics including feminist theory and methodology in IR, gender mainstreaming and gender expertise, the neoliberalization of feminism, and the governance atypical forms of women's labor.

She has been the responsible applicant of two 'research-for-development' projects funded by the Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development, one focusing on gender and land commercialization in Cambodia and Ghana and one on gender in peacebuilding in Indonesia and Nigeria.

Prügl is recipient of the Eminent Scholar Award of the Feminist Theory and Gender Studies Section (FTGS) of the International Studies Association (ISA). Since January 2022, she is co-editor of the *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.

Performativity in International Gender Expertise

The international policy project to advance gender equality has led to the creation of international gender expertise. A specialized kind of knowledge that proposes problem definitions and solutions, gender expertise also is a performative practice that involves a network of (human and material) actors and that brings into being phenomena ranging from 'gender gaps' to 'women's empowerment'. The presentation discusses the implications of embracing a performative approach to gender expertise, offering illustrations from the areas of food security and peacebuilding.

WORKSHOP

THE POLITICAL, PERSONAL AND PROBLEMATIC: HOW TO NAVIGATE THE POLITICS OF ENGAGEMENT IN PRACTICE?

In this workshop Dave and Laura will be facilitating and co-learning in exercises that explore the ways we relate to ourselves and others when seeking to engage beyond the academy.

This will include activities that help us connect on a deeper level, to create a safe relational space where we can develop a shared critical awareness of the politics of engagement in different settings. We will then explore how we can navigate these politics, with a particular focus on how we can maintain our critical contributions and help make all stakeholder's knowledges feel welcomed and valued, in a way that also protects our emotional energy.



Dave Bell

Dave is a knowledge mobilisation specialist. He has a PhD in climate science and experience in environmental policy, climate change mitigation

research and knowledge mobilisation approaches for large interdisciplinary research programmes for international development. Dave's work at SPRE focuses on how academic-policy engagement can be more ethical and effective, with particular attention to advancing equity,

diversity and inclusion, building and supporting networks, and operationalising 'learning by doing' approaches.



Laura Bea, BA, MSc (she/they)

Laura is an incoming PhD Student funded by the ESRC SCDTP at the University of Southampton. Their PhD will be focused on

how fiction and poetry can be used within the policy making process. She holds a BA from the University of Southampton in English and Philosophy, and an MSc in Sustainable Development from the University of Sussex. Laura specialises in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion within academic-policy engagement, and also has an 8+ year history of campaigns and advocacy within Higher Education Institutions. Laura is currently a Specialist EDI Policy Officer at the University of Southampton Public Policy Southampton Unit, and a Network Manager for the Universities Policy Engagement Unit.

ABSTRACTS

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ATTENDING ONLINE

The Intellectual Justification of Sovereign Power: Problem Representations of the Kurdish Issue in Turkish Scholarship

This article analyses, from a critical perspective, the nexus between power and knowledge in Turkish scholarship on the Kurds and the Kurdish issue. Two main arguments are advanced herein. First, Turkish scholars who adhere to the dominant nationalist ideology in Turkey (mis)represent the Kurds and the Kurdish issue in accordance with the dictates of this ideology for the purpose of intellectually justifying sovereign power in the maintenance of relations of ethnic domination and subordination. Second, while the Turkish state no longer denies the existence of the Kurds, neither the state nor Turkish scholars properly recognize Kurdish identity and the Kurds' rights-claims *qua* a people or national minority. Rather, Turkish scholars offer representations of the Kurdish issue that include the Kurds in the Turkish nation-state by excluding their identity *qua* a people or national minority with justified claims to self-rule or autonomy. Consequently, the shift from the decades-long policy of denial, which previously amounted to the exclusion of the very existence and identity of the Kurds for the purpose of including them in the Turkish nation by means of assimilation, does not signify any progress. On the contrary, the shift from *exclusive inclusion* to *inclusive exclusion* prevents a peaceful and just resolution of the Kurdish issue and perpetuates the ethnic conflict between Turks and Kurds in Turkey with detrimental consequences for both sides. The failed peace process between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement from 2009 through 2015 only reinforces this reality.



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What's the problem with civics curricula (represented to be)?

What counts as knowledge in society, materialized in educational policy, is under constant renegotiation. During the past decade there has been a turn from an emphasis on competencies towards factual knowledge in Swedish education policy debates. Knowledge, both in a conceptual and subject matter understanding, could from this perspective be seen as continually reconstructed at the point of intersection between stability and change.

The Swedish curriculum has undergone two large revisions between 2011-2022, and throughout the same time educational policy has been extensively debated in the media under the narrative 'Swedish pupils have less and less knowledge, but higher and higher grades'. In this study, the research interest involves analyzing the problematizations encompassing what counts as subject matter knowledge in Swedish elementary school civics curricula 2011 and 2022, and problematizations of knowledge in editorials in three prominent Swedish newspapers. WPR is applied as an approach in order to explore these curricular and medial problematizations. Preliminary results show how diverse epistemological knowledge conceptions seems to be entangled with governing ideals concerning which knowledge is considered useful and preferable in society. There is reason to believe that these hegemonic ideas could have an impact on which curricula, and subsequently educational practice, is made possible to imagine.



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Governing through “underlying (preexisting) health conditions”: “chronic illness”, “race-ism” and COVID-19

COVID-19 presents a unique opportunity to reflect on modes of governing. This paper approaches the question with a particular focus – how the “problem” of the “sick person” is represented in selected governmental practices. It targets as an entry point for this important topic the refrain of “underlying health conditions”, which has been applied in several countries to refer to the causes of mortality associated with COVID-19. References to “underlying health conditions”, we suggest, ought to be conceived of and approached as governmental strategies shaping lives rather than as apolitical descriptors of the human condition. To this end we de-naturalize the term, consider the conditions of its emergence, and draw attention to the political implications of its usage.

Exploring the emergence and effects of this way of naming “sick people” provides profound insights into contemporary governing practices. We highlight:

- the “need” from the late 18th century to manage the “problem” of “chronic illness”;
- the “discovery” of “co-morbidities” in the 1970s;
- the contestation surrounding coverage of “preexisting conditions” in American health care;
- and the priority assigned “the race” in managing COVID-19.



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Poststructural interview analysis and gender performativity: theoretical and methodological articulations for analyzing gendered discursive practices in physics education research

Various scholars have been consistently arguing for the concept of “gender performativity” (cf. Butler, 1990) as an innovative theoretical approach within physics education research (PER). Since this concept is anchored on a poststructuralist perspective, its use within qualitative research that draws on interview material necessarily requires a particular understanding of the “subject”. Given that, my proposal for the symposium is to discuss the potentials and limitations I have encountered when applying poststructural interview analysis (PIA) (cf. Bacchi and Bonham, 2016) to the analysis of gendered discursive practices in articulation with Butler’s conceptualization of gender performativity within the context of PER. My analytical focus is on the problematization of PER as an academic area exempt from gender bias, unlike physics. I draw on findings of an empirical study which consisted of interviews with six teachers and eighteen students enrolled in a postgraduate program in physics education located in a major Brazilian public university. In sum, the open yet clear guidelines for interview analysis provided by PIA allowed me to explore not only interviewees’ gender performances and assumptions about the construct of gender itself, but also institutionalized power dynamics that make gender relations invisible within the postgraduate program and its research agenda.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Bacchi, C. L., & Bonham, J. (2016). Poststructural interview analysis. In *Poststructural Policy Analysis* (pp. 113–121). Palgrave Macmillan US.



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Utilising WPR to strengthen reflexive capacities in academic-policy engagement practice

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Systems and practices intended to increase the use of evidence in policymaking in the UK predominantly treat evidence use as a technical problem. The proposed ‘solutions’ often involve producing and mobilising more evidence, with greater certainty, packaged and targeted in more sophisticated ways, to compete for attention and instrumentally ‘impact’ policy at scale. These practices are enabled by reductive logics such as deficit models, value-neutrality, and knowledge hierarchies. The result is an academic-policy landscape with a “vast and increasing mass of rudderless activity, which is busy rather than effective” that creates harm through wasted time and resources, reduced goodwill, and (re)producing inequities.¹

Many academic-policy actors recognise these technical pitfalls and are seeking more strategic and relational approaches with clear implications for practice. WPR is an attractive resource for supporting this shift, particularly for focusing critical and collective attention on the relationships between strategy, assumptions, and practice, and on the politics of evidence production and use – thereby strengthening reflexive capacities.

This paper presents reflections on the application of WPR to stimulate critical thinking in a collective consultation response to the UK national research and innovation funding agency (UKRI). We will also expand on other potential uses of WPR, from an academic-policy practice perspective.

¹ Oliver, K., Hopkins, A., Boaz, A., Guillot-Wright, S. and Cairney, P. (2022) What works to promote research-policy engagement? Evidence & Policy, vol XX no XX, 1–23, DOI: 10.1332/174426421X16420918447616



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Safety from domestic abuse: how is the problem represented to be in the United Kingdom?

Domestic abuse policy aims to guarantee ‘safety’ from harm. However, there is no unique definition of what safety is, and survivors’ and children’s perceptions of safety are often underrepresented, with potentially dramatic consequences.

This study analyses a sample of child protection and domestic abuse literature and policy in the United Kingdom, using the theoretical framework of the discourse analysis, informed by Bacchi’s (2000) “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” approach.

