

Positioning and Repositioning – Discourse, Power and Agency in Research and Therapy

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Abstract

Poststructuralist theory shows how agency is fundamentally illusory. Just as there are multiple readings of any text, so are there multiple readings of ourselves (Davies, 1991). This opens up the possibility that the speaking/writing subject can use some of the understandings of poststructuralist theory to gain another kind of agency. The effects of being positioned differently within new discourses can bring about observable dramatic personal changes. Narrative therapy/research was carried out to explore not only the ways women “who had experienced violent relationships” had been positioned by discourse, but also the ways they had resisted the discourse and therefore created a sense of agency. The discourses of academia are also challenged and the conclusion reached supports Foucault’s argument that not only are power and resistance always operating together, but also that power is productive and power relations can be used positively.

Introduction – explaining the context

In this article I refer to doctoral research which I carried out with two groups of women who had experienced violent relationships. Together we were interested in researching their lives in order to re-member the rich stories of their lives that had been left buried under the thin description that the abuse story had developed. Narrative ideas and practices including externalising conversations, letter and document writing, journal writing, and group work were used. There were nine women in total, whose ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the late fifties. Four women were in the first group and five in the second. All sessions were videotaped. Group letters were written by the researcher/therapist after each session, and these assisted in the telling and re-telling of stories, mapping the influence of abuse and at the same time thickening counterplot stories.

I came to the project as a therapist and a researcher who was very aware of the powerful status that came with these two roles. I was uncomfortable with the power, especially given that the women I was working with had constantly been with men

who had abused their power. I was also aware that the place where the discourses of academia and therapy meet and intersect is a very powerful one and I was situated right at that intersection. Foucault's work on power became pivotal as I found a way to make sense of and to work with that power.

According to Foucault (1980, p.98):

Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something that only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. In other words individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.

Foucault says that not only is power everywhere but power is also productive as it allows relations to take place and the products of relations to emerge. What follows is my explanation of how I went about establishing a context in which the participants were privileged as the primary authors of their preferred knowledges and practices. This article is concerned with the productive potential of power relations and how power relations can be used positively.

Power relations in research – positioning myself in the research

Positioning myself as a decentred narrative therapist/researcher was not easy for me. I had to grapple with discourses which spoke strongly to me of “correct professional behaviour and appropriate boundaries”. I had to dismantle discourses that told me to “keep my place” and “watch my boundaries”. I often shared my own stories with clients and wept at some of their stories (see also Hoffman, 1992). These practices did not sit well within the professional knowledges of counselling and psychotherapy in which I had been trained. During the group sessions my internal dialogue would often ask me “Are you a leader or a participant?” Sometimes I was both.

I came to the project as a therapist/researcher/woman bound up within a powerful web of conflicting discourses: those of the “professional”, the “academic”, and the “woman”. This was not only difficult for me but also, I suggest, for the participants. I must have appeared to change hats often, for indeed I did. For example, when we met for coffee I chatted about the various topics that we all talked about: our children, our ex-partners, our mothers and so on. When I led the sessions I was both researcher and therapist, sharing my experiences, re-searching for theirs and asking appropriate questions to facilitate the re-searching. When I wrote the letters I was therapist, and

when I wrote the research and gave it to the participants to read I was researcher/academic. Of course my roles were never even as clear-cut as this, but my purpose in spelling this out is to give some indication of the difficulties conflicting roles created for my positioning in this project.

I saw myself as a therapist whose job it was to validate women's knowledges, rather than being in a position of deferring to "expert" knowledges, and professing to know the "truth" about women and relationships. As a researcher and a therapist I strove to be as transparent, accountable and ethical as possible within the process. Transparency is the term used by White (1992, p.144) to describe the process whereby the therapist is able to "deconstruct and thus embody her/his responses (including questions, comments, thoughts, and opinions) by situating these in the context of his/her personal experiences, imagination, and intentional states". I therefore took responsibility for the project while at the same time reflecting on my inner dialogue within the group. I wanted to lead the group without coercing the women into the process. I did not want to privilege my voice as the one meta-dialogue (Steier, 1991, p.6) trying to "transcend, subsume or interpret the voices of the participants".

