Gender and resilience-thinking in the UK: New policy paradigm or neoliberal orthodoxy?

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Over the past decade, resilience has emerged as a key priority linking disparate areas of British policy, including international development, climate change, international security, domestic counter-terrorism measures, domestic infrastructure, education and health. Yet while resilience has captured the attention of critical policy scholars, research to date has focused near-exclusively on resilience as a dimension of international development and security agendas. Moreover, the gendered dimensions of resilience have not been mapped.

This paper charts the movement of resilience from foreign to domestic policy, and in particular its growing influence in education and health (especially mental and sexual health) policy in the UK. Drawing on a corpus analysis of policy documents produced over the last 10 years, it documents the multiplying meanings and targets of resilience-thinking, noting in particular a shift from efforts to foster resilience at the level of the population towards fostering resilience at the level of the individual, and the necessary gendering of resilience this entails. It argues that resilient individuals, as conceptualised in contemporary social policy, bear a strong resemblance to the self-regulating subjects associated with Third Way and Thatcherite models of citizenship. While gendered, resilience is thus an individualizing concept which hinders efforts to promote gender equality.
Introduction

Resilience, broadly, refers to the capacity of a population, system or individual to deal with adversity, either by ‘bouncing back’ to its original shape, or by transforming in response to environmental change. The concept suggests a particular understanding of policymakers’ relationship to risk, going beyond modernist approaches which sought to identify and contain risk and introducing a (postmodern?) approach which accepts that risk is, to an extent, an inescapable fact of life. Across the last decade or so, building resilience has emerged as a key objective of UK policy in a number of fields, most notably security, development, and environmental policy. As a result, resilience has drawn considerable attention from scholars of public policy, with commentators by turns celebrating it as a new approach to the governance of uncertainty and complexity or condemning it as merely another evolution of ‘bad old’ neoliberal styles of governance.

To date, however, little has been written about resilience as it manifests in social policy. Yet resilience has made inroads here, and is a thread running through government initiatives relating to, among other things, education, health (particularly mental and sexual health), crime and unemployment. It is frequently – although not exclusively – a strategy for working with young people thought to be vulnerable, whether due to social exclusion, troubled upbringing or low self-esteem. Building resilience often forms a central part of strategies for tackling disadvantage and inequality. It is foregrounded, for example, in Government Equalities Office (GEO) literature on body confidence (2013; 2014) and in Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) literature on welfare and employment. Resilience is, therefore, of interest to feminist scholars of social policy.

This paper investigates the entry of resilience into central UK social policy. It presents the findings of a qualitative content analysis of policy literature published between 2005 and 2016 which compares resilience in social policy to resilience in two other fields (security and development). It finds, first, that resilience is implicated in the depoliticisation of risk. This follows from the argument of critics of resilience that it functions to render power structures invisible re-cast suffering as inevitable, equipping citizens as it does with the tools to manage suffering but not to resist its causes. The analysis presented here adds to this account by demonstrating that in social policy, discourses of resilience conceptualise factors such as gender and ethnicity as ‘beyond control’ and out of the reach of policymakers. The impact of sexist and racist social structures on the individual is therefore naturalised. While gender and gender equality are often key features of the policy documents in the sample, their transformative potential is circumscribed. In resilience discourses, gender becomes one among many ‘risk factors’ which operate on an individual, and systematic critique of gendered social structures becomes impossible. This has significant implications for feminist political science and policy analysis in the context of questions about whether gender equality policy can truly be transformative in a neoliberal policy context.

However, the paper also finds that resilience in social policy does not merely mimic resilience in other fields. Rather, in social policy resilience functions to regulate social deviance. It is directed at the creation of risk-aware and -averse citizens who are also virtuous: as much as possible, they do not smoke, take drugs or have promiscuous sex; they do not riot and they are able to counter extremist narratives – and above all they take responsibility for their lives. As with ‘older’ styles of risk governance, then, resilience creates moral citizens. Furthermore, resilience aims to create new gendered subjectivities out of old: for example, go-getting, confident young women are created from shy girls with low self-esteem.
Resilience-thinking, neoliberalism and risk

As David Chandler has noted, there are competing definitions of resilience (Chandler, 2014a, pp. 5-9). More traditional approaches to resilience focus on the stability of a system, emphasising its capacity to ‘bounce back’ to its ‘usual’ shape following an externally-imposed shock or trauma. This might denote the capacity of an ecosystem to recover from stresses placed upon it by humans. Alternatively, it could describe the ability of a community to mend and rebuild following an attack or natural disaster. In this formulation, resilience is ‘keeping calm and carrying on’. However, Chandler also observes a revised definition of resilience: the ability to adapt to change. In this latter approach to resilience, the objective is not simply to bounce back to a predetermined shape, but rather to improve and transform as a result of trauma. Here, resilience means self-reflexivity and change.

