

McNamee, S. & Gergen, K.J. (eds.,1992). **Therapy as a Social Construction**. London, Sage, 220 pages.

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Therapy as a Social Construction is an important work which propels us into a new era for therapeutic practice. The diverse contributing authors illustrate newer developments in the arena which previously has been promoted as systemic therapy. The current focus moves us away from a constructivist, solipsist epistemology, with its impairing dilemma of neutrality, towards a therapeutic understanding which gains inspiration from the social realm. Many of the volume's authors are particularly well-known in the field of family therapy (including, for example, Gianfranco Cecchin, Tom Andersen, the late Harold Goolishian, Harlene Anderson, Lynn Hoffman and Karl Tomm) and their articles illustrate constructionist developments in their practices.

The book itself is divided into four parts, although there is a great deal of overlap. Part I elaborates upon the meaning of constructionism for therapeutic practice. Hence, the authors in Part I focus on such issues as: the diminishment of the expert status of the therapist, the co-construction of meaning, the therapist's own history as influencing the process of therapy, and the process of reflexivity.

Part II provides authentic examples of the different forms of practice invited by a constructionist epistemology. Constructionism's flexibility with regard to the quest for therapeutic understanding, and different backgrounds and experiences of therapists, indicate that there will be variations in practice. The essays in Part II are all based upon the same theoretical context of constructionism, yet simultaneously illustrate how different therapists integrate their own person and their past experiences, to create meaningful styles of practice.

Part III includes specific case examples demonstrating a constructionist approach to therapy. A crucial similarity between the presentation of these cases is that they all demonstrate the meaning of a mutual, co-creative process between therapist and client. At the same time, the cases differ enough so that the reader is left with an impression of therapeutic creativity.

After having explored the arena of practice, the final section directs us again towards the theoretical realm where there are two major themes. One theme theoretically contrasts constructionist therapeutic practice with traditional therapeutic methodologies. A primary issue here is the definition of traditional therapeutic practice as modernist, while constructionism bears a postmodern theme. The focus is particularly upon the inadequacies of modernist (individualist) approaches to therapy, which the authors argue are leading us towards postmodern approaches in which "multiplicity, diversity, and relationship become the focus" (McNamee, p. 192).

The second major theme of Part IV is a critique of certain forms of constructionist practice. Here the authors suggest that some forms of constructionist-based therapy can inhibit both client and therapist by, for example, promoting only the client's replacement of one therapeutic narrative for another, rather than opening up a multitude of therapeutic understandings. As

another example, other therapists (and critics) have taken the disappearance of their own expert status to mean complete non-instrumentality, such that the therapist is literally lamed in the process of therapy. The authors in Part IV all suggest forms of therapeutic practice which should enhance the process of therapy, and from these descriptions one gains a sense of the direction of future developments.

Therapy as a Social Construction offers an elaborate understanding of the significance of the social constructionist epistemology when applied in the therapeutic domain. The volume's essays are well-written and suited for individuals within all areas of the helping professions. There is some repetition involving certain theoretical aspects of constructionism, which is a function of the volume's numerous contributors. At the same time, and perhaps from a constructionist viewpoint, reading similar explanations in different "voices" provides a richness of perspective which leads to a complex understanding of the primary aspects of constructionist therapeutic practice upon completion of the book. It is, thus, my opinion that *Therapy as a Social Construction* is an outstanding work which can be highly recommended.