

Interview, Involvement, and the Personal

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Our Frame

Responding to Chiseri-Strater's claim that feminist researchers must "turn back upon ourselves," Devault's call for "involvement" as an element of method, and Mazzei's work towards a "troubled listening" in educational research, this workshop engages participants in a "double-sided, reflexive personal" interview process. Researchers will learn to chart and pursue their responses to interviewees' feedback, creating a body of personal, reflexive data that will both complicate and deepen access to their own subjectivity in the relational contexts of the researcher-participant collaboration and larger project. The move to complicate, even destabilize, subjectivity here also responds to Rhodes and Alexander's recent call for research in which we might become "unknown to ourselves" as a queer, feminist practice.

Interview Prompt: Connecting to Our Work

Directions: Working in pairs, each person will spend **3 minutes** as the interviewer and **3 minutes** as the interviewee. When you are operating as the interviewer, your job is to read the following aloud (all at once) and take notes. Your primary task is to track your own responses as your partner talks. You may think of some follow up questions, notice your or your partner's non-verbal, visceral, or emotive responses, in addition to the words exchanged between you. Mazzei's short statement below is a guide for this work.

The interview focus: Describe your connection to your scholarly or teaching work.

- 1) Why do you do what you do?
- 2) What interests or motivates you in this work and why?

Getting Started: Taking Reflexive Notes

From Mazzei, *Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research: Putting Poststructural Theory to Work* (2007)

"As I heard phrases that intrigued me or as I was prompted to ask a question, I would note these thoughts, letting them pass as ink flowing on paper, much as one lets thoughts escape and flow when in a meditative state. This way of listening enabled me to hear the absences, the pauses, and the whispers, much as one experiences and 'hears' the rests and the pauses in music."

“Troubling” Our Listening: More Direction from Mazzei

“This would mean...a process for listening to allow me to untangle the layers, the complexities, and the contradictions to be found there. I needed to cultivate a method of reflexive listening (Denzin, 2002) that would allow me to hear the narratives previously elided.” (79)

“Yes, what was the big deal that prompted the pause, the silence, or the omission, both on her part and also in the bracketed questions that we as group members hesitated to ask? This absent presence in the narrative begs for a hearing; it is the voice that is so often ‘unheard’ or discounted or the receptacle of our projections as we ‘fill in’ the blanks with what we are comfortable hearing. After listening with this ‘blank slate’ (my tablet, not my mind), I reviewed the transcripts and field notes being particularly attentive to my written comments in an attempt to develop an organizational framework that might guide me in listening to the tapes once again.”

(81) “This final strategy was undertaken as an intent to hear with an ear to the *multiple* layers of meaning present in the conversations. At this stage, the *process* of listening was more important than the *product* of listening. Present were layers within which the pauses breathed deeply and the silences were given voice.”

“What voice begins to exercise this excessive ‘messiness,’ we need to recognize how quickly we often move to contain it. This desire to contain or to tame voice is so often couched in the ‘right’ translation that is appropriate and safe” (107).

“A troubled listening also means that we listen against the categories that we create as we listen to responses. We give up on trying to anticipate the direction of a response so we can formulate our next question, or to put the response into a category so we can place a checkmark in the appropriate box. A troubled listening goes beyond a reflexivity, although that is a prerequisite, toward an ongoing process of listening to ourselves and attempting to unmask the veils through which we filter what we say, what we ask, and what we hear. It means that we acknowledge the limits of language and attempt a listening and asking that confronts these limits. Such a listening requires courage and a willingness to break our own silences and to ask the questions that we dare not ask, that we prefer not to ask, that we prefer not to hear. It is by itself an enactment of a deconstructive methodology. It means as researchers that we give up on the possibility of the possible and seek the constant boundlessness of what our participants have to say. In other words, we actively try to get lost in the layers of the narrative in order to loosen ourselves from only listening to (or listening for) sounds.” (110)

“It is to open up the possibility of a blank space, not one that is empty, but one that is overflowing with the fullness of absence. And while this space of writing, of research, of writing about research is already disciplined, I seek an undisciplining” (114).

Some Recommended Reading

- Chiseri-Strater, Elizabeth. "Turning In Upon Ourselves: Positionality, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity in Case Study and Ethnographic Research." *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy*. Eds. Peter Mortensen and Gesa Kirsch. Urbana: NCTE, 1996. 115-33. Print.
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- Glenn, Cheryl. *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004. Print.
- Halberstam, Judith. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- Lather, Patti. "Postbook: Troubling the Ruins of Feminist Ethnography." *Signs*. 27: 1 (Autumn 2000) 199-227. Print.
- Lather, Patti and Chris Smithies. *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997. Print.
- Mazzei, Lisa. "Silent Listenings: Deconstructive Practices in Discourse-Based Research." *Educational Researcher* 33:2 (March 2004) 26-34. Print.
- . *Inhabited Silence in Qualitative Research: Putting Poststructural Theory to Work*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. Print.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005. Print.
- Rhodes, Jacqueline, and Jonathan Alexander. *Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self*. Logan, UT: Computers and Composition Digital Press/Utah State University Press, 2015. Web.
- Royster, J. and Gesa Kirsch. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012. Print.
- Schell, Eileen and K.J. Rawson. *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010. Print.

Want to keep our conversation going? Email me directly and I'll put together a list for our use (restainoj@gmail.com).