

Changing our minds, changing our bodies: power as embodied in research relations

ELIZABETH B. MOJE

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259, USA

In this paper I offer a reflection on my role in a collaborative research experience as a way of illustrating how attempts to establish rapport and work collaboratively in teaching and research can result in struggles over authority, power, and goals. In particular, I argue that we need to look closely at how embodied relations shape and are shaped in collaborative research relations. When discussing power relations among university researchers and classroom teachers – or in any relationship in which we are “studying down” (Harding, 1987) – researchers tend to focus on affiliatory or institutional power positions. I use artifactual data from a research relationship to raise questions about the *other* processes of power at work in such relationships. Specifically, I ask what our discursive and embodied relations with one another meant in terms of power. How did we enact power in and through the ways we positioned our bodies or the bodies of others? How are these material, embodied experiences situated in and productive of larger social, cultural, and historical discourses? Finally, what implications do these discursive and embodied relations have for *all* types of collaborative and even non-collaborative research relations?

In recent years, a number of theorists and researchers have suggested that researchers should engage in research not only to produce knowledge but also to make positive change in the lives of those who participate in research, change that the participants desire and articulate for themselves (e.g., Lather, 1986, 1991, 1997; Fine, 1994a; Gitlin & Russell, 1994). To achieve this “catalytic validity” (Lather, 1991, p. 68), many theorists and researchers have recommended the development of collaborative and close research relationships that depend on participant voice and closeness between research participants, as opposed to distanced and ostensibly objective stances taken in more traditional perspectives on research (Burowoy et al., 1992; Fine, 1992, 1994a; Schensul & Schensul, 1992; Reason, 1994). Although a number of positive collaborative relationships between researchers and classroom teachers have been described in the literature (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Gitlin & Russell, 1994; Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, 1997), less has been written about *rocky* collaborations. In particular, very little is said about the processes of achieving closeness and collaboration. For some, closeness is conflated with agreement,¹ but – as the result of a difficult collaboration – I find myself wondering about agreeable research relationships.

I wonder what kind of agreement exists in such relationships. Is, perhaps, something masking disagreement and power differentials? Smooth collaborations are upheld as the ideal, but the quest for smoothness, closeness, and friendliness may be driven or confused by dominant ideologies of “niceness,” especially for women engaged in research. In fact, the preponderance of smooth and close collaborative research relations represented in the field may be an example of how power can work in

“technical and positive” ways (Foucault, 1984, p. 62) to compel people to control and discipline themselves by trying to emulate these models. Rather than only seeking happy, friendly, or close collaborations, we might also ask how positions and power relations are negotiated and contested in uncomfortable research relationships and what possibilities emerge from engaging in frustrating, seemingly non-collaborative practices.

My intent in this paper is to examine how my attempts to establish rapport and to work collaboratively with a classroom teacher resulted in struggles over authority, power, and goals and how those power struggles may have resulted in part from the closeness of our collaborative relationship. Diane² – the classroom teacher with whom I worked – and I have found that while it is relatively easy to imagine the possibilities for collaborative action research, it is much more difficult to put those possibilities *into practice*. In particular, we struggled with two questions about collaboration throughout our work together: (a) What does it mean to engage in close and collaborative research and teaching practice?; (b) As we built and maintained our relationship, how did we position ourselves, each other, and the students?

My analyses of these questions have led me to argue that we need to look closely at how embodied relations – as an aspect of discursive practice (cf. Bourdieu, 1984; Fairclough, 1992) – shape and are shaped in research relations. Typically, when we discuss power relations among university researchers and classroom teachers – or in any relationship in which we are “studying down” (Harding, 1987) – we focus on affiliatory or institutional power positions. This “studying down” suggests a power differential that those who engage in collaborative work wish to avoid and seek to do so by changing the nature of the relationship. A number of collaborative perspectives, however, do not acknowledge the multiple agendas and commitments that shape power relations in participant groups (cf. Reason, 1994). In my work with Diane I found that while our university and school affiliations did play an important role in producing power differences between us, other – less obvious – differences, affiliations, and commitments also shaped our practices and produced power in our relations. It is these practices of power that I explore in this paper.

As the title of the paper implies, I suggest that changing the way we do research depends as much on changing our body practices as it does on changing our minds about what it means to do research. Specifically, we need to ask what our discursive relations – both verbal and embodied – with one another mean in terms of power, and how some of these relations are an artifact of close, collaborative work. How do we enact power in and through the ways we position our bodies or the bodies of others? How are these material, embodied experiences situated in and productive of larger social, cultural, and historical discourses? Finally, what implications do these discursive and embodied relations have for *all* types of collaborative and noncollaborative research relations?

To address these questions about power I reflect on my experience in attempting to engage in a collaborative, activist relationship with Diane, a junior-high school English teacher in a public school setting. In particular, I focus on how our talk, writing, and embodied relations shaped what we were trying to do as researchers and teachers. We both engaged in the project willingly, with what we initially believed were similar desires and goals. What emerged in our relationship was a struggle to define our positions, to understand and/or admit to the power that came or did not come with those positions, and to learn from each other while also maintaining our own commitments and passions for particular teaching and learning practices.

