

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AS A POSTMODERN DISCOURSE: AN EPISTEMOLOGY FOR CONVERSATIONAL THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE

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SUMMARY

Social construction discourse is a postmodern approach that provides a meaningful epistemology for therapies using conversation as a means to help people. Knowledge is viewed as the result of a social process and not as the objective description of external realities. Language provides the parameters for our understanding and experience. Discourse and language are discussed, as well as how people's lives and relationships are constituted by the dominant discourses of society. The deconstruction of power through reflecting conversation and transparency practises is attended to.

OPSOMMING

Sosiale konstruksie diskoers is 'n postmoderne benadering wat 'n betekenisvolle epistemologie bied vir terapieë wat gesprek as metode om mense te help, gebruik. Kennis word gesien as die gevolg van 'n sosiale konstruksie proses en nie as die objektiewe beskrywing van eksterne realiteite nie. Taal bied die parameters vir beide ons verstaan en ons ervaring. Diskoers en taal word bespreek, asook hoe mense se lewens en verhoudings deur die dominante diskoerse van die gemeenskap gekonstitueer word. Die dekonstruksie van mag deur middel van reflekerende gesprek en deursigtigheidspraktyke word bespreek.

Mental talk is largely performative - that is, it does not mirror or map an independent reality but is a functional element in social process itself.

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(Gergen 1989)

1. INTRODUCTION

It is generally accepted that we are in a process of an important paradigm shift, moving from a modern to a postmodern society. This shift is influencing all scientific and life practices. Various ideas and practices are arising. In the field of conversational therapies this shift is one of the dominant discourses among family therapists. This article is an attempt at participating in a search to find a meaningful epistemology for the various kinds of therapies that use conversation as a primary method of helping people. People such as counselors, family and marriage therapists, nurses, pastoral therapists, physicians, psychologists and social workers use these conversational methods. Conversation, however, is not limited to these helping professions, but is an everyday act of life through which we exist as people.

Our intention is to focus on social construction theory, or discourse as we prefer to call it, as an epistemology that can attribute to a better understanding of knowledge itself. Especially our knowledge of conversational therapeutic processes and why and how these contribute to bringing about change in people's lives and relationships.

2. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION DISCOURSE

The term *discourse* has become a central concept in postmodern thought (Foucault 1977, Gordon 1980, Lowe 1991). In Lowe's (1991:45) discussion of the term it is firstly used to indicate a public "*process of conversation*" through which meanings are constituted. It secondly refers to "*systematic and institutionalized ways of speaking/writing* or otherwise making sense through the use of language." Both these meanings are included when the term *postmodern discourse* is used in the article.

Various authors used different names for what is currently known as *social construction theory*, or as it will be named in this article, *social construction discourse*. George Kelly (1955) initiated his modernist theory on the rationality of people and called it *personal construct theory*. This

theory is, however, not to be associated with social construction discourse. Social construction discourse is constituted from different voices.

Gergen (1985a:266) uses the concepts *constructionism* and *social constructionist movement* interchangeably, while Berger and Luckmann (1967) and Hoffman (1990) prefer to use *social construction theory*. Although in many ways related to *constructivism*, as developed by Maturana and Varela (1987), this theoretical stance should be distinguished from *constructivism* and not be used interchangeably as Efran, Lukens and Lukens (1990) and Efran and Clarfield (1992) do. Although both emphasize language, constructivism was developed from a biological and individualistic vantage point, while social construction theory took its vantage point in the social and language domain. The two viewpoints are, however, mutually compatible.

The term *social construction discourse* is chosen for the purpose of this article. The concept *theory* refers to "an explanation based on thought...on observation and reasoning, especially one that has been tested and confirmed as a general principle explaining a large number of related facts" (Barnhart & Barnhart 1992:2174). Although there are other less modernistic definitions of the concept, it is associated with modernistic scientific practices. For this very reason it is a *contradictio in terminis* to use the concept social construction theory. The concept social construction discourse attempts to create space for the unfixed and open idea of a social construction epistemology.

Social construction discourse is more than just a new social paradigm. It is a way of understanding the phenomenon of knowledge itself. As Gergen (1985a:266) puts it: "[T]he study of social process could become generic for understanding the nature of knowledge itself." Social construction discourse is mainly concerned with "elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live" (Gergen 1985b:3).

