research

What can feminist theory offer policy implementation challenges?

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Implementation has long been a vexed issue in the mainstream public policy literature. The literature has remained more concerned with the design of policy and evidence of its impact than on the process by which it plays out. While implementation is often portrayed as a simple process of adopting best practice, experiences indicate that it is a far more complex process involving a range of actors translating policy into practice under varying conditions. Substantial changes to public service environments over the past few decades, both incremental and disruptive, have compounded this complexity. Commentators argue that it is time to look beyond current 'best practice' for new conceptual tools to tackle implementation challenges, particularly relating to those that take place around the many boundaries of public services (Dickinson and Sullivan, 2014a). In this paper we consider how post-structural feminist perspectives, with scope to actively challenge orthodoxies and embrace diversity and competing views, might further contemporary policy implementation research and practice.

key words policy implementation • cross-boundary working • feminism

Introduction

It is well recognised that policies are only as effective as their implementation (Hill and Hupe, 2009). Yet implementation remains a vexed issue and accounts of implementation failure are widespread (OECD, 2010). In the pursuit of evidence-based policy and practice, significant attention has been paid to the generation of high-quality evidence on which to base the design of effective policies, but all too often their implementation is ignored (Nutley and Homel, 2006). Despite the fact that implementation has been studied for nearly fifty years, it could be argued that this topic is even more contested today than when it was first identified as the 'missing link' of policy processes in the 1970s (Dickinson, 2011).

Implementation does not simply involve the spread of best practice or the adoption of particular tools and techniques, but is a much more complex process involving a range of different actors (South and Cattan, 2014). However, policy implementation research has often been highly rationalist in its thinking, portraying this process in a largely linear fashion (Hill and Hupe, 2009; Meyers and Dillon, 1999; Meyers et al, 2001; Riccucci et al, 2004). Although the way in which many public services

are delivered has radically altered since the 1980s, Mazmanian and Sabatier's (1983) definition of policy implementation is still illustrative of how this process is understood:

> Implementation is the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually incorporated in a state but which can also take the form of important executive orders to court decisions. Ideally, that decision identifies the problem(s) to be addressed, stipulates the objective(s) to be pursed, and in a variety of ways, 'structures' the implementation process. (Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1983: 20–21)

The major debate within this literature has therefore tended to revolve around a comparison of the 'expected versus the achieved' (deLeon and deLeon, 2002), where commentators focused on the degree to which what is realised differs from what the policy initially intended to achieve. Yet, policies are rarely implemented on a blank canvas and must compete for resources and attention within complex systems (Norris et al, 2014).

Implementation of almost any policy now requires actions and engagement across multiple organisational domains with government, public, private and community partners (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Rhodes, 2007). This means that implementation requires significant work across a range of boundaries – professional, organisational, sectoral, cultural, and knowledge-based. Yet this is largely ignored within the literature, apart from noting that collaborative working is problematic. Guidance relating to the implementation of policy is therefore often limited and ignores the potential for creativity and transformation through this process, as well as the benefits of tailoring policy to local conditions and actors.

In this paper we argue that feminist theories could advance thinking around the challenges of policy implementation. Similarly, post-structuralist debates, with their focus on agency (and, in turn, diversity) and unsettling authoritative views and orthodoxies, can shed light on implementation processes (Carey and Dickinson, 2015). We combine these insights to further the conceptualisation of contemporary policy implementation research and practice. Before considering what can be gained from feminist theory, we first discuss the state of the field of policy implementation research.

Policy implementation challenges

In the 1970s it became apparent that policy implementation could no longer be ignored (Friedman, 2006; Kettl, 2000; Lipsky, 1980; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984). Lipsky has argued since 1969 that 'the decisions of street level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively *become* the public policies they carry out' (Lipsky, 1980: xii). In the wake of of policy failures, lack of clarity around responsibility for achieving public service goals (as well as unattainable 'idealized dimensions' in goals (Lipsky, 1980: 40)) began to surface. This raised questions about how those policies were designed, communicated, interpreted and delivered. For example, were these policy failures due to the poor design of policy, the poor implementation of policy, or, some combination of these two? The field has since moved through multiple iterations and ways of conceptualising implementation. These have variously emphasised top-down or bottom-up research approaches (Lipsky, 1980; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1984), and

more recently attempted to synthesise these two perspectives (Sabatier, 1986). Top-down perspectives focus on identifying weak links in a delivery chain, while debates from the bottom-up literature revolve around whether there is such a thing as perfect implementation. Yet a gap remains in the literature. As Suggett (2011: 3) notes,

> the political promise to get the implementation right is loud and clear, but this is more complex than it seems. It might require better management tools and new skills… it might also require a new and more exacting level of analysis.

