

“Counselling as a Social Process”: A Person-Centered Perspective on a Social Constructionist Approach

Ivan Ellingham, Ph.D

Psychology Department

East and North Hertfordshire National Health Trust, UK

ABSTRACT. *This paper presents a critical examination from a person-centered perspective of an approach to counseling influenced by the social constructionist thought of Kenneth Gergen. The general postmodernist character of such social constructionism is considered and critiqued, as are certain implications for counselor training and practice. The position is taken that any attempt to introduce social constructionist ideas into the framework of person-centered counseling should be done in a way that does not compromise the fundamental vision of Carl Rogers, its main architect.*

*A conviction that **All is One** does not have to
cancel out an appreciation of separateness and diversity.
(Bernie Neville, 1999, p. 72)*

Introduction

Thanks to burgeoning interest within the domain of psychology as a whole, a perspective on human experience known as ‘social constructionism’ is currently becoming increasingly influential within the field of counseling/psychotherapy (C/P)¹—not least amongst adherents of the person-centered approach (cf. Ellingham, 1998, 1999b; Gross, et. al., 1997; Smith, 1994). Indicative of this interest and influence, John McLeod, a leading figure in counseling in the UK and sometime advocate of person-centered counseling (see McLeod & Wheeler, 1995), recently published a paper entitled, “Counselling as a Social Process” (1999). McLeod’s stated aim in this paper is, he says, “to offer an alternative way of seeing counseling, as a social rather than a psychological process” (p. 217). “This approach,” informs McLeod, “is influenced by the social constructionist philosophy of Kenneth Gergen and his colleagues” and as such “carries with it a number of implications for training and practice.”

In the present article, I explore and critique the views that McLeod sets forth in “Counselling as a Social Process,” with respect not only to the general social constructionist position with which he associates himself, but also to his discussion of its implications for

counseling training and practice. My purpose in so doing is to draw attention to problematic features of such a social process perspective, both in relation to C/P in general and to the person-centered approach in particular.

Social Constructionism and Postmodernism

In his construal of "counseling as a social process," McLeod owns that a basic ingredient in this approach is the contribution of the "new wave of feminist, narrative and social constructionist counsellors and psychotherapists" who "have made efforts to position themselves outside of the dominant discourse of therapy and define themselves in terms of their own version of a postmodern image of the person" (p. 221). Here it is important for McLeod that we do not confuse the postmodern character of this "new wave," and by implication the character of his social process approach, with an interpretation of postmodernism that sees it "as promoting a somewhat bleak concept of the person, in which nothing is fixed and people reshape and redefine themselves almost at random." It is McLeod's claim that those he dubs "postmodern counsellors and therapists," amongst whom he obviously includes himself, "have not taken this tack."

But in "Counseling as a social process" how does the evidence stack up in support of such a claim? When one examines it closely, it is highly debatable, in my view, whether McLeod does indeed manage to position his social process approach outside the bleaker interpretations of postmodernism, inclusive of "a somewhat bleak concept of the person."

Without doubt, it is clearly the case that an integral relationship exists between Gergen's social constructionism and the modern melange of thought known as postmodernism. So, for instance, Vivien Burr (1995) points up that "postmodernism" constitutes the "cultural and intellectual 'backcloth' against which social constructionism has taken shape" (p. 12); with Gergen himself being, on the testimony of Gross, Humphreys and Petlova (1997), "[a] major figure in postmodern thought within psychology," someone who "believes that social constructionist dialogues are essentially constituents of the broader, postmodern dialogues" (p. 18).

But to what interpretation of postmodernism do such statements refer? Burr (1995) provides a relevant and fruitful definition in this regard. "Postmodernism," she declares, represents the "rejection of 'grand narratives' in theory and the replacement of a search for truth with a celebration of the multiplicity of (equally valid) perspectives" (p. 185). Beginning as it does by pointing out how postmodernism involves "the rejection of 'grand narratives' in theory," this definition concords with a well-known declaration by Jean-Francois Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), the publication of which led to the term "postmodern" coming into popular usage. "Simplifying to the extreme," Lyotard there records, "I define *postmodern* as incredulity towards metanarratives" (p. xxiv). In Lyotard's usage, the term "metanarrative," as with Burr's (1995) "grand narrative," refers to global theories that attempt to provide a unitary and universal account of reality, a true explanation and representation of that which is actually there-- in particular to the comprehensive frameworks of thought found in the natural sciences, the ideational vehicles that, thanks to Thomas Kuhn (1970), have become known as "paradigms." Postmodernists, amongst others, are much impressed by Kuhn's finding that paradigms are schemes of ideas generated and agreed upon by a particular social group (a group of scientists) and, as such, are social

