REPRESENTATION IN FAMILY THEORY AND RESEARCH: COMPLEXITY, DELEUZE, AND SEMIOTIC EXPERIMENTATION

By

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To Brittany, Jackson, and Mitchell
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Family must be thought in terms of representation, but representations are constraining in that they form criteria that define what family is and what it must do. The concept of family complexity engages the problem of representation, but only by thinking about families that differ from dominant representations. I propose instead that family complexity is a more useful concept when family is thought in terms of difference in-itself. To do so I draw from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, a mid-20th century French philosopher, whose ideas of difference in-itself and multiplicity provides a way of engaging representation as a production rather than a re-presentation of experience.

The implications of the philosophy of difference Deleuze presents are vast, but at the very least create new assumptions for method. Rather than develop a single methodology I focus on how researchers, especially qualitative researchers, can develop methods through their own theoretical practice. To demonstrate, I experiment and improvise with the semiotics of family in child welfare using film. While the production of family occurs in many different spaces and through various processes, family production in child welfare is unique because of the way in which institutions, people, and agencies engage with signifiers in the production of family. Ultimately, the
project is a means of questioning how family might escape the constraints of representation, but also how family researchers can engage in research in a way that allows for messy, complex, and productive inquiry.
CHAPTER 1
DELEUZE: WHO IS HE AND WHAT IS HE GOOD FOR?

The best way to deal with dead authors is to resurrect them as if they were alive today to help us to think.

—Bruno Latour

*Gabriel Tarde and the End of the Social*

If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it?

—Michel Foucault

*Technologies of the Self*

I have written this paragraph more times than I can remember and so I have provided multiple openings.¹ I have thought about starting with a story, a personal statement, a traditional opening in which I explain how important this topic is and how everyone should be concerned about it, but none of them fit by themselves. The problem with starting is that there is no real starting point. If I pointed to where I think it began no one would recognize it. As Foucault says above, if I knew where this would end I may not have started it. That does not mean that I am not glad I did it or that I had a terrible experience in the process, but it was challenging, timeless, and not very popular. The question of having the courage referenced above is two-fold, “Would I have had the courage to do what I did?”, but also “Would I have the courage to go through the process knowing what it would take?”

The reason for the difficulty in writing this dissertation as well as the inspiration for it was Gilles Deleuze, a French philosopher who wrote during the middle to late 20th century. Deleuze composed an entire philosophical body of work on difference and

¹ see *Appendix A and Chapter 5*
repetition. He was a contemporary and colleague of Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Felix Guattari, and Jacques Derrida among others. Deleuze’s philosophy aims to shift philosophy away from representation. He did this through the work of other philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson, as well as many others. My goal in working with Deleuze was to combine what I saw as three separate things. One was the theory/philosophy of Deleuze, and in many cases Felix Guattari—a French psychoanalyst who coauthored several works with Deleuze—another was the study of family, specifically focusing on child welfare, and then there was video or film, which I wanted to use as a research medium. I had a theoretical grounding, a topic, and a method, but it was unclear was how to work these together. While I tried not to mimic the methods of others who had done similar work, there are examples of this kind of “messy” methodology (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015; Nordstrom, 2017) and there are many points of connection between this project and other “Deleuzian” research methodologies (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013).

The path that I took was confusing and frustrating. Deleuze’s philosophy is about getting away from classical representation and fixed signification, but my academic training has always been about bolting things down to create accurate representations. At the outset, then, I should say that this dissertation is not exactly what happened, but

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2 Foucault and Deleuze knew each other well throughout their careers and had high and low points. Foucault invited Deleuze to join the Department of Philosophy at University of Paris VIII, Vincennes, (Lyotard was also there during this period) they read each other’s work, had good things to say about each other and even had a scuffle over a graduate student’s dissertation. When Foucault died, Deleuze spoke at his funeral, even though they had not seen each other in several years (Dosse, 2010, p. 306). Deleuze later wrote a book about Foucault and Foucault wrote the introduction to Deleuze and Guattarí’s Anti-Oedipus. While the two write differently and take on different topics much of their philosophy agrees with the others’. For this reason, Foucault can be thought of as a useful point of reference for readers unfamiliar with Deleuze.
it is an active contracting of a series of past events in the present (Deleuze, 1968/1994). It is what I think it is at this point in time, knowing that at some future point I will contract it differently. With this in mind I start by overviewing Deleuze’s philosophy focusing mainly on difference, which is the foundation of his philosophy. The intent is to provide the readers with an introduction to Deleuze that will allow them to navigate the rest of the dissertation.

**Representation and Difference**

Deleuze addresses many philosophical questions extending back into the history of thought. However, he does this by choosing to align himself with theorists that may be considered lesser known. For instance, where Descartes moves to separate mind, body, and spirit into a scheme of transcendence (i.e., the body is corrupt, the mind better, the spirit perfect), Deleuze chooses Spinoza—philosopher of immanence and Descartes’ heretical contemporary (Deleuze, 1970/1988). In another case, rather than following John Locke’s conception of self, which forms the basis for modern thinking about the development of self, Deleuze chooses David Hume. Hume is skeptical of Locke’s ideas and theorizes instead an idea of self that arises out of habit rather than an *a priori* blank slate.³ There is also Bergson rather than Einstein and Tarde rather than Durkheim, this is not to say that Deleuze embraces everything that these theorists say, but that he finds ways to use their work together that have not been used and to develop problems not yet heard of (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/1987).

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³ I am not suggesting here that Locke is a rationalist, but that even the idea of the empirical *tabula rasa* self assumes a unified self.
Deleuze is often considered a post-structuralist (Best & Kellner, 1997); however, distinguishing between structuralism and poststructuralism is not necessarily helpful, neither are they separated among social theorists in France (Gane, 2003). However, in the interest of establishing some familiarity, it may be helpful to reference this distinction, but to avoid the idea that post-structuralism is a refutation to structuralism. Instead, it may be more helpful to think of post-structuralism as a modification to or a further development of the structuralism of Saussure, Lacan, and Levi-Strauss (Best & Kellner, 1997). In other words, Deleuze is not rejecting structuralism, but rethinks the basis for structure and inherent meaning by taking what he thinks “works” in structuralism and developing it further (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). While Deleuze’s writing originated in this period it has become more popular recently because his work has been influential in theoretical movements including the new empiricisms, new materialisms, post-humanism, postcolonialism, material semiotics, and affect theory, which are commonly associated with authors such as Karen Barad, Rosie Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Gayatri Spivak, Erin Manning, and Brian Massumi many of whom are used in what some have called post-qualitative research (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013).

The most important concept for Deleuze is difference. He uses difference as the basis for being. Deleuze comes to this conclusion by interrogating the idea of difference. We often think of difference as a difference of juxtaposition (e.g., the difference between this and that). We could also think of difference as being the slightest variation of a

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4 More commonly known as “Actor-network theory,” but I prefer “material semiotics” as does Bruno Latour (Latour, 2002)
thing. For example, individual families vary, but are still considered families. In these cases difference is created through a logic of negation in that we determine what a thing is by determining what it is not, either on a general or specific level. However, Deleuze moves to interrogate the “in-itself” of difference (Kant, 1781/1998). Difference in-itself is difference without a common denominator, it is a question of what difference actually is when detached from representation. This concept is challenging because it is so far from how we typically think of difference (e.g., variation within or without an identity).

It may be useful here to review which philosophical ideas Deleuze was reacting to during his career and why difference is so central. A major implication of Deleuze’s centering of difference is that it creates an asymmetrical being, which is a way of saying that being cannot be opposed to nothingness. This is a continuation of the work of French scholars preceding Deleuze including Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the existential phenomenologists and Deleuze’s own teacher Georges Canguilheim, who wrote specifically on deviation and normality (1966). The ideas of these philosophers were a response to philosophy built upon Descartes’ cogito (i.e., thought as the criteria for being) and Hegel’s dialectic of opposition (i.e., thesis/antithesis/synthesis), which opposed being to nothingness or juxtaposed a thing to its opposition or negation, these binary relations became the foundation for meaning in structuralism (Jenkins, 2002). Sartre is particularly relevant for Deleuze, especially his claim that there cannot be nothingness because any reference to a non-entity or a negative presupposes the thing it is trying to negate (Sartre, 1956). For example, there is no such thing as non-family because the idea of family must be contained within non-family. Therefore, attempts to determine the existence of a thing by negation can only
be done in thought or representation—negation cannot be experienced because it would become something by definition. However, to get around this we can oppose one thing to another thing, rather than nothingness, which creates a dialectic. In the case of family, this means that rather than comparing family against what is not-family it becomes a case of comparing extremes family defined in opposition to the individual or to society or community. Internally, family becomes similarly divided by opposition on common dimensions (i.e., biological/non-biological, complex/simple, single/married). The implications of these ideas are that being is “simple” and can easily be divided up dichotomously on various common criteria such as in the case of taxonomic representation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987).

The relevant conclusion for Deleuze’s ontology is that while we can speak in negative terms, the negative always implies the thing it seeks to negate, suggesting that we can never really negate anything.\(^5\) This implies that there is no cutting up of reality, but instead a folding in (Deleuze, 1988/1993). In other words, while we may be able to cut up, separate, negate, and compare representations of the world in thought, in experience or in time\(^6\) these representations fold into experience again. Making difference central to being provides a philosophical justification for folding, but this must be difference-in-itself not the difference that we identify in our minds. Difference-itself is

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\(^5\) This should not be taken to mean that we cannot use negative terms or prefixes such as “not,” “no,” “un-,” or “non-”, but that negative terms do not negate, but add to. For instance, in the case of family the description “the family has three children, does not have a father at home, and lives in a small apartment” describes what the family is as a series of properties that compose the family, but also reference the opposite of the negative, that there should be a father at home.

\(^6\) Time is an important concept for Deleuze. Combining repetition with difference he reconceives time as the repetition of difference (Deleuze, 1968/1994). I discuss this more in chapter 2, but Deleuze borrows Bergson’s idea of time as a series of instants that form a rhythm or what Bergson calls “duration.” The important distinction is that in time moments blend into each other so that there is no discrete unit or experience.
affectual, it is sensed rather than thought (Deleuze, 1969/1990). Representation constrains difference, forcing it to conform to prior configurations of difference and identity. In this way dependence on form, identity, and representation prevent real change because they always become tied to prior representations. In a family context this is incredibly problematic because the representation of family becomes more important than the family itself. Thus families may be suspected of wrongful behavior because they do not conform to the dominant representation or families may even wear themselves out attempting to conform to a model that is not within their power to produce.

Deleuze argues that difference is typically relegated to a difference from identity (i.e., representation). This may proceed as an infinitely large difference between two terms such as in the case of opposition or an infinitely small difference in terms of the smallest possible difference between two terms. In these cases it is not difference itself that is being referenced but a broad difference in terms of identity. In other words, the focus is on the representation of the concept and the shoring up of representations rather than how difference itself plays out in ontological terms. For example, in the case of family we may look at infinitely large differences by comparing family on a single dimension in terms of complexity, sexuality, or race; but we can also compare particular families by their very specific differences. However, in both cases our focus is on reinforcing the representation and identity of family, rather than on difference. Deleuze seeks to place difference in the center, that it is difference in-itself that forms the basis for being, rather than ideal forms or mental structures. What we experience as objects is difference. For example, in the process of experiencing a tree it is not the “tree” that we
experience, but the difference it “makes.” Thus what we experience is the making of difference in that particular duration of time. Mentally, we can then abstract out that experience into discrete objects, but the experience itself, the sensations we feel is not the tree, but the difference.

While Deleuze is an empiricist, he is considered a radical in that his focus is not on empiricism as a means of validating a given image, but to create something beyond what we have experienced (Williams, 2013). This may seem mystical, but he is encouraging us to think outside of the world we view to the world we are in. He is attempting to expand our notions of knowledge and what we can know. This is the Nietzschean Deleuze who never arrives but is always searching (Nietzsche, 1900). Centering being on difference is to found it on movement or a flow, a stream, or a current without destination (Daniel Smith & Protevi, 2015; Williams, 2013). Thus Deleuze’s project frees difference from the dominance of identity (i.e., the labeling and bounding of a thing) by making difference primary and identity secondary, creating a focus on difference itself rather than the supposed unity of an identity centered on commonality or sameness. Concerning identity and difference Deleuze wrote, “That identity not be first, that it exist as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle become; that it revolve around the Different: such would be the nature of a Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept, rather than being maintained under the domination of a concept in general already understood as identical.” (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 41). In this view what a thing is constantly fluctuates so that there really are no stable beings (i.e., is or are), but becomings.
Difference-in-itself helps us understand difference, but repetition or ‘repetition-for-itself’ helps us to understand how difference occurs. The concept of repetition has to do with time on a plane of immanence, with difference as the criteria for being. Deleuze explored ontological time with Bergson (Deleuze, 1966/1988) as an alternative to linear and psychological time (May, 2005). In ontological time there is a folding and refolding, or expression, of substance (material). For Deleuze, the present is the difference from an expression or duration of substance, the past is the accumulation of past expressions, not just of the individual (psychological time) but of the collective past (May, 2005), and the future is the potential expression of substance. These are summed up in the concepts of the virtual—unexpressed or unconscious potential differences, and the actual—expressed or conscious difference (Deleuze, 1968/1994). In this way time is not linked to any objective element—rotation or movement of the earth, or fluctuations in isotopes linked to signifiers such as seconds, minutes, hours, days—but to the repetition and the difference that repetition creates. This is not the repetition of the same (i.e., commonality and identity), but the repeating of that which differs. This is a little confusing, but if we think about how we perceive time it is the repetition of difference. If the world was stagnant then we would not perceive time or we would perceive time in discrete motions, but instead we perceive it as continuous fluctuation, which we delineate by the tiny differences that occur out of repetitious flow of experience.

For the purpose of this project, what is most important to understand is that life is a series of differences in time we create representations by framing difference, giving it an identity and juxtaposing it to other representations. The creation of representations is
not the problem but the reifying of representations. Unfortunately, this is not something that can be overcome easily, but because the basis for all being is difference, difference is constantly slipping through, breaking representation open and becoming something else. There is a process of resistance, then, to the tyranny of representation. My attempt has been to tap into that resistance that breaks out and escapes identity and organization.

**Family, Video, and Deleuze**

The quote at the beginning of this chapter expresses the challenge of a project of this type and some of my personal feelings. This dissertation did not proceed in a formulaic manner. Instead, the purpose was to take some of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ideas and “incarnate it in a foreign medium” but this was easier said than done (Massumi, 1992, p. 8). Their writing is challenging, traditional topics were not amenable to their ideas (i.e., investigating meaning or causation), and there were never any clear rules for using their concepts, but that is the point—to some extent. Deleuze’s style is based on the idea of a refrain, a repetition that tangles itself up in meaning. As a result he never entirely defines his concepts, choosing instead to use the words in context so that the reader must experience them, allow themselves to become entangled. This technique creates openings for further connection because there are no boundaries to the concept and it can be interpreted with a wide degree of freedom. At the same time, this is a relatively frustrating technique, especially when combined with philosophically

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7 Structural linguists point to the binary structure of language in that meaning is derived from binary oppositions (e.g., light/dark, happy/sad, simple/complex). Derrida, however, advocated for a deconstruction of binaries suggesting that they were ways of reinforcing power and domination. Deleuze goes by resisting meaning creation through relative opposition and comparison by using terms and allowing them to develop their own connections.
loaded terms, but it helps to think about this process in the same way that we think of a
child learning language—hearing words, producing sounds, and making connections
between objects, sounds, and gestures.

The way that we think about family is important as it engages with our
representations of family and these representations act as a means of controlling what
family can and/or should be. Historically family scholars have focused on the form and
function of family and identifying universal. For example, early family observations by
anthropologists sought to determine the universal aspects of family (Malinowski, 1963).
During this period family researchers identified family life stages (Rodgers & White,
1993), structures (Parsons, 1949), functioning (Parsons & Bales, 1956), and optimum
coping patterns (Hill, 1958). In all of these cases there was a focus on determining the
best structures and consequently functioning, not surprisingly, the version of family
considered ideal was the upper class, two parent, heterosexual, European family.
Cross-comparative studies such as Malinowski’s (1963) study of aboriginal families
were completed to find elements of the European family in aboriginal families, which
would give further credence to superiority of the European family. In this way the
nuclear family was abstracted out as a transcendent or ideal form because it performed
the functions needed of the family in society in the simplest and most efficient manner.
Contemporary studies of family suggest that nuclear families still function best or that
non-nuclear families are more likely to have negative outcomes (Amato, 2001; Kierkus
& Hewitt, 2009; Ziol-Guest & Dunifon, 2014); however, to claim that the form of family is
the reason is to suggest that form is independent of—transcends—cultural and
economic forces essentially confusing the effect with the cause (Ganong, Coleman, & Mapes, 1990; Ginther & Pollak, 2004; Valiquette-Tessier, Vandette, & Gosselin, 2016).

Shifts in policy, including an emphasis on economic advantage have shifted studies of family in the contemporary era that challenged more traditional notions of family, but refocused family in terms of outcomes and efficiency. This shift in focus has allowed for critiques of the traditional or nuclear family as well as an expansion of support for marginalized families; however, they have not resulted in an ontological shift of what family is. Rather, contemporary theorizing has provided support for a greater variety of family forms that deviate from the nuclear family—provided these families maintain positive outcomes and self-sufficiency. The greatest example of this shift may be the use of comparison studies to determine outcomes for gay and straight couples as a justification for families with same-sex (Biblarz & Savci, 2010). In this way changes in family have re-rooted in the ideal of self-sufficiency, in which “self-sufficiency” is a determination made by the sociopolitical apparatus and the implicit and explicit goal for the family by the economic, cultural, and political systems (HUD, 2016). It is not surprising, then, to see family become disconnected from prior ideal standards focused on form and reconnected to ideal standards of functioning. The nuclear form and its “simple” and “ideal” labels continue to fit into these new scheme by referring to the belief that the nuclear family functions efficiently and that the form transcends other forms in its ability to produce positive outcomes, but deviation is allowed given that economic standards can continue to be met. In other words, family structure is no longer as

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8 This idea is reinforced when researchers group family in terms of nuclear and not-nuclear (Kierkus & Hewitt, 2009), which translates to comparing a very specific family structure to a wide range of other family configurations producing statistical significance, but meaningless results.
important for cultural reasons, but because of its potential links to desirable economic outcomes. The nuclear family’s idealization in culture cannot then be separated from the efficiency it provides political and economic systems.

Shifts in economic and power relations also change the state’s involvement in family. Over the past century legal authority has become increasingly important in the lives of family, but especially relevant among families with fewer resources. The 19th and 20th centuries saw family becoming more fully subject to the state by subverting the power of the father (P. Meyer, 1983). During this period the state certified birth documentation and parentage, and in the 1970s courts began to certify paternity as well (Cherlin & Seltzer, 2014). Orphanages, once places of confinement, were opened up in the late 20th century as child welfare shifted away from institutionalization and into foster and group homes as well as adoption (Askeland, 2006). Additionally, former government entities moved into the private sector or began to contract with private agencies beginning in the 1960s (Netting, McMurtry, Kettner, & Jones-McClintic, 1990). Government entities focused on child welfare and the state issued the official existence documents for the child (i.e., birth certificate, death certificate), provided best practices for the medical treatment of the child (noncompliance can result in discipline or court-ordered medical care), and linked financial assistance to compliance with medical standards (i.e., psychosocial developmental milestones). While these examples can be seen as negative in many ways they represent shifts away from damaging practices that can be harmful to children and are certainly created with the best interest of the child in mind. At the same time, it is important to recognize that these changes also result in a
fundamental shift in family from one that is controlled by patriarchal authority to a family beholden to the authority of the state (Engels & Hunt, 2010).

While family has become a highly regulated social group, there have been some attempts to think family in new ways, especially with epistemological shifts occurring over the last half of the 20th century. Social constructionism was influential in this period, which suggests the importance of society in the personal constructions of family (Dermott & Seymour, 2011) including how families are created through discourse (J. F. Gubrium & Holstein, 1990) or by doing and displaying family (Finch, 2007; Morgan, 2013). These more subjectivist oriented approaches emphasize the need for nuance and particulars within family definitions, especially as it concerns historically marginalized groups (Biblarz & Savci, 2010). There are also examples of 'post-modern' theorizing in more current scholarship that attempt to rethink ideas of kinship, fatherhood, or the materiality of the family (Laurie & Stark, 2012; Lupton & Barclay, 1997; Schadler, 2016); however, these ideas have yet to be incorporated in the United States originating mainly with theorists in Europe or Australia.

Part of the difficulty in thinking about family in new ways is because of how methods constrain what knowledge can be produced. Our methodologies are more than technologies for knowledge production, but form paths in the ontological-epistemological field, thereby inscribing definitions of family. In other words if our methods require discrete representations of family (e.g., numbers, unified bodies, themes) then we will discuss and therefore produce families in discrete terms—spatial configurations with cause/effect relations. Studies of family almost always seek to lay family out by cutting it up and organizing it into discrete parts with clear causal relations.
Even qualitative research in family works to provide nuance to some of the general phenomena by laying out and analyzing subjective narratives related to family most notably through coding texts (Hendricks & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015). Thus, any attempt at rethinking family or considering family in more affectual or continuous terms requires methods capable of the task.

Film provides an odd solution to the issue of discrete analysis. Deleuze suggests that film (video) provides the means to put discrete elements in their continuity through montage. The human eye takes in light from the environment and constructs a picture. However, while light is reflected continuously, our brains do not process images continuously. Instead, movement is assembled and perceived by the change in images, perceived as motion. The German psychologist Max Wertheimer’s experiments in motion perception were an important in developing this idea, known as the phi phenomenon (Wertheimer, 1912). This phenomenon, in which discrete flashes of light are perceived as motion requires approximately 10-12 images per second to be realized. It is this phenomenon that makes film and video possible by making discrete images appear continuous. While it is true that the images on film do not actually move—they are representations of movement--Deleuze suggests that montage or the succession of still, but rapidly changing images creates an image in itself, which he refers to as a movement-image (Deleuze, 1983/1986). This image is a material process in that it is a production of light and a series of poses that allows for recognition in the same way that we see anything else and that while objects around us appear stagnant, all these are within a series of movement the same as film. Thus, what we experience as the world is actually a sequence of matter or a movement-image just as in the case
of film. Considering Deleuze’s conclusions about film it seems that extending these ideas into studies of family would allow for moving out of discrete analysis and into a continuous, qualitative, and affectual study of family that focuses on the potential of family or what family is capable of.