The authors’ main questions are:

1. How is safety from domestic abuse conceptualised and represented in the United Kingdom’s child protection and domestic abuse literature and policy?
2. Are there any pockets of policy and practice? Who holds different positions?
3. What are the consequences of holding different conceptualisations of safety?

The authors argue that ‘being’ safe is different from ‘feeling’ safe, and policy needs to represent the subjectivity of safety. There are multiple reasons why boosting survivors’ and children’s voices in policy is recommended. Firstly, it is essential to question survivors about their feelings of safety, as emotional containment is a prerequisite to recovery. Secondly, adopting a safety approach is preferable as phenomena such as the ‘failure to protect’ laws arise from policy frameworks that prioritise risk management. These common frameworks are skewed towards the need to prevent physical offending and do not emphasise the phenomenology of the parent.

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Post-truth, evidence and expertise: What's the Problem Represented to Be?

This paper explores the benefits and challenges in applying Carol Bacchi's *What's the Problem Represented to be?* (*WPR*) approach in a climate characterized by debates about a "post-truth" political paradigm. The paper begins with an exploration of claims that post-structuralist thought (such as that informing the *WPR* approach) exacerbates a "post-truth" politics. Highlighting the tensions and inconsistencies in the way appeals to evidence and expertise are deployed in policy debates, the paper traces out how, by taking seriously the key analytic underpinnings of the *WPR* approach, it is possible to displace debate about the *value* of "evidence" and "expertise" in policy making processes in order to focus instead on how such claims operate as part of wider *governmental techniques*. From this vantage point, it is possible to interrogate claims about the role and purpose of evidence and expertise in policy making, by exploring the kinds of discursive and governmental practice that they connect to, rather than by treating them as *merely* epistemological or ontological claims.



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Exploring silences in policy and problematisations at the intersection of gender, land use and climate change

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Over the past decades, numerous policies have been produced in domestic and international domains at the intersection of gender, land use and climate change. Recurring themes in the problematisations and proposed policy solutions are: calls for new economic incentives to stimulate ‘climate-friendly’ green growth, land/livestock production, employment in ‘marginal’ areas, and links between development and gender equality being reduced to “educating” women for jobs in the new “green market”. Yet, what is not problematized, where are the silences in this intersection? How to think the unthought – a central question in Bacchi’s WPR approach to critical policy analysis, represents a methodological challenge. Building on four case studies from Burkina Faso, Norway, Spain and Sweden, we focus on ‘how’ each case study approaches silences. We present and organise the largely actor-centric methods employed, and discuss their strengths and limitations when identifying what is left unproblematised across time, cultures and societal ambitions. As Bacchi and Goodwin argue (2016), a comparison of cases is a powerful tool to identify combinations of practices and relations that produce problematisations and silences in specific contexts. It is also powerful in identifying and discussing different tools and novel ways in which silences can be fleshed out.



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Questioning representations of athletes with elevated testosterone levels in elite women's sports: a critical policy analysis

Sport sociologists are often required to interpret, question and respond to the ways in which fairness and eligibility concerns in elite sports are represented in policy frameworks produced by sports governing bodies. Drawing on Carol Bacchi's critical policy analysis framework, 'what is the problem represented to be?', this paper explores the importance in developing a critical eye and reading about representations of women athletes with particular differences of sex development (DSD) with elevated testosterone levels and the idea of regulating their testosterone levels in the female classification. Through using the above critical policy analysis line of questioning, this analysis aims to consider what the problem of women athletes with relevant DSDs with elevated testosterone levels in female elite sports is represented to be; what the assumptions underlying these representations of the problem are; how these representations of the problem have come about; what is left unproblematic in this problem representation; what the lived effects produced by these representations of the problem are; and how these representations of the problem have been produced, disseminated, defended, questioned, disrupted and even could be replaced. The critical policy analysis argues that the continuing persistence of policies marking particular women with DSDs as a problem, is related in part to societal views defining particular bodies and athletic abilities in the female classification as either 'right' or 'wrong' and in need of fixing. In moving forward and redressing the problem, it requires the embodiment of biomedical ethics and human rights advocacy work by sports governing bodies.

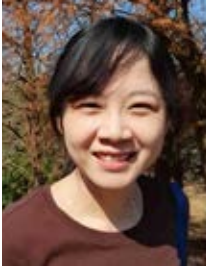
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What's the Problem with Sexual Intimacy following Intimate Partner Violence in the DSM-5?

Bacchi's 'What Is The Problem Represented To Be?' (WPR) is an ideal approach to integrate with feminist methodologies, as it provides the foundation from which to uncover subjective truths and lived experiences. Therefore, WPR gives a voice to the silenced. By using WPR, the study identified, explored and unpacked some of the 'problem' representations of the impacts on sexual intimacy following women's experiences of intimate partner violence within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). Drawing on a data subset from a larger Australian focused project, the WPR approach was useful in analysing how in a patriarchal and medical model-focused political climate the guises of "truth", "facts", and "evidence" are used to silence the voices of women who experience impacts on sexual intimacy following experiences of intimate partner violence. As it has been used in previous studies, WPR was used in this study to foster resistance against gendered or cultural stereotypes within policy, moving towards a feminist viewpoint in which women are the centre of their own narratives.



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Problematizing the “Care Crisis” in Long-Term Care Policy: A Critical Policy Analysis comparing Taiwan and Japan

This paper aims to explore the political discourses and ideas behind the long-term care policy development in Taiwan and Japan. While welfare state retrenchment prevails in most countries, Japan and Taiwan launched national long-term care systems in 2000 and 2007. This paper uses the “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach by Carol Bacchi, to examine how the social investment was framed as the solution to the perceived problems of these two systems of LTC and how such a process is similar or different across the two countries. This empirical analysis shows how the two countries define specific problem representations, underlying assumptions and silences, and then argues that the driving factors of these state welfare expansions are largely derived from the government intention of the improvement of labor force participation across both sexes and all age groups rather than the decline in the provision of family care. While the social investment approach is the dominant idea of LTC policy in both Taiwan and Japan, they adopted different strategies to the problem of care worker shortage which emerged from different underlying assumptions. Thus, the diverse directions of policy development further occur in various public debates or new issues. In conclusion, the analysis highlights the methodological advantages of juxtaposing seemingly similar discourses in different contexts. The discussion of the ideas behind the LTC policy development also offers insights into the debates of East Asian welfare capitalism and the related productivist welfare regime.

Keywords: East Asian Welfare Regime, Long-term Care Policy, Family Welfare, Poststructuralism, Cross-country Comparison

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A Genealogy of the Gambler-Subject Using an WPR Approach

This investigation offers an overview of how the demographic of the gambler-subject has changed over time from lower-class and heavily stigmatized to the online gambler who is educated with above-average income. Online gambling poses risks that are discreet from in-person gambling, and require specialised forms of regulation such as harm minimization measures. A WPR approach assists my analysis that there are two sites of the "problem" for online gambling that I suggest push Foucauldian analysis outside the bounds of its usual determination of power-knowledge in relation to the historical gambler-subject. The risks of online gambling are becoming difficult to measure and recognise in online spaces as separate from other types of online behaviours and risks, such as illegal gambling sites. Instead of deconstructing the use of expertise to determine when the gambler becomes dysfunctional or "problematic", instead I found gambling to be a much wider set of practices than first considered taking place online. Online, the gambler-subject now belongs to a growing demographic who partake in gambling-like practices, like online gaming for profit, holding crypto-currency and online trading. New regulatory practices that include harm minimization, which in Australia includes gambling blocks and exclusion registers, demonstrate how online gambling regulation appears as a way of responsabilizing the subject, and defining gambling in particular ways and not others. Using regulation to define what is problematic about gambling overlooks many aspects of the contemporary digital gambler-subject and how gambling firmly intersects with everyday life.

This research was undertaken on Darug and Whadjuk country with a study grant from the Office of Responsible Gambling in NSW and in-kind support from the State Library of Western Australia.

Walker's PhD project researched the development of an age-based classification system in Australia, and they graduated from the Department of Gender & Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney in 2019.



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Problematizing Palliative Care: a WPR analysis of WHO guidelines

Since the development of the World Health Organization (WHO) Public Health Strategy towards palliative care, countries have been required to establish palliative care programmes based on policy development, drug availability, education, and implementation in all levels of health care. Despite many successes in international development, palliative care remains a premise of countries with higher levels of resources, indicating that ideas of universal coverage are yet to be achieved. While WHO's approach emphasises 'common' palliative care frameworks that can be tailored to the specific conditions of each nation, this approach to international development has been recently questioned. It becomes increasingly important to question the premises upon which WHO recommends palliative care implementation and the implications these carry for how we think palliative care and the population guidelines aim to reach. Drawing from a Foucault-influenced approach to policy analysis, this paper introduces the What's the Problem Represented to Be? (WPR) (Bacchi, 2009) framework as an important tool to investigate WHO recommendations for palliative care implementation. The opportunity offered by this analysis propose alternative ways in which guidelines for service implementation can be thought about and suggest the political nature of WHO's advice, hence challenging their assumed scientific neutrality.

