THE TEACHER/STUDENT MISMATCH AS
A SITE FOR DIFFRACTING SUBJECTIVITY

by

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ABSTRACT

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Currently, in the United States, there is an urgency to address the perceived failure of contemporary public schools to educate diverse populations. This sense of failure is propped up by performance discrepancies between White, middle-class youth and low-income, including most often, youth of color. This disparity, frequently referred to as “the achievement gap,” drives mandatory school improvement policies and practices designed to improve outcomes for underperforming, sub-categorically, school populations. Amid these interrelated policies and practices, all of which are dependent upon assumptions requiring predictability, generalizability, and stability as characteristics of sub-populations and their constituent subjects, the racial divide and the economic gap have been re-coded in terms of differences in exam scores (Taubman, 2009, p. 154).

One significant implication of populational reasoning as recently deployed in contemporary U.S. public schools is that teachers—frequently White, middle-class women—are increasingly attributed with a categorical bias that “has increasingly served as a possible explanation [emphasis added] for the ‘achievement gap,’” rather than as a contributing factor embedded in “demographic factors … far more complex than [previously] indicated” in education research (Farkas 2004, as cited in Takei & Shouse, 2007, p. 368; Ferguson, 1998; Perry, 2003). In this way, the frequent failures and non-proficiencies of both teachers and students, key components of crisis
Discourses, are often attributed to simplistically applied and unexamined “racial asymmetry” (p. 368) and undesirably framed within a “cultural and demographic mismatch” (Grant & Gibson, 2011, p. 25).

In order to trouble commonsensical conceptualizations of this mismatch, this conceptual study works toward re-theorizing the mismatch as both a concept and as a subject-glomming “hub” in schools and society in ways that articulate difference differently. By diffracting feminist, new materialist and poststructural theories of subjectivity through the material discursive fields surrounding a contemporary work of art and a post-industrial city, notions of diffraction, as both a methodological tool and as a concept, are developed. Experimenting with the notion of concept as method, “mismatched” subjects are re-presented as non-individuated subjectivities that emerge within ever-changing material/discursive fields.
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DEDICATION

To Shamar, Rupert, Freedom and Michael, for always inspiring me to be
the best me that I can be.

To their mothers and “other” mothers Beth, Flo, Sharon, Linda, and with fond memories,
Yasmina, for sharing their beautiful sons with me for all of these years…
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And to Maribel, my love, my light, my heart. This milestone is as much yours as it is mine. No words, too many words…Thank you.

M. J. N.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Chapter I—COMPLICATING THE MISMATCH BETWEEN WHITE WOMEN TEACHERS AND BLACK MALE STUDENTS OR THE SEARCH FOR SCHOOL SUBJECTS OF A LESSER ONTOLOGICAL WEIGHT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Post” School Subjects as “Wildly Unpredictable” Political Subjects</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionalities and Uncertain Research</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiographically Inflected Difference</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem in Context: White Women Teachers, Black Boys and Their Entanglements in Contemporary Educational Discourses</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for a Theoretical Study of School Subjects Informed by the “Posts”</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and the “Posts,” or Defining the Undefinable</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist, New Materialisms and Their Critiques</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ontological in the Poststructural</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist, New Materialisms: An Ontological Turn</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter II—DEFINING THE TERMS; THEORETICAL CONCEPTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Through Foucault</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power/Knowledge</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse and Discursive Fields</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Politics of Discourse</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking Through Barad</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomena</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intra-activity and Agential Cuts</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter III—METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-foundational Methods</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-qualitative Research and Concept as Method</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are Data or “data”?</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffraction</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Diffraction?</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffraction as subject-shifter</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffraction as wave phenomenon</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffraction as posthumanist, intra-disciplinary tool</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffraction as post-qualitative research method</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As feminist critique of reflexivity and reflectivity</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation vs. articulation</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory Study</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcultural Concepts for Understanding Subjectivity</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDICES

Appendix A—Open Letter ................................................................. 220
Appendix B—The Updated Label for Dana Schutz’s “Open Casket” at the
    Whitney Biennial 2017 ................................................................. 223
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dana Schutz’s “Open Casket”</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Parker Bright protesting Dana Schutz’s “Open Casket”</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Arlos pushing for county jail relocation</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Morningside said angered by switch in jail plans</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Berkshire County Jail</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Atlas of Berkshire, Massachusetts, 1876</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Aerial view of the Allendale School</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hill 78</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Aerial view of Allendale School and proximity to GE toxic waste</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>River ducks full of PCBs</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Silver Lake and Building 38</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Building 38</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Pittsfield’s Juvenile Resource Center</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Races in Pittsfield, 2017</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sheriff willing to talk on inmate center</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pittsfield Public Schools Specialized Programs</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Intra-city migrations</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>New building is carbon copy</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>GE signs</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dorothy Amos Park</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>PCB contamination in the West Branch</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>North Gate with Building 42 at right</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Map of cleanup areas</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Unkamet Brook</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Unkamet Brook area: Main cleanup features</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

COMPLICATING THE MISMATCH BETWEEN WHITE WOMEN TEACHERS
AND BLACK MALE STUDENTS OR THE SEARCH FOR
SCHOOL SUBJECTS OF A LESSER ONTOLOGICAL WEIGHT

“Post” School Subjects as “Wildly Unpredictable” Political Subjects

To claim that politics requires a stable subject is to claim that there can
be no political opposition to that claim. Indeed, that claim implies that a
critique of the subject cannot be a politically informed critique but, rather, an
act which puts into jeopardy politics as such. To require the subject means to
foreclose the domain of the political, and that foreclosure, installed
analytically as an essential feature of the political, enforces the boundaries of
the domain of the political in such a way that that enforcement is protected
from political scrutiny. The act which unilaterally establishes the domain of
the political functions, then, as an authoritarian ruse by which political
contest over the status of the subject is summarily silenced. (Butler, 1992,
p. 4)

In 2003, I taught Language Arts in a small classroom in the basement of a
moderately-sized, 650-student, middle school in a small New England city. The class was
comprised of 15 students, predominantly African American, and due to a scheduling
glitch, all male. As a White, middle class, mobility-impaired, lesbian teacher, who had
also been a high school dropout, former foster child in an African American home,
homeless teenager, single parent, and urban, public housing dweller, my public and
assumed identity as a teacher was fraught with tensions between what I had been taught
about being a professional teacher and the multiple selves I was bringing to the
profession. Who was I in this place? Who might I be? My questions could have been
quickly glossed over via the overreliance by mainstream education on categorical identities bound to static conceptualizations of race and gender when attempting to understand the relational juxtaposition of White women teachers and young Black men in schools. However, my understanding of the relationalities and their constituent identities emerging among myself and my students seemed, from the start, to be complicated by individual biographies, local contingencies, and unpredictable interminglings of subject constituting discourses and materialities. As we negotiated relational identities across environments that included our town, our classroom, our school, and a predominantly African American community that helped raise us and sometimes claimed us, the heroic, mono-cultural, severely feminized and/or failing White women and the mythopoetically masculine, dangerous, ineducable, undisciplined, or “White acting” young Black males of modern culture and education research seemed distant to me. Most often, our engagements seemed to trouble the assumed clarity, transparency, and metanarrative descriptors of these complex, racialized, and gendered categories (Williams, 1991).

Thus, while our relationship began in a classroom, and in its earliest moments may have been characterized by traditional, dichotomous, teacher/student relationships, we worked continuously in these tensions, pushing against this binary and other cultural and institutional norms as our collective “we” became both seeped and layered with clashing breakdowns and reinforcements of: school/larger categorical and community boundaries and histories; the complex relationships between and among teachers, students, and institutions; our individual biographies; and the multiple, variable impacts of these engagements on both personal and professional identities, and identity enactments.

Amid this enduring collective, as I work to conceptualize a subjective “I” that is always relational as well as an “agential cut”\(^1\) (Barad, 2012b, p. 77) of a “specific slice of

\(^1\)Barad (2003) speaks of an agential cut, which, distinguished from the Cartesian cut between pre-determinative and distinct subjects and objects, “enacts a local resolution within the phenomenon of the inherent ontological indeterminacy” (p. 815). In this move, subject/object do
life” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 137), I query, who “am’ I, and who might I “become”? In the midst of our relational engagements, which have often been entangled with and contoured in the hub-like tensions of critical, multicultural, neoliberal, and school reform educational discourses (to name just a few), how might our raced and gendered excesses be reconsidered? And in reconsidering these excesses, which are frequently located in spaces, places, and events where “language misfires, structures and lives can open up” (Deleuze, as cited in St. Pierre, 2004, p. 329), how might post-foundational research practices help me understand our subjectivities as something different from and in excess of categorical identity? And in what ways might such inquiry provide insight into the ways that dominant conceptualizations of teachers and students as permanently and irreconcilably mismatched categorical subjects in schools rest upon notions of identity that foreclose alternative political and relational possibilities by positioning subject categories themselves as impermeable and unassailable (Butler, 1992)? In what ways might multiple theorizations of subjectivity that are experimentally theorized and “sliced” through poststructural frames committed to complicating the “unproblematized constructs of ‘teacher’ and ‘teacher stories’ [that] have proliferated in the U.S literature” (Miller, 2005a, p. 51) complicate our understandings of teacher/student collectivities? Additionally, how might these overly simplistic understandings, further troubled through an engagement with nascent notions of the ways “posthuman subjectivity reshapes the identity of humanistic practices” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 145), work to unsettle the “mismatch” as a non-contingent, categorical, and oppositionally framed concept in education?

Positing these questions as a generalized context, the purpose of this study is to engage in a theoretical exploration of the ways the demographic mismatch—most often made intelligible through definitions and limits imposed by variable and differential, not pre-exist relations, but rather they emerge through specific intra-actions. This notion of intra-action as a site-specific concept will be explored throughout the study.
racialized and gendered categorical logics and discourses—might alternatively be considered relationally, contingently, and less certainly through poststructural and new materialist notions of subjectivity. Such an exploration is based upon the assertion that a “post-humanistic vision of the subject can provide an alternative foundation for ethical and political subjectivity” (Braidotti, 2006a, p. 11). While various, often conflicting framings of school subjects, including notions of a post-human/ist subject, will be explored more fully throughout this study, the suggestion that categorical school subjects might be “freer” or “ontologically lighter” if untethered from the certainty of categorical identity is an explicitly political stance, and, I believe, has implications for popular, indeed normative, notions of collective politics in this current, historical, and very political moment in U.S. public schools. Such an untethering might allow for inquiry into some of the constitutive elements of categorical school subjects by interrogating and troubling their differential constructions at the limits of contemporary educational discourses. At the same time, it might act as an opening for the imagining of an intra-active, relational politics and ethics among, and around, teachers, students, and their material entanglements that posits ethicality as “attributable to a complex network of human and non-human agents, including historically specific sets of material conditions that exceed the traditional notion of the individual” (Barad, 2007, p. 23). Relatedly, when relationally constituted concepts such as the mismatch are revised and reconceived in relation to networks as opposed to binaries, these reconceptualizations might act as openings for the imagining of an intra-active, relational politics and ethics among, and around, teachers, students, and their material entanglements. Importantly, from this perspective, the “I” as school subject is never alone.

During this historical juncture, landmarked by the incursions, residues, and ripples of national legislative acts—the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), the National Research Council’s report, Scientific Research in Education (2002), Race to the Top, the legislation that constituted the “waiver” era, and the Every Student Succeeds Act
explicit attention to the political in education research is particularly important. The efforts of these policy report publications and the enactment of accompanying legislation are particularly significant in their attention to “improvement” of both teacher and student “populations” through mutually supportive, interdependent, deficiency models. White women teachers’ measurable outcomes “improve” through reforming, training, and supervision, and Black male students “improve” by increasing measurable outcomes on standardized test scores and high school graduation rates. While White women teachers and Black male students seem to be generally situated within a Black male/White female binary in clear, categorical, and dysfunctional opposition to each other, similar interventions on racialized and gendered supposed misbehaviors and proficiency deficits are applied to both populations. In other words, the frames of logic constituting each side of the binary require mutual buttressing from the other side in order to hold up. Such oppositional, yet mutually constitutive conceptualizations of school subjects then become actively politicized, as they are concurrently absorbed and employed in a deluge of profit, accountability, and advocacy-oriented discourses flowing through and sticking to concurrently complementary, contradictory, and intersecting political agendas. In each set of discourses, however, the complexity of their socio-historical emergence is obscured. Indeed, “the agency of individuals or groups is made to seem natural, [and] there is a tendency to lose sight of how the agendas and categories which define oppositions are historically formed. The systems of relevancies are taken for granted” (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997, p. 310). Thus, more complex notions of agency that are attentive to local, relational contingencies are overlooked.

In this current historical moment, a key trait of these intermingling entities is the increasing number of public school/corporate convergences, such as the Education Development Center, the Gates Foundation, the public school voucher movement, parent-teacher organizations, teachers’ unions, and “great schools” advocates. Key, accompanying, discourses include those around efficiency, competency, and the erosion of the public sector and its funding, to name but a few.
The relevancies and socio-historical formations of the relationalities between young Black male students and White women are particularly involute, and most likely impossible to disentangle. Fraught with both epistemological and ontological complexity and peril, an investigation into relations among White women teachers and Black male students forces us to engage with “risky practices” (Butler, 2004b, p. 321) as we brush against “difficult knowledges” (Britzman, 2000) requiring us to ask difficult questions and engage with complex, asymmetrical relationalities. In this perilous epistemological and ontological space, however, there is much to learn.

Despite their ostensible impermeability, Whiteness and Blackness, and male and female, conceptualized as opposite sides of failed and flawed binaries, are neither “foundational or primary, and [thus] theorizations of them must take into account the imbricated, implicated, nexus they form” (Butler, 2004a, p. 142). From this perspective, White and Black, male and female, and all of the “unpredictable offspring” (Williams, 1991, p. 11) they may produce in their discursive, material, and textual entanglements, do not mean the same thing in all places and temporalities. Accordingly, by disrupting the “doxic consensus”3 of foundations (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 235) and discrediting the inevitability of these oppositional binaries, we can find ourselves in a thinking space that allows us to explore processes and relationships occurring in the in-between spaces traditionally absorbed by the magnetism of binary poles. As Braidotti (2002) asserts, we tend to “think about B as non-A rather than think about the process of what goes on in between A and B” (p. 2). Arguing for thinking more resonant with Iriggary’s “mechanic of fluids,” Braidotti further pushes for an engagement with theoretical reasoning, unstrapped from binding concepts, as we seek more “adequate representations for processes, fluid in-between flows of data, experience and information” (p. 2). Here, I

3In using the term doxic consensus, Braidotti is referring to the firm belief that steady identities are required for moral and ethical behavior and political agency.
emphasize the shift from dialectically conceived oppositions to “complexity and relationality, which facilitates cross-border connections and alliances among differently located constituencies” (Braidotti, 2006a, p. 67).

Based on this supposition, I broadly ask: What might be occurring in the spaces made possible and impossible by the social/cultural/discursive/material “constructions” of the categorical limits bounding young Black men and White women teachers in U.S. schools? What relational, enacted “goings-on” might be occurring in the spaces marked by the gray complexities of the in-between (Braidotti, 2006, p. 46), and how might these spaces be interpreted differently from those that produce the mismatch as a certain and fixed, relational construct? And what material-semiotic swirls might be encircling the binary and gushing through the in-between, further shaping these enactments? In this murky yet expansive space, which is contoured by the poles of White/Black, male/female, and described by Butler (2006) as an epistemological and ontological nexus (p. 142), the subjectivities I seek to investigate might, indeed, be what she describes as “ontologically insecure” (Butler, 2004b, p. 321). This insecurity positions any work that attempts to muddy the ontological certainty of assumptions around White women and young Black males as categorically transparent subjects in schools perilous on multiple levels. While such insecurity is often perceived as a threat to politics, potentially destabilizing the current political work in schools that infuses agendas framed by equity discourses around achievement outcomes with identity politics, the theoretical framework developed throughout this study rests on the belief that ontological ambiguity does not preclude politics. To the contrary, in response to claims that politics cannot occur without an a priori subject, Butler (1992) has argued that by requiring the subject, ironically you then “use as your foundation a construct produced through the very systems of power you seek to critique” (p. 4). Similarly, Braidotti (2006b) has asserted that by requiring the liberal subject as a precondition for ethics, you actually impede the development of new modes of ethical behavior (p. 236). Different from the prerequisite of the firmly founded,
predetermined subject required in contemporary identity politics, what is implied here is
the need for critiques and creative reconceptualizations of the subject that allow us to
question what such a predetermination actually does. Butler (1992) asserts, “The task is
to interrogate what the theoretical move that establishes foundations authorizes, and what
precisely it excludes or forecloses” (p. 6). By challenging the theoretical move that
requires an a priori subject as an act of foreclosure, she opens up space for the subject
itself to become the site of critique, thus making possible a politics of “insistent contest
and resignification” (p. 6).

This insistent contestation, however, does not seek recourse in the demolition of the
categorical subject, but rather allows for a deconstruction of the subject in order for
the subject to be imagined through a more “open-ended ontology” (Salih, 2004, p. 6), or,
put differently, in an identity space that is non-essentialized (Miller, 2005a, p. 7). Identity
categories such as White and Black exist, and as Braidotti (2006) has cautioned, “an
emphasis on complexity does not mean a free fall into boundlessness” (p. 20). Indeed, as
Spivak (as cited in Britzman, 1997) pointed out in her earlier work, “one is left with the
semi-mournful position of the unavoidable usefulness of something dangerous” (p. 31).

And while categories, as conceptual placeholders, seem to enact their own non-human
agency that produces entangled discursive and material effects (Rosieck & Kinslow,
2016), the importance and even necessity of identity categories for particular political
mobilizations cannot be disregarded or minimized. Indeed, even while arguing for more
fluid theorizations of subjectivity, Braidotti (2002) has pointed out that the dissolution of
binary poles, i.e., Black/White, male/female, is anything but symmetrical, and that “the
politics of location [remains] crucial” (p. 84). However, by questioning the unwavering
reliability of fixed locations from which there can be no departure, we can

acknowledge the utility of such categorizations for certain purposes and the
necessity of their breakdown on other occasions … complicat[ing] the
definition [of the category in its] shift, in its expansion and contraction
according to circumstance, in its room for the possibility of creatively mated
taxonomies and their wildly unpredictable offspring. (Williams, 1991, p. 11)

And it is just such offspring that this study wishes to explore. By looking at the
places where the assumptions embedded in conceptualizations of categorical identity
break down amid the complex, and necessarily situated, subjectivities of White women
teachers and Black male students, it may become possible to envision a different
teacher/student “politics” that takes into account materially, discursively, and relationally
formed identities in their contingencies. Such looking requires thinking through disparate,
feminist encounters with Barad and Braidotti as well as Butler and Haraway, in places
where the White, woman teacher or Black, male student “as subject is never One”
(Blaagaard & van der Tuin, 2014, p. 8). Accordingly, such an envisioning works to
problematize the fixity of racialized and gendered notions of the school subject in such a
way that “it proliferates, runs amuck, and overtops the conceptual orders that control our
imaginations and shut down our lives” (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 346). This includes the
conceptual orders dominant in current educational research. Thus, by exploring the
potential for re-theorizing the mismatch by attending to the local, the contingent, and the
relational among varied and unexpected identity constructions and enactments among
White women teachers and Black male students in schools, we might, through an
uncertain approach to theoretical research, catch contingently located, always interpreted,
and never “just there” glimpses of mismatched subjects engaged in “the continuing
invention of [them]selves into ‘the surprise of what is not yet possible in the histories of
the spaces in which we find ourselves’” (Rajchman, as cited in Lather, 2007, p. 19).

**Positionalities and Uncertain Research**

Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work, it has been on the
basis of elements from my experience—always in relation to processes that I
saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognized
something cracked, dully jarring, or disfunctioning in things I saw, in the
institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography. (Foucault, cited in St. Pierre, 2004, pp. 344-345)

Against this backdrop, I find myself, as a theoretically inclined and still-novice educational researcher, preparing to engage in a research project informed by poststructural thought and some aspects of “the new materialisms.”

This project, above all, is an experimental grappling with post-foundational, post-humanist subjectivity in ways that are deeply concerned with “the politics and ethics of doing research on/for/to/with” my selves and others (Lather, 2007, p. 18). In this way, it works toward imagining subjectivity as constituted differently from the categorical subject represented in most contemporary education research in the United States. As Braidotti (2013) imagines,

We need to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations we are undergoing. That means we need to think differently about ourselves. I take the posthuman predicament as an opportunity to empower the pursuit of alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation. The posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming. (p.12)

The imagining of school subjects in this way seems crucial in this place and time, a moment in which categorical identities, and in particular identities that are categorically raced and gendered, serve to concurrently describe, define, and predict asymmetrical and differential possibilities of “who” a school subject might be in ways that still, and most often, are inflexible, inequitable, and exclusionary. Such descriptions, definitions, and predictions work through a wide array of education policies and practices to aid in the construction of contemporary school subjects. In their current workings, they are drenched with discourses that rely upon remarkably similar and unproblematised

4The theoretical cluster being recognized under the umbrella term the “new materialisms” is a contentious site that will be engaged throughout the study (Coleman, 2014, p. 30). See subchapter “Feminist New Materialisms: An Ontological Turn” for a discussion of some of the more provocative aspects of this emergent paradigm.
language(s) to describe and position categorized school subjects, regardless of the diverse and often conflicting ideological and political stances of those doing the describing and positioning (Taubman, 2009, p. xi). Indeed, as Brown (2011) has pointed out, due to “temporally shifting discourses and contexts,” discourses previously considered progressive and/or critical can be re-mobilized for imperialist or racist projects (p. 316). Similarly, Braidotti (2013) has argued that proponents of advanced capitalism seem to be able to harness the creative potential of nascent discourses such as posthumanism more quickly than their neo-humanist opponents (p. 45). In this complex, discursive context, unproblematic, non-contingent characterizations of categorical identity rarely explore the knottiness of the discursive practices and materialities that contribute to either the obdurateness of essentialized identity categories, or to their disassemblings. Relatedly, in education research, where issues of epistemology are often explored with little attention to the ontological (and more recently, sometimes vice versa), categorically identified school subjects often slide across epistemological and ontological framings in ways that reinforce “the traditional Western philosophical belief that ontology and epistemology are separate and distinct concerns” (Barad, 2007, p. 43). Said differently, while poststructural thought has engaged in extended critiques of the “real” as representative of what “is” via knowledge projects of situated knowing, some emergent new materialist frames seem to be privileging “new” knowledge about what “is,” with less regard to the ways knowledge projects are historically situated, partial, and located (Braidotti, 2013; Coleman, 2014; Loewen-Walker, 2014; McNeil, 2010; Thiele, 2014). Against this backdrop, this study is an attempt at inquiry amid the tensions of these critiques, each of which, sometimes and in different ways, reinforces the discursive and material conditions they may be setting out to critique/deconstruct.

Thus, as a teacher-administrator-researcher attempting to conceptualize school subjects that intra-act both within and interruptive of categorizing practices that work to contain and define identity via “a populational reasoning that … classifies, differentiates,
and divides” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 49), the language I choose seems very important. Fearing an interminable tethering to the uncertain, theoretical musings of a doctoral student that may only work for a moment, I find myself fumbling for language adequate to occupy the pages of a positionality statement for a post-foundational study that might re-present the aspiring doctoral student as differently engaged with the normative discourses of fledgling research practices. In my failure to locate a single theoretical framework or method within which to position my inquiry, I stumble in the shadows of research paradigms based on foundations, and wonder: How might I think in a “grammar unavailable to me” (Butler, 2004c, p. 326)? What words might reflect a conception of research that positions me as an uncertain, “inexpert” researcher in the role of “making a hole in knowledge” (Badiou, 1991, p. 25), while concurrently positioning me in the academy in possession of adequate knowledge to engage in such a project? And how does this hierarchical binary of expert/novice function to influence my emergent researcher positionalities and my perceptions of, and correlate productions of, knowledge considered to be of most (or any) worth? Thus, in my hesitancy to occupy a researcher position, it may be useful to think of this positionality statement as an engagement with “the thinking that writing produces” (St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 178) and as an enactment of “writing in excess of its composition” (Butler 2004c, p. 326) as I work through some of the theoretical tensions that have surfaced, collided, and lingered while intertwining in this theoretical, dissertation writing project. In this writing, I will offer an interpretation of my positionalities in this particular time-space, in an effort to re-present my dissertation writing as an uncertain endeavor that, “stalls, gets stuck, thumbs its nose at order, goes someplace the author does not know existed ahead of time, [and] stumbles over its sense” (St. Pierre, 1997b, p. 414). And so begins my stumbling.

As a White woman, teacher/administrator/researcher, both wearied and intrigued by the omnipresent discourses and materialities constituting White women teachers and Black male students as relational subjects in contemporary U.S., K-12, public schools,
this stumbling is unavoidable. As I attempt to imagine less categorical and more fluid school subjects, I find myself stuck between the openings and closings made possible through poststructural, discursive deconstructions and sometimes inadvertent reconstructions of school subjects, and issues of materiality and ontology most recently brought forward by what are sometimes called the “new materialisms” (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 629; Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). Put another way, while poststructural framings of discursively constituted subjects have allowed me to trouble frequently essentialized, racial identity categories in the spaces where gendered and “racial [and gender] identities are founded and flounder” (Haizlip, as cited in Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 38), identities are not purely discursive and are also entangled with materialities that help shape both traditional and non-traditional ontological frames that carry with them ethical implications for a White woman writing of subjectivity that is reciprocally co-constitutive in relation to young Black men. As such, an exclusively discursive exploration of the ways school subjects are constituted using associated and neatly compatible epistemological frames seems highly inadequate. Rather, an unruly, ontologically considered subject, steeped in discourse and materiality, is of great interest to me as a dissertation-immersed researcher engaged with recent, posthumanist explorations of an epistemologically and ontologically considered subjectivity.

Thus, from a position of theoretical polyvocality, this study is an engagement with curriculum theorizing as a knowledge project that inquires into curriculum through feminist, post-qualitative, poststructural, and posthumanist lenses, as well as those lenses’ disruptions of humanist versions of narrative (Miller, 2005a). From this location, curriculum is conceived “as a symbolic representation [which] refers to those institutional and discursive practices, structures, images, and experiences that can be identified and analyzed in various ways; i.e. politically, racially, autobiographically, etc.” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2006, p. 16). Curriculum understood in this way locates itself within a curriculum history that has been known to leave unproblematized the ways
“discourses … collude in producing normative assumptions of gendered, raced and sexed subjects” (Munro, 1988, p. 263). It might also be mapped amid the tensions of Malewski’s (2010a) dualing and dueling “registers of thought,” described as curriculum scholarship that holds itself accountable “only to the issues and concerns of powerful epistemological forces of those marginalized, subjugated, and distorted,” or to “circulating new languages, concepts and ideas within the field or out, across, and along various lines of discourse to reach variously situated publics, educators and intellectuals” (p. xiii). From these varied locational perspectives, this project is an entanglement with curriculum and its studies in an “ethico-onto-epistemological” (Barad, 2007, p. 185) way, troubling the belief that there must be a tradeoff between relevance and creative understanding in curriculum studies in particular (Malewski, 2010b, p. 6), and in education research more generally. Loaded with ethical conundrums, it is a research project purposefully situated “in contrast to easy knowledge, or structures for organizing texts that register as expectations met and conventions fulfilled” (Malewski, 2010a, p. xiii).

Such an engagement is an effort to explore possibilities for reimagining school subjects around the ways gendered, and racialized discourses, as well as comingling and intra-acting materialities (including the non-human), concurrently produce, saturate, and exceed both categorical and relational subjectivities among White women teachers and young Black men in schools. I attempt such explorations by borrowing some post-qualitative research lenses that acknowledge “the impossibility of an intersection between conventional humanist qualitative methodology and the theories of “the posts” (St. Pierre, 2014a, p. 2) and applying them to the concept of diffraction as a methodology imagined as post-foundational education research. While such lenses will be more thoroughly explored in Chapter II, it is important to note here that post-qualitative approaches to research emerge in the “ruins” of qualitative research methodologies that remain tethered to a logical positivism that never really worked with the anti-foundational theories of the
posts (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 1). Thus, struggling with clashing and clanking, yet mutually constitutive theoretical and methodological conceptualizations of difference, I hope to use inquiry in the form of “‘difficult knowledge’ sorts of questions about necessary complicities [and] inadequate categories” (Pitt & Britzman, as cited in Lather, 2007, p. viii). As I brush up, recoil from, and push back against the “discursive dangers” attached to the ethical, ontological, and epistemic relativity of White women to Black men (Alcoff, 1991, p. 7), I am concurrently trying to trouble our naturalized understandings of difference as inherited from Western thought traditions and “as always only happening between two and as a movement of separation and categorization” (Thiele, 2014, p. 204). As Haraway (1991) points out,

> The evidence is building of a need for a theory of “difference” whose geometries, paradigms, and logics break out of binaries, dialectics, and nature/culture models of any kind. Otherwise, threes will always reduce to twos, which quickly become lonely ones in the vanguard. And no one learns to count to four. These things matter politically. (p. 129)

Instead, rather than indulge the traditional duos of Black and White, or male and female, this study seeks to engage with Haraway’s “three’s and four’s” (p. 129) by stressing “heteronomy and multi-faceted relationality” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 145). In this way, it is an effort at exploring “patterns of difference that make a difference” (Barad, 2007, p. 239) via some experimental theorizing of subjectivity that seeks to demolish the cramped confines of exclusively categorical subjectivity and replace it with imaginings of capacious openings for differently conceived school subjects.

**Autobiographically Inflected Difference**

As such, this is a project deeply invested in problematizing the way difference is being conceptualized and put to work in public education discourses in the United States, and what some of the implications for such deployments might be in relation to the un/intelligibilities of diverse school subjects. This notion of difference has occupied
much of my time as a doctoral student, and in retrospect, I believe this journey actually began as an undergraduate, when, as a Sociology major, I trudged through the writings of Angela Davis (1981) and Margaret Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins (1994) and their seminal works on Black feminist thought, alongside Foucault’s (1991) *Discipline and Punish*, Butler’s (1990) *Gender Trouble*, and Haraway’s (1991) now famous “cyborg manifesto.” In these early readings, I attempted to reconcile not only the epistemological assertions in the texts, but the multiple identities I was bringing to my non-traditional college experience. As a White, female student who had lived most of her life in racially, ethnically, and/or gender-diverse homes and communities, my experiences, as interpreted in this moment, were complex, translated through many different “Englishes,” and lived in a body that is only sometimes, in some places, unproblematically read as White, female, and middle-class. Because of this, I have often asked of myself, “Who am I and where do I belong?” Having frequently fumbled with “proper” language and other ways of “being” a White, middle-class woman, the visual signifiers of my identity often obscured the social identities, relational affinities, and material engagements with the world that have constituted this “being.” Additionally, the ambiguities surrounding my interpretations of my different “selves” problematically positioned the assumptions around identity embedded in my earliest epistemological inquiries because, on the one hand, having been partially raised in my adolescence by Black women, I was passionately drawn to Black feminisms’ conceptualizations of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), reciprocity (Davis, 1980), and their critiques of the exclusionary practices of White feminisms; but on the other hand, I recognized, albeit reluctantly, that despite the many important critiques and contributions of Black feminist thought to feminism conceived of more broadly, as a White woman I did not “belong” in the refuge contoured by Black feminist epistemologies and politics. The entanglements of White
women and Black women were more complex than such a “joining’ would allow,5 and I was reminded that thinking space and embodied place were not always, if ever, the same thing. At this early point in my educational career, my exposure to post-structural notions of an unstable subject were too fleeting to take root, and so their seeds took to the wind, finding ground later in my educational endeavors.

As I continued my studies, however, which eventually led me to teaching middle school mathematics and language arts, these theoretically based questions around identity, belonging, and difference became even more complex. Having spent a significant chunk of my adolescence living with an African American family in a foster home, which was located in the same community within which I now taught, I pondered how my interpretations of that experience had contributed to my conception of intersecting and interacting racialized and gendered social identities. In particular, I wondered about the ways these conceptions might be contributing to my subject positioning as a White woman teacher of predominantly Black male students.

As I began to teach and learn with my students, the theories I had begun juggling as an undergraduate returned, grumbling in the back of my head as I worried about “eating the other” (hooks, 1992), and picking up “the master’s tools” (Lorde, 1984), while simultaneously wondering, sometimes out loud, how my enactment of Whiteness might be an act of “subversive repetition” (Butler, 1990) as I wrestled with both my complicities with and resistances to numerous variations of White privilege in my classroom, in the school halls, in the teachers’ lounge, and in the world.

5In discussing Haraway’s sometimes inconsistent positioning around secular/non-secular feminism as evidence of relational rather than destructive oppositions, Butler (2014) points out, “We might think about quarrels we get into on feminism, sexual difference, the category of gender, or secularism. Sometimes our antagonisms are internal” (p. 27). My sense is that the relationalities among post-structural and Black feminisms in my thinking are instances of this perception.
Although it is true that my “thinking now emerges from that ‘before’ … in ways for which I have no account” (Secomb, 2007, pp. 180-181), this rumination upon my thinking helps me mark my trail today, as I wander through and beneath the residues and shadows of my thinking over the years, looking for legitimacy and yearning for coherence as I strain to offer “a” positionality in which I might situate my dissertation. Much like Denise Riley (1992) in her paper, “A History of Preoccupations,” I reminisce and ruminate over the theoretical steppingstones of my thinking history that seem to surge through my work as my keyboard clatters with “certain phrases and formulations [that] take on a talismanic quality, [after] rattling at the back of one’s brains for years” (p. 123). This rattling seems to suggest a position that is neither here in the present nor there in the past, but rather, a dystemporal mental space resonant with Lather’s (2007) postmodern, where “traces and fragments survive, embedded in common sense, perspective, social practices, and political power” (p. 36) and with Colebrook’s new materialist notion of “past in present,” where/when “each text, word, fragment, and image of the past … acts as an always present resistance (or insistence) to a simple moving forward” (as cited in Loewen-Walker, 2014, p. 56). This non-linear and non-continuous mound of “spacetime matter” (Barad, 2012, p. 77) thinking is heaped with the materialities, relationalities, and discourses that have contributed to my conceptions of “selves” and “others” throughout my life. In this unstable mound of collapsed foundations that has avalanched under the weight of its critical theories, poststructural feminisms, new materialisms, and inescapable humanist framings, I find no freedom or comfort in a single positionality as I sit buried, post “ruins” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000), climbing through the rubble left amid the excavated tensions of the in-between.

In this in-between place, I scour the debris for the least jagged ends, hoping to find ways to conceive of subjects with smoother and less severe identity defining constraints that have historically worked to separate them from their “selves” and others, while concurrently attending to the sharper edges of history, identity politics, and the material,
made so by ideologies of certitude and belonging as constraint. In this unavoidably relational epistemological and ontological space, where a White woman is not only “a” White woman, and a young Black “boy” is not only “a” Black “boy,” I remain stuck, chasing theories laden with critical, material, and deconstructive capabilities in the space between critique and deconstruction, as I “pull on one thread and … tighten another” (MacLure, Holmes, Jones, & MacRae, 2010, p. 494). Unable to reconcile the conceptual conundrums, ontological contradictions and ethical danger zones that characterize the knowledges and acknowledgements entangled in my study as a dissensus-ridden knot, I seek to engage in uncertain, theoretical research that utilizes and contributes to the body of work emerging from education scholars working in the “the posts.” In this engagement, I am enmeshed in an inquiry project that works to re-imagine mismatch subjectivity in education research through a variety of lenses. Such theoretical lenses include those that perceive research and its accompanying apparatuses through the critiques of the Enlightenment’s humanism; the seductions of the post-structural; and some new, post/humanist tools for thinking about subjectivation as it occurs around racialized and gendered bodies and interpreted experiences in ways that acknowledge “the material is always completely imbricated with the linguistic and discursive” (St. Pierre, 2013a, p. 647). All the while, these lenses remain tinted by Black feminist thought, which includes the Black women who helped raise me and the young Black men and former students whose lives are woven through this study.

This is neither a comfortable or simple place to occupy. It is a “new, new” place (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013), where I focus my efforts to imagine a conceptual framework.

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6 The use of the term “boy” when referring to young, Black males is historically contentious. Because this term is immersed in the United States’ violent and racist history in relation to Black masculinity, this term will not be utilized in this study. Here, however, it marks the category in all its complexity.

7 This term was first used by Spivak (1999) to describe the “new, new” indigenous dominant.
for engaging in research around difference by excavating my circuitous relationships with dissimilarly situated and interpreted life experiences and theorists across time, seeking out disjunctures, intersections, and contradictions along the way. Often, mucking around in these tensions, I struggle to catch my breath, feeling as if I am falling, deeply and endlessly, into an abyss of confusion and unknowing, and yet…. This falling seems to sit somewhere between a mishap and a leap, not unlike Levin’s (as cited in Britzman, 2000) description of falling, of which he states, “I] implies something accidental, a stumbling, but we also use the word in speaking of ‘falling in love’ in which there is a sense of elevation” (p. 27). It is in this thinking as falling that I contemporaneously sink, float, and fly, stuck in the middle of the crisis of representation while paradoxically plummeting beneath the weight of, and clutching to stay afloat with, a pile of posts that include the poststructural, but that are unable to offer the comforts of definition or certainty offered by a single theoretical frame.

And so it seems I have stumbled in my flight, and land where I began, if my journey ever possessed an origin. Here, I will return to my imaginings of school subjects of a “lesser ontological weight” (Lather, 2007, p. viii) and move toward outlining a rationale and problem statement for a postfoundational engagement with subjectivity that seeks to differently theorize subjects perceived as demographically mismatched in education research. In particular, I wonder what happens to this subject when emergent, new materialist informed theories of the posthuman and some of their non-human collaborators collude with poststructural theories of a decentered subject immersed in discourse. Such a study seeks to complicate notions of contemporary, categorically conceptualized school subjects by engaging in research in the borderlands of educational research practices that are seeped in the humanities, arts, sciences, social sciences, and continental philosophy and spattered with their gifts of both competing and complementary gestures toward ontology. In these spaces, both teachers and students are conceived of as school subjects that just might change shape, shift form, and take flight as
they exceed, transgress, and are squished by the ontologically and epistemologically heavy limits and limitations of categorical identity in contemporary schools.

**The Problem in Context: White Women Teachers, Black Boys, and Their Entanglements in Contemporary Educational Discourses**

Currently, in the United States, there is an urgency to address the perceived failure of contemporary public schools to educate diverse populations. This sense of failure, instigated by displeasure over low standardized test scores, elevated high school dropout rates, and low college completion rates, is propped up by a performance discrepancy in each of these categories between White, middle-class youth and low-income, including most often, youth of color. In school accountability discourses, this disparity is frequently referred to as “the achievement gap,” and on school and district “report cards,” it is quantitatively measured by the distance between whole school and sub-categorical outcomes in relation to the aforementioned criteria. Students’ sub-categorical membership is determined by their officially perceived status as Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, Native of Hawaii or Pacific Islander, English Language Learner, Special Education, and Free and Reduced Lunch students, with each of these categories being recognized as at risk for failure based on long-term trends in public school, standardized assessment outcome data. The lower the school-wide test scores and the wider the gap between whole school and sub-categorical results, the lower the school’s performance index, a statistical value used in many states to determine a public school’s achievement status and perceived continued viability as a public school receiving federal funds. In accordance with federal and state policies enacted through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002), the waiver era, and more recently, the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, schools with unsatisfactory performance indices are frantically working to overcome these disparities by engaging in mandatory school improvement practices that will enable them to meet annual yearly progress (AYP) targets pre-determined by federal and state policy mandates. These improvement practices require the implementation of
“scientifically research-based” curricular and instructional programs that claim to have an evidence base for improving outcomes for underperforming, sub-categorically defined students, thus aligning instructional materials to the desired, quantifiable outcomes of particular school populations. Additionally, since the implementation of NCLB (2002), it has been required of schools and districts to inform students’ families of their progress toward AYP targets and the efforts they are undertaking to “close the gap.” Such reports were legislatively mandated to include the reasons why progress toward targets was inadequate, including public identification of specific, underperforming subgroups. Amid these interrelated policies and practices, all of which are dependent upon assumptions requiring predictability, generalizability, and stability as characteristics of sub-populations and their constituent subjects, the racial divide and the economic gap have been re-coded in terms of differences in exam scores (Taubman, 2009, p. 154).

