Supplement to Dissertation

Understanding Power in the Therapeutic Relationship

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Partial Manuscript for Power Contents in the Negotiation of Power in Therapeutic Relationships
Round One Interview Transcripts

P= participant
R= researcher

Participant 1 Round 1
Length: 57:17

R: (introduces power context via interview protocol)

R: I think you saw the first question, ‘describing a relationship with a past or current MHP.’ you might decide you want to describe a couple or one...whatever works for you.

P: I've had three total. (R: Ok, three total). The first one...I think they are all sort of different. I think it's the really the first one and then the other two. The first one was a hypnotherapist who I was referred to by my doctor for anxiety. We had one session and it went awful. Then at the end he said, “well, you’re cured so you don’t need to come back” I was like okay; I’m not coming back but not b/c I’m cured. That was interesting and dumb.

The other two were very similar. The first lady moved away so that’s how that ended and then I was on my own for a bit. Found my new counselor and I’ve been with her for a couple years so that’s probably the one I’m going to talk about the most.

R: What’s, um, I don't want to ask her identity so I'll say counselor #3 who is a gal.

Our relationship, if we were neighbors and not counselor-patient, we'd be friends. I know about her. She is potty training her son and I've seen pictures of her kids. She shares with me, too, I think to help me feel...I don't know if it is purposeful or if it is what it is. I feel like it’s friendly and I am thinking about the power thing with her and both the two ladies. I came in like “I’m broken and scared and sad and here is all of the power and I need you to fix me, I don’t know what to do...”

The one now, she took it and was like.... (motion) here is some back. You need to be in charge of your own mental health. I think its kind of shifted back to, I kind of guide what is going on. But it started out very much like I don’t know what to do, I’m just gonna to sit here and you fix me. Now it is more of a balance, I’m gonna tell you some things, you’re gonna ask me some questions and we’re gonna figure out what’s really wrong together.

R: It was awesome how much you moved when you were talking about the power (I repeated the motions) Do you have a sense of how she did that, it sounds like there is subtle or obvious way she did that...?
P: There have been a couple of really significant things. A lot of it is pretty subtle. I think, well, I came in, I’m gonna tell you my summary of myself. (R: I would love it and thank you for doing that).

I was Mormon until I was 32, like full in it to win it, Mormon. I had three kids, husband, 15 years. I left that church and became an atheist, full jump out. So I was struggling with what is morality, what are my guiding principles in life, and then my husband came out and I had lost my husband and all my friends and family gone from the Mormon thing, slowly, getting back my mom and dad an sisters and then lost my little family. And so I was a puddle of just broken, scared, sad. When I contacted her she was actually full but I emailed her secretary through their website and I gave her a brief breakdown, ‘left the Mormon church, gay husband, gay kid, transgender kid, Ahhhh!!!’" The secretary emailed back and said (counselor’s name) doesn’t have room but I’m sending her your story because this is kind of like what she does. She was like nope we are making room. They made room for me and that very first thing made me feel very welcome. Then I came in and just cried at her and she took it and said, “here are my goals for you.” That was the beginning power thing, my goals for you are....to be able to stand up for yourself, defend yourself, in my personal relationship, take my power back. I said, I don’t think I can do that. She said, ‘that’s okay that you don’t feel that way and I never want you think I want you to be somebody else, I want you to do all of these things in your way, in your language and that was one of those moments where it was like here is a little bit of the power back and I’m gonna figure out who you are and help you be you instead I’m gonna make you into this other person that I had in my mind was the person you were supposed to be. You get to be (participant’s name), Strong (participant’s name) not strong, I don’t know who, Glenn Close, laughter....that was one of those moments, subtlety or maybe more overtly, you get to decide that...it’s gradually gotten to the point now where I walk in, sit down and I get to decide what we’re going talk about. She might remind me of something that has happened before or maybe if she had given me an assignment, she might ask me about that...or if I have something else to talk about she won’t even bring that stuff up...I think that was the first question, sorry (laughter)

R: I love it, we go where we need to go in this process, it’s great

R: I want to follow up a little bit on one thing you said, there is a way that she was empowering you but not putting it on you and do you have a sense of what made that work?

P: A lot of it has to do with trusting her and she has authority. She speaks from a place of knowledge. When she says I can do a thing, I believe her and so then I can do it. So recently, my ex has decided to buy a house, I’m in school and poor as dirt so that is hard. It’s hard to watch him get better and better and better and better on the path we had chosen together. So he’s going to buy a house with his partner and he says (the ex-husband’s boyfriend) ‘I would love it if you lived in our basement.’ I said, ‘I don’t think my therapist would think that is a very good idea.” They were like ‘hmmm... ’I can kind of use her as a shield knowing that I don’ think it is a very good idea either. But I can use her, as authority to be like, no this is right for me and that is wrong for me.
R: That helps some how, how does it help?

P: I think because I was raised in a very patriarchal society, I still have a problem with the male authority figure and my ex is still that guy in a lot of ways to be, so to be able to pull her in and be like this is me talking, but I’ve got this back...it makes me brave, makes me say the things I want to say.

R: It’s like support, some one on your team...
You are already talking about some of this, especially as you spoke of authority, what is your exp of the PD with you and your MHPs?

P: It’s starts out with me not wanting any power, every time, with both ladies. Really now, I don’t feel there is much of a differential at all other than that authority. I really feel like that is what it has settled at for a while, um, you know pepe le pew, the skunk? He blips along, like, blupe, blupe, blupe and the cat scrabbles around and is crazy.... I feel like I’m the cat that comes in and scrabbles around and she is p, she’s like, ‘it’s alright, have you thought of it this way? Helping me reframes things is probably one of the biggest things that happens. She’s gotten to know me and my voice, now she can be like hmmm....has this happened before in a different context and can we think about it differently? This constant calm person that looks at my life and tells me ‘you have a weird crazy life’ that is the other thing, too, that happens that is good for me is having her validate, ‘no, this isn’t normal.’ My daughter...my child tried to commit suicide in February, and having her see all this stuff and say, no that is not a typical life, it’s okay you are having trouble cuz...this is trouble (R: A lot.)
I think that is how it goes....It’s authority, it’s calm, it's reflecting questions back at me, it’s reminding me of things I’ve already accomplished...a lot of that stuff...

R: Thanks..... you said something when you were first describing your relationship with (x) and you talked about how she shares things with you now, you know a little bit about what is going on her life, you’ve seen pictures of her kids, how does that impact the power dynamic for you to have her share more?

P: I think, hmmm... (Silence...8 seconds of silence)

I think it makes me feel comfortable also, there are days when either I don’t have much or I don’t need much or, I don’t know, it’s just a calm week, the kids are all at dads, I’m not in school, I haven’t seen the boyfriend....we’ll just talk and she’ll talk about her stuff. She had surgery and it went all wrong and we talked about that...and then we end up...talking about pain, talking about childbirth, talking about things I totally have experience with and she’ll even ask me...hmmm. She’s tricky (R note: client is wondering if clinician is doing this on purpose)... she just bought a potty chair yesterday and we were talking...oh, potty training...she’ll ask me, “Tell me, what is it like when everyone is potty trained?”...I’ll be like, you don’t even know, it’s the greatest things you’ve ever experienced!” She gives me a chance to be like expert person....that is something I’m an expert in, because I did it, not
that I am super great at it but I did it. I can tell you how to potty train a kid or how I did it.... I think that is probably what she is doing, but I never feel like it is a pre-meditated thing....

R: No, It sounds genuine and like a part of your connection with her....

P: It’s giving me a chance to be the authority person.

R: Awesome. It sounds like you are really able to hold the complexity of her being an authority and yet her being a person (we say person at the same time). Does that resonate?

P: Yeah, I think as I’ve gotten older, I’ve found that about a lot of things and it’s helped me navigate the fear of authority better. In school, when I started law school, I saw these professors and I was super, “oh my gosh” and then I started teaching in the (local school grad program) and I was like, “oh, now I’m that person and I’m a total disaster and so they are too. They are people too, so I’ve been able to look at people and be much less afraid of them, respecting their authority but not being afraid. In talking with my cohort and them talking about judges or all these people that are set up by society as big bad authority figures, I’m like, right but then you are going to see them at the restaurant and they are going to be eating food because they aren’t robots or they might spill on themselves...it’s helped me not be afraid, because I think authority is good and important and structures our world and helps us, but being afraid of them is debilitating....

R: There is something about this transition you’ve gone through with authority that sounds like its been I guess, transformative in how you view power....

P: I was thinking about my relationship with my dad, who is the ultimate big bad authority guy and how when I left the church, talking about,,,,,we would avoid everything, avoid, avoid, avoid....now I can have a conversation with him very frankly and it doesn’t impact me emotionally, I’m can have a debate with him about religion and politics and I’m not gonna cry about it because it doesn’t touch me anymore...

R: Thanks. Do you need anything? P: No thanks.

R: Describe a time where you wanted to bring something up...

P: This question has been interesting [to reflect on]. With my current therapist there have been sex things b/c I have a boyfriend and how to figure that out. My biggest one was with my previous therapist when I was still married and wanted to bring up my husband....he told me when we were married 3 years that he was bisexual. I was living with that as a Mormon, bisexual husband for a long time and that was really tough. After we left the church, we had been gone for a couple years and he decided he really needed to have gay sex. That was a thing he felt like he really needed to experience in his life. I texted him, “let’s talk about it when I get home.” He misunderstood that to mean go ahead and do that when I’m gone which is not what I meant. I was desperate to keep my family together. I really had lost my family and all of my friends. I had no more friends from the church that had been
my only thing. But I was in (grad school) and meeting people... he did that, in my weird desperation I kind of let him keep doing that and facilitated that. It was this half open marriage thing in this bizarre way that I was unhappy but anyway, I wanted to tell her cuz I hadn’t told anybody, nobody knew this and it was pain, pain, pain all the time. I really wanted to tell her, I was scared to tell her. I was afraid she would judge me and my choice, It was my choice to continue the relationship in that way. I remember telling (husband) I was going to tell her and getting his permission which is another thing... laughter...he was scared about it but I was like I have to tell someone he did acknowledge yeah, probably you should work this out....I remember telling her and it was very hard...I don’t know there is anything I wanted to say and haven’t but I wanted to say that but didn’t for a while. And then I finally did, it was... interesting...she, they sat there quietly for a minute, which I totally get, like what do you say? I think she knew it wasn’t the greatest thing for me and that if it was going to be a great thing for me I needed to work through a bunch of things I was just ignoring. I think she knew I wasn’t ready for that yet---okay, let’s pull this apart. I needed to tell her and she needed to hear it and she knew that needed to happen. She was quiet, asked some more questions, made sure I knew it was my choice. It was important just to say it out loud. Hear myself tell someone else and hear it from their perspective.

R: What do you think about her response to it?

P: I was really worried about her judging me. I’m sure you do, you hear something, whoa, I would never do that. She didn’t let that leak out. Even her knowing me and knowing how weird I was about keeping family together through all these weird things that weren’t great. She let me do that. the relationship ended pretty quickly after that, she moved. I don’t know what would have happened. I think her response was great for the initial bomb of this...I’m pretty good at making things seem like they are great.

R: It sounds like you are really aware, she is a human and she could have reactions but there was something important about those not leaking out...

P: With (current therapist), I walk into her office and there have a lot of books on the shelves and I look at them, some of them are about (the town)—cute little books and a lot of them are how God can help you in this...it’s all religiously books and I still have a hard time with religion and I’m still trying to get over some of the trauma and I’m not really super happy about some of it. So if she let her—I don’t know what religion she is...I don’t know if she is religious, I don’t know and I’m really glad because if I felt like she was trying to get me to pray or anything like that I’d be like I’m out of here. I can’t do that. Maybe in like 20 years, you can get me to meditate or be “spiritual.” But any of that stuff—you can be spiritual. No I don’t want to be, I don’t wanna be I spent a long time being spiritual. I’m done with that for now. I can be peaceful, I can be serene, I can be calm, I can be meditative and I don’t call that spiritual. RRRRR! If she were to have that leak out, I’d be trouble.

R: It’s awesome to hear the contrast, there is some self-disclosure, knowing some things that are unifying or humanizing but other things would be destructive....
P: Yeah, and she walks that line really well and maybe she doesn’t [do it intentionally], I don’t know...

R: Was there a time, any other times where you brought things up and you remember it being important and the response was noteworthy?

P: (Few seconds of silence)....there have been a lot of things. I feel like it’s been gradual thing, looking back on the couple of years I’ve been with her.... it’s like when you haven’t seen someone, a kid for a while, and suddenly you realize they are two feel taller and you wouldn’t notice it if you saw it everyday. There have been a couple things. She did her dissertation on performance anxiety and I have a Bachelor's degree in music. I remember talking with her about anxiety and trouble with that and I was on medication for a long time for it, not anymore, which I feel like is AH HA! (client gives the middle finger!) She was talking about her studies, the anxiety ramps up and ramps down and in this area you are better, adrenaline or whatever helps you perform better but up here, it’s useless, being able to accept that some should be there and that it can enhance your performance. Another one of those things that has stuck with me helps me stop fighting myself; this is part of me and its okay. That’s another thing, have you seen the Book of Mormon musical or heard any of the music from it?

R: Mormon Musical? Yes, I know it generally as a pursuer of cultural media...

P: There is this song called “turn it off.” It’s about being gay or having bad feelings you turn em off, like a light switch, that really was a thing growing up...you mind is a stage, if a bad thought tries to get on you push it off, push it off, push it off. Keep your mind stage clean and happy, and you smile a lot.

And so one of the things I remember her saying when I was sad about (my husband)— everything’s fine and then one day I’ll just cry ..Either I don’t know or I do know...she talks to me about feeling feelings and that you have to sit with them or they’ll just keep popping up like that. That is another thing that’s really helped that I do all the time is ...oh, I’m feeling sad, okay, stop, I’m gonna feel sad!

R: It’s like your own musical! Laughter.

P: Turn it on! Let’s go!

R: Turn it on! Turn it on!

P: I remember that hypnotherapist guy...

R: I’m very curious about him but I don’t want to get de-railed by him.

P: It’s related....He told me that I needed to take all the things that make me have anxiety and stick them in the box and hide them somewhere. He took me through this exercise of hiding it in this secret place. I remember it was under my sister’s crib when I was five. That
was the opposite of what (current therapist) is helping me do-- we’re going open that box and we’re gonna look and it and be uncomfortable!

R: Do you know what kind of MH background the hypnotherapist had?

P: I don’t know.... I’m not sure.... Are you thinking What kind of quack is this?

P: The doctor that referred me was Mormon. The whole thing, I just don’t---the whole thing is just a messed up thing. Anyway, I have a new doctor. A psychologist.

R: you persevered to get support MH support through the doctor who referred you to the hypnotist...how did you persevere to have faith in MHP’s?

P: Well, my dad’s a dentist. People hate dentists generally for a lot of great reasons. He talks a lot about how our mouths are self-cleaning. All this stuff that people are trying to get us to do, most of it, you probably won’t need most of the time. He talks about dentistry in a way that gives me a lot of faith in him as a dentist and I’ve kind of realized that different people have authority in different areas. When I went into the (grad program) I meet people who know about these things that I didn’t know existed. My ex husband who is an engineer, he knows how to take numbers and turn it into how fast water flows down a pipe....I keep bumping up against that....

If you let someone else be an expert and you know when you need that expert, you’ll get the help you need when you need it.

My husband came out, fully all the way out. I was like a puddle for a couple of months. Not eating, not sleeping, not functioning. I was driving down the road and trying to figure out how to re-build my life and not tear it down and start over...I felt like, I got this music degree, it was totally worthless and then I went to the (grad program) and I run this (business) it not, we knew it wasn’t going to be a forever ... digital stuff, we knew we’d have to keep up ....I knew I had to do something else...I realized law built on both of those things and was me. Then I decided, okay, enough of this feeling lonely, I started dating, went on eHarmony and found this boy that is cute and funny. I was doing this stuff, dusting myself off, trying to figure things out. I’m still crying ever once in a while, more often that I want to be crying....so then I started looking around....(for a new counselor)

R: So fun talking to you. I just want you know that I’m totally honored to hear all these parts of your life. It’s strange to not be a bit more effusive and be able to say what a bad ass you are....(Participant laughs)

P: Tell me about time when you were aware of what you and your psychologist did together in the session, influenced something outside the session in your life.

P: I’ve got this middle kid, my middle kid is 15, we were in the hospital in February and has been diagnosed with Bipolar Depression or budding Borderline Personality Disorder.
We’re in DBT right now. So this child is like, fallin apart. Somebody looked at ze weird, storms out, slams the door and is in zir room punching, hitting and I went in, we hadn’t started DBT yet, so now I realize I was doing what they wanted me to do but I had to rely what my counselor and I had talked about, so I go in and need to make sure this kid is safe because there is this risk. I walked in and ze was sitting in from of the door. I knock on the door and (kid) opens the door: What? What are you feeling right now? What I needed to do was listen and validate and listen and validate and not reinforce bad behavior and that is what we talked about so many times, how do I deal with this child, it’s like eggshells everywhere. Ze was crying, I don’t know, I don’t know. It seems like you are in distress…Ze punches the wall, are you safe, no knives, no pills..and I left. I was wondering did I do anything? no probably not….

Real skills she was trying to teach me to handle my child and falling back on...instead of feeling guilty, I’m going to go cry. I was able to be like well, the kid is safe, I did what I could and now I’m going to see if the other kids did their homework.

R: You could tolerate that moment,

P: I did what I should have done and what I knew to do...I didn’t know anything.

R: It was coming out of those conversations that gave you a framework.

P: A lot of the things we talk about are: “could you say it this way?” well, not feel fake and weird. Sometimes you have to feel fake and weird and you have to say it anyway… Negotiation that you are doing, how would this work with your kid in your unique family…

R: Any negative experiences of things influencing life outside of session in a not so good way?

P: Feeling feelings is not my favorite thing to do but I get there have been times where I've sat with a feeling that I’d rather turn off.

R: But its uncomfortable and you might want to swear at her under your breath or something....

P: (laughing) I go to a personal trainer too, it’s that soreness, it’s the emotional sore muscles. And that’s okay. I don’t think so, it has been really positive.

R: That’s awesome.

P: I feel really lucky to have found that particular person.

R: How does (counselor) respond when you are powerful as the client...express strong opinions...push back or just say, wait a minute..
P: I feel like she is really proud of me when I do that. We’ve come to this—where I couldn’t do that at all. I remember a few weeks ago I was sad about (ex husband) and I realized no wait a minute I am mad about him and I yelled in session! AHHHRRRRR! She was like, yeah, you can be angry and that is great!
Also sometimes, I have negative feelings about my kids, I get resentful and all these things...and I’ll go in and lay that out and I remember one time she said. You can always tell me this, you can never tell your kids this...I know, I know. She let’s me do that, encourages me to do that, I think she’d probably be happy if I yelled every time! But I’m never yelling at her, either. I have said, “no I can’t do that, it’s too scary for me.”

R: That’s a way you’ve pushed back with her...

P: That’s scary She’ll unpack that..why is that scary? not like you have to do it anyway but Okay! I found something?! Let’s figure out why is that scary and redirect the conversation from whatever thing I thought it was...to...

R: A deeper exploration of what it was, so it doesn’t turn into a power struggle..

P: No, it would change it so much, She’d be the powerful authority and I’d shrink away....

R: That unpacking of why you are pushing back, that unpacking seems to shift gears to learning more about yourself?

P: I think that is what has caused so much growth for me. You can’t have an answer for every specific situation you have to understand the larger thing that is happening with you and figure out what the tools are to reframe it in the moment....that is the real growth.. If I say my kids won’t clean up their rooms.....that’s a thing, that a specific circumstance....she can be like, can you say, this, this or this, can you try a chart, can you try blah....can you set this particular kind of boundary and I’ll be like NO! NOOOOO! (voice raises significantly) She’ll be like AH, HA! Interesting....you are now crying about this. That helps me figure out Oh, I have boundary setting troubles and that affects so many things not just my kids dirty rooms.

R: Totally and if you didn’t explore that whole territory....there would be such a restricted exploration...this is just about this and you need just need to do this...

P: Yeah, It’s like trying to make a law that covers all the things where you are trying to get specific g....how we should behave in parks, we can’t smoke we have to have our pets on leashes...instead we need to respect each other’s community....if you understand what were trying to do here.....

R: the big picture vs. these rigid rules...

R: Is there a time where you needs were not being met by your current counselor?
P: There have been times where there is so much we didn’t have time to even talk about some of it. And a lot of it has to do with my kids being in crisis and that ends up being the most important things I need to get a handle on and armor up and next week we can talk about me. I can go use my tools to do that myself sometimes. That is probably the only time when they weren’t...and then there are the okay weeks when I’m okay...those are kind of funny...I think maybe we could like dig deeper or something but sometimes it’s okay to not come out crying...but if I don’t come out crying then I feel like I didn’t do any good work....but sometimes it’s okay right?, to take and easy week? (almost asking me?) I do see her every week..

R: you sound have like you two perspectives on those easy weeks....part of you feels like it’s okay, ah, I get a break

P: It doesn’t happen terribly often but the other part of me is like We didn't do any work, we just chatted...I was a human person...without any pressure to be something else....

R: It’s mixed still....
R: Is there any part of you that has wanted to say that about those sessions that are more chatty?

P: Yeah, I think so....But I’ve thought about that by myself, I haven’t brought it up..If they happened every time, then I’d be like maybe I’m cured, (laughs) maybe it’s time to take a break, do sessions less often...that has more been my response not, we need to fix this thing...I tend to be perfectionist-y. So you gotta be okay not working all the time...

R: Part of you is respecting that rhythm
Anything that would keep you from bringing that up....

P: Sometimes she talks a lot about her kids....and stuff and sometimes I feel like she needs to talk a lot but I’m paying you for me to talk but it seems mean to be like “uh hem.” I think respecting that she is a human and not be like you’ve spoken enough... and knowing that maybe in the zombie apocalypse, I see her, I’ll help her ax a zombie b/c we’re friends, too.

R: You said it would seem mean, tell me about being mean to a MHP and what that would be like for you.

P: I think we’ve set up our relationship and I’ve allowed certain things and set certain boundaries and let some things.... I do feel like I have some of the power to do that...not all of it, it’s a relationship but we’ve established that this is what we do and to change the rules on her, I think would be mean. Maybe mean is not the right word but because of me it would feel mean. I don’t think she’d take it as mean. I think she’d want me to say something if I really needed to...I don’t necessary feel like I need to...It really does all work out, there are weeks where it’s too much...

R: Describe a time where you go to make the choices about what happened in a session.
I think I get to do that mostly all the time. It usually starts, I come in...she goes, “ahhh! (stretches out, takes a breath)” I think she’s inspiring me to do that. Here we are, let that go...... How was your week? Then I start talking about surface-y stuff and then...usually the week’s where we don’t dig very deep, I didn’t think about it before I showed up, didn’t prepare, I didn’t bring my thoughts with me. So we talk about silly things for a while and then I’ll segue into something else...and there are natural.... breaks...OH! (P remembers something at this moment) There was a while where I was feeling bad about going too late (during the session). So I started setting an alarm to remind me when it was time to stop. She said, “that’s my job, you don’t need to worry about that.” and that changed things for me a lot to realize she is just going to take care of that and if she goes over, she’s choosing to go over and its not me stealing time away from her. That’s one thing that really helped, she established, this is my thing....that was good for me. It let me just talk about my stuff and she got to rule the time...

R: Is there anything else that came into your mind, something we didn’t address, a question I didn’t ask, you wish I’d asked.

P: I’ve been thinking about these questions....

R: As n overall sidebar question, I’m really aware as you talked today about how much your life is interfacing with these different structures of power, Mormonism, to bigger cultural pieces of power, having a gay husband and having a trans kid and dealing with the hospital. There is a lot of power structures in your life...you are figuring out how to navigate those.... I wondered if that is what it feels like or if you do you notice all those layers...

P: Thinking about the hospital, when your child (silence) comes to you and says that I just swallowed all these pills and they are covered in cuts, you have a role. You are the power. You have to keep it together even thought you are not together, right? I remember I called poison control and they said you don’t need to speed or break any laws but I need you to go to the hospital right now, I’m calling ahead...we walked in there was this girl with compound fracture and they took (my kid) first cuz they knew she was coming...but you gotta keep it together....so we were there at the local hospital, transferred her to the children’s hospital, we’re there everything is fine, the levels are coming down, everything’s fine and then the nurse comes up to me and treats me like a person, not a mom, not asking me questions about insurance, not what did you do, how did you get here, all this... but are you okay? I just (exploded with emotion)...she said let’s go down to the parent’s lounge real quick, she’s got 4 doctors in here, she’d gonna be fine we’re gonna go down here......that was a real shift....keeping it all together...being the one with all the authority and power and suddenly being like now, I need to hug this strange nurse and I’m going to cry on her. Did that, got a drink of water. She’s like, "Ready?” Yep. I go back in and then I assumed it again. That was an interesting things...being the parent is a weird.... power situation especially with teenagers that are trying to get their own personal power...
And when I was (reading your study recruitment letter), the part about not using your own personal power not to get them to participate. I have a good relationship with my kids, it’s pretty casual... I could invite them without making them feel obligated...I thought about that a long time...I wield a lot of power over those people, I could make them do a lot of things not with physically forcing them or anything but the power I have over them as someone they trust. It’s been interesting to think about my own accidental power...

R: just through your role...

P: There is power I claw for...! (Laughing...)

R: It related to the study...this role puts you in a place of power...and when I thought about the announcement, I thought, there are a lot of people that want me to get done with this dissertation and they would say anything to get someone to come here and talk to me....it’s interesting that that one line allowed you to reflect on your own power... Does that seem like a good spot to end?

P: Yes.
Participant 2 Round 1  
50:22

R: I think I sent you the questions, right?

P: Yes, I barely glanced at them...

R: Good, that’s probably good. I just wanted to share them for the purposes of being transparent, but my intention wasn’t for people to think about them too much.

P: OK

Researcher provides intro to context of power.

R: So, um, just that brief context about power and what I’m studying, is just I want to learn more about the power dynamic between clients and mental health professionals. So, in this case, power is defined as the ability or capacity to direct or influence one’s own behavior or the behavior of others in the course of events. So, while power may bring to mind negative experiences, I’m also interested in power related experiences that are positive, negative or neutral—just, just power. And, most importantly, I’m interested in your interpretation of power in your story. And not particularly anything specific that I’m pulling for. You, know, just your experience of power. And I will take some notes while we’re talking, if that’s OK, just to kind of remind me to go back to things that you say.

P: Verbal acknowledgements of agreement and understanding to above intro throughout researcher talking (Yes, Ok, Mm-hmm, Sure, etc).

R: So, this first question I have is just describing a relationship you have, or have had, with a mental health professional. And, what I’ve noticed in asking this question is people tend to go through, like, a chronology, and so you could or couldn’t do that. Whatever works for you. Like, if there’s just a couple that pop to your mind or just one.

P: Ok. Great.

R: Yeah. Whatever ... you could just describe a relationship with a mental health professional how you would describe it.

P: Just the relationship in general—not related to power?

R: Yeah. No, just the relationship with them.

P: Well, I’ve had two therapists. Umm, the first one that I had I loved. Like, we just, like, immediately connected. And it was the first time I had ever been to therapy, so you know, it was like just a positive first experience and I guess I sort of latched onto that as ... I mean, it was great and she ended up moving after I’d been seeing her for like, oh gosh, maybe 6 or 7 months. Umm, and I was really bummed because I had this like really strong connection
with her. Umm, but then I ended up, am now seeing, since then I’ve been seeing actually one of her like best friends. Umm, so it’s kind of cool cause I think that helped my transition. Cause she knew me, you know I’d given my first therapist permission to speak to the new therapist, so she sort of like knew me and knew what was going on, so that was kind of nice. Umm, but I definitely noticed differences in my relationships. Like, the first one, I mean, I had a lot harder time at first, like, talking about things. You know, it was the first time I’d ever done that. Umm, but with the transition at first I didn’t like the new therapist cause I was subconsciously comparing her, you know, to the old therapist and I was trying not to do that. So, it was just... I love my therapist now but it was just interesting how I came to feel, essentially the same way about both of them, but it started out very differently.

R: Totally. What words would you use to describe, like, your current therapist and the relationship you have with her?

P: I mean, I’d say it’s very like open but and there’s like a lot of sharing between us, so it almost feels like almost, you know, borderline almost like more like a friendship because there’s some mutual sharing that goes on, umm, and I think I respond better to that and I’m sure she could pick up on that. Umm, and it’s just like a very comfortable environment. I think, I’m sorry, I’m trying to come up with words, not phrases...

R: No. That’s OK. Phrases are good too. Whatever comes to your mind is good.

P: I think, like, she has a really good awareness of umm, like, my tendencies and my thought processes and umm... so, I think it’s just, like, I can’t come up with a word, but I don’t know... It just feels very, like, natural I guess.

R: Mm hmm. That’s great. Let me follow up on a thing you said, if that’s OK (P: mm hmm). You talked about the mutual sharing that happens and maybe that she senses that that is a way to connect with you or that you like that. Could you say more about how that mutual sharing helps you or how that works in session?

P: Umm, I think it helps because it, at least at first now I’m really comfortable with her, but I think at first it was helpful because I didn’t feel quite like I was on the spot so much. (Cannot make out what P says for a moment) I had a really hard time at first, it was just like sitting there and feeling like I had to talk and being, like, it felt like I was in the limelight. Yeah, so I think it just sort of breaks down the walls when someone else gives a little bit of themselves, you know...

R: That’s one of the things that’s been challenging me about this interview process, is not doing that.

Laughter

P: Yeah! It’s natural...
R: Yeah! It’s natural to me to just be more relational, so umm so I can really—I’m experiencing that now with these interviews like I can’t, I’m not my normal self.

P: Yeah.

R: But I appreciate what you said about breaking down the walls. Do you recall the kind of sharing that, that made you feel more comfortable?

P: Umm, initially?

R: Yeah.

P: I think she may have started talking about her dog? Because I am, you know my sister, you probably know about (dog’s name), and that was a huge part of our lives and dogs in general are still a huge part of our lives. So, umm, I can’t remember if I had maybe brought up (dog’s name), I mean I probably did, and I think that was the first thing where she was like, “Oh, my dog...” and told me some funny story about her dog, and then it was kind of like, oh we have this mutual thing in common. Umm. Yeah, that was one.

R: It’s just a way to connect and, like, break the ice it sounds like a little bit.

P: Mm hmm. And then I was like, oh you’re a dog person, you must be a good person.

Laughter.

R: Totally! If you don’t like dogs, I don’t trust you!

More laughter

P: Yeah, right! Sorry, not going to work!

Laughter.

R: Love it! Thanks for sharing. What is your perspective on the power dynamic between yourself and your therapist? You can use one or both as an example. How do you perceive that power dynamic? Where do you feel it? What do you think about it?

P: It was really different when I first started therapy. I felt very much like... like I didn’t have a lot of power because I was unsure of how things worked. I didn’t know what the process is like. I was like, do I just come in and start talking? Do I have her prompt me? And she prompted me for a while because I’d just come in and be like (both R and P), Hi.... (laughter) I’m here! But, it’s been neat to see the change over the course of it; in therapy now I just come in and start spewing immediately. And I’ve learned that that’s a tactic I need to do, otherwise I won’t talk about what I like, most need to talk about. I’ll just talk about everything else first. Umm, so I think, at first it was very much I felt like I didn’t know how much power I would have or could have or what was appropriate. Or I always want to
do the right thing, so you know, aim to please, so I was like I want to do whatever you are supposed to do and, umm, so that has changed over the course of being in therapy for awhile and... now I feel a lot more like I run the show.

Y: Yeah. Totally. It sounds like one of the ways you feel like you run the show is your able to bring things up more quickly. Is there anything else about ways that you might run the show or... your thoughts on the power dynamic?

P: I think I just feel like, like, I can control the time. So, like, if I want to talk about something or she’s trying to lead me down a path that I don’t really want to go, I feel like a can say: nope, sorry. Not ready to go there. So I guess that makes me feel like I have power cause I can control... and, you know, when I first started therapy I didn’t feel that way, so I wouldn’t share things that I was, were, you know a little more difficult to talk about cause I thought oh, what if she just makes me keep talking and I can’t stop and...

R: Yeah. And what if I’m not ready?

P: What if I’m not ready, yeah.

R: So, now you know that you can say, nope! Don’t want to go there.

P: Yeah! That’s ok! And my first therapist was so amazing cause we’d start talking about something and, umm, immediately I was like NOPE. I mean, I think I just said it like very direct, and she was like OK. And, just, you know, we moved on to something else and I think I was like, oh- that wasn’t a big deal. She wasn’t mad at me, she wasn’t frustrated that I... so I think just like her showing me that it was OK for me to say no and you know... and I wasn’t going to be in trouble

R: Kind of like accepting your needs, you’re boundary or something...


R: I’m guessing the first therapist, that you loved, I’m guessing there was something about the way that she navigated that space with you...

P: She was so amazing...

R. Or power or something, like, in a positive way. Do you have any thoughts about that? As far as the power dynamic between you and the first therapist?

P: Umm. Honestly, I may have to go in and think about this a little bit more, to have a more detailed answer, but I think she just, she just always made me feel really, like, heard. And I think that was something that was lacking in other parts of my life, so I think that was a huge piece of it. And she was like, it’s OK to have negative feelings and kind of acknowledged that for me, and like you don’t have to be perfect all the time. And, I think just acknowledging that, and like she was the first person, I was telling her about
something that happened in my life that was kind of difficult, and she was like the very first person in my life to ever say, gosh that must have been hard. And it was just like nice to like, have somebody, umm, I guess validate my feelings.

R: That makes sense, yeah. And, that validation does something. Like, what do you think it does?

P: Umm, well, I think it, well it definitely made me realize that there’s not something wrong with me for, you know, feeling the way that I felt. Umm, and that it’s, you know, that it’s OK to feel that way and...

R: Totally. And that changes, I mean, I’m talking out loud a little bit cause this process is so, kind of, in the moment but I’m wondering if you have any thoughts about how that validation and, therefore feeling like there’s not something wrong with you, how that shifts the power dynamic, or if it does.

P: Well, I think that was part of transition for me between feeling like, umm, she was in control versus me being in control. Like, I think that was the beginning of oh, I can do, I can take this where I want to take this and she’s not going to be upset... I mean, I think she even said to me one time, umm, you don’t have to worry about my feelings. And that was really helpful because that’s just my personality, I mean I’m a nurse, by nature that’s just my personality and I think that sort of like gave me permission to put myself first and I was not particularly good at that in most parts of my life. So, umm, that was huge.

R: A relief, in a way. (P: Yeah. Definitely) Describe a time you where maybe you wanted to bring something up in therapy and you either could or couldn’t do it.

P: Actually, this happened in my last therapy session, last week and that was the first time that’s really happened to me in... (deep breath)... a long time. I mean probably close to a year. I mean... and I left being like I didn’t bring that up the entire time. And it was, like, in the back of my head the whole time and I was just chatting about menial things. Umm, and I don’t think I realized that that thing bothered me as much as it did, umm, until I got there and then I was like, ooh, I don’t know, I want to talk to her about this, but then she might probe me and then I’ll have to, like, really think about my feelings surrounding it and... It was interesting cause I was kind of mad at myself when I left because I was like, why didn’t you bring that up? This is the space to hash it out. And, it was just, uhhhh, a surprising feeling cause I hadn’t... I hadn’t had that problem in a long time, where I couldn’t like talk about... cause usually I just go in being like I’m going to say it right away, first thing, otherwise I don’t say it, so...

R: So, what made you hold it back that day, do you think?

P: I think there’s a couple contributing factors. Umm, I had work the night before so I hadn’t slept much so when I’m tired, like most people, I don’t regulate my emotions as well. Umm, I lack confidence, you know, I’m just like not at my normal level of cognition, you know, so I think that was part of it. And it had like just happened not to long, like that morning, umm
so it was still kind of like a new feeling and I was like oh, this is going to (couldn't make out this word), so I like to like process things and think about things a lot and I think I just... yeah. I didn’t have time to do that, so I wasn’t quite ready I guess.

R: Yeah. It seems like you were, kind of like, holding it and letting it kind of marinate a little bit. And you didn’t want to be that vulnerable with it yet. (P: Yeah. Mm hmm.) What decisions have you made since then about telling her or bringing that up?

P: Well, I wrote it down. Like, I have a journal, which is something that both my therapists encouraged me to do, and I’m just starting to get better about doing that, but I’ve found that it’s helpful if I just write it down. And then sometimes I’ll, like, bring it and read it to her cause that feels a little bit less vulnerable than just saying it out loud. Umm, so I wrote it down and then I plan to, the next time I see her, either read it or bring it up.

R: Mm hmm. You’re setting yourself up. Let’s do it! (clap) Is there anything about hard parts of therapy or good parts of therapy with the therapist that you wanted to bring up with them and it was difficult? So, more about the relationship stuff or the way the sessions went or...

P: I think when my first therapist, when she first told me that she was going to leave, and she was pregnant at the time, so I knew it was, the nice thing was I knew it was going to be ending, like, at some point obviously, so she could take time off to have the baby, umm but I was... she kept asking me how I felt about it and I was just, like, oh it’s fine. I just had a hard time expressing how I actually felt... I ended up writing her a letter, you know, for the major last session, and having her read it in front of me so that I could like be there, you know, and I could tell her my real feelings cause, but... sorry, what was, remind me what your actual question was?

R: Just if anything came up in the therapy relationship that was hard to bring up. Or, easy to bring up.

P: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it was a little bit hard. Umm, oh! When I first switched therapists, umm, it was really hard for me, and I’m not sure if I ever actually did, to bring up the fact that, uhh, I was having a hard time connecting with her. And I actually emailed my old therapist about it cause she was, like, oh you can still email me, and, you know, I told her oh it’s just not, like, I’m just not having the same connection, you know, and she kind of was, just like, well you know sometimes it takes time. It’s like finding the right shoe, you know, you have to get the right fit. And, she was like, I don’t remember exactly, but essentially like maybe it’s not a good fit and that’s OK. Umm, and then I was like well, I’m just going to keep working on this and... I think it was just hard for me, I think any transition would have been hard, because I loved the first therapist so much and, you know, it’s hard not to compare people. So, yeah, I’m not sure I ever brought that up with my new therapist, actually. I think I just progressively worked it out.

R: Is there anything that would have kept you from bringing it up with her?
P: I felt like I was hurting her feelings.

R: And what if you would have hurt her feelings?

P: Yeah, I mean she’d survive after; it’s happened a million times! But, I just... I have this fear of hurting... you know, I try not to hurt people’s feeling and so I think that’s what I was really worried about or... I was worried it was not going to work and, oh, now I’m going to have to find another therapist... and, you know... that’s a lot of work and this was so easy because she knew my first therapist and she could give her background on me and I didn’t have to hash out my whole like story again and...

R: Totally. So, it was almost like, easier, to just stick with it cause it would’ve been uncomfortable and inconvenient to, like, bring that up.

P: Yeah. Mm hmm.

R: Thank you. That makes sense. Umm, I was really struck by the story of you writing the letter to your first therapist and reading it. It sounds like it was a really touching moment. Umm, how did you think of that idea and sharing it and how did she respond?

P: I, my mom has always been into thank you cards and so that’s kind of passed down to me, so I was like well, I want to thank her because this has been so great for me and it’s shown me that therapy is OK and I can do it and it’s not this big, horrible, scary thing... umm, and I wanted to share that with her because I was profoundly grateful. Umm, so that’s sort of how that came about. And then, on the last session I was just, like, I’m really comfortable, but I wrote this letter for you and I’d love you to read it and, umm, it was uncomfortable while she was reading it and I was sitting there, but it obviously like moved her and then that made me feel good cause I felt like I conveyed, you know, my feelings and really want her to know that... and she sang me a song!

R: She sang you a song?!

P: Yeah! It was so neat. Yeah, she’s like part Native American and she sang a Native American song and it was really cool. Powerful. Yeah.

R: That’s awesome. (deep breath) Thank you. The next question is: tell me about a time when you were aware that what you and your counselor did together in the session influenced something in your life outside of the session.

P: Umm, well there’s an obvious direct thing, like, we draft something that I was going to say to somebody cause I was having trouble in a relationship, you know, and I mean so that obviously directly influences because we came up with it together and then I used that in a conversation that’s happened a couple times. Umm...

R: And what’s it like to have that experience of having that really influence your life outside the session?
P: It’s made me a huge advocate of therapy! I mean, my sister has contributed heavily to that as well!

R: Sure thing.

P: But, it’s made me, I mean, because of my family and growing up and my sister’s profession, obviously, I wasn’t quite as against therapy as there’s, you know there’s kind of a negative stigma out there, umm but it’s definitely made me... like, I mean, I shared with all my friends, almost immediately after I started therapy, like, this is so amazing and so helpful! I have my own space! And, umm, it’s just made me really comfortable just, like, talking about it.

R: Singing the praises! (P: Yeah! And I do!) Sharing the love out there! (P: Yup.) Yeah. So, drafting something together and then sharing that and having that maybe impact that relationship...

P: Yeah. Not feeling like I had to come up with it all on my own. It’s nice... like a team.

R: And how do you feel about how those, like, how those collaborative activities happen in therapy? Like, you guys are kind of working on something together...

P: I like that, because I’m very much, like, a team-oriented person. Like I, you know, all through high school and college I ran on cross country and track teams and my, you know, whole childhood played on teams and I have a twin! So we were always a team. You know, I mean, we were always together so, I’m not particularly, I don’t love, just like, doing things and being by myself. And, umm, and my profession you know it’s very much team oriented so I think that’s just how I function best and so when I, you know, feel like I can get that I feel more confident and...

R: Yeah. It’s like your way of doing things in the world is like, we’re doing it together. And, it’s comfortable, it sounds like. Yeah? (P: Yes.) Anything else about things in therapy influencing your life?

P: Umm, I mean certain conversations have influenced the way that I maybe think about people in my life or the way I’m reacting or interacting with people in my life. Umm. I think just being in therapy in general and learning that its, like, OK to put my needs first and that doesn’t make me an uncompassionate person or, umm... I think that was, like, a huge piece of progress for me. So, I think that’s the other big thing. And, then, just acknowledging and embracing vulnerability and, I mean, I’m still working on that but, like, I’ve come a long way so I think that was a huge thing that I got, too.

R: Well, that sounds like, you know, there’s a lot of... that’s such an important word. I hear it a lot more now than I used to. Vulnerability, you know, it’s like such a good...

P: Brene Brown!
R: Yes, Brene Brown! Yeah, I mean you were just taking me there! I was just thinking about her, that’s kind of what I was thinking about so... it’s like that’s definitely, like, influencing who you are, right? Like, how you are out here in the world.

P: And, like, I learned that I can be vulnerable... and I’m still... I’m OK. I survived. You know? And I think that just that practice, practicing vulnerability over and over again is, I mean that’s huge. And I think that translates, I mean I know that translates over into other aspects of my life. You know? But that started in therapy.

R: Right. It’s showing up and saying a hard thing and being, like, I made it.

P: Yeah. Oh, that wasn’t so bad, you know?!

(Laughter)

R: Totally. Yeah. Thanks. How have any of your counselors responded to you when you are powerful, as the client? So, whenever you’ve maybe expressed your own opinions, resist your counselor’s influence, or just, sort of, push back.

P: I don’t do that terribly often! Umm, the one time that comes to mind where I really shut her down was, umm, she was, my first therapist, was trying to get me to meditate and I just... I don’t sit still well, in general, and I just have a hard time with that. And I, at this point in therapy, I hadn’t been in therapy for very long and she was like ok, well, we’re just gonna try and sit here for a minute and just be... cuz I tend to go, go, go and I don’t ever just like, you know, be and exist with myself, And, so we were working on that and literally, maybe 10 seconds in, I was like NOPE, I can’t do it. I’m done; I can’t do it. And I was just very, like, it just immediately felt so, so uncomfortable to me, umm, that I just shut it down right... and for me I’m usually just oh, I’ll just do whatever I need to do, you know, power through. But, it was just like this instant, oh my gosh this is so overwhelmingly uncomfortable, I can’t even handle it. Umm, and she was like Ok. I mean, she was just totally like, fine with it and I was like, oh, ok! You know, I was just... she wasn’t upset at me, she didn’t, she wasn’t disappointed in me. Umm, I remember her saying a couple of times, like, there’s no wrong answers, cause I would be, like, nervous about saying the wrong thing.

R: Totally. Yeah. Those cues, like, there are no wrong answers or it’s OK to have hard feelings or OK. Just the cue of, it’s OK you just said no. It’s like, those cues, umm, they send, they send messages and I’m just sort of thinking about that, in the moment, that they send a message of some kind, you know?

P: It’s OK to say no, for one, which is huge for me. Like, you know, you’re not a mean person, you’re not a bad person if you say no, that’s OK. I think that was a big thing. Umm, and I think it also just sends the message of, like, supportiveness. Like, I’ll support you wherever you’re at. I don’t need you to be, you know, here or...

R: Acceptance. (P: Yeah) Have you ever wanted to push back, but you didn’t?
P: Yup, I have. Umm, I think it was... I think I’ve just gotten out of those situations by changing the subject and, instead of directly saying I don’t want to talk about that or why are you saying that, because I think I was trying to avoid the confrontation.

R: Has that worked, did that work, has that worked for you?

P: I think I avoided the, what I... yeah, yeah! I avoided what I didn’t want, so... was it the best way to progress? Maybe not, but I avoided the uncomfortable feelings I was trying to avoid, yeah.

R: Effective, in that case. (P: Yeah) Yeah. Totally. So there’s a way that you can feel a resistance and you find a way to shift things.

P: Yeah. I think I really felt that when I first started with the new therapist and I was, like, this isn't working. I can’t connect to her. Like, I don’t like her style. Umm, I mean, I definitely felt resistant. I didn’t like some of the things she was saying and... I think too, umm, it was interesting that she already knew so much about me, which I wanted, and I asked the first therapist to tell her because I didn’t want to rehash everything out, but I think it made her feel, I mean this is obviously my interpretation, she never verbalized this to me, but like she already knew me really well, so I think she started in with some things that I was like, well, I’m not ready to talk to you about that yet. And, I think that was, that made me like, wait a minute, excuse me. That was hard.

R: Mm hmm. Yeah, and you were acknowledging there that, yeah you gave the permission to do that to make it easier for you, but there was still a period of trust you wanted to build. (P: Exactly, yeah.) And, so, you didn’t really want to give her that power yet, really, even though she had the information. (P: Mm hmm.) Yeah. She had to go through some tests, I think, huh? (P: Ah ha) What do you think they were? Like, cause you’re saying something about her style and some of the things she said and, like, what do you think you...

P: What kind of tests do I think?

R: Yeah, what kind of, what do you think you were looking for?

P: Well, I maybe... like, what I was looking for in a therapist, but it’s unfortunate because I still compare, I mean, in talking about it, not in the sessions, but just now it’s coming up for me, it’s like I’m comparing her to the first therapist (R: Yeah! Totally.) But, I think, I think I was kind of testing to see how she would react to certain things in my life that I said, like, I’m not ready to discuss this yet... I wanted to see if she was going to have the same reaction as the first therapist, and that’s fine, she did. But, umm, I think there’s that and I think I, I wanted to see if she would, umm, connect with me in the same way as far as making... One of the things my first therapist said that I loved is she would make like analogies for things in my life to help explain... Like, I’m a runner so she would make running related analogies and that was just so cool for me because I could really, like, it helped me understand things and so I think I was waiting to see if she would pick up on
those things about me without me directly saying it. And then I remember I was frustrated because she didn't do email. Everything was on the phone. I was like, I have to call, you know? So, and my first therapist said yeah, she's a little bit more old school and I was, like, well I'm not old school like that. I don't know about that!

R: I want to text her!

P: I want to text! And, we text now and it's great!

(Laughter)

P: But, I think I was kind of feeling her out to see if, you know, she was willing to do that.

R: Mm hmm. Yeah. Thanks for sharing that, what the tests might have been. Umm... describe an experience where your needs were not being met by one of those counselors.

P: Not being met... I'm not sure if I’ve had an experience like that. Umm, I think anytime that I felt like maybe my needs weren’t met it was because I didn't bring up what was bothering me. So they wouldn't know, but I think it was more related to me not being honest with them about things I wanted to talk about, more than them doing something that...

R: Yeah, and was there... I mean, I think we already kind of covered this, but I just want to dip into it one more time. It sounds like when you talk about not bringing things up that you really attribute that most to your own, like, your own stuff. Do you think there was anything about either of the counselors, or your relationship with them, that made it harder to bring certain things up?

P: Yeah... my current therapist, there are things that... she’s made, like, a few comments that I’m like, I don’t really like that. And instead of telling her I just internalize it and I think that maybe prevents me from, yeah, bringing certain things up.

R: Yeah. I really kind of felt like you really touched in with that. You were like, oh there’s a couple things she said. Is there anything you want to tell me about those things or, I mean, you don’t have to share content with me (P: Ummm.) but I’m curious as a researcher if there’s, like, a theme to those or if there’s a theme in her response...

P: There’s certain relationships I have in my life that I’m not, that I don’t, that I’m not quite ready to, like, deal with in therapy. And, umm, and there, it’s not like there’s anything particularly bad or that’s really, you know, causing (control?) in my life, but there’s just some things that I could, yeah, I have feelings about them and it would probably be helpful to discuss that and I’m just not quite there. And, umm, she’s just made a couple comments... I don’t really want to get into specifics, so I’m trying to figure a way to...

R: That's totally fine.
P: ...umm explain it without being too specific, but umm. She's just said a few things sort of related to one of these relationships that, she wasn’t intending to, but the way I took it was oh, you’re judging that person. And, I... so, then I’m hesitant to bring something up cause I’m afraid that she’s gonna be judgmental about this person in my life that’s very important to me. So, I think that, yeah, I think that was...

R: Totally. That makes sense. It’ just that that, you’re listening for those... you hear those comments, you feel a little somethin’ and you’re like, uhhh. And, it, but it’s hard to say that, right?

P: Yeah. And she’s made other comments about this person in my life that I know that she actually really respects this person and I don’t think she actually feels the way that I’m, you know, interpreting. But, I just still have like, there’s just this little hesitation. Like, something’s there that’s like preventing me from...

R: Mm hmm. And, what do you think would happen if you told her that?

P: Yeah. No, again I think it’s my fear of like hurting her feelings or am I going to lose her trust? Even though I know I won’t, but like I know logically I won’t, umm I think I still ... I’m afraid it might change our dynamic...

R: And you worked so hard to get the dynamic.

P: Yeah. (laughing) Right?! But, I also recognize, like, it’s not going to continue if I can’t be honest and open, like, and vulnerable with her. Like, I know it’s not going to continue to progress the way I want it to cuz I’ve experienced that in other relationships in my life.

R: So your aware of that. And you’re kind of, you’re kind of monitoring that a little bit, would you say? Like, monitoring or noticing how vulnerable you are with her? (P: Definitely. Yeah.) And, kind of, assessing, like monitoring or assessing.

P: I’m definitely doing that. And, it’s like, nursing is all about that! It’s all about that. Assessing and monitoring, so like that translates into like every aspect of my life. So, I definitely, umm, definitely am doing that.

R: What do you think you might be waiting for?

P: I don’t know. Umm. Yeah, I don’t know. That’s a really good question. I, you know, I still think I don’t have, I don’t think, I know I don’t have the same relationship with her that I had with my first therapist. And, so, I don’t know if I’m waiting for that magical moment when I... when that happens, but their different people so it’s not, I mean, you know (R: Yeah.) They have different style, like that’s not gonna happen, but...

R: Is there anything she could do to make that easier for you? Obviously we’re talking in hypotheticals here.
P: Oh, sure. Yeah.

R: And there’s no expectation that you do this. Zero, from me, but is there anything she could do that would make it easier?

P: Probably if I just told her what I’m feeling and then she would probably acknowledge it and I’d be, like, oh. OK. She’s acknowledging it, she’s recognizing that maybe she is doing that or saying those things that are bothering me and that would, that would make me feel good. You know, I’d feel more comfortable.

R: Is there anything she could do, though, besides acknowledge it after you noted it? Is there anything before...

P: Without me telling her?

R: Totally. Just wondering. And I’m not looking for anything specific, just curious if anything comes to your mind.

P: I’m not sure. I mean cause I think it’s just a personality; it’s just a personality and style difference. And it’s awesome that I had that first incredible therapist but I think for the rest of my life it’s gonna like set me up with this comparison and, umm, so I’m not sure if there’s really anything she could do. I mean. Yeah. I can’t...

R: OK. That’s cool. (P: Sorry I can’t really think of anything that...) No, that’s cool. I’m just doing this in real time. Seeing what comes up. Umm. Describe a time where you got to make the choices about what happened in treatment?

P: And I think that, I almost feel like that happens every day when I pick what we’re going to talk about. Umm, yeah. I feel like that’s a choice every, every session. Like, as far as, like the time when I said no I’m not going to meditate and sit here (laughing), that was definitely me making a choice.

R: And how does, umm, coming in and being able to, like, pick what you talk about, how does that impact your relationship with her?

P: I think it makes me feel more powerful. I mean, really, I think... I think it, I don’t know I just feel like... it’s my space and I think that, umm, I don’t think I’m explaining it very well about my relationship with her, but umm... I mean, I think it just helps because I don’t feel like I’m on anyone else’s agenda or, you know, trying to conform to what somebody else wants or, umm, do something because... I mean, because in a lot of friendships and relationships in your life in general, you know, you tend to like compromise, and I mean that’s like part of a relationship. Umm, you know, you think about what the other person needs and wants and I think me being able to just come in and just be, like, I’m going to do what I want. We’re going to do what I want.

R: Mm hmm. We’re going to do what I want.
P: Umm, I think that... I don't know, I like that type of, you know it’s nice to have that in one place in your life, like that type of relationship where you don’t feel like you have to constantly be thinking or worrying about the other person.

R: Mm hmm. Yeah, you’ve said a couple times how important it is for you to have had that kind of space in your life, you know, and it sounds like that is just an important part of therapy for you, is just having that space where you go.

P: It is. For sure. Yeah. And, that’s why I tell all my friends; I’m like you should do therapy! You get your own space! You get your own space!

R: Yeah. You get your own space. Umm, I think the only final question I have is I’m still thinking a little bit about the difference between the two therapists, you know? (P: yeah.) And I’m still thinking about one of the things I do, as a therapist and a client, is umm I’m just like, do I have a good picture of what that is. And I’m still thinking about the difference between the first therapist and your current one and just wondering if there’s anything that, cause it’s just sort of a felt difference, right? It’s just sort of, like, an experience. But, is there any other way to describe it besides that?

P: Like, the difference between them?

R: Yeah.

P: I mean, I think the first therapist, held me more accountable to my feelings. And, she, the way she jokingly described it to me was like, well I’m meaner than the new therapist, when she was, you know, telling me... And she was not mean by any, any way, shape or form, but she was a lot more direct and I kind of came in saying I need that. I need you to pull it out of me; otherwise I’ll just sit here and blab all day about the weather. And she picked up on that, like, immediately, actually, without me having to say it. And I think that was a big difference was that she would call me out right away. And I need that. And the new therapist actually doesn’t really call me out very much.

R: There’s a way, though, that your first therapist did that (P: Yeah.) that worked for you.

(Hard to understand; talking over each other)

P: Yeah... like, what did she do... she just said it! Like, I mean she just, I mean she didn’t like putz around and try and like eventually round back to it, she’d just be like, just directly say it. Right away. After I made whatever comment or statement or whatever I was saying, she would just immediately... and it was almost like she said what came to her mind right away, you know. Sometimes it wasn’t like, super filtered, but I appreciated that. I really liked that.

R: You respected it, it sounds like.

P: Yeah, I respected it.
R: You really respected it. There’s a part of you, it sounds like, that umm, you really so respect having the space to pick what you want to talk about and, like, it feels empowering it sounds like. But also it sounds like there’s a part that wants to be held accountable too. So, I’m just thinking about those two parts. They are just there, right? They’re in the room. (P: Yeah.) You’re like, I wanna control, you know, what I’m saying...

P: Yeah. I want to be in control, but...

R: ...but I also want to be challenged.

P: So, maybe there’s a more, maybe I want more of like a shared dynamic of power and I’m not feeling like I’m getting that as much in the current...

R: What do you think? I mean, I’m definitely not trying to put words in your mouth...

P: I’m thinking out loud here, too...

R: I love thinking out loud with you. Let’s think out loud!

P: It’s just, I mean, that’s... yeah, maybe I feel like I just have a little too much control? I mean, not that I want less control necessarily, but I think it’s... I need more, I need her to hold me accountable more. I feel like, I sort of feel like she has this, umm, amazing view of me, like I’m this incredible person and, umm, I’m really successful and confident. Which, I don’t necessarily disagree with, but like I think I want her to be, I kind of want her to pick out my weaknesses more I think and that’s not happening and my first therapist was really good at that. In a, obviously, like respectful way, but she would kind of grab those things and be like, hey. Whereas I feel like the new therapist doesn’t...

R: She lets those things go a little bit, huh?

P: Yeah, I think she lets things go. And then, I in turn don’t, umm, bring as much light to them as I could or... Like, honestly, in talking out loud about all this, I feel like did more in the 6 months I saw the first therapist than I’ve done in the, like, maybe 13 or 14 months I’ve been with... And, I think part of that was just where I was at. Like, I, you know, there was opportunity for a lot more quick growth initially cause I had never done therapy before, but...

R: One more question, cause I’m still thinking about this... it’s really good! Umm. I could totally relate to what you were saying where your old therapist said well, she’s meaner than I am, you know? Like, I totally got what you meant, that she wasn’t mean, but I’m guessing that, you know, you said how much she challenged you. And I’m just wondering... there were some things there that allowed that to happen in a way that you really respected. Or that you appreciated or something. And, so, that challenge came with something.
P: I think part of it, and I brought this up, she was the very first person to ever, like, validate my feelings on some things. And I think that was huge for me. And I think that... I mean I think that just set me up for, or set us up, for having this dynamic where I was just, like, wow you like care about me. You are like OK with me just sharing whatever I want to share. And I think, cause it was the first time I’d ever had that, I think that just meant a lot to me and, yeah. Cause that was huge for me. Huge.

R: Totally. And I don’t, I’m happy to hear you repeat it cause I think it makes... it’s enough. It is enough, It sounds like it sealed the deal for you, as far as, you could then hear just about anything knowing that she validated your feelings, you know? (P: Yeah) Cool. So, we brought up a...

(Some talking over, laughter)

P: Now I want to see her again! Dang it!

R: So, that’s, I’m aware of that you know? I’m aware of us trudging up this comparison.

P: Yeah, which is fine. And I assumed that would happen.

R: Yeah. Cool. So, it sounds like it was OK with you.

P: Yeah, yeah.

R: Awesome. Anything else that this sparked for you or you want to say that I didn't ask you or that you wish I would’ve asked you about?

P: I don’t think so. I mean, I feel like I need to talk to my therapist about some things just, you know, about... I guess be honest with her about how I’ve been feeling about our relationship. Maybe think about it more and think about what I might want to say to her.

R: Yeah. And, you know, I’m so appreciative of you saying that because I’m aware in asking these questions that there’s influence, you know, to talking about it. And, so, you know, I want you to know that I don’t expect anything from you and as we proceed in the study it’s obviously OK with me if you don’t talk to her but I’m aware that that is a possibility of our talking about all this out loud; that it impacts your work with your counselor. And, so I’m really open to hearing about that as we go in the study or not. You know, like, I just appreciate hearing your experience that’s uniquely yours.

P: And honestly, in reading the email and the flyer and I was like, I actually thought, oh this will probably make me think about things that I should bring, that I want to bring up, ultimately that I just haven’t for, you know, whatever reason. It might stir some good conversations and I hope, I mean, I hope it does.

R: Yeah. And I’m eager to hear what happens, or not, but totally appreciative. I'm going to turn this off and we can debrief a little bit.
Round One Participant #3 Length 1:01:05

R: introduces power context/definition...

P: I like it, I’m excited, I personally think a lot about power dynamics so I’m curious and I recently read a little about power dynamics in therapy in so much as the therapist is kind of using, behind the curtain using some power dynamics to grow and change...

R: The first question...describe your relationship with a past or current MHP..

P: Let’s see, well, just one?!??!

R: You can give me some thoughts about many, it’s open ended, you can talk out loud.

P: There is really two main types that I’ve had, one is more effective and one is less effective, this is only over the last couple years I was going to therapy to try to finish my master’s...it brought up a billion others things. Let’s talk about an effective one: Inquisitive, really confident....this one positive one where I had amazing gains and changes in a short period of time, the woman was....I feel like she really tried to hone in on things that would make my life better now...and not “that sounds like that was intense from your childhood” .. She didn’t get stuck in the drama of my life. She would go there but she would come back to like daily stuff that I could do to make my life easier and she was really confident and curious.

R: How did that impact you, that there were things she did that made your life better now?

P: it was hard I guess because it was a short-term thing. I’ve been a low-income client, she has limited hours at this one clinic, it was over when it was over. I really wanted more but then I got put with a different person who was an intern and the difference was night and day. The short-term impact was like “whoa, a simple one hour a week relationship can have immediate impacts on my life. The next impact was like, darn, I don’t know how she did that and I don’t know how to find another person who did that and I don’t have the money for an expensive therapist.

R: Right... you mentioned a negative or less effective one, what could you tell me about that?

P: I’m not saying they are bad people but I’ve seen a few that are more maybe like friends, like pals, feels like were just gossiping about my life but I don’t see any changes. I’ll tell them a deep dark secret and I feel like their response is not confident and inquisitive...it’s almost like, check box, huh, okay, maybe that related to this and this....they don’t catch the impact of when things are more or less significant. I can ramble endlessly about my life which I’m sure a lot of people can. Some people open their mouth once and their whole life changes. I’m more of a gabber, but the bad or ineffective ones just gab with me..oh, that
happened to me once...oh my god....they don’t do that but the effect is nil. Yeah I have this private person I can tell things to but I’m not experiencing any change or growth

R: Do you think there were overt differences that you can identify the two kinds of therapists...where there any demographic difference or similarity?

P: I’ll tell you there were three of these types that were effective. All were less than 10 sessions each. All of them were, two of them were the leader of that low-income therapy group, they weren’t interns. One of them retired about a year after I saw her...I was like dang! She worked at my school in the therapy office, which you are only allowed to have 10 sessions, she was amazing, personally I haven’t been to many very really experienced therapists and these three were the three that I’ve seen. The commonality is that they were in their later years, 20 years of experience or whatever, but also they were working in situation where they were helping people with lesser means. They weren’t just long-term professionals but they were do-gooders, doing service....they all also were women, that’s my jam. I had another guy who was an intern who was probably only the effective intern I ever saw. He was probably only about 20% of their effectiveness as them..He had been a minister for years so I think he was used to talking to people, you could tell he still hadn’t got how to manipulate the therapy relationship to help the person have a transformative experience....you could just tell but I don’t think gender is the main thing but they were older and women..

R: power dynamic q—how did you experience that power dynamic, you mentioned a couple times that effective therapists manipulate that dynamic in effective ways.

P: In general, in my conscious experience, I am not insecure, which I feel in my life I don’t find a lot of people who feel that way. Its not like I’m super confident but I’m just not walking about feeling insecure about my looks or smarts, or my... sometime I think “I don’t know if I’m smart enough for that.” But I’m not. In general when I’m approaching the TR I don’t experience a power imbalance. Other people might experience something that they relate to their parents or siblings...feeling power or powerful I don’t have that immediate experience of which one am I..But at the same time I do have problems with authority, I want things to be fair in a lot of situations, in other situations I want control, I want to control it all. Those type of dynamics came into play. I came in even, but I’m judging throughout am I getting the upper hand, are they getting the upper hand? There was one person I was seeing and I had to switch a few times because they were interns...he was always late, 5 to 10 minutes late every time and sometimes longer 15-20 min late and I told him I don’t like that you are late. He’s like we’ll just go over, I know your schedule is flexible. I’m always running late. I was like it’s not okay with me.

I was making a power play....

He just didn’t care. He was like, no it doesn’t matter. I feel like therapists they sometimes get triggered and you can see it. I think I can see it happen. Oh that affected them, especially the newer ones you can read them a little more quickly. This did not phase him and he didn’t care, he didn’t care at all. Other things I said, I saw he did care...this one he did not
care. I’ll be honest when he was late I would sit there and think of all the ways he was a bad therapist in that 5 or 10 min and then when he didn’t care, I was like oh my god..He’s not and then I started reading about therapy and the therapy relationship a little bit, I don’t know if you want to know my personal psychological diagnosis of myself???

R: You can share whatever you want; I’m open to hearing anything you want to share. I’m appreciating the vulnerability. I’m finding myself wanting to have a dialogue but I can’t! Anything you want to tell me is great.

P: A few years ago I read about OCPD, and after years of knowing about OCD, and always thinking a bunch of those sounds like me and the quality is different...when you get to the part of “you know you shouldn’t do it but you can’t stop” I’m like no, that not me, I know I’m right...I absolutely right and I don’t have repetitive things but when you read the general description, I was like that sounds like me......

But I know I’m right so it’s not OCD, b/c they just can’t stop the behavior even though it’s not quite needed. (Laughs at self). so I self- I guess-diagnosed or identify as a person who has OCPD most of my life.

After he was late for a bunch of times and he knew this (self-diagnosis) and I had read some other books and how it affects your family..Perfectionism that leads you to failure because you are obsessing so much all the time. So I decided to go and read journal articles because I was a grad student and I had access to journals about OCPD and the therapy relationship (she is cracking up!)

I read this really great article that was clearly not for a person with OCPD to ever read: “Watch out for this person [the OCPD client] the assault is coming. They are going to come in with all the things that are wrong with you and they are probably going to hit a lot nerves because they have been cataloguing it.

R: How did that affect you to read that?