constructions. Powerfully influenced by the way socially constructed twentieth century science has enabled supposedly civilized and superior cultures to perpetrate atrocities on a scale never seen before, a salient feature of the postmodernists' credo has become the repudiation of "the modernist Enlightenment faith that science and reason can bring about increasing progress for humankind" (Ellingham, 1998, p. 111). Swayed, too, by "the linguistic philosophy of Wittgenstein...and Rorty...as well as the poststructuralist literary theory and philosophy of such writers as Foucault, Derrida and de Man" (Held, 1995, pp. 3-4), postmodernist thinkers like Lyotard have thus come to maintain that "'science' is just another discourse which is as 'true' as many others" (Gross, et al, 1997, p. 43); indeed, that "All truths...are *merely* constructions in language by knowers situated in *particular* discursive contexts" (Held, 1995, pp. 7-8, 9).

It is just such an interpretation of postmodernism that seems to underlie Gergen's social constructionism. Witness the following joint statement of Gergen and Sheila McNamee in *Therapy as Social Construction* (1992). According to Gergen and McNamee,

our formulations of what is the case are guided by and limited to the systems of language in which we live. What can be said about the world—including self and others—is an outgrowth of shared conventions of discourse. Thus, for example, one cannot describe the history of a country or oneself on the basis of "what actually happened"; rather, one has available a repertoire of story-telling devices or narrative forms and these devices are imposed on the past....In effect, what we take to be "the real and the good" are largely textual histories (p. 4)

Rule-bound and "caged" within our particular Wittgensteinian "language-game," lodged in our personal language-laden world, postmodernist social constructionists of Gergen's ilk would thus have us believe that "we can never get outside language to attain knowledge of an independent—extralinguistic—reality" (Held, 1995, p. 8). "Each language system [on the "postmodern epistemology"] has its own particular way of distorting, filtering, constructing experience" (Polkinghorne, 1992, pp. 149, 150). In consequence of which, "the real is not an integrated system" (p. 149). We need to realize, McLeod avows in a 1994 work, that we are confined to dealing with "local knowledges rather than universal truths" (1994, p. 191), a sentiment entirely congruent with the views he expresses in "Counseling as a social process" apropos the status of counseling theories.

On McLeod's reckoning, with regards to these theories "there is an increasing appreciation that there are profound limitations to the psychological metanarratives around which counseling and psychotherapy have been built" (1999, p. 221). "Theories of counseling," McLeod posits, "are no longer regarded as maps or mirrors of reality, reflecting 'objective' or 'real' facts about human beings, but as language systems which exist to enable dialogue over problematic aspects of experience, and as narrative 'templates' which offer alternative ways of telling the story of a life." Such an "*ex cathedra*" statement by McLeod on the ontological status of counseling theories (or non-ontological, depending on your point of view) makes it abundantly clear in my view just how much McLeod's social constructionism, in close accord as it is with Gergen's thought, can be identified as postmodernist on Burr's definition-- not only with respect to that definition's mention of "the rejection of 'grand narratives'," but also with respect to the proposition that postmodernism entails "the replacement of a search for truth with a celebration of the multiplicity of (equally valid)

perspectives" (Burr, 1995, p. 185). For in depicting the multiplicity of counseling theories as he does (i.e. as "alternative ways of telling the story of a life" with no objective reality beyond them against which to evaluate whether this or that "narrative 'template'" is less or more true than any other), McLeod is patently participating in "a celebration of the multiplicity of (equally valid) perspectives."

Now what may not be apparent at this point is that in adopting a postmodernist position exactly in accord with Burr's definition, McLeod (his earlier disclaimer notwithstanding) has effectively chosen to espouse an interpretation of postmodernism that-- far from being "non-bleak"-- is very bleak indeed. For once one defines postmodernism as involving the "celebration" of equally valid perspectives, one becomes bogged down in the quagmire of "relativism," relativism being, as Burr explicates, "the view that there can be no ultimate truth, and that therefore all perspectives are equally valid" (1995, p. 185).