Within this context of low-performing students and failing schools, a climate of urgency becomes energized and intensifies via a complex interplay of crisis (Noguera, 1997), epidemic (McCoy, 2000) and rescue (Popkewitz, 1998; Sleeter, 2001) discourses (to name but a few) as they circulate through schools and research communities, brushing against, intermingling, and colliding with each other in complex, contradictory, and complementary ways. While each contributes differently to the discursive tempest whirling around contemporary U.S. public schools, all are in some ways limited by and reliant upon populational reasoning as the primary framework for categorizing, classifying, and intervening upon contemporary school subjects. Thus, low-income students, English language learners, and students of color, categorically sorted and positioned in schools, are organized through a populational reasoning that “functions as a social practice that historically classifies, differentiates, and divides” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 49). Accordingly, such differentially organized school subjects are conceptualized through “abstracted forms of individualization that segment[ed] the person into discrete attributes and behaviors that c[an] be supervised and observed” (Wagner, as cited in
Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997, p. 290). In other words, certain populations are believed to exhibit sub-categorically defined, observable, and predictable social, behavioral, and learning attributes, which make them recognizable as individuals in contemporary public schools. These sub-categorical divisions also enable the gaze of statistical observation to be directed upon predictable populations, and are distinctly hierarchical and asymmetrical, particularly in the ways the socially constructed and lived identities of individuals are abstracted through racialized, classed, and gendered categories and then conceptualized through these abstractions as stable and fixed. Thus, from the perspective of populational reasoning, distinct groupings of school subjects, possessing specific, populational characteristics, can be studied, intervened upon, and “improved.”

By extension, populational reasoning works just as diligently to form individuals as it does to determine the classificatory criteria for an individual’s inclusion within a particular subgroup. Individual school subjects, made intelligible through statistical and calculative processes external to the immediate occurrence of discursive and material entanglements in schools, are constituted within a context where “individuals and events are organized and reclassified in a manner that separates the particular [individual and the] event from [their] immediate historical situation” (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997, p. 26). Such classifications are never merely descriptive. As Hacking (as cited in Barnet, Clarke, Cloke, & Malpass, 2002) describes,

The “avalanche of numbers” through which modern states have categorized people since the nineteenth century have generated new ways of “making up people.” Systems for counting populations depend on forming categories around people, and these categories in turn help form those people themselves, in so far as they mobilize around those classificatory identities. (p. 632)

In other words, the subcategorizing practices of contemporary reform agendas don’t merely describe differentially constituted school subjects, but rather they help produce them and contribute to their reproduction. Indeed, the categories and their statistical representations seem to possess a non-human agency all their own.
While the implications for such classificatory practices are immense, one significant implication of populational reasoning as recently deployed in contemporary U.S. public schools is that teachers—frequently White, middle-class women—are increasingly attributed with a categorical bias that “has increasingly served as a possible explanation [emphasis added] for the ‘achievement gap,’” rather than as a contributing factor embedded in “demographic factors … far more complex than [previously] indicated” in education research (Farkas, 2004; Ferguson, 1998; Perry 2003, all cited in Takei & Shouse, 2007, p. 368). In this way, the frequent failures and non-proficiencies of both teachers and students, key components of crisis discourses, are often attributed to simplistically applied and unexamined “racial asymmetry” (Takei & Shouse, 2007, p. 368) and undesirably framed within a “cultural and demographic mismatch” (Grant & Gibson, 2011, p. 25).

The notion of an achievement gap-causing mismatch is conjointly commonsensical and discordant, depending upon, and embedded in, logics that help to produce both the identity-based collectives of many critical and multicultural discourses, but also the student subcategories of more positivist and post-positivist research models, serving as a foundational assumption across a wide range of educational discourses. The nimble clamber of the mismatch across diverse ideological frames is not surprising, for as Weedon (1997) has pointed out, “common-sense knowledge is not a monolithic fixed body of knowledge. It is often contradictory and subject to change” (p. 74). Accordingly, due to its conceptual mobility and normalization across a wide variety of perspectives, when considered alongside a problem-solution approach to education research, the mismatch as a fractured yet resilient assumption often serves as a primary foundation upon which to form and inform research questions, methods and methodologies, subsequent interventions based on findings, and recommendations for future research, regardless of epistemological affinities. Thus, the teacher/student mismatch, often epitomized in the abstracted categories of White women teachers and Black male
students and positioned as commonsensical across a wide variety of discourses, becomes a primary focus for both identity-based research models and more positivist, scientifically research-based intervention models, as each seek to intervene upon mismatch framed and inherently oppositional relationalities. This work is dominant despite significant bodies of work that suggest that identity categories and their inter-relationalities in schools may be anything but commonsensical.

In contrast to categorical interpretations of difference, the theoretical framework engaged in this study, as both emergent and experimental, purports two primary goals. The first goal is to problematize the certainty of mismatch discourses that contribute to the differential constitution of school subjects. I propose to do so by contextualizing some of the identity constructs that are constituent of the achievement gap as locationally and socio-historically particular. These constructs are steeped in complex and contingent discursive formations as opposed to offering static identities attached to foundational subjects. This premise is based on the notion that the mismatch as a concept, constructed at the intersections of complex, racialized, and gendered discourses and historicities, forms an array of hegemonic practices via the employment of normative knowledges about White women and young Black men. Therefore, borrowing from Popkewitz’s (1998) concept of “scaffolding,” a term he applies to the ways “different discourses … come together to generate principles for participation and action” (p. 6), as well as his argument that notions of subjectivity are not inscribed by clearly conceived notions of race and gender but rather that such inscriptions “are based on distinctions that relate to other discourses and thus have no single origin” (p. 51), the first trajectory of this theoretically inclined study will explore:

- some of the complex interplays of discourses constituting school subjects around the categorical limits of Black, White, women, and young, male, and
• via a theoretical engagement with postfoundational subjectivity, ways that various poststructural, theoretical frames can help us see the work these discourses “do” in making contemporary school subjects un/intelligible. By unpacking and exploring alternative discourses in relation to the mismatch, a particularly interesting theoretical space emerges, a space within which it might be possible to look in excess of dominant discourses in both the ways that categories are constructed, and the ways these same categories are prone to break down. Just as “the fixing of … categories loses sight of how distinctions and divisions produce and are produced in a field of unequal social relations” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 44), exploring the unfixing of categories in schools may give us insight into the ways identities are gendered and “racialized, but in a complex, indeterminate structuring that is fluid and contingent rather than fixed and stable” (p. 47). Such indeterminacy allows for “the possibility of engaging and responding to the fluidity and malleability of identities and difference, of refusing fixed and static categories of sameness or permanent otherness” (Ellsworth & Miller, 2005, p. 181). As such, how categorical limits are produced, transgressed, and reinforced via discursive entanglements, as well as the implications of such productions, transgressions, and reinforcements in relation to theories of subjectivity, is at the core of this study.

This theoretical frame has a second, related goal as well. Education scholars such as Lenz-Taguchi (2012), St. Pierre (2013), Lather (2013), MacLure (2013), Mazzei (2014), Jackson (2014), de Freitas and Sinclair (2014), and Rosiek and Kinslow (2016), to name but a few, have recently been troubling the limits of post-structural deconstruction and exclusive foci on discourse as being based upon an overreliance on linguistic representation and issues of epistemology, and thus inadvertently reinforcing the material/discursive divide. In an effort to engage with these provocations, this study will also explore:
• ways discourses *and* materialities are locally entangled in an effort to explore subject constituting intra-actions among White women teachers and Black male students;

• how the “mismatch” might be rethought by engaging with material/discursive entanglements in ways that shift the subject/object of the study from a unitary, individual human subject(s) to conceptualizations of intra-action and interconnectedness (Barad, 2007);[^8]

• ways the subjectivities of and relationalities among White women teachers and Black male students might be reconfigured via an exploration of their intra-actions with other human/non-human entities that comprise their communities.

Importantly, then, the notion that subjectivities are relationally, contingently, and continuously constituted and formed will be developed throughout this theoretically predisposed study.

Implicit in this move is the belief that poststructural theories continue to be useful *and necessary* in helping us understand social and cultural notions of agency and power, but have been less than always “useful” in helping us understand the ways that the material is implicated in discursive configurations. As such, this theoretical framework, in its efforts to displace—or at least greatly trouble—material/discursive and realist/relativist divides, forms part of what has been coined by Haraway (1997) as a “diffractive methodology.” While this term will be developed more thoroughly as a concept, method, and ethos in the next chapter, at this point it is important to just briefly define this methodology in regard to the theoretical framework as “a method of diffractively reading insights through one another [and] building new insights, together with the recognition that intrinsic to this analysis is an ethics that is not predicated on

[^8]: Baradian terms and concepts, such as “material/discursive entanglement” and “intra-action,” will be defined in the next sub-chapter and deployed throughout the study as I engage them with interpretations of postqualitative “data.”
externality but rather entanglements” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, I, 2012, p. 50). Thus, concepts emerging from a wide variety of disciplines and discursive communities become engaged in a transgression of disciplinary borders in order to allow for an entanglement of previously segregated ideas that have historically been located inside and outside disciplinary boundaries. In this way, diffractive practices are posited as a relational method investigative of “the relational nature of difference [and] as a methodology for treating theories and texts not as preexisting entities, but as intra-action, as forces from which other texts come into existence” (p. 57). Such an approach allows for reading insights from different theoretical frames through one another. In this case, such a reading occurs by means of a post-foundational, post-humanist, theoretical study and its attempts to muddy mainstream notions of “the mismatch” via the material and discursive entanglements co-constitutive of one White woman educator’s grappling and interpretations of/with experimental notions of a multiplicitous and posthuman/ist subjectivity. Such an approach embraces Barad’s (2007) goal of engaging in a trans-disciplinary approach

in an effort to foster constructive engagements across (and a reworking of) disciplinary boundaries … beyond the mere acknowledgement that both material and discursive, natural and cultural, factors play a role in knowledge production by examining how these factors work together, and how conceptions of materiality, social practice, nature, and discourse must change to accommodate their mutual involvement. (p. 25)

As such, a diffractive methodology works toward disrupting epistemological, ontological, and disciplinary boundaries of “us and them” and “inside(rs) and outside(rs),” a useful approach for a study interested in problematizing simple renderings of subjectivity in schools.

**Rationale for a Theoretical Study of School Subjects Informed by “the Posts”**

Therefore, located within and against this contemporary educational research context preoccupied with research methodologies that might function as “the fix of the
day” (St. Pierre, 2006, p. 240) and a public school context obsessed with a quantification and regulation of achievement acquired through the sorting, categorizing, and normalizing of school subjects (Popkewitz, 1998), my project can be considered an ontological and epistemological engagement with post-inspired, theoretical research that seeks to problematize and destabilize our common sense conceptions of identity in U.S. schools. This seeking includes looking for moments/spaces/events/intra-actions where categorically positioned school subjects might be imagined less certainly as they push up against, are constrained by, recoil from, interrupt, and breach subjects constituting categorical limits and the entanglements of the discourses and materialities sustaining them. Such school subjects, I will argue, are much less an issue of the imaginary than an issue of representation. They have always been slippery, swiftly and artfully sliding in and out of positions that are abstracted and hitched to a categorical logic long before and after we attempt to accurately signify their materiality in motion (Leander, Phillips, & Taylor, 2010, p. 335). As Leander et al. have pointed out, while the possible identities of school subjects are conceived through “categories, stasis, structures … messy circulations and plural geographies … have always been on the move” (p. 335).

Thus, from the start, I have worked to build a conceptual frame that will help me conceive the research setting as a knot of mottled, mangled, and messy circulations where a relational “I,” as a researcher occupying multiple school subject positions across “space-time-mattering” (Barad, 2012, p. 77), wonders what a study might look, think, and act like as it enters a post-qualitative “refusal space in order to think within and against the weight of such a context” (St. Pierre, 2013a, p. 629). How might such a study, in its efforts to resist an un-interrogated acceptance of the categorical and frequently “failed” school subject, contribute to an understanding of the discourses and materialities that help constitute the messy, fluid relationalities of subjects in contemporary schools and their surrounding communities? By engaging in research and thinking practices that resist “overcod[ing] by the normative” and “configura[tion] into repetitions of banality”
(Lather, 2007, p. 18), might it be possible to diffuse and/or rupture the epistemological abstractions of categorical identity by attending to new, different, and/or revisited ways of thinking about raced, gendered, and relational ontologies?

In response to these questions, this study proposes that one way to experiment with more complex configurations of the relational subjectivities among young Black males and White women teachers in schools is to engage with an entourage of disparate, dissident, and yet potentially collaborative “post” theories. This argument for conceptualizing school subjects through “post” lenses is based on three, interrelated, assumptions:

First, this theoretical framework proceeds on the supposition that teacher and student identities cannot be understood solely as categorical. Rather, a wide range of discourses and materialities intra-act to inform the un/intelligibility of categorical school subjects and are thus constitutive elements of how teachers and students co-construct and respond to each other as intelligible subjects in contemporary schools. Such a move intentionally works to counter research practices that either “take the nature and source of these multiple identity categories for granted and/or explore[s] these identity categories but do[es] not fully interrogate the relationships between them” (Youdell, 2006a, p. 27). Accordingly, this theoretical space is not interested in explaining how racialized or gendered discourses function to produce White women, Black male students and their anticipated, oppositional relationalities and politics. Instead, it seeks to interrogate and unsettle commonsensical, identity-informing concepts in traditional education research by theorizing one researcher’s always partial perspective and contingently situated inquiry into subjectivity envisioned as fickle and capricious relational entanglements occurring in contemporary U.S. society and schools. While such entanglements can often appear sedimentary in traditional education research and its accompanying conventional conceptions of the researcher as knower, a key position in this study is that even subjects seemingly sedimented through positivist and post-positivist research practices are
engaged in often undetectable divergences and transfigurations. As Barad (2014) helps us to remember, “Sedimenting does not entail closure. Mountain ranges in their liveliness attest to this fact” (p. 168).

Second, a “post” lens allows for thinking about a politics that doesn’t require heroes, villains, and victims in the subjectivities of the Black male student or the White woman teacher. Instead, what becomes possible to even think about is the notion of a contingent politics that can accommodate the convergence of multiple histories, multiply interpreted experiences, ambiguous embodiments, and multiple subjectivities among its participants in the space where identities both eddy around and trickle beyond the categorical limit. As conceptualized in this study, these are the identity formations in flux, and the politics that are emergent, in this complexly neoliberal moment in schools. As Brown (1995) attends to these problematic and “contradictory operations of politicized identity within late-modern democracy,” she astutely describes this contemporary identity: “Even as it is being articulated, circulated and, lately, institutionalized in a host of legal, political and cultural practices, identity is unraveling—metaphysically, culturally, geopolitically and historically—as rapidly as it is being produced” (p. 231). Thus, while the notion of the categorical mismatch might fit neatly into education reform agendas, policies, and practices directed toward closing the achievement gap, it fails to absorb more complex and fluid notions of identity, such as identity conceived as iterative reconfiguration (Barad, 2007, p. 243), commodity, hybridity, and/or relational enactment.

Last, this study is positioned in the long wake of the National Research Council’s (2002) rejection of postmodern critiques of objectivity and “trustworthy knowledge” (St. Pierre, 2006, p. 250) and, in contrast, contends that such a rejection shortsightedly privileges a narrowly defined scientific research in education that is overly dependent on “forms of knowledge and intervention with a higher epistemological profile” than more qualitatively inclined, social science and humanities based education research (Barry,
Osborne, & Rose, 1996, p. 12). Moreover, such a privileging marginalizes large bodies of work that are attempting to disrupt the “reproduct[ion] of conventional ‘wisdom’ about power that travels through the folklore of educational reform” (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 2) and ignores the “exclusionary impulse … characteristic of positivism” within a “system [that] can only function by reducing complexity” (Lyotard, as cited in St. Pierre, 2006, p. 250). Hence, while critiques regarding the lack of clarity and “labyrinthine” nature of education research rooted in the postmodern are abundant (Constas, cited in Pillow, 2000, p. 21), this “posts”-informed study proceeds on the assumption that complex, entangled, and socio-historical issues of race, gender, and identity in contemporary U.S. public schools are often best explored through lenses that attend to “a range of issues that address ontological claims, epistemological matters, methodological practices, analytical actions, representational preferences, practical concerns, and political agendas” (Pillow, 2000, p. 37). Indeed, such an approach remains wary of claims of certainty. As Butler (2006) has queried,

"What travels under the sign of “clarity,” and what would be the price of failing to deploy a certain critical suspicion when the arrival of lucidity is announced? Who devises the protocols of “clarity” and whose interests do they serve? What is foreclosed by the insistence on parochial standards of transparency as requisite for all communication? What does “transparency” keep obscure? (p. 10)"

Similarly, Lather (as cited in Pillow, 2000) pushes us to challenge “taken-for-granted structures of intelligibility, to make visible the foundations of the very categories we are dependent upon-truth, progress, rationality, humanism, gender, and race to name a few—and … to consider how such questioning would affect what we research, how we do it, and how we know it” (p. 22). By rejecting the inevitability of “Science with a big S” (Lather, 2010) through an interrogation into the effects of some of the structures we rely upon to legitimate expertise, this study hopes to engage with a conceptualization of research that might explore the ways school subjects are made intelligible though a
complex interplay between expertise and the political in education research practices (Barry et al., 1996, pp. 13-14).

**Research Questions**

The preceding discussions highlight the importance of arguments for a theoretical engagement with sometimes disparate theories, not rooted in an evaluation of epistemological compatibility, but a questioning of the assumptions embedded in grasping onto a single theoretical framework, and an engagement with the tensions between and amid competing/complementary and overlapping frameworks that does not collapse into debates about insides and outsides, or us and them. As Barad (2003) elaborates,

> What often appears as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges does not actually entail a relation of absolute exteriority at all. Like the diffraction patterns illuminating the indefinite nature of boundaries displaying shadows in “light” regions and bright spots in “dark” regions—the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of “exteriority within.” (p. 803)

This interest in reconfiguring the boundaries of insides and outsides situates such theorizing as both politically and ethically oriented work. As Alaimo and Hekman (2008) point out, “discourses have material consequences that require ethical responses. Ethics must be centered not only on those discourses but on the material consequences as well” (p. 7). Thus, as a White woman engaging in inquiry around material and discursive entanglements with Black male students in particular and the mismatch as a generalized concept, the challenge of engaging in ethical work is posited as different from and more than merely being able to reflexively position White privilege in education research, and relatedly, in research communities (Pillow, 2003). It is from this standpoint, then, that the following questions were used to guide this research project:
1. How might the notion “White woman teacher” as school subject be troubled and reimagined as in excess of and different from the categorical and oppositional subject of mismatch discourses?

2. How might the notion of “Black male” as school subject be troubled and reimagined as in excess of and different from the categorical and oppositional subject of mismatch discourses?

3. How might the notion of “White women teacher” and “Black male” as relational subjects be troubled and reimagined as in excess of and different from the categorical and oppositional subject of mismatch discourses?

Thus, as I trudge through the delineated but blurred spaces between “us” and “them” in schools, I think alongside Sommers (1994) as she offers, “[My] question, finally, is not what “insiders,” as opposed to “outsiders,” can know; it is how [emphasis added] those positions are being constructed as incommensurate or conflictive (pp. 524-525).

Relatedly, I also wonder about the ways these constructions might be explored through the fragility of their censures. In the next section, I will briefly review the various theories that guided this post-foundational inquiry into mismatched subjectivity in schools.

**Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and the “Posts,” or Defining the Undefinable**

What are we calling postmodernity? I’m not up to date. (Foucault, as cited in Lather, 2007, p. 5)

Post-structuralism is a baroque designation, because there has never been one structuralism, and because what it deals with did not come “after.” (Nancy, 1991, p. 2)

While the terms “postmodernism” and “poststructuralism” share some overlap and are frequently conflated in their use, it is important to distinguish them a bit in order to explore their distinct “intellectual genealogies and their theoretical trajectories and
applications” (Peters, 1999, para. 1.1), as well as to sketch their relationships to other, theoretical “posts.” Borrowing from Peters’s (1999) argument that the two are best understood by distinguishing between the theoretical concerns and objects of study of each, this section begins by outlining these distinctions. I then follow up with a brief discussion of their relevance to the theoretical framing of this study and conclude by problematizing efforts to define either term.

Postmodernism’s object of study is modernism, and, though the use of the prefix “post” most often connotes a chronological association, the relationship between the two is somewhat more complex. Thus, rather than thinking of the postmodern as coming after modernity, it might best be thought of “not so much [as] a chronological moment in time but as more a moment in logic, or a rupture—a break-in modernist consciousness” (Miller, 2010a, p. 666). This modern consciousness, as manifested in the arts, was influenced by rapid industrialization and urbanization, and is largely believed to have begun around the late 19th century when a shift in methods, attitudes, and style became evident as “artist[s] deliberately br[oke] away from classical and traditional methods of expression based on assumptions of realism and naturalism” (Peters, 1999, para. 2.2). In philosophy, this modern consciousness emerges in what is frequently called the modern era, a historical period that followed the medieval era and was shaped by thinkers such as Descartes, Bacon, Locke, Hobbes, and Kant. Importantly, these thinkers based their knowledge claims on “the supremacy of reason for discovering the truth about a rational universe, the necessity of supplementing reason with experience, and overarching theories of knowledge,” (Miller, 2010a, p. 667). Hence, in philosophy, and later in the social sciences, modernism can be seen as an ethos fueled by a strong belief in “the advancement of knowledge and human progress, made on the basis of experience and scientific method” (Peters, 1999, para. 2.3). As an example of modernist consciousness, Peters, like Foucault, epitomizes philosophical modernity with Kant’s critical philosophy, a stance that posits criticism as a fundamental tool for advancing knowledge (para. 2.3).
In both the arts and philosophy, there is an “underlying assumption … that the modern is in some sense better than the old, simply because, in the sequence of historical development, it comes later” (para. 2.1).

In relation to the modern, the postmodern can be considered as “a turnout of and away from the modern; from previously customary modes of thinking and living” (Miller, 2010a, p. 666). Seen as “being-within a particular way of thinking, language and a particular cultural, social, historical framework,” postmodernism critiques modernism’s master-narratives that claim generalizability across diverse contexts, and accordingly seeks to disrupt universal claims to knowledge and/or truth (p. 667). As such, Miller emphasizes that it is somewhat erroneous to call it an “ism,” which implies “something complete, totalized, unified” (p. 666). In the arts, postmodern thought has been engaged in challenging hierarchical binaries such as high art and popular art, and troubling aesthetic unity and singular meanings across diverse textual mediums through juxtapositions, parodies, exaggerations, etc. (p. 667). Referring to the postmodern era as a “conceptual system,” Lather (2007) describes the postmodern as “generally refer[ring] to the material and historical shifts of the global uprising of the marginalized, the revolution in communication technology, and the fissures of global multinational hypercapitalism” (p. 5). Ermarth (as cited in Peters, 1999) complements this description by positing two key assumptions that make the postmodern shift recognizable. The first is “the assumption that there is no common denominator-in ‘nature’ or ‘truth’ or ‘God’ or ‘the future’-that guarantees the One-ness of the world,” and the second assumption is that “human systems operate like language, being self-reflexive rather than self-referential systems-systems of differential function which are powerful but finite, and which construct meaning and value” (para. 2.8).

On the other hand, poststructuralism has as its object of study structuralism. Structuralism, emerging at the beginning of the 20th century, is most frequently conceptualized as a critique of humanist and enlightenment projects via an “intellectual
movement and philosophical orientation associated with Western discourses who claim to analyze and explain invariant structures in and constitutive of nature, society and human psyche” (Miller, 2010b, p. 500). Highly recognized by its founding theories, which include “the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and Emil Benveniste, Marxist theory, Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology, the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan” (Weedon, 1996, p. 12), as well as contributions by Roman Jakobsen in structural linguistics and Claude Levi-Strauss in anthropology, structuralism successfully sought the status of science in its study of language and culture through its supposition of “a systemic center that organized and sustained an entire society and its sets of relations” (Miller, 2010b, p. 500).

Thus, poststructuralism, as structuralism’s opposing, binary pair, is characterized by Peters (1999) as “a mode of thinking, a style of philosophizing, and a kind of writing” that can be seen as incorporating structuralism’s critique of enlightenment and humanist projects while concurrently critiquing its “totalizing explanatory frameworks, especially … its ahistoricism and universalism” (Lather, 2007, p. 5). Of particular relevance to this study are contributions made by early French poststructural theories. The thinkers from this period are often seen as genealogically affiliated with Nietzsche’s “critique of truth and his emphasis upon the plurality of interpretation,” a critique that gave rise to Lyotard’s analysis of narratives and narratology, Foucault’s notion of truth as a product of discursive regimes and genres, and an overarching interrogation of the “Cartesian-Kantian humanistic subject” perceived as “autonomous, free and transparently self-conscious” (Peters, 1999, para. 4.8). In particular, Butler’s theor(ies) of performativity, Foucault’s engagements with power and discourse, and Derrida’s notion of deconstruction have been and continue to be particularly fruitful spaces in which to think through the “destabiliz[ation of] binarized biologies of gender, race, sexuality and ability” (Loewen-Walker, 2014, p. 48). Importantly, what emerged from such diverse methods and objects of thought were tools with which to think about a decentered
subject, unknowable as an object of study, and drenched in complex cultural and historical contexts. “Discursively constituted and positioned at the intersection of libidinal forces and socio-cultural practices” (Peters, 1999, para. 4.8), what emerges is a multi-faceted subject replete with multiple subjectivities.

In my earliest imaginings of this study, I positioned myself as a researcher who, like Peters, was “poststructuralist in my interests and postmodern in my sensibilities” (Peters, 2013, p. 35). The “posts” and “post” thinking, however, have proliferated in recent years, concurrent with my doctoral studies and all that entails. Further challenging Enlightenment humanism, these neoteric “posts,” including, but not limited to, worldviews through post-human, post-colonial, post-foundational, and post-subjective lenses, have worked to “provide[d] a diverse array of analyses to interrogate the ontological and epistemological order of things (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 646) as they strive to envision a non-essential, de-centered subject. These “posts” are in constant interaction in my thinking, colliding, buttressing, and blotching each other with their forces and residues, engaging with the contingencies of the moment in ways that often blur their epistemological boundaries. I think of these thinking spaces as tensions to be “worked” rather than “worked through” in this study (Ellsworth & Miller, 2005, p. 180).

And so, weighed down beneath a pile of “posts” that include the poststructural and postmodern, but are not limited to them, it is not enough to merely say I situate my work within poststructural thought. Indeed, poststructuralism and its associated theories and theorists who are “forced to huddle under this categorical umbrella” (Jay, 1995, p. 156) seem to resist and even defy classification, since they seem to lose something of their generative capabilities as soon as they are confined and defined as finite and immobile terms. Butler (1992) has most notably critiqued the ways poststructural theories are frequently conflated and situated neatly into the category of poststructural thought. She queries,
What authorizes such an assumption from the start? From the start we must believe that theories offer themselves in bundles or in organized totalities, and that historically a set of theories which are structurally similar emerge as the articulation of an historically specific condition of human reflection. (p. 5)

Accordingly, Nancy (1991) positions the insufficiency of poststructuralism as an overarching category as a “testimony to the line of rupture-whose traces are complex, sinuous, sometimes difficult to grasp, multiple or effaced” (p. 3). Whatever the term “poststructural” means, in this study, as it moves across contexts and fluctuating contingencies, it remains “pervasive, elusive, and marked by a proliferation of conflicting definitions that refuse to settle into meaning” (Lather, 2007, p. 5).

**Feminist, New Materialisms and Their Critiques**

One of the most prolific clusters of “posts” in recent years have been those falling under the umbrella of the feminist, new materialisms. These theorists, while an extremely diverse group, are most ostensibly associated with the ontological turn, a theoretical movement that signals a shift away from the linguistic turn often associated with poststructural theorizing. This distinction, while far from unanimously ascribed, is at least in part characteristic of this school of thought. Indeed, while St. Pierre has argued that at least some poststructural thinkers have always attended to ontology, many feminists situated in the thick of new materialist theoretical activity are at least in partial disagreement with this assertion. Indicative of this sentiment, while acknowledging that poststructural thinkers have been challenging the resoluteness of Cartesian binaries for quite some time, Alaimo and Hekman (2008) argue that “there is one dichotomy they

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9This assertion will be explored more fully in a subsequent sub-section that delves more deeply into some of the tensions surrounding feminist, new materialisms.
appear to embrace almost without question: language and reality”¹⁰ (p. 2). In their influential, edited edition, Material Feminisms, these scholars bring together contemporary feminist thinkers as they engage with recent epistemological framings that critique poststructural theories as “focusing exclusively on representations, ideology, and discourse [and thereby] excluding lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance from consideration” (p. 4). Positing these allegedly limited foci as symptomatic of feminism’s “flight from nature” and indicative of efforts directed toward “relentlessly disentangling ‘woman’ from the supposed ground of essentialism, reductionism and stasis,” these authors assert that essentialist and reductive conceptions of “woman” have instead been reinstated because “that very nature is either explicitly or implicitly reconfirmed as the treacherous quicksand of misogyny” (p. 4). Stated differently, for these scholars, not only did poststructural thinkers’ gestures toward a material ontology not go far enough, but in their “bracketing or negating” of matter and nature and their critiques of science as a normalizing discourse, they failed to engage with science in “innovative, productive or affirmative ways” (p. 4). In effect then, from this perspective, the absence and/or elision of biology and/or matter actually worked toward constituting it as a binarial “other.”

Therefore, Hekman (2014) further maintains, what was needed was a theoretical approach that would make good on postmodernism’s failed promise to, “deconstruct the discourse/reality dichotomy” (p. 148). She continues, “The linguistic constructionists got one thing right: language does construct reality. What they got wrong is that idea that language alone constructs reality; other constitutive factors were ignored” (p. 148).¹¹

¹⁰A major contribution of poststructural thought is the rejection of “a reality” that exists independent of language and discourse and that is waiting to be un/dis/covered. This critique is more involved than this space allows for, but is a key element in understanding the knottiness of feminism’s relationship to a “real” that might be tethered to essentialism.

¹¹Again, these are tensions contouring these feminisms to be explored throughout the dissertation for what they can “do” when entangled rather than assertions of this frame.
Therefore, in place of, in dialogue with, and/or in tension with post-structural thinkers’ attentiveness to discourse, feminist new materialists might be said to share the belief that “dominant constructivist orientation[s] to social analysis is inadequate for thinking about matter, materiality, and politics in ways that do justice to the contemporary context of biopolitics and a global, political economy” (Colebrook, forthcoming, p. 1).

Some interpretations of this re-turn to matter concurrently summon the demise of the human subject. Theories and theorists interested in everything from viruses, bacteria, genes, affective intensities, artificial intelligences, capital flows, and varying iterations of post-anthropocentric perspectives assert, for a wide variety of reasons, the demise of the human as the center of contemporary thought. As has been stated throughout this framework, however, this study is particularly interested in re-conceptualizing categorically conceived school subjects, and as such, my interest in feminist, new materialist thought is predominantly an engagement with emergent, new materialist renderings of and/or openings for an “ontology of the subject” (Hekman, 2014, p. 149) in ways that consider human/non-human and material/discursive entanglements as constitutive of contemporary subjects in U.S schools. Hekman, resonant with Braidotti’s (2013) argument for the continued necessity of a theory of the subject (p. 16), contends that while material feminists have offered viable theories for an ontology of the body as “transcorporeal” and “as an intra-action between nature and culture,” there are significant gaps in the literature in regards to the theorization of a subject that is more than the body (Hekman, 2014, p. 162). She articulates,

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12Hekman (2014) cites Bordo (1993), Grosz (1994, 1995, 1996, 2004, 2005), Bray and Colebrook (1998), and Mol (1999) as instances of new materialist body studies that attempt to address the problematics of the location of the body of at the “intersection between patriarchal structures ad women’s lives” (pp. 151-159). She positions them as falling short in theorizing an ontology of the subject, however, and offers an in-depth discussion of the ways Pickering’s “mangle” (1993) and Butler’s later work (2001) might contribute to the development of such an ontology.
We are more than our bodies—we are persons with identities—we are “I’s.” What can we say about the ontology of the subject, the “I”? Can we develop an ontology of the subject without falling prey to one of the traps of modernism: the mind/body dualism?... An ontology of the subject must be able to describe the interaction of multiple factors that constitute subjectivity: the linguistic, the material, the cultural, the racial, sexual preference and many others. (pp. 162-163)

From this perspective, the human subject remains crucial, but not in isolation and/or as the only thing that matters. Rather, thinking an ontology of the subject in these terms makes it possible to consider human subjectivities as a hodgepodge of relationalities and connections that include not only other humans, but also non-humans in all their iterations. Importantly, in order to explore subjectivity in these ways, the theoretical framework offered for this study is most interested in the collisions and buttressing that seem to be occurring between feminist poststructural and new materialist thought, rather than choosing a “side.” The next subsection serves to articulate some ruminations amid these ontological and epistemological tensions.

The Ontological in the Poststructural

As previously stated, the already complex landscape of the “posts” has been further complicated in recent years by a new amalgamation of theories that call for a theoretical turn toward ontology. Rumblings of the “death” of poststructural theory provide background noise as a growing number of researchers call for us to attend to being alongside our knowing, to challenge our “representational and binary logics,” and to recognize the interrelated nature of language, the material and the human (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, pp. 629-630). While some of these “new” theorists are disenchanted with poststructural thought, not everyone has failed to find the space necessary to do this work within in this theoretical cluster. Hekman (2008) has argued that some postmodern thinkers, particularly Foucault, have been interpreted inaccurately (p. 101). Similarly, taking up Butler’s (1990) call to attend to post-structuralism in all of its “modalities and
permutations” (p. 4), St. Pierre (2013) points out that poststructuralist thought has always attended to ontology, pushing us to read poststructural thinkers more closely.\textsuperscript{13} From this position, she argues that recent critiques of the “posts” offered by the latest theoretical categories interchangeably labeled the “new materialisms,” and/or the “ontological turn,” may in some ways be misinformed. St Pierre goes on to contend that these critiques, most notably those that dismiss poststructural thought as overemphasizing the “discursive” or “linguistic” at the expense of the material and empirical, fail to recognize that these posts’ critiques of the Enlightenment and humanist thought have always attended to the material, a material “which is always already completely imbricated with the linguistic and discursive” (p. 647). Like Hekman, St. Pierre argues that Foucault’s work is particularly rich with attention to ontology, pointing to his studies of various systems of thought across historical periods as he looked at how these systems created an order of things “that cohered for a time until they did not” (Foucault, as cited in St. Pierre, 2013, p. 646). In this historical work, she contends, Foucault suggests he was:

exploring how particular cultural codes produce systems of thought that enabled for different ontologies and epistemologies … by attending to “chance, discontinuity, and materiality in the order of things—seemingly insignificant and random material and discursive irruptions that, over time, enabled something different to be thought and lived—a different order of things.” (p. 646)

Similarly, Butler (2010) troubles comfortable notions of distinct ontologies by replacing the discrete ontology with a relational one. She writes,

There is no life without the conditions of life that variably sustain life, and those conditions are pervasively social, establishing not the discrete ontology of the person, but rather the interdependency of persons, involving reproducible and sustaining social relations, and relations to the environment and to non-human forms of life, broadly construed. (p. 19)

\textsuperscript{13} Coole (2013) similarly points out both Bourdieu’s and Foucault’s attention to terms such as “concrete,” “material,” “real,” and “empirical,” providing examples from Foucault’s “Discipline and Punish” such as “physico-political techniques” and “tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms” (p. 465).
Foucault’s offering of the shifting nature of cultural codes as creating space for different epistemologies and ontologies is particularly relevant to the context of this study, and when coupled with poststructural and new materialist notions of relational ontology and Barad’s emphasis on the entanglement of ethics, ontology, and epistemology, a particularly productive space within which to think about “the mismatch” emerges. In this space, where attentiveness to ontology is positioned amid and in relation with as opposed to beyond poststructural thought, this study works to problematize categorically conceived ontologies as conceptualized in traditional renderings of “the mismatch” in educational research. Instead, ontology is imagined as a set of temporal, spatial, corporeal, epistemological, and performative intra-activities that are relationally contingent upon material and social surroundings, enactments, and exchanges. Such a conception of ontology rejects notions of thought and lived identity as sovereign and autonomous, but rather reframes thinking and being, or epistemology and ontology, as relationally, politically, and ethically constituted, and thus constitutive of identities that might be conceived of via “a ‘posthumanist materialism’ that shifts from mimesis to something ‘altered and altering in its approach to language and history’” (Cohen, as cited in Lather, 2001, p. 205). What this might allow for are new modes of subjectivity (Hayles, 2005) that allow us to imagine school subjects, not through epistemological frames of categorical individuation, but rather through complementary and co-emergent frames that try to think amid the tensions, contradictions, ambiguities, and unpredictable outcomes of discursive and material entanglements among human and non-human factors in schools.

Further contributing to this more malleable notion of ontology is what Foucault has (as cited in Dean, 1996) described as “a critical ontology of ourselves” (p. 210). Ontology so considered is deeply entwined with the Foucauldian notion of a history of the present. Dean (1996) succinctly elaborates on the interconnectedness of ontologies and histories:
First, what is at issue is a history of localized and heterogeneous ontologies that do not add up to either a single form of human being or a single present (Rose 1995). Nor is “a history of the present” about the emergence of a “modernity” that is a unity of discrete but interdependent elements (Dean 1994a: 51-2). There is rather a multiplicity of presents, a multiplicity of ways of experiencing those presents and a multiplicity of the “we” who are subjects of that experience. Secondly, these multiple ontologies are different ways of thinking about who we are, how we should act and how we should act upon ourselves. What is at issue here is not so much what human beings really are or have become but how we think about who they are, and the consequences of this. (p. 210)

From this perspective, the ontologies of “mismatched” school subjects can be problematized in various ways using multiple frames and creating space for research that attends to some of the complexities and ethical concerns that unfold.

To close this section, I return for a moment to the act of dissertation writing. As Lather (2001) reminds us, “while knowledge projects are linguistically mediated or rhetorically staged, there is a being in excess of our knowing, whether we know it or not” (p. 213). In the novitiate realm of dissertation writing, we are often counseled to condense our epistemological stance for the “elevator pitch,” and such summations serve the purpose of positioning us not only within a distinct and clear epistemological stance, but often, they also hitch us to unproblematized, corresponding notions of ontology. Of late, however, and despite evidence of some attention to ontology in poststructural thought, the new materialists have been more extensively troubling taken-for-granted notions of ontology and, in particular, are critiquing “extreme epistemological perspective[s] ... [that] believe that all knowledge is based on sociological factors like power, influence, and economic factors” (St. Pierre, 2006, p. 250). As my reading, writing, and thinking have dawdled across my doctoral studies, the pages have become more heavily spattered and smeared with these new materialisms, and thus this study moves forward based on a belief that engaging in research projects that attend exclusively to projects of epistemology or knowing without looking for clues into being tends to leave unstudied significant issues in contemporary schools.
This is/was/will be an untidy thinking space, and while complex and sometimes contradictory notions of the new materialisms will be engaged throughout the study, I would also like to briefly but explicitly posit three primary assumptions that are most relevant to the theoretical explorations offered thus far. I position my theorizings in this way in an effort to distinguish this exploratory, theoretical work from particular trajectories of new materialist scholarship that seeks to enact a greater break and distancing from poststructural modes of thought.