P: The funny thing was it was coming to this point that I had had enough with him being late...one time he was 20 minutes late I texted him...and I was like where are you? He was like, Oh yeah, I’m almost there, I’m looking for parking. I think this guy ended up getting fired not because of the stuff with me. He was an older man who had his license from when he was in his 20's but then worked in real estate for 20 years, he was Buddhist and really warm and loved to help and talk to people. He should have been a social service worker, he was a kind person but he was just a mess. Not related to me, he was fired or quit....When I read that one article, b/c it was hard to find something so specific, I don’t know the jargon, I haven’t read in general about psychology enough to read a lot of the journal articles...actually, I think the night before I had compiled a list of 10 things that I needed to tell him that was upsetting me about him (laughter).

R: Hold that experience in your mind, with this situation or another where you wanted to bring something up and you could/couldn’t do it.
I couldn’t not, part of OCPD and my exploration of it over the last couple years is trying to get the critical words out of my mouth, I’ve ended up hurting a bunch of people and losing friends...it’s my clumsy way of trying to get familiar my feelings and how to interact more genuinely with people.
I’ve had to go through some hiccups, I guess, of being maybe mean, of being not, like gentle, in my trying to negotiate space with people and relationships. I didn’t hold back, I was planning on going in and telling him all that stuff....

The times when I hold back, like with the person I have right now....I don’t think he’s doing a very good job. It’s that chatty chummy thing and I don’t feel any change or help, it’s not helping me at all. Sometimes, I want to tell him, “You are not helping me at all.” And I don’t because I feel like I’m protecting him, he’s studying for his license, he hasn’t been doing it for very long, he’s sweet, I like him as a person, we have stuff in common, we both like bicycles, perspectives on the world, I don’t want to hurt his feelings and I feel bad for him that I don’t think he is a good therapist.

R: You are holding back that information, sounds like to protect him and because you like him, but you are very clear as a client that he is not helping you...what’s it like to be holding on to that information that this guy is not helping...

P: He’s not helping me make transformative changes in my life....he is helping me b/c I don’t have much of a social life so It’s almost like a coffee date or something and not someone who is helping you through your hard times. What that is like, is that I listen to my friends problems and I like trying to help them. It’s a time when, it almost feels like I get to have a full hour of me doing the talking ...I’m helping thme.it also feels like another reason its not helping me is that I think I’m helping them, who knows if that is true, I’m protecting them a little by telling them I’m not experiencing any gains from it....

A few weeks ago this thing came up about trust he was saying I think you need to learn to trust people more, I was like I don’t trust many people, he was like “do you trust me?” and I was like NO! and he was like (gasp).

R: Did that conversation go somewhere interesting?

P: No, unfortunately, I don’ think he’s good at figuring out how to steer to conversation And maybe I’m a difficult client because I’ve talked so much in my life about feelings, the interesting part for me was that he thinks I do need to trust people, that’s what I got out of it. He said, well maybe we can work on trying to have trust with us. I was like I don’t know what that means, yeah, whatever, then following week we didn’t talk about it at all, it got dropped.

R: what was it like that it got dropped, did you notice that?

P: I’ve been thinking a lot about our conversation....what happens is, I’m really chatty, I can chat about my most intense experiences like “It was Monday!” what happens to therapists who aren’t highly trained is they don’t know how to see what is my mind, mental vomit and
what's like oh, there's a nugget, no, stop talking about that other thing. Let's go back to this one thing. They don't know how to view my body language or have an agenda or ask me directly: what is the most intense thing you are experiencing right now, how can we hone in on that? and then do their weird techniques to help me dial in, maybe I've had a lot of funny bizarre experiences, traumatic experiences, weird experiences and I grew up in a weird situation, I think people are like, wow!

R: Thank you, this is helpful. I'm not trying to lead you here, the way he responded to the trust conversation, does that have an impact on you not even being willing to bring up the fact that he is not helping you?

P: I feel like that was the first glimpse he had that it is not really helpful. He's heard me talk about how helpful this other woman at the same clinic was...and I would try to explain to him, he did like this and like, she helped me even though she didn't understand the situation with my thesis exactly, she asked me important questions about it even though she didn't have to understand what it was about, she could get this umbrella...she wrote it down so she could flip back to it when I was talking about it. “Wait, who was that person again?” I told him other things that I felt like she did that helped her understand where the nugget of immobility was in my life.

R: It makes me think you are giving him a lot of hints but he's not picking up on them...

P Yeah or its just not his style, he does Gestalt Therapy and which I don’t quite know what is. I don’t know what that is exactly...but yeah, he doesn’t pick up on it. I've seen him a little over a year, I think the first 6 months we were together, I told him I want you to talk a lot, I want you to summarize what I’m saying, I want you to interject, you are totally welcome to guide the conversation and stop me from talking at any point. And so, in the first 6 months, he would constantly go, “what I hear you saying is..” and he would summarize and I feel literally like he never got it right for six months. He was always just a little off. No, that wasn’t quite what I was saying, he's a smart guy, he's a queer, he's a little older, this is his second career and he just didn't get me, ya know, time after time after time, I would be like, “nope, that's not it.” I would try to cut him off and he would just talk a little louder trying to finish his thought, looking up into the corner and referencing his theory books he just finished...

R: Tell me about a time when you were aware that what you and the counselor did together...

P I started to tell you about the woman before this guy, with her, well this thing she did, I would just go “my thesis, my thesis, I feel like I’m dying, feel like I’m dying can't breathe, I’m not bathing, I’m not eating...P: You probably know what I mean, (we laugh). I was a total mess, really struggling with the basics, following apart physically, eating frozen mac and cheese, vegan, gluten free but still, what she did is she asked to explain to her exactly what I still needed to do to finish the thesis. This was probably something I should have been doing with an advisor but I didn’t have the best relationship with my advisor it was a
technical thesis, I can't talk to my friends and family about it, they are like, I have no idea what you are talking about, she doesn't know what I'm talking about either but she slows me down and says, what have you done, what exactly, in chapter titles do you still need to do, what do you need to do to do that? Who are the professors or classmates that you've been working with, who has that data? She was just able to use her logic to be like okay, that's about it on that. then I had hundreds of photographs...I had to put notes on them, captions, formatting problems, integrate them into the text...
I already had the map in my head but she got it down on paper. What can you do in the next week before I see you again? Can you select the 50 photographs you need? Is that something you can do, just one thing? I was having so much trouble because I was at a standstill with my thesis. It was really collaborative, I felt the different tensions, it seems like you like your photographs, is that an in? and once I get working, omg, workaholic, the start to the next edit was really hard for me, is this our in? Can we get in with the photographs?

R: How did you notice the collaboration and transparency?

P: I could tell she picked the thing I was a little more light-hearted about, that was her suggestion. That made me feel... it's one of those things that OCPD people need or maybe most people needed, it makes you feel sane and understood the fact that she picked that, in retrospect, that made sense. She was able to listen to my stuff help me see what my options are even though she has no idea what I'm talking about. She got the feelings, how stuck or how complicated it is...
It's opposite of the guy now, I don't feel like he gets me even though I like him a lot....

R: How has one of these counselors responded to you when you have been powerful as the client?

P: The time the guy was late a lot, he responded by not caring at all. After the time I was like, hey you can't be late anymore, it's really influencing me negatively. He was like...no it's cool, I know you are flexible, that's just how I am, I can't work on that right now. Then the next week is when I brought the list, his problems, the 10 most lame things he did in therapy. One of them was a traumatic story I told him and afterwards he was like “okay.” ...like super “moving on to the next thing”. At the end of the session I had been really upset and I had cried, some therapists, you can tell they want to hug you at the end, sometimes they want to shake your hand sometimes they are leaning back, a lot of them, it depends on their body language thing...in therapy school they must be learning about what to look for.....in this instance, I thought he leaned in to give me a hug, so I hugged him. When I left, I thought, "he did good that time." That's what I was thinking I told him this really deep hard story and he was able to be a little kinder and gentler when I left. I was leaving still a little shaken up but the hour is over or whatever.... The next week, this is one of the things I told him....the next week, we sat down, I’m thinking, I’ve heard about trauma stories, sometimes what you need is to feel someone heard you and tell your story and feel that it was heard. Sometimes when I’ve told it, people will repeat it back and I’m like that’s not what I said. I thought we got it! I finally got it! We sit down and he said, "I think we need to talk about what happened last week." I was like “Yeah, we can do that, great.” I was feeling happy and
whatever. He was like, “Yeah last week when you left, you leaned in to hug me and I wanna know what that means, I’m a man, I don’t know if there was sexual tension. I’m not sure why you wanted to hug me.

Participant laughing loudly. “Oh my god!”

R: What was that like for you, what did you feel and what did you do?

P: I absolutely immediately felt, he doesn’t get me, he doesn’t hear me, he has no idea how important it was for me to share that story in so much detail and he’s fucking clueless. I immediately thought, “I’m seeing a dumbass as a therapist.” That’s just the logic part, Emotionally, it was a punch in the gut, “Oh my god, I thought I was going to get this moment of feeling seen and now I just feel invisible again.” So that was one of the 10 things I brought up...I said I think it’s ridiculous you just used the words sexual tension with me.

Number one, b/c my story was sexual, my traumatic story is sexual in nature and you are assuming I have any sexual feelings for you, first of all, I’m bisexual, so you are assuming any hetero hug is going to have sexual tension. And that is just countering my visibility as a bisexual—that it has to be a man and woman who hug for it to be sexual tension. I told him all that stuff and he was like “Oh cool, I never thought about that.” I guess because he learned in his therapy training, when you have a female client you need to look, are they putting you in a father role? Boyfriend role? Queer and bi and other stuff that maybe that is not part of what is going on.

R: There’s something you feel about his reaction to those 10 things.

P: The reaction to the 10 things, I actually brought them written down, 1 by 1. I could see on his face, he didn’t care, I think there was one or two, “he was like there I messed up, yeah, maybe that one with the hug.” It was such a party foul, it was so wrong. What happens is you start to feel safe and like you are going to have some meaningful safe place to transform, to go deeper, and then it immediately puts you back in the role of making a safe place for them. That’s what it did for me.

That is part of the problem with interns, they are a little clumsy, so they client is put in the position of, they should be paying you. You’re are making it safe for them to learn through their squeaky awkwardness, their clumsiness. You’re there for them. I don’t know how much the world of interns helping low-income people is helping in a larger sense, I’m not sure.

R: Thank you so much, I want you to keep talking...

P: It’s funny because I feel almost bad because I could be talking about some of my other three or four therapists...I don’t know why he was there, it was short-term and it didn’t work out. I was the person that got put with him. I told him the 10 things, he only cared the one or two, the ones he felt were interesting and important...He didn’t care that I felt the others were interesting and important. He went on a vacation and he wanted to do the therapy over Skype. At the time I told him about the 10 things, I want to switch (therapists)
and I want you to hook it up, He said, we can talk about that...this was about a vacation he was going on, while we’re gone, we’ll Skype, I was like, no I want a new person. It was getting closer and closer, I don’t want to Skype, and you said you were going to look into me seeing another person. I saw her a few times, he came back and she was like, I can't fit into your schedule. I went back to him twice. The first time I said, I want to switch, I think we did a lot of great stuff. He did hook me up with a lot of good resources that helped me outside of therapy. He cared about me. He said, I have access to this room that is near my house and the center. This day and this day, I could see you there, separately from this center, independent. (I said) No I don’t want to come to your weird room in a Buddhist temple that you have once/week that is not and office and doesn’t have a group of people. We were going to do the termination the next week. That week, he emailed me and said it looks like I’m not going back and won’t be working there, sorry we didn’t get time to do the termination. Do you want to meet me at that other place?

No I do not want to meet you and please don’t email me again! He wrote right back. “Okay I won’t write you again.” I was like OMG, even the final request doesn’t get, ya know. It’s not like he scared me. I wasn’t scared for my safety but I felt like I’m looking for a healing situation and this isn’t it. It’s not like he’s a full on creep...

R: Right, I understand what you mean...
If we do shift to one of the more effective counselors, was there a time during any of those relationship when your needs weren't being met?

Maybe I’ll talk about the man I had, I saw him for a year and 3 months. I saw a woman for 10 weeks, waiting, another woman for less than 10, this guy I’ going to tell you about, then I went to this new center with weird guy, busy woman and the guy now. I think there was one other person I saw three times at my school. We really didn’t get along. He told me, “you need long term therapy and no one can help you in 10 weeks.” Therefore I don’t want to see you. I said I demand to be seen, I need to see someone, I’m flipping out. I will see you for 3 sessions and all I will talk about with you is how to get you into long-term therapy. Laughter. Even though it actually worked because I ended up in long-term therapy.

R: Times where your needs were being met.

Even though he wasn’t able to do the work those other women did, which, they seemed like geniuses to me. He was very present, my needs did get met because he was on time, he was reliable, he was a good communicator, he was kind and loving....I don't know if he was gay or straight, he mentioned a woman he had dated. I like when therapist reveal a little bit about their personal lives, I almost can’t be with someone who wants to have a complete separation. I usually in the beginning ask or if its at a place--- that annoying three therapy guy who helped me talk about what kind of therapist I’m looking for, that is something that I like is someone who will reveal things about themselves....(participant remembers another therapeutic relationship) Every time it was traumatic for me. I felt bad because she was black and I wanted to help her, I want to help all the bad therapists, time to figure out the kinds,
She was so sweet and cute and I was like, I'll stick it out. It was compounded by the fact that she was black. She ended up telling me about her sister dying in the hospital right at the time I was deciding to take a break from my sister for a year. She tells me her sister died in the hospital from the accident. It was a little too much information, I want some information—

R: I get that, you want to feel their presence but you don't need details like that. You want to know they are a person.

P: I wanna know they have people to talk to.
I remember the lady who made the diagram, she said, blah blah blah...(disclosure). I don't remember because that’s how bland she made it. Maybe someone died. I said on “no, are you okay. I have other people to talk to so don't worry about that, I have a strong support network.” I was like Ah; I don't have to protect her. She has a support network and it's not about me. Whereas the guy I’m seeing now, his mother passed away but she’d been sick for a really long time and when he told me, it felt like he didn't have a support network like I felt like he was bringing it to the table. Like he wanted me to know that he was going through something. Not like, “going through something, still work and I’m still here for you.” The way they tell you they are going through something. They need to put a hard stop there; I have a support network so I’m good.

For some reason with my first long-term guy, I can't think of anything he necessarily did right except he treated me politely, he treated me well, he followed through, I appreciated all that stuff. I definitely felt like he listened to me. I really like to talk about psychology theory if it related to me. Sometimes it would be over my head but he would go there because he knew I wanted to. I know you like to use that label on yourself, in my practice, I think it’s a constellation of influences and don’t work from the theory that there is one diagnosis and therefore one path…..you can use that label but I’m staying with my own way of thinking about you. He was transparent and also smart. He got me or whatever...

R: Tell me about a time where you were in control of what happens.

P: Unfortunately, I feel like I’m in control a lot because I ramble and the other person is not taking control.. Sometimes what I’m looking for as a person who likes to be in control, is someone else to take the reins, not that they are going to kick me out of the carriage, someone I can trust to take the reins, Unfortunately, with my two long-term people, one time with the long-term nice guy, he did that thing that is the eye movement thing (EMDR)... he did that with little things you hold in your hands... in a way I felt in control when that happened. He told me he was learning how to do it and said I could try it if you want to. He wasn’t like, I think you need it, he was telling me his experience, maybe you would like it.

I like that there was an option for a different style of experience with the same therapist. He wasn’t pushing on it but it was available to me and I got to dabble in it. An then be like, “that was enough.” He was like, okay great. It was a really special experience, it was a
wonderful experience. I don’t know if therapists have this tool belt of alternative therapies or if he just learned it and wanted to check it out.

R: You liked having that option, being able to say yes and tell him when you were done.

R: My final follow-up, I’m getting the sense that you are so tenacious in seeking out help, you haven’t been helped much of the time, how do you, why might do that, how it benefits you or how you think about that?

P: I think up until this thesis, I hadn’t realized how valuable it would be to learn about mental health, I was fine. I had issues but none of them were debilitating. When it came to the thesis and I was like what’s wrong with me? Why can’t I finish this? I’ve been interested in psychology and social psychology as a total ley person. I think I just decided, wow, you can work on your mental health, that is something you can do on purpose. Even if you are not an ax murder, you can make your life and your experience better and have better relationships. And so once I got that, I was like I do want that. It is mostly related to my thesis. Now I’m done with my thesis I finished it in May. At this point, I go to a meditation thing a couple times a week and I watch a lot of videos on you tube with a couple speakers that I like, I try to read some books on relationships, my favorite being Intimate Partners from the 70’s/80’s. I think partly why I seek out the therapy is from stuff I’ve read that you can have experiences in the therapy relationship that you can’t necessarily have with just people in your life, that can help you transform your behavior, feelings, outlook. I think I tolerate luke warm skills because I don’t have money, I don’t have money for more. My current therapist really likes the idea of the good enough mother, he thinks it works when we’re with perfectionism, I would say he really isn’t the good enough mother, he’s good enough for now. I don’t have access to something more. So…..

R: that is an artifact of coming in for low-income counseling. You don’t feel like you get to choose who you will see..

P: Yeah, it’s the luck of the draw and most of them are on one year cycles, if you want to quit your guy or fall in the middle sometimes you’ll have to wait to the next cycle to get another therapist..

R: How has that impacted you?

P: It sucks, is sucks really hard....
I don’t wanna sound pompous, but maybe I’m a more complicated person to try to work with. I’m really, really judging them and I’m like reading about what they are doing or something, I don’t know what it is. Maybe there are people who would maybe benefit from the intern experience but maybe not, they are not aware of the faults of it as I am.

R: Anything else come up that you want to say that I didn’t get to that feels important?

P: No that was a pretty broad survey of my therapy experiences
Round One Participant #4
35:55

(This call is now being recorded)

Researcher provides Intro/brief context of power:

R: Awesome. Ok, well, I’m gonna just start with introducing the, kind of, context of power in which I’m studying. So, as I said, or as the study flyer said, I’m interested in learning more about the power dynamic between clients and their mental health professionals and the definition of power I’m using is just a really simple one. The ability or capacity to direct or influence one’s own behavior, the behavior of others and the course of events. And while power might bring to mind negative experiences, I’m also interested in learning about all experiences of power—positive, negative or neutral. So, most importantly, I’m interested in knowing your interpretation of power and what your experience has been with power in the therapeutic relationship. That’s sort of the context. Does that make sense? Do you have any questions about that?

P: No, that sounds... that makes total sense. And, no. No questions.

R: Awesome. Well, my first question is just describing your relationship with a past or current mental health professional. And when I have asked other participants this question, they’ve sort of maybe gone through their history and been, like, there were 3 major therapists or there are two that stand out. I’m really flexible with how much or, you know, how many mental health professionals you want to share, you know, with me. So, take that where you want it.

P: OK. Well, I’ve had four. Umm, the first two were pretty minor. I only saw the first one, like, two times and the second one three times, I think. And they just kind of rubbed me the wrong way pretty quickly and I just decided not to go back to them. And, then, my third one was at the Portland State Student Health and Counseling Center and I saw that person for, like, maybe five or six months, I can’t remember. Not super, super long. And that was cool. That was great. Umm, it’s been awhile now. It’s been a good three years since I did that and I honestly can’t remember too many details about, like, how I felt, but I felt generally positive. And then the more recent one just ended last month. I was seeing someone through [local community agency] once a week from September of last year until last month. And that was great, that was good. That one is the freshest in my mind. It was, like, definitely positive. And, like, I feel like the person I was seeing... just, what I got out of it the most was just, like, being able to talk for an hour (laughing) and getting, like... I feel like she didn’t reflect what I was saying that much. She didn’t, like, give me a whole lot of, like, insights, but it was still, if nothing else, really good to just be able to talk for an hour and be able to externalize some of my thoughts.

R: Yeah. Umm, how else would you describe your relationship with that person, yeah, the relationship you had or your feelings about that person; your sense of the work.
P: Well, umm, I don't know I guess it was nice and polite and friendly but, like, friendly with, you know, some professional distance, but still nice and pleasant. I mean, yeah, it felt supportive, for sure, but it felt supportive more in like, I don't know how to explain... like, a friend who is listening, like letting at you vent at them type of way. Like I said, like I felt like I didn’t get much, like, I guess professional or expert insight or, like... she challenged me on a few things sometimes, but overall not much. And that made me wonder sometimes whether, you know, she was just agreeing with everything I was saying or whether she didn't have the toolset or confidence to challenge me, or something. I don’t know.

R: Right. You were curious. You were curious about it. You said something about professional distance and I’m wondering if I could ask you more about that... and just asking you, like, how did you get the sense that there was some professional distance there?

P: I guess, like, we were friendly and nice but it was, like, limited I guess. We would always have small chat and talk about how we were doing and talk about the weather and biking and, like, things like that and that felt nice and friendly and all that, but then I felt like there was always this sense of, like, we shouldn’t go to far that direction. I don’t know, maybe that was just in my head or whatever, but...

R: Yeah. There was something that gave you this sign that there was an end to that small talk at the beginning of the session and then you got down to business or something.

P: Basically, yeah yeah.

R: OK, awesome. I’m gonna move on to the next question...

P: And feel free to ask a follow up question if I'm not getting to the...

R: Yeah, totally, totally. I definitely will. I think that I’m trying also see how my questions will get there rather than rushing you too much, too. I might come to some things you say earlier in the interview later. So, just given that this relationship is pretty recent, I’m curious about what your perspective or experience of the power dynamic between yourself and that counselor was. How did you perceive the power dynamic?

P: Umm, as one of like supportive... it was interesting because, like... well, OK, I didn’t know this until the end of me seeing her, but she was a grad student and she was interning at this place and I was one of the only people she had... I was one of the, like the first or second person she had seen who was seeking, like, talk therapy. Everyone else she had seen wanted medication or something else. And, so, she was excited about that and so I guess when I saw her she just seemed, like, really stoked to talk to me and was very supportive and I was stoked to talk to her, so I didn’t feel like there was any power imbalance perse. But, like, I never felt like she was dismissive or like she was, like, coercive or dangling the possibility of me not being able to have services through them or whatever. I never felt anything like that—just nice and supportive.
R: Awesome. What were some of the things that you experienced that were supportive or that made you feel like there wasn’t much of a power imbalance there?

P: I don’t know, just felt like we were more or less like two equals and that we were, like... the goal was for me to figure out some stuff and we were both in it together. And, I guess like... I guess, like, I would say some stuff and she would offer her take on it and I would, you know, sometimes I would agree and sometimes I wasn’t and, like, there was room for that. And there was room for us to, like, bounce ideas back and forth as far as what I’m doing and what steps I should take it the future blah blah blah blah. SO, I guess I just felt like, I felt like we were in it together.

R: Yeah, totally. That makes sense to me. That totally gives me the vibe of the relationship. Thank you. Describe a time where you wanted to bring something up in therapy and you either could or couldn’t do it.

P: Well, like... sometimes, I felt like generally whenever I would bring up, like, a pretty pointed thing... like, something I needed to work on, she wasn’t terribly good at, like, I don’t know, the responses she’d come at me with or, like, the resources she would bring to me never felt very satisfying. And, so I guess I started to, like, be more hesitant to sometimes ask about, like, specific dynamics or specific habits I was dissatisfied with.

R: It sounds like there was, umm, you started shifting what you would talk about or not talk about.

P: A bit, yeah, because I wasn’t really getting satisfactory responses and I felt kind of just, like... it felt a little textbook sometimes and a little bit, like, just not, really like, hopeful or insightful. I feel like, she was like, I’d be like, I don’t know, like I’m having this, whatever, like anxiety and she would, like, just go and look up... like, she would do a google search and I was like, I could just do a google search. Like, I could do that! I need you to give me, like, your years of schooling and training and whatever you’ve learned and that. So, that didn’t feel very helpful. And, so, there were some times where I just, like... I think it came to a point where I just stopped expecting that from her, where I like came into the relationship expecting that more. Expecting to be able to, like, ask those questions and get responses that felt good.

R: Did you ever consider saying that to the practitioner or did you ever do that?

P: Let me think... I don’t know. Maybe I did, I can’t remember. I definitely wouldn’t say it like that. I wouldn’t, you know, I’d want to be wary or conscious of her feelings. Umm, so...

R: Yeah, it’s definitely not an easy thing to do for any of us! You know, for sure. I’m just curious if there was a part of you that wished you could’ve said that or...

P: Now that you say it it’s like, obviously, why wouldn’t I just, like, talk to her about it, but I don’t think I ever did. I think I felt worried about, like, hurting her feelings.
R: Mm hmm. And there was something, there was something more that you were needing ... like, something... it sounds like, in a way, you were hoping, and this might be a leading question, it’s just the way I’m thinking of it right now. It’s almost like you were hoping she would use more power when you really needed it.

P: Umm, power, sure. I don’t think of it in that sense. I think of it like she has this training and this skill set, you know, or whatever, and I need help, And I’m coming to her for help. And, so I wish that she could go farther with it, beyond a, like, google search, cause that just didn’t... that was something I could have done on my own.

R: Totally. That expertise is what you were looking for.

P: And, I guess that is... one of the power dynamics there is, like, her being the expert and me being, like, you know this person who thinks that I don’t, you know, who doesn’t have that knowledge, but it didn’t feel that way to me.

R: In thinking about being conscious of the counselor’s feelings, do you have any sense of what you feared might happen if you did say something negative about your experience?

P: I don’t know, I guess it’s just, like, I was afraid of hurting her feelings and also, like, afraid maybe that it would stall the counseling process or the relationship. Or that it might set it back. I guess, like, I guess that’s part of what I was worried about, but... yeah.

R: Yeah. I mean, in our culture it’s just really hard to give feedback in general. I mean, it’s just really challenging, so that makes so much sense.

P: I would, like, I would tell her no sometimes. Like, you know, she’d be... she would try to repeat what I said or, like, rephrase it and I’d just be like, no that’s not really how it is or things like that.

R: Yeah, you would just be honest, gently, and just be like no...

P: When I would come at her with a specific concern and then she wouldn’t really give me any particular insight on it, I never really talked to her about that.
R: Mm hmm. Yeah. Thank you. I’m gonna go on to the next one, which is telling me about a time where you were aware that maybe something you and your counselor did together in the session or something you talked about influenced something in your life outside the session.

P: Ok, so something that me and the counselor about influencing something outside of the session?

R: Mm hmm, yeah.

P: OK. Well, hmm, I don’t know. Cause we talked about so many things and, you know. Well, OK, I guess I can talk in a like, very specific sense, but like... So, I started seeing the
counselor in September and in October I started dating someone. And then me and that person stopped dating in June, so right around when my, like, counseling visits ended too. And, so, that was huge I think. Cause I had that, I was going through counseling the entire time I was dating this person and, so almost the entire time, or no, yeah, the entire time. And, so, that was good. I got to reflect on that relationship a lot and, so like, gave me a platform to, like, process that relationship and, like, make better sense of it.

R: Mm hmm. Can you remember any specific times where you had a conversation with your counselor that really shifted your perspective about that relationship or a part of it?

P: Sorry, I almost dropped my phone. Umm. Well, yeah, so this person, like in general, was like really insecure and really, umm, really bad at communicating her insecurity as insecurity and would instead frequently get mad at me for hurting her when, like, what it seemed like to me was that’s he felt insecure and had, like, there were ways that I was hurting her but it was, like, mostly out of my control and I was, like, constantly doing my best to meet her needs and, like, apologize and validate but, umm, that was just really, really hard like throughout the relationship. And, so, the counselor I was seeing I feel like was really helpful in, like... I would describe specific incidents and my counselor would be, like, that sounds really hard. It sounds like you did your best like blah blah and so I guess... One specific incidence, I guess, well it was like there was this instance where me and my girlfriend, umm, we were always really busy and could typically only hang on the weekends and there was one particular weekend where her and I could only hang out for, like, a few hours and we spent the night together but I had to get up early to go on a hike with some housemates and she got really mad at me for going on the hike and, you know, it... throughout our relationship my ex would frequently make me feel crazy and so I needed help sometimes making sense of things. Because I always, like, felt like I was doing my best, I felt like I was doing my, like, end of things but I was also dating this person who was consistently telling me that I was, like, a jerk and being negligent. And, so, yeah, the person, the counselor I was seeing really helped in those specific types of moments where I felt like my partner was coming at me with, like, crazy making tactics and I was feeling very confused.

R: Mm hmm. Sounds like it helped, like, clarify things for you and make sense of it. And not make you feel so awful about it.

P: Mm hmm. Yeah, definitely.

P: I still felt pretty crazy, off and on. Or just confused, you know. And, but it helped. It definitely helped. I had friends who helped me see things clearly too.

R: Yeah. Awesome. The next question is about a time where you might have been powerful as the client in a session. So, and my question is, how did your counselor respond to you when you were powerful? Like, for example, when you expressed strong opinions or you resisted their perspective or you pushed back. Was there any of those moments that you recall?
P: Yeah. She was always like very respectful and really good at like, you know, challenging me back if she felt like it or it felt like it was at points that needed to be stressed. Umm, yeah, it always felt fine. I always felt comfortable, you know, disagreeing with what she was saying. And I felt comfortable with her encouraging me to look at things from a way that I wasn’t.

R: How would she challenge you?

P: Like, just through I guess like simple insistence or being like... like she might say something one way and then I would be resistant to it and then she might phrase it another way to make me, hopefully, see it.

R: Mm hmm. Got it. Any other moments you can think of when you were, umm, just particularly expressive or just challenging yourself, like any time where you might have been challenging or powerful?

P: Umm, like, challenging her?

R: Yeah.

P: No... it didn’t come up very often. Yeah, so, not really.

R: Mm hmm. That’s totally fine. And the next question is more about your needs. So, I was wondering if you could describe a time where your needs weren’t being met by your counselor. I think you’ve already kind of touched on that a little bit and maybe we can get a little more into it.

P: You said where there were or weren’t being met?

R: Where they were not being met.

P: Yeah, I guess like, what I said earlier I guess is the biggest example of just me coming to her with a specific pattern or dynamic or worry and then her typically not giving me a super satisfying answer. Umm... yeah. So, wait so, the question is describe a time when my needs were not being met?

R: Yeah. Do you want to, do you feel like talking about a thing that you tried to bring up, just in a more specific way? Like, then kind of tell me what happened?

P: It’s hard to remember.

R: Yeah, it’s hard to remember for sure.

P: Like, I’m imagining some of the print outs she would bring during our sessions. And, like, so I’m trying to like... I’m remembering a few of those and that helps me remember a little
bit. I remember she printed one about anxiety and, like, different types of anxiety. And one about, like, this big vocab sheet for different ways to express, like, different feelings and that one felt especially just, like, completely unnecessary and almost kind of, like, condescending. But, like, I have no idea where she was coming from bringing that in. It didn’t feel, like, needed whatsoever. I feel like I have a pretty good range of words to describe my feelings.

R: Totally. What do you think was going on there?

P: Maybe she was bringing it in for me to reflect on my partner’s feelings and emotions. That’s, maybe... I don’t know, but I don’t remember it being presented in that context. But, I don’t remember what context it was brought up.

R: Mm hmm. You use the word condescending, though. Umm, tell me more about that experience, if you had it with her?

P: Well, yeah, so I guess, like, her bringing... it was just, it was just after several meetings or weeks or months. Umm, that she brought in this sheet that described different emotions. And, so, umm, so like gave different examples of words to describe emotions. And, I just felt, yeah it just felt really unnecessary.

R: Yeah. It wasn’t matching your goals. Like, what you needed, what you were talking about it. It was sort of wasn’t connected to what you needed.

P: Yeah, I didn’t feel like I needed to expand my vocabulary and I also don’t really, I mean I don’t remember why she brought it up, I don’t remember her giving much of an explanation. It was just kind of like, oh I printed this thing out and I thought it might be helpful. And, like, you know, I don’t know why she thought it might be helpful?

R: Mm hmm. Yeah. Not a lot of context there. Yeah.

P: Because I’m trying to remember the specific thing I came to her with that like... I think, like, one thing I came to her with was, like, this, umm, consistent sense of frustration and, like, anxiety I have with my housemates and just, like, mundane little housemate dynamics. And, like, you know me stressing about the cleanliness of the house. Pretty, like, it’s hard not to be stressed out about, like, I, the house isn’t filthy, but I guess I,, there’s like an imbalance of who’s cleaning and its hard for me to not see the messes and then, like, stress about them. And, so I was, like, talking to her about that and I was looking for a way to navigate that and I feel like, I don’t know, I don’t remember her giving me a very satisfying answer.

R: Mm hmm. Yeah. You’re bringing up this point that I’m thinking about as your talking that is this really interesting point of, about, like what is the point of therapy in a way. Like, is it to just listen and validate or is it to actually, you know, give you some real serious tools to navigate what you need help with. And, so I feel like there’s a bit of that tension that you’re talking about with her. Does that resonate at all or does that make sense?
P: Yeah. I guess I think of counselors and therapists as being there to give me tools. Like, I can talk to my friends; I have friends to talk to. I’m like, having one more person to talk to is nice and it’s helpful, but my friends are already there for me in that capacity. Umm, I’m looking for this, I’m looking towards these people to give me these, like, I guess, like, more practical, I don’t know, frameworks or step by step type of, like, you should try this maybe or you should think of it in this way.

R: Yeah. You want some new frames and some new tools and some, like, things you haven’t tried.

P: Or, like, this thought pattern might be connected to this thought pattern and then that might be connected to this trauma and blah blah blah blah blah.

R: Yeah. And, kind of, it sounds like you wanted a bit more of that insight-oriented work, not necessarily just to be heard. Does that sound true?

P: Mm hmm. Yeah.

R: Yeah. OK. Last question, I might have one or two follow ups beyond this, but describe a time where you got to make the choices about what happened in your treatment or in your therapy sessions.

P: Well, there weren’t many choices to be made, necessarily. You know, like, I mean frequently, I found most every single time, we started our sessions by me, like, you know talking about whatever was weighing most heavily on me. And, or whatever was, you know, in the forefront of my mind. And then, umm, so like in that regard I got to steer the conversation quite a bit. And then, like, frequently if she had something that she wanted to talk about, she wouldn’t bring it up until I had, you know, exhausted all the things I wanted to talk about. So, I feel like I could, yeah. I feel like I got to make the choices in that regard pretty consistently.

R: Mm hmm. Yeah. And, how did that work for you or how did that impact your relationship with her?

P: Umm, I think it was fine. It was nice to be able to vent about things that were weighing heavily on me. Also maybe that was part of the reason why, like, maybe I should have, like, given her more room to initiate things because that, because then maybe I would have felt like she was being more proactive. Because I’m the type of person who can talk and talk and talk. So, maybe, umm, maybe that’s part of the reason why she... maybe she, maybe there wasn’t much room for her to be more proactive.

R: Hmm. You sound like your just reflecting on that right now and being curious about it in your own head looking back on it. Yeah. Umm, yeah. There was something you said early in the, like when we were talking about the first question. Umm, where you said that she challenged you, but not much. I mean. I feel like you touched on this. But I wanted to know,
umm, just more about how you ended up just noticing that she was challenging you sometimes and then she wasn’t and it sounds like you stopped bringing certain things up. And I was wondering how it affected you to not feel like she was going to challenge you or like she was there to give you proactive ideas and just... how do you think that affected you throughout therapy?

P: Umm, I think like I didn’t, I’m definitely very conscious of reaching a point where, umm, I stopped expecting her to, like, give me those, give me the hard insights I was looking for. And, so, like, I’m very conscious of that. So like I think I, I guess I definitely came to her with pointed questions. So, like, I definitely came to her describing certain things that were, you know, I was struggling with. Umm, but I think there was a point where I started doing it less. And I think towards the end of our, like, us seeing each other, I started a bit more because I wanted to, like, make the most of our last few sessions. So, you know.

R: Right. And did that feel, how did that feel to you to like push, push things at the end?

P: Umm. It was fine. Umm, like, still I, still I was never satisfied. I never got the type of, like, insight that I was looking for. Not often or, like, yeah. Not often.

R: Mm hmm. Yeah, and did your therapy with her end because of her internship or because you guys decided together that you were done?

P: No, I think it was like, yeah, she was graduating from grad school and had to, like, was wrapping up her internship at that place.

R: Mm hmm. Cool. Is there anything else you thought of while we were talking that you want to share?

P: Umm, I don't think so. No.

R: OK. Umm. What’s it been like to talk about this today?

P: Oh, this is fine. I’m curious now, like, I’m curious at the idea of me talking a lot and not giving her room to initiate, umm, or direct. I just feel like, that was a thought that hadn’t, like, occurred to me much until just now. I guess I always imagined her being, like, the professional and who would be like totally comfortable steering things if that was what was needed or whatever. But, maybe she didn’t feel that way. Maybe she didn’t have that comfort or confidence. And so, I don’t know. That’s an interesting thought for me to think about.

R: Mm hmm. Sounds like the other interesting thing that came up while we were talking is the idea of, just, how do we tell professionals that what we’re not getting is adequate and that that is just challenging, you know? Because we don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings and, umm, and there’s a way that, I’ll probably follow up on this in the future, but there’s a way that we manage that, that process. And we still make it work for us, you know, as
clients. But that there is a part that’s just, it’s just hard to just say: hey, I wish you were giving me more. You know?

P: I’d say I think it’s made harder by, umm, like, I’m on [Medicaid] and so... so, I was able to see, I forgot to mention this because it was so, such a blip, I was able to see one... I was able to see a counselor one time at; I forget what they were called [P names cross streets]. Umm, but I was able to see one person there once but then she told me that they would only have room in their schedule to see me once a month. And that felt completely ridiculous to me. And pointless. And, so, I was so grateful that I found a place where I could see someone once a week that I feel like maybe that was part of the reason why I didn’t want to critique her too much because I wanted to just, like, I was so grateful for even being able to see someone once a week, I wanted to like keep that and have it be good and solid.

R: Yeah, totally. And that, that’s, do you recall if that was [local community mental health agency]?

P: Yeah, that’s what it was.

R: Yeah, so your dealing with the difference between the community mental health setting versus a more clinic based setting, so it was, you just felt grateful to be able to see someone once a week rather than once a month.

P: Mm hmm. Basically, yeah.

R: Yeah. So, that’s, it sounds like that was a factor too, in being able to keep seeing her, you know, like it was, yeah. OK.

P: Yeah, I didn’t want to... I found this good things, I was able to see someone once a week and it felt good and I didn’t want to mess up, so...

R: Yeah. Awesome. Well, I’m going to turn the recording off and then we can debrief a little bit.

P: OK, cool.

Round One Participant #5
54:22

Researcher provides intro to context of power.

R: ...just talk. And, that, I'll give you that context, which I did put out in the email to you, which is just... yeah, I’m more interested in learning about the power dynamic between client and mental health professional, and that I’m really using a simple definition for that: the ability to direct or influence one’s own behavior, the behavior of others, or the course of events. And, so, sometimes power brings to mind negative things, but I’m also really interested in positive things, neutral things, all aspects of power—powerful or empowered—any of those things.
P: OK.

R: But, really, I’m honestly just most interested in your interpretation of power and what your experience is. Since I’m doing qualitative research, this is about your story, you know? Any questions about that?

P: OK. No.

R: I’ll probably take some notes while you talk to, like, keep track of my own thoughts and maybe remind myself of things to follow up with. Yeah. The first question is about a past or current mental health professional and what your, how you would describe your relationship with them. So, a lot of people have been, like, I’ve had 2 or 3 counselors and here’s the story about them—I’m really flexible about how you want to answer. If you just want to talk about your current person...

P: Umm, I would like to talk about a past person, a one time occurrence, and then I can talk a little bit about my current one.

R: Great.

P: So, my first experience was with, it was years ago, and I started seeing a student who was in the social work program [at a local university] and I started seeing her at the [local non-profit agency]. And I was with her all through school and then, when she graduated and got her own practice, I stayed with her the whole time. And I think in that particular point in my life I really needed someone to just, like, be sweet to me. And she was very good at that. Like, very just, like, well how does that make you feel and are you ok today? And that was really great for 3 years, probably. Umm, and then, to me it felt like, I guess in terms of power, like that sort of power dynamic shifted. Where I was like, this person isn’t giving me anything that I need anymore. So, that was really... and it’s challenging to, like, be in such an intimate relationship with someone but in this really confined way. And the to have to, like, end that relationship because you feel like their not giving you what you need, even though that’s their job. Like, that’s pretty awkward. And I found myself, like, in session, like, making stuff up so I could be there; instead of just working on stuff that I needed to work on. Umm, and so that was challenging for me. Umm, and so eventually, and this is my favorite story that I tell about this person all the time, is that in one of our sessions she said epitphany instead of epiphany and for some reason it was like the straw that broke the camels back for me. Where I was just, like, really? You didn’t even notice that you said that? And that that’s not the right word that you should be using? And, also, I’m a horrible, judgey person, but umm... that was, like, ok. I can’t do this anymore.

R: Everyone has their moments.

P: So, it was just like, you know I was seeing her once a month. And then I was just, like, tapering off and then I was like cancelling all the time and then I think I was just like I think I’m ready for this to be over. I’m feeling OK. Umm, and then I didn’t see anybody for years
and, umm, I guess it was like 3 years ago, a little over 3 years ago, I just kind of felt like I needed to start working on myself again. And, umm, I had left my old massage practice cause things weren’t going well there and I’m sure that’s part of what was happening for me. So, I was looking for spaces and that’s actually how I met [current MHP] is I was looking for spaces. And, umm, she... I was like, you know, I looked at all these other spaces, and I was like I don’t want to rent space from you, but do you have any room for clients? And she was like, yeah I could probably squeeze you in and I was, like, yessss! Cause I knew right away that, like, she had this... For me, I guess I feel like I’m smart and I’m sarcastic and I’m not very professional, quote unquote. And, so, finding someone that won’t really let me get away with those things. Like, I think it’s easy to, with some therapists, to sort of manipulate them with those things. Or get around doing real work with those things, so you have to have somebody that’s well matched to you that’s able to be like, OK.

R: I got you.

P: Yeah. Your using this as a thing to not talk about what you’re really feeling right now. Umm, and my relationship with [current MHP] has been probably the closest thing, in my experience, of having what I would think of as, like, mother energy. Like, someone that I sort of see as a mentor and someone that I see as supportive and totally unconditional love and sort of a hard ass when it comes to things about, like, taking care of myself. Umm, and so I think that can be challenging in our relationship when I, umm, have to work on things that are hard for me or I do things that I’m embarrassed by... or, like, any of those things. And, so, that’s where I feel a lot of that power is it becomes really challenging for me to fully express myself because I care about what she thinks about me. And so that’s... umm, I think that can be an obstacle in a therapeutic relationship. And I, I mean, she’s also, she’s really good about recognizing that and, like, creating ways for that to be overcomeable—which is not a word but I can’t think of anything else right now.

R: But at least you knew it wasn’t a word, right?

P: Yea, exactly! (laughter) Umm, I do make up words, but I know that I’m making them up. Umm, so yeah, I feel like, uhh, she gets me. And she also will really... I think another power dynamic in our relationship is that when she... she really pays attention to my body language or my facial expressions. And she totally will bring it up to me. And I’m used to people ignoring that. And, so, she can catch me in that moment and be like, you look like your not OK right now or your about to cry and, like, that’s really hard for me to be in those moments when I can usually just get by in, like, my normal social circles and people aren’t noticing those tiny little things. But with her it’s like, oh I have to stay in this moment and like process through whatever is going on.

R: Right. And show that vulnerability.

P: Totally. And sometimes it’s challenging because I don’t know that my body is doing whatever my body is doing. And I’m, like, am I? I don’t know what I’m supposed to say now! Umm, and that can be a pressure too, is, like, her sensing that something’s going on with me and me, honestly, either not being aware/conscious of it or really not feeling like there’s
anything going on with me. And that can be an interesting power dynamic of, like, you’re telling me I’m not OK, but I really feel like I’m OK.

R: Right. And how do you guys deal with those moments?

P: Umm, sometimes it’s pretty awkward. Umm, and I’ll just kind of be quiet. Sometimes I can tap into something deeper and kind of figure out what’s going on. Umm, sometimes I get super defensive, which I think is probably great for [current MHP] cause I’m sure she has some sort of (couldn’t decipher word) that she knows about that...

R: Sometimes when a spade is a spade.

P: Yeah. That defense mechanism of, like, yeah, this is uncomfortable so I’m going to freak out about it. Umm, and it always leaves me with something to think about after the session. Like, I’m the kind of person that processes pretty slowly. And, so, I like to think about stuff for a long time, so pretty much initially it’s easy for me to get really defensive, and then leave the session thinking about what happened and what my feelings were and how I was doing and coming to more of, like, an understanding of where whatever she was noticing came from. Or if it was just, like, oh she’s just noticing something that isn’t there.

R: Yeah, totally. And do you think that the awkward moment, maybe sometimes, or the moment where you realize something isn’t there and that just genuinely maybe true, right?

P: Yeah.

R: Do you feel like those moments have been responded to well? Or do you feel like you guys actually go there? Or is it more, like, letting it go for a moment and then thinking about it later? Do you come back to it or?

P: I think in the actual moment, like, [current MHP] usually gives it some time for me to sort of navigate that situation about how I want to handle it. She doesn’t usually push me to go there if I don’t seem ready to. Like, if I’m still sort of in that defensive space. Umm, and then sometimes it’s, it comes on so suddenly that like, you know, she’ll notice my body language change and I’ll be like, oh gosh, I didn’t even notice, and check in with myself and be like, oh it’s because this triggered this other thing that I was thinking about or this is... I’m feeling this emotion at this moment. Umm, and sometimes we just move on to something else. Because I think she can either sense that I’m not ready to go wherever that was taking us or I’m too resentful of, like, her pointing out something that I’m not ready to deal with. Or that I’m genuinely being like, I don’t know. I mean, I often, for my whole like pretty much, people can read my face. I have a very expressive face. And, so, umm there are definitely times when people assume things because of some face that I’m making and my internal experience of that is totally different than what is being put out into the world. So, that can be challenging, especially in therapy, I think.

R: Mm hmm. Totally. Umm, you said so many important, awesome things. It sounds like there’s a way that you really do find to fully express yourself, even though you’re, maybe
worried, about what she would think of you. And I’m just wondering, like, if there’s something that happens in your relationship or something that your therapist does that allows you to kind of fully express yourself without that fear of judgment or rejection, or maybe you always fear it, but is there anything...

P: I think, umm...

R: Like, something might allow you to know that it is safe to do that...

P: I think it was an instantaneous thing with [current MHP], like about how our chemistry was together. But, also, how she has been supportive of me over time has been something that is really significant to me. And, so, she’s earned my trust. Umm, and she's also never really pushed me. And I think I was so ready to change and I'm so ready to be in the process that I'm in, that that was also allowed me to, like, get over those times when I was really freaked out about saying stuff that I was embarrassed about. And I would have those conversations with her before I would do that, also. That I would say, I really don’t want to tell you this thing. And I even had a conversation with her where I was like, I’m... is it OK, if when these things happen, I can write it down and tell you that way because I feel like I can’t say it. Umm... so, yeah. I think it’s just a combination of, umm, a sense of a connection with someone and then, also, her just earning that trust over the time that we’ve been together and the way she interacts with me. And knowing that she, 1) isn't going anywhere, which is a big deal for me, and 2) umm, that we’re in this together, I guess?

R: Mm hmm. That feeling.

P: Yeah.

R: Totally. Thank you. You know you’ve already mentioned a couple things about this, but I’m just curious, what is your perspective or experience of the power dynamic between you and these two different therapists that you’ve seen?

P: I guess, I mean, I don’t... I think that when I was thinking about that, when I read the questions, I was trying to think of, like, what is a power dynamic? And how does that play out in sort of an intimate relationship, or in a relationship that you feel so good about. Cause I do, I think when people, you know, say power dynamic to me it, like, I respond to it with this sort of negative, like somebody is oppressing someone else instead of this interplay of like switching back and forth or, jus, you know. Umm, so it was hard for me to think about, especially my relationship with [current MHP], I mean my therapist...

R: You can say her name. I probably won’t use it just to...

P: (laughing) It’s totally fine. Umm, and, umm...

R: So it’s a little harder to like frame, or even like see the power when you feel so good about the relationship. And you feel so... the good chemistry and the good connection. And I guess I can help clarify what I mean, I guess. It’s just, umm, that sense that the person is in
that expert position, right? And we have gone to them, we go to them for help and support and there are boundaries in the relationship and there are, you know. It's one sided in the way that we don't get to know a lot about them. So, umm, but yeah, I don't mean it in a negative way either. It's just there's power in the relationship, in and of itself. So, I don't know. Does that stir up any additional thoughts?

P: Well I would say that, like, the boundaries are really challenging for me. Like, I want [current MHP] to be in my life all the time, everyday. Like, I want to do stuff with her. But, I think that that’s also, you know, like I don’t know what she’s like when she’s not being my therapist, so that relationship could ruin our therapeutic relationship or I could not like her anymore. And, so, that has been challenging for me is that sort of boundary and, like, coming to terms with, like, this is the only relationship that I get to have with this person. Umm, and... I will say that it was interesting, recently something pretty intense happened in my life and, umm, it definitely, like, I think that was the first time that, like, sort of the power curtain was drawn back, if that makes any sense, where I was like, oh right, this is a situation where someone is, like, doing their job with me. Umm, and I can't remember what it was specifically, but I mentioned something about, umm, [current MHP] knowing something about me, or noticing something about me and not bringing it up to me; like sort of this long behavior pattern. And I, and it was this sudden feeling of feeling like oh my god, there's this whole thing about me that I, that you, knew about me that you never really brought up in counseling. And 1) it was like, OK. You were waiting for me to do that. But, at the same time it was like she was keeping a secret from me. And she said, yeah- there are lots of things that I know about you. And that was a really, that was a real challenging moment for me. And I think I’m still sort of a little reeling from that. Like realizing that oh my gosh, this person is like sitting there listening to me talk and we have this great relationship, but at the same time they’re like seeing all these different patterns and making all these, like, assessments about if I have a problem with this or if I have a problem with that or, like, if I have this personality thing or, you know. And, so that, it was, it was like totally that moment of like, oh right, this is, and this is why I’m here. That that was, it was definitely... I think it, it created a little bit of a shift for me in terms of that power recognition of like oh, right, this isn’t just... we’re not just chatting.

R: Right. There are some things that are like held back or, umm, our therapists have their own personal thoughts about us or assessments. Yeah. How do you feel like you two met that moment together? Like, sounds like it’s been very impactful.

P: I feel like we haven’t really processed through it fully. Umm, it was only a few sessions ago and so, umm, I think that it will be interesting to see how it plays out as I, sort of, figure out what I want to talk to her about in that. And I, it's really, it's really complicated for me because I totally appreciate that she wants me to take the lead in terms of what I'm ready to explore with myself and what I'm ready to really deal with, but at the same time I think there's some resentment of, like, that you're the professional. Aren't you supposed to be telling me what I need to deal with? So that's a real hard place for me right now and I don't really know how that is going to manifest.
R: Yeah, you’re speaking... I really appreciate what you’re saying cause you’re speaking to a lot of the nuances of, of just therapy. And then power, too. Like, in one sense there’s a part of me that’s almost interpreting what you just said as I want you to use your own power. And, I don’t know. Do you have any other thoughts about that? Like, wanting your therapist to use their power?

P: Yeah. It’s an interesting example because I, umm, this winter I had really bad anxiety and panic and it was sort of the second time in my life it got bad enough that I, like, couldn’t really do anything. And, umm, it was really, there was another moment where, like, [current MHP] said for sure, like, yeah- you have an anxiety disorder and you have a panic disorder. And, for me, that was like a total relief. And, like, I know that it’s uncommon now for people to want to be diagnosed, but because I, because of whatever way that I am, it was really helpful for me to say: this is what I have, now I can do something about it. And to feel like that was a complete, like, OK. This is a thing that I have now; I can deal with it. And, so to feel like this experience had been going on and on and we’ve been talking about it and that she, it sort of seemed like she had just forgotten to say that, you know? And that was definitely a moment of a little let down of, like, yes- it would have been really helpful for you to use your power in that moment of diagnosis to say, yes you have these things. Umm, instead of feeling like the responsibility was on me to, like, figure out whatever was going on with me.

R: Totally. It’s so tricky! But, yeah. That’s the piece of positive power that I think you’re saying that you crave in these situations where you want to be told and that telling is from an expert position.

P: Yeah.

R: Yeah. That’s really helpful. One more question about power dynamic related to the other relationship that you mentioned, which was, you know, a student/early career professional. You said that you feel like the power dynamic started to shift where almost you had more power in a way, and more insight. And you talked about, yeah, I mean what are your thoughts about how and why that shifted, if you have any?

P: Umm, I’m not sure I know what the why is, but I think over time, umm... I mean, I think the therapy worked. What I needed, I got out of the relationship. But, then I outgrew it. And I think that her style, I mean, everybody brings their own style to whatever it is that they do, and I think that was very much her style was this sort of... And she, I think there was some newness that happened there, too. In terms of, like, there was a lot of well how does that make you feel and what would that look like and eventually that got to be... not challenging enough for me. So, I... umm... yeah. And I think to me that power shift sort of occurred when I realized I was starting to manipulate the relationship to, because I though I should still be in therapy, so it was like I was making things up to be there. I mean, not like horrible things, but like I was really searching for things to talk about and, like, problems that I had or... I just didn’t feel like I needed to be in therapy anymore, especially with this person.
R: And that really naturally brings me to the next question, which your already talking about, which is asking you about a time where you wanted to bring something up in therapy and you either could or couldn’t do it. And that, I’m not sure if that’s a time where you wanted to bring that up and you didn’t or couldn’t? What is... what was that experience for you, of feeling that, you know, quote unquote manipulation and, like, your just pulling for things and, you know. Did you ever get a chance to say anything or?

P: Umm, no. No, I mean I never had that conversation with her where I was like, I’ve been making stuff up, I need to end this relationship. But it was a very dragged out, like, just not showing up to stuff. I mean, I would cancel appointments. I’m not very good at, umm, confronting people and so... especially anyone that I consider to have some sort of authority, which is pretty much everyone to me. Umm, so yeah. It took a long time for me to just be, like, I think I’m ready to be done now. And I don’t really... yeah, I mean I guess my sense of power in that situation was just feeling like I don’t want to have to deal with this. I don’t want to sit face to face with this person and say, I don’t want to do this anymore because you said epiphany the other day. You know? Like I just didn’t, umm, and it was like, also I think that this is, you know, umm, therapy and counseling is such a personal thing that it’s hard to be like... you know. It’s like a break up. You know. And that’s hard.

R: Totally.

P: Even though you know that someone has, like, definitely been taking classes in, like, self-care and how to not take things personally and all that stuff, it still is challenging for me to, like, recognize... And, I think that it was also hard because I felt this shift and was starting to be, sort of, almost... mean about it in some ways, where I was like I’m just smarter than you and I don’t need you anymore and, like, not to her face, but I think that I started having that attitude and I don’t know if that was part of me trying to get to a place where I could end the relationship.

R: Right, yeah. It’s hard!

P: Or, to like, take that, get enough power to like leave, you know? I don’t know.

R: Totally. It’s a hard thing to do and everything you’re talking about is really challenging and I honor you’re, you know, experience with it. It’s very challenging. Two questions to follow up on that; 1) What would it have been like if she had just brought it up to you? Do you think it would’ve been easier if she said, like, how you doing? Do you think you’re ready? I’m sensing some disconnection.

P: Right. Umm, I think initially I would have felt rejected, but I think that’s just an issue for me. Umm, and then I probably would’ve felt relieved. Umm, but again, I didn’t feel like she... I didn’t feel like the relationship that we had, like that was a thing that was even possible, you know. That she would have noticed that. Or that we could have had talked about it. Because I think if that had been a dynamic of our relationship, I wouldn’t have needed to leave the relationship, if that makes sense.
R: Can I quote you on that?

P: Yeah.

R: That’s a powerful statement, you know?

P: Mm mm.

R: That's real. (quiet moment) I'm just kind of sitting with that. It's been a powerful week of hearing all this stuff...

P: I'm sure.

R: I appreciate you...

P: Yeah.

R: Was there a time in the opposite direction where you were able to bring something up that you really wanted to bring up, or... good, bad or indifferent, even. Just a time where you thought ahead of time and thought, I gotta talk to this person about this.

P: Yes. Umm, it happens all the time with [current practitioner]. Umm... I'm always scared, but I think it's more around my own feelings of judgment. Umm, and I'm not sure that it's just because of the therapeutic relationship, or just relationships in general, that I tend to be really hesitant to talk about things that are difficult for me. Or things I have done that I feel not great about. Umm, but it has been really interesting in my relationship with [current practitioner] that I've really been able to do that and that I've wanted to do that. Like I said, coming up with that solution of, like, can I write things down to tell you when I don't feel like, umm... yeah. It's been really surprising to me that I'm so willing to talk to her about what's going on with me.

R: And is there a way that she responds to you that makes that feel OK?

P: (Deep breath) Yes. I think that she always responds with, and it surprises me every time, but she always responds with total concern for me in the situation. And that's, like, so different for me in any of the relationships I've had that it's like... and I think that's part of what's built trust in our relationship too is, like, knowing that she's always concerned about how I'm doing. Umm, even when I'm doing dumb stuff. And, so that's a big deal.

R: Right. She doesn't criticize you for doing that and sort of worry about the other people. She's worried out you.

P: Right. Mm mm.

R: Awesome. Thanks.
P: Yeah. (sniffle) I always cry when I talk about people being nice to me, so... just so you know.

(laughter)

R: Yeah and I’m just letting that happen. Is that OK?

P: Yeah, of course!
R: Like I don’t, I don’t want to get up in your business with that.

P: No. You don’t need to take care of me. I am fine. I just thought I’d let you know, for future reference that, as I’m tearing up, that’s why. It’s pretty messed up, but true.

R: I mean, and I, in this process of research interviewing, I’m not able to be as organic as I would be normally, too. So, rest assured that I am wanting to, umm, reflect and validate more than I am.

P: It’s actually way better that you don’t cause then I’ll just do more, so it’s good to just pretend like it’s not happening.

R: Totally. I’m glad we’re on the same page, then. (laughter) So, this one I think, this one will be pretty easy probably to answer, but umm, tell me about a time where what you did with your counselor in the session influenced something outside the session in your life. Like where you really took it out into the world or you realized what happened in the session really changed something that affected your life.

P: (deep breath) I mean, I can’t think of anything off the top of my head, like, super specifically. But I think I often leave sessions with [current practitioner] thinking about things. Like one of my favorite things about being in therapy with her is that she always has a new perspective. Like, I think that I’ve been living with my own perspectives for so long and they are sort of this ingrained thing that, like, I know that I’m this way because of these reasons. And, whenever we talk about something, she always says, but what about this thing? And I’m like, oh, yeah. That could be a thing! That’s like totally outside of anything that I’ve been able to, like, conceive of cause I’m so stuck in my own pattern of, like, what’s going on. Umm, and so that’s been incredibly helpful and I think that I take it out into my life all the time. New things that I’m like, oh- I don’t have to worry about that anymore. This is a new way to think about something.

R: And there was like this open, like this motion you did with your hands. It was like, it’s almost like I got the sense that when she does that it opens up room for you. Does that sound true?

P: Yeah, I think that it opens up the world for me. Like I just don’t even, I’ve been, I’m super analytical and self-analytical and, because I always want to find answers, and so I think that I’ve been living with all these answers for all these years that I’ve invented. And, so to have
someone that gets me point out that there’s a trillion other things that could be possible is world opening for me, for sure, for me.

R: Yeah. Thanks. Umm, how does [current practitioner] respond to you when your powerful as the client? Like, when you do express strong opinions or you disagree or you push back or... you know? You resist.

P: Umm, well I guess I think of that as two different things.
R: Sure. Tell me.

P: I think that being powerful in myself, umm, or being powerful about an idea, to me, I guess, is different than pushing back against something that she might have brought up or said.

R: Totally.

P: So, how she responds to me when I’m really, uh, passionate about something or have a really strong opinion or, umm... specifically I can think of, umm, throughout the relationship that we’ve had I’ve sort of come to this realization that I’m really passionate about body positivity and acceptance and working on that for myself. And [current practitioner] has been so incredibly, like, not just supportive of it, but, like, really appreciative of it I think from a personal level where she feels like I inspire her sometimes and that’s a pretty amazing feeling. You know, to come into session and say this week I was thinking about these things and to have her, you know, specifically recognize that, like, wow that’s an amazing thing and I’m so glad that I get to know that, you know. So, that’s pretty empowering for sure.

R: Totally.

P: And, umm, gosh... in terms of pushing back, I think that dynamic most occurs when I’m being defensive and she’s trying to get me to get out of that defensive mode and sort of see what’s underneath that. Umm, and she, she’ll push pretty hard. And I think sometimes that is... (deep breath), although I guess that’s not really a part of, I don’t know if that’s a place of power, per se, um...

R: You don’t have to analyze it, but I think just, you can just tell me...

P: Well, I don’t have to, but I will.

(laughter)

R: Fair enough. Fair enough. Umm, I guess I was just wanting to support you in saying more about the pushing pretty hard.

P: Umm, I think... I think she always appreciates my opinions and what I have to say. But I think the reason I go to her is because she does push me past things that are hard and
doesn’t let me stay in that grumpy toddler stage and move on to the, like, grown up oh, I’m having a reaction to this, let’s look at what that means. Umm, and then in terms of, like, I don’t think we’ve ever... well, I guess we have disagreed on some stuff, but usually we just agree to disagree.

R: Mm hmm. Which is a fabulous solution.

P: Yeah.

R: Can you think of anything that you’ve agreed to disagree about?

P: Umm, I think we agree to disagree about, umm, I have a real problem with the world and the way that it works and, uh, [current practitioner] really wants me to embrace this idea of faith. And I am very reluctant to accept that I can just trust that things will be OK. So we’ve had a lot of discussions about faith and what that means. But, we’ve definitely had to walk away from some stuff. And, also, I’m very grumpy and I want everything to go my way. And I want the world to be happy and loving all the time. And [current practitioner] sees a lot of, what’s the word that I want, umm, I can only think of benefit right now, to suffering and I disagree heartily. I think everyone should be happy all the time and not have to suffer at all. I know it’s not real, but that’s how I feel. So that’s definitely an agree to disagree thing so far.

R: And you’re smiling about it, which means it probably has that vibe in the session sometimes where you’re like, mm hmm, yup. You’re doing you’re thing and I’m doing mine.

P: Pretty much. Yes.

R: Right. And there’s almost, like a playful agreement that like...

P: Yeah, I think that, uh... just I’m just having this thought right now, that I think playfulness and laughter are huge things in my life and to find someone in a power position that’s able to make that part of the situation, umm, allows me to feel more comfortable in that situation for sure.

R: The next question is about needs. So, describing a situation where your needs were not being met by a counselor.

P: OK. Can I talk about the horrible experience I had this winter? (laughter)

R: Yes. Please, I welcome you.

P: So, umm, this wasn’t [current practitioner] or my other counselor, it was just a one time visit that I went to [counseling center at local university] and, umm, as I mentioned I was having this really bad bout with anxiety this winter. And, quite honestly I was definitely drug seeking. Like, at that particular moment, I was like I just need something to be able to go to class and do all this stuff. And Oregon has become, like, very strict about
benzodiazepines because people are such drug seekers and all this stuff, so it’s like almost impossible if you don’t already have a prescriber to get them. And I didn’t at the time. And [current practitioner]’s person had like retired or moved or whatever. And, so it was like weeks of navigating the whole system of trying to like find somebody that could prescribe that I could go see that took one of my insurances and all this stuff. So I finally went to [counseling center at local university] because I looked on the website and they were like, it said that they had psychiatrists and I was like oh, great! I can like, go see a psychiatrist and get some meds to, like, get me through till cause I had had, I finally made this appointment to see somebody for long term care. So I went in for I guess what they call, like, an emergency or… counseling session. And this woman was just so cold and, like, unresponsive. And I was, and I definitely had a lot invested in this session because I was, like, finally I can go somewhere and somebody’s gonna help me and, like, I took the bus down there, which was a big deal at the time for me. Like, just getting there and getting home was, like, a struggle for me, and so. And, like, just sitting in that chair and just being able to see myself from the outside and being like, I can’t imagine seeing me in this situation as a counselor and not being more helpful or compassionate or something. Because I was so defeated and I was so sad and so scared and so, like, so everything. And she was just like, OK, well I just want to tell you that this is what this session is and we can’t really do anything for you today and here’s a thing on breathing and here’s a list of people that you could go see that take your insurance. And I was just like, and I was like so I can’t see if a… and they were like, no psychiatrists are only for the people who are already being seen here. And, I don’t know. I just felt so powerless in that situation and like I didn’t feel like I; and I was so angry. Like I wanted to yell at her and be like, you should change that on the website because it’s really unclear and it makes it seem like people can get this service when they can’t and I want to make a complaint about you and, you now, all this stuff. But I was just so defeated in that moment I didn’t feel like I could anything. And I’ve never had anybody, umm, in this field be so sterile. And it was just a really weird experience for me. And I was like, and you’re working at a student health, like it seems like you would have some sort of… it was just really bizarre. And, so yeah. That was definitely my most unempowered interaction with a health care professional that I’ve ever had for sure.

R: Totally. And that’s, there were two pieces to that. The way that she was and then that policy that was a structural barrier to you getting what you needed which was medication services. And I’m interested in those structures and how they impact us too. So, I’m just wanting to validate that that’s a thing. Like, that those policies exist. They are around. And it sounds like it would’ve been beautiful for you to continue to see your counselor and just get med services there. And it sounds like it was really hard to, like, navigate that.

P: Totally.

R: Like it wasn’t easy to just be like here is my insurance and you’re a prescriber.

P: Yeah. It was incredibly difficult.

R: And you are a super smart woman, you know? So, that’s intense. Yeah. They don’t make it easy.
P: Mm hmm. No. And like I totally recognize within that particular interaction like I was like clearly they have a policy and I think that the; something that was very clear to me during this whole thing and trying to get meds and trying to get help, was like it’s really been reduced down to if you are trying to kill yourself then you can get a lot of services, but if you’re trying to stay alive and be active in your life it is very hard to get services, which was a very profound thing for me to think about. Like I was like, no I actually want to live and I want to get back to my life but I can’t do that right now, so if you could please help me that would be really, really great.

R: Another quotable moment right there.