Overview

In the next three chapters I discuss the above argument in more detail as well as my methodological decisions and resulting productions. These chapters work together, but are composed in a way that would allow them to be published separately, thus they are meant to work as stand-alone articles. Each is composed in a different style as well, which would allow for publication in different journals depending on the content area of the journal and its editorial style. Chapter two visits the idea of family complexity which has become popular in recent decades. It explains the idea of family complexity and its reliance on representations of family rather than family-itself. To do so I review Henri Bergson’s concepts of multiplicity and duration and bring in Deleuze’s ontology of difference to think about family complexity and qualitative research in family studies. Chapter three overviews the challenges of working with “difficult” theorists such as Deleuze. It proposes thinking about theory as a disciplinary practice and method as an improvisational technique that when put together can allow the author to develop new methods for producing knowledge and escaping the control and coercion of academic space. Chapter four thinks through family in the child welfare system using video. The chapter is brief, with the focus remaining on the videos themselves and encourages the reader/viewer to think about the films not as conclusions, but as provocations and continuations. Finally, chapter five concludes this work, but does so by introducing brief ideas that depart somewhat from the main body of this work. These are ideas that were
developed in the process of writing, but were left unexplored. It could be that these are potential points of departure for future projects or lines of thought for both the author and reader.

This dissertation moves through many different areas and many competing fields and as a result runs the risk of some serious criticism. Therefore, in closing this opening chapter I present one final thought—extending from a conversation with a colleague after a long day at an academic conference—that the easiest and laziest critique to level against this kind of experimental or improvisational methods is to ask, “What’s the point?” and a close second is something along the lines of “What is its contribution to (insert whatever it is that the asker values—for example, “social justice,” “the field,” or “science”)?” The second case is a more specific version of the first and both cases—when asked to intimidate or dismiss—are the wrong question. The value of a line of research/writing/theory is never the question of the author (obviously the author finds the work valuable), but the question of the reader. It may be that some elements inspire while others dissuade and each element produces differently in any set it encounters. In other words, value is always determined in relation to various conditions, which create a varied utility. Asking the “creator” for the utility of a concept or an idea stops thought by asking for a pre-packaged, already-chewed, or easily-digestible utility that precludes one from engaging with the line to see what they can produce. This seems to be the current situation as the production of knowledge positions itself in a signifying positionality that barks out orders and directs an individual’s behavior in the name of health and justice (Braidotti, 2007): “Don’t eat that, you’ll get fat!” “Form a line and make it diverse!” “Stop smoking, you’ll get cancer!” “Eat your peas!” “Add some Latinas to
Neoliberalism is a kind of practicality that asks for packaged utility, demands complicity, stifles creativity, and reinforces the state of things in the very act of addressing injustices. Like a baby bird, it asks, “Can you please chew this up and spit it into my mouth? You wouldn’t require me to manage it myself, would you?” It is a pervasive movement that seeks to encourage illiteracy and miseducation through good intentions. Our current political milieu is a reaction against the fascism of science, but as a reversion to authoritarianism. It demands even simpler statements and solutions it is the result of miseducation and illiteracy: a bird who presents everything in 180 characters.

The tools for fighting oppression and injustice do not lie in debating the intricacies of specific methods or questioning the intent of the author, but asking, “What does this make possible? What can I do with it?” If the answer is nothing, then move on, but if there is something to add, then do it! Internal criticism does not enable, but disables the strength and creativity necessary in resisting and struggling for justice and while this entire section could be one giant cop-out—and it may be—the point remains: you cannot fight fascism with fascism.
CHAPTER 2
FAMILY COMPLEXITY: GETTING BEYOND STRUCTURE

Family complexity is concept that has become more popular in recent years and typically defined as family forms that fall outside of the “traditional”—two-parent, heterosexual, upper-middle class, white—or nuclear family. While the concept is getting more attention, it is not new. In the early 80s Glen Elder wrote about the idea of family complexity using W. I. Thomas’ *The Polish Peasant* and Robert Merton’s *Social Structure*. Elder (1981) was interested in the changes from the nuclear family that occurred during the 1970s, most likely because of the rise in the divorce rate during this period. More recently, researchers cite structural and formation pattern aberrations including the number of children in the family, the number and gender of parents (Goldberg, 2010), divorce and remarriage, multiple-partner fertility (Carlson & Meyer, 2014), later child-bearing ages, or childlessness (Furstenberg, 2014). Scholars point to large social, cultural, and economic shifts as the causes for deviations from the “traditional” family, but also social issues such as mass incarceration, education, and job readiness (L. M. Berger & Bzostek, 2014; Carlson & Meyer, 2014; Furstenberg, 2014; Sykes & Pettit, 2014). At a base level, then, family complexity refers to a family composed of many parts as opposed to a few or a family formation pattern that does not follow a direct path. There are some potential problems with these ideas, most notably whether or not family is or was ever simple or “traditional” (Coontz, 1992). However, family complexity does have merit in that it looks at the diversity and variety of families in general and allows family more freedom of movement and acceptance. Unfortunately, current ideas of family complexity lack sufficient nuance and in many cases is only used as a substitute for less socially acceptable terms referring to families that are deemed
dysfunctional or inefficient. The intention of this paper is to lend some additional considerations and a theoretical basis for family complexity in hopes of developing the concept as a tool for thinking about family rather than another label.

An important part of determining complexity in families relates to how we represent families, the criteria we use to form our representations, and how well families fit our criteria. This is the first problem with family complexity as currently defined, it is more an issue of representation than it is an issue of families themselves. When we observe families our observations fall into a kind of line between ideal observations—which fit our criteria perfectly—and chaos—which we can never quite make sense of because it deviates so far beyond our representational criteria (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 262). In between these we form a general idea of family with specific internal variations. To make out particular variations we require a common criteria along which family can vary we do this by comparing how well specific forms conform to the general criteria. For example, number of parents, number of children, income can all be used to compare and subdivide the category “family.” However, we can also look multidimensionally by comparing a given family to an ideal family in general: two-parent, heterosexual, two or three children, a house, stable income. Given that this representation fulfills the contemporary goals of family, which is to raise children independent of external support, comparing families to this model allows us to make conclusions about the negative outcomes when families deviate from this ideal.

Family in general is the simplest or purest form of family because the criteria must be few and broad. This is different than saying the thing itself is simple, rather the criteria are simple (few). This general form must be the simplest or purest type of family
because the criteria must be able to fit all families. Thus there is a significant connection between what we recognize as family and what family does. It is important to remember that while criteria can always change, currently the simplest criteria for family is considered to be reproduction, caregiving, and the social relations that extend from it. The centering of children as the essential characteristic of family means that at a general level the simplest form of reproduction would then be a man, woman and their child. This is the foundation of the nuclear family,¹ which is the dominant representation of family in the current era. Anything termed “family” then must have some point of commonality with the nuclear representation, but families may not perfectly fit these basic criteria. Thus, family on a specific level become deviations from the simplest form, which is the form in general. Families that deviate significantly from the nuclear form become “complex” in that they require more parts (i.e., people and institutions) to fulfill the basic function of biological reproduction and caregiving (Carlson & Meyer, 2014). Indeed, discussions of family complexity often posit a kind of binary organization between simple (nuclear) and not simple (complex) (L. M. Berger & Bzostek, 2014; Elder, 1981; Goldberg, 2010; D. R. Meyer & Carlson, 2014), and the trend of increasing family complexity refers to an increase in families who deviate from the nuclear in formation, function, and structure. Thus complexity scholarship, as is currently conceived, is a study of variation from the nuclear form.

It is important to recognize that the nuclear family is a representation, statistically it is not the most common family configuration—as there are more divorced and

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¹ I want to emphasize that the nuclear family is considered ideal because of the criteria selection of what may be termed family, not because it is in fact the best form. It is the simplest form given the criteria for what is selected as family.
remarried families (Livingston, 2014). However, it is still clear that this idea of family is dominant regardless of its statistical existence. For example, recent changes in the U.S. have redefined marriage as a relationship independent of gender. However, this is simply a redefining of dominant or “normal” practices. The dominant form is reinforced by research surrounding family that often seeks to sustain “normal” families (via the questions asked, results chosen, data collected, etc.). However, the idea is dominant regardless of the actuality. The upholding of the dominant family is dependent not only on the values of individuals, but also includes the values of the economic and political systems, societal institutions as well as discursive regimes. All these produce family structures that are most beneficial for the dominant regime. These are in turn reinforced as the moral ideal (i.e., the two-parent heterosexual family) through various institutions including medicine and religion (Donzelot, 1977/1979). Thus as families encounter institutions they are labeled normal or deviant with those unqualified entering into a system of surveillance, policing, and rehabilitation (dependency), which becomes a means of either producing better producers/consumers or at the very least, separating the bad so that they cannot corrupt the good.

While the dominant mode of family may be nuclear, there have been plenty of debates over the claim that the nuclear family is the ideal family form (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Cherlin, 2004; Popenoe, 1993; Stacey, 1993); and contemporary theorizing and activism has allowed for changes to the form of family, but the nuclear family remains a vital point of reference. However, the supreme court’s decision in Loving v. Virginia of 1967, increasing divorce rates spiking toward the end of the 1970s, and later activism in the 1980s by LGBT groups and the shift created some commotion in the early 1990s
with scholars decrying the end of “the traditional family” (Popenoe, 1993) or celebrating its demise (Stacey, 1993). Demographic changes related to gender and work (Cherlin, 1988) as well as the removing of gender and sexuality as structural elements of family (Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001) led to the need for new ways of studying and understanding family with some turning to social constructionist epistemologies (J. F. Gubrium & Holstein, 1990) while others complicated objectivist models of family through systems theory (Broderick, 1993). Much of this led to some questioning as to the changing place of marriage in society (Cherlin, 2004) and the need for a look a broader view of the family, which would include multigenerational bonds (Bengtson, 2001). Most recently, Obergefell v. Hodges represented a dramatic legal shift because of the broadening of family culturally as well as persistent activism by LGBT groups, as well as family scholars (Coontz, 1992; Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005) over several decades.

Contemporary capitalism requires more than what was offered by the nuclear family. The changes in the mean and mode of production have required women and men to work without confinement to the factory or office and moved work into the home as more effective communication became available (e.g., email, text, phone, video conference), which allows for the crossing over of family and work that is often applauded (i.e., flexible schedules, working from home) while creating strain from the impossible demands placed upon bodies to work, raise and educate children, and maintain activity as a citizen in the community (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). The fulfilling of these demands has enabled the creation or growth of additional industries
(i.e., daycare, food service, convenience products, housekeeping services) ending the confinement of family to the home while increasing control.

The broader acceptance of variations from the nuclear family and the increasing interest in family complexity should not be surprising as the two are one in the same. The broader issue relates to why the nuclear family remains dominant when so many non-nuclear families are accepted. Smith (1993) addressed this by suggesting that the nuclear family is a “generator of procedures for selecting syntax, categories, and vocabulary in the writing of texts and the production of talk and for interpreting sentences, written or spoken, ordered by it” (p. 52). In other words, the nuclear family becomes the comparison point for any other reference to “family” because it is the dominant representation. Because the nuclear family fits the general family criteria in the simplest form, it becomes embedded in language and thought, as the underlying object of reference for any particular family representation. Thus, it is not simply another variation, but the point from which all other families vary. Thinking along with Smith, we can see how any future or current ideas about family policy (e.g., married/single tax filings; WIC), housing (e.g., single-family homes), schooling (e.g., parent involvement, especially during in-school hours), and even consumer products (e.g., “family car”) develop in relation to the nuclear family. Additionally, shifts in family form, function, and acceptance have created a broad range of families consisting simply of not-nuclear that scholars have grouped in many different names, but they all remain as deviations and in some cases deviants. For example, “blended,” “fragile,” “single-parent,” “uninvolved,” or “abusive.” Regardless of the label, what remains is that these terms derive their meaning by their opposition to the representation in general.
Considering the embeddedness of the nuclear representation or image of family rethinking family, and therefore complexity, requires reconsidering difference and unleashing it from the requirements of representation. In order to do this I enlist the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, a mid-20th century French philosopher who wrote extensively on difference. The crux of Deleuze’s philosophy is to divorce philosophy from the confines of platonic representation, which has been remade through successive generations of philosophical thought (e.g., Augustine, Descartes, Kant), and is the basis for much of what we have just reviewed. Building off of the existential phenomenologists Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze works to think through being without juxtaposing it to nothingness, seeing that nothingness presupposes being (Sartre, 1956). In this same way, Deleuze is helpful for engaging family without representation or at least more fluid representations.

**Representation and Multiplicity**

Discussing family beyond a simple-complex binary is a question of rethinking the criteria for determining what family is. However, the creation of a new criteria for determining representations of family is problematic because it only creates a new ideal. At the same time, representations are necessary for us to think about family and make research and policy decisions. Therefore, rather than determining a criteria that would provide a single best definition for family here I think through the process by which we produce criteria for determining what family is. This is a process of making sense of family through the creation of dimensions on which family can be created through comparison and juxtaposition. In other words, it is a process of taking the chaos of innumerable interactions and choosing how to group these interactions and define the subjects engaged in these interactions.
To think about this further I turn to the concept of multiplicity first introduced by Henri Bergson and later used and expanded by Deleuze. A multiplicity, for Bergson, is a unity composed of multiple parts; however, a unified body is also a perception (Bergson, 1889/1950, p. 81). Bergson suggests that “every image is within certain images and without others” (p. 13). Therefore images\(^2\) can be both part of an image and whole. For example, a person may be a part of a family, but also a part of a school or workplace, which are all parts of society but the person is also a multiplicity of appendages, tissue, bacteria, and parasites. Thinking in this way Bergson pushes us further to think of multiplicity as enumeration (Lawlor & Moulard, 2016) or the means by which we divide and combine images. For instance, how we combine a set of images (organs) into “human” or a group of humans into “family.” When counting families we must determine the criteria for which images ‘count’ as family. In so doing we combine various images to form “family” and “not-family.” However, what counts as family changes, so that something that was “not-family” at one point may be considered family at a later point. In this way a given image is never a universal category, but it is always a part of the thing itself. In other words, thinking of family as multiplicity suggests that family appears unified, but shifts as the criteria for what composes family changes.

The beauty of the concept of multiplicity lies in the way it takes in the images it produces of itself. Determining discrete parts necessitates the formation of a “set” of basic elements. In this case the definition of the set takes place as the parts are

\(^2\) Bergson suggested thinking of the materialism-idealism debate by using the concept of an image (1896/1962). This is not a reference to a visual image, but a suggestion that matter was an “aggregate of images,” each image being “less than what the materialist calls a thing” but more than what the idealist calls a “representation” (pp. xi-xii). Thus, everything is an image, not a thought nor a material object, but a connection of matter and thought.
defined. This should not be confused with the logic of ‘both/and,’ but rather the redefinition of the two together meaning the set defines the elements and the elements define the set, they are not separate entities, but relations (i.e., parts a,b,c necessitate set X, set Y necessitates parts f,g,h). However, the definition of elements and sets does not suggest these exist within a closed system. The defining of elements and sets is a process of bracketing in or closing off “outside” elements. In this way the concept disturbs the idea of stable representation as it connects image sets together. For example, rather than taking a unity of family and determining its parts, multiplicity connects additional images, including the image of the thing itself, to others, creating an ability for the multiplicity to shift depending in different contexts. Thinking about family with this concept creates family as a set of connected discrete images—people, homes, neighborhoods, behaviors, and so on. These images are connected and combined to form additional images that become elements of the multiplicity. Thus, multiplicity allows us to see how our observation and labeling of family is not through a one-way mirror (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), but that the labels and observations become elements of the thing itself.

This idea of multiplicity is useful because it provides additional layers to family by allowing us to think about how family is both composed of elements and an element of other compositions, it is both multiple and singular. However, Bergson goes even further with this concept by suggesting that there are two types of multiplicity—a discrete multiplicities and continuous multiplicities (Bergson, 1896/1962). The multiplicities are defined by how they treat difference, a difference in kind for the continuous multiplicity and difference in degree for the discrete multiplicity. Discrete and continuous
multiplicities are not things themselves, but means of enumeration. Thus we can see how a given event could have both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Viewing only the quantitative dimensions provides a discrete analysis, but truncates what occurred in the event. Thinking about family and family complexity is a useful way to reconsider the complexity of determining the criteria of family, but also the way in which families exist differently in time and space.

**Discrete Multiplicities and Difference in degree**

A discrete multiplicity enumerates spatial dimensions, meaning that its elements are discrete and can be compared and counted. Therefore, the underlying assumption of a spatial multiplicity is that there must be a uniform medium on which to compare a given thing. For example, if we are to compare one family to another, there must be a uniform dimension on which to compare them. Numbers figure heavily in a discrete multiplicity because they are uniform and can therefore be used for an exact comparison, counted, or indexed. For this reason Bergson also calls a discrete multiplicity a quantitative multiplicity. More broadly, anytime we describe something in terms of amounts or quantities, for example “more” or “less,” we describe what Bergson calls a difference in degree, which characterizes discrete multiplicities. Much of the research we participate in as family scholars falls into determining differences of degree. Whether it is researching family structure, function, and/or outcomes we are concerned with differences in degree.

In order to be comparable, dimensions must be homogeneous and uniform, however, they can be laid out on either on a subjective or objective basis. Discrete multiplicities require clearly delineated conditions and require very specific criteria such as in the case with operational definitions or determining dependents on tax forms (IRS,
2017). However, when delineating in this way there are subject-object relations that must be taken into account. By holding the criteria for the object constant, the object becomes standardized across subjects. In doing so family becomes formed around one specific set of interpretive rules that apply to all families. In the subjective case the consciousness of the subject is unified and standardized, becoming the criteria on which meaning varies (Lawlor & Moulard, 2016). In other words, we hold the subject constant and allow their actions, thoughts, narratives to vary. However, in both cases, be it objective or subjective, we create a homogeneous and uniform medium on which something else can vary—two or more dimensions with one held constant. Whether they are objective or subjective depends on whichever we hold constant either the object or the subject. What is most important to recognize is that there is no actual subjectivity in these cases because the subject must be made constant (an object), an abstraction of itself.

Speaking in terms of family form or structure refers to a spatializing (making uniform and homogeneous) of family. It is a way of creating a spatial representation of family in that it can be laid out, measured, and juxtaposed, whereas family as we experience it through our senses cannot be measured or juxtaposed except after the fact. Thus, in discussing family form we must first admit that a discussion of form is a discussion of family as it was in the past—and thus as a representation—but under the present conditions in which we are discussing/analyzing it. This is not to say that measuring, calculating, and estimating family is ineffective, but it is removed from the thing itself and is therefore limited in what it can do.
Additionally, methods have epistemological needs that reflect an ontological set of conditions that meet the requirements of a question to be answered. For example, in the case of the researcher the question must be discrete in that it can be separated for analysis. However, the discrete answer must assume a discrete world in which entities can be separated out into discrete elements either in totality or by relative approximation. This is most important in research because the purpose is often to make a comparison. However, comparison requires a common substance and dimension. In this case the strategy is to ground both comparison points numerically, which allows for comparison and statistical testing of the mathematical models. However, any resulting model can only be used to make a claim about the representation it created in the process. Thus, form is not independent, there is no family in-itself rather there is family for the sake of a question. In this way it may be more useful to think of research as discrete or continuous, especially considering that what is typically termed qualitative or quantitative use discrete units.

Still, it is useful to think in terms of discrete multiplicities because the concept allows for nesting elements within each other allowing us to recognize that we are in fact forming unified bodies in our minds. However, the danger of discrete multiplicities lays in reifying them rather than recognizing them as mental abstractions. This is especially dangerous in family research, which must define, consciously or unconsciously, the frame for what counts as family, a process that occurs, in part, through our selection of methodologies and methods, but also in policy and legal cases. Thus it is the case that representation “substitute[s] the explanation for the fact itself” (1889/1950, p. 181). It is for this reason that discussions of family complexity fail
because they substitute complexity in discrete multiplicities for the complexity of family itself.

**Continuous Multiplicity and Difference in kind**

At the heart of the idea of family complexity is a philosophical problem of change and heterogeneity. In other words, family is heterogeneous, but also persists over time. Discrete multiplicities work as a means of spatialize enumeration and creating representations by determining discrete criteria. This works through a difference in degree, which operates as a measure between identities. To think of family outside of representation we have to first rethink difference. Deleuze's philosophical project was a rethinking of difference, moving difference away from difference by negation and opposition to think about difference itself. It was difference, and more specifically, the repetition of difference, Deleuze suggested, that is the criteria for being, and by extension, time. While philosophers such as Kant (1781/1998) and Heidegger (1953/2010) had also discussed the importance of time and its relation to free will and existence, respectively. Deleuze’s philosophy also implies a theory of time as well as space by drawing from Henri Bergson (Deleuze, 1966/1988). Deleuze suggests that being occurs within time as a repetition of presents in which each present creates the conditions upon which the current present is based. In suggesting this, Deleuze caps the asymmetry of being by developing a view of time that flows in one direction and that forgets, but does not negate previous presents.

This is a challenging idea, but it is important because the underpinning of what we commonly call complexity presupposes a complex-simple opposition derived from a logic of negation. In this binary a thing that is easily recognized, composed of few parts, or quickly analyzed to ascertain its causative properties is simple, while complex refers
not to a thing itself, but a deviation from simple, it is not-simple. Complex things are
difficult to break apart, contain many parts, and are their properties are difficult to
determine. The ability to break down things into simplicity revolves around the negative,
the ability to recognize something as this and not that. As a result, simplicity is very
much related to a process of recognition of a predetermined form.