Show me the power: theories that guide my analysis of power

The production of power

My interpretation of these practices depends heavily on Foucault's (1980) theorizing about power as "productive," a result of interactions and relationships, rather than an entity that is possessed by some or by systems and desired or resisted by others. Foucault argued:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (1984, p. 61)

Some groups *are* dominant over others, but this dominance is sustained through "processes of different origin and scattered location" (Foucault, 1977, p. 138) that regulate minute details of space, time, and bodies, thus producing and normalizing bodies to serve prevailing relations of dominance and subordination (cf. Bordo, 1993). In arguing that power is produced in and circulates among people, Foucault does not deny that regimes or systems of power exist. Instead, his argument suggests – like work done from cultural studies perspectives – that it is through micro-practices of power that systems and regimes are produced and reproduced (cf. Fiske, 1994; Grossberg, 1995). Foucault argues that power operates through "technologies of self," implying that we make power as we engage in relationships, and that at times that power shapes our own actions. In other words, we participate in creating differentially valued subject positions, even when attempting to challenge or subvert oppressive power relations. For me, Foucault's emphasis on the unpredictable nature of workings of power is most compelling. By applying a Foucauldian perspective on power to my reflexive analysis of this research relationship, I was able to see the multiple ways that the teacher and I produced power in our relationship.

My emphasis on understanding power as unpredictably generated in and generative of relationships, is not meant, however, to dismiss the importance of "affiliatory power" (Said, 1993) which, in this case, suggests that my position as a university professor brought with it the power of authority, knowledge, and prestige over a classroom teacher. Nor do I wish to suggest that micro-practices of power stand outside larger power relations. Each power move that the teacher and I made in our relationship was situated within institutional arrangements that in many ways pushed us to engage in particular discursive – verbal and embodied – practices. I intend, however, to complicate common interpretations of affiliatory power, interpretations which suggest that power exists within people as a result of their affiliations and that people hold only one affiliation that produces power. This view of power and affiliation seems too simplistic, too linear, and too uncomplicated to me. As this analysis will reveal, the institutions of family, church, marriage, and class were as powerful as the institution of academe in shaping what we said and did in our relationship. It was at the intersection of all of these institutional affiliations – enacted through our micro-practices – that power was produced in our relationship.

What is more, following Foucault, I argue that people do not *hold* power as a result of their affiliations; rather, others may ascribe power to people in particular positions or people may act on the basis of their sense of their own affiliatory power, knowledge, and

authority. These enactments of affiliatory power may include moves either to reinforce or to deny, mystify, or mask power, and these moves may be especially present in relationships where people are working hard to collaborate and maintain closeness despite their differences in ideology or practice. The recognition that even attempts to *deny* power can result in oppressive relations is perhaps the most troubling notion for a stance that calls for closeness, rapport, and collaboration in research.

Body matters

Body matters, and what we do with bodies – our own and others’ – is especially important. The construction of differently valued subject positions and the production of power occur in part through the normalization and regulation of our bodies. As Foucault writes:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he (*sic*) is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself. (1980, p. 155)

I connect Foucault’s perspectives on power as embodied to “body work” by feminist theorists such as Susan Bordo (1993), Judith Butler (1993), Elizabeth Grosz (1994), and bell hooks (1994). These theories also suggest that knowledge and power are not “held” in institutions or by individuals, but are generated in embodied and bodily relations, between people. Grosz writes:

Power does not control the subject through systems of ideas – ideologies – or through coercive force; rather, it surveys, supervises, observes, measures the body’s behavior and interactions with others in order to produce knowledges. (1994, p. 149)

For Susan Bordo, women, in particular, cannot escape from their bodies. Their work is shaped by the excessive social and cultural emphasis on bodies and bodily relations that women confront in each aspect of their lives:

For women, associated with the body and largely confined to a life centered on the body (both the beautification of one’s own body and the reproduction, care, and maintenance of the bodies of others), culture’s grip on the body is a constant, intimate fact of everyday life. (1993, p. 17)

The control of the self through the regulation of or gaze on the body extends to the regulation of our relationships, and yet we rarely ask how our focus on weight, health, fitness, dress, and style might influence our research or teaching relationships. Turning to these perspectives helped me to analyze particular practices – body practices – through which Diane and I produced power in our relationships.

In the remainder of the paper, I provide a brief description of the study and the teacher’s and my respective backgrounds. I then present artifactual data and a reflection on these data as a way of showing our verbal discursive practices. I close with my interpretation of how our bodies played a role in the way we positioned ourselves and each other in this relationship, and I raise questions about what this reflexive “body work” means for collaborative and close practice.

The story of my work with Diane

Diane and I met in the course of Diane's master's degree work at the university where I was at the time an assistant professor. In the winter quarter of my first year at the university I taught a course that I called "Issues in Secondary Literacy," in which we focused on sociocultural contexts of literacy. As a class, we explored whether and how traditional literacy strategies draw from or ignore the social interests and backgrounds of students. As we read about strategies throughout the quarter, we also tried them and critiqued them.

As the class talked about writing process and the writer's workshop approach, Diane raised her struggles with peer-response groups. In addition to telling her about some similar struggles encountered by Timothy Lensmire (1994) and suggesting that she read Lensmire's (1994) book, I volunteered to come out to her school and work with her; I tried to make clear that I was not an expert in this particular pedagogical approach, but that I would be learning about putting it into practice with her. She immediately accepted, and we made plans to start working together in the spring quarter.