The first premise integral to this study is that this effort at theoretical experimentation is seeking ways “to build on rather than abandon the lessons learned in the linguistic turn” (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 6). The racialized and gendered, material and discursive legacies that swirl around any efforts toward exploring intra-actional becomings of White women and young Black males in contemporary U.S schools and society are complex. Therefore, in keeping with Hekman’s analysis of new materialism’s limited theorizing around the ontological subject, a theoretical experimentation with varying notions of “post” subjectivity cannot simply position new materialist theories of subjectivity (some of which champion asubjectivity), in opposition to, as coming after, or as a corrective of poststructural theories of the subject. As such, in this conceptual study the theoretical intermingling among the two is both rooted and seeking. It seeks, in its engagement with some feminist, new materialist lenses that envision subjectivity as non-individuated and emergent, to engage with an “adequate conceptual representation [that] … is not about the confirmation of steady identities, or the claim to counter-identities, but about the creation of alternative thinkable and shareable subject positions” (Braidotti, 2006a, p. 95). Such seeking, however, does not and cannot start from scratch, and as such is rooted in both theorized and lived histories,
memories, and other contingencies that tinge the “new” with yesterdays and tomorrows that are embedded in today. I quote Haraway (1997) here at length,

Shaped as an insider and an outsider to the hegemonic power and discourses of my European and North American legacies, I remember that anti-Semitism and misogyny intensified in the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution of early modern Europe, that racism and colonialism flourished in the travelling habits of the cosmopolitan Enlightenment and that the intensified misery of billions of men and women seems organically rooted in the freedoms of transnational capitalism and technoscience. But I also remember the dreams and achievements of contingent freedoms, situated knowledges and relief of suffering that are inextricable from this contaminated triple historical heritage. I remain a child of the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and technoscience. My modest witness cannot ever be simply oppositional. (p. 3)

In this ontologically and epistemologically saturated space, post-structural attention to situatedness and power remain extremely important when exploring differentiated becomings that are never symmetrical and always mottled with the stickiness of the past” (Ahmed, as cited in Loewen-Walker, 2014, p. 56). Ahmed reminds us,

Historical harms live on not only in the body of the individual, but in the “skin” or the intergenerational affectivity of whole communities. To forget the past (and we are no strangers to such large-scale forgetting in the face of historical injustices) then, would be a “repetition of the violence or injury.” (p. 56)

Considered through this lens, the mismatch, epitomized via White women and young Black men’s oppositional relationality, is not just a contemporary, historical moment, but is submerged in lived histories that coat and sometimes saturate the lived subjectivities of today.

Hence, continued allegiance to post-structural thought is also deeply connected to an unremitting need for attentiveness to issues of power lest one “leaps into unmediated realms of ontology” (McNeil, 2010, p. 436) that are sometimes represented as pure, unrestricted “becomings.” Sharing concerns with van der Zaag (2015) in regard to her poignant critique of some renderings of new materialism, I too worry that in their “theoretical and empirical enthusiasm for human/nonhuman relationality … the question
of how power invests subject formations has almost entirely disappeared” (p. 1). Because of this concern, while a singular focus on the discursive is inadequate to the task of exploring the epistemological and ontological enmeshment of White women and young Black males in schools, an inverted single-mindedness toward becoming and ontological uncertainty creates similar ethical conundrums. Thus, ontological openness cannot be seen as a corrective for the limits of discursively contoured subjectivity. As Braidotti (2006a) has pointed out in her analysis of several “new materialisms”-inclined theorists’ work around race and “post” subjectivities, this work is not easy and does not simply resolve ethical issues, but rather such theoretical moves continue to tread “a treacherous path” (p. 63). In particular, she refers to the work of Lucius Outlaw, whom she describes as looking for “alternative foundations for black subjectivity” in a context where “radical claims cannot be sustained, and [yet one is] loath to reinvent a tradition out of the suffering of the black community” (p. 63). Indeed, theorizing in the murky viscosity of raced and gendered nexuses often becomes uncomfortably provocative, ethically problematic, and politically risky, and as such is frequently prematurely abandoned.

And yet, I can’t help but wonder what we might learn if we “stayed with the trouble” for a moment, as Haraway (2016) advises. In this discomforting space, what might we “see”\textsuperscript{14} by engaging in an exploration into the ways that subject-shifting material/discursive energies re/de/Configure racialized and gendered subjectivities as they attach themselves to living and mobile bodies in ways that counter both the certainty of the mismatch’s racialized and gendered discourses, and their lived effects? My hunch is that when there is concurrent attention paid to ontology, the discourses contouring the certainty of the mismatch would require more and more heavy lifting if they are to remain afloat amid the circulatory flows of common sense. Any theoretical engagement

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\textsuperscript{14}In Chapter II, I will discuss in detail Haraway’s recuperation of “sight” as a tool for feminism.
with this work, however, will arguably require a diffractive reading\textsuperscript{15} of poststructural and new materialist frames in order to attend to the intra-activity of the material and discursive layers of complexity residing in the mismatch.

This brings us to the second premise, closely related to the first, which is that the “new materialisms,” as engaged in this study, do not seek to reverse the discourse/matter binary in order to reposition matter in dominant, hierarchical relation to discourse. Rather, they will be employed to work toward a recognition of the interrelated nature of discourse and materiality in ways that understand this interrelatedness as having “no inside/outside, no origin and end, no gap between sign/structure/language and reference/nature/matter” (van der Tuin, as cited in Loewen-Walker, 2014, pp. 48-49).

From this perspective, and consistent with both Barad’s concept of intra-activity as well as my intended use of diffractive theoretical frameworks, meaning is neither purely discursive nor materialist, but rather, “individual entities—matter, human, non-human, discourse, nature and culture—[then] only find meaning or expression through their co-creative connections and entanglements with other entities” (Loewen-Walker, 2014, p. 49). New materialists working in this way “situate themselves against the opposition between mind and matter, and define themselves as distinctly different from older materialisms that regarded matter as some basis, foundation or substrate from which life might be determined” (Colebrook, forthcoming, p. 3). To signal this distinction, rather than speak of “the material,” new materialists frequently shift grammars as they speak of the notion of “materiality.” Indeed, this distinction is highly purposeful, and, while elaborating on the distinction between the terms “material” and “materiality,” Colebrook argues that the term “materiality” implicates process, conjecturing that “to refer to

\textsuperscript{15}The concepts of diffraction and intra-action will be more fully developed in forthcoming subsections. For this section, it is important to note that diffraction in this context refers to a reading of diverse theories through, rather than next to or against each other. This subsection is briefly, but importantly, most interested in exploring some of the theoretical fault lines such a reading might provoke.
materiality is to go beyond what is simply given—the thing as it is named or predicated [the material]—and to consider the process by which it comes into being or actuality” (p. 4). As articulated throughout this framework, what is of greatest interest to me throughout this study is an exploration into ways that materiality, understood as the way matter comes to matter (Barad, 2003), and discourse intra-act to constitute and/or de/re/form racialized and gendered school subjects currently positioned unproblematically and oppositionally via mismatch discourses.

The third and final premise, also closely related to the first, is the continued importance of the human as a specific case of “life,” thus refusing the most recent “death of the human subject” approach to theories of subjectivity favored by some trajectories of feminist, new materialist thought. This is a crucial premise, because while some work emerging from new materialist thinkers is engaged with contemporary posthumanisms via human-less post-anthropocentricism and/or object oriented ontologies, this study is pointedly concerned with the human as a posthumanist subject configured differently from both humanist and exclusively poststructurally informed, posthumanist iterations of subjectivity. In this study, the human remains central for primarily ethical reasons. As Braidotti (2013) points out when she argues for the continued need for theories of the human subject, “humanism’s restricted notion of what counts as the human is one of the keys to understand how we got to a posthuman turn at all” (p. 16). In a similar vein, Haraway (2006) reminds us, “you can’t do human ahistorically, or as if ‘human’ were one thing” (p. 146). Thus, such doing, including the theoretical discarding of the “human,” is not a singular act or horizontal move. Humans don’t occupy a single position in our world, but rather “are quite a crowd, at all of our temporalities and materialities” (p. 146).

Similarly attentive to the complexity and asymmetry of the “human,” while some new materialist conceptualizations of subjectivity as “becoming” are imagined almost exclusively as creative, open-ended and unrestrained becomings or intensities, not all
work in this way. Others, such as some of the more critical engagements with bio-genetic capitalism, can be characterized as “post-anthropocentric, but not necessarily post-humanistic,” as they attempt to shed light on these late capitalisms’ effects [on humanity] which tend to be “deeply inhumane” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 65). In a study motivated by the relationalities of a White woman teacher and some of her former Black male students occurring in historical moments that are steeped in the residues, intensities, and diffractive effects of Hurricane Katrina, “Black Lives Matter,” the Women’s March, the “school to prison pipeline,” Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, and Emmett Till (to name but a few) and immersed in both virtual and “real” “spacetime matterings” (Barad, 2012b, p. 77) such as “Chiraq,” Charlottesville, Virginia, and Flint, Michigan, the impotentiality of the human embedded in the posthuman condition seems deeply significant and cause to reject an outright abandonment of the human in theories of posthuman subjectivity. Consequently, to discard the human in its entirety, as a counter to human/ism’s ethical malfeasance, creates new ethical concerns around the inhuman/e. This theme recurs throughout this study.

Thus, thinking of subjectivity as constituted via the complex intra-action of human and non-human factors and as an engagement with both poststructural and new materialist thought, it seems important at this point to describe and contour some of the theoretical and methodological concepts that I will be using to attempt to engage theories and research practices as “contestatory reconfiguration[s] of the present” (Campbell, 2004, p. 174). These concepts, articulated and used generatively by Barad, Haraway, and many others grappling with the relationships among discourse and materiality in their current, knowledge-producing practices, will be engaged in this study as both theoretical and methodological tools that work toward unsettling humanist conceptions of individuated subjectivity as exclusively and/or unproblematically categorical and oppositional. As such, they shape what Barad (2007) calls the “ethico-onto-epistemological” frame of this study (p. 185).
Chapter II

DEFINING THE TERMS: THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. (Foucault, 1982, p. 777)

One cannot “be” either a cell or a molecule-or a woman, colonized person, laborer, and so on... “Being” is much more problematic and contingent. (Haraway, 1988, p. 585)

Thus far, I have argued that new concepts are needed to help us re-conceptualize subjectivity in order to trouble the categorical and oppositionally relational certainty of “mismatched” subjects in contemporary U.S. schools. In this chapter, I explore the Foucauldian concepts of discourse, knowledge/power, and the ways they impact subject formation. As well, I address Barad’s theorizing around ontological inseparability as I work to construct a diffracting methodology that might help me unsettle some of the widely accepted divisions between ontology, epistemology, and ethics in Western knowledge projects. Crucially, investigating these two modes of thinking will help me lay the groundwork for experimentations with diffraction as a post-qualitative methodology.

To begin, I explore Foucault’s multi-faceted inquiries into the relationships between discourse, power/knowledge, and the formation of the subject as a form of poststructural theorizing. Specifically, I contour a particular rendering of Foucault’s notion of discursive formations as a poststructural tool directed toward complicating our understandings of the mismatch as a commonsensical concept in education. By engaging
with some of the ways Foucault has grappled with the workings of discourse, knowledge, and power, I investigate some possibilities for an understanding of the formation of multiplicitous, post-humanist subjectivities that differ from more traditional, humanist conceptualizations of the subject.

I then turn to the concepts of phenomena, intra-activity, and agency as I explore Barad’s feminist, new materialist rendering of the formation of posthumanist subjectivity. Together, in Chapter III, these Foucauldian and Baradian concepts will be offered as components of a post-qualitative research methodology that seeks to articulate mismatch subjectivities by diffracting these disparate, posthumanist lenses in order to re-conceptualize the human subject as multiple, non-individuated, and relational.

Thinking Through Foucault

Over the last several decades, education researchers have turned to the theorizings of Michel Foucault to help us understand the way power functions in the construction of our knowledge projects and their effects.¹ His works, which constitute a diverse and, at times, seemingly inconsistent body of thought, span multiple decades and reflect different problems and approaches that he was grappling with at different points in his career.² Since it is ill-advised to regard these “periods” via a customary, maturation-oriented progress narrative, Bernauer (as cited in Baker & Heyning, 2004) helps disrupt the habituality of this chronological, linear thinking by organizing his work along three

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²St. Pierre (2004) writes that her interests led her to look at a theory of the subject Foucault wrote about later in his career, “care of the self.” She elaborates, “In the course of his life’s work, Foucault changed his mind. He writes that he is inclined ‘to begin and begin again, to attempt and be mistaken, to go back and rework everything from top to bottom’ (p. 325).
distinct axes: the knowledge axis, which is concerned with “what knowledge does and not reads”; the power axis, which concerns itself with “how power is constructive and not repressive”; and the subject axis, which is concerned with “how the self is not discovered but invented” (p. 27). By organizing Foucault’s work in these ways, Bernauer places emphasis on knowledge, power, and the subject as three coordinates on a grid to show the different “lines of analysis” upon which interpreters of his work have pointed their lenses.

In his essay “The Subject and Power,” Foucault (1982) also partitions his works, although somewhat differently. For him, his knowledge projects might best be understood as three interrelated, yet distinct “modes of inquiry,” which he describes as modes that “try to give themselves the status of sciences,”

3 modes that “objectivize … the subject in … ‘dividing practices,’” and modes that explore “the way a human being turns himself into a subject” (pp. 777-778). Stated differently, for Foucault, the ways the subject becomes an object of knowledge through disciplinary knowledge and classification and dividing practices, as well as the way the subject contributes to her/his own formation, are central to his work. This emphasis is explicit when he explains the goal(s) of his work,

It has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. (p. 777)

Resonant with this emphasis, although I will dive more deeply into these elements in the final chapters of this dissertation, in the following subsections I will briefly define some Foucauldian concepts that have helped me explore the ways discursive fields are formed through power/knowledge entanglements in ways that might be contributing to the

3Here, Foucault (1982) is referring to the subject constituted through “modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences,” such as “the speaking subject” of linguistics, “the productive subject” of economics, and “the living subject” of biology (p. 777). In these cases, the objectivizing of the subject is informed, in part, by disciplinary knowledge claims.
formation of mismatch subjectivities. Specifically, as described in Chapter I of this dissertation, I am looking to complicate some of the discourses that are engaged in “naming, classifying and analyzing [in ways that] work toward disciplining and normalizing” school populations (Lather, 2004, p. 282), while concurrently looking for ways to “denaturalize[e] the regularities that govern our thought” (p. 278).

**Power**

In their innovative text, *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives*, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) offer Foucault’s “theory of power” (p. 49) as one example of a way to “think[ing] methodologically and philosophically together” (p. vii). Thinking with his theories as an engagement with post-methodologies, they point out that Foucault’s methods for analyzing power differ greatly from more traditional, interpretive approaches. They elaborate, “Instead of pursuing ontological ‘essences and origins’ through the questions ‘What is power?’ and ‘Where does it come from?’ Foucault seeks to explore ‘the productive effects of power as it circulates through the practices of people in their daily lives’” (p. 49). Thus, instead of asking where and with whom power originates in various structures and institutions, by shifting the inquiry toward the effects of power, questions are now directed toward “how the self comes into being, what the costs of the self might be, and how the self might be made again differently” (Youdell, 2006b, p. 512).

In exploring this line of inquiry, Foucault’s understanding of power can be distinguished from more traditional approaches in two distinct ways. First, he critiques the widespread notion that power is a possession that can be had by individuals who

4While Foucault is perhaps most famous for his genealogical and archaeological methodologies, this study is primarily interested in diffracting his theories around subject formation through new materialist approaches of the same. Nonetheless, since theory and method are inextricable, these historically inclined methodologies seep into his concepts but will not be developed or explicitly engaged here.
consciously wield it. Instead, he characterizes power’s movements through our material, cultural, and social worlds as multi-directional rather than unidirectional flows (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 51). Within this critique, Foucault points out several limitations embedded in these more conventional understandings of power. He begins by arguing that the perception of power as a possession “is limited because it runs the risk of homogenizing and essentializing subjects as having universal characteristics” (p. 51).

This risk is further compounded because it most often assumes a “dualistic” relationship between “monolithic entities,” such as the “oppressor/oppressed,” thus contributing to an understanding of subjectivity as uniform, “ignor[ing] the subtle ways in which power operates” (p. 51). Importantly, he further argues that such conceptualizations have led analysts of repressive power to seek its originary source as they work toward uncovering “real” or “underlying” power, thus furthering the notion that power is “fixed [and] transcendental,” and assuming the absence of freedom or agency on the “oppressed” side of the dualism (p. 51). Crucially, this approach fails to recognize the opportunities for resistance “within and against relations of power” in ways that “transform lives” (p. 51).

The second way that Foucault’s analysis of power differs significantly from traditional approaches is that for him, “power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society” (Gaventa, 2003, p. 2). In other words, for Foucault, power produces things, and importantly, it does so as it flows among complex networks rather than between dualistic entities. This productive capacity is part of what helps power take hold. He explains, “What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourses” (Foucault, as cited in Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 51). In Foucault’s (1991) words,
We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it “excludes”, it “represses”, it “censors”, it “abstracts”, it “masks”, it “conceals”. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. (p. 194)

But how do these productions occur? How does Foucault explain the ways power produces these domains of objects and rituals of truths? And, of great importance to this study, how do these workings contribute to the production of human subjects? In order to investigate the how of Foucault’s analytics of power, in the next sub-sections I will discuss the Foucauldian concepts of power/knowledge and discursive regimes.

**Power/Knowledge**

In order to more fully grasp the way Foucault’s theorizing shifts our understandings of power as a key element in the formation of subjectivity, it is important to unpack his particular configuration of the concept “knowledge/power.” For Foucault, knowledge and power are not two distinct entities but rather must be understood as interrelated, with knowledge perceived as an exercise of power and power being understood as a function of knowledge. This melding of these two previously distinct entities to form a new, dyadic concept was a significant departure from the ways power had been previously theorized in philosophy and related disciplines. In talking about the ways Foucault’s theorizing of power/knowledge marks a break from prior interpretations, Gordon (1980) notes two crucial differences:

- his reflection on power beyond the traditional terms of good and evil
- his conception of power as more than the dualisms of the “benign” model conceived as “the agency of social cohesion” and the “more polemical representation of power as an instance of repression, violence and coercion” (pp. 234-235).

Instead, Foucault works with a notion of power/knowledge that contends that since power is always moving and producing relations among people, objects, structures, and institutions, then one of the things power is also engaged with is the production of
knowledge. As Jackson and Mazzei (2012) explain, “Taking this perspective of power as a relation—as always, moving and circulating among people—also enables a different analysis of knowledge: how knowledge is an effect of power” (p. 49). They elaborate,

Foucault’s power/knowledge doublet captures how people’s actions are local reactions and responses, even struggles and resistances, and are temporarily embedded within specific, and shifting, relations of power. Therefore power and knowledge constantly articulate one another in the practices of people. (p. 49)

Importantly, then, power/knowledge as a concept is key to understanding the ways people are made into foundational subjects through their enactments of site-specific power/knowledge projects.

In his early works, Foucault directed his philosophical and methodological approaches toward the ways the deviant subject and the sexualized subject were constructed from the 1700s through the 1900s. As he engaged in this historiographic work, Foucault was particularly invested in exploring the configurations that enable “power [to] produce[s] knowledge and particular types of knowable subjects (such as the criminal and the pervert)” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 52). Importantly, and as Gordon (1980) points out, this inquiry signals a different way of looking at how knowledge, particularly disciplinary knowledge, is infused with power in ways that produce truths about the intelligibility of human subjects. In this way, power previously understood as a transcendent and intangible force is demystified. Gordon contends, “If certain knowledges of ‘Man’ are able to serve a technological function in the domination of people, this is not so much thanks to their capacity to establish a reign of ideological mystification as to their ability to define a certain field of empirical truth” (p. 237). From here, however, the question remains: How does power/knowledge function to help form intelligible human subjects? To engage with that question, I now turn the discussion to the Foucauldian concepts of discourse and discursive fields.
Discourse and Discursive Fields

Discourse as a Foucauldian concept is often considered an advantageous “mode of entry into poststructural analysis” because of “its aims to describe the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect on the function of systems of thought” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 50).

Weedon (1997) similarly describes Foucauldian discourse as an investigation into the “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them” (p. 105). Importantly, she points out, “Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (p. 105). Thus, while some definitions of discourse locate its function purely in the realm of language, understood in these Foucauldian ways, “discourse can be seen in the everyday practice of humans [and is] therefore, ... not only text but also action” (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p. 25).

In some ways, then, discourse might be understood as a vehicle by which power disperses the ways we can intelligibly think and speak about our world. Indeed, one major role of societal discourse is that it “mediates its power and control through institutions and elites ‘who are charged with saying what counts as true’” (Talbani, as cited in Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p. 25). For Foucault, this mediation occurs via the enactment of regimes of truth, which he defines as “a general politics of truth, that is, the type of discourse it accepts and makes function as true” (p. 25). Crucially, these enactments occur as society struggles “to establish and pass on a regime of truth and develop techniques and procedures to inculcate and transmit cultural values considered to be true” (p. 25).
From this stance, it is easy to see discourse primarily as a constraint, and indeed much of Foucault’s work has looked at how populations have been constituted and controlled throughout history. As Weedon (1997) points out, however, as much as “discourse transmits and produces power; it [also] undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p. 107). Thus, for Foucault, discourse, in concert with power, must be seen as productive, enabling the tensions between discourse’s constraining and enabling capacities to create spaces for “other discourses, other possible meanings, other claims, rights, and positions” (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p. 23). As Foucault (as cited in Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013) elaborates, “We must make allowance for the complex and unstable powers whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (p. 24).

Of great significance for this study, then, are the ways this complexity and instability work to constitute intelligible school subjects, as well as to provide rival discourses that enable variations in our interpretations of what constitutes an intelligible subject. For just as the structures and processes of a particular regime help form and at times constrain our subjectivities within discursive fields, “language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power exist, intersect, and produce competing ways for giving meaning to and constructing subjectivity” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 50). As I work to loosen mismatch subjectivities from their categorical locations in commonsensical conceptualizations of the mismatch, I will, in part, be thinking with Foucault. I do so in order to better understand the discourses that currently define and fail to define the oppositional relationalities typically characterizing, especially in the U.S., the White woman teacher and Black male student mismatch. Importantly, I work to investigate what discourses do as they work to sustain the regimes of truth that inform our sorting and classifying practices in contemporary public schools. By trying to unpack the discourses that especially contribute to the normalization of mismatch subjects as “failures,” I
examine how “mismatched” school subjects are made objects to be acted upon via the deployment of disciplinary knowledge and expertise, sorting and dividing practices, and the enactments of these discourses by school subjects themselves. This last point is important, because, while “naming, classifying and analyzing all work toward disciplining and normalizing” (Lather, 2004, p. 282), the normalization and regulation of behavior deemed acceptable to gain recognition as an intelligible subject is “as much about what we do to ourselves as what is done to us” (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, as cited in Lather, 2004, p. 282). Thus, discourse, imbued with power/knowledge, flows through our social worlds and is not exclusively externally imposed. Thinking with Foucault, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) remind me that power flows through discursive fields and “reaches into the very grain of individuals, touch[ing] their bodies and insert[ing] itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning process and everyday lives … within the social body rather than from above it” (p. 50).

The Politics of Discourse

To close this section, I wish to make a few final comments about the relevance of Foucault’s work for this study. In the introduction to this dissertation, I asserted that by reconceptualizing mismatched subjectivities, this study would be engaged in “political” work directed toward discarding essentialized notions of categorical subjectivity in favor of conceptualizations that allow for school subjects of a “lesser ontological weight.”5 Subsequently, throughout my rationale, I posited an argument for the political urgency of this work and situated my inquiry amid accountability and school improvement discourses that work to form varying, mismatch subjectivities with frequently oppressive and inequitable effects. In order to bring forward these arguments, here I briefly “politicize” my engagement with Foucault’s work. For Foucault (as cited in Grierson,

5The most concise version of this argument can be found on page 4 of this dissertation.
2007), crucial questions to ask when examining the ways discourses enact certain effects and not others include: “What are the modes of existence of this discourse? At any historical moment, what kinds of conditions come into play in determining that a particular subject is the legitimate executor of a certain kind of knowledge?” (p. 536).

In this current moment, when U.S. public schools are being flooded with “for profit” curriculum, assessments, and business models under the banners of “efficiency,” “proficiency,” “closing the gap,” and “college and career readiness,” what is occurring in this discursive field that enables the constitution of mismatch subjectivities as failing subjects? How might the Foucauldian concepts of knowledge/power and discourse provide us with “tools and strategies for interrogating the ‘nature of the present,’ an interrogation that seeks to expose the relationship between ‘the subject, truth, and the constitution of experience’” (Foucault, as cited in Youdell, 2006b, p. 512)? And what makes such an investigation political?

While Foucault has been critiqued by many as failing to adequately situate himself as a privileged, White male in his work, others argue that his work is inherently political. In regard to my own positionality, I concur with Youdell (2006b), who argues that his efforts are wholly political in that they focus upon those aspects of the present that Foucault finds “intolerable.” Foucault seeks to develop understandings of how the present is made, and so how it might be unmade, by “following lines of fragility in the present,” trajectories that might allow us to “grasp why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is.” (p. 512)

Thus, his work is not a sterile analytic of historically situated discursive fields, but rather an engagement with the ways “different epistemes disclose different worlds,” thus emphasizing “the dire material consequences” of particular disclosures (Hekman, 2008, p. 111). By extension, and of equal importance, in working to understand how the present is made—especially in and through schooling and its relationalities—we might ask: How might we make it differently?
Thinking Through Barad

As discussed earlier in the dissertation, while Foucault has often been applauded for a greater attentiveness to the material world than some other poststructural thinkers, many proponents of feminist, new materialisms feel that his attentions still did not go far enough. One of these feminist thinkers is Karen Barad. For her, while Foucault\(^6\) (as cited in Barad, 2007) theorized power not as “an external force that acts on a subject” but rather as a “reiterating” actor in “its stabilizing and sedimenting effects” (p. 235), Barad (2007) argues that his “moving substrate of force relations’ is not limited to the social” in her agential realist account (p. 235). In the following sections, I will explore some of these differences as I engage with several of the key concepts she provides to help explain ontological inseparability, a theorization she puts forth in an effort attend to the liveliness of a world that is more than just human.

Phenomena

In order to formulate her arguments for the inseparability of ontology, epistemology, and ethics, Barad (2007) uses as her starting point the science-philosophy of quantum physicist Niels Bohr. She begins with his critique of “the spectator theory of knowledge,” a theory rooted in traditional approaches to epistemology that convey the researcher as a “knowing subject [that] is a conscious self-aware self-contained independent rational agent that comes to a knowledge project fully formed” (p. 341). For Barad, this perspective misses the intricate and intertwined relationship between knowing and being, and, thus, she argues, misunderstands the complicated relationships occurring between knower and known. She explains, “The knower cannot be assumed to be a self-contained rational humanist subject. Rather subjects (like objects) are differentially constituted through specific intra-actions…. Hence, in contrast to the spectator theory of

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\(^6\)Barad (2007) attributes this conceptualization of power to Butler as well (p. 235).
knowledge, what is at issue is not knowledge of the world from above or outside, but *knowing as part of being*” (p. 342). From this viewpoint, knowledge projects do not transpire among a knowing subject and a separate and distant object of knowledge, but rather knower and known are entangled in and emerge via knowledge projects that are onto-epistemological.

To help us grasp this paradigmatic shift, she offers us a redefined, quantum-inspired conceptualization of the term “phenomenon” that rejects characterizations of phenomena as “the way things in themselves appear” (Barad, 2007, p. 412) and instead redefines them as new ontological units that discard bound and individuated ontologies in favor of ontologies premised upon connectivity and inseparability. She explains, “The primary ontological unit is not independent objects with independently determinate boundaries and properties but what Bohr termed ‘phenomena’” (p. 33). This concept, she further describes, is inhabited by “ontologically primitive relations-relations without pre-existing relata” (p. 333), indicating that there are no ontological units or “beings” that exist prior to their relations with other ontological units. Importantly, phenomena theorized in this way have no insides and outsides in the way individuated ontological units do, but rather their boundaries are relational, emergent, and contingently formed. So how might we understand the connectivity of these ontological units? I will now turn to the Baradian concept intra-action in order to explore the ways these units “come to be.”

**Intra-action and Agential Cuts**

In order to articulate the goings-on amid and between these embryonic and contingent ontological relations, Barad (2007) has developed the concept of intra-action in an effort to shift notions of relationality away from traditional understandings of relationships as being the *interaction* between or among discrete ontological entities. She distinguishes:
The neologism “intra-action” signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual “interaction,” which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that “distinct” agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the “distinct” agencies are only distinct in a relational, not absolute, sense, that is agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements. (p. 33)

There are several important features to highlight in these interrelated descriptions of phenomena, intra-action and ontological inseparability. The first is that because intra-action as entanglement occurs within the particularity of any given phenomenon, intra-actions are constitutive of phenomena. As Barad argues, “It is through the specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the components of phenomena become determinate and that particular material articulations of the world become meaningful” (p. 333). From this perspective, then, matter (in the form of material articulations) and meaning emerge in the context of phenomena as locally specific intra-actions, thus collapsing the material/discursive binary and replacing it with phenomena as a relational, material/semiotic field.

The second feature to be emphasized is Barad’s significant reformation of traditional understandings of agency. Crucially, if ontology is rooted in relationality and inseparability, then agency conceived as located within individuals that act upon other, distinct individuals and objects becomes implausible. As Barad (2012b) argues, “agency is an enactment, not something someone has, or something instantiated in the form of an individual agent” (p. 77). Rather, agency is perceived as an “ebb and flow” of differentially intra-active being (Barad, 2003, p. 817).

Importantly, if traditional understandings of agency are unsettled in this way, then their accompanying notions of causality must also be reconsidered. This is because, as Barad (2007) explains, “causality is most often figured as a relation between distinct entities. For example, in the interaction between distinct entities the one that modifies (e.g., leaves its mark on) another entity is said to be the cause of the effect left on the
other” (p. 175). But if individuals “do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action” (Barad, 2012b, p. 77), then how might traditional notions of agency and causality be reworked?

In her theorizing, Barad works toward reframing agency by locating it within phenomenon as opposed to within individuals as something they possess. From this perspective,

agency is not the same as capability for action, neither is it any other property/attribute of a thing (indeed, there are no individual things, but phenomena); “agency—rather than being thought in opposition to structures as forms of subjective intentionality and the potential for individual action—is about the possibilities for changing the configurations of spacetimematter relations.” (Barad, as cited in Niemimaa, 2014, p. 6)

Thus, agency becomes a more expansive concept and, by dislocating it from its traditional meaning of subjective intentionality, becomes dispersed across time, space, matter, and human and non-human worlds. This dispersal is enacted by extracting agency from its location within the human subject and disrupting the first-then linearity of cause and effect. This is possible because in Barad’s onto-epistemological framework, “agencies-within-phenomenon are not a priori given, but result from discursive material practices” (Niemimaa, 2014, p. 6).

But if agency is no longer attached to subject intentionality, what happens to the ethical obligations that have traditionally been embedded in interactions perceived as occurring between intentional subjects? Barad (2012b) does help us make sense of the ways non-individuated becoming, agency, and causality work together to contour ethical ways of knowing and being in the world. She does so through the third and final feature to be explored in relation to the concepts ontological inseparability, phenomena and interactivity; her notion of “agential cuts” (p. 77). Through this concept, we can more

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7Importantly, Barad (2007) uses the terms “apparatus” and “discursive material practices” interchangeably.
clearly see how she conceptualizes ethics as the third element in her ethico-onto-epistemological entanglement paradigm.

Therefore, while this discussion began with a description of the ways Barad re-envisioned ontology and epistemology as entangled rather than distinct domains, her revision of the concept agency introduces the third element of Barad’s entanglement paradigm—the role of ethics. We can recall that one of the purported goals of feminist, new materialist thought is to dissolve dichotomies often perceived as being left intact in some renderings of feminist poststructural theory. In particular, feminist, new materialists reject nature/culture and matter/meaning divides, as they seek to reconfigure subjectivity through different ways of knowing and being. As Barad (2012b) has pointed out,

> the nature/culture divide is the bedrock for an impressive array of allied dichotomies (for example female/male, animal/human, primitive/modern, natural/unnatural, real/constructed, substance/form, matter/spirit, physical/mental, stuff/meaning, innate/learned, given/made) and associated inequalities [emphasis added]. (p. 80)

Importantly, then, their theoretical quest has been to reconfigure the relationships between/among particularly obdurate binaries and, as such, has inherently ethical connotations, particularly in relation to the essentializing hierarchies associated with binarial pairs, i.e., Black/White, male/female, human/non-human, etc. However, new questions arise when considering agency as an entangled enactment, particularly in regard to how to “open up a space for negotiation, choice, action and change” (Kautz & Jensen, 2012, p. 92). Crucially, if we discard notions of agency as individual action and intent in exchange for agency as relational and intra-active enactment, how do we consider notions of accountability and responsibility in relation to these shifts?

To help resolve some of these conundrums, Barad (2003) offers the term “agential cut” to explain how we might disentangle the constitutive elements of specific phenomena at the local level. An agential cut, she explains, differs vastly from a Cartesian cut, which assumes an inherent distinction between subject and object, and is
thus a move of separation (p. 815). To counter this act of ontological separation, Barad’s conceptualization of the agential cut reconfigures ontological cuts as occurring locally, and importantly, within phenomena that do not pre-exist these enactments, but instead are constituted via the enactments and cuts (p. 815). Thus, agential cuts might be conceived as cutting together/apart (Barad, 2014).

Importantly, then, the ontological indeterminacy of subject/object can become *locally* determinate, as agential cuts are made to enable an investigation of a phenomenon’s constitutive components via a *temporary* separation between matter, meaning, and an abundance of disparate parts (Barad, as cited in Niemimaa, 2014, p. 6). Thus, “it is through agential cuts that sociomaterial becomes cut into social and material; not as discrete entities with fixed boundaries, but temporarily solid intra-acting agencies-within-phenomenon” (p. 6).

Therefore, these agential cuts enact a separation of subject/object *within* a specific phenomenon that is constituted via agential intra-actions rather than as an act of separation that constructs interiors and exteriors, or selves and Others. For Barad (2012a), this distinction is crucial and a key element of her ethico-onto-epistemology. She elaborates,

> Boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted through the intra-activity of mattering. Differentiating is not about radical exteriorities … but rather what I call agential separability. That is, differentiating is not about Othering, separating, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments. So the very nature of materiality itself is an entanglement. Hence, what is on the other side of the agential cut is never separate from us. Agential separability is not individuation. Ethics is therefore not about right responses to a radically exteriorized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming, of which we are a part. (para. 38)

As seen here, for Barad, ethical responses are the enactment of agential separability *within* phenomena, as opposed to a right response to an externalized and thus objectified Other. Significantly, since ontological entities do not pre-exist one another, our agency-
inspired actions are not directed toward pre-existing Others, but rather our intra-actions enact mutual becomings, and as such, our “becomings with” our historical Others are inextricably intertwined. In this way “intra-actions effect what’s real and what’s possible, as some things come to matter and others are excluded” (Barad, 2007. P. 393). Thus, reality is intra-active and agential.

In closing, it is important to explicitly highlight one final element of Barad’s ethico-onto-epistemological framework, which she enfolds into her revisions and expansions of the concept of agency. She emphasizes,

“Since intra-actions are constraining but not determinate,” intra-acting neither belongs to a completely free subjectivity nor to a fully determined reality, but rather happens in a material semiotic field where “particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world’s becoming, to context and rework what matters and what is excluded form mattering.” (Barad, as cited in Timeto, 2011, p. 164)

Importantly, then, this is not a conceptual location that envisions “becoming with” as either open-ended or pre-determined, but rather as a reconfiguration of what being and knowing, as ethical enactments, might make possible. Thus, while “not everything is possible in every moment … interior and exterior, past, present and future, are iteratively enfolded and reworked, but never eliminated (and never fixed)” (Barad, 2007, p. 182).

From this perspective, then, the intra-active subjectivities of Black boys and White women in contemporary U.S. schools are much more complex than an exclusive engagement with mismatch discourses might allow us to believe. In order to further pursue this major point around which this whole dissertation research circulates, I next will turn to Haraway’s and then to Barad’s engagements with “diffraction.” In particular, I will explore their conceptualizations of such that offer potentials for a theoretical and methodological practice that might help us reconfigure commonsense notions of the mismatch by distorting the certainty of mismatched school subjects through the diffractive lenses of relationality, connection, and interference.
Chapter III

METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

Post-foundational Methods

In a special issue of *Qualitative Inquiry*, entitled “Problematizing Methodological Simplicity in Qualitative Research,” the contributing authors worked to trouble taken for granted “beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge-and the appropriate methods to employ given those beliefs” (McCoy, 2012, p. 762). Building on critiques of research foundations that were percolating in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they confronted some of the “motivations” and “movements toward (over) simplicity” (p. 762), which they attributed to “simplistic and mechanistic approaches … that rely on the authority and normativity of methods to produce knowledge devoid of critical reflection and contextual considerations” (Koro-Ljungberg & Mazzei, 2012, p. 728). These confrontations, which sought to extricate some of the complex interplays of habitual, “strategic” and/or “imposed” understandings and implementations of research practices (p. 762), included a strong critique of many taken-for-granted research foundations. In particular, these foundations were problematized based on their enduring fidelity to “‘the old theory of representation’ with its successor regimes of truth, ontology of continuity, and permanent tables of difference” (Foucault, as cited in Lather, 2004, p. 281). Thus, looking to break with research habits that unproblematically apply complex theories of difference to pre-designed and decontextualized research practices, these researchers worked to challenge some of the ways methodological concepts—such as “data,” “validity,” and
“truth”—are defined in ways that most often require stable and code-able notions of “difference.” In place of these foundations, what they called for were “different theories that frame research, different research methodologies, and different representations of research. And these differences [will] surely require different language, experimental writing (Richardson, 1994), and perhaps, “messy texts” (Marcus, as cited in St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 186).

This methodological move, however, could never only be an engagement with the new. As Lather and St. Pierre (2013) point out, “We always bring tradition with us into the new, and it is very difficult to think outside our training, which, in spite of our best efforts, normalizes our thinking and doing” (p. 630). Additionally, MacLure (2013) remarks, “The malign effects of those deeply ingrained intellectual habits are immensely difficult to discern, and almost impossible to renounce or escape, even now, in our allegedly post-Enlightenment, post-humanist times” (p. 626). Thus, “the categories we have invented to organize and structure humanist qualitative methodology” (p. 630) continue to squabble with our conscious and unconscious researcher selves, even as we attempt to trouble Descartes’s knowing subject, the unadulterated agency and depth of the human, and the self-conscious and intentional researching doer before the deed.

Amid this swirl of competing intentions and practices, in this chapter I depict some of my encounters with a variety of these methodological skirmishes as I sketch a study-specific iteration of post-qualitative research practices. Importantly, post-qualitative research methods conceptualized in this way function as both emergent and residual practices that concurrently critique and makes use of more traditional research methods. To begin this discussion, in the next subsection, I briefly describe the ways some contemporary education researchers are thinking about post-qualitative inquiry as a methodological engagement with theoretical concepts.
Post-qualitative Research and Concept as Method

This experimental work is risky, creative, surprising, and remarkable. It cannot be measured, predicted, controlled, systematized, formalized, described in a textbook, or called forth by preexisting, approved methodological processes, methods, and practices. (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 2)

If this is an awful mess … then would something less messy make a mess of describing it? (Law, 1999, p. 1)

Revisiting the methodology engaged in her own dissertation work, St. Pierre (2017) describes the challenges of academic writing when the theories and methods are based upon incompatible assumptions. As she describes the difficulties of partnering poststructural theories and “conventional humanist qualitative methodology” in her early dissertation work, she recalls, “It was in the writing that I realized those two structures could not be thought together, that their ontologies and epistemologies were incompatible because of their very different descriptions of human being, language, discourse, power … and so on” (p. 1). In more recent work, Taguchi and St. Pierre (2017) explain that this, in part, is because of the extreme incongruity between the “new” empiricisms being explored by new materialist thinkers who locate their work amid the ontological turn: 1

“the empiricisms of social constructionism and logical empiricism used in the research methodologies we teach and learn in educational research” (St. Pierre, 2016, as cited in Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 643). In emphasizing this disconnect between traditional research practices and the posthumanist theories through which they are attempting to think the world, these authors highlight two incompatibilities that are particularly troublesome for researchers attempting to deploy traditional qualitative methods while thinking with the theories of “the posts.”

