

# ‘WHAT’S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE?’

A New Thinking Paradigm

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## WIDENING THE SCOPE OF APPLICATION

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## WIDENING THE SCOPE OF APPLICATION

Chapter 1 introduced a WPR (What's the Problem Represented to be?) way of thinking as an analytic strategy and its usefulness in the field of policy analysis. In this chapter, the argument is made that this novel mode of critical interrogation can be applied in a wide variety of sites and to a plethora of 'entities'. To make this argument, I identify the two central propositions in WPR: firstly, that it is useful to start a critical analysis from forms of proposal (or 'proposed solutions') and to work backwards to consider how the 'problem' is represented or produced within them (see Chapter 1); and secondly, that this mode of analysis involves putting into question numerous commonly assumed drivers of social change, including 'difficulties', 'controversies', 'social conditions', 'indeterminate situations' and, of course, 'problems'. The two propositions work together to destabilise assumptions about how social change takes place and how best to reflect on complex socio-material arrangements.

In the Introduction, WPR was identified as a poststructuralist mode of analysis linked to an ontology of becoming. There are thus connections with developments in other fields influenced by poststructuralism, for example, with actor-network theory and with the literature on performativity (Chapter 14). Shared or allied conceptions of the 'subject', 'reality' and 'materialism' are elaborated in later chapters.

This chapter highlights the novelty in WPR thinking and its usefulness as a mode of critical interrogation beyond public policy. As explained in the Introduction, WPR thinking is not a psychological theory. It does not ask: 'how do we think?' (Dewey 1910), in the sense of 'how are we made to think?'. Rather, it offers a specific analytic strategy as a 'way of thinking differently'. It follows

Foucault in his critique of Hegelian dialectical thinking and in his endorsement of problematisation as a way to get ‘inside’ thinking. WPR develops this proposition to illustrate the usefulness of treating all policies and all ‘entities’ as problematisations (or problem representations). The political implications of this stratagem are explored below.

### **Foucault, problematisation and WPR**

Foucault introduces and endorses a particular way of thinking, which he calls ‘thinking problematically’. In the place of Hegelian dialectics, he recommends producing a ‘history of problematics’. ‘Problematic’ translates into French as *problématique*. It refers to the complex of issues associated with a topic. In France, the term is often used to describe a thesis project, elaborating the question under examination.

Foucault views totalising approaches, such as Hegel’s, as teleological and closed (Raaper & Olssen 2017, p. 104). In the place of Hegel’s ‘power of negation’, he calls for ‘thought without contradiction, without dialectics, without negation; thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple ... *We must think problematically rather than question and answer dialectically*’ (Foucault 1978b, pp. 185–186, emphasis added).

In an interview with Paul Rabinow, Foucault describes this new way of thinking as distinct from both the history of ideas and from the ‘history of mentalities’ (Foucault 1997, p. 117). For Foucault, thought is ‘not merely a mental, cognitive, speculative, or linguistic phenomenon’; rather, it is a ‘set of practices in its own right’, that is, ‘a process that participates in the constitution of the objects of which it speaks, and that has specific and identifiable political effects’ (Deacon 2000, p. 132). The element that is capable of describing the history of thought is ‘what one could call the element of problems or, more exactly, problematizations’ (Foucault 1997, p. 117).

To analyse problematisations, Foucault recommends two forms of analysis: archaeology and genealogy. ‘The archaeological dimension of the analysis made it possible to examine the *forms [of problematization] themselves*, its genealogical dimension enabled me to analyze the *formation out of the practices* and the modifications undergone by the latter’ (Foucault 1986, p. 12, emphasis added). For example, to put the status of contemporary French prisons in question, Foucault looks to see how systems of punishment were problematised in the past (archaeology) and how current imprisonment practices relate to those earlier problematisations (genealogy). Together these modes of inquiry overturn the ‘unquestioned status’ that ‘historically contingent problematisations’ – in this case imprisonment – hold ‘in determining our contemporary practice of thought’ (Bernauer 1990, p. 4).

Examining the 'forms of problematization themselves' – how items *are* problematised – provides a means to get 'inside thinking'. It involves 'going behind' 'objects' and 'subjects', presumed to be fixed and unchanging, to consider their 'conditions of emergence' and hence their mutability (Bacchi 2023, p. 55; Foucault 2007, p. 117). For example, as with prisons, Foucault (1978a) encourages us to consider sexuality as a mutable object for thought, problematised in different contexts, for example, as either part of a moral code or as a biological imperative.