Policy implementation is a truly international issue, with many OECD governments plagued by high profile implementation failures (OECD, 2010). Where implementation failures have been identified, it is often argued that an inability to work across boundaries is at the heart of implementation issues (Hawke, 2010). Yet public services that entail working across boundaries are most likely to carry a high human cost in the event of policy failure. A recent Australian example of this was the 'pink batts', or Home Insulation Scheme, which provided citizens with subsidised home insulation installed by private companies under government contracts. Four workers employed by these companies were killed installing insulation in separate incidents. A formal investigation into the scheme found that the failure of the various arms of government, contractors and licencing agencies involved to work collaboratively in implementing the policy and ensuring the safety of workers was a root cause of this policy's failure and the workers' deaths (Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program, 2014). The collaborative challenges took a number of forms, including: a failure of the political executive to work effectively with the bureaucracy; the Australian Public Service failing to work effectively across internal organisational divides; a failure of the Australian Public Service to work effectively with small commercial enterprises, failures of clear lines of accountability across these groups; and, a failure of some small businesses to work appropriately with their employees (Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program, 2014). Competing priorities, a lack of understanding of the issues relevant to the installation of insulation, a failure to communicate effectively, and a failure to monitor activity were also cited as examples, in this case, of the ways in which the actors involved failed to work effectively across boundaries, with tragic consequences.

In the UK, the *Doing them Justice* report drew on four in-depth case studies to identify lessons and challenges around implementing policies with a social justice focus. In a similar conclusion to the 'pink batts' programme, the report found these cases all faced 'huge challenges of co-ordination' and loss of coherence over time (Norris et al, 2014: 7). In situations where policymakers had 'their eyes on a moving target and their actions can be thrown off course by external events or by the limits of central government control', greater attention to how a policy was communicated to different implementers increased the odds of coordination (Norris et al, 2014: 7). This raises questions about what forms communication should take with regard to different implementers (and why some may work for some groups but not others).

The case has been made that contemporary policy implementation is even more complex than in the past, due to the greater and more diverse networks of actors involved (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Rhodes, 1997; 2007). Yet, our knowledge of how these networks facilitate or prevent change when implementing policies is limited (Parsons, 2004; Shergold, 2013; Hill and Hupe, 2009; Barrett, 2004; Suggett,

2011). This is problematic because, as the examples set out above illustrate, effective cross-boundary working across these networks is critical to implementation. Barrett (2004: 260) argues that:

> There is still a lack of attention to process in governance theory and practice, in particular explicit attention to the appropriateness of differing conceptualizations of the policy–action relationship to desired outcomes (means and ends).

If it is true that we now operate in an era of multiple and overlapping policy processes (both formal and informal) that play an important role in shaping policy implementation (Osborne, 2006; 2010a), then research into implementation needs to sharpen its focus on relationships and governance. This poses new questions for research and practice. Implementation issues are rendered more complex by the fact that not all research that addresses implementation issues identifies itself as implementation research (deLeon and deLeon, 2002).

To deal with the dynamic and highly relational nature of contemporary policy implementation, future policy implementation research needs to track implementation across different administrative layers and organisational contexts in real time. Through this process we can begin to examine how differing norms, values and cultures come together (or fail to), and interact with more formal structures to create particular policy outcomes (Carey et al, 2015). This allows us to answer certain empirical questions concerning the nature of policy implementation, although there are further conceptual issues that also require resolution. For example, how can we understand the interactions of differing norms, values and cultures within policy networks? The answer to this question is as important for those carrying out cross-boundary implementation as those researching it.