Social construction discourse is an attempt to approach knowledge from the perspective of the social processes through which it is created. Social construction theorists see ideas, concepts and memories being

co-constructed within social interchanges and "mediated through language" (Hoffman 1992:8).

Knowledge is thus not viewed as the objective reflection or representation of an external reality, but as the social construction of people in their attempt to live together within this world (Freedman & Combs 1996). Knowledge is negotiated meaning within the context of linguistic interaction (Anderson & Goolishian 1991a:22; Gergen 1982; Hoffman 1990). Knowledge does not consist in "static systems of forms, cognitive structures, or frameworks" (Shotter 1993:183). The objective basis of conventional knowledge is thus challenged and knowledge is viewed as a social construction that is the product of historically situated interaction between people (Gergen 1985b:5) or the "conversational contexts in which it occurs or has its influence" (Shotter 1993:183). Gergen (1985a:266) explains as follows: "Social constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artifact of communal interchange." In this sense science is no longer a reflection of the world, but a reflection of the social processes through which it is constructed (Gergen 1991b:16). By viewing knowledge as social phenomenon, social construction discourse avoids or bridges the dualism between idealism and realism (Gergen 1985a, 1985b; Hoffman 1990).

The social construction viewpoint is expressed by Hoffman (1992:10) when she challenges the idea of a singular truth, objective social research and the way in which the self of a person is reduced to "a kind of irreducible inner reality represented by words like cognitions or the emotions." These words are social constructions but their use becomes problematic and imprisoning the moment they obtain objective or truth status. This happens when people forget that the words are social constructions.

Shotter's (1993) view adds to this in his summary on what social construction analyses do not do, applying the theory to itself as not claiming to provide the truth itself: "[I]t does not claim a privileged voice in the conversation of humankind; ...only a voice in a critical dialogue with others" (Shotter 1993:183). Social construction discourse itself does not pretend to be the truth or the ontological right way of thinking. If it should, however, be privileged as is done in this research project, it is for

ethical and not for ontological reasons. The ethical reasons for this choice will hopefully become clear in the further reading of this article.

The social construction of knowledge emphasizes the importance of language as social phenomenon, through which individuals as relational beings, live.

3. LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION DISCOURSE

A dominant discourse within the social construction discourse is on knowledge, language and the way in which meaning is constructed through conversations.

3.1 Language as discourse

Both the constructivist and social construction approaches emphasize the importance of language. Both dismantle the image of language transporting or transferring thoughts, meanings, knowledge or information from one person's reality into another person's reality (Pearce 1989).

For constructivists, language merely perturbs the other person to build up conceptual structures which to him/her, seems compatible with the words and actions of the speaker (Maturana & Varela 1987; Von Glasersfeld 1991). Maturana and Varela (1987) used the term "languaging" to explain the linguistic domain in which structural coupling between human beings come about.

Within the social construction discourse, language is more than just a way of connecting between people. People exist in language. The expression, "to be in language" (Wittgenstein in Andersen 1993:309; Anderson & Goolishian 1988:377; Mills in Shotter & Gergen 1989:141) is used to explain that it is a dynamic, social operation and not a simple linguistic activity. It must be distinguished from the psycholinguistic use of "to be in language" where meaning and understanding are derived from the logics of symbols, signs and the grammatical structure of language.

Meaning and understanding come about in language (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:37). For Shotter (1993:183) language does not exist in "a pre-determined code for linking inner psychological events to outer events in social life." In this context, understanding does not mean that

we ever understand another person. On the contrary, we are able to understand through dialogue only what it is that the other person is saying. This understanding is always in context and never lasts through time: "[E]very way of speaking embodies a different evaluative stance, a different way of being or position in the world" (Shotter 1993:183). In this sense, understanding is always a process 'on the way' and never fully achieved (Anderson & Goolishian 1988). In this way a permanent process of dialogue between people is ensured (Shotter 1993).

3.2 Language and meaning

The relation between meaning and language is best described by Anderson and Goolishian (1988:378): "Meaning and understanding do not exist prior to the utterances of language", but come into being within language. Eagleton (1983:60) states that meaning is "not simply something 'expressed' or 'reflected' in language: it is actually produced by it...we can only have the meanings and experience in the first place because we have a language to have them in." Andersen (1993:304) puts it this way: "We are in language that brings us a general knowledge (prejudice) that both limits and makes possible what we understand."