Interrogating the idea of difference is not a common task, if anything, we think of
difference as a common sense concept learned from an early age. Bergson introduces
the idea of difference in kind, which is a difference in quality, something that cannot be
expressed discretely. While, differences in degree divide images into homogeneous,
countable parts, differences in kind are heterogeneous and cannot be counted because
they differ in terms of quality, not number. Bergson suggests that each experience in a
series “…has altered the shade of a thousand perceptions or memories, and that in this
sense it pervades them, although it does not itself come into view” (1889/1950, p.
9).

This is because continuous multiplicities are organized in time, not space. Bergson
idea of time is a bit unfamiliar, he describes time as duration. Bergson argues that our
‘common sense’ view of time is a spatialized time. For example, when we think of time
as a series of seconds, minutes, or years we confuse time with our division of
movement in space—division of the earth’s orbit and rotation into discrete

corresponding units. Bergson’s argument is that space is external and discrete—a table,
a chair, a building are objects with clear boundaries. Dividing time into spatialized units
or units of motion is a representation of time that makes time uniform and homogenous,
a medium for comparison. Duration, in contrast, is heterogeneous, not homogeneous,
spatialized, or bounded. Duration ‘flows’ from past into present (Bergson, 1896/1962, p.
197), meaning that an experience in duration cannot be separated out from the
conditions that “preceded” it. Any division of time, then, creates a difference in the
quality of time as it determines limits on the succession of instants that can precede and
proceed a given moment.

Perhaps the easiest way to think about duration is to think about the way we and
the families we study experience our lives. We do not experience life as a series of
discrete events, but as a succession of interpenetrating multiplicities. For example, a
given event be it divorce, job loss, or sickness does not impact each family in the same
say nor all at once, neither is it held constant on either the subject or object, it is more of
a rhythm which plays out in a series. However, we often treat these as uniform events
through dichotomous variables, but these efforts are unable to get at the rhythm in
which they are experienced. While space is discrete (measureable, distinct) time is not.
Time is continuous, each moment flows into the next, which means that any attempt to
create a distinct event in time changes the quality of that moment. In other words, if we
determined a family event such as the birth of a child we would be required to define the
beginning and ending of such an event. While we could compare this event across
cases, the points at which we choose to begin and end the event change everything
about what the event is. In other words, we choose what led to the event and what
resulted from it. However, this is not a clear proposition, rather it is always contested as
the events are never wholly separate.

In bringing in the idea of time espoused by Bergson, we begin to move beyond a
comparison or juxtaposition and begin to think beyond difference against an identity or
representation and begin to think about a completely free difference.\textsuperscript{3} To refer to family complexity in objective or subjective terms may do something to complicate family or allow for greater variation in family forms and functions; however, these conceptions remain tangled up in discrete criteria and therefore subject difference to the requirements of representation.

However, we do not always think of this messy, complex, interpenetration of experience. As Bergson says, “But this wholly dynamic way [continuous multiplicity] of looking at things is repugnant to the reflective consciousness, because the latter delights in clean cut distinctions, which are easily expressed in words, and in things with well-defined outlines, like those which are perceived in space” (Bergson, 1889/1950, p. 9). For example, we often say that we are more or less cold or more or less happy. Speaking in this way, according to Bergson, necessitates taking sensation out of duration, spatializing it and juxtaposing it with other experiences we deem similar. In other words, we define a set of sensations as “anger” and another set as “sadness.” However, when we speak in this way we are not speaking of our actual feeling, but are externalizing our internal states by setting them up in space, bounding, and juxtaposing them. In duration images change in relation to the set of previous images and the potential that is within that set. Thus we cannot say that we are more or less happy, but that we feel differently in relation to our previous states.

\textsuperscript{3} The frequent critique here would be to reduce this position to that of naïve relativism in that everything is “relative” the problem with doing this is that in relativism difference is relegated to the difference between particulars, which is more an extreme position of subjectivity within a unified subject, rather than the difference in itself of Bergson or Deleuze.
Thus we can see two ways of distinguishing things—in time and in space—and their corresponding kinds of difference: difference in kind or quality, in which an entity cannot be divided or separated without changing qualitatively and difference in degree. In the case of family complexity we see how complexity is a result of what Bergson describes as a confusion of space and time. Family cannot be more or less complex except in a spatialized time, which allows for comparing abstractions and leads to a reliance on negation as difference. While thinking in discrete terms is useful it is also constraining and removed from the thing itself, therefore family scholars should work not to reify the frames they use for defining family.

**Implications for Family Research**

Perhaps the most influential implication of duration and multiplicity for family scholars relates to the way we determine family and its parts whether in degree or in kind. For one, we can hold that family cannot be divided without changing qualitatively (Deleuze, 1966/1988). In other words, you cannot break up the family into external, countable dimensions without changing the family, neither can you study multiple families and add them up as if they were homogeneous parts of a universal whole. In order to add something together that is heterogeneous you have to abstract out difference by creating a representation. Thus in creating something homogeneous and comparable, and therefore thinkable, the heterogeneity is lost. However, this does not mean that we are doomed to think of family only in terms of representation.

In order to reorient research toward heterogeneity, Bergson suggested considering the way in which problems and questions are created. For one, Bergson suggested that problems and solutions were created together, and that in determining a problem we also create a solution (Deleuze, 1966/1988). Thus in the creation of a
question we already assume a way of being and determine the means through which
that question could be answered. Thus we are constrained by our questions, which
already have solutions to be uncovered. Actual freedom lies in the ability to create or
define a problems (p. 15). In other words, our research questions and methodologies
define an entire “order of things” from the beginning (Foucault, 1966/1994), including
what does and does not count as family. It may not be surprising, then, that the timing of
the rise of the nuclear family coincided with the proliferation of quantitative survey and
demographic methods. While family scholars have certainly been critical of the
production of knowledge derived from these representations (Few, 2007; Oswald et al.,
2005), family studies has yet to have its “crisis of representation” wherein we must
evaluate our ontological foundations of family (Marcus & Fischer, 1996).

In addition to consider the implications of methods, family scholars must be
proactive in deconstructing the representations of family. The power of the state is
absolute in terms of defining, determining, and producing families. The state becomes
the entity responsible for creating and affirming representations of family through judicial
and legislative authority. In other words, the state determines which families are fit and
which are unfit—meaning fit for economic and child production—and makes decisions in
circumstances where either are deemed unfit. As evidenced by the recent Supreme
Court decision and decades of activism by LGBTQ+ activists, the legal system’s
definition or representation of family is a central and dominant representation regardless
of how family may exist in the broader society, but it is not intractable. Considering this,
the issue may not be how families really are, but how families are allowed to be, and
family scholars must critique the representations of the state beyond critiques focused on gender and sexuality.

When we think of family as continuous multiplicity it opens up our conceptions of family because it takes away our ability to see family as either a unity, a multiple, or even a deviation from a unity. Admittedly, it is strange to think of family as anything but a unity. Indeed we often talk about different types of family because there are no two alike, but we recognize that they still fall under a family unity. The recognition that family must be understood in continuous flow is not necessarily unique. Goldberg's (2010) discussion of family complexity and gender suggested that controlling discrete variables and comparing across cases fails to get at the more fluid elements of family and its interaction with gender. This pushes us toward thinking in terms of qualitative multiplicities. Because continuous multiplicities change in quality, but not spatially, family can externally 'look' the same, but internally it is constantly differing via the many other multiplicities encountering it through social, economic, and cultural flows or continuous multiplicities. It is in a constant state of fluctuation and difference, a difference of quality, difference in kind. We still refer to family as family and we know what it is, but it has certainly changed, even if it is externally the same. Furstenberg (2014) circles this idea when he suggests that 1960s demographers never saw the pending societal changes of the proceeding decades coming. Bergson suggests this is because external change is only realized spatially, after the fact. However, during the 50s and 60s the quality of family changed to allow for the external changes of the later

4 Because continuous multiplicities are in duration they are always in motion, flowing, and interpenetrating.
decades. Frustrating as it may be we cannot predict change when we conflate complexity with structured, external difference because it will have already changed internally.

In order to engage with continuous dimensions of family it may be that qualitative family methods must undergo a revolution. Bergson challenges us to think qualitative methodologies outside of the spatiality of family, to think family in its duration and qualitative methods can help us to do this; however, it is important not to think that any methodology labeled “qualitative” investigates a qualitative multiplicity. Indeed, qualitative multiplicities fall under the domain of qualitative research, but qualitative research does not necessarily focus on qualitative multiplicities. The typical quantitative/qualitative distinction in social research focuses on data—how the data is collected and the methods used for analysis. Most often quantitative data is numerical and qualitative is textual, but not always. ‘Scientific research’ as it is currently described reflects a mode of spatializing its object of study. The purpose is often to provide a mechanical causal understanding of human behavior as a means of understanding and then providing alternative actions that might improve efficiency or outcomes. This is especially the case as neoliberalism creeps steadily forward in the academy. However, this is not to say that discrete research is unnecessary or unhelpful, but it is problematic to suggest that it is an ideal form or that efficiency or “better” outcomes should be the only purpose of a scientific endeavor. Instead, I propose that greater academic freedom and a heterogeneity are necessary to address the family issues that we take up.

Qualitative research is especially in a troubling position within the interdisciplinary study of families. This position is troubling because while qualitative researchers have
gained some level of acceptance in the field there is still a relatively narrow focus (Sharp, Zvonkovic, Humble, & Elise Radina, 2014) much of which focuses on difference from degree or juxtaposition, rather than difference in kind (Hendricks & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015). In terms of Bergson’s qualitative/quantitative distinction, it may be that family studies, as well as social research more generally, has failed to take up qualitative distinctions or at least to put them at the forefront.

A major focus for many qualitative researchers stems from early 19th century theory focusing on the phenomenology of Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty as well as the pragmatism of William James and George Herbert Mead, which were united by Blumer under the heading “symbolic interactionism” (1969/1986) and embellished by later scholars, such as Stryker (1980). The focus of symbolic interactionism is to understand the meanings of interpersonal interactions and role-taking/making behavior, which suggests that our roles and actions are created via our interactions with the world. Most of the dominant forms of qualitative inquiry come out of this perspective be it grounded theory, narrative analysis, ethnography, or phenomenology. However, thinking with Bergson we may ask whether or not qualitative research works with continuous or qualitative distinctions or if it uses discrete analysis techniques to analyze a continuous phenomenon.

Thinking with Bergson we could think of the individual as not being a unity, but a multiplicity. In doing so the individual person is no longer individual, but a part of something else. Still, in defining it as a part, we reduce the individual to a quantity. In this way it becomes external and spatialized, an aspect of a quantitative multiplicity. To put the ‘individual’ into a qualitative multiplicity means that the individual is not only no
longer unified, but is also no longer a quantity, but a flow or a movement, what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze called a “line.” To study something as a qualitative multiplicity, then, requires thinking in terms of time, flow, and lines—difference in itself rather than juxtaposed difference.

If we were to make a distinction in kind between ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ research it would be this: Qualitative methods should take into account differences in kind rather than differences in degree. In other words, quantitative research is very capable of studying discrete elements because they are able to be measured and quantified. When qualitative methods are used to analyze discrete data they fail because they are unable to provide a discrete analysis, rather they provide a discrete analysis of a continuous phenomenon. Discrete analyses of continuous elements are disadvantaged as they must first spatialize or make discrete the continuous multiplicity. Mixed methods is offered as a means of analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, but fails in its attempt at continuous analysis because it must converse with the discrete analysis. Thus, our confusion of time with space, as Bergson says, ends with us misrepresenting our subject under study because we attempt to spatialize elements, which cannot be spatialized.

Considering Bergson’s conclusions, we may then think of how or what qualitative analysis can do. Qualitative research is capable of studying differences in kind—those differences that change when divided. However, doing so requires that research create distinctions in kind and this is perhaps the more revolutionary of the purposes of qualitative research. In other words, it is the purpose of qualitative to create
representations. Not in a way of reifying representations, but proliferating them, to see what is possible.

In suggesting that qualitative research in family studies seek to study differences in kind and thereby produce distinctions in kind I am suggesting something somewhat difficult considering that our methods have yet to focus on studying these differences. Methods that seek to reduce to sameness, that look for commonality shift the focus to discrete elements. Instead we can think about how we can make our data flow, create, and produce rather than represent. Representation is the mode of quantitative multiplicities and area that is impossible for qualitative scholars to compete in because the epistemological assumptions necessitate large-scale, countable data. However, this is a challenge for family qualitative researchers that can be answered. Researchers can experiment (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987), get lost (Lather, 2007), and get messy (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015) as they explore new pathways in the onto-epistemological swamp, forging experimental and questionable methods as they create family distinctions that seek out the internal, affectual, and virtual dimensions of family.

To summarize, family complexity can be improved in at least two ways. First, by admitting that families are complex, they are only made simple by our representations of them. Thus there are no simple families, only simple representations. Doing so requires that researchers critique representational schemes not by opposing the implications of the scheme, but the scheme itself as well as the effects of the scheme on family. Second, by recognizing that discrete methods create representational schemes, they do not study the thing itself. Discussions of complexity could be improved by proliferating the schemes created to represent family. Rather than attempting to find the one true
scheme for representing family, scholars should instead try multiple different schemes in attempts to see what those schemes create. What may occur, for example, if family included homes, cars, pets, food, and so on? Qualitative family researchers should experiment with ways of putting our discrete analyses to work, by putting them back into time (i.e., using them to produce something rather than represent something). By engaging with family in time, qualitative family researchers are specifically poised to engage with continuous multiplicities make contributions into the complexity of families that is internal and continuous, but in order to do so they must be able to distinguish the discrete, countable methodological pathways that are common in family studies.
CHAPTER 3
DISCIPLESHIP AND IMPROVISATION OR “APPLYING” IMPOSSIBLE THEORISTS

What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end.

—Michel Foucault
Technologies of the Self

Philosophy in qualitative methodology has become a means of developing new ideas and challenging methodology focused on technique and rules of systematization (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011; Koro-Ljungberg, 2015; Law, 2004). Reading theory is necessary for all scholars, but to “apply” a theory or set of ideas under a theoretical tradition is not a quick process. Methodologists have looked to French poststructuralists such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, or postmodernists such as Baudrillard and Lyotard, the new materialism of Karen Barad or Posthumanism of Rosie Braidotti. These writers all produce fantastic ideas to think with, but for methodologists there is a broader question of how these ideas may be brought into method. Over the last several years qualitative researchers from across multiple disciplines have worked to apply what might be called difficult ideas (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013; Taguchi, 2012; Ulmer, 2015). And there have been helpful suggestions such as “plugging-in” theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011) or using diffractive analyses with multiple perspectives (Davies, 2014; L. Mazzei, 2014). In the spirit of engaging with difficult-to-apply theorists here I suggest another way of using theorists in methodology. Not as a critique of previous suggestions, but as another way.

The ideas of Deleuze and Guattari have become one stream among many that researchers have developed in looking for new modes of research. Indeed, there have been many calls for researchers to employ the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari in their
research and theoretical practice (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; L. A. Mazzei & McCoy, 2010; St Pierre, 2004). Massumi’s near-famous invitation “to lift a dynamism out of [Deleuze and Guattaris’ work] and incarnate it in a foreign medium” (1992, p. 8) has inspired many qualitative and cultural studies scholars (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013). However, one of the difficulties in working with Deleuze and Guattari has been determining how to use their ideas in a practical sense—or if the idea of practicality is even valued. A popular use of Deleuze and Guattari is “mapping,” and has been used in a variety of ways (Leander & Rowe, 2006; Martin & Kamberelis, 2013; Renold & Mellor, 2013; Wilson, 2003). There is no one way to map, but in itself one could see how “mapping” as a loose method is in danger of becoming the Deleuzian approach. In the interest of looking beyond mapping I sought out another line to explore. However, rather than explain this line, I am more interested here in developing a way of engaging with theorists that may help others as they seek to engage with difficult theorists rather than suggest a specific method. In other words, I wonder how we are to engage with theorists if we want to develop methods and methodologies ourselves.

There are tensions in “applying” Deleuze and Guattari. Philosophical purists insist that Deleuze is first and foremost a philosopher (Jones & Roffe, 2009), but developing concepts, for some, may be a worthless endeavor (Bourdieu, 1988), and deep engagement with philosophy may even be dangerous with the continuing and rising influence of neoliberalism in the academy. There is also a feeling of dread in working with Deleuze and Guattari that I have experienced and talked about with colleagues because using their work is not particularly clean or straightforward. This creates plenty of uncertainty, which provides freedom, but also rides the rim of nihilism.
Even Deleuze and Guattari themselves are uncertain about the application of their ideas. Of some of their methods they confess, at least once, that “We ourselves were unable to do it” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 22). Thus, it is a difficult, if not dangerous, line, which is often the case with attempts to break out of well-defined spaces and try something new (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Here I work through some of my own experiences with Deleuze, as well as Deleuze and Guattari\(^1\) to demonstrate theoretical discipline and methodological improvisation, two helpful and related principles of engaging challenging theorists. While much of the paper is devoted to my personal experiences, I hope that my experiences and the related concepts will be useful for scholars interested in considering their entanglements with their work as well as those theorists with whom they engage.

**Discipline and Discipleship**

I grew up using the King James translation of the Holy Bible. More recent editions of the Bible make it easier to understand and include notes that clarify certain words and describe cultural contexts. The effort is to help simplify the text thereby increasing access to the word of God. Reading the King James’ version’s Elizabethan English was slow and laborious—it took time to decipher the word—and I often had to find a dictionary or guide to help in my reading, more often me and my siblings slept while someone else read, until it was our turn when we eagerly told our father we were “pondering the words.” In more recent versions of the Bible, I assume, reading is much quicker and easier to digest, but there is less of a need to go to dictionaries or guides.

\(^1\) Are refer to them in this way because what Deleuze or Guattari write is not the same as what Deleuze and Guattari write.
Even in the case of a dictionary words often have multiple or questionable meanings and translations. However, the uncertainty created space for thought. In many ways reading theory is a similar task to reading the King James’ Bible. There are always efforts to translate texts into contemporary and “straightforward” vernacular. Yet, reading difficult and uncertain texts is an experience in thought, not a process of recognition.

Translating or democratizing theory and research is helpful and important, especially when laypeople are skeptical about the research process such as is the case with social science research. Truthfully, if the purpose of the research and theory is to better society then it must be able to convince society. At the same time, there is something lost in democratizing theory because concepts, and often difficult concepts, are required to think differently. As Zarathustra says, “Everyone being allowed to learn to read, ruineth in the long run not only writing but also thinking” (Nietzsche, 1900). In other words, when research and theory are democratized so that everyone can become an “expert,” we lose the nuance gained from a dedicated study of that topic/theorist. Zarathustra’s suggestion that thought is ruined is even more pertinent because thinking is a very different process than understanding or explaining. This is especially the case when one theorist is learned by analogy or simile (e.g., Aristotle is like Plato, but more refined; or Heidegger and Husserl are like two branches of the same tree). These strategies are helpful for orienting oneself and it would be false to say that theorists, in particular, are not intimately tied to one another, but it also dangerous to experiment only superficially, not because a scholar risks getting it “wrong” (this should be the last
concern), but because they are unable to learn to think—and by extension, to be—in a different way.

Instead of approaching a theorist with the desire to learn or understand, it may be helpful to approach theorists in ways that allow us to be different and in this way studying a theorist becomes a discipleship. Indeed, just as a religious convert grows in understanding as they become a member of a congregation they also become something else through adherence to and inherence in dogmas, rituals, and social networks. While I did not intend, in a conscious effort, to follow Deleuze religiously what follows here are a few contractions of my experimentation with Deleuze (as Deleuze and Guattari would use the word), which I began to see as a discipleship. The word disciple shares a Latin root with discipline through the verb discere, to learn, disciplina (knowledge, instruction) and discipulus (learner); however, a disciple implies more than learning or even apprenticeship, but a devotion to and behavioral change through that devotion. Thus there is a change in what or who the disciple is and how it thinks. In presenting this I am not advocating for a Deleuzian orthodoxy, nor am I advocating for dogmatic and uncritical acceptance of a theorist, but I am saying that one must take a plunge and swim in order to think with a theorist (Deleuze, 1968/1994).

Using my own tumblings with the philosophy of Deleuze and his collaborations with Felix Guattari, I suggest that “applying” theorists is a devotional practice of experimentation that allows for methodological improvisation. Improvisation sometimes conjures thoughts of “winging it” or ad-libbing, more commonly known as bullshitting. However, the improvisation I describe is attached to a devotional style that makes improvisation a means of developing a theorist in unknown ways as well as a means of
experiencing a theorist. It is not a process for experts, which assumes a discrete set of masterable skills. Rather it is a task for disciples searching for the *ubermensch*. One that is much more similar to that of early philosophers and scientists who developed their own ways of understanding and experimentation, often in a search for something outrageous (e.g., alchemy, eternal life), which pushed them to develop outrageous methods.

**Frustration, Faith, and Devotion**

For those finding themselves in the labyrinth of “difficult” theorists the process of reading can be terribly unsettling (Lather, 2007). It requires moving beyond well-charted territories and in some cases destroying them. This includes many of the linguistic and symbolic representations we have come to depend on. Throughout my journey with Deleuze I have found that frustration is consistent. However, this frustration stems from a desire to think differently with frustration settling in when I find myself drawn back to the comfort of the certainty I am accustomed to (i.e., method, rules, authority).