I was born and raised in New Zealand. As such I was the subject of discourses of gender that spoke to me very clearly about women's and men's roles. My own family of origin adhered very strongly to these roles. We had a strong Protestant work ethic, and we placed a lot of confidence in professional knowledge. The rules and regulations of the society in which we lived as a family spoke to us strongly of "right" behaviour. We grew up learning that if we played by the rules, and worked hard, then we would have successful, happy lives. Within the project, discourses of gender and family life were constitutive of both the participants' lives and my life.

Resistance, agency, or personal power?

Foucault (1980) argued that there are no relations of power without resistance. Wherever power attempts to dominate, resistance occurs. According to Weedon (1987, pp.112–13):

Where there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to the subject position is produced. Such resistances are a frequent feature, for example, of women's writing in our patriarchal society. The discursive constitution of subjects, both compliant and resistant, is part of a wider social play for power.

White (1992) understands therapy as nurturing resistance to the dominant discourse or story. The women from both groups involved in this project had already

shown resistance to their dominant stories; for example, naming the perpetrator as an abuser is a refusal (resistance) to be dominated by self-blame. Coming to a group and speaking out about the abuse is a refusal (resistance) to be dominated by secrecy. In narrative therapy practices, the client's problem is first honoured as a form of resistance to practices of power that are impoverishing their life.

How does the term resistance equate with what actually happened within the group process? Well, when I talked with the women about how they had resisted abusive practices, they actually resisted the discourse of resistance that I was using. For example, Nickki was especially clear that she did not accept the idea of resistance as her way of dealing with the abuse. She said that for her resistance was an active form of behaviour, as in the French Resistance Movement. She said she did not “resist”, she “survived”:

I don't see it [dealing with abuse] as resistance I see it as survival. Resistance is something more active. How I dealt with it is survival, survival isn't resistance. Survival is just putting up with it [the abuse]. – Nickki

I suggest that in saying this Nickki was positioning herself in an agentic way. Davies (1991, p.51) explains:

Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognize that constitution and resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted. It is the freedom to recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity. And agency is never autonomy in the sense of being an individual standing outside social structure and process.

The term “agency” is often used in narrative therapy practices to explain the position whereby the client can make preferred decisions about their life, or “get back into the driving seat of their life”. Dickerson & Zimmerman (1996) suggest agency means that each of us can play a part in choosing which, out of all the multitude of discourses or stories that we are always living within, we will let guide us, and in what contexts, based on a consideration of all our experiences. Freedman & Combs (1996) are interested in constructing an “agentive self” with people. They say they “ask questions with an eye to enhancing those aspects of the emerging story that support ‘personal agency’ ” (p.97). Parry & Doan (1994, p.43) argue that “no one ever fully becomes the author of her/his own story; any such assumption can only lead back into the illusions of control, individual autonomy, isolated selfhood, and single truth. The person goes forth instead to join with others in the universal human action of multiple authorship.”

Talking about agency in this way brings forth the idea of a “self” that has agency or personal power or can make preferred decisions. Drewery & Winslade (1997, p.42) explain it thus:

Often, it seems to us, problems are such because we feel unable to move them – we have lost agency in our life. What is happening is that the stories we are telling ourselves about what is happening are disabling. These are stories in which the client is positioned or subjected: he is not the actor but the passive recipient of the given positioning.

White (1992) also talks about narrative therapeutic practices as assisting clients in establishing a sense of “agency”. He suggests (pp.145–46) this sense is derived from:

the experience of escaping “passengerhood” in life, and from the sense of being able to play an active role in the shaping of one’s own life – of possessing the capacity to influence developments in one’s life according to one’s purposes and to the extent of bringing about preferred outcomes.

White argues that this sense of personal agency is established through the “development of some awareness of the degree to which certain modes of life and thought shape our existence and through the experience of some choice in relation to the modes of life and thought that we might live by” (1992, p.146). Davies (1991, p.52) says “agency is spoken into existence at any one moment. It is fragmented, transitory, a discursive position that can be occupied within one discourse simultaneously with its non occupation in another.” When I use the terms power or personal power, this is what I am referring to, the sense of agency.

