

WAYS OF PERCEPTION BUILD UP RESEARCH

— **Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research**

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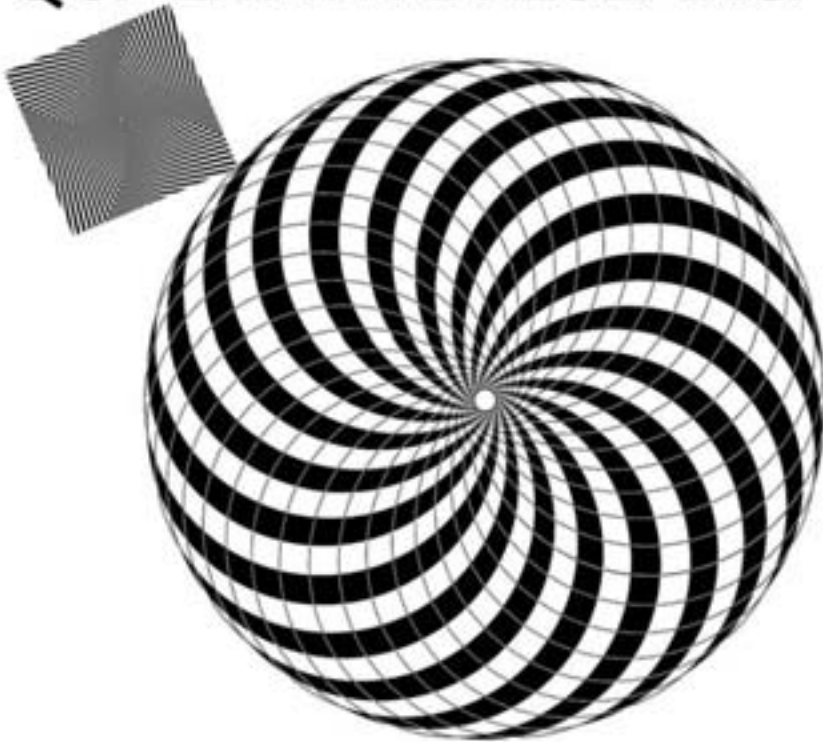
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THINKING WITH THEORY IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



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Abstract: The article underlines the main idea of the book *Thinking with theory in qualitative research*: considering the information from multiple perspectives. In general, matters of research are exactly the situations that we do not understand. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes them as situations to whom we do not know how to react, unfolding in spaces that we do not know how to describe. The attempt to think methodologically and philosophically, at the same time, might help us, as the authors of the discussed book propose. The authors themselves used the qualitative method of interview to demonstrate the way in which the different philosophical patterns may be applied.

Keywords: Alecia Youngblood Jackson, Lisa A. Mazzei, qualitative research, process, methodology, multiple perspectives, intertextuality.

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Research is usually difficult because of the vastity of the domain, because of the various possibilities that may be comprised into one specific theme. The foundation of any research is an elaborate thinking process that settles the steps which have to be taken in order to cover the area of interest and travel towards some relevant conclusions. This vital process of thinking is described in the book *Thinking with theory in qualitative research*, written by Alecia Youngblood Jackson & Lisa A. Mazzei. Alecia Jackson holds a PhD in Language Education from The University of Georgia, where she also obtained a Women's Studies Graduate Certificate and a Qualitative Studies Graduate Certificate. She teaches educational research at the master's and doctoral levels in the College of Education at Appalachian State University. Lisa A. Mazzei began her career at Ohio Dominican University where she spent 10 years teaching and advising pre-service teacher candidates. She joined the faculty at the University of Oregon in 2012 where she teaches Curriculum Theory at both the Undergraduate and Doctoral levels. Professor Mazzei is known for her work in the field of qualitative methodology where she has published three books (one award winning) and numerous articles and book chapters. She is a methodological innovator in posthuman inquiry and her work is widely read and cited across disciplines such as education, psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, business and medicine.

— This specific book teaches us how to use different philosophical concepts in our research activity, in order to achieve profundity and stability. These philosophical concepts are:

- The deconstructivism of Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004)
- The postcolonial marginality of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942 – present)
- The power/knowledge of Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984)
- The performativity of Judith Butler (1956 – present)
- The desire of Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995)

— The intra-activity matter of Karen Barad (1956 – present)

The premises of the book are focused on considering the information from multiple perspectives. In general, matters of research are exactly the situations that we do not understand. The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes them as situations to whom we do not know how to react, unfolding in spaces that we do not know how to describe. The attempt to think methodologically and philosophically, at the same time, might help us, as the authors of the discussed book propose. The authors themselves used the qualitative method of interview to demonstrate the way in which the different philosophical patterns may be applied. The subjects that were interviewed were asked to be as conscious and as selective as possible regarding their answers, to try to separate their own interpretation, their suppositions from the effective experience in order to get very close to what is considered to be the truth.