When we set out to do this study, we wanted to examine the process by which Diane, a junior high school English teacher, and her students negotiated a process approach to writing (see Graves, 1983; Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1994) and reading in her seventh-grade, regular level English class. Using instructional procedures based on theoretical principles and empirical studies of literacy, Diane and I worked together to enact a literacy pedagogy different from that which Diane had typically used. Working together, we hoped ultimately to change Diane's pedagogy from packaged writing activities and unconnected novel reading to a workshop pedagogy in which students chose topics and formats, wrote individually and collaboratively, conferred with Diane and other students, revised and edited their work, and shared their work publicly in the classroom, school, and community. We wanted to connect the reading of novels, short stories, and essays to the students' writing, but we also hoped to address concerns about the individualist emphasis of expressivist pedagogy as raised by Berlin (1987) and Lensmire (1994) among others. Diane's primary goal was to put the approach into practice and to study its success, whereas my goal was to try to understand how the pedagogy was shaped by Diane's and my interactions with students as we engaged in various literacy events and practices. I wanted to study how Diane, her students, and I negotiated socially, historically, and culturally shaped arrangements of teaching and learning, thus also negotiating our beliefs and values and literacy practices. We both wanted to examine our collaborative relationship, primarily so that we could build on our strengths and change any problematic aspects of our collaboration.

It may strike the reader as odd that I write as a single author about the difficulties of collaboration. The issue of authorship is only one of the many questions that Diane and I have struggled with in defining and enacting collaborative research. Does a collaborative agenda require collaborative writing? Does collaboration require consensus? Diane and I discussed the writing of our research, and we agreed early on that we should each have the opportunity to write about our experiences individually. We believe that there are advantages, particularly in regard to honesty and voice, to writing about our experiences as individuals.³ It is, however, a complicated endeavor to reflect on one's role in a relationship without othering, through re-presentation, someone else's voice and experience. Although I use Diane's words and actions in this paper, I do not interpret what she meant by them; rather, I reflect on what they meant to me.

I originally turned to critical discourse analysis (cf. Foucault, 1972; Kress, 1989, Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Luke, 1995/1996) to make sense of our discursive practices.⁴ A critical discourse analysis relies on the analysis of linguistic devices that people take up to show how the discourse – often unintentionally – serves to position others in particular ways. The analysis also depends on a thorough understanding of the context in which such devices are embedded (Luke, 1995/1996). Ultimately, however, the use of critical discourse analysis to write about the relationship in which I was so deeply invested proved problematic. I am engaging in reflexive work through the writing of this paper, but the reflexive process refers to my own role in the relationship. I want to avoid othering Diane and instead to “work the hyphen,” as Fine (1994b) would say, between Diane and me, to understand my role in how and why we enacted and subverted particular power positions. The fact that I was so much a part of the context makes an “objective” analysis, even one that relies on an established procedure such as CDA, difficult and suspect because the procedure depends on *my* analysis of the context. As a result, although the critical discourse analysis was very important to moving my reflexive work forward, what I present here will focus on what these discursive positionings *meant to me* as a member of the relationship. I use the insights from my analysis, but do not present an analysis of discourse as would be called for in a formal critical discourse analysis. Instead, I reflect on and am reflexive about my role in our collaborative relationship.

Complicating collaboration

In this section I use an electronic mail message written by Diane and notes from my researcher’s journal to examine disjunctures in our thinking and to examine how we positioned ourselves and each other. I use this examination of power and positioning to ask questions and theorize about the production of power in our embodied relations, which I discuss in a later section of the paper. Thus, this reflection on textual artifacts provides a context for understanding our embodied relations. The reflection also illustrates the conflicts that necessitated the reflexive analysis of my uses of body as a tool of power. Diane’s writing comes from an electronic mail message that she sent me two months into the project. I chose this writing because it represented – and still does – a painful and frustrating moment of our relationship. My writing comes from my researcher’s journal of roughly the same time period, in which I recorded my impressions and theoretical memos that connect observations and interviews to larger theories.

Our collaboration began productively as we worked together to plan the first several weeks of the literacy workshop. We sat side by side, discussing possible strategies to use, planning minilessons, and preparing typical tools of the literacy workshop (e.g., record-keeping tools, informational handouts, and progress charts). And, indeed, the first several weeks proceeded smoothly, as students seemed to pick up quickly on the discourse of the workshop and to engage in the writing and reading that we encouraged. I soon began to notice, however, some patterns that troubled me, as exemplified in a theoretical memo I wrote early in the school year:

Theoretical Memo, 8–31–95; On Cultural Stereotypes & Cultural Relevance

D. commented on Tuesday that, “I have to get over my Hispanic female thing. I think there’s an attitude going there.” Also, D is concerned with Maria and Eugenio. She’s worried about gang stuff because she hears them talking about

after-school activities. [What's going on here with DW's biases? What's going on with mine? Am I trying too hard to defend these kids?] There *is* something resistant about Eugenio and Maria, and they *aren't* into writing, even when given the chance to do their own topics. How can we reach them?

As illustrated in my memo, I was concerned about issues of culture and racism and how we could make the literacy workshop culturally responsive. I began to raise such issues on a regular basis, questioning our methods and the theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogy we had adopted. In our conversations I would often comment on the lack of engagement I observed in certain kids and would wonder aloud whether their disengagement had a basis in cultural difference. Diane, I soon learned, felt frustrated with my observations, as illustrated in this excerpt from an electronic mail message she wrote in early November:

If I can voice one frustration with our work so far, it's that I feel pulled in 20 different directions.... I feel like I'm spending so much time worrying about Monica and Khek and a few others that I'm not concentrating on the majority of the others who need my writing instruction. I'm not saying that these kids are not important. I want them to be engaged.... But honestly, can you picture Khek or Monica being thrilled about anything with school – any book, any writing, any activity, any assembly, any anything?...