But, then again, is relativism such a bad thing?-- especially when within the world of C/P it gives rise to a general sense of well-being and *bonhomie*. What's wrong in subscribing to a postmodernist credo of equal strokes for folks of all theoretical persuasion, when there is the positive pay-off that members of all schools of counseling get to feel OK?

Postmodernist Relativity: A Nihilistic Reality?

Why this means of fostering matey mutuality within the field of C/P is decidedly bleak is pointed out in trenchant terms by Ernest Gellner in his book *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (1992). What makes postmodernist relativism of the kind inherent in McLeod's views so bleak, Gellner elucidates, is that such "Relativismus über alles" entails "nihilism" (1992, pp. 49ff). Gergen, as M. Brewster Smith (1994) highlights, peddles "an extreme form of antiscientific relativism" that is fittingly designated "nihilistic relativism" (pp. 408 and 409); McLeod, it seems, dutifully follows suit.

With reference to the field of C/P, consider how, in concrete terms, such relativism leads to nihilism. Estimates vary on the number of distinctively different theories of C/P that currently exist; some have reported several hundred (Karasu, 1986). With so many different "narrative templates," what can transpire is that certain activities defined as C/P according to one such template are at odds with and completely the opposite of activities defined as C/P by another. Take a state of affairs that I have personally encountered. As a person-centered therapist working individually with clients in a residential care setting, I allowed my clients to take the lead in discussing whatever personal experiences they wished to raise, whether those experiences were of a "positive" or "negative" nature. Such a person-centered *modus operandi*, however, was in direct opposition to the cognitive behavioral approach adopted by other individuals working "therapeutically" with the same clients. In their approach the clients were directed only to speak of their positive experiences and could lose reward tokens through discussing negative experiences. From a postmodernist relativist perspective, each of these "templates" is to be given equal respect despite the fact that they are essentially contradictory. In such a nihilistic state of affairs, no objective criteria exist for determining what is and what is not proper therapeutic practice.

Another nihilist outcome of such "anything goes" relativism has been that members of the field of C/P confronted by numerous "equally valid" narrative templates have adopted a policy of employing their own personally inspired local discourse to mix and match

components from the diverse templates and so generate an individually tailored “eclectic” theory or model of counseling. Under such circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find Woolfe (1995) recording that one result of the influence of postmodernism on the field of counseling “appears to be a gradual move towards greater eclecticism” (p. 35). So influenced, we are, it seems, moving closer to a chaotic condition in which C/P becomes whatever each individual practitioner says it is: of there being as many “models” of C/P as there are counselor/psychotherapists-- particularly so where counselor training courses encourage their students to develop their own personal eclectic “model” of C/P.

If what I am saying seems alarmist and extreme, consider the experience in the United States of a former client of a female psychiatrist. Interviewed on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, the client related how as a hospital inmate she received “therapeutic treatment” from the psychiatrist in relation to childhood sexual abuse suffered at the hands of her mother. The client’s narrative was that the psychiatrist regularly visited her in her private hospital room and sexually abused her; the psychiatrist’s, that as a “transference figure” for the client’s mother she was “systematically desensitizing” the client to the sexual abuse perpetrated by the mother. Some therapeutic narrative template! Equally valid?

Now likely McLeod would dispute that he is a postmodern relativistic nihilist. But with his view that counseling theories are merely alternative stories that “are no longer regarded as maps or mirrors of reality, reflecting ‘objective’ or ‘real’ facts about human beings,” it is difficult to see on what basis he is able to judge whether any activity whatsoever perpetrated in the name of a particular local counseling discourse is *really* C/P or not.

“Counselling as a Social Process” and The Person-Centered Approach

In order to clarify the problematic features of McLeod’s social process approach in relation to person-centered C/P, I first briefly overview key theoretical elements of the person-centered approach, as formulated essentially by Carl Rogers.

Central to the person-centered approach’s explication of C/P is Rogers’ conceptual “foundation block” of the “actualizing tendency,” that is “a directional tendency inherent in the human organism-- a tendency to grow, to develop, to realize its full potential,” “a natural tendency toward a more complex and complete development” (1980, p. 117-8). To use the words of leading person-centered authorities Bozarth and Brodley (1991), the actualizing tendency is “*individual and universal*,” “unique to the individual” while at the same time “a motivating tendency for all organisms” (p. 48).