In one particularly difficult moment, I had organized a group-mapping interview for a pilot study, but no one came. I had anticipated poor attendance and tried to prevent it by calling and texting the participants multiple times during the day and right before the interview. I was frustrated because I felt like I had done everything right. But I was also relieved. I was relieved because I was unsure about what I was doing. I had developed a mapping interview method, but I struggled to square “Deleuzian inquiry” with more traditional methodological techniques. Instead of an interview I decided to do the activity myself. This culminated in me writing the word “frustration” in large capital letters (see Figure 3-1) across the entire map while ranting:
AAAAAHHHH! And there’s this, this frustration and I just want to write this over the whole damn thing because there’s this f***ing frustration [writes frustration] over the whole damn thing because it’s like [slams table and laughs] I don’t even know what I’m doing, it’s like I want to feel like I’m doing it right, but it, it’s not, there’s no really right, but it’s like I’m talking in terms of all these identities, like or all these words, I mean but how, I can’t get beyond words, I can’t get beyond words, I mean that’s the only way I have to represent, but ultimately I’m representing, right? AAAAAHHHH! I don’t know, it’s like how do you do a Deleuzian research project? I don’t know. And that’s what, you know people, people want that, people want in this, in this, they want this in that paper, I mean connecting it to this paper, Deleuze, how does Deleuze change research? I don’t f***ing know. Like if I was to tell you how he changes research I feel like it’d automatically be, it’d immediately be a lie it, it would immediately be not true because that’s the whole idea, there is no way to do it. It’s like it can’t be done because there is no it, there is no Deleuzian research, it doesn’t exist. So when I read you know that chapter in Deleuze and Research Methodologies (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013) and I think, “Well that’s not what I would do.” Just because that’s not what I would do doesn’t mean that what they did is wrong because there is no, cause if you’re saying it’s wrong then you’re, you automatically, you create this identity I mean because I guess that is the idea or the transcendence or whatever I mean it’s not transcendence is it? [Opens a cupboard] There’s a coffee pot in here and a lock on one of the doors, a lock on a couple of the doors, this frustration! How do I do this…?

In this quote there is obvious frustration, but there is also confusion. It is clear that I cannot express what it is that bothers me or what it is that I feel I am doing wrong. This was still relatively early in my experiences with Deleuze and was at a point where I could feel Deleuze better than I could express. In other words, I had the feel for Deleuze, but I found it difficult to put that feeling into words. I would be lying if I said that I feel completely comfortable putting Deleuze into words now, but I’m also not sure I ever want to feel completely comfortable. However, the current conditions of the academy require us to be able to translate sensations into discrete units of meaning, even when they fail to do sensation justice.

While there was frustration, the process was buoyed up by a devotion, a kind of faith or belief in Deleuze. Regardless of a researcher’s methodological tradition there is
always an undergirding trust in its process either because of the renown of the author of the method or because of logical arguments for the method’s validity, but ultimately the researcher has to believe that the theorist, method, or practice will be worthwhile. We may be able to speak of this belief or trust as desire, and in Deleuze and Guattaris’ terms, a desire to produce. In other words, it was not a desire to find something that was missing (i.e., a transcendent end or ideal), but to create something or to see what might be created. Deleuze’s own philosophical practice follows this principle, which he and Guattari describe as a process of concept creation (1991/1994) because productive desire is about creation rather than filling in gaps or finding what is lacking, working with theorists, for Deleuze, is not so much a question of getting it “right,” or even succeeding, but to create.

In devoting myself to Deleuze I was never quite sure what Deleuze was doing in my work even though he was always in it—in subjects that were directly related to his philosophy but also in my life, my parenting, my teaching, and my religiosity to the point that I could never definitively say that what I was doing belonged to me, but I made it a part of my self. This is not to say that my experience was mystical, but that my practice was constantly informed by Deleuze. My discipleship was never wholly intentional, but there were rituals that entered into my practice. For example, a candle given to me as a tongue-in-cheek gift that I would light before I wrote or before I read Deleuze (see Figure 3-2). This is not to say that I was no longer frustrated with Deleuze, but every avenue we explored, every dark and light and green and wood-paneled recess we have explored together has influenced the movements we have created and pushed me to take it one step further with the belief that something else could happen. In other words,
when he got me “lost,” when he took me “off-track,” I may have been angry, but getting lost, off-track, and angry only furthered the process by creating new possibilities. The only thing we could have done “wrong” was to quit, but we just kept moving, we never quit—at least not yet.

Reading one or several theorists, then, can be a devotional practice and a sacred one—in that it requires an amount of sacrifice to do so. The process is not efficient, it is not comprised of simple steps, and it is more or less frowned upon as a wasteful and unappreciated use of time. It requires slowing down and creating one’s own rhythm (Ulmer, 2016). It may even include ritual devotion: Time to think, to be with, or to simply be. Thus devotion is important and necessary for engaging with theorists beyond a superficial understanding. It is not enough to be able to describe or even teach the theorist, but one must be able to experience it, live it, especially if one is to experiment and improvise with those ideas. However, this should all be underlined with a caveat that speaking in terms of devotion should not be equated with dogmatic, religious, ideological, or uncritical readings of theorists. Instead, this kind of theoretical practice requires an understanding of the nuances and critiques of a theorist as well as their work itself much like you would understand the nuances of a lover, a close friend, or even a roommate.

**Journaling with Deleuze: An Interjection**

Early on in my reading of Deleuze and Guattari, and then Deleuze more specifically, a colleague suggested journaling to Deleuze. She mentioned that she often

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2 Clearly this section has few of the “actual” words of Deleuze or Guattari in it. The point here is not to represent Gilles Deleuze. I have very little actual experience with the embodied person with the proper name Gilles Deleuze and I don’t really care who he was nor, frankly, do I think Deleuze would care. In his own philosophy Deleuze suggests that the self is a contraction of instances in time (Deleuze, 1968/1994),
did this with authors and that sometimes they would write back. I was intrigued and went straightway to buy the most “Deleuzian” journal I could find (See Figure 3-3). I had high hopes for our conversations and had seen others have very successful conversations with their own “ghosts” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015). I was happily surprised when Deleuze began to write back, but he was a real ass: unhelpful, difficult, stubborn, and altogether uncouth. Our conversations were often tangential and never as helpful as I had hoped; although “helpful” may suggest a kind of simplicity that Deleuze is not interested in.

At first I wrote notes in the journal about whatever I was reading. Eventually, Deleuze began to make comments and soon I addressed him directly. One of our first conversations went something like this (bear in mind Deleuze enjoys savory language):

Justin: My friend suggested, or mentioned, that she dialogues with those writers she is drawing from. I LOVE this idea. I think this journal should be a journal to Deleuze. Or perhaps a conversation. What do you think?

Deleuze: People have always talked to others. It’s intriguing.

Justin: Okay, I thought maybe you’d think it odd.

I am not sure why Deleuze agreed to talk with me, especially because everyone knows he hates conversations (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/2007). Perhaps he was bored.

D: Haven’t you read my work?

J: [pause] Some, it’s challenging.

D: [pause] Why do you call it challenging?

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thus the self is multiple and fractured but put together through the active syntheses of the mind, thus while the Deleuze I conversed with is not nor is meant to be the embodied Gilles Deleuze, this is a Deleuze that I put together and is very much who Gilles Deleuze is in within me, or at least one of me. Ethically then, it is important for me to suggest that this should not be taken as representative of Deleuze or his work, but is rather a connection and production of Deleuze.
J: Everyone does.
D: Calls it challenging?
J: Sure.
D: Hmmmmm, well tell me what’s challenging.
J: It’s just difficult to understand.
D: Specifically?
J: Difference.
D: Difference?
J: Yes.
D: You’re so caught up in traditional thinking about difference that you struggle to make “sense” of my idea of difference.
J: I guess.

I remember this time—trying to think about difference without identity or negation, difference-itself. It was incredibly difficult. I would work myself into caffeine comas at the local coffee shop trying to figure out what he was trying to say. I remember looking around at the other people and envying their lives wishing I could trade with them and do math instead of deciphering philosophical concepts. I felt like I was in a trance at times, staring into their lives in this coffee shop, so close to me in space, but so far away in time. They were stuck with only identity and negation, stuck in a Hegelian, prefabricated world! At the same time, I didn’t entirely know what I was doing, or talking about, but I trusted in Deleuze—he knew the way.

Looking back on some of the early entries I am embarrassed to see what I wrote to Deleuze and, truthfully, have left those sections out of this writing in order to save face. Suffice it to say I was very confused and it is likely that I will look back at this article with the same sentiment at some point in the future, not because of any
progression in my understanding but because my understanding will change. After a few months Deleuze and I began to write more frequently; although he did not always respond.

J: Are you there?
D: Yeah
J: Whoa! Got a sec?
D: Sure.
J: So, people are saying I interpret you wrong.
D: What the f--- does that mean? Interpreting? How can you interpret something in motion? You are only interpreting the representation of the thing.
J: I know, but I need some validation.
D: Go f--- yourself.
J: You’re such an a--.
D: [Laughs]
J: Someone told me my interpretation was too structural.
D: F---ing hell! Structural, post-structural? Representational bulls---!
J: Wow.
D: Yes, you probably aren’t getting it, but structure/post-structure are purposeless labels.
J: Thanks, I gotta run.

After some time Deleuze started to show up in more than just the journal. He showed up in my conversations, in my dreams, in a video, and even in a prayer candle (Figure 3-3). The Deleuze candle burned quickly as I lit it nearly every day while I read and wrote. The candle was appropriate considering I approached Deleuze as a religious
devotee. One night in a cloud of angst I walked to the ice cream shop and wrote in my journal:

It’s been a while since I tried to make sense of all this. Tonight I have a proposal due, but I’m forcing things and just can’t seem to make sense of it all. I just haven’t read enough! Yet I feel like I should have some decent idea. I’m about to give up on you, Gilles. And you probably don’t care because you’re most likely a narcissistic bastard, but look at me generalizing you like that! How can I write with you when I don’t even know you? That sentence seems like total bull crap in a Deleuzian world. My career would be easier without you in it, but I know I’ll keep working with you. I’ll probably do it all the way to an academic grave…

I never felt entirely comfortable with him. There were times when I didn’t want him around. One night, I read Eve Tuck’s “Breaking up with Deleuze.” I felt like I was talking with the friend of a friend and I began to realize why someone might not want to be around Deleuze, but he wouldn’t leave. And I didn’t want him to; he intrigued me. My dissertation became riddled with our conversations to the point that it was mostly the two of us talking and most of the conversations, while entertaining, fell flat. Other times the conversations with Deleuze brought in others:

D: Hahahahaha! You arrogant bastard.
J: Me?!
D: You are sitting here writing about how you know all of this stuff, but you don’t really.
J: I’m proficient.
D: There is no such thing. All you have done is recite and trace my work.
J: I’m using your work as a means of understanding what I’m doing.
D: I am aware of that, but you haven’t made anything new. You have created an identity, a center for my work, but it doesn’t work like that.
J: Of course I KNOW THAT! Still, people want someone who looks like they know what they’re talking about. It’s not like you walked around questioning everything. You’re not Socrates.
D: It’s a good thing too. What a moron.

Socrates: Huh?

J: Oh great.

Socrates: Questions, I do enjoy questions. What is your question?

J: I think questions are immediately constraining. For example, if I were to ask, “what is a family capable of?” the connected thought is, “what can a family do?” Or “What is the extent of a family’s ability?” Another question might be, “how can families flex and change?” this may conjure up “How far can we go with family?” or “what are the boundaries of the definition of family?” In any case questions do not have a universal meaning or a universal intention.

Socrates: A question cannot be universally understood?

J: I don’t think so.

Socrates: Perhaps you do not know what a question is then.

J: It’s something I have to put in my dissertation.

Socrates: Quite utilitarian, but really, what is a question?

J: I hate this conversation.

Socrates: Then I’m doing my job.

Honestly, sometimes Deleuze wasn’t any help at all:

J: Okay, are you here? I don’t get this. I’m just being honest right now. The white wall of signifiance and the black hole of subjectification (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987)? What are you talking about?

Guattari: Gilles is done talking with you and I’m upset that you haven’t the courtesy to ask me. As if I didn’t write these books you are referencing.

J: Dr. Guattari! No, I mean, I know you wrote the books I just, I just don’t know you as well. I don’t like to bug people I don’t know very well, you know?

Guattari: Hahahaha! I’m just messing with you! Gilles is taking a s--- or something.

J: [nervous laughter] okay, yeah, well.

Guattari: Relax. What’s your question?
J: I just need some help figuring this subjectification and significance thing out.

Guattari: Sure, “There is a simple general formula…”

Guattari was always more helpful, but he didn’t show up much.

At some point Deleuze left the page, actually I’m not sure when he left the page, or if he did, but somewhere along the way he was always with me. In my head or outside my head, but always there. I started to feel lost, as if no one really could communicate with me. People would ask about my work and I would laugh and change the subject. It wasn’t that I couldn’t talk about it, but they were late to a very long conversation and I didn’t feel like it was their business. Deleuze was that friend that I brought to every party, every reunion, and every dinner, but no one was really sure who he was. Some people were nervous about me and Deleuze. They would question what it was exactly that I was doing with him and it made them uncomfortable. Honestly, I wasn’t completely comfortable, but it was working out. After a while, however, I started to wonder about it. When I found Gilles I was in the middle of a bad break-up with God and subsequently with my family. Gilles was a replacement for that authority that had so long been in my life.

D: You are making me sick!!!

J: What?

D: With this paper you are writing. Let me say something here, dumb---.

J: I’m writing about how I learned something from you, but that I’m not going to try to imitate you anymore.

D: It sure is taking you a long time to do it.

J: [long pause] are you serious? Have you ever read your writing?

D: Writing is...
J: Oh shut up, Gilles.

To me Gilles wasn’t ever living, at least in a traditional sense. But he was there, he spoke to me, but I wasn’t sure he had a human body and I wasn’t sure where he was. At the same time, he seemed to be there—in everything. I asked him what to do, asked him where to go, what to buy, whether or not I should go vegan or start smoking. The problem was that Deleuze wasn’t really into that. He was about defying signification, authority, order, and transcendence.

Once we tried to make a podcast together and he became angry and left the room. That was (perhaps) the first time I really started to question myself. I wrote:

I think I know why you’re mad. I get it if you won’t talk to me. For one, I am struggling to start because I want to know that I’m doing it right or that I know exactly what I’m saying, but to know how to “do Deleuze” means that you lost it. The confusion is good. I mean the confusion is productive. If I knew exactly what it was that you were saying (and this isn’t because I don’t “know,” it’s because I’m just kind of floating, I’m ungrounded or rather there is nothing to be grounded in) I’d be done by now, but I can’t get done because there are so many things, so many possibilities that keep popping up, popping up everywhere! It’s a party. All the time, it’s a party in my head or outside my head—I’m really not sure. But more than that you’re mad because I missed the big kicker. In my attempt to make this concrete I tried to reduce you to Marx, to Mills, to Weber, maybe even Durkheim in places. I wanted some nice, well-fitting piece that fit into “family policing.” It sounds nice, you know? But it’s not you. Don’t get me wrong, there is certainly something to say about images producing family. It’s interesting, but I missed the bigger point.

Looking back it’s funny to see how far off I was. I didn’t want to admit what was really going on. I don’t remember when exactly it was that I realized my problem. I think I knew long before I addressed it, but I didn’t want to admit it. Maybe I still haven’t admitted it. Bourdieu was actually the one who helped me see it. He told me that I was using Gilles as an authority to bolster my argument when in actuality name-dropping doesn’t give me anything (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). He didn’t know how right he
was. I had oedipalized myself. I had made Gilles my father, my God. Foucault was so 
disgusted by my subjectification that he wouldn’t even talk to me. It’s funny how 
hindsight brings clarity—or at least supposed clarity. For example, this snippet from a 
conversation:

D: Don’t let yourself be created, create your own damn project! Experiment, 
damn it!

J: You’re always there when I need you, bastard.

Here was Deleuze yelling at me to make my own project. Telling me not to allow 
anyone to create it for me—or for anyone to create me for that matter—to tell me what it 
was that I should do, and my response was an odd term of endearment. Looking back 
now I realize he was telling me to go, to leave and do my own thing—he was breaking 
up with me. But I couldn’t believe that, it felt too strange. “Deleuze, break up with me?” I 
thought, “Never” and shook my head, smiling slightly.

Deleuze and I had an encounter, a moment, a becoming. For a long time I tried 
to imitate him, but after a while I realized this was not the way to do it. In fact, when I 
revisited Tuck’s *Breaking up with Deleuze* (2010) I was a little embarrassed. Her 
experience with Deleuze looked so easy; it worked, even if it was just for a while. I 
began to realize that if I wanted to work with Deleuze the point was not to recreate or 
represent, but to take something from the encounter and put it in something else, to 
create a rupture. It wasn’t really about understanding him or being him it was about 
doing something with him. The (in)famous wasp and orchid do not try to imitate each 
other (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Instead, there is a moment of connection, a 
change in duration, in quality. Spatially, the wasp and orchid are the same, but virtually 
there is a difference from itself, an emergent quality.
At the same time, I realized this is what I had done all along. I had slowly planted seeds (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 11) or perhaps I simply rode the nodes of the tuber as it stretched and grew into the tangles of other plant’s roots. I became lost and never really found ‘myself’ again. However, even as I type this I wonder if I really believe it. I wonder if I really believe that Deleuze produces through encounters, that I won’t one day be the reviewer who—as a reviewer once suggested to me—suggests, “read a little more Deleuze” or says, “it sounds like this came from the internet.” Perhaps my Deleuze is a bit looser than that Deleuze, a little less clear, a little less contextualized or territorialized, a lot more arrogant and much more rebellious.

**Methodological Improvisation**

The difficulty with devotion to a theorist is that it is possible for one to go “down the rabbit hole” without coming back up or reducing the theorist to add-and-stir steps. And therein lies the difficulty of working with complex ideas, which is that one can be overwhelmed by the amount there is to learn or the new information they continue to learn. Wrapped up in this is the desire to do it “right,” or beyond criticism, which is impossible. However, we will also fail if we think of theory as a means of understanding and explaining data. Pierre Bourdieu suggested that the process of adding the appropriate data to find a desired result was closer to a magic ritual than science (Bourdieu, 1988)—an add water and stir method. Instead, “the truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of finding the problem and consequently of positing it…” (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/1987, p. vii). Thus the task of the researcher—for Deleuze and Guattari—is not one of technical proficiency and the application of method, but of developing and thinking problems. However, finding and positing a problem is not something that can be done simply, rather it is often messy or confusing (Koro-
Henri Bergson, an early 20th century philosopher, suggests that the practice of creating questions is essential to developing problems because the answer to a question lies within the question, meaning that the question bounds possible solutions (Deleuze, 1966/1988). This assertion creates some difficulty because it suggests a dual nature of problems, being composed of both problem and solution or question and answer (Koro-Ljungberg & Barko, 2012). The process of positing a problem, then, becomes a process of palpating and exploring (May, 2005). However, this cannot be a quick process, it is a long and steady struggle requiring devotion to a pathway rather than quick questions and answers followed by applications (Schwandt, 2008). This type of theoretical practice does not comprehend terms like “evidence-based practices” and “translational research” because it does not and cannot comprehend those things.

Considering all this, when Deleuze and Guattari emphatically declare, “Experiment, don’t signify and interpret!” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 139), they are advocating a habit, not a technique. Experimentation is a process of connection and folding over and over again to see what happens. It was that philosophical drive that created science, and it seems to have been forgotten—replaced by the techno-scientific machine. This is not to say that science is bad, but that in many ways it has adopted capitalist discourses of production, usability, consumer-oriented programming, and translatable and applicable findings. Instead, Deleuze advocates for a return to the idea of experimentation, possibility, uncertainty, and creativity—what he calls a radical empiricism (Deleuze, 1995/2001).
To develop this further it may help to consider a musical example. After reading Todd May’s (2005) book on Deleuze I was particularly drawn to May’s relating Deleuze to jazz saxophonist John Coltrane. Over his career Coltrane pushed the boundaries of jazz, the saxophone, and himself. I began to listen to Coltrane, but I found his music unsettling; however, as I listened more I began to enjoy the dissonant sounds and the unpredictable melodies, but listening did not make me an expert. I could have learned to play the saxophone, but I would not have been able to do what Coltrane did even if I could have made some outrageous and unsynchronized sounds. Even if I could create something similar to Coltrane, he was a disciple, a committed practitioner of jazz music while I would simply be a fortunate mimic. This meant that Coltrane could develop something completely outside of the collective understanding of music, something minor and asignifying, but that drew from a lifelong jazz practice. A seemingly nonsensical creation, but that could only be created by a devoted practitioner. We see the same thing in other forms of art, especially among expressionist and abstract expressionist painters. The technique mastered by these artists, including Coltrane and artists such as Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning, was that of discipleship and improvisation. The improvised and experimental aspects of their artistic practices meant nothing without their ritual devotion to the practice.

Coltrane was a starting point for me; although I started more times than I can remember, but I never stopped—I just started again. As a part of my work I spent time listening to Coltrane, especially his later work—most notably his album “Ascension.” While listening I would think about my data, the project, and allow the sensations to wash over me. These sounds created an affect, which was not translatable into discrete
knowledge, but engaged with my research practice in continuous ways by bleeding onto my project (Gershon, 2013). In a couple instances I drove around town speaking into my recorder or placing a camera on the dash to record my out-loud-thoughts as I moved from place to place. I visited places that were significant to me and talked about my data, my life, my family. Frankly, I did not find these individual experiments particularly fruitful, meaning they did not provide me with understanding or clarity, but improvisation is not fruitful in that way and neither is experimentation. Indeed, experimentation that is continually fruitful (i.e., consistently significant results) should be thoroughly examined. However, this does not mean that experimentation is fruitless, that it is not productive or that we should shy away from activities that may not be considered fruitful by others. These “failed” experiments were vital to my research pathway as they were a part of a creative process, which built one on the other (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015). Each experiment created a set of conditions for the following experiment.

As I continued to think about jazz and “improv” I realized a connection to Deleuze and Guattari through the stage improv principle of “yes, and…” In stage improvisation actors play off of each other using this principle. Rather than reciting scripted lines the actors engage in a continuous back and forth in which each action, word, or glance creates a set of conditions that builds on the following actions and creates the potential for the continued evolution of the scene. Thus, the “yes” confirms the set of conditions and builds off of it (and…) instead of dismissing the actions of the previous action. This is very much in line with Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the conjunction “and” when they suggest repetitive connection “…and…and…and…” rather than negation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 25). By invoking the “and” they suggest a constant building on
or folding in of immanent connections as an experimental and productive process rather than a dismissive and constraining approach, which stifles creativity. Thus, methodological improvisation operates through engagement and creation rather than rejection or negation. This does not mean that there is a lack of critical reflection, but a production with the elements that ‘work’ through “yes, and…” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. xv). There may be elements of the improvisation that do not work, but these always build into the creation of the whole. In other words, everything must be taken together in the process of creation or production.