(P: laughter)

R: Do you feel like, you’ve talked about a lot of important and complex moments with [current practitioner] and with the other person, but was there a time where your needs were really being met by your counselor where you can just think back and be like, wow. That just saved my butt.

P: (long pause) Yeah, I think a lot. I mean, I, like I said, I haven’t had a lot of strong parenting in my life and so in my relationship with [current practitioner] all the time is, maybe more than it should, meets my needs. You know, like, I think she goes above and beyond and I’ve been really touched and moved by how much she’s been there for me. And, so, yeah, constantly. I feel like beyond my needs are being met by that relationship.

R: And what is the, you’re experience of the above and beyond? What makes you feel the above and beyond feeling?

P: I don’t want to get her in trouble!

R: Well, no! You would never get her in trouble for a number of reasons.

(P: laughter)

P: She came to my house... I’m just kidding. Umm, times when I’ve been really, like this winter when I was having a lot of anxiety like she will text with me outside of session. Umm, and if she knows something is happening in my life, like an interview or a doctor appointment or anything, she’s like let me know how it goes. Umm, and she’ll just check in with me and see how things are going. And that was really, actually really a lifesaver for me this winter when I was literally not leaving my house, you know. And being pretty freaked out about what was going on, umm, psychologically with myself. And it was really comforting to have her, to know that she was there. And that she was on my side and that she wants to know what’s going on with me. So, yeah, it’s definitely this very motherly role for me and that is probably meeting needs that I don’t even know that I have. Or have allowed myself to believe that I need.
R: Yeah. And there is something, there’s something about that going above and beyond that, that sounds like it feels, like... it’s interesting. You were kind of joking about getting her in trouble. It’s interesting because that feels so appropriate, right?

P: Right.

R: But it’s like we’re all so aware that there’s these limitations to these relationships and I’m sure we’ll get into more complex things as the study evolves, you know?

P: Yeah.

R: But, that’s just, that’s just interesting because it seems like exactly what you need and yet, there’s a tension there. So, I’m just thinking about that.

P: Well, I think that I, umm, bring an interesting perspective also because I’m studying to be a counselor and so I’m aware, more consciously, of like the dynamic that’s happening or things that might be happening from her perspective, you know, professionally. Umm, or that I know that she’s not supposed to do certain things or, you know, like ethical things or whatever. And, so I think...

R: But where do we get those, this is getting off topic, but I’m very curious about where we get those ideas, but that’s a different study.

P: But, yes, I totally agree. It’s a really interesting thing to think about. You know, where do we decide where the boundaries are going to be, especially in taking care of people.

R: Right, yeah. I have a question. Umm, I might have one or two follow-ups, but yeah, describe a time where you got to make the choices about what happened in treatment.

P: I don’t know. Have I been making choices or has she been steering it the whole time? I don’t know.

(laughter)

P: That’s exactly how it feels sometimes. Umm, I think especially with [current practitioner]. I’ve been so gung ho about this process that there have been times where, like, I’ve come into session with a list of things that I want to talk about. Umm, it’s interesting because now that I’m not in school I think I’m thinking less, but I used to come in very, like, aware of things that I wanted to talk about. Because, you know, something I read sparked something about my own experience or something that I wanted to work on myself or I was having, umm, relationship stuff with people that I wanted to bring up. I just started noticing it would happen, I go every 2 weeks now, so things would happen or occur to me on the off week. So, I started writing stuff down so that I could come in, umm... and I think [current practitioner] is pretty good about letting me, or at least letting me feel like I’m steering the session if that’s what I feel like I need to do. I rarely come in and don’t have like eight different things to talk about. And, sometimes, this is actually a frustrating thing
for me, is that sometimes the sort of parent dynamic comes up and she will help with these sort of administrative things, like oh we need to deal with your application to graduate school or we need to talk about dealing with your health insurance or whatever. And we’ll spend so much time talking about it that we don’t end up, like, having time to talk about the things that I wanted to talk about in the session because it just organically falls out that way. But, it’s interesting to me that that happens.

R: Yeah. It sounds like you’re not so sure if that’s how you want to spend you’re time.

P: Right. And I don’t think that I’ve been, I mean, I want the information and I’m glad that she’s helping, but I think I haven’t been, I’m just now thinking about it, in those moments I don’t think I have really, with myself even, been like I need to say that I don’t want to talk about this anymore. And move on to things that I really want to talk about. Yeah. Or that it even occurred to me that I could do that.

R: Yeah. And I think that that’s the really rad thing about us talking about power in the therapeutic relationship together over this course of time is... we’re changing things, maybe! Or whatever. Or not. But, it’s a process. So, I appreciate you allowing yourself to, like, just have spontaneous thoughts about it. You know?

P: Yeah.

R: Yeah. Anything that you wish I would have asked you that I didn’t or topic you wish I would have covered?

P: (long pause) Not that I can think of off the top of my head. I might think about it later. If I do, I’ll write it down.

R: Umm. Yeah. I do want to go back to one thing; I’m like debating. You mentioned this idea of, umm, that you’re smart and sarcastic and not professional. You know, like, which hello, I can relate. Umm, and how do you feel like... OK, you mentioned those things and because of those things sometimes it’s easy for me to get away with things that you haven’t been able to get away with with [current practitioner], but I think I’m thinking about, umm, the power being, like, being not as professional as other people and maybe wanting a counselor isn’t as... that’s not the right word, not professional, but like that’s able to meet you somewhere in that place of, like, we’re... I’m not in my suit and, you know, or whatever. So, I don’t even know if I have a question, but I kind of feel curious about that dynamic of power with you and [current practitioner].

P: I think that that, I think to me that levels the power. Umm... yeah. Because she feels like my kind of person. You know, like, she was wearing a hoody the first time I met her, and jeans. And that was like, oh, this is a person that like... I think it’s also this relatable thing, where if I talk about the things that are going on with me, I feel like this person can relate to them. Whereas, you know, a 72 year old dude that sits in a leather chair wearing a suit and makes a certain amount of money every year, and I don’t know how much money
[current practitioner] makes, umm, I'm not gonna feel as relatable to, And I don’t think that I would want to build a relationship with them.

R: Right, yeah. Thanks for letting me, like, messily spew out that question.
R: Brief into to power.....first question.....

I’ve been in counseling for the past 10 years, I’d say. And, I think that has, the relationships with different counselors has progressed over that period time as I’ve gained a better understanding of the kind of relationship with a therapist that would be most beneficial to me. Power is one of those things that has evolved over time in the selection that I’ve made of a therapist or my coming to better understand what works well for me and what doesn’t. First therapy experience was directly before and after a hospitalization in 2005, in a university setting. I was a lot younger at the time, the therapists at that point in time were a bit more paternalistic that the ones since then. I don’t know if that is because I was at a point of more crisis and in need of some pretty intensive mental health services so there was a lot of, what I felt at the time, liberties taken for my own behalf on the part of the mental health professional. The therapist at that point of time had strongly influenced me to take a leave of absence form school and strongly advocated to the administration for me to leave. I signed a voluntary leave of absence with the understanding that it would be in my best interest to sign it voluntarily. I did that and then when I got back to (uhome state) I went into the emergency room which was also at the suggestion of my MHP from school, that that would be the fast track to get back to school. I didn’t necessarily realize that going into the emergency room meant that I would be hospitalized because of the questions they were asking, like safety check kinds of things...

R: I’m getting the sense that this is not fully voluntary....if you go to the ER, this is what they might ask you.

Right, that there is a possibility of going into the hospital, there was no discussion of that. it was go to the ER and you’ll get a psych eval which you need to be able to come back to school. I didn’t want to leave school at the time but it seemed like the only option that was available to me. After being hospitalized that kind of left me a little wary of MHPs and what I shared with them.

R: Sure

P: At that point also during that hospitalization there was a point where my parents had come in to visit me and one of the MHP’s in the hospital shared, with my parents without telling me ahead of time, that they were going to let my parents know I had been engaging in self-harm behavior. I was in the room with them when that happened and that was very uncomfortable. That early part of all of that, MH treatment, was a lot of feeling like I didn’t have much agency in the situation and there were a lot of decisions being made for me.

R: This thing you wanted to do which was school, was almost used as a way to encourage you to do these things that you didn’t even know what could happen, sounds like

P: Absolutely.
Did the therapist from school ever involved with your hospitalization, did that therapist communicate with the hospital?

I don’t remember. It might have been a situation where I signed an ROI. After I went into the hospital it seemed separate like it was a really separate thing from school and there wasn’t any connection or support in any kind of way, it was a really separate experience once I was home.

R: that sounds like it was your first experience and it sounds like things evolved from there and somehow you regained a sense of faith in the MH system. How did you do that?

I saw a number of different counselors since then. The points at which I’ve been through therapy, left and re-entered were usually times of crisis. I can make two other ones. One was when I was in school for social work in (city) and when back to therapy because I was feeling suicidal again and I had been off of medication that I had been on years before but decided I wasn’t going to take it because I didn’t think—it felt like it was something that was forced on me so there was this act of-- I’m not going to do that because you told me to do it.

R: You were rebelling against something you didn’t fully choose, sounds like.

P: Went back into counseling through school and then eventually started medication again and noticed some alleviation of symptoms that made me better able to engage with school, it made me trust that I could see actual results and they gave me a different type of medication at that time so that might have had something to do with it.

P: From there I chose a therapist from the community, it wasn’t through school, so that, being able to build that relationship with a therapist that it felt like I had agency in, being able to chose that, was really helpful. That therapist was validating of my past therapy experience so that I didn’t feel like I was a crazy person. So that really helped to get the ball back rolling. After that initial experience I just tried to avoid counseling that was through any of the schools that I had been going to because that left a bad taste in my mouth, I think because of how closely it was intertwined with potentially punitive measures at school and divorcing myself of those things and treating my mental health as something separate that was for me as opposed to connected to my academic experience was very helpful.

R: I’m taking some notes so I can circle back to some things. When you were in social work school, was there any relationship between your program and your mental, did the social work program know what was going on with your mental health and how do you feel like that was handled?

P: That environment was much more accepting and supportive of students doing what they needed to do for our own self care as it is wrapped into the program so that was a much more supportive environment for that. I didn’t disclose too much at that time because I wasn’t comfortable but not because the environment wouldn’t have been supportive.
(researcher clarified)

Professors within that school were much more likely to work with me with later deadlines, or if I was explaining what was going on, to a certain extent they were a lot more supportive which allowed me to engage with what I needed to with my MHP without the fear of repercussions.

R: what of the counselors stand out for you as super effective or not effective, clearly that first one—maybe not so great, does anyone else stand out?

P: Yes, my therapist that I have now and the therapist before, in particular, that’s when I started transitioning (gender transition). The therapist before this one was trans himself, which he disclosed, not off the bat but maybe a couple months into our sessions, in a way that he was relating, that showed me he was not judging feelings I was having and before that I didn’t feel necessarily feel comfortable discussing or even exploring any of the feelings about my gender I had before that for fear of not understanding or judgment or being labeled certain things that could have negative impacts—stigmas that follow you around.

R: That was a turning point—being able to come out and talk about gender. How did that counselor, having a similar identity and self-disclosing that, how did that impact you?

P: It made me feel so much more comfortable with myself and connection that for a very long time I didn’t feel that any of the MHP for a number of reasons were understanding, they would say the right things, the textbook things, especially, I’m not trained in counseling by any means but (I know) what empathetic listening looks like, hearing the thing that would strike me as ‘cookie cutter’ or that what I was feeling wasn’t really—there was no connection in that way. that was the first time that I felt I was really being heard and that made me that much more able to open up and get into some of the things that had really been troubling me which before that, there wasn’t space for that or I didn’t feel there was space for that.

R: There was something that told you there wasn’t space. Sounds like you sensed you would not be supported.

P: Yeah.

R: Your last two people really stand out to you, are there any other ways you would describe that counselor or the one you have now as far as the relationship you have?

P: A lot of it is that it doesn’t feel like there is a right way to go about things and that is something both of them have really put out there so that I’m not—for myself, I’m often hyper-worried about doing the wrong thing—that within the a therapy session is a really
big blockade for me to really get to what is going on if I’m worried if there will be judgement for or approval or disapproval. The idea that there isn’t a right way and that...that also I get to make decision for myself and they are just there to facilitate my process as opposed to telling me or advising me from their own bias, that support is what has made a big difference.

R: When you were first talking about your journey, you talked about you figuring out what kind of relationship would be more right for you, you were being told there is a right way to go about dealing with your mental health while you are getting your BA and it wasn’t the right way for you. You have a pretty amazing ability to still have faith in this profession....

P: It’s like a lot of people talk about the process of finding a therapist that you click with and that’s something that I tried to really keep trying at, there were definitely points where I was going to give up on therapy b/c I thought it was going to be more of the same bullshit. I think finding people that I found to be really authentic reinvigorated my sense of-- faith in the profession, if that makes sense.

R: Thanks for sharing, I really appreciate it so much. We’re already talking about the second question---the power dynamic—that is threaded through what we’ve talked about.

P: Power in general is something that I pay a lot of attention to outside of a therapy session with like how I’m interacting in the world and what places I’m holding more privilege or power or place other people are as well. It comes out or its something that I’m paying attention to in a therapy session a lot more especially having had the experience of not feeling like I’ve been fully able to get what I should be able to get out of it and that’s a new thing, too, I guess, the last thing I said—changing to and idea that I can get something out of it and I have power as a client to make choices to see a professional or not for my own mental health over the course of time I’ve been able to gain that sense of not....entitlement- that’s not the right word but I guess that is the right word.you should be able to come to a session and get something from it. It’s not this thing that you have to do to say that you are checking boxes to say you are taking care of yourself....thinking of a session like that or an interaction with a therapist has been more of a leveling of what the power differential had been in the past and thinking of it as working through things together as opposed to saying things out there and kind of wondering what they are thinking or how they are going to fix me or solve whatever problem I have. There isn’t a problem to solve you are sort of working through your stuff together.

R: There is a way that the more leveling therapists do that, can you think of when how the power dynamic has been more level or equal, how MHP’s have made you feel that or how its occurred?

IN particular, with The past two therapists, their approach in our initial meeting is such that they put everything out there from what their modality is or how they approach things and they were very transparent from the get go about what that looks like for them and I don’t know if that is a reflection of being a client for a number of years to where the language makes sense or that I know what to look for or that just these therapists in
particular have been more transparent that the other ones, I don’t know if the other therapists were explaining what their perspective was but I wasn’t getting what that meant or if they weren’t even doing that. That’s really helpful because you get an idea off the bat of where somebody is coming from, and then, to me, that makes me feel more inclined to engage given that they are saying okay I want this to be a-- not an issue of I’m telling you what’s going on, when they state outright that its about working through this in that kind of level, then I feel more agency to be able to, if I were to catch something that made me feel disempowered, that I would be more likely to say something or speak up about it. Before that I would assume that however it was happening was how it had to happen.

R: There is an explicit expression of transparency or an invitation to be part of the process is different. Describe a time where you wanted to bring something up in therapy and either could or couldn't---maybe it’s about your life or about the TR itself.

P: I’m trying to think….with past therapists, in terms of the TR, not being able to express that I wasn’t finding the sessions fulfilling or that I didn’t feel like I was making any progress, the way that I would handle that is by coming in and acting like I was fine so the therapist would eventually—which is also what did happen--would say that they didn’t think we need to have sessions anymore so then I would just leave and then not have to have any conflict with them or have to say something which I didn’t feel comfortable saying, “well I’m just not getting what I need out of this or I don’t feel like I’m making progress,” so I tried to facilitated what I thought they wanted to see, which was not having anymore indicators of depression or anxiety, or whatever it was that I thought they were trying to fix, thinking there was something to wrap up neatly and be free to go and get out of that situation or be done with therapy completely or try to find someone else.

R: to me you are an expert as I ask this question—I’m interested in this experience

I’m wondering as someone who has experience that or thought about, what do you think they could have done to make it easier for you to say something.

P: Yeah, I think that, I don’t know if that is in part because of types of therapists they were more CBT or DBT or very behavioral focused.. I think what could have been helpful is trying to frame therapy as not trying to fix certain things...that gives the idea that there is an end game as opposed to thinking about as a life long process of just self-care, if that was something they kind of were able to sense I was feeling, I felt maybe understood my personality or where I was coming from more they would be able to get that I would be trying to either please them or do the “right thing” and if it had been expressed that there wasn’t that, there wasn’t a goal necessarily, and I think in particular my current therapist is very good at putting out there that there aren’t those things, there isn’t a goal, there is nothing to fix. That makes me feel much more comfortable, one being able to speak to her frankly and two, not feeling like I have to pretend that something is going well that they are doing what they need to be doing.

R: You don’t have to make them feel good about what they are doing...
P: Right. Yeah, absolutely.

R: Just one more Q about that, did the other therapists besides your last two, did they ever ask you, how are things going?

P: No. Laughter.

R: What do you think about that?

P: Thinking about it now, it’s pretty frustrating b/c it seems like trying to open that conversation up or just checking in, even if they thought things were going swimmingly, it could have at least opened the door up to have a conversation where we could have at least tried to have that kind of communication. To not check in on that seems kind of, I don’t know, like either prideful on their part or making a lot of assumptions about the work that they think that they must be doing, which is, it’s not going to make me feel like really open talking if they have that kind of energy, I guess. It brings out all of the rebellion side of me, that’s like, “oh really, okay, whatever, I’m done with you.” That’s not the point of therapy and that is definitely what I was going thorough.

R: You are bringing up a super good point if we don’t challenge our own expertise, I really appreciate your reflections on that.

R: Was there a time where you brought something up and it went well or....

P: With regards to the TR???? Or??

R: Or something you really, really wanted to tell the person, hard to bring up.

P: With my current therapist, one of the things we talked about on the get go or what I heard from her was that spirituality as being a part of the things that she sees as part of holistic care and I... that’s...at the time, and, I’m changing a bit now but that was not my jam at all. She was telling me that in the first session and I remember thinking this is not gonna work. And having this moment of maybe I’m not gonna come back, this will be the only session and then I’m done. Something about the openness she put out there um, allowed me to be able to say, listen I think spirituality is bullshit and was really frank with it and we had this conversation where she like really heard what I was saying. She kind of let me have my little rant about it. Since then were were able to come back to it and talk about it in ways that have really shifted pre-conceived ideas about that and we’ve been able to work through what, why I feel that way about these things. I think previously, I think with others therapists if they would have said that I wouldn’t have said anything or rolled my eyes internally...I was able to bring that up to her because of how approachable she is as a therapist.
There was counterbalance, that zinged you but it made you feel like you could bring it up. You took a risk there and you made a decision to take that risk. How did you make that decision?

P: I think that in our beginning sessions, her explaining that socially conscious counseling as being this part of her and also divulging things about her training about social justice Buddhism or whatever the right way to say that is, I could see we had similar ways of seeing the world so we could connect on the idea that her version of spiritually wasn’t like “shits rainbows” it’s not that but it acknowledges pain and suffering, being able to have some common ground then, I felt better about pushing back because we had things we agreed on and we had a mutual respect of opinion.

R: Enough common ground that if I push back, she'll get it...

P: And will be receptive enough to have a conversations about it and that she wouldn’t be dismissive of my feelings even if she agreed or not.

R: This next questions is about becoming aware of influence...

P: Sure, um, I think I can continue on more of what I was talking about—the spirituality piece. I came into sessions having just gotten out of Intensive Outpatient, and one of the things that was really hard for me at the time to sit with at the time was all of the injustice and all of the big, structural problems with the world that don’t seem like they are able to change even though I’m trying to work towards it but become very overwhelming, one of the things we would talk about is having compassion for individuals, in this idea of spirituality, just being able to kind of have compassion for people without saying it’s okay the world is messed up that these moments you have with individual people can be part of this bigger thing that makes you feel at peace which doesn’t negate the suffering and pain that exists and so that there is this balance of being able to hold both things and that was a really big thing for me to be able to acknowledge because I was super angsty and angry all the time, um, that I would not have been able to get to had I not been able to push back initially and even open up the conversation about what spirituality was which I wouldn’t have been able to do if she wasn’t open for me to be able to do. I wouldn't have had that kind of breakthrough, whatever you would call it,had she not allowed for me to have space to engage with her initially.

R: Those conversations in therapy are impacting your life philosophy or the way you see the world, that has influence. You alluded to the fact that there were decision made with a MHP that influenced your life in not so good ways. You mentioned meds, I’m curious what you think negative impacts may have been outside your life with any of the MHP's you worked with.

P: I think feeling like, that I wasn’t necessarily being heard in earlier counseling sessions translated into a lot of internal frustration that I was always going to feel whatever the
vague form of depression I was feeling or I was always going to feel misunderstood or unhappy ...(participant takes break to deal with funky contact lens)

P: Return... I think it really exacerbated the symptoms of depression when you feel that sense of hopelessness which if you are going to counseling and counseling is making you feel worse, almost, or it like you must really be fucked up because that’s not even helping. I think that sent me down a not great path for a long time. Yeah. (several seconds of silence). That’s all I got.

R: that’s enough. How has a counselor responded when you are powerful ...the spirituality example is one, if there are any others.

P: several seconds of silence. It’s interesting because—the pushing back thing is much newer. It wouldn’t happen overtly in other sessions. I wouldn’t express how I was feeling. (several seconds of silence). Well, I suppose in a general sense, I can’t think of many concrete examples in particular with my current therapist, that kind of pushing back or...using power in the session was almost welcomed and celebrated as opposed to forcefully met back, I guess. So, or acknowledged as valid feelings but maybe if it was—the power that was being asserted was about things that would have negative impacts for myself, there would be a reframe push back, if it was something that was more beneficial or agency... in ways that were therapeutic then there was a differentiation there...

R: You are beautifully nailing something subtle here...

P: If it is power that is positive for myself then that is welcomed and fostered and acknowledged. If it is coming from a space that is not healthy-healthy isn’t the right work, a negative tape or something that isn’t beneficial, then the push back, I guess, the therapist reaction is—-I’m talking this through right now—becomes client centered, the response is based on what is going to be based on what is the best thing for me, it doesn’t outwardly appear to be a personality or a set way of the therapist they are able to mold their reactions to create the best reactions for me or the client, in my experience.

R: No matter what you’re expressing or seeing, a good MHP is going to be able to use their power in a positive way to help you.

P: Yes, absolutely!

R: I think you’ve alluded to this a lot, so I don’t want you to feel like you have repeat anything but if you have anything more to say about this, I’d love to hear it (needs not being met Q) you are weaving that into your story of these therapists. It’s important for me to help other clinician see how their client’s needs aren’t being met.

P: I guess one of the things, I imagine, this becomes something that you cultivate as a clinician over time, knowing when to push more or prod more about things that might need to get talked about, that there is a level of discomfort about, like trauma or things that are uncomfortable about their subject or nature. If I had been made to feel more comfortable or
pushed to ask more questions to try to get---maybe I would have been able to open up even thought i didn’t feel super comfortable with it—what that that line is, you want a client to feel comfortable but also knowing what their, within the boundaries of what the set forth but also being able to draw more out that maybe would have been helpful. I don’t know if I answers your question

R: What you just said makes me wonder if even though you aren’t feeling comfortable in a TR, these therapists that weren’t effective could have turned it around by asking you a question, or giving you a prompt or....they could have turned it around.

P: I think that’s how I felt. I think they could’ve. It’s something that I have had to think about myself over time, for myself, don’t be so stubborn as to not....putting it out there ahead of time, if I’m shutting down or all of a sudden if I look like this or this, this means this. I’ll just say that to you ahead of time.

R: Almost preparing them to give them some clues.

P: Or working on what the boundaries are so you’ve agreed ahead of time for them to push on certain things. So maybe if that conversation was to happen, it wouldn’t be so—you’d be more receptive in the moment because you’d know there is still understanding and safety within the space because it’s something you agreed upon before hand. With past therapists, it was almost a frustration of—how could not figure this out? So I’m not gonna- you could turn this around---if you just throw me anything, I’ll be back engaged if not, it’s like no, you’re not trying hard enough, maybe I’ve felt in the past.

Thanks!

R: This is final questions and I might have another follow-up...Choice in tx Q.

P: My current therapist now, it’s almost completely self-directed which is incredibly empowering because it took me a little bit to get used to us staring at each other at the beginning of session—that has me feeling much, much more empowered that there is no agenda but it’s also balanced enough, to where, not enough structure can make me feel like I’m not really sure what I’m supposed to be doing and I think she is very good about occasionally checking in with me, would it be okay with you if we talked about this today, I usually want it very much to be whatever you want to talk about and if you have other things to talk about, we can, I thought this might help me get a better idea of x, which might help our relationship. So I think that balance---if it is too far in the other direction it can feel like—what am I doing here.

R: It sounds like that consent is helpful, can we talk about this---maybe it’s a leading question, it sounds like your counselor does that thing where there are occasions where you sit there at stare at each other, I’m gonna throw out there this idea that if this person wasn’t so transparent and authentic then that would be not awesome.
P: Yeah, for real! When I first started and was trying to see if I could get through the awkwardness of it almost, all of the transparent things she said to me made me like, okay, this is a little bit different but it isn’t bad, b/c I trust this person and so we’re gonna see how it goes. This current therapy is far different than anything I’ve ever experienced and like, at the outset I knew it was way outside my comfort zone but I trusted the space that was created so I was able to do it and it has been the most beneficial therapy I’ve had. I’m not someone who would generally jump into that. It’s very much what the therapist created, that allowed me to do that.

R: This add on question I have that has evolved over the course of us talking, you’ve talked about having conversations with your counselor about social justice and you have an awareness of power and privilege, what do you think about going to MHP’s that have more in common with you or are more aligned, I’m imagining you with your current person and with that university counselor back in the day and I’m imagining that’s a totally different vibe…..

P: I think there is something, going in to the last two therapists, one of the things I knew was going to be important to me was to ask about what their— their philosophy or theory that grounds… their practice… I knew it was going to have to be somebody that was anti-oppressive feminist lens or it wouldn’t work because I needed for myself to have that to know that we were coming from that same place or…. it wouldn’t work because exactly what I’m thinking of… the really stale--with that you know their, they have the understanding of what power looks like and how that impacts the interactions between two people and on a structure level, too. And given the structural kind of stuff that I want to talk about Or that bothers me, it all about that so I needed my therapist to be similar enough that they got it and I didn’t have to explain all of the things...

R: I relate to that as a client.

R: When you talk about feminist and anti-oppressive frameworks, it makes me think about how important that would be if you’re really going to be yourself and get support with your transition, I know that is not the only part of your life and experience, Joe Schmoe at the university counseling center is not gonna feel safe.

P: Laughing, yes...

Yeah absolutely and a big thing this time around is very much for me about what gender in society and what my authentic experience of that is and in combination of what it looks like in levels of power and privilege in the ways we walk around in the world. I needed to know that the therapist I would be speaking to got that… had that understanding b/c these were the things I was grappling with, I didn’t want to talk with someone is just, kind of, who thinks there is one story of what transitioning is and it looks like this, that’s not gonna work.
R: I might have to quote you on that.  P: Laughing.

Do you have anything else you want to share with me or did I stir up anything you didn’t get to say?

Silence.

P: I’m thinking a little bit about if you’re struggling with sex orientation and gender—these issues that are very internal and personal but also have reflection in society, you have your personal struggle but also, you see the way that’s bigger too, trying to figure out how you fit into that, having a therapist that has that understanding that allows you to speak about it, especially for myself, those being important things, the kind of political, not political but social like lens alignment is important to feel like you can say things and be heard.

R: Yeah, that personal experience is connected to these larger power structures....

P: Yeah. Silence.

R: I’m gonna end the interview there....
Round One Participant #7
53:11

P: OK. Do you need any of that in the?

R: No. None of it. So, yeah, describing a relationship with past or current. And a lot of people have just been sharing too their whole, like, just a brief overview of here was my first therapist and here was my second. And so you can do whatever you want.

P: OK, ok. Cool.

R: And I ‘m going to take some notes to probably like come back to some stuff.

P: OK, great. Umm, I have been in therapy now, I think next week is a year. And this is the first time I’ve ever done therapy in my whole life.

R: Awesome.

P: So, it’s pretty dramatic. Umm, it’s, umm... so I started last summer and I had just written a musical. And then I was trying to like, I sort of like left the world a little bit and, like, sort of gone on a creative walkabout and had this whole sort of hermiting experience and this sort of transformative experience. And then coming back into the world was, like, a little bumpy for me and I was like, I need a little... I need some help here, like figuring out how to like re-integrate myself sort of back into the world and sort of some other stuff. So, umm... so, yeah that was sort of the moment that, umm... I was ready to sort of like reach out and try... try it. I had done a lot of like, more like co-counseling and stuff with friends or like sort of that kind of dynamic in the world but had never done this. So, it definitely like, umm... has been... yes. It’s taken... it’s, like... yeah. Ummm. OK.

R: You can mumble and ramble and think out loud as much as you want, you know?

P: Yeah, cool. Thank you.

R: Like, its totally... there’s no performance here. You probably perform in many elements of your life. You don’t have to do that in here. It’s all good.

P: (laughing) Cool. Thank you. Ummm, so I think, I mean the metaphor that, umm, my therapist uses for the dynamic, which I really like, is the idea that he’s a navigator and that I’m driving, you know? And that I’m sort of like... and I don’t know if he had like said that early on and I just didn’t, like, hear it? Or that it feels like in the last few months that metaphor sort of like sunk in or, like, oh OK. That sort of being new, when I was like so new to it, it’s sort of like any first you know? Where you’re like inherently feel like you have less power because you don’t know the landscape. You don’t know the rules. You don’t know the... where the lines are. You know? What’s expected, what’s... you know. All those sort of things. Yeah, so I feel like that metaphor really has [worked?] for me and, like, has been a helpful way to sort of negotiate the power dynamic of, like, OK you might give me direction,
you are gonna to give me directions or offer, like, I see this, or, you know, oh you’re doing this or whatever. But, ultimately, I’m driving, so I can be like, I don’t want to go that way. You know? Like, I disagree, you know. Or, oh cool, I hear that. I’m not gonna take the left right here, but maybe later I’ll take a left. Or, you know, whatever. Finding that balance. It’s been a really good, you know, power dynamic.

R: And it sounds like you’ve gotten more familiar with it as the year has gone on. Like, it’s been illuminated. Like, the map or something has been... it just sounds a little crisper or clearer.

P: Yeah. Definitely. Like, yeah. I’m definitely more comfortable in it and I definitely, like, less, like at the beginning I was really nervous like every session, you know? Especially the beginning, like right before going, you know? And, like, wanting to like pre-process everything. You know? Wanting to like have umm, a list of things... ehhh, I don’t know about write it down write it down, but bring like oh here are the things that I know this week that I know I want to talk about in therapy. And then to what degree of letting go of control of where it might go or the moments of, like, transition between concepts or ideas or... those are the... those are the hardest for me, I think, because those are the moments where... like, if I’m talking I sort of am retaining the power. And, once I’m not, then it’s like who’s in charge here? Are you gonna ask me a question? Am I gonna, like, think of something else? Are we gonna stay on this topic, are we gonna move? Those sort of moments have been a little, like that’s where I get more anxious, sharing the...

R: Totally. I might come back to that. There’s some super rich stuff there that, umm, seems really relevant and might just happen to come out in some of the other questions. Is there, besides like the beautiful metaphor of, like, navigator and driving, is there any other way you’d describe the relationship in general with your person? Like, how does it feel and how do you think about it?

P: Hmm. I think, I mean I think what’s hard, what’s challenging, especially initially, was like every single time was totally different you know? So I would sort of be, like, oh afterwards I’m gonna feel this way and then that was, like, wouldn’t be true the next time, you know? And so that was really hard of like... not knowing. Yeah, not knowing how it was gonna go or how... what kind of emotions I would be hitting or how that would feel afterwards, so, umm. But, I mean, taking a break from it has been interesting to, like, see the things. Like this is a longest I’ve gone without it since I started. So, this is like interesting of like having... like it’s sort of a release valve for me. Therapy is sort of like, like all the feelings and the things and then therapy sort of sssss (mimics sound like letting air out) You know, like, umm....

R: Yeah. Totally.

P: Get, get it out or get it, you know, like, and he helps sort of like... I’m in my brain a lot and not in the rest of me and not, like, leads with logic a lot and lead with, like, wanting to figure it all out. So, like he helps me to, like, come into my body and feel the feelings. So, like, being
away from it for a couple weeks was definitely challenging cause I had to, like, figure some of that out or, like, go through that on my own a little bit.

R: Yeah, and experience life without it—without the release valve.

P: Yeah, or like figure out how to replicate that by my own a little bit, too.

R: Totally. Umm. You’ve already spoken about this pretty, I mean, with the navigating kind of metaphor, but is there anything else you’d share about your experience of the power dynamic between you and your counselor?

P: I mean, I’m pretty... let’s see. I really like power dynamics like in my own life, in my own like, it’s part of my sexuality and my perversion as well. So, like it’s been interesting and I’ve always sort of had, like, crushes on teachers and crushes on authority figures and, you know. Umm, so that definitely has been interesting of, like, moments where I’ve sort of, like, given over power or been asking, like, can I do this or is it OK if I change topics or is it OK if I? And then, and then even in the moment feeling like oh I don’t need to ask that. But then, especially by his response as well, being like well, do you? What do you want to do? You know, like, he’s really consistent about, like, throwing that back into my court so that that doesn’t really work. So, then I sort of, I challenge myself in terms of like in the moment, not just in that room, but elsewhere, where am I giving up that power when it actually should be mine to hold.

R: Thank you so much. That is quotable chunk of information. Like, there’s so much in there. And how, how... so, one way you guys have played with that is through consent, kind of. Or, like, or lobbing that ball back to you. Like your counselor lobs it back to you. How else do you think power dynamics have impacted the work with your person? Are there any other ways that...

P: I mean there is a dynamic of, like gold stars. Of being like, you did good. And that is a power dynamic in the sense that, you know, ultimately he’s done all this work studying and he has this whole set of knowledge that I don’t have and that definitely, like, is a dynamic that won’t shift, right? You know, that’s the whole set up of it.

R: That’s that expertise piece.

P: There’s a reason that I’m wanting to have your opinion in the first place is cause you know stuff I don’t know. So that does sort of create a power dynamic inherently. Like, you know what the inside of brains do more than I do, but I know what the inside of my brain is doing more than you do, so we’re both sort of having our expertise. So, I’ve definitely come to it more of a, it sort of feels like a collaboration. You know, like working together on me figuring out these things and me sort of stepping into my power and, you know. But, yeah, I mean definitely, for me, him like... I’m an overachiever and I want gold stars. Like, I’m very like motivated to get the “hey good job”. That is something like, straight A student, like you know, all that stuff. So, knowing like I can sort of anticipate sometimes when I’m gonna get a gold star or be like there’s certain work that maybe I don’t necessarily wanna do or things
that I don’t maybe like really wanna talk about at all, but I know if I do, he’s probably gonna be like, whispering: you’re really courageous. You know?

(laughter)

R: I love it! Totally! And there’s a relationship there of, like, how that gold star almost motivates you to do things that are hard. Right? It’s not like your not just doing it to get props, but it’s actually like a decision to be like: if I talk about this or I do this, my person will be like “good job”.

P: Yeah. And that feels good, you know? And sometimes that outweighs how hard it was and sometimes it doesn’t. But, you know, it does help move it forward and make me like want to dig a little deeper to like... yeah. Or him like... uhhh... yeah, like recently I, well I’ve had a crush on him from pretty much the beginning. And then it was like it got to a point where it was really like over... it was too much. It was the focus of it more than felt good and I was like trying on my end to, like, I’m like I do not want to tell him this. I do not want to talk about this. This is very uncomfortable. And, like, uhhh... and then like end with this—make him uncomfortable and then being like I’m not supposed to care. Like, that dynamic too; I’m not supposed to care what he’s feeling or thinking or, you know? Like it’s supposed to be this, you know... but then we’re human, so...

R: Yeah. All these worries or all these shoulds, but yet it’s still there.

P: Yeah. And I was like, OK, so... I mean at that point I even like asked (a friend, person’s name), I was like, is this gonna be the worst thing... like, can I talk about this? You know, not knowing the rules quite even, of like is that gonna be, like, will I ruin therapy or will I, like, somehow damage the relationship if I bring that in. You know? And, umm, she was like you know, I think that if he’s on his shit he’ll be ok, you know? Like, he’ll be able to handle it—he’ll be able to hang. And I was like, alright. So, you know, like I made the decision that I would talk about it at some point in that, you know, when it like sort of naturally whatever. So, then a few weeks later was like, alright, and I talked about it and it was really uncomfortable for me, but he was like you’re very courageous for bringing this in here and talking about it and it was really good. Umm, and then I was able to figure out a lot of stuff around my own, like, trying to get gold stars and like looking to people who give me gold stars for that approval or for that, you know, love or for that stuff in terms of how I was raised. So, I feel like I needed to have gone through there so that I could sort of get it out and work through it. But, umm, yeah.

R: It’s... I’m so glad you said this because I think it’s something that, like, happens more often than we’re allowed to talk about, right? And, so I’m gonna give you a gold star for talking about it.

(laughter)

R: So, I’m reinforcing the dynamic, but I’m doing that willingly. Umm...
P: But, I mean, it’s not... I mean, again, the power dynamic can be a really positive thing that like reinforces doing work that’s hard and, like...

R: Exactly. And I’m really getting that from you today. It’s a cool concept for me to take into my research. Umm, I wanna, if it’s OK for me to ask more about when you actually disclosed the crush. Is it OK for me to ask more?

P: Yeah.

R: How do you feel like... it sounds like, from what you just told me, that it didn’t stay too much in the realm about you and this other person, it really ended up being about your work and your therapy and, like, your history, you know and it didn’t stay in that space of like, this is just about us. And, so, umm... I guess that brings me to a curiosity about how your counselor responded initially. Was it the courageous? Like, they gave you the gold stars? And then how did you end up exploring the crush?

P: Umm... yeah, yeah, I mean mostly... it’s funny cause like I was like trying to think back on like what did I even say and I like can’t quite remember. Like, I kind of was like, it was... I had been like rehearse; not rehearsing it, but you know like figuring out where... you know, there’s always a degree of like what I’m going to share and what I’m not going to share. And that’s a decision that I make and that’s also something that we negotiate in therapy, right? So, like, you might ask me, like someone might ask me a question, like following up or wanting to go into an area that feels even more vulnerable and I can like respond or I can’t. Like, that’s, you know, like or I can decide to follow that or... like, I think it’s not even, it doesn’t even necessarily like feel like a decision, like a conscious decision, like it’s more of like I just don’t have more to say about it. Like, I’ll try to talk about it and I won’t, I just won’t. You know, versus something that’s like really needing to come out or wanting to come out or I feel like this is the space to share it. You know, I will have things to talk about. It’ll come out. But if it’s an area that like I feel really like no, this is just me, I’m gonna work on this on my own, you know, stuff, then I’m not gonna have more to say about it and he won’t, like, push that necessarily. Or like try to be like get me to talk about things. So, I think that, for me, with the like crush thing, that like I’m gonna talk about it but there’s things about it that I don’t wanna disclose. You know, that would make things maybe feel weird or make me feel really like too...

R: Exposed?

P: Exposed. Yeah. Like, and there wouldn’t necessarily help like, the conversation, you know? Like I’m not gonna tell you about my fantasy realm cause I don’t want you to know that.

R: Totally. Right.

P: You know? But, like, but I’m gonna tell you that I’m having the abstract sort of feelings there cause that like needs to be like said out loud cause it needs to shift from this like
version of you that, that I like have in my head that like I need to shift it out of this really weird, like this fantasy realm so it can become reality so I can be, like, so I can move past it.

R: Yeah. And do you feel like it’s helped to talk about it?

P: Yeah.

R: It’s helped you? How do you feel like it’s helped?

P: I mean I’m not, it’s not, I’m not like focused on him in the same way. It’s like, I also was like sort of unwound some of the like, I mean... as a therapist you’re like a mirror and then I’m like, I feel like for him I’m not supposed to like put you on a pedestal, you know. So it’s like a mirror pedestal. So, it’s like, which is like really appealing, but, umm, bringing it a little bit more into like oh, like, yeah your a real person and we are doing this work together in this room and what things am I wanting you to say to me that are just things that I need to hear versus, like... and then projecting that sort of... or like my own like, I really like myself. I, I umm... I wrote a song called [song title] for example. So, you know, like...

R: What an awesome term, by the way.

P: Coined it, no big deal.

(laughter)

R: NBD. Wikipedia.

(laughter)

P: Don’t let anyone tell you they invented it cause I did. (laughter) So, that’s part of it too, right? Like, the appeal of like someone mirroring myself back to me and me being like oooo, that’s really sexy. Cause, you know, like that sort of... so, how much of it is you and how much of it is me enjoying seeing myself and that process so... I think, for me, trying to like take some of that back and being like, you know, in the last month or so like spending a little bit more time like actually in front of a mirror like saying things to myself that I wanna hear instead of like projecting it through an authority figure that I want to say to me so that I can feel those things being true because someone of authority told them to me. Versus being like, well you know they’re true. So why don’t you just tell yourself them.

R: Wow. You’re really... you’re really working through that. And it looks like it’s emotional. Like, there are some moments where you’ve gotten teary talking about this topic. Cause it’s intense, it sounds like.

P: Mm hmm. Yeah.
R: It's intense it seems like. It's your work. You're doing it. Thanks. So, I think you're already speaking to this. You're like reading my mind, you know. But, the next question is about, you know, the issue of a time where you wanted to bring up something up in therapy and you either could or couldn't do it. And, I mean, you've already really spoken to that so I don't know if you want to delve into that a little bit more or if you have something else that, umm, that you want to speak to on that front of like being, wanting to bring something up and not being able to do it or being able to do it.

P: Yeah. Umm, I mean I think like, for me, especially like earlier on there was some stuff that, like, stuff that happened to me as a kid that I hadn't really like talked about that was really hard and that like I hadn't had the space to deal with and then like the not dealing with it was making it bigger and making it like scarier and then the fact that I hadn't talked about it yet in my life was like making it like this scary thing. So, that was hard because there was so much like built up around it of like of habit of not talking about it too and then what that does to it. So, umm, that was the first really big like sort of hurdle I think for me for therapy, of being like oh, I don't even fucking know you, you know, like why am I gonna tell you this thing that I've only like told a few other people in my whole life. Like, we just met, you know? So, that, part of that process you know and he was really, you know... like I was pretty freaked out, like at the beginning, and he was really good about being like hey, we're just going to get to know each other. Like, you don't have to like talk about hard stuff or talk about like anything, really, that you don't want to talk about, you know. Like, we're just gonna like figure out who you are and we're... you know...

R: Yeah. We're gonna get to know each other. I don't expect you to just give me...

P: So, like, here's everything I'm coming to therapy for, you know...

R: Yeah—off the bat.

P: Yeah. But then, but you know, part of the intake process was like filling out a form that was like why are you in therapy and what do you want to accomplish, you know, so that sort of duality was tricky of like trying to even articulate that without even like having ever gone there. You know, was really, you know do I just open the can I don't even know, but also that's helpful in a lot of ways like, yeah you want to have goals, I get that too. So, umm, finding that balance and, you know, I did a lot of work like on my own around that to like be ready to like talk about it and be like OK now I'm going to or... or now I'm ready to and I don't necessarily have to, though, you know and finding that dynamic of like if like I am in therapy and I'm like trying to talk about something and it's not working, like trusting that. And being like I'm not ready to touch that yet, that's too vulnerable or maybe this isn't the place yet or maybe I don't trust enough or have the connection enough or maybe I need to do more unwinding on my own before I'm ready to like be that vulnerable or let that out.

R: Yeah, and that's one of the ways you assess whether you're ready to talk about something is like how does this feel and how is it going and... how did you know you were ready to talk to your counselor about, about the thing that happened to you as a kid? How did you know you were ready? Or how did you know they were ready?
P: Hmm. Well, I mean, I had like imagined the conversation, you know, for a really long time. Like for weeks and weeks and weeks. And, so...

R: How did you... did you ever imagine your counselor’s response?

P: I don’t know. Umm... I mean, I think it was like... the more I would imagine the dynamic like sort of like I would like the less “holy shit that’s scary”, it got less scary the more times I sort of like played it through and the more times I like looked at it directly, you know, became less of a ghost and more of like this thing that, you know. Umm, so I guess once it was at a point where it wasn’t like... where I feel like I could actually talk about it without just like having big feelings and freaking out and not even having words. You know, that’s the thing too, that’s not helpful, you know. And like that’s not, you know that’s a whole level of vulnerable that I don’t really feel like being, you know? So, being like OK, I’m gonna do that part on my own and then, hopefully, you know, and then, right, then get to the point where I can like say it out loud because I’ve been like practicing on my own in a way.

R: Totally, right. And that’s your part of it and then it makes me think about this other part of, you mentioned the word trust, you know, how you built up the trust in your counselor to be able to say it. And I’m also curious about how you feel like they responded to it, as far as like whether that was helpful to you or not...

P: Umm, yeah, I mean I think part of the trust process was just, like, sharing other vulnerable things, you know, and like being, feeling seen and feeling like, umm... oh, that wasn’t, that wasn’t actually scary, you know? Where like walking away being like, oh I feel good, you know, like I feel like lighter for having said that and so that sort of reinforcing like, hey, this will help. Like, starting to know that on a really intuitive level. Like getting through it, it’s gonna be worth it because the smaller things, or the less scary things that you’ve shared like it’s helped moved forward, you know. Cause there, just to a degree of like... when something’s in your own head, umm, you can’t really ever look at it quite all the way, you know. And like just by the process of like saying it out loud. So, I think, I mean like the process like actually when, you know, I’ve shared like at one point he was like well, do you wanna tell me what happened and I was like not really (both laughing). I really don’t. Like, I really don’t

R: Like that’s the genuine answer.

P: Yeah, and he laughed I think and I was like but I need to, so I’m going to. So, like, and I think that, umm... one, I think on some level I wanted to like have a level of like understanding like the meaning of it or understanding like outside in the world and like he didn’t really give me that, you know, more of like hey that sounds like that was really confusing and that’s you know, like, but not being like that was horrible that that horrible thing happened or that wasn’t so bad or that wasn’t, you know, like I sort of wanted that, but then it was sort of good not to have that either because it’s not... like I feel like that would of made it worse in some ways maybe? I don’t know, like it was, it was interesting to
have it be so like just me and this thing and it was about just saying it. And talking about it wasn’t really about like the reaction or the, the meaning of it or that sort of judgment of it.

R: Totally, yeah.

P: And then, and we haven’t like circled back at all, and I’ve definitely been like doing that sort of processing through it on my, like on my own I think a lot of it. Umm, but being like oh, I think it matters less, sort of the meaning in the bigger world and it matters more in like what that meant for me.

R: Right, and then having your counselor not define the bigger meaning for you was really helpful. That makes a lot of sense. Thank you. Thanks for like really trying to put words to a lot of complex, you know, like therapeutic that are, they're also hard to name, right? Like this stuff is hard to like name. So, umm... do you have a thought about a time where, umm, you were aware that what you and your counselor did in session influenced something outside of the session? In your life or in your relationships or in your work?

P: Umm, I mean it’s definitely like not very linear like that. Umm...

R: Yeah. Tell me what it’s like for you.

P: So, I think, I mean I think for me it’s like having a clear view of who I am and how I work and the things I do and the things I don’t do and then getting to make a decision about that, with a little more clarity of like, OK, I’m that way or do I want to be that way or this is my pattern... do I like that? Do I not like that, do I want to challenge that, you know. So like even little stuff like, oh, talking about... I have, I'm in a time travelling gender queer boy band that I produce and I’m part of, it’s like a spin off from the musical I wrote, so I was like really excited about my boy band and was like, had found some things at a thrift shop to give each of them for their characters, umm and was talking about that and being excited and being like that way, like a way to express my gratitude to them for being awesome and being part of my group. And, you know, I think part of that conversation was like, I don’t know if he like explicitly was like, have you told them that you think they’re great and, you know, but like that being reflected back about being like, OK, that’s the, the impetus for the gift, but did you say the thing? And I was like, oh. (bumped something, side conversation) And, so I was like, oh. OK. Maybe not. You know. And then like a few weeks later there was a moment where we had just had a really hard rehearsal and the whole show was coming together and it was really stressful, but everyone was working so hard and I was like... ahhhh. I won the boy band lottery, you guys. You guys are amazing and talented and like they were like ohhhhh. And I was like, OK, that felt good you know. Like, OK, saying it out loud is important to you, you know. And like having that sort of thing. So it’s not sort of like, oh you should do this or oh, this is my advice, but being like oh, OK, I’m doing this and maybe there’s another way to do it that might be more affective.
R: Yeah. You’re really speaking to the nuance of how it isn’t linear, you know, and I like you bringing that to my attention because it’s sort of like, what I’m hearing you say is that you get to have the power of what you do take out of there and implement in your life.

P: Yeah.

R: And you get to see how you want to experiment with it. And you get to test the results. You know?

P: Yeah. Totally.

R: And adjust as needed.

P: Yeah. I mean, there’s been moments too where he’s been like well, maybe you’re doing this or are you this way? And I’ll think about it and be like, no. You’re wrong. No. You know? Like having that too and owning my power enough to be like just because you say it and just because you’re the expert doesn’t actually mean that you’re the expert on me. I’m the only one that’s an expert on me.

R: Right, which completely speaks to the next question, which is how your counselor responds when you’re powerful as the client and when you push back like that. How does your counselor respond? Like, when you do say no, that’s not it.

P: Yeah. He’s like, OK. You know? Well, tell me how you are or, you know, he usually doesn’t even have to ask that cause I’m usually like, no I think I’m this way. Or I think it affects me this way. Or he’ll be like oh, are you having, you know, at one point we were talking about my partner is like also an artist, and has been having like... a lot of success. And was sort of like got an article in [local queer publication] and her own column and like all these things and I was having like... umm... some... we were just having a little bit of a hard time and he was like, we’re you, are you like jealous of her success or competing with her like, you know. And I was sort of like; no that’s not it. It’s more of like her time and her energy and being like I want your focus, not like I don’t want you to be famous. So, you know, like having that of like, oh I could see why you might think that. Or, even like, I’ve questioned that in myself. So it’s helpful for you to be like, well maybe you’re doing this thing. You know?

R: Right. And then you get to really see. Am I?

P: Yeah. I get to be like, am I? Well, that sounds like a bad way to be but, I mean, if I am doing that thing I want to know because I don’t wanna be. I’m like a really competitive person, generally speaking, but I don’t wanna be competing with my partner. We’re on the same team, you know? So, like wanting to see that and wanting to be like, why... that’s not where the tension is. OK. Yeah.

R: Totally. And it sounds like your counselor responds in a way that allows you to be powerful, if you need to be. Is that true?
P: Mm hmm. Yeah. He doesn’t like push back. It’s not like he’s like oh, I need to be right, you know. Or, like I’m invested in this version of you that I… you know, like because it is a collaboration.

R: Yeah, right. And that that comes through in all of those moments. Umm, any moments where your needs weren’t being met by your counselor and your aware of that?

P: I mean I think the closest is like when he’s just a little off base. You know? Where I’m just like, no that’s not or that doesn’t ring true. Or like, you know, moments where like I have the, I’ll have the agenda going in of like here’s what I think I wanna talk about or… work on this week and then he’ll start asking questions about like, we’ll sort of veer off and he’ll start like asking questions about this piece of my life that hasn’t really, we haven’t really talked about or hasn’t really got filled in or, you know. And then I just, you know, then I kind of decide. But, umm… it’s, again, it’s like the power dynamic like, OK, he wants to like go here, do… am I down? Am I so attached to my agenda that I, you know...

R: Mm hmm. You make your decision.

P: Yeah. Or like letting it be organic, too. And being like sometimes we’re gonna talk about stuff that I super didn’t plan on talking about today and like, that’s OK too. There’s like a learning process for me in there as well, but OK. Like, letting go sometimes too and being like, OK. So, yeah. But I mean, there’s no… that was one of those like, I don’t really know. There’s not, there hasn’t been anything that I’m like I’m annoyed that he like… I mean, sometimes I walk away from therapy feeling annoyed, but like not in a like you did something wrong but like, you made me talk about something that I really didn’t necessarily wanna talk about. You know?

(laughter)

R: Right!

P: But, I mean, if he didn’t do that to some degree that would be questionable. You know? Like, if I walked away liking my therapist every session like, there would probably be something amiss.

R: Totally. Well, I like, regardless of that, I really like the complexity your holding of like... I’m bound to get annoyed. Do you know? And that that’s not bad and I’m using that to understand my own experience. Like, it’s... yeah.

P: Yeah. I mean, or even after like telling him I had a crush on him and like then after that, you know, session, feeling like really bummied out, you know. And really like having to let go of that fantasy and having to like, you know, like have this weird break up all on my own. A thing that didn’t ever even really exist. And then me being like, hmmrrr, I’m annoyed with him. But it’s not like he did any... it’s like he wasn’t, he didn’t say some of the things that I
like maybe wanted him to say, but I didn’t like actually want him to say those things, you know? That sort of weird thing that’s like feelings but not, yeah...

R: You’re articulating that complexity so well about therapy. It’s just, it’s great. Umm... there’s so... there’s like... it’s like hard to find words cause I wanna, you’re talking about so many amazing complex things, but I wanna like get into them a little bit as we finish up, too. Just to kind of unpack them fully, you know? Cause I don’t wanna leave being like, I wanna unpack that! Umm, it sounds like you felt safe—I don’t wanna put the words in your mouth, but I’m looking for some words, I guess, about how you feel like your counselor responded to the disclosure of the crush. Like, how do you feel like they responded and how they handle their power there? Does that make sense?

P: Yeah, totally. I mean, I think that's part of it, too. Like, this funny catch 22 of that situation where like, in this sort of other world/crush world/fantasy world where I would’ve wanted to go there, you know. But, if he actually did want to and did like, take that moment of vulnerability to play on that, then I wouldn’t actually want to because then he would have bad ethics and be a person I wouldn’t want to have a crush on.

R: Totally. You’re killing it right now!

(laughter)

R: Umm, it hard for me not to be more relational during this interview cause its research, it’s like I wanna just like be in this with you! That’s when the challenge of doing these...

P: Maybe we’ll have to go get coffee after the whole thing! And, be like, oh my god, since you’re not my therapist...

(laughter)

R: Umm, what you just said was so awesome. Umm, and it speaks to the complexity and importance of us, as therapists, understanding our power in that moment. And the power that we have when someone’s coming to us with this really vulnerable information. And it’s sort of like, do we exploit it? Or do we honor it? You know? I’m just like sitting with the intensity of that. Like...

P: Well, and I think like, this idea of what’s real in the connection, you know? And like... I think that what had sort of like taken the feeling of like crush from me to the next level that had sort of like made it something that I had to really deal with and bring it back into the room is this conversation that we had had like a couple weeks prior, which was like... I don’t even remember how we got here exactly, but I was sort of trying to like understand a little bit more of like how he felt about me. And... and... then I was just sort of like, processing about it. Like, well you probably have your own world so you probably, you know, I don’t know. Like I was sort of processing about that question and he was like, he asked me... he’s like, are you asking me if I care about you? And I thought about it and I was like... yeah, you’re right, I am asking you that. You know like and to have him like sort of
suss that out. And not just answer it, but like I then like had to ask it in a way of like, oh yeah. I am asking that. Umm, and he was like, yeah I mean I, this is work that is what I’m doing in the world, like this is really important, this is so part of everything that I am, so I mean, yeah I think about you and I saw the article about you in [local queer publication] and I was like, oh yay, [name’s self] is like, that’s the [band]! Look at that. And I smiled and like yeah, I think he said I care about you deeply. You know? So, that was like oh! And it felt so good. But then it was also like, oh, it’s real?! Like, or he has real feelings about me but like, on what plane? You know, and that sort of thing was sort of then like, amplified this crush that I already had, but yeah. It’s complicated.

R: It is complicated and we’re gonna keep it complicated. And I hope you’ll hold me to that when I share the research with you, cause that’s one of the things that’s gonna happen over the course of the next few months, is you’ll get a chance to chime in on what I kind of discover, you know, through this work and through analyzing it. Umm, and I hope you’ll keep me to that complexity, you know? Cause I don’t ever wanna simplify this. I do wanna highlight it, you know? And be like, this is complex, so. Umm, yeah. Anything else about... anything else I didn’t let you say or?

P: Umm, I said a few things.

(laughter)

R: Yeah, totally! The last question is really just kind of simple, but, umm, and I think you already answered it. But, describing a time where you got to make the choices about what happened in therapy, and it sounds like...

P: Hmm... there was one moment that I thought was really cool that was like, umm... after... so, the session we like talked about the crush and then it was really hard and I had lots of feelings afterwards and then I didn’t go to therapy the next week. I like, was like, my schedule also was like, there very, totally logical reasons to not go to therapy that next week. And then I was also like you don’t have to go to therapy next week. If you need some time to like... unwind the...

(laughter)

R: I love this!

P: Its like, how do you note take that?

(laughter)

R: I’m gonna be like, “wiggling fingers down the bod..” like, whatever. Coming down. I know, it’s kind of funny when I look at my note. It’s good.

P: You know. And then, being like, well I don’t want him to think that I’m not, that I’m running away because we had like this really intense thing happen. But then also being like,
I get to do what I want, you know, like I get to do what I need and I don’t have to explain it to him, you know?

R: Right, right. That’s your power. Right?

P: Yeah. So, originally it was like, hey could you do Monday instead cause of my work schedule, I needed to work the day that we usually have therapy. And then I was like actually, let’s skip next week. Let’s do the next, you know, like I sat with it and was like, OK. Umm, but then... like, right out the gate the next session he was like, so you cancelled last... you know? Not like a “that was bad”, but like I’m reflecting that. Like, we had, we went like, we had this really vulnerable, really intimate session and then... you went away a little bit. And that’s, and not judging that necessarily, but like that’s tr... you know like having that reflected. But, then we processed about all the things that I had sort of figured out by going through that. And, like a little bit about how that was for me telling him that. It was a lot of processing about therapy in therapy, which is always like really sort of meta.

(laughter)

R: So meta. So meta. Especially with us really intellectual, political [locals], right?

P: Umm, so then we got through that whole conversation and then we still had like... I dunno, like 20 minutes left? There was still some time left and... my brain was like... it was a relief, you know? Like we had sort of, I talked about it and it was sort of like I felt really calm for the first time in awhile and I felt like pretty good. But, then I was also like I didn’t want to keep talking about it. Like, I was really done talking about the talking about the crush that... you know what I’m saying?

R: Yes, I do! I do.

P: I needed to like not talk about that anymore. You know? (laughing)

R: Yes. You were done processing.

P: I was done processing about that. Like, I was done doing that. You know. But I couldn’t find the segue out.

R: OK.

P: Like, I couldn’t figure out anything else to talk about cause I was so, like I was actually like, it was quiet in my brain for the first time in quite awhile, you know? Umm. And, so, I like... I think I spoke to that to some degree and was like, I don’t know how to segue out of here! You know, like get me out!

(laughter)

R: Totally. Throw me a life jack, like a lifesaver, you know!
P: Can you... what do you want... can we, can we... you know, like...

R: Can you help me out?

P: Help me, you know?! But like asking, I don’t know, like sort of trying to articulate that a little bit. Umm. And he was like hey can we try... like could we try like a little meditation sort of thing? I was like, cool. Yeah. So, he like sort of like led me through like a being in my body and breathing and like, just... and that was really cool! Cause I was like, umm... sitting with the quiet and the calmness. And not needing to like (snaps fingers) push myself back into thinking and going. And just being like, oh OK. Silence is OK. What if, what if we’re just quiet in therapy? Ahhhh! You know? Like, but maybe if that’s where I’m at for a second, like trying to embrace that. You know. And like having a moment where... then I started to... then, after like a few moments of being quiet, I started to stress about how we were gonna get out of, out of the meditation. You know? Like, is he gonna, he is gonna tell me it’s done? How are we gonna know? Like, should I start talking about something else? How do I... you know? And like, the brain started, you know. And then, at one point, I was like... cause my eyes were closed cause he told me to close my eyes... and I was like, can I open my eyes? And he’s like, do you feel called to open your eyes? Jesus Christ!

(laughter)

R: What did you think of that?

P: I thought it was adorable! Yeah.

(laughter)

R: Awesome.

P: So, I felt called to open my eyes. So that’s what I did.

(laughter)

R: OK, I’m gonna go back to one of my first questions because I feel like you shared this super important thing after this question, about the crush, but I think if you wouldn’t have shared that today it would’ve, it was such a valuable thing to disclose to me and I honor it so much.

P: Thank you.

R: And thank you. Like... it’s, yeah. I’ll give you a million gold stars, you total badass. Umm, and I think that it’s really valuable experience to represent in research because it happens and it doesn’t always happen well, so. But I do wanna go back to, since you told me that piece, I was wondering if, like how you would describe your relationship with your counselor after, after all, sharing all that with me? How would you describe it like in
adjectives or like? You’ve used the word collaborative. I just welcome you to say any words that would describe your, your therapeutic relationship. I mean, you just used the word adorable. That’s a good word. Is it hard to describe?

P: A little. I mean, I feel like if it was like... a friendship or a, you know, like some sort of connection that was outside of this room that I don’t get to actually know about him, so it’s interesting... you know. It’s like interesting to think of it as like a relationship, you know. Cause it’s like one sided in that way, but he’s also bringing his whole self into the room, I just don’t get to know about him, necessarily. So, umm... but it definitely, I mean it definitely feels like a really important relationship in my life.

R: Mm hmm. Cool. Thank you.

P: Yeah.

R: Anything else before we end?

P: No.
Researcher provides intro to context of power.

R: Well, I did send you the questions. I don’t know if you had a chance to glance at them. But, yeah, so I’m looking at just the power dynamic between clients and mental health practitioners. So, my definition of that I’m using for the study is just really general: power, the ability or capacity to influence or direct behavior, your own, others, and the course of events. And, like you probably read, it’s not that I’m looking for negative experiences of power—it’s positive, neutral; any experience. And, most importantly, yours. Just your experience with your mental health practitioner. So, any questions about that?

P: Umm, no I don’t think so. No.

R: Awesome. So, you were kind of mentioning on the phone that you had this person that you saw intermittently, so I’m just wondering if, yeah if... the first question is describing your relationship with a past or current mental health professional. Just whatever comes to mind.

P: Yeah, umm, I started seeing her because I was going through some really difficult life changes. I was, uh, I was getting divorced and I was also losing the band that I was in that partner with for like thirteen years. So, like, I wasn’t able to, to feel like I could handle that, so. So I just searched like, umm, therapists that would be good for me on the criteria that I would look for and I found one and then just started going. And it was great! It was really... she helped me a lot. I’m going to be going to see her soon again, too.

R: Awesome. What was that criteria that you looked for?

P: Umm, well it was umm, it was mainly, mainly it was poly friendly because I’m polyamorous and, but also queer friendly, not because I’m queer but because my partner is, you know. Also, just because I wouldn’t want to see anybody who wasn’t queer friendly.

R: Fair enough. Definitely.

P: And, also, umm, life changing as a specialty; like life changes.

R: Yeah, totally.

P: Oh, and also people of color also. And I suppose subconsciously, well I mean I think I also wanted/would have preferred a woman, but like I didn’t... that wasn’t something that was gonna be a hard line for me.

R: Yeah. And how did you come, like how did you... how do you think those criteria helped you? If this person fit them and then you met with them. How do you think knowing those
things were there or present within the identity or philosophy of that counselor, how do you feel like those helped?

P: Well, I feel like they helped immensely because if the counselor didn’t think that those things were OK they would tell me that was part of my problem, right? (laughter from P)

R: Right, you got it! You’re a well-informed mental health consumer, yeah. You didn't want to be pathologized in those parts of your life.

P: Yeah, yeah. Exactly, yeah.

R: Totally. And how, like how did you get to that point of knowing that? Just knowing that that would be important?

P: Umm, I don’t know. I mean, I suppose I just assumed it would be, because I had never seen a therapist before. So I was like, well it has to be somebody who’s OK with all these aspects of my identity cause otherwise what’s the point. It would just be a big waste of time!

R: Yeah. And you had, you thought about it and that’s what happened. So you said it was helpful, how else would you describe like your therapeutic relationship with this person? Like, I don’t know if it’s adjectives or metaphors or whatever comes to your mind.

P: Umm, I don’t know. Umm... I suppose it was very, umm, it was also sort of like a mentor a little bit because she was so much older than me. She’s like, umm, probably in her fifties. So, like it was also sort of like I was really interested in hearing about her life and learning more about her. Umm, just as like an example of somebody who can, who’s working on having a healthy life. Not even necessarily has one, but works on one.

R: Yeah. How was it to learn about her? Like, and was she OK sharing that stuff with you?

P: I think she was, but she always sort of tried to redirect the focus to me, often times. But I was always very interested in learning more about her and, just like, I know/I knew it wasn’t appropriate but I was like oh, she... I could totally be friends with this lady, she’s so interesting and she’s so neat.

R: Mm hmm. Totally. Totally makes sense. Yeah, anything else that comes to mind about her?

P: Uh, no. No. Oh, as far as our relationship goes?

R: Yeah. What did you, you’re kind of getting to this a little bit in what you’re saying right now [P’s name], but what was your experience of, umm, the power dynamic with you and her?
P: Umm, I mean, I suppose it was very positive. Sometimes it was neutral. But it was always like, there was always a certain sense of like, umm, that she had power in the relationship and that; I never got the sense that she ever, umm, abused it or misused it. Or, often times too, it was sort of like, umm, when she would assert her power it was always like, oh OK, I gotta pay attention to what she’s trying to assert because she is the trained professional knowing what’s ethical and what’s right for her practice and for herself, so. So I always sort of just tried to just be aware of paying attention to the boundaries she needed.

R: Mm hmm. Yeah. How did you track those, or how did you notice them?

P: It was just sort of intuitive. Like, umm, one of the things that I, when (P laughs nervously)... I feel kind of silly. But one of the things was like, oh I could get one of my partners to go see her and then I can pay for my partner going to therapy. And then she sort of like... was like, no. Like, no, that’s not OK. Like, it has to be centered to you. And I’m like, oh OK, that’s fine. Cause I was like, oh I’d be kind of getting the system a little bit cause I could use my health insurance to help my partner who doesn’t have mental health insurance to be able to see them regularly. But, umm, but she was just like no, you have to be here for those. And I was like, oh OK. Like I was like, OK, that’s a boundary I’m not going to push that.