Rhodes (2014: 9) contends that bureaucrats charged with implementing policy 'must now have the skills for managing the complex, non-routine issues, policies and relationships [that occur] in networks'. To do this effectively, he suggests that power and authority must be decentralized to bureaucrats and that we need to recover the craft of public administration and management: 'Network governance requires new skills in managing the mix of bureaucracy, markets and networks' (Rhodes, 2014: 24). In identifying what these skills are, we require the right conceptual toolbox to unpack contemporary policy implementation contexts. Consistent with this, we have seen scholars argue for a deeper analysis of the (entwined) concepts of context (Bate, 2012; Pollitt, 2013) and the interplay between structure and agency in practice (Dickinson and Sullivan, 2014a, 2016). In their analysis of collaborative performance, Dickinson and Sullivan (2014a) argue that cross-boundary issues are not simply a matter of finessing structural arrangements (for example, funding, organisational / team boundaries, legalities), but also addressing important social and cultural dimensions to collaborative relationships. In supporting policy implementation in cross-boundary contexts, language, symbols and objects, emotions, identity and practices make important contributions to the efficacy of these processes. Similarly, Head and Alford (2015) argue that efforts to address problems that span boundaries are hampered by conflicting values and perceptions of the fundamental cause of such problems, as well as the public sector's characteristic ways of working. In this arena, how a problem is defined sets parameters for designing and delivering its policy solution (Bacchi, 2009;

Shapiro, 1992). For those working in cross-boundary settings, greater attention needs to be given to how different actors frame policy problems and solutions.

Against this background, O'Flynn (2014), Osborne (2010a) and others have made efforts to set out the major questions confronting public policy, given the dominance of cross-boundary working, that need to be progressed for implementation to be more effective in addressing complex problems. While the questions they pose are extensive, they include several that are particularly relevant for contemporary policy implementation research and practice, including:

- What do we mean conceptually by working 'across boundaries' for policy implementation?
- Why is cross-boundary working important?
- What does implementation in contested spaces involve?

The persistence of cross-boundary issues in tackling wicked problems through nearly half a century of public sector reform suggests it is time for us to view these problems through a different lens, to design more adaptive and effective policy responses. As Dickinson and Sullivan (2014b) suggest, it's time to look to other fields for new conceptual tools for addressing 'boundary issues' in public management. Towards that end we interrogate the three questions set out above, drawing on post-structural feminist theory and the insights and concepts it provides for policy implementation. Before moving on to this task, we provide a brief overview of this field of research.

Feminist theory – a brief overview

Feminism is a highly contested concept beyond some fairly fundamental propositions concerning the equal merit of men and women (Adichie, 2015; Bacchi, 1996; Delmar, 1986; McCann and Kim, 2013; Offen, 1988). Some strands of contemporary feminist analysis still focus on traditional notions of patriarchy and female oppression, particularly in developing countries. Others employ a post-structuralist understanding of gender and power. Research on migration of women from poor countries to be employed in 'feminised' poorly-paid jobs like cleaning and care work by women in more affluent countries, for example, explores power dynamics between women in different economic and social contexts (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Phillips, 2013). In this paper, we have chosen to focus on post-structural feminist discourses because these offer the greatest potential insight into the questions posed for implementation research by O'Flynn, Osborne and others.

Feminist scholars have already made important contributions to the study of public policy. This includes considering: how policy problems are framed (Bacchi, 2009, 1996); the need for a gendered analysis of policy design (Bacch and Eveline, 2010; Parpart, 2014) workforce composition (Deacon, 1982; Evans et al, 2014; Lindorff, 2009); and, the kinds of assumptions that underpin institutions (Williams, 1992). However, to date a feminist lens has not been explicitly brought to policy implementation. Feminist post-structural theory, encompassing elements of discourse analysis, offers potential concepts and tools to critically examine and shape the implementation of policy in various contexts and settings and to deconstruct entrenched policy regimes (Howart and Griggs, 2012).

Broadly, post-structural feminism (like other post-structural perspectives) recognises that knowledge, truth, rationality and power are all constituted in dynamic relationships, rather than a possession or something any one individual can lay claim to (Bacci and Eveline, 2010; St. Pierre, 2000). It points to a contestation over meaning, which takes place in discourse "a relatively bounded, socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak about "'given social object or practice'" (Bachi and Eveline, 2010; McHoul and Grace, 1993: 31)In this sense, these strands of feminist theory emphasise the contestability of truth, knowledge and power. Some feminist scholars have taken post-structuralist theories further than others, to examine implications for the material world in which we live and the experiences of individuals, and how these might be transformed, that is, combining theory and practice and/or grounding theory in lived experienced 'the personal is political' (Gavey, 1989; Hanisch, 1969). As Hollingsworth (19: 29) suggests, "Feminist… research consciously seeks to break up social silences to make spaces for fracturing the very ideologies that justify power inequalities". While traditionally this has meant power inequalities between genders or racial groups, it is equally applicable to different groups involved in policy (who speak from different contexts, with different knowledges and using different languages). Principles of post-structuralist feminism can be applied to "all practices in order to analyse how they are structured, what power relations they produce and reduce, [and] where we might [find opportunities] for transformation" (Weedon, 1987: 132). In doing so, they bring a fresh perspective to structure/agency debates in public administration, particularly policy implementation.