Resilience is theorised to be necessary in a world in which it is not always possible to foresee disasters, prevent them from occurring, or completely shield populations from their effects. If disasters are to some extent inevitable, then communities need be able to withstand them rather than attempt to avoid them. Resilience thus, for Chandler, introduces a new policy episteme. It represents a move away from a liberal style of governance which sought to discover and understand risks, and work to mitigate these and prevent disasters from occurring, and instates in its place a style of governance which operates on the understanding that disasters, shocks and stresses are often undiscoverable prior to the event. The object of governing, then, becomes the creation of a system or community that can withstand the inevitable disaster – and perhaps improve itself in the process. Chandler regards this as a new, ‘post-classical’ approach to policymaking (Chandler, 2014a; 2014b).

Other accounts of resilience have been less inclined to view resilience-thinking as a new episteme. In these evaluations, resilience is seen as an extension of existing governance practices. Critics have pointed out that resilience’s emphasis on individual adaptability is not far removed from forms of neoliberal governance which emphasise individuals’ responsibility for their own well-being while dismantling state provision for welfare at the macro-level (Joseph, 2013; Reid, 2012). That the aim of governance might be to produce responsible, self-managing citizens is hardly a new observation, but rather can be traced back to Foucauldian accounts of the neoliberal subject. For Foucault, neoliberal governance exhorts individuals to develop their personal aptitudes, aspirations and skills (2008, pp. 215-237), qualities which may then be ‘tapped’ (Calkin, 2015) by the forces of capitalism. This is accompanied by an often moralistic rhetoric of personal responsibility (Forkert, 2014; Petersen, 1996).

Against the backdrop of Foucauldian critiques of neoliberal governance, resilience-thinking’s emphasis on the development of individuals’ personal qualities and responsibility does not seem so new. It also strongly resembles forms of risk governance that predate resilience but nonetheless have offered similar individualised solutions to policy problems. For many social theorists, risk management has been a central feature of modern society, dubbed the ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1998). For Ulrich Beck, this occurred not because society had become more hazardous, but rather as a result of the increasing recognition that catastrophic events such as plagues or famines, once believed to emanate from external forces such as God or nature, could be brought under human control – and might even have origins in human organisation. For Beck risk represents the politicisation of danger, the realisation that danger can be avoided or mitigated by human intervention. This was regarded as fundamental to the process of modernisation (Elliot, 2002, p. 295).

Risk here is conceptualised primarily as a concern of social planners. Yet authors following Beck and Giddens have noted the tendency in practice for risk governance to move away from interventions at the macro-level, and take aim at individuals and their behaviour. Following authors such as Robert Castel (1991) and Nikolas Rose (2001), Alan Petersen (1996) argues that risk has been displaced onto
individuals, who are increasingly expected to manage their own relationship to it. This privatisation of risk is, for Petersen, central to the neoliberal project’s requirement for citizens to be responsible and self-governing. This process of ‘responsibilisation’ (Burchell, 1993, p. 276) is a key focus of the critical literature on risk. Deborah Lupton further argues that as risk is increasingly conceptualised as a consequence of an individual’s lifestyle choices, to engage in risky behaviour is increasingly treated as a personal moral failing as individuals ‘choose to ignore’ risks (1999, p. 429) and therefore place themselves in danger. The sociocultural contexts in which ‘risky’ lifestyle choices are made are unaccounted for; blame is displaced entirely onto the victim. This has a gender dimension. Risk is attached to women’s bodies in particular, especially in pregnancy, during which time women face heightened moral disapproval if perceived to be behaving irresponsibly (Lupton, 2012).

Resilience therefore does not appear to be such a departure from older, risk-based forms of governance, which had already undergone a wholesale shift in the direction of individualisation and responsibilisation by the time resilience became a policy buzzword. Resilient subjects are similarly responsibilised: expected to be prepared, aware and self-reflexive (Joseph, 2013, p. 42). They ‘do not look to states to secure their wellbeing because they have been disciplined into believing in the necessity to secure it for themselves’ (Reid, 2012, p. 69).

