Plugging One Text Into Another: Thinking With Theory in Qualitative Research

Alecia Y. Jackson[1] and Lisa A. Mazzei[2]

Abstract

In this article, the authors describe the work of their recently published book, *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives.* The purpose of this article is to show how they use theory to think with their data (and use data to think with theory) in order to accomplish a reading of data that is both within and against interpretivism. The authors put to use a concept picked up from Deleuze and Guattari to capture their thinking with theory in qualitative research: "plugging in." They engage "plugging in" as a machinic process that works against conventional coding in qualitative data interpretation and analysis by explaining and enacting the methodological maneuvers taken up in their thinking with theory. The authors conclude that "plugging in" positions both data and theory as machines and reveals both their supple substance and their machinic potential to interrupt and transform other machines, other data, and other knowledge projects.

Introduction

In this time of researching situations that we no longer understand, what Deleuze (1989) describes as "situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe," (p. xi) it is our hope that what we call "plugging one text into another" is a move to begin creating a language and way of thinking methodologically *and* philosophically together that is up to the task. This article is based on our recently published book, *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives.* In this book, we endeavor to explain how we think with theory in our current project that centers on a rather conventional qualitative interview study of women professors in the academy who are first-generation college graduates. Drawing on six poststructural philosophers, we "plug in" the common data set and the theorists' philosophical concepts. We read the same data across multiple theorists by plugging the theory and the data into one another. The result of "thinking with theory" across the data illustrates how knowledge is opened up and proliferated rather than foreclosed and simplified.

Working Within/Against Interpretivism

Our purpose in this article, and in the book on a larger scale, is to challenge qualitative researchers to use theory to think *with* their data (or use data to think *with* theory) in order to accomplish a reading of data that is both *within and against interpretivism*. We maintain that data interpretation and analysis does not happen via mechanistic coding, reducing data to themes, and writing up transparent narratives that do little to critique the complexities of social life; such simplistic approaches preclude dense and multilayered treatment of data. Furthermore, we challenge simplistic treatments of data and data analysis in qualitative research that, for example, beckon voices to "speak for themselves" or that reduce complicated and conflicting voices and data to thematic "chunks" that can be interpreted free of context, circumstance, other texts, theoretical concepts, and so on.[1]

We came to this project the way many methodologists come to different approaches to their data: the processes we were using were insufficient and we could no longer ignore what we had put up with before.[2] In the context of qualitative research, specifically qualitative research that concerns itself with an analysis of speech and conversations, good

[1]Department of Leadership and Educational Studies, Reich College of Education, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, USA
[2]Department of Education Studies, University of Oregon, USA

Corresponding Author:
Alecia Y. Jackson, Department of Leadership and Educational Studies, Reich College of Education, Appalachian State University, Box 32086, Boone, NC 28608-2086, USA
Email: jacksonay@appstate.edu

methodologists are taught to organize what they have "seen, heard, and read" to make sense of and represent what they have learned (Glesne, 1999, p. 130). Well-trained methodologists are carefully taught to be attentive to their field notes and transcription data in order to sort and sift, and identify the codes and categories that emerge from the data. Perhaps, we realized, we were no longer good methodologists. Perhaps we were becoming post-methodologists in the way that Patti Lather (2007) and Elizabeth St.Pierre (2009) have described.

Although the research that informs our project is an orthodox interview study in many ways, all of the poststructural theorists whom we use demand that we attempt to decenter some of the traps in humanistic qualitative inquiry: for example: data, voice, narrative, and meaning-making. In other words, our methodological aims are against interpretive imperatives that limit so-called "analysis" and inhibits the inclusion of previously unthought "data."[3] It is such a rethinking of an interpretive methodology that gets us out of the representational trap of trying to figure out what the participants in our study "mean" and helps us to avoid being seduced by the desire to create a coherent and interesting narrative that is bound by themes and patterns.

For example, interview methods in interpretive qualitative inquiry oblige researchers to "center" the subject. We as researchers ask participants to be selective in (a) their telling, (b) their interpretation of experience, (c) the representation of themselves and (d) the assumptions that they make about who that self is (during the telling). What emanates from such centering is a supposed coherent narrative that represents truth. However, our methodology-against-interpretivism disrupts the centering compulsion of traditional qualitative research; this project that we are presenting is about cutting into the center, opening it up to see what newness might be incited.

To acknowledge and accept the centeredness of interviewing practices is to work both within and against a project that is failed from the start. Yet, starting with the interview as a failed practice does not mean that we give up on the interview as method. Rather, we make very specific assumptions about data, voice, and truth. A recognition of the limits of our received practices does not mean that we reject such practices; instead, we work the limits (and limitations) of such practices. For example, we accept in our research and in the conversations with the women in this study that the data is partial, incomplete, and is always in a process of a retelling and remembering. The methodological implications of this view is that we as researchers question what we ask of data as told by participants, question what we hear and how we hear (our own privilege and authority in listening and telling), and deconstruct why one story is told and not another (Alcoff, 1991). As Cixous and Calle-Gruber (1997) wrote, "all narratives tell one story in place of another story" (p. 178). If one narrative—the one that we are plugging in to theory—has been told in place of

another, then not only "data" but also "analysis" become *something else*. This *something else* is our refusal to tell the stories of the women; that is, a refusal to create thematic patterns to represent the essence of the participants in our study.