1Importantly, and as argued elsewhere in this dissertation, while these theorists vary greatly in regard to the breadth and intensity of their gestures toward the ontological turn, what they share is a belief in the inextricability of epistemological and ontological concerns.
First, they point out, in the “new”\textsuperscript{2} approaches, “there is neither a human person nor a pre-existing research methodology at the beginning” (Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 643). For these researchers, many of whom have grappled for some time with poststructural critiques of the self-conscious and rational human subject, there is no researcher or author understood as the individual subject of humanism who is “present to herself who exists ahead of writing” (St. Pierre, 2014b, p. 376). Instead, and as envisioned in this study, research is a phenomenon constituted via an entanglement of material and discursive practices that produce networks of subjects and objects that are both human and non-human. Conceptualized in this way, post-qualitative inquiry actively works to trouble conceptions of agency, the field, and many other concepts that inform and form traditional research practices.\textsuperscript{3}

The second incompatibility stressed by Taguchi and St. Pierre (2017) relates to the actual function of the concept itself in post-qualitative inquiry. They assert,

The philosophical concepts of Butler, Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari … are quite different from familiar concepts of education and the social sciences (e.g., cognition, race, culture, role, free market) that can overdetermine inquiry as much as method because philosophical concepts do not identify, organize, consolidate, and represent experience under the sign of the concept. Instead, they reorient thought. (p. 643)

Thus, inspired by recent feminist symposium work by Colebrook (2013), they argue for a re-envisioning of the concept as a methodology. In particular, they ask “whether it would be possible to tilt educational inquiry, deeply imbricated for some time with the Cartesian image of thought … toward philosophy, its concepts and its conceptual-based practices” (Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 644). Thinking in these ways, they open up possibilities

\textsuperscript{2}Again, as pointed out by these authors, the newness referred to here owes ancestral allegiance to Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Leibnitz, as well as Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, and many others.

\textsuperscript{3}I will engage in more detailed discussions of these interruptive renderings of traditional research terms and concepts in subsequent sections of this chapter.
for re-imaginings of research practices that ponder the different sorts of movement undertaken by theories as they travel within and across various disciplinary borders. From this perspective, there is no right way to engage with post-qualitative methodologies, and thus “ideas about how and the extent to which a concept can ‘be’ (ontologically and epistemologically) material, performative, and agentic are different, [contextually] chang[ing] their practices in relation to the ‘real”’ (p. 644).

This redeployment of the concept as method shares a trajectory with assertions made in Chapter I of this dissertation about the seemingly impermeable nature of discourses and concepts in education. It also works as both a critique of and a shift away from current, accountability-tethered tendencies in education research that privilege positivist and post-positivist projects that focus on “what works” in relation to criteria such as predictability and generalizability. In fact, Colebrook (as cited in Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017), in exploring the connectivities between education and philosophy cautions, said,

Both philosophy’s and education’s focus on usefulness entails a potential harmfulness. In educational research, this is evident in its repeated turn to positivist social science which mimics the predictive capacity of the natural sciences to order and control knowledge and subjects, to make both, as Foucault wrote, docile, self-disciplined subjects, to normalize them and make them useful. (p. 645)

Resonating with the arguments made throughout this dissertation, the concepts through which we think not only help us understand the world; they help create the world. In this study concerned with reconceptualizing notions of normative subjectivity in schools, Colebrook’s warning resounds the theoretical framework put forth in earlier chapters.

With these gestures in mind, then, in the upcoming sections of this chapter, I will experiment with “concepts as methods,” as I explore the various ways diffraction as an intra-disciplinary concept might help me “reorient” thinking around the mismatch in contemporary public schools. I do this as an engagement with feminist research that seeks to engage with our concepts, as well as the “subjects and objects” of our research, in
ways that produce “a disjunctive space that expands rather than reduces interpretive possibilities” (McCoy, as cited in Lather, 2001, p. 213). Before I shift to an in-depth development of these concepts, however, I briefly describe the ways I am thinking about and working with “data” in this post-qualitatively conceived conceptual study.

What are Data or “data”?

Data … is wondered, eaten, walked, loved, listened to, written, enacted, versed, produced, pictured, charted, drawn, and lived … data is everywhere, nowhere, vanishing, and taking on a strange and unexpected life on its own. Data is going into many directions at once and data is no longer in one place. (Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013, p. 222)

As researchers, we utilize concepts in our knowledge projects because they do things. This doing is enacted not only by the theoretical concepts with which we engage as part of our epistemological positioning, but also the methodological concepts we utilize to help us frame our methods that help us make sense of the world. Interestingly, while our theoretical concepts are often more malleable, shifting shape and interpretive prowess across research disciplines and contexts, our methodological concepts seem, most often, to be considered through lenses of “the definite, the repeatable, [and] the more or less stable” (Law, 2004, p. 6). Because of this, when particular methods and their constitutive concepts are unproblematically deployed in habitual ways, we miss the significance of both the “epistemological and ontological wrestling” that occurs in our work, and thus most often leaving “unthought [the ways] … research-based knowledge is conceptualized and produced” (Lather, 2013, p. 636). Thinking with Foucault, however, St. Pierre (2014b) reminds us that “all concepts … emerge, have meaning, and are put to work in a particular ‘grid of intelligibility’” (p. 374), making some objects/subjects of research intelligible and others unintelligible. Additionally, this grid often attempts to define and restrain knowledge projects that, despite these efforts, have a tendency to seep
through the cracks of our normatively conceived and widely accepted definitions of methods’ categories.

Yet working post-qualitatively, and returning to previous dissertation work, St. Pierre (2011) offers a way forward by asserting that “the deconstruction of even one concept/category disrupts other related structuring concepts/categories … and initiates the cascading collapse of methodology’s center” (p. 613). Perceiving research practices as forming an apparatus with interdependent moving parts, and reminding us that “we’ve forgotten we’ve made it up” (p. 613), she challenges us to alter just one of those parts in order to engage in research that is both experimental and entangled.

For her, the concept she was most troubled by was “data,” and I have been deeply influenced by this work. Like St. Pierre and other feminist, post-qualitative researchers, as I wrestled with the ontological and epistemological complexities of White women and Black boys in this study, conventional notions of “data,” as both a collectable entity and a stable concept, have troubled me from the start. Despite being a key element in both positivist and interpretive research, this concept becomes especially problematic when attempting to disrupt epistemological and ontological certainties around post-informed notions of subjectivity.

In order to describe my own re-framings of data as a methodological concept, I here, then, would like to briefly foreground this maneuver. Since the interpretive turn, one way we go about “knowing” the world is by engaging in qualitative research methods. This turn, in part, was a critique of any sciences that failed to take into account issues of values and ethics in their knowledge projects’ “quest for certainty” (Dewey, as cited in St. Pierre, 2013b, p. 224). St. Pierre argues, however, that despite interpretivism’s adherents’ seeming consensus that “what we call data are really our own constructions of other people’s construction of what they and their compatriots are up to” (Geertz, as cited in St. Pierre, 2013b, p. 224), over time it became apparent that many scholars working amid these critiques struggled to leave their positivist training behind (St. Pierre, 2013b,
p. 224). She extends this argument by asserting that despite proponents of qualitative methods professing objections to “measurement, quantification, and prediction” as the primary lenses through which to understand people’s lived experiences, these lenses are still hard at work in their research practices. She elaborates,

Conventional humanist qualitative methodology provides a handy preexisting research process to follow, a container with well-identified categories into which researchers are expected to slot all aspects of their research projects so they are recognizable, clear, and accessible. And even though qualitative methodology still claims to be “emergent,” its concepts and categories, which have been tightened up over the years, tend to control the study. (p. 1)

Amid this critique of qualitative research methods that failed to shift far enough away from their positivist origins in their efforts to complicate understandings of lived experiences, for the last several decades St. Pierre has troubled, in particular, conventional qualitative methodologists’ conceptualizations and deployment of “data.” While acknowledging the difficulty of talking about data in isolation from all of the other “accompanying problems [that] emerge as we reach the limits of the epistemology that grounds the humanist narrative of qualitative methodology,” she starts with this crucial concept, arguing, “When we put a signifier like data under erasure, the entire structure that includes it begins to fall apart, and clarity becomes impossible” (St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 179).

In particular, St. Pierre (1997a) reminds us that one role poststructural theory has played in the research landscape has been to “offer opportunities to investigate [different] worlds by opening up language for redeployment in revitalized social agendas” (p. 176). Hence, tagging the term “data” as a signifier, she snips it from its formulaic roots in traditional qualitative research practices and re-envisions the way it operates. She explains, we can “resignify the very terms that, having become unmoored from their grounds, are at once the remnants of that loss and the resources from which to articulate the future” (Butler, as cited in St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 176). Thus, data becomes “data,” and
is re-deployed as a methodological concept in the making. To do this, she argues for the necessity of disrupting the linearity of data collection and analysis practices in traditional qualitative research, and in doing so, she also challenges the supremacy of the text as evidence of both data collection and the deployment of valid interpretive practices.

Referencing Lincoln and Guba’s early depictions of qualitative data as “the observational and interview notes accumulated in the field, documents and records,” researchers’ begin “doing” research by “collect[ing] data using methods such as observation, participation, and the interview” (Lincoln & Guba, as cited in St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 179). Crucially, this perspective implies a starting point, and “data” is perceived as something that exists “out there,” to be collected, by the researcher, as evidence of research. St. Pierre (1997a) continues:

> With this received understanding of data in mind, we believe we must translate whatever we think are data into language, code that language, then cut up pages of text in order to sort those coded data bits into categories (we do this either by hand or computer), and produce knowledge based on those categories, which, in the end, are simply words. (p. 179)

Thus, from this perspective, researchers engage in a process of textualization, defined as “the process by which unwritten behavior[s] become fixed, atomized, and classified as data of a certain sort” (Van Maanen, as cited in St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 179). Indeed, as St. Pierre (1997a) notes, Van Maanen further claims, “only in textualized form do data yield to analysis” (p. 179).

When working with the theories of the posts, however, the problems with this perspective are numerous. Since de Saussure’s “theory of the sign,” a theorization in which he asserted that “meaning is produced within language rather than reflected by language,” and that the meanings of individual signs are acquired through “language

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4Van Maanen situates this term in Ricoeur’s (1973) famous essay, “The model of the text: Meaningful action considered as a text.” In this paper he questions the extent to which “the notion of text is a good paradigm for the so-called object of social sciences” and to what extent “text-interpretation” might be used as a paradigm for interpretation in the social sciences (p. 91).
chains,” poststructural accounts of language have “assume[ed] that meaning is constituted within language and that meaning is not guaranteed by the subject that speaks it” (Weedon, 1997, pp. 22-23). From this perspective, the “incommensurabilities” between post-theories and conventional qualitative methods are immense, since the latter, in conflict with the former, assume “that data be textualized, and, [still thinking with] with logical positivism, that words in those texts can be brute, sense data” (St. Pierre, 2013b, p. 224).

In this study, I work with St. Pierre’s re-conceptualization of the ways data function in education research, a reconceptualization she posits as more of a troubling and rejection of the old than a proffering of a new concept. Indeed, she states that post-qualitative research does *not* set out to offer “an alternative methodology” (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613). Instead, working in the middle of these troublings of the role of language in our methods and subsequent knowledge claims, she asks, “How can language, which regularly falls apart, secure meaning and truth? How can language provide the evidentiary warrant for the production of knowledge in a postmodern world?” (St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 179). Pushing back against the linearity of conventional qualitative inquiry in terms of first, data collection; next, coding, analysis and interpretation; and last, new theories of knowledge, St. Pierre also asks, “What happens, however, when this linear process is interrupted because the researcher enters this narrative in the middle” (p. 180).

In response (but not with answers) to these questions, I offer an engagement with data that is experimental and emergent. As I did with the theoretical framework, I think with Hacking and with Popkewitz, who assert that “there is no such thing as pure evidence outside the circumstances in which it was obtained” (Hacking, as cited in St. Pierre, 2013b, p. 225) and that “there are no data without theory that orders and gives classification to the things of the world” (Popkewitz, as cited in St. Pierre, 2013b, p. 225). From this viewpoint, then, my conceptualization of “data” is informed and formed by and
with the theories with which I am thinking, and so “data,” as a methodological concept, becomes emergent and entangled.

Thinking with both poststructural critiques of the assumed transparency of language and new materialist lenses, which dispute the separability of ontology and epistemology, I work to “remember that [thinking in this way] does not allow the subject/object and human/material oppositions to be thought or lived. We are not separate from the world. Being in every sense is entangled, connected, indefinite, impersonal, shifting into different multiplicities and assemblages” (St. Pierre, 2013b, p. 226). In this remembering, despite constant slippages into more conventional ways of thinking and doing research, what I am attempting to do is “think data” in ways that might complicate understandings of the mismatch by disrupting the ways we produce, replicate, and sustain mismatch subjectivities in our current knowledge-producing practices around school subjects and difference. To do this, I gesture toward the work of other feminist, new materialist researchers in education who read data as “data (under erasure), data-undone, data-rethought, dataparticles, or maybe data-becoming” (Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013, p. 219). Thinking of data in this way, I am engaging with “techniques of deliberate imprecision” in an effort to explore “decentered subjectivities” that are constituted through complex, material discursive entanglements and intra-actions that cannot be textualized and coded for interpretive use (Law, 2004, p. 3). Instead, the mismatch is conceived as being constituted by this assumption: “Events and processes are complex in that they exceed our capacity to know them” (p. 6).

Thus, “data” in this study is/are part of an experimental research project that resists “methodological enclosure” (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 2). In writing through, about, within, and intra-actively with the mismatch, the work is “risky, creating, surprising, and remarkable” (p. 2). It is an engagement with the unexpected. Importantly, it is an engagement with “the world that is unintelligible and unrecognizable within existing categories and practices, and as such, ‘kicks back’ sticks, and takes hold” (Barad, as cited in St. Pierre,

Thus, as has been argued throughout this study, since researched/ing subjectivities are never alone, data can include music, lyrics, statistics, art encounters, mass media projects, random objects, rivers, highways, smells, virtual space, fear, and shame as well as anything that might help me engage with a mismatch that is frequently about the “complex dynamics by which a repudiated past can be sutured onto an apparently disjunctive future” (Hayles, 2005, p. 327). Thus “data” is/are not “out there” to be collected and coded, but instead might be found anywhere, and in/at any time. In these ways, I am working to unsettle the researcher as the Knower who collects and uncovers knowledge “out there” by intra-acting with “data” in ways that co-constitute the researcher and the articulated knowledge project. This intra-action is an engagement with the concept of diffraction as a research method, in ways that “give up on data collection and instead offer re-readings of representations in every form” (Clough, as cited in St. Pierre, 2013b, p. 225). In the following sub-sections, I thus explore the concept of diffraction from several perspectives as I work to shape it as a thinking apparatus for some poststructural and new materialist articulations of mismatch subjectivities.

**Diffraction**

Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals. Diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings. (Haraway, 1997, p. 273)

Diffraction is a concept first introduced to feminist thought by Donna Haraway (1992) in her seminal work, *The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others* as “a feminist tool to rethink difference/s beyond binary
opposition/s” (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014, p. 165). Generated amid Haraway’s feminist, transdisciplinary, and long-term concerns with difference/s, be they “sexual, racial or (multi) species configurations,” diffraction as a theoretical and methodological tool works not as a conceptual move to take us “beyond differentiability,” but rather as an effort to “undo the naturalized understanding of it (difference) as always only happening between two and as a movement of separation and categorization” (Thiele, 2014, p. 203).

Shifting notions of difference from the categorical, fixed, and oppositional to conceptualizations that are more fluid, relational, and complexly constituted are at the crux of this study’s conceptual frame. Thus, Haraway’s and later Barad’s engagements with diffraction seem uniquely capable of crafting some new ways to think about difference in contemporary schools and their environs. Importantly, for this study, diffraction will be crafted and utilized as a tool for thinking with different and sometimes dissentious theories alongside and through each other. I utilize this practice as a way to engage with the effects of mutual interferences—interferences that arise when competing epistemologies collide, overlap, collaborate, and bounce off each other via their perspectival and material implications and effects. In this way, I believe that diffraction can thus help to “subject-shift” in relation to sometimes overly simplistic perceptions of “the mismatch” as an individuated and oppositional pairing occurring between taxonomically divided teacher/student identities.

Thus, throughout the remainder of this dissertation, notions of subjectivity will be diffractively reconfigured as constituted via relational entanglements rather than as essences that precede relationalities. I therefore employ diffraction as a theoretical tool in order to engage with the multi-layered and multi-purposed relationalities that flock teacher/students-comprised collectivities that are fully and relationally immersed in the thick of locally and globally situated and conceived contingencies. Such a deployment is in pursuit of ways to think and “live in a world of difference(s), a world in/as ongoing differentiation, in such ways that the outcome is not ever more separation and
antagonism, exclusion and the fear of others, but so that new senses of commonality are envisioned” (Thiele, 2014, p. 202).

As such, then, I here offer a brief discussion around what the concept of diffraction is and/or might beCOME as it emerges with this experimental, posthumanist, theoretical inquiry. I then follow with a brief examination of how it might be engaged as an intra-disciplinary thinking tool for decentering our concepts in ways that complicate disciplinary boundaries and their knowledge productions. Lastly, I explore diffraction as a methodological tool in ways that trouble notions of reflexivity and representation in our knowledge-producing practices. I focus, in particular, on how researcher subjectivity might be relationally constituted in ways that differ from more traditional and humanist inquiry projects.

What is Diffraction?

Diffraction as subject-shifter. In attempting to “think” difference as non-hierarchical and not only categorical in ways that acknowledge the entangled nature of ontology and epistemology, and discourse and matter, the concept of diffraction as both a “visual field” and a “practice” seems uniquely qualified (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014, p. 165).

As mentioned above, diffraction was first introduced as a feminist theoretical concept to dislodge difference from its Western humanist underpinnings by Haraway (1992). Drawing from the field of optical physics, she sought to “move our images of difference/s from oppositional to differential, from static to productive, and our ideas of scientific [and social scientific] knowledge from reflective, disinterested judgment to mattering, embedded involvement” (p. 165). Arguing that the highly criticized metaphor of “sight”

In particular, I am interested in complicating the borders between the humanities and other disciplines in education research that often present with higher epistemological profiles.
must be reclaimed for feminism, she proposed diffraction as “a siting and sighting device” that “forbids any direct sightings” by offering a visual metaphor based on patterns of interference rather than representations rooted in practices of “distance, reproduction and reflection” (p. 295). This new and “generative technology,” she contended, was not interested in “stories of hyper-productionism and enlightenment” and “their reproduction of the sacred image of the same, of the one true copy,” but rather was invested in learning about “how the world’s agents and actants work; how they/we/it come into the world, and how they/we/it are reformed” (p. 299).

To explain this move, Haraway (1992) offered Trinh Minh-Ha’s notion of an “inappropriate/d other” as an example of a subject shifted by diffractive lenses. This subject, as Trinh and Haraway explain, is not a categorical subject that acts via notions of agency as an individual possession, nor is this subject constituted by the singularity of a place, race, ethnicity, or event. Rather, for Trinh, in referring to her earlier work, reasserts that due to its multi-sited situatedness and relational complexity, the “inappropriate/d other” can be described as “someone whom you cannot appropriate, and someone whom is inappropriate” (Trinh & Grzinic, 2005, p. 125). Haraway (1992) refers to this “other” as a subject who is “slightly off, and yet not entirely outside,” and importantly, also argues that “inappropriate(d)ness does not refer to a fixed location, but is constantly changing according to the specific circumstances, events of each person, event or struggle” (pp. 125-126). Haraway further “sites” this differently conceived subject amid “the networks of multi-cultural, ethnic, racial, national, and sexual actors emerging since World War II, [with] Trinh’s phrase [‘inappropriate/d others] referring to the historical positioning of those who cannot adopt the mask of either ‘self’ or ‘other’ offered by previously dominant, modern Western narratives of identity and politics” (p. 299). The

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6In particular, she is referring to critiques of “the gaze” as an enactment of power articulated via Foucault (1973, 1977), Said (1978), and feminists such as Irigaray (1974), who argue that the metaphor of vision is integral to constructions of gender and gender difference.
“other” considered in this way shifts shapes via its complexly situated relationalities. Haraway continues,

To be “inappropriate/d” does not mean “not to be in relation with”—i.e., to be in special reservation, with the status of authentic, the untouched, in the allochronic and allotropic\(^7\) condition of innocence. Rather, to be “inappropriate/d” means to be in critical, deconstructive relationality, in a diffracting rather than reflecting (ratio)nality—as the means of making the potent connection that exceeds domination. To be “inappropriate/d” is to not fit in the *taxon*, to be dislocated from the available maps, specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives, not to be originally fixed by difference. … looking for a way to figure “difference” as a “critical difference within,” and not as special taxonomic grounding difference as apartheid. (p. 299)

Thus, throughout this study, I have considered—especially in relation to dominant notions of the categorical or taxonomically conceived subject—an “inappropriate/d” school subject that will be considered through lenses of relationality. This would be a relationality that allows for a more fluid and ontologically complex subject shaped by multiple and simultaneous contingencies as opposed to a subject absolutely constrained by the exclusionary, us/them (Black/White, for example) categories of contemporary, enlightenment-oriented discourses.

**Diffraction as wave phenomenon**. So *how* might the concept of diffraction, conceived as a concept, a practice, *and* as a method, work toward helping us imagine these complex and multiply relational subject shifts? Here it is useful to turn to the more recent work of Karen Barad, who, in conversation with Haraway’s earlier conceptualizations, posits diffraction as a concept located amid “the thick legacy of feminist theorizing about difference” as well as within the material considerations of the world residing in the field of optical physics (Barad, 2014, p. 168). In this coupling, Barad works to engage the notion of diffraction as a metaphoric, analytical tool for thinking about difference differently. Simultaneously, she posits diffraction as a world-

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\(^7\)The term *allochronic* in this context mean occurring in different time periods, and the term *allotropic* is referencing the existence of an element in two or more forms, e.g., diamonds and graphite.
making physical phenomenon that might help us understand “patterns of difference that make a difference” and thus, by way of this difference making, patterns that turn out to be “the fundamental constituents that make up the world” (Barad, 2007, p. 82).

Importantly, Barad locates her conception of diffraction as a “mode of analysis” in the field of quantum physics, creating space for the onto-epistemological claims that inform her conceptions of posthumanist subjectivity as intra-actively constituted through material/discursive entanglements. In contrast to classical Newtonian physics, which is premised upon foundations and determinism, Barad (2007) characterizes her engagement with diffraction as an example of “quantum weirdness” (p. 83). She therefore calls for inquiry that “makes it possible for entangled relationalities to make connections between ‘entities’ that do not appear to proximate in space and time” (p. 74), thus challenging traditional notions of agency, cause, and effect.

For this study, I believe that it is sufficient to describe some of Barad’s most basic assertions around the phenomenon of diffraction. Thereafter, I will describe the key, related, concepts of intra-action and interference. Here I will briefly describe the concept of diffraction as it pertains to the behavior of waves and particles. I then will elaborate on ways I believe that a quantum understanding of these behaviors makes diffraction useful as an analytical tool for reconfiguring subjectivity located in the mismatch in contemporary public schools.

As a physical phenomenon attributed by classical physics to wave behavior, Barad (2007) describes diffraction classically conceived as “the way waves combine when they overlap and the apparent bending and spreading out of waves when they encounter obstruction” (p. 28). Of significance for this study, it is important to imagine the diffractive happenings of waves changing course as they collide, or pass through an opening, or reroute around a barrier in their path. I offer a textbook-like description of this phenomenon:
Water waves have the ability to travel around corners, around obstacles and through openings. Diffraction of water waves is observed in a harbor as waves bend around small boats and are found to disturb the water behind them. The same waves however are unable to diffract around larger boats since their wavelength is smaller than the boat. Diffraction of sound waves is commonly observed; we notice sound diffracting around corners, allowing us to hear others who are speaking to us from adjacent rooms. Many forest-dwelling birds take advantage of the diffractive ability of long-wavelength sound waves. Owls for instance are able to communicate across long distances due to the fact that their long-wavelength *hoots* are able to diffract around forest trees and carry farther than the short-wavelength *tweets* of songbirds. (*Reflection, Refraction, and Diffraction*, n.d.).

This passage helps me in making several points relevant for my engagement with diffraction in this study. The first point is that in classical physics, waves do not behave like particles and, as such, are indistinct and indiscrete both in location and in origin. As Barad (2007) points out, “particles are particular entities, and each particle occupies a point in space at a given moment in time. Waves, on the other hand, are not things per se; rather they are disturbances (which cannot be localized to a single point)” (p. 76). As disturbances, waves enact and effect all kinds of movement: oscillation, cresting, troughing, and swerving in response to an engagement with an obstacle or obstacles that alter their paths. Movement and its effects characterize wave behavior, creating overlapping, synergistic, and interruptive superpositions with all sorts of obstacles, including other waves that alter the wave’s productive patterns, all of which lack pre-determinacy, predictability, and permanent situatedness.

Additionally, as Barad (2007) points out, “unlike particles, waves can overlap at the same point in space,” (p. 76) and in this overlapping, the ensuing wave differs from its composite waves. She elaborates, “For example, when two water waves overlap, the resultant wave can be larger or smaller than either component wave … when the crest of one wave overlaps with the crest of another, the resultant waveform is larger than the individual component waves” (p. 76). She counters, however, “If the crest of one wave overlaps with the trough of another, the disturbances partly or in some cases completely cancel each other out, resulting in an area of relative calm” (p. 76).
In its most simplistic rendering, then, Barad’s waves, like Trinh’s in/appropriated subject, are the result of multiple, contingent, and combinational disturbances that produce diffractive effects rather than reflect and/or represent more or less accurate and predictable images of an original. Furthermore, this diffracted subject is constituted not only by the wave and its behavior, but by its behavior conceptualized entangled with its encounters with varying obstacles rather than as essentialized and pre-existing the encounter.

This brings me to my second point, which is that since the obstacle and the entity are entangled, both are changed in the encounter. This change is not a linear cause and effect, but rather a relational enmeshment that is unable to concede itself to unidirectional notions of power and individuated agency. To exemplify this point, consider, as Barad did, what happens when a wave approaches two holes in a breakwater. As she points out, the waveforms that exit each of the holes combine to form a diffraction pattern. It is not only the waveforms that are effected by this encounter, however. Over time, the breakwater will become worn by the force of the waves passing through the holes, and the holes may become larger, or indeed, may even become one as their boundaries wear away. This wearing, in turn, will alter the waves’ behavior as well, and significantly, these effects are not limited to the relationship between the approaching waves and the breakwater itself. While the breakwater protects its proximal coast from turbulent wave forces and their corresponding erosive power, it often leads to an intentional, protective accumulation of sediment that, in turn, impacts longshore drift by starving out sedimentation downstream, and thus accelerating erosion on beaches not protected by the breakwater (United States Department of Commerce, 2008). The waves’ indeterminate originary force exceeds its purposeful passage through the breakwater, and their diffractive patterns become entangled with other, less proximal, in the future effects—

8For images of the various diffraction patterns of waves, see Barad (2007, p. 77).
effects felt far beyond the breakwater holes, both in space, and in time, and thus complicating our sense of connectivity, relationality, and response-ability.

This brings me to my third, rather elongated point: in *quantum* physics, a particle does not always behave like a particle either, and at times, diffractive effects can be seen in their wake, just like a wave. Indeed, this makes sense if part of the argument made here is that entities, such as the wave, the obstacle, and the ensuing diffractive patterns, are actually constituted by their encounters with other one another, rather than pre-existent of the encounter. This finding/awareness/discovery, however, significantly troubles the behavioral distinctions traditionally attributed to waves and particles by classical physics. By extension, then, this point offers some potential and greatly sought conceptual “alternatives, to the reductive effects of dualism” often perceived “in [both] realist and social-constructivist theorizing” (Van der Tuin, 2014, p. 234).

In this offering, quantum understandings of diffraction become indispensable theoretical and methodological tools for this inquiry project. To help exemplify this point, I will turn briefly to Barad’s (2007) offering of “the wave-particle duality paradox” as a particular example of the way quantum physics requires “*a crucial rethinking of much of Western epistemology and ontology* [emphasis in original]” (p. 83). This example, then, paves the way for this dissertation’s exploratory, theoretical reconfiguration of how we might think differently about subjectivity in schools.

For Barad, Bohr’s explanation of the wave-particle duality paradox is paramount to understanding the shifts necessary for producing quantum informed, onto-epistemological knowledge projects. To begin, it is important to briefly discuss the two-slit diffraction apparatus as understood by classical Newtonian physics. This understanding, as Barad (2014) points out, positions this apparatus as “the ultimate ontological sorting machine” in that it can clearly discern between waves and particles based on their behavior. That is, waves can go through both slits at once and thus produce diffraction patterns, while particles go through one slit at a time and thus produce just one
single point on the screen (Barad, 2014, p. 173). Barad discloses, however, that in the early 20th century, it was noted that some electrons moving through the diffraction apparatus failed to be properly sorted, in that they exhibited wave-like instead of particle-like behavior (p. 173). She elaborates,

Indeed, it seems that each individual electron is somehow going through both slits at once. (Talk about inappropriate!) To make matters worse, each individual electron arrives at one point on the screen just like a proper particle. Now add a which slit detector to the apparatus (to watch an electron going through the slits) and the electrons behave like particles. Impossible they say, but this is the electron’s lived experience. (p. 173)

Recall, however, that according to classical physics, not only do waves behave like waves and particles behave like particles, but the two-slit diffraction apparatus is the “ultimate ontological sorting machine” (p. 173). So how can this be?

To describe this phenomenon, Niels Bohr enacts “a radical reworking of the classical worldview” by offering an explanation for this “queer behavior of electrons” that troubles classical understandings of wave and particle identity as “essence, fixity or givenness” (Barad, 2014, p. 173). Instead, he argues, depending on the entanglement of the apparatus, the observer and the observed, we perceive entities that were easily and ontologically categorized in classical physics based on fixed attributes now behaving in seemingly unexplainable ways. He explains in his theory of complementarity, that is, this is not because waves and particles are suddenly misbehaving, but rather because our characterizations and subsequent understandings of waves and particles have been flawed. He elaborates, “Wave and particle are not inherent attributes of objects, but rather atoms perform wave or particle in their intra-action with the apparatus. The apparatus is an inseparable part of the phenomenon” (Bohr, as cited in Barad, 2014, p. 180). This is in part exemplified by the perceived change in behavior of the electron when the slit detector was added.

While this rethinking is an overly simplistic rendition of the wave/particle/apparatus queering enacted via quantum entanglement, it works adequately here to
exemplify the onto-epistemological shifts called for by both Bohr and Barad. These shifts will now move to the forefront as I “work” the concept of diffraction in order to help reconsider contemporary, posthumanist subjectivities currently being constituted amid current local and global complexities. These subjectivities are formed both in excess of and different from rigid categorizations and pre-determined, fixed, and oppositional relationalities.

In the next subsections, my discussion of diffraction will turn to some of the ways diffraction, engaged via multiple feminisms, might work as an analytical and methodological tool to help us rethink difference/s in relation to mismatch subjectivities.

**Diffraction as a posthumanist, intra-disciplinary tool.** For Barad, diffractive thinking involves reading seemingly disparate, often conflicting theories of knowledge through one another in order to gain new/different insights. One of the key benefits of engaging in diffractive thinking practices in this way is that they allow for a decentering of our concepts by theorizing about difference in ways that complicate traditional knowledge projects most often occurring within disciplinary enclaves. Thinking with both Bohr’s two slit experiment and Haraway’s deployment of Trinh’s “inappropriate/d other,” Barad’s version of diffraction flouts disciplinary fidelity and in so doing becomes better attuned to the relational nature of difference, which “has nothing to do with essences” (Van der Tuin, 2014, p. 234). What this allows for, Barad (2012a) argues, is an engagement with difference as diffraction patterns among schools of thought in order to “record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement and difference” rather than as a conceptual singularity generated within the purity and autonomy of disciplinary boundaries (para. 8).

Thus, instead of striving for the alignment and disciplinary allegiance of disciplinary frames and concepts, one begins to look for what happens when concepts, or in this case differently conceptualized school subjects, float or are propelled unexpectedly across disciplinary boundaries, where they are in part re-configured by new concepts in
their travels. By engaging in diffractive practices that are attentive to a wide range of relationalities among concepts and fields of studies, diffractively conceived school subjects become less “predictable, stable, and normative” (Miller, 2005a, pp. 218-219), as their “realities may clash at some point,” but “collaborate and even depend on one another” elsewhere (Mol, 1999, p. 83).

Thus, when diffraction as “relatings” is considered in relation to disciplinary knowledge, what emerges might be considered a form of intra-disciplinarity. That is, the fixed boundaries between and among traditionally separate and sometimes competing epistemological and ontological worldviews become porous, even for those “classifications that have built fences around certain traditions” (Van der Tuin, 2014, p. 235), such as the humanities, the physical sciences, and the social sciences. These formerly often revered boundaries are now replaced with disciplinary entanglements, envisioned as “dynamic links” (p. 235) forged not only among academic disciplines, but “amongst insight derived outside academia as well” (Barad, 2012a, para. 9), thus calling greater attention to disciplinary exclusions. Importantly, Barad argues, this allows for us to explore some of the “inventive provocations” that might transpire by exploring the entanglement of ethics and epistemologies as “matters of fact” and “matters of concern” (para. 6). She explains,

Entanglement … calls into question this set of dualisms that places nature on one side and culture on the other. And which separates off matters of fact from matters of concern (Bruno Latour) and matters of care (Maria Puig de la Bellacasa), and shifts them off to be dealt with by what we aptly call here in the States “separate academic divisions,” whereby the division of labor is such that the natural sciences are assigned matters of fact and the humanities matters of concern, for example. It is difficult to see the diffraction patterns—the patterns of difference that make a difference—when the cordonning off of concerns into separate domains elides the resonances and dissonances that make up diffraction patterns that make the entanglements visible. (para. 6)

Thus, for Barad, the entanglements of disciplinary insights are conceptualized as both method and object of study, since diffractive theorizing produces diffracted objects of
study. It does so via an attentiveness to the superpositions, intersections, and interferences that interrupt notions of disciplinary borders as conceptual containers. Importantly, Barad locates this work within a larger, feminist, historical framework. As Geertz and van der Tuin (2016) succinctly articulate,

Reading (and theorizing) diffractively expresses what a self-accountable feminist type of intellectual critique and textual engagement ideally should consist of: Rather than employing a hierarchical methodology that would put different texts, theories, and strands of thought against one another, diffractively engaging with texts and intellectual traditions means that they are dialogically read “through one another” to engender creative, and unexpected outcomes…. And that all while acknowledging and respecting the contextual and theoretical differences between the readings in question. This methodology thus stays true to Haraway’s idea of diffraction: Rather than flat-out rejecting what has been theorized before, the foundations of the old, so to say, are being re- used to think anew. (para. 4)

While the implications of Barad’s argument for intra-disciplinary, diffractive, research practices are far-reaching, I wish to make two brief points here. First, for Barad and many other feminist new materialists, theories are conceived not merely as tools to help us reflect, describe, or explain “the” world, but rather they are perceived as participants in world-making, thereby typifying diffractive theorizing as an active practice that makes a difference(s) in the world. Crucially, from this perspective, theories are not abstracted from the lived bodies of the knower and the known, but rather, “overwhelmingly, theory is bodily, and theory is literal” (Haraway, 1992, p. 299). Thus, theories are not just thoughts, they are happenings, constituted via the material/discursive entanglements of thinking/being as practice. As Thiele (2011) describes, “We configure our world and establish connections with it through our ways of seeing. Diffraction, so intended, does not simply regard our visual field, but is a practice that invests our knowledge, our imaginary and our practices at the same time” (p. 165). Similarly, for this study, theorizing, as an engagement with reconfiguring subjectivity or subject shifting, might also be considered a form of worlding.
Diffraction as post-qualitative research method. Haraway (as cited in Timeto, 2011) has argued, “We as humans need a ‘different kind of theory of mediations’ [and] new representational practices rather than new representations are required to make [emphasis added] differences rather than merely see them” (p. 165). From this perspective, then, diffractive research methods and methodologies are not about an engagement between a researcher’s rational, knowable, and self-conscious interior and an exterior object of knowledge, nor are they an act of representation that “mirror[s] a reality that is thought to exist independent of the researcher” (Davies, 2017b, p. 1). Rather, diffractive research practices are better conceived as enactments of a diffractive “method and a practice that pays attention to material engagement with data and the ‘relations of difference and how they matter’” (Barad, as cited in Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 112).

While thus far, diffraction has primarily been presented as a methodological approach that unsettles disciplinary boundaries in order to observe the diffractive effects of reading different insights through one another, the following sub-sections will briefly outline how diffractive practices are also engaged as an effort to overturn some of the assumptions embedded in traditional qualitative inquiry. In particular, feminist, poststructural, and new materialist critiques of reflexivity and representation will be explored as alternative lenses through which to view our research practices.

As feminist critique of reflection and reflexivity. Diffraction differs significantly from the widespread qualitative research practices of reflection and reflexivity. This is a particularly poignant distinction in feminist theorizing, where critiques of reflection and reflexivity are abundant. As Haraway (1992) describes, reflection in optical physics describes the way waves change direction when they bounce of a barrier and thus, as in the case of particles in classic physics, “displaces the same elsewhere” (p. 300). This critique is echoed by Barad (2007), who argues that because of this mirroring displacement, metaphors of reflection and reflexivity actually reinforce an “illusion of essential, fixed position” in our theoretical knowledge projects (p. 29). As an engagement
with these critiques, this discussion will briefly outline some of the more prevalent notions of reflection and reflexivity in qualitative research, followed by some ways diffraction, as a methodological tool and as a feminist critique, seeks to complicate notions of vision and enactment in our research practices.

As Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) explain, “In late and advanced modernity, reflexivity has become a major concept in sociological discussions, expressing the ability and practice of a person to change his or her life in response to knowledge about one’s social circumstances” (p. 113). While Bozalek and Zembylas discuss D’Cruz et al.’s (2007) three variations of reflexivity in their thorough review of this concept, I will briefly elaborate just two here. The first variation is posited in reference to the works of Beck and Giddens and is contextualized by way of Beck’s “individualization thesis,” which pairs “the [historical] weakening of traditional customs and the rise of individual agency-personal choice and agency” (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 113). According to Beck’s thesis, this rise was accompanied by a shift from a primarily collective identity toward an individualized self-awareness that contributed to newly manifested notions of self-reflection and reflexivity. For Beck (1992, 1994), reflection referred to “knowledge gained” via “threats posed to the self” whereas reflexivity most often “focus[ed] on the practices that individuals use for the process of self-confrontation” (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 113). Giddens (1990, 1991), on the other hand, defined reflexivity as “the ability to act critically in the world in ways that reduce struggles over power and politics” (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 113). Importantly, both of these approaches perceive reflexivity as an individual’s response to their social world, and therefore place responsibility for outcomes on the decision-making capabilities of the individual (p. 113).