However, even these critics of resilience do acknowledge something new about the concept: its re-problematisation of disasters as necessary phenomena. Critics have taken aim at what they see as resilience-thinking’s celebration of the inevitability of disaster. Julian Reid observes that in sustainable development strategies, disasters are increasingly portrayed not as threats to humanity, but as opportunities for communities to rebuild better, implement social change, and become responsible for their own survival (2012). This requires acceptance that the world is inherently disastrous and security is fleeting. The objective is to learn to bear suffering, rather than to change the world such that suffering does not occur.

The rhetoric of the inevitability of disaster and suffering serves to cover over their origins in human agency. In resilience-thinking, events such as flooding come to be seen as inescapable facts of life for the communities affected by them. Yet the incidence of heavy flooding and other natural disasters is linked to climate change resulting from human activity (Hirabayashi, et al., 2013; van Aalst, 2006). This fact is obscured in resilience-thinking, which imbues subjects with responsibility for bearing the effects of natural disasters while removing any basis for resisting their causes. Following the above accounts of risk, then, we might say that if risk initially represented the politicisation of danger, resilience represents its depoliticisation.

The research

Marc Welsh (2014) has observed the existence of two distinct, but complementary discourses of resilience. ‘Socio-ecological’ resilience, which emphasises the relationship between the environment and the community, is the focus of much of the existing academic literature on resilience in public policy. ‘Psycho-social’ resilience, meanwhile, is centred on the individual and their response to adversity. Both, however, refer to the capacity of the object of policy to recover or adapt following trauma. Psycho-social resilience has been the focus of some significant social initiatives in the UK, a prime example being the Resilience Programme, which was piloted in schools between 2007 and 2010 with the aim of promoting schoolchildren’s wellbeing by increasing their resilience (Challen, et al., 2011). In some social policy documents, building resilience, especially in children and young people, is explicitly portrayed as a government-spanning objective, cutting across the Department of Health in
relation to mental and sexual health, ‘the Home Office in terms of civic disorder and crime, the Government Equalities Office in relation to body confidence, and the Department for Education in terms of teenage pregnancy’ (Department of Health, 2013, pp. 16-17).

Nonetheless, as a concept resilience is less prevalent and less well-developed in UK social policy than it is in security, development and environmental policy. When social policy documents mention resilience, this often takes the form of a buzzword which is not clearly defined or developed. Conversely, in the latter areas of policy, the concept is likely to be given more substance and used more consistently. Hence, to date the bulk of academic commentary on resilience in public policy has concentrated on these latter areas. Critical approaches to resilience, however, suggest that the entry of resilience into social policy may be significant. If, in socio-ecological resilience discourses, resilience functions to individualise and responsibilise while covering over the origins of suffering in human activity and human power structures, it seems reasonable to suspect that it might operate the same way in social policy.

For this reason, this paper sets out the findings of a qualitative content analysis of policy literature published from 2005 to 2016. A literature search for uses of the word ‘resilience’ was conducted using the Publications portal of the Gov.uk website. Due to the rather less developed nature of resilience in social policy, this was wide in scope and included White Papers, Green Papers and research reports. Mentions of resilience were particularly prevalent in documents produced by the Department of Health (DH), the new executive body Public Health England (PHE) and the Department for Education (DfE), but examples of resilience in social policy were also found in documents produced by the Home Office and DWP. Articles were discarded from the sample if their use of the term ‘resilience’ was shallow and buzzword-esque (i.e. it was only mentioned once or twice in passing and lacked clear conceptualisation). A similar search was conducted for documents produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Department for International Development (DfID) – two of the departments in which resilience-thinking is most well-developed. This allowed for a comparison between socio-ecological and psycho-social resilience frames.

Depoliticising risk, depoliticising gender

In documents produced by DEFRA and DfID, adversity and disaster are consistently placed beyond the reach of human intervention. A striking example of this is found in the National Flood Emergency Framework for England’s (DEFRA, 2014, p. 3) proclamation that ‘flooding happens!’ As the document goes on to assert, ‘no part of England can expect to escape the impact of flooding entirely’ (p. 3). While the Framework does, of course, set in place strategies for managing and (where possible) preventing floods, substantial emphasis is placed on preparedness for inevitable flooding, including constant vigilance to ‘risks, threats and vulnerabilities’ (p. 23) as well as having plans in place to assist with recovery. The recovery process itself falls outside of the scope of the document, and readers are directed towards online resilience toolkits produced by the Cabinet Office (p. 4). In sum: while central government intervention in flooding does form part of the Framework, this is not linked to any broader environmental strategy which might decrease the incidence of flooding. The role of climate change is acknowledged, but in the passive voice – the impact of human activity on the climate does not form a part of the discussion.