The hypothesis of the research was: In which way is the first generation of women who graduated university and remained in this field seen by its family, community circle, university colleagues and eventually by the students? Ten women were interviewed. Only two cases are presented in this book and viewed through each pattern of philosophical thinking named above. Cassandra – the oldest child of an Afro-American family with her parents being farmers and Sera – having alcoholic parents. Each chapter starts with presenting the main philosophical concepts of one specific author and then continues with applying them on the information obtained from the two subjects. The transmutation of an abstract thinking on a concrete form is a captivating action that keeps the curiosity and attention of a specialized reader at high levels.

The first chapter is more like an introductory one which underlines the importance of intertextuality, of plugging one text into another, as the authors describe this term – a continuous creating and de-creating, arranging, organizing, bringing together. During our research we need to answer the question of how vast is the territory covered by this web of connections. A research is quite a 3D film composed of the reality field, the field of representation (the book, the graphics), the field of subjectivity (the author). In building this 3D image the decisions on what roads are closed and which elements start to develop roots need to be taken.

The second chapter concentrates on the ideas of the Algerian-French philosopher Jacques Derrida who explains the importance of the gap between a word that designates something and the real object itself that is named through that specific word. Not a total similarity, but in fact the hole between the two makes a language functional. The sign is a structure of difference which shows both the presence and the absence. That leads to the work technique of leaving open-sight of the words that have been cut off, of showing the entire process – in

fact the well-known making-of from the film industry and rapidly extending into many other domains. The obstacles lead to a shift of perspective. Many small shifts of perspective build the whole.

The third chapter dedicated to the Indian literary critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and named *Thinking with marginality* draws the attention on the fact that everything that situates in center usually hides something that it has been suppressed before. For example, Cassandra is perceived through her marginality, her *blackness* (the term used in the book) that is desired to be in center from time to time by the ones who are always in the center. That happens when different important meetings between universities or with other institutions need a minority representative. *The center* wants to maintain its power/knowledge and it cannot define itself if not through the relationships with the marginality. That is why Cassandra was hired as a 'token' (at least this is the way she felt). The fall of the marginality pushes the start button of collision between the center and the edge. Moreover, the situation such as the one of Cassandra demonstrates that the center contains a margin and the margin a center. A margin lives in the center as a margin, but in the margin as a center. (Cassandra is an example for her community, a center of interest for her old neighbours).

In the fourth chapter the attention goes to the term of power in the way the French philosopher Michel Foucault proposes to be understood. He thinks that the power is not the root of any action, it does not explain everything, but, in fact, the power needs to be explained. The power lies in the relation between truth and knowledge and the conditions in which different levels of knowledge become the truth we live in, our reality. That is why knowledge is not fix, but something that changes and transforms also the surroundings, moving the center of gravity (of power) from one hand to another. People are vehicles of power; they make it exist even if they do not own it. That is why, in many cases, the effects of an action overrun the expectations.

The American philosopher Judith Butler sees the language that we speak as a structure that constrains us. We cannot tell more than what the language we speak lets us, to the extent that we do not speak, we are spoken. The structuralism believes that the language does not reflect the reality, but it produces it. This aspect leads also to the social roles – the behaviour determined by the environment which influences our level of performativity. The repetition creates the self, but the self is never complete, nuances are added each day.

Gilles Deleuze talks about desire and the force of intensities. You tend to mute some desires in order to fit a specific place. A person tries to be traditionalistic and modernist at the same time and this attempt tears her/him apart. Similar does the multitude of other desires. The silence of desires gives the illusion of

similarity. In the cases of the two women, Cassandra and Sera, the dumbing of desires means that in the university they do not talk about their origin, in their families they do not remind every single time that they have PhDs and teach in an important university. Silence protects your image. Apart from your own personal desires, many of them are unconsciously born from the collectivity.

The previous idea leads in the seventh chapter to the perspective of the American theorist Karen Barad that says the intentionality does not depend on individualities, but on groups of people, including historical contexts and financial conditions.

Through the entire book, the cases of Cassandra and Sera are connected to the fact that they are women, that they come from a marginal environment, that they are firstly doubted and do not know to maintain their authority in front of the students. They both fought with a lack of trust in themselves and consequently from the others.

One conclusion of the discussed book is that thinking a specific theme through theory may lead to revelations, although it is hard to separate each theory, because the concepts are very much intertwined. *‘Thinking is not something we do; thinking happens to us, from without. There is a necessity to thinking, for the event of thought lies beyond the autonomy of choice. Thinking happens.’* (Claire Colebrook, Gilles Deleuze, London: Routledge, 2002).