In relation to policy implementation, post-structuralist feminism has the potential to draw attention to precisely the types of social and cultural issues that Dickinson and Sullivan (2014b) argue are important to processes of cross-boundary working for effective policy implementation, including language and communication, power inequities and the role of effect (all explored below in more detail). These discourses also challenge categories more broadly, including language, ideation processes and evidence – all of which play a critical role in implementation (Barrett, 2004; Béland, 2007; Patashnik, 2008). One example is how post-structural feminist literature contributes to considerations of language in a way that rarely occurs in policy and public administration debates (see, for exceptions, Fairclough, 2013; 2000). Language can have very real and material implications for the experiences of individuals and groups. As argued by Derrida (1967), Foucault (1975), Giddens (1984) and others, language does not merely reflect the real world but also constructs it. Moreover, the meaning of language shifts depending on the social context. This means it can, and perhaps should, always be disputable.

As Weedon (1987: 40–41) has argued, *feminist* post-structuralism as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change". Change is the critical difference between feminist post-structuralism and some more traditional post-structural schools of thought. Rather than merely describing the world, feminist perspectives seek to develop conceptual insights that can enable real world change. These theories hold great potential for illuminating some of the challenges of policy implementation in cross-boundary contexts. Of course feminism is not the only action–orientated post-structuralist tradition to promote the "power of difference" in moving societies forward (Offen, 1988: 56). However, this field of thought has the potential to offer

valuable lessons about how to effect change in policy implementation and also how to address challenges within this process (Ferguson, 1984; Hawkesworth, 1994; Offen, 1988; Simon, 1955). We now move on to set out what feminist theory offers for the challenges of policy implementation.

Applying post-structural feminist theories to contemporary policy implementation challenges

In this section we begin the work of applying insights from post-structural feminism to the questions set out in the introduction, focusing in particular on issues of cross-boundary work in policy implementation. We bring conceptual clarity to the first two questions ('What do we mean conceptually by working 'across boundaries' for policy implementation?' and 'Why is cross boundary working important?'), and in relation to the third question we aim to enhance implementation practice. In doing so, we hope to start a broader conversation and action agenda to explore the potential for such perspectives to offer new ways forward for policy implementation research and practice.

What do we mean conceptually by working 'across boundaries' for policy implementation?

For decades, public administration analysis has been underpinned by the idea of stable boundaries, for example, public/private, federal/state, citizen/bureaucrat, but this notion of stability is no longer sufficient (Hernes, 2004). As we have argued above, policy implementation now almost exclusively involves some form of boundary spanning – whether between government departments, or across sectors. These boundaries can be structural/physical, cultural, symbolic or discursive (O'Flynn, 2014). Dickinson (2014a) illustrates that these categories of boundaries are not mutually exclusive and the impact of these is often generated through their interaction – physical boundaries can precipitate symbolic or discursive boundaries, for example. Within the public administration and public policy literature, boundaries have typically been represented as material, stable and constraining entities. For example, organisational boundaries are seen as limiting and inhibiting the degree to which agencies are capable of interacting, preventing information-sharing, shared accountability and performance regimes and communication practices. Less considered is the constitutive nature of these boundaries, such as the role they play in identity-building for individuals and groups (Dickinon and Sullivan, 2016). Beyond public administration, broader literatures suggest that boundaries are not just constraining, but may 'also constitute gateways' (Rumford, 2006: 135). Understanding boundary forms is an important part of devising effective implementation practice (O'Flynn, 2016).