This project was borne out of our discussions of the failures of coding within a poststructural research method, and we talked about the ways in which each of us had been using theory in our previous and current work with qualitative data. Neither of us coded data anymore, but we could not systematically describe what happened when we "thought with theory." We wanted a common "data set" to work with and so we set out to interview first-generation academic women. We could have interviewed plumbers, carpenters, PhD students, politicians, but we were interested in this particular category because first-generation is rather invisible, and we suspected that women who claimed the category would have unique and complex perspectives on their lives.

Plugging In

We use a concept that we picked up from Deleuze and Guattari to capture our thinking with theory in qualitative research. That little phrase is : "plugging in." We first encountered "plugging in" while reading Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*: " . . . When one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, *must* be plugged into in order to work" (p. 4). In our thinking with theory, we were confronted with multiple texts—or literary machines: interview data, tomes of theory, conventional qualitative research methods books that we were working against, things we had previously written, traces of data, reviewer comments, and so on *ad infinitum*. That is, we had a sense of the ceaseless variations possible in having coauthored texts that relied on a plugging in of ideas, fragments, theory, selves, sensations. And so we moved to engage "plugging in" as a *process* rather than a *concept*, something we could put to work, for as Rosi Braidotti (2002) urges in this time of change, "the challenge lies in thinking about processes, rather than concepts" (p. 1).

Conceptualizing the process of "plugging in" is the easy part. Putting it to work requires much more acumen. Plugging in to produce something new is a constant, continuous process of making and unmaking. An assemblage isn't a thing—it is the *process* of making and unmaking the thing. It is the process of arranging, organizing, fitting together. So to see it at work, we have to ask not only how things are connected but also what territory is claimed in that connection. To consider what happens in the process of "plugging in" multiple machines in this assemblage and to ask what new territories are claimed within the field of qualitative research methods.

Certainly what we envisioned for this project was not grounded in traditional coding and thematic, conventional

analysis of data, with emphasis on the production of an end or commodity. Rather we positioned our project as a production of knowledge that might emerge as a creation out of chaos (Grosz, 2008). Coding and data reduction then would be seen as commodification and the process of "plugging in" as a production of the new, *the assemblage in formation*. Imagine this production of knowledge—emerging as assemblage, creation from chaos—not as a final arrival but as the result of plugging in: an assemblage of "continuous, self-vibrating intensities" that required discarding the

> tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather, an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders, so that a book has no sequel nor the world its object nor one or several authors as its subject. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 23)

And so what are the "fields" that make up this assemblage, an assemblage that will inevitably be "plugged in" to your own machines: your own theories, data, methods, becomings, and so on. For us and our project, we connect "a field of reality" (data, theory, method) "a field of representation" (producing different knowledge, resisting stable meaning) and "a field of subjectivity" (becoming-researcher).

In the "field of reality," what did we plug in? We interviewed 10 women who were the first generation in their families to graduate from college and who then went on to earn doctorates and become academics. Our initial aim was to view the data across theoretical constructs (e.g., phenomenology, critical theory, poststructuralism). We did not set out to focus on theoretical frameworks in the abstract; rather, we wanted to engage the implication of those concepts for qualitative methodology, analysis, and representation. However, becoming more enmeshed in the "process of making the thing," we found that there was too much data to be read across the theoretical frameworks. We sought to resist an easy story, and yet to illustrate from *all* of the data was to revert to the macro and to sweeping generalizations.

And so we narrowed and focused on two transcripts for purposes of discussion: Cassandra's and Sera's. There is nothing pure about what they told us, yet we needed their "stories" to knead the dynamics among philosophy, theory, and social life to see what gets made, not understood. That is, Cassandra and Sera had already "made meaning" of their experiences in that they chose to tell them in a particular way—in their selection, what they emphasized, and what they chose not to reveal.

We assume that data is partial, incomplete, and always being retold and remembered. This is not something we have arrived at on our own, nor is it something that has come to us through the process of writing this book. In the introductory chapter to *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry*, we wrote:

> . . . the privileging of voice in traditional qualitative research assumes that voice makes present the truth and *reflects* the meaning of an experience that has already happened. This is the voice that, in traditional qualitative research, is heard and then recorded, coded, and categorized as normative and containable data. Given such traditional privileging of voice we ask: How do we go about working the limits of voice? And why should we be engaged in such a practice? How does putting privileged understandings of voice under poststructural scrutiny result in a positioning of voice as *productive* of meaning—as excessive and unstable voices that surprise us, both pleasantly and uncomfortably, with previously unarticulated and unthought meanings? We assert that in our zeal as qualitative researchers to gather data and make meaning, or to make easy sense, we often seek that voice which we can easily name, categorize and respond to. We argue that a more fertile practice, . . . is to seek the voice that escapes easy classification and that does not make easy sense. (Mazzei & Jackson, 2009, p. 4)