1 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications
The analysis of resilience-thinking in DEFRA and DfID policy thus supports the earlier assertion that danger has again been depoliticised.

The social policy documents also tended to focus on risk, with factors in social exclusion and disadvantage interpreted as ‘risk factors’ or ‘deficit factors’. Risks are bracketed into those which can be altered and those which cannot. Take, for example, this statement from the Department of Health’s Framework for Sexual Health Improvement in England:

A wide range of factors has been shown to influence adolescent health outcomes. Many of these are ‘deficit’ factors, such as growing up in a single-parent family or living in a deprived area. However, these factors are clearly beyond the control of adolescents, and many resilient young people who grow up in difficult circumstances do have positive outcomes (2013, p. 16).

Here, risk/deficit factors are conceptualised as ‘beyond control’, leading to the assertion that the only course of action open to policymakers is to operate to increase resilience at the level of the individual. This statement from Home Office research on ‘resilience to drug use’ bears some similarities:

The evidence indicates that risk and protective factors are context dependent and influence people for a variety of reasons. Some, such as gender and ethnicity, are fixed and cannot be changed. Others such as parental discipline can be altered (2007, p. 3).

Likewise, GEO research into body image and self-esteem differentiates between ‘factors which have the potential to change’ such as weight, and ‘factors such as age, ethnicity, gender which are fixed’ (Burrowes, 2013, p. 21). Note the portrayal of gender and ethnicity in both cases as ‘fixed’. It is not that these statements are inaccurate: individuals of course are not able to switch identity at will, and very few adolescents living in deprived areas are able to change their surroundings. Rather, it is that consideration of human agency terminates here. In these documents, social disadvantage (along the lines of gender, race and social class) becomes one among many ‘risk factors’ that passively ‘accumulate’. Any prospect for restructuring society such that gender and ethnicity do not have such a detrimental impact cannot be ‘thought’ in the context of policy that individualises risk in this way. As gender and other inequalities are converted into ‘risk factors’, they are depoliticised and conceptualised as existing beyond the reach of both policy and individuals; intervention, now, is only possible at the micro-level and not at the macro-level of social structures.

Resilient subjects

In DEFRA and DfID documents, the definitions of resilience on offer closely resemble Chandler’s classical and post-classical approaches: either ‘the capacity to “bounce back” from adversity’ (Public Health England, 2014, p. 4) or ‘the ability of countries, communities and households to manage change, by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses’ (DfID, 2011, p. 6).

But in the social policy documents, there is a significant departure from the meanings of resilience outlined by Chandler. Predictably, the ‘psycho-social’ variant is foregrounded. What is more surprising, however, is that resilience also comes to mean resistance to forms of activity regarded as undesirable or socially deviant, including risk-taking behaviour. In the same Home Office research on drug use, ‘resilience is defined as those behaviours and methods that young people utilise in making their decisions not to use drugs, despite being exposed to drugs and other risk factors’ (2007, p. 4). The document explains: ‘to be considered resilient the young people selected for the study needed to have
had the opportunity to use drugs and to have almost always chosen not to use them’ (p. 5). Resilience explicitly means resistance here, with the research operating on the assumption that being exposed to drugs is a ‘risk factor’ to be withstood, requiring the development of a personal quality in order to do so.

A similar formulation can be found in a DfE research report on resilience to (violent) extremism (DfE, 2011). Following both classical and post-classical definitions of resilience, one might expect ‘resilience to violent extremism’ to refer to the capacity of a group or community to repair or transform in the wake of an act of terrorism. But instead, resilience is again explicitly defined as resistance to something: ‘a process in which people can overcome or resist negative influences that block (for instance) emotional well-being and/or achievement’ (p. 10). Throughout, the phrase ‘resilience to extremism’ is used to mean resistance to extremism: the ability to identify and challenge extremist narratives.