Improvisation via the conjunction “and” is a helpful concept because it gets at the complexity of experience by breaking up the verb “to be” as it adds on ever more connections (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). For example, individual identity rather than Hispanic woman or white Hispanic woman becomes white and Hispanic and woman and lesbian and middle-income and single and parent and…so on. In other words, it does not create a new identity through intersecting parts (white Hispanic woman), but a combination of various elements that allow for a complex and unique representation\(^3\). In research experimentation followed by “yes, and…” encourages researchers to work through their practice as Massumi said, by not asking “Is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. xv). Thus the focus in a

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\(^3\) One of the strangest comments I receive in talking to colleagues about “post-structural” theory is that it seeks to undo the work of race and gender scholars. It may be that somewhere along the line someone has done so, but improvisation and experimentation is about creating more space, freeing more ways of being and in doing so allowing for freedom of movement and expression and creation. Doing this allows for marginalized groups to create their own territories rather than being given territories to exist in.
methodological improvisation is not a search for answers but a process of creating or defining a problem (Bergson, 1889/1950). It is a search through the potential of various methodological practices to find what “works” or perhaps even more-so a search to find what could work.

In following this kind of improvisation the research process becomes much more fluid, everything affects everything else and creates conditions for creation. The data is no longer discrete, rather the data flows through and around everything else. For example, a story shared by a participant in an interview is not set off from the life of the researcher, the researcher reacts to the story becomes enamored by it and it spills over the project creating layers and affecting the thoughts and actions that follow. However, it is not only the “social” aspects, but all of the elements nonhuman objects from a recording apparatus to a piece of dirt in my eye that results in my losing track of my writing and then writing about something else entirely. A birthday party resulting in an overheard phone conversation that turns into an opportunity to recruit study participants. The research project then becomes an event, an ongoing process that is constantly unfolding and folding but that is also never fully done and never fully started, it was already ongoing.

In one particular example of this I was working to develop video as a method, but I was unaware of how to do it. During this time my son began to steal my phone and take pictures (Object 3-1). The camera on my phone was accessible without being unlocked, which meant that for a curious 4 year-old the camera was the only available entertainment on the phone. I would find him at times playing with the phone, taking pictures and videos as he walked around the house, my office, or while playing outside.
The videos showed him exploring under the covers of a bed, telling jokes, focusing in on the workings of a copy machine, zooming in on objects to the point where they became indiscriminate. However, the explorations were not an attempt at understanding (i.e., a causal understanding) they were purely an exploration of potential—what it could be, do, or become. He was also interested in what the image itself was capable of through the operation of the camera in relation to the object. For example, he would pull the camera in close to his eye or change the angle of the camera. The camera would also become an object such as a spaceship or generic device for communicating with unseen explorers. In these ways he created video as a pure production and connection of ideas, perceptions, and questions. His concern was not to make sense of anything, but to explore what a thing was capable of.

This method of video was intriguing to me and at this point I did not know what to call it, but I was interested in how the camera allowed for productive rather than representative connection to the visible world. While we often consider the camera to be analogous to the eye, and it is in many respects, the camera creates a wholly different view. A camera can place an expansive view into one frame, but it can also fill a frame with a tiny object, such as in macro photography. In both cases the frame creates an effect that cannot be reproduced by the eye. For example, an eye cannot focus in on the tiny object nor widen its frame to view a majestic mountain range in one glance. Thus the camera allows things to be seen in ways that could not be seen otherwise. Indeed, even when attempting to simply create a direct representation the camera fails.

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4 The idea of a direct representation is problematic in itself because it assumes the thing to be reproduced is singular when it is always multiple. Even in an instant replay situation there is still a judgement that
because of differences in the framing, angle, aperture setting, and lighting of a shot. This occurs in all situations, but becomes more acute when connected to social issues such as body image and gender where the camera can produce slimmer or softer looks (often considered more beautiful) depending on the camera’s relation to the subject and settings.

Rather than seeing the camera as a false view of the world, however, I was interested in how the camera could extend human perception as a tool. This is not to say to make human perception better, but to create a different perception, to create new possibilities. To do this I began to experiment with the camera by looking at things through its lens. I took some data from a group mapping interview that I had done and followed along its lines with the camera exploring the different words and pathways. I then reviewed these pathways in some editing software and connected various other images and sounds to the data. I also recorded myself interacting with the data—drawing on it, laying on it, listening to it. Then I watched the recordings to see what else I could learn from seeing this process through the camera.

I put these together in a film (Object 3-2), which detailed some of my workings and questions about data, video, and Deleuze, but it was unclear if it was at all helpful for the viewer. For me it brought up questions about how we create subjects from our participants in our work. The ways in which I disguised their names and histories so as to create a homogeneous set of persons that I could compare and derive common experiences from their narratives. Also, I wondered about wanting to hear specific

must be made and may not be agreed with. In other words what something is or how something happened is never clear.
narratives or stories from those I interviewed or how I put their stories into my frame of reference about foster care and foster alumni. I questioned my steering the conversation toward things that were quotable for papers or conference presentations and my anxiety at times when I let the conversation ramble rather than reigning it in and staying focused on the questions I had, rather than the topics and conversations that those in the interview brought up. I characterized this in the words, “Tell me what I want to hear!”

Creating video in this way created a change in the purpose of video. While video is most often used to create and/or display representations of something, in this case video became about exploring and learning through the process of creating. It is difficult to disassociate video from its ability to convey or display something, but there is a process of knowledge creation that occurs in the production of the video. This is not actually that strange to think of when we consider that it is through the process of producing tables, themes, conclusions that knowledge is formed, not in the actual things themselves. In other words, just like my son’s creations, the final video may not be immediately intelligible, nor interesting, instead the knowledge associated with the video was created in the production of it rather than in the viewing of it. The biggest implication of this conclusion is that video could be a method of analysis rather than a method of collection or presentation, which is the typical domain of video in research.

There is no doubt that this can be a frustrating process and I have been frustrated constantly, but pathway through frustration is not to give up, but to invoke the “yes, and” principle discussed above, or perhaps in less enthusiastic times “okay, and?” Thus “Deleuzian” research, in this case, required a kind of trust in the process, in the
researcher, in the participants, the topic, in Deleuze. This trust is what allows any researcher to keep going. While I did not start out in some time of improvisational mindset, I realized as I went on that my process was that of an improvisation, not the type of improvisation that results from being unprepared, but a free-flowing improvisation that occurs when there is enough substance to engage. But the improvisation of Coltrane who used improvisation to push the boundaries of jazz, music, and life. Doing research in this way requires that scholars slow down (Massumi, 2002; Ulmer, 2016), allowing for marinating, simmering, or braising rather than quick, fried, and to-go. Certainly this is a difficult commitment in an increasingly demanding academic milieu, but the call for this kind of scholarship is widespread (Berg & Seeber, 2016) and well worth it.

Conclusion

Methodological improvisation is not the first critique of the structured research process; there are many that have done so and suggested ways of moving forward (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015; Law, 2004). This kind of work requires that the research be judged on the basis of its philosophical premise, but researchers and reviewers continue to use post-positivist criteria as a universal standard for meeting the qualifications of “rigor” (Hendricks & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015). This is not to say that post-positive work is bad or should be avoided, but that while following ready-made methodological recipes is respected, reliance on a few privileged modes of research creates a stagnant and homogeneous body of knowledge that is often unable to answer the constant challenges and changes in society. Indeed, rigorous reliance on and reproduction of methodology is often the criteria for the ‘best’ research. This occurs even in qualitative methods, which have little or no theoretical grounding in replicability.
or generalizability. We need methods that are discrete, but we need to also understand their limits and reifying potential.

By engaging with theorists that we can think with and open up new ideas, ways of thinking and being we are better able to address and identify the increasingly difficult problems facing us in late-capitalism. We are required to find ways of escape, ways to become. My suggestion here is that this must be more than superficial, it cannot be that this is our “work,” it must become a devotional practice, and a way of being. Improvisation gives us the tools to use the ideas while devotion and discipleship supply the strength to keep going. Through improvisation we find the flexibility to maneuver and shift with the territory, but also to create something new and to believe that something else can be produced. In this way Deleuze and Guattari provide a means by which to enter their own work, but also the work of other theorists and provide a guide in their own work as they create monstrosities with the work of others (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/1987). Our work is to create monstrosities as well.
Figure 3-1. Mapping Frustration
Figure 3-2. The Deleuze Candle

Figure 3-3. The Journal
Object 3-1. Jackson’s Experimentations and Improvisations: A short set of video clips (.mp4 file 979MB)

Object 3-2. Struggles and Frustration with Deleuze: A film about improvisations and experimentations (.mp4 file 300MB)
CHAPTER 4
EXPLORING FAMILY POTENTIALITIES IN CHILD WELFARE THROUGH SEMIOTIC
EXPERIMENTATION

Research, the state, law, power, all these create a space that has been
thoroughly worked over, cultivated, coded, ordered, and defined. Within this space the
question is how anything can escape from striation. Here we question how family can
escape, not on an individual level, regarding specific families but ontologically. In other
words, the question is not, “How can families escape?” But rather, “How can family
escape?” Family here is a construct created and controlled by power (Donzelot,

Rather than looking at family generally, I opt to look at how generalities via
semiotic entanglements signify within particular situations. In this case I focus on the
most striated and controlled of all family spaces, which is families in dependency care,
which places children under the auspices of state agencies and the parents on
probation, and gives them plans for completion of tasks that will allow them to be
reunited. This space is one in which there is an unexpected moment of escape as family
counselors, case managers, attorneys and others work to produce family for the child. It
is a site of family production, but what results is neither clear nor exactly “family.” As
such, one could wonder what might be possible for family in this space. What occurs
when family comes under the power of the state, but through the state the abstract
machines that define and code family (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). What becomes
of family in these cases and how does family create departures and moments of flight
as it escapes its rooted meanings, ties to power, and more?

The philosopher Gilles Deleuze suggested, “We’ve got to hijack speech. Creating
has always been something different from communicating. The key thing may be to
create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control” (1990/1995, p. 175). The question is to take this suggestion and put it into the space of family control. Can we create family in new ways that are supportive—life giving—without the control, domination, and representation that often results? Reforms so often fall into more frequent surveillance or control via communication (e.g., Guardian ad Litems, mandatory data collection for recipients of support post-foster care; supervised visitation; therapy). Solutions to issues surrounding families and dependency involve calls for more research, more funding, or greater training (Bass, 2004; Buehler, Rhodes, Orme, & Cuddeback, 2006). While these can all be useful—yet highly unlikely—they fall short because they engage family at a superficial and abstract level rather than engaging at an ontological, semiotic level.

A Method

Strangely enough, I do not seek to answer this question, instead my hope was to experiment with the semiotics of family through encounters with video. Here I present several videos that were created under different conditions and through different encounters. The purpose of the videos is to play with what Guattari called “unformed matters” in a way that engages family in unimagined ways (Genosko, 1996). In some cases the videos center on a narrative, however, many do not. Narrative can be powerful in the way that it draws conclusions for the audience, but in so doing it constrains thought by telling the viewers what to think or by insinuating that there is one conclusion. Where narrative is used, the attempt is to use narrative in a way that leaves the narrative open and undetermined, thereby allowing the viewer to draw their own conclusions.
This paper was part of a larger methodological experiment with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, a mid-century French philosopher, and it is a culmination of many lines related to family, method, and video. While there were many attempts to put it into a whole paper with a clean narrative it never made sense to do so both personally and theoretically. However, my intention is not to create something confusing, but to allow for multiple elements that could be configured in several ways. In this way the reader could develop their own way through the work by engaging with whichever material is of interest to them. The difficulty for the reader is likely to be in letting go of what should happen and instead just let it happen. It may help the viewer/reader to make connections to art or arts-based research in viewing this project. Arts-based projects are “an unfolding and expanding orientation to qualitative social science that draws inspiration, concepts, processes, and representation from the arts, broadly defined” (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. xi). While research and art are typically thought of as separate entities, here I connect the two by thinking of the ways that affect and quality interfaces with existence (i.e., the actualization of a quality in an utterance—the apple is red).

Images typically fall into visual studies of family; however, rather than take on a visual study of family, this project pulls from the ideas of Charles S. Peirce, Gilles Deleuze, and Henri Bergson which chart a course through family as a system of images (material-thought relations) and signs in which video can provide a compelling means of analysis. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, particularly his ideas on cinema, allow for

1 I use plural pronouns purposely throughout in order to resist gender dichotomies and address the multiple “selves” of the reader.

2 See Appendix B—Peirce’s Semiotics and Deleuze’s Cinema
video to work through and with Peirce’s semiotics, which allows family to be studied not as a thing in itself, but as a relation of signs that create a territory of family. Family that strays from this territory is reigned in by various forces, the state apparatus being an amalgamation. However, it is too abstract to say that the state reigns in family, rather this occurs through a continuous, intra-active process of family production. This process is intra-active rather than interactive because the variation occurs within itself. In other words, family variation occurs not in a holistic fashion, but in a fragmentary production of images, which always occurs from within, but change the whole of which they are a part. The ultimate question, perhaps, is how do images create and maintain family, as a temporal process, within various spaces, specifically child welfare.

Considering this, my research questions shift to ask, “What could family do or become?” and “What are the conditions that shape family, good family, or bad family?” Underlying these questions is the idea of complexity and the thousands of syntheses that create family including the ways that these syntheses engage with language and thought. I then put these together to create additional questions rather than make simple conclusions, the hope being that readers and viewers will engage with these questions and develop their own responses as they engage with the uncertainty. Rather than introducing these videos further by describing methods or literary and theoretical context I display them here and encourage the reader to look to for answers to some of the more traditional questions.

**The Films**

Eleven in total, these videos were developed in conjunction with research assistants drawing on data from case files and interviews with former foster youth. I used my own experience as a Guardian ad Litem to drive some of the videos or answer
questions as needed. Videos one through six (Object 4-1 through Object 4-6) were developed independent of me, meaning each was produced without my direct guidance and were derived from—but not representative of—the case files we reviewed. I review them here briefly. “Infinite Relations” portrays a young woman who has experienced sexual abuse and some of what others say about her who are attending to her case. This video plays with our perceptions of sexual abuse survivors in the child welfare system and the way in which they are often characterized when in many cases their full stories are unknown. “Cleaning Up” is a momentary look at a child cleaning, it invites us to question who the child is and the situation in which the child is engaged. “Case Management” shows the perspective of a case manager working on a case, reflecting the disconnected and mundane way in which families are formed and reformed in the child welfare system. “Choosing Clothes” looks briefly at a parent or guardian preparing for court. “Candle” uses a candle as a metaphor juxtaposing children and anger in the home. “Household” explores the difficulty of tracing out family relationships and how families that take unfamiliar forms can challenge those working in child welfare. It also suggests how events related to abuse or neglect can influence family structure.

The initial six videos were used in video elicitation interviews with former foster youth as well as another that I created “Pills” (Object 4-7), which is my own production, but was created from the case files. This short film attempted to look into the experience of a parent addicted to prescription medication. From the interviews with former foster youth I developed other videos including “Scrapbook” (Object 4-8), which reflected the way in which one of the participants organized her family and included sundry persons from her case manager to other foster kids that she lived with and became close to
during care. While the people in the photos were somewhat uncharacteristic of “simple” families the pictures reflected the events typical in the life of a teenager, including graduation, cheerleading, and fun with family and friends. This video was used in later elicitation interviews as well.

The final four videos were created with more involvement than the initial set of films. These videos drew from the case files, interviews, news stories, and volunteer experience. They were also developed over several months of weekly meetings in which I worked with research assistants to create storyboards in conjunction with Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory of signs. “Table” (Object 4-9) and “After School” (Object 4-10) were developed in conjunction with research assistants who took the lead on production. “Family Semiotics” (Object 4-11) and “Family Time” (Object 4-12) were produced by myself. “Table” explores drugs on the periphery of events in the family, but the way in which drugs often became the only focus once a case is opened. “After School” sought to create some confusion around the idea of normality and breakdown the conceptions of children in foster care by portraying a teen coming home from school and forcing the audience to draw conclusions about his relationship to his home and family context. “Family Semiotics” asks what is that signifies “family,” “good family,” and “bad family” by juxtaposing various images. Finally, “Family Time” plays with repetition and time choosing to forgo narrative in exchange for a rhythm of time through the juxtaposition of home and the doctor’s office. It asks about the relationship between family, the doctor, and the child welfare system.

Points for Consideration

There were a few points of clarity in our experience of making these films. For one, there was always the question of “Would this really happen?” thus we were
continually competing with conceptions of reality, but not in such a way that we sought
to distance ourselves from reality or conform to what we thought would be real, doing so
seemed to only be a way to reinforce stereotypes. Instead we used what we had seen
in the actual experiences of families in the child welfare system and sought to magnify
some of the paradoxes inherent in the cases. For example, in some of the cases we
reviewed it was not clear that there was any abuse, rather the children were taken in the
interest of safety. In one case a participant told me how her child had been removed
after a hospital visit because she (the mother) had been in foster care and was told that
she was at a higher risk for abusing her child as a result. Thus it was clear to us that it
was not simply the action itself but the surrounding signifiers that came to signify
“abuse” or “neglect.” We wondered how racial attitudes might play into these
perceptions, for example, in “Table” we wondered if the presence of the white father
may have tempered the reaction of police and emergency personnel as well as the
audience’s reaction to the marijuana joint on the table. “Family Semiotics” developed
this idea more specifically through juxtaposition of music, image, and action as well as
race, gender, and age. It asked questions about drug use among families that we do not
expect or that do not “look” like drug users.

Another point to consider is the way in which we as researchers had to engage
with our own understandings of family, abuse, neglect and how to portray that while at
the same time recognizing that we would actually have to create this illusion. For
example, thinking about our own family experiences, our knowledge of or experience
with abusive relationships, or drug use. We also had to work with the resources that
were available to us, including actors and props, and make clear but constrained

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decisions about what to create and how to do it. In this way, while we were unrestrained in what we could imagine, what was materially viable was a completely different issue. This was helpful in many ways in that it forced us to seriously consider what we could and should create with what limited resources we had.

Finally, video is a powerful medium for researchers, but it is more often used as a technique for representation rather than experimentation. Here we use film to work through some of the difficulties associated with family representation in order to create new ways of viewing and experiencing family that may be helpful in rethinking what family is and does, but also what it is to be a “good” or “bad” family. This type of project could also be extended, with the availability of greater resources, to work directly with former foster youth or social workers to explore their own perceptions of family and how to rethink family in ways that may be liberating both to them and the families they work with.
Object 4-1. Infinite Relations: A short film about a young girl in the foster system (.mp4 file 57.6MB)

Object 4-2. Cleaning Up: A short film about cleaning up a mess (.mp4 file 167MB)

Object 4-3. Case Management: A short film about a child welfare case manager (.mp4 file 153MB)

Object 4-4. Choosing Clothes: A short film about a parent/guardian getting ready for court (.mp4 66MB)

Object 4-5. Candle: A short film about a caregiver (.mp4 72MB)

Object 4-6. Household: A short film reconsidering the idea of family (.mp4 338MB)

Object 4-7. Pills: A short film about a man taking pills (.mp4 200MB)

Object 4-8. Scrapbook: A short film portraying a family scrapbook (.mp4 150MB)

Object 4-9. Table: A short film about a family event (.mp4 132MB)

Object 4-10. After School: A short film about a boy coming home from school (.mp4 57MB)

Object 4-11. Family Time: A short film experimenting with family and time (.mp4 358MB)

Object 4-12. Family Semiotics: A short film about signification and family (.mp4 16MB)
CHAPTER 5
DEPARTURES

The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning.

—Michel Foucault
Technologies of the Self

In writing this dissertation I ended up with hundreds of unused pages of text written over the course of three years. Many of these were lines that I began exploring, but decided they did not fit in the flow of whichever chapter I was writing. Rather than delete these or leave them to wither in the “cloud” I wondered if some of them may not be presented as points of departure, lines extending outward reaching out for connections. The suggestion was made that this chapter could be composed of aphorisms in the style of Nietzsche and so I have taken these “scraps,” as I called them, and placed them here as “departures” that I or someone else may take or could take, in the future. I also weaved in some other ending thoughts that I have as I bring this project to a close.

Maybe the biggest lie we ever told ourselves is that family is “natural.” Family is a production system for bodies, which makes it incredibly important to economic and state interests. Being shrouded in religious and moral discourse is a chief form of obfuscating that cynical fact. When we are concerned about the “success” of a child what we are really wanting to know is how we can get that person to no longer be a concern and how we can live an independent life. When we turn our problems inward to family (e.g., Maybe if that child had better parents he wouldn’t have killed those boys!) it shifts responsibility off of the state, off of ourselves, but it is impossible to divide culpability. The idea of the “natural” family has done significant damage because “natural” becomes
a means of saying “true family” or “real family” it becomes the standard by which family is defined and measured, regardless of the range of variation that we allow for.

“Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production. The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people’s imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will” (Marx, Engels, & Arthur, 1932/1970, pp. 46-47).

Family also belongs to a relation of production, it is the production of the individual body and the means of producing it that are so fought over. The question of how the body should be produced, not only in terms of the sexual act, but the production of the body as it is produced materially and within the limits of those working to produce a body. But also it is the material limits pronounced by these relations and the inherent injustices that are ignored in favor of a discourse of individual shortcomings. Unfortunately this idea is far less political than it seems considering that there is no position liberal or conservative that currently focused on a change in the relation of production, but rather the focus is on how the individual will be supported within these relations.

It is the representation of individuals that is problematic, even in cases where they are raced, gendered, classed, sexualized, etc. there is still a focus on these categories as if the person fit like a puzzle, this is not the confusion of intersectional theorists, on the contrary, these theorists underscore the importance of putting these categories back into motion (Collins, 2002), but it is the use of these ideas to create multiple layers of the individual rather than recognize the interpenetration and complete inability to separate not only the characteristics of the individual, but the individual from
the individuals with which they produce. Multiplicity allows the individual to be seen as only a frame, a spatial representation of broader engagements with matter, than what we take for granted.