I guess what I'm saying is, the majority of my emotional energy (as well as the majority of our planning time together) is being spent on two or three kids – kids whom we may never reach anyway. Is it possible to concentrate more on our writing program? We'll pay attention, of course, to making it diverse and to reaching all of the kids as much as possible – but concentrate on WW and writing itself – on what will reach more kids?

This message served as a turning point in our relationship. Not only did Diane raise several issues that frustrated or concerned her, but she also couched her concerns in a language that suggested to me she felt silenced in our relationship. For example, in Diane's opening of her email message she exhorted me to have an "open mind," a phrasing which characterized my actions to that point as "closed." To me, Diane was saying that I had not been listening to her. I wondered if I had been listening to her, while I also struggled with my frustration over her words in the message. What's more, Diane's message alerted me to the fact that she felt intimidated by what she saw as power differentials between us. In this same message Diane expressed her concern to me over how the students viewed our roles in the classroom as a result of one student comment:

Tell me this: What do you think it says to the kids (about my credibility) when you teach the mini lesson? Now, I'm being perfectly candid, so hear me out.... Amber's [the student] comment last time got to me, I guess (about you being a professor and that's why you were teaching the editing ML). Do they think you're at GP because I don't know what I'm doing? I mean, it's true, but do you think the kids know it? I do not (as you wondered today) feel like you are taking over – not by any means. But I guess I'm just wondering how you feel – what are the kids thinking?

When I read Diane's concern regarding how my role in the classroom reflected on her credibility, in conjunction with her other frustrations, I felt anguish as well as confusion.

I had offered to help teach as a way of breaking down the typical power relationships between university researcher and classroom teacher – we were to be co-teachers and co-researchers. This, I thought to myself, is what the collaborative research says to do. If this move to subvert the typical power relations did not work, then what were we to do?

In the same email message, Diane suggested that I asked her to engage in an excessive workload that I was not myself engaged in: “And may I again be candid in saying that if we have to rethink evaluation I’m quite sure I’ll have a breakdown? I might even cry.” Diane *did* carry the burden of the grading and evaluation in the classroom, but what, I thought at the time, was I to do? Our human subjects contract required that I have no voice in evaluation of students; moreover, I, too, felt a burden in trying to juggle this unfunded research project with my own teaching and service obligations at the university. Again, I felt failure – this should not happen in a collaborative project. How did other collaborative researchers manage institutional requirements and their own work schedules; how did they divide responsibilities without playing into typical power differentials?

Perhaps most upsetting for me, however, was Diane’s request that we “concentrate more on our writing program... concentrate on writer’s workshop and writing itself – on what will reach more kids?” because it was through this request that I came to realize the depth of our philosophical differences. The struggles that we faced at this point seemed insurmountable: I read Diane’s words as saying that she heard my constant questions and musings about culture, race, and ethnicity as questions directed to just a few students and as questions that were irrelevant to what we were trying to do. I realized that she felt that I was preventing us from teaching literacy well.

Diane’s desire represented an ethical and a practical dilemma for me: I struggled between my need to be faithful and responsive to her desire for change and my need to make what I saw as critical change for students in the classroom. My beliefs about literacy, teaching, and learning did not allow me to separate teaching and learning about reading and writing from issues of culture, race, and ethnicity. Whereas I believed that our pedagogical and curricular innovations had to address engagement as a social, cultural, and institutional construction, I learned from this message that Diane saw the kids’ engagement as personally or individually constructed and as separate from what we did pedagogically. As her words indicate, Diane wanted to focus on the pedagogy, on “writer’s workshop and writing itself,” but for me, writer’s workshop and writing could not be separated from who kids were as social and cultural beings. This was not, for me, an abstract question of critical pedagogy or collaborative research; to honor Diane’s request would have required me to act against my own beliefs. I did not know how to be faithful to our relationship while also being faithful to my beliefs about what was best for the young people in the classroom.

I was also torn by these revelations because I had been taught – as a “good girl” and as a student of theory on collaborative research – that it is bad to offend and frustrate others because we need to be close and connected if we are to collaborate. While I will acknowledge that my understanding of collaboration is as much about who I am as a person, and particularly as a white woman (cf. hooks, 1989, 1990), it is telling that there are few, if any, representations of troubled research collaborations published in research on education. As Banning (1998), Evans (1998) and hooks (1990) have argued, collaborative relationships – especially between women teachers and researchers – are very likely to be shaped by white, middle-class notions of niceness, notions that serve to control and discipline our practices.

Moreover, although I was also frustrated with what I considered Diane's dismissal of several students, and I was upset with the way that I felt positioned by Diane's message – as if I had been diverting our energies and wasting our time – I recognized how hard it would be to constantly have someone challenging classroom decisions and practices. In other words, I could at some level empathize with Diane, and I feared that if I did not stop making challenges to the pedagogy, she – out of frustration and exhaustion – would drop all innovation in her work and perhaps “invite me out” of her classroom. Thus, my fear of offending Diane was driven not only by my own classed and gendered interpretations of collaboration, but also by my fear of being asked to leave the research site in which I had already invested a great deal of time. Real, material consequences for my career were reflected in these anxieties: I struggled with questions such as, “What if I'm kicked out of here?” and “How will I write about this?”