R: Right, totally! And your hands are up and it sounds like there’s this part of you that’s like, that kind of respects that.

P: Yeah. Because I mean, like, I’ve had a lot of jobs and everywhere you work there’s always like... a certain amount of power you have as an employee and often times people will use that power to like share with others, or to like trade with others, or whatever. So, it’s like the employee in a sense is sort of in the bottom of a power dynamic with their employer. Or, like in her case it would be like the laws or the restrictions or the guidelines around her type of work is she’s sort of like subservient to that. So, I was like, oh maybe she could like give free healthcare to my partner, maybe? And then, when she was like, no you have to be here for those sessions, I was like oh, OK. That’s fine. Like, cause I didn’t want to push, but I was like maybe this is something that could happen because what does the healthcare company care if their paying for me or them?

R: Right. You’re just trying to see what could happen. See what the possibilities were.

P: Yeah. So, I guess I sort of pushed my boundary with her just a little, but it was like as soon as she said it I was like I can just back off. Cause I didn’t want to push her boundaries because I wanted to get something out of her, I sort of pushed her boundary because I wanted to see if there was a way we could subversively, so I guess...

R: Work with the system a little bit.

P: Yeah, yeah.
R: Mm hmm. Besides the obvious, you sound really aware that, you know, that a mental health professional has like ethics or rules or things that dictate their profession and, obviously, you’re going to a professional for help, but was there any other thing that she did or that occurred that made you really aware that she had power?

P: Umm... I suppose, the only other thing I can think of is, umm, occasionally when we were having our conversations she would sort of redirect it and I always just let her redirect it to where she wanted because I assumed she was doing it because she was trying to do some sort of treatment. There was some sort of plan that she had for where our conversation was going to go and I just sort of... I was like, oh OK, you're trying to redirect this I'm gonna just go with it. I suppose that's a sort of sense of power, even though it's really subtle.

R: Mm hmm. And it sounds like you decided to like trust that.

P: Oh, yeah, for sure. I felt a lot of trust for her. And that took a little bit of time; maybe one or two sessions until I got a sense of who I felt like she was and what ethics and values she had and then I was like, oh OK well... I mean. I'm here to get help from her cause I'm the one who's like not able to feel like I can live my life.

R: Yeah. So you feel like someone who can do that. Like, help you. You said trust and you said it really strongly. So, could you tell me more about how you came to trust her; what did you learn and how did you get there, even over a couple sessions?

P: I think that probably what it is is, umm... I think that when a person... a person has to, umm, sort of like, I feel like trust sort of takes time to build even if it can happen quickly there’s still stages and I feel like, it was like immediately when we started having our sessions like I would, I would sort of test my vulnerability. I feel like this is something that’s hard to talk about, I’m gonna... so every time I would sort of push more vulnerability she would always sort of like, umm, accept the vulnerability in a, uh, supportive way. And so I think that that’s sort of how I built trust with her was like, as I became more vulnerable she was more accepting and then... even thought it happened very quickly, there was still like a sort of gradient stage to it.

R: Yeah. You’re really speaking to something super nuanced that is really, really awesome to kind of hear someone else articulate. I’m wondering how... when you would test your vulnerability, there’s a way that you would assess, umm, her response or her kind of receiving that. And do you have any awareness of what you were looking for or what you did see?

P: Umm... I think that, umm... I think it was really just in the way that she would react to things that were emotionally charged for me. So, like say I would have something that was like, oh this thing makes me feel really guilty and it’s something I have a hard time admitting to others. And, so I would be like OK, this hard, this is something that’s hard to... to share. And so I would share it, or I’d share it generally, and then so she would sort of have a, then I would wait for her response. And when her responses were always, and that’s the thing is that she was always supportive and always... umm, helpful and
compassionate. Like even if it was something where I was like, oh I feel like I did something wrong, then I have to sort of admit guilt, then it was like, and then her response would be, oh yeah, that is wrong. You did do something wrong. And then her response was sort of, instead of like admonishment, it was like sadness. It was like, oh I’m sorry you feel so guilty about what you did cause what you did was wrong. So I was like, oh OK so like she’s acknowledging that what I did was wrong and yet she’s not gonna admonish me for it. And so, like that’s an example of how it’s like oh I’m gonna be vulnerable with this and then see how you take it. And then when she took it in a way that made me feel, umm... I guess, umm, supported but also like, I guess not necessarily negatively judged, I don’t know.

R: Mm hmm, totally. Thank you for letting me follow up on all these things.

P: Oh, sure. Let me know if I’m rambling too much.

R: No way! No way. Umm, so this is a question about thinking about a time where you maybe wanted to bring something up in therapy and, perhaps it’s something about your life or perhaps it’s even about the therapeutic relationship or therapy. Does anything come to mind? Where you either could bring it up or you weren’t able to?

P: Umm, there was definitely a lot of those things. Like there were some things that I never ended up bringing up. There were some things I felt that was hard to bring up and then eventually did. And I felt like all those times that it happened it was always like... I haven’t done enough processing with it in order to share. Or this thing is so deeply painful that I don’t want to share it right now. So, it all really was like based on my comfort level, it was never based on, it was never based on how she would take it. Although I suppose that’s not totally true because there was that time where I was trying to like, oh could you, maybe like she would just give my partner free, free... I never told her that that’s what I would like because I didn’t want to request anything of her that she would have to say no to. So I guess that’s one thing that I never, or that I felt like I... I didn’t feel like I needed to bring it up to her, I was just like, OK this is obvious that this is something that she’s not gonna wanna do and I’m not gonna ask her about why because that’s just gonna be like interrogation. Because it’s like I’m not just saying your not giving it to me, why not? Like, I didn’t want that. I was like OK; I trust that she just has a good reason for this. Even if that reason is just that she doesn’t wanna do it. Like, that’s fine. Like, so you know, like that’s something I never really brought up with her.

R: Mm hmm. The part about why you wanted it or why she didn’t?

R: The part about why I wanted it because I didn’t wanna put any pressure on the fact that she didn’t. Because it was really obvious she didn’t wanna do it. I didn’t even wanna bring up why I wanted it because I didn’t wanna like put any pressure on her that like... cause I didn’t want her to have to like tell me no.

R: Yeah, you’re really aware of, you’re particularly [P’s name] aware of... and I’m talking out loud, obviously. But like you’re aware of respecting the professional in that dynamic. Like, you’re really aware of it. You seem, like sensitive to respecting that other person.
P: Well I think that’s from working, umm, like working class jobs for a really long part of my life. It’s like, when you’re in a, when you’re in your job, when your in your work environment, there’s like... and, also, the relationship you have with a customer or a client. There’s some power there too, I suppose because—it’s not much, there’s not really much institutional power—but there’s definitely a like, I’ll leave a bad review or I’ll complain about you or something like that. Or even just like to know that somebody’s so dissatisfied with you would be, is, a really crappy thing. Because you can’t, when you’re a worker you have this like... yeah, I think there is sort of like a power relationship where you’re in subservience to the people you’re serving. So you, I guess the power change goes a little bit both ways? But it’s probably more stronger on their end than it would be on the patient’s, but...

R: Was there anything about the therapy that you ever wanted to bring up? Or about how things were going or, umm...

P: Umm, no I don’t so. I think that that all went really smoothly. I never felt like, I never felt like she wasn’t... meeting my needs.

R: Yeah, that’s one of the questions. So I can just skip to that. Umm, yeah, is there any time where she wasn’t meeting your needs? Perhaps not.

P: No I, no I don’t think so. Cause I mean I think, ultimately, I was at; I was sort of like at my wit’s end. So like, I was... any help I could get at that point was like, positive.

R: Right. You were just looking to be like, picked up, and anything that’s up is better than where you were.

P: Yeah. Right.

R: Umm, but there was a; there is a way that like when your at you’re wit’s end... that, yeah there’s something about when any of us are at our wit’s end, that is bringing a sort of level of vulnerability to someone. I guess that... yeah, that makes that trust important that you talked about earlier, you know. Umm, what about a time where maybe you were aware that you and your counselor, what you did in the session or what you talked about, influenced something outside of the session in your life. When did the work you did influence your life?

P: Oh, I think I feel like that was happening like, immediately. Like, every session she would give me advice and, uh, a lot of my issues were around like anxiety because I grew up, I grew up in [US city] in like the ghetto and like I have like... I theorize that I might even have a slight, or even just a minor, PTSD from that environment. Living in that world. And, umm, so I have a lot of anxiety and a lot of nervousness and, uh, I’ll get like panic attacks and stuff. And, umm, that’s; when I was going to her it was specifically for anxiety cause I was just like, couldn’t control my anxiety. So, every session she definitely like every session it was easier and easier to manage. And it was like every session I could see results like very
single time. And that just really encouraged me to keep going cause I’m like, oh gosh (P laughs), this is so healthy for me.

R: Totally. And how, yeah, and how do you think, umm... she achieved those results?

P: Umm, I think just with like, it’s been awhile, but I think it’s just with umm, she’d teach me things, like breathing techniques or... or just, umm, mental techniques and how to manage that. Cause I think that one of the things that was really hard for me was that I kept thinking that I had to just stop it.

R: Yes.

P: Like, I was like this thing’s causing me; this thing is a problem I want it to just go away. And she was like no it’s not going to go away. You have to learn to live with it.

R: What was that like to hear?

P: It was really reassuring because it was like it was really daunting to think; cause all my time was spent in trying to just suppress all that and there’s was just, just made it worse and it was just like this spiral of, of, of difficulties. And so it was really liberating to be like, oh! I don’t have to destroy that thing, I can just learn how to like live with it and... and then, that was like, that was really reassuring cause it was like, OK that other thing felt impossible because that’s why I’m here.

R: You’re like—this makes sense! So it sounds like, yeah, it was like intuitively it made sense to you. Yeah. Thanks. Umm, how do you think your counselor responds when you’re powerful as the client? If you ever push back or express strong opinions or just resist what’s going on.

P: I don’t... I mean, I guess I don’t feel like I really did that? (P laughs) I don’t feel like I ever... I mean, I suppose I was like, hey... here’s my partner, maybe you could just speak with them and then like, they could just come here to see you and maybe we could just let that happen. And she was like, no. And I was like, oh OK. So I guess I never really pushed back at her at all. I mean. Maybe I did and I just wasn’t aware of it or I can’t remember it, but I can’t really think of a time where I did cause I was just like... she’s great, she’s helping me, I’m just gonna listen to her.

R: Right, yeah. Umm... yeah, is there; that situation of asking to see your partner comes up, it keeps coming up, and... yeah, that’s just interesting. But I don’t know if I have anything awesome to add to that. But, umm... what do you think; do you have any thoughts on why you wouldn’t have to push back ever? Or why that doesn’t really occur to you? Or...

P: I think that, umm, a big part of it is that I, I umm... I think I just like, umm... I suppose I have a really strong respect for authority when I judge the authority as an authority, if that makes sense.
R: That's a quotable... yes.

P: Like, umm, I'm like oh, this person's good to me, this person has good intentions. They may not be perfect, but I can just sort of give myself to them. I can just sort of be like, OK, help me. And tell me what to think. Or tell me, tell me what you think and I'll tell you what I think and... I feel like our exchanges were always very, very much in that way where she would be like, do you think you're doing this? And I was like, and maybe it was something that she... like, one time she was sort of like... she, she's a little older, so she's like old school. Umm, so there would be times where sometimes I'd be like, oh, what you just said is kind of like, I don't totally agree with that, but that's your opinion and like, that's cool. And it kind of makes sense because maybe you're a little bit older; maybe you're a little bit more traditional. But, umm, there would be times where she'd say something and I'd be like, oh I don't, I mean I, like if she would say, I think maybe you're doing this, in my mind I would think... I would think, umm, no I'm not doing that. But I'm like, well if she's saying that she thinks I'm doing it I should really think about whether or not I am and I would be like, well I don't think so, but maybe you're right. And I would sort of just be like, I would tell her, oh I don't agree with what you're saying, but I'll really consider what you're saying and I'll think about what you're saying. You know. And so I would, it was sort of like every time... I guess I just, yeah I guess I just never really pushed back on her, I just never...

R: I dunno. I would consider that, like a gentle push back. Like a gentle like negotiation of not being like totally submissive to that power and I also see that she also offered it sometimes tentatively. Like, sometimes. Sometimes maybe she said I think you're doing this and then other times she would say do you think you're doing this. What do you think? Like...

P: Yeah. She definitely left it more open and more to interpretation. But every time she would make a suggestion then I wouldn't just throw it out. And even if I disagreed, I would tell her: I disagree, but that's something I should think about because maybe you're right. Cause that's the this is that, when it comes to really intense psychological things, is you're blinded by your own self so much that I just went into it assuming that I probably had things that I had blinders up and it's like, OK, I don't agree with you but I trust that you have a really valid reason for making that suggestion, so I'll really take it to heart.

R: Mm hmm. Yeah. You mentioned, umm, the old school part, like of her. And I think you were, you were kind of acknowledging that there are times where you told her that you disagreed. Was that what I read correctly, did I hear that correctly?

P: Mm hmm. Yeah.

R: What other kinds of things where that would happen, or do you remember any of those moments?

P: Umm. There weren't very many, but they were almost always like... the reason why I'm like so ready to believe that she's right is because all the times that she would, that I would disagree with her, was about things that were about me, right? So, I'm like, OK she's telling
me that she thinks I’m doing this. That’s something that I wouldn’t wish that I would do or think. And so, of course I’m gonna wanna be resistant to it. So I have to be extra open to it, even if she’s wrong, because I’m resistant to anything that’s personal or something that makes me feel like, like reflects on me poorly.

R: Mmmm. Mm hmm. You’re just, and you’re just aware of that.

P: I mean, not in the moment. But after each session I definitely spend the day and/or week just really chewing on it, really thinking about it. And that’s why the consistency’s so good because it’s like, I really thought about what you said last week and it made me think about this other thing. Or, oh you totally were right about that. Let me give you another example of how I did that.

(laughter)

R: You’re just really open to it, though. Like you’re just interested in self-knowledge. Like, for real.

P: Oh, yeah, for sure.

R: Umm, I want to go back to that word old school one more time. Were there value difference in any aspects of things that came up because she was older and more old school?

P: I think that... I mean, I like kind of assume there were because I just kind of like, every time I’m dealing with people who are of a vastly different age I just wanna assume that we’re gonna come at it from different generations. Whether they’re older or younger. And I find that it’s common for older people to be more, to trend towards a more conservative... even though that’s not true for individuals, I think just averages. Umm, I’m sorry, what was the question?

R: Just if there were any values differences that came up, you know?

P: Not, uh, not any value changes that were objective, but values that were personal. So, for instance, like, umm, like I’m poly and I regularly practice polyamory now and she was like, oh yeah, I had, I was poly for a little bit in the sixties and now I’m just monogamous. And I’m like, well if you were poly in the sixties maybe that’s something that’s right for you? But then I’m like well she’s figured her thing out. I’m sure she’s happy with where she’s; I don’t need to bother her about it, you know. But, that was like something that would be like, oh you personally valued this thing and then you gave it up. I would, like personally, I like, I never would give up the things I value. Until I don’t value them, maybe. I’ve changed my values on certain things, but things that I really care about I never let go. Like I’ve been a vegan since 1997. And I was like, I’m never gonna let it go, you know. Even when they start cloning me I’m not gonna eat me! (P laughs) So, umm. So, there were some things that were like personally, like, oh also she was Buddhist and like I would never be Buddhist. So it’s
like that’s a personal value that I don’t agree with, but I would, but there weren’t any values that were like, that I would say were not personal that I didn’t disagree with her on.

R: Yeah, it sounds like you were, you could... just tolerate those, any of those differences and that they didn’t affect how you would interact with her. Like, knowing that she was Buddhist or knowing that she wasn’t actively poly.

P: Yeah. Like everything that she; all of her personal values were never anything I found intolerable. So like, I didn’t have to tolerate her values. It was just like, that’s just your values, it’s not mine it’s yours and there’s nothing wrong with it, so. And also like, you don’t share that value with me, but yet you accept that I have it. So like, it’s only respectful if I accept that you don’t have it if we can both mutual accept that we each could have it. (P laughs)

R: Right. Which takes you back to the beginning of looking, like having the criteria for a counselor, right?

P: Yeah, for sure.

R: Which you’re really speaking to that really eloquently like, it’s about that ability for them to accept yours and they may or may not know everything about it or whatever. Yeah.

P: Mm hmm. Yeah.

R: Umm, we’re almost done.

P: Oh, OK.

R: Umm, for today anyway. Yeah, I have a feeling that you kind of spoke to this a little bit already, but describe a time where you feel like you got to make the choices about what happened in your counseling.

P: Umm. I mean, I suppose I never felt like I didn’t have a choice. Umm, I never felt like I had to do anything. There were times where she would give me assignments and then I didn’t do them. Uh, they weren’t even assignments, they were just suggestions like, oh this is what I think you should do, this really helps me, maybe this can help you. I don’t feel like I ever had anything where I felt like I had to do anything with her. It was always just sort of like; try this it might work, try this it might work, try this it might work. And some of them I tried and some of them I didn’t. Like, there was some Buddhist techniques that she taught me that I was like, I don’t wanna try that. But, umm, there were other things that she said, she was like I want you to try this and I was like, oh that sounds like a great idea! And then I never did it. But then there were also times where she’d be like hey, do this and I would it and it would really help.

R: And how did she respond to any three of those scenarios? Where you’d be like, no. Yes, didn’t. Yes, did.
P: I suppose she never... she only ever responded to the times where I would come back and be like, hey I did that thing you said and it worked. That's the only time she would respond. If it were anything else, she'd never even ask about it. And I think it's because she just sort of has this attitude of like, I dunno what's gonna work for you, but I'm just gonna hit you with everything I got and see what sticks.

R: And you'll decide.

P: Mm hmm. Yeah, I never felt like she ever told me to do something that I had to do, you know?

R: Yeah. One, at least, more follow up question is you've been occasionally referring to, umm, times where she would just self disclose different things. About her life or her self and I'm curious what you're thoughts are on self-disclosure and power and how that impacted your relationship with her.

P: I think that, umm, I think that her disclosure was something that she did consciously in order to—this is my theory—in order to, umm... mutual vulnerability. So, she was like, oh, if you're gonna open up about your life, I'm gonna tell you a little bit bout mine. And she would tell me stories of, even like what she did in the week, like since I last saw her. And every time she would do something like that it always made me feel more comfortable. Umm, it made me feel like I, it made me feel inspired always to share more with her. So, that's why it was sort of like, I was sort of like, oh she tells me about her life and I tell her about my life and it was sort of weird cause it was like oh, it feels really friendly, but I know it's not friendly. But then I sort of had this desire to; there would be times where I would be like, oh that's cool, is that when you did that thing? And she'd be like, no. And so we'd sort of have an exchange about; we'd have time where we were just exchanging about her. And that was something that made me feel super comfortable because I feel, I often feel a little uncomfortable when all the attention is on me. And so for her to like balance that and take some time for herself really made me feel comfortable with her.

R: Mm hmm. Totally. You mentioned like almost right there, and then previously, that idea that you would want to be friends with her and it felt friendly, but you know you can't be. And... yeah, I mean you sound like you generally just know that, respect that, but, umm... did you ever express that? Like, I wish we could be friends?

P: No. (P laughs)

R: No? Just curious.

P: Maybe I should. (still laughing)

R: Not that I think you should! There's no value judgment there for me; I was just curious because I think it's a natural, like it's a natural inclination, you know?
P: Yeah, I never did cause I just always assumed that that would be incredibly inappropriate.

R: You’re really aware of the boundaries of this deal. You’re really aware. Umm. One more thing if that’s OK?

P: Sure.

R: You used the words mutual vulnerability and it sounds like that was just really important to you and in a way that that neutralized the power dynamic. Do you agree with that statement or disagree?

P: Oh, yeah, I totally agree with that statement. Yeah. Because... like, a really good example I think is the way people deal with horses. Like, horses are, umm, prey animals and dogs and cats are predators and we’re predators. So, when you interact with a dog or a cat, it’s always this dominance game. Like, with a dog it’s, you constantly have to assert dominance and then the dog is like, oh, you’re the pack leader. You’re taking care of shit. I’ll just be really happy about everything. Or, it’s kind of like that with cats but cats are a little different because they’re so independent. But horses are like, horses are like prey animals, so you have to; when you train a horse you have to scare them and then not do anything to them. And then the horse is like, oh this predator is not gonna hurt me. I’m gonna be friends with them and together we’ll make up a team. And so that’s how, so there’s like that difference of dynamic where it’s like with predators you’re like, I have dominance over you, but we’re friends. And with prey it’s I have dominance over you and we’re friends, it’s the same thing but it’s like the reaction of the person on the bottom. Like, when you’re interacting with a dog you’re not on top until they let you be on top. With prey, with a prey animal, you’re always on top until they see you’re not going to hurt them. Even though horses are way stronger than we are, they still see us as being dominant because we have eyes in front of our head. And so I feel like that’s what it’s like with, with humans—it’s a predator-predator dominance relationship. So, you to have like a subservience. And a lot of times, when people are really vulnerable, the only way they’re ever going to be vulnerable with another predator is if the other predator is vulnerable too. And so that’s why you have those weird traditions of like, I’m gonna cut my hand as a symbol that we’re friends. You know, like those old timey, like medieval types of movies you see, like a lot of the gestures are I’m gonna hurt myself in front of you to prove vulnerability to you. To share respect. And I think that that’s probably what she was totally doing, very consciously, but I’m sure it comes very naturally to her, too. That she wants to be attracting people that, but I think that’s the psychological dynamic in the power dynamic, which is that I’m powerful over you cause I’m the therapist, but I’m gonna show you vulnerability so you feel like I’m not gonna take advantage of you.

R: And you really respect that.

P: Oh, yeah. Because, I mean, I mean that’s, in a way that’s how you have to deal with every person. Even like, everybody is that, I mean it’s; people are very different. There’s a wide range of people, but that dynamic happens to you everywhere in your life. It’s a constant
like, who's in power. That's why bosses who self-deprecate are really successful, I think, because they're like, oh I'm the boss, but like, I'm an idiot!

(laughing)

R: Is there, it sounds like you haven't had the opportunity of not experiencing that mutual vulnerability because you've had this one person that's been really affective, so it's more of a thought experiment for me to ask you: what if the person you were seeing wasn't able to do that?

P: Oh, I just wouldn't have gone. I probably would've been like, OK, thanks for the session and then never gone back.

R: Mm hmm. So you were watching for that.

P: Oh, yeah.

R: Umm, and feeling it. And intuiting whether it was happening and reflecting on it. Yeah, yeah. Cool. Umm. I don't think I have any other questions today. Anything else come up in your mind as we were talkin' that I...

P: Umm, no I don't think so.

R: Anything you wish I would've asked you about?

P: No, I don't think so. I don't know if this is relevant, but I feel like, I often would think like, what if I were to see her at like Fred Meyer?

R: Yes, this is relevant.

P: I was like, how do I act? I was like, oh. I guess I would have to say hi very curtly and then leave really quickly. Leave the situation or something. I don't know. So I was like, aware of like; it was really weird because it's like, oh here's this person that I go to and we have this space where it gets really intense, really a safe space that gets... oh, and she had like therapy dogs! Oh my god. The sweetest dogs ever! And I was like, oh, what would I do? What would I do if I saw her dogs outside because her dogs would like be like, oh it's you! And I'd be like, oh we're not there!

(laughter)

R: Have you guys ever talked about that, you and the therapist?

P: No, that's just like my musings.

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah! I like hearing your musings. Any other musings about therapy or the therapeutic relationship or power?
P: I mean, no, I don’t think so.

R: Cool. Let’s, we can just end it there and debrief a little bit.
Participant 9 Round One

Researcher provides intro to context of power.

R: Awesome. Well, umm, I know I sent you the brief context of power, but this is just sort of like the, the sort of set up to get you in the mode of thinking about power dynamics in the therapeutic relationship. So, I’m interested in the power dynamic between clients and their mental health professionals and I’m using the definition in a really simple way, which is, just: power being the capacity to direct or influence one’s own behavior, the behavior of others, or the course of events. And so, sometimes when we take about power, it brings up like negative connotations, but I’m really interested in all elements of power. How power is used positively, how we’re negatively impacted by some of our experiences with power, and then just, you know, neutral observations about power. So, really I’m just most interested in your experience because qualitative research is just, is not looking for anything in particular—it’s asking a question and then your story is the answer. You know? So, really it’s like whatever comes up for you is the right answer.

P: Alright.

R: And if you have any questions about the questions, or you’re not clear, yeah just prompt me and I’ll try to help you out. I’ll probably take some notes while we talk just so I can circle back to some things but, umm... so, yeah. Do you have any questions about the definition or?

P: I don’t think so.

R: Awesome. So, the first question is about describing your relationship with a past or current mental health professional. So, a lot of people have been just going through their whole history and been like, here’s what my history of mental health treatment has been. And some people have said like, here are the people that I think are good and here are the people that I don’t think did a good job. And so, really, however you wanna tell me about a relationship, or relationships, with a mental health professional is great.

P: OK. Does it matter; do you want a good one or a bad one or do you want... Do you have a preference?

R: No, I think that the questions will, you know, glean those experiences, but yeah. How would you describe one of your relationships?

P: Umm... I guess the one that comes to mind is when we lived in Vegas. That was probably one of the initial seasons of a lot of counseling that I did. And I was, had met with a woman, umm... actually I had met with another woman, but then my schedule didn’t work out with her days so she referred me to somebody else. I met with her. Umm... and I worked with her for, I dunno, a month or two. And about that same time my husband and I were in marriage counseling too. And then, this gal I was working with, wasn’t a good fit and at that time I was feeling very depressed and very angry. Umm, and I felt like she was afraid of me.
I felt like she; I wanted to bring up how much anger I had or I wanted to be able to talk about how angry I was, but I felt like she was concerned or scared or... that’s what I actually felt like, like she was afraid of me. And so I didn’t feel like I could talk to her. Or if I felt like I would start to come up and I wanted to talk through with it, she almost couldn’t handle it is the way that it felt. Umm, and so the marriage counselor that we were working with, he referred me to a woman that was in his office and she was an older woman, umm, probably about the same age as my mom. And she had a daughter who was the same age as I was. Umm, and it was... I guess it was, it’s a very clear in my mind—I don’t know if it’s two different styles or two different types—the other woman was younger; she was a little bit older. But all I needed was somebody to just, you know, to just sit and listen and let me talk through it and not feel like... and the funny thing is she was a really tall Amazon of a woman. And this was a really tiny, like petite, woman more like my size. But she just, you know, she just let me talk through it and she wasn’t, she didn’t, I didn’t feel like she was afraid of me so we were able to kinda talk through it. Versus this one, uh... I dunno. I think because I didn’t feel like she was very comfortable. Like she actually, at one point, wanted to refer me to a psychiatrist, umm, for medication, which I’ve been on medication for depression before, so I’m not against that. But I just kinda felt like, I think my feeling was she was trying to... wanted me to go talk to somebody else before I talked to her almost to... just what I kept feeling was like, she’s afraid of me. Yeah, and at this time I’m like mid-twenties, I’m small and I’m... it didn’t feel like a safe place. So I didn’t feel like she was using power, I guess maybe, but I just felt like, OK. In this relationship it wasn’t a comfortable place. And I didn’t feel like I could even... I didn’t, it’s like I couldn’t talk through things because I was afraid because I felt she was afraid.

R: And how did you... I bet there were some real important ways you came to that assessment, that she was afraid of you. And do you remember like how you, how she responded to you that made you feel that way?

P: I remember, one time, we were in her office and we were talking and I was talking about, I was angry, and I said I’m so angry I just wanna to throw something. I remember the look on her face. Like she looked concerned. Like, you know, she’s like well, you know, we don’t do that here. I remember thinking; I’m not going to throw something. I’m trying to talk about the fact that I am angry and just for my own sake of admitting that I was angry. And touching into that anger for the first time in my life, it was scary for me. So, I’m like, this is not... I don’t, at that time, like I’ve done a lot of counseling up to this point in my life. And at this point I think if I was in a situation like this I think I would just know, OK this isn’t a good fit, I’ll move on, you know. At that time, though, I’m very grateful that our marriage counselor, cause he knew I was doing individual counseling, referred me to somebody else cause I said I just don’t know if it’s a good fit. So, I’m glad he referred me to somebody else and this other woman, [past therapist], just sweet, spunky, fun, you know, little bit older woman. That’s all I needed was somebody that, could just felt, I felt like she could handle it. Cause it’s like, she’s not afraid of me. It’s not, you know, and that’s what she kept saying, it’s OK, it’s... you know, not that it’s not a big deal, you’re gonna be OK. Let’s, you know, versus the other gal. And, what I was gonna say is, I’m glad [marriage counselor] referred me to [second individual counselor] or I think this could have been a... I dunno if that, at that time, if I would have initiated looking for somebody else. Or if I would have had the courage
to just make the awareness of, oh OK. This isn’t a good fit. And just go find somebody else. Now I... there’s maturity and experience that I could recognize that. But, at that time, I think I was probably twenty... let’s see, how old was I? Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three... I was probably twenty-five. So, it was probably like twelve years ago, maybe. So, looking back at it, I’m glad I had just had somebody kind of refer me or I think that could potentially have, I dunno. I dunno if it would have stopped me, but it would have made me internalize, gosh, what’s wrong with me? Like, and I remember that was one thing that [past therapist] said. There’s nothing wrong with you. It’s OK. Talk through it. You just need somebody to love you and to listen. Versus the other gal—I remember my perception was that she was afraid of me and that she couldn’t handle me. Which then made me afraid of my own anger, which really wasn’t that... I mean, yeah, there was a lot there. But, I’m like...

R: What am I gonna do?

P: Right.

R: And it’s interesting because you just said [second therapist] said it was OK. And it’s almost like that was the opposite message you were getting from the other woman, which is that this is not OK. And so, there’s a lot of power in how we respond to clients—how I’ve been responded to as a client—in what kind of messages we send, right?

P: Right. Especially for me because growing up I grew up in a southern culture household where you just don’t get angry. You know, you don’t let... you just don’t do that. And so, that was the same message. That whether it was intentional or not, that’s what was coming through; that this isn’t OK. There’s too much here. My god, what am I gonna do? I’m I gonna hurt some... you know, like it made me afraid of my own stuff and anger.

R: When that really wasn’t your instinct.

P: Yeah.

R: Yeah. Thank you. That’s really helpful. Is there any other relationships that come to your mind that you would want to describe that you’ve had over the years.

(long pause)

P: I think, I mean that’s the only one that in my mind, kind of, I had a clear like, OK. I could compare it. Cause I kept working with [past therapist] in Vegas for a couple years and the marriage counselor and then we moved here. I worked with another woman that I liked, umm, and as long as I felt... and I think, after being in counseling for a number of years, you get, I get better at communicating myself and being able to verb, you know, put into words what I’m thinking and what I’m feeling. So I don’t need somebody to ask as many questions cause I can kind of do that on my own now. They’re just there bouncing or redirecting or asking me a different question that takes the, umm... So I guess the answer would probably be no, no there’s nobody else that actually comes to mind. I think I’ve been fairly blessed and fortunate for finding people that were able to just... where I felt comfortable.
R: Yeah, totally. That’s great. How would you describe your most recent person that you’ve been working with?

P: Umm, sweet man that I know, ummm, he’s actually in Georgia, so we’ve done a lot of, umm, Skype or Face time or over the phone... that’s maybe, I wonder, I’m like I wonder if I like men or women better? I’m like, I don’t know! It kinda just depends, I guess. But he’s been really; he’s been sweet. He’s a sweet guy. Umm, I guess kind of like fatherly-ish? Umm, but yet very able to talk about whatever and I don’t, I’ve never, you know I’ve felt comfortable or I haven’t ever felt embarrassed or... and some of that’s because I’ve gone through a lot of counseling and talked through a lot of stuff. So I have a lot of sexual abuse in my history. So I think, I think maybe that’s another thing that I have not; I have talked to one other woman when we first got here and I was trying to find somebody to talk to. I think if you have somebody who has as much sexual abuse in their past as I do, it’s so comfortable and natural and normal for me to talk about it because I’ve talked through so much of it that it doesn’t phase me to talk about it that sometimes I think my level of vulnerability or transparency or openness makes the other person uncomfortable if their not used to that, if that makes sense?

R: Of course it makes sense! h

P: So, I did have one other person that I was like, yeah I just don’t think this is a really good fit. And I think it was, and that’s what I, when I came away I told my husband, I said yeah I just don’t think, I was like, not that she was afraid of me but I almost kind of felt like I don’t think she can handle or it made me, actually it did kind of make me think about gosh, maybe I need to start filtering my words. And then I’m like no that’s not a good thing. Like, I’m not, I’m just talking through things and what I felt and what I thought and kind of what happened, in very explicit detail and I’ve gone through that so many times it’s like, oh, the car is blue, OK. But, you know, to somebody else that hasn’t gone through this much stuff; they may be like uhhhh. So, that’s another person, actually, that comes to mind.

R: Yeah. And you’re... there’s a really, there’s a part of you that’s monitoring or like watching as the client to be like can this person handle it? And looking for clues and cues and kind of getting a vibe of whether or not this person can really help you.

P: So I think those are probably two examples where I felt like and this one, again, I’ve had enough counseling up to this point about seven to eight years ago, that I was like OK, it’s just not the right fit. And it didn’t deter me. Thinking about it now I’m glad that I had, we were already in marriage counseling that he was just able to recommend else and I just moved over. Otherwise, that potentially could have deterred me. And the sad thing is that that was kind of the, that was right at the point where I was just kind of stepping my toe into touching the history or going into all this, so... kind of makes me sad. I’m like, gosh, I hope she got better!

(laughter)
R: I’ve been having some amazing conversations like that, with humor. I mean we’re laughing cause it’s like, I mean...

P: Well, it makes me think like, OK, I was able to find somebody else, but what if somebody else didn’t? So, but yeah.

R: What do you think about the humor cause I’ve been reflecting on the humor of maybe how ludicrous some of our experiences are in counseling or how we use dark humor to like...

P: I think you have to. Cause you need to laugh.

R: Yeah! Cause you’ll cry if you don’t!

P: Well, not that it’s not, I mean not that it would be bad to cry, but sometimes it just... laughter and crying can help you release things or whatever. I’m sure there is physical things that happen in your body that like, OK.

R: There’s this way right now where you were just reflecting on her and you were thinking man, I hope she got better.

P: Yeah. I have this saying that I talk to a friend, another friend of mine who’s kind of like a mentor—she’s quite a bit older than I am and we have a similar history so we’ve connected a lot over the years—well, it’s her saying that I’ve adopted that she refers to it when a therapist makes a mistake, she says they drop the baby. So, that’s what I’ve just been thinking about. Like, yup, she dropped the baby.

(laughter)

R: That could be quotable, from your friend! That’s really awesome. I mean, and that’s the dark humor and that it takes to kind of be like, huh, let’s get...

P: And I guess the other thing that I was reflecting here and I was like when I was working with [past therapist], we were talking about the same stuff. And it wasn’t that [past therapist] did anything different other than... I mean, she was, she had been a therapist for a lot longer. So some of it could have just been, I’m sure a lot of it was experience, maturity. Plus, you know, she had children too and so maybe that made it a little bit easier to relate to or, you know. Not afraid to talk about it.


P: Not worried that you’re gonna throw something at me because you’re angry cause you’re not gonna do that, I know... I mean, it’s just like that isn’t what I was gonna do, but then I felt like that’s what this other gal [trying to remember her name]. She just had, really tall, had really long hair and had glasses. That’s all I remember! (laughing)
R: It's a trip to go through these therapists, right?

P: It is! (laughing)

R: Well, let's shift gears into talking more directly about the power dynamic, which you're speaking to already. So, in general, what is your perspective on the power dynamic between yourself and mental health professionals? What do you think?

P: I guess... at this point I feel... I'm much more grounded in who I am. Or more confident or more at peace or more whatever word you wanna use, centered or whatever, that I don't think it would... I don't think I would so easily get affected or sucked into it as quickly. Either one: I would probably recognize it a little bit more if I didn't feel like it was a good fit or if I felt... and I'm using the power dynamic as a bad thing right now, like if they were trying to shift something or move me in a certain direction or, umm. But I also feel like I have the ability to... I dunno, probably just communicate myself much more than I did back then. And I also feel like I probably could, I think I probably also could work with most any therapist and it would be a benefit. Almost kind of like OK, I'm paying them to get something, like I'm using them to move or to grow or to do something. So, whether I like them or not or it feels like it's a good fit or not, I still feel like I could leave with some progress. But that comes after sixteen years of counseling. So, I mean, I'm... so, you know, some miles under my belt of what I want from it or how to use it or how to apply it or how to grow or how to press through difficult things with it. So, (xyz... inaudible) kind of rambling.

R: No, I love it. Rambling is usually where we get to some interesting stuff. So, I mean, I'm really thinking a lot about... you're kind of talking about this, like, process you go through after being in counseling for years and seeing different people. There's like this process of growth, where you figure out how to use the power of the relationship (both state this line at the same time), you know, for a good way.

P: And I think that, especially at this point with how much counseling I have done so far, I don't think when I'm in a relationship that I'm so... cause I used to be much more tied into [person's name]. Does she like me or does she not like me or am I saying the right thing or is she get... you know, like. Now I just like, I don't... not that it doesn't matter, not that I don't feel some of that, but I'm able to be like that's not what this is about, you know. I can kind of press through that. Umm, so in some ways I feel like I... like I said before, I think I could probably go to most any therapist, whether I liked them or not, and it could be a good... growth would come out of it because I've learned how to, this is gonna sound bad, but I've learned how to use the relationship for what I need.

R: That's not bad.

P: Right. So, it that sense power is a good thing. Cause I'm learning how, I've learned how to think OK, this is... and sometimes it may not be that I'm coming in for a specific thing, but it
may just be like I want to be working through some of this stuff so I can, I think I could do that with most anybody.

R: Well, and it sounds like—I’m just curious—you also... I think that’s a product of growth and maturity, which is a word you’ve used already in the interview. Like time, learning how to use it. What works, what doesn’t. Is there anything else you can think about that makes you better? Or a therapist better at helping you?

P: Umm. For me, I guess, and I think I’ve said this before, where I’m not pulled into the ‘gosh does she like me does she not’ or just the insecurity or feeling less than. Like you’re the professional and I’m the person. It’s like, no. You know. I’m here, we’re working together, you’re helping me. Yeah. So maybe in some ways, as I’m talking out loud, I’m like OK. I do feel like I’m powerful in the relationship with a therapist. Like, I’m coming into it from a place of stability or strength. Not necessarily wholeness, because we all have areas that are still broken. There always gonna go from, you know, one healing to another, whatever...

R: Sure. Life long process.

P: Totally. But there’s a much stronger place that I’m coming from or standing in a sense of power. Umm, and I guess that that what now would make a person better or not? Umm. I don’t know. I mean I guess if I was going to somebody that... I mean. Well, I’ve never, hopefully you wouldn’t go to somebody who wouldn’t let you talk or, you know, talking over you or you know. That would probably make you bad. Like, OK, this is just not gonna work. If I don’t get a chance to say anything... most therapists/counselors wouldn’t do that, or you hope they wouldn’t.

R: That’s OK. I think you were really clear with me when you said like, I’ve grown to this point that I could figure out how to use whatever is in front of me. Whatever expertise is in front of me in a helpful way for myself. That’s awesome. So, that’s good enough for me.

P: OK.

R: The next question is about maybe sharing a time with me where you wanted to bring something up in counseling with the counselor and you either could or couldn’t do it. And that might be about the counseling or it might be about something from your own life.

P: Umm. I guess going back to, that other lady, the tall lady with long hair. I wanted to bring up how angry I was, but I couldn’t because there was enough subtle redirects that made me feel like it was unacceptable to be angry. Which I don’t think that’s what she was saying, but that’s how I perceived it. Which is what mattered in that situation. Umm, so that’s probably the main one I can think of.

R: I can imagine it would have been really hard at that time in your therapy career to, umm, to tell her that—to bring that up. To say I don’t feel like you’re letting me be angry.
P: And I don’t think I even said that.

R: Right.

P: Because I don’t think I could. And at that point I’m, you know, you’re young, you’re immature, you’ve never really done this before and don’t know what to do or what not to do. I’m just drowning in my life and it’s not going well and I’m trying to reach for help. And the message that I’m getting is I’m not OK. I need to go see a psychologist for medication for evening moods and, or I’m you know, no- you’re being angry or throwing something is not allowed in here.

R: Right. And in that moment it’s sort of like there’s a path that’s closed off. Like, you wouldn’t even think to say you’re not allowing me to be angry because you’re so silenced.

P: Right.

R: Any other times where you did bring things up in counseling that were harder to bring up, or?

P: Umm, I’m trying to think. When we were in [US city], umm, we were in marriage counseling too cause I had had an affair with a, at a job down there, but it ended up, it really was another case of sexual abuse where I could have pressed charges if I had wanted to, of the guy, the manager. Which I decided not to cause at that point we were moving and it didn’t really matter. Umm, for me at least. Umm, but that was probably another thing, bringing that up. Well, we went to marriage counseling for that. Of, you know, OK we’re bringing it up. I had the affair. We were talking through it, but it wasn’t something that we were already in counseling and then had the, oh I should bring this up. Cause we kind of went into it with, OK, our marriage is falling apart. I’m drowning in depression and this whole history of sexual abuse. And then I was in this relationship, in a, with this other guy—my employer at this company. So I guess maybe that was a time of bringing. I dunno, am I answering your question right? I’m like, am I supposed to be bringing something up where I didn’t feel like I could bring it up or just an interesting example of when I did bring something up?

R: Yeah, just something that you did. And it sounds like you were there to work on your marriage and the affair, but like there was more to talk about and you did talk about it.

P: Right. Cause it was all layered in... well, like I said, I’ve had a lot of sexual abuse, so it was all layered in all of that, which was kind of all of that kinda started to come up at that season/time.

R: Thank you so much for your vulnerability, [P’s name]. And one of the challenges of this interviewing process is I would love to be more like bi-directional. (laughter) But, I have to not say much. Umm, so...

P: Totally fine.
R: So, but I really appreciate you so much, sharing this stuff with me. And I guess there’s a part of that story of the affair, or sexual assault, that has power in it too.

P: Right.

R: And I was wondering if, who or how you came to understand that affair as more of a power like relationship that had power and control in it.

P: It was actually, it was in that, in the marriage counseling with [marriage counselor] is we started to unpack what was happening and why it happened and how it happened. Umm, and one of the things I’ve said is that my, and you know I still feel like I… I still had a choice, so I’m not gonna fully, you know...

R: I understand what you mean.

P: It’s a little bit blurry, but one of the things that I’ve said when I’ve talked about it before is that the affair had, I mean it was deeply painful and hurtful to my husband, but there was even deeper pain for me when I realized I had let someone do to me essentially what I promised would never happen again. To manipulate or to twist or to, umm, kind of draw me into this, which I had said I would never do that again. Which happened in that situation, so. It was in talking about it with [marriage counselor], which sometimes we met with together and sometimes we met with one on one to talk through stuff, but it was in that relationship with him of talking through how it happened, when it happened, where it happened, conversations leading up to it that I started to realize I only got hired for that job because he knew what he wanted from the beginning. Like, I can see that from this standpoint of after having unpacked it so many times I can, or in that season, I can see like, OK. He knew what he wanted from the beginning. He kind of was grooming me for the position of that. Umm, so then, yes for my husband it was a very painful thing, but for me, and it was painful because I hurt him, but it was also even more painful because it tied into this other thing of I won’t ever let anybody do that to me again and I walked right into it. And that was actually happening, so I hadn’t done a significant amount of counseling. I had done some, umm, up to that point. But that was the time where I was meeting with this woman with the long straight hair that like, OK I’m angry, but not realizing why I’m angry yet, but I’m just so angry. And then feeling like, OK, she can’t handle the anger but then maybe I shouldn’t be angry, you know. Cause I tend to be a holder, push it down. That’s what you’re supposed to do. You’re not supposed to be loud or be angry. Which is why I’m glad I went and saw [past therapist] because then I realized I’m really not, I’m really OK!

R: Mm hmm. Totally. And it sounds like from your story about, like coming to that realization, that it was something that you came to or that you became aware of and I’m wondering if, if you recall, if... and I’m just curious if you recall if [marriage counselor] maybe used his power positively to influence that perspective or if it really did just come from your insights.

P: Umm...
R: Does my question make sense?

P: It does. And I would say it was probably a little bit of both. Because I went into it fully saying I had an affair, I cheated on my husband. And then, and my husband, even if he was here, would say, you know, he would say the same thing. That [former boss], my boss, yes, I had an affair with [former boss] and it was very painful for [partner], but [former boss] new what he was doing. So it’s, I don’t know, I think talking through it with [marriage counselor], talking through it with [marriage counselor] and [husband] sitting here, talking through it just me and [marriage counselor], talking through it with just me and [partner] of realizing. It’s kind of, it’s not totally cut and dry, black and white, just grey cause that’s just life. But I think I was able to recognize why I was feeling more depressed or more angry or what it triggered in on me that still was undealt with or raw brokenness, woundedness in my own life. And so then it was almost like then I had to kind of separate it a little bit and be like, OK, let’s look at it from this angle and then now let’s look at it from this angle so that I could heal and grow through both. Because it kind of is two different things. So, I think he… I never felt like [marriage counselor] like put words in my mouth or tried to convince me of something. Umm, you know, but he would pose questions or ask questions or we’d talk through things. And I think in some ways what helped me find an ability, or just kind of settledness or peace of, in my mind, I mean, sometimes… most of the time if I’m telling somebody I will—not that it comes up that often—but I’m fairly open with it, [partner] and I both are. If we’re in conversation with somebody about talking about working through difficult seasons of marriage, I will say I had an affair. Because I did, you know. But if you unpack it, different layers, then you can, then there’s...

R: There’s more complexity to it.

P: There’s more complexity to it. Umm. But I don’t ever feel like, I don’t think, I never felt like [marriage counselor] pushed me in one direction or the other. But I think he did a helpful job of, originally just looking at the one, cause that’s what we came in for, and then kind of unpacking the other with the three of us together, [partner], myself, and [marriage counselor]. And like seeing how it kind of was this web of stuff.

R: And it sounds like that was really helpful or you.

P: Yeah, it was. And that’s like, I was like I was going somewhere with this, I might have totally forgot, but I think it helped me… not that I didn’t have to work through my own guilt or shame or hurt for what I did to my husband, but it helped me kind of, I don’t know... I don’t know what the right word is. Just kind of take a deep breath or like settle into, OK. It made more sense. It made more... you know, the right word might be...

R: Well, that movement you made is like, you know. It’s like (deep sigh). There’s like a sense of relief or groundedness or something.

P: Right, yeah. But I still wouldn’t all say, oh it was all abuse and... it’s two.
R: Huh uh. I really do hear you and I hear the complexity of that and I agree with, I hold those complexities too, you know? Cause...

P: But having talked through that with him, I think what it did is it put, it put a foundation, something to set it on—OK, there's two sides to it and I understand that. And I can work through and heal through and talk through and grow through both sides. But, it, I dunno, it let me set it on something versus like, what's wrong with me, why am I doing this, you know, I'm a terrible person. It's like it put some sort of foundation. And I don't think, I would say in that situation I think [marriage counselor] did a very good job of, kind of, unpacking it, you know. Of working through it with us of, we're in the process of creating the foundation to kind of set it on.

R: Totally. I love that motion. Thank you. That's been another fun part of like talking to people is, you know, I'm audioing this and it's like there's all this beautiful like motions people are doing. Umm, cool. So, shifting gears a little bit, thank you so much [P's name]. Umm, tell me about a time where you were aware that what you and a counselor did in session, or talked about in session, influenced your life outside of counseling.

P: Umm... so, sexual abuse for me started when I was five and it went on for a long time. And I never told anybody till I was fourteen. And I survived my life, by... by disassociating, essentially. Just, shutting down. And I spent a significant portion of my life disappearing, you know. I'd be in a total conversation with you, talking to you, but I wouldn't have any idea what I was saying or no recollection. That's how I went through a significant portion of my life. And it was, I think it was working with [past therapist], down in Vegas, of trying to stay present in conversations. And I still do it sometimes, now. I don't know if you, if you've noticed, but most people at this point, I don't know if I've gotten better, but. When I'm in conversation with somebody, it's almost like I'm moving my mouth almost as your moving your mouth and it's just how I've had to teach myself to stay present in the conversation with you, of, versus disappearing. And, I don't disappear—very rarely. Usually, it's probably, in fact normal or healthy now. You're tired, you just kind of zone out type, whatever. It's just normal. So I don't disappear the way I used to. But I have noticed sometimes I still do that same, I don't even, I don't even realize I do it anymore. It's cause I had worked; I had twenty years of disappearing. It took so much work and it was so hard to stay present that that's what we worked on. It's like I literally had to move my mouth to... you know, if you were talking to me, I'm almost mimicking your words cause I'm so focused on staying present and listening to you. And then I just had to work on re-training my brain to stay present—to stay here. Don't go away. Don't disappear. Stay here. And that's how I did it, a lot of times. That was one of my re-training mechanisms. But, now, you know, x number of years later where I'm not disappearing, I'll still catch myself, like stop doing that! People are gonna think you're like... (laughing) And I don't really worry about it that much anymore. Sometimes I just laugh about it.

R: Totally. And it sounds like working on staying present in counseling has really impacted, really influenced your life outside of it.

P: It has.
R: In a way that, you know, sounds like things changed for you once you were able to be more present.

P: Significantly, yeah. But if you ever see me moving my mouth when you’re moving your mouth—that’s why!

(laughter)

P: I don’t even know I’m doing it half the time! Sometimes my sister will point it out. She’s like, (whispering) you’re moving your mouth when I’m talking. I’m like, sorry. Cause I don’t even think about it anymore. It’s almost my version of walking with a limp... we all have...

(laughing)

R: There’s that humor again! Like, I can’t, I have laughed so much doing these interviews about the hardest things and, umm, I think it’s gonna come out in the study. How we use humor to like deal with a lot of things. But, umm, so you’ve spoken about your own power as the client a little bit today already. So, umm, it might be interesting to go to one of your more recent therapeutic relationships, umm for this question, which is: how does your counselor respond to you when you are powerful as the client? When you express strong opinions or resist the counselor’s influence or push back on anything or...

P: Umm, the two counselors that I still kind of have—I mean, I don’t, I’m not regularly in counseling, but if something comes up or every now and then I’m like, hey, let’s just touch base or I want to talk to somebody, I would go to either one of these two. One of them, uh, lives back in Georgia and the other one is local. At this point, it’s a little bit hard to say simply because I’ve known them for so many years and I’ve worked with them for so many years that... I think if I was to push back on something or so no, I don’t agree... well, one that’s totally not my personality. I’m not a super assertive person to begin with. And I tend to verbally process out loud and talk through things. Umm, so if I was disagreeing about something and they knew that I was wrong, they probably would know, you know, give her a week or two or three and she’ll come back and like, you’re right—I’m sorry. You know, whatever. Or whatever it would be; gosh you were right, I shouldn’t have said that or that was, you know. So, I think both of these people trust me enough that they know I will keep working through it. Or I’m not a hard and fast this is the decision there’s no more to it. But on some of the things, but on, you know if something came up where I felt like it was like, OK, here’s my decision. I also feel like they would both be respectful, whether they agree with it or not. But maybe it’s a little bit hard just because there’s relationship with both of those; like I’ve worked with them long enough that they kind of know me or I know them or they trust me or vice versa. Umm, but I still don’t feel... at least the guy I’ve worked with in Georgia, and he’s probably the person that I would... if I, would be the first person I would reach out to if I needed something. Or even if I just was talking, or like trying to figure out what I’m doing with my life, you know. He would be the guy that I would be like, OK, well let’s lay all the cards on the table—this is all the different things I’m thinking about. Umm. I don’t know where I was going with that, other than I feel like, again, even if I said, drew a position, that, oh I remember what I was going to say. I don’t, I’m not, I don’t have, like I
said before, I’m not, there’s a little more maturity or settledness in who I am where I don’t necessarily need his approval. So that probably makes it a little bit better because I know hey there’s gonna be some things where maybe he’d go right and I’d go left, but it doesn’t really matter cause, you know. And so I, that makes it easier to make a decision like that. But I also feel like I... if I, we were, if I was trying to make a decision and I said I was gonna go left and they knew I really should have right, they would trust me to come back, you know. And I would, you know, I don’t have any qualms of, oh I made a mistake. You were right, I really shouldn’t have done that or that would have been the better thing to do...

R: Yeah, you don’t have concerns about a shifting story and a shifting experience. You’re willing to come back and be like, hey. There’s some nuance to what you’re saying that I want to see if I can get to. Umm, which is there’s this way that you’re really like come to be less insecure you know, through life and through counseling, to the point that you don’t need that kind of counselor’s approval. But there’s also, umm, this part of you that you spoke to a bit, that’s not super assertive. And so there’s, there’s a complexity there. Like, there’s a part of you that feels really powerful and like not needing them to like you any more or don’t care too much about what they think. But you’re also, it sounds like, very umm... yeah, very like (deep breath). I’m not sure if I can find the right word. But not very assertive, is what you said.

P: The word, the phrase that comes to my mind that I would use to describe myself or my personality is gentle strength. Like, I’m a gentle person, but there’s some strength there. But I don’t have to stand up and be strong in your face, you know. Because I’m just, I’m not a—I’m a fighter, in the sense that thank goodness I am to have gotten to where I am today to press through as much as I had to. But I’m not a in your face, gonna, it’s just not who I am. So there’s strength there, but there’s also a gentleness. Umm, and I don’t know if I like one more than the other. I kind of like the blend of them. Umm, I’m glad I have both. Cause I think one without the other would not, cause one I, if I was just the gentleness then yeah, it would be really easy to be pulled in whatever directions or a lot of insecurity. But if I was just the strength then I would really miss the other. If that makes sense.

R: Yeah. It totally makes sense. Umm, thank you. It sounds like, umm... that gentle strength has clarified since long, straight hair gal, right? Like that sense of your person and who you are and what you’re about has like grown and been cultivated over these years of just living and growing and working on yourself and going to therapy. So, I was just thinking about...

P: And I think, in some ways, that is something that makes me feel powerful. It makes me like, using your word. Like it makes me feel... I have a lot of respect for that part of me. Or I have a lot of gratefulness for that part of me. And there is a lot of, there is a powerfulness to it in the sense that I could be in a situation with, you know, in a therapeutic relationship where I can be open to feedback and, but I am also, it doesn’t necessarily really matter, not that it doesn’t, I don’t, you know like if I, not that I don’t have to still process through like gosh I really want this person to like me, or whatever. I think we all have that. But it definitely doesn’t, that, neither one of those dictates my next step forward or, you know, as much as it would've.
R: Mm hmm. Yeah. Thanks. Just one or two more questions. Doing OK?

P: Mm hmm.

R: Good. Were there any other times you can think that your needs weren’t being met by your counselors, cause you’ve spoken about a couple, so this would be an opportunity to speak about any other times that come to mind.

P: Not that I can think of. Umm.

(long pause)

R: Can you think of a time where you really realized your needs were first really being met by counseling or your counselor?

P: Umm, one of them was probably going back to that gal, [past counselor], is just remembering how she made me feel—OK. Almost this sense of I’m normal or it’s a, I’m OK or I’m gonna be OK or it’s OK. You know, just... I don’t even remember if it was so much what she said or what she did, but just that in her presence, I didn’t, I felt like, OK. I’m gonna be OK. I’m not a total disastrous mess. Yes, there’s stuff to work through, but it’s gonna be OK. We can work through this. That was probably one of the big things. Or one of the big times I can think of.

R: And there’s something ironic, or something, about feeling like a disaster, right? Going to counseling being like, I’m a total disaster. And then having the person be like, no you’re not.

P: Right.

R: Like, there’s something (takes breath)...

P: Ah, I can breathe!

R: ...really interesting about that. Because I think counseling can have this sort of like idea that we go to it when we’re really broken or we’re really fucked up or, you know, we’re really messy. But it’s like I find it super interesting personally and professionally that being supported into, umm, being normalized, that you’re ok, is like such a powerful part of the process. I just think that’s... that’s something I’m really thinking about as I do these interviews is how much normalizing, like normalizing your experience is such a powerful tool. Almost every person has referred to it, you know. Of like, that idea that I’m OK. So, that’s just some of my thoughts. (laughs) Umm, what do you think about choices and making choices in counseling, in therapy? Is there a particular time where you got to make some choices about what happened in therapy or?

P: Hmm. (long pause) I don’t know... I’m trying to think if the quest... nothing’s coming to mind or, umm... (long pause) You mean like in a situation where they wanted to talk about something and I decided to talk about something different or?
R: Anything. Yeah, can you think of a time where you chose?

P: I guess I can, yeah I can remember some times of, in conversations with like a counselor or a therapist in a season and not being ready to talk about something. Like, I’m not ready to go there yet. I’m just, I’m not ready. Umm, and their response would be like, OK, you know. It was never pressing, it was always, umm, you can be ready when you're ready, I’m not gonna press you. So, in that sense, it would make me feel like, using your word, I had some power. Nobody’s pushing me into something. Umm, and then I would just choose, OK, I’m not ready here, but we can talk about this. Or sometimes I may be able to talk about it, but I don’t wanna, you know, like step into the depth of the emotion. Like, we can talk about this because I know this is something that we're gonna have to talk about at some point, so let’s go ahead and like outline some things or like, this is something.

R: Put it on the table.

P: Put it on the table. But I’m not ready to like get into this one yet. Just can’t do it quite yet.

R: And you’re able to say that.

P: Yeah.

R: Mm hmm. And that be respected—that there’s a difference between putting it on the table and diving into it.

P: Right.

R: Yeah. Awesome. Is there anything that I missed that like you wish I would’ve asked about, or? Did anything come up while we were talking that you're maybe not even sure is relevant but…

(long pause)

P: Nothing’s really coming to my mind.

R: Awesome. Well, that seems like a good place to end the official interview. Does that sound good?

P: Sounds good to me.

(laughter as recorder turns off)
Round One Participant #10.

Q #1.

With [current person]; I've had 2 main therapists for many years. Before [current MHP] I saw (another therapist) 2004-2011. They are very different from one another. But I feel like talking about current person, it’s complicated by my own history and relationship with power you could say and her style and her personality and things like that. her way of going about it. I’ve had 2 diff friends who’ve gone to her—she doesn’t fuck around, she’ll tell you the hardcore truth so I knew that already. I don’t want to over answer this question. My relationship with her is a good one to talk about b/c from the beginning, when I had a phone interview where I wanted to ask her a bunch of q’s, it was a really good conversation about the power dynamic in the TR, I brought it up and that’s a thing and it’s hard and gets in the way and can very much inform get in the way of the process or whatever the hell...

Q: How did you become aware of that...

I went to a psychologist in [another state] where I grew up when I was 17, when I was severely depressed and suicidal for a couple years and then I went a woo-woo lady a few years later who was really cool, combo of talkin and body work which was really powerful at the time. I moved to Portland and have had varying very shitty experiences with counseling here. I saw (another local therapist) for couples counseling 11 years ago and the point is, I’ve had a vary degree of counseling experiences but those shitty experiences, a number of shitty experiences at (local agency) so many negative experiences there....i won’t even go into it. I had a bad one at (another local spot) it wasn't like I had a really super analytic experience of power in a traditional, like analysis. I didn’t have that “you are the subject and I am the doctor....”

Q: Something made you aware of it when you called you current person

None of them were where I felt disempowered or made me feel bad, where I come from politically and doing personal work in the communities I’m surrounded by, anti-authoritarian, liberation anarchist person forever. I’ve never been a theory person. I despise it. In the same way I despise power dynamics that are abusive in counseling or any kind of doctor-patient relationship. that’s a lot of what informed it. Why I came to (her) and wanted to have that convo. With (past tx) I felt I was on the hot seat, inherent, I can’t erase the fact that I’m the one that has to tell all this vulnerable shit about myself and the other person doesn’t. I was really in touch with that. what I appreciated about (past tx) is that he would relate to me and share his own experiences and that helped up be more mutual-ish or whoever word I’m looking for, felt more like a balanced sharing. I don’t inappropriately expect my counselor to be my bf but my specifically b/c of my awareness of power and how awkward and weird and uncomfortable having a profess relationship that is really vulnerable with someone really is..
Q: you said your relationship with your current person is different. How would you describe that diff.

The whole reason I wanted to change counselors, I liked him and I appreciated he could relate as a trans person. Shared the frustration with lesbian community and hatred of trans women. He was an ally, I kind of hate that word a lot, when I do use it, I make a statement that:
I mentioned that to (current)- I really appreciated that, are you willing to do that with me. She was like, I’m not a trans woman but I try to relate with all my patients probably she said. I like the things she said and she’s awesome. The main reason I wanted to try another therapist is that [past MHP] was really passive. Maybe that’s just a style sometimes. Maybe it’s a therapist not wanting to talk over or lead too much and let the other person lead their process. It was a sounding board all the time and I was like working things out and being like “ra ra ra ra” (current ) has made me realized I need reeled in. shes not a vessel that could be anybody. She has challenged me so much, we've had to have a meta conversation about talking about our TR so many times b/c I've had such a hard time so many times with it. I've been like “This is my last session , I can’t do this anymore” or feeling super self-conscious or I annoy her, sad feelings and I feel glad that I stuck it out. That’s been really hard b/c what I often feel is happening is that there is an unfair power dynamic that I’m not strong enough.....

I’m interested in what you were going to say...maybe we will move on.

I’m trying to pause more, it’s part of my time with current person.

Q: #2

It’s complicated. With her b/c part of my task at hand is a lot of the talking has been like, me saying “I feel like when you are challenging me when it feels like you are frustrated with me, it interrupts the process of me being able to hear you. The way you say it can block it from reaching me or something....her challenge to me, that is like this basic underlying thing, I need a comfortable safe place in order to do the work or something and her challenge to me has been, I think you [participant] need to work....it’s never gonna be a perfect experience, she has challenged the idea of safety, I’m not a child anymore, a child is innocent and vulnerable and safety really is a thing...of course it relates in adult relationships with abuse. She has challenged that idea, questioned that, that world get thrown around in communities you and I have been part of, abuse of language, unfortunate and unhealthy. “I feel really unsafe right now” It’s a grey area, a fine line. Anyway...I'm talking about my understanding of safety to do the work and her challenging me to push through that uncomfortability.

R: There is something that makes it possible to work through this power dynamic. Something going on that is working for you that allows you to have these really hard conversations and stick with it. What do you think that is?
P: I often find myself at this precipice or fence where I could go one of two ways, or interpret things one of two ways. The point of this is my last session, maybe I do need to find a new counselor, there have been times where she’s said, maybe I’m not the right person for you, maybe you need another style, someone who is careful or tender. I’ve wondered that too is there too much of a clash and does this get in the way too much. I keep sticking with her b/c she has done that work with me. Stayed late. She reassuring. Sometimes its surprising b/c of my own childhood issues. She’ll be like I love you and I care about you and basically, the message is I want you to keep coming back or I want good things for you, I’m not judging you, I do care about you. Messages like that.

Q follow-up on fence. How would you describe that other path?

Our two point of views. A lot of times [current MHP] has been I wish you would let go of the reins sometime and just trust in me and me directly things sometimes, it’s kind of like that, I see her belief and I see my belief, and I’m like which one should I believe. Is this fucked up or okay? A lot of times, of course, I wonder, she isn’t God and can’t be this omnipotent person and isn’t always right. That critical person from my stuff, my anarchism, power-challenging…..wanna critique it, are you sure you’re not doing something fucked up? I do keep coming back.

Q: It’s something that reminds me, I should be asking myself. Maybe we both have to ask that together….

She talks about transference and countertransference a lot with me lately. She’s cool. Sometimes she’s so hardcore. Then sometimes there is like, you think I’m doing this thing and I’m not. She’s like I have a particular perspective. I’ll say something and it’s almost a smart ass or an eye roll comment. And she’ll (challenge it)

Q3:

Fuck yeah, so many times, so many things. When I’ve done a thing that I feel like she isn’t going to like or b/c she knows me she is worried about that behavior, I’ve kept from her when I’ve fucked people cuz she’s like oh no you are doing that things again, where you’ve been reckless, I feel shamed, guilty or embarrassed, trifecta of unfortunate feelings the most recent thing is that I was smoking pot for really long while again and didn’t tell her. She specifically forbade me from smoking pot. I told her after I did some fucked up shit while I was high-fucking someone while I was high-reckless, going against my limits and boundaries—I sent her an email, she was really reassuring about it and was like I’m sure you are feeling a lot of shame, that sounds really hard (I’m paraphrasing). Its reassuring that she gets it that I’m in a vulnerable place and can’t be like “goddam it (self name).”

Qb: TR
So many times I’m withholding the fact that I’m so self-conscious, I thinking I’m not gonna tell her, gonna disappear, go radio silent, email her later and tell her that I think I can’t come back. There have been lotts of times like that. It’s been horrible, because I’m suffering inside and it gets in the way of us doing anything, obviously. That’s always been really sad. For whatever reason it comes up more sometimes probably when we are working on something scary or hard and I’m like really sensitive about a particular thing and she challenges me about it. There have been times where I’m uber self-conscious even from the point of when she comes down, I’m thinking “oh, this bitch again, sigh, it’s gonna be such a hard session or something.” Eventually, I was able to tell her all that and we’ve been able to work it out, that I though that was my last session so many times recently. I’m going to keep pushing myself. She’ll be like, “I do not think that about you at all, that is not how I see you, I really want to interrupt that thought. You do not annoy me.”

R: How does that help you?

It’s really reassuring, very reassuring, soothing, it helps me relax and feel more comfortable and trust her, I guess you could say. But trust is a really hard thing for me. She knows that and that is something she has brought up so many fucking times. I wish you would trust me more [participant] and let me have the reigns.

R: You guys are really working something out together.

P: It’s hard.