As we read all of the data, we were attentive to our own theoretical and methodological perspectives on voice, truth, and meaning. We sought "voices" that, even as partial and incomplete, produced multiplicities and excesses of meaning and subjectivities. So in fact, rather than seeking stability within and among the data, we were drawn to that data that seemed to be about difference rather than sameness. Given this perspective, Sera and Cassandra's data were ones we returned to over and over again, and they surprised us with the ways in which they described/inscribed their "experiences." How they seemed to understand how they were positioned—and how they positioned themselves—within a broad range of discursive fields as well as social and material conditions was more nuanced than any of the other first-generation women academics whom we interviewed. In order to work against "sameness" (or resisting the coding imperative to reach "data saturation"), we wanted to emphasize *difference within* Cassandra and Sera's language-based expressions of subjectivity, power, desire, and so on. In other words, Sera and Cassandra helped us to break open the particular identity of "first-generation academic woman" through their *difference within* the category. Certainly, we can "describe" their difference in categorical ways: Cassandra is Black, a full professor, near retirement, physically disabled due to mobility problems, and works in the social sciences. Sera is White, an early-career assistant professor, a single mother, and works in the humanities. Though they grew up in opposite geographical and cultural ends of the United States, and had very different childhood experiences, their trajectories to academia are quite similar. Yet we do not treat these categorical similarities and differences as comparative, correlational, or causal;

to do so would remain entrenched in liberal humanist identity-work of centering and stabilizing the subject in conventional qualitative research. Rather, we noticed that particularly in Cassandra and Sera's data, they expressed multiplicity, ambiguity, and incoherent subjectivity.

We read Sera's and Cassandra's interview-transcripts-positioned-as-partial-and-incomplete over and over, keeping in mind the theoretical constructs that initiated our project, those constructs that we had encountered as graduate students and that continued to inform our scholarly work (and our nonacademic lives) over the last 10 to 15 years. Therefore, as we read the data, the theory was in our selves, but something different happened in the moments of plugging in. We characterize this reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory as a moment of plugging in, of entering the assemblage, of making new connectives. We began to realize how plugging in creates a different relationship among texts: they *constitute* one another and in doing so create something new.

This "something new" was how the larger theoretical frameworks dissolved and what sprouted in the assemblage of our thinking were *people, or theorists.* On some level we could say that Sera constituted Derrida, who constituted Cassandra, who constituted Foucault, who constituted Spivak, and so on. They make each other in the plugging in and create new ways of thinking about *both theory and data.* Articulation is about making new combinations to create new identities.

The theorists who rhizomatically emerged were Derrida, Spivak, Foucault, Butler, Deleuze, and Barad. Therefore, in this new assemblage of texts, we found that just as we needed to hone in on specific data episodes, we learned that rather instead of theoretical frameworks (e.g., critical theory, poststructrualism) we needed to focus more specifically on theorists, and not just on theorists, but *a* specific concept from the theorists who made up part of the assemblage (e.g., deconstruction, marginality, power/knowledge). Perhaps these particular theorists bubbled up for us because in our previous work we have positioned them as productive provocation: theorists who open up thought rather than foreclose it. Further, just as we narrowed our focus on the data, we grasped onto these concepts as they were articulated in a certain moment and time in a philosopher's *oeuvre.* We recognize that, for example, Foucault's view of the subject modified as he expanded and deepened his own thinking. So even as we put concepts to work in order to emphasize the processes of social, cultural, and material life and ways of knowing/being, we are careful to locate both theory *and* data.

Therefore, what "plugging in" requires from a methodological perspective is not limited to merely an intimacy with *both* the data and the theory, nor simply a keen attentiveness to the particularities and situatedness of each. Rather we believe that "plugging in" involves at least three maneuvers:

1. putting philosophical concepts to work via disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how they *constitute or make one another*;

2. being deliberate and transparent in what analytical questions are made possible by a specific theoretical concept (e.g., deconstruction or performativity) and how the questions that are used to think with *emerged in the middle* of "plugging in;" and

3. working the same "data chunks" repeatedly to "deform [them], to make [them] groan and protest" (Foucault, 1980, p. 22-23) with an overabundance of meaning, which in turn not only creates new knowledge but also shows the *suppleness of each when plugged in.*

And so, we worked with unstable subjects and concepts-on-the-move that would intervene in a process to diffract, rather than foreclose, thought. We "plug in" to help extend a thinking at the limit.[4] This then is at least one of our aims, a thinking at the limit of our ability to know as made possible by these theorists and their concepts at work, these data, and their excesses.

The Threshold

Enter the threshold. In architecture, a threshold is in the middle of things. It exists as a passageway. A threshold has no function, purpose, or meaning until it is connected to other spaces. That is, a threshold does not become a passageway until it is attached to other things different from itself. Thresholds contain both entries and exits; they are both/and. A single threshold can be not only an entryway, but also an exit; therefore, the structure itself is not quite as linear and definitive as one might think. In other terms, thresholds can denote excess, such as in having a low threshold for pain. The excess of a threshold is the space in which something else occurs: a response, an effect. Once you exceed the threshold, something new happens.

We offer the figuration of the threshold as a way to situate our "plugging in," or how we put the data and theory to work in the threshold to create new analytical questions. In the space of the threshold, we became aware of how theory and data constitute or make one another—and how, in the threshold, the divisions among and definitions of theory and data collapse. In our project, we were surrounded by texts: the data, the theory, our memories of the interview process, our shifty selves as researchers, our current interactions with some of the research participants, our own personal and professional knowledge of being women academics (one of us as first-generation), and so on. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote, "Machines make thought itself nomadic" (p. 24); therefore, all of these aforementioned texts/literary machines, when plugged in while in the

threshold, produced something new, something different from mere themes and patterns generated by coding.