Consequently, with Diane's challenge to my position in our project, I backed off my attempts to make change in the pedagogy, and I began to concentrate solely on collecting data, ironically distancing myself from our relationship. On the surface we “made nice” (Alvermann, 1995; Evans, 1998), but our relationship was far from collaborative and the possibilities for making change seemed limited. The power produced in our practices was not so much about one of us holding power over the other; we both felt controlled by the various practices of power that circulated in our relationship, embedded as it was in larger discourses and structures of power and authority.

Diane's message, although frustrating, forced me to examine the ways I was positioning Diane and myself in our research relationship. What had I been doing while Diane was struggling with the issues she spoke of in her message? In contrast with Diane's writing, my writing of theoretical memos appears secret and subversive. Although the functions of our writings were very different because mine was a private writing and Diane's was an act intended to communicate, my writing is imbued with techniques of power. This excerpt from another of my theoretical memos illustrates my self-positioning as researcher and my positioning of Diane as the researched:

Theoretical Memo, 9-01-95: Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Woods, 1992)

D defines the situation of 4th period very differently from the way she defines the situation of 3rd period. In the context of her definitions (4th period is filled with “rowdy,” on-the-edge-of-being-gang-members students, whereas 3rd period is represented by “diligent,” hardworking, “bright,” white students), she interprets students' actions, words, and symbolic gestures in different ways. Her interpretations guide her actions, words, and symbolic gestures, even down to the tone of her voice and the stance of her body.

Through my writing I engaged in surveillance of Diane, positioning her as one to be watched, to be classified, and to be corrected or regulated. I defined her as different – especially from me, thus positioning myself rather securely – and I positioned the students as marginalized and disempowered, although I was not necessarily more able to reach kids. And I even turned to “science,” by attempting to understand her practices through theoretical lenses such as symbolic interactionism or discourse theory.

I objectified and reduced Diane to a player in an interactionist drama, much as I risk doing to her and to myself in writing this piece. My memos reveal a conflict in my own thinking about our roles in the research: Did I really intend this to be a collaborative study? Or did I hope to collaborate in the teaching, while *studying the teacher*?

What is most interesting about this writing, however, is how different it was from our talk. My discursive practices in my journal were forthright (although framed in the discourse of research), but my discourse in conversation with Diane was veiled and cautious even as I tried to be honest. Although after each class period Diane and I talked about our experiences during the period, I rarely shared my writing with her.

In our conversations I tried to present ideas for change, sharing with Diane – as she indicated in her email message – my ideas for reshaping our practices or my observations of students who were not engaged. It was in these moments that I often volunteered to teach, thinking that it was unfair to suggest experiments that I expected her to put into practice. At the time, I believed that I was trying to “even” the playing field by taking on a share of the burden. In my desire to make nice I felt uncomfortable saying, “Why don’t you try this?” so I would instead say, “If you’d like, I could teach...” The result was a re-inscription of my authority as expert and professor because not only did my offer send an implicit message that I did not think Diane could teach in a particular way, but it also suggested – to at least one student – that Diane did not have the expertise that I had. What I failed to see was that my conversations with Diane routinely positioned her as powerless, despite whatever I meant to do in the relationship. The feeling of powerlessness that I had (and still have) each time I read Diane’s email message were similar to feelings that she had as a result of many of our conversations. It does not matter that I did not mean – consciously, at any rate – to take power; what matters is what got meant.⁵

Becoming aware of these discursive techniques of power did not make the relationship easier. As a result of several later conversations, I came to understand that Diane’s feelings of powerlessness were not only a result of the ideas I posed in our conversations, of the verbal discourses I engaged in, or even of my affiliatory powers. They were also based in embodied practices such as dress, body image, and personal habits as well. They were based in relationships with students. In short, they were based in personal relationships outside of our teacher–researcher relationship. They were based in what Fairclough (1992) calls *ethos*, or the social identity that people enact through both verbal and nonverbal relations. Building on Bourdieu (1984), who argues that language is a dimension of body through which a person’s relationship to the world is articulated, Fairclough posits that *ethos* is enacted not only in language, but also in the ways people sit, move, respond physically, and hold their faces.

Similarly, I argue that one’s *ethos* – including his/her embodied practices – shapes social relationships in ways that produce power. Rarely, however, are the embodied aspects of research relationships examined for the production of power. Too often, we assume that power differentials are challenged through structures such as researchers participating as classroom teachers, and in discursive practices such as changing the ways we talk about the people involved in the research or inviting teachers to participate in the writing and presenting of research. While these are important aspects of equalizing collaborative relationships, they do not capture the myriad of unpredictable ways that people produce power in their everyday practices and relationships. Ironically – or appropriately – I learned about how these differentials produced power in our relationship as we engaged in a project designed to add a social and critical element to the writer’s workshop pedagogy.

Power in bodies

Despite our discomfort in the relationship, we continued to work together, both making nice while also trying to salvage the relationship. One thing that we did agree on was that there is some limit to how much expressive writing students can productively engage in during one year, so we decided to revise the workshop approach to include different types of writing practices. Drawing from critiques of expressivist pedagogy (cf. Moje, in press), Diane and I designed an end-of-the-year project that would push our students to engage in social and cultural critique by asking students to engage in one of two projects: (a) a study of important people in their lives (cf. Lensmire, 1994) or (b) a study of a social or community problem.⁶ Each of us modeled how to choose a topic, research it, and present it. Because of our interests, Diane chose to focus on important people, whereas I chose to study what I considered an important social and personal problem: body image and the “beauty myth” (cf. Wolf, 1991).