Language thus constitutes meaning. Life is experienced within language and how we experience is given meaning to within the parameters of our language. The language we grow up and live in within a specific culture, specifies or constitutes the experiences we have. As Gergen (1991b:10) argues, experiences then are culturally and not biologically constituted:

In some cultures, investigators find it difficult to locate any terms referring to "inner states." In others, the vocabulary is very limited, including only one or two terms that Westerners would identify as emotions. In still other cultures, many more terms are used to depict emotions than are found in the West. And often when another culture does have terms that seem to correspond to our own, their meanings turn out to be quite different.

From a social construction viewpoint the focus is not on the individual person but on the social interaction in which language is generated,

sustained and abandoned (Gergen & Gergen 1991). In this way language and meaning constitute people's lives (Bruner 1986, 1990; White 1992).

Anderson and Goolishian (1992:26) also move towards a more "hermeneutic and interpretive position" regarding therapy. This view emphasizes meanings as co-created and experienced by individuals in conversation with each other. Human action takes place in a reality of understanding within the process of social construction and dialogue. From this point of view "people live, and understand their living, through socially constructed narrative realities that give meaning and organization to their experience" (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:26). This statement underlines narrative as another important social construction discourse. The concepts of discourse and narrative will now be discussed.

3.3 Narrative and discourse

Language, discourse and narrative are intertwined concepts. Discourses can also be described as meaning systems in language. Language constitutes meaning in a discourse manner, or in the words of Lowe (1991:45), as "systematic and institutionalized ways of speaking/writing." For this reason the postmodern emphasis in social construction discourse is not primarily on language, but rather on discourse.

The various discourses in society have a constitutive or shaping effect on the personal discourses and lives of people. People, however, do not necessarily live in a reflexive and self-reflexive way within these discourses, but in a narrative way.

In striving to make sense of experiences and of life, people arrange "their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them... [t]his... can be referred to as a story or a self-narrative" (White & Epston 1990:10). Because the full richness of our lived experiences cannot be captured by a single dominant narrative, some narratives become part of a person's life and are thus shaping or constituting it (White & Epston 1990; White 1995). Others, however, are part of a person's life experience but never become part of a shaping narrative.

The stories that do not get told become subjugated knowledge of a person's life (Foucault in Gordon 1980). White and Epston (1990) distinguish between dominant and alternative stories, where the dominant

story is the one that gets told over and over again and is constituting a person's life, while the alternative story forms part of the subjugated knowledge and thus does not shape the person's life to the same extent. These narratives come about within the context of the various discourses within a society that have a constitutive effect on the narrative process.

All this happens within language or is constituted by the language we live in. These notions have important implications for the way in which therapy is constructed.

3.4 Language, discourse, narrative and therapy

If language, discourse and narrative constitute meaning, experience and lives, then therapy can be described as a language event. Change is then enabled within language. What is talked about and how it is talked about, makes a difference, and it is these differences that can be used to make a difference by shaping or constituting people's lives (Anderson & Goolishian 1988, 1992; Bateson 1979; Berg & de Shazer 1993). In therapy the focus is on how people's lives are constituted by language, meaning and narratives.

Structuralism involves structural thinking that requires a looking beneath the surface of what is being said, because language acts as a representation or a mirroring of an objective reality. Poststructuralism suggests that language is reality. In language a reality is mediated and constituted. Language thus, is not reflecting or representing a reality (Lowe 1991; Sluzki 1992). Therapists who work from such a language concept are Anderson and Goolishian (1992), White and Epston (1990), the Tromso group of Andersen (1991, 1993) and the Brattleboro group of Hoffman (1992) and Lax (1992).

Viewing therapy as conversation does not mean that it is a simple or obvious event. Berg and de Shazer (1993:5) draw a distinction between "therapy as conversation" and "therapy is conversation". They do this to emphasize that conversation in itself isn't therapy, but that therapy is an event occurring in conversation. It happens in a conversation between people within language. In a discourse-sensitive therapeutic practice,

"[d]iscourse is both the major theoretical object and the method of practice" (Lowe 1991:47).