Foucault (1988) writes about whether or not you would have the courage to write what you did after you finished writing it. That statement engages a feeling I have had in the more recent years of writing this. While this dissertation is about complexity, in terms of method and topic, it is also the creation of a self in that it contracts various elements into a connected series and in at least one of those series is “me” (Deleuze, 1968/1994). One of the most difficult things about writing this dissertation and presenting it has been to allow it to be itself, to let go of it and let it do what it will. The intent of the project was to put Deleuze, Family, and Method in a blender and see what came out, but instead I felt like it broke the machine, which is not necessarily a good thing because I think I am the machine. It would be a lie to say it started out as clean and ended as neatly as this document will suggest, but the purpose of this was to write something reasonably neat—so I will try, with the caveat that what is written is a synthesis of events, a contemplation—in other words—a self.

This is a rejection of a search for truth opting instead for “a whole cartload of beautiful possibilities” (Nietzsche, 1907/1990, p. 5). In doing so I attempt to create an escape, or as Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) say, a “line of flight,” which might be thought of as a rethinking or recreating of a problem opening it up to new possibilities (potentialities). To do this we must look at sociology, theory, and philosophy as a means of escape, which is not exactly a solution, but a way out—however brief—of the
quagmire of modernity. Thus, the purpose is not to answer a question, but to posit a problem (Deleuze, 1966/1988).

Traditionally this would be the place to wrap everything up cohesively, but each chapter is meant to stand on its own, which makes “wrapping-up” somewhat redundant. If I had to say something, which I do, I would say that representation can be dangerous because it is so easily reified. This is not a new thought, we understand how race and gender, which are wholly representations (i.e., abstractions) have material effects as powerful tools of domination and subjection. However, we forget about those things that we assume to be good from the outset, such is the case with family and the institutions that support/control it. The problem is that family, and child welfare in particular, is incredibly nuanced, it has immense power and influence, but the allegiance to the representation of the “good” family is constraining when that “good” family requires a specific set of signifiers that can only be gained through access to economic resources (even Julia, a participant, remarked that a family should have a “large, clean house”). The question, though, is how to open up family and I witnessed this in my observations as a Guardian ad Litem and in my interviews, that the children can adapt, but it is so often the desire to put them in the right looking situation that creates more trauma than leaving them at home (Bass, 2004). This is really the chief idea in this project that both in family and in research that the allegiance to representation is a problem. In thinking about family or family policy it is the constraint of representation that creates barriers for policymakers and the families they serve. Additional policy can be helpful, but what the policy actually does will always play out in unknown ways, for instance, Calvin told me how he was faced with the choice of staying in care for a few more years so that he
could get free college and a lot of people told him to stay in, including his sisters. The policy did not provide relief or more positive outcomes for Calvin, it created another element in the system he was navigating, it was not a way out, just another consideration.

The “father” of French sociology was Auguste Comte, but we must also recognize the movement from which Comte arose, which was founded by Henri de Saint-Simon (Gane, 2003). The enlightenment had created a stir of interest in determining ways to construct society. With this came the creation of scholarly groups or “societies” eager to determine how to form societies in the wake of the enlightenment. The “Wednesday Society” in which Kant took part was one such example (Deligiorgi, 2012). The followers of Saint-Simon, the Saint-Simonians, had similar ideas, but were wont to actually construct these societies and experimented with socialism and new family, or reproductive, configurations. Eventually the group was driven out of France, immigrating to Egypt in order to help construct the Suez canal. However, the spirit of the group lived on in Comte who sought not only to develop positivism as a way of determining the best society, but to establish a political and religious order of sociologists to usher in the utopia made possible by positivism (Comte, 1853/2009).

Thus, for Comte, sociology was a means by which we could determine how to create a better society, method was simply a tool of a larger goal. However, over time positivism became a method divorced from the larger goal toward a means of organization and data analysis itself rather than of deriving new potentials and possibilities. This was in part due to Durkheim’s Rules of the Sociological Method
forming the basis for sociology in the United States (Gane, 2003; Ritzer, 2011). True, Durkheim’s particular sociology reinforces a general sociology focused on what Pierre Bourdieu called promoting the idea of collective responsibility (Bourdieu, 1998a, p. 7). But theory as an envisioning process has been sidelined to the techniques of data analysis and population trends (Goldthorpe, 2015) enhanced by the advent of “big data.” Description and even explanation, however, are never neutral, knowledge is always developed through power and by distributing knowledge without a larger purpose sociology becomes wholly reactive to the economic conditions of the academy and institutional politics.

We can think of family as a stable set of individuals who relate in specific and similar ways across cultures (Malinowski, 1963; Murdock, 1949), groups that serve certain functions in society related to child raising and socialization (Parsons & Bales, 1955), or even small group configurations related to the economic conditions of a given society (Engels, 1884/2010). Definitions become more difficult when discussing changes to family. The family decline debate of the late 80s and early 90s focused on the shift away from the nuclear form of family with some suggesting that the family was in decline, meaning that it no longer looked or functioned the way it should (Popenoe, 1993) while others suggested that was a good thing (Stacey, 1993). Thus, family is not a simple thing that occurs, but is very much tangled up in cultural and political movements. Indeed, family is a label bestowed upon and removed from groups by the state apparatus and has often been withheld from groups not afforded legal status or
privilege including—among others—slaves, the poor\textsuperscript{1}, and interracial or gay couples (Coontz, 1992; Schwartz, 2006). Considering the complex relationship between language, culture, and power it is not surprising that family definitions are numerous and contested.

It is difficult to say what post-structuralism is exactly. For one, it is difficult to define something that, at its core, resists the idea of concrete definitions. This is also what makes post-structuralism both helpful and unhelpful. Post-structuralism can be thought of a group of theorists or as a wave of thought that arose after, or “post,” Ferdinand de Saussure and the linguists, anthropologists, and psychoanalysts that he influenced—often referred to as structuralists. Like other theoretical perspectives, a given theorist may have any number of similarities or differences with the others that are considered a part of the perspective. While the authors may take similar perspectives they are rarely attempting to carve out a whole theory. For example, while we may think of symbolic interactionism as a ‘perspective’ it is better thought of as a grouping of theorists who were connected both by ideas, time and space (i.e., the University of Chicago in the early 20th century). Thus, while researchers may suggest they are using “symbolic interactionism,” this is fairly nondescript because of the different assumptions and projects of those theorists labeled symbolic interactionists (Blumer, 1969/1986). For example, Mead’s ideas are more closely aligned with realist ontological assumptions while Blumer takes more of a nominalist position (Ritzer, 2011, pp. 351-390). As a result, it is difficult to say whether or not post-structuralism is so much a group of

\textsuperscript{1} In the case of the poor this often means a difficulty in getting married due to economic barriers either legal or cultural (i.e., cannot afford a wedding, ring, etc.) and dissolution of marriage in the case of divorce when legal fees are too expensive.
coordinated theorists as much as it was a the next generation of French philosophers engaging with the “structuralists” who preceded them.

Changes in family can be seen as individual responses to broad economic changes, but broad changes in family can also be explained by changes in the means and relations of production. As Marx and Engels said,

“There is no other way to explain the changes in family than with constant revolutionizing of the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” (1848/2012, p. 77).

Even if we admit that individual decisions play a role in changes in family we must also admit that many of these changes come about in relation to changes in technology or ideas, which create changes in the means and mode of production of family. For example, it is no wonder that the shift for women to work outside the home with greater acceptance and regularity comes with increased technology to create more efficient households. This is a difficult thought because we typically associate family with happiness and as a meaningful, fulfilling activity of choice, but when all this melts away we are left with viewing fluctuations in family in a dialectical relationship with the economy and the changing means of production. It is further difficult to suggest that movements focused on liberating women, radicalizing gender, or accepting a wider range of family configurations as “normative” may be—at least to some degree—related to broad economic changes. This is not to say that there is no social change initiated by
members of a society, rather we should always look for the dialectical relationship at work.

Multiplicity has been developed in many different ways. Alain Badiou (2011) suggests that a multiplicity is an element of something else and that its existence, or being, is only in relation to the thing to which it belongs. On a basic level this can be represented by the equation: $[x \in y]$, meaning that $x$ is an element of $y$. Badiou (2011) suggests that being is multiplicity because the element $x$ is always defined in relation to the set in which it exists ($y$) rather than being defined by itself. In other words, $x$ is not an element of $x$; rather, $x$ is always an element of something else. In a later book Deleuze along with his coauthor Felix Guattari also have the idea of a heterogeneous and interpenetrating multiplicity, but add that a multiplicity should always thought as having $n-1$ dimensions, which suggests $n$—or the whole—is never actually completed, but is constantly shifting (1980/1987).

To explain the idea of the movement image further I will explain a bit more about the process of film projection. Film is dependent on the capturing of still images, if the image it captures is moving than the image will blur, thus images must be captured quickly and distinctly. In turn, the images must also be projected clearly and distinctly. For example, if one was to simply roll film past a lens while exposing each frame of film to light the result would be several blurry images that when projected would appear as a blotted mess. To prevent this, the shutter of the camera opens and closes for each frame as it passes through the camera and the same is done when projecting, the shutter blocks light as the film moves. As a result, the viewer does not see the actual moving of the film. Rather, the viewer only sees the succession of still images. If the
shutter does not block the viewer from seeing the movement of the film then the film becomes indiscernible. Interestingly enough, while film is captured at 24 frames per second projectors project many more images per second. The number of images per second is known as the flicker rater or more commonly, the refresh rate. This is done by creating shutters that pass between the light and the image more quickly so that the shutter not only prevents the viewer from seeing the movement of one frame to the next, but also passes over the same frame one or more times so that the same frame is projected several times. This blocking of light actually increases the perception of motion (Hammack, 2015)!

Video operates in a different way. Depending on the camera, video can capture many more images per second; however, the standard capture rate is 30 frames per second. Motion is produced by sequencing images as in film; however it is done pixel by pixel (tiny dots of light that make up a screen) rather than frame by frame. By sequencing the color variation of each pixel via complex algorithms—codecs—the pixel changes create movement. Mackenzie (2010) provides a stunning explanation and theorization of this process. Similar to film, the image is not presented as a string of frames, but with discrete changes, which are perceived as continuous motion. In video the pixels are refreshed, or changed, about 60 times per second (hertz). This number is due to the fact that the refresh rate of video was tied to the alternating current it used to project the lines of video (initially video was refreshed line by line). More recent technology uses algorithms to increase the refresh rate of images to multiples of sixty. For example, refresh rates of around 240 hertz produce motion that is perceived as
smoother and this difference can be perceived by the human brain, but regardless of the typical 60Hz or 240Hz refresh rate, motion is still perceived.

Film and video have their own semiotic that proceeds as a series of images from various shots and angles that creating images with very little similarity to our everyday lives. It is abstract in that it pulls experiences out of duration and places them together in a clean linear form that life rarely exists in. However, this is not to say that video should imitate life. Language does not imitate life, rather it moves with life, changes alongside and with it and is therefore within it. Video/film benefits from a similar effect in that film affects and is affected by life. At the same time, referring to them as separate (i.e., affect and are affected) is also a false notion, life and film are only separated in thought. Language, thought, film, affect, move together and are a part of each other, in other words, they are within each other. If qualitative research is to “create a distinction in kind” how better to do this than through video? Does film not hold an untapped potential for creation that at the same time is bounded by “real world” conditions?

It seems to me that dissertations are meant to be a creation or extension of the author’s self, which can then be scrutinized and deemed worthy or unworthy of the status of “Doctor of Philosophy”. By extension, dissertations prove whether or not the individual is capable of amassing and synthesizing information for an academic audience, specifically the supervising committee. Thus the purpose of this dissertation is to convince my supervising committee that “I” am either capable or incapable. However, there is a fundamental philosophical question locked up in this task, which relates to the assumption that the self of that author is unified and individual. In other words, is everything “I” put on this page “mine”? Or is this dissertation an assemblage—
a production—of multiple “things” or multiple people? And if it is composed of multiple elements, what unifies it? Can we say that it is “the same” from first draft to final? It may be, then, that this dissertation begins with these philosophical questions: “What is it to stay the same?” “What is it to change?” “What is it to be different?” I do not seek to answer these questions here, but they are an important starting point in determining how to approach difficult questions related to methodology, family, and complexity. At the same time, they are also the types of questions that sociology rarely has time for—at least in my experience—and family studies\(^3\) has even less time for, but they are immensely important in research practice.

We feel the same way about our book. What matters is whether it works, and how it works, and who it works for. It's a machine too. It's not a matter of reading it over and over again, you have to do something else with it. It's a book we enjoyed producing. We're not writing for people who think psychoanalysis is doing fine and sees the unconscious for what it is. We're writing for people who think it's pretty dull and sad as it burbles on about Oedipus, castration, the death instinct, and so on. We're writing for unconsciousnesses that have had enough. We're looking for allies. We need allies. And we think these allies are already out there, that they've gone ahead without us, that there are lots of people who've had enough and are thinking, feeling, and working in similar directions: it's not a question of fashion but of a deeper "spirit of the age" informing converging projects in a wide range of fields. In ethnology, for instance. In psychiatry. Or what Foucault's doing: our method's not the same, but we seem to meet him on all sorts of points that seem basic, on paths he's already

\(^2\) This is not to say sociologists are not interested, but that there is really no time for it as has been discussed widely across various academic disciplines see (Ulmer, 2016), also (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

\(^3\) The amount of attention that family scholars pay to their philosophical assumptions is unclear. Instructional texts, for instance, give varying amounts of attention to ontological and epistemological assumptions. In one of the earliest texts devoted to qualitative methods in family studies, Daly (1992) writes a chapter discussing epistemology (Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992). Over a decade later Daly provides a more thorough accounting in his own text (2007) reviewing the relationships between epistemologies, paradigms, theories, and methods drawing from Crotty (1998). The Sourcebook of Family Theory and Research (Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2004) includes a section on epistemology adapted from Klein and Whites’ theory text (1996), which describes three different epistemological perspectives. A more recent version of Klein and Whites’ text contains a more-or-less similar approach to epistemology (2008). Smith, Hamon, Ingoldsby, and Miller’s theory text does not mention epistemology or ontological assumptions (2008).
mapped out. And then it's true we've read a lot. But as the fancy took us, rather randomly. What we're after certainly isn't any return to Freud or return to Marx. Nor any theory of reading. What we look for in a book is the way it transmits something that resists coding: flows, revolutionary active lines of flight, lines of absolute decoding rather than any intellectual culture. Even in books there are oedipal structures, oedipal codes and strictures that are all the more insidious for being abstract, nonfigurative. What we find in great English and American novelists is a gift, rare among the French, for intensities, flows, machine-books, tool-books, schizo-books. All we've got in France is Artaud and half of Beckett. People may criticize our book for being too literary, but we're sure such criticism will come from teachers of literature. Is it our fault that Lawrence, Miller, Kerouac, Burroughs, Artaud, and Beckett know more about schizophrenia than psychiatrists and psychoanalysts? (Deleuze, 1990/1995, p. 23)

They told me not to add anything after the defense. But, I don’t think anyone will read this so why not? It’ll be my “own” little thing. In the defense one of the biggest takeaways for me was that I was holding back. And that is true. Perhaps part way because I’m not willing to let go, but also that I’m not entirely sure about anything and I don’t feel compelled to encourage anyone else to be sure of anything. I have the critique part down, I’m happy to find holes in everything, but when it comes to maintaining a position I find myself so often falling into nihilism. I co-wrote a paper a couple years ago and my co-author put in this quote that I liked, but I didn’t get at the time. It was something about how our position after post-structuralism is to do what we can to find ways out of nihilism. I guess I see nihilism as this kind of vacuum; it just pulls everything in. The only way to stay above critique is to get sucked into the darkness—no one can touch you if you critique them first—but that is a dark place. I wonder if it wouldn’t be more interesting and fun, for that matter, to stake out all sorts of positions. Maybe what Deleuze leaves me with, at this point anyway, is a sense of striking out new positions and when someone says, “Wait, what about…?” I say, “Well, let’s try something else.” In other words, there is no certainty, there is no ideal: “For all have
sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). In other words, what would it be to live an experimental and improvisational life? Unfettered from the need to be perfect/imperfect, but to be differently. I’m not there (and will never be there because to suggest otherwise would be to create only another ideal) and I also don’t want to say that this is what it is to “be Deleuzian” because that’s garbage. But I think it’s where I want to head next.
Another Personal Statement

This dissertation is a swim with Deleuze, complete with (near) drownings. While the project was intended to be a clean-messy application of Deleuze, or Deleuze and Guattari, which I had dreamed of previously (Hendricks & Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), it ended up simply being messy. This dissertation has been five years in the making and somewhere in that time I found this section on learning in *Difference and Repetition* that really encapsulated a lot of how I thought and think about learning philosophy and Deleuze more specifically:

> The movement of the swimmer does not resemble that of the wave, in particular, the movements of the swimming instructor which we reproduce on the sand bear no relation to the movements of the wave, which we learn to deal with only by grasping the former in practice as signs. That is why it is so difficult to say how someone learns: there is an innate or acquired practical familiarity with signs, which means that there is something amorous—but also something fatal—about all education… (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 23)

> The variability of swimming fits this whole process and it helps even more to think about it in terms of swimming in the ocean where waves change, tides move up and down, and you drift in and out of the surf. There is and was a lot of danger, though. In some ways it was more like a trip to the edge of a volcano—an attempt to get as close as possible to falling in without actually falling in. In some ways this is like Deleuze’s “line of flight,” which is a kind of trajectory that completely disrupts the order of a given territory.

Deleuze advocates for lines of flight, which break open the neatly organized territories of binaries (male/female, rich/poor, black/white). However, there is a danger in creating the lines because we often rediscover “everything we were fleeing” (Deleuze...
& Parnet, 1977/1987, p. 38). In other words, rather than escaping, we recreate or reterritorialize the line of flight by bringing it back into organization, the same organization, only differently dressed. Foucault suggests similarly that “We know very well that, even with the best intentions, [programs we create to fix problems] become a tool, an instrument of oppression” (1988, p. 10) That was my concern in creating this dissertation and why I so many times grew frustrated because when I thought I was escaping I found myself again in a different-looking territory that was very much the same¹. It is difficult to make all of that come out in this document, but suffice it to say it was a violent process of resistance and fleeing. I realized this one night outside an ice cream shop as I wrote a note to Deleuze. I told him that I may follow the line to my death and he admits, in another place, that many authors do. It seems quaint to say that my dissertation took me to the brink of death, but that seems to be the point, to a certain extent. In some ways they are about who can play on the edge of the crater and survive.

The main issue I came to confront in all of this mess was the idea of complexity in research, especially complexity in family research as well as the idea of family complexity. The idea of complexity has come to be seen as much too simplistic and Deleuze gave me some ideas for thinking about that. At the same time I should be clear that this dissertation is not about quick solutions to issues surrounding family complexity and child welfare. In many ways it is against those types of projects and the ways in which they conflate ‘complex’ with ‘problematic’. Neither is it about families as much as

¹ Appendix A details some of the ways that Deleuze deterreorialized and reterritorialized me.
it is about the concept ‘family’. Instead, it works over the problem of family: how we think about family and how this leads us to think about and label families.

Consequently, this dissertation is concerned with the conventional ideas and theorizing taking place in the study of family. John Law (2004) suggests that any attempt to research a topic must be as complex and confusing as that which it purports to study. This is my attempt at such a project. Family is a dangerous area for this type of work because it is so often taken for granted. Indeed, there may be few things considered as “natural” as family; although what we typically think of as “natural” is often a reification of a dominant idea. Here my aim is to suggest that what we think of as “family” and as the “natural” production of family is not as simple as we believe, rather, family is a mess.

**Another Personal Statement**

- I do not know who Deleuze is and I have never known him.
- It is difficult to say what Deleuze is good for because I have to question what good *is* first.
- It is difficult to say “I” because “I” am not certain about Descartes’ *cogito*.
- It is difficult to say who I am because I am more inclined to side against Locke’s claim of a unified self.
- If I am all these things than I suppose I am Deleuze, but:
- I do not know who Deleuze is and I have never known him.
- It is difficult to say what Deleuze is good for because I have to question what good *is* first.
- It is difficult to say “I” because “I” am not certain about Descartes’ *cogito*.
- It is difficult to say who I am because I am more inclined to side against
  Locke's claim of a unified self.
- If I am all these things than I suppose I am Deleuze, but:
- I do not know who Deleuze is and I have never known him.
- It is difficult to say what Deleuze is good for because I have to question what
  good is first.
- It is difficult to say “I” because “I” am not certain about Descartes’ cogito.
- It is difficult to say who I am because I am more inclined to side against
  Locke’s claim of a unified self.
- If I am all these things than I suppose I am Deleuze, but…[repeat]

**Another Personal Statement**

When I began reading Deleuze I was in a weird place in my life. It was just a few
months before I would resign from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
(Mormons). The theoretical basis for this dissertation makes it completely necessary to
address this because my entire life up to this point was spent in devotion to God and the
church. I prayed and read scripture daily, went to church weekly, worked hard to keep
all of my covenants, I served a two-year mission for the church, married another
Mormon and had children relatively quickly and at a relatively young age. I finished
having children before ever owning a house or beginning a career. When we resigned
from the church I was relieved and excited to explore a world that I did not really
understand, but I also needed something to fill the moral and ethical guide and daily
ritual that religion had been for me. In the beginning Deleuze became a kind of religious
text to me. It was not always easy to understand, but there were these gems of wisdom
and new ways of living that I had not considered. I wanted to be Deleuzian. I talked
about Deleuze with everyone, I was a new convert sharing my newfound beliefs. Eventually, though, I had a falling out with Deleuze. Not so much that I stopped liking Deleuze, but that I realized he was not that special. I traced his work to other philosophers like Bergson, Spinoza, and Nietzsche. I read Saussure and Peirce, looked at Guattari’s individual writings, googled “Hjemslev.” What I realized was that Deleuze was interesting and put different philosophers together in ways that were intriguing, but he was not an all-knowing sage. He had some serious flaws. Deleuze was kind of a proxy for God in my life, but he disappointed me, just the same as Joseph Smith did before. There is something important about realizing that no one knows everything. It forces you to be more critical and encourages you to do your own work. Claiming a proposition is true based on who said it is fallacious. Deleuze took me further than this, though, or it may have been Nietzsche through Deleuze. Together they helped me to question not just trusting authors, but trusting any system of logic. Not to go so far as to reject any system of logic, but to love uncertainty, to not put my devotion into any one thing and to not follow anything blindly. In Thus Spake Zarathustra, the prophet suggests that once we have slain the dragon we become the child. This is me as the child: curious, inquisitive and ever-questioning, but messy as hell.