As Diane and I shared our work on our own projects at the end of each class period, we invariably turned to a discussion of bodies. As I revealed my insecurity with my body while talking about my project, I learned that Diane viewed me as very strong, impeccably groomed, and physically fit – a distinctly different view from the one I hold of myself. Diane explained to me that she saw me as very powerful in terms of body and health; at one point she even referred to me as “the healthiest person she knew.” Although Diane had often made comments about my eating habits throughout our collaboration (e.g., “What are you having for lunch, a crouton?”), she had never explained to me what *my* body focus meant *for her* and for our relationship.

With the revelation that our conversations provided me, I began to analyze other aspects of our interaction, looking for ways that I might be producing power through my focus on body (as enacted in my dress and diet, in particular) even as I attempted to transform my most obvious power position, that of university researcher working in collaboration with a teacher who had been my student. My analysis illustrates how some power differentials can be produced in embodied – actual physical and material – relationships. In other words, our bodies spoke what our mouths refused to speak.

It is important to note that these embodied relationships are situated in particular sociohistorical contexts. That is, these embodied relationships, while enacted by individuals, are always in a dialectical relationship with broader discourses and systems of power. Micropractices of power between individuals are often the artifact of broader systems and discourses, but also produce the power that supports broader discourses and systems (cf. Foucault, 1977; Fiske, 1994; Grossberg, 1995). Thus, these micropractices – in this case embodied practices – cannot be separated from affiliatory and institutional power; indeed, they represent the ways that such power relations get enacted, even when one tries to challenge them.

This reflection first required that I examine just what my embodied practices were. Except for the first week of school and on special occasions when I taught in each of her classes, I came to Diane’s classroom two days each week, arriving at the beginning of Diane’s second-period class and staying at least through her fourth-period class. Although this represented a significant time investment for me given my own teaching and service commitments at the university, this body practice belied my frequent reminders to Diane that we were “the same.” On several occasions Diane commented that she envied my being able to leave the school and go to a different space. She often suggested, for example, that we go out for lunch, driven by a desire to be out of the building. Thus, my comings and goings represented a body practice that produced me

as powerful. In addition, we had indicated in our promise to protect the “human subjects” involved in the research that only Diane would have responsibility for grading students. As a result, Diane had a teaching-related workload that I did not share, making our role as co-teachers less than equal.

My dress also produced me as powerful. At times I “dressed down,” but more often I wore suit jackets with pants or skirts because I went immediately to my university teaching after being at the school. By contrast, Diane usually wore casual pants or jeans with sweaters. Diane remarked more than once that I “always looked so put together.” Although neither of us was required to dress in a particular way, our dress spoke to the ways we each interpreted our positions as teachers and sent messages about how we viewed ourselves as people and as colleagues.

When participating in class, I sat among the students, taking field notes and trying to engage in discussions. Students often chatted with me when they came in, and some even wrote notes to me during class activities. When engaged in whole-class novel readings, students called on me to take a turn at reading aloud. During individual or small-group writing times, I usually sat with students to confer about their writing. In this capacity, I served as teacher, and yet my interactions with students were different from Diane’s. As she noted, I sat with students longer and talked with them more about the background of their writing. On one occasion when I shared an insight about a student that I had learned in a conference, Diane commented, “See, I don’t have time to hear those things from kids because I’m too busy policing the room.” Diane’s comment indicated to me that the different ways we engaged in embodied relations with the students produced power between us. I realized that while we were trying to enact a co-teaching relationship, I had the luxury of spending time with kids. Diane’s embodied relations with students were driven by discourses of authority and control that marked the entire school’s practices.

Finally, during our lunch period together, I rarely ate. I often drank a soda or water, but I ate little. I did not eat for many reasons: It took too much effort to pack a lunch; I am self-conscious about eating in front of other people; not eating means not gaining weight. I was unaware, however, of what might get meant from my failure to eat. Through our conversations at the end of the year, Diane revealed to me that she saw my refusal to eat as “will power,” with a focus on health and fitness. Thus, even practices revolving around food and eating produced a kind of power in our relationship that positioned me as strong, full of will, full of power.

Other aspects of difference between Diane and me, aspects that could be attributed to personal, embodied relations resulting from different institutional affiliations, also produced power in our relationship. For example, my position as a married woman – perhaps more than my position as a professor – may have produced power in our relationship. As a married woman in a society that subtly – and not so subtly – values and rewards married women over single women, I was positioned in our relationship as powerful. My status as married – which seemed so removed from our relationship focused on teaching and research – represented a source of power that I could not negotiate. This power, however, was exacerbated by my emphasis on body and dress. In a kind of “catch-22” similar to that which Wolf (1991) describes in *The beauty myth*, while I was trying so hard to appear fit and well groomed in an attempt to earn position and credibility from Diane, her colleagues and students, my focus on body and perfection was producing negative power in our relationship.

These embodied relations were integrally connected to my institutional power affiliations, illustrating that affiliatory power is a very complex and unpredictable

artifact of sociohistorical and institutional relations. My position as “professional,” for example, was not just a vestige of my affiliation with the university, compared with Diane’s affiliation with the public schools. Indeed, Diane and many of her colleagues dismissed many university-based professors and researchers as idealistic, naive, and lacking in experience in the “real” world of classrooms. The positioning in our particular relationship, although influenced by affiliatory ideology, was much more complex: Instead of gaining my power from a mere university affiliation, I was powerful because I able to negotiate *both* the university and the classroom. I could talk to classroom teachers as a peer because I did have classroom experience, and I understood the frustrations and complexities of classroom life. My efforts, then, to join in conversations in the teachers’ lounge – efforts in which I engaged so that I could be part of the group and not be seen as a “university person” – produced a different kind of power, the power of group membership. Diane did not have access to membership at the university in the ways that I had access to membership at her school.