White (1992,1995) also challenges the foundationalist notion of an objective knowledge of the world, essentialism and representationalism. Language (stories/narratives) therefore does not represent people's lives but constitutes and shapes it. The acts of therapy and training are linguistic events, occurring in language in the form of conversations that constitute people's lives. Therapy can be described as conversation (Berg & de Shazer 1993), therapeutic conversation (Anderson & Goolishian 1992), as an art of conversation (Lowe 1991:46), dialogue (Goldner 1993) and as being discourse-sensitive through paying attention to the ongoing conversation, but also to the institutionalized forms of speaking (Lowe 1991).

Through the narratives and stories that people have about their own and other people's lives, they make sense and give meaning to their experiences. It then becomes dominant stories and these stories determine which experiences are included and are shaping people's lives (White 1991). The alternative narratives and knowledge become marginalized and subjugated and do not get told.

The emphasis on language in social construction discourse also accentuates deconstruction, being a branch of literary criticism as an important conversation in therapy.

4. DECONSTRUCTION

4.1 About deconstruction

Radical skepticism about the dominant discourses in life as "regimes of truth" (Lowe 1991:43) brings about an analysis of the gaps, silences, ambiguities and power relations implicit within these discourses. This general strategy is often referred to as deconstruction, which is a broader application than deconstruction in the study of literary and philosophical texts.

Deconstruction within the literary study, refers to taking apart a text. Form is surrounded by genre which is embedded in a cultural-historical context, and the genre is the literature of fact and fictions and can be life

stories, histories and theories. These theories are seen as objective perspectives. These objective perspectives have been deconstructed, thereby revealing an ethno- and androcentrism, as well as prejudices of class, race and religion.

De Shazer (1993:115) warns against the unified definition of deconstruction, as neither possible nor desirable. He explains how deconstructing in literary terms would mean the sympathetic viewing of the text's logic, while at the same time reading it from a view of what is left out or unarticulated. The "not-yet-said" or unarticulated is also necessary for the text's functioning. De Shazer (1993:116) cites Grosz in the following description of deconstruction: "[T]his mode of 'reading a text from both inside and outside its terms, i.e., from its margins, must remain ambivalently an act of love and respect, and of self-assertion and critical distancing.'"

To deconstruct is to undo, not to destroy. Sampson (1989) explained how Derrida, in his deconstruction wanted to undo the tradition that dominated the Western thought and formed the roots of understanding by deconstructing the tradition, while at the same time using the tools from that tradition.

"One of Derrida's central methodological devices to accomplish this feat hinges on the notion of placing a term under erasure (*sous rature*)" (Sampson 1989:6). A word is literally first written and then erased, keeping both the erased word and the word itself simultaneously. The erasing is a strategy to accentuate that the term is both needed and not needed at the same time. Sampson (1989:7) quotes Spivak when explaining: "Since the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible." This strategy of *sous rature* is used to employ the familiar and commonly known, to deconstruct the familiar and known. The word under erasure is used to reveal its status as useful, necessary and at the same time wrong and not useful. X is at the same time X and its opposite, not-X.

Words being used are therefore necessary in order to understand, while they are at the same time inaccurate. Within the meaning of any possible text there is also its opposite text (Sampson 1989). "The very

terms which render some aspects of our lives rationally-visible to us, render other aspects rationally-invisible" (Shotter 1993:184).

Chang and Phillips (1993:100) quoted Anderson and Goolishian's definition:

Deconstruction...is to..."take apart the interpretive assumptions of a system of meaning that you are examining...[so that] you reveal the assumption on which the model is based. [As] these are revealed, you open space for alternative understanding."

To listen for what was not said does in this sense not refer to the unconscious or repressed in a psychodynamic sense, but to the opposite meaning within what was said, to validate and to question what was said and what was not said.

Lather (1991:13) cites Grosz when identifying the three steps that deconstruction can be divided into:

- i) Identify the binaries, the oppositions that structure an argument;
- ii) Reverse or displace the dependent term from its negative position to a place that locates it as the very condition of the positive term;
- iii) and create a more fluid and less coercive conceptual organisation of terms which transcends a binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither of the binary terms.

Deconstruction provides a corrective moment, a safeguard against dogmatism, a displacement, to keep it in process, to continuously demystify the realities we create (Lather 1991). The deconstruction idea reminds of Maturana and Varela's (1987) constructivist arguments against objective knowledge. All knowledge is constructed in language. However, as we cannot live without it, objectivity is replaced by "objectivity".