The critical task becomes identifying the 'type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking' on which these accepted practices (e.g. imprisonment) are based (Foucault 1994, p. 456). This form of critique allows us to gain a sense of the 'implicit system in which we find ourselves', of 'the system of limits and exclusions we practice without realizing it' and thus 'to make the cultural unconscious apparent' (Simon 1971, p. 73 in O'Farrell 2005, p. 69).

When researchers 'think problematically', they can be described as 'policy *problematizers*' (Webb 2014). As policy problematisers, researchers refuse the problem-solving framework, which continues to dominate thinking across many disciplines, because it is seen to foreclose consideration of the complex factors and interconnections that require analysis (Introduction). The work of the 'policy problematizer' is to defamiliarise present categories and practices, opening up indeterminate spaces for creative possibilities, always with an eye to their own problematisations (Chapter 6). WPR offers a *policy problematising* approach (see Alvesson & Sandberg 2013). It *problematises* (thinks problematically about) the *problematisations* ('the forms of problematization themselves') in policy proposals and other kinds of proposals, as elaborated in Chapter 1.

Importantly, WPR makes a novel move that deviates from both Foucault's stance and the majority of theoretical contributions to critical analysis. It queries the presumption that 'thinking' is best approached as a *reaction* to some postulated *difficulty*, a position Foucault adopts. For a 'domain of action' to enter the field of thought, says Foucault, 'it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a *certain number of difficulties* around it' (Foucault 1997, p. 117, emphasis added). In his account these 'difficulties' result from social, economic or political processes.

By contrast, in a WPR approach there is no assumption that some set of 'difficulties' (or 'problems') sparks a 'response' from governments or other bodies; rather, it puts those postulated 'difficulties' (or 'problems') under critical scrutiny. In WPR, for example, governing bodies (understood broadly) do not *address* the assumed phenomenon of 'childhood obesity'. Rather, through their proposals they produce 'childhood obesity' as a particular kind of 'problem', a problem representation that requires critical interrogation.

Alexander and Coveney (2013), for example, argue that Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines for Children 2002 produce the 'problem' of 'childhood obesity' as one of inactivity.

To clarify the argument that policies produce 'problems' as particular sorts of problems, it is helpful to reflect on how thinking was conceptualised by the American pragmatists Dewey, James and Peirce. These late-nineteenth-, early-twentieth-century philosophers had a significant impact on sociological theory and political practices both in the US and abroad. Their influence continues today, as explained in Chapter 3.

### Pragmatism and 'problems'

It is not possible to do justice to the complexity of the ideas and theoretical propositions advanced by this trio of American pragmatists (see Glossary). I wish only to isolate a theme in their work that serves to distinguish the project associated with WPR from conventional ways of approaching social and political analysis. To prefigure the argument, in pragmatism, thinking is characterised as a cognitive process that relies upon the existence of 'problems', 'difficulties' or 'indeterminate situations'. WPR questions both the position that 'thinking' is a cognitive capacity and, also, the presumption of pre-existing problems that this view relies upon. As noted in the Introduction, in WPR, 'thinking' involves an analytic strategy, not a presumed psychological trait.

Both James and Dewey were psychologists. Dewey (2004, p. 82 in Savransky 2016, p. 198) described 'how we think' in these terms: 'men [sic] do not, in their natural estate, think when they have no troubles to cope with, no difficulties to overcome'. Sounding almost Calvinist, he argued that a 'life of ease, of success without effort, would be a thoughtless life' (Dewey 2004, p. 82 in Savransky 2016, p. 198). This argument is linked to Dewey's engagement with theories of evolution ('survival of the fittest') and to his commitment to the scientific method. As Savransky (2017, p. 30, emphasis added) explains, for Dewey, 'Thinking is not only passively empirical but also actively experimental'. It emerges 'whenever the present confronts one with *perplexing facts*, with *difficulties* that demand creative attention'.

This process of thinking and experimentation relies upon the existence of what Dewey called 'indeterminate situations' (i.e. 'difficulties'), conceptualised as 'actual situations', as *existing in fact*. They are situations that produce an existential 'itch', a tension 'which actuates a person to seek a solution' (Shermis & Barth 1983, p. 88). To 'think', in this account, one needs to *struggle* with *problems* and work to *solve* them. 'Psychologically, the dialectic means that all inhibition is also stimulus, and thereby contributes to building up a new coordination' (Dewey 1904, p. 2.1562 in Point & Vuillerod 2019, p. 415).