9The third variation relates to the privileging of cognition over emotion in these models. While this is an important insight, it will not be explored in this study.
The second variation is defined as “an individual’s self-critical approach that questions how knowledge is generated and how power relations influence the process of knowledge production” (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 113). According to these authors, feminist research has contributed significantly to this notion of “reflexivity” and “critical reflection,” and they cite Harding’s notion of “strong objectivity” and Daley’s work around ethics and the role of the researcher as examples of these contributions (p. 113). In each of these cases, the relationship between power and knowledge production is a major concern.

Not surprisingly, many of these variations have had a significant impact on the field of education. Citing Edward and Thomas (2010) in relation to teacher education, Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) point out that “reflexive processes are usually directed toward the self and its rational choices” and are thus characterized “as a competence, a set of skills and abilities to look into one’s self and make rational choices,” or point “towards knowledge and its social production within power relations” (p. 114). Each of these takes on reflexivity, however, have found themselves encumbered with numerous critiques.

Early critiques of reflexive practices perceived Giddens’s “reflexive self” as a concept that minimized the impact of complex social issues by characterizing them as “the consequences of poor decisions” and, accordingly, the result of individual agency (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 113). Perhaps one of the most prominent critiques of reflexivity in education research, however, has been Pillow’s (2003) inquiry into the ways reflexivity as a methodological tool “intersects with debates and questions surrounding representation and legitimization in qualitative research” (p. 175). These intersections are situated amid what has been termed a “crisis of representation” (Marcus & Fischer, 1987) and connote a time when our “epistemological foundations have been shaken by a general loss of faith in received stories about the nature of representation” (Geertz, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 175). Contouring this crisis by posing newly framed
questions that consider “the politics of the gaze,” Pillow (2003) queries: “Who benefits from our representations? Are our representations valid? Do they matter? Who can research whom, when and how?” (pp. 175-176). Importantly, researchers who ask these questions as part of their research practices prioritize “a need to forefront the politics of representation by making visible, through reflexivity, how we do the work of representation” (Britzman, 1995; Fine, 1994; Lather, 1993,1995, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 176). Furthermore, when juxtaposed with examinations of representation offered by “race-based methodologies and epistemologies,” these questions become even more complex and difficult to engage with (Delgado-Bernal, 1998; Parker, Dehyle, & Villenas, 2000; Villenas, 1996, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 176).

Thus, in an effort to chart some of these complexities in order to “make visible” and “be vigilant about our practices” (Spivak, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 177), Pillow describes and problematizes four trends in reflexive research practices: “reflexivity as recognition of self, reflexivity as recognition of other, reflexivity as truth, and reflexivity as transcendence” (p. 175). While there is no space here to delve deeply into the implications for each of these claims, it is important to highlight several of Pillow’s key critiques directed toward reflexive research practices, as they will subsequently be elaborated via feminist, new materialist critiques of reflexivity.

The first key critique is that as a methodological practice, reflexivity often relies upon “a modernist subject [that is] singular, knowable and fixable” (Pillow, 2003, p. 180). Characterized by Pillow as a call for the “researcher to know thyself,” this practice “imbues the researcher with the ability to be self-reflexive, to recognize an otherness of self and the self of others” (p. 181), and hence relies upon an individualized,

10 Importantly, for Pillow (2003), “the four strategies work together … to provide the researcher with a form of self-reflexivity as confession that often yields a catharsis of self-awareness for the researcher, which provides a cure for the problem of doing representation” (p. 181). In a sense then, reflexivity is utilized as a way “beyond” the crisis.
rational, and self-knowing subject. To exemplify this practice, she references Peshkin (1988) as an example of researcher efforts to locate a unified and essentialized Cartesian subject within the researcher self. He asserts, “researchers should systematically seek out their own subjectivity while their research is in progress, and … you should be ‘aware,’ and ‘observe’ yourself through the use of reflexive notes to yourself” (Peshkin, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 182). Furthermore, Peshkin argues for a careful monitoring of the self … if researchers are informed about the qualities that have emerged during their research, they can at least disclose to their readers where self and subject became joined. They can at best be enabled to write unshackled from orientations that they did not realize were intervening in their research process. (pp. 181-182)

From this perspective, then, the researcher as a knowing, Cartesian subject is capable of producing “better” data by engaging in reflexive practices that foster an awareness of his/her researcher self and by using that awareness to “unshackle” this unified self from the biases and privileges that emerge throughout the research project. Crucially, these practices are posited as helping us “represent difference better” (Wasserfall, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 176) as well as working to legitimize researcher authority by making our researching and researched selves and others knowable and thus familiar (Pillow, 2003, p. 180). According to Trinh, however, the knowledge claims deriving from these moves serve to neutralize difference by “leaving unmarked … what we think we are marking” and thus reducing our reflexive practices to “a question of technique and method” (Trinh, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 180).

Thus, in an effort to decenter this Cartesian subject engaged with a self-conscious knowledge of self and other, postmodern critiques of reflexive methodologies have attempted to recraft reflexivity via a postmodern, researching and researched subject envisioned “as multiple, as situated, as shifting” (Pillow, 2003, p. 180). Importantly, subjectivity so conceived resituates the uses of reflexivity as a research practice that “incorporate[es] a reflexivity that accounts for multiplicity without making it singular and
that acknowledges the unknowable without making it familiar” (p. 181). Thus, what Pillow calls for

is a reflexivity that pushes toward an unfamiliar, towards the uncomfortable, cannot be a simple story of subjects, subjectivity, and transcendence or self-indulgent tellings. A tracing of the problematics of reflexivity calls for a positioning of reflexivity not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions—at times even a failure of our language and practices. (p. 192)

From this perspective, reflexive practices as “confounding disruptions” to “a simple story” are constitutive of a research text rife with conundrums, contradictions, and incoherencies.

Despite this push to trouble the illusory transparency of the modernist subject, reflexive practices inflected with postmodern notions of subjectivity have been subject to substantial criticism as well. Some of the most poignant critiques remind us that it would be a mistake to offer postmodernism as a corrective to modernist engagements with reflexivity, since postmodernism is also limited by the confines of its own discursive communities and their theoretical attachments (Pillow, 2003, p. 181). As Jinks argues, “As long as the pre-theoretical commitments of any field retain some currency among its practitioners, the theoretical landscape will invariably conform to these discursive limits” (as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 181). This remains true even when postmodern practices of self-reflexivity are directed “not to the self-reflection of the knower but to constitutive reflexivity—an interrogation of the practices that constitute our accounts of the world” (Woolgar, as cited in Campbell, 2004, p. 163), for it is in this very notion of constituency that many feminist, new materialist arguments point to poststructural frames’ lack of inclusivity in their accounts of the world. It is to these arguments that this discussion now turns.

In response to the perceived inadequacy of reflexive methodologies “for bringing the self into visibility in relation to knowledge,” Bozalek and Zembylas (2017) also point to Haraway as being the first to offer diffractive practices as an alternative to the
mirroring effects of reflexivity (p. 114). They assert, “What attracted Haraway to the
notion of diffraction is the affordance it provides for patterns of difference and
heterogeneity through interference rather than sameness-which reflection and reflexivity
tend to signify” (p. 115). Since then, numerous scholars in the field of education (Davies,
2014a, 2014b, 2017b; Davies & Gannon, 2013; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Lenz Taguchi,
2012, 2013) have been influenced by new materialist concerns with the entanglement of
matter and meaning, and have begun engaging in diffractive research practices as they
work to develop alternative research models that, at least in part, are emerging from
critiques of reflexive methodologies. Most often, the inadequacy of reflexive research
practices is challenged by these researchers on two important grounds (Bozalek &

The first challenge to reflexivity that these researchers put forth is “that reflexivity
starts off with preconceived assumptions of binaries, rather than investigating how
boundaries or binaries are produced through methodology itself” (Bozalek & Zembylas,
2017, p. 116). As an alternative to the inside/outside, self/other binaries of reflexive
practices as well as the assumed distinction between subject and object, nature and
culture, and researcher and subject, diffractive methodologies are attempting to trouble
research concepts by characterizing them not as “fixed entities with essences or
properties and boundaries, but [as] ‘material-discursive phenomena’” that should be read
as intra-active and entangled (Barad, as cited in Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 116).

This brings us to the second ground upon which reflexivity is deemed insufficient,
which is the claim that reflexive methodologies don’t “pay attention to the materiality of
data and the entanglements and interdependencies in processes in which different kinds
of bodies are constituted” (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 117). This claim and its
concerns with the constitutive nature of subjectivity is of great significance to a study
engaged in inquiry around posthumanist subjectivity, for as Lenz Taguchi points out that
while “reflection is … based on the assumption of an ‘I’ who is different and exterior to
that which is conceptualizing, an ‘I’ who is separate from the world,” diffraction discards the interior/exterior dichotomy and instead even the researching/researched “I” is constituted via intra-actions amongst humans, nonhumans, words, things, texts, and research apparatuses (as cited in Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 116). Indeed, “the very notion of dichotomy—cutting into two—as a singular act of absolute differentiation, fracturing this from that, now from then” is troubled (Barad, as cited in Bozalek & Zembylas, 2017, p. 117) as we “move our images of difference/s from oppositional to differential, from static to productive, and our ideas of scientific [and social scientific] knowledge from reflective, disinterested judgment to mattering, embedded involvement” (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014, p. 165). From this perspective, then, our research practices move from an engagement with reflexivity as a tool to assist our pursuit of legitimacy, trustworthiness, and a truer truth to diffractive practices that trouble our most basic claims to represent. So what might diffractive practices look like, and what might feminist, posthumanist, research look like as it grapples with the impossibility of representation and the concurrent desire to represent (Lather, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 184)? In the next subsections, this discussion will briefly turn to Haraway’s notions of articulation as an alternative to claims of representational practices in qualitative research.

**Representation vs. articulation.**

Insofar as representation is an act of mirroring a reality that is thought to exist independent of the researcher, it creates a complex methodological puzzle in the context of poststructuralist and new materialist theorizing. Representationalism obscures the constitutive work being done in the act of representation itself, mobilizing repetitive modes of enunciation that place categories prior to the subject, and assuming that the individual being represented exists as an entity with clear boundaries prior to, and independent of, the act of representation. (Davies, 2017b, p. 1)

This quote from Davies succinctly describes the conundrums confronting feminist researchers working with poststructuralist and new materialist frames as they seek
alternatives to representationalism as a methodological tendency that has been under significant critique for several decades now. Beginning with Hacking’s (1983) *Representing and Intervening*, which traces the historical roots of representational thought back to Democritus’s atomic theory and the introduction of “a gap between representations and represented,” philosophers from a wide variety of disciplines have sought to unsettle the “deeply entrenched” and “common-sense appeal” of representationalist practices (Barad, 2007, p. 48). Of particular significance to a study interested in troubling some of the dichotomies produced through the “cutting” practices of Cartesian thought is Rouse’s critique of representationalism as a “particularly inconspicuous consequence of the Cartesian division between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ that breaks along the line of the knowing subject” (p. 48). Relatedly, he contests “the asymmetrical faith in word over world that underlines the nature of Cartesian doubt” (p. 48), and argues,

> The presumption that we can know what we mean, or what our verbal performances say, more readily than we can know the objects those sayings are about is a Cartesian legacy, a linguistic variation on Descartes’ insistence that we have a direct and privileged access to the contents of our thoughts which we lack toward the “external” world. (Rouse, as cited in Barad, 2007, p. 49)

While a deeper investigation of these challenges to representationalism is beyond the scope of this discussion, the critiques contoured by Hacking and Rouse convey the substance of some of the limitations representationalist thought poses to poststructural and new materialist, feminist researchers who have been attempting to unsettle Descartes’s rational subject for quite some time now. As Davies (2017b) points out, “presuming the capacity of the researcher to represent with words or images a reality that lies before, and independent of, the researcher’s gaze, then, we create an unresolvable contradiction if we want to theorize that work as post-humanist and new materialist” (p. 1). Thus, in an effort to describe how some of these contradictions and tensions will be approached in a study working to trouble categorically conceived school subjects, this
conversation will now turn to some of the ways Haraway’s notion of articulation as a
diffractive research practice might displace the Cartesian cuts of representationalism in
an effort to realign “post” research practices with “post” onto-epistemological
commitments.

For Haraway, the concept of diffraction is not based upon a representational model
but rather relies upon a model of “articulation” (Campbell, 2004, p. 174). Borrowing
from and adapting Latour’s theory of articulation,11 Haraway’s version of articulation
might be conceived as connecting rather than representing disparate entities such as
language, matter, humans, non-humans, and research apparatuses, and then expressing
this connectivity via knowledge projects and practices that are situated and contingent.
Differing significantly from representational research practices wherein a subject
represents an object, articulation is offered as a practice where [researchers] construct a
relation to others, not as objects but as subjects” (Haraway, as cited in Campbell, 2004,
p. 175). Importantly then, and in keeping with Haraway’s conceptualization of
“in/appropriate/d Others” and her investments in human/human and human/non-human
connectivity, diffraction as a model of articulation seeks to acknowledge the
co-constitutiveness of relational subjects that exist in different networks to those of
domination (p. 175). As such, it is important to emphasize in three key premises that are
enfolded in diffractive research practices as practices of articulation:

- Research methods are not distinct from, but rather entangled with and
  constitutive of subjects and objects. As such, research phenomena are not
  represented as objects separate from the researching subject, but rather they are
  constituted via intra-active agencies and thus are “forever being re-enfolded
  and reformed” (Barad, 2007, p. 177).

11Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg are also known for their respective work on
articulation; however, for this study, the term is primarily being applied via its conceptualization
in Science and Technology Studies (STS).
• Research so conceived is a conglomeration of material-semiotic practices that produce networks of human and non-human subjects (Campbell, 2004, p. 175). As such, it does not seek to construct “real” or “true” representations of the world, but rather is engaged in worlding with “a world [that] is agentic and interacts with knowers” (Tanesini, 1999, p. 184).

• “Humans” do not simply assemble different apparatuses for satisfying particular knowledge projects but are themselves part of the world’s ongoing reconfiguring. To the degree that … observational interventions, concepts, or other human practices have a role to play, it is as part of the material configuration of the world in its intra-active becoming (Barad, 2007, p. 341).

Thus, to conclude, this study is posited as a theoretical inquiry into the teacher/student mismatch via a diffractive methodology that claims affinity toward research methodologies of articulation as opposed to representation. In this way, the researcher “I” is conceived as an articulation of some potential connectivities and reconfigurations among White women teachers, Black male students, and their materially and semiotically constituted worlds.

**Exploratory Study**

While this study has morphed into a conceptual study that is interested in exploring some of the ways poststructural and new materialist lenses might re/de-constitute mismatch subjectivities, initially this study was conceived as an ethnographic study, designed to complicate understandings of the relationships among White women teachers and young Black male students in U.S middle schools. Conceptualizing curriculum as a relational engagement, I sought to explore issues of inequity and power in a public middle school setting via a thematic analysis of the experiential perceptions of myself and a group of former students whom I perceived as working to “transcend” the
traditional parameters of student/teacher relationships. Rooted in critical frames of resistance, empowerment, and transcendence, I envisioned an unproblematic engagement with our categorical selves that might explore “difference” largely through critical race and multicultural analytical perspectives. Rather than troubling the mismatch as an ethical, epistemological, and ontological concern, I conceived the study’s design as primarily an epistemological problem. Thus, I sought to explore an achievement gap\textsuperscript{12} that I understood, in part, to be created by misunderstandings and problematic relationships across diverse ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, and gendered groups. This theoretical frame, which served as a precursor to the one developed for this dissertation, worked from three propositions borrowing heavily from Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995): (1) race, class, and gender are three social constructs through which identity is negotiated and constructed; (2) an interdisciplinary approach is necessary to decipher the complexities that define the identity negotiations and construction that inform teacher/student relationships; and (3) such an interpretation is required to facilitate all voices involved in this study being heard.

As can be seen, in these early framings, the research was focused on equitable representations of “voice” and social transformation, and therefore research questions revolved around attempting to understand and describe resistance to inequitable practices in schools. As such, it largely resonates with Van Manen’s (1990) description:

In education, research which has a critical theory thrust aims at promoting critical consciousness, and struggles to break down the institutional structures and arrangements which reproduce oppressive ideologies and the social inequalities that are sustained and produced by these social structures and ideologies. (p. 176)

\textsuperscript{12}In contemporary school reform discourses, the achievement gap as a discursive field is most often understood as intersectional with the mismatch. Each one is often used as sharing intersecting characteristics with the other.
In this way, and in contrast to theoretical perspectives that seek to merely describe or explain social phenomena, it was a study conceived through critical lenses that engaged with critiques of ideology and inequality, ultimately to enact change. Issues of voice, power, and identity were unproblematically hinged to categorical identity, and agency resided, albeit unequally, within the researcher and the participants as Cartesian contrived research subjects.

To support this framework, the research design was conceived as an ethnographic model that I will briefly define here as “a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs and language of a culture sharing group (Harris, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 68). Exploratory data collection and analysis were engaged through participant observation fieldwork in the form of interviewing, field notes, and recollected conversations and experiences. The participants were former students ranging in age from 18 to 19 years old, and the number of students interviewed was four due to availability during the timeline of the study. Participants were selected via snowball sampling. The interviewing process engaged was a naturalistic technique, in which interviews were intentionally shaped to be conversational rather than consisting of formal, pre-determined questions. Guiding questions were open-ended and as follows:

1. Describe your earliest memories of school. What did you feel was positive? What things would you describe as being less than positive?
2. Describe your relationships with others in school. What were your relationships like with teachers? Other students? Administration? Other school employees?
3. What have you learned in school? How have you benefited? What things would you like to have learned?
4. What was your sense of belonging like in school? Did you feel like you fit in? Why or why not?
5. How can school be made better? Do you think better schools are possible?

6. What are your dreams for the future? Do you feel prepared to make them come true? Why or why not?

As we engaged in discussions of the “participants’ answers” to these questions, the problematics of this design began to emerge. As a favorite teacher, the dialogue was largely limited to hero and villain narratives, and accordingly, conversations seemed unnaturally limited to perceived occasions of “rescue” and notions of “me,” their former teacher, as the ideal teacher. Additionally, racialized and gendered identity categories went largely unchallenged but instead were hitched unproblematically to dominant discourses in schools constituting us/them, Black/White, and male/female dichotomies to name a few, despite my perceptions of our relationalities as being considerably more complex.

Even more problematic for me, however, was the increasing shift occurring in my doctoral program of study toward poststructural theories and their reconceptualizations of concepts such as “voice,” “experience,” and “identity,” as well as questions arising in qualitative research around the “crisis of representation.” This crisis, which has been the site of ongoing debate in qualitative research for several decades now, has been characterized as a space where researchers are alternatively critiqued and self-situated in positionalities described as hegemonic, counter-hegemonic, essentializing, giving voice, inattentive to material and historical realities, “anything goes” practitioners, and most recently, preoccupied with representation as “the dominant image of thought” (MacLure, 2013, p. 659). Amid such a contentious cacophony, my ability to interview, observe, and represent my former Black male students, specifically as a White woman researcher, had become increasingly troublesome from a methodological perspective.

Additionally, it was becoming impossible for me to think of these former students as participants. As I agonized over what such a methodological frame might mean to me from an ethical standpoint, I realized that the study I wanted to engage in was certainly
related to this collective, but it was more interested in re-theorizing the disobedient subjectivities that surfaced amid our relationalities across disparate times and places, as opposed to applying theory to data. It is from these problematic, exploratory research experiences that the current study emerged.

Poststructural Concepts for Understanding Subjectivity

Poststructural understandings of subjectivity vary greatly from traditional, humanist notions of the subject. While situated renderings of poststructural subjectivity will be explored in relation to particular readings of the mismatch as phenomena, it is important to briefly explain some of the more prominent elements of poststructural thought’s critique of the liberal, humanist subject. One major critique is that, while humanist perceptions of the subject characterize the individual as unified, coherent, autonomous, and in possession of a self-determining rationality, poststructural depictions argue for a conceptualization of subjectivity that conceives of the subject as multiple, contradictory, and constituted, in part, through discourse. In replacing the inherent nature of the essential, humanist subject with a conceptualization of the subject as a site for continuous conflict, incoherence, and flux, Weedon (1987) points out, “[Poststructural] subjectivity is precarious, contradictory, and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak” (p. 33).

With these distinctions in mind, here I will discuss two concepts fundamental to understandings of poststructural subjectivity; experience, and identity. It is important to emphasize the distinction between traditional and poststructural portrayals of these terms, as each, in its own way, speaks directly to some of the limitations of understanding identity as categorical, which is a key theme in this study.

Experience as a component of poststructural subjectivity. Experience as an element of poststructural subjectivity is quite different from humanist renderings that position experience foundationally “as a ground of analysis and a ground of knowledge
about the world” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 31). In order to engage with a notion of experience as constitutive of poststructurally conceived subjectivity, I rely heavily on historian Joan Scott’s (1992) highly influential publication, The Evidence of Experience, which problematizes taken for granted notions of experience as both a foundation of narrated history and for understanding identity. In this discussion, Scott troubles the taken for granted relationship between experience and humanist notions of unique, unified individuality by showing how such perceptions “obscure[s] how our notion of meaningful experience is socially produced” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 31). She makes this claim amid disciplinary debates in history described as a “crisis for orthodox history” and characterized by a renovation and proliferation of traditionally conceived historical thought and subjectivity that multiplies “not only stories, but subjects, and by insisting that histories are written from fundamentally different—indeed irreconcilable-perspectives or standpoints, no one of which is complete or completely true” (Scott, 1992, p. 24). She argues, however, that while this widening of what counts as history is important, many of these anti(foundationalist perspectives still rely upon experience as an unproblematized, evidentiary foundation (p. 26). Importantly, she contends, because our understandings of our experience are socially produced, there are several ideological misconceptions that inform these still foundational renderings of experience as historical evidence. She thus puts forth several critiques to contour what she perceives as the limitations of these perspectives.

Her first critique is directed toward approaches that privilege an expansion of vision as a strategy for expanding knowledge. She articulates,

The challenge to normative history has been described, in terms of conventional historical understandings of evidence, as an enlargement of the picture, a corrective to oversights resulting from inaccurate or incomplete vision, and it has rested its claim to legitimacy on the authority of experience, the direct experience of others, as well as of the historian who learns to see and illuminate the lives of those others in his or her texts. (Scott, 1992, p. 24)
According to Scott, however, this approach does little to solve the problem of the exclusion of histories of “difference” in the canon. Two points remain central here. First, she argues, experience as evidence was already key to orthodox, epistemological lenses that considered a subject’s personal account of their experience as true (p. 24). Indeed, she points out, experience was not only posited as truth, but “as the most authentic kind of truth” (Williams, as cited in Scott, 1992, p. 27). Second, and relatedly, by remaining within this epistemological frame and leaving traditional notions of experience uncontested, a chance is lost for investigating the “assumptions and practices that excluded considerations of difference in the first place” and instead, “[such notions] take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and thus naturalize difference” (p. 25). In the end, for Scott, making and expanding the visibility of historical experience fails to analyze both the workings of systems within which subjects are constituted and their historicity. Instead, difference is absorbed into true stories residing in the authentic experience of the Other. As such, the terms constituting historical difference remain largely intact.

The next ideological misconception Scott (1992) overturns is the notion that experience is something that subjects have and instead asserts, “It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience” (pp. 25-26). As Smith and Watson (2010) engage with Scott’s argument, they cite Teresa DeLauretis’s framing of experience as a process constituting subjectivity:

Through that process … one places oneself or is placed in social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in oneself) those relations-material, economic, and interpersonal-which are in fact social, and, in a larger perspective, historical. (p. 31)

Thus, continuing this line of thought, subjects do not exist prior to experience but rather come to know themselves based on particular experiences that are attached to their social categories and identities (p. 31).
Lastly, Scott (1992) argues, subjects are constituted discursively, and thus “experience is a linguistic event (it doesn’t happen outside established meanings)” (p. 34). This is not the linguistic determinism that is so often attributed to poststructural thinkers, however. She elaborates, “Subjects are constituted discursively, but there are conflicts among discursive systems, contradictions within any one of them, multiple meanings for the concepts they deploy” (p. 34). Thus, discursive fields may help form or limit subjectivities, but they can never fully define or contain them. From this perspective, then, and in keeping with the theoretical frame for this study, there are limitations to the ways discourses contribute to the constitution of school subjects.

Therefore, in a study engaged with troubling the certainty of categorical identity, the notion of experience as something that needs to be unpacked and situated as opposed to a truth encountered via the production or interpretation of a research text is a crucial distinction to make. By viewing “experience [as] at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted” (Scott, 1992, p. 31), we are confronted with the necessity of exploring the historical contingencies and their concurrent, often contradictory ideological systems in order to disentangle what seemingly simple claims to experience obscure. Thus, while it is important to engage with the previously absent histories of marginalized others and the effects of these invisibilities, such an approach falls short in that it does little to explore how these absences and invisibilities came to be in the first place. In a study where oppositional, categorical identity as constitutive of racialized and gendered school subjects occupying the discursive space of the mismatch is being troubled, critiques of experience conceived as authentic, authoritative, and universal are a crucial element of this study’s conceptual underpinnings.

**Identity as a component of poststructural subjectivity.** As indicated in the theoretical framework for this study, the notion of identity as multiple and fluid is a key element in poststructural conceptualizations of subjectivity and analytical category, importantly because one explicit intention of this study is to trouble purely
epistemological notions of difference. Therefore, in this brief subsection, I will highlight two key lenses through which identity might be engaged via theoretical research practices exploring “mismatch”-situated subjectivities.

The first lens identified in regard to identity and subjectivity is that of identity as difference and commonality. For Smith and Watson (2010), identity is a relational rather than individualized construct. They elaborate, “Identities materialize within collectivities and out of the culturally marked differences that permeate symbolic interactions within and between collectivities” (p. 38). This framing is different from a dichotomous framing that would posit communities of difference and similarity as opposites with clear boundaries demarcating insides and outsides. Rather, because both social interactions and community borders are constantly shifting, identity categories rarely, if ever, stand still. In this study, following Miller’s (2005a) lead, feminist inquiry is seen as “a historically situated and discursively inflected practice … [that] posits subjects as irreducibly multiple, [and] calls attention to constructions of ‘identity’ as produced and sustained by cultural norms” (p. 47). Due to this irreducibility and multiplicity, these norms are rarely extractable as singular and/or harmonious, and so competing and conflicting norms often collaborate to constitute multiple and conflicting identities. From this perspective, while school subjects may sometimes seem to be about coherently narrated individuals, research narratives “wrap up the interrupted and fragmentary discourses of identity … and present them as persons themselves” (Gilmore, 1994, p. 17). Thus, for this study, while constructions of identity in normative, contemporary school discourses are extremely important for understanding the mismatch, they also become a potential

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13As has been asserted throughout this dissertation, one of the key theoretical explorations to be explored in this study is how such notions that posit identity as constituted almost exclusively by culture and ethnicity might be complicated by layering these notions with insights gained from new materialist lenses.
location for the failure of the mismatch to adequately describe/explain/contain its subjects.

The next element of identity I wish to identify as constituting poststructurally conceived notions of subjectivity is the notion of identity as based upon historically specific models. Citing Stuart Hall, Smith and Watson (2010) assert that cultural identities are “the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (p. 39). From this perspective, categorical identities such as “Black” or “woman” are never universal, but rather shift across both discursive and material times and places. Scott (1992) also thinks with Hall as she further elaborates this point by describing how the emergence of “new” identities doesn’t refer to pre-existing identities that were predetermined, inevitable, and/or discovered, but rather must be located in particular historical and political moments. As Hall (as cited in Scott, 1992) explains, “The fact is, ‘black’ has never been just there either… It has always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally, and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (p. 33). Much like Hall’s discussion of how “Black” as an identity “had to be learned” and could only be learned in a specific historical context and moment, so, too, are “mismatched” identities in contemporary U.S. public schools learned and historically situated among the discursive swarm constituting their affiliated school subjectivities. As such, identity will be a key analytical category for exploring subjectivities constituted via this engagement with feminist, theoretical inquiry.

The Posthumanist Subject as “Not Just” Human

We need to devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match the profound transformations we are undergoing. That means we need to think differently about ourselves. I take the posthuman predicament as an opportunity to empower the pursuit of alternative schemes of thought, knowledge and self-representation. The posthuman condition
urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming. (Braidotti, 2013, p. 12)

As the posthuman gets a life, it will be fascinating to observe and engage adaptations of narrative lives through an imaginary of surfaces, networks, assemblages, prosthetics, and avatars. (Smith, 2011, p. 571)

It has been argued throughout this dissertation that poststructural lenses alone are inadequate to help us understand mismatch subjectivities in contemporary U.S. schools. Instead, I have argued, we also need to engage other elements of posthumanism, including some aspects of feminist, new materialisms and their renderings of posthuman subjectivity. But what is a “posthuman” subject? In a general sense, this study is an exploratory engagement with this question. As articulated in the theoretical framework for this study, while poststructural frames have been extremely useful in helping us understand how discourse and power work to help constitute subjectivity, they have not always been as valuable in helping us account for the ways intra-activity among discourses and materialities might be co-constitutive of subjectivity in more complex ways. Therefore, this subchapter is a brief exploration of how this theoretical experimentation, also informed by fledgling theories of posthuman subjectivity, might provide new insights into subjectivities located in “the mismatch” in contemporary public schools. The mismatch so conceived is not merely a discursive swirl, but rather envisaged as a Baradian phenomenon, configured by this researcher’s selves, her relationalities with “Others,” their concurrent, material, and discursive collusions, a diffractively conceived theoretical and methodological frame, and particular agential cuts enacted via non-generalizable, site-specific engagements. In this study, feminist, diffractive theorizing as a postfoundational methodology is posited as a research tool that does not claim to accurately represent or describe the mismatch, but rather offers knowledge claims that are based on a de/re-configuring of a particular interpretation of the mismatch through lenses informed by one teacher/student collective that exists as part of “a larger material arrangement of which ‘we’ are ‘part’” (Barad, 2007, p. 178).
Theorizing subjectivity in this way involves the production of a text, but it is an unfaithful text, seeking to think difference differently rather than represent or produce a copy of difference through faithful representation. This methodological approach looks to experiment with multiple “options between different versions of reality [that are] are not exclusive, but [rather] clash in some places, depend on each other in others” (Mol, 1999, p. 74). It is also intra-active, engaged in becoming with “not just” human bodies, places, times, and other texts in ways that position the text itself as part of a discursive and material phenomenon. Conceptualized in this way, there is no text representing the world but only a “text-world” phenomenon. As Braidotti (2013) describes,

A text, theoretical and scientific as well as literary, is a relay point between different moments in space and time, as well as different levels, degrees, forms, and configurations of the thinking process. It is a mobile entity, a speed jet. Thinking and writing, like breathing, are not held into the mould of linearity, or the confines of the printed page, but move outwards, out of bounds, in webs of encounters with ideas, others, texts. The linguistic signifier is merely one of the points in a chaining of effects, not its centre or its endgame. The source of intellectual inspiration comes from the never-ending flow of connections between the texts and their multiple “outsides.” (p. 166)

Therefore, the following, brief discussion seeks to contour an experimentally conceived conceptual apparatus emerging from writing as knowing, being, thinking, and doing, that gestures, in part, toward posthuman subjectivity. As such, it will begin with a brief discussion of “the posthuman” as conceptualized in this study. It will then briefly explore two potential analytical frames for considering subjectivity through posthuman lenses—the posthuman as a relational, non-individuated subject, and the posthuman as a dystemporal subject.

The Still Human, Posthuman/ist Subject

While traditional notions of subjectivity rely on a rational, self-conscious, remembering, interpreting, and narrating subject as well as a “very specific form of embodiment that usually conveys trust in the impression that the subject of the narration
is identical to the subject of the narrative,” over the last several decades, poststructural thought has radically called into question the viability of this humanist subject (Herbrechter, 2012, p. 331). More recently, however, some scholars have argued that poststructural theory’s “decentering” of the human subject has not gone far enough, and thus their thinking has begun to gravitate toward spaces situated under the “newer” umbrella category of posthumanism. As Wolfe (cited in Callus & Herbrecher, 2012) asserts, posthumanism has now been firmly situated within the humanities and the social sciences as a critical discourse (p. 241) by “an academy growing increasingly inured to ‘switching codes’ of thought” (Bartscherer & Coover, as cited in Callus & Herbrecher, 2012, p. 241). In these spaces, contemporary technoculture, biotechnology, and other modes of post-anthropocentrism are concurrently collaborating with and reshaping the humanities as they “force through a rethinking of the integrities and identities of the human: not forgetting, either, those of its non-human others, many of them of humanity’s own making and remaking—gods, monsters, animals, machines, systems” (Callus & Herbrecher, 2012, p. 241). Thus, an engagement with posthuman subjectivity is an engagement with a human radically reconfigured.

In this study, however, “the human” remains central to an investigation into mismatch subjectivity. As has been argued elsewhere, this is based on the belief that discarding the human subject is always a differential act. Thus, rather than reject an engagement with human subjectivity in favor of exclusive emphases on non-human subjectivities, this study will explore the “posthuman” as a relationally conceived subject via a reading of poststructural and other posthuman theories diffractively through each other in order to both “recuperate” poststructural notions of situatedness and

14 This term refers to a theoretical trend that rejects the human subject as the center of all knowing and being, making space for non-human actors in theories of subjectivity.

15 Callus and Herbrechter cite Graham (2002), Derrida (2008), and Haraway (2008) as instances of this rethinking.
create “openings” in regard to “what it means to be human in the twenty-first century” (Hayles, 2005, p. 327). While this coincident recuperation and opening of what it means to be human entails a re-envisioning of human subjectivity, “there arguably remains an immutability to the human which calls for a reinscription of concepts, categories and philosophemes that are on the way to revision rather than superannuation” (Callus & Herbrechter, 2012, p. 242). As such, the posthuman subject envisioned in this theoretical experimentation might be considered a dis/re/configuration of the humanist subject that attempts to extend the critiques of poststructural theory by a further complicating of “the human.” Based on these assumptions, emergent notions of posthumanist theory continue to query what it means to be human while “gather[ing] together multiple, overlapping, and sometimes discrepant fields of critical activity” (Whitlock, 2012, p. vii). As Whitlock argues, “A productive contradiction and instability [is] embedded in the conjunction of ‘posthuman’ and ‘lives’” (p. v), an instability that “marks recognition that humanism, always already in disharmony with itself, forever sounds of other airs, other heirs” (Badmington as cited in Smith, 2012, p. 22).

“Posting,” however, also often signals in a sense of newness, a coming after or a successor, and thus enacts a linear, progressive notion of time. The posthuman is no exception. As Seamen (as cited in Smith, 2012) points out, posthumanism as “a temporal or epochal term of reference (often) tracks the succession to a new form of the human whose capacities are extended through technological innovations and whose relations are dispersed across virtual networks” or “a new form of human” often represented in popular culture as “deliberately engineered for the imagined product of breakthroughs, both fictional and real, in genetic manipulation, reproductive technologies, and virtual reality” (p. 138) or as a particular iteration of the subject such as the non-human, cyborg, transhuman, etc. In these strands, we may note, the contemporary form of the subject is frequently produced through metaphors deriving from technoscience and bioengineering (Smith, 2012, p. 138). Thus, rather than re-conceptualizing the human subject through
critical theoretical activity that is “directed at deconstructing and dismantling the Cartesian or Enlightenment subject, historicizing the emergence of a particular notion of the liberal subject, and and/or delineating the world historical effects of that subject’s dispensation” (Callus & Herbrechter, 2012, p. 138), Mitchell (as cited in Smith, 2012) argues that this newer and better posthuman as a subject might be best characterized by Me++ (p. 140). As Dinerstein (as cited in Smith, 2012) notes, Me++ can be recognized as “a consumer gold rush: the evolution of the fragile human body into a silicon based cyborg with superhuman capacities” and thus mostly just an “intensification” of humanist thinking (p. 140).

In response to this tendency, Smith (2012) argues, as part of mobilizing posthumanist critique to recognize the persistence of a humanist imaginary in populist reiterations of posthumanism, we must “interrupt its presentist scope” (p. 140). Thus, in concurrence with perspectives that negatively appraise both the excessive technologizing and lack of attention to historical situatedness in some renderings of posthuman subjectivity, posthumanism as conceptualized in this study situates itself as both a critique of and a resistance to these renderings. Additionally, unlike some recent theoretical iterations of posthumanism as non- and/or anti-human and thus not requiring a theory of subjectivity, this study argues for the continued importance of theories of subjectivity that include the human and its relationalities as an important part of contemporary posthuman discourse. This is largely because, as argued previously in the framing of this dissertation, discarding the human subject is always a differential act that is in part constitutive of anti-humanist critiques deeply connected to the “othering” of people frequently considered “less than human” (Butler, 2004). Importantly, then, these assumptions around the continued need for the human subject, as well as the subject’s

16And, I would argue, highly futuristic and ahistorical.
complexly historical and dystemporal emergence, are integral to both the methodological and theoretical frames proffered throughout this study.

Two analytical lenses are posited as central to this methodologically informed move. The first is a reconceptualization of the human as a non-individuated subject, constituted through/by its relationalities with other entities—including, but not limited to, other humans. This notion of the posthuman is closely aligned with Barad’s notion of subjectivity as intra-active. The second is that the posthuman subject might be read as a dystemporal subject, diversely located in places and times that are never singular, and thus never certain. In the following subsection, I will briefly describe these two posthuman inflected lenses.

**The Posthuman Subject as Situated, Dystemporal, and Relational**

“Human” requires an extraordinary congeries of partners. Humans, wherever you track them, are products of situated relationalities with organisms, tools, much else. We are quite a crowd, at all of our temporalities and materialities. (Haraway, 2006, p. 144)

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Haraway, 2011, p. 2)

As Braidotti denotes, Haraway’s (2004b) groundbreaking feminist treatise, “The Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” is often seen as a fundamental text for postfoundational subjectivities. In this text, we are confronted with a neo-Foucauldian reading of “the manipulation of bodies in our present social system” while at the same time being challenged to “think of what new kinds of bodies are being constructed right now” (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 198). Similarly, this study is deeply invested in complicating understandings of difference and subjectivity in contemporary U.S. schools by exploring “these new kinds of bodies” via notions of relational and thus non-unitary subjectivity and their accompanying, process
oriented notions of subjectivation. A theoretical study considered in this way is deeply influenced by Braidotti’s assertion that were she to write an autobiography, it “would be the self-portrait of a collectivity” (as cited in Peterson, 2006, p. 90). The subject conceived in this way does not understand the body as a container for a singular individual, but rather works toward “disrupt[ing] individuations we [only] believe are real” by conceptualizing subjectivity as an entanglement and assemblage of humans [and] individuals as emergent through intra-action” (St. Pierre, 2011, pp. 618-619). Thus, White women teachers and young Black male students “become” rather than “are” as they intra-act amid interpreted experiences, imaginings, and re-memberings via engagements with posthuman subjectivity that consider the human not in isolation, but as an entanglement of discourses and materialities.

Subjectivity considered in this way “prefers multiplicities and misplaced identities” characterized by “non-linearity, non-fixity and non-unitary subjectivity” (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 201) as opposed to subjects bound by place, time, and identity categories. Organic and inorganic, “real” and imagined, highly dystemporal, such considerations are an engagement with inquiry into the ways that “the forces of space, time, materialities and bodies co-constitute the ongoing shaping of human subjectivities” (Juelskjaer, 2013, p. 754). Accordingly, such inquiry is directed toward a different understanding of “the dynamic and multiple relations between figure and ground” of teachers and students in schools by “re-turning” to the significance of situatedness and the politics of knowledge in feminist theorizing and engaging with the “methodological inventiveness” characteristic of the new materialist turn (Hughes & Lury, 2013, p. 787).