Keywords: Poststructuralism; WHO; WPR; Palliative care

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How digital health documentation transforms professional practices in primary healthcare in Denmark: A WPR Document analysis

Denmark has one of the most digitized healthcare systems, driven by several strategies since 1998, focusing on different aspects of digital health. Thus, all healthcare documentation occurs in electronic health records (EHR). Health professionals use EHRs to share information and coordinate care and treatment. The most prevalent assumption seems to be that strategies represent 'neutral' descriptions of pre-existing problems that digitalization can help solve. This study critically examines problem constructions in practical documents on digital documentation strategies in Danish municipal healthcare and how these problem constructions imply particular solutions. A document analysis based on WPR was applied. Forty practical documents in the form of guidelines, strategies, and quality control documents were included. The analysis uncovered three problem representations: lack of coherence between health services in a complex healthcare system, lack of assessable data for management and political prioritization, and inefficiency in the healthcare system. The proposed solution is a digitalized and standardized practice that transforms recordkeeping in the municipalities. Digital documentation functions as an organizational micromanagement approach that assigns the health professional a subject position as an employee acting according to the organization's framework rather than the profession's normative framework. When performing an integrated analysis by applying all questions it is possible to uncover a 'tightly woven' representation of problem representations, and it becomes clear how practical documents do not only represent the subject of digital documentation but also bridges from text to possible real effects.



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Problem-solving for problem-solving: data analytics to identify families for service intervention

Rosalind Edwards, Val Gillies and Sarah Gorin

This paper explores the double-faceted problem-solving logic in UK early intervention provision through applying Bacchi's ideas about problematisation linked to those of technological solutionism.

Discourses of transmitted deprivation and anti-social behaviour, and the accompanying costly public sector burden, produce particular families as a self-evident social problem. Local government need to identify these families for problem-solving intervention, and data analytics companies will solve that problem for them by algorithmic analysis and predictive risk modelling. This is accompanied by discursive themes around delivering powerful knowledge, timeliness and economic efficiency in data analytic companies' claims for their systems. Technological solutionism carries an aura of indisputability because it purports to deal in neutral, objective facts.

The double-faceted problem-solving logic shifts the burden of responsibility onto the behaviour of specific families, moralising and individualising social problems and diverting attention from complex structural causes. It also calls up a set of dependencies between local government and data analytics companies. Companies are reliant on citizens being datafied by public services, and local government is dependent on companies manipulating that data. Yet there are questions around whether data linkage and analytics does in actuality provide insightful accurate knowledge and efficient solutions for local government.

New research project about parents' views on identifying particular families for service intervention by joining up data from different sources: generic.wordpress.soton.ac.uk/parentdata

Indigenous and non-Indigenous research collaborations audio, visual and text resources available at: indigenous.ncrm.ac.uk

The International Journal of Social Research Methodology - a forum for high quality and cutting edge methodological debates and discussions bit.ly/2HU1nPm

Editors Notebook: ijsrm.org, [@TheIJSRM](https://twitter.com/TheIJSRM)



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Governing families through technologies: combining wpr and bourdieu's 'construction of the object'

In this paper we will consider our attempts to merge two analytic and disciplinary perspectives in co-authoring a book on how families are governed through technologies such as biologisation, and artificial intelligence. We aim to bring together sociological and criminological perspectives to provide a cross-disciplinary approach to the topic. To achieve this, we are drawing on a combination of Bourdieu's discussion of 'the construction of the object' (CoO) and Bacchi's Foucauldian-inspired framework of 'what's the problem represented to be?' (WPR). CoO alerts us to how social issues are conceived and defined within narrow approaches that reproduce structural inequalities, while WPR draws our attention to parallel concerns with how what institutions propose to do about something reveals what they regard as problematic and needing to change. But bringing these two theoretical influences together is neither standard nor without challenges. We will consider the CoO and WPR as a telling set of reflective tools to demonstrate how social phenomena and social research about them are constructed, and linked to power and interests, through a case study of biologisation and risk-focused AI systems as technologies for governing families in contemporary policy and practice.



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Doing WPR Collectively

Helga Eggebø (2020) has developed a collective data analysis method called “collective qualitative analysis” (CQA). In this approach, all research project participants take part in a joint workshop and collectively conduct a four-step analytical sequence: 1) reviewing the data, 2) mapping the data, 3) sorting the data and 4) creating an outline and workplan. While Eggebø (2020) described an inductive thematic analysis of in-depth interviews, she suggests that the method could be adjusted using alternate analytical strategies, in order to analyze e.g. observational notes, photos or texts. In this paper, we develop the CQA method for the purpose of analyzing policy documents, by combining it with Carol Lee Bacchi’s (1999, 2009, 2021) “What’s the Problem Represented to be approach” (WPR approach). We present a proposal for how we plan to combine the two approaches for the purpose of analyzing a broad corpus of immigration policy documents. We will be testing the collective WPR analysis as a part of an ongoing research project about the regulation of migration through monetary requirements (REMIMO). This collective analysis is suitable for combination with a critical feminist approach as the WPR approach. A collective analytical process brings together multiple voices and the tension between diverging voices creates a potential for new understandings. We suggest that this could strengthen our ability to critically investigate silences, alternative representations, and to uncover what is left unproblematic. Moreover, we think that the collective process facilitates the 7th step of the WPR approach, namely applying the questions critically to our own research.

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How does falling nuclear and fossil profitability affect energy policy discourse? The capacity “problem” and the lights going out

What happens to energy policy discourse when falling profitability makes it difficult to maintain the hegemonic framing of fossil and nuclear power as the only means of providing affordable energy? And how does this dislocation affect energy policy? This article uses Carol Bacchi’s Foucault-inspired policy analysis to analyse 13 interviews and 31 policy documents. It explores how Swedish energy policy discourse responded to a profitability crisis that struck its nuclear industry in 2016, and how these responses were used to legitimize a political decision to support nuclear power. The article shows how the profitability crisis was met with the framing of nuclear power as a necessary tool for ensuring the physical supply of electricity rather than, as before, affordable energy prices, and with the construction of an ultimatum: to remove a tax on nuclear power or to see all of Sweden’s nuclear reactors shut down so abruptly that the power system would be jeopardized. It explores the discursive and institutional conditions that enabled this framing, points to an ambivalence in the established discourse that might be used to challenge it, and argues that it is probable that similar discursive responses will be advanced in other contexts where physical security of supply is a more pressing issue than in Sweden.

This is the first empirical article in a compilation thesis that uses the WPR-approach to study energy policy and the phasing out of fossil fuels and nuclear power. Theoretically, it seeks to expand the WPR approach with an increased attention to how discursive and institutional conditions enable certain problem representations while marginalizing others.



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A solution, but what is the problem? – Contemplating the problem-solving ethos in Sexuality Education

Using sexuality education (SE) to solve different social problems has become a defining discourse to explain what SE *does*. Since the late 19th century, SE has been a tool for combating and preventing social problems stemming out of venereal diseases, unintended pregnancies, low sexual moral, sexual deviance, low sexual- and reproductive health, gender inequalities, sexism, sexual exploitation, sexual violence, and a general lack of knowledge about the body and sexualities. Although SE has developed differently in various countries and taken on different directions, it continues to appear as a solution to prevent and solve a multitude of social problems. But if solving and preventing problems is the very core and purpose of sexuality education, I think it is suitable to ask how policies and educational programs ‘knows’ what problems to solve?

In response to this simple, yet important question, this paper, without denying the importance of SE, considers how the problem-solving ethos is discursively constructed and underpinned through problematisations. In this paper I use the WPR-approach to target the aftermath of policy. By departing from a policy that is already produced, I show how the Swedish Government first announced a policy reform and eight days later adjusted their message to correspond with public opinion. The empirical material consists of the announcement, a debate article by the Minister of Higher Education, and a selection of 20 newspaper articles published during the eight days in between. This paper provides an empirical example of how a problem-solving discourse underpins and narrates coherence between policy (solutions) and problems. In this paper I also consider how problematisations can work as a soothing technique of acceptance in which policy, as a solution, is in need for problems.

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Problematising the global urban agenda: A poststructural discursive policy analysis of the United Nations' 2016 New Urban Agenda

Drawing on theoretical concepts from Foucauldian poststructuralism, this paper asks to what extent the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (NUA) problematises sustainable cities, urbanisation and urban development. In so doing, the paper questions how global urbanisation is rendered governable and acted upon by global policymaking's discursive practices. The empirical material used in the study draws on work conducted in 2016 for the UN and the French government during the organisation of the Habitat III UN world conference and the drafting of its outcome document. Applying Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to be?" (WPR) poststructural method in discursive policy analysis, the empirical analysis finds out that the problem representations contained within the NUA's recommendations for transformative commitments towards global sustainability are in fact politically ambiguous. They suggest a neo-modernist form of governmentality which aims to stabilise capitalistic modes of spatial production all over the world, and that due to its 'régime of truth' the implementation of the NUA might result in the persistence of conditions of unsustainable urbanisation, cities and urban development.



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Problematizing transition to adulthood policies and their effects for disabled youth

Transition to adulthood for disabled youth has been identified as a public policy problem in many advanced democracies. The problem is predominantly framed as a service transfer issue when young people “age out” of children’s health services and public education. Such transition policies were shaped by both explicit and implicit understandings of disability, development and adulthood. These understandings constitute transition to adulthood as a particular kind of “problem” and play a key role in what is and what is not considered to address it. This study aimed to understand how transition is problematized in Ontario policies and implications for the health and daily lives of youths with developmental disabilities (DD) and their parents. Guided by Carol Bacchi’s WPR approach, this multi-method study examined three policy documents and interview accounts of 13 parents of youths with DD. Normative assumptions about ways of being, becoming, and behaving as an adult shaped implicit problem representations of disabled youth and their inadequate progression to socially valued adult roles and activities. Policies shaped by these assumptions had both beneficial effects and unanticipated harmful effects for youths with DD and their parents. Rethinking the problem of transition can open possibilities for mitigating unintended harms and for embracing diverse ways of being and doing over the life course.