Similarly, my relations with students produced power in my relationship with Diane. Not only did I work well with students, but they also liked me, and – because of my nonteacher position – I had the luxury of being more like a friend to them. Diane, who was accountable to students in a different way, could not engage in the same type of relationships. And, indeed, students ascribed power to her as teacher. They were less interested in consorting with an authority figure than they were with me, even though they repeatedly told me how much they liked Diane as a teacher. To the students I was unusual, interesting, and different, if only because I was an adult who was not a teacher and not a parent. My “ability” to negotiate university and secondary-school classrooms and to hang out with kids made it difficult to dismiss me as an absentminded or ivory-tower professor. I produced power through this “ability” – an ability which stemmed not from some quality of mine, but from my access to multiple spaces – to negotiate several different cultural identities as a result of many different kinds of embodied relationships.

It seems doubly ironic, given this analysis, that I was working diligently to enact the very embodied relationships that ultimately produced me as more powerful than Diane, at least in our relationship, but I was doing so as a way to equalize the relationship. As a former classroom teacher, I have many friends who are teachers, and I have always believed that it is crucial that I maintain such friendships to support my classroom research. I have worked hard to position myself as able to live and work in public school, as well as university, classrooms because I believed that teachers would respect me as a colleague if I were able to work side by side with them. Through our conversations, I came to understand that my attempts to be *some body* in the world of schools contributed to the production of very negative power differentials. These differences may have positioned Diane as less influential in the relationship because our physical and personal lives were different, she did not have the credentials to live in both worlds, and she could not be “friends” with her students in the same ways I could.

It did not matter that I was unsure of my body, my work, my relationship with her and her colleagues, and my interactions with students. What mattered was that I was always working to produce what I thought would be a normal body, a good body in her eyes.⁷ And what mattered most of all was that while we did not speak our philosophical differences in words, we spoke them through our bodies. My body power (which I produced and which Diane ascribed to me) said what my words did not or said things I would not have wanted to say. The fact that we were both white women also shaped our practices and interpretations of those practices. As Bordo (1993), Grosz (1994), and

Wolf (1991) have each argued, women in particular control themselves as they live with a “life centered on the body” (Bordo, 1993, p. 17). As Bordo makes clear, this body-centered life is not just about beauty and health, but also about reproduction of and care for the bodies of others. Thus, my relationships with students, other teachers, and even my life partner emphasized a difference in the opportunities Diane and I had to care for others in particular ways. These differences may have produced power between us, power that shaped our research, as well as personal, practices.

What makes this analysis especially complex is that the ways we interpreted each other’s body practices were dependent on how we were positioned as women in the world. Had I also been a classroom teacher, Diane might have seen the way I dressed and ate or the ways that I interacted with students very differently. Diane might have viewed my friendliness with students, for example, as problematic, rather than as a source of power on my part (After one disruptive classroom incident Diane said to me, “You always manage to bring humor to it [kids’ disruptions] – I just get mad.”). Had Diane been a university researcher, I might have seen her sitting with the teacher’s desk between us as motivated by comfort and convenience rather than as a move to separate us and to put me “in my place.” In other words, our university and classroom affiliations – or positions – did matter, but many other affiliations and positions also mattered. A different university researcher could have enacted a wonderfully collaborative relationship with Diane. Our physical identities, our professional and personal relations with others, our religious and cultural commitments, and our social positions (wife/single woman; daughters; churchgoer; community volunteer) were reflected in our practices and in our interpretations of those practices.

As Diane and I began to discuss the ways we wanted to change our bodies, to make ourselves into different people, these differences started to become clear to me. And as the differences became clear, so did some of the “mysterious” power relations between us. We began to talk again because we found a small space in which we could understand each other, a space of agreement and trust. Similarly, as Diane and I talked more about how we felt a lack of control when it came to changing our bodies, it seemed that we were able to think about our relationship – and indeed, collaboration – differently. I was no longer the expert; Diane no longer the student. This space *did not* solve our problems or make the collaboration “happen,” however, because our differences in philosophy about teaching and learning remained. But this experience did allow us to talk again, and as we began to see our body practices differently, we also began to talk about our teaching and research practices more easily. Our body talk allowed us a glimpse of our differences, and it encouraged this reflexive project.

Changing our bodies, changing our minds: the possibilities in practice

Elizabeth Grosz (1994), among others, argues that the Cartesian dualism which separates mind and body needs to be rethought – our consciousness, or minds, cannot be separated from what our bodies do and feel. “Changing our bodies, changing our minds,” alludes to the idea that what we do with our bodies is connected to what we do with our minds and that if we are to change our minds in regard to research and collaboration, we may also need to change our embodied practices. Indeed, my reflection illustrates one way in which bodies and minds are integrally and intimately connected. What I did with my body – my dress, my hair, my ways of moving and

holding my body, and the ways I related to other teachers and students – shaped my research relationship with Diane. These embodied power relations are not separate from discursive and structural relations; as we enact our embodied relationships our body talk serves as a discursive practice that serves to build and rebuild structures of power.

Given work such as Susan Bordo's (1993), which reminds women how much their body obsessions regulate their relationships with others, it seems especially important that women engaged in collaborative relationships – whether with other women or with men – think carefully about what their bodies and body discourses might mean for the production of power in relationships. This is not to suggest, however, that only women need to examine the micropractices of power in their research relationships: All researchers and teachers should examine how their embodied relations shape the research and teaching they do in classrooms. Relationships are always coded with difference – difference that is more complex and layered than just one institutionally based difference such as the university–classroom divide implies.