Dewey uses Hegel's 'conviction of the important place of opposition, of contradiction and of negation in life' to rigorously formulate his own conception of a problem (Point & Vuillerod 2019, p. 413). For Dewey, the dialectical process translates to problem-solving. In this pragmatist interpretation of Hegel, 'the notion of problem is fundamental to understand progress in the world history' (Point & Vuillerod 2019, p. 408). 'Thinking is always relative to a problem' (Dewey 1904, p. 2.1562 in Point & Vuillerod 2019, p. 415).

William James makes a similar argument in *The Principles of Psychology*:

In all voluntary thinking there is some topic or subject about which all the members of the thought revolve. Half the time this topic is a *problem*, a *gap* we cannot yet fill with a definite picture, word, or phrase, but which, in the manner described some time back, influences us *in an intensely active and determinate psychic way*. Whatever may be the images and phrases that pass before us, we feel their relation to *this aching gap*.

(James 1890, p. 259 in Savransky 2019, p. 145, emphasis added)

There are resonances between James' 'aching gap' and Dewey's 'perplexing facts', the 'difficulties that demand creative attention'. For James, the 'facts of struggle seem too deeply characteristic of the whole frame of things for me not to suspect that hindrance and experiment go all the way through' (James 1988, p. 5 in Savransky 2019, p. 157).

Similarly, for Peirce, inquiry 'starts from an uncomfortable state of doubt, which blocks the flow of usual actions, where it is not possible to choose among alternative courses of action' (in Bacha 2004). Scientific inquiry constitutes 'an effort to put an end to the doubt' (Bacha 2004). Problems, it seems – the 'aching gap', the 'indeterminate situation', the 'uncomfortable state of doubt' – are essential to pragmatist thought. This view is so entrenched in Western culture that it is difficult to think otherwise.

WPR is not in the business of explaining 'thought processes' or 'cognitive abilities', which are the targets in the work of Dewey, James and Pierce. To repeat, WPR is not a psychological theory. Rather, it offers a style of analysis and critique that probes the deep-seated ontological and epistemological assumptions in analytic approaches. Hence, psychology is treated as an assumed 'knowledge' that needs questioning rather than an accepted mode of thinking.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, WPR challenges the pragmatist presumption that problems provide a necessary prompt to 'thought' – that 'problems that exist' *make us think*. It resists this insistence that 'thinking' involves *responding* to 'problems' or 'contradictions'. It offers, instead, a style of analysis

and critique that stresses the need to rethink how postulated ‘problems’ are conceptualised.

On this point, we need to consider the long-running debates about the status of so-called ‘objective conditions’ or ‘putative conditions’, along with the accusations of ‘ontological gerrymandering’, in studies of ‘social problems’ (Puddephatt 2022; Spector & Kitsuse 1987; Woolgar & Pawluch 1985). The question in these debates becomes how far an analyst is willing to position themselves away from assumed social factors.

WPR distances itself from *any presumptions* regarding assumed existing ‘overarching conditions’ as drivers of forms of life and change (Woolgar & Lezaun 2013, p. 328). As noted, it queries the tendency among pragmatist philosophers to examine life in terms of inhibitions and challenges, characterised as a ‘thoughtless life’ should ‘men’ (sic) ‘have no troubles to cope with, no difficulties to overcome’ (Dewey 2004, p. 82 in Savransky 2016, p. 198). Rather, WPR recommends a form of social analysis that involves critical interrogation of the implicit ‘problems’ in all policy proposals and other forms of proposal.

This argument does not make the WPR approach an example of radical or strict constructivism, which is often accompanied by accusations of relativism (Bacchi 1999, p. 38). WPR reconfigures the debates around realism (see Chapter 15) and ‘objective conditions’. It provides a new entry point to interrogate postulated ‘conditions’ through examining the proposals (‘proposed solutions’) introduced to ‘address’ them (Chapter 1). While it might appear that proposals or ‘proposed solutions’ constitute a form of assumed ‘objective condition’ since they emerge from documents or artefacts, they are not treated as ‘driving forces’ for thinking or change in the way ‘problems’ tend to be approached in pragmatist accounts. Rather, they direct attention to implicit problem representations that become the analytic target.