   Post-structural feminist theories help us to more deeply interrogate what boundaries are and how they operate. O'Flynn (2016) recently noted that much attention to the 'boundary issue' has focused on how to create collaboration and consensus. However, some boundaries may be coercive (for example, forcing individuals to conform to particular cultures and norms) and some boundary-crossing practices may be disruptive (altering given ways of working). Cross-boundary working may not always create additional value, efficacy or effectiveness as is suggested in the literature. We need to acknowledge these differences and develop competencies to navigate different forms

of boundaries and their effects (O'Flynn, 2016). In this respect, feminist perspectives draw attention to the importance of positionality. Positionality refers to the concept that all ideas are inherently developed in response to others – there is no such thing as neutral or objective ideas. Knowledge becomes valid when it includes a specific position with regard to context "because changing contextual and relational factors are crucial for defining identities and our knowledge in any given situation" (Maer and Tetreault, 19, :118). Cross-boundary working means working with individuals or groups with different positionalities. It should also mean that those groups articulate their contextual differences; that is, the contexts from which they speak and, in turn, the limitations of what they can 'speak' that is, the claims they can lay to truth). This becomes important for negotiating power differentials between groups involved in policy implementation. Positionality helps to acknowledge the partiality of any one group's knowledge and, in turn, can help to mediate damaging effects of boundary work.

Feminist theorists also bring to the fore concepts of social performance and performativity (Butler, 1988), consistent with Dickinson and Sullivan's (2014a) work on the performance of collaboration within policy networks. When we think about social actions, such as collaboration or negotiation over policy implementation, we embody particular cultural and historical possibilities (Butler, 1988). At the same time, we also enact those possibilities. In other words, when working across boundaries we do so from a set of historically-conditioned presuppositions which shape how we act/perform. In paying attention to these performances, we can understand how actors 'construct relationships and erect boundaries' in between themselves and others, and the ways in which they are shaped by the histories of particular individuals and groups, for example past experiences of collaboration or of other actors (Dickinson and Sullivan, 2014a). Within this deeper interrogation of both positionality and performance we can ascertain why certain dynamics emerge within policy networks.

O'Flynn (2014) notes that the demand for cross-boundary working has led to a proliferation of questions. For example, are boundaries constructed or concrete? What creates them? How do they take hold in different contexts and how can we catalyse change? We argue that the answers to these questions are embedded in a deeper appreciation and examination of culture(s), and that conceptual tools that enable us to take account of what creates and drives different forms of positionality must guide this. This perspective suggests that answers to boundary and implementation problems lie not in structures (as often thought), but in historically-conditioned human performances (Carey et al, 2015; Dickinson and Sullivan, 2014a). When we understand these, and what produces them, we can find better ways to manage them. This is precisely where notions of positionality and performativity make helpful contributions to the policy implementation literature. For example, bureaucracies have been structured and re-structured continuously throughout the 21st century in search of boundary solutions (O'Flynn, 2014). However, a greater emphasis on culture and performance helps us to see that boundaries are most often *socially* constructed. Changing organisational structures merely generates new boundaries. This indicates that we should focus on the development of capabilities and processes for navigating cultural difference rather than subjecting bureaucracies to constant structural reconfiguration. In practice, this may require recognising that difference or a lack of consensus is not necessarily problematic to implementation but rather an important part of the contexts in which we operate that, with attention, can be negotiated.

This leads us to our second question, why is cross-boundary working important?

Why is cross boundary working important?

The complexity of contemporary public policy issues, combined with changing citizen expectations and increasingly outsourced service delivery, has shifted the goalposts for public sector managers. Kay and Daugbjerg (2015; see also Osborne, 2010a) argue that new public governance) involves working both within a *plural* state with multiple actors delivering services and a *pluralist* state where multiple processes inform policy-making, requiring focus not only on interorganisational relationships by "interpretation of the policy instruments literature as a key driver of observed governance proceses" (Kay and Daugbjerg, 2015: 238). As Osborne (2010b: 412) has argue, "'the reality of contemporary public service management is that it is an interorganisational and collaborative activity, and requires the governance of complex systems and interorganisational processes". This means that all policy work, whether design or implementation, involves working across departmental, organisational and sectoral boundaries (6, 1997; O'Flynn, 2011). Despite this, boundary working is regarded as one of (if not the most) challenging aspects of contemporary policy 'work' (Colebatch, 2006; Kelman, 2007; O'Flynn, 2014). The fact that it is so challenging may make people resistant to embracing cross-boundary working. More specifically, the negotiation and persuasion involved in working across boundaries is rarely captured in measures of success for poicy-makers or implementers, occurring instead in a 'black box' leading to achievement of specified outcomes in specified timeframes. Time spent negotiating trust, values and meaning within institutional and environmental contexts, as well as between individual policy actors, is not typically factored into the increasingly market-driven delivery of public services, despite evidence that it can reduce friction that might otherwise occur in implementation (deLon and deLeon 2002; Kay and Daugbjerg 2015).