At the very most we can claim a ground that shifted under our feet as we proceeded through the threshold. We can go to Derrida (1972): "Determined and dated, this is a reading of the work in which I find myself engaged: which therefore is no more my own than it remains arrested here. This too is a situation to be read . . . " (p. vii). Our thinking with theory activity can be considered determined and dated. Determined and dated by a particular task that is at once something we do in the present and infiltrated by traces of past and future readings. Derrida uses an interesting word choice: arrested. Arrested, as a signifier, in its plenitude explodes into multiple meanings if we follow it along some chain of signification: arrest—seize—stop—halt—*to make a brief visit*. Arrest does not simply mean "seize" in its totality, for if we follow the trace, the word is opened up to imply temporality. Thinking with theory as arrested in the threshold, then, can signify *temporary meaning that can escape and transform at any moment*—at moments after more reading, for example (which is part of the shifting ground of the threshold).

We noticed a genealogical connection of our movement from one theorist to the next in ways that expand/stretch/distort previous ways of knowing. Derrida helped us account for the silence as trace and as a purposeful and productive way to think about what else participants might be saying in the gap. In thinking voice and silence, Deleuze extended our thinking by complicating the production of silence in an interrogation of what was produced and what was producing what we name a desiring silence. Similarly, a movement to Barad and her theory of intra-action draws on the immanence and vitalism that Deleuze presents in his concepts toward an enactment of processes of becoming that shift to a focus on ontology. Foucault offers a view of power as relational and productive (as opposed to always prohibitive), and Spivak relies on Foucault's power/knowledge combination to posit her perspectives of marginality in the "teaching machine." Spivak takes up Foucault to a point and then brings in Derrida to deconstruct how the teaching machine secures its center by defining marginality in the academy. Butler, too, considers Foucauldian power relations as productive of a performative subjectivity. Continuing on this genealogical bent, Barad draws heavily on the work of Foucault and Butler but theorizes the relationship between the material and the discursive to what she terms a posthumanist performativity.

So it is in this way that we approached our thinking with theory. The data were not centered or stabilized but used as brief stopping points and continually transformed, and exceeded, as we used theory to turn the data into something different, and we used data to push theory to its limit. For example, we "read" the same excerpt of data from Cassandra, one of the participants in our interview study, with a power/knowledge reading alongside Foucault and with a posthumanist performative stance alongside Barad. In the reading with Foucault, the questions that emerged explored how power relations are endowed "with processes which are more or less adjusted to the situation" (Foucault, 2000, p. 224). That is, power relations are specific and local to subjects who are in mutual relations with one another. In thinking with Barad, she taught us to be aware of a diffractive reading that emphasizes not how discourses function to produce power relations, but how power relations materialize in the intra-action between/with the material and the discursive.

It is impossible for us to treat our thinking with theory as a full answer because it gets its very identity from what is excluded: we included only a small range of theories and arrested a specific concept, rather than a body of work, from each theorist. What is central is at the expense of what is marginal (we follow Derrida in this regard: the center always conceals something). We are not merely using the vocabulary of Foucault (power) or Spivak (marginality) or Deleuze (desire) and we resist *forcing* the concepts into our thinking of data. Rather, we are *doing* and *using* the vocabulary and concepts as we push research and data and theory to its exhaustion in order to produce knowledge differently; in this way, we focus on the constitutive and generative aspects of texts. By refusing a closed system for fixed meaning (i.e., transferable patterns and themes generated from coding data with reductive language) we engage the threshold as site of transformation.

To transform both theory and data and to keep meaning on the move in the threshold, we crafted a set of analytical questions that we would pursue with the help of each theorist—an image that we experienced as having Butler or Derrida or Spivak reading over our shoulder and asking a series of questions. Again, these are not *the* questions or concepts (any more than first-generation-academic-women is *the* data), but we chose concepts that would help us extend our thinking beyond an easy sense. Rather than approaching the data in search of patterns or themes (which we will come back to in a bit) we approached the data with the analytical questions informed by the key concepts that we plugged into the data and in turn, back into the theory.

Folding and Flattening

We characterize our thinking with theory as making three moves:

1. disrupting the theory/practice binary by decentering each and instead showing how they *constitute or make one another*;
2. allowing analytical questions that are used to think with to *emerge in the middle* of "plugging in;" and
3. showing the *suppleness of both theory and data when plugged in.* So what we have practiced is not an attention to one of the various poles in a myriad

of binaries—subject/object; data/theory; researcher/researched—but a flattening and attentiveness to how each constitutes the other and how each, as supple, sprout as something new in the threshold. Such practice incites the provocations to be found in a plugging of theory into data into theory. It also evokes a folding— not just of data into theory and vice versa—but also of ourselves as researchers into the texts and into the theoretical threshold.