Such inventive methodological practices, while creating openings for school subjects in excess of current school categorization practices, are not indicative of an “anything goes” approach, however. Rather, they are layered with researcher intentions that are steeped in concerns for the political and the ethical, and as such inherit Haraway’s cyborgian “oppositional consciousness” and its concerns for difference, social
justice, resistance, and survival (Braidotti, 2006b, p. 199). Thus, instead of fidelity to a systematic method or approach, it is to these concerns that researchers find themselves accountable. As such, and as argued more vigorously in Chapter I, these intentions are not anti-foundational, but rather, as part of their political and ethical locatedness, they acknowledge the fact that the material effects of identity categories are both obdurate and complex, and do not just disappear as we think with more open-ended theories of ontology. Thinking, writing and theorizing in this way, however, are also a form of worlding, and so, as Haraway reminds us while musing over her own philosophical work.

These knowledge-making and world-making fields inform a craft that for me is relentlessly replete with organic and inorganic critters and stories, in their thick material and narrative tissues. The tight coupling of writing and research—where both terms require the factual, fictional, and fabulated; they are situated in close proximity to woman, the native, the dispossessed. (Haraway, 2011, p. 2)

Theorizing, from this point of view, has the potential to create new worlds with differently imagined subjects, even as it stumbles in the thick viscosity of “material existences in the thick now” (Barad, 2015, p. 388). Thus, our historical Others do not go away in this strand of posthuman thought, but rather they are remade and re/deformed in a contemporary, neoliberal society where archaic infrastructures, technology, information systems, data flows, biotechnologies, and biopolitics enact with historical sedimentations and reconfigure not only vulnerability and precarity, but possibility and positive change as well. Indeed, as posthuman perspectives proliferate, we seem to need a way of imagining the human within the posthuman in a way that “generates an imperative to interrogate more deeply the values and interests that underpin any representation of the ‘posthuman’ condition. What is at stake … is precisely what (and who) will define authoritative notions of normative, exemplary, desirable humanity into the twenty-first century” (Graham, 2002, p. 11). As such, 21st century humanity is a complex configuration that is both situated in our current moment and dystemporal, as it mingles traces of yesterday in a today that is rooted in tomorrow. As Braidotti (2006b) describes,
Capital harps on and trades in body fluids: the cheap sweat and blood of the disposable workforce throughout the Third World; but also, the wetness of desire of First World consumers as they commodify their existence into over-saturated stupor. Hyper-reality does not wipe out class relations: it just intensifies them. Postmodernity rests on the paradox of simultaneous commodification and conformism of cultures, while intensifying disparities among them, as well as structural inequalities. (p. 204)

In this dystemporal yet situated context, the subjectivities of White women teachers and young Black men are laden with postcolonial and neoliberal labor markets, students and teachers as data points, and information and capital hyperflows in ways that intensify their differently and intra-actively historical Otherness. Concurrently, previously critical discourses are mutated into media events and information systems that move across space, time, and matter in ways that expose the “leakiness of bodily boundaries” (Shildrick, as cited in Graham, 2002, p. 12) via the incessantly shape-shifting form of the contemporary subject. As such, theories and subjectivities are never just here and now, and never stand still.
Chapter IV

MATTER AND MATTERING: ARTICULATIONS OF THE MISMATCH IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Introductory Interlude

In 2012, I was approached by the education director of a nearby contemporary art museum to see if she could attend a parent forum I was offering to my students’ parents. The forum’s topic was the Common Core State Standards and the ways their adoption was shifting curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices in our school. While the forum was largely informational, it sparked a conversation between myself and the museum’s educators (and later artists and curators) around the ways we could partner to enrich our students’ engagement with inquiry and design-based thinking, as well as to enhance students’ “critical thinking skills.” By extension, the partnership might provide an “authentic” setting for both school and museum staff to participate in job-embedded professional development experiences that would help us implement the new policy mandates around the Common Core State Standards, all the while remaining intentionally faithful to the missions of both institutions. For the museum professionals, this meant continuing their role as an accessible and viable resource for regional schools in ways that engaged students and teachers with “interpretations of the world around us [that might] serve as a platform to encourage creative thinking” by “engag[ing] its diverse audiences with thought-provoking, interdisciplinary exhibitions” (“About the Aldrich,” 2017). For my 236-student, K-8, public, teacher-founded charter school, this meant
engaging our students in ways that nurture and develop “commitment to community, social justice, and tolerance towards others” by engaging in hands-on, “real-world” learning experiences through relationships with local and regional community partners (“Mission statement,” 2017). Importantly, the mission also emphasizes the necessity of “striv[ing] … to promote excellence in the profession,” and developing “the unique gifts and talents” of all members of the school community.

Against this backdrop, over the last several years I have worked in partnership with the museum and the director of education programs to provide and participate in professional development workshops for and with educators in the region. I’ve done so primarily to bring my students to the museum as way to engage with the world outside the classroom, and to engage in a multi-year, artist-in-residence program where, each year, the museum provides an exhibiting or alumni artist to work on-site at the school with our middle school students on a project they co-design. In an effort to extend this work into the lower grades in the school, this year we submitted a proposal for and were awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant for our partnership. We are excited to have funding to continue this important collaborative work over the next two years.

In particular, this partnership thus far has illuminated, for me, ways in which my own thinking has shifted and at times imploded, while working with contemporary artists. Through these engagements with and exposures to radical reconfigurations of our social world, I have begun to explore ways of thinking about the mismatch that had never occurred to me when I was looking solely at written texts and academic “literature” with which to engage and expand my thinking. Ultimately, “what happened” for me with and in this museum/artist/school research setting was that I came to perceive our work as an engagement with “data” in the form of contemporary art as it brushed up against, and at times splattered, some of the text-tethered conceptions of the mismatch in the education literature depicting White women and Black boys in contemporary U.S. schools. In these encounters, my understandings of social difference, portrayed by contemporary artists,
were disrupted, de/reconstructed, and often stretched beyond the limits of acceptability in regard to discourses about teachers and students. Thus, deeply informed by my work with the museum, the work engaged in this chapter rests on the assumption that in the arts, “a depiction is never just an illustration … [but rather] it is the site for the construction and depiction of social difference” (Rose, 2016, p. 17).

Contending Bodies: Re-presentations and Art-iculations

With this understanding of the arts in mind, in this chapter, I work to complicate ways that the mismatch is conceptualized in mainstream education discourses. I do so by diffracting these commonsensical conceptualizations of White female and Black male relationalities through three contemporary works of visual art. Specifically, I will diffract/interpret, through poststructural and new materialist theoretical lenses, these artistic renderings of the oftentimes unstable and provocative1 entanglements that inform the production of mismatched subjectivities in contemporary society. In this way, by utilizing both Haraway’s and Barad’s notions of diffraction and positioning these aspects of a post-qualitative research practice, I work toward revising the mismatch as a concept that has traditionally worked to form “hubs” of intelligible subjectivity around the commonsensical and categorical constraints contouring difference in mainstream education discourses. By exploring contemporary art as a location for cite/site/sight/ing “where the effects of difference appear” (Haraway, 1997, p. 298), I will argue that simplistic and unproblematized conceptualizations of the mismatch collapse as “the interpenetration of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others” (p. 298) offer possibilities for differently articulated connectivities and relationalities

1In particular, I am thinking with the term “provocative” as an affective field that contours some of the taboos around White women and Black boys, such as those described by Frankenberg (1993).
among White women teachers and Black male students in schools. Thus, by exploring the varying, “contending bodies” that might “emerge at the intersection” of different kinds of “research, writing, and publishing…; cultural productions of all kinds, including available metaphors and narratives; and technology, such as the visualization technologies” (Haraway, 1997, p. 299), I work to cite, site, and sight racialized and gendered bodies differently. With these intentions, the discussions in this chapter will examine some the “interaction[s], interference[s], [and] reinforcement[s]” (p. 273) that swirl around the discourses and materialities articulated in these artistic renderings of mismatch relationalities. Importantly, I position this work as an engagement with diffraction as “a feminist tool to rethink difference/s beyond binary opposition/s” (Kaiser & Thiele, 2014, p. 165) in ways that might help us not only complicate our understandings of the connectivities and disconnectivities between Black male students and White women teachers, but also help us imagine more affirmative relationalities.

Thus, as I engage in a diffractive reading of some disparately situated works of contemporary visual art, I work toward re-theorizing the mismatch as both a concept and as a subject-glomming “hub” in ways that articulate difference differently. By re-conceptualizing and articulating the mismatch as existing within ever-changing material/discursive fields, I am working to trouble abstractions of the mismatch as a concept that typically works to describe, label, and contour stable and predictable school subjects. Instead, I offer, in its place, diffracted subjectivities that are always shifting shape and thus articulated in ways that are impossible to fully or accurately predict, assume, and represent. In these ways, I am working to trouble habitual understandings of “difference,” especially as “it” is deployed to describe, explain, and intervene upon the “failings” of mismatched school subjects.

Therefore, the theoretical and methodological work done in this chapter is an effort to “shift the focus from representationalism and the hegemony of language/signification in our understandings of discursive practices, material processes and the production of
knowledge” toward a notion of difference as articulation (Barrett & Bolt, 2013, p. xi). Importantly, and as discussed in Chapter II of this dissertation, diffraction as a model of articulation seeks to acknowledge the co-constitutiveness of relational subjects “that exist in networks other than just those of domination (Campbell, 2004, p. 175) and thus construct a relation to others, not as objects but as subjects” (Haraway, as cited in Campbell, 2004, p. 175). My intention here is to show that by shifting our matter-of-fact understandings of relational difference in these ways, less certain and oppositional, and more permeable and hopeful, knowledge projects around the mismatched subjectivities of White women teachers and Black male students become possible.

By engaging in these theoretical and methodological practices, I am building on my earlier assertions that the mismatch is a complex, material, and discursive subject/object of study. I thus offer this engagement with contemporary art as a way to explore what I have previously described as the knottiness of the discursive practices and materialities that contribute to both the obdurateness of essentialized identity categories and to their disassemblings. With this intention, I begin by exploring some of the ways artistic expression is being re-worked by both new materialist and poststructural thinkers as a way to assist me in articulating and mapping:

- some of the complex relationships among racialized and gendered subjectivities,
- habitual representative practices of these subjectivities, and
- ways that artistic production and creativity might disrupt commonsensical relationships between language, its role in representation, and knowledge (Barrett & Bolt, 2013, p. xii).

With these aims in mind, in the next section, I will briefly describe some of the assumptions around arts-based research that are entangled with the inquiry practices enacted in this chapter. More specifically, I will discuss some of the ways the visual arts
might contribute to a diffractive methodology that seeks to articulate rather than represent mismatched school subjectivities.

**Diffracting the Mismatched Subject through Visual Arts, or Why “Contemporary Art” Makes for “Good” Data**

The contemporary works of art entangled in this research project are in part conceptualized as an “appearance of data” (St. Pierre, 2013) as conceived through the lens of post-qualitative research. Simultaneously, however, I also posit these works of art as a tool to help me trouble the ways subjectivities are defined around institutional practices such as categorizing, as well as to assist my exploration of some ways mismatched subjectivities might be re-conceived as “material-semiotic actor[s] … that encompass[es] the human and the non-human, the social and physical, and the material and immaterial” (Haraway, as cited in Barrett & Bolt, 2013, p. 3). In particular, I am interested in examining the ways feminist, poststructural, and new materialist theorizings might be diffracted through one another in order to help us better understand the materialities and discourses that intra-act to contour and form racialized and gendered subjectivities.

With this focus in mind, a brief discussion of the assumptions embedded in these entanglements seems important. As argued throughout this dissertation, the current moment in contemporary U.S. schools might be described as one where “the reductive technologies in educational discourses … as evidenced by new curriculum structures and the emphasis on means-end accountabilities” (Grierson, 2007, p. 540) work to classify, differentiate, and divide contemporary school subjects (Popkewitz, 1998). Despite the seeming omnipotence of accountability discourses and materialities, however, in a world increasingly characterized by the complex and multi-directional flows of people and
things, other material-discursive fields intra-act with these networks of accountability. One of these fields is the contemporary visual arts.

As Grierson (2007) points out, even while we live “in an over-rationalised world” (p. 534), we also live in “a world of escalating global complexities marked by a plethora of visual images, signs and texts that operate to obliterate, translate and transform spaces of nation, ethnicity, gender, class, culture, language, history and meaning” (p. 540). These images are not merely representative. In keeping with the assertions made in the conceptual framework for this study, the visual arts, as both creative practice and product, are rich with articulations of the “dynamic material exchange[s] [that] can occur between objects, bodies and images,” and as such, can “produce real material effects in the world” (Bolt, 2004, p. 8). Thus, by turning my inquiring attention to the “deformational and transformational potential” of artistic imagery, I am working to discard the prevalent, reductive, subject-categorizing technologies at work in U.S. public schools and replace them with diffraction as a visual technology that might help us re-constitute school subjects through “multi-sited situatedness and relational complexity” (Trinh & Grzinic, 2005, p. 125).

In this chapter, then, I engage with contemporary art as “data” in order to explore the ways “attention is given to the construction of subjectivity in and through art” (Grierson, 2007, p. 531). I am particularly interested in some of the ways that the contemporary visual arts might help to complicate commonsensical conceptualizations of the relationally “mismatched” subjectivities of White women and Black men by simultaneously complicating understandings of how mismatch subjectivities “come into the world, and how they/we/it are reformed” (Haraway, 1992, p. 299). Thus, via a diffractive “methodology,” I explore disparate “contingenc[ies] of knowledge and ontological formations that might be evidenced in the plethora of visual representations circulating” in the contemporary art world (Grierson, 2007, p. 532).
Importantly, works of art, conceived as both cultural and material products and practices, are not to be attached to an artist/subject who occupies “the privileged place of rationalism and the unique and creative individual human,” but instead might be conceived as a “network of vibrations and deferred signs and meanings” (Grierson, 2007, p. 540). In this space, I engage with Haraway’s (1992) diffractive methodology, which seeks patterns and effects of interference rather than “true” or accurate representations rooted in practices of “distance, reproduction and reflection” (p. 295), and with Barad (2007), who uses diffraction as a tool that “makes it possible for entangled relationalities to make connections between ‘entities’ that do not appear to proximate in space and time” (p. 74). By diffracting the mismatch through contemporary visual arts in these ways, I can explore the often obscured ethico-onto-epistemological “traffic” that moves through and within commonsensically framed mismatch subjectivities (Haraway, 1989).

As Ahmed (2008), also thinking with Haraway, has poignantly expressed,

"Following the traffic means letting go of proper objects, including disciplinary objects: biology, culture, the social and so on. Things usually happen when the objects of our theoretical work fall apart, when things get messy … new developments in thinking within all disciplines…often proceed from the collapse of their objects. (p. 35)"

Because contemporary artists are often engaging with some of the more untidy and unruly aspects of our lived and thought world, encounters with contemporary art offer particularly rich “data” sources to help articulate complexly cluttered knowledge projects.

From this perspective, then, I work in this chapter to experiment with, rather than define or clarify, different configurations of “matched” subjectivity by diffracting the mismatch through a painting by contemporary artist Dana Schutz. Concurring with Grierson (2007), what I propose is an engagement with art understood

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2While conceptualized differently, this push to “let go” of disciplinary objects is most certainly influenced by Foucault’s early work on the ways disciplinary knowledge objectifies subjects.
as a signifying practice of indeterminacy through which materiality, philosophy, history and contemporary political and cultural conditions of subjectivity are intertwined in the risky forays of knowledge beyond the propositional logic of empirical scientific data. (pp. 539-540)

In this way, mismatched subjectivities will be experimentally conceptualized as emerging through complex intra-actions with humans and non-human entities in material-discursive fields, as opposed to being conceived as pre-existing subjectivities who are unproblematically and oppositionally positioned as categorically defined subjects. I will begin by providing a context for the Whitney’s 2017 Biennial exhibiting artist Dana Schutz’s painting, *Open Casket*.

**The Whitney Biennial as a Discursive Field**

Artists are often prognosticators. They are sensitive to the signals-and not afraid to face the realities-of the present-day culture that they refine, transform, fortify and retransmit…. For artists pay attention, worry, contemplate, speculate, advance, provoke, contest, and protest. (Weinberg, 2017, p. 5)

The above quote opens the foreword to the 2017 Whitney Biennial catalogue, written by the museum’s director to introduce an exhibition marked by protest, controversy, and critical dialogue. Indeed, envisioned and curated between 2016 and 2017, the various installations that comprise this biennial emerged during a time described as “anxious and deeply unsettled,” with the exhibition characterized as both reflecting and foreshadowing “the uncertain, bitter, and divided state of the nation” (Weinberg, 2017, p. 5). Importantly, curator Locks explains that this Biennial was curated as an engagement with this context by ‘juxtapos[ing] and combin[ing] artworks that, fundamentally, have been made out of the stuff of our present moment” (p. 27). She elaborates,

Whether the general moods of anxiety, vulnerability or rage, or the reverberations of specific social debates and struggles, such as state sanctioned violence against Black bodies … the exhibition seeks to frame a
set of questions about the self and the social, how the two intersect, and importantly, how rethinking our conception of the former might transform our relation to the latter. (p. 27)

Indeed, our current historical moment seems to ooze with angst, as divisiveness tinged high-temperature political and social debates on social media, in the press, in coffee shops, and on city streets. In this often volatile context, “America first” discourses become entangled with the revocation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), “pink pussy hats” storm Washington, D.C., and “Unite the Right” activists invade Charlottesville, Virginia. Also enmeshed within these complex, discursive fields are the “Black Lives Matter” movement, the drive for corporate tax cuts, and the incessantly interrupted quest for transgendered rights, to name just a few. In this turbid, and at times seemingly delirious, social world, for many, it can feel hard to breathe. As curator Locks (2017) further situates the Biennial:

These are turbulent times, and the turbulence affects you, infects you, seeps in. Sometimes you sigh because it just feels necessary. “The sigh is the pathway to breathe: it allows breathing” [citing Rankine]. Or you find the intensity of feeling manifested in some other way: a tightened jaw, a clenched fist, a lump in the throat, a shaking of the head. (Locks, 2017, p. 27)

We breathe deeply, even as we are afraid to breathe. In this tinderbox atmosphere, the space between “us” and “them” seems simultaneously distant and stifling. As the narratives available for talking about difference seem gridded in almost scripted ways, they become viscous as they stick to renderings of identity that rely on fixed locations and coherent subjects, despite the complex social and cultural maneuverings required to attain political visibility and intelligibility in this current historical moment. And yet, despite the seeming intensification of complex, identity-based, cultural divisions, “subjectivity remains an open question-how it forms and operates” (Locks, 2017, p. 22). As a result, the Biennial exhibition is more than just an engagement with dark times. As co-editor of ARTnews Andrew Russeth (2017) describes,
The mood is, by turns, anxious and dark, even sinister, but also, at times, expectant, guardedly hopeful. Everyone is on edge. The show presents a nation, and the sensibilities of its artists, in a period of transition, with violence cresting, identities in flux, and some brave souls hatching plans. A sea change is coming, though it is unclear if its effect will be disastrous, momentous, or something more complicated. Call it the biennial on the brink.

While the collection of works comprising the biennial takes on contemporary issues around subjectivity in many exciting ways, in particular, Dana Schutz’s painting, “Open Casket,” offers an opportunity for exploring how mismatched subjectivities may be forming and operating in this current historical moment. In the next sections, I will engage with this painting as “data,” as I work to articulate the mismatch in ways that differ from mainstream representations of mismatched subjectivities in contemporary education discourses. In particular, I experiment with interpretive practices informed by feminist, poststructural, and new materialist notions of posthumanist subjectivity in ways that allow for “concepts to be reformulated as a consequence of their encounters” (Haines & Grattan, 2017, p. 16). By experimenting in this way, I am attempting to not only dislodge the certainty of the mismatch as an exclusively oppositional concept, but to also investigate some of the discursive and material practices that contribute to its durability. I now turn to Dana Schutz, Emmett Till, and the controversial painting entitled, “Open Casket.”

**Dana Schutz, Emmet Till, and “Open Casket” as Discursively Constituted Subjects**

On the 5th floor of the Whitney’s 2017 Biennial Exhibition, a small painting by Brooklyn-based, White female artist Dana Schutz took its place among this 78th installment of the longest-running survey of contemporary American art. The installation was themed around “the formation of self and the individual’s place in a turbulent
society,” and throughout the exhibition, artists challenged us to “consider how these realities affect our senses of self and community” during a time “rife with racial tensions,

Figure 1. Dana Schutz’s “Open Casket,” a 2016 oil on canvas painting in the Whitney Biennial. Credit: Collection of the artist

economic inequities, and polarizing politics” (Lew & Locks, 2017). Situated amid what curator Locks (2017) has described as “social tension so thick it coats the throat” (p. 27), this painting was in part inspired by the recent police shootings of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, and their dystemporal conjuring of a photograph of 14-year-old Emmett Till’s corpse in his funeral coffin. The widely circulated photograph, taken by David Jackson and first published in Jet magazine on September 15, 1955, reflects Till’s mother’s wishes to “let the people see what I’ve seen” (Goldberger, Moakley, & Pollack, 2017). In the original photograph, Till’s mother had dressed him formally for his funeral and insisted on leaving the casket open so that “the public could no longer pretend to ignore what they couldn’t see” (Goldberger et al., 2017). Entangled with this photograph in complex and controversial ways, the oil on canvas painting portrays Till “on one side by a mostly abstract, thickly painted head in shades of dark brown and black, and on the other side by his white dress shirt” (Tomkins, 2017).
I first became aware of the painting on social media, where debates began to percolate around whether Schutz, a White woman, had the “right” to portray the suffering of Till, a young Black man, whether the Whitney was being socially responsible in including the painting in the Biennial Exhibition, or whether calls to remove and/or destroy the painting from the exhibition constituted censorship. Given my contemporaneous immersion in this conceptual study about the complex relationalities among White women and young Black men in contemporary schools, I was immediately intrigued by the painting and the discursive commotion rumbling in its wake. How might Dana Schutz, Emmet Till, “Open Casket,” and the 2017 Whitney Biennial help me articulate more complex understandings of the multifaceted relationalities among White women and young Black men in schools and in society at large? Mulling my research questions, I began to wonder if the material-semiotic minefields being detonated amid these mismatch-singed discourses might provide insights into the seeming impermeability and unassailability of the mismatch as both a concept, and as a subject position, in contemporary U.S. public schools. In the following sub-sections, I will examine, through feminist, poststructural, and new materialist lenses, some of the ways the discourses and materialities surrounding the relational subjectivities of Dana Schutz and Emmett Till might help contribute to more nuanced understandings of the ways “the mismatch,” as a concept frequently deployed in education, works simultaneously to produce, re-produce, and fail to produce stable and uniformly intelligible White women and Black male subjectivities in schools.

“Open Casket” as a “Mismatched” Discursive Field

At the heart of the politics of difference is a critique of the enlightenment demands that we examine how these boundaries are socially constructed, and how they are maintained and policed. It suggests that we must learn how these boundaries are manipulated and represented in the service of political end. In particular, the deconstruction of political hierarchies of value comprising binary oppositions and philosophies of
difference is highly significant for current debates on multiculturalism and feminism in education. (Peters, 2012, p. 40)

Since some of the interpretive practices that I will experiment with in this chapter are influenced by Foucault’s seminal works around discourse, the subject, and knowledge/power, I will briefly recap the ways his thinking has influenced the ways I am thinking about discourse in this chapter. As I have outlined in Chapter II, Foucault (1994) has argued that, throughout his work, his “objective has been to create a history of the differing modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (p. 326). In my efforts to inquire into the “making” of “mismatched” human subjects, in this chapter I will primarily be engaging with two “modes” of Foucault’s work: the ways the subject is objectivized via the dividing practices occurring within and between her/himself and others, and the ways both the productive and repressive effects of discourse inform the ways people turn themselves into subjects. In particular, this discussion will focus on the ways these discourses might be contributing to the un/intelligibility of racialized and gendered, discursively contoured subjectivities of selves and others in contemporary U.S. society and, by extension, schools.

On August 4, 1955, in Money, Mississippi, 14-year-old Emmett Till was accused of whistling at White cashier Carolyn Bryant at the local grocery store. Several days later, the cashier’s husband and his half-brother brutally murdered young Till, beating him and then shooting him in the head. Both men were acquitted of all charges by an all-White, male jury. This event and his mother’s decision to display his body in an open casket are often attributed to sparking an awareness of brutality against Blacks that worked to galvanize the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. In January of 2017, Timothy Tyson, author of *The Blood of Emmett Till*, further revealed that in a 2007 interview, Bryant revealed to him that she had made the story up.

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3To revisit this discussion, refer to this dissertation, page 54.
Tyson’s revelation entered a social and cultural context where an increased awareness of institutionalized violence against African American males was again at the forefront of a contentious, national, discursive field that included Black Lives Matter vs. All Lives Matter, claims to and critiques of color-blindness, “I Can’t Breathe,” “Hands up. Don’t Shoot,” the rationalization of police violence on Black males based on White fear, and many more. In particular, both Bryant’s original accusation and her recent recantation contribute to a particular formation of White women/Black boy relational subjectivity, whence that subjectivity is conceptualized in relation to both the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till and in relation to the continued, state-sanctioned violence against Black men today. Thus, the relationalities that flow between Till and Bryant cannot be relegated to the past but, instead, must be understood as part of the discursive swirl that churns around contemporary, mismatched subjectivities in ways that may make Dana Schutz, a White woman, painting Emmett Till, a Black boy, severely problematic.

To explore these problematics, I would like to chip away a bit at the discursive field that has formed around this painting by exploring two very different perceptions of how the painting expresses the tragedy and violence-laden relationalities among White women and Black boys. In particular, I utilize these two disparate perceptions in order to help me position the binaries that mark the extreme poles of this discursive field, and in so doing, in part contour the field of intelligible subjectivity. In loosely bounding the outermost edges of this field, I am attempting to engage with both the discursive limits around Schutz and Till as relationally mismatched subjectivities, and to inquire into “Open Casket” as an articulation of mismatched subjectivities. Again I think with Foucault when he asks,

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4The justification of White violence against Black people has a long history, rooted in practices of objectifying Black males as dangerous. Here I am thinking with Franz Fanon (1967), *Black Skin, White Masks*. 
“At any historical moment, what kinds of conditions come into play in determining that a particular subject is the legitimate executor of a certain kind of knowledge.” And of the object of knowledge, [he] asks, “At any historical moment, what conditions come into play in determining that a particular object is the appropriate object of a particular kind of knowledge.” (Foucault, as cited in Grierson, 2007, p. 536)

Thus, thinking of the mismatch as a discursive hub that informs intelligible subjectivity and as a historically specific object of knowledge, I will begin the next section by examining a letter of protest written by British artist Hannah Black and co-signed by other concerned members of the art community. This letter, which was sent to the Whitney and called for the removal of the painting, is located at one pole of the discursive field. I will interpret this letter alongside a wall text added by the Whitney to the Schutz installation in response to the controversy. This text I situate at the opposite end of the discursive field. I do this, in part, to contour the outermost limits of relationally conceived, mismatched subjectivity. Thus, as I explore the discourses swirling around and between these texts, I work to identify some of the ways this field functions to contour mismatched relationalities as they relate to Schutz’s painting. Importantly, in these engagements I am looking to complicate our understandings of the not always visible complexities that contour “the grid of narrative intelligibility” (Tamboukou, 2013, p. 95) that forms our understandings of racialized and gendered, mismatched subjectivities in schools.

**An Open Letter and Wall Text**

In the art world, the opening of the Whitney’s 2017 Biennial was accompanied by excitement, since it would be the first biennial in their new space next to Manhattan’s High Line Park. To compound this excitement, the list of exhibiting artists contained more unknowns than usual, leaving anticipators hopeful about the potential “newness” of the show (Schwabsky, 2017). In the days that followed, however, art critic Barry Schwabsky noted that his “curiosity grew as [he] noticed a strange disparity: The first responders among the critics were rapturously favorable …, but the word of mouth
among artists of my acquaintance was coming in negative.” Indeed, while the exhibit officially went on display on March, 17, 2017 and received complimentary reviews from mostly White critics, just one day later, on Saturday, March 18, artist Parker Bright held a protest in front of Schutz’s painting. Wearing a gray t-shirt that read, “BLACK DEATH SPECTACLE,” the artist reportedly stated, “She has nothing to say to the black community about black trauma” (Greenberger, 2017).

Figure 2. Parker Bright protesting Dana Schutz’s “Open Casket.” Scott W. H. Young (@heiscott)/via Twitter in Greenberger (2017)

Joining this protest, British artist Hannah Black penned a hotly debated, open letter to the Whitney, “urgent[ly] recommend[ing] that the painting be destroyed and not entered into
any market or museum” (Black, as cited in Greenberger, 2017). Concerned with what she characterized as the curators’ “terrible mistake[s],” Black began the letter by stating that while Till’s mother chose to share the photo of her son in an open casket to “‘let the people see what [she’d] seen,’ … even the disfigured corpse of a child was not sufficient to move the white gaze from its habitual cold calculation [a fact] evident daily and in a myriad of ways, not least the fact that this painting exists at all” (Black, as cited in Greenberger, 2017). She continued her critique by arguing that if the work was an attempt at “white shame,” it failed because shame cannot be adequately represented in a painting by a White artist of a dead Black boy. Instead, she contended, any intentions to highlight the shameful nature of white violence should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material. The subject matter is not Schutz’s; white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights.

She summarized her plea for the destruction of “Open Casket” by stating,

In Brief: the painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people because it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalized for a long time.

She concluded by asking the curators to “make amends” for their mistake getting rid of the painting. If not, she cautioned, by ignoring issues of representation and appropriation, we ignore art’s “most important foundational consideration,” thus risking its dissolution “into empty formalism or irony, into a pastime or a therapy.”

In response to this protest, statements of support for the painting were issued by the museum and the show’s curators amid an art world overwrought by a discursive whirlwind and inhabited by questions like: Should art infuriate? and “Should art that infuriates be removed?” (Smith, 2017). Additionally, after the painting was briefly removed due to a water leak, a new wall text that acknowledged the controversy and

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5There was great skepticism at the time as to whether this was the true reason for the removal of the painting, especially because it was the only painting removed. Somewhat
allowed for the artist to contextualize the work was installed next to the painting (Appendix B). In this statement, the painting is not described as a *representation of* young Till, but instead, it is positioned as a *response to* the 1955 photograph of him in his “open casket.” From this perspective, the differences in the ways the painting is being understood are drastic. Instead of the photograph being deemed as insufficient “to move the white gaze” (Black, as cited in Greenberger, 2017), the wall text stated that “the atrocious image drew widespread attention to violence against African Americans and helped galvanize the civil rights movement” (The Whitney, as cited in Goldstein, 2017). The statement proceeded, “…this painting has been at the center of a heated debate around questions of cultural appropriation, the ethics of representation, the political efficacy of the painting, and the possibilities or limitations of empathy.” Furthermore, in this context, the Whitney asserted its decision to include the painting in a biennial that “reflects the ongoing fact of racialized violence in the United States,” and in so doing, identified a key role for the museum being to “engage in this enduring history,” because “art is critical to this conversation” (The Whitney, as cited in Goldstein, 2017).

For Schutz, her reasons for making the painting were also complex. Having created the painting in August of 2016, she reflected, it was “a long violent summer of mass shootings, rallies filled with hate speech, and an ever-escalating number of Black men being shot execution style by police, recorded with camera phones as witness” (The Whitney, as cited in Goldstein, 2017). She continued, “Till’s photograph, like a festering wound, felt analogous to the tragic events of the summer. What had been hidden was now in plain view.” Then, shifting from the national scene to some more personal motivations, she conveyed,

I did not know if I could make this painting, ethically or emotionally. It is easy for artists to self-censor, to convince yourself not to make something before even trying. I don’t know what it is like to be Black in America. But I

ironically, the controversy over “Open Casket” detracted from the fact that the new Whitney, being touted as a design for other museums to emulate, was leaking.
do know what it is like to be a mother. Emmett Till was Mamie Till-Mobley’s only son. I thought about the possibility of painting it only after listening to interviews with her. In her sorrow and rage, she wanted her son’s death not just to be her pain but America’s pain. She concluded her statement with, “The painting was never for sale and never will be.”

**Diffracting “Open Casket”: The Production of Mismatched Subjects in Discourse**

The statements made in these texts seem, in many ways, to manifest the current divisiveness in our society. Moreover, commonsensical, humanist understandings of subjectivity would situate both Black and Schutz as rational, knowing, and self-conscious subjects, occupying particular, essential, and oppositional locations in their social worlds that are based upon particular notions of identity and experience. Alternatively, and as has been argued throughout this dissertation, poststructural conceptualizations of subjectivity see these same subjects as multiple, contradictory, and as sites for continuous conflict, incoherence, and flux. As such, in investigating the discursive field around *Open Casket* in order to gain insights into the ways racialized and gendered, relational subjectivities are made im/possible, the following discussion explores some ways various discourses might be working to help produce mismatched subjectivities in contemporary society.

For both Black and Schutz, the painting conjures a significant, tragic historical event that is then affixed to similarly horrific, contemporary events in ways that form discursive chains across time. These discourses include White on Black violence, state-sanctioned violence against Blacks, the failure of the criminal justice system to intervene, the failure of America to engage in reparative and restorative justice around this violent past/present, and complex entanglements of identity, cultural appropriation, and the right to represent. Indeed, in the public debates that both informed and emanated from Schutz’s and Black’s complex and, at times, contradictory, socio-cultural and historical locations, the discursive explosion “over identity, race, artistic agency, and what it means to be politically engaged in a dangerously fluid historical moment” (Goldstein, 2017),
burst into the art world and constructed a combat zone on social media. Summoning notions of social responsibility and accountability, cultural heritage and inheritance, the central theme of these debates focused on whether Schutz, as a white female artist, had the right to invoke this painful visual lodestone of the Civil Rights era—or whether her claim to its power put her in a lineage of privileged white rapaciousness that goes back to and encompasses the murder itself. (Goldstein, 2017)

In this context, it would be easy to analyze each position from the perspective of the incommensurability of the two “speaking subjects,” while focusing on what curator Lews described as “a strange confluence [of] this idea of extreme political correctness on one side and extreme anti-intellectualism and xenophobia on the other side” (as cited in Goldstein, 2017). Here, however, I wish to engage with this discursive field by briefly disentangling some of the discursive chains that are working to both produce and repress un/viable subjects. By locating these artists’ positionalities at opposite ends of the discursive field, I am attempting to look at both the limits of the discursive field and the possible subjectivities these limits may or may not produce.6

For Black, Schutz’s painting transgresses discursive boundaries that are often surveilled and sustained through a particular rendering of identity politics that functions to strictly delineate White and Black experience in U.S. society. In making this move, Black positions Till’s murder, and the subsequent photograph shared by his mother, as “raw material” depicting “Black pain” and thus off-limits for Schutz. She asserts that this position is necessary due to the fact that Whites will never comprehend Mamie Till’s gesture, due to a “collective lack of understanding” evidenced by the continuation of

6Of course, for Foucault (2003), discursive fields do not, in fact, possess actual limits, but rather are linked to other discourses via chains which, in turn, connect to other discursive fields. To help us understand the ways limits function, however, Foucault offers his conceptualization of transgression and the limit. While this idea will not be developed here, I will just mention that limits are in part defined by their ability to be transgressed. He writes, “The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows” (p. 445).
Black deaths, the extreme poverty of Black communities, and the denial of Black children their childhood. Thus, the discursive chain formed by these discourses creates a particular discursive field in which Schutz’s decision to paint young Till is understood as an example of “capitalist appropriation,” insensitive to the historical wounds that it re-enacts, and as such, unethical.

Importantly, then, the “Open Letter” as a form of protest operates, in part, as a discursive practice in a discursive field that works not only to contour Schutz’s intelligibility as a White woman artist, but to form what might constitute permissible and thus recognizable relational subjectivities among Schutz, Emmett Till, and Black men in contemporary society. Although this discussion is brief, we can see how protesters of “Open Casket” are engaging in a particular form of dissent in relation to the ways Schutz, a White woman artist, has situated herself in relation to Emmett Till, a murdered, young Black man. From this perspective, I argue, Schutz is perceived as an essentialized subject, occupying a fixed and static location at the intersections of White, woman, and commercially successful artist. In this location, Schutz is deemed incapable of “present[ing] white shame,” both because “the subject matter is not [hers]” (Black, as cited in Goldstein, 2017), and because, as a White woman, “she has nothing to say to the black community about black trauma” (Greenberger, 2017).

Conversely, in both her original presentation of the painting, and in the supplementary “wall text,” it would seem that Schutz is, in some ways, attempting to complicate her location as a White woman painting a murdered, young Black man in this current, historical moment. Connecting Till’s violent death to the recent deaths of Black men by White police officers during the summer of 2016, she states that she “did not know if she could make the painting, either emotionally or ethically” and describes her efforts to resist self-censorship. Additionally, she informs the public that she will not profit from the painting since she had decided early on and prior to the biennial to keep it for her private collection. From this perspective, the mono-cultural White woman
depicted by Black shows signs of rupture, as her essentialized location starts to blur amid her struggles with the emotions attached to both the historical and contemporary tragedies, and the ethics of trying to “paint” contemporary police violence and Emmett Till in a way that honors Mamie Till Mobley’s “sorrow and rage.”

A second look, however, helped me to interpret a different, essentializing discourse circulating in Schutz’s accounts. Her depiction of motherhood as a universal location connected her sense of grief to Emmett Till’s mother in extremely problematic ways, largely because this connection was left unproblematized. By failing to acknowledge the complex asymmetries of racialized motherhood in the United States, Schutz seems to miss one of the most poignant elements of the “Open Letter” as protest; that is, via her social location as a successful White artist, she is afforded privileges of free speech and creative freedom that are not equally afforded to all artists, or to members of society at large.

In both of these accounts, then, essentializing discourses around identity function to make some subjects unintelligible, such as the White woman artist expressing empathy for Black men, but they also work to produce subjectivities in ways that fail to account for the socio-historical situatedness of identity categories such as motherhood.

Just untangling some of the ways Schutz and Black engage with a subject producing discourses around White woman/Black boy relationality, however, is inadequate in working to more fully understand the way these discourses work to form intelligible, mismatched subjectivities. Since these discourses disperse both repressive and productive power, in so doing, they produce responses and resistances in both of these locations, and all of the locations in between. Citing Foucault, Rose (2016) points out, “‘where there is power there is resistance … a multiplicity of points of resistance,’ and by this he meant that there are many discourses that jostle and compete in their effects” (p. 189).
Here is what I am trying to tease out here, amid all of the discourses that have surrounded the painting, the 2017 Biennial, the exchange between Hannah Black, her letter’s co-signers, and Dana Schutz, and the meanings people give to artistic representations of and engagements with historical trauma: the competing certainties, sanctions, and incommensurabilities of location seem, in this current moment, to be contributing to a particular “history of the present.” Accordingly, while the controversy around “Open Casket” at times seems to indicate that there are only extreme social tensions surrounding the relationalities of White women and Black boys in contemporary society (even as these mismatched subjectivities are contoured by these two extremes), commonsense portrayals of these same subjectivities seem, most often, to avoid explicit engagement with this volatility. Particularly in schools, the surety of these oppositional locations remains unchallenged, and thus the ways these locations are constructed remains largely absent from the conversation.

Further, then, pedagogical approaches designed to negotiate mismatched subjective relationalities tend to focus on ways to work the middle of the discursive field, avoiding both the intensities on the edges and their effects. Thus, by inserting pedagogical practices7 that focus on culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995), multicultural education (Banks & Banks, 2004), unpacking White privilege (McIntosh, 1989), and preparing teachers for working in culturally diverse schools (Sleeter, 2001), teachers—most often White women in the U.S.—are provided with guidance on how to negotiate and teach within the mismatch, rather than how to disrupt it. Critically, and as described in Chapter I of this dissertation, these pedagogical approaches enter a discursive field that is also occupied by accountability discourses

7These knowledge projects have been extremely impactful in engaging pre-service and practicing teachers in conversations about teaching practices and issues of difference.
around teacher/student failures and deficit discourses that work to produce particular renderings of low-income, racialized, and gendered student subjects.  