Q# influence life outside the session

P. plenty of times. I thought about that question and a number of things came to mind. There is a lot of things that [current MHP] has said or opened up about my past or realized the depth of some past shit. There is this one particular thing she said that resonates throughout its’ like this soundwave that’s continuing outward into space. About how we test people in relationships and the relationship we’re in, we test the waters, we do it all the time. She specifically told me that probably at a particular time where I did something that was hurtful to a partner or something I’m dating. Kind of like a theory, this is what we subconsciously do, not a concrete statement but a way to describe what happens in relationship all the time. We have theories about ourselves that we want to test against the person we are with and prove or disprove that theory that we have about yourself: I’m unlovable, I’m going to do this fucked up thing and see if they still love me. Since she told me that I’m like, oh jesus, I do that all the time, hurting people in relationships or doing something so reckless that hurts a person, why the fuck did I do that? I wasn’t trying to sabotage this relationship or be a little fucker...

R: That idea allowed you to make some much sense of some past shit, current shit, future shit, that reverberation is big.
P: It helped me, I feel like the whole process of counseling is about becoming more self-aware if you put it in a tiny little nutshell really basis. That idea helps me be more self-aware and deliberate. Doesn’t mean I haven’t fucked up like so many fucking times since then or done old patterns.

A lot less that previous years, huger gaps in between, like “I will not do that.”

Q#: respond when you are powerful. You kind of alluded to this in your conflict...when you were mentioning this idea that X challenges you and you sense she might be frustrated, that comes to mind, there might be a time where you are pushing back....

P: I feel like I have a two fold answer ready for that. there are times where I’m powerful in a really positive “go girl” kind of way. She’s really cool about being like “yeah, that’s really hard, way to do that thing that was really hard.” Even recently, I came to some conclusions on my own and she was like, “You did that all by yourself, you didn’t even need my help” patting on the back, (what’s that word? K: validating?) yes, she can be good about validating accomplishments when I’m powerful in a positive way. There have been times where she has been like, “you don’t want to hear what I have to say, you want to take the reigns.” Then I’m like, “oh shit.” Then there is a hard conversation that happens. It’s true she is right, I’m being stubborn or wanting to be in control. She’ll call me on it is basically what my answer to that is—how does she respond...

R: validating or challenging....

P: Specifically,’. That;s how I want to say it. Really calls me on my shit. when that happens.... “Why am I here, you don’t even want to hear from me....?”

Q: I want to ask a follow-up, what impact does that have on you, having this person is your life that is going to call you on your shit.

P: We’ve actually broken this apart recently again and I really like to have the conversation even if they come to the same conclusions. I wanted to break down judgment or the power dynamic of her sitting in judgment. We got really meta about it. The idea of judgment and what that can mean. I’m not saying, “you’re judging me.” And the negative connotation that often has...I just mean in general. It’s not necessary, I’m just afraid of your harsh judgments or your judgment of me. You have to recognize you make judgment calls and then respond accordingly, what you know about me, you read that and then you judge the situation and or behavior that I exhibit. We’ve broken that down recently again....

I already mentioned that I keep things from her that trifecta of guilt shame or embarrassment, it definitely has that affect for me. I fear her judgment and that doesn’t mean a negative way—“I’m having all this parent trigger shit from childhood and she is going to yell at me or I’m going to get in trouble.” It’s like, this is what I told her, I wanted to clarify to her that I wasn’t being like, “you’re judging me, that’s evil.” I’m afraid of your judgment because I know you’ll be right. Like, I know you know me really well and you’re
going to call me on shit really righteously. I guess in that way, it encourages me right now in this moment. It makes me ponder that I should always tell her everything. In a way, of course I should, I shouldn’t keep things from her. I feel bad when I do keep things from her, it’s dishonest, I might as well show who I really am all the time, also, whatever we’re human and we’re allowed to do whatever the fuck we want. I don’t know.

R: the complexity of these concepts. I love you are thinking real time about your TR, I want to validate you for being so fucking bold for bringing things up, having a lot of hard conversations. You’re a total badass. For real.

P: needs not being met

P: I’ll talk about a past one. Maybe that was the q I didn’t know how to answer because I was forcibly looking through it through my current relationship, I feel like [current MHP] is a good example to draw upon b/c its complicated. Yes there is power there is something about the way she communicates and that's a problems, I’ve wondered about that. Is she is really hardcore, could she be more gentle? Stuff like that. but at the same time I have a lot work to do about pushing through when things are hard and when I feel, challenged or they are scary, ya know. It’s complicated that way, in a nutshell.

The reason why I wanted to leave counseling with [past MHP] is that he was more passive and took that good listener approach, sounding board, let the client lead thing...and also, I will say [current MHP] let me get away with that for a long time and has been like, “I don’t think I’m helping you by just letting you talk, I need to speak up more and you need to be challenged more, that’s part of the problem in your life. My words. I will say is that I wanted was something that I’d heard of, someone who was going to give me homework and challenge me, x has done that “make a list” “practice this behavior” which is cool and its an ongoing challenge that steps outside the room. I feel like I jumped ship really hard opposite from last counselor to current. I wanted more, I needed input. Which is interesting because I’ve looked back and I remember when I first saw old counselor, I thought he talked too much, being like I don’t want to be told what my experience is by your interpretation, why don’t you listen more, I don’t think I said that but it almost felt like he changed his style of counseling in general. Or maybe someone brought it up. He became the more sounding board thing.

Q: How did you end it with last counselor. Did he know you were done.

Yeah, Yeah...I think it was a little vague. I think I was like I’m pretty okay right now is maybe what it was, maybe I don’t need counseling or an and/or I might look into other counselors in the future. I think I said something about that....There is another counselor I’ve been curious about...I didn’t feel, I knew he was profesh about it and I could be like, whatever, if that he has hurt feelings he could push through it. That would be my fear about breaking up with anyone. I don’t want to hurt someone’s feelings or bring up issues for them...I think..... it was a while ago.....4 years ago. I think I’d already been looking at [current counselor] I’d heard about her from friends....
Q: choices about what happened

P: Maybe this is just repeating, in the beginning she let me get away with leading more….probably early on brought up, asked her, will you be really careful with me because I get really sensitive and then shut off. She say it happen and I’ll check out and shut off. I hate that I do that kind of. Esp right now that I’m more aware. [current MHP] has told me that when something is hard and scary you are done and that sucks. Especially b/c its not just my rel with [current MHP], it’s a problem elsewhere I’ve seen it, I become a blank stare checked out overwhelmed whatever person, b/c it trigger some old bullshit.

Q: how do you decide what you are going to work on each session

That is usually lead by me. But a lot of times, the last time I will have said, can we talk more about this next week, I feel like there is something here…or she’ll say, let’s talk about it more next time. I wish that happened more, we forget, we both forget, even with notes, esp with her having multiple lives walking in her room, it must be hard to keep straight. It’s impossible to keep straight.

R: there’s some awesome stuff that came up that will probably come up in the next interview…

P: That’s good to hear.

Anything you wish I would have asked you?

P: It was about….Me wanting to add that this isn't just this relationship with [current MHP]. It’s really important in that room because of how it applies to my intimate relationships with people, my romantic relationships with people.
Round Two Interview Transcripts

Round Two Participant #1

My child is 16 and I’ve watched this happen. It’s really interesting because we switched to DBT from Cognitive Behavior Therapy to this DBT thing and you get something different out of that skill based training than you do out of talk therapy, so watching them kind of maneuver through and mature and go from really super resistant to like ‘ok maybe this will work’ and embracing it but still like resisting a lot of the power stuff especially with the prescribing nurse practitioner. The prescribing nurse practitioner is less involved with the skill stuff so I think there is less of a feeling of safeness... way more resistance and it’s like ‘uh! Child!’

R- Yeah, I know the DBT model. It sounds like it’s helping. That’s awesome. So what do you think about this? It sounds like it resonates on a certain level? Or it makes sense?

It does. I think, I wonder ... this sort of pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority; I think it makes you come to it with a different willingness or unwillingness you know what I mean? So I think that’s interesting how it sort of sets you up for how the relationship is going to be and whether or not you’ll be ok with someone kind of guiding you or if that would be the wrong thing.

R – It’s true. It’s really a big piece of what happens and then it also is something people work out in therapy, it’s like sometimes your relationship to power and authority has to change, right? And you are working that out...

Sometimes it’s your whole deal

R – Exactly! (Talking about diagram and questions...)

Question #2

I did have an experience. So I had to have surgery just for lady things, not a big deal but it was general anesthesia surgery so I was going to have my 17 year old drive me and then my 15 year old take care of me and my therapist was like ‘You need to ask your boyfriend.’

- Dan, my boyfriend in Washington – ‘to come down and help you.’ I was like ‘Agh. I can’t do that, that’s so scary.’ Because relying on somebody, you know, the whole thing... and she was like ‘you need to do it. You have to do it, and I’m gonna text you and I’m going to ask you if you’ve done it yet.’ And I was like ‘oh no!’

R – She’s serious

She’d never done that before and she was taking control and telling me what to do. So then I did it, it was really super scary and I did it and he was like ‘Duh, I’ve already offered four times.’ I mean, you know, whatever.. so he was totally nice and came down, it all worked
out and blah blah blah but that was the thing where she really took a hard line with me, like treating me like ‘no, now you are going to listen to me here’ because she knew. We’d been talking about [my ex husband] and my problems with letting people help me, and all of that stuff so she knew exactly what had to happen and what I was supposed to do, it’s just that I wasn’t going to do it because I was sacred of that. So anyway, that was interesting. That hadn’t happened before, or since but it was definitely a power thing.

R – Definitely, it’s such a good example of power. It sounds like it was kinda shocking.

Uh-huh

R- But there was some way you knew that she was right.

She was totally right, yeah.

R- How did you know?

It wasn’t that she just said that one thing and that was that. You know, we talked about: your 15 year old - as sweet as that child is – is not an adult that can take you to the hospital if you have a problem. Also I guess just the whole, I felt safe already in that relationship ad so there had been enough deposits in the emotional bank account or whatever that this was the time where she could, you know... this needs to happen. I do trust her to give me good advice so it was just, I guess it was just based on the past relationship but it was also based on I know she knows the whole story. She knows about my kids, she knows about my boyfriend, she knows about me...

R – your history...

Yeah, the whole thing.

R – your ex...

Yeah, so having that objective perspective that knows everything is important for me I think.

R – I think that there is a way that she’s tracking what you might need and kind of knowing just when to use her power for the purposes of good...

Right.

R – It's interesting.

She does withhold until it needs to happen. It’s so funny, I’ve watched... we will just be chatting and then she’ll write something down and I’m like ‘what did you write?’ ‘what was that thing?’
R – do you ask her ever?

I have asked her, but most of the time I know. I’m like, oh that was a write down moment! (laughing)

R – You are like reflecting, and your like ‘Uh huh. Yep!’

She like flips back, makes a mark... like, yeah that happened before.

R – So, I’m almost thinking of this just in the moment, which is why these interviews are so interesting and fun. It’s almost as if, if she gave you her opinion too often, or if she told you what to do too often it just wouldn’t have the same kind of potency.

Definitely. I wouldn’t ever learn anything either, I think. I need to figure stuff out on my own, I can’t always be in therapy. If I could carry her with me, like an app... my therapist app.

So having her, most of the time what she is doing is poking at the question to get me to answer it myself and so then when there is a time when I’m stubbornly just ignoring the answer that’s when I think she’s like ‘Nope! This is the answer’... but she has to, you know I think... just watching and... It has to shock or else I would be like ‘You’re bossy. I’m not going to come back.’

R – Right. Being bossy is a whole different thing. Oh my gosh, that’s great. Thanks for sharing that I think it’s a great example of power, in a good way.

#3

The one that came to mind was when, so I had a therapist before who moved to wherever and she was the first person I ever told that my husband was gay and having sex with other men while we were married and I wish she had pushed at that a little more because I was very much like ‘This is ok, it’s fine and everything is fine and I’m having some anxiety but it is completely unrelated...’ and I wish she had been like ‘Maybe it’s related.’ Anything! But she just was very accepting, which was good and maybe she was still trying to build up the relationship or whatever but I wish she had used some of that... you know ‘Maybe it has something to do with everything else...’

R – How do you think that would have helped you at that point?

I’m not sure, because you know... hindsight. So, I don’t know if I was ready to do anything but I think maybe I would have been more ready for the inevitable ‘No, I’m not bisexual. I’m totally gay.’ I would have been, I hope or think maybe I would have had time to become more independent, like emotionally independent or kind of ready for ‘Ok, that’s fine because I don’t need you as much as I thought I needed you.’ Because it really was sort of like run... boop....ok.
R – Almost like you would have had a little more time to just prepare emotionally

Yeah, and maybe it would have been my choice more than just his choice. That would have been something.

R – That’s pretty powerful.

Yeah. But that’s not how it went so... ok.

R – Fair enough. I can sense that there is a part of you that, all of my participants in my study are very gracious with therapists. They are not throwing us all under the bus, and I can tell that in your case it’s almost like, you want to make it ok that she didn’t do that...

Yeah because there are a lot of things to consider when you are helping somebody I think. I had a lot of other things... like I was still crumbling down the hill from Mormonism so how do you help somebody? I do feel like there is no book, it’s like parenting, there is not a thing where you look up if A then B is the right answer.

R- It is just interesting to reflect on the complexity of it all, right? And to be like ‘Well... I wonder what if’

And would it have been like the butterfly effect and now everything would be different or would it just be one of those things and everything would have gone down the same.

R – Yeah, we don’t know but it’s interesting to contemplate and clearly you are living life, doing your thing, moving on.

#4

When you are in the room and they are not being helpful? Well, it depends. They hypnotherapist that was a complete wackadoodle – I hadn’t had much experience and so I sat with him and I was like ok, well we’ll give it a try. This is not working. This is weird but I don’t know any better so maybe this is what it’s supposed to be. So there was that sort of thing, like I guess this is how it goes?! I don’t think I’ll do this again.

R – Right. Something feels weird but you’re just like Ummm, I don’t know?!

Yeah, and I just wont go back. But he cured me anyway so...

R – Yeah, you were fine anyway!

Right, so I’ll just go. And then with my current therapist I would say I really feel like maybe it’s an off day because there have been so many other times when it’s been surprisingly helpful, like not what I’d expected her to say but it was helpful or just kind of I needed some reinforcement but sometimes when, there was a day when she talked about her kids a lot
and I was like, that’s cool. I would like to hear about your kids but I’m paying you a lot of money to hear about your kids...

R – Right, and that’s not necessarily helpful to me.

Right, not right then. But, it feels like there are hard days and easy days and we will get back to one that is effective and there’s not always something pressing. Sometimes I walk in, sit down and I’m crying and she’s like OK! And other days when I’m not I think her sharing with me, I think there’s probably some purpose to it so that’s the other thing... I think there’s probably some purpose to it that I don’t really know and I know that we will get back to a good day. Plus, if I were to say ‘you are not helpful’ I would need to follow it up with ‘what would be helpful is this...’ and I don’t know what that would be. If I’m going to criticize somebody I’d like to give them ‘Here’s what I actually need’... and I don’t know what that is.

R – That’s an interesting point. It’s almost like, by virtue of not knowing and then having trust and faith that it will go back to it’s normal rhythm it’s just sort of like occasionally there is a place holder session or something, my language but...

That’s exactly what they are... like, we’re just going to keep this habit, this routine going so that we don’t drop of. I still need it but maybe I didn’t need it as much right then or I don’t know...

R – or maybe she needed to talk about her kids?

Maybe she did.

R – What do you think would happen if you were like, Hey I’m not sure what we should do right now but this isn’t it?

I think she would.... Hummm. She’d probably say ‘thanks for saying that’ and try something. I think she would be open to that. That seems to be how it would go. I never have done that though so I’m not totally sure but... just talking about a lot of the stuff that we do is like her saying ‘How can you say that in your words?’ I know that I need to stand up for myself in some way or do something but it’s scary and we’ll talk through “how do you say that in your words?” and you know, ‘what could they respond with?’ so I know that she knows all of the interpersonal stuff and so if I were to say that... I know first of all that she would know it’s serious, that if I’m saying something she’s going to be like ‘ OH! Listen!’ and then also I think she would respond well.

R – Uh hum. Again, there is grace there that we just... I know I’ve done it too, where my counselor’s like, I’m like ‘huh... I don’t know if this is the thing...’ and I guess I heard some things in the first round of interviews about not wanting to hurt counselor’s feelings you know, not wanting to ruin the relationship... one of the things I’m thinking about is just shame. We don’t want to shame anyone for being who they are, even your counselor that you are paying a lot of money.
Yeah! They are still a person and you respect that. Yeah. And also I think with all of this experience with life you really do realize that this isn’t easy, what you are asking them to do for you.

R – Awww. That’s a good point. How did you get there?

Just, I think parenting is a big... and parenting this child. So my child hears voices and sees things, says that she has alternate personalities only when they are getting in trouble... I’m like ‘oh! You’re so transparent!’ but they talk about it with all of their different doctors and their doctors are always like ‘Wow, that sounds really scary. I’m not too worried about that, let’s talk about your anxiety.’ They always are totally validating and then go around, lets try and find what the real problem is. Some of my therapists have been like ‘Why do they do that! Somebody has to tell her you don’t have…’ – what does she think she has?

R – Multiple personality disorder? Something like that...

Something.. there is another...

R – Dissociative identity disorder?

That’s it. It’s like ‘ Why doesn’t anyone tell her she doesn’t have that?’ and my therapist is like, that’s the opposite thing that you do for people. If you tell her that, then it's going to be like boom... like escalating. So, I’m trying to deal with this kid and I’m learning all of these things about this one specific child and then, these people... all of the mental health professionals have way more knowledge than I have, because I’m this one little bucket of information. They have all of this information from all of these different people and I can’t even do it for my kid who I am with every minute of every day and so expecting them to get the perfect answer... I really feel like it’s the parenting mess ups I constantly do that give me a lot of empathy and forgiveness...

R – so much compassion...

Yeah. For people trying to do the things that are hard.

R – Yeah. Yeah you have empathy for yourself and for them and that’s just kind of part of who you are too, to just be kind to people it seems. You don’t go to that place where it’s like a critical judgment, you don’t go there it sounds like... first.

Yeah I don’t go there first for sure but also if I were to go there again and again I feel that I would change therapists. That’s how I would solve that problem. I’d be like, so I could do the hard work of fixing this, I don’t feel like that's my responsibility and there are other fish in the sea that are nice. That’s how I would probably get around that which is totally avoidy and that's me too! That’s probably what I would do. It’s like a new boyfriend, if they have all of these problems your not going to be like ‘let's fix those problems!’ No, you are going to be like... no. Move on. Not worth, I haven’t invested enough.
R – You’re right. Which is why I think we have to have a lot of self-awareness as the therapists, to be like ‘what am I doing? What’s my deal here?’

Totally. Exactly. That’s parenting too. You are going to be bad at it and you are not going to get better unless you figure out that you are bad at it.

R – You’re right. Someone can tell you you’re bad at it and you can be like “Nope.”

No I’m not. You don’t even know…

R – Right. I think that’s partially in a way Amanda why I want to do this study, is to help therapists be more aware of like..

Yeah, but no one is ever going to tell you that you are bad.

R- Right. I want them to know that.

I think it’s important to know.

R – That no one is going to tell you when you are bad. They are going to fake good. They are going to pretend that they are done with therapy and, that’s cool, people have the power to do that… that’s great. That’s a very creative way to get out but more so can a therapist catch their own stuff a little bit sooner? And all these other cool things that you all as my participants are saying there’s a lot of clues I guess about what we could do better. So I want to give the clues away, you know…

If this happens…

R – Yeah. And it’s not going to be like A + B = C. But you can look out for these things, or you be aware of these things and so it’s still going to be complex right, because you are talk about you have your own history, your own personality, your own values… A therapist is their own person… your life is your life…

Yeah and every day is going to be different.

R – Yep. So in a way, you just have a lot of grace about it.

That is interesting.

R – That idea?

Yeah, like how forgiving is too forgiving almost and, at this point, I think you can probably reach the end of how helpful a certain person could be and you need somebody who will have a different dynamic with you so could you instead change it up and keep progressing with the same person. I think you could but you’d have to get over that grace and kinda say
ok, next level. That doesn’t feel like the patient’s role but it should be. You should be able to say I’m ready to do the next thing.

R – I want it to be ok. I want to be able to notice as the therapist but I also want... I want, I’m a client all of the time too – of course –

I heard one time that you are supposed to, like on a TV show. That every therapist needs a therapist.

R – you have to, It’s not required in law but you should be maybe...

I think everybody should have a therapist.

R – That’s awesome. I guess it’s the idea that I also want clients to feel empowered to say that to us and to not let our power, expertise or authority get in the way. So that’s also something I want to get out there is that idea. But not that anyone has to do anything... no one has to do anything. I guess I’m probably motivated to have all options open or something. You know?

Yeah. That people be aware of themselves and what’s possible and not just settle for...

R- a lot of settling, huh? In our lives, in the world.

Yeah, there is a lot. Though that’s fair too because you can pick your battles and sometimes...

R – You’re right. You can pick your battles and that’s it’s own power, right. Picking your battles. Very cool.

#5

I’ve been thinking about that one, because that one I can’t necessarily think of an exact time because for whatever reason in my mind that means role-playing or something but I do know that

R – It just more means like a parallel, like a parallel dynamic.

Well I think that there just is a parallel dynamic with how I relate to certain kinds of authority, like there is some authority that I will just (scoffs) to, not even look in the eye but as far as like my mom where she still is an authority in a lot of things for me, like no one can make chicken enchiladas better than my mom period. And just other things that are less funny or healthy. The way that I relate to my therapist is very similar to those kinds of relationships and so I think that’s why it’s helpful for me a lot of times to come up with ‘How could you say that?’ because I could say it to somebody that I have that feeling with and then that makes me able to say it to somebody else. And also, there is a little bit and this is probably weird but if we come up with an idea, like if I have to work out something
with my ex about the kids, if we come up with an idea and then she sends me out in the world to do it I want do it so that I can come back and report and be like 'I did it!' because I'll get that she's proud of me and that feels good and all of that stuff too. That happens all over my life, too much all over my life. I need to not do that so much, but being able to work it out with somebody that I have that level of respect for because there is that, your not going to steer me wrong and if I can say it to you I can say it to them. I think that happens all of the time.

R – That’s almost a core theme it sounds like, some of that stuff you were just saying is a core theme that you are working out in different situations whether it’s kid, boyfriend, ex...

Parents. Yeah.

R – It’s a lot, right?

Yeah.

R – Yeah. What do you think are some of the patterns that are mirrored in your counseling relationship that have helped you work through things outside of therapy? Anything that you can think of? Its ok if you can’t.

I might need a second to think. Well, I feel like just generally I’m less intimidated by the world and I think that’s because of – a bunch of things but one of the things is – having somebody in that authority role who also knows all of my crazy garbage and still says ‘No, you are doing fine.’ ‘No, you are a good parent’ and ‘your kids are hard.’ That kind of stuff where it’s bolstered up my ability to then look at other people and be like, yeah you are an authority figure but I also have my own power and my own expertise. I guess that’s sort of...

R – Yeah. You really are articulating a complicated thing very well. I know your like, I’m not sure... Its complicated because there’s different pieces to it, you said there was the authority of the therapist, there is all of the stuff they know about you, and then there is a way that they validate you and support you and then that all comes together to sort of make you feel like - Ok, I’m a complicated person, but I have power and agency in my life.

Yeah. I’ve been reading a lot of Facebook posts about imposter syndrome and so I feel like everyone is sort of wandering around the world as a kid in disguise and I think that has helped me be like – no, we are all doing that so it’s fine. You can value your own authority for what it is. You don’t have to be an expert in everything and you can still respect people that are experts in things you are not. In law school I have this one professor that I think is the coolest and in my mind she’s like 12 feet tall and she’s actually 5 feet tall. Every time I see her I’m like ‘you’re so small.’

R – But you’re so big in my heart! Or my mind.
Right. She’s like ‘call me Lauren’ and emailing me silly things... I was like ‘Why are you doing that because I’m just your stupid student’ but that’s where it’s like, no I do all of this other stuff that is actually pretty cool and I’m a grown person not a 12 year old girl...

R – and she likes you as a person, which is easy for me to imagine

It’s been hard for me, historically to accept that and I think that’s definitely helped me to have that validation by somebody with power... who doesn’t abuse it.

R – so that takes me to a follow up. That makes me wonder if counseling, therapy, feels and you know law school relationships, power relationships, if some of it is reparative to you? Or you would say that it’s reparative from past abuses of power?

Absolutely. 100%. No question. My parents, my dad is the ultimate authority figure in my brain because he was the Priesthood holder and the one that would sit me down and say ‘Jesus was perfect so what’s wrong with you?’ So you are the only one who knows if you’re doing go or not because you’re the only one who knows your thoughts so a major mind game with this authority thing and so when I left the church it was like ‘how do I even look him in the eye, I’m so ashamed’ and all that stuff and all of the perspectives that she’s given me with what’s really going on and kind of asking all of those questions. I can have a debate with him on religion now, which was like, I couldn’t even contemplate that a few years ago and it’s more than just because he’s my dad but I think it’s with all of these authority figures, like going into class and not feeling like I’m going to throw up from if the professor says that my idea was weird. Just all of that stuff where it is definitely, you have the people with authority and then me down here and I think it’s brought them down a little and I think it’s brought me up a little so I feel like there is less of that disparity.

R – Which really changes the way that you navigate the world, you know. There’s a lot of really positive experiences that are coming out with the research, awesome therapeutic experiences ...

It’s real! It works!

R- Totally! And I think that it matters, right? It matters. It changes things.

Yeah. I was reading a stupid law case about algorithms and how the better algorithms help you deal with broader situations. You can make an algorithm deal with one specific situation, like me and my dad, but then get broader and that’s, I think, the thing that’s so great about therapy is that it broadens that algorithm so that when you navigate the world, in a new situation your like ‘ok this is brand new but I have all of these tools’ that just ‘I can deal with you’ because I can deal with people like you...

R – That is beautifully stated. That’s been another fun thing about the research is all of the beautiful metaphors people bring... I’m like Yes! An algorithm! That’s rad, yeah.
I would tell a story that is adjacent.

R – You would?

I totally would.

R – Tell me more!

Well let’s say that it really bugged me that she talked about her kids, I would tell a story about my sister talking about her kids or something like that where I would like, you know ‘I go to her house to do this one thing and all she can do is talk about..’ or something. I’d totally do something really slimy like that. I don’t think it’s very good but it’s what I would do.

R – Well, again, there is something there about being able to send the message without putting it in neon lights...

Right

R – and you are asking that person, can you fill in the gaps?

Right, here you go.

R – Here’s a nugget.

Yep, another one of those clues. ...keeps telling me these weird stories about, while they are sitting talking with someone in their room...

R – There’s also something coming up, like I said clues... there’s also a lot of hints clients give us and we’re like ___ you know?

‘That’s interesting. How’s that relate to you?’ about me?

R – Right, it’s like they are giving us so many hints, like literally sometimes not ever very hidden. You know? Things like ‘I told my new therapist that I really wanted them to be directive’ or ‘I told my new therapist that I really needed them to talk less’ sometimes it’s not even... it’s just

And your like ‘Interesting... bla bla bla bla...’

R- Right. We’re so interesting. This is all so interesting, you know? And it’s fun to laugh about it because it’s kind of wild.

Right but when you really need help, you really need them to be less talkative...
R - Right. Totally. Anything else that you can think of?

I don’t think so. The questions were good, but that was all I...

R - (talking about the interviews and the process...)

It’s been interesting to have this in mind as I go forward.

R – Yeah, what has that been like?

Mostly watching my kid. She’s out in the car, they are out in the car which is why I keep pointing...but watching them and their reaction to invalidation or the prescribing nurse practitioner just invalidates or uses sarcasm a lot and it doesn’t rub my child the right way and so there’s like this full shut down, like wooo the whole deal, like come on.

R – like so obvious

But the person doesn’t chance how they’re interacting and I’m like --- what are you doing?! So we actually talked with the other - so she has the prescribing nurse practitioner, the individual therapist, and the group – so I talked to the individual therapist about this. I’m like ‘I don’t know what to do’ and so she asked me to call her instead of having Ray (?) call, I called and like ‘Ok so when you say.’ what was the thing she kept saying? Oh ‘I’m not concerned about the voices or whatever to my child what they hear is I don’t care about this and it’s not a big deal and it doesn’t matter that it’s scary. So I need you to say something, other words. Choose different words. I don’t care what you say, but not those words.’ Which I think, you know, that’s part of maturing as a client is just maturing as a person, being able to have that interpersonal stuff. When something is really hurting you you have to... but I don’t know, with a kid you don’t have as much control over leaving. She can’t choose a different therapist although when you are in this program they require that you only go to that clinic so that’s another thing that’s like ---- that’s something I’ve been thinking about to is how the structure of the, the administrative structure, effects the power relationship... which is probably a whole different paper.

R – 100%. Those are the things I’m thinking about all of the time. I have supervisees that come in and talk to me who work at places like that and that is a big part of their experience as a worker, let alone the client. These are things I think about all of the time. I could write 40 papers on power, do you know what I mean? I could just keep going until I’m 90. But it sounds like, I remember when you first came in and you were talking about the research announcement and power with your kids and it does sound like – not that you’ve never thought about power before – but it does sound like just talking about it has brought it more to the surface and that you are aware of all of these dynamics.

Yeah. I am. The advantages that I have as an adult human with just that granted power, my ability to just take my money somewhere else. That’s some power.
R - That’s right. It is. And you may or may not decide to do that at some point but that parallel of you being able to even call and talk to the nurse practitioner. It’s interesting how your own power is being supported in your therapy so that you can help your kid to shore up their power. So it’s this chain or awesome power radness where it’s like you’ve had fucked up experiences with power and authority, you have had mental health professionals that have been supportive and helped you and made you feel more powerful therefore you can help your kid ... that’s a pretty cool ripple effect.

It is. And just being made aware of this thing I think that’s helped me realize when I need to step up and when it is a power situation. I think I feel more comfortable with that too, just being about to identify it ‘oh, this is what’s happening. Ok, I can deal with power because I have some.’
Round Two Participant #2

#1

It’s helpful to hear your explanation because I looked at it but I was sort of confused, you know. So it’s nice to hear your explanation of it. The first thing when you were talking about maturing as a client because when I was thinking about those questions you sent me I was like I feel like my dynamic with my therapist has changed and I feel like a huge piece of that is because I’ve matured as a client and I’ve been in therapy for a little while now so I have a better idea of what I want, what I need. That was interesting to see that on there.

R – So that resonates with you, that part.

Yeah, for sure. Also the relationship to power and authority, the pre-existing relationship because I have this very – and I was going to ask you, but I’ll say this first and then I’ll ask you... everyone has an interesting perspective on what power and authority is, like you were saying, and so when I was looking at your questions last night I was like... because my idea of power is probably an extreme idea of power, like a boss, or a leader, somebody that you by nature of their profession or their job has all of this power. That’s what I think of when I first hear the word. So I had actually kind of, you probably told me this last time I just can’t remember if you have a specific definition of power that you are working with?

R- I’m working with a super general one.

OK

R- Like the ability to influence others attitudes, behaviors, you know? I can’t remember it right off the top of my tongue but very generic definition of power, which is just the ability to influence. With this study it’s sort of like it’s inherently embedded because of the therapeutic dynamic, right? But it is a nebulous thing. That’s the interesting part about my research, trying to pull it out of the either.

So the ability to influence.

R - The ability to influence people, their ideas, their decisions, their – in this case – mental health. It isn’t necessarily negative, right? That’s one of the things I think I said at the beginning of the first interview was not just interested in negative stuff, but positive stuff and even just stuff that isn’t even positive or negative but, just like you said earlier, just is.

It’s interesting because with power I start off with this negative connotation to it, because you think of the people who have used their power in a negative way, like Hitler or those extreme examples...

R – Exactly, but that’s I think what makes this more interesting to me is I think a lot of other people are using power too, we just don’t
We don’t think of it

R – we don’t think of it unless it’s extreme. I’m interested in that. It’s fun talking to you about it, I think about this in my own head all of the time, so you are asking some questions that are like things I’ve been thinking about. Any other ways that this seems to align, or not, with your experience? Did anything seem strange or off?

This whole thing actually seems very in alignment with my experience. I think I’ve had like all three different... I’ve experienced all three of the benefiting, mitigating and resisting. I feel like I’m sort of getting, in my therapeutic relationship right now, to the benefiting part. I’m at like a really good space in it, but I’ve definitely been the ‘well I’m just going to bare with this’ and ‘ugh, is this helpful?’ and then I’ve also had the - I tend to go for the passive resistance, that’s more how I am vs. like well, I’m just going to sit here and not really say anything even though I don’t like what is being said or I don’t, you know. So I definitely can identify with like all three of those.

R – Awesome. Yeah, thank you.

It’s very accurate.

R – Well that’s what my hope is, right, is that when you all see the final diagram and the theory and then what I’m saying, that you are like that DOES resonate. Otherwise I would be making it up, or... so that’s really good to here and it tell me like I’m on the right track, which is what I wanted to know.

#2

One thing I was thinking of is that I feel like currently in my therapeutic relationship the power dynamic feels more equal to me, like I feel like with any – you go see a doctor, you go in and you definitely feel like they have this authority over you because they are like the expert and there is always that relationship - I feel more that it is like, I feel like there is more give from each of us. I feel like I am not just sitting there expecting her to come up with things to help me but I am like ‘Oh, you’re right. What a great idea. Let me think about that more and come back with...’ like I just feel like there is more balance. I also feel like I am at a place now where like I want her to push me and she knows like how to push me and it feels like, it feels a lot better to me then before where I was like oh she’s pushing me to something I don’t want to discuss like I’m resistant to that and I’m going to shut down. Now I’m more open to, I don’t know I think a lot of it is me and my perspective has changed but I think probably too the way that she’s approaching it, or she’s figured out what works better for me or something. It just feels like, it just feels better.

R – Yeah, and that leads to something one of my more recent interviews brought up for me which is that while we are maturing as clients, therapists are maturing as therapists too. So I think that is going to end up being part of it too. That might be what you’re, do you think that’s what you are talking about? Is like she’s learning about you?

Yeah, she’s learning about me.
R – How else do you think that she might be getting better at that? Do you have any ideas on how she is doing it?

I think I have been more open with feedback like ‘Oh that was helpful.’ You know? I think in general too I have actually just been more open to discussing some things that I was kind of resistant to discussing before so I think as I’ve, you know, opened up a lot more I think it’s probably easier for her to be like ‘oh that is something she does want to explore more’ and figure out how to encourage that.

R – Yeah, totally. You are kind of, something is going on together over time, right?

Yeah.

R – That’s cool. When you talked about things being more equal or more balanced, besides you maturing as a client, which you’ve already acknowledged, is there anything you can point to that allows you to understand how it feels more balanced and equitable?

One thing that I know that I appreciate is she always like has some sort of positive feedback for me or like ‘oh I’m proud of you’ or like ‘That must have been really hard but it’s really cool that you did that.’ Obviously positive feedback feels good and so, yeah, that’s like reinforcement and like certain things in my life like if there is a conversation I’m trying to have or something that is difficult I like think about her and I’m like 'she would be proud of me if I did...' you know, it’s in my head. I have her there and then I’m like excited to tell her about it and so I just think there is this like emerging dynamic of I don’t know what you would call it exactly but.

R – It’s really cool that you are describing that idea of carrying her with you and it sounds like it does something for you...

Definitely.

R – when you are needing to be bold or courageous.

There is like accountability, which that’s how I function based on accountability. I just function really well when I have to be accountable to someone or something like that is just the nature of my personality so I think having that accountability is helpful.

R – That is part of your pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority.

Yeah, yeah.

R – accountability is part of it, if I’m piecing it together correctly.

Definitely, yeah.
R – How do you think you have gotten more open to her pushing?

I think it has to do with like the time in my life, other things that are going on like there were certain things she was pushing and it wasn’t the right time because there was like too many emotions involved. I was in it too much. I just was like ‘No, can’t. Too emotional.’ And now I’m like a little bit removed from that and so I think I’m at a point where it’s easier to process and think about because the emotions aren’t so heightened.

R – Yeah, there is a readiness and an ability to have some room or space from things? Yeah. Anything else about that question, about new thoughts or experiences?

I guess the other thing is just confidence in her ability to like understand me and analyze what I’m going through. I definitely feel like that has been a huge transition, at least my perception of it, in the last couple of month or something.

R – How have you monitored that, like her ability to understand you?

It’s reflections that she’s made that, as soon as she say’s it, it’s like something I have been thinking about but I haven’t quite been able to like get my head wrapped around it or get it phrased into a thought and then she say’s it and I’m like ‘that’s what I’m thinking’ and I just wasn’t able to formulate. So, I’m like, she’s clearly hearing what I’m saying and is able to acknowledge that and bring it out which - and then there have been several times where I’m like ‘Oh that’s so cool, thanks for giving me a phrase or a thought for that.’

R – an anchor point or something... like that really grounds your experience or puts words to it. Which goes back to like benefiting from power in a way, because it’s empowering it looks like. Your energy is almost feeling empowered by that.

Yeah, that’s a good way to put it actually.

R – I like that you use the word confidence in her ability because I think that’s really... It seems like it would be a common way to say that but I think it’s a unique way because I think that’s what’s happening sometimes is our confidence in our counselors is growing. Hopefully.

#3

I was a little bit unsure about this question a little bit because so it has to be like wish? So when I wanted it to happen and it didn’t?

R – You know I think that is a really good counter question, but I think it could be either. If you didn’t have a time where it didn’t, if you only had a times where they did help you that’s great.

I can’t necessarily come up with a specific example but there are times when I’m sitting there and I’m like ‘I want you to challenge me and to push me and to pull this out of me and
you are not doing it.’ Probably, looking back, it’s because I’m not giving enough, like I wasn’t giving enough. I mean, she’s not a mind reader, she’s not just going to figure out you know...so I think it was me sitting there being like ‘I want you to do some of this work for me.’ ‘I want you to figure it out’ you know? And I don’t think I ever really gave her enough to do that so I feel like it was like in hindsight kind of an unreasonable expectation.

R – And if it would have been reasonable? I like that you are letting her off the hook really well, which I think is really gracious and perhaps totally, you know that’s your experience and I value it... but if it wasn’t an unrealistic expectation, what do you wish she would have done?

Probed me. Asked further questions, then you know like ‘it seems like this is hard for you but...’ and then I could have said ‘I’m not going to go there’ or... because I think I’ve been a lot better, I mean A LOT better, about being assertive about what I want to talk about in therapy but I think there have been times where I’ve just been like I need you too pull this out of me, like I need you to do it because I, for whatever reason, have this barrier.

R – and it’s hard, right? It’s hard. It sounds like you are really aware that it would have meant something if those probes would have happened but you also know that you could have pushed back.

Yeah. And I think I did push back several times and I think that may be why she stopped probing about those specific topics.

R – What’s your push back look like?

I will flat out say ‘I’m not ready to talk about that.’ There’s only really been one topic when that’s ever come up, maybe two topics. One topic and then one I cannot meditate or sit still or be in a space just quiet like to save my life, it just makes me uncomfortable. I’m like ‘That can’t... done.’ She was like ‘Ok, we’re just going to sit here for like 3 minutes’ and 30 seconds in I was like ‘I am way too uncomfortable. We’re done.’ I’ll typically say, or I’ll change the subject and I’ll acknowledge. I’ll be like ‘I’m changing the subject blah blah blah.’

R- Awesome, thank you.

#4

I think part of that definitely has to do with the definition of power, and that they are an authority figure and it’s kind of difficult to challenge an authority figure. I also, even though it’s like a therapeutic relationship and I’m not supposed to take care of them I just by nature, my personality, think about her feelings like ‘oh I don’t want to hurt her feelings. I don’t want to make her...’ you know. That’s just, I can’t help it. That’s just how I think. When I’ve tried to... I’m like - ok, I need to break this up because I didn’t like this or I didn’t want to do this or something doesn’t feel right I need to acknowledge it. I’m like ‘oh, but it’s
going to hurt her feelings’ or ‘she’s gonna...’ you know. So that’s kind of my thing, like holding back.

R – I’ve heard this a lot in round one, which is why it made me ask more about it. I’m interested in this idea of hurting our feelings, and you sound really aware, for you, one of the ways you ascribe that to two things: them being an authority figure and just your personality. Knowing yourself and knowing that you are going to care about how the person feels. But, I want to know more if you have more about hurting a mental health professional’s feelings, and what that would be like?

My logical self is like; I’m sure it happens all of the time, they are used to it, they have ways of coping with it, like it probably actually isn’t going to hurt their feelings that much you are just building it up in your head. Logically I think all of those things but I don’t like to hurt anyone’s feelings in general so I think there is just this whole... and I’m adverse to conflict, right? So this could create conflict. And then, well what if it changes our dynamic and then I’m not comfortable with bringing things up because I feel offended or...

R – Changing the dynamic, that’s an interesting one. It sound’s like it’s kind of scary to imagine losing this thing you have, kind of like you could fuck it up.

Yeah, for sure, and then I’m not going to get what I need.

R – And then you have to start over or

And then I have to start over and that sounds scary and awful and I don’t want to do that.

R – Tell the story again. Yeah, I appreciate what you are saying that there is a logical side that understands that we can handle it but that there is an emotional side, a vulnerable side to hurting our feelings. Yeah. I don’t have any more questions about that but I might. I’m just letting them marinate because I think it’s...

It’s interesting thinking about that because in my profession people say hurtful things all of the time but you just brush it off because whatever, people are in pain, people are upset about something else and you are the easy target and it’s like, I just brush it off and move on. I’m sure that what therapists do too but it’s hard when you are possibly the instigating factor.

R – It’s interesting to hear you talk about your job because it makes me thing about what is different about that setting vs. this setting because why do patients feel so, they feel pretty free

Oh, they feel empowered to be real mean! Yeah.

R – right. But, I wonder... It’s interesting. That’s just interesting, studying that power dynamic.
I think maybe physical pain and physical suffering, because it's more obvious like it's more out there and they are like, obviously you can see that I'm suffering so much. It's my right to be mean because I'm, you know. Physical suffering is so much more obvious whereas people that are at therapy, you know, their suffering is not quiet as visible.

R – Totally, it's an invisible struggle. Invisible suffering in a way.

That's certainly happened.

R – Yeah, do you feel like telling me anything about it?

Yeah, one thing that comes up is power dynamics within the family specifically with my parents. That's kind of something that's come up multiple times. It's sort of interesting because she'll bring up like, I'm paraphrasing but 'this is like what you feel like your role is within your family' and then, when I was thinking about this question I was like 'oh, it totally feels like a power thing.' I've never really thought of it like that. I guess, in that and like romantic relationships. Those are the two things that we've sort of talked about as far as relationships, you know.

R – Do you think that any of that literally plays out between you and counselor? Like where, you mentioned parents they are the original authority figure right? Have there been any times where you felt like that it was literally, not just being talked about between you and a counselor but the power was there?

Like I was interacting with her in a way that I would interact with my parents? That type of thing? Um... In the beginning, because one of my strategies in my personal life is to practice avoidance with my parents and so I was definitely doing that in the beginning for sure. I don't think I would have been able to identify that necessarily in that moment, at that time. Yeah, this is learned behavior that I've done since day one so...

R – Right, and it's a strategy you've used with authority.

Coping strategy, yeah.

R – With your parents, as authority figures. Yeah, Anything else about that? It seems like a hard question to like...

It is a hard question

R – It's hard, but it's like there's something that was kind of lightly touched on in the first round with a lot of people like how is this paralleling, how are you working out other relationships through this one, you know?

Yeah, kind of. I'm still a little bit confused.
Yeah, It’s a hard question. It’s probably a very therapist-y question, you know, so it’s good to talk it out with you because that’s the nature of this work is that it’s kind of a live, active, thing. So it might just be looking for something that isn’t there. Or language stuff too. Yeah. Do you ever feel judged by your counselor?

No, I don’t but I have the fear... It’s weird because I’ve never felt judged by her really at all except maybe once or twice in the very beginning and I think it was mostly because I was trying to adapt to the relationship and the change, you know. I’m just thinking about it now because you asked, I’ve never really thought about it as in ‘oh I feel like she was judging me.’ But there are times where I’ve been like I don’t want to say that because I feel like she might judge me or judge, more than me, it’s like judge the person I’m talking about. This may be a really important person in my life and I don’t want her to have this negative perception of them

R – you want to be protective

I want to be protective, yeah. There’s certain people in my life that I am very very protective of and, but as I have opened out more and I’ve seen her reaction to those people and she clearly still respects them and has positive things to say about them. It’s made me more comfortable because I’m like, oh even if I say maybe something not overly positive about a person it doesn’t mean she’s going to think they are this awful, you know.

R – You’re watching that a lot. You’re watching that dynamic if I talk about so-and-so is she going to make them an enemy? Therapists do that sometimes, huh. They get on teams.

I’d like to think she’s probably on my team

R – of course, definitely, but even on your team against someone else... That's not necessarily something you want. That’s not what you need is her to be like...

That person’s not good for you, that person is a bad influence for this reason or, yeah.

R – yep. There is a way that she is respecting the people in your life and your roll in their life.

That’s exactly it, yeah. That’s exactly what it is.

R – and that really helps you trust her and have confidence in her.

I feel like I can open up and be honest.

R – and it maybe even makes it more likely that you are going to say hard things about them because...

It’s safe.
R – That’s interesting. I think therapist’s need to hear that, I do. I think they get on sometimes it feels really good to talk shit on a person with your client and be like ‘that person is fucked up’

They screwed you over or... totally

R – and it’s like... ummm. I get it though. It’s not always good. I’ve been a therapist and a client for so long that I’ve been on both sides of that, where I maybe shouldn’t have said a thing or I’ll see my therapist do that stuff where she just has a really strong reaction to someone in my life and I’m like hold up girl, I don’t know.

Careful!

R – so, yeah, that’s cool.

#6

Can you define power dynamics?

R – yeah, I sort of just mean like...

Like between us? Talk with her about OUR power dynamics?

R – Yeah.

Ok. I’ve never, I guess at least consciously thought about bringing that up except for I guess when I first started seeing her, when I was just like – and I didn’t identify that it was a power dynamics – I was just like oh, this isn’t working, you know. I don’t know.

R – Well, it’s hard right? It’s like we’re aware that we are there in a power differential because the counselor is the expert we are seeking help from, but there is something it’s almost like it is hard to attribute anything to that power dynamic, it’s hard to see.

It’s like if I’m maybe not getting something that I want... When I thought about it I just wrote down that like, practicing avoidance by changing the subject or thinking about how important does this really feel to me? Does this feel – is it something that’s really important for me to bring up? Am I not going to be able to move on? Am I going to get stuck?

R – Stuff you’ve kind of alluded to in the other questions, the critiquing question, giving feedback question. This is sort of just more of a bonus question following up on some things but has it had any impact to talk about power, being in this study? You don’t have to have anything, I’m just curious.
Um, after our first session I was thinking about it and then honestly it just... I brought it up to my therapist and I was like ‘hey, I’m doing this thing, it might bring something up, it would be cool to talk about it.’ And she was like ‘Yes, yeah. That’s really cool’ and then it just, other kind of big things happened in my life and...

R – Cool! That’s cool. That sounds like how power is. It disappears you know and that’s not bad either because it maybe means it’s in the backdrop, you know, and it’s not the most important thing and you are really kind of clear that you have a really good relationship with your person and you’re feeling good about it and it’s grown and it’s deepened, you know. Not that I need to define all of that for you, but I’m a big reflector. It’s hard not to be a therapist, you know. But that make sense to me. Let’s see if there was anything else.

I guess just one more thing about that last question is I use time a lot, like I wait, like I’ll be like three sessions go on and then I’m like ‘O....k..... this does feel.....’ I just like to take time and see, because I think over time I can kind of figure out more of how I feel about it and then I can go home and think about it and then I come back, you know. So I think time is a big thing for me.

R – that reminds me of a question that I’ve been curious about too which is do you ever talk to other people about your therapeutic relationship with your counselor?

Well, my sister a little bit. Or I’ll be like ‘Kayla, She’d be so proud of me, I did this. I can’t wait to tell her about it.’ And she’ll be like ‘Yeah, she will!’ and then like you know... She’ll be like ‘What did she say?’ or something. So we talk about it and then with friends, I have a couple of friends who I’ll be like, like if I just had therapy and then I’m going to meet for a run or something I’ll be like ‘oh I just talked about this and I feel this’ I need to process this more and so I’ll be like ‘my therapist brought this up’ and then kind of get their opinion about it, which is kind of nice.

R – Yeah, checking things out sometimes, or continuing the processing because you only have the hour

Right, sometimes it just like .... (Inaudible)

R – Thanks for talking to me about time. It sounds like time is an interesting part of your process, like waiting, reflecting, and just letting it marinate.

Yeah.

R – You let it marinate.

And I guess, now that I bring that up, one thing that I’m just thinking right now could have possibly affected our relationship is she went on this vacation to Europe and that was three weeks she was gone and then she got really really sick afterwards so I didn’t see her for seven weeks or something like that which was like this long chunk of time not to see her and for some reason I think it made me realize how much I missed it, not that I have any
massive crisis where I’m like I need to talk to someone, you know, but just to have that space. It definitely made me appreciate it more.

R- Totally, the unanticipated break. You realized.

I was like, oh that’s really nice to have that person.

R- Yeah, just some distance to appreciate it. Do you feel good about the way she handled that? Like as far as just letting you know?

Yeah, I mean, it was fine. She texted me, which for me that works great. I prefer that, it’s easy.

R – It works.

It works. I kept being like aw, you’re not better yet? You know, but I felt really bad for her.

R – Not good. Anything else I didn’t get to that you wanted to tell me? Or? Do you have any questions for me?

I don’t think so.
Do you think those three things are more due to the personality they already have, that they negotiate in the world, or is it more something that happens within the therapeutic relationship that's different?

R: – Well, that's a good question. I think that I can take that question and reflect on it but what is coming up is that a lot of people who go to therapy have a pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority, meaning they already kind of like have a set attitude about power and authority and then they also have their own power realities and identities like based on who they are in the world and my theory is particularly coming from the perspective of the client so I don't know much about specifically the other therapists, right. It's all run through the perception of the client and so that is a huge deal of how the client perceives power in the therapeutic relationship and how the perceive the mental health professional so there's a lot of – some people perceive it as safe and helpful, some people perceive it as unsafe and unhelpful. So yeah, I'm trying to fill out the pieces of the theory that are thinner or that I'm just still curious about so that's where my round 2 questions were based on. Like Ok, I think I have some sense of where this might be going but I need to clarify and get more information. That's why I need to think about your question more and that's a really good question to think about after I do round 2.

And I guess, maybe for your post-doc you can interview therapists and clients and see what kind of weird stuff they are both going through.

R: – Absolutely, and it would be really nice to kind of continue this because there is so much here. I mean, there is just so much. It's been super fun.

What I was saying right before the recording is that I had a new therapy relationship so – what was the last time we talked? It seems like it was 4 or 5 months ago?

R: – Yeah, it was probably mid-august.

Oh, wow. Was it in mid-august?

R: Somewhere in august or September. Early September maybe?

Ok, well so I started a new therapy relationship and then I just recently stopped it. It was really different than my other ones.

R: – Do you want to tell me how?

Yeah, and that's going to be the examples that I'm going to come up with are probably going to be from that.
R: – Ok. Awesome.

Yeah, so it was another intern. I think we’ve talked about how I’ve mostly gone to interns because I am low income and right now I’m a student. When I was a student I saw some people at school and they were amazing and then they retired. They were expert, amazing and they were able to sort of like toy with me in just the perfect way to help me out of stuck situations.

R: – Yeah, I remember. I loved your interview. I loved it, it was great.

And when I saw the difference from going to... and they were like you need... one of them was really annoying and he would only see me three times and he said ‘you need long term therapy’ so that was my whole transition from like, you know, amazing people at school to the world of interns that I can afford for long term therapy which is now what I have been in for a couple years. I stopped seeing the therapist that I saw for over a year right after I finished my thesis, which was in may. I did his year internship with him and then he got licensed and then I stayed with him for another 5 months until I finished my thesis. He was kind enough to give me my same rate, I think I went up by $10 or something, so that’s like $4 of his regular rate that he was starting to charge. I don’t think I talked to you in September - did I? - Because I stopped with him in May. Maybe I did but yeah so I finally stopped it and my main reasons were that I had come up with these categories that I... of relationships, three of 4 categories of relationships that I have with people and they were: do I like you? Do I respect you? Do I trust you? There was one other one that I remember that I sometimes felt was applicable but not really so that’s why its kind of narrowed down to do I like you, do I respect you, do I trust you. And so... respect you – I think means like do I like the trajectory of your life you know, and you’ve done this thing... he was very open and he would tell me about himself. I’ve pretty much exclusively only gone to therapists that would do that a little bit. If they want to maintain like no information than it’s really hard for me. So, I really... and do I like you is – actually do we get along as people? Does the conversation flow? Do I think you are funny or silly or, you know, do I think you are a kind person? There’s a lot of people who I like, but I just don’t have any respect for them. And then do I trust you is a whole different thing that I’m still struggling with, right. What I found with him was that I liked him and I respected him and I felt like this was a milestone for me even though I didn’t find that I trusted him. I actually confided in him as we went through the termination process that I felt very invested in his career and that I felt that I stuck it out a little bit for him and stuff like that, you know? I felt like I saw him growing as a therapist.

R: – It sounds like you actually started with someone new since I talked to you.

And then I started with someone new. I didn’t remember if I had told you all of that. So then I took little time off. So then I started, I was going to... I’ve been going to the Against the Stream meditation center, which opened up in April. It’s literally 5 blocks away and I started going there. I’ve gone a lot. I’ve gone one time a week, two times a week. Sometimes I go to a day long on the weekends and so I kind of just use that as a crutch. It’s been really helpful and I’ve read a bunch of interesting books and some stuff but then I
decided that I really wanted to go back and I found a place. It is through a school here and they have their own internship centers like they have three or four therapy centers that are separate from the university campus. If you care it’s CIIS.

R: – Yeah, I know them, that’s great.

Yeah so I called around and I found a person that was taking a new person and I think like the semester was starting or something, I don’t know. In the fall. I got a person and our first couple sessions like when he was doing the intake - I think it took two or three because we went really slow for all of the questions - I was like this guy rocks! You know, the honeymoon phase or whatever. I thought, I’m really chatty and I love chatting people up --- I don’t love chatting people up but I tend to do it --- and to get that as part of the dynamic between me and another person really fast is this chattiness and he seemed to not be affected and he would just still ask the next question and still be like you know listening to the facts or the deeper truth and focusing on that and not getting all chatted up. But then, then I saw him for a few months and I just stopped about two or three weeks ago but basically it just, for me, it went downhill from there. That’s what I wanted to tell you about, yeah. That’s what I’m going to probably focus on in my questions is like what I went through with the new intern relationship.

R: Ok, awesome so that leads right into the first question

#2

Ok so basically my main experience is that he just seemed like definitely like he came from traumatic experience of his own that maybe he is still working through you know, so it’s more than other people that I’ve worked with and other interns. He was a little bit more transparent that he’s working through stuff himself which made it really hard for me to feel like my stuff could be ... I mean it was just a little too much (inaudible) and not only that but I would say like ‘Oh I kind of like it when a therapist is like this or...’ He always wanted a lot of feedback. Like ‘I really want this to work for you so would you like it like this or would you like it like that or...’ you know. I would say ‘Oh yeah, I like it when you did that one thing’ and then like the next time I could see him overdoing that one thing. It was almost like a bad actor, you know? But he was very sincere; it’s not that he was faking anything. I don’t know, some traumatized people they’ve had to negotiate so many uncomfortable spaces that they’ve actually been, a lot of their life they’ve been acting.

Part#3 Part 2 round 2

R: – Sorry, my cheek hit the button! It would be so awesome if we were together in the same room.

Yeah that would be better.
R: – I always love the complexity at which you hold people, you know when you describe these really complex therapeutic relationships you are always just so, you are really gracious about all of the parts of therapists and interns and I appreciate that.

Well you know I care about the people and that is part of my problem in the world, is trying to find space where I can turn it around and care about myself.

R: – Could you tell me more about how you came to understand or know that he might be still working out his own shit?

Well, for one, it’s his body language. He just looks like a person who is not ok a little bit. You know, like a little tense. He’s guarded but then on purpose opening up with it’s almost like he has a list from home - I’ll open up about x,y,z. It’s not not disingenuous – wait, that was really confusing. It’s NOT disingenuous, that’s what I meant to say. I don’t know if you’ve known people who’ve suffered either horrible beatings or sexual abuse or like a death of a parent and then no one caring for them afterward – stuff like that – and then they, they are just slightly awkward. They are like socially awkward basically.

R: – Did he share anything?

He didn’t share anything. Other people respond in totally different ways, this is just one way – and this is the way that he responded is that he was awkward and then in certain times he would say ‘Well bla-bla-bla has really helped me.’ You know? A lot of my therapists have said that ‘This was effective for me’ and bla-bla-bla but they did it with this really detached like ‘I don’t’ need you to sooth me’ energy so that I got some information but I didn’t feel any need to be there for them which is like a really important thing for me because I wanna be there for people very shortly and then I want to escape. (laughing)

R: – right, and so if I go back to this question about power it’s sort of like you felt, I’m kind of gleaning that you felt a little more power than he did?

Yeah, I don’t think he realized that. He didn’t realize that but I felt like I couldn’t find a safe place, you know. It’s different, not feeling trusting than the previous guy... this like and respect but not trust.... This was kind of like I didn’t like our dynamic. I didn’t know enough about him to respect him AND I didn’t trust him. He kind of fell apart in three fronts. You know, whereas the previous guy the like and respect were a milestone for me as I said and I couldn’t find it here. Whereas this first two or three, I think we did two and then kind of half of another one, the intake sessions done which was like an 8 page long form and in those, I think because he had a script, it was like he had a slightly different personality. It seemed like he was coming up with a good follow up or whatever, or he would say like ‘I got that, let’s move on to the next question.’ Like he was in control a little bit more with these questions or he appeared that way. Plus I think maybe it was a task for him so he was concentrated on it which made his facial expressions and body language feel a little more in control or like ‘I have a task so I understand your telling this great story but let’s get back to my task.’
R: – What happened for you once that intake was over?

I felt like I was taking care of him. He should have been paying me money. I felt like he didn’t know how to negotiate our dynamic at all. Like I said ‘I like during the intake’ he said ‘what did you like about that so far?’ And I said ‘Well I like how serious you are and you don’t seem to be swayed by all of my different mood changes or whatever different stories and stuff and you just kept bringing me back to, you know, what felt like the central topic or whatever.’ So, I don’t know, from then on he started to get this crease in his forehead, a crease of concern and seriousness – which I think he probably has in his life but maybe I didn’t notice those first times because he was looking down and writing a lot – but it was like, I feel like maybe it was what he wanted from someone when he was going through whatever he went through he wanted someone to (inaudible) him and feel concerned, which is not what I want from someone. I don’t like… I like serious but not concerned.

R: – How do you think he would have used… I understand what you are saying in a way is about his development as a counselor right? Part of what you are noticing is that these interns also have a process of maturing as mental health professionals and that, if you catch them in their internship they are really still figuring it out.

Yeah. So awkward. So one day, I had said like ‘I like it…’ because pervious therapists have really liked this... ‘I like it when people keep me on track, and keep me focused on the hard stuff and don’t let me just ramble.’ So he said ok and he started trying to go like ‘Well, just a second...’ and then he would ask me like a question to focus and I just never felt like they focused the conversation, right? He was just bad at that task that I’d asked him to do. So one day I went in there and he started to do that and I just kind of like raised my voice a little and kept talking and then I just decided ‘He aint talkin’ this session!’ and I just talked over him and rambled really loud but I felt like I was being manipulative and I just didn’t want to deal with his awkwardness. He would often say ‘Where do you feel that in your body?’ right after I said like ‘Yeah and I got all tense in my chest.’ It was just like bad, you know. I’d say ‘Well I felt tense in my chest...’ and he’d be like ‘Uh-huuumuh.’ (laughing)

R: – Totally.

#3

It’s the thing he will figure out, which is that... I mean, I think I was the first person he ever saw as a professional. Who knows how he’ll develop from there but the next session after that he said ‘Last session was great. I think maybe we should change it up and I shouldn’t interject ‘ and I was like ‘yeah, I did that on purpose because I was sick of hearing your questions.’

R: – What did he say to that?

He was like ‘Oooohhh.’ He was very, very surprised and he looked kind of like when I told the previous guy I didn’t trust him but that it was still important for me what we developed. So maybe I like to shock people, I don’t know, that’s definitely been a little bit of a trend in
my outside relationships. I tell people something that I think is somewhat obvious and they are like ‘I didn’t see this coming!’ I need to do that faster with people, like maybe this thing that I’m holding that I think is obvious that really later is going to come as a shock and try to get it out sooner. So I did with him. I just said ‘yeah, I’m sorry. It wasn’t that helpful for me and I just wanted to fill in some background material on my life for you so we could move forward. It feels like we are really stuck.’ And each time after that I was like I don’t like this about this, I don’t like this about our therapy session, I don’t like this and I don’t have a suggestion… like he said ‘What do you think we should do differently?’ and it’s like I don’t know I just think maybe he’s not wise yet. You have to have some wisdom.

R: – Right. You were very open, it sounds like, to giving him feedback.

Yeah, I tried to be. He took it but you know, I feel like each subsequent session became kind of sadder, you know. And finally when I left him a message I said ‘You know, I think this is going to be the last session, I just wanted to give you a heads up.’ And so when I went in, I mean I was already thinking about it and he knew, and when I got there he was like ‘I’m really sad to hear this’ and I was like ‘Yeah I thought you would be and that’s why I wanted to leave it on the message and not just tell you when I got here.’ At the end, I was like ‘I feel more bad for you, because I feel like you could grow from this experience then for me, because I just need to get out of here.’ And I’m paying 20 bucks – I mean I was only paying $20, which was nice, but not nice if it’s nothing and just a burden. He said ‘Yeah, I just really wish you would stay and I’m really sad that you are leaving.’ I felt like it was about him. The termination was more for him than me.

R: – Right. You are really helping me tune into, one of the things my advisor was challenging me on this last couple of months is that the mental health therapist isn’t in my theory a lot because I’m really trying to maintain focus on the client but you’re really tuning me into the fact that while I’m noticing on my diagram I have the maturing of the client, there’s the maturing as a therapist that’s a very big part of power so this talk is going to push me to add the therapist maturing as part of my theory and I really appreciate that because I think you’ve had some very unique intern experiences that are really super important for me to hear. I think you are validating something my advisor has been pushing me to do but I’m such an anti-authoritarian that I don’t want the therapist in my theory too much.

I’ll tell you, because I’m anti-authoritarian too and when you see people that are vulnerable but they are going to be in positions that you would be anti-authoritarian against, you know, but you are seeing them in the early stages where they’re – yeah – maturing. It really changes your... because now I feel differently towards therapists. I realize a lot of them went through stuff themselves and that’s what drew them or, they have a sibling who went through something heavy, or whatever and they really do want to help people and they are very invested. Then the mature ones, you know like the weird guy that, you know he wasn’t mature as a therapist because he had taken all of that time off and then become a real estate agent, but that guy... he really wanted to help me! He was just inappropriate. I think that from a position of being disempowered, having the therapist work out their own power shit is so important first because then they don’t bring that to the table as much.
R: – I think that’s a quotable moment there in my research. I feel like that’s it, that’s what’s gotta be written in the final manuscript that therapists need to work out their power shit for sure.

But don’t therapists go to therapy themselves? About their therapy?

R: – You know, it’s funny... I mean I’ve personally been in therapy for a long time, probably since 1998 and I personally for the last 8 years have gone weekly and I think that that makes a different, hugely. I think that it’s a kind of unspoken hope and intention of therapists to do that but it’s a little bit not, of course, enforced right? So the program I taught at in Oregon, they required their students to just go to 10 sessions, which is just not enough, right? Of course you could go to more, you could do your own therapy but if you were kind of resistant to therapy you had to at least do 10.... Yeah, I’m on your team. It’s a peculiar experience.

The interns are sort of, they are not going to therapy exactly but they have an advisor that they are talking about every session with.

R: – Yep, absolutely.

And so they at least have that on their side, I guess.

R: – Did this guy record any of your sessions or videotape them?

Well this was the funny thing, he told me in the beginning ‘I’m going to record all of the sessions’ and I was like ‘Well I don’t like that, that’s bullshit bla-bla-bla’ and he was like ‘Well, that’s what we do here’ and that was during the intake part where he was reading from the form and I was like ‘Ok.’ I basically agreed. He never recorded any of them and so one time, it flashed and I was like ‘Hey, you haven’t been recording’ and he said ‘Well, you were resistant so I just didn’t bring it up again.’ And I thought, that’s a weird power thing too. I said Ok, but he didn’t do it. He thought that I was resistant, so he was like babysitting me basically and I thought oh man, he’s got some shit to work out.

R: – I asked you that just because I can imagine if someone would have seen or heard your sessions they could have helped him more because he’s just reporting on what happened, right?, without that.

Yeah

R: Interesting.

And if he’s missing cues he’s not going to get them suddenly in the summary.
R: – Right. Absolutely. You sound like you have gained a lot of ability to be pretty forthright with therapists and that sounds like it is pretty unique to you and your experience and your own self-work. DO you have any thoughts about what you think has made you really forthright with therapists over the years?

Yeah. I do think it’s um… I mean, I’ll tell you even though I have been seeing all of these interns and I think I told you in our first conversation that I identify as a person with OCPD and so I read some journal articles about that, from the therapist’s perspective…

R: – Yeah, I remember that. I will never forget parts of that first interview with you. It was really powerful.