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Problematizations and Performances: United Nations' Policy on Peacekeeper Sexual Exploitation and Abuse through the lenses of Carol Bacchi and Sara Ahmed

This paper brings Carol Bacchi's WPR into conversation with Sara Ahmed's analysis of audit systems and non-performativity within performance cultures. I show how each approach sheds light upon UN policy solutions for UN peacekeeper perpetrated sexual violence and exploitation (SEA). My analysis is based on the UN Secretary-General's reports on SEA data, peacekeeper training, and peacekeeping risk assessment materials. The WPR approach reveals that UN policy problematizes SEA as transactional sex represented as inevitable in the conditions of poverty and gender inequality at UN sites of intervention. SEA solutions individualize perpetrators as rule-breakers subject to discipline and generalize victims as among the many impacted by SEA globally. This representation situates the UN as the solution to, rather than cause of, SEA, restoring a narrative of the UN as defender of the vulnerable. Sara Ahmed's conceptualization of non-performativity within performance cultures suggests that UN systems of documenting SEA mask the problem. From this perspective, the Secretary-General's reports on SEA data, peacekeeper training, and SEA risk assessments are a performance that masks on-going peacekeeper perpetrated sexual violence and exploitation. Both theoretical lenses elucidate UN policy failure to address SEA, but is the concept of masking at odds with the WPR approach?

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Humanitarian representation of childhood in times of irregularised migration

After the “refugee crisis” in 2015 Sweden has shifted towards a state policy discourse of increased focus on irregularisation of migration, temporary permits of residence, and prolonged waiting periods. This has left unaccompanied minors ‘on the move’ longer, oftentimes turning 18 during the period of waiting for asylum (Djampour 2018). Public social service provision of welfare for unaccompanied youth was also limited (Kazemi 2021). Departing from a WPR-perspective (Bacchi 2009) the aim of this article is to investigate how humanitarian policy solutions of welfare are legitimated depending on problematizations of childhood and rights of unaccompanied youth in Sweden is represented. The empirical material consists of documents issued by the non governmental organizations *The [Swedish] Children’s Agency and Save the Children Sweden*. These voluntary organizations both work from a child rights perspective and have been part of a collaboration with the municipality of Stockholm on unaccompanied youth without access to public care, during 2017-2021. The documents are issued in 2018-2020. The articles preliminary findings is that depending on how ‘unaccompanied youth’, are problematized, this in turn produces effects on what kind of welfare that could be possible for unaccompanied youth. Problematizations of childhood produced specific discursive effects of inclusion. A WPR perspective is particularly useful as it allows for contextualization of universal concepts such as childhood. Since the CRC became implemented in Swedish law in 2020, such contextualization are urgent.

WPR, children’s rights, unaccompanied youth, reception, Sweden



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Representing the problem of Dementia

Reflections on Carol Bacchi's What is the Problem Represented to Be Approach

Population ageing is increasing the number of people experiencing varied forms of age-related progressive neurodegeneration that produces the symptom pattern/syndrome that is called 'dementia'. Dementia has come to be cast as a condition deserving urgent policy attention across the globe. In the United Kingdom (UK) resources have been invested in earlier intervention and in basic science research into pathological mechanisms underlying dementia. Policy initiatives include government Dementia Strategies and encouragement of 'Living Well with Dementia', 'Dementia Friendly Communities', 'Dementia Friends' and 'Dementia Champions'.

This paper will explore England's national dementia policy and practices using Bacchi's framework of questions to understand dementia-related policy initiatives, service re-orientation and lobbying campaigns.

Our preliminary conclusions are:

1. Bacchi's approach does elucidate the representation of dementia within medical and social care.
2. A 'medical-industrial-charity' complex shapes and controls the representation of dementia.
3. Using the WPR approach in a more systematic way might well yield different answers but different conclusions can enrich policy debate.
4. The WPR analytic approach helps explain why prevention gets overlooked and reminds us that not all 'stakeholders' have the same motivations.
5. However, WPR does not necessarily identify levers for change.
6. We are left with some questions. For example, does problematising problems get us anywhere? In medical science, what is a policy? And how could we 'disrupt' the very disruptiveness of dementia itself?



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When the “problem” denies trans* representation: Examining the case of an open-door policy in school washrooms

Despite LGBTQ+ human rights campaigns in the US and Canada gaining media attention, the question of bathroom use continues to be problematic in schools for gender diverse students whose gender identity does not cohere to the existing sex segregated bathroom organization. In schools where gender neutral washrooms have been the seemingly progressive response to gender inclusivity, policies of accommodation around bathroom usage continue to exclude gender diverse students. A WPR approach, as a paradigmatic shift, sees the accommodation itself as reifying the existing sex-segregated structure thus framing the gender diverse student as problematic, and requiring special, individualized, and reactive treatment (see Ingrey, 2018).

In specific instances, disciplinary tactics operate to criminalize the washroom user. For example, in one case in Ontario, Canada, through a literal open-door policy, school administrators removed the school washroom doors for “safety reasons”. In my paper I argue that the removal of the doors is an example of “hostile architecture” (Petty, 2016), that which excludes so-called undesirables in an effort at the securitization of public spaces.

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Petty, J. (2016). The London spikes controversy: Homelessness, urban securitisation and the question of 'hostile architecture'. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 5(1), 67.

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Society Is Growing Colder: Loneliness Problematized in a Nordic Welfare State

In 2018, the UK drew international attention when it announced the appointment of its first 'Minister of Loneliness', releasing a number of policies related to the goal of reducing loneliness in the population around the same time. Norway was among the first nations to follow suit, releasing its own loneliness strategy in 2019. In recent years, political attention to loneliness and its impact have only grown in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, however, very little research has explored the political discourses on loneliness in any context. Utilizing Carol Bacchi's What is the Problem Represented to Be (WPR) framework, this paper presents findings from a discourse analysis of loneliness-centered policies and political speech in Norway from 2017-2021.

The findings indicate that the recent wave of loneliness policy presents a medicalized problematization of loneliness. Loneliness is thus understood as a problem of risk to be solved by a benevolent modern welfare state. Loneliness in Norway has come to be understood in epidemiological terms, by targeting risk groups and recognizing loneliness as a risk factor for poor health and early death. This study also finds that risk factors for loneliness itself are frequently purported to stem from modern living. In this problematization, loneliness is argued to be one consequence of a society's increased reliance on technology over face-to-face interaction. As such, loneliness surfaces as a medicalized product of the modern risk society.

Key words: Loneliness, medicalization, risk society, modernity, welfare state, policy, Norway, discourse analysis, WPR



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Representations of security in Swedish migration policy 2015-2022

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Drawing upon an analytical combination of What is the problem represented to be (WPR) approach and recent developments in securitization theory (ST) we in this paper zoom in on migration policy in Sweden 2015-2022. Starting with the common WPR issue ‘what is the problem?’ we highlight the threats as perceived by the Swedish Government to legitimate its autumn 2015 policy turn from ‘open your hearts’ to a more restrictive stance dressed in securitizing language. Exploring the justifying points of reference raised by the governing coalition and radical right/retrotopian party opposition in Parliament we also bring some notice to current Swedish migration policy responses related to the war in Ukraine. Arguably, this verbal migration turnarounds highlights the need for not reifying party political positions, and at the same time showing that the concept of the in-securitized ‘abject migrant’ is particularly useful for making sense of Swedish migration policy taken place since 2015. Overall, we find the combination of WPR and ST fruitful for an analysis of the intricate relations exposed in the context of migration policies, thus also in a way confirming the ambiguity in policy-making that March and Olsen once described as “organized anarchy”.



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Combining the WPR-approach with the “logics of critical explanation” – potentials and limitations

In my thesis, I work with critical policy analysis on empirical data from seven legislative procedures during a 15 year time period in Sweden, which all address young persons called “unaccompanied minors”.

As relevant as it is to deconstruct the image of “unaccompanied minors” and migrants in general, I wanted my analysis to go beyond dismantling presuppositions, to say something about the political context in which these reforms had been constructed (Bacchi 2005, 2009). Furthermore, to comment on (un-)intended policy effects, I conducted a number of interviews, but found it difficult to integrate this data with the policy text in the analysis.

As a way out of these dilemmas, I designed a combined theoretical/methodological framework where I added the “logics of critical explanation approach” to the WPR, with the ambition explain these reforms through discourse theory in line with what I see as the spirit of the WPR, but through a framework that lifts the political and ideological dimension as well as drawing attention to the relation between affects and discourse (Glynos & Howarth 2007 and 2008).

My contribution to the symposium is a paper where I elaborate on this combination of the WPR and the logics approach. As I see it, the potential with this combination is a fine-grained analysis with political relevance, but a limitation that still needs to be discussed is how to position material “reality” in data analysis when everything is considered as discourse (in my case the status of interview data compared to policy text) and what ethical dilemmas this means in relation to potential research participants.

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Using genealogy to problematise the government of education and civil society?