In these ways, while Black’s and Schutz’s positions are located at the limits of this discursive field, they work, in tandem, to both produce and repress particular renderings of intelligibility subjectivity. As troublesome “hotspots” of relational subjectivity, the extreme identity politics of the protest for the removal of Open Casket as well as the ameliorative efforts of Schutz as articulated in the “wall text” serve as discursive barriers or force fields that work to “center” relational subjectivities in safer, less controversial, discursive space. Indeed, the “middle” of this discursive field seems to enact a state of equilibrium, wherein balance, in the form of centered practices, is produced by the equally polarizing action of opposing discursive forces.

In these ways, we can see that the productive powers of extreme discourses can work to undermine their assumed intentionality and its effects. Here, I am reminded that while “discourse transmits and produces power; it [also] undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1978, p. 100). But what might such a thwarting look like? How can we take advantage of power’s fragility in an effort to rethink mismatched subjectivities of “a lesser ontological weight” (Lather, 2007, p. 23). In what ways might a different engagement with the tensions between discourse’s constraining and enabling capacities help us imagine “other discourses, other possible meanings, other claims, rights, and positions” (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013, p. 23). With these questions in mind, in the next section, I experiment with some feminist new materialist conceptualizations of posthuman subjectivity as a way to think differently about commonsensical notions of mismatched subjectivity. In particular, I will engage with “Open Casket” as a posthumanist phenomenon, composed of the intra-activity of human

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8This discursive field was explored fully in Chapter I of this dissertation, particularly around Popkewitz’s thinking about discursive scaffolds. For purposes of brevity, I simply generally reference it here.
and non-human discourses and materialities. In this engagement, I will enact particular agential cuts in an effort to disentangle some of the constitutive elements of the mismatch differently. Crucially, by rejecting the ontological separation articulated in the discursive field that surrounds the mismatch, I will offer “Open Casket” as a sight/site/cite of posthuman subjectivity.

**Diffracting the Mismatch: “Open Casket” as an Enactment of Posthumanist Subjectivity**

The societal traumas we were talking about are powerfully present, but what I was struck by in the Biennial is that the artists seem to be coming into this rupture like white blood cells, trying to heal the wounds. (Lew, as cited in Goldstein, 2017)

How might we imagine anew the category of human being, or better yet, what Sylvia Wynter calls “being human”? Is there an ethical dimension, and if so, how and where does it get articulated? Can we conceive of ourselves not only as singular individuals but also as co-humans…? (Locks, 2017, p. 2017)

In the previous section, while I worked to unpack some of the ways the discourses contributing to the normalization of mismatch subjectivity might be operating in the discursive field around “Open Casket,” I still struggled to find a space where Schutz and Till might connect in ways that were both different from and more than the incommensurability of their singularly and essentially conceived subjects’ positions. Despite this effort, however, while it was easy to identify some of the tensions at work in producing these mismatched subjects, ways to form these subjects as more affirmatively relational remained elusive. On one end, there was a failure to recognize the danger in repositioning White subjectivity without adequate attention to socio-historical asymmetries, and on the other side, there seemed no possibility for differently conceived connectedness. In other words, while one end seemed wide open, the other appeared sealed shut. In relation to the theories informing my interpretations, then, I posit that Till, and the contemporary victims of state sanctioned violence that conjured him, remained
un-representable and in-articulable as relational subjects for a White woman artist. Thus, in this next sub-section, I experiment with the task of “re-making” this mismatch through lenses of posthumanist relationality. To do this, I work with the feminist, new materialist concepts outlined in Chapter II of this dissertation to imagine mismatch subjectivities that are both attentive to issues of power and more affirmatively conceived. In particular, I will deploy the concepts of intra-activity, phenomenon, and agential cuts in order to explore both the possibilities and limitations afforded by feminist, new materialist lenses.

“Open casket” as an intra-active phenomenon. In engaging with the discursive whirlwind around this painting, I have struggled to imagine ways in which “knowing as part of being” (Barad, 2007, p. 342) in relation to mismatch subjectivities might be imagined as less polarizing than the binary ends framing the discursive field, but also as more troublesome than the discourses clustered in the middle of the field. This struggle has largely been motivated by the way all of these discourses, no matter how distinct, work together to maintain the status quo around commonsensical understandings of mismatch subjectivities. While the discursive edges seem to form a force field of intensity that acts as a repellent for engagement, the middle fails to engage at all with the ways mismatched, us/them binaries are constructed, despite making concerted and valiant efforts to change what these constructions do.

Also of related interest, lately I have been pondering a marked increase in conversations citing White privilege among my White, mostly women, educator friends and acquaintances. Interestingly, it appears that just by invoking a reflective awareness and acknowledgement of one’s own privilege in society, you can earn a “pass” that exempts you from the White racist sector of the White identity category. This pass, at least superficially and in some places and spaces, allows its possessor to travel beyond the barriers that partition the “extremist White right” and “women for Trump” camps. In this way, it transports individuals from the generic “White” category into the “I’m not
like those White people” category. This category feels like a non-innocent,\textsuperscript{9} innocent space.

But as a political strategy, acknowledging one’s privileged location and distancing oneself from those who lack this awareness seem to fall flat in light of the complex discourses and materialities that swirled the Whitney Biennial in the spring of 2017. When viewed under the spotlight of the recent social/political/cultural events that have flooded our senses around the continuous and incessant precarity of Black lives in the United States, this approach seems ineffectual and more about preservation/construction of a viable self-identity than about addressing the extreme vulnerability of Black lives.

In part, I think, it is a symptom of the failure of both radical critiques based on rigid identity categories, and liberal conceptions of a rational and self-aware citizenship, to impact the lived experiences of racialized Others, despite increased attention to and strides toward civil rights in recent decades. As Black (as cited in Greenberg, 2017) passionately articulated, “Black people go on dying …, Black communities go on living in desperate poverty … [and] Black children are still denied childhood.” But if, however, as Latour\textsuperscript{10} (2004) has argued, critique has “run out of steam,” then what can we do?

For feminist new materialist Karen Barad, one thing we might do is look at how onto-ethico-epistemological practices constitute phenomena. From this perspective, for Barad, like Foucault, discourses work to divide the world. She asserts, however, that discourses cannot be separated from the material world within which they engage. She explains, “Boundary making practices, that is discursive practices, are fully implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity through which phenomena come to matter” (Barad, 2003, p. 822). As described in Chapter II, being implicated in this way encompasses not just

\textsuperscript{9}I think with Haraway’s notion of non-innocence here, which argues that no matter what location we assume or assigned, there is no innocent place.

\textsuperscript{10}This critique has also notably been brought forth, although differently by many others, including Foucault (1978), Butler, (2004b), and Barad (2007), to name just a few.
knowing and being, but the ethical accountability entailed in each. Considered through this lens, then, Schutz’s painting of Till ceases to act as a representation of a historical event, but instead can be conceptualized as a particular articulation of mismatched relationality as a phenomenon. Of significance for this conceptual study, it is an example of doing difference differently.

Conceptualized as a Baradian phenomenon, then, “Open Casket” must be conceived as the intra-action of ontological units or “beings” that do not exist prior to their coming together. These entities, such as oil paint, Schutz’s hands, Mamie Till Mobley’s 1955 photograph, summer of 2016 newspaper headlines, leaking museums and the leaky boundaries of these timespacematterings, all possess “capacities and powers that can be creatively actualized in a variety of ways under different [intra]actions” (Bryant, 2016). Conceived in this way, both real and imagined bodies, discourses and objects are not pre-defined by their properties, but “by their capacities or powers, and we never have a fully or fixed inventory of those capacities” (Bryant, 2016).

Thus, by looking at the agential ontology of “Open Casket” as a material-discursive phenomenon, different agencies come to bear on the material effects of the painting in the world. As seen below, despite the polarizing effects of the dominant discourses that seemed to saturate the work, these material effects did not go unremarked in the commentary surrounding the painting at the time of its showing. I provide some substantial descriptions below:

I was surprised at what a quiet painting it is. It turns out that, even in making use of that horrific photograph, Schutz was practicing restraint. Far from making a spectacle of the tormented corpse, she has generalized Till’s face into a nearly abstract concatenation of marks—though Schutz’s technique is very different, you might think of Francis Bacon’s blurred faces. Is she being evasive? Perhaps, though one might also argue that the blurred face is one seen through eyes filled with tears, and that the painting’s central concern is in evoking an emotion rather than conveying the image that caused the emotion. (Schwabsky, 2017)
It’s fascinating that if you look at this now-famous painting in person, you see that it’s of course an abstracted evocation of a hideous, abominable murder, but you also notice that it’s not a flat painting but actually literally vaulting out into the world, giving the image a real symbolic weight or presence. (Lew, as cited in Goldstein, 2017)

But what surprised me most when I saw Open Casket was something that had gone mostly unmentioned in the various commentaries I’d come across: the fact, not visible in photographs of the painting, that it has a prominent relief element. Its surface is not flat; it has a raised and sculpted portion that looks swollen and gouged. The painting’s surface thus becomes a metaphor for the tormented body it depicts—a peculiar way of the representation itself becoming, in Pope. L’s words, “a shadow of the thing it claims to portray.” At the same time, this strange, blobby protrusion gives the appearance that something has been hidden in the painting and that (although the museum label lists only oil on canvas as its materials) there is some other matter secreted under the paint surface we see. (Schwabsky, 2017)

As can be seen in these portrayals, the painting affected the world in ways other than just “representing” the original photograph. Blurred faces, a concatenation of marks, restraint, swollen, gouged, vaulting, weight, evasive, raised and sculpted, presence, secreted, tormented, quiet, shadow, tears. All of these words conjure an affective, tactile, and material world that both encompasses and exceeds the discursive field that worked, at times, to concurrently distance and conflate the relational subjectivities of the murdered young Till and the artist Schutz. Importantly, through these lenses, by painting Till, Schutz neither retreats to the comfort of liberal, self-aware identity nor to the strategic, effortlessly intelligible narrative grid of the middle. Instead, despite the repellant effects of the opposite, discursive poles, she touches Till. Thus, in conceiving of “Open Casket” as an intra-active phenomenon, touch can be conceived as a crucial, constitutive element.

For Barad, touch is a significant concept, particularly in relation to the ethico-portion of her onto-ethico-epistemeological triad. In her seminal essay, “On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am” (in press),11 she contends, “Theorizing, a form of

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11While this article was originally published in 2012 in a special edition of differences journal, the version I am working with is a re-publication with significant edits that will be part of an edited collection by Witzgall and Stakemeier entitled The Politics of Materiality.
experimenting, is about being in touch. What keeps theories alive and lively is being responsible and responsive to the world’s patternings and murmurings.” She continues, however, “Touch is never pure or innocent. It is inseparable from the field of differential relations that constitute it” (p. 161). This is of great significance to any re-framing of the mismatch as phenomenon, because non-innocence and inseparability are crucial components of any ethical attempts to trouble the binary of “inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion, mattering/not-mattering” (p. 161).

Therefore, thinking of touch as intra-active entanglement, how might Barad’s notion of touch contribute to a feminist, new materialist understanding of Schutz’s and Till’s relationality as constitutive of the mismatch as a phenomenon and as a specific rendering of posthumanist subjectivity? In problematizing the discursive field in the previous sections of this chapter, it was argued that the intensities at the extreme edges of this field function to repel normative subjectivities, pushing them to cluster in the middle. For Barad, however, it is at the edges, where we fail to connect, that we also might find our humanity. This is because in all our efforts at inclusion and exclusion, “there is … always something that drops out” (Barad, in press, p. 161). Because of this, she argues, the task may not be to expand who gets included, but instead,

What if it takes sensing the abyss, the edges of the limits of “inclusion” and “exclusion” before the binary of inside/outside, inclusion/exclusion, mattering/not-mattering can be seriously troubled? What if it is only in facing the inhuman—the indeterminate non/being non/becoming of mattering and not mattering— that an ethics committed to the rupture of indifference can arise? (p. 161)

Thus, as I think of the mismatch as a binary composed of insides and outsides and conceptually contoured via us/them knowledge projects that determine who/what/how something matters, is it possible that the most unethical position might be indifference, inaction, avoidance? Barad continues,

What if it is only in the encounter with the inhuman—the liminality of no/thingness—in all its liveliness, its conditions of im/possibility, that we
can truly confront our actions lacking in compassion...? Perhaps it takes facing the inhuman within us before com-passion—suffering together with, participating with, feeling with, being moved by—can be lived. How would we feel if it is by way of the inhuman that we come to feel, to care, to respond? (p. 161)

Thus, for Barad, it is only by confronting the inhuman within us that we can truly connect with, feel with, suffer with, be moved by, and respond to our liminal Others. But what might this look like? While modern humanism has been accused of “purify[ing]” the world’s complex connectivity into by dividing it into clearly separated fields of “artefacts, people, signs, norms, organisations, texts, hybrids between nature and culture, and subjects and objects, [which] produc[e] sanitised entities that are not conceded any mixed forms” (Latour, as cited in Witzgall, in press, p. 15), is it possible that a way to re-connect beings and things might be to mess things up?

To mess things up, I return to “Open Casket” as a phenomenon, conceived as an intra-active entanglement of human and non-human knowing, being, doing. Considered in this way, Schutz, in touching Till, enacts her response-ability as a particular agential cut in an indeterminate field of possibilities. Enmeshed in the inhumanity of the summer of 2016, she reaches back across timespacematter and touches Till at the same time that Till protrudes into the current, historical moment in ways that tinge today with yesterday in hopes of a different tomorrow. Rather than “purifying” the encounter, she gouges and muddies it, with blobs of black, white, brown orange, red, gold paint, lavender and blue paint, and offers the encounter to the world. Intra-acting with this encounter is a discursive swirl molded by extremes and swollen with avoidance. These discourses concurrently intra-act with Black bodies blocking “Open Casket” from the gaze of White viewers, protecting Till from yet another assault, and another spectacular viewing by White America. Schutz’s offering, as an onto-ethico-epistemological engagement with the ongoing, state-sanctioned violence against Black males in U.S. society, can never be innocent.
Some Non-concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, by diffracting the notion of the mismatch through a controversial contemporary work of art, I explored the ways poststructural attention to discourse and new materialist concerns with intra-activity and phenomena offer very different thinking spaces for considering the relationalities occurring among White women and Black boys in contemporary society. Here I would like to briefly make three “large” points.

First, and as has been asserted throughout this dissertation, while poststructural theories have been incredibly useful in helping us destabilize the normative categories that have worked to produce racialized, gendered, classed, abled, etc. subjectivities in humanist theories, this destabilization has also involved a flight from nature that often works, although not always intentionally, to foster a mistrust of the biological body. Significantly, because this destabilization has tended to position “the ‘sign’ as only the referent to an inaccessible ‘real,’” the durability of our customary categories “often persist as neat sign systems that are unable to transcend their structuralist legacies” (Loewen-Walker, 2004, p. 48).

This is not to say that the destabilization of the sign does not do anything, but the question remains, which brings me to my second point: After the destabilization of the sign, what does one do? This question is particularly relevant in this current historical moment, both in U.S. schools and in contemporary society. Throughout the summer of 2016, and since the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, large segments of White America, as evidenced in the 2017 marches on Washington, are wondering what ethical and involved citizenship and, particularly, citizenship in relation to and alongside our historical Others might look like. As our streets swarm with Black Lives Matter, “pink pussy hats,” the March for Science, and many other grassroots movements, questions about how we might be and intra-act with each other and with this
current national geopolitical context seem to be at the forefront of concerns about political identity.

The last, more convoluted point I wish to make is that tensions among Black and White America seem to be stretched to their proverbial limits. I offered this reading as a way to unpack some of the discourses and materialities that are entangled with these tensions, but also to experiment not only with a way to be together differently, but with ways to differently perceive being together. By exploring ways we might unpack the mismatches that explicitly engage with the ethics of knowing and being, it may be possible to at least start thinking difference differently. But in conceiving of the mismatch as a material/discursive phenomenon, I am not suggesting that there is a corrective or an easy or comfortable way out. Instead, in this experimental reconceptualization of the mismatch via an artist’s engagement with the precarity of Black lives in the United States, I am attempting to think in a space that does not exclude, a priori, the possibility of more ethical engagement.

Of course, ethics, as a field of study, belongs in the disciplinary realm of philosophy. But in this current moment, it seems urgent to embrace feminist new materialism’s call for intradisciplinarity in order to think difference differently in the hope of forming more ethical “condensations of response-ability” (Witzgall, in press, p. 15). This will require us listening to each other and recognizing that we do not inhabit one world, but rather there are multiple worlds and worldings. As Mol (1999) reminds us, these different worlds are not perspectives seen by different people—a single person may slide in her work from one performance to another. Neither are they alternative, bygone constructions of which only one has emerged from the past—they emerged at different points in history, but none of them had vanished. So they are different versions, different performances, different realities, that coexist in the present. (p. 79)
All of this re-thinking, being, doing, will take work, and the tools and strategies of a politics based exclusively on reified versions of identity or on liberal citizenship and rights seem too worn out for the job. But the task is urgent. We have to try.
So if the nonhuman is neither neatly bounded, substantially (and morally) independent, and over there, nor insubstantial, dissolute, and in here, then what is it, what thing is nonhuman? And does it matter? The questions are intimately related, for we are talking about things that matter, or about how things matter. (Hinchcliffe, Kearnes, Degan, & Whatmore, 2005, p. 644)

In the previous chapter, I explored some ways our understandings of mismatched subjectivities might be complicated by engaging in a poststructural analysis of how the discursive field around a contemporary painting might provide insights into commonsensical understandings of the mismatch as inherently oppositional. I also experimented with Barad’s notions of phenomenon, agential cuts, and touch to offer insights into how the certainty of oppositional relationalities among mismatched subjectivities might be interrupted through an onto-ethico-epistemological framework. I did this as a way to explore, through diffractive interpretive practices, some of the ways some contemporary theorists are engaging with notions of posthuman subjectivity as an alternative to the rational, self-conscious, and coherent subject of conventional research.

In this chapter, I would like to explore notions of posthumanist subjectivity somewhat differently. To do this, I will experiment with the Baradian practice of re-membering¹ in order to help me formulate a conceptualization of mismatch

¹The concepts of re-membering and non-individuated subjectivity will be developed throughout this chapter.
subjectivity that is both situated and non-individuated. This notion of “non-individuated” subjectivity will be a primary focus of this chapter. Still thinking through the lens of onto-ethico-epistemology, I will develop this notion of non-individuated subjectivity in relation to the mismatch by engaging in a re-turn to the city of my childhood and my earliest years of teaching. In this re-turn, I will enact an articulation of the ways people and things, such as media, geography, global capitalism, corporations, and chemicals, buildings, lakes, and rivers might be intra-acting to shape local enactments of mismatched subjectivities. Considered in these ways, and as I have argued throughout this dissertation, articulation might be conceived of as connecting rather than representing disparate entities such as language, matter, humans, non-humans, and research practices, and then expressing this connectivity via knowledge projects and practices that are situated and contingent.

Importantly, my ongoing theoretical quest for a situated and de-centered subject and for a subject emergently constituted through its relationalities with a material/discursive world continues to take place in the diffracted interferences and reinforcements among feminist poststructural and new materialist theory. As argued in Chapter III of this dissertation, such a deployment of posthumanist thought enables me to rework subjectivity in ways in that allow for the remaking of our/selves and historical Others in a contemporary, neoliberal society where archaic infrastructures, technology, information systems, data flows, biotechnologies and biopolitics enact with historical sedimentations and reconfigure not only vulnerability and precarity, but possibility and positive change as well.

Thus, as opposed to thinking through/with an us/them binary in relation to the categorical mismatch, I wonder, instead: How are we connected, and in what ways are our subjectivities continuously being constituted by these connections? Emphasizing the importance of recognizing that “situations emerge[d] historically,” and gr[ow] out of a great number of contingencies and forces, while at the same time foregrounding the fact
that “there was never a moment or a place where it\textsuperscript{2} was decided” (Mol, 1999, p. 79), how are local understandings of the mismatch being formed across timespacematter? And when thinking across timespacematter\textsuperscript{3} about the role of place, nature/culture, and ethics in subject formation, how do different “cuts” of time and space and matter produce different subjectivities?

In the following sections, I will engage with how subjects, produced through enactments of power and as becoming with their connectivities with humans and non-humans, might be reconceptualized via the posthuman concept of non-individuated subjectivity. I will begin by exploring the Baradian notion of re-membering as a methodological tool to help me experiment, both visually and textually, with “data” as it becomes entangled with a non-linear, narrative around various intra-activities that might be contributing to commonsensical notions of the mismatch in local, public schools. I will then utilize re-membering as a way to articulate these intra-activities. Lastly, I will interpret this work as an engagement with feminisms that seek to consider the ontological, the epistemological, and the ethical in their knowledge projects.

**Re-membering as the Entanglement of Disparate Parts**

One concept that has been particularly useful in helping me grapple with the relationalities among theories, methods, and research practices has been Barad’s notion of re-membering, largely because it ties together Barad’s notions of diffraction, intra-actions, agential cuts, phenomena, and apparatuses\textsuperscript{4} in ways that can be deployed in a

\textsuperscript{2}“It” in this case is referring to a locally commonsensical notion of the mismatch.

\textsuperscript{3}Since Barad thinks of space, time, and matter as phenomenal and thus intra-active, they are considered to be mutually constitutive. Therefore, yesterday, today, and tomorrow are considered to be entangled in the mattering of the world.

\textsuperscript{4}These concepts were developed in Chapters II and III of this dissertation.
posthumanist study interested in engaging with “entanglements of disparate parts” (Barad, 2015, p. 406). These parts, be they theories, methodological tools, material practices, discursive flows, and/or embodied relationalities, are not thought of as separate elements or distinct phenomena when viewed through these Baradian lenses, but rather they are approached more complexly as they are conceived in relation to the division of parts and wholes. She describes writing as a form of “re-emberbering” in this way:

[Writing] is a patchwork. Made of disparate parts. Or so it may seem. But why should we understand parts as individually constructed building blocks or disconnected pieces of one or another forms of original wholeness? After all, to be a part is not to be absolutely apart but to be constituted and threaded through with the entanglements of part-ing. That is, if “parts,” by definition, arise from divisions or cuts, it does not necessarily follow that cuts sever or break things off, either spatially or temporally, producing absolute differences of this and that, here and there, now and then. Intra-actions enact cuts that cut (things) together-apart (one move). (p. 406)

In these ways, she challenges the notion of “disparate parts” by instead arguing that parts are connected through the enactment of part-ing or cutting. She continues,

So a patchwork would not be a sewing together of individual bits and pieces but a phenomenon that always already holds together, whose pattern of differentiating-entangling may not be recognized but is indeed re-membered. In this severing/joining move, the pieces are not brought together through researcher agency, but rather always already hold together, [via] a pattern of differentiated entangling [that] may not be recognized but is indeed re-membered. (p. 406)

From this perspective, then, this chapter is an active engagement with this notion of re-membering via a cutting together/apart of a city. As such, it will re-member the rise and retreat of a corporation, some dystemporally situated histories of intra-city communities, material/discursive engagements with jails, factories and schools, intra-city migrations, rivers, brooks and materially and discursively considered, relationally constituted local subjectivities. Immersed in a subject/object network, in these ways, re-membering involves “tracing entanglements” (p. 407) and exploring human and non-human networks via different ontological cuts.
Conceptualized in this way, re-membering is a particular engagement with the world as phenomenon. Here, I will briefly elaborate on how this and some related Baradian concepts are being deployed in this chapter. For Barad (2007), phenomena are conceptualized as

*differential patterns of mattering* ("diffraction patterns") produced through complex agential intra-actions of material discursive practices or apparatuses of bodily production, *where apparatuses are not mere observing instruments but boundary-drawing practices-specific material (re)configuring of the world-which come to matter.* (p. 140, emphasis in original)

From this perspective, then, the researcher does not merely observe the world, gather empirical data, and represent these "found" data, but rather the researcher is part of the apparatus and, as such, is part of the becoming and worlding that occur via research practices. Thus, for Barad, her notion of re-membering is an enactment of what she calls an agential cut. This cut is very different from a Cartesian cut occurring between taken-for-granted, pre-determinative, and distinct subjects and objects (p. 140). Instead, it conceives of cuts that "enact a local resolution" among entities of "inherent, ontological indeterminacy" (Barad, 2003, p. 815). Described as *intra* rather than *inter*-active, in this move/cut, subject/object, self/others, and material/discursive do not pre-exist relations in ontologically determinant ways, but rather they emerge through specific intra-actions. Thus, difference is neither ontologically or epistemologically predetermined, but rather emerges via site-specific relationality. What follows from these conceptual re-configurations of the researcher, apparatuses, and phenomena is that prior to the intra-actions among them, none have an inherent nature but instead become recognized as a relational and specific effect of that very intra-activity (Juelskjaer, 2013, p. 756).

This is not just an epistemological project, but an ethical and ontological one, forming what Barad (2007) calls an onto-ethico-epistemology formed by "the intertwining of ethics, knowing and being" and an acknowledgement that "knowing is a
matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part” (p. 185). Knowing and being in this way

underlines the fact that knowing is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart, where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility. There is not this knowing from a distance. Instead of there being a separation of subject and object, there is an entanglement of subject and object…. Objectivity … is about accountability to marks on bodies, and responsibility to the entanglements of which we are a part. (Barad, 2012, Section 1:3)

Working from this onto-ethico-epistemological perspective, in the next sections, I will juxtapose “data” and text, re-membered from my hometown. By cutting together/apart images, text, maps, newspaper clippings, and my own narratives, all gathered from across disparate times and places, I will work to enact an engagement with non-linear timespacematter as a way to consider the mismatch as a conglomeration of intra-acting human and non-human forces.

**New School, New Jail, Old Jail New School**

In the 1970s, many of the old public elementary schools were demolished due to cost of upkeep and shifts in the number of residents in various neighborhoods. To replace these schools, new “community schools” were built in order to absorb students from multiple neighborhood schools. One of these schools was Morningside Community School, and it was based on the model of the recently opened West Side Community School. Morningside, located in the longstanding Morningside neighborhood in the city, was built on Burbank St., and the school property straddled the property of the old county jail, which was set for demolition once a new site was located and the new facility built. State bonding funds were dependent on the removal of the jail from the school site. There was, however, a brief grandfathered period of time, where the school grounds and the jail property would overlap. Unfortunately, the city had difficulty finding a new site
for the new jail due to public protest over having a jail in any neighborhood that had enough space, and so Morningside Community School and the Berkshire House of Correction co-resided, abutting at the corner of Burbank and Second Streets for quite a few years.

**Morningside, 1890s**

When he desired to fish a favorite trout stream, or to devote twenty-four successive hours to a favorite novel, he was not ordinarily to be prevented, and on the former Dickinson farm in the northeastern part of the town, a broad tract of pasture and woodland purchased and by him named “Morningside,” he built a miniature Swiss chalet, where he could, when he wished, seclude himself from over-importunate men of affairs.

Twenty years later, the establishment initiated by William Stanley employed over 5,000 people, and its shops, in the vicinity of Silver Lake and Morningside, covered fifty acres. Not only did the early prosperity of the company augment the material welfare of Pittsfield, but also it was of a nature to energize unusually the popular spirit. It represented an industry which was at the time novel and strange, and of which the mysterious possibilities defied calculation. (The history of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Internet Archive)
Arlos, pushing for county jail relocation, wants the state to provide some pressure

In an effort to build pressure for relocation of the county jail, City Councilwoman and County Commissioner Peter G. Arlos said this morning he will ask the Council to arrange a meeting with the state official who approved state aid for the new Morningside Community School near the jail.

In a prepared statement, Arlos said the opposition of city officials to relocating the jail within Pittsfield was threatening state commitment to pay 40 percent of the principal and interest costs on the new, $1.7 million Morningside school scheduled to open in Fall.

Arlos noted that in a meeting with a state official, it was explained that because the heavily-traffic near the jail, the facility cannot be built in Pittsfield — but will stay anyway if a new facility is not built — just doesn't make sense.

Meet commitment

City Council President Paul E. Brundage has said he will oppose the relocation of the jail anywhere in the city, but Mayor Evan S. Dobelle has said he will not sanction construction of a new facility in the city until he receives considerable more detail on the proposed design, including population and correctional program.

In line with Dobelle’s concerns, Dale T. Reed, a member of the Jail Site Selection Commission appointed by the County Commissioners, yesterday presented that the committee’s work will be a two to three months and the planning board for detailed evidence of the capability of community facilities that would serve a particular jail site.

Figure 3. Arlos pushing for county jail relocation. Source: Berkshire Eagle, August 5, 1976.
Morningside said angered by switch in jail plans

By Gerald B. O'Connor

Dwellers in Pittsfield's Morningside neighborhood were described today as angered by the City Council's evident intention of supporting renovation of the present county jail on Second Street instead of construction of a new jail at another site.

At the center of the anger is the future of the Morningside Community School which is a side-by-side neighbor to the century-old jail.

"It's a travesty to be holding a hearing on this now," said Thomas M. Connelly, a cochairman of the Community School Commission. "We've been all through this, and to renovate that old jail just to save money is like putting an ice cube in a barrel of burning oil. It's pouring money down a hole."

Comments from commission members and neighborhood residents were elicited today in advance of tonight's public hearing at City Hall on the jail renovation issue.

The Council's intent is to give Morningside residents an opportunity to comment on the remittance, several NAC and Community School Commission members said, that was necessary for the city to obtain state reimbursement of 65 per cent of the construction and interest costs on the $3.4 million Morningside School.

Connolly in answer to questions this morning said the commitment was in a written agreement between the city and the then board of County Commissioners. It set a maximum period of 10 years for the jail to be removed, he said.

That agreement, he added, was presented to officials of the School Building Assistance Bureau (SBAB) to obtain state approval of the undersized school site and of state reimbursement.

One of the present goals of City Councilmen is to seek, through Gov. Michael S. Dukakis, a waiver of the state requirement that the jail be moved in exchange for the financial aid.

No limit recalled

The SBAB specialist who worked on the Morningside this," she said. "There are obvious needs to enlarge the site, not only because the school will have 100 more children next fall than it had last year, but because we need more playing fields for sports and that sort of thing to build a better feeling about the neighborhood."

There is also feeling, several people said, that Morningside, as one of the low-income sections of town "is paying through the nose again." One argument is that city and county officials don't want to face the difficulty of trying to find another site for the jail because it will be opposed by more affluent people.

Mrs. Zawistowski and Mrs. Barbarotta said in addition that some inmates today are convicted of violent crimes, like rape, and that the jail no longer is the "old jail" where people convicted or charged with relatively inoffensive crimes, like drunkenness, were confined.

Melle said that "at the very least, I'd like to see an ad hoc committee formed to look at all alternatives before a decision is made." Some Council and County

Figure 4. Morningside said angered by switch in jail plans. Source: Berkshire Eagle, July 27, 1977.
Figure 5. Berkshire County Jail. Retrieved from https://www.hippostcard.com/listing/pittsfield-massachusettsberkshire-county-jailcultivated-garden-in-front1913/10688625

This image of the jail was on an old postcard I found in my sleuthing for “data” around this central and controversial landmark in my home town. I find it interesting that, despite the jail being firmly situated in the center of the Morningside community of my home town, and Morningside being the name for the new school on Burbank, on the old maps Morningside did not geographically include any of land west of Brown Street, or south of what was then Peck Place and what is now Tyler Street. I wonder what caused that neighborhood to shift. Was it the housing boon south of Allen Avenue, which at that time contoured Allen farm? The big granite arch to the farm still greets your entrance to what is called “Allendale” today.
The city was by no means prepared for the housing of its increased permanent population between 1900 and 1910; and this matter soon assumed the proportions of a serious problem. Local owners of residential real estate were accustomed to move with deliberation. A “land boom” was not within their experience, and they regarded symptoms of it warily. The expansion of dwelling facilities did not for several years keep pace with the need for them. Outside capital, here as elsewhere, seized its legitimate opportunity. In 1905 the scarcity of tenements first became noticeable. The building development thereafter was chiefly toward the northeast, where, in the wooded Morningside section, the occupancy of house lots had begun markedly to increase about 1895. A considerable part of this expenditure was due to the erection of the great factories, north and east of Silver Lake, of the General Electric Company of Schenectady, New York, which in 1903 purchased the stock and plant of the Stanley Electric Manufacturing Company. To narrate with detail the extraordinary development of this enterprise is not within the province of the present chapter; nevertheless, no account, not even a general one, of the first quarter-century of the city’s existence can well be attempted, or understood, without some account also of the company’s existence, so important was their interrelation and so curiously coincident in point of time were their beginnings. The city of Pittsfield began its course in January, 1891, and in the following April the Stanley Company made its first shipment of machinery. (The history of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Internet Archive). https://archive.org/stream/historyofpittsf22smit/historyofpittsf22smit_djvu.txt
The Allendale School Property is located at 180 Connecticut Avenue in Pittsfield, to the north of the GE facility across the Tyler Street Extension, and is bordered on the other three sides by residential areas. The school building occupies approximately 40,000 square feet within a property of approximately 12 acres in size. In 1991, a 2-foot soil cap (with geotextile) was placed over much of the playground area by GE. In 1998, some soil outside the existing cap was found to contain PCBs exceeding 2 ppm and was also removed by GE.

**How did this property get contaminated?**

The Allendale School property was originally part of the 1,250-acre Allen Farm that was used to breed horses. In 1950, the parcel upon which the school sits was donated to the City of Pittsfield for use as a school. At the time of the school’s construction in 1950, GE and the City entered into an agreement under which the City was allowed to remove soil from GE property for use as fill material at the school grounds. The fill material placed on the school property originated from the Hill 78 Area, which is located south of the school property, across Tyler Street Extension. (Retrieved from https://www.epa.gov/ge-housatonic/allendale-school-ge-pittsfieldhousatonic-river-site)
Hill 78

The Hill 78 Area site is an 85-acre section of land located in the center of the GE facility in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. At the time of this public health assessment, this site is bounded to the north by the Allendale School Property and residential houses along California Avenue, to the east by the Unkamet Brook Area site, to the south by Merrill Avenue, and to the west by New York Avenue and the East Street Area 1 site (see Figure 1). This site consists of four areas: the landfill area, the Pittsfield Generating Company (PGC) facility area, the western and southern areas, and the parking lots for the operating plant buildings located to the east in the Unkamet Brook Area site. Except for the parking lot entrances, the Hill 78 Area is enclosed by a perimeter fence and has access restricted to GE and PGC personnel and their contractors (Blasland, Bouck and Lee 1997). The site currently has very limited commercial activity. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, General Electric Site-Hill 78 Area, 2003, Retrieved from https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/hac/pha/ge-hillarea78/ge-hillarea78pha093003.pdf)
Figure 9. Aerial view of Allendale School and proximity to GE toxic waste. Retrieved: http://www.thebeatnews.org/BeatTeam/allendale-elementary-school/

Figure 10. River ducks full of PCBs. Source: Berkshire Eagle, August 27, 1999.
Silver Lake and Building 38

Figure 11. Silver Lake and Building 38

When we were kids, the biggest dare was who would be brave enough to stick their hand in Silver Lake. Rumor was a kid took the dare and his hand dissolved.

Figure 12. Building 38
Morningside

In the Pittsfield directory of 1876, one citizen is listed by profession as a hunter. The classification was sentimental rather than accurate. Although there were more birds in the woods then than now, and a good many more fish in the streams and lakes, hunting and fishing could hardly have supplied the sole means of livelihood the year around. Nevertheless, not a few men partly supported themselves by hunting, under the liberal game laws then in force; and the North Street merchants considered it worthwhile to advertise that they would pay cash for “raw skins”. Trout brooks within easy distance of the village had not been exhausted. Pontoosuc Lake still justified Dr. Todd’s appellation of “the poor man’s pork barrel”, and numerous humble housewives counted on a steady supply of pickerel and bullheads. The Sun complacently recorded in 1876 that the river at Taylor’s bridge on South Street having been “blown up with giant powder, several barrels of suckers” were thereupon captured by the bold artillerists. It does not appear that the legal authorities were moved by this explosive fishery. The regular police force of those days consisted of seven men. Pittsfield was a law-abiding community, although there was a good deal of complaint of nocturnal disorder in the streets. This was due to a boisterous rather than to a vicious element, but the policemen needed not to suffer from tedium. Jail deliveries at the flimsy wooden lockup on School Street attracted merely casual notice from the local press. One inmate climbed “through the roof” and was seen no more; another, having been liberated by a judicious friend, who “took the key from the peg beside the door and unlocked it”, posted himself across the street from the despicable dungeon, and frequently assaulted the night with triumphant outcries. On more serious occasions, when the instrumentalities of the police proved inadequate, the citizens were ready to take the law into their own hands. Thus fifty indignant neighbors wrecked an offensive hostelry on Beaver Street, and threw the furniture, crockery, and stoves into Silver Lake, and there the matter ended. (The history of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Internet Archive, retrieved from https://archive.org/stream/historyofpittsfi22smit/historyofpittsfi22smit_djvu.txt)
Pittsfield’s Juvenile Resource Center Will Vacate Prison Building

The Juvenile Resource Center, which educates students who for disciplinary or related reasons cannot be served by the city’s two high schools, has recently come under fire from the NAACP and others, in large part because of its location. McCandless acknowledged on Wednesday that the site of the JRC sends a problematic symbolic message, though he defended the programs that go on there as vital to many students. “I think it absolutely sends the wrong message,” the superintendent told the committee. “As often happens with public programs, the program exists where affordable or free space exists,” The superintendent noted that in most other school districts in Berkshire County and throughout the commonwealth, most of the students the center serves would simply be expelled and unable to attend any public high school. Many districts also permanently exclude youth with a felony conviction from public schooling, but because of its alternate option, Pittsfield does not. “Pittsfield is committed to serving these students and keeping them in school, even if that school is not actually physically a school,” McCandless stated, referring to components like the JRC’s drop-out program as “literally, a life saver.” Because of the nature of the programs, the superintendent said, it does require some elements of security that are afforded by the collaboration with the sheriff’s department. “Sometimes they need to be in a place with a metal detector,” McCandless acknowledges. “A place where there’s somebody beyond a teacher or a tutor, who is capable of enforcing some order.” A new home for the school has not yet been located, however, and the School Department is actively seeking rentable space that is either already up to code for educational usage or willing to upgrade to the requirements.” Right now, in all honesty, we’re in a bit of a panic as to where do we go,” said McCandless. “We’re not exactly sure where we’re going to go, but we have been working on it and brainstorming with some really positive results so far.” (Durwin, 2014)
Figure 14. Races in Pittsfield, 2017. The dark gray indicates Black sections of the city, with the city being demarcated from the county by the red box. Retrieved from http://www.city-data.com/races/races-Pittsfield-Massachusetts.html

Figure 15. Sheriff willing to talk on inmate center. Source: Berkshire Eagle, September 7, 1977.
Caught in a Time Warp

The NAACP’s Will Singleton says Pittsfield’s municipal government doesn’t reflect the community’s changing demographics. Pittsfield is a predominantly white city in overwhelmingly rural and white Berkshire County. Yet over the last 20 years the makeup of the city has begun to change. Between 2000 and 2010, the black population grew about 40 percent and the Latino population by nearly 140 percent. Immigrants are moving to Pittsfield, with significant numbers of people coming from Ecuador, Mexico, and Ghana.

Yet as the demographics of the city began changing, the makeup and mentality of City Hall remained largely the same. The city’s affirmative action hiring plan, crafted about 20 years ago, was forgotten and ignored. Pittsfield Mayor Dan Bianchi, a former city councilor, says he never heard any concerns about minority hiring during the decade that he represented an African American neighborhood. When the job of cultural development director opened up recently, Bianchi appointed a search committee made up of three men and one woman, all of them white.