Yeah, so I think an issue that I’ve had already is being, you know trying to sort of like take my mind which is hyper judgmental in some ways and then completely oblivious in other ways obviously but and I think I’ve spent a lot of my time going, ell it’s obvious so I never say anything and then when I finally do people are always like Oh my god! I had no idea you cared about X, Y, Z. Getting that response over and over, then starting therapy you know when I couldn’t finish my theses and I was like why am I procrastinating and then I say Wow, now I’m judging my therapist and when I tell them they are shocked too… o…k… so this is an opportunity for me to work out that and especially on interns it’s easy because they’re bad at therapy usually. My criticism can come up pretty quickly. If someone was more seasoned maybe it would, you know like the person I saw at SF state, and the person I saw at SF Aids health project or whatever it’s called, and there was one other person I think I saw that was seasoned. You know I only got to see them for 10 sessions and I didn’t get to the point where I could criticize them. I’m sure I could, but so with these guys it’s easier right away to just be like ‘You’re messing this up, you’re messing…’ and so I got to sort of work out that dynamic maybe a little bit with them and get to a place, and in my life I started doing it too which is you know well giving people… well, also like maybe softening my feedback a little bit and really deciding well I know I observed that over and over and I’m having a hard time stopping observing it but it’s actually not that important to me and it’s ok if that person is clumsy – I’m going to call it clumsy – in these couple manners of our relationship. I’m not going to point it out and it’s going to be ok and I hope I never bring it up in anger or something, you know?

R: – Well there is a way that you’re softening, right? Over time as you learn more about yourself?

Exactly. So I think that what’s helped me is like that, as is to be expected, the therapy relationship mimics other relationships in our lives and sort of is like getting used to seeing that in it’s isolated form and I did feel bad for… you know, I’ve also have a hard time breaking up friendships and relationships in my life and so now I’ve been through all of these terminations where I was the one who chose to leave and I had a lot of guilt, I felt bad like they’d built up a level of care or they were learning or whatever. I’ve also been left and the times that I’ve been left, terminated or whatever, I’ve had to say like ‘I don’t want you to leave me. Why aren’t you taking me with you?’ and so I kinda think people should change therapists! (laughing) Regularly, you know.
R: – Yeah, I mean you sound like you're practicing a couple of things. You are practicing how criticism comes out of your mouth and how it impacts other people and you're practicing termination.

Right. Exactly.

R: – That seems important for you in a way. How do you think that those two things are, they are like the work for you and you're like kind of doing it.

Right. I think it's like I don't know if everyone has that work, you know whatever work they have people might be able to find in an intern some help. The thing is, those times with the seasoned people I just saw how instantly I was able to improve whereas with interns it's like these baby frickin' steps, you know. It's very frustrating. So yeah, I will say yeah sure I practiced and it was helpful but in the end it was also a burden. It just felt painstakingly slow and cumbersome.

R: – Tell me more about the burden from this, like how you held that over the last couple months with this guy

I mean I just felt like, you know how the mind just cycles around... some of the thoughts in the cycle were: I'm wasting my money, I'm doing him a favor, he should be paying me – so it was about the money of course because I have low income right now – or it would be like, oh my god... just those little things: I can't look at his face being concerned anymore. Those are the thoughts that are cycling but I think the dynamic that's happening is... it's the like/respect/trust. He doesn't have any of it and yet I'm going in there, being vulnerable, telling him things, practicing vulnerability, practicing honesty and I'm just not experiencing any kind of deep layers of growth.

R: – Right. Yeah, and does that mimic relationships or patterns in your life? Or not at all?

Well I'm really lucky right now, I have an internship – I don't know if I had a job the last time we talked, I might have still been looking for work.

R: – I think you were looking, yeah.

Ok. I started the job in [specific month] and I do have, let me think.... Let's say not that bad. (Inaudible...) but I do think that maybe a little bit I have tended to put too much energy into relationships that I'm not getting anything out of in the past. Or that I'm not getting growth out of, let's say, because I'm getting something out of it like passing boredom and stuff. But, yeah, not so much, which is maybe partly why I find it intolerable. I don't know how other people experience interns, you know.

R: How do you feel about or what do you think about the length of this last intern/therapist relationship?
This was my shortest time that wasn't like a 10 session max right from the start. I feel that it was a waste of my time. Even though I was able to be honest with him and I was able to terminate and go through that and not feel too attached and bad or guilty. In the end I actually don't think it served me. I can't think of like one moment in there that was like ‘OH!’ you know, and I think I saw him for 4 months. 3 ½ months I think, you know. I just feel like it was a little bit... that's what I mean by a burden. The lingering feeling is that - oh I should have stayed for him, to help him.

R: Right. That also mirrors that experience you had with the guy you stayed with at the end of your thesis. You even said that you said that to him, which is that you kind of were invested in him and you hung in there for him. Not that you didn't get anything out of it, but just that’s something that you are grappling with sometimes.

The thing is I did get stuff out of it with him because I liked, I respected him. I haven't had a lot of friends in the last few years... I do have friends that care about me a lot and I care about them, but I don't have friends that I'm like talking to weekly, you know. Checking in. Or let's say, I have two friends that I talk to weekly but I don't see them very often. I don't have people that I'm seeing on a regular basis and talking to, so I told him he was more like a friend then a therapist. I didn't feel like I built a deep trust in a year and a half with him that I was able to have transformative experiences the way that I had with these other people that I could really quickly get into a transformative space. Most of my transformations are coming out of either meditation practice, or books I’m reading, or just trial and error in my life whereas I felt that quicker transformation with really good therapists that I thought were really good and I wish I could have that / find it but that I hadn't felt that with him. That's really what I said. I was like, still it's important to me because you were like a friend I could rely on and I saw every week and that was really stable.

R: - You really just awesomely answered all of my questions, I didn’t even have to rally ask them of you. You just sort of narrated them for me, which is great. My final couple thoughts are just wondering or questions are just how's it been to talk to me about this? We’ve only spent a little bit of time together but it's been like lots of powerful themes have come out of our conversation. What's it been like for you to reflect on this and how were you reflecting on this when you were seeing this guy?

One of my friends that I speak to regularly but she lives in Santa Cruz so I don't see her very often, this is how we talk about our therapists. (Laughing) So in a way I’m sharing our conversations and also we both like to read about psychology and stuff so we like try to work on ourselves because we both... she comes out of a worse situation than me, but ... so it's kind of like that. In a way it feels like you're my close friend because we are sort of sharing the back room information, you know.

R: – Totally

Yeah. So like this deeper layer – the experience of the experience. I really get into thinking about that in general.
R: – right, you enjoy the meta. The meta perspective.

Exactly. I like that and I’m curious what you’ll come up with. I feel invested in that part, like I want you to succeed and if anything I say is helpful then it’s exciting.

R: Thank you. I feel the mutual support and respect. I’m really glad that you have participated in this because I think you are really contributing a really valuable perspective. You have a lot of great therapeutic experiences. I want to follow up on talking to your friends about therapy. How do you think that helps you or impacts you to talk about your therapeutic experiences with a friend?

That’s funny… what if all clients had to go to therapy about their therapy also? (laughing) like all therapist have to do it but also clients too!

R: – and what if we all talked, right? Like what if that was like… I mean there is so much that you are experiencing that you are trying to convey to this last intern and you are really, it feels like, working really hard to convey it but there is a piece of it that he’s not getting that is very clearly probably articulated in your conversations with your friends and with me… you know?

Yeah. So with her, she has two therapists actually. One was a marriage and family counselor and one was an individual, but then her and her partner broke up but then she decided to keep seeing that woman by herself so she has two people she goes to once a week. I think she should stop.

R: – Do they know about each other?

They know about each other and I think one of them is a little bit more like a cheerleader – you go girl, you can do it! And the other one is a little bit more like… they both have very specific personalities. For me, it’s a lot of time, she’s a single mother and bla-bla-bla but I really like… then she also, we talk to each other so I don’t know if that counts. We have kind of like; I mean I talked to her about wanting to terminate with this guy and save $20.

R: – and how did that help you, to talk to her about that?

I mean… I like her, I respect her and I trust her. Well, I don’t really respect her. She’s made some bad choices you know, and I’ve wanted to just force her to change but she wont but let’s say I like her a lot, our dynamic is great and I trust her, so she’s got two of three. So when I tell her things I trust what her feedback is and I’m able to receive it from her in a way that makes it acceptable. I don’t necessarily do what she says, but I think that’s why I like to talk to her about stuff. About my experience with my job, my housemates, my therapist – she’s a really good person for me to get feedback. The advice that I take or don’t take from her ends up well. She has a good track record.
R: – Totally. Is there anything I missed? That I didn’t ask you or that you didn’t share that you want to share right now?

Well I’ll tell you this... I decided to stop giving insto-shock therapy therapy to people I meet on the street or at parties etc.. I think I told you that I was a human can opener and I get people to tell me their deepest darkest things within an hour. I decided to stop doing that and so, like with my job, which is in a professional setting at a city, I barely know my co-workers. This is like a new experience for me. As far as the power dynamic of my experience -- I’m not a licensed therapist but as someone who has witnessed to a lot of people’s stories – to put down that power and just let people be semi-strangers, you know you don’t know their dark secret, is sort of like a new relationship for me. I’m not even available... like one girl broke her foot, and another girl somethin-somethin and someone’s kid was sick and I’d just say ‘huh’ and walk away. It’s been very interesting. It’s an internship so it’s not a permanent long term.. it can be up to two years so it can be long term, semi-long term but it’s not my permanent forever job and the experiment that I’m running on how can I tone down the curiosity about people that makes me dive in. My natural cheerful charismatic something makes them trust me and then I’m not really trustworthy though because I’m not a long term friend for most people that have told me this stuff so it’s like trying to be more genuine in my approach is like don’t dig in because you are not there for them. It’s been a really interesting experience. One woman who’s gay, and I’m bisexual and I probably come off as queer something you know, tried to bond with me on that and I just didn’t even bond on that. One sentence, I think I said ‘oh, a friend of mine in Spain studied x,y,z queer studies and bla-bla-bla liked my misuse of articles of Spanish, thought it was funny because I fucked up the gender’ so it was like one tiny share but other than that, like I haven’t told anybody I’m bisexual or I date. I haven’t told my age, my age has come up at least 5 or 10 times and I’ve always said “ha ha!” I just don’t answer. Or I just say something else, like if they said ‘Oh, how old is your sister?’ I said ‘She’s younger’ I don’t say ‘than my age.’ I am practicing not revealing information and not using the power that I have to extract information.

R: Right. I can see that you are on your own journey about your own power.

It’s therapy related because I imagine a lot of therapists find the thing that works for them to get the client to the emotional space – like, oh for me if I have small talk and then the client is sitting over there and then, you know... or whatever it is. To learn to wield that with your client, right? The power that you have to get them to open up. I think a lot of people have to find that, like my recent dude he doesn’t have it at all. I imagine if you are a therapist and you’re doing that all day long, when you get out you either want to shut it down, or you don’t want any more people to talk to you, or maybe you can’t shut it off and you’re walking around doing it with everybody.

R: Yeah, I think that’s also a maturing as a therapist process. So for me, I’m sort of like I’m a lot more socially isolated than I used to be because my work really does impact me and I put a lot into it. I’d say I’m at that stage where I want to shut down a little more after I work really hard. So yeah... Awesome. Do you have any questions for me about anything? The study? My work? Anything?
One more thing I wanted to tell you I’m reading a new book called [specific book] about exercise and psychology. Have you heard of it? Spark by [author] or something, I don’t remember. It has a stick figure guy running on the cover... anyway. It’s changing a lot of my kind of feelings about therapy also because the guy, I think he does therapy but he focuses a lot on exercise for depression etc. etc. and I just kind of wish that therapists had a little element of life coach in them, not completely but a little bit more than they do. Like what are you eating how are you sleeping? I thought of it when you talked about sleeping. What are you eating? How are you sleeping? Are you exercising? Ok now into the talk part, you know?

R: – totally. Checking into those life things not just the psyche.

I think that those things are part of the psyche

R: Of course!

So it’s like a check in on what you are eating and if you're exercising and if you're sleeping seems like a major groundwork of the rest of the session.

R: I like that.

The book has changed my life.

R: I’m going to check it out that sounds interesting. Thanks for sharing that with me!
Round Two Participant #4

R: Is it okay if I turn this on?
P: Yeah, please. Go ahead.
R: So, I haven’t done into that too much, but here is just a draft of what I came up with after the first ten interviews, so I’ll just explain it to you because it’s kind of messy. So, one of the thing that came out of the interviews is maturing as a client, which you’ll see at the top there, which is like a very important part of being able to deal with power better over time, you know, when you’re first a client, you’re just like, ‘What’s up with this power differential in therapy and how am I supposed to be?’ seems like it gets better for people over time. The core thing that is coming out in the data is how people utilize power in the therapeutic relationship. And there are a few categories down there at the bottom. Obviously people benefit from power that comes out in a therapeutic relationship through their own empowerment growth, change; they get a lot out of therapy from the expertise of the therapist and the relationship between themselves and the therapist. So, that’s like a really positive part.

And then there is an interesting category of mitigating the power that comes out in a therapeutic relationship which is like this way when you’re therapist is not quite on or they may be missing the boat or they are putting something on you that’s not really you – how people deal with that, how they still glean help from like unhelpful therapy, and how they bear with unhelpfulness as a client cause’ sometimes therapists aren’t super helpful but they bear with it and still try to get something out of it. And then there is another category on the right bottom, resisting power, and this was very interesting part of the research where people have very creative ways of resisting power in a therapeutic relationship if they don’t like what’s going on, they don’t feel like it’s a fit. They have active ways of doing that like confronting therapists, but more often people are very passive about the way that they resist power in that relationship. They’ll shut down, they’ll fake good, they’ll pretend that everything is okay, just to get out of a therapeutic relationship. So, those are the main things and on the left of the diagram you’ll see almost everyone has a pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority. I guess, you know, everyone in the world does. But there is a way that people think about power and authority before they even come to therapy.

And then on the right side is real current power realities and identities. So, there are struggles in people’s lives that relate to power. There are identities in people’s lives that relate to power, privilege, oppression, and those things all kind of come together to sort of impact, you know, how people, you know, deal with power in a therapeutic relationship. So, that’s like the gist of kind of what’s going on. It’s already shaping up a little bit more clearly after the second round of interviews. So, yeah, I mean not that I expect you to have any like grand thoughts, but I’ve just -- if you have any questions, or if you feel like this resonates with you or doesn’t, I would want to hear it.

P: It does. I like you. I like the ideas. I get confused with charts sometimes.
R: Oh, yeah. It’s a hot mess, really.
P: Yeah.
R: It’s a draft. So –
P: Totally. But I like – I guess I am confused about like really what the differences between those two things are. It sounds like different ways of saying the same things kind of.
R: Yeah, it is. It sort of like the one on the left is more of a – the way that people grow up, you know did they grow up in a normal household? Did they grow up in the south? Did they grow up in a working class family? So, maybe more of the historical forces of power that have shaped their perspective and then the one on the right is the more like recent active, kind of current.
P: Current?
R: Yeah, stuff. So, I think that’s actually a really helpful piece of feedback. It’s sort of like the pre-therapeutic is more historical.
P: Totally. Yeah, totally. And those two words pre-therapeutic aren’t really – make the distinction.
R: Yeah, but, it could be clearer. So, that’s really actually helpful.
P: This is really good. I think it’s a really like [Unintelligible audio 00:05:08]. I think it will at least take time for me to absorb.
R: Sure.
P: Kind of make sense of.
R: Yeah, I just want to get an initial gut check from everyone really to be honest then what will happen either after this round, sometimes in the next couple of months because I will do a final member check and I will say here is where the research is landings, what do you think? You know. So, you get a chance to get some of our writing and think about it more later, you know. Yeah, any other questions or thoughts about that?
P: Turn my phone off.
R: So good – casual mobiles in here [sic].
P: I am – I always have an initial, like an initial moment of confusion when thinking about like what power means in these relationships.
R: Yeah.
P: So, I’m like – so, it took me a second as you were talking about these different ways of responding to power or utilizing power, I felt like I was refreshing, like definitions of that as you spoke and it took me a second. It’s so hard. I think it’s like a good like umbrella term, but that term is also like talking about so much. And so –
R: Yeah.
P: It took me like a second to like process all of that.
R: Really.
P: So.
R: Yeah, I think one of the challenges for me is a lot of the way that people talk about therapy, therapeutic relationships is like decontextualized from power. Sometimes they like bring it back, you know, and so that is also – I’m also kind of blowing it up and making everything about power, but not bad; good, bad and different meaning that there is just a potency to the relationship,
because a client is coming to a therapist within a power differential to like obtain help and support and so there is a lot of influence that happens between the two people and with the expertise of the therapist. So, I am really talking about power in a very like general way, like – and – but I understand what you mean like why is it, like it’s almost disorienting, because it’s like, ‘Wait, what are we talking about?’

P: It’s taking so many dynamics and putting it under one umbrella.

R: Yup.

P: Which is appropriate and useful, but also takes a second to like fully grasp for me.

R: Yeah, totally.

P: Yeah.

R: Totally. And one of the projects I did before I did this research study as I took seventeen studies just from a really general about therapeutic relationship. And I looked at them to see where the power was – and by the way none of them were about power, none of the questions were about power, there were just like purely feedbacks from clients about therapy and there was power all over the place. And so –

P: No, like it’s so true. It’s so true. Yeah

R: And so –

P: I think every conversation I’ve ever had with friends about, you know, therapists, and what they have done to them.

R: Totally.

P: Yeah.

R: So, I am flipping the script a little bit and saying it’s all about power. It’s not just about this – this, you know, two people in a room who are just meeting each other there. It’s about everything. But I am a very like political person and I make everything about everything.

P: Me too.

R: So, for me it blows up really quickly into like systems and hierarchies, you know. So –

P: Totally. I always joke with my friends about, like my last couple of friends, they’re like imagine the last [Unintelligible audio 00:09:11] we are seeing, like numbers to letters scrolling around everybody, you see like power and relationships flowing around everywhere.

R: Exactly. Totally. I know.

P: And they are like what are you talking about?

R: It’s my life. Right. And so, yeah, well, thanks. We can kind of let that go for now. If something else comes up you can share with me, please. The next question is just if you’ve had any thoughts or experiences about power in therapeutic relationships since we last talked. I don’t know if you’ve been in therapy, or you have rethought anything or --?

P: I have. Okay. Well, I did see one person once or not once, three times, cause’ I took it into the counseling class actually at [local university] and part of the class was going and having three sessions with the therapist. So, it was also three times. Now, let’s see – new thoughts? I don’t know. I can talk about the
experience, but thinking about it in terms of power. I don’t know if I have that much to say about that around to the back [sic]. It felt – I didn’t like it. If the person – I don’t know, seemed very helpful – there is only three sessions I know, but immediately it was kind of like, very like, not bad for a first impression. I like them okay as a person, but there was like – well, you feel like you’re speaking a different language often times, like our politics down the line and like how we move through the world and you and the world didn’t align very well. And so, pretty much from the first session I kind of had this attitude of like ‘Okay,’ this is just a class assignment. I am just going to get this over with and have my three sessions. But, I don’t know. I think the person was like very nice and created like a nice therapeutic relationship [sic] and a respectful one. I didn’t feel like they were, like authoritative and kind of like in an offensive way.

R: Yeah. It does seem relevant. I know you’re kind of like wondering if it’s relevant to this question but that is something that’s coming up in a study. You said that your politics didn’t align, and I am wondering like how you caught onto that.

P: It was a lot of separate talk, really. Ideas around dating and relationships and, oh, even just men and masculinity and like – I felt like everything I was saying was like foreign language and new concepts to the person.

R: And how did you notice that?

P: How did I notice that? Facial expressions, body language, and their follow up questions. It was very conversational, like they would ask me, you know, all sorts of questions about what I meant and, yeah.

R: I’m actually interested in this, because I think this is coming out of the research is that there is a more modern, contemporary, politicized therapy client and those are the people that are in my study cause’ those are the people that are interested in power and talking about it. And I think they’re more hip to watching these facial expressions, body language, follow up questions to like see if there is a social lens alignment, you know.

P: Right. Whenever I – cause I am always on [Unintelligible audio 00:12:35] so you know, when I have seen therapists in the past, it’s been through them, so I’ll call up whatever agencies. The ones I’ve been to the most was [local community mental health agency]

R: Yup.

P: And I’ve also like seen someone through life perfect once or twice I think. So, the first question asked is like [Unintelligible audio 00:12:57] that if I need like a feminist analysis. And, you know, daily I would have someone who is like more important with the politics, but that’s like a good, easily understandable, kind of like way to pitch the –

R: Kind of like the starting place.

P: Yeah. And yeah, so, it’s something that’s you know like, will probably be understood and known to whoever will be assigning me a therapist.

R: Right. So, that’s a like a way that you code it in a way to like help other people know this is kind of what I want so that they can hypothetically, hopefully match you up.
P: Yeah.
R: With someone that will be closer to your politics.
P: Totally. Yeah.
R: Yeah.
P: That’s worked out pretty well for me.
R: Yeah, it’s kind of smart, you know, especially if you are seeking help in the systems, it’s like such a – you just don’t know who you’re getting.
P: And the other thing that’s important with me working around to like the history of abuse and stuff like I can’t have someone who will – I have to have someone who will see these things from a feminist lens or a radical lens. And I need someone who will like help, support me with this stuff without like enabling me or excusing a group of stuff –
R: Yes.
P: Cause’ that’s like – I don’t know, even in a therapeutic relationship that’s like a thing that can happen.
R: Of course.
P: So.
R: Do you have any examples of talking about that abuse stuff with therapists?
Like I’m trying to – cause’ I mean that’s not something that we got to you in the first round of interview that that was a piece of your history. You did mention how therapists helped you with, you know different relationship dynamics, you know, and sorting those out. I remember you talking about that. But I am interested in – since abuse is such a powerful hidden thing, right? It’s like a micro level experience within this other power latent relationship of therapists and clients. I am thinking if you’re willing to talk about it more today?
P: Yeah.
R: Yeah?
P: Yeah.
R: Okay.
P: Talk about what the --?
R: Sorry. Just how you – I guess how you dealt with being called out an abuser in therapy?
P: Well, I wasn’t called out –
R: Not interview.
P: Oh.
R: How you worked on –
P: Got you.
R: Dealing with what you perceived your own abusive dynamics in therapy.
P: Well, it was a lot of them. There are so many ways – a lot of it was just – oh, just? Okay. Okay. I’ll just ramble for a while to really give –
R: And you know what? Rambling is great.
P: Okay. Okay. So, there was the work of like identifying specific behaviors that was fairly easy to do, you know, like I am pretty, like to every degree - at the point that I started seeing therapists about this stuff I was already pretty self-aware about specific behaviors. And that was like something [sic], you know,
I’d be like I am doing this thing and I don’t want to do it anymore. And they would to a degree help me like identify the emotional, developmental like things behind that behavior. And like – so that was one thing identifying behaviors. I’m like working on it from that angle. And otherwise it’s just like – I mean like seeing counselors has like really helped in general, like emotional wellbeing and like coping skills and the communication skills. And so, that’s another way that’s helped. Third is kind of like processing the like hurt feelings and like very like – very like real trauma I have from like being called out. And like the loss of community I experienced. And like the really confused and self [Unintelligible audio 00:16:50] that I experienced afterwards. And then like – I guess closer really to that would maybe where there’d be a fourth finger is trying to, learning how to take all the like criticisms that I have had from people. And learning A. which ones to kind of listen to and which ones to like – learning to be confident in myself and like my self-awareness enough to know like, okay like, this person said I did like a, b, c and d, and they are right about a, b, and c, but they are not really right about d. And I have to be confident enough in myself to like not stress about that self-doubt for forever. Yeah.

R: It’s almost like that last point you made which really related to the diagram and the pieces we were talking about somehow. Like – it’s like the therapist in that case helping you sort through and sift through like what is accurate in the criticisms people have of you, what is maybe overkill. It’s like that has really helped you out like a complicated way of understanding what is valid and what is maybe bullshit? And that that is really an important thing to have someone hold the complexity of that like, and like someone to just say, ‘You’re not all bad, and you are not all great,’ right? But there is a continuum here and we have to look at it. So, that seems like it’s about the current power related experiences you’re having. And like a way the therapists have helped you like navigate that.

P: Yeah, that seems accurate to me.

R: Yeah. So, is there any time that you were seeing a mental health professional about this stuff or something else where you wished they had used their power in a positive strong way to help you more?

P: Well, there have been a few times where like I don’t know, like this is unfair to put our counselor [Unintelligible audio 00:19:08], but there have been a few times where I have been like, okay, I have this problem and I want you to help me with this problem and they’re just kind of like, you know, trying to do the whole like get me to help myself thing, or so it seems. Whatever they are doing, they are not helping me. They are not giving me like the concrete like – I want a worksheet or something. I want like – I want to know what other people have done in like concrete ways, so I can deal with whatever problems.

R: Right.

P: And there have been like numerous times where I’ve like sort that out. They just don’t give me anything concrete.
R: You almost – you wish – sounds like you wished they shared more tools with you, more research, or more like ideas.

P: It’s really a – yeah, ideas, tools, make sense to me, because I thought it’d be really helpful to like know how other people have navigated things sometimes. And I don’t want to like wing it all the time. I don’t want to like figure it out on my own all the time.

R: You don’t want to reinvent the wheel, like is there a specific that you wanted help with and you’re willing to share?

P: Yeah, I think one thing I can think of is like feelings of like – I don’t know like – I don’t know how to define it, like speak about it, but like I guess, feeling really anxious in like particular about like my living situation and having housemaids and like – my housemaids – and just like, having like, feeling overwhelmed at abuse basically and being like, my [Unintelligible audio 00:20:37] like scaring the hell out of me with all these like little things, and how do I like – how do I not be [Unintelligible audio 00:20:45] about these things? And also, how do I like communicate those things? Because I’m really, really like anxious about controlling like I’m always like worried about being controlling. And so, I like want to know how to like be able to express like these things without coming off as controlling, you know, while being mindful of like the gender dynamics and things, because all my house members are women except for me. And so, I really want to be mindful of like centering my needs in the house in a way that might not be like appropriate or fair. And so, yeah, that’s one thing I’ve thought of.

R: It’s a big thing, right?

P: Yeah.

R: And it’s like, almost like it would be nice, sounds like you wish that there was less just listening, you know, or like getting you to figure it out more, more ideas and brain storming and like tools on how to do it.

P: Yeah.

R: Yeah. Do you feel like you’ve figured that one out?

P: It doesn’t feel like as urgent as it used to like – I’m like really, really working on my communication with my housemaids because basically our pattern is that like something will bother me and it will bother me and bother me and bother me but I’m like – I always like wait to communicate it. I wait till the house meeting or something. I wait to see the housemaid in person, that’s when anyone’s barely home. I’ve always been passing home for like a week.

R: Right.

P: And then – and then things happens when like I do ask for something. I’m like, ‘Hey, can someone take out the bathroom trash? It’s overflowing.’ I feel so guilty when they do, do it. I’m like, ‘No, don’t do that,’ like it’s really hard for me. And so, I just try to just chill the hell out. And again, it’s kind of like, just like stepping outside of my like anxiety a little bit and being able to have a clear picture of like what is and isn’t okay. And working to be more confident and like, my like boundaries and needs and just like feeling comfortable with them. And feeling like, like feeling them but not like – feeling them but not feeling anxious about them so much, you know.
R: It's so complicated, kind of what you are talking about, because it's like – it just reminds me of like this conundrum of like trying to get your needs met and be confident and still appropriate, right, but not be entitled or use power, not be aware of your privilege, do you know? It's like – it's a lot. It's like a lot of the stuff that you've mentioned that you've worked on in therapy is about power.

P: Yeah.

R: You know.

P: Yeah.

R: So, not to get too mellow [sic].

P: Oh, here is a thing that you might appreciate. I don't know if you'll appreciate it or not. So, this was a while back. I mean I've got multiple therapists tell me this and I'm actually really curious about what you think. I've had therapist tell me like that, I like – I think some said overly intellectualized and some just said intellectualized. I have a tendency to intellectualize all this. And I see that and I think it's true but also like – I'm like, kind of like it works for me. And so, don't know what the big deal is [sic]. And like – I would like to be like more like emotion – like i people who cry more easily, things like that. I do see like that’d be pretty fucking sweet. But at the same time like just thinking about things and like – I don't know, like political, and like – I don't know, almost like mechanical terms, like it works pretty well for me. I feel like – so, I'm not too concerned about it, but –

R: Yeah, do you want to ask me a question about it?

P: I don't know. What do you think?

R: You know I – I work with a lot of people like us, like they didn't have political or intellectual analysis of a lot of things, right? And I think this is a common thing that therapists say about people that are – they have a strong world view. And I think that sometimes it's complicated. Sometimes they're saying it because they feel frustrated, you know, because if you have a radical perspective, there is always something to push back against, do you know? So, sometimes therapists are frustrated with this. Sometimes they are genuinely interested in helping us as clients, kind of drop down a little bit more into our bodies, and into our feelings, and into like some kind of other non-just head place. So, I think sometimes it's their shit and sometimes it's genuine, you know.

P: Yeah, totally.

R: And so, I think – I always prefer to deal with that as not an absolute as a therapist and be like, 'Let's talk about the intellectualizing that's going on right now.' What do you think about it? Like do you think it's working for you? Do you like to go? So, I'm like a bit more like collaborative. I'm not just going to like label you as an intellectualizer and think that I think you should drop down into your gut more or into your feelings. So, I think it's tricky. Activists are some of the hardest people to counsel in my opinion, but I love it.

P: Why?
R: Because they are sophisticated, you know in there – and I think this as myself as a client, do you know? Like I am a tough client – like because I am always questioning the way things are. I’m always challenging things. I’m challenging myself. I’m challenging other people. I don’t know. I think we are kind of tough. And I like that’s – I kind of love us, but does that make sense?

P: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

R: Because we are looking at things on our own level. And they are looking at things on the community level. And we are looking at things on the way macro level. So, I think that’s complicated. There are some clients you don’t give a shit about, structures of oppression or you know power or politics, or feminism, or racism, you know.

P: I wouldn’t know how to – I wouldn’t know how to be like a counselor to someone or support to someone [Unintelligible audio 00:28:03].

R: Yup.

P: And just to let you know, as far as the whole intellectualizing thing goes, one thing that does identify the problem is like that I would have a tendency to put off making like actual, putting like a change in the action basically because I want to like process it. And I found myself like processing, and processing, and writing, and journaling, and thinking but then it’s not actually like changing that much.

R: Yeah.

P: And that was something like that got stuck in for a while for sure over like the past five years of working on like abuse and stuff and you know actually working on deeper emotional stuff. [Unintelligible audio 00:28:52] like two and a half years, it was like processing and like intellectualizing. And then – but I think has like made the difference for me has been, just like, I don’t know, just general, like more emotional resiliency and good coping skills and stuff. And just being able to like, being like, ‘Okay, I have a problem,’ and somehow like I could just like more so than before, I could just like, be like okay [Unintelligible audio 00:29:27] like just not do that anymore.

R: Yeah. Yeah, it’s like a little bit easier.

P: Yeah.

R: It’s just like a little bit more like flow like, ‘Okay, I want to do something.’

P: But I’m not like – I’m still intellectualizing as much as I did before. I’m just like not dwelling on it.

R: You are not getting stuck in it.

P: Yeah.

R: Yeah, totally.

P: So.

R: Awesome. Shifting a little bit towards giving feedback to mental health professionals or critiquing them. I don’t know if you ever have given direct feedback to a counselor about whether they were unhelpful, but if you did, I’d love to hear about that. And if you didn’t I want to know what held you back from critiquing them or giving them feedback more directly.

P: I don’t think I ever have – nothing like major. I might have done it like once or twice in the moment. But, yeah, I think part of it was like wanting to have like
– to maintain like a friendly like relationship and not step on their toes and like also it’s [Unintelligible audio 00:30:40] in a counseling relationships like, they’re like temporary, so like my insurance doesn’t cover all that you know. The most I’ve ever seen of one counselor was for about nine months. And so, in some ways like what to take [sic] from my experience those types of moments where I might like criticize them, didn’t like come up until later on. And then at that point I was like oh, we only have like how many sessions left, I don’t really want you to bother with this. And maybe it was also just like – like I didn’t think that, like whatever I had to say would actually like change how they would approach, not because that they would be unwilling to change, but because they might not get it. And that was just part of their personality or something, you know.

R: Yeah. So, it’s just like a futility in a way.

P: Yeah.

R: In like the dramatic sense of the word.

P: Yeah.

R: It’s futile to kind of broach that with them.

P: Like I didn’t actually expect them to change because it seems like, you know [Unintelligible audio 00:32:07] and –

R: Can you say more about maintaining a friendly kind of like relationship and not stepping on their toes like --?

P: Well, it all seems like -- I think part of that is like not wanting to take up, you know, the time and like the fifty minutes sessions, short sessions, taking up times like, try to process the set between me and the therapist seems like [Unintelligible audio 00:32:37]. Other than that like – I mean I think in other circumstances it was someone who like I was going to be seeing for, you know, a long time and, yeah, I don’t know. I think if there was something about seeing them for a long time and if it was like – if we had longer sessions than I’d be more inclined to do it. But I do think that like avoiding like hurting their feelings and stepping on their toes potentially, it’s like the least of my concerns, not because I don’t care about them but because I think that I can do it and I know they can do it and I’ll be fine.

R: Yeah. That’s interesting. I like that you clarified that. It’s like you’d be fine and they’d be fine but it’s still hard to do or it’s still not a priority sometimes.

P: It’s not a priority given like the short nature of the session time [Unintelligible audio 00:33:44].

R: Yeah. Cool. So, yeah, power dynamics, did you ever become aware of the time where you and the counselor were working out power dynamics that relate to other relationships or patterns in your life? Or something that just felt really familiar?

P: Oh, like we were recreating the damage?

R: Yeah. They were, you know, they were sort of getting played out a little bit in the therapy?

P: Yeah, maybe a little bit. Maybe -it's hard to say. It's hard to know. Okay, this sounds like very embarrassing. I'm just going to say it. Okay. So, I think some people are like find it, like encouraging and reassuring but like I'm someone
who is like taking abuse seriously and I’m working to change it. And so they like get – they’re like charmed by it. And I see it happen and you know people out in public and stuff. And I think I have seen it with one particular therapist I had, really like, I feel like, I was like class pet or whatever.

R: Yeah.

P: I had a little bit of a class pet feeling. And that’s a dynamic that’s like I really don’t like obviously. I mean it’s not obvious, but I don’t like it. It’s not doing me any good. It’s not doing them any good. I don’t want any brownie points [sic] for this. And so, I feel like maybe with one counselor there was like a little bit of that going on.

R: How did you notice that?

P: I don’t know just like - she seemed like awfully like happy and proud about like – and just like giving me too many kudos. I feel like for her –

R: Yeah. Did you ever mention that or did you just try to avoid it or --?

P: No, I think I articulated it in my brain until now.

R: You didn’t even know?

P: Yeah, like I knew about it like really didn’t articulate it.

R: How did it just come up right now? Did you just --?

P: Cause’ you asked.

R: Yeah, that’s what it took you to, that question of –

P: But what was the question again? It was like have any dynamics come inside [sic]?

R: Yeah.

P: Yeah.

R: Thanks for sharing it. I think that it’s actually a very interesting thing that relates to those power of realities and it’s probably pretty interesting and complicated what’s going on there with the therapist, do you know?

P: And how, you know, how come that is – but like I think it’s [Unintelligible audio 00:37:03] to be working with like abusers and I don’t know, especially men. So, yeah, I really don’t think that it’s a healthy – like a helpful dynamic. And so, not sure how – so, this is something to be aware of in all situations [sic] but –

R: Right.

P: It’s situations like mine I think it’s something to be aware of.

R: I want to ask you one more question about this if that’s okay?

P: Yeah.

R: How do you think it’s harmful to engage in that? That brownie points kind of charmed, class pet?

P: Yeah. It’s like – it’s just like type of positive reinforcement. I don’t know. It almost feels like – I’m not sure how to put it. Essentially it feels like I’m getting like points for doing something that A. that I should have done a long time ago. And B. that like that I’m only doing after the fact of hurting other people and that feels gross. And then also there is something else there, I don’t really know. It just doesn’t – as far as like – it feels like the temptation is there sometimes to be like – to talk about these things. And more like – maybe some of it is temptation that there is [Unintelligible audio 00:39:05]
that positive feedback and that positive feedback feels nice, like, I'm like, 'Oh, cool. This person thinks I'm good,' that's nice. But at the same time like it's – I had to be like aware of that and like be self-critical and like, you know, be like I can be proud of myself.

R: Sure.
P: I can be like happy about the change I’ve made.
R: Right.
P: But I don’t feel comfortable with getting like too caught up in other people. And they’re like praise like -- I have to be like really mindful of myself to be like – yeah, not get too up [sic] on that praise and not let it get to my head and like – I don’t know, not like – also like – I think one thing that was common was like, oh, okay, you totally get this – like men using like feminist language to gain like trust and like permeate peoples like shields and stuff.

R: Mm-hmm.
P: And I feel like I get why people give me that type of like admiration – feels somewhere like that type of thing.
R: Yeah, it's the flip or something of that.
P: Yeah.
R: I mean I feel like it’s really complicated what we are talking about and it would be interesting to let that marinate cause’ it’s pretty complicated and interesting what you’re talking about. And I think what you’re saying here is actually really important for therapists to hear. And that’s one of the reasons why I’m doing this study is that I think there are a lot of things that clients have to say about power related things if you use it as the large umbrella, they are very important for the therapists to hear. And there is something in what you just said that feels pretty important in it a way of -- that we as therapists could unconsciously be replicating fucked up dynamics. Not on purpose, not because we are bad people, do you know?

P: Mm-hmm.
R: But because it’s easy to do that, cause’ working men, and it’s a human interaction, and we’re – a lot’s going on. So, thank you for sharing that all. It’s really, actually, even though you said it was – can I use the word embarrassing or –? I think it’s a fucking great thing to share for the study, so.

P: Cool.
R: And now I’m giving you props for it, just cause’ I am excited.
P: No, that's helpful.
R: The final question, unless there is any other stuff that comes up. Yeah, I mean why you can’t or don’t feel like you can talk directly with the counselor about – my question asks power dynamics in your relationship with them, what do you do?

P: What I feel like I can’t talk to them about power dynamics?
R: Mm-hmm.
P: Well, I haven’t had a situation where like it would really bother me that much. No, I’ll see – I think my gut choice is to be like to, you know, not to get to any more visits.
R: Yeah.
P: Not got back. Maybe the time that I've had in [sic] [Unintelligible audio 00:42:55] I immediately do not like them. And that's why I did it. I just didn't want to pay any more visits.

R: What's your ultimate – it's the ultimate power as the client, right?

P: Mm-hmm.

R: To not go back. Mm-hmm.

P: And like – I mean I think like – and fill it with a – make a mental note for the future and be like, 'Okay, that counselor did like x, y and z.' I didn't like those things. Next time I am going to look for like somebody who doesn't do those things. I'm going to be more mindful of that.

R: And the last counselor you just went to - the three session person for the class, how did you guys arrange to end that? Or did you just arrange for it to be three sessions or --?

P: It was just three sessions. Yeah. It was known from the beginning. Yeah.

R: So, she didn’t really have to broach that too much of whether you can continue or not?

P: No, she left it open-ended. Yeah, she was like, ‘So, if you ever want to come back, feel free. I'll give you like the discounts at student rates like let me know.’ Yeah.

R: Cool. Anything else that you thought of while we were talking today? Or anything that I didn’t ask you wish I would have?

P: No, nothing I can think of. No.

R: Awesome.
Round Two Participant #5

I think the major thing I was thinking when you were talking about the sort of current power realities and identities is that, I guess for me I didn’t... power is so specific and I just never thought about it really in the context of being that specific. It was just like ‘Oh I have relationships with people and some people are in more authority positions’ but I never really gave it that name of ‘power’ and thinking about power so specifically in terms of how that relates to who I am and my identities. I don’t know if that’s because it’s less of, that I just come from a more privileged place of not having to think about it in such a specific way or that it just was never presented to me in a way that I was like ‘Oh! That’s something that I could use to describe these feelings.’

R – Yeah. Are you uncertain whether it resonates or not or are you just curious about how it’s coming to the surface, or?

I wouldn’t say that it doesn’t resonate with me I guess I just think of – this is going to sound really silly but – power sounds so powerful and so I think I’ve shied away from using it in realistic I guess... it seems, I guess, fantastical... sort of mythical in a way where it’s not in an actual experience that we have. You know, that power is this thing that presidents have, or kings and queens but you know, everyday people don’t have power.

R – I think that’s why I’m doing the study is because there is such a hidden, like you said, mythical – which I love that word to describe it. It’s everywhere and it’s nowhere. So I think that’s actually one of the reasons why I want to try to pull out what’s happening and try to articulate it. Maybe it wont be perfect or maybe it will just be a work in progress but yeah, that’s exactly it. That’s cool, that’s interesting. Does anything else align with your experience, any of those pieces? Or not align?

Let me review... I think for sure that it’s really interesting to think about the pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority and I guess for me authority has kind of been a place holder for power more so. That’s more of the context that I think of in terms of my power dynamics with people. I guess because I feel really intimidated by people that are in authority places and I pretty much think of almost everyone in positions of authority over me because of my own experience with myself I guess. I’m still sorting that out. Authority I guess has been more so synonymous with probably what you are talking about in terms of power I think that’s probably the major reason we come into therapy is because of that relationship to power, or not understanding that relationship to power.

R – That’s an interesting perspective. I’ve never thought of it totally that direct but I can’t not endorse that right now.

Well, yeah. I think that that’s what a relationship is. I mean if you really boil it down there’s sort of this power play between - am I taking care of myself? Am I taking care of you? What am I taking care of? And really that boils down to where is my autonomy in that? Where am I giving myself away? Or I guess that is my experience.
R – I love it. I want your experience.

Well that’s good because I probably shouldn’t talk about other people’s experiences!

R – Awesome. There is something in what you said I might come back to. It sounds like authority was more spark of a place. We talked probably in August? September? Something like that?

#2

I think that there are times with [current therapist] where she’ll say things about relationships that I have or things that I – I don’t want to say that she says I should or shouldn’t be doing something but I can very much base my decisions on ‘Well, I don’t think [current MHP] would like it if I did this...’ or ‘I know she would want me to do this thing.’ It’s kind of interesting because those two things, the other question that you asked about using power for good sort of tie in for me. It can either be this way where I feel sort of like... or I guess it can be like two sides to the same coin. Sometimes it’s really helpful for me to think about like ‘what would [current MHP] do?’ or ‘what would she want me to be thinking that would be good for me?’ and then other times it’s probably another excuse for me to not do something that I don’t want to do or I feel bad about something that I really want to do. It makes me question my own judgment.

R – Yes.

And that’s an issue for me anyway, questioning my own judgment. Because I think of her as an authority figure or a power source in my life it is easy for me to fall into places where, for her intentionally or unintentionally she will mention something or we’ll talk about something and for whatever reason it will stick with me and as I go back out into the world I’ll make decisions based around that. Particularly I would say in relationship context, dating relationship context or thinking about things that I should or shouldn’t do. I am really curious as to whether that is something that is just part of my personality because I tend to be very black and white so it’s like either/or and so I don’t know if I’m interpreting that information as like [current MHP] wants me to do this or she doesn’t want me to do this instead of there is a spectrum of what information has been given to you and you can sort of glean from whatever you want. I think for me coming to my own power is really about trusting my own decision making capabilities. I think I question them most because I’m afraid that I’ll look stupid and that I’m making the wrong choice. I think that has a lot to do for me around just believing that things will be ok, because I just don’t think anything will ever be ok.

R – Thank you. There is so much good stuff in there.

Did I get off subject?

R- You are not off subject! You are so on subject. I want to follow up on something – you so clearly articulated that desire to trust your own decision making process and then you also
talked about the fact that there is this little [current MHP] on your shoulder being like ‘do that/don’t do that.’ So how do you negotiate that tension or where are you at in that process right now between utilizing [current MHP] as a source of help and power and then trusting yourself? Where do you think you are with that?

Some days better than others. I think it’s more about me using that little [current MHP] as a tool to get myself to a place where I am really using her as this outside thing because I don’t trust myself. To be able to blame this little [current MHP] for being like ‘Don’t do that’ or ‘Do this!’ so that I don’t have to take responsibility so much for the choices that I’m making. I think in the end it’s actually beneficial. If nothing else I think that it helps me think through things. I think that’s part or what I need to accept about myself is that I’m not a split second decision maker. I need to process things and I need to think about what the outcomes are going to be and weigh what I am willing to risk for whatever choice I’m making. I think accepting that, I’m somewhere in the middle of working through that and accepting that that’s my process instead of being like – It seems like everyone is just so able to be like ‘Yeah! I’m doing this’ and just going for it and I’m like ‘Well, let me just piece out all of these different things and see if I can figure out what the outcomes are going to be and if this is the right choice for me... do all of my woo-woo stuff to see if it’s the right thing...’ I think for me there has been a lot of finding different ways, even doing woo-woo stuff or muscle testing or using [current MHP], to try and get myself to make decisions and trying to get out of my head because somehow I think sometimes decisions are better made without that whole process because you get too involved in it and then it’s like I don’t even remember what I was trying to decide in the first place.

R – It got so meta. It got so nested. I think that feeds directly into the next question...

#3

I was dating someone that was not great for me but I was really into them and she was very much in that process, and very much that voice that I needed that was like ‘you need to stand up for yourself’ ‘you need to not be with this person anymore’ ‘you need to...’ – I mean I guess it wasn’t ‘need’ but she was able to be that part of myself that I couldn’t access at the time, or at least that’s how I felt. Sort of looking in the mirror of like ‘these are the bad things that are going on in this situation... why would you even want yourself to be in this situation?’ and even so far as to be like, after we sort of ended things she was like ‘No, you shouldn’t go over there!’ and I was like ‘Ok.’ That’s what I needed, that was a point where I needed her power to substitute my own. It was easy for me to be like ‘oh well [current MHP] says I can’t do it’ because I can’t make those decisions. I would hem and haw and be like ‘But I want to!’ and I’d probably make that choice.

R – but there is some way that you know, or that you are aware of that that opinion that [current MHP] is expressing, that powerful opinion, makes sense or resonates with you.

Absolutely.
R – How do you know?

It was an ongoing process, for sure, this particular situation. In terms of me knowing that I wasn’t making the best choices for my own benefit - I think I know because I trust her intention for me. I think that our relationship was established enough, and I mean regardless of whether our relationship was established enough, I knew right away when I met [current MHP] that this was a person that I was looking for in terms of a therapeutic relationship and at that point there was enough trust there for me to know that she was reflecting back to me what I needed to be doing. It was more a confirmation of what I knew I needed to do but I wasn’t strong enough to do it.

R – Yep. That makes sense. You are articulating I think something really important about the positive power of therapy.

Right. I guess that’s why I didn’t want to say ‘You need to do this’ – she definitely wasn’t presenting it in this way that was like ‘you need to make these choices!’ it was just like ‘Is this really what you want for yourself?’

R – Absolutely and like you said, the mirror. It’s easier to see sometimes in the mirror than it is living it even, you know? You are making so much sense.

Also I trust that she always has the best intentions for me.

R – Yeah. That’s really clear. You said you trust her intentions for you and that’s it right there, right? I think if that’s true then the power is softened in a way, or the use of power makes sense, or the use of strong opinions, you know?

I guess to me I feel like in my relationship specifically with [current MHP] it’s like power is just hanging out and sometimes I take it and sometimes she takes it. It’s not like it has a steady place with wither one of us in terms of how we relate with one another.

R – I like that visual.

It just came to me.

R- It’s beautiful. It’s a keeper. It’s quotable. I don’t know if you want to answer this one about [current MHP] or someone else but

#4

I’ve held back for short periods of time but I always get to a place where it comes out. Either she notices through body language that I’m not expressing as much as I usually do or that I’m quiet or I just get to a place where – I think now because of the established relationship that we have. I think initially it was really hard for me and I think I told you before there were things that I didn’t want to tell her and so I was like ‘Can I write them down?’ and she was like ‘Sure.’ So that was a solution for me to be able – because I knew
when I started this process that coming from a previous mental health situation where I was making stuff up because I was just done with that relationship – to go into this being very honest about what was going on and knowing that it was hard for me to say things that I felt might disappoint her. That’s a big thing for me with authority and power, I think is the disappointment aspect of it.

R – So it comes out, it comes out eventually.

It definitely comes out. I feel like usually in session she’ll catch me in stuff and a lot of times I’ll go home and think about something and be like ‘Oh, I didn’t like the way that made me feel’ or ‘that made me feel something not right in myself for what she was trying to say’ so usually I’ll email or text her and we settle it that way. That’s probably the biggest healing part for me is to have a sort of authority/power relationship with someone that gives me an equal amount of power about how I feel about how I feel.

R – That’s awesome

You’ll get used to me crying whenever I talk about myself, or people being nice to me.

R- I think you said that to me last time, but it is touching what you just said – that that’s if you look back at the diagram it’s like that is how you are healing some of your historical relationship to power and authority and that is a very big deal. That has huge implications for empowerment in your life, so I could cry too because it is very touching and that’s the part when I am talking about power I not talking about just the negatives, right? That’s also the piece that I’m interested in is that. One more question about that… In the period of time where it hasn’t yet come out, you haven’t been caught or you haven’t told on yourself or your not pouting or whatever – that’s what I would do is pout –

No, I’m more like ‘What? Everything is fine.’

R- Everything is fine! So when it hasn’t come out yet, what’s going on in that period of time?

For me – you want me to tell you about other people’s experiences? (laughing) Right, this is just about me – I think, I don’t know violated is probably the wrong word, but it’s… I have a very expressive face and I also am, I guess I’m pretty expressive, and so it’s sort of been a life long struggle for me to have other people knoww how I’m feeling before I’m ready to deal with it or have even given it any thought because my face is making a face or I have some sort of body language so my first reaction usually is defensiveness and denial. Like “you don’t know me! You don’t know what’s going on with me. I’m just making a face.’ Or whatever. With [current MHP] specifically, she’ll stay with it and she’ll ask me about what my process is that’s going on with me where as I think in the outside world it feels really vulnerable to have people of all different kind of relationships reading you. Sometimes more accurately that you are even ready for or even know about. Sometime someone will walk into a room and people will be like ‘oh you do not like that person’ and I’m like ‘I don’t?’ and I’m like oh god what did my face say? It’s not something that, it’s this totally
visceral experience that I have that’s totally expressed to other people without me really having a process about what’s going on. Or, that is a very specific process that I have that just is supposed to be internal but is very apparent to other people.

R – Right and if it is not external, there are times where it’s not external... there are times where you don’t get caught in the facial expression or the body language?

Oh, I don’t know about that.

R- really? You think it’s always known?

I hope not!

R- Right because sometimes you are emailing or texting and saying ‘Hey, I don't know if you know this but this bothered me...’ so when it’s not known, in that period of time before you tell someone, [current MHP], a counselor, what’s bothering you... what are you doing in that time? Are you thinking about it?

Usually obsessing about it and feeling guilty, and feeling bad, and feeling like I shouldn’t have feelings about how I’m feeling. I tend to internalize and take everything on myself like it’s my fault that I’m feeling bad about something. I over think about it. I think about it and think about it and then it gets to the point where I’m like ‘Ok, I clearly need to communicate this otherwise I’m not going to be able to work through it’

R – yeah, or move forward, proceed.

Yeah. I sort of have a very specific process or steps that I go through when I feel, I guess in this context, like my power is being taken away or I feel less powerful is that I get angry, then I feel guilty, and then I feel sad and then I feel usually regret that I communicated something about how I feel because I feel like I don't have the right to express what’s going on with me. I don't know why, it's very odd. I think part of it is my relationship with my parents.

R- Doesn't it always go back to that? In some way.


R- It’s important nonetheless. I think that that leads into the next question...

#5

I like to keep it behind the curtain. She’s doing magic things and I don't want to think about it. I think very much that over the course of my relationship with [current MHP] she has been really trying to build that trust about having an authority figure, a sort of parenting role, because I think she knew that that’s where a lot of my pain and discomfort comes
from is just feeling really alone and not having that sort of unconditionally parental care happening. I’m sorry, what was the question specifically?

R – you are answering it. (re reads reads question)

I think particularly it was, I noticed when she would be very – we’ve talked about medical things in terms of mental health stuff or just chatting and [current MHP] has always been very adamant about ‘You need to go to the doctor’ or ‘you need to do these things’ and it felt so parent-y to me but it was like this really amazing ‘oh this is what a parent does’, there’s no questions about whether you should go to the doctor or do whatever. For me that’s comforting. That’s the thing about authority that’s interesting to me is that I really like to push back against it but I think all of the push back is really because I long for boundaries. I want someone to create boundaries for me because it tells me that they care about me. Also it takes some of the pressure off my insanely long decision making process.

R – Which is nice to shorten that, huh? For you

Sometimes it is, yeah. Also to know that everything isn’t a disaster, that’s a big deal for me is that a lot of things... I struggle to deal with because I think, with my parents everything was a big deal and so every time something happens I’m like ‘wAhhhhh’ instead of just ‘oh, your car broke down, call AAA and it will be fine.’ That’s part of why I question my decisions also is because I don’t know how to gauge what’s a big deal and what’s not a big deal. I think in terms of friendships, I mean my friendships are, I’m pretty good in that relationship arena but dating-wise I think [current MHP]’s also been very – I keep coming up with these words that sound so terrible –calculated in her sort of presentation of how to build more healthy relationships and to move away from questioning whether I deserve things or not but that dating is hard for everybody. It’s challenging and also confirming thoughts that I have about myself in terms of knowing that I seem to be quite different than other people and my experience is different than other people’s in a very, I guess I feel like there’s always... everything seems easy for everyone else and everything seems very challenging for me. I think [current MHP]’s done a really good job of complimenting that specialness, but also encouraging that everyone has challenges.

R – there is something about those two things coming together that allows you to feel validated.

In terms of that I think she helps me most with my relationship with myself. I think that I can be really dualistic a lot about there is this good part of me and this bad part of me, and [current MHP]’s really good at sort of getting in between those things and opening up that grey area in terms of my analization of myself, which is deep and long and exhausting.

R- and very black and white.

Pretty much... and mostly black.
R – that’s a piece that’s coming up a lot in the data too as far as the benefiting from power... a lot of people are reporting in one way or another that getting away from dualistic ways of thinking or believing about themselves... it’s really interesting. I think that is almost a modern – I’m talking out loud with you – a modern sign of improved mental health is getting away from dualistic thinking. It’s interesting, it’s coming up in all of these different parts like where people will be like ‘my counselor helped me realize it’s not that I shouldn’t ever feel it, right?’ all of these kinds of interesting things.

Getting away from should and shouldn’ts

R – I like that you just mentioned specifically dualistic thinking because I think that’s what I’ve been hearing a lot of.

I was going to say, when you were saying about the current power realities in terms of gender identities or being queer and just seeing generally in the, I’m sure Portland is not the most average of places, but I would say that it’s interesting to me to see younger generations, people in their 20’s who it seems like everyone’s queer, gender queer, doing whatever and so that just struck me because I was thinking everything is becoming a spectrum now, a scale and so that’s interesting that that’s also happening in mental health.

R – That is interesting. I think it’s going to become part of this a little bit... somehow that concept of how do people benefit? One of the ways is getting out of those ways of thinking.

Yeah, I would say two things about that. One, I think that it makes me think a lot about my privileges as whatever my identities have been in my life, or are. And Two that I... .... I forgot...

R – That’s ok, it will come back to you at a time where you are not thinking so hard.

#6

R- I think we’ve already covered this.

I guess something that I would be interested in asking you about is what does power dynamics mean to you and how did you land on power and what is your working definition of that? Did you send that to me already?

R - I think it was at the beginning of the first interview, but you are asking a more complicated question which I’m willing to answer. Power dynamics, it just feels like I remember when I was first training to be a counselor I was always aware of this historical piece of out history as counselors being very psychodynamic. The idea that we are supposed to be a blank slate. That’s not true anymore, we’ve moved into the age of authenticity and genuineness and transparency, thank god! I’ve still always, as a political person as a more activist-y person, I’ve always thought about power, structures of power, systems of power. I’ve just always thought a lot about this weird role I’m in as a therapist
and as a client. How does the power dynamic work in a modern psychotherapy relationship? Because we are out of those times and I think it’s a lot more complicated and I think there’s a lot of good stuff that happens with therapy. And then I also think that it’s such a private confidential relationship that a lot of weird stuff happens too. I think I’m just sort of interested in the institution of therapy as a whole. Thank goodness, because I guess it’s good to be interested in something you do. I have so many curiosities and I guess power dynamic for me is just that idea of what you said is that a therapist has more expertise, right, they have more authority in some of these issues that people are coming for help with, that doesn’t mean that they should treat people that way. I believe personally in a more egalitarian way of seeing the relationship, but being aware that people are going to perceive me as having more power. So being aware of that is important to me.

It’s interesting for me, what came up during that is that my first question was what -- do you think you can actually achieve, like actually help someone, in that egalitarian space? Does there have to be someone that is sort of more, I guess, in control? I don’t know if that’s sort of just an old school way of thinking in terms of ‘Of course there has to be an authority figure that’s driving the situation.’

R - Yeah, I mean, that’s something that really resonates with kind of this whole interview in a way, that question you are asking. That’s kind of a question you’re having and I think I have a two part answer to that: One, when it comes to therapy I guess there is always going to be someone who’s more of the expert but I also think we can get a lot from other relationships too when they are more balanced and I think we can get a lot in the therapeutic relationship when we are on a similar level. When the power is just hanging out and I’m not using it, or you’re not using it and we’re just relating as people. I believe a lot happens there too. So I don’t have any like...

I guess it was interesting to me more as an observation of like, oh that’s interesting that that’s what comes up for me is ‘well of course someone has to be in charge if anything is going to happen.’ It’s like Oh... maybe that’s not so true. But that that’s sort of a cultural thing that I grew up with, this idea that you have a teacher and you have a boss and you have a parent...

R – You have a whatever... you have a therapist... you are definitely playing with that with [current MHP]. You are going in and out of that; do you know what I mean? There is a way that you guys are...

Yeah and it’s so interesting because I had just talked about how egalitarian our relationship is, or feels.

R- that’s awesome, you talked about that with her?

Not using that word.

R – yeah, sure. It's a fancy feminist word. The feminists brought that into therapy.
I also remembered the second thing I was going to say about identities! Is that I think it is also very isolating and segregating in that people are self-identifying in so many different ways, that if you don’t self-identify in so many different ways you can be really left out of whatever that situation is, at least I find that in the queer community quite strongly. Like I’m this and I’m this and I’m this and I’m that and I’m this and I’m that --- and I’m like I don’t have any of those things.

R – You’re like, I’m just me. Right? Is that not good enough?

Apparently not! Also I don’t know half of the terms that you just listed.

R - right, but that’s also what happens with - going back to now we are getting all philosophical, nerding out – dualism. It goes back to then, ok well then that then can be used in a dualistic way instead of a spectrum-y way to be like ‘you are not good enough.’ And people can feel not good enough. There’s all of those dynamics in subcultural communities and marginalized communities, enclaves of groups

I guess I think of it as more, they want to be as part of something so if they can have all of these identities and then there’s these other people who have all of these identities then they can all be a group together. Yeah, it’s an interesting thing to think about, is egalitarian something that can work or does there always have to be this pitting against of two different things all of the time?

R – Yeah

Who knows?

R- We’re going to have to keep figuring that one out.

I want you to answer it for me right now Karen!

R – oh man, you'll have to come back. Let's go back to one more thing you said early, is that ok?

Of course. I’m not in a hurry at all.

R - So you said something really very clearly that you feel intimidated by authority, and almost everyone has more authority than you – how do you think the way that power’s being handled in your therapy relationship is helping you with that?

I think it proves to me over and over that even if someone is in a place of authority or I perceive them to be better than me or more powerful than me, I still have power in that situation. That I’m still able to express how I feel or if something bothers me and I think we are getting to, I’m starting to understand what my reaction is so I can start to break down more why is it that I feel so shitty when I say how I feel and why I think that everyone’s so much better than I am. So I think with [current MHP] it’s a super safe space for me to
explore that and to also get constant positive feedback about ‘it’s ok for you to say how you feel. I’m not going anywhere. I’m not going to yell at you. I’m not going to tell you if you are right or wrong, I’m just going to listen.’ I think that that’s super beneficial for me.

R – Yeah, and corrective.

I think it’s another example of her using her power for good.

R – I think, luckily, there is a lot of that in this study. And that’s exciting, to represent all of the good things that are happening with the use of power.
Round Two Participant #6

R: So, yeah, I don’t think I sent this to you cause’ I didn’t want everyone to feel everyone’s own, but I wanted to start with this guy. So, it is just a draft as you can see.

P: Okay.

R: So, after I analyze the first ten interviews for the first ten, like those are the ten participants that will be in the study, so got to create a theory of what’s going on with the power, right? Well, here are some things that, you know, are going on the top there, find some maturing as they go, learning more about what they need from their abyss, what they can tolerate, what they are willing to put up with. So, that’s one of the processes that’s at play. On the left here and this will print the sea sky [sic] and you will see everyone seems to have a pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority like how do they feel about power and authority before they even come to therapy and how does that impact on how do they engage with therapists and around issues of power.

On the left, or on the right, excuse me; there is a current of power of realities and identities. And these are all the things people are facing in their life regarding power and their relationships or power and their identities - as people you know may have histories they have this pre-therapeutic relationship. Then they’re dealing with life, then the world, maybe they’re queer, trance, dealing with, you know, racial and ethnic differences and, you know, trying to navigate the world, you know, and figuring out how power and issues of oppression and marginalization and privilege impacted everything. So, that’s definitely present.

--And then, kind of the core thing is really understanding how clients utilize power in a therapeutic relationship and within that there is their own perception of like, is the [Unintelligible audio 00:01:52] Professional helpful and safe? Or are they unsafe and unhelpful? Then all these different categories on the bottom - which I added a new one today actually. So, people seem to have benefited from power, that’s the part where like a three year old relationship with your council, you grow, you feel empowered, you change, you get challenged, all the good stuff, right? And then there is mitigating power which is when, you know, maybe the [Unintelligible audio 00:02:17] Professional isn’t super, always the most helpful but you’re figuring out a way to make it work, you’re gleaning help from them, you’re like bearing with any unhelpfulness or cutting them some slack, you are giving them the benefit of the doubt, so that’s that middle path. --And then, there is resisting power. So, almost everyone has a way of resisting power when they don’t like something that’s going on. They either actively resist by challenging the [Unintelligible audio 00:02:45] Professional or lots, most people have a whole way of passively resisting like they get quiet, they fake that they’re doing better than they are, they do whatever they can to get
out of the therapeutic relationship that's not meeting their needs. So, that's an awesome way that people find to resist power.

And then the one I added today that you are getting the benefit of hearing about is something that really relates to your experience actually, which is like, this experience of like beyond just resisting, mitigating or benefitting-the more harmful component of when you actually have to concede to power. So, like, when you were telling me in the first interview by your experience when you were in the hospital and like people did things that they didn’t have the permission to do like talk to your family about some harm, right? So, when I was reviewing the theory today I was like there is another really important category about the far more harmful stuff that happens, you know. So, it’s sort of going in this direction of like this is the better side of power and this is the not so awesome side of power.

P: Okay.
R: So, yeah, I mean –
P: Cool.
R: I just wanted to like show you guys where it’s at. You can see if it resonates or if there is anything that you want to share with me about it. So, do you guys have any thoughts? I mean it’s a lot to take in.
P: I think it’s awesome.
R: Yeah?
P: This is like a really cool, conceptual map of things.
R: Cool. Anything particularly resonates with you? Did you hear your story in there?
P: Yeah, I mean I think in all of – I think in all of the places that have been more beneficial – I mean each of the ways that you – especially adding the last piece in, that’s really, yeah, they’re all on quaint with the, you know, at different times with different people at different place in my life. And I think that’s cool that that’s also kind of the framework that you’re putting around that as, you know that clients are growing, right?
R: Yeah.
P: And then having a relationship to power and authority beforehand.
R: Yeah.
P: And then also with like those conceptualizations can change overtime or where you’re at.
R: Sure.
P: And those are kind of also guiding currently how we look at these things. And then kind of with that as a framework the way that it like actually plays out in different experiences. And this is a really neat way you’ve mapped it out here.
R: Thanks. And so what I’m doing is underneath all of these categories, you know, I support that with the quote that you guys have given me, you know, because it’s got to be grounded in your experience, you know. It’s not something I’m making up, you know.
P: Yeah. Yeah.
R: It's like this is all the stuff that's coming together from everyone's stories. So, in around two questions I'm trying to like pull out your ears that seemed a little thin for my first round of questioning.

P: Sure.

R: So, coming back and seeing if I can fill in some gaps, you know.

P: Yeah.

R: So, that's what my second round of questions are kind of about. So, there is a lot of like overlap I think, now that I have done a few interviews between the first round and the second, but they're just kind of pulling a little bit more out and kind of verifying.

P: Sure. Okay.

R: So, yeah, any questions about it or --?

P: No.

R: Cool.

P: At the moment I may have some active thinking about things a little bit more.

R: Yeah. Thanks for taking all that in.

P: No, it's cool.

R: It's a lot.

P: It is really – I don't know. It's pretty cool that you've been able to come up with like – and you know like you said based on what folks were saying and then trying to make sense of it in a model that it's true to what people's experiences are, as opposed to trying to make the experiences fit in an existing thing.

R: Exactly.

P: So, this is really cool.

R: Thanks. Thanks for understanding the process, you know.

P: Yeah.

R: Taken longer than I expected but doesn't everything, right?

P: Yeah. No, I know that.

P: Cool. It's like getting all these Meta level things [sic].

R: Totally. It's crazy.

P: That's cool.

R: So, yeah, so, I guess I'll just kind of follow through with the next question if you're ready.

P: Yeah, for sure.

R: Which is just like have you had any new thoughts or experiences about power in your therapeutic relationship since we talked last?

P: Sure. So, I was thinking about this. Yes. I am trying to think if I touched on this before or not. And you'd probably –

R: I can help remind you.

P: Okay. One thing that we have been talking about is what to do about when I miss sessions.

R: You didn't mention this to me.

P: Oh, okay. Cool. So, then this is great. This would be great. This would actually hopefully fill in some things. And we've talked about it with regard to one of the things that happens for me is sometimes I can just forget about things, or
like get really busy, or things come up. And this is like in more aspects of life then just therapy.