As for the counseling client, he or she, in Rogers’ view, is someone in whom the actualizing tendency has been “thwarted or warped” due to the past introjection of values alien to his or her intrinsic “organismic valuing process” (1980, p. 118; 1959, p. 210). As a result, such an individual has proved deficient in actualizing the “‘real’... organic self” that they truly are, been unable to construct an “organized, consistent conceptual gestalt” of self congruent with this inner valuing resource (1951, p. 532; 1961, chpt. 8). So alienated, they are not “a congruent, genuine, integrated person” (1957, pp. 223-224). Effective C/P, however, enables the client to undergo a change process involving “a shift from incongruence to congruence” (1961, p. 157), whereby the individual “moves in the direction of greater independence or self-responsibility...in the direction of increasing self-government, self-regulation and autonomy, and away from heteronymous control, or control by external

forces”—towards, that is, the hypothetical end point of “complete congruence,” of being fully functioning (1951, p. 488; 1959, p. 235). At this “end point,” contends Rogers, the person enjoys “a reflexive awareness” of themselves as “an integrated process of changingness” (1961, pp. 155, 158). C/P, for Rogers, is thus “a matter of freeing...the client for normal growth and development,” of facilitating that rational process by which the individual moves “with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goals his [sic.] organism is endeavouring to achieve” (1942, p. 29; 1961, pp. 194-5).

Conceived in this way, “The fundamental notion of Client-Centered [i.e. person-centered] Therapy is that the therapist can trust the tendency of the client and the only role of the therapist is to create an interpersonal climate that promotes the actualizing tendency” (Bozarth & Brodley, 1991, p. 51). The climate so created has been taken to “constitute love in the highest sense, or *agape*, to use the Greek term” (Patterson, 1985, p. 91), being crucially composed of the therapist attitudinal conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence. It is on this basis, Mearns and Thorne (1999) affirm, that “[e]ssentially person-centred counseling endeavours to create...those ‘special moments’ when the client will feel able to change...by *freeing the natural healing process within the client*” (p. 146). Referring to his own experience in this regard, Rogers (1980) describes such moments as occurring in relation to a client “when I am closest to my inner intuitive self,...close to the transcendental core of me” (p. 129). At such times, he avers, “it seems my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes part of something larger.”

Against the backdrop of this brief summary of key features of person-centered theory, consider the extent of their incompatibility with implications that McLeod identifies as arising from his social process approach in relation to the following topics.

The image of the person

In terms of the way in which a person associates personal identity with having a unique “self,” McLeod’s social constructionist position is that the persons we are, our sense of self, is a fundamental product of our culture, our society. A classic example of this referred to by social constructionists is the case of Dorinne Kondo, a born and raised American of Japanese parents. Complete with her socially discursively produced US “self,” Kondo, an anthropologist, went to Japan and “immersed” herself in the life of a Japanese family, assuming a “Japanese daughter’s role” (Kondo, in Stevens, 1995, p. 268). One day while out shopping Kondo caught sight of her own reflection and noticed to her consternation “a woman walking with characteristically Japanese bend to the knees and a sliding of the feet” (p. 270). By being embedded in Japanese culture, Kondo, as she saw it, had started developing a Japanese sense of “self.” Such a jarring awareness of this new sense of “self” vis-à-vis its US equivalent, Kondo denotes as “the fragmentation of the self” (p. 269). Kondo’s experience, that is to say, provides us with an example of the way our “Western models of self, with their emphases on autonomy, independence and separation from others will be at odds with the much more relational and collective notions about the self in Japan, and may even appear ‘wrong’ and ‘abnormal’” (Gross, et al., p. 40).

Thanks, though, to modern technologies such as the Internet, the postmodern world is seen as exposing us more and more to different notions about subjective identity, “more and

more to the opinions, values, and life-styles of others” (Gergen, 1991, p. 49). For social constructionists like Gergen, and seemingly for McLeod, such “social saturation brings with it a general loss in our assumption of true and knowable selves” (p. 16). In McLeod’s words, “self...is a matter of cultural convention. The notion of ‘self’ is not foundational” (p. 221). What we have as a result, according to Gergen (1991), is “a saturated self,” a condition of “multiphrenia,” “a new pattern of self-consciousness involving the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments” (pp. 73-4). All of us are like Kondo, for we all “absorb multiple voices,” each “truth” becoming “relativized by our simultaneous consciousness of compelling alternatives,” such that “each truth about ourselves is a construction of the moment, true only for a given time and within certain relationships” (p. 16). “With the spread of the postmodern consciousness,” declares Gergen, “we see the demise of personal identity...the sense of authenticity, sincerity” (p. 228). “In their stead,” he proclaims, “an open slate emerges on which persons may inscribe, erase, and rewrite identities as the ever-shifting, ever-expanding, and incoherent network of relationships invites or permits.”