Genealogy has been characterised for its interlocking modes of historical method, critique and interpretive style and its relationship to modes of subjectivity and forms of government. It is in how these modes of practice combine that genealogy might be defined as a methodology that asks what is the problem represented to be? In this paper I develop methodological principles that enable such a critique of how the government of education for a civil society can be conceptualised. I use as my case the utilisation of literacy and education in strategies of government that seek to secure the ‘circulation’ of human populations and the production of civil society. I begin the paper by discussing how problematisation can be understood as a critical and interpretive act. I then argue that problematisations of the politics and histories of education can be genealogical in design and archaeological in method. I follow this by discussing Foucault’s use of the terms descent and emergence to situate problematisations as a form of critical history. I conclude by suggesting that representations of being and experience in Foucauldian genealogy addresses concerns with WPR’s capacity to reproblematiser (a) normative statements, and (b) offer alternative truths.



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Constructing the Problem of Interoperability: An Analysis of Swedish Sociotechnical Imaginaries in Digital Education Policy

Interoperability, i.e. the ability of information technology systems, devices, and platforms to communicate with and exchange digital data with one another, has become a central and vital part in the digitalization of everyday school practice and has been continuously driven forward by the ambitions of various educational policy actors. This study aims at understanding the constructed and performative discourse around interoperability in the Swedish educational context drawing on the theoretical and analytical framing of problem-representations based on Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be' approach and Jasanoff's 'sociotechnical imaginaries'. Working with a large collection of sources, this paper analyzes a selection of key policy documents between 2016 and 2020, suggesting intertwined social and technical interoperability imaginaries. In the Swedish context, interoperability is partially constructed as a mundane technical aspect, however, the imaginary of frictionless data flows enabled through interoperability also shapes the debate around opportunities such as increasing equality and democratic aspects in education. Further, problem-representations concerning interoperability within policy documents also highlight implicit sociotechnical imaginaries of new forms of marketization and new possibilities of oversight, due to the frictionless flow of data.

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Evidence-making ‘outbreak’: a critical analysis of the productive capacity and constitutive effects of outbreak science

Outbreaks speed up and challenge the ideal processes of evidence-based policy. In emergency situations, such as we have seen with Covid-19, there is an imperative to act swiftly to prevent harm. But in these situations, it is all the more apparent that evidence is uncertain, emergent and evolving. Idealised approaches to evidence-based policy – in which it is assumed that scientists will produce objective and reliable knowledge that can be translated and used in a technical-rational decision-making process to produce better policy outcomes – are ill equipped to deal with the uncertainties arising in evolving situations of need. The emerging field of ‘outbreak science’ offers indications of how evidence-making for policy might be done differently in specific outbreak situations. But how does ‘outbreak science’ do its work? Upon what conceptual logics does it rely? How has it come to be? And what effects does it make?

Taking ‘outbreak science’ as a proposal, in this presentation I will critically consider how science and other material-discursive practices work to produce ‘outbreak’, how ‘outbreak science’ might be conceived as a ‘break-out’ from the evidence-based paradigm as conventionally construed, and what this means for how evidence itself is constituted and made to matter in the governance of global health. By extending the ontopolitical commitments of Carol Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” (WPR) approach, and combining poststructural policy analysis with perspectives drawn from Science and Technology Studies, this presentation invites a shift away from thinking with evidence primarily as a matter of epistemology towards thinking with evidence as a matter of ontology, attending to how evidence is not only made and translated but transformed as it is put to use in its situation. This approach does not simply ask ‘What is the evidence?’, but also asks ‘How is evidence made?’, ‘How is evidence put-to-use?’, and ‘How is evidence made-to-matter?’, including for those whose lives are affected and made precarious in emergencies.

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Caught in a Polarizing Standstill: WPR as Critical Practice and the Case of School-based Mindfulness

According to Foucault the act of criticism is about making harder what has now become too easy. But how can this appeal be understood in cases where criticism of a given object has itself become too easy? In this paper, I discuss how Bacchi's WPR approach can be employed in cases where a landscape of polarization surrounds a specific topic, i.e. where problematizations are produced not only through proposals or proposed solutions but also through the critique and suspicions emerging from opposing forces and positions. As a case illustrative of this landscape, I turn to the specific scholarly debate on the application of mindfulness in schools. Within this field, one camp has praised mindfulness as an unparalleled instrument to improve student's wellbeing, mental health and academic outcomes, contrasted by an opposing group of critics arguing that such practices are construed as a superficial coping technique, which serves as yet another quick fix to neoliberal developments in education. On both sides, a dynamic production of alternating problematizations takes place, yet the question remains whether exclusively promoting or dismissing current policies concerning school-based mindfulness has become too easy. My broader focus will be on the question of how WPR can be characterized as a critical practice and of how this relates to current discussions of the constructive potential of post-structuralist approaches in general.



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How is gender equality made in Sweden? A postcolonial feministic perspective on Swedish gender equality policy between 2014 and 2019

Sweden has a reputation of being one of the most modern and gender equal countries and formed the world's first self-declared feminist government in 2014. According to existing research *Swedishness* itself has become a symbol of gender equality and modernity. With the starting point that this linkage is problematic, I study how governing takes place through problematization within Swedish gender equality policy in order to examine the *making* of gender equality. A special focus is directed to how individuals and groups are produced and shaped. The empirical material was collected by first mapping the entire policy area between 2014 and 2019, followed by a narrow document selection based on analytical- and subject specific considerations. The results show that the problems articulated are a *lack of regulation*, a *lack of knowledge*, a *lack of collaboration*, *wrongful designation* and a *lack of attention for certain groups*. To explore these problem representations further, I draw on existing power-critical research and postcolonial feminist theory with the conclusion that *Swedishness* and *Norms of Honor* are created in an asymmetric-diametrical relationship as well as that this field of policy is fragmented, emptied of a specific content and deeply entrenched in both ethnocentric and neoliberal discourses.



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Questioning policy-making as problem-solving. A Bacchian examination of how paid parental leave was problematized in New Zealand and Norway.

This thesis adopts Carol Bacchi's Foucault-influenced poststructuralist perspective to investigate how the concept of gender equality was conceptualized in the paid parental leave (PPL) policies in New Zealand and Norway. Poststructuralism is concerned with how we 'know' things, and with language, and the Foucauldian influence brings a focus on discourse as knowledge. Poststructuralism is also concerned with subjectivity, the subject positions created by the discourse, and the way in which some people are excluded from certain subject positions. The research investigates changes to the PPL policies in in New Zealand and Norway and how gender equality was conceptualized in each country.

This research is conducted using two closely-related poststructuralist methodologies for two different types of data. The first data consist of historical documents from prior to and including the time that the PPL policies were changed and Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' or 'WPR' framework is used to analyse them. The second data consist of interviews with people involved in the PPL policies and Bacchi and Bonham's Poststructural Interview Analysis or 'PIA' framework is used to analyse them. For both data sets, the analysis consists of thematic coding, followed by answering the series of WPR questions or the PIA processes. Three common themes of payment rate, eligibility, and rights were identified in the analysis of the historical data and they provided a focus for the interview data analysis. Different conceptions of gender equality were identified in each country.

The research makes a number of contributions. It provides an original insight into the design of PPL policy from a critical perspective and brings a gender lens to policy analysis. It offers a unique comparison between New Zealand and Norway, and provides a further methodological example of the established WPR framework, as well as an early application of the new PIA approach. The research also challenges policy-makers to adopt and maintain a critical perspective in their work, and to recognise that people are subjects, and that policies are problems constituted by the discourse.



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“Elusive” or “Measurable”? Quality and the Swedish School Inspectorate

In transnational and national education policy, “quality” is frequently discussed and has become a global phenomenon. In such policy documents (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2017; World Bank, 2018) demands for more and better “quality” is raised, but at the same time, the concept is also being challenged in previous research (Dahler-Larsen, 2019; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm, & Simola, 2011). Hence, critical voices question the ‘common sense’ status that the concept “quality” had been bestowed in policy (Cottle & Alexander, 2012). In Sweden, it is the Swedish School Inspectorate (SSI) that is commissioned by the state to audit the educational “quality”. However, as a definition of the concept is lacking in policy, the SSI enact national policy and guidelines in order to audit “quality.” In this paper, the underlying assumptions and the discursive effects of how the SSI construe “quality” in different policy proposals has been critically scrutinised. To access and interrogate such constructs, Bacchi’s (2009) post structural “What’s the problem represented to be?” (WPR) approach is introduced. The results of the study indicates that “quality” is assumed to be both measurable and elusive at the same time. Moreover, the analysis highlight that the SSI operates in a field of tension when they try to target something more elusive than just figures and numbers. The discursive effects of these assumptions affect what can be thought and said about “quality” both on local and national levels.

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Applying the “*What’s the Problem Represented to be?*” approach to bioethics research: epistemological and methodological considerations

This paper examines some epistemological and methodological issues related to the application of “*What’s the Problem Represented to be?*” (WPR approach) to research that situates itself in bioethics. It provides the example of a WPR inspired analysis of selected ethical, deontological and juridical international norms on biomedical research involving minors. In this example, the WPR analysis focuses on the different kinds of problematizations of minors’ vulnerability and autonomy that have been provided in almost a century (from 1947 to present). It suggests that these forms of problematization were shaped by what was increasingly presented as an urgent need: promoting pediatric research. Three main epistemological and methodological questions are considered: what is the specificity of bioethical guidelines and regulations compared to other policies? How should scholars using WPR position themselves in debates about the normativity of bioethics research? In what ways does the WPR approach contribute to bioethics debates and what are its limits?

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Dissecting discourses in policy: How are issues of gender and diversity in higher education represented in policy documents in Norway?