Repositioning – how the women repositioned themselves

One of the themes that emerged in both groups was that the women witnessed how they were held back by guilt, shame and self-doubt, but more than that, guilt, shame and self-doubt convinced the women’s knowledge/power to hide itself. It can be argued that the strong influence of the gender discourse of femininity, that is, the set of general attitudes, approaches and behaviour that females are encouraged to develop because we are female – sensible, intelligent, interactive, aware and caring – directly contradicts the discourse of personal power. The participants often saw the latter as the idea of “self-promotion” (being selfish). The idea of personal power challenges women to be, as Epston (1997) calls it, a “person for self” rather than a “person for others”.

Noddings (1984, p.105) addresses this issue of caring for others. She argues that:

an ethic of caring strives to maintain the caring attitude. That means that the one-caring must be maintained, for she is the immediate source of caring. The one-caring, then, properly pays heed to her own condition. She does not need to hatch out elaborate excuses to give herself rest, or to seek congenial companionship or to find joy in her personal work.

We therefore have to encourage women to turn to themselves and “nourish from the overflowing cup”, rather than minister to others to the point of exhaustion which, I suggest, creates martyrdom. However, sacrifice for others is common within gendered feminine discourse. The participants were often unsure about whether or not they should be spending time on their own pursuits. An interesting way to reframe this is to consider the advice we are given on board an aeroplane. If we have a small child with us and we need to use an oxygen mask, we are told to fit our own mask first and then attend to the child. This is so counter to the dominant discourse of motherhood that it has to be told to us each time we fly! Our automatic response would be to go to the aid of the child before ourselves.

Christine’s way of repositioning herself within the gendered feminine discourse was to deconstruct the discourse in such a way that she gave herself permission to be less than perfect. She did this by naming it her “witchy wise woman” side:

I think my witchy wise woman was suggesting to me that maybe I need to look at the possibility of being less than perfect. And look at the other side of being totally responsible and to relax and have some fun and enjoy a bit more, so it is my witchy side I have to get into. – Christine

Feelings of guilt and shame are often associated with breaking away from gendered discourse. We all experience shame at different levels and different degrees of intensity, but Bepko & Krestan (1990, p.43) argue that it is the “not fully valid as a human being” feeling that is part of the collective legacy of womanhood. They suggest that often our female shame is hidden to us because we unconsciously assume that a woman has less value than a man, and we rarely stop to think about it. Bepko & Krestan see shame as “falling short, a limitation which results in a feeling of worthlessness, of being no good” (p.43). They argue that most of the cultural messages about the basic inferiority of women are messages that shame women for being women. They say “shame always makes us work harder at being good because the appeal of goodness is that it temporally relieves shame” (p.43).

The shame trap is critical to our understanding of women who seem to “put up with” abuse. The women in these groups showed us that shame and guilt often

convince women to remain silent because speaking out about the abuse evokes more shame. Together we discussed how this demonstrates the way in which women are positioned impossibly by discourses of wifedom and motherhood that tell them that loyalty to their partner and family is all-important (putting the family first) and that children need their fathers (boys need role models), and legal discourse that tells them that violence to wives is a punishable offence (why does she stay?). What is a woman to do in this hopeless position? Whichever decision she makes, guilt and shame will visit her for either putting up with the abuse, or for depriving the children of a “happy family”, and we all know the importance of the family as the foundation for civilised society.

As Kline (1993, p.97) notes, “self doubt is the one thing that makes us turn around and march decisively away from our power”. She argues that the way for women to regain their personal power is through the process of thinking. Kline argues that the discourse of femininity has convinced women that we cannot think. Thinking is impossible, she says, when self-doubt, shame or blame are present.

Power and process

When I worked within the group process I was aware of and acknowledged the power that came to me as a therapist, an academic and a researcher. So I thought about the productive potential of this power. How could I use this power relation in a way that was beneficial to the participants?