Deconstruction of discourse as an ongoing conversation (everyday conversations) and Discourses as the dominant texts or bodies of knowledge can be distinguished (Lowe 1991:45). Discourses as the dominant text or bodies of knowledge marginalize some voices and privilege other knowledgeable voices and thereby constitute power-knowledge relations.

Discourses regarding knowledge, power and gender relations are deconstructed within the social construction framework.

4.2 Power discourses

The discourse regarding power and family therapy was shaped by many contributions (Bateson 1972; Chapman 1993; Dell 1986; Goldner 1993; Harstoch 1990; Held & Pols 1985; Imber-Black 1986; Minuchin 1991; White 1991, 1992, 1995; White & Epston 1990). The work of Foucault plays an important role in the discourse on power (power relations) and family therapy in the works of family therapists in the social construction discourse.

Flaskas and Humphreys (1993) intersected ideas of Foucault and the construction of ideas on power (power relations) in therapy and contrasted it to Bateson's notion of power. They identified Bateson's two central themes regarding power: Firstly, that the concept of power represents an epistemological error, and secondly that the idea of power is potentially unethical and toxic in its effects.

In the mid 1980's the debate regarding power and family therapy centered around the idea of the impossibility of unilateral power, because of the circularity and complementarity of a system. This in turn influenced therapists to negate power as constituting people's lives. Feminist theories contributed to the deconstruction of the power-knowledge relations.

Being convinced by Foucault's (Gordon 1980) arguments on power, it is necessary to include conversations on these issues and how it relates to conversational therapy and therapy training. Not attending to these issues would mean to be "double blind" (Von Foerster 1984a, 1984b, 1991) and in such a way to be insensitive to difference and the way in which power constitutes lives and relationships.

In a dialogue Foucault (Gordon 1980:141) explained that "power is 'always already there' and that one is never 'outside' it." He also stressed the fact that never to be outside of power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat. Foucault (Gordon 1980:142) continued to suggest the following:

- Power is co-extensive with the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network;

- Relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) for which they play a conditioning as well as a conditioned role at the same time;
- These relations don't take the sole form of prohibition and punishment, but are of multiple forms;
- Power relations, do 'serve' because it is capable of being utilized in strategies;

One should not assume a massive and primal condition of domination with "dominators" on one side and "dominated" on the other, but a multiform production of relations of power and resistance. Because power is seen as relational, resistance exists in the same place as power, is multiple and can be integrated in multiform strategies.

Power and power relations can be seen in everyday interactions, techniques and practices, such as the hierarchizing of individuals in relation to one another (Parker 1989). Parker (1989:63) also discussed how power plays a role in the way the "self" is constructed as the subject and object of discourse. Conversational power is seen in the processes that privilege certain kinds of talk, "talking procedures" and certain "talkers" while marginalizing others (Goldner 1993:161).

Flaskas and Humphreys (1993:42) emphasized Foucault's notion of "...the productive potential of power...", because it creates discourses and knowledge. Power has an influence on how knowledge is created and on the subjugation (Gordon 1980:81) or marginalization of "alternative" knowledges (Flaskas & Humphreys 1993:42).

Minuchin (1991), in his challenge to a constructivist view of multiple realities, change and narratives, described how the seduction of constructivism may lead therapists not to realize the harsh reality and real effects that problems have on people's lives. He argued that the renaming of power does not make it disappear. From a narrative point of view though, power is questioned and deconstructed in the everyday life of a person. In this respect the narrative and constructivist idea of opening more choices doesn't mean to help people stay within an oppressive situation, but to empower them to challenge from their strengths the dominant stories that constitute their life-stories and help them to change their roles.

White (1991, 1992, 1995; White & Epston 1990) succeeded in developing a family therapy approach in which Foucault's concepts (Flaskas

& Humphreys 1993:42) are translated into a therapeutic language. The “externalizing the problem”- approach focuses on the relationship and functioning of the power of the dominant story and how it constitutes people’s lives. People are subject to the power of these normalizing truths that shape their lives and relationships (White 1991). The dominant stories maintain their constitutive power through techniques and practices of everyday power, while alternative stories become subjugated or marginalized knowledge. White (1991, 1992a) attempts to attend to these alternative stories with the purpose of empowering the alternative story to become more constitutive of people’s lives.