Inconsistencies and lack of coherence in policies are sharply evident to those working across policy and service boundaries, federal and regional government jurisdictions, portfolios and departments and national frontiers. However, charting a course through shifting and siloed government regulatory, funding, contracting and reporting arrangements is a significant challenge for those implementing policy. Success hinges on governments' capacity to draw different policy strands together, to reconcile competing priorities, to relinquish control while managing risk, to protect service users vulnerable to exploitation or neglect in the pursuit of efficiency, and to articulate clear overarching goals for public investment in terms understood by the authorising environment. In theory, this is encapsulated in 'creating public value' through strategic design and implementation of public policy, achieving the equivalent of shareholder value in public management focused on the collective good (Beningon and Moore, 2011). Yet, the policy rhetoric of coordinated, strategic and integrated delivery of public services is rarely backed up by structural collaboration or systemic attempts to capture and understand the cumulative impact of policy action in government.

Feminist theories can enable deeper analysis of why different actors need to be brought together to solve problems. As noted above, groups have different and partial knowledge of policy problems. Accessing this different knowledge is the gain that offsets the heightened complexity of working across boundaries, although the extent

to which this has been achieved in practice is variable (O'Flynn, 2014). Moreover, post-structural feminism also highlights the ways in which the diverse groups drawn into the policy process can and should challenge authoritative ways of working on the basis of positionality. It demonstrates that authoritative ways of working, while powerful, are partial and need to be challenged. For those occupying more marginal positions, embracing this fact provides a greater authority to speak and challenge dominant paradigms and ways of working. As Redford (1969) noted, long before markets pervaded public service delivery, it is not enough to simply remove barriers to participation; there is also a need for measures to empower individuals through education and economic benefit to question and reform the political–administrative system.

Thus, post-structuralist feminist theories and ways of working have de-centred notions of authority, that is, single ways of knowing or doing) (Gavey, 1989 St. Pierre, 2000), consistent with arguments made by Rhodes (2014) about the needs of contemporary bureaucrats. Recognising that de-centred power can be productive allows for and enables a great diversity of perspectives, as well as assisting to negotiate diverse perspectives. When we consider that much policy work now involves working across organisational, institutional and sectoral boundaries, a plurality of meanings is both unavoidable and one of the chief advantages promoted within discourses of new public governance (Osborne, 2010a). The question then becomes one of how best to secure the gains of this plurality, which bring us to our third question.

What does implementation in contested spaces involve?

We argue that feminist perspectives offer insights into the types of skills and knowledge required to navigate cross-boundary working. We focus on two factors in particular: language and the desire for unified frameworks.

Common language is often said to be a barrier to effective cross-boundary working (Banson et al, 2010; Wiseman, 2015). While not denying that differences in language can make policy implementation more challenging, feminism has shown that arguing for a common language is not innocent nor neutral (Weedon, 1987). Rather, it is riddled with presuppositions which may in actual fact hinder progress (Gavey, 1989). When we allow different languages (and discourses) to exist, and also actively encourage an awareness of this, we give policy actors greater choice. As Weedon (1987: 106) suggests, 'the lack of discursive unity and uniformity… means that the individuals [or groups implicated in implementation] have available to them, at least potentially, the discursive means to resist the implications of' policies or ways of working. Put more simply, in allowing different languages to co-exist we give groups greater opportunity to define their own roles in policy – to articulate their own positionality and subjectivities. Hence, a feminist approach to implementation could lead the field to more effectively embrace a multiplicity of voices, subjectivities and ways of knowing and doing. In particular, these include more emotive ways of working. Increasingly, public administration is realising the need for 'soft skills' for working effectively within policy networks. These include brokering and coordination skills, as well as a willingness to undertake the emotional labour of working in a highly relational environment (Dickinson and Sullivan, 2014b; Newman, 2012). Emotions have, in the past, been seen as getting in the way of the type of rational, impartial decision-making which ought to govern policy processes (Dickinson and

Sullivan, 2014a; 2014b). However, working in contested relational spaces is emotive – particularly when we consider the different positionalities and subjectivities at play.