As a result of theorizing of this experience, I have been forced to challenge talk about easy, friendly, and close collaboration. Achieving closeness is not just about finding someone who agrees with you. And it is also not just about denying or inverting institutional power, because that is not the only way power is produced in relationships. In writing about her attempts to “trouble reflexivity,” Wanda Pillow (1998) asks what “possibilities emerge from unsettling, uncomfortable practices?” I believe that at least two possibilities come from this collaboration. First, this research relationship has forced me to think about collaboration and relationships, to be reflexive in a way that I might not have been otherwise. I have had to examine my power – power I wanted to transform, deny, dismiss, or mystify – in our work together. I have had to realize that agreeing to collaborate does not make collaboration happen, nor does it make power differentials go away. In fact, I have learned that agreeing to collaborate without carefully examining what will be gained may make it possible for power differences to flourish. I have had to examine how my power stems not only from my ideological commitments, but also from my affiliations, physical being, embodied practices in the classroom, and material conditions in the classroom and school. Perhaps most important, I have learned that closeness does not equate to making nice. Making nice covers up real differences, but these differences get spoken through our bodies so that power differences continue to be reproduced in seemingly mysterious ways.

Accordingly, while I obviously will not change my body and my ways of being to try to match those of my teaching and research partners, I will continue to reflect on how my embodied and other discursive practices may be producing power in the relationship. Instead of trying to change these practices, I will try to talk openly about them – and about our philosophical and other differences – with my research and teaching partners. Thus, engaging in this difficult, unsettling, and uncomfortable collaborative relationship has supported my growth, my movement across boundaries, and my understanding of the multiple identities – and power affiliations – that I embody. Were I to work only in relationships with those who shared my beliefs and practices, I would be living and working within fixed boundaries (see hooks, 1994) and trying to fit myself to an image of collaborative work that highlights only agreeable, smooth relationships.

This point alludes to the second possibility I see in looking carefully at this messy, troubled collaboration. I write this account of the tensions and messiness of collaborative research so that collaborative work does not become a tool through which we discipline

ourselves by muting our voices and making nice (cf. Alvermann, 1995; Banning, 1998; Evans, 1998) as we attempt to make our collaborations look and feel as nice as the ones we often read about. We need to write and talk openly about our unpleasant and difficult collaborations as teachers and researchers. But to do that we need to see more pictures of rocky collaborations that will provide us with models of how to work together and that let us ask what possibilities emerge in difficult collaborations. That is not to say that the representations we have are false, but simply that we need other ways of thinking about the work we do with others.

In classroom research relations, the teacher and researcher are not the only people in the relationship – ultimately our work was centered on making a difference in students' learning. Both Diane and I had the interests of students at heart, but we both felt a commitment to teaching students in distinctly different ways. For me, being true to Diane's desire meant working against my idea of what was best for the students. I have not resolved that dilemma, so it seems important to point out that getting close through our body talk reshaped some of the negative power relations flowing through our relationship and helped us work together, but it did not necessarily lead to changed practice. Collaboration – exalted as good research practice – did not in this case lead to dramatic change in the literacy pedagogy or in the way each of us thinks about literacy. Thus, if researchers and teachers hope to collaborate to make change in education, then we need to continue to examine that hyphen between self and other (Fine, 1994b) – all of the others in research relations – in complex and challenging ways, ways that suggest multiple ways to collaborate, rather than create a standard representation which serves to normalize and regulate our practices.

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Notes

1. For example, when I realized that my own collaboration was not going smoothly, I began to question colleagues about their collaborative relationships. One colleague advised me that, "You have to collaborate with people who agree with you."

2. A pseudonym.

3. I should note, here, however, that I have shared this manuscript with Diane, and that we have talked on several occasions about our relationship and about issues of power in classroom research.

4. To conduct this analysis, I combined procedures and analytic constructs from a number of discourse analysts and took the data sets through three levels of analysis. Using analytic constructs suggested by Foucault (1972, 1980), I examined these two sets of writings (and other data sets) for how our discourse reverses or cuts out ideas, how it can be discontinuous and exclusive of other discourses, how it shapes and reshapes things and events, and how it is supported by or fixed in particular external conditions. Then I analyzed the data by drawing from features of text analysis laid out by Fairclough (1992). Finally, I used a set of coding categories that Gore (1996) laid out to examine how the discourse carries out several functions of power, including individualization, surveillance, normalization, exclusion, classification, distribution, totalization, and regulation and self-positioning. Each of these levels of analysis yielded different – but not contradictory – themes, which influenced my reflective/reflexive work.

5. I use the phrase “what got meant” in relation to Foucault’s notion that what matters in discourse analysis is not what was meant by what was said [or written], but how discursive practices are rooted in exterior conditions. I argue that although it does not matter what was meant, it does matter what “gets meant” (cf. Moje, 1996).

6. Examples of topics included gangs, racism, and teen pregnancy. Because this project was significantly different from other writing practices we had engaged in, we chose to carry out a project ourselves and to model our work for the students.

7. When I refer to “body” here, I use the word very broadly to mean not only my physical, but also my emotional, spiritual, and professional body. I attempted to be an important body, a some-body. My consciousness was my body; I could not escape from it. I believed that a fit and strong body would translate into a fit and strong career.

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