In our plugging of data into theory into data, we did not simply flatten the poles of the binary, but also we began to reconsider the implications of such flattening in this enterprise called qualitative research. Can there be useful knowledge if the traditional categories no longer hold? Consider, for example, the subject. As we practiced folding data, our participants, theorists and their concepts, and ourselves into a threshold, we were continually confronted with the subject. Judith Butler (2005) wrote, "In speaking the 'I,' I undergo something of what cannot be captured or assimilated by the 'I,' since I always arrive too late to myself" (p. 79). If the "I" of the participant is always becoming in the process of telling, so too the "I" of the researcher is always becoming in the process of researching, listening, and writing. What might constitute a retelling and an approach to research that displaces many of the normalizing features of data stories and the subject in qualitative inquiry? In our process of flattening and folding, we do not seek more and more reflexivity that reveals more and more about the researcher's ways of knowing. We seek to unsettle the "I" of both the researcher and researched who is a static and singular subject.

Do we still believe in the subject? Yes, and no. We do not adhere to the liberal humanist subject that is an individual person or self. We do try to understand the historical constitution of subjectivity and the entangled production of agency that occurs in the process of intra-action as described by Karen Barad. Barad (2007) discusses the "entangled state of agencies" (pp. 22-23) that exceed traditional notions of how we conceive of agency, subjectivity, and the individual. For Barad (2007), "agency is an enactment, not something that someone or something has" (p. 235). Susan Hekman further develops the idea of the subject in what she terms the "'I' of the mangle:"

> The 'I' is a mangle composed of multiple elements. The social scripts defining subjecthood are a key aspect of that mangle. But the mangle also encompasses a body that is sexed and raced, a body that is located at a particular place in the social hierarchy, and a body/subject that has had a range of experiences. The result may be a subject that fits neatly into the definition of subject the social scripts circumscribe. Or the result may be an "I" who cannot find a

script that fits, that resists the scripts available to her/him. In all cases, however, there is no single causal factor determining the subject; the elements of subjectivity intra-act in a complex web. (p. 100-1)

Our aim here is not to recite a manifesto, but instead to enact a process of data/theory/writing that is at once and at the same time using, producing, and questioning the practices that are and have been available to us. To embrace, not avoid, the methodological "hot-spots " where difficult situations may exist or erupt. Maggie MacLure (2010) alerts us that these hot spots may have much more to teach us than the "static connections that we often assume between self and other, researcher and researched." Karen Barad (1999) has this to say:

> The dichotomized positions of realism and social constructivism—which presume a subject/object dichotomy—can acknowledge the situated/constructed character of only one of the poles of the dualism at a time. Realists do not deny that subjects are materially situated; constructivists insist upon the socially or discursively constructed character of objects. Neither recognizes their mutually constitutive "intra-action." (p. 2)

We are purposeful in our choice of folding and flattening to describe our methodological practice that rejects an interpretivist stance and that embraces the mutually constitutive nature of which Barad writes. The "intra-action" that characterized our process was made of reconsidering the mutual constitution of meaning as happening in-between researcher/researched; data/theory; and inside/outside. The data and theory are folded into one another whereby this process results in a "new inside of this outside" (Deleuze, 1986/1988, p. 97) that occurs in the threshold as described above. We insert ourselves as researchers into the data in a process that Karin Hultman and Hillevi Lenz Taguchi (2010) describe as a flattening.

Part of the work of flattening is a move away from a stance toward coding that situates the researcher at a distance from the data. In our view, coding concerns itself with the macro in a move that was at some levels predictable, and certainly did not produce new knowledge. For instance, we could present the following so-called major themes and patterns in a writing up of the findings which will not come as a surprise to many, especially those who are women in the academy:

1. Imposter syndrome
2. Continuing male privilege (and ignorance of such on the part of many male colleagues)
3. Double standards in the treatment of men and women
4. The importance of mentoring

These themes are not interesting, nor particularly new, not to us anyway. Coding takes us back to what is known, not only to the experience of our participants but also to our own experience as well; it also disallows a repetition that results in the production of the new, a production of different knowledge. A focus on the macro produced by the codes might cause us to miss the texture, the contradictions, the tensions, and entangled becomings produced in the mangle as described by Susan Hekman. A focus on the macro pulls us *out* of the threshold—that dynamic space that is always becoming—and locks us into more of a territorialized place of fixed, recognizable meaning. The micro of the folding that we attempt produces a "dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations" (Barad, 2007, p. 224).

In a return to the threshold, a couple of our analytical questions may be helpful to illustrate the difference between "patterns" that we mention above, and the type of thinking "in the mangle" that the micro produces.

For example, Foucault would have us ask, "How do power/ knowledge relations and practices produce Cassandra's and Sera's multiple subjectivities as they venture into the academy as first-generation professors?" We know from the data that male privilege continues in the academy, but how are these women recognizable by the disciplinary structures (both material and discursive) that they and their male colleagues inhabit?

We know from the data that double standards for men and women continue, but Derrida would have us look for examples of both when and how deconstruction happens by the very fact that these women are in the academy and how this happening disrupts the institutional structures that seek fixity. How do we understand deconstruction then as the event that happens in the mangle of the "I" that is a complex web of factors? These questions and the others we take up as prompted by the philosophers we are thinking with produced the possibility of the irruptive emergence of a new concept, rather than a reproduction of what is known.

The move away from the macro of coding and into the threshold is what happens when we seek to move away from patterns for the purpose of changing our relationship to theory and data. To plug data and theory into one another in the threshold is to position ourselves as researchers otherwise than merely always already subject ready to capture and code the experiences of our participants and their material conditions as always already object. Such a practice of reading diffractively means that we try to fold these texts into one another in a move that flattens our relationship to the participants, the theory, and the data.