In the Government Response to the Riots (DCLG, 2013), produced following the 2011 riots in cities across England, resilience is conceived of as an aspect of one’s character, ‘critical to achieving to the best of one’s quality at school, staying away from risky behaviour, deciding on what kind of career one wants, and finding a way to achieve those goals’ (p. 19). In the sexual health Framework, resilient young people are thought to ‘understand the benefits of loving, healthy relationships and delaying sex’ (Department of Health, 2013, p. 13). Building resilience is predicted to ‘address the range of risky activities that young people undertake’ (p. 17). Across a range of policy documents dealing with different areas of social life, then, resilience is thought to result in less risk-taking behaviour, and indeed is sometimes treated as synonymous with the avoidance of risk.

There is an obvious moral element to this. In their avoidance of risk, resilient subjects are conceptualised not just as confident and happy people but as upstanding moral citizens: they do not riot, take drugs, or have promiscuous sex, and cannot be influenced by extremist narratives. In short, they do not participate in activities regarded as socially deviant. There is a tacit conservatism to these norms, especially regarding sex, drugs and family life. What this suggests is that resilience in social policy is not a value-neutral approach to governing uncertainty, but a value-laden approach to the regulation of social deviance. Resilient subjects are self-regulating neoliberal subjects, and their self-regulation is imbued with a (sometimes conservative) morality.

Yet at the same time, resilience is conceptualised as a means of addressing inequality. For starters, in the documents analysed, resilience operates along explicitly gendered lines to address gender inequalities. Mobilising resilience thus requires strategies targeted at differently-gendered populations. One such population is girls and young women, a group conceptualised as potentially suffering from low self-esteem resulting from negative body image. This approach to building resilience comes to the fore in GEO research (Burrowes, 2013), which acknowledges that men can suffer low body image (especially gay and non-white men), but stresses that women, especially young women, are more likely to. The result is presented as a lack of self-esteem resulting in increased risk-taking:

Lower body satisfaction appears to increase the chances of adolescents using unhealthy weight control behaviours (such as crash dieting) that are likely to result in weight gain and poorer overall health. ... women with lower body satisfaction are more likely to be inconsistent with safer-sex practices (e.g. using a condom), more likely to have had multiple sex partners in the past year, and more likely to have had sex after drinking alcohol or using drugs in comparison to women with higher body satisfaction ... Smokers are more pre-occupied with their weight than non-smokers (p. 14).
Resilience-building must consequently be targeted at the reduction of primarily feminine ‘deficits’ such as poor body confidence. Increasing resilience therefore requires interventions aimed at individual women, including both exercise-based and psychotherapeutic interventions (pp. 21-24). These insights were put into practice in the GEO’s Body Confidence Campaign, which facilitated a number of such interventions (GEO, 2013; 2014). Some attention is given to the role of broader social causes of negative body image, and the document suggests that it may help to ‘chang[e] the types of images that are portrayed in the media’ (p. 22). This assertion is relatively undeveloped in this document, although the GEO has worked with industry to promote diverse body images in advertising (GEO, 2013).

The GEO document rationalises the mobilisation of a predominantly (although not exclusively) feminine form of resilience based in enhanced body image. While less developed, a differently gendered form of resilience emerges in other documents. The documents analysed do not definitively state whether men are, on average, more or less resilient than women, but do suggest that men and women have ‘different needs’ (Department of Health, 2013, p. 15) and point to problems more often associated with boys or men, such as low academic attainment (Department for Education, 2007, p. 19) and unwillingness to talk about mental health (Department for Education, 2016, p. 20). Resilience thus aims to discipline problematic masculine behaviours as well as problematic feminine behaviours, and ‘tailored’ approaches (Department of Health, 2013, p. 15) are needed to do this. The Sexual Health Framework describes one such programme combining sport and sexual health awareness as ‘utilising the natural competitive qualities of young men to address key sexual-health issues’ (Department of Health, 2013, p. 16). Thus, both problem and intervention are coded masculine.

This section has demonstrated how resilience operates to create new subjectivities, prioritising the avoidance of risk and deviant behaviour – the latter re-figured as what’s best for the self. But in addition, resilience works to create ‘new’ gendered subjectivities out of ‘old’ ones: shy girls with poor body image are made into confident young women; and boys exhibiting problem behaviour are made into responsible young men. Resilient subjects are therefore gendered subjects.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Critical perspectives on resilience suggest that, far from representing a new episteme in policymaking, it instead deepens and extends existing practices of neoliberal governance. This evaluation of resilience in social policy has, to a large extent, supported this critical literature. It has shown that as in development and security policy, resilience in social policy serves to depoliticise suffering: to naturalise power structures and displace responsibility for bearing suffering onto the individual. The structures of gender, race and class are re-figured as beyond the control of individuals, and therefore out of the reach of policy.