Engaging different ways of knowing, being, doing and the emotional labour that goes hand-in-hand with doing this work would constitute a notable shift away from our current attempts to generate common frameworks of understanding. We now work within a plural state and a pluralist state with greater emphasis on inter-organisational working (Osborne, 2010a). This has lead successive waves of attempts to capture the same challenges of cross-boundary working (that is the different positionalities, languages and knowledges of different actors) (Carey and Dickinson, 2015; Rhodes, 2014). In recent years, these have included popular terms like co-design and co-production, which dominate the policy landscape but gloss over the intricacies of cross-boundary practices including issues of power, context and performivity. Rather than common frameworks, feminist perspectives would suggest that we pay more attention to what is gained through diversity and difference and allow space to explore differences in knowledge, experience, context and power. Arguably, it is here that the value of cross-boundary working lies – a richness that will be missed if we seek only consensus, collaborative and commonalities. To do this, we need to listen, question the experiences and perspectives of others, value difference and diversity and recognise that our own knowledge is always partial (Atwood et al, 2003).

Discusson and conclusions

Althaus and Roberts (2016) note that no recent developments in implementation research have revolutionised our thinking, indicating that a more radical re-think of the field is required. What ideas will form the basis for this revolution remain unclear, although as argued throughout this article we are seeing a trend towards a more anthropological approach with an emphasis on culture and performance. In this paper we have sought to demonstrate that feminist thinking may also provide ideas and concepts which can aid in a more radical re-think of implementation. However, we note that despite all that feminist theories could add to a consideration of policy implementation issues, in practice there is little tolerance for partial knowledge in politics.

A key challenge for governments implementing policy in cross-boundary settings is managing risk and accountability. The proliferation and fragmentation of government programmes, service contracts and regulation focused on producing value and reducing risk within narrowly defined parameters, has exaggerated the divide between problem structure (that is, the structural boundaries real or perceived that define a problem) and institutional structures, instead of bridging it. The institutional architecture created to produce public value has become a barrier both to defining complex problems and to developing effective policy solutions. Post-structural feminist theory offers a framework to interrogate the basis on which the value of this approach is assessed, and to explore the potential gains of alternative approaches to delivering public services.

In Figure 1 we provide an overview of approaches to policy implementation. Third wave policy implementation, which is still a field very much in a state of construction (and potentially feeding into a more concrete fourth wave), seeks to grapple with emerging complexity in policy implementation, including different forms of plurality. While attention to this plurality is a major step forward – shifting us once and for all from a rationalist and linear conceptualisation of implementation – it does not yet

provide us with the necessary tools by which we can not only capture this complexity but also help to secure the gains that it offers. Feminist perspectives provide a more solid conceptual foundation by which to value and encourage diversity within a context of plurality.

Figure 1: Approaches to policy implementation

	Paradigm	Focus	Value base	Goal
First wave policy implementation	Public administration	Top-down	Control	Generalisable theories of implementation
Second wave policy implementation	New public management	Bottom-up	Local diversity	Generalisable theories of implementation
Third wave policy implementation	New public governance	Complexity	Plurality	Capture and understand complexity
Feminist perspectives on implementation	Unsettling assumptions	Challenge orthodoxy	Diversity	Give voice

Rather than merely acknowledging complexity post-structural feminist theory pushes us forward to actively challenge orthodoxies and make space for competing views inside and outside of government. We can be more open to dissenting views amongst public servants, or non-government actors. It enables us to shift from vague concepts of plurality to more concrete notions of diversity (deLeon, 1999). We argue that there is a need to actively seek out different, and particularly under-represented, voices and make space for them. This is important because alone complexity can seem daunting and impenetrable (deLeon, 1999). In contrast, feminist perspectives provide a roadmap for how to embrace complexity, that is, valuing the diversity embedded therein), and seek value from it. In doing so we can more deeply engage with the values, cultures and norms of different groups involved in this complexity, taking us from abstract descriptions to concrete and rich understandings of how different groups are shaping or could play enhanced roles in policy implementation.

Ultimately, the inclusion of post-structural feminist concepts gives current implementation research a new mandate to move beyond acknowledging and, to some degree, describing complexity to engaging more critically with who different actors are and what they have to offer implementation challenges.

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