This image of the person as possessor of a flickering multiplicity of non-foundational “ever-shifting” selves is far removed from Rogers’ conception of the individual who in “becoming a person” becomes more and more their true and real self, more and more an autonomous individual free “from heteronymous control or control by external forces” (1951, p. 488). Indeed, given that the social constructionist image, as conjured by Gergen, is of a person who seems to possess as many “selves” as there are social forces, from a person-centered perspective such an individual could be said to be exhibiting a multiplicity of facades and extremely incongruent—in psychiatric terms, to be displaying symptoms of marked “psychopathology.”

If, indeed, social constructionists such as Gergen and McLeod would grant the supplementary existence of an implicit coherent “self,” of which an individual’s “saturated selves” are diverse expressions, then far from seeing Gergen as describing someone who is highly incongruent we might conceivably equate the “multiphrenic” individual with the person-centered fully functioning person, someone who enjoys “a reflexive awareness” of themselves as “an integrated process of changingness” (Rogers, 1961, pp. 155, 158). In other words, instead of seeing a cluster of disparate parts, as Gergen appears to, we might construe such parts as having a common intrinsic “I-ness”, in the manner that diverse pieces of music by the same great compose all bear his or her personal musical “signature.”

Contrary to her own interpretation, Dorrine Kondo, as I see it, actually possessed a foundational “I,” a reflexive awareness common to her American self and to her Japanese self. For if she had had no sense of self-continuity across the two cultural contexts, if her sense of “I” was entirely a construction of either one cultural context or the other, on what basis could she know that she was somehow the same person in both contexts? On my interpretation, Kondo had to have a sense of self that transcended the two cultural frameworks, a self common to both contexts that provided her with a link of identity. True fragmentation, I would argue, would have existed if this self that transcended and linked the two cultural selves had not existed, such that the person possessed the “divided self” (Laing, 1960) of the psychotic individual, or the multiple personalities of individuals suffering from dissociative identity disorders.

That multiphrenia is drastically different from schizophrenia and multiple personality disorder is made plain by James Glass in his book *Shattered Selves* (1993). In this work Glass examines what it really means for postmodernists “to celebrate multiple—and fragmented—selves” (cover note, Glass, 1993), comparing the postmodernist discourse on this topic to the first-person narratives of women diagnosed with serious psychiatric “illnesses.” Indicting the postmodernist view of self, Glass contends that “to see the schizophrenic or the multiple personality as culture heroes, as carriers of a new ‘postmodern’ synthesis, as symbols of a nihilistic awakening, is to mystify and distort what they and the circumstances of their respective tragedies speak” (p. 161). Suffering as they do “from radical forms of psychological disconnection”, it is in the psychological anguish and distress of “schizophrenics and multiple personalities,” explains Glass, that we see how little there is to celebrate for individuals who in a real, non-rhetorical sense are excluded from “knowledge of self and place as a continuous presence within identifiable forms of historical experience” (p. 129).

By contrast, to be fully functioning, according to Rogers, involves an ability to deeply and empathically immerse oneself in a multiplicity of worlds, even as one retains a sense of one’s own unique identity—a sense of oneness in diversity that religious psychologies associate with mystical experience. “The mystic,” as Joseph Campbell (1972) has put it, “enters the waters and finds he can swim; whereas the schizophrenic...has fallen or has intentionally plunged and is drowning” (p. 209).

The counseling process

In line with his assumption of the cultural relativity of the “self,” that it is a “cultural convention” and “not foundational,” it is wrong, according to McLeod, to say apropos the counseling client that there is “something ‘wrong’ with the person” (1999, p. 221); just as it would be wrong from a Japanese perspective to talk in terms of there being something wrong with the autonomous American self, or vice versa. Such a postmodernist promulgation of equally valid perspectives leads McLeod to declare, employing Gergen’s (1990) phrase, that it is “reinforcing a language of deficit” to refer to a client’s discursively produced, post-counseling self as better or worse than the pre-counseling one. For McLeod, these are just alternative “self” stories. To speak of “cure” is thus invalid, as is the notion that “structures within the person” are being modified. Each “story” is as real as the next.