For example, to analyse how proposals to ‘address’ ‘childhood obesity’ shape the ‘problem’, there is no assumption that something called ‘childhood obesity’ exists. There is no assumed underlying condition (‘childhood obesity’) driving the analysis. Instead, a complex of multiple political factors shapes ‘childhood obesity’ as an assumed ‘problem’. The task in WPR is to identify and reflect critically on these factors, a task accomplished through interrogating the proposals targeting ‘childhood obesity’ as an assumed state of being.

As argued above, this critical approach to the production of ‘problems’ as particular sorts of problems extends to a cluster of other concepts – ‘indeterminate situations’, ‘difficulties’, ‘controversies’, ‘dilemmas’, ‘issues’ and ‘matters of concern’. In each case, these terms tend to link analysis to a presumed form of disturbance that requires a response, with the necessary assumption that it is possible to ‘access’ those ‘disturbances’ in some

sort of context-free way. The term 'problem' continues to occupy pride of place among this cluster of concepts. How this characterisation of 'problems' as postulated 'prompts' to thought processes impacts contemporary social theory is pursued in Chapter 3.

WPR dispels any such presumed starting places for socio-political analysis on the grounds that these 'putative conditions' produce a claim to objective access to those conditions. It offers as an alternative entry point the proposals made to 'address' some presumed 'problem' and how they operate as problematisations. It asks: 'What's the problem (or issue or controversy) represented to be?' This shift in emphasis *from* putative conditions *to* problem representations creates room for greater contestation around the ways in which policies and other proposals constitute 'problems' (Bacchi 2009, p. 31).

As mentioned previously, the starting premise in WPR is that *what we propose to do about something indicates what we believe needs to change and hence what is deemed to be problematic ('the problem')*. The usefulness of this analytic intervention in the policy domain is illustrated by the widespread adoption of the WPR approach in numerous fields and across many countries. In the remainder of this chapter this argument is extended to diverse forms of 'entity'. As exemplars, we consider how buildings, rooms within buildings, maps, media reports and theoretical propositions can be approached as proposals and guides to conduct (Chapter 1) and hence as problem representations. These examples illustrate how WPR produces novel insights into the roles these 'entities' play in governing practices and in creating realities. The argument that claims of this sort lack substance and display hubris is pursued in Chapter 14 (Savransky 2018, pp. 226–228).

### Bringing WPR to buildings and other 'entities'

WPR approaches buildings much in the same way it approaches policies – as proposals which contain problem representations. Describing buildings as proposals, or as guides to conduct, provides insights into the ways buildings shape possible relations among people and things. Bottrell and Goodwin (2011, p. 4) use the example of modern schools with their 'uni-purpose facilities located on enclosed land, fenced and gated' and how they reflect a 'hidden curriculum' that problematises the moral and cognitive training of young people.

This argument emerges from the theoretical proposition that buildings can be treated as governmental technologies (Guggenheim 2010; Woolgar & Lezaun 2013, p. 333; see Introduction). In line with poststructuralist theory, the focus is on the processes and practices involved in a 'thing's' becoming (Chapter 5). In this sense, buildings can be described as 'fluid' (Harrison, Lancaster & Rhodes 2023), occupying a stable location while being open to

different uses. Importantly, they do not always perform what they are supposed to do (Guggenheim 2010, p. 166).

Specific rooms in buildings operate as proposals and problematisations in similar ways, as Ingrey (2018) shows in her critical analysis of washrooms in schools. Gender-neutral washrooms problematise bathroom use in terms of accommodation on a case-by-case basis (Ingrey 2018, p. 776). This design performs a 'cisgendering' and 'heteronorming' practice, with implications for 'gendered subjectivation and recognition' (Ingrey 2018, p. 776; Chapter 11).

Public washrooms operate as productive spaces that 'don't just tell us where to go; they also tell us who we are, where we belong, and where we don't belong' (Rasmussen 2009, p. 439). As Ingrey describes, the 'simple act of accessing a suitable washroom space' becomes 'humiliating, pathologizing and alienating, and ultimately transphobic because it does not pay attention to a reconfiguring of all sex-segregated washrooms' (Ingrey 2018, pp. 781–782). Asking 'What's the problem represented to be?' helps to identify the 'cissexist and heteronormative ideal' (Cavanagh 2010, p. 15) operating in the 'gendered spatial design' of the public washroom.