How Does it Work?

To further illustrate how the plugging in "works" and what it produces, we would like to present two of our analytic questions and then illustrate with a brief data excerpt.

Derrida's deconstruction. Our past encounters with Derrida caused us to reject the signifiers that we rely on as researchers— experience, truth, voice, data. With Derrida, we stay close to the narratives to examine what is produced in the deconstructive moment—the jarring and excessive nature of events that do not fit neatly into categories, nor that capture an experience, but that rupture structures and received notions of the academy. Hence, the analytic question that Derrida prompts is: *How does the presence of Sera and Cassandra in the academy make visible the excesses of race, class, and gender in the event that is deconstruction?* We plug the narratives of Sera and Cassandra into our thinking of deconstruction as the event in an attempt to glimpse the irruptive nature of deconstruction and its effects on these women, their family members, and colleagues in the academy. Places of irruption that tear the fabric of what is supposed to be—where language is strained, where meaning is missed, where destabilization occurs, and where excess produces a snagging that resists closure. That is, deconstruction as *always already* happening. There are other ways that we might have approached deconstruction; however, for this reading, we are attempting to stay close to deconstruction as the event—not a reading that is *about* the event but the *actual happening* that jars things and pushes them off balance just enough to keep things moving, thus enabling transformation.

To talk about deconstruction as destabilizing is to approach the data in ways that prevent a closure of meaning. It is an unsettling, off kilter reading/rending/rendering that allows that which is threatening to the order and stability of the hierarchy to emerge. Derrida writes that "because it [deconstruction] destabilizes the conditions of possibility of objectivity, of the relation to the object, of everything that constitutes an assured subjectivity . . . deconstruction proves the impossibility of closure, of totality, of a system or discourse of or on method" (Malabou & Derrida, 2004, p. 226). What is it about deconstruction as the event that prevents closure? In our thinking with Derrida and plugging our deconstructive questions into the narratives, how might we seek that which is in the cracks, gaps, the aporias that destabilize and open the possibility for change in the following account by Cassandra?

I had been brought here to be a mentor to the African American students and to create courses and programs and so forth to talk about diversity, and so some of the white students felt that I was paying too much attention to the black students and so they wrote these long, very critical letters of me that accused me of reverse discrimination and that I was showing favoritism to the black students because they would come in to my office.

My office is small now, but it was even smaller then. And they [black students] would be sitting all on the floor and everything and we just hung out together.

I was a mother figure. I knew how to work with those students and I knew that [they] need a lot of personal attention. Now there was never a time when I didn't give the same amount of attention to any white student who wanted it.

My door was open and, but [the white students],—that was an accusation, [that it wasn't]—it became so huge that it went all the way up through the provost's office and I found myself spending a lot of time writing letters of rebuttal and that kind of thing and eventually the university came up with some funding and sent several of us to a conference in Atlanta on racial issues to find solutions to the problem.

There are many moments or possibilities for destabilizing in the account given above. We cannot know the long-term effect on the other faculty and administrators, but we can know that this "event" of student protest was not something that could be ignored. As a result of the student complaints and Cassandra's response, the university decided that the issue was important enough (or embarrassing enough) that some response (other than a silent one) was necessary. When Cassandra said, "I still quote some of the stuff to this day" that came out of the Atlanta conference on racial issues that she attended with colleagues, it serves as an affirmation of what she was already doing. We can't know, but perhaps this event that leads to being sent to the conference produces something new in the form of conversations with students and colleagues—changed pedagogy, or policy discussions. The center is destabilized and her "marginal" practices for mentoring minority students are validated. Although we are not so naïve as to assume that radical change might occur given one such instance, we look to deconstruction as *one* way to understand the possibility of something other than what has always been. We look for the creation of a deconstructive space in the academy that fosters the destabilizing moment. According to Derrida (1997),

That is what deconstruction is made of: not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break. The condition of this performative success, which is never guaranteed, is the alliance of these to newness. (p. 6)

Cassandra and the others still engage in a literate upholding of tradition, and the institution does not fundamentally change, but the structures within do. By her very presence she continues to destabilize and permit/allow the possibility of deconstruction.

Barad's intra-activity. It is the work of Karen Barad and others named as "new materialists" or "material feminists"

that we use to ask how our intra-action with other bodies (both human and nonhuman) produce subjectivities and performative enactments not previously thought. We see the work of Karen Barad as an enactment of the ontological shift made by Deleuze in a philosophy of immanence. This is to think of *knowing in being* that is not merely a reinsertion of the material, nor a privileging of the material, but a shaking up of the privileging of the discursive in postmodern thought without a recentering of the material that preceded the linguistic turn. This fundamental break presented by Barad helps us "fashion an approach that brings the material back in without rejecting the legitimate insights of the linguistic turn" (Hekman, 2010, p. 7). Such fashioning prompts the question: *How do Cassandra and Sera intra-act with the materiality of their world in ways that produce different becomings?*

Karen Barad (2007) discusses the "entangled state of agencies" that exceed the traditional notions of how we conceive of agency, subjectivity, and the individual (pp. 22-23). For Barad (2007), "agency is an enactment, not something that someone or something *has*" (p. 235, emphasis ours). Such entanglements require an "analysis that enables us to theorize the social and the natural together;" (Barad, 2007, p. 25) that is, in theorizing the social and natural together, our research participants intra-act with the matter of their worlds in ways in which they are transformed by matter and vice versa. How then might we take into account, in our reading of Cassandra's narrative through a materialist becoming, "the fact that the forces at work in the materialization of bodies are not only social and the bodies produced are not all human?" (Barad, 2007, p. 225).