Again McLeod, in my view, posits ideas that are at odds with the basic import of person-centered theory. From McLeod’s perspective, it would seem that Rogers is telling something of a fairy story when he refers to successful counseling as “a shift from incongruence to congruence,” a shift that involves real and constructive growth of self-structure. With the story of incongruence no better or worse than the story of congruence, not only does the notion of congruence become meaningless, but so too do the notions of the client undergoing “real” change, real growth, real “healing.” And if these notions are meaningless, what place is there for the “foundation block” of person-centered theory that is deemed to motivate such change, growth and healing, “the actualizing tendency”?

The training and preparation of counselors

With respect to the training and preparation of counselors, of interest to me in McLeod's discussion on the implications of his social process approach is his assertion that "training and education prepares counsellors to engage in conversations that go beyond the psychological, and to encompass important areas of human experience such as the spiritual, political, environmental and moral" (pp. 222-3). An immediate problem I have with such a viewpoint is whether conversations can ever go beyond the psychological, given that a generally accepted definition of psychology is "the science of human behavior and experience." From such a perspective, spiritual experience, political experience, environmental experience and moral experience all fall within the domain of psychology, i.e. they are all psychological. Aside from which, as is most apparent with aesthetic experience, I regard it as a basic given that human experience transcends the experiential domain mediated by conversations, i.e. of discursive symbolization (cf. Langer, 1953). A pertinent case of such transcendence vis-a-vis the field of C/P is that enshrined in the interaction between mother and infant, that mode of interpersonal experiencing that ordinary discourse terms "love," and which psychoanalytic thinkers Erik Erikson (1950) and Donald Winnicott (1965) term "basic trust." To these authors and others, such a mode of experiencing forms the original magma out of which eventually emerges our discursive self-identity and our discursive knowing of the world and others (cf. Giddens, 1991, p. 38), a magma that becomes revisited in any fundamental reconstruction of the self as occurs in C/P (cf. Stern, 1985). On such scenario, to provide the kind of relationship whereby a client might reconstruct their socially discursively produced self-identity requires more than conversation. Fundamentally, it requires us to re-create the condition of love in which self development is rooted.

Person-centered C/P is itself an approach that considers a vital requisite for constructive self-change to be the receiving by the client of that pristine and self-giving mode of love known as *agape* (cf. Rogers, 1962, p. 422; Patterson, 1985, p. 91). "Profound healing and growth" take place for the client, Rogers (1980) attests, when the counselor conveys such a cognitive-affective, non-verbal, transcendent and spiritual loving/knowing of the client (p. 129). It is such a mode of being and knowing that spiritual traditions of diverse cultures see as the wellspring of oneness from which all diversity flows; the communal font that makes us one with another whether our discursive mind knows it or not. The message of this gospel for counselor expertise and training is that polishing up one's ability to love takes precedence over polishing up one's "capacity to appreciate the intricacies of language" (McLeod, 1999, p. 221). To paraphrase St. Paul, I may have as great a command of language as Brian Thorne, but if I am without love I am not an authentic counselor.

A Final Word

Among person-centered thinkers, Maureen O'Hara stands out as the most erudite and engaged commentator on the challenges that social constructionist and postmodern thought pose for the person-centered approach. O'Hara (1995) is fully aware of the dangers intrinsic to the kind of social constructionist position advocated by John McLeod-- of, as she terms it,

the "strong-form constructivism" advocated by those who "take the position that there is no reality either beneath or beyond linguistic constructions" (1995, p. 295).

Away from the bleak postmodernist interpretation of McLeod, O'Hara directs our attention to social constructionism of a less nihilist kind, to the postmodern dialogues of "weak-form constructivists." These individuals, O'Hara (1995) attests, "acknowledge that consciousness consists of constructions, but see these constructions as surface clues to deeper, more essential experience." "As Polanyi (1969) pointed up," informs O'Hara, "the willingness to have faith in some greater coherence is the sine qua non of both the scientific and psychotherapeutic enterprises" (p. 296).

