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Talking about anger

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment

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Catherine M. O'Connor

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Abstract

This project takes place within poststructuralist challenges to psychology's dominant discourses of theory and research on anger. These dominant discourses of psychology produce anger as an entity which is categorised separately from other emotions, is located within individuals as essential and physiological, and which must be controlled by reason; discourses which reproduce mind/body and individual/social binaries. This study deconstructs anger talk in transcripts of interviews with twenty counselling students, eight experienced counsellors, and seven of the original group three years later. The texts are read, discourses producing anger and subjectivity are explicated, and the constitutive power of language is instanced in detailed analysis of textual fragments. In my reading of these texts, anger is a product and is productive of social relations, and I read the texts through three overlays: discourses of anger, the constitution of subjectivities, and specific language forms. I have braided three plaits of themes in anger talk: psychology discourses, moral evaluations, and social relations. Detailed analyses of fragments of the texts capture the constitution of subjectivities in the grammatical and syntactical textures of anger talk which enact the social interweave of claims and conflicts, protests and renegotiations of power relations. In the counsellor study and the follow-up of students, discourse production varies as subject positions are enabled among professional discourses. Finally, this study illustrates the general relevance of poststructural approaches as research methodologies for social psychology. Multiple discourses constitute subjectivities in social relations, and constitute the objects of psychology. The deconstruction of discourses weaves us as researchers into the fabric of discursive processes, not as observers, but as weavers and woven.

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