As deconstruction of power is done by objectification of taken for granted practices of power (White 1991), people in therapy are encouraged to re-author their own lives and agency of self is established. Flax (1990:41) maintains that all postmodern discourses are deconstructive:

Postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truths, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture.

Another way of deconstructing theories and practices is through transparency and multiple reflexive conversations.

4.3 Transparency and reflexive conversations as deconstruction

Postmodern family therapy approaches emphasize a more egalitarian and open relationship between therapist and client, researcher and participants, supervisor and supervisee, and in this way deconstruct the power within these relationships (Anderson & Goolishian 1990; Brodsky and Hare-Mustin 1980; Chapman 1993; Friedman 1993; Goodrich 1991; Kvale 1992; McGoldrick, Anderson & Walsh 1989; Steier 1991; White & Epston 1990;;Epston & White 1992).

“The success of power/knowledge mechanisms is proportional to their ability to hide themselves” (Foucault in Richer 1992:112). Multiple reflexive conversation used in the postmodern discourse acts as ways of deconstructing the power/knowledge relation (Kvale 1992; McNamee & Gergen 1992; Steier 1991). In this way the number of interpretations are

expanded and 'subjects' are made 'participants', co-producing research, training and therapy.

Epston (White 1991; Freeman & Lobovits 1993) use the concept of transparency to describe the deconstruction of the therapeutic process.

4.4 Transparency practices in therapy and training

White (1991) used Epston's concept of transparency to describe a situation where the reflecting team joins the therapist and client to question the therapist or make comments regarding the therapeutic session in the client's presence. This way of reflection on the session opens up the therapist's dilemmas and choices for further discussion. This creates opportunities to co-create therapy, further the dialogue and give the client more possibilities and choices to listen to. After this reflection the client is given a chance to respond very briefly. The therapeutic process is in this way demystified and made transparent to the client.

Epston (1993:231) sees one way of transparency within the therapy, (for example questioning the questions of the therapist) as a way that "allows more discretion in formulating personal responses to therapist responses." Making transparent the possibilities and different questions within therapy, "grand theories" regarding therapy is deconstructed.

Freeman and Lobovits (1993) used Epston's idea of transparency during therapy to illustrate how mutual reflection on the process of communication itself; ideas of both the client and the therapist can be made transparent and available for revision to further the partnership in therapy.

5. SOME AFTER THOUGHTS

Social construction discourse does not pretend to have ontological status, but does provide for us a meaningful epistemology that enables us to come to a coherent understanding of the process of conversational therapy. It enables us to find therapeutic metaphors or practices which in themselves are shaped by a social construction discourse, as well as to understand and validate other prevailing therapeutic theories and models.

Different therapeutic practices in various parts of the world have contributed to the discourse on the social construction of therapy.

Contributions of the Calgary group (The Calgary Participator) should be noted. Tomm's (1987, 1990) ideas on reflexive questioning and therapeutic ethical postures and Parry's (1990) article on narratives and agency of self contributed to the diversity of voices regarding therapeutic practices of the social construction discourse. Conferences (Gilligan & Price 1993) and publications (Friedman 1993) are done in the same way by reflecting and including all participants' ideas and listening to different voices that contribute to the discourse.

In Houston and Galveston, Harry Goolishian and Harlene Anderson developed an approach that can be referred to as the "client is the expert" and "not-knowing" (Anderson & Goolishian 1992). In Norway, Andersen and the Tromso group developed important work that can be described as a reflecting process (Andersen (1991, 1993). Another approach that contributes to the social construction discourse, is the narrative approach of White and Epston (Epston 1993; Epston & White 1992; White & Epston 1990; White 1989/90, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1995).

Many voices of researchers and therapists contribute and indeed constitute the discourse on therapy as a social construction. Power-knowledge relations are acknowledged and deconstructed, contributing to the decentering of a meta-narrative regarding therapy and power. Therapy within the postmodern discourse is seen as a discourse sensitive therapeutic practice.

Thinking and working within a social construction discourse also helps us to understand and validate the meaning and contribution of therapeutic theories and models that would, from a postmodern perspective be referred to as modernistic. Deconstructing the power issues embedded in these enable us to enrich our therapeutic work with a diversity of ideas and ways of constructing realities that enable people to live in ethical ways. This, the constant search and attempt to construct the realities and lives we live in an ethical manner, is our guiding star in the process of thinking and doing therapy in a conversational way.

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