

Subject, object: overlapping discursive effects? ↗

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Speaking from a liminal space

- “Pākehā Counsellors consider their positioning: Towards postcolonial praxis”
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A liminal space is a blurry boundary zone between two established and clear spatial areas, and a liminal moment is a blurry boundary period between two segments of time. ...

web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_L.html

Some themes, elements

- Postcolonial & poststructuralist lens brought to practice
 - Foucault, Derrida, Butler, Davies, Hollway, Lather
 - Said, Walker, Durie, Fleras & Spoonley, Hokowhitu
 - Micro and macro social constructionism: hegemonic discourse: Gramsci, Laclau & Mouffe (*via* Howarth)
- A collaborative celebration and deconstruction of the discursive production of counselling practice
 - Public conversations project
 - 5 senior practitioners

The privilege & joy of research

- Reading so much theory – with a purpose
- Being generously gifted rich data by 5 practitioners
- Reading the data in light of the Foucauldian tradition
- Looking for something more, reading and reaching further

The basic theory

- Foucauldian traditions
 - Discourse produces persons as subjects moment by moment
- Positioning Theory & agency
 - In each moment we are subject to (many) position calls which offer varying degrees of agency
 - Each position call taken up produces a consequential call to the other in a conversation

Thinking about the subject

This emphasis on the subject is part of a Foucauldian move away from:

..the self as a noun (and thus stable and relatively fixed) to the self as a verb, always in process, taking its shape in and through the discursive possibilities through which selves are made. (Davies et al., 2004, p.368)

The humanistic idea(l) of the autonomous self is undermined in the Foucauldian shift to discourse (Bevir, 1999) and the 'self as a verb' is more usually described as being a *subject*, or a person or individual as experiencing *subjection* or *subjectification* (Davies, 2006).

Subjectification: mastery and submission

- The achievement of mastery – as a subject - requires simultaneous submission to discourse. Thus to achieve ‘mastery’ as a counsellor, a person needs to become subject(ed) to counselling discourse.
- Butler argues that this subjection creates the ‘possibility’ for the subject through an effect of power; power that the subject can then take up through agency. The achievement of mastery creates the ‘possibility’ for the subject to act as a counsellor.
- Subjection and positioning occur simultaneously.

Just local discursive effects?

- Is it possible to only attune our view of practice to the small and local:
 - One counsellor and one client
- What if the data begs that I attend to the large scale, the political, the impact of hegemonic data?

'Janet': a challenging context

And I met with a young woman who identified as Māori, lesbian and who was sent by the courts as a respondent and the person who had [applied for] the protection was female and Pākehā. And just the positioning that put us in to start with of her being forced having no choice but to come and meet with me. And how we had to negotiate a platform to even begin. And how hard that was for her, and for me, in doing that.

And just that idea of how to be very careful and respectful and be totally aware all the time me being older, Pākehā, dominant culture. And the focus on her sense, her strong sense of injustice and how justice was not being done, had not been done.

And the situation, which she was in, and the whole history of injustice that sat behind all of that. *Janet* (p. 152)

Hegemonic & local discourse

- Domestic violence legislation
 - *“respondent”*
 - “forced, having no choice but to come and meet with me”*

- Treaty issues:
 - *“her strong sense of how justice was not being done, had not been done”*
 - *“the whole history of injustice that sat behind all of that”*

- Counsellor – client
 - For Janet to establish a counselling relationship the hegemonic, legal and Treaty issues had to be addressed first.

Objectivization - Foucault

... power relations characterize the way human beings “govern” one another, and their analysis shows how, through certain patterns of “governance” with madmen, sick people, criminals and so on, the mad, the ill, the delinquent subject is objectivized.

Such an analysis does not mean, therefore, that the abuse of one sort of power or another has created madmen, sick people, or criminals where there none before, but that the various and particular forms of “governing” individuals were determining factors in the various modes of the subject’s objectivization.

(Florence, 1994, pp. 318-319)

Theorising objectivization –1

Where govt contracts service provision from NGOs the service contract acts to transmit hegemonic discourses. It funds particular services and demands particular approaches to practice and the meeting of particular standards as well as the achievement of particular outcomes.

These hegemonic demands position *counsellor* objects and *client* objects in particular ways. At the same time as being constituted as an object of these hegemonic discourses the counsellor is also positioned by her identity, personal values and practice ethics, and the client by her values, aspirations as well as her 'problem' story. (p204)

Theorising objectivization –2

The counsellor is simultaneously produced as *object* within these hegemonic discourses and as *subject* both within the hegemonic discourse and within other discourses.

The process of objectification is not productive of high levels of agency.

The process of subjectification may open a space for agency if the counsellor is able to take it up.

The challenge for the counsellor is to seek an agentic position as counsellor while simultaneously being produced as the object of the hegemonic sovereign (state) discourse. (p204)

Objectivization & *Butler's* subject

- Where one might expect submission to consist in a yielding to an externally imposed dominant order, and to be marked by a loss of control and mastery, it is paradoxically marked by mastery itself... neither submission nor mastery is *performed by a subject*; the lived simultaneity of submission as mastery, and mastery as submission, is the condition of possibility for the subject itself (Butler, 1995, pp. 45-46).

Theorising objectivization -3

What is not obvious in Butler's statement is the simultaneous multiple positioning involved for the counsellor when she is produced as an object of *and* subject to state power *and* simultaneously by discourses of counselling ethics and values *and* her practice identity.

She has to submit to the hegemony of the state system (a position which offers limited agency) while simultaneously submitting to discourses of counselling, (which may offer her greater agency). Simultaneous agency in *both* discourses is the pre-condition for mastery. *Only* if this is achieved can she offer her client an agentic position. (p.205)

taking up these ideas....

- I now understand some practice moments/contexts differently
 - Eg. Clients who are subject to involuntary referral
 - Who (along with their counsellor) become objectivised by hegemonic discourse
- I now understand the registration issue differently
 - Over the last 20 years registration has become hegemonic
 - NZAC and counsellors need to engage with the current hegemony

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