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Studying medical transgressions through policy processes: a methodological discussion

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In today's modern biomedical research many of our cultural categories as healthy and ill, life and death and what is animal and what is human, are challenged. An example is xenotransplantation: transplantation of cells, tissue and organs from animals to humans. In the 1990s this was a promising new technology where the pig was introduced as a possible donor animal. But the transplants also challenged the category of what we see as human and animal. Modern biomedicine is in this way often seen as both controversial and/or risky. Another example is stem cell, that has been seen as a controversial technology that is challenging our conceptions of when human life starts and what right we humans have to control the beginning of life. In Sweden, as most western countries, these controversies started policy processes in the 1990s and 2000s on how to regulate the research.

In this paper I use xenotransplantation and stem cell as an example for a methodological discussion on how to use policy processes as an empirical field. What are the ethnologists' approaches in studying policy processes? How can we study how cultural boundaries are changing through policy processes? What medical transgressions are to be found in these policy processes?