Gender equality, equal rights, and equal status are core values and are among Norwegian society's most powerful driving forces (The Research Council of Norway, 2019). The Norwegian state while working with various stakeholders has largely put in place policies and strategies that articulate issues of gender and diversity in all societal sectors. The stakeholders working under the state support and recommend measures that contribute to the integration of the work on gender balance and diversity at institutions of higher learning and the wider Norwegian society. After decades of research and systematic measures, results have been achieved, for example, UiT The Arctic University of Norway increased the share of women in professor positions from 9% in 2000 to 39% in 2020 (Duarte, Kochanska, & Nustad, 2020) and a relatively balanced leadership situation in research groups by 2021: 43% women and 57% men (Duarte, Kochanska, & Rönnblom, 2021). However, even with such levels of attainment, great disparities still prevail across the different fields of knowledge and disciplines in many Norwegian universities. The Duarte et.al (2020) report reveals that in the Faculty of Science and Technology and Faculty of Engineering Science and Technology combined, men, hold 82% of the professorship positions and account for 80% of the research group leaders while women are overrepresented in the fields commonly associated with female activities such as social sciences, care, and education.

Drawing from such recent research-based evidence, this paper aims to investigate how Norwegian policies/strategies problematize matters of gender and diversity in higher education. Employing Carol Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach, the paper evaluates frames of problem representation and how those representations give direction to the policy, define fields, articulate issues, or set limits to policy possibilities. WPR is employed to critically interrogate the policies focusing on the social and value-laden ways in which gender and diversity are initially represented. WPR will be combined with feminist perspectives in this analysis.



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Rethinking the politics of geographical names as cultural heritage

In this paper I explore how combining poststructural policy analysis with theories of scale can contribute to the development of new theory regarding geographical names as cultural heritage in policies that regulate names in official use.

I apply the “what is the problem represented to be?” or WPR approach to “unpack” the national policy for geographical names in Norway. The main goal of the policy is to safeguard names as cultural heritage, and the government strives to achieve this safeguarding by regulating the written form of names in official use, typically on maps and road signs.

Inspired by literature in the fields of critical place names studies and critical heritage studies, my point of departure is that scale and scalar relations play a crucial role in the production and meaning making in policies regulating geographical names and cultural heritage.

Utilizing the WPR Approach, I identify and examine the power dynamics between two different scalar problem representations of names as cultural heritage in policy. Drawing on poststructuralist theories, especially literature where scale and scale politics is looked upon as an epistemological concept, I explore the relations between the politics of scale and the WPR approach. In my discussion, the making and unmaking of ‘subjects’, ‘objects’ and ‘places’ will be central.



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WPR for the Purposes of Decoloniality

This paper explores the intersection between decolonial approaches and critical approaches to policy analysis - specifically, Carol Bacchi's WPR Approach. As an example, I consider the United Nations policy of Constitutional Assistance (UNCA) - a policy which focuses on the process of making constitutions for societies described as 'post-conflict' as a way to secure peaceful and stable societies. I present the case that the WPR Approach serves the decolonial agenda when the policy and problematisations in question are analysed with a particular focus on uncovering the coloniality of policy problematisations. Coloniality is a concept developed by Anibal Quijano and Walter Dignolo and refers to the long lasting patterns of colonial power which continue to structure global society in discernible ways, despite the formal end of judicial colonialism. Decoloniality is a specific theoretical offering within a broader scholarship focusing on decolonising which focuses on how we may begin to challenge the colonialities in the social world. In particular, I argue that questions 4 and 6 of the WPR Approach - *What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently? and How/where is this representation of the 'problem' produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?* - can be used to advance the aims of decoloniality 'the transformation of colonial subjects and subjectivities into decolonial subjects and subjectivities.' (Dignolo and Walsh, 2018: 146). In all, this is a contribution to ongoing explorations of how the WPR Approach can be combined with other theoretical perspectives.

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The theoretical foundation of “anti-mask” thoughts and development as social movement: Critical empirical analysis of the Japanese case study using the WPR approach

This presentation aims to analyze, by using WPR approach, the anti-regulation movements that emerged during the Covid-19 epidemic, particularly social movements based on anti-mask ideology. The case is Japan which has little legally mandatory regulation by the state, but where regulation was strongly enforced through horizontal peer pressure within society. Although the anti-regulation movement has been consumed in the mass media in relation to conspiracy theories, little academic attention has been paid to its intrinsic logic in previous studies. Such budding and ongoing social movements can be comprehensively understood and critiqued with the aid of the WPR approach. This research classifies social movements opposing a face mask regulation into three categories: right-wing libertarianism, neoliberal deregulation and left-wing liberalism. It then empirically clarifies the development of each of these ideologies in the context of the Japanese case. The logic, which appears in civil society, is then examined through the WPR approach. We can see that social movements in pandemics are not short-term phenomena, but have a medium- to long-term impact on the map of deep ideas about human being and their way of life.



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The transformation of mass surveillance in data protection discourse: A brief genealogy

“Mass surveillance” has historically been a polarising term, conjuring up visions of totalitarianism. Despite this, our lives are now constantly tracked by governments and private corporations alike. This paper presents the results of a genealogy of data protection discourse from the 1950s to the present, with a focus on how mass surveillance is represented as a policy problem in the legal instruments, policy papers and conference proceedings of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It traces the ways in which both potential harms and benefits of mass surveillance practices have been articulated, and shows how mass surveillance practices, once considered verboten, are increasingly portrayed as neutral, or even positive. A shift is identified from generally bipartisan agreement over the incompatibility of mass surveillance with democracy, to more general acceptance of surveillance practices when re-branded as tools to promote economic growth, security and public health. This is significant because it highlights the inherent instability of policies anchored to seemingly fixed or self-evident truths such as the “public interest,” “well-being,” “trustworthiness” or “ethics.”



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Empathic Policy Analysis: The Transformative Potential of the What's the Problem Approach

In this paper, we explore the potential of Carol Bacchi's What's the Problem Represented to be (WPR) approach to cultivate social empathy in policymaking processes and practices. Social empathy extends empathy from an interpersonal disposition to the social and political structures that inform policy processes and outcomes. Empathy is not simply feeling bad for someone; rather it requires that subjects relate to and share the feelings of others. It thus requires an emotional understanding of phenomena and of political subjectivities, which we suggest can be cultivated through an emotional analysis of policy that is premised on the WPR. The WPR is largely concerned with how problems are represented and the various effects that are produced by those representations, and emphasizes reflexivity among researchers. Building on social work and emotional policy analysis research, we suggest that extending the analytical foci of the WPR to include emotional discourse offers a promising framework for both nurturing and applying empathy in policy contexts. We suggest that such a framework can expose the various subject positions of both the analyst and policy subjects, implicating disciplinary forces that hinder connection between subjects. Once such forces are illuminated, policymakers can potentially reconfigure policy in more socially just ways. We thus emphasize the transformative potential of fostering empathy in and through policymaking.



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A Critical Analysis of Key Policies Shaping Services for Young Children with Disabilities in South Africa

There have been significant recent developments in the policy arena in South Africa in respect of disability and of early childhood development viz. the *White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy*. Using Bacchi's analytical framework encapsulated in the question, What's the problem represented to be?, these policies were subjected to scrutiny, analysing how disability and inclusion are represented within them, and how these representations shape the lives of young children with disabilities. Among the underlying assumptions contained in these policies is that barriers excluding persons with disabilities are socially constructed and their removal will result in inclusion. Further, the policies imply that marginalisation and vulnerability are inherent traits of children with disabilities. Inclusion is portrayed as an ideology rather than a practice. Amongst unproblematised elements of the policies is the supposition that children with disabilities are a homogenous group, and that there is a distinction between children with and without disabilities. The effects of these representations manifest in a focus on social barriers, which downplays the importance of habilitation and rehabilitation for the individual child and may result in children with disabilities being portrayed as passive recipients of services. It may also undermine choice and agency of children and their families. Further, the analysis indicates that defining the principle of inclusion too broadly makes it difficult to measure.

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What's the problem of public food in a Swedish municipality represented to be?

The research presented here is part of a larger study on small-scale ecological farms in Sweden. Municipalities in Sweden are responsible for food provisioning in public institutions such as schools and homes for elderly and people with special needs. Their engagement with this responsibility involves redistributing local tax income toward food producers: local or distant, large or small, organic or 'conventional', monocultural or diversified. In this capacity, they have the potential to facilitate or hinder the flourishing of local food producers in their jurisdiction. How they reason, justify and deal with food provisioning policies — how they formulate the problem of public food procurement — can partly be seen on their websites and in public documents. Drawing on the systematic questions of the WPR approach (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016), we investigate the public food procurement policies of a municipality in central Sweden. The research is based primarily on publicly accessible municipal documents. We trace the history of a shift in local food procurement policy with potential to radically change municipal food provisioning, and furthermore be exemplary for other municipalities in Sweden.