It is possible to consider how specific pieces of 'equipment' in buildings or rooms operate as proposals and problem representations. Walker et al. (2018, p. 318) note how the design of the room for 'box visits' in prisons configures relationships between accused felons and friends/relatives as denying touch (see also Zurn 2019). The authors emphasise the role of the Perspex or glass wall that prohibits physical contact. Applying WPR to the 'box' opens reflections on the ways in which this denial of touch and its reliance on psychological behavioural theories underpins this draconian measure.

Maps provide another example of the role of mechanisms (or instruments), as technologies, in governing population. Lindberg's (2019) analysis of maps of the Arctic focuses on the ways in which maps limit and enable certain conceptualisations of 'the Arctic' and politics within the region. Drawing on WPR, she (Lindberg 2021, p. 482) delineates the map's constitutive power effects, making it possible to reflect on the complex implications that shape the conditions under which political discussions are held. Question 6 in WPR, which highlights resistance practices, can be used to examine the possibility of counter-mapping as a way towards democratising map making and map use beyond state institutions (Lindberg 2019, p. 190; see also Tazzioli 2014).

### **Bringing WPR to governmental technologies and media analysis**

Since WPR works with and through a governmentality perspective (Chapter 7), it can be deployed to interrogate a wide range of governmental and knowledge practices. 'Policy' in WPR is not simply what governments (narrowly

conceived as government institutions) do; it embraces a wide range of actors and agencies, including experts and professionals, and the knowledge upon which they rely. Hence, WPR can be applied to the range of materials associated with these agencies and experts. For example, a researcher could apply the WPR questions to proposals in reports or programs produced by professional groups or agencies or non-governmental organisations.

Because WPR assumes a broad view of governing that moves 'behind' or 'outside' government institutions (Foucault 2007, pp. 162–163), it can be applied to *non-governmental* technologies and mechanisms – e.g. *The diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders – DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association 2013; see Buller, Epstein & Hosken 2022). Other targets for analysis include expert knowledges (e.g. 'evidence-based policy' paradigm; see Lancaster, Treloar & Ritter 2017), case law and precedent (Seear & Fraser 2014), symposia (Månsson & Ekendahl 2015) and social marketing texts (Farrugia 2016).

WPR can also be deployed in media analysis, though with some provisos. To 'qualify' for a WPR analysis, the source or material needs to function as a 'practical text' or 'guide to conduct' (Chapter 1). This starting point makes it possible to work backwards to identify a link to how the 'problem' is represented/produced. The possible usefulness of WPR in media analysis, therefore, depends on the nature of selected texts and on the kinds of questions that the material invites.

For example, Nielsen and Bonham (2015) draw on WPR to critically interrogate a road safety campaign screened by the South Australian Motor Accident Commission from 2010 to 2014 (for details, see Bacchi & Goodwin 2016, pp. 77–78). As another example, in his study of the adoption of a broad understanding of 'security' in Sweden in the 1990s, Larsson (2021) includes as material for analysis a government website, 'Your security', operated by the MSB (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency), the MSB YouTube channel and the MSB podcast series *If a crisis comes*. Such 'texts' can be readily seen to contain 'proposals' (understood broadly) on behalf of conventional state institutions to influence conduct. As a result, they can usefully be approached as 'levers' in a WPR analysis to open reflections on the forms of governing, and associated effects, instituted through a particular way of constituting the 'problem' (Bacchi & Goodwin 2016, p. 18).

Manlik (2022) illustrates how it is possible to read certain media texts as proposals regarding conduct and hence as governing strategies beyond media directly produced by government bodies. She (2022, p. 116 fn 1) treats the magazine *Lesbians on the Loose* as a 'practical text', showing how it aims to produce particular effects in the conduct of its audiences. Specifically, she explains how 'sexual minority' women are positioned within the magazine texts 'as responsible, at least in part, for addressing the "problem"

of HIV'. Manlik's analysis illustrates 'how certain subject positions are rendered thinkable or unthinkable' through these problem representations with clear subjectification effects (Question 5 in WPR; Box 1.1). As she points out, the goal is not to search for signs of intentional manipulation but to seek out the conceptual logics that make certain stances possible (Manlik 2022, p. 115).