I could use it to ask questions about the counterplots of their stories. I could use it to draw the focus back to these counterplots and build up rich descriptions of them. I did this both in the group sessions and in the group letters. The group letters gave me the chance to use the power of the letter in a productive way. For example, I used the letter to remind Liz of the power of abuse and then reflected on the steps she had taken (using her own words) to reinforce her own agency. Here is an excerpt from that letter:

Liz talked about how anger got her stuck when it encouraged her to turn anger in on herself. Anger then called on depression and together they talked Liz into believing that she could not cope on her own. Have other group members had similar experiences when they have been completely immobilized by anger and depression? Can you recall how you were able to beat it? Liz, you named the following steps that you took to “beat” depression:

- 1. You “had lots of help from your mother when she came to stay”.*
- 2. You “used some medication” to help balance depression’s demands.*

3. You went to a “psychiatric outpatients group” to talk about the effects of abuse and depression on your life.
 4. You “had counselling” to talk about the effects of the problem.
 5. You “began to see how abuse was working”.
 6. You were “so aware of how abuse was trying to trick” you.
 7. You “learnt all about feelings” even though fear was working hard to keep you numb.
 8. You were “so determined that abuse wasn’t going to beat” you.
 9. You turned depression into anger and then you fought depression.
 10. You “take anger and turn it into energy” – you “fight depression by firing yourself up”.
 11. You employ the “use of a riot shield to deflect abuse away” from you.
- Liz, you have talked about how wearying it is fighting abuse. How in the past you survived by “keeping a low profile” and “turning a blind eye”. I wonder if you could share with us some of your tips for “turning anger into energy” and tell us how you have managed to defy depression. You might like to jot these down in your journal.

I also used document writing and declarations from time to time in the group process. A declaration was created based on the women’s ideas about abuse, and another document called *The Threads of Women* was developed from what were considered to be the strengths the women in the group brought to the community of women. These documents were included in the weekly letters.

Liz really enjoyed reading *The Threads of Women* document, and said she had put it on her bedroom wall. She told us how she was helping and supporting another woman who was in an abusive relationship. She also said, “The other night I couldn’t sleep and suddenly everything was so clear so I sat up in bed and wrote in my journal.” Liz read to us what she had written. She had written her own declaration!

Liz’s declaration

I declare never again will I tolerate a relationship with a person who thinks they have the right to abuse me, tell me what to do or take over my life. Or one that in any way makes me doubt myself, my abilities, and tries to manipulate and control me. I have the right to form my own ideas and opinions and work things out for myself taking others into consideration. Today I feel I’ve taken control over myself and am enjoying the journey with its ups and downs.

I thought this was wonderful. Liz was so proud, confident and excited as she read it. It was a wonderful moment for us all to witness. When I wrote the group letter after the session, I included Liz's declaration in it. I typed it up and put a border around it. Liz was very touched and proud of this, and the other women were pleased to have their own copies.

I suggest that in this way I used the power of the therapeutic relationship to raise the consciousness of the women. It gave them courage to voice their ideas, to speak out, to consider times when guilt or shame had not held them back.

As another way of using this relational power, I asked the women (in the group letter) if they had considered the way they could use their skills as women and mothers to construct a CV. This was something some of the women did, and some chose to share their CVs with the group.

Nickki's CV

- Sole charge – (as a parent) used to making executive decisions.
- Prioritising – used to putting important things first.
- Interpersonal skills – nurturing self and others, encouraging and building up self-esteem.
- Time management – juggling everybody's needs and the household.
- An accepting attitude – knowing some difficulties that others face.
- Empathy.
- Reliability, trustworthiness – we are there for our kids.

I suggest that this CV of Nickki's is an example of how she had used her personal power to reposition herself as a mother, within a discourse that is usually reserved for male executives. This can be seen as a strategy to undermine the status of the discourse one wants to resist. Foucault calls this kind of knowledge "subjugated knowledge", that is, one accorded lower status than scientific knowledge. As Alldred (1996, p.149) rightly points out:

a mother can draw on a discourse of experience to support her knowledge in opposition to psychological knowledge. By explicitly claiming that her means of knowing is through experience, there can be an implicit (or explicit) criticism of the psychological discourse – which is constructed by contrast, as abstract and ungrounded in practice.