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Systemic complexity, fused approaches and the WPR

The term ‘diversion’ is used to describe strategies that police and/or prosecutors can use to provide routes to public health interventions for people with underlying needs. Drug-related deaths are rising worldwide and are particularly acute in Scotland, UK. This has led to an increased focus on the potential for diversion strategies to be used as part of drug policy innovation. Drug policy and practice in Scotland exists within an area of complex governance. Scotland’s devolved government has responsibility for health and justice policy, yet drug legislation remains reserved to the central UK Government in Westminster. We understood that Carol Bacchi’s (2009) ‘what’s the problem represented to be’ (WPR) analysis approach was known for its ability to manage complexity and generate detailed research findings. Resultantly, we selected this approach to inform our analytic process. We sought, however, to introduce new dimensions to the approach by fusing the WPR and Spencer and Ritchie’s (1994) structured framework analysis method. This created a sequential process that introduced evidenceable research stages, increasing transparency and rigour. Using the modified WPR-SFT approach, our study identified several ‘unseen’ barriers to implementing the form of diversion proposed in UK and Scottish policy discourses. The study concludes that a fusion of these two theoretical and methodological approaches may be beneficial to others who are examining social policies within areas of complex governance.



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What would the state like us to believe is the problem and why? Questioning the problem representation of corporate accountability for modern slavery inherent within Australia's *Modern Slavery Act*

The introduction of the *Modern Slavery Act* (2018) (MSA) into Australian domestic law was hailed as a landmark development and has become a foundational component of the Government's response to modern slavery. Taking inspiration from similar legislation in the United Kingdom and the United States, the MSA problematises corporate accountability for modern slavery by positioning consumers and investors as responsible for influencing business behaviour and relying on market forces for enforcement. Questioning this problematisation, utilising Bacchi's (2009) policy analysis framework 'What's the problem represented to be' (WPR), enables critical critique of the proposed solution presented by the legislation. Furthermore, this analysis offers unique insights into how unsubstantiated assumptions can influence the law-making process and lead to a widely accepted form of governance enacted through a problem representation which can be exposed as deeply flawed. Importantly, applying WPR to this context also reveals inherent limitations with this approach related to considering central components of the current political climate which influence the development of problem representations within law making and governance, such as motivations, as well as in ascertaining the effectiveness of proposed solutions. Therefore, this paper considers not only what can the WPR approach tell us about the regulation of corporate accountability for modern slavery offered by the MSA, but also what this regulation can tell us about the WPR approach.

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Educational imaginaries: governance at the intersection of technology and education

This article argues that sociotechnical imaginaries, defined as collectively held, institutionally stabilised, and publicly performed visions of desirable sociotechnical futures, are significantly connected to visions, policies, and projects of educating citizens. These visions, policies, and projects — *or educational imaginaries*, — constitute ways to problematise, negotiate and ultimately govern citizens and citizenship at the intersection between technology and education. This article presents a model which conceptualises and analyses educational imaginaries, and specifically introduces the notion (and method) of ‘problematization’ into these imaginaries. The model, consisting of four key components — technology, problematisations, collective actors, and target populations — is exemplified through a genealogy of the education of the ‘digitalised citizen’.



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Searching for the new oil: Climate change and post-carbon futures in a second tier petro-region.

From June 2014 to June 2015, the Stavanger region in Norway lost more than 10.000 jobs in the oil industry because of drops in global oil prices. The “Oil Crisis” was short-lived, but the event nevertheless reinforced anxieties about the future of the region. Since the 1970s, Stavanger and surrounding areas, have moved from being one of the poorest regions in Norway to one of the wealthiest due to the discovery of rich oil deposits in the North Sea. In 2015, Stavanger was selected as one of the EU’s first three lighthouse smart cities. The Triangulum project was limited in scope and impact, but it sparked a flurry of “Smart City” activities in the region and it has become a primary policy for the future of the region. The Smart City imaginary (Cugurullo, 2018; Günel, 2019; Halpern et al., 2017) offered the potential of a post-oil future for this oil dependent region. This adoption of the Smart City concept as a development policy can be considered an expression of Stavanger’s awkward engagement with possible post-fossil fuel world orders (Tsing, 2005).

The Smart City is presented as a solution to two dominant anxieties (and problem representations) in the region: 1. The possible loss of jobs in the oil industry and 2. The fact that the Stavanger Region is considered the least attractive metropolitan region to live in by a majority of Norwegians. The Smart concept thus offers solutions to continued growth in the region through the repurposing of oil sector expertise into new high-tech industries and by making the region an attractive place to live i.e. smart city is envisaged to deliver prosperity through “good” jobs and “good” lives. This paper will problematize this unfolding of the smart city concept in Stavanger drawing on Bacchi’s WPR approach as well as Cultural Political Economy. Finally, the paper will provide reflections on my own awkward engagement with Smart City as a development policy concept through my position as manager of the Smart City research initiative at the University of Stavanger.



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Representations of and responses to CALD women and DFV: a discourse analysis.

Despite the vast amount of research on domestic and family violence (DFV) in Australia, the extent of violence in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities is unidentifiable due to limited research. With a woman murdered every 9 days and a man murdered every 29 days in Australia, DFV is an increasing social problem. The current 'facts' and 'evidence' of DFV in CALD communities indicates a particular set of 'problems' that CALD women experience. Common narratives position CALD women as deficit in education and awareness and with 'complexities' that have been categorised according to 'facts' and 'evidence'. Applying Bacchi's WPR approach to policy analysis, policy documents are examined for assigned meanings and representations, silences, assumptions, and alternatives approaches to policies. An expansion of this approach includes qualitative interviews with CALD working professionals in the DFV industry drawing on the WPR approach. The usefulness of the WPR approach in the current political climate reveals the hidden and subtle harms caused to CALD women in a DFV policy context. In the context of 'truths' and 'facts' this approach seeks to challenge truths presented to us, highlighting the failures of policies to do exactly what they were designed to do, protect women.

Keywords: policy; domestic violence; CALD; intersectionality; domestic violence policies; refugee; migrant



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Doing Drugs Policy: the development of critical drug theory using the WPR approach

Objective

The objective of the research was to explore the different narratives surrounding the participation of stakeholders in drug policy development, including avenues of participation.

Methods

The research utilised a range of methods including interviews, participant observation and document analysis. The data was analysed using two strategies: firstly narrative analysis to identify common and competing stories and narratives; and secondly the WPR approach. The application of the WPR approach resulted in the development of a new theory called 'critical drug theory' (CDT).

Results/Discussion

The presupposition that underlies the representation of drug users is that drug use is harmful - therefore participation in policy is of stakeholders who have experienced this 'harm' ('problematic drug users') and are seeking to reduce/eliminate it. Representation of pleasure resulting from drug use is silenced, and other aspects of drug use ignored. As a result, participation in policy is restricted to certain channels where governments feel they can be most effective- 'problem' drug use and users. CDT developed out of the 6th WPR question 'how can the representation be disrupted/challenged'? By using stories to counter the master narratives, CDT seeks to challenge and disrupt the representation of drug use being 'harmful', and drug users being 'problematic'.

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Problematisation and policy assemblage

Carol Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach has powerfully foregrounded the importance of examining the social and political processes of 'problematisation' that inform the development and enactment of public policies. Close attention to problematisation is also a key feature of a rapidly expanding body of literature that adopts 'an assemblage approach' to the analysis of public policy. In this paper, I will consider the potentials and limitations of bringing together the theories and methods inherent to the WPR approach with those in the emerging 'policy assemblage' literature. Building in particular on the work of anthropologist Tania Li (2007) and recent work I have conducted that has sought to articulate the theoretical and conceptual foundations of 'policy assemblage' (Savage 2019), I will argue that the WPR and assemblage approaches have great potential to work harmoniously as part of a sociologically-informed analysis of public policy. I will also argue, however, that a policy assemblage approach goes beyond the study of problematisation in significant ways, providing a powerful analytical lens for connecting the ideational realm of problems to: 1) the 'technical realm' (i.e. the translation of problems into policy infrastructures and technologies); and 2) the central role of human actors in these processes of 'rendering technical' forms of problematisation.

Li, T. M. (2007). Practices of assemblage and community forest management. *Economy and Society*, 36(2), 263–293.

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The “problem of health care” in canada’s federal prisons

The United Nations states that prisoners should enjoy the same standards of health care that are available in the community. Despite this, persons in prison experience barriers to care and face unique health challenges. Given the ways in which prisons shape health outcomes for incarcerated persons, it is important to interrogate how the provision of health care is *governed* in custodial settings. In this paper, we examine one important aspect of governance: legislation governing the provision of healthcare in prisons. We view this issue through a critical lens, building on a body of poststructural scholarship which has illuminated how laws and policies are not merely tools of governance but also key sites for the production of meanings around social “problems”, including the “problem of health.” Taking Canada’s *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* as a case example and applying Carol Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to Be” analytical framework, we examine how the specific representation of “health” in this legislation works to produce effects for persons in federal prison, illuminating the contingency of the particular construction of “essential health care” in this law. Three key themes are formed through this analysis. First, what constitutes “essential services” in the context of federal prisons is more limited compared to the broader community. Second, the dichotomy between the rights of persons in prison versus the protection of society that is produced in development of these laws has significant bearing on the treatment of those in prison. Third, this representation has negative effects on the health of persons in prison. In order to meet United Nations standards, greater attention must be paid to the ways in which laws and other governing practices re-produce inequities in health care provision in prisons.



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The grip of the UK responsible gambling policy approach: who and what are constructed as the problem, and why does it persist?

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Gambling as a commercialised activity has undergone significant changes in recent decades. Gambling-related harms, and the activities of the gambling industry, are now gaining recognition as public health issues and drivers of inequities. As in other countries, the dominant UK policy response to gambling-related harms has been the implementation of a 'responsible gambling' approach in partnership with the industry, that seeks to encourage citizens to 'gamble responsibly'. This mirrors the predominant, individuating policy models deployed in response to other health-harming industries such as the alcohol and processed food and beverage industries in the UK and elsewhere. To date, however, there have been comparatively few analyses of UK gambling policy from a public health perspective.