Therefore, insofar as the psychotherapeutic process may be seen as involving novel constructions of consciousness arising from "deeper, more essential experience," it would seem that person-centered theorists, and theorists of C/P in general, have something of a common cause with those social constructionist theorists who espouse a "weak-form", truly less bleak version of social constructionism. As I have indicated elsewhere (Ellingham, 1999a, p. 131), I believe there is some scope for incorporating "weak-form" social constructionist ideas into the general framework of person-centered theory. For wherever attempts are made to integrate social constructionist with person-centered thought, it is important in my view to stay true to the mystical vision of Carl Rogers: the vision, as Rogers described it, that "hidden in all of the personal communications which I really hear there seem to be orderly psychological laws, aspects of the same order we find in the universe as a whole" (Rogers, 1980, p. 8).

I My terminology follows person-centered tradition in considering that "counseling" and "psychotherapy," and related terms, refer the same interpersonal activity. To emphasize this point I make use of the combined term "counseling/psychotherapy" ("C/P" for short).

REFERENCES

- Bozarth, J. D., & Brodley, B. T. (1991). Actualization. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6 (5), 45-59.
- Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Campbell, J. (1972). *Myths to Live By*. New York: Bantam.
- Ellingham, I. H. (1998). Person-centred porridge. *Person-Centred Practice*, 6 (2), 110-112.
- Ellingham, I.H. (1999a). Carl Rogers' 'congruence' as an organismic not a Freudian concept. *The Person-Centered Journal*, 6 (2), 121-140.
- Ellingham, I. H. (1999b). On transcending person-centred postmodernist porridge. *Person-Centred Practice*, 7 (2), 62-78.
- Erikson, E. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York: Norton.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gellner, E. (1992). *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Glass, J. M. (1993). *Shattered selves: Multiple personality in a postmodern world*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gross, R., Humphreys, P., & Petkova, B. (1997). *Challenges in psychology*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Held, B. S. (1995). *Back to reality: A critique of postmodern theory in psychotherapy*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Karasu, T. B. (1986). The specificity against nonspecificity dilemma. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 143, 687-695.
- Kuhn, T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions* (2nd ed.). Chicago IL: Chicago University Press.
- Laing, R. D. (1960). *The divided self*. London: Tavistock.
- Langer, S. K. (1953). *Philosophy in a new key*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- McLeod, J. (1994). *Doing counseling research*. London: Sage.
- McLeod, J. (1999). Counselling as a social process. *Counseling, 10*(3), 217-222.
- McLeod, J., & Wheeler, S. (1995). Person-centred and psychodynamic counseling. *Counseling, 6*(4), 283-7.
- McNamee, S., & Gergen, K. J. (Eds.). (1992). *Therapy as social construction*. London: Sage.
- Meams, B., & Thorne, B. (1999). *Person-centred counseling in action*. (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Neville, B. (1999). The client-centered ecopsychologist. *The Person-Centered Journal, 6*(1), 59-74.
- O'Hara, M. (1995) Is it time for clinical psychology to deconstruct constructivism? *Journal of Constructivist Psychology 8*(4): 293-303.
- Patterson, C. H. (1985). *The therapeutic relationship*. Monterey: Brooks/Cole.
- Polanyi, M. (1969). *Knowing and being*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1992). Postmodern epistemology of practice. In S. Kvale (Ed.), *Psychology and postmodernism*. London: Sage.
- Rogers, C. R. (1942). *Counseling and psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-Centered Therapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21*(2), 95-103.
- Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships, as developed in the client-centered framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science, Vol. 3*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rogers, C. R. (1962). The interpersonal relationship. *Harvard Educational Review, 32*(4), 416-429.
- Rogers, C. R. (1980). *A way of being*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Smith, M. B. (1994). Selfhood at risk: postmodern perils and the perils of postmodernism. *American Psychologist, 49*(5), 405-411.
- Stern, D. N. (1985). *The interpersonal world of the infant*. New York: Basic Books.
- Stevens, R. (Ed.). (1995). *Understanding the self*. London: Sage.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1965). *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment*. London: Hogarth.
- Woolfe, R. (1995). What do you think is the most significant trend or issue in counseling today? *Counseling, 6*(1), 34-40.

Policy Statement

The Person-Centered Journal is sponsored by the Association for Development of the Person-Centered Approach (ADPCA). The publication is intended to promote and disseminate scholarly thinking about person-centered principles, practices, and philosophy.

All materials contained in The Person-Centered Journal are the property of the ADPCA, which grants reproduction permission to libraries, researchers, and teachers to copy all or part of the materials in this issue for scholarly purposes with the stipulation that no fee for profit be charged to the consumer for the use or possession of such copies.