To Singleton, seeing the city with fresh eyes, the problems were easy to spot. “When I was growing up here, even though we didn’t use the word diversity, I had the sense that if you were willing to work hard and you were honest and straight-forward, you had a chance of opportunity, especially when General Electric was here,” he says.

Singleton’s nostalgia for the GE days is not unique. Many black and white Pittsfielders of a certain age share his view. They remember a time when jobs were plentiful. African Americans were mostly clustered in low-level positions, but those jobs catapulted them into the middle class, enabling them to buy a home and send their children to college, just as Singleton’s father did. During that golden age, residents say, there were more black business owners catering to these workers and more black teachers in the schools. (Gurley, 2014)
**SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS**

**Student Resource Center**

The Student Resource Center, formerly known as the Juvenile Resource Center, has a new location: 7 Whipple Street, Pittsfield MA 01201.

**Positive Options Program, at Berkshire Community College**

The Positive Options Program allows Pittsfield Public Schools students to pursue a high school diploma in a small group setting on a college campus.

Figure 16. Pittsfield Public Schools Specialized Programs. Retrieved from http://www.pittsfield.net/district_info/programs/specialized_programs

**Intra-city Migrations**

Figure 17. Intra-city migrations
New building is carbon copy of West Side

By Gerald B. O’Connor

“I couldn’t have asked for a better situation,” said Principal Jeffrey A. Daury a few days before the opening of the city’s newest showcase, Morningside Community School. “All teachers are ones who applied for the jobs here. There were no forced transfers.”

As a result, he said, morale is high.

Morningside, second community school to be built here, opened its doors Wednesday to 368 pupils from an area embracing the old Rice and Mercer school districts and a section that formerly was part of the district around Plunkett school.

Built at a cost of $3.6 million, Morningside is a near duplicate of its forerunner, West Side Community School, which entered its third year of operation Wednesday.

Exteriors of both buildings are almost the same. Differences are found in fewer window openings and use of a bay-type window sash at Morningside. The bay windows open outward on hinges. At West Side, the windows slide.

Interior differences are found in a larger room at Morningside for the branch of the city’s public library, and a different layout of reading and teacher-planing rooms on the second floor. Otherwise, the schools are alike, except for the sites they sit on.

Morningside, situated on 4.3 acres that were formerly part of the grounds for the adjacent Berkshire County Jail and House of Correction, is almost centrally located in the district it serves. West Side, on the other hand, is at one corner of its district, which makes the walk to school longer for some of the children there than at Morningside.

The Morningside site is “ideal” in the view of Thomas M. Connolly, cochairman of the city’s Community School Commission, set up by former Mayor or Donald G. Butler to oversee construction of both buildings. It will be even better on that future day when the city acquires the remaining 8.8 acres of the jail site, he said.

Conditions to be met

When that day will be depends on a number of factors, chief of which is settlement of currently raging dispute over when and where to build a new jail. One of the conditions set by the state School Building Assistance Bureau was that Morningside could rise on a portion of the jail property now as long as all the land is acquired within a reasonable period of time.

Ten years is the outside limit, according to the agreement reached three years ago.

The searches for sites for both schools were lengthy and strewn with obstacles. The final site selections were, in effect, compromises from initial proposals that were challenged as either too costly in terms of site development or unworkable because of prior restrictions on land use.

That the play area around Morningside is not as large as school planners initially hoped is no significant drawback in the eyes of Principal Daury.

Neither Mercer nor Rice schools had play areas as large, well laid out or well equipped as Morningside, he pointed out. Kindergarten and primary grade children can use swings and heavy play timbers at the west end of the building. Older children can use either of two paved courts on the south, one outfitted with backboards and baskets and the other lined for volleyball.

More grass

In addition, said Daury, there is a grassed lot further to the south which can be used for field games like soccer. Field sports will be a bonus that pupils at the old Mercer and Rice schools didn’t enjoy.

Like West Side, Morningside is designed for flexibility in teaching. Daury says team teaching, multigrading and related concepts have been developed during summer workshops.

Best Wishes


Figure 18. New building is carbon copy. Source: Berkshire Eagle, September 11, 1976.
What Are PCBs?

PCBs are a group of man-made organic chemicals consisting of carbon, hydrogen and chlorine atoms. The number of chlorine atoms and their location in a PCB molecule determine many of its physical and chemical properties. PCBs have no known taste or smell, and range in consistency from an oil to a waxy solid.

PCBs belong to a broad family of man-made organic chemicals known as chlorinated hydrocarbons. PCBs were domestically manufactured from 1929 until manufacturing was banned in 1979. They have a range of toxicity and vary in consistency from thin, light-colored liquids to yellow or black waxy solids. Due to their non-flammability, chemical stability, high boiling point and electrical insulating properties, PCBs were used in hundreds of industrial and commercial applications including:

1. Electrical, heat transfer and hydraulic equipment
2. Plasticizers in paints, plastics and rubber products
3. Pigments, dyes and carbonless copy paper
4. Other industrial applications

Figure 20. Dorothy Amos Park: One lake, one river, two brooks, two elementary schools, at least three parks and three neighborhoods contaminated by PCBs that were used in the same factory and redistributed across the city in groundfill. Source: Berkshire Environmental Action Team, 2009.

Figure 21. PCB contamination in the West Branch. Source: Berkshire Environmental Action Team, 2009.
Dorothy Amos Park: PCBs in the West Branch

Dorothy Amos Park is located on a site that was once home to a junkyard. The junkyard was covered over and made into Dorothy Amos Park. The Park is on the West Branch of the Housatonic River. In the mid-1990s, citizens of Pittsfield called for PCB testing on the West Branch of the Housatonic River. On September 30, 1997, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) issued a “Notice of Responsibility” to General Electric Co. (GE) because Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) were found on the property and needed to be removed. From May to August of 1998, GE removed 3,800 cubic yards of contaminated soil from the Park and installed one ground water monitoring well. They did not remove contaminated soil from down the riverbank, nor in the river. In 1999 the EPA performed tests for PCBs downstream of Dorothy Amos Park to the confluence with the East Branch of the Housatonic River. They found elevated levels of PCBs, which they presumed came from Dorothy Amos Park. So they performed more tests for PCBs on the riverbank and sediment in the river next to Dorothy Amos Park. They found sediment in the river that contained 7,630 parts per million (ppm) of PCBs. For comparison, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires residential properties to be remediated to no more than an average of 2 ppm in the soil. In the water of the river, the EPA set the fresh water criterion continuous concentration for PCB is 0.014 ppb and the human health criteria is 0.000064 ppb—that’s parts per Billion – 1,000 times less than ppm

Abbreviations
ATSDR = Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
DEP = Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
DPH = Massachusetts Department of Public Health
EPA = US Environmental Protection Agency
GE = General Electric Company
PCB = Polychlorinated Biphenols

Figure 22. North Gate with Building 42 at right. Courtesy of Judy Rupinski, Pittsfield, MA. Retrieved from http://ethw.org/Archives:Transformers_at_Pittsfield_part_1

Figure 23. Map of cleanup areas. Retrieved from https://www.epa.gov/ge-housatonic/cleanup-areas-focus-ge-pittsfieldhousatonic-river-site
Unkamet Brook


Re-membering and Re-collecting Data

Both urban and rural spaces are saturated with stories. Every day we pass through these spaces we work, walk, live, and breathe them. Moreover, they are multi-textual and often highly politicized. Spectral traces of history ebb and flow in, through, and under the tide of contemporary life. (Springett, 2015, p. 623)

In cutting together/apart the “data” presented above, I worked to re-member, across timespacematter, the ways human and non-human entities in my hometown might be intra-acting to produce particular, posthuman subjectivities, including mismatched ones. In collecting these “data,” the notion of the mismatch as a concept and, thus, a worlding device steered me in different directions across time, space, place, and matter, as I traversed my city through archives, newspaper clippings, and interpretively stitched-together memories. Throughout, I struggled against the constant pull to construct a linear, coherent narrative that would “tell a story.” Instead, I looked for connectivities and relationalities among people and things that were not immediately visible: a new playground and a shrinking hill on a factory site, a closed jail, a new school site, a contaminated river, and a slowly but steadily shifting city demographic, as evidenced by population density maps that radically changed the composition of the city’s neighborhoods.

As I cut and pasted digitally, conceptually, and interpretively, I began to notice that in the city archives, newspaper clippings, demographic data, etc., three entities seemed omnipresent in the city’s history: General Electric (GE), the jail, and the Housatonic River. Regardless of the decade, source, and any efforts I made to locate different, potentially outlying “actors” in my re-membered city, these three elements seemed to be almost co-constitutive of the town, its birth, its emergence as an industrial city, and its decline. And yet, their connectivities were hardly linear or coherent, and any narratives I tried to cobble together evaded coherence, even as I struggled to “make sense” of it all.
Instead, thinking again with Barad (2010), I found myself engaging with a material-discursive world that seemed less like a story and more like a “performance of spacetime (re)configurings that are more akin to how electrons experience the world than any journey narrated though rhetorical forms that presume actors move along trajectories across a stage of spacetime (often called history)” (p. 240). Thus, moving through the mindscapes and landscapes of my hometown, I trudged through my memories, the archives, and the post-industrial decay that has carved huge holes out of the city’s center as I worked to find “a way of thinking with and through dis/continuity,” and a way to stay in “the dis/orienting experience of the dis/jointedness of time and space” (p. 240).

Of course, I’ve failed miserably, since the ghosts of humanism, with their linear narratives, coherent textual structures, and efforts to “tell a story” tapped the keyboard with me as I wrote. Yet still, I think there is something to be learned here. In this city, “difference” did not pre-exist the city’s development and remain static across time. Instead, it morphed and twisted, intra-acting with the city’s intricate and circuitous journey. This journey tinged conversations that still echo off of the teachers’ lounge walls, such as “What about the nice kids? What are we doing for them?” and “Where did he come from?” As GE fled, they took their jobs and the city’s economy with them, having a complex impact in schools. The largely White working class left town, although there are smatterings of old family names remaining in the now desperate community of Morningside.5 The city’s population dropped from 57,000 in 1970 to approximately 42,000 in 2016. Those that remained were either close enough to retirement to receive a severance package when the last plant closed its doors, or they were not skilled enough to make it worthwhile to follow the plant south. And for some, they just couldn’t leave home. In the middle school where I worked in the late 1990s and early 2000s, several of

5Currently, Morningside is becoming infamous as being the “home” of the opiate epidemic plaguing the city.
the teachers I worked with had husbands who were former employees of GE. Some of these teachers, all White women, were now the primary earners for the family, while others were balancing work and family while their spouse commuted great distances to enable the compulsory career change.

The Morningside neighborhood, which abutted GE and was home to many of the laborers that worked at the company’s plants, was gradually emptied of its GE workers, and in their place, the largely African American community to the west began shifting eastward, occupying empty apartments and, for some, looking to escape the increasingly crime-ridden neighborhood of “the West side.” As factories, people, and the tax base began to evacuate the crumbling city, a new jail was built. As seen through the “data” shared above, this expenditure was not without controversy. While the burgeoning population of locals requiring short-term\textsuperscript{6} incarceration burst the seams of the old jail, which had been built in 1876 by Civil War veterans, the city tried to coalesce its socio-economic and political past, present, and future.

Concurrently, the city’s waterways began dying. Birds, fish, and many other forms of local wildlife’s existence were threatened, as the magnitude of the PCB contamination of the city’s river and brooks became public knowledge. Despite agreements between the Environmental Protection Agency and the now long-gone GE, cleanup is still not complete, despite the PCB ban enacted in 1979. Throughout this process, the sheer magnitude of the damage to parks, residential neighborhoods, recreational areas, and the old plant site has overwhelmed the city’s residents and seemingly led to a concurrent mixture of despair, activism, and anomie. This affective field seems, in part, to be an effect of both a sense of betrayal at GE’s exodus and a longing for “the good old days.”

\textsuperscript{6}The Berkshire County House of Corrections is a minimum security facility and only houses short-term offenders with sentences of less than two years.
Against this abbreviated and methodologically blunderous\(^7\) interpretation of events, I would now like to interpret differently this city as a site, and intra-active component of, enactments of posthuman subjectivity. By diffracting insights from a variety of intra-mingling, post-inspired feminisms, I will engage interpretively with the ways “a multiplicity of beings cast as human and non-human [might be] participat[ing] in the coproduction of socio-political collectives” (Sundberg, 2014, p. 33).

I do this to achieve two primary goals. The first goal is to trouble the mismatch as an essentializing concept. One way I do this is by localizing possible iterations of the mismatch as a lived, understood, and material-discursive enactment in my hometown. Thus, as I continue to work to disrupt commonsense understandings of the challenges facing White women teachers and Black boys in contemporary U.S. classrooms, I will instead articulate a different understanding of some ways the local human and non-human intra-act in ways that contribute to a particular construction of difference in the city where I grew up.

The second purported goal is to experiment with a locally inflected iteration of the mismatch as an example of posthumanist, non-individuated subjectivity. Specifically, I wish to explore “how particular boundaries and meanings are enacted through particular practices … along with what political and ethical consequences; that is who and what matters and who and what is at the very same moment excluded from mattering” (Hinton, Mehrabi, & Barla, 2015, p. 1). Therefore, by thinking with/through/about my “data,” I ponder: What intra-activities are being enacted across these local contingencies of timespacematter that work to form Others in a material/discursive field that never sits still? And what can an exploration of these intra-activities teach us about the ways

\(^7\)While one intent of a diffractive methodology is to disrupt the singular, coherent reading, I felt it necessary to acclimate my reads to the context. This decision is not consistent with the methodological claims of the study and enacts a tension embedded in this work. Feebly, then, I offer my rendering as a particular interpretation and as one articulation among a field of many.
subjects are formed, not as individuals, but as intra-active and relationally constituted beings.

**Building Lives with Other Worldly Actants**

Ontologically heterogeneous partners become who and what they are in relational material-semiotic worlding. Natures, cultures, subjects and objects of not pre-exist their intertwined worldings. (Haraway, 2016, p. 13)

In re-membering my hometown, I thought heavily with Haraway as I tried to understand difference in ways different from the normalized practices of categorization and classification discussed in Chapter I. In particular, I have tried to look at the ways lives might be being “built” in ways that produce asymmetries and enact practices of Othering. In doing so, I worked not to construct a narrative of progress, or a concise and persuasive, rhetorically contoured critique, but instead to re-member what Haraway (1998) has called an “amodern history of [with] a different geometry, not of progress but of permanent and multi-patterned interaction through which lives and worlds get built, human and inhuman” (p. 304).

My pursuit of posthuman subjects engaged in multi-patterned, in this case, intra-actions emphasizes a becoming with a world that is not *just* of our own making, but importantly, it also does not work to create a futuristic, non- or anti-human technospace that lives in sometimes dystopic, sometimes utopic shadows. Instead, still thinking with Haraway, I think of my re-membering as a form of world-building that leaves humans in the front and center, but unlike the anthropocentrism of humanism, they do not occupy this space alone. As Haraway (1998) articulated, “Lives are built, so we had best become good craftspeople with the other worldly actants in the story” (p. 299).

Thus, in Pittsfield, people, chemicals, mayors, and city councilmen, superintendents, jails, schools, parks, corporations, hills, inmates, fish, bridges, and neighborhoods form subjectivities that shift the focus from a bound, agentic, exclusively
human subject to the consideration of a subject that is intra-active, built with a conglomeration of human and non-human materials and, always, discursively and materially formed. To further develop this point, I will engage with this notion of non-individuated subjectivity as a knowledge project.

**Entangled Subjects as Knowledge Project**

For Barad (as cited in Hekman, 2010), “to be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, but to ‘lack an independent, self-contained existence … individuals emerge through and as part of this entangled intra-relating’” (p. 72). Thus, in Pittsfield, the entangled entities that are presented and emerge through the data co-produce bodies and things in ways that make them mutually dependent upon each other for their very existence. Critical to this understanding, however, is Barad’s nuanced, but explicit, assertion that beings and things often emerge asymmetrically, in part due to the complex interplays among materialities and discourses in their becomings. Of these processes she asks,

> Is there a way to account for the ability of these norms to materialize the very substance of the human body? That is, what is it about the material nature of regulatory practices and of human bodies that enables discourse to work its productive material effects on bodies? What is the relationship between materiality and discourse such that regulatory apparatuses are susceptible to being reworked through significations as well as through material rearrangements? (Barad, 2007, p. 209)

For me, these questions evoke the most challenging aspects of working with the theoretical and methodological frames of the posts. While more conventional methods look for answers to their research questions by “coding” data collected in the research setting and thematizing the researcher’s understandings of these “codings” as a way to

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8Existence here is not referring to lived experience, but instead it references the way humans and non-humans come into existence through material-discursive intra-actions.
capture new understandings and produce new knowledges, post-methods discourage these practices and challenge the claims to knowledge they produce. As I think with/about Barad’s questions above, however, there can be no such response. Yet, the questions linger and bring me to the question: What types of knowledge might my re-membered engagements with “data” produce?

Because this study is primarily concerned with the mismatch among White women teachers and Black boys, I wish to make a particular “cut” here around the knowledge project that I am putting forth. Thinking with Barad, and thus always trying to place, at the forefront of my interpretive practices, the notion that “cuts” are not movements of separation but rather always entail a cutting together/apart, what I would like to do is engage in a series of “cuts” around the concept of race.

The first cut seeks to attend to the question: What happens to concepts like race, class, and gender in renderings of non-individuated subjectivity, such as my re-membered engagement with data above? Here I would like to ruminate on some potential “happenings” around race as an understandably emboldened socio-cultural category in education and in qualitative research. In my re-memberings of my hometown, race was a recurring thread; however, it was not specifically defined or located, but rather, it moved through this patchwork, whispering here, yet shouting over there. Deeply embedded in the timespacemattering of the city, it was everywhere, and yet, in some spaces, it remained extremely difficult to pin down, although when considered through and alongside other re-membered entities, it still seemed to be “there.” But just where and when was “there”? This particular timespacemattering was “cut” across a period of about 150 years, from the late 1880s until now. It could have been cut differently, since the Native Americans inhabited this area well into the 19th century, and numerous archives exist documenting their early exchanges with White settlers from Connecticut and New York. But I did not make this cut.
The “whys” of the “cut,” I think, are a crucial part of the timespacemattering of this city, and my own timespacemattering. I was born and raised in the southeast section of the city, far from GE and into a family where no one worked at GE. My neighborhood was almost all White; however, when I went to live with a foster family on “the west side” of the city, my relationship with my city changed dramatically. While I only generalize here, it is worth noting that this life change has greatly motivated my engagements with race both as an undergraduate and a graduate student. Still immersed in that experience after all these years, this theoretical study has been, in large part, a way to think/understand the mismatch differently.

As I struggle to interpret my re-membrances, I find myself concurrently seeking and eliding an explicit engagement with race. This is, in part, due to the knowledge claims of the framework, which greatly discourage nailing anything down. But everything I do to construct a more fluid, amorphous social field that will enable more open-ended understandings of ontological being feels like an elision of race. In looking for ways to “circumvent the limitations of social constructionist theorizations” that might allow me “to come to a better understanding of the very processes through which race materializes—not only as meaning and ideology but also as racialized matter/bodies” (Hinton et al., 2015, p. 6), it seems that the actual bodies of racialized beings are in some way obscured. Of course, all kinds of Othering is occurring—animals, rivers, workers, children, etc.—but the articulation of non-individuation, at times, feels like a betrayal, although I am not sure a betrayal of what. Of the community I formerly lived in? My sociology training? My training as a teacher and a school leader? And yet, despite this sense, there is also something interesting, different, and filled with potential in this

9In elementary school, there were two African American children attending from my neighborhood. They were brothers, and their father was a GE executive.
conceptual field, if I could just articulate it better. As soon as I find the words, however, the field shifts.

This shifting, coupled with the elusivity of grabbing onto discursive fields across timespacematter, is also a conundrum. While many feminist, new materialist thinkers claim to retain an allegiance to poststructural attention to power by talking about “material-discursive” entanglement, I have not found many places where this is actually done. In Pittsfield, I can sense discourses at work—economic growth and progress narratives, “not in my backyard” protests, secret talks behind closed corporate doors, lobbyists at work defunding the EPA, and schools sorting and classifying difficult students into “The Juvenile Resource Center”—but following the threads in an effort to locate some of their connectivities seems futile.

Additionally, when I chase discourses, I tend to lose sight of their material co-constituents, enacting another, agential cut-together/apart, together/apart. Thinking with Flint, Michigan, I wonder: Does it make sense to study the effects of undertreated river water on lead pipes without looking at the impact of these effects on the lives of the inhabitants around the banks? I know that in Pittsfield, the tributary running adjacent to Dorothy Amos Park also runs right through “the West Side,” and through the backyards of many of the homes there, and yet I could find no information about an EPA study conducted here. They must have tested the soil there? Maybe the way to get to a sense of the way non-individuated subjectivities get made in this scenario would be to look at the discursive field around “the West side” and the materiality of the riverbed and soil that runs through it. I’m still unsure how to do this kind of research. I’ll close this chapter with one last question: In working to trouble the mismatch among White women teachers and Black boys by trying to shape conceptual space that allows for subjects of lesser ontological weight, what other conceptual spaces get closed down?
Chapter VI

SOME NON-CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this dissertation, I have offered a theoretical and methodological framework for thinking about difference differently in relation to the commonsensical notion of the mismatch in contemporary U.S. public schools. I have also, experimentally, offered two possible engagements with post-qualitative conceptualizations of “data” as a way to deploy this framework as an enactment post-inspired, feminist, research practices. In this final, non-concluding chapter, I would like to engage with some of the potentials and limits of this approach in relation to education research. I will begin by discussing some of the challenges I encountered as I both constructed and deployed diffraction as a theoretical and methodological framework and tool for conceptualizing difference differently.

A Wobbly Frame

This theoretical study has, in large part, been an articulation of my efforts to diffractively engage poststructural lenses with those more overtly attending to the ontological, but it has also been an engagement with the vertigos, dissonances, and intermittent paralyses of working across disparate frames, largely because such frames are prone to wobble, in part due to the hesitancy and ambiguity of their affiliation. In particular, significant challenges exist when trying to push back against the strangleholds of humanism while living within it. While new materialist and other “posthuman”
inclined thinkers work determinedly to re-vision both human and non-human being and “becoming,” sometimes there is an implicit sense of somehow having solved the representational puzzle via creative forms of “non”-representation, alongside a newly triumphant science narrative embedded somewhere in what Ahmed has interpreted as somewhat of a “bandwagon effect” (Hird, 2009, p. 342) of new feminisms. And while Alaimo and Hekman (2008) have in some ways posited new materialist thought as an effort to merely “revise [rather than supplant] the paradigms of poststructuralism, postmodernism and cultural studies in ways that can more productively account for the agency, semiotic force, and dynamics of bodies and natures” (p. 6), such a revision is far from being seamless, uncontroversial, or complete. There is no consensus. As Colebrook (forthcoming) further points out in regard to the new materialist catchphrase “materiality”:

To write of “materiality” rather than matter is to stake a claim or situate oneself outside older matter/mind or matter/ideality binaries, and yet—like materialism—“materiality” or being a “new materialist” makes no sense without some combative notion of just what materiality is not. One thing is perhaps certain: new materialism is well and truly against the notion that it is ideas, language or texts that construct reality. (p. 1)

As such, my attempts at a diffractive reading are more than a mere supplementing of poststructuralist theories with new materialist ones, but rather they were efforts at reading or working these frames through each other. This move was an effort not only to gain new insights, but also to engage with/in the tensions and contradictions between the two frames, which are considerable. As such, theories offered by “the new materialisms” must be concurrently utilized and troubled, rather than posited as conceptual correctives or progress oriented “posts.” Such a stance rests upon the belief that, despite new materialist critiques of poststructuralism’s overreliance on language’s constructive abilities, all theoretical frames rely upon rhetorical maneuvers to stake their claims, and these rhetorical moves are still discursively constructed and linguistically represented. This reminder conjures caution for those of us still swathed in and at least a bit enamored
with the critiques of metanarratives and universal truths offered by poststructuralism (Weedon, 1997, p. 172). Like all discursive chains, theoretical and ontological apparatuses actually produce something. Indeed, theoretical frames create insides and outsides such that even the “new” art/science/social science intra-disciplinarity has the potential to evolve into a new successor regime with all that entails; surveilled borders, critiques of “other,” less “anti-human,” theoretical frames, and a reinstatement of humanist ideals in regard to the nature and function of knowledge. As Dillon (as cited in Clough, 2012) has indicated, “There is no ontology that does not legislate for its own empowerment technologically in the sense of prescribing the means for its own enablement and … there is no technology that is not an expression of ontology” (p. 1). As always, even in our euphoric engagement with exciting new ideas, we should remain wary.

In particular, I have argued that in a study engaged with the relational complexities emergent among White women and Black boys in schools, it is of great importance that any theoretical and methodological frames adopted are attentive to issues of power and its dissymmetrical proliferation in such a commonsensically polemical space. As such, and motivated by Haraway (2007), I have been reluctant to engage in a currently prevalent trend that casually deploys Deleuze in my quest for an ontologically freer, “becoming” subject, a deployment that it could be argued is beginning to feel normative. As Braidotti (2002) points out:

The accounts of feminism and feminist theory that are emerging from the rank and file of the new Deleuzians are puzzling in that they neglect the turn toward difference which marked the feminist poststructuralist generation. They are unhistorical and decontextualized in their reception of Deleuze. This may well be one of the effects of the relative occultation and marginalization of this brand of feminism in the 1990’s—the era of the hegemony of “gender.” It may also simply mark a generation gap and the specific forms of selective memory that such gaps entail. (p. 88)
This could invoke an understandable critique of this study. Despite my engagement with different feminisms, Deleuze is currently the theoretical go-to for new materialisms in education.

Another limitation of this study is the apparent elision of some elements of race, as discussed in Chapter IV. In particular, as I continue to grapple with the traces and fissures of “women of color” feminisms lingering in my thoughts, I greatly fear one of these gaps may be a “forgetting” in regard to the obstinacy and perseverance of White feminisms’ hegemony. While my daily life as an educator involves frequent collaboration, collusion, and contention with Black mothers, these relationalities and tensions are absent from this study. As such, it is crucial that when deploying these new materialist concepts in education research, feminist becomings are considered in more than singular and horizontal ways. As Braidotti (2006a) again reminds us, processes of becoming

> can be contiguous, but in so far as there is structural dissymmetry in the starting positions of the Same and of his Others, their lines or paths of becoming are discontinuous. Some becomings operate a much needed dislodgement of dominant subject positions (masculinity, heterosexuality, whiteness, …). Others mark instead the conditions for the affirmation of new subject positions and thus lay the foundations for possible futures. (p. 77)

Particularly in some deployments of Deleuze’s flattened ontology, “becoming,” or “lines of flight,” ¹ appear to enact a gesture toward unobstructed ontology.

Along similar lines, Braidotti’s insistence on our continued attentiveness to the dissymmetry and differential functions of becoming directs this discussion toward another layer of ethicality in regard to my adoption of a diffractive theoretical frame. Whether engaging with concepts from contemporary science and technology studies or Deleuzian/Spinozist/Bergsonian monisms and vitalism, our locations continue to

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¹These concepts were not used in this study, but are hallmarks in some deployments of new materialist thought in education at this time.
“matter.” Indeed, as a White woman engaging in research as an attempt to dislodge the material/discursive divide by exploring some of the ways raced and gendered identity matters, and “matters” in contemporary schools, it seems important that while working with new materialist thought against “reinstituting the equation between matter and passivity” (Barad, 2007, p. 225), there is concurrent and entangled attention to issues of power. Indeed, Rosiek (2015), arguing for inquiry into White supremacy that acknowledges that its presence and force are not merely “sustained by epistemic practices” (p. 3), has argued for an engagement with multiple frames to help counter this tendency. Utilizing Barad’s notion of agential ontology, he works to “open the possibility of regarding whiteness not simply as a social object in need of description, but as an agent whose activity exceeds any single theory’s ability to adequately frame a relation to it” (p. 3). This innovative consideration has significant implications for the necessity of engaging with multiple theoretical frames when engaging in research around race. Rosiek articulates,

Fetishizing any theory or method makes us vulnerable to becoming instruments of the social ordering activity of whiteness. This activity manifests both through the production of racialized subjects and the materially inequitable conditions of living. Most importantly for our methodological considerations, this whiteness-as-agent has a pattern of co-opting the subjects of researchers themselves, bending every theoretical framework that is brought to bear against it to its own racializing activity. (p. 4)

From Rosiek’s (2015) perspective, then, scholars working in the new materialisms have made it difficult to continue to conceptualize materiality as merely an effect of the social, cultural, and/or discursive, and in so doing have engaged in a sort of double move and draw our attention to some of the power workings of both purely epistemological frames and their correlate, segregated discursive communities. Indeed, Barad (2007) makes this connection explicitly as she queries, “Why are language and culture granted their own agency and historicity, while matter is figured as passive and immutable or at
best inherits a potential for change derivatively from language and culture?” (p. 132). She elaborates,

What is needed is an analysis that enables us to theorize the social and the natural together, to read our best understandings through one another in a way that clarifies the relationship between them. To write matter and meaning into separate categories, to analyze them relative to separate disciplinary technologies, and to divide complex phenomena into one balkanized enclave or the other is to elide certain crucial aspects by design. On the other hand, considering them together does not mean forcing them together, collapsing important differences between them, or treating them in the same way, rather it means allowing any integral aspects to emerge by not (writing them out before we get started). (p. 25)

Like Barad, Braidotti (2006a) has also cautioned against the continued segregation of discursive communities, and argues that imagining non-unitary and transversal subjects requires an ethics of interrelations, not just among discourses in one’s own work, but among discursive communities as well (p. 138). In particular, she laments “the continuing drift, in both mainstream and feminist cultures, between science studies on the one hand, and philosophies of the subject on the other. The missing links of this are manifold, and they converge on a collision course upon the theme of ‘post-humanism’” (p. 138).

With all these researchers and theorists, however, whether they highlight the call for multiple frames, intra-disciplinarity, engagement with multiple discursive communities, and/or concurrent attention to competing and conflicting knowledge frames, the difficulties of doing this work, at times, seem understated. In order to work across numerous disciplines, the level of study required could be considered insurmountable. While engagements with rivers, and paintings, and corporations can be interpreted generally, a nuanced understanding of the ways PCBs have inhabited communities, or the ways race flows through the art world, for example, requires deeper study than is manageable for most scholars trained in a single discipline, say, education. These are just some of the limitations to working with “a wobbly frame.”
Working Across Multiple Feminisms

Other challenges to working with multiple theories through a diffractive framework are some of the contentions embedded within feminist theories themselves. The most poignant critique has come from Sara Ahmed (2008), who has raised significant critiques of some strands of new materialist thought. Referencing some feminist, new materialist founding premises, such as their criticism of poststructural feminists’ rejection of biology as a strategy to counter anti-essentialism in relation to the category “women,” she troubles their “representation as a gift to feminism in [their] very refusal to be prohibited by its prohibitions” (p. 24). Said differently, she challenges the way some feminist, new materialists posit this critique, which is a critique of a critique, as the founding gesture of a field that purports to reject critique (p. 24).

Additionally, as has been the case in much of feminism’s disparate, fluid, celebratory, and contentious history, the work of scholars of color remains largely absent from this strand of feminist thought. I suspect it may be, in part, due to the difficulties, which I described in Chapter IV, of letting go of certain categories, particularly in education research. I would also argue, however, that the absence of scholars of color might also be attributed to an overall elision of the concept of race in feminist, new materialist work in education. Indeed, this is, in part, what motivated me to dive into these theories in late 2013. Deeply invested in exploring the non-innocence of any work that explores the racialization of subjectivity, I have sought, through this study, to find ways to account for the discursive and material elements of subjectivity. Reading, writing, and thinking over these last several years, I echo Watson and Huntington in thinking that some of the new materialist work emerging from feminist studies demonstrates a “lack of a robust engagement with the question of power and politics, … and tend[s] to privilege ‘only certain human-non-human assemblages’” (Hinton et al.,
These awarenesses and tensions have signaled significant limitations to this study.

**Some Concluding Thoughts**

By engaging in a theoretical study around how to think difference differently, I have learned a few things about the challenges inherent in any attempts to disrupt categorical identity in society and in schools. When thinking about Black boys and White women specifically, in this conceptual study, they were separate, but rather always “cut together apart.” This was so even though their day to day intra-actions were largely absent from the written study. While I had originally set out to include teacher-student intra-actions among myself and the young men who inspired this study, there seemed to be no way for a White woman researcher to engage with post-theories and not “represent” what might be constituting such goings-on. Thus, the study morphed into a theoretical inquiry that sought to discover what sort of re-worlding certain theories might be able to do around mismatched subjectivities. What I was looking for was a way to think/be/do categories differently from the way they are done in more traditional education research.

In many ways, I failed. But not entirely. Empathizing with Schutz and her painting of “Open Casket,” I think a true failure would have been not to try. The discourses and materialities constituting the relationalities among White women and Black boys in contemporary society seem to be creating hotspots of precarity, vulnerability, and differential becomings in a world increasingly driven by the desires of post-industrial capitalism. Avoiding these hotspots seems less than cowardly, and more than complicit. In order to find other ways of being and becoming, we have to connect, even as we are “enmeshed in partial and flawed translations across difference” (Haraway, 2016, p. 10). Indeed, Haraway chides, “Becoming with, not becoming, is how we stay with the
trouble” (p. 12). She elaborates, “We require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics I always situated, someplace and not noplace, entangled and worldly” (p. 4).

So just what might this becoming with look like? Haraway (2016) challenges us to make kin, and in particular, “oddkin” (p. 3). She offers,

Making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible. Who lives and who dies, and how, in this kinship rather than that one? What shape is this kinship, were and whom do its lines connect and disconnect, and so what? What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other non-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance? (p. 2)

In re-thinking the mismatch, among White women, Black boys, dying cities, government-sanctioned murder, renewed allegiances to “America First” nationalism, the Women’s March and Black Lives matter, thinking with oddkin may just be a way onward.
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Appendix A

Open Letter

To the curators and staff of the Whitney Biennial:

I am writing to ask you to remove Dana Schutz’s painting “Open Casket” and with the urgent recommendation that the painting be destroyed and not entered into any market or museum.

As you know, this painting depicts the dead body of 14-year-old Emmett Till in the open casket that his mother chose, saying, “Let the people see what I’ve seen.” That even the disfigured corpse of a child was not sufficient to move the white gaze from its habitual cold calculation is evident daily and in a myriad of ways, not least the fact that this painting exists at all. In brief: the painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people because it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalized for a long time.

Although Schutz’s intention may be to present white shame, this shame is not correctly represented as a painting of a dead Black boy by a white artist — those non-Black artists who sincerely wish to highlight the shameful nature of white violence should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material. The subject matter is not Schutz’s; white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights. The painting must go.

Emmett Till’s name has circulated widely since his death. It has come to stand not only for Till himself but also for the mournability (to each other, if not to everyone) of people marked as disposable, for the weight so often given to a white woman’s word above a Black child’s comfort or survival, and for the injustice of anti-Black legal systems. Through his mother’s courage, Till was made available to Black people as an inspiration and warning. Non-Black people must accept that they will never embody and cannot understand this gesture: the evidence of their collective lack of understanding is that Black people go on dying at the hands of white supremacists, that Black communities go on living in desperate poverty not far from the museum where this valuable painting hangs, that Black children are still denied childhood. Even if Schutz has not been gifted with any real sensitivity to history, if Black people are telling her that the painting has caused unnecessary hurt, she and you must accept the truth of this. The painting must go.

Ongoing debates on the appropriation of Black culture by non-Black artists have highlighted the relation of these appropriations to the systematic oppression of Black communities in the US and worldwide, and, in a wider historical view, to the capitalist appropriation of the lives and bodies of Black people with which our present era began. Meanwhile, a similarly high-stakes conversation has been going on about the willingness
of a largely non-Black media to share images and footage of Black people in torment and distress or even at the moment of death, evoking deeply shameful white American traditions such as the public lynching. Although derided by many white and white-affiliated critics as trivial and naive, discussions of appropriation and representation go to the heart of the question of how we might seek to live in a reparative mode, with humility, clarity, humour and hope, given the barbaric realities of racial and gendered violence on which our lives are founded. I see no more important foundational consideration for art than this question, which otherwise dissolves into empty formalism or irony, into a pastime or a therapy.

The curators of the Whitney biennial surely agree, because they have staged a show in which Black life and anti-Black violence feature as themes, and been approvingly reviewed in major publications for doing so. Although it is possible that this inclusion means no more than that blackness is hot right now, driven into non-Black consciousness by prominent Black uprisings and struggles across the US and elsewhere, I choose to assume as much capacity for insight and sincerity in the biennial curators as I do in myself: Which is to say — we all make terrible mistakes sometimes, but through effort the more important thing could be how we move to make amends for them and what we learn in the process. The painting must go.

Thank you for reading
Hannah Black
Artist/writer
Whitney ISP 2013-14

Co-signatories:
Amal Alhaag
Andrea Arrubla
Hannah Assebe
Thea Ballard
Anwar Batte
Parker Bright
Harry Burke
Gaby Cepeda
Vivian Crockett
Jareh Das
Jesse Darling
Aria Dean
Kimberly Drew
Chrissy Etienne
Hamishi Farah
Ja’Tovia Gary
Hannah Gregory
Jack Gross
Rose-Anne Gush
Mostafa Heddaya
Juliana Huxtable
Alexander Iadarola
Anisa Jackson
Hannah Catherine Jones
Devin Kenny
Dana Kopel
Carolyn Lazard
Taylor LeMelle
Beatrice Loft Schulz
Jacqueline Mabey
Mia Matthias
Tiona Nekkia McClodden
Sandra Mujinga
Lulu Nunn
Precious Okoyomon
Emmanuel Olunkwa
Mathew Parkin
Temra Pavlović
Imani Robinson
Andrew Ross
Cory Scozzari
Christina Sharpe
Misu Simbiatu
Addie Wagenknecht
Dominique White
Kandis Williams
Robert Wilson
Appendix B

The Updated Label for Dana Schutz’s “Open Casket” at the Whitney Biennial 2017

Dana Schutz
Born 1976 in Livonia, MI; lives in Brooklyn, NY
Open Casket, 2016
Oil on canvas
Collection of the artist

In Open Casket, Dana Schutz responds to a photograph of Emmett Till in his coffin. In 1955, after being falsely accused of flirting with a white woman, the fourteen-year-old African American boy was beaten, lynched, and mutilated. His mother chose to have an open casket at his funeral, making the brutality of her son’s murder visible to the world and allowing it to be photographed. The atrocious image drew widespread attention to violence against African Americans and helped galvanize the civil rights movement.

Since the opening of the Biennial, this painting has been at the center of heated debate around questions of cultural appropriation, the ethics of representation, the political efficacy of painting, and the possibilities or limitations of empathy. The painting’s inclusion in the Biennial reflects on the ongoing fact of racialized violence in the United States, and stems from the curators’ belief that the Whitney, as a museum of American art, must engage this enduring history, and that art is critical to this conversation.

I made the painting “Open Casket” in August 2016, after a long, violent summer of mass shootings, rallies filled with hate speech, and an ever-escalating number of Black men being shot execution style by police, recorded with camera phones as witness.

At this time, there was renewed attention to the brutal murder and mutilation of Emmett Till, and his mother’s decision to leave his casket open to, in her words, “let the world see” what she had seen. Till’s photograph, like a festering wound, felt analogous to the tragic events of the summer. What had been hidden was now in plain view.

I did not know if I could make this painting, ethically or emotionally. It is easy for artists to self-censor, to convince yourself to not make something before even trying. I don’t know what it is like to be Black in America. But I do know what it is like to be a mother. Emmett was Mamie Till-Mobley’s only son. I thought about the possibility of painting it only after listening to interviews with her. In her sorrow and rage she wanted her son’s death not just to be her pain but America’s pain.

This painting was never for sale and never will be.

-D.S.

Image: Andrew Goldstein