This analysis uses the WPR approach to examine the emergence and maintenance of 'responsible gambling' as a hegemonic policy regime and the concepts of 'gambling' and 'gaming' as a social practice, and 'the gambler' as an actor, on which this depends. It focuses on who and what is constructed as the policy problem and the implications of this approach for different actors and groups. The WPR approach is expanded and complemented by applying the critical logics approach (CLA) as developed by Glynos and Howarth. Specifically, the concepts of political and fantasmatic logics are used to analyse how the responsible gambling agenda is constructed and challenged, and the ways in which it appeals to policy actors.

The dominant or 'taken-for-granted' status of 'responsible gambling' as a guiding logic to gambling policy has important implications for public health. These are presented in the paper along with an exploration of the ways in which the WPR and the CLA complement each other to enhance critical policy analysis.



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Giftedness as Text and Enacted in Swedish Education Discourse

In 1997 Roland S. Persson, a Swedish psychologist, brought the concept of 'särbegåvning' into the Swedish vocabulary. The term was primarily meant to address teachers, specifically as a reaction against a political turn in education, expecting all students to be the same, thereby ignoring to acknowledge the education needs of "particularly able students" (Persson 1997).

One way to explore further what happens when a new concept, although with already established connotations, enter into an education context is to look at it from the point of policy analysis. In the intersection between theory and method, one dilemma I would like to address is how to go about in interpreting representations at the level of text, in policy documents and transcriptions of interviews and classroom observations. In addition, since giftedness is neither specifically mentioned in the main policy documents, I would like to discuss how to interpret representations of what is not mentioned, but still contributes to "assumptions, presuppositions and implications" (Bacchi 2009). In turn, both dilemmas relate to some extent to concepts of intentionality, validity and reliability.



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ATTENDING IN PERSON

The Problem and Production of Informal Caregiving in Quebec, Canada

As is the case in many other western contexts, informal caregiving has received significant political attention in Quebec, Canada over the past several decades. Currently, the Quebec government is in the process of developing a policy for informal caregiving (“la proche aide”) that is intended to respond to the needs of the informal caregivers in this Canadian province. Combining Carol Bacchi’s “What is the Problem Represented to be?” approach (2012) with that of a Foucaultian genealogy (1980), this paper critically analyses the various ways that the needs of a new subject, that of the informal caregiver, have been represented and produced in both government policies and by informal caregiver advocacy organizations. It explores the implications of these representations and productions of “the informal caregiver” from an intersectional lens that seeks to disrupt current conceptualizations of the needs of informal caregivers and the taken for granted nature of the category of informal caregiver itself. Building on the work of Tronto (2013), it advances the argument that caring is fundamentally relational and that this relationality must be central to any political attempts to address the problems that are currently being identified as those of the informal caregiver.

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ATTENDING IN PERSON

Keeping the lights on: What's the problem represented to be? Green industrial imaginaries in Sweden.

The paper utilises a Poststructural approach to policy analysis whereby “problem representations” (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016) produced in the current processes of making industrial development sustainable are identified. By using the *What's the problem represented to be? approach* (WPR), I identify major representations that are present in both regional and national policy texts on “green industrial transition” in the North of Sweden. Additionally, I aim to identify *sociotechnical imaginaries* (Jasanoff, 2015) in the problem representations as well as potential political effects that are enhanced through these imaginaries of green industrial development. By including the concept *sociotechnical imaginaries* in the analytical framework, my ambition is to illuminate aspects of the underlying assumptions in the problem representations that could otherwise be missed or neglected. These aspects are theoretical, concerning the function of collectively imagined futures in policy making, as well as empirical due to the focus on specific technical and material dimensions that the concept brings. Together, I argue, this helps me to grasp and analyze representations of sustainable industrial development in a policy area heavily directed to innovative and “smart” solutions to environmental problems. The analysis is based on policy documents as well as observations of digital conferences.



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The epistemological injustices of pandemic governing: Questioning governing knowledge in the pandemic university

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In this paper, we ask: How do the problem representations of the pandemic constitute governing “truths” deemed necessary for university decision-making? Drawing on the WPR approach, in communication with the concept of epistemological justice (Fricker, 2007), we examine pandemic policy responses from two research intensive universities in Canada to consider the logics that silence key epistemological spaces in higher education. We use Fricker’s notion of epistemological injustice, which explores the silences of negative space, where a knower is pre-emptively rendered invisible by “not being asked,” (Fricker, 2007). Considering how decisions changed over time with shifting waves of the pandemic, the argument is that testimonial injustices are carried out when responses privilege administrative truths, rendering collegial governance practices invisible. Additionally, we consider how such negative spaces create effects on university actors and constitute the objectification of the university itself.

Connections to the call: In our paper, we give consideration to how the WPR approach can be used coherently with the insights of epistemological injustice (Fricker, 2007). While Foucauldian concepts of knowledge and objectification underpin both WPR and Fricker’s thinking, we want to open a discussion for what assumptions are made visible and the limitations for political analyses of/within institutions. Our paper relates to two main questions in the call: What is the potential usefulness of the WPR approach in the current political climate that sees “truth”, “facts” and “evidence” as guiding principles? What are the potentials and limitations of combining the WPR approach with other theoretical perspectives?

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What are the potentials and limitations of combining the WPR approach with other theoretical perspectives?

In the WPR approach to policy analysis, Carol Bacchi's central argument is that 'problems' do not have an objective existence, but are made manifest in policy proposals. What the problem is represented to be is derived from looking back from the policy proposal. While this is helpful for understanding policy discourses, the WPR approach does not in its current form offer a way to consider how these discourses mediate practice, or indeed how 'what the problem is represented to be' is reflected, inflected, deflected or re-problematized in and through practice. In a sense, Bacchi's WPR approach addresses what Ball (1993) termed policy-as-discourse but does not address policy-as-text or indeed the dialectical relationship between the two. In a paper that I recently co-authored (Tawell and McCluskey 2021), my co-author and I proposed the need to examine how best to combine Bacchi's WPR approach with other methods to explore how policy discourses mediate practice. In this talk, I will attempt to address this point by drawing on insights from my DPhil thesis on the enactment of national school exclusion policy in England and explore the potential benefits of shifting from a poststructuralist to sociocultural position to explore not only how policy discourses mediate practice, but how practice mediates discourse.



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ATTENDING ONLINE

What is the problem represented to be in China's world-class university policy? A poststructural policy analysis

Underlying current research on China's world-class university (WCU) policy approaches are analytical foci that privilege the agency of social actors and the problem-solving approach to policy analysis. Foucauldian poststructuralists draw our attention to policy document, which is seen as a discourse that organizes and administers society. Inspired by Foucault, Carol Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' approach (WPR) views policy document as a technology of governmentality. As proposed solutions to a problem, policy text produces the very problem that it seeks to address. Carol Bacchi draws our analytical attention to the rationalities, technologies of governing and subjectification effects created by particular problem representations in the WCU policy. Using WPR, this paper shows that WCU is represented as merely a technical, managerial and organizational problem. Such representations naturally reify WCU in material terms, such as research output, and in a temporal form of state planning. Genealogically, the root of WCU can be traced to the neoliberal movement of knowledge economy. However, Shanghai Ranking overturned this center-periphery landscape in disseminating the concept of WCU. China's one-party state means that WCU is pursued at the expense of sacrificing social sciences and subjecting academics and students to become 'red experts.'



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ATTENDING ONLINE

Governing by Protection. Studying the Problematization of Whistleblower Protection in the EU

Despite the proliferation of *whistleblower protection* legislation across the world, increasingly scholars report that these laws fail to fully protect the whistleblower. In this paper, I direct attention to the politics of *whistleblower protection* and suggest that the Foucauldian concept of *problematization* can help to clarify how legal regulation is involved in the exercise of political power. I situate my study in the *EU* context and the *Whistleblower Protection Directive* drawing on Carol Bacchi's *WPR approach*. The study finds, that by mobilizing the engagement of workers in *law enforcement*, whistleblower protection works as a technology of power to rectify the problematics of *EU* government. I conclude by reflecting on the *ethico-political* implications of governmentalizing whistleblower protection in advanced liberal democracies.

Keywords: Whistleblower Protection, EU, Governmentalization, Problematization, Law Enforcement



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What's the problem represented to look like?

In this paper I turn to the works of feminist geographer Gillian Rose in order to explore new ways for critical policy analysis to comprehend the increasingly multimodal aspects of current policy formats. Not only are official policies in a wide range of areas and across countries communicated through, for instance, websites that allow for rich presentations of text, audio, images and films, but traditional policy documents issued by formal government bodies such as agencies, regions and municipalities are also increasingly draped in a form of advertisement style presentation. Productively, Carol Bacchi's What's the Problem Represented to be (WPR) approach to policy analysis advances a broad understanding of what a policy is by identifying it as 'prescriptive texts'. While this has served an important purpose in the sense that scholars influenced by the WPR approach have worked with a wide range of documents beyond formal government publications, WPR analyses with an explicit focus on how problems are represented through compositions of images, layout and typography have not been as pronounced in the research. Therefore, this paper aims to discuss the possible benefits and limitations of moving in this direction.