The following is an example of the way the power of the group was used. It demonstrates how Scarlett was able to resist a powerful discourse. Scarlett had difficulties

with a fundamentalist church where she and her violent partner had sought counselling with the house group leader and his wife:

We went to counselling one time cos like he [her partner] just really terrified me one night and he knew that I wouldn't go back [into the relationship] with him after what had happened and we went to counselling with two church people and they are so ignorant about this sort of thing [violence]. He [the group leader] had said to Nigel, you probably only hit her once. You'll probably never do it again. And the [group leader's] wife was saying, you've got to learn what to do, to not make Nigel angry. You know you've got to learn. Ian [the group leader] was going, "obviously you're a strong willed person Scarlett you'll just have to learn how to submit," and I'm thinking, oh my fault again. – Scarlett

The power/knowledge of the discourses of religion were reinforcing the femininity discourses that Scarlett had internalised and was trying so hard to resist. These discourses together began to restrict and control Scarlett, but by talking it through with someone who had questioned and challenged their religious beliefs she was able to come to this conclusion:

I've always been a believer [in God] but I think I just liked it [church] because I thought, oh Jesus is good and all the rest of it you know. But then they start talking about hell and all that, Satan demons and all that sort of thing and that's when I started having a fear of going to hell. Yeah but it really gets a grip of you. This is awful, but, I saw them [people in the church] as destroying my personality and – God is so totally different to that. And they say Satan came to kill, rob, and destroy and that was what I felt was happening to me in the church. Because God's so different to that you see. So I've still got a very strong belief in him [God]. But I see them [leaders in her church] as being hypocrites and it just doesn't gel and there's just no compassion and love and they're justifying things that shouldn't be justified. If men are abusive and it's not looked at as bad, well it's condoned; do you know what I mean? – Scarlett

Scarlett was repositioning herself within the discourse of God is love. She was questioning whether or not a loving God would condone violence. She was also beginning to question the status and power of the elders in the church. This was not easy for Scarlett. The cost to her was visits from guilt and fear. They came in all forms, including horrific nightmares. Scarlett spoke at length about these visits in her journal. Resisting a discourse that had given her a sense of security for years was a very big step. Resisting this discourse meant that Scarlett was ostracised from the church

community. Christine had experienced similar ostracising, and she was able to talk with Scarlett about this. Their voices added strength to their convictions, and together the rest of the group heard their testimony to the injustices showered upon them from people in positions of power within the church community.

A note on my own positioning and sense of agency

At the beginning of this article I discussed my position in the research. I talked about my resistance to professional discourses and the dilemmas these produced. I now want to explore some tensions that relate to my positioning within academic discourses and how these were resolved.

Further problems arose for me as I began to write up the research. Discourses of academia spoke strongly to me about how the research should be presented. How, I asked myself, was I going to carry my postmodern position through into the writing of an academic thesis when academic discourses are positioned firmly in a modernist world? With modernist writing the writer adopts the posture of knowing authority, thus sustaining hierarchies of privilege. Claims are made to individual authorship, thus sustaining the view of individuals as original sources of thought. In the write-up of the experiences of groups one and two, my preference was to story the process rather than to try to analyse the process theoretically. I suggest that the stories of the process are more convincing than a traditional scientific explanation. White (1998) once said, regarding court work, that stories convince more than a well-rationalised argument. Andersen (1993, p.320) suggests that we need to find a way to write, “so that the reader is touched and moved”. As Gergen (1994) points out, Milgram’s (1974) research on obedience scarcely tests an hypothesis, however it shocks the reader into consciousness. Andersen (1993) reflected that in the constructivist period of his work he was very concerned about the “what” – definitions of problems, descriptions, understandings and possible solutions. Now in the social constructionist period he says it has become more and more interesting to deal with “how” one reaches definitions and re-definitions.

Gergen (1994) asked how scholarly communities could be opened to permit the voices of the culture to be heard. Burman (1994) noted the feminist struggle within academic institutions. She particularly mentioned a key dilemma facing feminist academics seeking to make women’s experiences and issues visible. “How do we communicate in terms that engage with, and intervene in, academic genres without fragmenting, objectifying or disempowering women’s experiences?” (Burman, 1994, p.131).

As I became more confident in my position within the discourses of academia, I began to see that my research is a way of bringing the personal back into the professional.

Where self-help books are bringing more and more professional language into daily relationships, my research helps to restore the balance by bringing women's voices into scholarly communities.

Gergen (1994, p.55) argues that "theoretical intelligibilities" are the scientists' mode of describing and explaining the world. "Such intelligibilities," he argues, "place labels on human action, furnish causes for people's success and failure and provide rationales for behaviour." To the extent that any reality becomes objectified or taken for granted, relationships are frozen, options sealed off and voices unheard. Academic discourses are heavily influenced by scientific discourses. I did not want the scientific discourse about the theory to be privileged. The power of the scientific discourse is that it privileges itself as scientific while the stories with less theoretical explanation become lower class. In the case of this research there was a danger that the women's voices would be pushed to the margins.