Another Personal Statement

I used to be a quantitative researcher whatever that means. And now I am again, working at a research institute, and it’s hard sometimes to do this work, but it’s hard not to, too.

An Evolving List of Questions

I kept a list of my research questions over the past four years:
How do the conditions surrounding families and learning/education create repetitions and differences?

How do Deleuzian differences in family learning/education connect and relate?

How do families break free from striation (sameness)?

How does the state constrain families?

How should families/individuals interact with education?

How do families interact with schools?

Specifically, how do families become-schools?

How do families create conditions for learning?

What do family's encounters with schools produce? In the school? In the family?

How do families move through and around expectations placed on them by schools?

How do families create difference in education? How does difference influence family interactions with schools?

What are the virtual conditions shaping children's education?

Why are parents not doing enough? (could include parents themselves and those saying they aren’t doing enough).

Which parents aren’t doing enough?

What do we do with bad families?

How do we determine who is a bad family?

What is an evil family?

How does a bad family become labeled?

Which actions create bad families?

What are the relations between relations that create a bad family?
How are families becoming-bad?
What do you want to know about foster care?
What do you know about foster care?
Is foster care a good thing?
How is foster care becoming?
How is adoption becoming?
How does foster care become?
How does a foster child become?
How does foster child become…bad, good?
Does foster care create relations that compound or destroy family? What does foster care do to family?
How does family destroy or create foster care?
What is becoming-foster child? What is becoming-family? Or how do these become?
How does family flex, stretch, twist, rotate, end, or how does is flex and stretch and grow and shrink and rotate and stagnate…?
How can we conceive of family without the nuclear family?
How can we think of family immanently rather than transcendentally?
APPENDIX B
ADDRESSING TRADITIONAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I address some more traditional questions related to a research article here because placing them with the videos always overshadowed what was meant to be experiential rather than conclusive. The purpose was never to create a specific argument but to create some questions in dominant narratives through video. However, I did base my approach in a theoretical argument and followed a loose set of methodological goals. I present them here not in any clear relation to the project, but as a loose set of arguments because this is more aligned with my approach to the videos. I did not follow a rigid set of guidelines, but developed different actions as I went along. This section does not comprise all of my work on the project. It is only a synthesis of what I currently consider relevant in this present moment. While each section runs into the next I make little attempt at weaving them together, but instead envision them living on their own allowing the reader to read what is most relevant to them without having to read everything. This also allows for more freedom in publishing and working with the videos in the chapter which could be used in the future for publication or screening.

A Critical Overview of Family Production in Child Welfare

In speaking of family we should be aware of at least two discourses: “the illusion of the ‘never-been-seen-before’ and its counter-part, ‘the-way-it-always-has-been’” (Bourdieu, 1998b, p. 68), so it is with family. Any improvisation involving family cannot assume that family is tied to ideal or true from, rather it pushes what family is to explore what could be. Historical research suggests that family has changed significantly over time (Coontz, 1992, 2006; Engels, 1884/2010) including the relationship between children and society and even the conception of “childhood” (Aries, 1960/1962; Corsaro,
Therefore, it is not a stretch to experiment with what family might be, but in doing so we should take into consideration the way in which family engages with various other institutions and forces.

As Foucault demonstrated, modern states have created more efficient means of control to maintain the control and an economic status quo (Foucault, 1975/1977, 1975/2012). Many of these technologies evolved as authority over the family shifted away from the male figure and shifted to the state (P. Meyer, 1983). As such, the family moved from confinement in the home with a patriarchal authority at its head to interconnection or integration with other formerly confined institutions including education, medicine, family services, and the judicial system with the state apparatus(es) at the head (Donzelot, 1977/1979; P. Meyer, 1983). These entities became a part of family as they began to claim legal authority over family decisions including proscriptive and prescriptive decisions related to health, education, and punishment (Minow, 1991). This is not to say that families were at one time simple and have become complex, but that family changes in form and function with shifts in economic and political configurations (i.e., desire and power). Any similarity in family is due to the representations we create for family.

Social institutions and the state apparatus that supports them engage in discursive or semiotic regimes which signify “good” and “bad” families, the labeling of which refers families to additional institutions for continued communication (surveillance) depending on their assigned signification. For example, families receiving Medicaid benefits may be referred to nutrition supplement programs like the department of agriculture’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Women Infants
and Children (WIC), both of which provide money for food to low-income families. This is not to say that these programs do not provide a useful service, but in providing one service they also become an important component in the surveying and maintenance of family. Family interactions with child welfare are relatively recent. Child welfare as a state institution did not engage with families more broadly in the US until the early 20th century. The rationalization of family life was accompanied by many shifts in thinking about children (Aries, 1960/1962). The idea of childhood and the subsequent material construction of the period via various societal practices, technological innovations, and institutions including the school, family, and the law have created childhood and children as an innocent period for maturation and growth (Corsaro, 1997). The school system, in particular, is a central element of children’s lives and children spend more time in school to prepare them for increasing need for more highly skilled and increasingly technical labor and freeing up parents to work in a recently formed industrial labor force. This shift in thinking about children was reinforced by efforts to create children as a protected class, including the creation of child labor restrictions, and necessitated the creation of a child protection system capable of advocating for children who could no longer provide for themselves or their families until much later in life (Askeland, 2006). This shift was accompanied by technological innovations that removed the need for many of the child-friendly jobs in the mercantile class such as messenger and stock boys or newspaper sales, which were compatible with school days seeing as the hours were mainly after school (Corsaro, 1997). As a result, the focus on children became that of education for more highly skilled labor and the protection of children who were beginning to be seen
as highly vulnerable to psychological maladies as adults if their childhoods were less than ideal.

The New Deal and Great Society programs of the 30s and 60s added to programs for schools and families, which included programs like food assistance and child protection. Individual states and nonprofit organizations (mainly churches) provided much of the care for neglected or abandoned children until 1912 when the Children's Bureau was created, which addressed child-family issues at a federal level ("Children's Bureau Timeline," 2016). In the later 20th century the Child Abuse and Protection Act was first passed and reauthorized regularly, most recently in 2011. This act creates an office of child abuse and neglect and provides funding for organizations and researchers focused on child welfare, giving more power to the Children's Bureau to research and fund state-level programs. While these many programs were created to help families they “too often in effect controlled and restricted those people and subjected them to governmental regulation without protection against power imbalances” (Minow, 1991, p. 267). Indeed, child welfare has become, in many respects, to be a system of family control and punishment. This change took place as social workers became mediators of government aid, controlling the flow of resources based on compliance to specified family behaviors and forms (i.e., education and career pathways, therapy, housing decisions). Thus, while the child protection system seeks to provide help to children in difficult situations these children were in many ways made vulnerable by this same system that sought to protect them as it rearranged the sources of support for children re-centering economic aid on compliance to goals common ideas
of the dominant, which were often those seen in white, middle-class, heterosexual families.

The process of engaging families in the child welfare system can be explained simply, but is actually incredibly complex. In any case this process begins with the identification of abuse or neglect, defined federally as “any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm” In order for a child to be taken into the care of the state a shelter petition must be filed and granted by the appropriate court. The petition is filed by the state department responsible for children and families as is the placement of the child ("How the child welfare system works," 2013). In some states the court appoints a guardian ad litem who is often a volunteer to periodically check on the child and determine whether the child’s needs are being met and whether or not the placement is in the best interest of the child (Fla. Stat. § 61.403). Cases are reviewed per the judge’s discretion, usually determined by the state’s standard of timeliness. Placement changes are made as needed and if parents comply with their reunification plan as the state department and judge see fit then the child is reunified, if not they determine another permanent solution for the child which could include living with a relative or adoption.

A federal system, like that in the US, necessitates a look at national as well as state level laws and decisions and how these affect the production of family. While the federal level has some say when providing funds, state statutes provide direction for families entering into the legal system. This project takes place in Florida and thus we use Florida specific statutes as they relate to family. The number of statutes and legal
precedents relevant to the study of children and families is unreasonable to cover here, instead I will give a brief overview of relevant terms and the general flow of child welfare in Florida.

Child welfare cases in Florida are those involving abuse which is defined as “1. Intentional infliction of physical or mental injury upon a child; 2. An intentional act that could reasonably be expected to result in physical or mental injury to a child; or 3. Active encouragement of any person to commit an act that results or could reasonably be expected to result in physical or mental injury to a child” (Fla. Stat. § 827.03) and neglect defined as, “1. A caregiver’s failure or omission to provide a child with the care, supervision, and services necessary to maintain the child’s physical and mental health, including, but not limited to, food, nutrition, clothing, shelter, supervision, medicine, and medical services that a prudent person would consider essential for the well-being of the child; or 2. A caregiver’s failure to make a reasonable effort to protect a child from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by another person” (Fla. Stat. § 827.03). Any child welfare case begins with a report via the child protection hotline or seizure by a medical professional. Child Protective Investigators (CPIs) investigate and evaluate claims and determine the course of action. In some cases families have cases opened against them, but are not cause for children entering into dependency. However, inability to comply with the case plan can result in dependency. When children are taken and a shelter petition is filed with the judge. The child is sheltered and a “shelter hearing” takes place involving various representative from state agencies and the courts. A placement is then determined for the child and the child is put in placement. After placement a case plan is created and the parents and representatives meet before the
judge where the parents have the option to proceed with a trial or to accept the terms of
the case plan and waive their right to a trial without admitting guilt (this is the typical
course of action).

During placement, which can be with anyone the Department of Children and
Families (DCF) determines appropriate (kinship/relative care, non-relative care, foster
care, group home), the family care counselor and Guardian ad Litem (GAL) checks in
regularly with the child and reports any concerns to their respective agencies, the
counselor reports to DCF and the GAL with the court system. Reports on placement are
filed every 6 months and reviewed with the judge at the Judicial Review. After 12
months the state requires a permanent placement for the child either through
permanent guardianship, adoption, or reunification. This is the basic outline, actual
conditions can vary in many ways.

This is the ideal pattern; however, it is rare for things to go this smoothly, and the
difficulties and failures of the child welfare system are well noted. Case workers are
underpaid and overworked, and sometimes lack proper training or education. Burnout is
common and fixes often add additional work or added layers of bureaucracy. Children
are often lost or unaccounted for and generally children in the ‘system’ do poorer than
their peers who have been abused, but not been in care (Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio,
& Barth, 2012). Critiques are not unknown within the child welfare system, but are
exacerbated by volunteers and workers that often hold beliefs coinciding with these
dominant narratives of family and children who uphold the white, upper-middle class
view or what Dorothy Smith called the “Standard North-American Family” (1993). Smith
argued that the SNAF was an ideological code, which drove family and even family
reform back to this standard idea of family. The trouble here is that creating family is a production of specific conditions many of which do not exist within certain spaces or does not allow for heterogeneous bodies. Because of this the focus becomes on working to fit people into these forms or on how to secure the ideal functioning all of which necessitate additional rationalization. Still, family often escapes the configurations dictated by the state, which we sometimes hear as “runaways” “troubled teens,” or “kidnappings.” Obviously there is a concern for the child and abuse, but these epithets often occur as a means of controlling and legitimating punishment, which allows for further control by the legal system (Minow, 1991).

The need for additional rationalization to account for previous rationalization is nothing new. Indeed, in research and policy we often search for solutions to problems, but the “solutions” often create problems, which result in the “solution” being a problem itself. Much of modernity’s project is—and was—dealing with the problems created by solutions. For example, technological advances that create efficiency and innovation (i.e., industrialization), but bring with them environmental problems, alienation, poverty, obesity, and many other issues. Horkheimer and Adorno refer to this process, in part, as the “irrationality of rationality” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002)—a focus on increased rationality to solve the problems created by rationalization. Even our exciting solutions to problems such as global warming—solar panels, electric cars, and veganism—seem impervious now, but undoubtedly contain problems of their own that cannot yet be known—or perhaps remain undiscussed because of movement politics. Research is often performed to create policy suggestions or interventions meant to serve public or private institutions or markets engaging with the populations under consideration rather
than the people themselves\(^2\). While this does not have to be problematic in itself it does bring into question the totalizing power of state capitalism and the relation of power to data, research, and reform, which rather than solving problems seems to create additional problems, perpetuating the regime and adding, as Foucault demonstrated, more efficient forms of control (1975/1977).

Rationalization is undergirded by a search for and belief in the existence of truth. Not only truth, but order, that society could work properly given the discovery of its transcendent operation. Progress marches to the idea of a brighter future—what we might call a transcendent end, one that is better, more perfect. The search for truth underlies this march regardless of the aim of a movement. The problem is that truth becomes a quest for a new standard, a representation, a new form of dominance, which serves to winnow behavior into compliance with the standards set by this search for truth. In families this means determining “best practices” for families to engage in or the best forms for family to assume. Considering the power of the state in determining, producing, and differentiating families as well as the transcendent thought that runs through much of the research and thinking about family we can safely assume that family is not an independent, self-defined, universal set, but instead that family is a thing that is shaped, coerced, formed and unformed by power.

\(^2\) Let me provide an example, at a recent community meeting I attended the organizers had invited a very successful academic to speak. The academic was slated for 10-15 minutes, but spoke 10 minutes past the allotted time and had to be signaled to stop. This would not have been a big deal if the presenter had provided some helpful and relevant information for the audience, but the presentation was full of jargon, highfalutin statistics, and ended with a bulleted list of vague policy recommendations. In short, it was a typical conference-type presentation, which would have been perfect and applauded in another setting, but in this case it had very little relevance. Afterward this talk a large portion of the audience left and many of my colleagues were dumbfounded by the presenter’s lack of awareness.
The increasing rationalization of child welfare and the state more generally, fits well with what Deleuze called control societies. Building off of Foucault’s work suggesting that disciplining and confining of bodies has shifted and is shifting away from confinement to control (Deleuze, 1995), Deleuze, briefly describes these “control societies.” He suggests that they are those in which communication has replaced confinement. This change results in a loosening of confinement in exchange for information or data. The major issue in a society of control is the ability of the state and the economy to have a constant stream of information³. This is realized in the shifting away from confinement or end of many institutions that appeared during the modern era⁴ such as the asylum, school, family, orphanage, and the hospital. This shift is easily illustrated by the appearance of “big-data” including the collection and analysis of metadata, which is constant in an era of mobile devices, GPS, and “free” entertainment⁵. The effort to realize the modernist dream of predictability, control, and stability marches on embodied in new mechanisms of communication. Data, research, and surveillance under the guise of “convenience,” “marketing,” and “safety” is the discourse of these societies (Deleuze, 1995). Thus, any research that seeks to create an escape from totalizing power must resist falling back into typical assumptions and patterns of knowledge and data.

³ This works in some ways against Habermas’s theory of communicative action in that the push for greater and better communication changes nothing because of the power distribution. It is instead a way for institutions to gain access and control in the interest of convenience and safety.

⁴ Certainly the idea of an “era” can be troubled, but here I use this idea as a collective signifier of both a period and a focus on ideas developed during this period, specifically increased rationalization, individualism, and industrial capitalism.

⁵ Here I am referencing entertainment that is paid for in advertisements or marketing data such as metadata collected by large technology companies such as Facebook, Google, and other forms of consumer data.
Given the difficulties with engaging in such a quagmire, which is primarily the domain of social work, this project does not seek to add to critique or propose solutions, but instead to step back to take a broader view at how family is produced in. This production occurs abstractly not in a general way, but in a way that multiplies abstract forces as they play out in an event (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). Family becomes externalized or created in space in relation to an abstract machine—discourses giving meaning to signifiers. In other words, while we could see child welfare as a set of people making decisions and look to individual factors, biases, fatigue as factors influencing families and children (and these certainly are) there is also a more abstract question related to how the persons within these systems act in relation to the signifiers within the event or case. While it benefits the child welfare system to have laypeople believe that cases of abuse and neglect are clear and obvious, the reality is that these are legal cases in which evidence must be presented and an argument made. Within this process there is an semiotic process in which a family is signified along with abuse and neglect by whatever signifiers can be/are entangled.

Typically a research project would uncover the meaning of these signifiers and how they come to represent family, abuse, or neglect, but in this case I make this only an element because recognizing the meaning or the way in which meaning is communicated only works to identify, which leads to its own set of problems that we have already discussed. Instead, I search for another way that family could be or that family is within these semiotic arrangements in the cases. To do this I developed a means of experimenting with semiotics in a visual medium that allows not only for new
representations, but for signifiers to be rearranged, cut-up and folded in in new ways that allow for different questions and a productive basis that allows for the research to continue as viewers make sense of the films in relation to their own experience.

**Film and Video in Qualitative Research**

Film has been used since its inception to ask questions about the world or present conclusions. Some of the earliest films explored themes central to the world such as Charlie Chaplin’s Modern Times. In this film men are herded like cattle (juxtaposed between images of machines and animals) of industrialization, the plight of the modern laborer, the relations between the owners of the means of production, the mode or production, poverty, and so on. Buster Keaton was another well-known filmmaker of the time with similarly provocative and critical films. During this same period, academic films sought to be more objective and less polemical by documenting representations of phenomena rather than creating a collaborative story. Visual methods have changed over the past century, but the influence of positivism on video research remains.

Researching the visual began in the area of anthropology with video and still images becoming an important aspect of objective ethnographies (Marion & Crowder, 2013). Films of ‘native’ peoples such as “Nanook of the North” (Flaherty & Flaherty, 1924), “Balinese Character: Photographic Analysis” (Bateson & Mead, 1942). Zora Neale Huston’s visual studies of Black communities in the southern US were another important contribution during this period, but differ significantly in that they showcase a participatory dimension of ethnography in that Hurston was documenting aspects of cultures in which she lived, but that existed on the periphery of the US. Regardless of perspective, films during this period used video and film to give a realist and unbiased
view of culture (Marion & Crowder, 2013). Much of this came from a difficulty with the inadequacy of language representing cultures outside of the United States. For example, Gubrium and Harper (2016) describe Margaret Mead’s Balinese Character as an attempt to use photo to create an understanding of culture without translation and the camera as a tool “no less, no more” that balances “the inherent bias of words” (p. 12). Decades later the representation of these images would be called into question as it was discovered that many of the scenes from Balinese and Nanook were recreated by the participants for the researcher, creating a kind of performance, but early in the history of film, photography, and video these mediums were considered to be effective representations, especially when done correctly.

The advent of mobile film and video cameras created a more participatory style of research using the camera and researcher together as a means of portraying life as it was lived, with a more interpretive quality, but one that was still concerned with accuracy in representation. Cinéma vérité or “truthful cinema” is one example of this movement (Marion & Crowder, 2013). While not a research film per se and still constrained by the heavy camera and tripod, Dziga Vertov’s Man with a Movie Camera (2002) is an example in which the camera man himself becomes a part of the film. His film explored life in the Soviet Union in 1929, showcasing the language of cinema in itself. This shift could be seen as similar to the shift or a difference in method from observation to participant observation in which the researcher takes a more interactive and interpretive role in the culture under study; although Vertov’s work has a reflexive quality, which goes beyond subjectivity.
As science continued to separate itself from more interpretive methods film and photography divided more clearly between visual research and visual art. The idea in these instances was that film, cinema, and photography were creative approaches while visual depictions in research documented the lives and realities of those under study. Even as researchers began to recognize issues of shot, frame, and editing the focus remained on creating a true representation of the real or good ‘data.’ In this way the visual became the data that was collected and codified via analysis. Video was a means of capturing specific reactions or nonverbal gestures allowing researchers to capture the “whole” of a situation, the facial expressions, the context of an interview, the home of a family, the relationship dynamics of a couple (Gottman & Porterfield, 1981), or reactions of children (Vaughn & Waters, 1990). However, this creates a different purpose for video. While early anthropologists used video or photos as a means of transcending the biases or contexts of language, later psychological researchers used video as a data capture technique. These researchers were not concerned about the video itself, but with video as a medium through which multiple representations of something or someone under study, including surroundings, gestures, appearance, and facial expressions could be captured, and transformed into numerical or textual data and analyzed.

In more recent years visuals have been used in a greater variety of ways and as a means in and of themselves. Photo and video elicitation are one example of this in which images can be used to create responses or produce thoughts about a topic or experience of study (A. Gubrium & Harper, 2016). For example, Paulo Freire used photovoice to elicit responses from participants who were unable to read and Margaret
Mead used the method to engage with young children (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). Over time photo and video methods were given over, more and more, to the participants themselves, for example, Navajo Film Themselves (Worth & Adair, 1972) was one of the first, but since that time many have created videos that can speak to larger society about the experiences and challenges of communities. These kinds of films and photo studies are a form of action research that can enable marginalized groups to create their own representations. These projects use video not as a means, but as an end with the process of creating the video as the method and the experiences of those involved as the data. They also give control of representation to those who own the story rather than an all-seeing auteur (Asch, Cardozo, Cabellero, & Bortoli, 1991). With internet-connected high-quality cameras available nearly all the time, the visual has become and is becoming an ever-important aspect of the social world, especially in social justice, images have been paramount in global and domestic reactions to refugees and police violence.

Toward the end of the 20th century ideas about objectivity, relativism and oppression as well as new technologies allowed for a wider variety of techniques, applications, and intentions. Avante garde or Avante-doc film pushed the boundaries of reality, fiction, objectivity, and subjectivity (MacDonald, 2015). These changes led to film becoming a means of protest, such as Martha Rosler’s Semiotics of the Kitchen (1975). However, these developments stayed mainly within the humanities. While most social scientists seem less willing to experiment with video and its more artistic elements (Marion & Crowder, 2013) there are some recent moves to embrace some of the more
artistic elements of video to engage in research, especially outside of the US (Wolfe, 2016).