R: Sure.
P: So, there is that. But then another thing is that sometimes when I’m feeling like the most, like I really need the session is when I am most in my [Unintelligible audio 00:09:00] anxiety or the barriers that are – exist for me – are working against me getting to the place that makes me feel better. And so, Brad and I’ve discussed – or when I miss a session we have been discussing, ‘Okay, what was going on?’ To try to get an idea of if it’s – what we could do about it? I guess.

R: Sure.
P: So, she approached it after one of the sessions I missed, and was like, ‘I want to talk about something. You are not in trouble. I am not upset with you,’ because that’s also something we had pre-discussed like my relationship to lots of – lots of different people in my life are always feeling like I’m disappointing them. So, she was well aware of that, but was in a position where she could bring that up and ask like what she could do to best help me is the way that she framed it. So, if I am saying I can’t make it, does she want me to push back?

R: Right.
P: Or does she – or do I want for her to like send me a reminder the day before.
R: Sure.
P: Cause’ now we are on every other week. We’ll check-in in some way, or do we just want to talk about it when I come next and just –
R: Right.
P: Also for me to pay attention to, you know, what things are coming up for me at the time that this is going on, so just kind of be aware of it. So, we went through like a lot of options.
R: Definitely.
P: And that was something that like in the interaction. As it was happening, I was like, ‘Oh, I hate this. This feels horribly uncomfortable.’
R: Yeah.
P: But knowing that it was out of – she was looking out for my best interests and that was very clear to me.
R: Yeah.
P: And she was very clear of like, ‘Why?’ so I didn’t take it as like she was trying to impose like a disciplinary measure on things. So, I think that’s a cool that she is able to like use accountability measures.
R: Totally.
P: Which I think relates to like power that she has the ability to do that, right?
R: Yeah. That’s awesome. How did – did her saying like things like, ‘You are not in trouble, I’m not upset,’ how did that – how did that impact you when she was able to say that? It’s kind of like she’s professing it a little bit.
P: It was great. I mean it – she addressed it right away knowing like where – where my anxiety comes from in a lot of things, so she was able to – having developed a relationship that we have.
R: It reminds me of this.
P: Yeah.
R: It’s like she’s being aware – not to interrupt you.
P: No.
R: I just got like excited. Yeah.

R: She was – she got – she’s aware that you might have the tendency to like cave to please others or like, you know want to do anything with disappointing anyone. And that’s a way that you’re just aware of power dynamics in your life and that she’s aware of that. So, it’s interesting cause’ it’s like saying that you are not in trouble or she’s not upset – it’s like that – it’s like – I don’t know if you felt yourself calming down or if you were worked up but –

P: Oh, yeah. I mean I knew where it was going, right? So, I was like thank you. And I am still a little uncomfortable with this because I still feel those things that are going to be there anyway.

R: Yeah.

P: But she did everything that she could, I think, to set it up so that – and then we like talked through the fact that I was still feeling that way, but that I knew like logically based on like having her say these things that – and I believed her, but we also talked about that these things are still going to happen for me. I sought to do my own processing to not feel the way that’s she’s trying to give me the space to not feel but also feel as it were. Yeah, and that’s a great example like operating, knowing what those current things are. And also giving – so like – it reminds me of the on here resisting power part –

R: Yeah.

P: And this passive way, which in my past has either been to say that I am better when I am not or another thing for me is to just kind of drop as once things start getting tense or I feel like I am not feeling what I should be to just completely like scrap it, and be like, ‘All right –

R: Peace.

P: ‘We are done. I am just not going to show up anymore.’ Like that’s how that’s going to work. So, also given that, you know, knowing that the way that she was able to address it was making sure we talked about it, so that it was addressed but also not – I don’t know – setting up mechanism so that I don’t just miss the sessions and just not come in anymore.

R: Totally. Almost really like helping, just kind of being that that – like intervening in that whole process in a helpful way, so that it could all just be kind of on the table.

P: Yeah.

R: So, how did it turn out? Like where did your conversation go? Did you make any decisions together or --?

P: We did. We decided that we would just check in what’s on my next, each session, but that – the also – that the – the monetary disincentive for paying the rest of the – yeah, cause’ you know, you can’t bill – you can’t get insurance from a session that didn’t happen, right? So, I will pay the – so, we talked about that and that I am – that thought like that’s not a worry of mine
because in some ways it makes me sound a little crazy and feel better that I like now have to pay an amount, and then it’s like, okay, at least I have to do that so that I am not getting like a pass for it.

R: Yeah.

P: And she was like, ‘Okay. Well --.’

R: She doesn’t really want your money without seeing you, right?

P: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

R: That’s what probably you’d imagine she’d say [sic] like, ‘Dude, it’s not about that.’

P: Right. Exactly. Exactly. But this is like kind of like what we came up with.

R: Yeah, but it makes sense. I mean I’m glad that you mentioned the money part because I was, you know I wasn’t thinking about that part but it’s such an important part of the dynamic of missing sessions or power or whatever.

P: Yeah, cause’ it’s like three times as much as it would be to just go to the session, right? However, if – when it is a thing that’s like based on me not wanting to go because I don’t want to get out of bed then the money part isn’t really much thinking long term at all. I’m just like, completely like, just not happening. So, I’ll deal with that later, like I’ll put that off.

R: Yeah.

P: But that’s kind of where we came to with it anyway – as I might ask you to do things like I know it’s there, it just totally depends on what happens.

R: Yeah.

P: So, I guess we kind of let it – we talked about it than in other regards to my life of like, just can’t pay attention to like what are different triggers for me and trying to just be aware of them. And then like obviously there will be future steps that – but that’s like where I’m at with it.

R: Cool. So, you guys came up with a plan now and it sounds like one you both can forget about.

P: Yeah, I think so.

R: You know.

P: It makes me like not being nervous to see her.

R: Yeah.

P: If I’ve missed a session, since we talked about it, so even just talking about it.

R: Yeah.

P: It’s good.

R: Yeah. Awesome. So, I think this is a bit of a follow up from the first interview but still wanting to fill in this idea of when a counselor uses their power in a positive, strong way to help you, so just wondering if you have any examples or ideas about that times where you wished a counselor would have done that more? You know use their power for good. In a way what you just experience was a positive use of power, you know in a way. But are there any other times you can think of in your therapeutic history?

P: Yeah, well, there is one that I could think of that I guess was a positive that I didn’t necessarily – I think I spoke about the first time I was hospitalized as a negative.

R: Yes.
P: But I think there are other parts of that that were positive. I don’t want to talk about this person in particular, but there was a psychiatrist that I saw that would ask me questions, this was a while ago while I was in undergrad before I had left school.

R: Yeah.

P: And she would check in about self-harm stuff, but she would – at one point I had cut myself pretty significantly and was really, really detached from the significance of that and it was out of – like I had almost like bled out at night cause of it, like it was so deep that it could have been really bad.

R: Yeah.

P: And I was really detached from like thinking that that was even like a thing.

R: Yeah.

P: And this person had asked questions about that. And like from a more of kind of trying to get an idea of like the severity of those things. And she immediately kind of really quickly to make me sing like a safety contract and things, and then set me up with a lot of other supports before – they then sent to call my dad to pick me up. So, that in some regards felt like, ‘Oh, that was like a breach of trust,’ but I also was able to recognize in that way that that was like an appropriate use of power to make sure that I was safe. And maybe I didn’t want to acknowledge or have anything to do with that at that time, but by her doing that she intervened where had I just left off, had she not done anything then maybe like I would have continued down that path [sic].

R: Mm-hmm.

P: So, I don’t know. I think like with harm to yourself or other stuff can be – that’s where a lot of that gets really muddle because –

R: Dicey.

P: On the one end you’re like fuck off, or you know – I don’t know. You feel like your trust has been violated as a participant or as a client, but at the same time it’s also like in some ways for your own good, which is like that paternalism thing that’s really trick with the power but you know it sometimes – in retrospect I can see that that also is really a good thing.

R: Yeah and in regards to the part of it you talked about in your first interview, was this the person that told your parents?

P: No, this is the –

R: Okay.

P: This is not that. That was an entire other messed up –

R: That was racked up. That was not good. Was it the same incident? Was it the same hospital?

P: No. This was the psychiatrist at school.

R: Okay, cool.

P: And then the thing that the people, the psychiatrist in the hospital that was when I was back home in [home city/home state].

R: Okay.

P: And that happened just like in front of me with them in the room.

R: Yeah.
Like, ‘Are you kidding right now?’

Yeah. That’s awesome. Thank you for the distinction.

Sure.

It’s like I’m not – I don’t have all of the timeline in my head.

Yeah, that’s okay. There have also been in a million different people that I’ve seen, so I can understand why it’s not easy.

No, it’s cool because I’m hearing – what I’m hearing you say is like – it’s almost like looking back. You can see some of that as a positive use of power, like doing the safety contract, helping you become aware of it that that form of harm was very serious. How long do you think it took you to see that as more helpful?

I think right now like as I was just thinking of that, like I actually have never framed that in a positive way like until like just now.

Yeah. Wow. That’s cool.

Thinking about it.

That’s cool. Thanks for sharing that.

Okay.

Cause’ in ways this isn’t a live process, right? Like it’s happening right now, you know.

Yeah. Yeah.

Like it’s not just static, you know.

Yeah. And I guess if I can add one thing to that, part of that too I think is having that – so, that was years ago.

Yeah.

Then having gone through getting my masters in social work and working with folks where I’ve had to make similar assessments for people. I hadn’t thought about that until like years ago, right? So, now I’m like I have a different perspective on it too now cause’ I can –

Yeah.

I get why a lot more than I think I did before.

Of course.

So, that’s all I can place into that.

Of course. Yeah. And having – maybe had to make those tough calls as a social worker, right? And having more perspective on where do those tough calls come from being on the other side.

Yeah.

Bidding on both sides is valuable [sic].

Yeah, thanks.

Super. Yeah. So, a lot of – you know you talked about the last two counselors you’ve seen being much more helpful than those that you saw prior to that, so were there any of the ones that you saw prior to the last two, like in addition to the psychiatrist? Are there any ways that you wish they would’ve used their power more effectively to help you?

I don’t know. I think the – I really did -- the way – I don’t know. I think I really liked the way that they’ve interacted with me, the last four. I mean the one thing that I can think of would be –
R: I’m thinking the ones before the last two.
P: Oh, okay. I’m sorry.
R: Yeah.
P: I thought you meant those two.
R: I’m sorry.
P: Okay. Okay.
R: It might have been confusing.
P: I’m like, ‘I don’t know, these ones were great.’
R: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The ones before that.
P: Okay. Sure.
R: I mean like – yeah, I’m guessing there might be some things you wished they would have done more powerfully and helpfully, but I don’t want to put words in your mouth if you don’t have anything.
P: No, no. Okay. I was just thinking of the – I mean I thought you meant –
R: Your last two?
P: Yeah. Yeah. No, plenty of those. One in particular when I was in – so, after the hospital when I was home.
R: Yeah.
P: I went into a DBT program for a while. I think I went there twice. Groups and individuals and my parents would come to some of these. It was horribly like the most awkward time but one of the things that I had discussed with my therapist at the time was that I have realized a lot of past trauma from when I was younger that I had completely blocked out. That I was just going through remembering having all this come up. And at the time I was also having a really, really, hard time with my mom. And not wanting to open up to her and not wanting her to know anything about like anything. And there was – I wish that there was a way for that therapist to help me to be able to talk about these things as there are still things I’ve not ever discussed with my parents. And our relationship has gotten better but I think it would have been very helpful for me to process those things, and also for her to kind of like facilitate that in some way.
R: Yeah.
P: Or given me more options for it as opposed to just keeping it like, that I was like, ‘Hell no.’
R: Right.
P: And that was –
R: Right. And then that was the final word.
P: Yeah.
R: Yeah.
P: Then I think I would have been open if she could have come at in some other way that like I could have seen that or, yeah, I don’t know. I feel like that was like a window that shut and then I was like, all right, I am never going down that road again.
R: Right.
P: And I think I was at a point that it was also fresh that it really could have been kind of processed and –
R: Right.
P: My family was already in like a shit show dealing with all of the stuff that was going on with me.
R: Yeah.
P: That we were already talking about like things we were like never talking about before.
R: Right.
P: So, it seems like that could have been – that would have been a great point in time for that to kind of have happened and it seems like a missed opportunity.
R: Beautifully stated; missed opportunity, absolutely. Thank you for sharing that.
P: Yeah.
R: Do you have any sense of like guesses or hunches on why that therapist kept things so tight or didn’t do that? Do you have any hunches?
P: Part of me thinks that she was very wrapped in the – whatever the – I don’t know if modality is the right word – the behavioral part of the DBT. And focus on behaviors and trying to like mitigate those things, which is also why I eventually moved out of like trying to do it a lot of like DBT or CBT because I didn’t think it was getting at any other things that I wanted to get at. And so I think we were more focused on like the diary card of like whatever, or checking in on that, like all that. Like at the time I was like, ‘This is fucking stupid,’ yeah, it was already not a good fit, but I don’t think that – I think that’s where her focus was and it wasn’t necessarily about like healing or you know, the more important – the more relational importance of my family and being involved in my process and history and all that. It was kind of -- we just did like – we checked in, we went over the like card thing and my individual sessions, and then in the group sessions we did those like in the modules.
R: Skill modules -- skill buildings modules.
P: Yeah.
R: And then when did your parents come?
P: I think – I don’t think they were at every group –
R: They were just like family groups maybe sometime.
P: Must have been like that. Yeah. Cause’ I think maybe they came like once a month to the groups.
R: Yeah.
P: And otherwise it was just ice, the normal group, my individual sessions and I think it was once a month everybody’s parents were there which was also entirely bizarre.
R: Yeah, I am already impacted by that story because I think that it is very important for therapist to hear. That if they are not able to be flexible with the modality or the model they are using then you can miss an awesome opportunity, do you know?
P: Yeah.
R: Because if you are not tracking what is actually needed from the client, do you know
R: That’s a big deal. Thank you.
P: Yeah.
R: You mentioned so transparently like referring back to interview one about the resisting power in a passive way. You were talking about how you do that. And you mentioned like super clearly about your own stuff, not wanting to disappoint others, so like that all makes so much sense to me like how it fits together but is there anything else besides like your own stuff that has held you back from critiquing men of all professionals openly or giving them feedback more directly when they are unhelpful?
P: I mean especially in the past which I mean is partially like maybe the dynamic of like age, of like my own development is also like – a lot of my early therapists were like fifty or older and I was a lot younger.
R: Yeah.
P: So, since then the age gap has been a lot less.
R: Yeah.
P: Which makes it seem that’s kind of an easier interaction to have. I think it’s a little bit more natural also to have like a more of a conversation around it whereas even trying to engage in the way that I would like just have an open conversation now as like a teenager into like young twenties with someone that’s about my parent’s age. I think that there is also, in my mind, the idea that in order to push back you will have to be really forceful to even be heard at all because that imbalance was so great. So, that was a much bigger leap to make that didn’t seem like it was worth the energy for.
R: Yeah.
P: Because it would most likely not be heard anyway whereas when the dynamics have been a little bit more balanced, saying something, a little something seems like it might get through and it’s a lot easier to say like they push back gently and then have it be received and then to keep working with it whereas if there is already a wall up there it’s like –
R: What’s the point?
P: Yeah, and the other thing if the walls are already there like that’s to me is kind of like –
R: Fuck it.
P: Yeah, exactly.
R: Yeah.
P: Well, it’s coming out well. You are already not going to get it.
R: Right.
P: Cause’ this is the way you’re approaching it.
R: Yeah, how much work should I have to do? I mean how can you even overcome that wall? It feels so impenetrable already. So, it’s like how uncomfortable are you going to make yourself, you know?
P: Yeah.
R: Till I bust that wall down.
P: Yeah.
R: Yeah.
P: And another big part of that is also when there's that realization where it's like, ‘Okay,’ and then there is a shift to some of the more like, okay, what can I get from this? How can I like – whatever, I'll bear with it, whatever those things are and try to get some of my needs met even though it's not ideal, since this is a situation that doesn't really seem like you have the ability to change it until you can find somebody else you just keep going with that cause’ it’s –

R: Yeah, it's what you got.

P: Yeah, exactly.

R: It's what you got.

P: Yeah.

R: It’s not always easy to get help or find any therapist or have the energy to do that. So, you got to do those things like with gleaning help and bearing with it. Yeah.

P: We’re having – I mean it’s been better in the past years, but like insurance having to pay for things, like just not being able to afford just to go to a therapist that –

R: Absolutely.

P: It wasn’t, you know, a hundred something an hour outside of pocket and that’s not –

R: Right. Well, that’s a barrier.

P: Yeah.

R: Yeah.

P: So, I was like all right, I’m going to stick with this person that’s pretty shitty but it’s like a fifteen dollars a session and I can do that, because the other one’s not doable at all, so –

R: Absolutely. And one of my friends has been talking with me a lot about how that plays out with them regarding seeing interns and how seeing interns is a way that people do their best and try to get some help, but then it's not always the best help, you know, because they can't afford an expensive therapist, you know. So, yeah, it’s tricky. So, this is something like I am trying to like get a deeper handle on in the second round which is telling me about a time where you became aware that you and your [Unintelligible audio 00:35:32] Professional were working out power dynamics that were related to other relations or patterns in your life. I can help you like make more sense of that question cause’ it’s a tricky question. It has to do with that idea of parallel, you know, like your life is out here and then your therapist relationship is in here, and sometimes they are parallels where and, yeah, there might be power struggles, there might not be power struggles, it just might be reactions, conversation dynamics.

P: Okay.

R: Does that help?

P: Yeah, I think I know – I know where you’re getting at. You’re having some interaction and then you’re like, ‘Oh, this is the same shit I do with so and so,’ or ‘this is the same way I react.’

R: Yeah. Yeah.
P: Like this or like in more stream, ‘Oh, this is like all my shit with my dad,’ like right now, it’s happening, like one of the ---
R: Yeah.
P: I think I have had those moments. Well, so, okay – so, one of my – this wasn’t like after like – so, this is if we are working through the power stuff or it’s I realize something about –
R: Either way, give me whatever you got.
P: When I first was trying to find a therapist when I was back in [home state] after leaving school. I tried a number of male therapists and the dynamic that was working out was not like – at first was not like – I just didn’t like the way it felt. And then I at some point realized that I felt like I didn’t have any room to speak in that. And then I also -- the therapist was not understanding like my emotions – like the emotions that I was feeling or like the depth of them or the way that I was like – at this point talking about like some trauma that had happened in particular with a neighbor of mine, a male neighbor who was a number of years older than me, so. And I would feel very uncomfortable being vulnerable at all.
R: Sure.
P: And so, after a few sessions with different male therapists, so then I would do like three with one and then three with another, cause’ like this isn’t working, let me try this again, and after the second one I was like I think that I can’t have male therapists. Like I think that this is – whatever that energy is I think it had a lot to do with trauma and also like my relationship with like men or men that I had dated in the past that it didn’t feel like an equal exchange.
R: Right. Yeah, and I mean one of the things that I’m hearing is you were feeling some of that power dynamic. They weren’t addressing it.
P: Oh, definitely not. Yeah.
R: Right?
P: Yeah.
R: Which is how – again, missed opportunity is all over the place, right? Not that that would have worked for you or – but it’s interesting like you’re holding up all by yourself [sic].
P: Yeah.
R: And they’re never being like, ‘Hey, I’m a dude. You have trauma with dudes.’
P: Right.
R: That might be really fucking hard, do you know?
P: Yeah, there is definitely no acknowledgement of that like whatsoever.
R: Yeah.
P: Yeah, and that could have been helpful in just like maybe it still could have worked out, like not having to sit here and hold all of that –
R: By yourself?
P: Yeah, and having at least being acknowledged like, ‘Okay, I’m not – it’s just isn’t me.’
R: No.
P: This is a thing.
R: This is a thing.
P: Yeah.
R: And it’s again, this came up in our first interview and it’s another fascinating part of the data that I got to fit in somewhere which is the tenacity that people have to keep trying. Like – and you definitely have had that your whole life. Like the tenacity to keep trying to find help even though you’ve got a lot of people who failed you.

P: That’s a good reframe. Thank you.
R: You know that I’m totally inspired by it in my study because people just do not give up and I just don’t know how. They don’t give up on us sometimes, cause’ we are a hot mess sometimes, not all professional, do you know? Like, I mean I am a client too, of course, so – so, yeah, I don’t know. I’m just really struck by that. You’re just really – you’re in Long Island, your home and you are probably away from your family [sic].

P: Yeah.
R: And you’re like Mount Everest, nope. Try again.

P: Yeah.
R: Nope. And you keep going until the point where you have this, you know, you have this relationship now where you can have all these, like you know, even have the conversation about missing sessions in a way that it’s like more beneficial, so it’s pretty rad.

P: Yeah.
R: You know. Any other thoughts about how you – how you kept trying or why or --?

P: Yeah. Oh, sorry. I was just going to say it’s something I hadn’t thought about.

R: Go ahead.

P: Kind of the similar, interesting like the flip of that. Realization of like where things match other things, like other relationships.

R: Yeah. Yeah.

P: When I – before I started to – well, right before I started to transition but knew that I needed to talk about it.

R: Yeah.

P: I was seeing a counselor at PSU that was female identified. And I was going through a lot with my girlfriend at the time. That was around the way that she was talking about trans-guys as being dykes that want male privilege was essentially how she was framing this, right? So, that was a rough --

R: Ouch.

P: So, I am trying to figure out what’s out and I’m also having a lot of really internalized like – like freaking out and also being like I can’t be trans because that’s like literally the worst thing for going from like –

R: Yeah.

P: Like second, like whatever – like second wave. A lot of progression in my feminism and I was like this is who I [Unintelligible audio 00:42:12] myself as and I was like, oh, okay. So, then I wanted to talk about all of that and having the therapist not really know much about trans related things, but also being really worried that I was going to speak like – I don’t know, like talk about things that she would interpret as like wanting to participate in massaging or
wanting to participate in patriarchy or wanting these things that don’t have anything to do with my transitioning but that my girlfriend at the time was –

R: You were afraid of being like, or feeling, or being perceived as.

P: Yeah. Yeah. So, I just didn’t talk about any of those things. And then left and – well, then was hospitalized again shortly after, because I had started to transition and not having anyone to talk to.

R: Which makes sense, right? Like we are laughing right now because it’s like –

P: Oh, yeah. Of course.

R: I mean, yeah, that’s also in my study that sort of dark humor that we all have to use to tolerate how fucked up it is sometimes.

P: Yeah.

R: You know? And we are like, we are laughing because it’s like a missed opportunity.

P: Yeah.

R: To talk about all the suppressed shit that was internalized and stuck, right? And it’s like – it’s dark and if you don’t laugh about you’ll cry, right?

P: Yeah, exactly - exactly. That’s the tool. Yeah.

R: That’s a really awesome example of that parallel because you really needed someone to be like, ‘No, it’s okay to talk about all these things.’

P: Yeah.

R: It’s okay to just process them. Let’s figure them out. Let’s put them on the table and see where they can go and yeah. You’re fierce. You’re seriously fierce.

P: Thank you.

R: Yeah. Yeah, when I was originally putting my second round questions forth to my advisor I had this question lined up rewarding but given kind of some of that stuff that we talked about today, I think I know the answer to this question. I think you've told me what you do when you can’t or don’t feel like you can talk directly with your [Unintelligible audio 00:44:40] Professional about power dynamics. I think I have a good sense of that. But it’s taken me back to my originally formed question which was about do you ever talk to anyone else about therapy when you are struggling with it? You know, how do you use those other things to cope with the fact that your therapist what you want them to be or just kind of riffing a little bit here?

P: Yeah.

R: Try feeling a little overconfident.

P: It does great. I’m going terrific [sic]. That’s odd. I mean I have a lot of friends that are in somewhere lines of profession to myself, some that are – I don’t have any friends that are therapists or like mental health like specifically, but a lot of social work, social justice, and really aware people.

R: Yeah.

P: And we all kind of support each other in these ways. So, in some ways it can be easy to talk. I don’t want everyone to get in like all the deep shit, but there are roughly times like when – if I am not able to connect on something I might like flush it out with one of my friends and then kind of help myself to processing so that then I am at a space where I am better able to maybe
address it then in therapy I otherwise wouldn't have been able to. So, yeah, I think – I don't know, just using like other friendly focusing way.

R: Yeah, sound a little bored. Yeah, pre-processing sometimes what you might want to talk about in therapy, you know, working it out. Yeah. Yeah, any other thoughts about what you do when you can't talk directly with your counselor about power dynamics in your relationship to them?

P: No, I think you've got a sense of it pretty much.

R: Yeah.

P: I don’t have any other --

R: Nothing to add?

P: Yeah, no. that’s it.

R: Yeah. Yeah, anything – any other things that came up while we were talking that you want to share or that you wish I had asked you?

P: No, I don’t think so. Let me look at this thing for a second. I don’t think so. No. I think we got most of the things.
Round Two Participant #7

R: Are you okay if I turn this on? One thing I didn't send you was I wanted to tell you we're the current round one Dana ended up which led to some of the two questions. So it's kind of a messy draft but I'll explain it to you just because I want to get you [crosstalk] Yes. I just want to get your initial impression. So power at the top, one of the things that came out of round one was maturing as a client is a big deal. So as you get better at being a client and you're a client longer you know more of what you expect of therapy, how to deal with the power differential more effectively and you're just a little more badass over time. The big theme is how clients utilize power in the therapeutic relationship that's down there in the middle and I'm ending up with four categories. There's three right now I can already tell there's a fourth one. So clients benefit from power and that's through like all the good stuff that happens in there, it'll be like empowerment, growth, change, red shit. And then there's this category that's interesting called "Mitigating Power". It's like things are perfect, maybe there's a little bit of challenging dynamics in therapy but you're still-

P: The word 'mitigating', what does that mean?

R: It means 'neutralizing', almost like getting something out of it even though there's power at play.

P: Because I hear expression like 'mitigating circumstances' a lot where you're like it's a challenge but you're making it work.

R: Sure we can look it up too. But my point there is this tension around, you're having a challenge with the relationship or with power but you're gleaning help from it or you're bearing with the unhealthfulness of the mental health professional. So that's an interesting piece that came out. And then resisting power which is probably a pretty obvious one. We're not happy with what's going on or it's not going well and people find very creative ways to resist power in a therapeutic relationship. Some of them are more active where people confront their therapists about things that aren't fit for them or they're getting shit put on them that doesn't work. And then a lot of people were more in the passive category of like if they don't like what's going on they get quite, don't share as much, fake like they're doing well, they would even see that they're better just to get out of the therapy in relationship. So that has something to do with having a hard time confronting sometimes. There's another category that's come up since doing this drawing which is "Conceding to Power" which is when you really feel like you're overpowered fully by the mental health professional. And I don't have a lot of people who have that experience in my study which is great.

There's not a lot of super-negative power experiences, there's a lot of more interesting dynamic in this middle path power experiences but there's still a
few people who felt really bowled over. So one of fun stuff on the left, that little apprentices thing on left. Everyone seems to have a pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority which makes sense. Like we all have a history, a background, a sense of how we deal with power. And then on the right side there’s more current power realities and identities. So what kind of power-based struggles are happening in your life right now, your relationships, your sexual identity and what identities do you have in your life that are power-related whether those be gender-based identities, sexual identity. There’re a lot of people in the study who are just more aware of power because of who they are in the world.

And they’re just aware of places where they’re marginalized in society and people who are just politically a bit more aware of power as they day-to-day reality. So those are some contexts, those ones one the edges that are really impacting how clients deal with power. And there’s some client perception of the mental health professional and the relationship, is it safe, helpful, is unsafe, unhelpful. Some of that’s starting to shift already with round two and where that fitting into the theory. So this is just kind of a draft of where it was after the first ten interviews. [inaudible 00:04:42.19] throughout you in this crazy draft diagram.

P: I’m glad you made a diagram. That helps me a lot too. Because otherwise, I probably wouldn’t have been like-

R: Yes. I’m just saying words, so many words. Does anything resonate with you or sound like it makes sense to you or doesn’t?

P: Yes. I think they’re interesting, sort of passive resisting is sort of interesting to think about the subtle ways if that happens.

R: Does it resonate in some way or just makes sense?

P: Yes. My brain is like "Where are we? What are we doing right now?".

R: Take your time. It’s like orienting to talking about a bunch of crazy shit, right?

P: Yes. I think there’s something in there around, the power that I’m resisting but I’m not jumping into what I want to say about it yet.

R: That’s cool. You can come back to when you’re more [inaudible 00:06:21.14] shared it if you want to. I’m easy. It’s about you feeling comfortable if possible. Do you have any other questions about it, about the diagram or where it’s going?

P: You’re sort of organizing your answers into this idea, into these concepts, is that the idea?
R: Yes. What I have to do for my study is, because it's qualitative research, and so when I look at the transcripts and I have to analyze the data and I have to start abstracting it to these concepts and build a theory. But for me and my goal is to have that all be really grounded in your data. It's not coming from my mind. It's not coming from my biases. It's just what is in the data and how do I translate that into broader categories that will help people understand how power is unfolding in therapeutic relationships with at least my study participants. For my ten people that are like this particular cross section of Portland radicals and queers and freaks and awesome activists, people who are more interested in power in general. So that's how that works when you come and go back and forth between abstracting and conceptualizing and staying grounds and the quotes really deter [crosstalk] and so I try to stay really close but still I'm forced to go higher up. It's researchy, research stuff. You know?

P: Yes. Totally.

R: You look like you have a question.

P: No, I was thinking of just the idea of how intimate and how honest we are and that being the decision on some level whether we're aware of it or not. And then how that changes too depending on the dynamic or what happened recently and watching that I think has been interesting for me in the last few months. I'm going to go lay a little bit and then both of us see that and me not knowing necessarily why but I ran out of money too which is sort of an interesting dynamic that happened so then the financial piece of the dynamic is so intense that also has to do with-

R: Thank you for power or something.

P: Resources and the idea of that this is really intimate collaboration but I'm paying you to hold space for me. And there're so many, I've looked at it and then I'm like it would be hard or like wanting more but not being able to afford more. Like we just said in our last session, talked about I had this dream where he was there and he was in this room. I sat down and he was like [inaudible 00:10:21.03] I'm here anytime you need me. And I was like "Oh". And realizing that on some level I want that but I don't get to have it. And that's kind of interesting reality of it. Or comparing it to when I've had mentors in college and there was that similar dynamic but I didn't hand you a credit card at the end of it so it wasn't quite so [inaudible 00:10:49.24] my parents or my scholarship or my bill that I eventually get was paying their salary for them to mentor me. They were doing it for free. It was their job but how different it feels in therapy.

R: Absolutely not. What was it like to run out of money?

P: It sucked.
R: As it relates to therapy it sounds it sucks too.

P: And I had at one point previously when I was out of money but I knew that I was going to have money pretty soon again I was like "Can I owe you? Can you pay you like skip a week and then pay you twice, whatever". And then soon after I remembered I had some savings bonds that my great-grandma had given me and got them from my mom. So then I was able to, and I said "Never mind". So we never really had that conversation because he was like "I figure we would talk about it or not talk about it in a session". But we never really, would he have done that? I don't actually know. And it was kind of intensity even ask for that or knowing if that's like aloud. But then when I really ran out of money and I was looking for a job and I already borrowed money from my parents and I already cashed everything in and didn't know when I would be able to afford a weekly sort of [inaudible 00:12:44.07] notes of big cost even though it's sliding scale. And I think he was also tied into, I haven't totally figured out exactly what made me frustrated and want to be like "Maybe I don't need therapy". But that moment of how do you decide when to stop, how do you decide why to stop, who gets to say in that dynamic. So me sort of saying "Why I have the power I can not put a therapy because I don't have money and you annoyed me right now and I'll let you know maybe next month once I have a job" or whatever. And then I spent the next three weeks being like "I'm fine, I don't need therapy".

R: So that just happened in the last couple of months?

P: Yes. I guess it was a month.

R: How did you resolve that? It sounds like you did take a little break from therapy for a couple of weeks and it sounds like you went back. How did you make that decision to go back?

P: It didn’t seem like, I never intended to never go back I don’t think. But it didn’t seem like right to just not even have a conversation about it. It seemed like if I were to make that decision I wanted to make sure that that was for the right reasons and the right decision and no doubt he would want to weigh in on it.

R: Did you talk about it when you got back or did you just jump back in the stuff?

P: Yes.

R: You talked about it.

P: Yes.

R: Is it okay if I ask more because this relates to the first question which is new thoughts or experiences about power in your therapeutic relationship. So you’re
naturally going there and how money, quitting and not quitting or therapist annoying you and all those things seem like very relevant. Is it okay if we keep talking about it?

P: Yes.

R: So you talked about it?

P: Yes.

R: How did it go?

P: It was rather unpleasant.

R: As it can be. Getting awkward and unpleasant.

P: It was definitely like him being like, Here's what I think maybe just happened or here's what I'm seeing is happening. And being like, well he said it seemed like I was really like disappointed with the world and also him and it was all tied together. I don't think I really talked much at that session, I just sort of was like, okay, and then talking about maybe some trust issues that I have or being like, my tendency, when you run away from something and what that says about you could be kind of intense.

R: Did you agree with his analysis?

P: In the moment or in retrospect?

R: Either, both.

P: Yes. I'm still trying to, it's very complicated I guess. And in that conversation I'm an extrovert so I'm just like "Let me just start talking and see what happens" but it was very like, cerebral, being like "If you see that I did this or if you could see that I might have done this or I could see that this might have been because I'm this way" but it wasn't like "Oh, Yes, I know what happened". It was just brainstorming about it. I have written him an emailed that I never intended on sending. And I’m curious to read it now to see what's in there but I was pretty angry and let down. And I think it ties to the money thing too to be like "I need you and you’re not there because I have to pay you and I don't have money”.

R: Is that what was letting you down or did something happen? Was is just the vulnerability of that dynamic?

P: I think it was, I remember the session because I just started to work. And had this really intense interaction with a co-worker where I was opening and it was
the second time I ever opened and I didn't have keys and this teacher wanted in. And I didn't have keys. And I didn't immediately run off to get the person with the keys because they were on their way back in. And I kept doing what I was doing and she got so upset, she thought I was being so rude and when [coworker] came down and let her she was like "You're so rude, how dare you." Nasty.

R: Misunderstanding.

P: Misunderstanding and not getting opportunity to resolve it and then having a whole way of working with someone, it was horrible. And I'm brand new and I'm trying to make a good impression and this lady has been there forever and I'm like "uh, I'm so stressed out!" so I'm like "Let's try to take this opportunity" so I was like wrote it up, this is my opportunity to be professional and see what this company is for real. When something goes bad that's when you know where you are really and what's happening. So I emailed my immediate supervisor and just like "Here's what happened really straightforward" and then when I came to work then I was off for two days and then I came back to work and we sort of talked about what to do next and I tended to in the past anyway to avoid conflict. It's that upper-middle class socialization. Not really tend to, conflict has in the past freaked me out, but I was really twitchier any time I saw would come in, the space I thought myself really shutting down and losing off and being like "This lady is going to yell at me anytime I do anything that she perceives to be slightly wrong". And I can't live like that that so I was "Someone needs to step up and act like a jerk, we just need to sit down and talk it through like let's do this". So [another co-worker], who's the program manager did it and we sat down and it was so intense and it was, so.....but I held myself and I was totally vulnerable and I was totally honest that she made fun of me for it in the session.

R: That's terrible.

P: Did you come here like a trouble maker?

R: That's awful. Super shitty. Did that experience eventually come into therapy?

P: Yes. I had sort of gotten through it and my partner was really supportive and was like "I'm so proud of you, you did it, you stood up for yourself". [co-worker] being like "You did this and you're so rude and.." And I would be like "That's your perception of me? But that's not me and you don't get to tell me who I am. That felt really important. And it hit the button because I had a really emotionally abusive relationship that I was in in my early twenties where he would tell me "You're this way" and project all this really dark icky stuff on to me and I let him. It's really intense and really exhausting but I felt like I did it, I held my own and I was really seeing this strength in being honest and
tender and vulnerable and expressive even though she kept accusing of being manipulative, my co-worker saw me and stood up for me.

And that was really important. After the whole thing I was like I need to go for a walk. And I walk out of building, heard the puppy right there. This is exactly what I need. It's a puppy so I got to play with the puppy and then this kid who was inside, takes one of those tiny kid chairs and puts it right in front of the door, it's all glass, and sits in it and watches. So adorable kid watching an adorable puppy, getting to play with puppy. So my co-worker was all laughing. Look, [participant]’s got a puppy. What just happened? You guys are magical, I’m just saying. Sometimes the universe is like "You need a puppy". And then I went for a walk, because I had to keep working, it was actually at the beginning of a work day. I came back in [co-worker] and I had, and he’s trying to be professional himself and the [co-worker p had a conflict with] was no where near and we had to banter about it. Because [co-worker] kept calling saying that I file grievance and I’m like "I sent an email". It was . So [co-worker] was like "If anything else happens just file grievance". And I was like "That’ll make me a trouble maker". So we got to have a little... okay, He sees me. But I think I don't know exactly what I wanted from [current MHP] around holding space for this story but I definitely didn't get it. But I’m not sure what I needed exactly or even if it's the expectation of that even is something that, I don’t know.

R: That actually, if it’s okay, it leads into our next question a little bit and we can always backtrack. But you just said you didn't know what you needed but let's imagine you're back in that situation, it sounds like you relate that story to [current MHP] in therapy. What do you wish he would've done to use his power in a positive strong way to help you in that moment? He has the power to, like I was just getting into it with you, like I'm on your team. So I was probably using my power to be on your team because I just felt it. Because I hate fucked up people. So I’m not saying that's what you wanted from [current MHP] but it’s just an example of how we’re interacting right now but what do you think he could’ve done in a more positive strong way using his power to help?

P: I think that’s it too. That felt really good when you were like "Yes, that’s messed up" and he didn't really, he just sat there and was very neutral. And I just got really in my own head of being like "Does he think that I am manipulative?" started projecting all the doubts onto him because he was being neutral. And he wasn't being like "Yeah, You got it, gold star".

R: Yes, back to gold star.

P: And then also being frustrated that it’s not so simple. I was so proud of myself for not letting myself go dark. And then all of a sudden it hit me when he wasn’t validating this part.
R: And then you're facing that situation again kind of. A similar dynamic where you gotta decide how you're going to deal with that, being disappointed by someone or let down by someone.

P: And not knowing if the things that I want to ask for, I even get to ask for. Or being what, is he distracted, is he tired? The little bit of information that I have about him which I'm not "supposed to." Whatever. It's that sort of wanting to not know too much about your therapist so that the space can be, about you or whatever. But then also being like he has a blog that I didn't read and so I'm like "Is there something going on with him personally or is it about him or is it about me?" or getting lost there a little bit because that's like a loop too.

R: And there's a lot of information spinning around in your mind in that moment.

P: When I'm pissed I was sure I was I was going to get a gold start and I didn't or was I pissed that the truth of being really vulnerable and really charismatic and there is an edge there. It can be used, I can get my way when it maybe isn't, maybe I shouldn't. I can take up more space then maybe people would be happy about. And being like seeing the dark part of myself and be like [inaudible 00:30:47.00] I want a gold start, you did it. I wanted to be like "You did it and you're done with therapy because you're totally 100% perfect".

R: And you want to be solid and clean and good and gold starish but you can see that edge though to yourself, to the relationship in therapy and you're aware of so much [participant], you're so aware of so much and I can tell that's really intense for you to be aware of all of the things.

P: And therapy has made it worse.

R: Yes. That's what we do. Fucking make it worse.

P: And better.

R: Yes. That's the complexity of everything that is everything.

P: I didn't need my fucking dial turned up. Well, here we are. Great. Awesome.

R: This leads into the next question. Again, we can always rewind where we can do what we want or in charge. So that's also at that moment where you are really feeling subconscious, it sounds like you're not getting your gold star and just wondering what's going on with my therapist, did they check it out, are they judging me, or are they just distracted, did they not get it, what's going on. Were you able to give feedback to him about that?
P: No.
R: I'm interested because it is my next question. Because he wasn't meeting your needs hypothetically if we just summarize everything you just said to me. You might perceive it differently now that that was meeting your needs, I'm not sure but if he wasn't, what held you back in that moment from telling him that? Obviously it's hard but if you think of that through, just what was hard about giving him that feedback right there?

P: Being an extrovert really sucks sometimes because it's so vulnerable. Because you don't know what you're going to say until you are saying it. Especially in a situation like that where you don't really understand it yet so you can't articulate it yet so to go through it out loud with the person it's about in the moment without having any clarity on the situation, avoid that situation whenever I can.

R: You stated that so impressively. I have no questions. I'm with you. It's vulnerable. It's way too vulnerable sometimes. Did you ever talk about it with him? Did you guys get back to it or did you sweep it?

P: Around the edges of it but not directly. This last session they feel like, I gave him a flyer to my show and here's the thing that he said when I came back that I found was interesting. Because I was like, also I don't know if I can afford every week therapy, I don't know if, so I was, my whole life is changing right now, I'm going through this big transition. Do I have the space, because that was also one of the really frustrating things. I did want to work on stuff and I did on some level but I was fucking tired and exhausted and that was frustrating. Do you want to show up? I can't right now. I'm like, he's disappointed of that.

R: You said you gave him a flyer and he said something interesting when you came back.

P: Yes. When I came back he said, he was like, this is around the negotiation of when to stop or how often to do it. You could od it, I was like can I do therapy once a month and he was like if you do once a month, it's not therapy. It's something else. It's like a check-in. And it was really intense, the way he said it or it felt like when you're trying to, the complicated thing of trying to negotiate a shift in a relationship and being how you have power. I could say I'm done with therapy and I'm leaving. Or I could say I'm going to do a little therapy. But I don't really want you to see me that well. So I'm going to come in once a month. Whatever. All levels of it. Like I don't have the money or energy to do it. And then being like what is the value of it being therapy or not being therapy and who values that. I felt that was interesting.

R: Yes. Who gets to decide. This is what you're saying.

P: It felt like he was saying to me "You have to be in or out".
R: And that seems to get into some of the stuff down here. It's getting into, which is my other category over here, do you concede to that power. Or do you resist.

P: It was like I don’t really want to be boyfriends but we can still see each other and have a date every once in a while and the person being like "No". That doesn’t work for me.

R: How was that for you when he said that? It was intense?

P: Yes. I was very much like "Okay. This feels significant, I don’t really get it" or "Do I care if it's therapy or if it's a check-in?". And I think I asked him a questions about what's the difference, or why do you need every week, why do you need that for that to be therapy? Why can't we have therapy once a month, why can't that be therapy?

R: And that was a way you were directly resisting. If you were asking some of those questions you were resisting, you were challenging, you were questioning, you were pushing.

P: Or I want to understand too.

R: Of course.

P: And I want to get what it is that you mean by that or what the difference is or why can’t I do what I want. It’s so helpful to have someone like tracking your shit and pointing out when you’re repeating patterns or seeing it in a different way than you’re seeing it, and basically he was saying, his answer was "When I see you every week, I’m really in your landscape, I’m seeing, I’m about to point things out, I’m really seeing things. Once a month it’s like you’re presenting how you’re doing". It's not quite so, it's not actually in there. That makes sense?

R: Yes. What did you decide to do?

P: Go back to therapy every week. That was like "Do you think you've done a therapy?", I was like "No". Not at all. And at that I got a job and I was like "Do I want to, is this an important part of my self-care? Yes". Does it suck sometimes? Yes. Is it [inaudible 00:40:41.04] ? Yes. But if I’d be also against his idea of going into and wanting to be in [inaudible 00:40:51.03] and wanting to be so good at therapy and how would one even measure how good one is a therapy and then my brain was like "I'll get it done really fast. I'll walk through all my issues and I'll be out of there". And then even when you accomplish this and you stand up to the co-worker and you figure some things out and stand in your power, it’s still so complicated. You know how much work there is always.
R: I can relate to that as a weekly therapy client in my life. I can relate to that. It’s just the work. I might be going to therapy for x more years but pretty consistently for eight years weekly. It’s hard because it just cycles around. The issues, they cycle back around in a different layer or something. That’s my experience. It’s hard totally.

P: Until I keep showing up to that on purpose.

R: Totally. And now you’re showing up in a vulnerable way of me to talk about it which is next level red gold start if yes, me. I’m going to ask you this next question given we’re in this situation that is so amazingly representing these questions. Can we reflect together on how you think this experience of, it’s a complicated experience that you just shared, the events and therapy of the last couple of months. It’s like there’s the event at work, before that there was the vulnerability of having no money, after that there’s this question of how often do you come and then there’s how [current MHP] was disappointing in his response to your experience of the events. So there’s a lot of stuff and it is complicated. But do you think that you and Kirk, you and your therapist are working out some power dynamics together that relate to other areas of your life in any of those situations?

P: Yes. Oh yeah, It feels like intimacy role play. Is it real, is it not real, that sort of a weird cerebral [inaudible 00:43:35.21] connection. That sort of a thing of we’re collaborating and it’s really intimate, it’s really vulnerable, what happens when you disappoint me? It’s like looking in the mirror of what happens when anyone disappoints me which is I just sort of go away and don’t talk to them about it necessarily because that’s still scary. What if I’m wrong? So it’s like mirroring out.

R: I sign myself up for this. Touche. Not for me. Totally. No, I appreciate your awareness of the mirroring or the parallel, the therapy is definitely like paralleling power dynamics, conflict patterns, avoiding lots of different things that are implicated in power and relationships. I’m sure that that’s something we can talk more about. And I makes me want to check back in if it’s okay with you about something you shared in the first interview about the crush that you had. Is it okay to ask about that? Bring that back?

P: Yes.

R: How’s that factoring or not anything we were talking about today or does that feel resolved or present?

P: It’s definitely there and it was brought up also for me as one of the hypothesis of why I was frustrated with him. We talked abstractly about it, it’s definitely an interesting thread because sometimes he’ll bring it up and then it pisses me off. It’s like I don’t want to talk about that right now and don’t make me until
I go that vulnerable and that he has that knowledge that I’ve shared but I have to get there to be able to even talk. And when I told him too that’s the other time that I skipped a week. And that being like "You were really deep and vulnerable and that was really intense in any way". I’m not saying that you did it wrong but I’m mirroring that for you. So I think that it does tie into that going away, also the pedestal thing of "There’s this power dynamic, this is person’s not really real but they are kind of real but I can project stuff onto them but they’re also mirroring me and I [inaudible 00:47:14.10] sexual but I’m looking to him to validate me and trying to shift that so I’m trying to validate myself more and not give the power to him and the crush ties into all those things. And I’m a total pervert too so power dynamics into it. So you make me feel off kilter, that’s interesting to me.

R: It’s interesting to put all that in a pot and sign yourself up to be like "I’m going to pay you to be in this space with me and to hold the space to me with me" like you said but then there is so much power that that person has. Because you have given them this vulnerable information what I just heard you say is that is hard when they bring it up and you don’t.

P: Maybe this ties into the question and I’m like "You don’t know what ties into the question? Shut up". Never actually said that to you.

R: I understand. But there’s a part of you that wants to say that or there’s a part of you that is saying that inside yourself on me. Not put words in your mouth.

P: But it ties into this how vulnerable I am with him at any point of time or any session and it’s different. It’s a constantly moving thing and I found myself, especially when I run away and then slowly coming back but definitely not sharing as much or not quite going as vulnerable in some things. Like having to come back into it.

R: And how’s that helping you?

P: It’s definitely interesting to watch myself and be watching my behaviors around this really intimate connection that I have that’s challenging and looking at my own behaviors around that and my own trust stuff.

R: Yes. And the emotion you made, it’s like you hold back a little bit but then you’re slowly moving towards but you’re doing that at your own pace. That sounds like a way that you’re, I’m going to use the language from my draft theory, you’re mitigating power by holding back a little bit or easing your way back in to the therapeutic relationship in a vulnerable way.

P: Yes. Last session, the flyer, I give him the flyer, and this is where I hadn’t actually pictured him coming to the show and I wasn’t actually saying "Do you want to come to my show?". I was talking with him about the show and talking about the flyer and he was like "Okay". Like see it, [crosstalk] you can see
what I’m doing, it’s tangible, I wasn’t saying “I want you to come to my show” necessarily. So then about half way through the last session I talked about the [inaudible 00:51:01.27] and he referenced it and he looked over here and I looked, then he put the flyer up in this, we’ll both poor thing. And I was like [inaudible 00:51:10.27] he was like super sincere, like I want to talk about, I thought a lot about your invitation and whether I would come to show or not and I wanted you to know that I’m not coming and I feel like it’s in everyone’s best interest, that kind of a thing. He talked about how it would be hard for him if his sister showed up at something that he was doing.

And we’ve talked about sharing space because there’s social overlap, So then we started processing a little bit about our relationship outside of the room and that leading to processing about therapy. And when I went to look at the wall where the clock usually is and it wasn’t there and I was like ”Where’s the clock?”. We were about half way through and then I kept going and he was like ”Tell me what just happened” and then I talked about looking for the clock and also being like, honestly we were talking about therapy and processing about therapy right now and I probably had some things to say about this but I don’t want to talk about it because I’m trying to get out of there. But I being like ”Go, what time is it? Let me try and find something to talk”. Like let me pull ”I had a dream last night”. Is that really what I’m thinking about? No. I’m trying to get out of that moment because now we’re processing about us. And I’m not ready. Me too because I haven’t figured it out yet. It’s that level of vulnerable that we had been since I left him [inaudible 00:53:09.27]

R: And you said that out loud, that thing, that piece?

P: Yes. [inaudible 00:53:21.05]

R: How did he respond?

P: He just sat there and let me stew. And then I did go ahead and process about therapy a little bit but only the tip of the iceberg. A little bit. It would be weird if you were there because shared space once out in the [inaudible 00:54:22.04] and it was very intense. But he wanted to process about it but I didn’t really want to process about it because I really enjoyed him being in the room like I’m an exhibitionist of it. So I was like ”My cute therapist is here. Let’s dance. Was he watching me?”, that kind of stuff. So he was like ”How was it?”, I was like ”It was fine”.

R: Because partly he doesn’t want to say all that.

P: Exactly. So I don’t know how to say part of that. Because I don’t want to make him feel uncomfortable.

R: Yes. But it’s private kind of.
P: But in therapy, where is that line?

R: Where is that line? Part of everything we've been talking about today seems like there's such a complexity to it, like there's just no easy answers. And I think that's hard and it's part of why I wanted to do the study on power because it is so complicated and there aren't easy answers but we need more questions and more information and more perspectives. So I feel like we're totally in it today together. We are in this study. Your therapy is in this study, it's really a lot about power. And it's so valuable to talk to you about your therapy experience and it's definitely gold star coming your way. It's pretty bad ass that you're doing this, that you're willing to be this vulnerable, be vulnerable with me which is... I'm just totally honored and I know you're an exhibitionist but I look forward to sharing with you what quotes that I might use in the final manuscript that'll be published so that you can approve those if you'll good or not. Your whole, everything [inaudible 00:56:49.08] each question so my last question is, it seems like there is a lot of that you haven't been able to talk directly about yet with your counselor about a lot of what's going on in the last month or two. Not everything you have talked about some things. But what do you do when you don't feel like you're ready? That's some one what you've been talking about today, when you're not ready to talk directly with your counselor about power dynamics in your relationship. What do you do? How do you deal with that? How do you work with that?

P: Luckily, I have so much to process all the time that it doesn't feel like I'm not talking about this, it's like "Fuck, I'm trying to work a full-time job and produce an event". So there's concealing things that I'm trying to [inaudible 00:57:53.00] so it's not like I do really need the therapy space to fucking work some shit out. That's really working on my life stuff. So it doesn't necessarily feel like I'm not talking about it. It's just like I'm not ready for that and I don't need to ask his permission to not to about that yet. And I feel like if I needed to say like I'm not ready to talk about this right now or even acknowledging out loud I don't really want to process about therapy right now because I know there's something in there but I don't know if I'm ready to go there. He wasn't like process about it but he just sat there and then I had to sit with that of "I don't want to be that vulnerable. Why are you in therapy then?". I think there's a time and place where we do have to push ourselves to be more vulnerable than we want to be. But then there's also a time when you're like "No I don't want to talk about that yet" and that is being my best self and adulting myself and parenting myself.

R: The words you said though [inaudible 00:59:14.14] powerful they are, there is something going, you didn't say it like this but there is something going on but I'm not ready to talk about it yet. That is so powerful. Just have those
words. Because they’re always there for you. And maybe sometimes you’re going to use them as a defense and sometimes you really need them.

P: Totally. Because like my own extrovert nature has been used against me. When someone’s in that abusive relationship, being like "Here’s what’s happening" and you being like "I don’t know, I guess it could be this way or.. you said that" it can be used against you, it is a vulnerability. And knowing how to use it and how to trust people with it, who to trust with it.

R: Anything that you were thinking that you didn't get a chance to say or that you wish I would’ve asked you about today?

P: [inaudible 01:00:28.17] this week went to therapy and that moment of processing about therapy and start to go there a little bit and I was like "Now's the time [inaudible 01:00:41.26] I’m ready to process. Even that, even time in this.

R: Yes. Tell me about that. Say more.

P: It was really helpful last time too. I figured so many things out and I was able to talk about, I don’t even remember the details but it definitely shifted things for me to be able to understand what I mean and understand what I did and didn’t want to share with him but to not have to explore it in front of him necessarily. But to get that moment to process about therapy not with my therapist, super helpful. So I felt like I was like "I have to do it again". I want to time that right and I want to be having things to say and there’s sort of natural art to things where it’s like when to figure that out. So I think yes, when that was like [inaudible 01:01:42.13] start opening that door of processing about therapy and thinking about that. Now it’s the time.

R: That was really cool and interesting to hear because when I’ve been listening to the interviews I’m transcribing them or just [inaudible 01:02:01.16] whatever it’s really powerful to be part of a process where why things are happening in the moment, you’re coming up with new thoughts or ideas or connecting things and it sounds like to some degree there was a timing thing where it was helpful to talk to me now and it is maybe once removed from therapy a little bit.

P: Yes. I doesn’t have the same intensity. I’d already be nervous before it last time. We really think highly of you and being like "Oh". And kind of therapy but it’s not but this time I was like "No, I know what it is, I don’t know it doesn’t feel as intense as therapy feels" which is really interesting.

R: And it’s a way that you get to talk a little bit about this shit without revealing your vulnerability in that exact way. This was just so great talking to you today. I could tell that you made that decision at the beginning to warm up, to bring your most vulnerable self here with me and that is really fucking rad. I’m just honored to talk to you about this stuff. It’s really cool.
P: Thank you.

R: I can't wait for you to read the study. I was just thinking here I will send you your transcripts. I will send those to everyone because I think that's a really good idea for everyone to have the transcripts of the interview because that could be helpful to you to remember what you said and to reflect on our conversation then and now. And when we did the inform concept for the study we weren't sure if there would be any benefit to being in the study but it sounds like there could be. And that's pretty cool. I think you gave me so much. Is there anything else?

P: I'm pretty good
Round Two Participant #9

I guess one thing that comes to mind is I definitely can recognize that as you are maturing - as I'm maturing as a client – it makes it all easier. But you've got to start somewhere.

R: – Exactly

But I was just thinking, I feel like if I'm in a therapeutic relationship I can, in fact I probably maybe almost would prefer, it to be a stronger person because I'm stronger now to some degree. I was just going to say, gosh, it's very hard when you're first starting and you don't really know how to use it or utilize it but you've got to start somewhere so that's the thought that came to mind. I'm glad I started somewhere.

R: – Right, you're mature as a client. You know what you want, how to use it and yeah...

And I think there is probably no faster, easier way then to just – it's a process.

R: – Exactly

It takes time.

R: – Yeah, and the hope there is that like if we can help other therapists be more aware that clients who haven't had therapy are very vulnerable to power and influence. But yeah, there is no other way but to do it. Any other?

I guess it makes me wonder, I mean I'm thinking back when I first started going to therapy, if it would have been helpful - maybe it would, maybe it wouldn't I don't know, - if somebody would have explained that to me. The - you are going to get better at this, you're going to get better at sitting across from me and be able to tell me what you need and what you want, in the mean time I'm going to try and help you get to that point. So if somebody could have communicated that to me – and I learn by hearing things multiple times so maybe it could have been every month or every meeting just a little nugget of 'you know, it's always hard.' I mean even if I'm in therapy now, there is always difficult things that you can always keep growing and always keep learning but if in that starting phase, if that had been part of the message that was being communicated from the provider and the therapist was 'you're going to get better at this' 'you'll get – it will get easier.' It doesn't mean it's EASY, it never will be but

R: – Yeah, but there is something about the way that you are saying that, it's like it sounds so obvious but I've never heard anyone say it and I don't think I've ever said it. Do you know?

I don't think I've ever thought that. I'm only thinking of this because that's what I was thinking, that you've gotta start somewhere. But for me maybe it would have given me hope or it would have been
R: – Yeah, and what if you could excel faster, right? What if that gives you just enough props you up enough to feel like ‘Ok, I can do this.’ and ‘I will get better’ and ‘if it feels weird that’s ok.’ Yeah, I really like that. I like that [participant], that’s quotable! You know? That like BOOM, right there. Love it.

Glad I could help.

R: – you are definitely helping. You are a big part of things that are on that diagram. Does it feel like some of it aligns with your experience? Or not?

I mean I think too, when you are first starting all of this is very vague, even just as a client you don’t get this. You don’t see this. You don’t understand this. I get it now and I can apply (inaudible) into it, but as a young person – or younger in the process – it’s hard to get that. So that’s what kind of makes me go back to what I said before if there is a way to help them... or help me going back, because often I do remember feeling ‘I don’t know what I’m doing’ 'Am I doing this right?' or ‘How do I do this?’ or... so.

R: – Well there is so much unstated, is also what you are saying. The vagueness.

I think for me, I don’t like vague so if it could have been presented in a way that helped me. I still may not fully understand it and it’s not my experience yet, but if I have that information, which I still may not even be able to understand, it provides a little clarity to help me then be like ‘Ok, I’ll get there.’

R: – Right. It’s like a template, you can work towards it.

Towards it. And I think it would have helped me more quickly even maybe if I understand how to utilize the relationship vs. it taking so much time to get to a point where I figured that out on my own.

R: – yep. I think that’s why I’m doing this, is because I think there is so much that can be benefitted from decreasing that vagueness and the mystery of it and being about to look at, you know, this isn’t where it’s going to end but being able to like ‘here’s some things you can bring to the surface that will help you and your client deal with all of this easier and better and maybe even help you make less mistakes or waste time less or...’

Almost like it provides some scaffolding to the relationship so that there is some structure.

R: – yeah and I think that therapy still has this air of mystery to it that I don’t know if it’s helpful anymore. You know? Like, let’s just put it out there. So, yeah, those are all really helpful thoughts.

#2

I guess the only thing would be maybe in my own self being more aware of, like I’m not meeting regularly but if something comes up it’s easy for me to call the therapist and
schedule an appointment and be able to know what I need and be able to communicate. This is what’s going on, this is what I’m feeling, this is what I’m thinking.

R: – how do you think you got there?

I think probably just doing it, and that’s what I’m saying I don’t think you can rush the process. It’s going to take what it’s going to take. You can’t decide how fast it’s going to take, but I think my own maturity, or my own settled-ness in myself, to be able to then – or maybe even more self aware of what I’m wrestling with or struggling with so that when I need help I can it’s more clear in my mind than (inaudible) and that doesn’t mean that it’s always clear. I might say ‘ok it’s vague within this topic but this is the issue so help me figure out what to do with this.’

R: – uh-huh. It sounds like there’s two things there. It sounds like there is a way you feel more empowered to just do it, and then also clearer about what you might want out of it.

Right.

R: – yeah, any thoughts about power and therapy from being in the study or from our first conversation? Any

What I had mentioned earlier was, initially it was very helpful to have somebody who was very, just gentle and patient because that’s what I needed vs. now I think if I was shopping around for somebody or interviewing people I would pick somebody different. I would pick somebody who’s stronger because I think I need that at this point. I need more pushing, you know, so that if I push back they can kind of push into that a little bit. So I think what it makes me think of is that I would be more drawn to somebody who comes across as being a little bit more powerful vs. before, that wouldn’t have been a good fit.

R: – no, it would have been scary.

It would have been BAD. That’s why that one lady that I told you last time wasn’t a good fit.

R: – I remember.

Vs. now... it would have been fine probably. In fact, I probably would have preferred her over the other gal, even though that other gal could still probably be really good now too. But yeah, so I probably would pick somebody who’s a little bit more – who I could just say ‘Well, what do you think?’ you know and not just like ‘Well...’ you know. Sometimes it’s good for me to talk but I’m pretty good at processing my thoughts and putting them together in a very concise articulate manner so I need somebody else’s perception, what their reactions to it, and I don’t necessarily just take that into myself and then that’s what I feel like I need somebody who can tell me this and then dialog with and wrestle through it with me and give me different ideas or things to think about.
R: – do you remember in the first interview when you were, I don’t know if this is what you were referring to but you were talking about the woman that was afraid of your anger.

Yeah.

R: – that also seems like a time where someone more powerful, someone who could contain that... do you know, even though that was early in your process? So it’s interesting. It seems like a complicated maybe formula, like of what we might need depending on where we are at and what we are bringing.

So I think, at this point maybe I said this last time, I think I could probably work with anybody and get something out of it because I think I kind of know how to do that now. There’s probably people that I would, well there definitely would be personality types that I would probably benefit more from.

R: – Cool

#3

I actually don’t know if anything comes to mind in the past, partly because in some ways I think if they had used their power in a stronger way it may have been too much. With the exception of that one gal, everybody else that I’ve worked with – I mean, I have had a positive experience with everybody except that one person, so...

R: – is there something that’s coming up that’s more present, or something that hasn’t happened yet, or?

Nothing really comes to mind. I feel like [current MHP], the gal that I work with now, she’s actually really good at helping me do – she does this in a strong way to help me. We’re considering... we are going to have to take care of my mentally ill mother in law so we are trying to make decisions about what we need to do with her so there is a lot of old fear of me getting swallowed up or forgotten in everybody else’s needs so making this decision, I have wrestled with where is the line between ok I’m being selfish, she doesn’t have anybody so she need help you know, but where is the line? When is it a healthy boundary in terms of saying ‘I will only do this if these other things are in place’ or ‘these are the things that I need in order to step into that’ and when is – is that getting into being selfish and I just don’t want to help anybody? She’s done a really good job of - and I tend to lean more onto the ‘oh I’m being selfish’ - so she’s actually been really good at saying ‘No. You’re not.’ ‘Don’t do this/ do this.’ ‘Do this, this is good.’

R: – you look so powerful as you’re saying that like you look like, you know?

Yes. So she has helped me, she has used her power in a way of helping me feel powerful in it but also, in a healthy way. So that it’s balanced.

Which has then helped me feel like ok, I feel safe in this. [husband] is often times even in the conversation so he’s a part of this whole process to but just being able to communicate what I need and what I don’t need. Maybe if we get in the situation my needs change so then we’ll go back to the drawing board and I’ll re-communicate what I need but, at this point, in order to do this I need x, y, and z. So she’s definitely done a good job of helping, would be an example of where I can think of somebody who’s used their power in a good way to help.

R: – that’s a really good example. Thanks for thinking about it

And it makes me feel like ‘Oh’ -like you said - I can feel it. I feel stronger. This isn’t going to be a – it’s going to be difficult, and I’m sure it will be difficult in ways that I am not aware of, but I don’t feel like it’s going to be a swallow me up and I’m going to lose myself in in type of situation.

R: – yeah because you have someone in the moment, like Beverly. She has your back, kind of. I mean, what’s it like to feel like you lean towards thinking you are being too selfish – what’s it like to have someone just be like ‘No.’ ‘You’re not.’

It’s powerful is what it feels like. It’s like ‘Oh. Yeah. This is good.’ (laughing) and she’s also... [husband]and I have done, we both work with her individually but we will also do stuff with her together and there’s been times in my appointment with her where her response is ‘No. He’s wrong. This is not healthy’ and I know she does the same thing to him. So she’s a very strong, powerful person but not in a controlling way. I know it has helped both of us. But she’s also very kind and gentle, but she also will call him out on things when it’s with me and vice versa when we’re together.

R: – do you think that’s what offsets that powerfulness is the kindness and the gentleness?

Yeah, because I’d say I trust her. I’m not afraid of her power or her influence because I trust her. Granted, I’ve worked with her on and off for 2 years maybe so there’s been a gradual development of that trust. Even from the beginning there were times where she would – she always had that element to some degree.

R: – Yeah, you are bringing I think a really interesting perspective up with how opinionated counselors can be. Do you know? We have opinions and I don’t know that I’ve thought much about that specifically... opinions, like us giving people our opinions or advice -I guess I’ve thought about advice - but there’s a lot of reasons why you’re not afraid of that opinion, I think, with her. There’s a lot of things that you...

And she probably, if I was working with her 15-16 years ago, the way she related to me would be different, because I would be different. So there’s that level of maturity of being able to know what I need or something, not necessarily know what I need but being able to respond to or interact with her opinions which I do want and which is why now if I was choosing a counselor I would want somebody who I felt was a little bit more engaging.
offering opinions whereas before it would have totally snowplowed me and would have been too much.

R: – totally. You said something interesting if it’s ok to ask one more question about this. The idea the [current MHP] works with both of you separately and then also together, that takes a lot of trust too and I wonder what allows that to be ok for you? Not that that’s, you know, it just is a very cool interesting dynamic where she does have power and influence over you as individuals and then as a collective, couple.

To be honest, I prefer it that way because I think it helps me feel like ‘ok you are getting the whole picture.’

R: – Yes.

And so then I feel like she’s able to offer better counsel or response or advice because she’s not just hearing my side. She’s hearing my side and engaging with me but she’s also hearing his side and engaging with him. So just in my session, I know she knows his perspective, or his background, his personality. I like working - if we’re going to be doing marriage counseling I like... if we are doing marriage or individual and/or, I like it to be the same person because then I don’t feel like you have to... I don’t know I just get a better-balanced perspective of it.