I took heart from Gergen (1994, p.61):

The invitation to transform extends then to the form of scholarly expression. As the human sciences experiment with modes of expression so do they transform the conception of the scholar, the academy, the nature of education and ultimately the potential for human relationship.

As with therapy from a social construction/poststructuralist perspective, the therapy I was creating does not follow pre-determined maps or formats. Rather, maps and formats are created collaboratively and are unique and specific to the client and the therapist at the time. I began to feel more confident about positioning myself slightly differently within academic discourses. As I understood more and more how I positioned myself within a social construction discourse, my courage increased, and with the support of my supervisors I knew that I could push the boundaries of academia with good reason.

The same confidence was present in the group sessions. I had become comfortable with my role of sitting back and listening. I was comfortable knowing that I did not have to be wrestling with my inner dialogue about what (therapeutic) questions I should be asking. Rather, I could devote my attention to seeing, hearing and affirming (Andersen, 1993). This was possible because I was able to watch the video of the session and then think, in my own time and space, about the questions I would need to ask. These questions then became the basis of the group letter. I was developing a therapy practice that was suitable to me, while at the same time creating some very useful outcomes for the participants. I was experiencing a sense of agency about my work, and about its place within professional and academic discourses.

The positive use of the power of academic discourse

Some may ask why I used a project such as this in an academic arena? What benefits could this arena have for the participants? The following explanation may show the way I attempted to use the productive potential of the power of academic discourse and academia.

As part of the research/therapy process I gave participants a draft copy of the thesis and asked them if they would like to comment on it and make any changes. When Christine returned her copy, this is what she said:

Reading about my story in the research and taking part in the research is something I'm doing for me that I haven't been able to do since the violent marriage ended. It has mirrored the violence and abuse back to me. As difficult as those times have been, they have been my life. Taking part in this research has been a way for me to own that part of my life. No one from the wider community reflected back to me how terrible it was at the time. It's like it hasn't been my story up till now. I'm having to own it whereas before I blocked it out. I think it's good that I'm owning it now. I am becoming visible through owning that part of my story.

I think I have got to the stage where I think I can forgive him [her ex-husband]. This is a stage of ending for me. This reading of this thesis has come at the stage where I am tying up the ends.

Christine's copy of the chapters I had given her to read came back heavily marked. Christine had interacted very much with the text, writing comments in the margin and underlining passages that had meaning for her. Alongside Nickki's comments about survival and resistance in Chapter Seven, Christine wrote, "I always imagined if there was to be a war, I would be in the resistance movement." She agreed strongly with the passages about shame, saying that shame still tried to silence her about her past.

During a conversation with Christine I had mentioned that because we have been involved with abuse we sometimes become immune to it. As an illustration of what I had rather clumsily tried to say, I mentioned Keith's (Professor Keith Ballard, my academic supervisor) reaction to Christine's story as he read it. He had reported to me that the graphic account of her beating would stay with him forever.

Some days after our conversation, Christine telephoned me to say she had been concerned that she could not remember what Keith looked like, from the videotape in which the supervisors introduced themselves. She said she had been feeling very small and frightened at the thought that a man out there knew so much about her, and she could not put a face to the name. She said she felt that "he knew a whole lot more

about me than I knew about him”. Christine wondered if it might be possible for her to meet Keith.

I asked Keith whether or not he would meet Christine. He was happy to do so, and so we arranged to meet and have coffee. This was an important meeting for Christine. She was able to put a face to the name, and both were able to have a very enjoyable conversation about various things, one of these being a novel that they had both just read. Fear had convinced Christine to be frightened at this meeting. Christine faced fear full on, and when she met Keith it was a way of defying the voice of fear yet again. She mentioned again that shame’s voice was whispering loudly in her ear as she prepared to meet Keith. Christine refused yet again to be silenced by shame.

I suggest that this meeting was very important for Christine because of the positive use of the power of the academic discourse. Christine had positioned herself in an agentic way by speaking up to the discourse, by agreeing with it in some places, and by resisting it in others. I suggest that this was yet another example of the productive potential of power, of using power relations in a positive way, that was a theme of this research and therapy.

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