Returning to the same data excerpt and in thinking this data with Barad, we shift our focus away from Cassandra and the students as making choices or acting on and being acted on. We look for how the forces of offices and bodies work together, in a way that moves us away from what is *told* by Cassandra toward what is *produced* in this intra-action. Cassandra described her office as "small now, but . . . even smaller then." This office, as a force producing a materialization of bodies, creates an intimate (cramped) space that welcomes (deters) students and that invites a closeness (repulsion) of bodies "sitting on the floor" and hanging out together. This material of the office produces a social environment of refuge and intimacy for the Black students who are in the minority at Regional State University. It creates a belonging space where for a brief moment, they are on the inside looking out, rather than vice versa. These Black students, "sitting on the floor" are able to refuse constraining norms about power and prestige and in turn produce Cassandra differently as a mentor. This office, this material force, also produces Cassandra in a way that shifts her identity from one who students "thought I didn't even know what was in the textbook," as in an earlier

data excerpt to one who, "provides a lot of personal attention."

This office, this material force, is not the only force producing intra-actions. The fact that the White students experience this space as exclusionary and accuse Cassandra of "reverse discrimination" is an example of how the forces, both human and not human, material and otherwise, intra-act to produce different becomings. We become aware of the constraints produced in the confines of an office that is seen/experienced as safe space for the Black students but exclusionary space for the White students. In this entangled state of agencies, we see that what is produced by the intra-actions renders Cassandra as welcoming for the Black students and as a conundrum for the White students who accuse her of reverse discrimination.

We undertake the above analysis with Barad for the purpose of reassessing how we understand social phenomena and how we unnaturally divide the world into categories that include the "social" and the "natural." The office is both social and natural, material and discursive. The question is not *why* does this happen, but *how* does this happen? The implications for how we think data differently given this entangled state is to move away from thinking the interview and what is "told" discursively toward a thinking of the interview and what is "told" as discursive, as material, as discursive *and* material, as material<->discursive, and as constituted *between* the discursive and the material in a posthumanist becoming.

The Necessity of Theory

We have tried to illustrate our reliance on theory to shake us out of the complacency of seeing/hearing/thinking as we always have, or might have, or will have. We take seriously the following quote from Derrida that speaks to the necessity of theory in qualitative research.

> There should be philosophy across the borders, not only in philosophy proper, but in other fields, such as law, medicine, and so forth. . . . We should have philosophers trained as philosophers as rigorously as possible, and at the same time audacious philosophers who cross the borders and discover new connections, new fields, not only interdisciplinary researche[r]s but themes that are not even interdisciplinary. (Derrida, 1997, p. 7)

In our work both individual and collaborative, we use theory to intervene in a process that serves to diffract meaning, rather than foreclose meaning, to "earn our theory" (Lather, 2010). We are not claiming to be audacious philosophers, but what we are claiming is the possibility of new questions and different ways of thinking research and data after coding in a process of plugging

one text into another. To think with theory is not only useful, *but essential*, for without theory we have no way to think otherwise. We continue this maddening, frustrating, exhilarating practice so as not to reproduce what we already think, know, and experience.

Theory is necessary in our work because it keeps the processes of "knowing" and "being" in the middle of things, in a state of in-between-ness, as always becoming. The threshold incites change, movement, and transformation of analytical work in qualitative inquiry. For a moment, in the threshold where theory and data and method come together, everything and everyone become something else. The in-between-ness of the threshold offers up new ways to think about difference, transformation, and social structures. For qualitative researchers, such a mapping of difference allows multiple entries and exits, encouraging us to avoid traps of tracing data that can lead us to generalities, themes, and patterns.

Deleuze & Guattari (1987) wrote, 'When one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, *must* be plugged into in order to work' (p. 4). Claire Colebrook (2002) offers an example of machines "plugging in" in order to work differently. The bicycle is a machine that does not work or have a particular meaning or use until it connects up with another machine. When it connects up with a cyclist, it becomes a vehicle; when is placed in a gallery, it becomes artwork. Similarly, our use of theory has been to see how machines "work" when they are plugged into one another.

In the threshold, both data and theory flow along the same connectives; they are both little machines. They are both productive forces in their potential for difference: in traditional form, qualitative interview data has been treated as pure, foundational, truth-as-presence. Yet in the threshold, data and theory stay on the move, seeking connectives and assemblages to interrupt (and to be interrupted). In our work with theory, data's ontological journey depends on the joining and contamination of theory in order to *become.* And yet data-as-machine or theory-as-machine can be connected to another assemblage to *become* again. Furthermore, Massumi (1992) warns that becoming "cannot be adequately described. If it could, it would already be what it is becoming, in which case it wouldn't be becoming at all" (p. 103). What Massumi explains here is that work in the threshold cannot be predicted or prescribed *in advance*; that is, we cannot neatly fit data into predetermined or even emergent grounded-theory type themes and patterns. Nor can we prescribe method, or what thinking with theory is.