R: – that’s cool because some people feel like – it’s interesting that you feel like more comfortable and balanced there are some people feel like it’s more biased when that happens. It’s so cool to hear your perspective. I think that’s really valuable.

[husband] would say the same thing. It’s, I think we both have this... I think it’s helpful for both of us to just, when we’re working through something that’s difficult I’m really struggling and working with [current MHP], then he’s working with [current MHP] is his response to my struggling I don’t know, I think it just works.

R: – It just works. I love that. It just works. It does just work.

#4

I wish I could... I wrote that lady. I sent her an email, that one counselor. I wish I had it. It’s come up before, a couple years ago with another friend of mine and I was like I wish – I went back, in fact to try and find it but I couldn’t find it. I know I emailed it to her so part of me wishes I could go back and be like ‘what did I say to her?’ because I told her flat out, the phrase I used was ‘you dropped the baby’

R: – I remember you saying that

So I wish I could have found the... I think... did she respond to it? I have no idea. She didn’t reply to me because the relationship had ended and I had moved on but I wanted to give
her feedback. It was kind, it wasn't beating her up but I needed to say something. So I did. I was proud of myself.

R: – How did you know you needed to do it?

I think because I was just perseverating over and over and it was stressing me out. I was angry. That, at the time, was part of this whole thing of 'you have a voice. You are not getting swallowed up or suffocated by everybody. If you don't like something, what do you not like about it? Use your words.' So I think part of it was 'alright, I need to put this into practice.' But I don't think I've ever given feedback, or I guess I would say I haven't really had anybody that I didn't like or I fired. There's been times I've asked for more. I've asked for, like 'I understand that mental health professional you are trying to help but I'm strong enough to handle your opinion. I want to know what it is.' So I've asked for more.

R: – How's that go for you when you ask for more?

It usually goes fairly well, I mean I haven't worked with that many people and the people that I have worked with over the years have been fine, or seem to have been fine with it. I don't necessarily ask for that right from the beginning so there's a little bit of 'Ok, gotta get to know me' that type of thing.

R:– yeah. It's awesome because there's this way that, you know I'm thinking about this section. You were just talking about your current power realities that were going on in your life at the time where you needed to give that counselor feedback. It's like that was mirroring what you needed to practice in your own life to sort of work through some stuff and then now you're feeling more powerful in your life and you're like I'm more able to tolerate opinions, feedback, ideas. It's just a way that there is this journey, that's what it's coming down to a little bit as I think about it. Like, this life journey if you stick with counseling intermittently even over the course of your life and your development it's like there is a journey of power where it shifts over time. I'm just thinking out loud that it's definitely a time-based thing; there is a time component to it.

And it's kind of, in some ways... if you use the example working out at the gym, as you get stronger you need stronger weights.

R: – Thank you!

So if somebody was just going to just be exercising with little weights and say 'I'm getting stronger' I'd be like 'I want bigger muscles.' I'm in therapy because I want to get better and I want to grow so that means the weights have to be stronger.

R: – that's a gem. I love it. It's been one of the funnest things about listening to interviews and writing them up is all of the awesome metaphors people use, I mean that's perfect. It's like Hello! It's great.
I guess the only one I can really think of is that one gal; really tall, long hair and glasses. I wish I could remember her name. The response was she couldn’t handle me and I always felt like I’m too much or I’m not enough and that’s what’s being portrayed in the counseling is I’m too much when really... the woman who I went to afterwards, who I found out later was her supervising person... So the lady I went to after that, [MHP], she just was... she was kind, she was gentle and so she really was more of the – she created the safer space and was dialoging. I remember her telling me ‘you’re going to be ok. So much of this is normal.’

R: – and that other counselor wasn’t strong enough to say that.

I don’t think she was, and then as I’m getting angry... I have all of this rage and depression that’s been buried for years and years that’s starting to come up. It’s not coming up in a way that she needed to be afraid of me, I’m not going to hit you; I’m not a violent person. But as I’m telling you I’m so angry I just want to throw something – and for me to actually say that was a huge step because normally I don’t like to be angry. So the fact that I’m even telling you that that’s what I feel should have been ‘that’s ok. That’s good. That means it’s coming up.’ And her response to it I remember was ‘well that wouldn’t be appropriate. We don’t do that here.’ I remember shutting down. I remember like ‘you can’t handle me. I’m too much. There’s too much in here and I’m too much.’

R:-- right and I’m totally resonating. It’s interesting because it’s really normal for the things from the first interview to come back in the second. We’re just trying to kind of like fill in the gaps. It’s super interesting to hear you talk about that more today because I can see the mirror of how you needed someone to mirror that you were ok and that your power, that it was a helpful form of releasing your anger. That that was a phase and you were going to get through that. I can see how hard it is to be like ‘I’m too much’ and that person was such a poor match for you developmentally. She was maybe earlier in her career.

She was. So when I think about it, it just makes me think gosh I’m so glad I found somebody else. I didn’t just give up.

R: – Me too.

Because I could have and a lot of people probably do. And that makes me angry! (laughing)

R: – and it should! Well, and that’s coming up a lot in this study, the perseverance that we have as clients to keep going when we have bad experiences. I just think that’s super interesting. I’m interested in that. You persevered, and how? Something allowed you to know that that just wasn’t the only experience you were going to get.

Right. I’m stubborn. And that’s one of the areas in life where it served me well.

R: – yeah. It sounds like you also had a friend that you were talking to at that time, that gave you that phrasing ‘dropped the baby’
Yes. Yeah. My friend [friend’s name], that was helpful.

R: – Do you think that friend helped?

Yeah. Definitely. She’s a dear friend but also been a mentor over the years and so she for a long time had been encouraging me to begin counseling. And when I wasn’t ready she’d say I’ll offer you everything I have, as much as I have, but I really still feel like you need to get a counselor. She’s also somebody that, because we had a similar background and experience so she was also somebody that let me have a front row seat to her journey. She just shared with me and was very open, was honest if I asked questions. So she definitely was a huge factor for just, you know ‘there’s somebody else out there, you wanna try again.’ So, definitely.

R: – yeah, so you’re stubbornness plus [friend]’s support = you didn’t give up. You didn’t give up when she dropped the baby.

And I felt validated or understood by [friend], which then helped me. And then even when I was working with [MHP], who was her supervisor for all of the hours and stuff, [MHP] validated it too. ‘She made a mistake.’

R: – Did the bad counselor refer you to [MHP]?

No. Our marriage counselor at that point, who was totally separate across town didn’t even know that [MHP] was her supervisor but [MHP] had a private practice in his, in a building like this that she worked at a couple days a week and then the other couple days she did supervision.

R: – and did you tell [MHP] who the counselor was?

Yeah, she knew. It came up later, I don’t even remember how it came up and maybe it was even that first appointment that it came up, that she is her supervisor. So there was a part of me that, I remember feeling initially ‘I’m not sure how I feel about that’ because does that mean that, I don’t know how the supervision works... does that mean she’s telling her all about me? Probably. Then I was like ‘how do I feel about that?’ but then it didn’t bother me just because of the way that [MHP] responded to me of ‘She made a mistake. She was wrong.’ And was able to tell me what she saw in me. Like, ‘I don’t know why she...’ so I just felt heard, or validated, or like ‘Ok, just let it go.’

R: – that’s such an interesting experience.

And I think I might have even have given [MHP] the email that I sent to her, I can’t remember. I think I did, although I don’t know what’s involved with supervision she maybe the other gal, who I can’t remember her name, had to bring it in. I don’t know.

R: – that is such an interesting story.
I have wondered, like ‘I wonder where that other lady is now’ and what that feedback session was between the two of them.

R: – well it’s interesting because these people, they live in our memory a little bit. You’re like ‘Hummmmm..’ – you said last time – ‘hope she grew.’

I don’t ever really think about it, until last time when we were talking about it I was like oh yeah. It could be interesting. I don’t even remember what her name is now. It’s been a long time ago. Hopefully she’s doing good. Hopefully she learned and was better.

R: – that was an interesting experience. It’s really interesting to hear it more today. I don’t know that I caught the connection between the two. I might have just been focused on other things.

It was totally random too because we were going to the marriage counselor and I told him ‘I’m not liking this person I’m having a really hard time, I don’t feel like it’s a good, I don’t feel like she’s doing a good job’ and so he said, he gave me the card for [MHP] and said ‘why don’t you consider giving [MHP] a call. She’s here in the office, you could just meet her’ and then later... yep.

#6

R:- so this next question you already just spoke about it really when you were talking about [friend], in a way, like your friendship with her. [friend], right? So I don’t know if you have more to say about that but it might be interesting to talk about.. One thing I was thinking about when I was formulating this question is, I’m curious about how we talk to other people about counseling, like in our life. How we talk about our counselor with other people and how we work out things with other people that help us with counseling.

I think I actually do that well, in large part because I had somebody that did it well with me. I can think of several friends that are in counseling and are having a hard time with it and being able to tell them, without even thinking about it, being able to tell a little bit about what we talked about at the beginning, you know, ‘you’ll get better’ or ‘it will be easier to start articulating what you need or using it’ that type of thing. Or listening, or being able to share, kind of what [friend] did. Kind of letting you have a front row seat to like ok well this is where I am or where I was and this is what happened. Situations are different, totally different response, but at least you’d have an idea. You’d have an example. I think that was significantly helpful with [friend]. I think because that was modeled to me, I think it’s just easy to model that or to do that for other people. Or to even just friends and people that I know are struggling, and they’re not just shallow acquaintances they’re relationships that I have had for a number of years, but inviting them into the process. Sending them email’s that I’ve sent to the counselor or Beverly’s responses to me just so they can watch it happen so then maybe it’s – I don’t know, I think it’s helpful. That’s what [friend] did with me and it was helpful. Again I don’t do that with everybody, there’s a relationship there. I do that... a lot, actually.
R: – do you ever feel like it’s helpful to complain about counseling with other people? About your own counseling? Or just sort of vent about it?

To complain about things I don’t like about it?

R: –yeah.

I think I can complain or vent about ‘this is frustrating, this is hard, I’m going through this again, it’s another layer I thought I was done with this already…’ but I don’t think I personally view counseling as a... I mean, it’s helpful and so I don’t think, within my own mind, that I vent about it. I might vent about the process because it’s painful or difficult of frustrating or discouraging.

R: – that sounds like you take a lot of personal responsibility for the work and you don’t put it on the counselor

Right, no.

R: – that’s just not your perspective. It’s just not the way you see it. And you see it as, whatever’s coming up that’s hard as just part of the journey, part of the process. You don’t feel too bogged down in any one thing or one part of it. You’re just like this is what it is, it’s hard.

Yeah, and I’m stubborn and tenacious then. I just keep going because I want to keep getting better. And I’ll probably still be struggling and it will still be hard when I’m 90 so... because there’s always more.

R:- I know! We’ll still be in counseling, right.

You’ll still have a job.

R: – I will still have a job. I will be helping someone else have a job because I will be going.

But, to give you an example I was, even yesterday I was talking to someone, I was telling them about the woman... a friend of mine who had kind of not reamed me but definitely about the whole ‘why are you...’ tuff on me ‘why are you going to be moving to an executive assistant position. You are smart, you could be the executive’ but just realizing that ‘I don’t want to’ so there’s just this settled-ness or this sense of like, wow. I feel like I’m the most settled and the most – later 30’s have been the best years of my life by far. It’s just awesome, you see some of the fruit of all the work and it’s good. Then I was laughing with somebody, I said ‘you know but when I’m 47, I’ll probably look back when I was 37 and be like uh I was so naive, I had no idea...’ you know, because that’s the way it is.

R: – well it’s like it gets better, and then you have to start dealing with shit like mother in laws. I mean, you’re like... what?!. Then it’s that, you know.
[husband] and I will even laugh about it sometimes, like remember when we were first married and we didn’t know what we were doing. Now we’re 16 years later like oh my god that’s painful. I almost didn’t even want to look, it’s like it was painful to think about how little we didn’t know what we were doing. But then we’re like, you know, but 16 years further we’ll probably look back like remember how good we thought we were doing when we were like 16 years into this, oh we had no idea.

R: - yeah and it also sounds like you are just a growth oriented person, and it’s like you are at this place where you’re able to really appreciate how far you’ve come.

I think that’s a good thing because I think I’m very proud of my work. I am, it’s good. I think because I’m so proud of it and it’s been so good and you’ve experienced it maybe just, you want more. There are times where I’m like, ok, I don’t want to deal with this right now. But I know I will because I’m that personality.

R: – yep, tenacious.

I remember [friend] told - oh this is actually sort of fits with this... When I was... [anger-resistant MHP]. That was the girl’s name. She was very tall, like 6 foot something, long hair, glasses.

R: – I love that you just remembered her name.

I did! I’ve been trying to think like, what was her name! When I decided – ok. making the decision I just can’t do this, [MHP]’s not a good fit... I remember [friend] telling me, she told me more than once. She’s like ‘You are a dream client.’ She said ‘you are the kind of person that any therapist would love to have. It’s ok, go find somebody else.’

R: – I love [friend] so much! You’re a dream client, I agree [friend]. That’s awesome. She was just supporting you.

She was.

R: – and she was mirroring what you needed when [MHP] couldn’t, you know? And she was mirroring ‘you’re a dreamboat; you’re not too much. Let’s find you someone – keep trying.’ Yeah, what an interesting story. I love your story and I can’t wait to... like the next step of the process is going to be, so I’m interviewing everyone again from the first round and then I’m not sure but I’m trying to finish by June so... (Talks about next steps until recording cuts off.)
P: I thought you were - I thought you were/

R: It's gonna be for you.

P: I get it now. I see. That's so cool. I forgot.

R: I brought it late last time, so.. I was a little [more with it today] [00:00:17]

P: Oh, yeah.

R: So I didn’t tell this, I think, in the email, but one of the things that I wanted to do is start doing a little member checking, which is like telling you where the data’s currently at, after I analyze the first 10 interviews. And like showing you this draft visual, maybe just explaining it briefly, and then getting your feedback.

P: Cool.

R: It's not gonna be like the millions of pages that I’ve written, but it's obviously my handwriting a little bit hard to read, but..

P: [inaudible 00:00:49]

R: So, this is a little bit crazy-looking, but I can walk you through it. So, obviously, my studies are all [power?] or so. The core thing that’s like the central category is looking at how, seeing how clients utilize power in the therapy of relationship, so accomplish their goals, or deal with whatever is going on, and so, I took the core thing I'm looking at, and there's all these contexts and processes that are implicated after I analyze the first set of data. So, there’s a lot of people, like, there’s maturing as a client, you kind of get better at utilizing power as you mature as a client, you get better at dealing with all the bullshit that is therapy, and dealing with it. Everyone seems to have like their pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority, even though I kind of talked about that with regards to like political background and (?) [00:01:56] anarchist, liberation kind of perspective. There's also a lot of current power realities and identities in people’s lives. You know, how their identities impact, how they relate to power and the therapeutic relationship. There’s a lot about how clients perceive the [?] [00:02:19] professional and therapeutic relationship; do we perceive it as safe and helpful; therapeutic perceive it as like unsafe and unhelpful. And then there’s always ways people utilize power, and how they benefit from it; do they like empower themselves, grow and change, and then there’s very interesting - these are very interesting to me, how do people mitigate the power that comes out in a therapeutic relationship, meaning how do they bear with - kind of unhelpful therapy processes, and how do they glean things out of those, regardless. And then a lot of information about resisting power, like, how people actively challenge power in a therapeutic relationship, or perspectives that their therapist has. And then there’s a lot coming up about
passive ways that people resist, by shutting down, or faking good, etc. So, the goal in my second interview is to kind of fill out some of this, and that was some of the questions relate to as areas where, you know, the theory I'm coming up with is thin in certain areas, and I wanna get more data. So, so that's like just a brief [overview?][00:03:33], quick and dirty. Do you have any, like, reactions to it? Or?

P: Reactions?

R: Good, bad, different?

P: I have inner thoughts about it, just relating the graph to my struggles with power, with [[current MHP]?].

R: Yea. Do you wanna share anything about it, or?

P: Sure. But I feel like it's in the questions, probably.

R: Okay.

P: If you wanna go through, I don't know. I figured/

R:/ Totally.

P: somehow that you will go [inaudible] [overlapping] [00:04:08]

R: I definitely wanna go through them one at a time. So we can come back to this, where you can kind of think about this as we go. But, do you feel like it aligns with your experience, or it doesn't? Or?

P: I think it does. It's a graph. Yea. Definitely. All these things. Like, the brief moments in time, I feel like when I really am like.. invested in, like, trusting [current MHP], you know, and just like letting it in, and doing what she says, or something, 'cause I don't know what else to do, or something. And then there's times when I'm like this is so fucking hard, or something, but fine, or whatever. And then, there's times like yesterday, which is why this is a good moment actually; it's actually weird being back here, 'cause yesterday kind of sucked. You know. But I was thinking that as I was walking over here, it's probably a good time to be asking these questions, or something, I mean, when you think about it more deeply. Anyway, at times I'm like super resistant, or whatever, and I just, like, am in my little [participant's name] fucking fortress, whatever it is. I don't know. Something like that. [participant’s name] fortress.

R: I like it. [participant’s name] fortress. Thanks for, like, being willing to come back today even though yesterday was a little hard, and I hope to be able to hear some about it, as it relates to the questions. Yea. Do you wanna say any more about that now, or do you just wanna go through the questions?
P: Probably just the questions. Sorry. I'm just like, I'm still asleep. 'Cause I like closed last night.

R: Did you?

P: I didn't even stay up that late afterwards. Usually I'm like so fried in the head, or jazzed up, as what it really mean, you know, like -

R: What do you do, where do you work?

P: I work at [local business]. I deliver late at night. Well, I mean, a couple of nights in a row. Last night, and tonight, every week I do like a crazy 10 pm to usually like 3:30 am kind of thing. That's when we usually get out, or whatever.

R: Yea. Take your time. I'm not in a rush. I don't have anything to do. You can take a break if you need to.

P: But I've been awake since like 10.. for some reason.

R: Do you have some [caffeine?] [inaudible 00:06:9] there?

P: Yea. That's really not gonna do anything. I've got some juice, too. I've got the Power ball tickets on my way over here.

R: Awesome. Good. [inaudible 00:06:51] like Saturday, I'm not sure I'm gonna do it today. I don't know. Someone in my family will hopefully like.

P: Share?

R: Yea. That's the hope.

P: I told the lady at the corner store, if I went, I'll give her a million dollars.

R: I know. I love that.

P: I was buying them there for a long time.

R: [inaudible 00:07:12] would give you tips, like, just like daily lottery, you know. [inaudible 00:07:20] like 20 bucks, like, damn, that's cool. I think this question relates to where you were at yesterday, and maybe today, which is, the first one: have you had any thoughts or experiences about power in your therapeutic relationship, since we last talked?... So, thoughts, reflections, or experiences.

P: I will say this, because it’s so fresh, and I don’t think I have maybe said it last time, at least for me, it’s like a fucking mindfuck. It’s a mindfuck. Like, yesterday, like, kind of retroactively, almost, aware of all the other times and that time, like, oh yea, this is that feeling that I feel sometimes. I’m like, am I insane? Like, because it’s like, it’s like trying to trust what someone is saying,
which anyone I trust, they're like, expertise, and wisdom, experience, training, all that shit, you know; but it's like what you're saying is so like contrary to my perception of myself right now. Or something. It's like, you know, it's just a mindfuck at the moment. That's the best way I can think to describe it.

R: Totally.

P: I was trying to be more in the memory of like what's going on..

R: I think you've mentioned something like related to that in the first interview. And it sounds like you're really aware that, like, there is that expertise, with some, like training in the room. But then you have to reckon with yourself, be like -

P: I have to do what?

R: Reckon with yourself. It's like, how does this jive with my experience.

P: Absolutely. It's crazy. And it's not just that. It's not just; yea. I should clarify, really, remind myself and mention to you that it's not, it's not just like black and white, stark contrasts of contrasts, of like truths, or something. It's like, oh, like, you know, this person is wise, and I know that they are trying to help me, and tell me all these things, or whatever, and I'm just resisted to it. You know, it's not just that, it's also like, it's like I start to trip out, you know, I'm all like, are you being fucked up to me; are you fucking with me. You know, like my trust bullshit is like 24/7. I have these annoying issues with trust. You know. Even after I was [inaudible 00:10:08] [current MHP]. I said, you know, like; or at least I've [gleamed?] this information I don't know her exact words, you know, like: after all this time, like don't you think like I sort of know you? You know? And I'm like, can't you trust that I have a pretty good grasp on what it is that you do, what your tendencies are [in love?], that kind of stuff. But yea, nevertheless, I start to feel like, are you wrong, just like misguided and wrong? Like, you know, like I have to.. I'm.. I really think it's all about power, and probably.. I mean, maybe I'm a good person to talk to about power, because I'm so stubborn, and such a bitch, and like.. And I want power in all my relationships, like, that's something I've learned about myself, you kind of talked about that in this graph, like.. I can't remember how. What am I saying? [inaudible 00:11:18][whispers]. What the hell was I just saying? I forgot.

R: [inaudible 00:11:23] by saying, like, are you wrong, about me, are you wrong. So, do you have any interest in sharing more of the content of that debate that you and [current MHP] were having yesterday? Like, meaning, how was she perceiving you, that made you ask, like, are you being fucked up. You know, like in your own head. Or even to her.
P: I just don't remember [what it was?] [inaudible 00:11:57]. That's such like a good example, because it's so complicated for me and my brain. And like, it's one of those moments; this is another clarifying thing, like, it was a very specific thing that we were talking about, where I feel like she's.. I don't even know how to break it down, [if I wasn't tired?], but, yea it was about, I think, maybe DBT (?) would be good for you [love?] [00:12:25], whatever, and I feel like DBT, DBT it's everywhere. I had, because my house made DBT thing and it just like keeps coming up.

R: It's like in the ether right now, or something.

P: So, yea. I was like, I'm like who [inaudible 00:12:42]. But then, she's like, and I also think, like, you could benefit from like a, a - what she called it? A processing group. That's what she called it. And I just heard that as support group, 'cause I don't know what the fuck a processing group is, or whatever, but clarified later it was different, but whatever. She said that someone here is doing like a processing group thing. And I was like, immediately, as I [inaudible 00:13:12] in anything, anywhere in this town, I'm just like: oh, there gonna be people that I hate there. Or whatever. Or they hate me. Or something. You know. And like, and I don't know. [current MHP] basically came to the conclusion like, oh that's probably not for you. This group probably is not for you because you know, like, part of, really, important part of like group like that is commitment to be there the whole time, and to like work on what comes up, or something. You know. 'Cause I had said like: ok, I'll go to the first one. And I'll see how it goes, or something. I can commit to going to the first one, but I'm just like always paranoid. [inaudible 00:13:54]. And I feel like that's understandable, or justified. But [current MHP] was like fighting me on that, basically. And I was just like [inaudible 00:14:06] [whispering] Yea. I even went as far to say like two.. I said like, because I was really trying to, like [?] find me a point about it, or something, you know, like, it's gonna be useful to me or anyone else if they are like my enemies [?] [inaudible 00:14:30], that's what I said. And she's like: you're really intense. They love, basically, like that's a really intense thing to say. You know, like, you're enemies, you're going into something they can [inaudible 00:14:40] or whatever. And I was like.. [sighs]..

R: Yea, there is something=

P: = mindfuck.

R: in that whole thing about how you and your counselor are like working out, like, some of this stuff. You know, like how are you taking what she is saying, and figuring out how to use it. But also, there's part of you that wants to resist it. You know?

P: Mhm. And in moments like that I just keep thinking like: oh, you don't get what I'm really saying, like, you know, when I think all the time, she probably
just does get what I'm saying, and she's just like no, you're just not listening to me. You know.

R: Yea, but you're really struggling with it sometimes.

P: Oh, yea.

R: You know, like - [inaudible 00:15:30] [overlapping]

P: I frustrate the hell out of her, you know. You know, like we left without hugging each other, when we like always try to hug each other, but there's totally times that I'm like see ya, or whatever. So that was really hard.

R: So was that you who didn't wanna hug her?

P: No, I think it was just kind of understood, or something.

R: Mhm.

P: I don't know. I should probably apologize. I was thinking that today, then I was like, I was thinking that before I came here. And then I was thinking like, sorry, I don't have to like process this. I just realized it might be over-processing.

R: I will let you know. Okay?

P: Mhm.

R: You can [inaudible 00:16:09] boundaries, but I think we're just kind of like unpacking, and kind of, you know? Like, you don't have to overwork it, but.. It sounds like it's still in process.

P: Oh, yeah.

R: Just, you know, like you're still thinking about yesterday. And how are you making sense of it?

P: [inaudible 00:16:29]

R: Yea.

P: I don't know. Other than what I'm telling you, it's kind of like real time, 'cause mostly yesterday I just tried not to think about it, which, unfortunately isn't something I do. I'm like, whoa, I feel like shit. This is overwhelming. I'm gonna go watch [TV show] You know? Literary. I think that may work.

R: Yea. Well, maybe we'll come back to it; let's leave it there for now. [inaudible 00:17:02]

P: Thanks for listening.
R: So, this is a question about positive, strong power. Like, a lot of time we wish your counselor use their power in a positive strong way to help you, to help you with your goals. Maybe they did. Or you wished they did.

P: I feel like, maybe, with past counselors... I feel like [current MHP] [inaudible 00:17:44]. Bitch.

R: I love that you can just talk to me like this. I do. And it is obviously really [off?] [inaudible 00:17:53]. I just appreciate it so much.

P: Thanks. I mean, I talk to her that way, too.

R: I know. It's great. It's great. I prefer it.

P: Yea. That's cool, you know.

R: So, past counselors; is there a part of you that thinks of some of them, or one of them, when you think about wishing they would have used their power in a positive strong way?

P: Yea, maybe like especially now that someone is kicking my ass, or something. Everyone was so gentle, or something. But fuck, I would have been like 80 times more resistant to it, so it's like.. Maybe that's cause they saw that right away. I mean, I was even more like, you know, like opinionated and tense, and whatever that one word is, self-righteous, probably, you know.

R: If they could have gotten through that part. what do you think the positive use of their power would have done for you?

P: Earlier critiques, you know, like earlier messages that I needed [inaudible 00:19:00] a long time ago, that maybe partners have been telling me in relationships for years. At the end of relationships.

R: Like catching pattern sooner?

P: Yea.

R: How do you think that could have helped you? Do you have a particular counselor in mind that you wish would have used their power more at a certain time in your life?

P: I mean, I told you that I saw [past MHP] for seven years. So that's probably like the main person I think of. But I feel like all the counselors, when I, like, look back and think about them. Maybe there were a couple that I feel like semi-intimidated by, but maybe that was more 'cause I hadn't been seeing them as long, and they were really quiet and stern-faced, but them, seemingly judgmental. But I guess the one I think of the most because of like how long we were together, you know, it's like a.. I wish I had.. Like i told you before, I think, you know, I'd wished.. The reason why I changed counselors is pretty
much because I was like.. you know, like, wishing someone gave me homework and challenged me more, or something. At least that's what I thought I wanted. You know what I mean?

R: [inaudible 00:20:39] [overlapping] [both laughing] Be careful what you wish for.

P: Exactly. You know. You know what I'm talking about.

R: I do.

P: It's like fuck.

R: Yea.

P: Whatever, mom.

R: Yea, like it's you want it, right; but part of you doesn't. You know? And part of you.. It's just hard. [inaudible 00:20:00]. Like, what do you think being challenged does, like, how do you think that helps you now?

P: Fuck. I don't know. It's a complicated situation that I find myself in. Because I'm so stubborn, I guess, that's maybe, me.. resistant, defensive. I'll just say defensive.

R: Okay.

P: 'Cause I feel that covers it enough.

R: Okay.

P: Not making me too much an asshole.

R: Fair enough.

P: Whatever. Yea. I'm like so defensive, and I mean, I'm thinking about it in my partner relationship, my girlfriend, you know, and also, like, with [current MHP]. Other people. [My house maid?].

R: Yea [inaudible 00:21:58] We'll go back to that.

P: But yea, when I let it in, and see the value of it, you know, helps me a lot to get somewhat, to get schooled basically. And I do, I do get schooled by [current MHP]. And I do take it in. And I get schooled by my girlfriend. And take it in, you know. I feel like every time I have like some big issue, or whatever, my gf just [inaudible 00:22:32], but it's not like even really purposely, it's just like she just drops truths in my pockets, or something; in my lap, I mean.

R: Truth bombs.

P: And it's like: oh shit. You know?
R: Well, given that you, like, describe yourself, you know, use the word defensive, it sounds like you do take it in. So, how do you, how do you reconcile the defensive part, you know, but knowing you want to take stuff in from your counselor? Like, how do you work with that defensiveness?

P: I don’t know. I’m trying to think of a time when I do let it in, what it looks like, or something. ’Cause when I don’t let it in, I’m just like fuck it. [inaudible 00:23:21], and I’m just like, you know.. like, I feel like I’m in trouble or something. You know?

R: Yea.

P: Or not even I feel like I’m in trouble, but it’s.. It reminds me of what it was like when I was the [scenario?] [00:23:36], because I just like, you know, hold up, and I can’t really even see the room anymore, ’cause I’m like someplace else. Purgatory. I’m sorry. What was the question again?

R: That’s okay. You’re fine. I think we’re just gonna wander around; it’s all good. I don’t know that this question, this next one, [inaudible 00:24:03] certain background on some things. I don’t know that this is exactly worded well for you, if you’re [inaudible 00:24:11] person, but this question is describing what held you back from critiquing, or giving feedback to your counselors, when they are unhelpful, or not meeting your needs.

P: Yea, I was [inaudible 00:24:24], and I’m like: I should read the whole question, you know. Like, I never stood there as the clarifier, or the last F [?]. You know. Only when these things have [inaudible 00:24:36] [whispering]

R: [inaudible 00:24:40] the question.

P: Will you ask me again? I’m sorry.

R: Yea. Describe what’s held you back from critiquing or giving feedback to your counselors when they are unhelpful, or not meeting your needs? [?] you adjusting the question, too.

P: In the past, with the past therapists and stuff, I’ve like meekly tried at some point to, you know, be like: can you give me homework, or something? You know, I think I’ve did that [inaudible 00:25:15] at some points. But, yea.. like, you know, it changes the questions and course, but like with [current MHP]… Can I look at the question?

R: Yea. Of course.

P: I’m sorry. I get lost sometimes.

R: I have a copy of the questions for you anyway.
P: I'm such a visual person. Describe [starts whispering]... Oh, yea. Okay. Like with [current MHP], I would say that what held me back is - I didn't know if she was being helpful or not, I just knew that it was like [inaudible 00:26:24] just didn't trust that she knew what was right, or something, you know. I know this is cheating on the question; this is not really a question, but yea, like... a lot of times I was just like hold up, because like, I just feel like there's no way out, or something, like... there's no, like, reasoning with her, or something. Or it's just gonna be like point of contention, you know, and I can, like -

R: Power struggle [kind of?].

P: You know. And I can't like convince her out; I keep thinking, like I said earlier, I'm like: ohh, I think she just doesn't get what I'm trying to say. I'm trying to say something really innocent, or something. I'm trying to say something really significant, or meaningful, or deeper than she thinks. She just thinks I'm being shallow, or something, and I was feeling like the need to explain myself, you know, like: oh, you just got me all wrong, or something, you know.

R: Feeling misunderstood, right?

P: Yea. I guess that's... yea.

R: You said meekly when you talked about [past MHP], like, asking him to homework. And not, like, resonates with a lot of what I have, that resonates with that sort of passive resistance, you know? A little bit.. Maybe it's more active to - I'm not sure. But meekly - what do you think made it hard to be more demanding? Or...

P: I think, maybe like - I didn't wanna like step on anyone's toes; didn't want to step on his toes, or something. Tell him how to do his job.

R: Yea. What's that mean if you do that with a mental health professional?

P: I think it might mean [?] take it defensive. Maybe I've just got too much trauma, probably, unfortunately. But I see the meaningfulness in asking this question. And the thing, you know, the thing you're doing. [inaudible 00:28:50] [overlapping]

R: I'm interested particularly, I'm interested in this particularly, because I do think what is coming off even with my power-aware clients in the study, is that it's still really hard to challenge a counselor. You know? And even though we're functioning on more egalitarian levels in this modern contemporary counseling realm, especially as here, with like more social justice and social conscience counseling, we're not like interested in the power over, but it's still hard to give us feedback. You know?
P: It's also... yea.

R: What were you gonna say?

P: I don't know. I was gonna say that, you know, that's also, you know, the goal in theory of a place like this, for example. It doesn't mean that we don't have, that everybody doesn't have like whatever. But I don't know. I mean -

R: Maybe it's more aspirational, right?

P: I don't know everyone here, or anything, but I mean, now I've had experience with you and experience with [current MHP]. I do believe that y'all both try really hard to be aware of whatever that thing's called in psychology....?

R: Transference?

P: Yea, that thing. That thing. I don't even know if it's psychology. I don't know what the fuck it is.


P: How do I actively step on her toes?

R: Yea. Do you ever? I just wanna use that language, 'cause I like it, but.. do you - are you more able to do that now than you used to be?

P: Yea. Yea. I think so. But it's good to be met with someone like [current MHP], who isn't gonna take my bullshit, you know. I just worry for her like in a day like yesterday, you know. Just like, she seemed like really frustrated, you know. Like, am I just being an asshole, even though, like, I don't mean to be. I just like, I am just fucked up person. I mean, I feel like she tells me all the time that, or she... yea, she tells me, reminds me, whatever, allows me to look at myself, you know. Like, you say like some really intense things, or whatever, you know. I'm like oh fuck, or something.

R: Like, about yourself, or other people?

P: Both. I don't know. Just intense. I don't know. Okay. Good question it was.

R: Yes. Are you able to.. to step on [current MHP]'s toes a little bit more than you were with [past counselor]?

P: Yea. Even though, you know, fucking, [current MHP] is like way more intimidating, and you know, demanding. And I knew that even, I think, early on. It was like after I'd gone only a couple of times, because I had two friends that had seen her before, and they were like: yeah, she doesn't fuck around. I will say that, like, for a long time, you know, I would kind of like insert my feeling that I.. that I needed her to be gentle an all this stuff. I don't know if I talked about all this -
R: You didn't. But..

P: But it's significant, actually, to allow these questions, I think. 'Cause, I've been thinking about it, as reading them. Yea, like, it was like, you know, basically, my.. my belief was like.. you know, if I'm like challenged too hard, then the information won't get through, or something, and then like, I won't be apt to change or something. And I'm, you know, I'm a really sensitive person. And things like that. And.. blah-blah-blah. I don't know what I would say of myself, but yea, basically asking her to be gentle all the time, like, because I was like so sensitive to the way she talked to me, basically. And [inaudible 00:33:29], whatever you wanna call it. 'Cause of my experience says and... yea, and I'm like, after like... you know, a couple of years doing that, basically, like, in the last year, she's just basically like been like: I don't think that's helping you. Like, I think I'm like colluding with something that's really like not, like, I'm not doing my job. If I'm colluding with that, basically.

R: This idea that you're fragile, or something, or?

P: Yea. And because, because of what she sees, my struggles are in relationships outside of that room, you know, like.. Like I think you need to sit with uncomfortable thing, and you know.. blah-blah-blah. I don't know. Ba-da-da-da it's there...

R: That's okay.

P: Examples, you know. And some weird things have come up, like, recently, like, one of them was me having this weird, like, semi- anxiety attack in there, like, I started crying about some bullshit. It was like, it was an OCD thing. And like, there's like this lotion bottle on desk, and I just wanted to know what it was, 'cause it was like facing the other way, and I thought it was a weird looking bottle. And.. And I like asked about it, and it came up, and fuck, I can't remember how it all went down, but it was like stressing me out so much, like, not knowing, or something. And, and, and it was like - and she even like - I was like so upset about it that she like let me hold it even. Or something. I can't even remember how it went, but it was an OCD thing, like I really, I couldn't focus, because I just kept thinking about this thing, like what the fuck is that. And it was like..

R: It was bothering you.

P: Yea. Basically, she was like: maybe we should try some... I don't remember what that shit's called; I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. The fuck is it called, exposure therapy, or whatever. And I was like: fuck you; you know. And she was like: I'm serious, actually. Like, you know, like, maybe, slowly, build the amount of time that you have to wait until you - I don't know. Like an example, you know, if it turns like, something that's bothering me, like waiting, like one full minute before it changes, or something, and then the next like 5 minutes... I don't know.
R: Did you ever do it?

P: No. Not yet. But I do think it's a good idea. And there's been other things, too. I'm trying to think what they are, like exercises, like, in her - oh, this one is a really big one, 'cause it definitely relates to my relationship - am I talking too much, by the way?

R: No, you're great.

P: Okay. Well, I know I'm great, but am I talking too much.

R: Right. No.

P: Yea. I was saying -

R: This is one of my relationship, this pattern, or thing -

P: Reassurance. It's a big one. And I had some really big realizations that [made me?] really sad last week about this, but. You know, like, [current MHP] has started to just, like, not answer me, when I'm like, when I ask for reassurance, basically. Like, because my reassurance questions are like - I don't even know what the fuck they are. But they are basically, I'm asking, you know, like, am I okay, are we okay, or something like that. You know. Like, I'm like, are you upset with me. I don't know. Are we okay?

R: Yea, Like, you're frustrated are you okay with me, are we okay?


R: Yea, there's this tension in all of this that is sort of like a part of you that wants to resist, and a part of you that knows there's some good stuff in it, even if it's uncomfortable.

P: Yea, probably.

R: Yea... Okay. What - this is interesting, 'cause you've been talking a little bit with me, like, about your partner relationship, today, just you've mentioned it. And this question is: tell me about a time when you've became aware that you and your counselor were working out power dynamics that relate to other relationships.

P: All the time. But more so the, you know, since I've seen [current MHP], and [current MHP] drives that home, like 24/7, you know, like I wanna help you in here, because they know that it mirrors things in relationships outside of here, you know. That's, like that's the most fundamental thing that I've learned, that meta thing that I've learned about counseling itself, with her, you know. That's like.. Of course, that's true, or something, but I don't know.
R: But no one brought it that way? No one brought it that way before?

P: [She?] really made it conscious as hell, you know, so like, h yeah, this isn’t just to talk about my feelings, or whatever. That’s how I feel like how I’ve used counseling, like, I just have a lot to say. You know, I have a lot of stuff I need to talk about, about my relationships out there. And I’m just like.. mhm. Yea. And then I feel like yeah, maybe I’m being an asshole in this relationship, even though it would be just me talking and counselor’s listening. You know. [current MHP] is a counselor, therapist person, you know, like, stops me and, you know, challenges things, or whatever.

R: So, I know it’s hard to be specific, right, because it’s hard to recall all of these things, especially like you’ve said -

P: [inaudible 00:39:45] sorry.

R: Yea, that’s okay. This is [?] everywhere, so, do you think that there is a specific time you can recall, where you and [current MHP] were mirroring something?

P: Well, I mean, the reassurance thing is like a fucking huge one, actually. Maybe I’ll just, unless you’re bored with that topic, expand on that.

R: No, no, no; go ahead. For example, reassurance. Tell me more about..

P: Yea, like what my realization was last week. I mean, ’cause I feel like it’s like every other day, or every fucking day, and when I see that statistic in my head, I think like how often is that I’m seeking verbal reassurance from my girlfriend. And how I’ve like done that in relationships. And other people have done it to me, you know? I’ve seen that insecurity in myself and others. That is just like so embarrassing, or something. I feel like such a tiny little child, you know, ’cause I’m just like: do you like me? You know? Like, you really like me? You care about me, or something? Those kinds of questions. Or, maybe it’s, you know, like, it’s also been, you know, are you attracted to me? I don’t know. Other questions [whispering] [inaudible 00:41:11]

R: Yea, and how do you think [current MHP] and you, or [current MHP], is using her power to help you with that pattern of reassurance?

P: Like I said, you know, like, that example of.. Because, yea, it’s like exactly what I need; I need to like find it in myself, because, you know, the truth is, as much as I have, like, enemies, and all that stuff [?] [00:41:45] that’s bringing that back up, and you know, like hating a fucking lot of humanity, and stuff. Like, I do really care what people think of me, at least the ones that I feel like.. matter to me. Which, [current MHP], really is one of those people, you know. Like, I’ve told her that before, you know, like, why I’m so resistant to her, for example, is because, like, down in me, you know, like, I value her opinion, and
I see her like as really, you know.. smart as hell person, you know.. and I figure she's probably right, or something, you know; I don't know.

R: Right. And what you're saying is, you are aware of needing to find it in yourself, that acceptance, right? And [current MHP] is kind of mirroring that with her more recent conversations with you, where she's not willing to reassure you as easy.

P: Yea.

R: Mhm.

P: That's good. It is good for me. I don't feel like it's like punishing, or anything.

R: How do you know that? Or how do you.. how do you know it's good for you? How do you?..?

P: It like resonates in there, or something. I don't know. It's like.. I feel purpose, or something, you know. It feels purposeful, like, I feel it in my body.. in those moments.

R: That's a fucking cool description of.. I don't know that anyone's ever said that like that to me.

P: It's true. I guess that's the nametag I will put on the sensation, or something. Or multiple sensations.

R: Right. Whereas, I bet, when it doesn't feel like it resonates, there's a different sensation.

P: Yea. Like slamming my head into a brick wall. Kind of like that.

R: Doesn't feel purposeful; does it? No.

P: That's when I want to slam my head into a brick wall.

R: We're getting close to the end. How are you doing?

P: I'm okay.

R: You need a break?

P: I don't know. You're probably seeing like a different side of me today. I feel like last time, maybe, I was like more on it, or something.

R: It's totally great.

P: It's kind of fun.

R: It's totally fine. I am getting what I need, you know?
P: Cool. You know I hope I'm saying something worth [inaudible 00:44:44], emotionally and physically, or something.

R: You know, if you - I mean, I think you're doing fine. I can feel your energy; you're just like, you know, you're just tired, you know. And.. But if something, if I go back and listen to this and type it up, and I think of anything to follow up with you, I can probably email you, if you're up for that?

P: Yea.

R: And say: hey, what did you mean by this? If I catch something. Okay, this is gonna - I think this is a unique question, but might have some overlap: what do you do when you can't, or don't feel like you can talk with your counselor about power dynamics or difficulties in your relationship with them?

P: = Silence.

R: What do you do? Silence?

P: That's what I do actively.

R: You shut down?

P: That's bad. Yea. It's bad. That's what the end of yesterday was. I mean, I try to force myself to vomit something out, like, [inaudible 00:45:54] common. You know? But, yea, mostly I am really silent and distant, and that just like basically shuts down the therapy relationship, one might say. And that sucks, a lot.

R: And what do you do between sessions after that happens? Like, how do you, what do you do?

P: Check-out, literary. Check-out and then, maybe, eventually, have some depressed feelings. Actually, I'm having depressed feelings the whole time... I don't know. Sometimes, like with any relationship, time can sometimes help, you know and then it starts to like trickle in, you know, and I, like, think critically of what's gone down, and rethink my position, or something, you know. A lot of times it takes a couple of few sessions. But in the case of me and [current MHP], really, as a whole, it's hard all the time. It's been hard for a long time. I've told you, I think I told you last time, you know, there's been times when I'm like: this is the last time. I'm never coming back here. I can't do this anymore.

R: Mhm. You were very clear about that.

P: I even, like, wondered that, yesterday, or something. That's like two-fold. I'm like, I'm too much for [current MHP]. And I don't know. It's a lot of giving up on myself, probably. [inaudible 00:48:12]
R: You're fine.

P: I talk a lot.

R: I like it.

P: Whatever.

R: I like it. You have a perfect person for me to talk about this with.

P: Okay.

R: It's great. Do you do anything else? It's sounds like a lot of it, like, when you have a hard time, in your relationship with [current MHP], or power shit comes up, it's a very internal process. Right? It's in your head. It's in your body. It's in your mood. Do you do anything else, like, do you talk to anyone else about it?

P: Yea. I really =

R: = Who do you talk to, and how do you do that?

P: A lot of times I talk with my roommate, and I talk with [girlfriend]. They're both my roommates. [another roommate] is my roommate. Yea, I'm not afraid to go and get real with my people. You know? I feel like.. I don't know, like call myself out, basically. You know, about what's going on in counseling, like.. I don't know. I can't actually think of an example, but I know I've done that, you know. I just don't know what words to describe it, situation.

R: Did you ever come home and be like: oh, that was tough today?

P: Maybe, but it will be like a few days later, or something. It will be before I go back, maybe the next week. Or maybe I'll speak in general about something that continues to be so hard. You know? That I'm resisting.

R: And when you think about not coming back to counseling; do you talk to anyone else about that?

P: Only after I do go back to counseling. And I've admitted it to [current MHP], definitely, like, you know, there've been times, Or maybe I said, you know, like, last time I was sure I wasn't coming back, or something; I don't know. I really should [inaudible 00:50:14] I think it would help me a lot.

R: It's interesting. That was, obviously, it's interesting you said that. I didn't wanna, like, lead you, but I am curious about the things people use to process between sessions, to help with power. And so it's interesting you mention that. I mean, I'm curious about how people use other people, and generally, how, whatever, but, yeah. Interesting. So, just a couple of, like, follow-up questions that are just general, based on our conversation today, not about my questions.
P: May I say one other thing -

R: Please.

P: In regards to how I deal, or something, you know. Like, I said that I check out, and I, you know, go to TV, and film world, that kind of stuff. But even still, things will come up, and the TV and film, that will make me feel things anyway, about what exactly is going on, or something. Even if it's, you know, I have to like make look a little foggy of what is really happening in the story to relate to it, you know? That will inevitably happen, and so.. it's not like it's all bad for me, or anything. Or even checking out is not [inaudible 00:51:32] bad, but.. you know.

R: Yes. It's sort of like you cannot get away from it.

P: That does happen.

R: Even if you try, you know.

P: And that's a good thing for me. Like, you know, some drama will be occurring in a movie, or thing, and I'm like watch them on exhibiting somewhere on the spectrum of what I've been exhibiting, or something. You know, some bullshit. And I'm like fuck, you know. Like, I feel like life always has a way of doing that to me. It's always after I break up with someone, then I become like new friends with someone who is like my partner basically, and they tell me all their feelings that they've had hurt by a recent partner, and I'm like fuck, your partner is me, you know.

R: Right. And that really reminds me of like all this stuff, like the current power realities, and identities, and just working with that all the time, and how the parallels mirroring is happening. So two quick follow-ups. How have you changed, given this more active, painful approach to counseling? Like, how has that impacted you?

P: Sometimes I don't know. That's a sad feeling. I mean, I think I have, but I'm still like so stubborn, and mistrustful, and a big fucking baby, and that's really annoying.

R: You're so goddamn aware of it, though.

P: So? That's how I feel about it. I've felt that way for years. You know, it's like great, so I know I have all these tendencies. How long has it been? Like, over a decade that I've known a lot of these things? And that's just like whooo-fucking-do, or something, you know. Awareness is like, only goes so far. It's great, and I can, like, talk, tell'em blue in their face about what's wrong with me, or something; not in a self-deprecating way, but in an actual critical way, or something, like.. also in a self-deprecating way...

R: So it sounds like you're not sure how it's changed.
P: I know there are some things. Like, one thing is.. I was trying to, like, even though I'm feeling down right now, I was trying to, like, grab at things that I know, really, like, underlined power in relationships, or something. One thing is that I, like, I really try to stick it out with people. Give people more of a chance, like realize relationships take work. And that they are hard. And that no two people are alike. And so, you know. It's always gonna be this human game, it's gonna be weird. What else? I don't know. Probably a lot of things. I think I maybe talked about this the last time, like, fundamental idea that [current MHP] has put in my head, which, there is a number of them, I just can't think of all of them right now. But I feel like I look through the world, through those lenses of what I've learned from her. Like, all the time now. And one of the big ones is like understanding that, like, when we do things that hurt each other, a lot of times it's like a [inaudible 00:55:25] test, or something. Or like a thermometer. It's like we're trying to prove, or disprove theories we have, that we've learned about ourselves, by, like, bouncing them off of our loved ones, or something, mainly in partner relationships. That's certainly true of me. It's like, okay, imma just do this fucked up thing. Let's see if you unconditionally love me, which is what I need, or something. Unconditional love shit. That's fucked my head up so bad. It's just.. I've been thinking about that all day. It's..

R: What do you mean?

P: It's like I'm always chasing after it. And it's like really unfair. And such an illusion. And that's like something that - [current MHP], you know, we talked about all about love book, I've still just only read like the first 40 pages of; I will probably read the rest of it someday, 'cause it seems amazing, but.. yea.. [current MHP] is definitely like schooled [?] [00:56:26], a lot of stuff about love, you know, like, that's a myth basically. That love is conditional. Or whatever. You know. [inaudible 00:56:35] [overlapping]

R: Yea, being schooled, or influenced. I'm sorry I interrupt you.

P: No, no. It's cool.

R: Being schooled, or influenced by these big ideas that your counselor shares with you. Like, things they think, or things they learn, or things they believe can be very influential, is what I'm hearing you say.

P: Mhm. Absolutely.

R: I can relate to that in my own counseling. For sure. One more question. Two more. That's okay? You mentioned DBT coming up, in the process group. Now, how did those come up? Like, as far as -

P: I barely even know anything about DBT. Like, I just know about it from them talking about it, and little bits that [current MHP] has talked about it. But I know that it's like.. it's basically like an emotional life skill training, almost.
Like, how to deal with your thoughts or feelings in relationships with people, or some shit. I don't know. What is it called again?

R: Dialectical Behavior Therapy.

P: Dialectical?

R: Mhm.

P: So it's about speaking? I'm guessing.

R: It's about holding the complexity of two opposites, of two things, you know, the fact that you want =

P: = Fuck, that sounds really good for me, even just that brief fundamental idea. If that's what it's about, sounds like perfect for me.

R: Yea. Okay.

P: Sorry to interrupt.


P: But why did they come up? Because, I don't know, 'cause I have problems. I can't remember.

R: [inaudible 00:58:13] [overlapping]. Like challenges, or people challenges, or communication?

P: I mean, I'll admit what's going on in my relationship right now. Not it's like I feel ashamed or embarrassed about it. 'Cause it might answer your question, sort of, I don't fucking now. I mean, just stop me if, you know -

R: Sure.

P: It sucks. My girlfriend does [a specific kind of work]. And I've just like continuously been like so jealous about it, and have all these big feelings. But that's like been complicated by the fact that, like, a lot of time we have no sex life, and... and it's just really hard for me to, like, watch all this energy going to, like, all [this specific kind of work], and like zero with me. That was like a big part of it. But now that, you know, like, right now, we've been having more sex. Just on last like month or something, it doesn't matter. I'm still...

R: It's frustrating.

P: ... jealous about it, and wanna, wanna control it. I don't know how to do it. I hate it. You know. That kind of stuff. And I know that's not fair, and so, like, I get all like.. shut up in myself about it, because I don't wanna say fucked up things that aren't fair. So, I'm just being like: can we talk? Like, literary, you know. It's complicated. I hate it.
R: Thanks for sharing. It sounds hard, for sure.

P: I hate it. And I hate it. It's understandable.

R: Yep. It is.

P: I have no problem with hating that she does it, but at the same time it's so unfair, and I feel like I'm like being such a fuck up, you know, I don't have a good enough politics, or I don't even fucking care about that, but you know what I mean?

R: I do know what you mean. I do. There's this idea that you should be okay with it. But that's not reality.

P: Yea.

R: Okay. Last thing. Anymore about this, and how it relates to recent therapy themes. Or did you feel like you got to it all?

P: [inaudible 01:00:39] like trusting in [current MHP]'s knowledge, or whatever. And I'm just kind of like, you know. She's told me a lot. I don't know if I've said this word to you, but she's asked me basically to surrender to her more. You know, like, I want you to surrender to.. to the fact that, like, maybe I know some things that would help you. And just kind of let it happen, or something. Apparently, that's like still extremely hard for me to do. I'm just like, oh, but you have like fucked up intentions, or you don't understand me, so you give me advice based on information [inaudible 01:01:25]

R: What has this been like for you? I mean, I don't, I don't have any more official questions. Has anything come up you wanted to tell me?

P: I don't know. Mostly I'm having a lot of feelings, or something. In life. In counseling. I mean, today, et cetera.

R: What's it been like to talk about power with me these two times, and I mean, how was it?

P: What's it been like?

R: Yea. Has it affected anything, or?

P: ... I don't know. I feel like last time was good. It was cool. It was moving. It was like understood, or something. And right now, I'm just like.. cursing power, or something. I don't know if that makes sense, like, last time was more like: yea, I get it. And, you know.. Power isn't all a bad thing, or - I don't know. That sounds stupid; I don't fucking know what I'm trying to say.

R: Wait a second. You're saying something that I think is kind of relevant to this, to what I'm figuring out with power and therapy, which is really
insidious and hard. Like, it's complex. Like, it's - it was easier to nab on the first round, right? Like, we're getting into the deeper nuances of it. And it's harder.

P: Yea. That's why I guess I said [inaudible 01:03:03] [whispering]. It's like a perfect time for me to talk about power today, because, like, yesterday sucked and it was really hard, and it was all about the negative aspects. I don't know.

R: I still feel like, [?] [01:03:19] keeping it complex, though. I don't feel like you showed up today and were like power's fucked. I feel like you were like: power's hard. You know? And therapy's hard. So, I appreciate it. I feel like this is what it is, right? I'm not.. You know, it's cool. So..

P: I think I want one more thing, maybe, to add..

R: Please.

P: .. which maybe is already quite clear, or whatever, but I think it's a good [inaudible 01:03:52] to say is that I feel like my biggest problem with power in a therapeutic relationship, at least in my very particular niche experience with [current MHP], you know, and being me, whatever, is how my own will to be in power - not empowered, but to have power over the therapeutic relationship is really what gets in the way. Oh fuck.

R: You're like this: boom! I nearly dropped the mic at the end here.

P: I dropped the mic on myself.

R: You just dropped the mic on yourself.

P: 'Cause, fuuuck.

R: Why do you wanna have power?

P: Oh, it's about, like, you know, some bullshit, but it's like, you know, 20-years-old, and doesn't apply anymore. But being safe, or control legal safety, that's what I've learned, I think. It's definitely what my sister learned, and we learned it from our mother, who exhibited that quite well in her own life, and in her motherhood with us, too. You know, like, to be in control is to be safe. I feel like that's a fundamental lesson that my sister and I learned, and I see all the time how we apply it to our own relationships in fucked up ways. My sister can be like such a mean hateful bitch to her partners, and stuff, and just be really controlling. I mean, she will say that openly, just like: oh, my god, I'm being such a bitch. Like, I've just been mean.

R: You both sound like you have the [?] [01:05:38] to do that.
P: Well, both of us. Both of us is like so. we're still like fucking assholes, like, struggling to, like, be a decent human being, or something, in our relationships. But yea, fuck, I totally mic-dropped, all over myself.

R: I think that that's a powerful statement, you know. And I don't know if I know how to ask any more about it right now. But I'm going to think about it. Because I think that it's really powerful related to some of the stuff that's coming up.

P: Yea. It might be worthwhile to be included in your study. The stubborn, power-hungry client. A dictatorial client.

R: I am such a different, you know, I'm like so..

P: Like I can compete with [current MHP], I mean [inaudible 01:06:35]

R: Fair enough.

P: I try, though. Nevertheless.

R: Yea, so I don't know how -
Partial Manuscript for Power Contexts of Negotiating Power in Therapeutic Relationships

Three important power contexts—current power realities and identities, pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority, and maturing as a client—describe, both historically and presently, how the participants explained the negotiation of power in their TR’s. Participant narratives described their MHP’s power contexts as well. Participants sensed their MHP’s power orientation that influenced interactions they had as clients. Most participants were also aware of and perceived their MHP’s development/maturity as an additional context that impacts how they experienced interactions related to power in their TR’s.

The Client’s Pre-therapeutic Relationship to Power & Authority

The client’s pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority emerged as an important context that influences the way power is negotiated by the participants in their TR’s. Growing up in a Mormon or in a southern household, experiencing working class jobs, being worried about “doing the wrong thing” or earning “gold stars” seemed to impact how the participants engaged with power within the TR. Participants diverged along the lines of how their pre-therapeutic power experiences prepared them for power in the TR—did they already respect power? Were they skeptical of power? Did they defer easily to power and authority? These pre-therapeutic experiences seemed to set the stage for how power is experienced and negotiated within the TR for these participants. The two dimensions of this property are described as power aware and power trusting. Participant 8 notes the ease at which they approach power and authority as a client:
I think I just like, umm... I suppose I have a really strong respect for authority when I judge the authority as an authority, if that makes sense.... I'm like oh, this persons good to me, this person has good intentions. They may not be perfect, but I can just sort of give myself to them. I can just sort of be like, OK, help me.

Another participant shared a power aware perspective:

I'm often hyper-worried about doing the wrong thing—that within the a therapy session is a really big blockade for me to really get to what is going on if I’m worried if there will be judgment for or approval or disapproval ... please them or do the 'right thing.' (Participant 6)

Participants spoke of their pre-therapeutic experiences of power and authority as experiences that either sensitized them to power or allowed them to be trusting of power.

**The Client’s Current Power Realities & Identities**

Most participants described coming to counseling with current power-related realities and power related identities. This category describes variance in how concerned the participants seemed to be about their own power problems and identities and how their concern appears related to pre-therapeutic experiences. Participant narratives that described a high concern/interest in their power related realities and identities, appeared related to a power aware perspective in the pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority category. Low concern appeared related to a power trusting quality with their pre-therapeutic relationship to power and authority. Participants’ described specific identities that the MHP may need mirror or understand to negotiate power effectively with them. It seemed critical for a participant with a transgender identity to know their MHP does not hold “one story of what transitioning is:”

My therapist that I have now and the therapist before, in particular, that’s when I started transitioning [gender]. The therapist before this one was trans himself, which he disclosed, not off the bat but maybe a couple months into our sessions, in a way that he was relating, that showed me he was not judging feelings I was having and before that I didn’t feel necessarily feel comfortable discussing or even exploring any of the feelings about my gender I had before that for fear of not understanding or judgment or being labeled certain things that could have negative impacts—stigmas that follow you around. (Participant 6)
Participants described ways they negotiate power in the TR by working out current power realities with the MHP. Participants described ways this occurs either through discussion of struggles in their lives or actively challenging power realities within the TR. They described ways they experiment with power dynamics or struggle with their “own will to be in power” in the TR. One participant spoke about the nuance and complexity of power realities through working with the experience of having a crush on their MHP:

I really like power dynamics like in my own life, it’s part of my sexuality and my perversion as well. So, like it’s been interesting and I’ve always sort of had, like, crushes on teachers and crushes on authority figures...in this sort of other world, crush world, fantasy world where I would’ve wanted to go there, you know. But, if he actually did want to and did like, take that moment of vulnerability to play on that, then I wouldn’t actually want to because then he would have bad ethics and be a person I wouldn’t want to have a crush on. (Participant 7)

Participants discussed ways that power related realities and identities were an integral to their therapeutic work and impacted their perceived ability to feel comfortable working out power in their TR with MHP’s.

**Maturing as a Client**

Maturing as a client was a process that appeared to assist participants in easing negotiations of power over time. Participants descriptions indicated they learn what to take from the interaction, what to leave behind, how to use the TR to benefit them—they learn the “landscape” of therapeutic work. In their early therapeutic experiences, it appeared much harder to tolerate the unknown and sit with the ambiguity of “Who’s in charge?” How does this work? An early experience of wanting the MHP to “fix me” was present in the narratives. As the participant matures as a client, they indicated a reduced need for power to be used, as their goals become more self-directed or collaborative. More experience appears to give these participants more power to make better decisions for
themselves about what they want, how to get it and how long to stay in a TR. Participant 9 spoke about this process:

I’m much more grounded in who I am. Or more confident or more at peace or more whatever word you wanna use, centered or whatever, that I don’t think it would... I don’t think I would so easily get affected or sucked into it as quickly. Either one: I would probably recognize it a little bit more if I didn’t feel like it was a good fit or if I felt... and I’m using the power dynamic as a bad thing right now, like if they were trying to shift something or move me in a certain direction or, umm. But I also feel like I have the ability to... I dunno, probably just communicate myself much more than I did back then. And I also feel like I probably could, I think I probably also could work with most any therapist and it would be a benefit. Almost kind of like OK, I’m paying them to get something, like I’m using them to move or to grow or to do something. So, whether I like them or not or it feels like it’s a good fit or not, I still feel like I could leave with some progress. But that comes after sixteen years of counseling.

In contrast, a participant who is much newer to therapeutic work describes their early reflections on the process when they were less mature:

That sort of being new, when I was like so new to it, it’s sort of like any first you know? Where you’re like inherently feel like you have less power because you don’t know the landscape. You don’t know the rules. You don’t know the... where the lines are. You know? What’s expected. (Participant 7).

Maturing as a client emerged as a context that appeared to assist the participants’ ability to feel more empowered in the TR over time.

**Mental Health Professional’s Power Orientation**

While the MHP’s experience was not a focus of this study, the MHP’s power orientation comes through in participant narratives and perceptions. This category describes the participant’s perception of how the MHP managed their power in the TR. Participant narratives described four MHP power orientations: disempowering, passive, active or shared.

**Disempowering power orientation.**

One participant shared how their perceived MHP’s use of power during a mental health crisis took away their choices and was ultimately perceived as disempowering:
The therapist at that point of time had strongly influenced me to take a leave of absence from school and strongly advocated to the administration for me to leave. I signed a voluntary leave of absence with the understanding that it would be in my best interest to sign it voluntarily. I did that and then when I got back to [home state] I went into the emergency room, which was also at the suggestion of my MHP from school, that that would be the fast track to get back to school. I didn’t necessarily realize that going into the emergency room meant that I would be hospitalized because of the questions they were asking, like safety check kinds of things. (Participant 6)

**Shared power orientation.**

Shared power is expressed by participant 5:

I guess to me I feel like in my relationship specifically with [current MHP] it’s like power is just hanging out and sometimes I take it and sometimes she takes it. It’s not like it has a steady place with either one of us in terms of how we relate with one another. (Participant 5)

**Passive power orientation.**

Some participants experienced a passive approach as unhelpful:

...but there have been a few times where I have been like, okay, I have this problem and I want you to help me with this problem and they’re just kind of like, you know, trying to do the whole like get me to help myself thing, or so it seems. Whatever they are doing, they are not helping me. They are not giving me like the concrete like – I want a worksheet or something. I want like – I want to know what other people have done in like concrete ways, so I can deal with whatever problems. (Participant 4)

**Active power orientation.**

The active power orientation was present in participant narratives when they wanted MHP’s that “gave them homework” or when they search for an MHP who “calls me on my shit.”

I wanted was something that I’d heard of, someone who was going to give me homework and challenge me, [my current MHP] has done that ‘make a list,’ ‘practice this behavior’ which is cool and its an ongoing challenge that steps outside the room. (Participant 10)

The MHP’s power orientation was perceived by participants and influenced their impressions of how the MHP managed power in the TR.

**MHP Maturity/ development**

This category describes the ways participants experienced the maturity and professional development of the MHP. This showed up as a context that helped participants judge how strongly they were held in the TR and how much they could expect
from their MHP’s. The struggle with seeing interns, “‘cookie cutter-like’ interventions and avoidance of uncomfortable power-related conversations impacted the negotiation of power. They expressed moments where working with an MHP who was inexperienced felt like a “burden” or “painstakingly slow and cumbersome.” Narratives from participants described “experienced” practitioners “in their later years” or who were “more mature.”

Participant 3 talked about going to a university counseling clinic to see an intern:

Well this was the funny thing, he told me in the beginning ‘I’m going to record all of the sessions’ and I was like ‘Well I don’t like that, that’s bullshit bla-bla-bla’ and he was like ‘Well, that’s what we do here’ and that was during the intake part where he was reading from the form and I was like ‘Ok.’ I basically agreed. He never recorded any of them and so one time, it flashed and I was like ‘Hey, you haven’t been recording’ and he said ‘Well, you were resistant so I just didn’t bring it up again.’ And I thought, that’s a weird power thing too. I said Ok, but he didn’t do it. He thought that I was resistant, so he was like babysitting me basically and I thought oh man, he’s got some shit to work out.

The participant perceived the MHP interns as not yet knowing how to handle client power and take appropriate responsibility for their decision-making in the TR. In contrast, a participant shared an incident where a more mature, experienced MHP (who, coincidentally and initially unknowingly, was the supervisor of a former MHP that the participant perceived as having pathologized them recently), was able to repair the rupture that had occurred in that previous TR:

There’s nothing wrong with you. It’s OK. Talk through it. You just need somebody to love you and to listen….. ‘She made a mistake. She was wrong.’ And was able to tell me what she saw in me. Like, ‘I don’t know why she...’ so I just felt heard, or validated, or like ‘Ok, just let it go.’ (Participant 9)

Participants described experiences of tracking their MHP’s maturity/development in order to explain what was happening in the TR related to power.

**Mental Health Professional’s Awareness & Use of Power Contexts**

Participant perceptions and narratives described the MHP’s awareness of and use of the power contexts as the primary process that impacts the central phenomena of how
clients negotiate power in the therapeutic relationship. This process appeared to be integral in guiding the consequences of the negotiation of power in the TR. Participants shared narratives that indicate their MHP’s differed in how they were able to match the needs, personality and power contexts of the participant. Participants who perceived their MHP as having poor awareness of power contexts lead to experiences of feeling disempowered or a need to actively or passively resist power in the TR. Participants who perceived their MHP to as having strong awareness of power contexts considered the negotiation of power to be more effective. The following participant describes how they perceived their MHP as effectively considering their power contexts:

So, she approached it after one of the sessions I missed, and was like, ‘I want to talk about something. You are not in trouble. I am not upset with you,’ because that’s also something we had pre-discussed like my relationship to lots of – lots of different people in my life are always feeling like I’m disappointing them. So, she was well aware of that, but was in a position where she could bring that up and ask like what she could do to best help me is the way that she framed it. (Participant 6)

Participant narratives signaled the importance of the MHP’s awareness and use of power contexts to more effectively negotiate power in the TR. The following sections outline the core category and the associated consequences.