### **Bringing WPR to theoretical propositions, concepts and comparative analysis**

The WPR questions can be employed fruitfully in analysing theoretical propositions and concepts. As with the 'materials' considered above ('entities' and media texts), it is possible to approach researchers' theoretical stances as *proposals* and hence as problematisations. For example, both the notion of 'class struggle' and a realist perspective in international relations indicate proposals about how things ought to be. Hence, it becomes possible to consider these theoretical interventions as 'guides to conduct' with implicit problem representations. As Backman and Löfstrand (2022, p. 273) clarify, 'every piece of published research is in a sense a "prescriptive text"' (Chapter 1).

Such an application of WPR is useful in literature reviews and forms of meta-analysis. Primdahl, Reid and Simovska (2018) examine various contributions on the topic of critical analysis using a problematisation approach. Johansson and Larsson (2022) use WPR to produce a critical review of the research literature on identity in university physics. Byrt, Cook and Burgin (2025) use WPR to conduct a meta-analysis of 11 studies that report on interventions into intimate partner violence, including economic abuse. Puukko (2024) employs WPR to examine competing conceptualisations of 'digital rights'. Zimmerman (2025) produces a 'problematising review' of how problems are represented in whistleblowing literature.

In each of these examples, drawing on WPR, the authors critique the causal and conceptual logics that underpin specific interventions, examine unspoken or taken-for-granted assumptions and identify opportunities to consider alternative problematisations. Following similar reasoning, *concepts* such as 'class', 'social capital' or 'national borders' can be approached as proposals that invite a WPR analysis. Here I take my lead from Tanesini (1994, p. 207) who notes that concepts are *proposals* about how to proceed from here. This project is illustrated in Chapter 21, which applies WPR to the concepts of 'risk', 'crisis' and 'uncertainty' (see also Bacchi & Wilson 2026).

WPR also provides a useful stratagem for comparing problematisations across time, across 'cultures' or across geophysical 'spaces'. In relation to geophysical 'spaces', such comparisons shift attention from how specific bordered entities 'compare' on identifiable factors or 'indicators' (e.g. birth rates, GDP [Gross domestic product]) to consideration of how an issue looks quite

different in different locales. The focus throughout is on the interconnections, the relations and the movement that results in specific effects in specific 'places'. These effects are understood as contingent and open to re-thinking, rather than as 'true' or 'real' (Chapter 15).

In this vein, Uma Narayan (1997) examines contrasting problematisations of *sati*, or 'widow burning', in what she calls the 'colonialist stance' and among contemporary Indian feminist critics (Chapter 11). She points out that the 'colonialist stance' ignores past political contestation and produces generalisations about the role of 'tradition' and 'Third World Patriarchal Cultural Practices' in the practice of *sati*. Narayan argues that such generalisations are damaging to the women involved since treating 'traditions' as fixed and unchanging forecloses 'any analysis of change' (1997, pp. 59–60; Lazreg 1988 in Narayan 1997, p. 60 n 29).

### Bringing WPR to interview texts

The question of how to apply WPR to interview material is complicated by the association of interviews with a conception of the subject as having direct access to the 'truth' of experience (Bonham & Bacchi 2017; Chapter 4). As with media texts, a way needs to be found to 'go behind' the 'object' (the interview) and to consider the conditions involved in its emergence. Because interviews do not offer 'proposals' or 'guides to conduct' in the way other materials do, a modified version of WPR is required. With Jennifer Bonham, I have developed a style of interview analysis, called post-structural interview analysis (PIA), that highlights the meanings that need to be in place for certain statements *to be possible*. As with WPR, the focus is on underlying conceptual logics and taken-for-granted assumptions. In PIA, space is retained for considering how unexpected or unusual utterances can provide the basis for alternative 'realities' (Bacchi & Bonham 2016; Chapter 18).

### Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the thinking that informs a WPR approach and indicated some areas where it can be applied – specifically, to a wide range of 'entities', media texts and theoretical propositions. The goal in each case is to open commonly accepted conceptions of 'things' to a specific form of questioning that considers how these 'things' are problematised and how they become possible. This 'complexification' of taken-for-granted conditions described as 'social issues' or 'problems' creates new openings for change. To further develop this argument, Chapter 3 pursues theoretical debates around the concept 'problem', including interventions that posit 'problem' as a positive and generative concept.

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