The experiments I engaged in suggest multiple ways that video can be used in experimental and productive ways. Video does not even need to be a mode of presentation or re-presentation, but can be used in analysis as well. These ideas need more time to marinate, but there is plenty of room for additional theorizing and using of video in research. By combining video with various social theories video becomes even more interesting and capable. Additionally, video is not often used as a presentation method in social research. However, it has powerful affective qualities that could be harnessed for addressing social justice issues including breaking apart power structures and subjectifications. Considering the project’s positioning against classical representation the purpose and methods of this dissertation must be similarly aligned. Deleuze eschews representation, which he and Guatarri refer to as tracing (1980/1987). Instead he suggests that we map. Mapping is an activity that reflects experience and engagement, and the event as a production, not a representation. In other words, something is created in relation to the experience rather than a representation of experience itself. Thus, things are always productive, never representative. To give an example, we often think of data as a numerical or linguistic representation of behavior, attitude, phenomena, but data is always a production from an encounter with the event. It is always a production of the conditions of the event. This does not mean that we

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6 At first glance this may seem like an issue of semantics in that I am simply calling representations productions, but this is as significant distinction as a fiction or non-fiction film, in the one case we are required to accept the non-fiction as reality whereas in the other case we can take it or leave it. Here I am suggesting that we always deal in fictions or simulacra (Deleuze & Krauss, 1983). Such a premise should not be seen as an invitation to chaos (nihilism), but to extreme caution and critical reflection.
cannot attempt to create a representation of the event, but that it must always be abstracted from experience.

For the most part, video in social science research focuses on displaying or representing events. These events differ in perspective, be it an objective/general (capturing an event for later analysis) or subjective/particular (capturing from the perspective of an individual) perspective. In contrast to the objectivist or subjectivist video of social science research, this paper seeks out something more fluid and continuous. I label this productive video\(^\text{7}\) because the purpose is not to represent either through objective/subjective perspectives, but to create a “gaseous” perception (Deleuze, 1983/1986). This is not so much a focus on representing an event, but on producing something through experimenting with affect. In doing so it suggests that video—images—can be productive in themselves, they can produce images. Similarly, Woodiwiss (2005) distinguishes between what we see, ‘vision,’ from the visual reality that is created or ‘visuality.’ In other words, images produce a whole order of things beyond the physical elements that make up the image. Thinking in these ways, video and images become a productive force.

The purpose of this project was to explore semiotics of family through video. In doing so the project assumes that images are more than representations of the physical world, but that images have their own logic and structure of signification both in terms of how they create the world, but also in the way that image/vision/visuality are material expressions (i.e., produce their own meanings). I drew from Deleuze and Guattarvis’ pragmatics and Deleuze’s philosophy of cinema as a basis for the project. Deleuze

\(^{7}\) This gets at the idea, but it might be more exciting to call it filmic experimentation
modifies the ideas of Immanuel Kant to develop what he calls the “transcendental plane” which could be compared to sociological ideas of the collective conscious or the intersubjectivity of Berger and Luckmann’s social construction (1991). However, in both of these cases there is a preoccupation with the human subject so that the social is held above or transcends the material world (e.g., Durkheim’s nonmaterial social facts) and human interactions are bracketed off or separated from object interactions, which is consistent with most of the history of thought going back to Descartes—thus the posthumanist’s interest in Deleuze. Deleuze brings in the immanence of Spinoza to develop a transcendental plane of a single substance with shifting material expressions. In other words, Deleuze does not distinguish between biology and society other than recognizing the distinction within language because mind/body/spirit or society/biology/religion have no real material separation but are expressions the same substance.

Thinking without these distinctions, or breaking down the subject/object distinction changes the way we conceive of family because it is no longer a social body, but an assemblage of material elements, which includes bodies among other elements including material possessions such as cars, homes, food, and electronic devices, but also illness, emotion, plants, animals, or drugs. Breaking the subject/object barrier also has implications for causality. Deleuze rethinks causality by returning to David Hume who rejected the idea that causality is knowable. Instead, Hume suggested that our knowledge of causality (event A → event B) is a belief of habit and repetition rather than general law because we come to the conclusion based on habit or custom (e.g., every time I drop a pen it falls and I can be reasonably certain it will occur every time after, but
I only come to this conclusion because I have never seen anything different). Recognizing then that our causality is a habit of labeling subject (actor) and object (recipient) it is possible to think of how everything acts through a means of semiotic expression rather than in terms of subject and object (Genosko, 1996). While there are some analyses of family that have begun to think in terms of immanence (Schadler, 2016) most the dominant mode of studying families continues to hold the social body as paramount along with the subject/object duality.

Using film in a productive capacity requires a different form of creating it. Deleuze and Guattari present a way of doing this when they declare, “Experiment, don't signify and interpret!” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 139). Therefore, having theorized video as a continuous medium I present a few experiments that led to (and are leading to) additional thoughts and experiments, not culminating in anything in particular, but becoming part of an ongoing process of experimentation and methodological improvisation. The point in presenting them—albeit not the point of the experiments—is to engage others in hopes that these experiments might make productive connections with other areas of research or concepts to form additional lines and produce yet uncharted knowledges, and ultimately, to cause “a little of Dionysus’ blood to flow in the organic veins of Apollo” (Deleuze, 1968/1994, p. 331; MacLure, 2016)

**Deleuze, Peirce, and Cinema**

While we may not recognize it, forms its own semiotic, just like language. Indeed, film has become so common in contemporary human experience that we rarely consider the many images that compose a scene. Filmmakers may recognize the subtle changes or differences in style, but most moviegoers or TV watchers will not recognize these elements beyond the general look or feel of the film. Similarly, in our everyday
speech we seldom consider how we are speaking unless the context demands it (e.g., a form or professional relationship). In film we may only notice a certain feeling to film and we may even recognize changes to the structure when something is absent, but it can be difficult to express what is wrong with the scene beyond a general confusion. For example, we would find it odd if an intimate conversation was filmed from a distance or if an action sequence was composed entirely of close-ups, but it is likely that we will find it difficult to express what is off unless we are attuned to film.

Thus film has its own semiotic, which is to say that it functions to logically deduce meaning from a given situation or set of objects (Chandler, 2007). However, Deleuze uses semiotics as a way of producing potentialities (i.e., what could have happened here?) rather than a single narrative. These productions are not confined to the world of fact (experience), but to affect and sensation as well. While Deleuze and Guattari layout a kind of semiotics I turn instead to Deleuze’s books on Cinema. Film is a different mode of signs. Linguistic signs are poured over and defined and redefined continually, but visual signs require engagement with the shot, framing, and lighting, of the scene. Thus video is much more fluid in its ability to create nuance in affect, experience, and thought. Therefore, if the purpose of a semiotic encounter is to create, as Nietzsche (1907/1990) says, “uncertainty” or, according to Deleuze, “potentiality” then video makes a useful medium for doing so. To better engage with visual signs Deleuze builds off of Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotics.

Charles Sanders Peirce was a philosopher in the United States identifying with the pragmatist tradition. Peirce developed his theory of signs, which he called semiotics, at the same time as Saussure, but independent of him. Peirce has a commonality with
the post-structuralists in that he also recognized the constant deferring of meaning, theorizing the end of this deferring process as a habit in which we end the process of deferring because it is what is typically done and what works in the given moment. However, this does not mean that Peirce gave up on universals or truth, rather Peirce was preoccupied with creating clear and distinct propositions through logic. And his ideas of abduction—a kind of mix of deduction and induction—come very close to contemporary methods of scientific practice (Everaert-Desmedt, 2011).

Peirce’s theory of signs is composed of three elements (Figure B-1). Peirce’s theory consists of three elements: representamen, object, and interpretant (Chandler, 2007). Some of the difficulty in reading Peirce is that these terms often change names depending on when he is writing or if he is referencing an element of the sign as a thing or as a part of a process, but for our purposes I will refer to them by the same name throughout. The representamen is the form of the thing doing the signifying, which may or may not be material. For example, it could be a stop sign (material) or a spoken word (immaterial)\(^8\), the key is that it must refer to ‘something else.’ The ‘something else’ that the representamen refers to is called the object. The interpretant, is the meaning or sense made from the sign that relates it to the object. It can be tempting to turn the interpretant into an interpreter, and it is the case there must be an interpreter of some kind (human/nonhuman), but the interpretant is the translation of the relationship between the representamen and the object generated by the sign, not a person. For example, in the case of a footprint in the sand we would determine that the footprint

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\(^8\) I refer to an immateriality and materiality of the sign here, but this is hotly debated will be complicated by Bergson.
(representamen) indicates that a foot (object) had been there because it looks similar to a foot (interpretant). However, it is key to recognize that the representamen does act like a subject in that it controls the interpretant, which means that the interpretant is not a thoughtful agentic process by a human mind, but a process of perception created by the representamen. In the above example, for instance, the recognizing of the footprint is not an agentic process of recognition, but a moment in which the footprint as a representamen places a meaning within us for what it could be through its similarity to a foot. This is an important distinction in that it separates Peirce from some of the interpretive theories that place humans at the center of a process of signification, including symbolic interactionism.

The meaning of the sign is created through an ordered determination of the three elements of the sign, a process that Peirce called “semiosis” (Figure B-1). The representamen is determined first followed by the interpretant, which is determined by the representamen. The representamen determines the interpretant because we can only determine the object through an interpretant. Another way of saying this may be to say that the interpretant is constrained by the representamen. This is an important distinction because it suggests that the interpretant cannot just be any made up relation, but must actually relate the sign and object in a meaningful way. At the same time, the object constrains or determines the representamen because the object must relate to the representamen in an actual way otherwise the representamen fails to relate to the object. In other words, an object can only be related to a sign in certain ways. We cannot, for example, suggest that the presence of a maple leaf indicates a pine tree—unless of course we have established this as a very confusing symbol for a pine tree.
Each element in the process of semiosis can be categorized as first, second, or thirdness. Categorizing each element gives us corresponding names for each, these are shown in Table B-1 (Chandler, 2007). Thus each representamen could signify in one of three ways, each object could determine a sign in one of three ways, and each interpretant could relate a representamen to the object in one of three ways. However, because the process of semiosis is ordered (i.e., representamen, object, interpretant) as are the categories of being, the possible categories for each element are constrained based on the category of the preceding element. For example, a representamen that signifies its object through a likeness or similarity is a qualisign and because firstness is not represented via experience, but by quality the object is constrained to being a likeness of the quality, or an icon. The interpretant is also constrained to connecting representamen and object rhematically, which is an open proposition, neither true or false, it just is. For instance, Peirce uses the example of redness. This can be a tricky idea, but is important because this project deals almost entirely in this kind of sign.

It is important to recognize that classes of signs are not mutually exclusive, instead each class of sign can be applied in a given instance at different levels. Each focuses on the way semiosis operates differently at various levels of generality. It is also important to recognize that Peirce did not stop at ten classes of signs, but continued classifying signs with estimates of tens-of-thousands of classes of signs. This level of detail makes it difficult for analysis and so complicated that it would make communicating impossible; thus we stop with ten classes of signs in order to maintain communication of the project and usability of Peirce’s ideas⁹.

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⁹ See (Everaert-Desmedt, 2011) for a useful overview of Peirce’s classifications
The reason for reviewing Peirce in such detail is because of how Deleuze uses his semiotics in connection to cinema. In his cinema books Deleuze lays out some concepts for thinking about film. He loosely bases the different types of images on C.S. Peirce’s semiotics. The affect, action, and perception images are three of these, which form the basis for Cinema 1. These images form the components of the movement-image, which is the succession of images that forms a changing whole through montage. We see these images multiple times a day because they form a kind of visual semiotic system through which video communicates. For example, even in a relatively simple news clip there may be several different shots—close-up, medium, establishing—each shot corresponding to a different type of image (i.e., affect, action, and perception, respectively).

Similar to Peirce’s theory of signs, Deleuze’s images do not have to correspond with only one image, but a given shot may signify in various ways. The affect image is an image of pure potential. It is, as Peirce would say, a ‘qualisign’ or a general feeling or unformed sensation. Deleuze describes affect images appearing mainly as close-ups, especially of a face (1986). This does not require a human face, but the face of a clock or the face of a knife. These images are not acting in anyway, but create a general something which is not yet formed. In other words, we may see the knife, but we do not know what will happen to the knife. It may be that nothing happens with the knife or that the knife may be used in an act of violence, regardless the close-up of the knife creates the potential for something to happen. The action image does something with the affect image—the knife slashes, the car moves, the man screams. Finally, the perception image is the culmination of the affect and action images in which the image determines
what happened, in other words, it is placed in certain terms. To give an example, horror films play out a simple affect-action-perception sequence in which the viewer is shown a weapon be it a knife or simply the body or face of the pursuer, the person being chased may or may not know about the pursuer, but it is the affect image of the pursuer or the weapon that triggers the audience into knowing that something will occur (Deleuze, 1986). Then there is the act, the knife that slashes, the gun that fires, the assailant that grabs, this is the action image, but it is not clear in the affect image what occurred, rather that something has happened. The perception image comes next, which puts the affect and action images into view and expresses a whole, a complete understanding. In this case that the character being pursued has died (or in some cases that the assailant may have died). The perception images does not have to be the “truth,” as we see from famous horror film sequels, but it is the sense that has been made by the film. Thus, Peirce’s semiotics became an important element guiding the creation of film and the decisions through which we experimented with the process through which meaning is produced, which Peirce calls “semiosis” (Corrington, 1994).

Creating the Films

I started the process of creating the films by reading Deleuze and Guattari and looking for connections for video in studying families, then did an exploratory group interview and mapping activity, but quickly realized I needed more exposure to the child welfare system. I began volunteering as a Guardian ad Litem, after finishing one case I was given permission to review some additional cases and was also assigned to two additional cases. With this additional experience, I enlisted several students to help outline case files. Initially I planned to create videos directly from the case files, but it became clear that re-presenting the files in video form was unhelpful because it only
created another tracing or a tracing. Instead I opted to have each student create a video of their own, which drew on their experience of outlining case files, but did not reflect the actual details of any specific case. These videos were insightful, but also reflected the perspective of the child welfare system considering that the files were written for the purpose of sheltering and placing children into homes. While I was not attempting to represent a holistic view the videos alone were too flat by themselves.

In order to gain some depth, I took these videos and showed them to three former foster youth in order to make connections and to add additional ideas/images of family to the movies. However, there was very little for them to connect to. In my first interview Julia had nothing to say about any of the videos and she felt that they lacked family in most instances. She suggested adding a video of a child in a nice house with other people around like a family would have. I followed up with additional questions, but her answers all led to a portrayal of an ideal family—having fun, getting along, with a large clean house. Julia did show me her scrapbook, however, which was composed of pictures she had collected throughout her teens. She had put a lot of care and work into putting all of the pictures together and lamented losing some of the pictures that had been left at her foster family’s home, but that they were unable to find when she called in preparation for the interview. I created a video of a scrapbook, not Julia’s but one I created that was similar to Julia’s.

In the next interview I included the scrapbook video, but I also wondered if it would be better to use narratives to elicit responses. I suspected the narratives would be helpful in giving participants a clearer picture more closely related to foster care. This was helpful because Crystal, whom I interviewed second, was able to provide some of
her own stories to add when she had read some of the narratives. However, the narratives created elicitations that produced similarities rather than difference. For example, after reading a narrative about a child with a mysterious bruise being removed from his home, Crystal told me about taking her son to the hospital after the TV had fallen on him and that he had been sheltered for a week until they were able to get a lawyer and regain custody. In this case she had been told it was because she had been in foster care and was at a “greater risk” for abusing her child as a result. While her story was intriguing it did not provide anything beyond what I had already known. In a typical project this case would have been useful in providing evidence of what could be more widespread and indeed when I asked others about stigma associated with foster care they confirmed that they felt embarrassed and hid their family status from others. This was informative for this project in that it created another sensation associated with foster care, not in a general sense, but in the way that embarrassment or shame might play into the production of family as well as the portrayal of foster children as difficult or prone to be abusive. In other words, rather than using the narratives to confirm common experiences, my approach was to draw out how family played out for participants in different ways even if they had common experiences.

I created a few additional videos after the interviews that drew on the interviews as well as the case files but also my own experiences as a volunteer, but also various bits of data that floated around me such as movies or TV with families or foster kids. For example, David Lynch’s “The Grandmother” and “Know How” a musical/film created by young adults formerly in foster care. Other elements from various media came together bits of stories about foster youth “succeeding” or “overcoming,” which seemed to place
foster youth in a default position of failure and weakness, which was reinforced by much of my volunteer training. The foster youth that I interviewed were not weak or failing, they had situations that required them to grow-up faster than most kids and lacked resources and stability that most young adults take for granted, but they were attending school, working, and staying “out of trouble.” This is not to say this is representative, but this does suggest that whatever may be true for most former foster youth is not true for all nor is it helpful.

Considering these experiences my later videos steered away from foster youth themselves in an effort to focus on the conditions that families engage with and are created by. Youth in care are not responsible for their situations, which is why I focused on the situations in which those kids had lived rather than focusing on portraying them, which allows the viewer to rethink how they may view not just foster kids but family itself, which extends well beyond relations between individuals, it takes in houses, joints, accidents, phones, pears, and time. Two of these films were created with research assistants over several months in which we met weekly to review Peirce’s semiotics and storyboard ideas for the films. I assisted in creating the films, but the assistants were responsible for the creative direction. The reason for relying more heavily on research assistants was to try and distance my thoughts and connections to provide some additional perspective to the films.

Storyboarding was a difficult process and while we had anticipated it working well as a means of transforming case files into films through Peirce’s semiotics it was a relatively poor method. Instead we determined to use storyboards as a means of mapping out potential films without constraint because we could create anything we
imagined while the films were constrained by locations we could access, actors we could procure and technical gear available to us. However, we were also able to begin thinking about how it was that certain aspects of the cases signified abuse or neglect and thinking through the cases in these ways gave us extra insight in how to develop the films. While we could have developed this further into a semiotic analysis, our purpose was informed by Peircean semiotics rather than a semiotic analysis itself. Generally, however, we recognized an important aspect of the case files is that they are in any case an “argument” or as Peirce might say a argumentive symbolic legisign. This is significant because this sign is completely determined in thought through the symbolic and legal relation of signifiers, which makes it a sign in thought only, completely removed from experience. As a result, to place the case file back into experience, into film and therefore into time meant that the details could be filled in in innumerable ways. Indeed, we questioned how a judge would recreate these cases in his or her mind considering that a many details would have to be actualized from whatever experience the judge has had. This was troubling for us in creating films considering that we felt entirely removed from many of the situations described and while it helped to speak with former foster youth about their experiences, living conditions, and family relations and to volunteer in child welfare, there was a significant gap between the information given in the case files and our own experience. Everything from rolling a fake joint to determining how a middle-school age youth would walk into a house was under question. In this way film became an incredible means of returning these cases into time through the blending of infinite elements.
While my initial plan was to screen some of the films I realized that while screening them is useful creating them was much more so. This method was improvisational in that it worked through various problems in the moment by diving again and again into the theoretical projects of Deleuze, Guattari, and Peirce. I struggled at times to know if anything meaningful would arrive, but ultimately the use of film suggested a few future uses. Arts-based research is a powerful way to represent and present findings, but it is also a powerful medium for exploring the lives of participants and portraying difference and uncertainty in our conclusions. Researchers often ignore the power of fiction because of standards of representation and objectivity, but traditional research often loses its ability to persuade people because it holds so tightly to these standards. This is not to say that researchers should disregard their integrity, but that research can be open to multiplicity and difference in that all experiences take place in their own time (duration) and singularity.

Film has a vastly untapped potential for participant-driven projects, but requires immense resources. In this project one of my reasons for using undergraduate (and later post-grad and graduate assistants) was to develop ways of engaging participants in video creation without subjecting participants to a process that was not entirely certain\textsuperscript{10}. This is not to say that participants could not participate in an open and fluid project, but that working specifically with former foster youth would have required more resources than I currently have. Still, participant-driven and even intervention type projects could be useful in helping participants explore their ideas about specific topics

\hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{10} In a couple of instances I attempted to have participants make short films, but this was overwhelming for participants even in cases where I had interviewed them previously and had built some rapport.
and situations through storyboarding and film production. As I described earlier, working with the films was a powerful process that required thinking through the data and ourselves as we determined what to create. A similar process could be useful for others who work in social welfare, especially those who interact only nominally with those they make decisions for.

Finally, taking an arts-based approach is useful in a time of increasing distrust in academic institutions but also a period in which images are so central to everyday life due to technological advances in mobile technology and internet connectivity. In this time researchers have struggled to keep up with disseminating their research in ways that the public can engage with. While online lectures or animated explainer videos are widely shared on social media these forms remain tied to video as a means of presentation rather than artistic expression. By engaging with affect and sensation researchers may find that they are better able to engage with a broad audience while at the same time maintaining academic rigor.
Figure B-1. Peirce’s Triadic Sign Model

Table B-1. Peirce’s Sign Classifications

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<th>Representamen</th>
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<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Justin Hendricks received his Bachelor of Science in family life with a minor in psychology from Brigham Young University where he worked with Dr. Larry Nelson studying emerging adulthood. After his undergraduate training, he moved to the University of Florida where he worked with Dr. William Marsiglio and received his Master of Arts in sociology. His Master’s project was titled: “Fathers and Education: Networks, Knowledge, and their Children’s Education.” While at the University of Florida he developed a further interest in qualitative research, theory, and philosophy and spent some years reading, thinking, and talking with Gilles Deleuze thanks in large part to Dr. Mirka Koro-Ljungberg. During this period he lost all sense of order in the universe and decided to take up Nietzsche’s call to free himself from “truth.” This opened up the potential of video and family by freeing them from representation. Experimenting and improvising in the area of family and film produced this dissertation, overseen by Dr. Constance Shehan, and he graduated from the University of Florida in August 2017 with a Doctor of Philosophy in sociology. He is currently a research coordinator at the Institute for Child Health Policy, part of the Department of Health Outcomes and Policy at the University of Florida.