

THE RHETORIC OF THE UNINSURED: CLAIMSMAKING IN PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH

Stanton Hudson

Dr. Clarence Lo, Thesis Advisor

ABSTRACT

Public policy research is often seen as another arena applicable to the objective lens of science, as policy makers weigh “the best evidence,” or scientific facts, about a social problem to determine which solutions are most warranted. Hundreds of millions of dollars are spent annually to determine the prevalence and extent of social problems, such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy and uninsured, to name a few. Yet, much of this data is ignored or even discredited by policy makers despite the rigorous and rational efforts of knowledge creation employed by scientists, leading many researchers to feel exasperated or frustrated at the public policy formation process.

What many often fail to realize is that public policy research and the public policy formation process are socially constructed by those involved. There are no facts, only claims made by stakeholders with varying interests and values. Claims are not measured on their own merit but rather by how effectively they appeal to the policy formation audience. Claimsmaking theory, therefore, provides a robust theoretical framework for examining the process of how claims are made, received, denied through counter claims, and reshaped. It also illustrates how claims and those who make them interact to formulate public policy

This research explores claimsmaking in public policy formation within a public policy research grant focused on reducing the social problem of the uninsured. Claims were examined across a four year period to understand how grounds, warrants, and conclusions were negotiated through discourse to derive a single policy recommendation.