

Salon

Title: The Possibilities and Dangers of Post-structuralism for Feminist Policy Work: A Salon

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Abstract

The symposium will bring together a group of women who have thought and written on feminist policy analysis across a variety of issues and contexts in order to theorize

“feminist policy analysis” under conditions of post-neo-liberalism, post-feminism and the tensions of the intersection of feminist policy and post-structuralism. Implicit in this goal will be a re-engagement with feminist standpoint theory “after” the critiques of identity politics and the humanist subject. A related topic will be the uses of qualitative research for policy research.

This symposium will be structured as a “salon” (The London Feminist Salon Collective, 2004) to explore the issues that arise at the intersection of feminist advocacy work and postmodern theory. It will especially focus on theories of the subject and agency, after humanism and the critiques of standpoint theory. This is an old debate that might be freshly engaged on the basis of unpacking an exemplar that studies the methodology of coming to know Irish women concealing pregnancy (Conlon, 2010). Conlon’s work traces the government commissioned research that resulted in the formation of a policy office to address the needs of such women and includes the sort of “betrayal” of qualitative interpretive work by policymakers that is a not uncommon story in feminist policy analysis (Patton, 2008).

Using Conlon’s “strong story” of a policy initiative in Ireland founded upon a feminist informed qualitative research study involving interviews with 400 Irish women concerning the nexus of “concealed pregnancies”, abortion and adoption, and subsequent involvement in further commissioned research for the same agency (focusing on crisis pregnancy counseling, concealed pregnancy and abandoned babies) and critical assessment of the trajectory of the Agency with reference to its feminist informed origins, a series of questions will be engaged.

What are the parameters of feminist (post)critical policy analysis? What is its genealogy as a field? The methods and analytic modes it deploys? What are its key terms and issues? What are its contributions and implications? Key exemplars?

What happens when feminist poststructuralism meets policy analysis? What does this say about the intersection of feminist advocacy work and poststructural theory—are they friend or foe? How might we (re)gage this old debate in new times using Conlon’s work that raises such questions as:

What is to be made of the critique of standpoint theory in the context of feminist policy work such as Conlon’s that relies on it?

What happens to the humanist subject and the theory of agency carried by it? What are the implications of this for the “competing versions of “woman/motherhood, society, and cultural identity” for The Crisis Pregnancy Agency in Ireland?

How does Conlon’s theorizing of agency map onto the theorizing of the London feminism salon collective (2004) regarding the problematization of agency in postmodern theory? Do you find it generative in terms of issues (and format)? How does it compare and contrast with the ideas of Valerie Hey, 2006?

Finally, what does it mean to move “beyond gender” in this work? How do we bring this theory to bear in analyzing data?

Participants will read the following in order to address these topics:

Barad, Karen (2000) Posthumanist performativity. *Signs* 28(3).

Childers, Sara. (2011). Getting in Trouble: Feminist Postcritical Policy Ethnography in an Urban School. *Qualitative Inquiry* 17(4): 345-354.

Conlon, Catherine (2010) Coming to Know Women Concealing Pregnancy. Unpublished PhD, University College Dublin. Ch 2: Pregnancy and Motherhood in the Irish Cultural Context.

Hey, Valerie (2006) The politics of performative resignification: Translating Judith Butler’s theoretical discourse. *The British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 27(4), 439-457.

Hoale, Karen (2009) Deconstruction and feminist standpoint theory, *Frontiers*, 30(1), 172-93.

Lather, Patti (2010) Feminist (Post)Critical Policy Analysis and the Democratization of Knowledge. Pp. 73-88 in Patti Lather, *Engaging Science Policy: From the Side of the Messy*. NY: Peter Lang.

Miller, Janet L. (2005) Autobiography and the Necessary Incompleteness of Teachers' Stories. In J. L. Miller, *Sounds of Silence Breaking: Women, Autobiography, Curriculum* (pp. 45-56). New York: Peter Lang

The London Feminist Salon Collective (2004) The problematization of agency in postmodern theory. *Gender and Education*, 16(1), 2004, 25-33.

While not assumed for attendance, the audience is encouraged to read as well so as to participate more fully in the conversation. The unpublished Conlon reading is attached.

Additional Reference

Patton, Cindy (2008) Finding “Fields” in the Field: Normalcy, Risk and Ethnographic Inquiry. *International Review of Qualitative Research* 1(2), 255-74.