However, this analysis has also demonstrated that resilience does something different in social policy. In security and development discourse, resilient subjects must accept risk into their lives: disaster cannot be avoided, so it must be withstood and its transformative capacity embraced. Resilient subjects in social policy must also accept some risk into their lives, especially those risks which come to bear on them as a result of their gender, race or social class. But they are also tasked with evading risk where possible. Across the documents in the sample, resilience refers to ‘resistance to’ risky behaviour; moreover, risky behaviour is here coterminous with socially deviant activities, be they rioting, drug use, promiscuous sex or religious extremism. The resilient subject of social policy is therefore an upstanding moral subject who avoids risk. They are also disciplined out of problematically
gendered behaviours and beliefs, such as negative female body image, thought to result in a higher incidence of risk-taking behaviours.

Some readers might be tempted to dismiss social policy constructions of resilience on the basis that they are grounded in an ‘incorrect’ conceptualisation. But this puts the cart before the horse in assuming that the ‘correct’ theorisation of resilience is the one suggested by academics. We need to look at what resilience does in practice to understand it, and in this case a relatively stable meaning of resilience – as ‘resistance to’ risk-taking and social deviance – has been asserted across policy fields. Even if less developed than in other areas of policy, resilience in social policy is not simply a throwaway buzzword, but rather has a crystallised, coherent meaning.

Graham Burchell has noted that technologies of neoliberal governance ‘are not all unambiguously “bad”’ (1993, p. 280) and the same can be said for resilience. Feminists may welcome many of the policy interventions discussed here, from education about sexual health risks to measures to promote the self-esteem of girls and young women. Interventions into resilience can have beneficial effects, and it is not the intention of this paper to claim otherwise. They also do not always preclude other types of intervention: as part of its work on body image, the GEO has also attempted to promote body diversity in advertising, for example. But the argument of this paper is that taken as an overarching approach to policy, ‘resilience-thinking’ heavily suggests that many types of intervention are impossible or inappropriate by consigning certain realms of social existence to a figurative ‘outside’ that policy cannot access. Aspects of identity such as gender and race, conceptualised as ‘fixed’, become depoliticised.

This depoliticisation must be set in the context of scholarly debate regarding the transformative potential of feminist and social justice claims in policy. Feminist policy research has consistently demonstrated that, while feminist interventions in government can potentially fundamentally transform policy agendas (McBride & Mazur, 2010; True, 2003; True & Mintrom, 2001), in practice they tend to align with pre-existing government agendas (Bacchi & Eveline, 2003; Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Franceschet & McDonald, 2004; Rönnblom, 2009; Squires & Wickham-Jones, 2004; Teghtsoonian, 2004), fuelling wider debate about the ‘neoliberalisation’ of feminism (Budgeon, 2011; Evans, 2015; Fraser, 2013; McBride, 2009). One contention is that equality claims may be ‘shrunk’ through their reduction to a particular interpretation or policy area, resulting in other dimensions of equality being neglected, or ‘bent’ as strategies originally used to address inequality are turned to other uses, in particular to serve the needs of the market (Lombardo, et al., 2009).

Shrinking and bending are at work when resilience enters social policy, with consequences for the articulation of social justice claims in policy. Claims about gender, class and racial inequality do make it into the social policy literature; however, they are transformed into ‘risk factors’ (which, again, are ‘fixed’). The policy documents are often packed with awareness that certain groups have worse outcomes (for example, worse health outcomes for BAME individuals, especially if they are also sexual minorities), but focus on encouraging these people to make ‘healthy choices’ (Department of Health, 2013, p. 5). Subordinated identities thus become ‘at-risk’ individuals expected to bear responsibility for their own suffering, through heightened awareness and evasion of risk. Thus, while equality claims have entered social policy, they are shrunk – broad critique of social power structures is missing, and the proposed solutions focus near-exclusively on the individual. They are also bent – claims about equality now go to work in the manufacture of responsible, risk-avoiding, moral subjects.
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