Our work with theory is necessary because it teaches us that both data and theory, as machines, have a supple substance, and that what matters more than certainty, accuracy, and authenticity are the relations, affects, and machinic potential to interrupt and transform other machines, other

data, other knowledge projects, and so on. Data and theory and method in the threshold never stand alone, isolated and elevated; rather, they keep things on the move, keep things *becoming.* The threshold of theory reminds us that there is radical possibility in the unfinalized.

Authors' Note

This article is based on Chapter 1 of our recently published book, Jackson, A. Y. and Mazzei, L. A. (2012). *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives.* London, UK: Routledge.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

Notes

1. See *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry*, edited by Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei (London: Routledge, 2009).

2. In the book, *Dialogues II* by Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, it is written that "it is rather when everything is going well, or everything goes better on the other line, that the crack happens on this new line—secret, imperceptible, marking a threshold of lowered resistance, or the rise of a threshold of exigency: you can no longer stand what you put up with before, even yesterday."(pp. 126).

3. See for example Elizabeth A. St.Pierre, "Methodology in the Fold and the Irruption of Transgressive Data." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 10, No. 2 (1997) and Lisa A. Mazzei, *Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research* (New York: Peter Lang 2007).

4. In *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, John Caputo (1986) writes of Heidegger as "a thinker whose thinking is conducted at the limits of philosophy" (p. 1). Throughout the book, Caputo discusses Heidegger's thinking "post philosophy," as he describes Heidegger as wanting to shake loose of Western philosophy in order "to overcome philosophy and take up the task of thought" (p. 266). Heidegger speaks of the end of philosophy as an end to the rationalities and strictures that limit thought. What he pursues is a transgression of these limits and strictures that open him to the beginning of thought, or rather, toward the beginning of thought not previously possible because it was outside or beyond the permissible, seeable, hearable limits.

References

Alcoff, L. (1991). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique 20*, 5-33.

Barad, K. (1999). Agential realism: Feminist interventions in understanding scientific practices. In M. Biagioli (Ed.), *The science studies reader* (pp. 1-11). New York, NY: Routledge.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of meaning*. Durham, UK: Duke University Press.

Braidotti, R. (2002). *Metamorphoses: Toward a materialist theory of becoming*. Malden, MA: Polity.

Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Cixous, H., & Calle-Gruber, M. (1997). *Helene Cixous rootprints: Memory and life writing*. (E. Prenowitz, Trans.). London, UK: Routledge.

Colebrook, C. (2002). *Gilles Deleuze*. London, UK: Routledge.

Deleuze, G. (1986/1988). *Foucault*. (S. Hand, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. (B. Massumi, Trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, G., & Parnet, C. (1987). *Dialogues II*. (H. Tomlinson & B. Habberjam, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J. (1972/1981). *Positions*. (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J. (1997). *Deconstruction in a nutshell: A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. (J. Caputo, Ed.). New York, NY: Fordham University Press.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings: 1972-1977*. (C. Gordon, Ed.; L. Marshall, C. Gordon, J. Mepham, & K. Soper, Trans.). New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (2000). *Power*. (P. Rabinow, Ed.; R. Hurley, Trans.). *Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Volume III. New York, NY: The New Press.

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers* (2nd ed). New York, NY: Longman.

Grosz, E. (2008). *Chaos, territory, art: Deleuze and the framing of the earth*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Hekman, S. (2010). *The material of knowledge: Feminist disclosures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hultman, K., & Lenz Taguchi, H. (2010). Challenging anthropocentric analysis of visual data: A relational materialist methodological approach to educational research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *23*, 525-542.

Lather, P. (2007). *Getting lost: Feminist efforts toward a double(d) science*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lather, P. (2010, July). *The state of qualitative inquiry: Methodology 2-1*. Keynote presented at the Summer Institute in

Qualitative Research, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK.

MacLure, M. (2010, December). *Qualitative inquiry: Where are the ruins?* Keynote presentation to the New Zealand Association for Research in Education Conference, University of Auckland.

Malabou, C., & Derrida, J. (2004). *Counterpath: Traveling with Jacques Derrida*. (D. Wills, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Massumi, B. (1992). *A user's guide to capitalism and schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Mazzei, L. A., & Jackson, A. Y. (2009). Introduction: The limit of voice. In A. Y. Jackson & L. A. Mazzei (Eds.), *Voice in qualitative inquiry* (pp. 1-13). London, UK: Routledge.

St.Pierre, E. A. (2009). Afterword: Decentering voice in qualitative inquiry. In A. Y. Jackson & L. A. Mazzei (Eds.), *Voice in qualitative inquiry* (pp. 221-236). London, UK: Routledge.

Bios

Alecia Y. Jackson is an associate professor at the Department of Leadership and Educational Studies, Reich College of Education, Appalachian State University, USA. She is coauthor with Lisa A. Mazzei of *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research* (Routledge), and coeditor with Lisa A. Mazzei of *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry* (Routledge).

Lisa A. Mazzei is an associate professor, Department of Education Studies, University of Oregon, USA. She is also visiting research fellow at the Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. She is coauthor with Alecia Y. Jackson of *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research* (Routledge), coeditor with Alecia Y. Jackson of *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry* (Routledge), and author of *Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research* (Peter Lang).