SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM: A UNIFYING METAPERSPECTIVE FOR

SOCIAL WORK

By

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BA, Rhodes College, 1995
MSSW, University of Louisville, Kent School of Social Work, 2001

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Kent School of Social Work
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

and

The College of Social Work
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky

August, 2005

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Approved on

July 20, 2005

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DEDICATION

For my family,

    Our past:

            John, 1946 - 1997
            Carol, 1943 - 2002

    Present:

            Chris and Jean
            Tony and Nichole

    And very bright future:

            Emma and Sophie
            Sage, Jacob, and Carli

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gale, thanks so much for all that I have learned from you. I came to Kent because of your work, I have taken six courses with you, and I am as equally proud to be able to call you a friend as I am of earning a doctorate.

Thanks also to Anita Barbee for encouraging and supporting me in the exploration of ideas that may move beyond the scientific paradigm. You are a scholar and more of a constructionist than you realize.

I have no words to describe the dedication of my wife, Jean, who listened to me sort through ideas, offered amazing suggestions, read and re-read my work while also watching the kids, keeping up with bills, and being understanding when I was so absorbed in writing that I didn't shave for two weeks. You are awesome and I am so unbelievably in love with you.

Thanks also to my fantastic kids, Emma (6) and Sophie (4), who wanted to get me a dissertation for Christmas this year and who now call me Dr. Daddy. Your giggles and laughter awaken me, inspire me throughout the day, and fill my dreams at night. I am so proud to be your father.

Finally, I must thank my identical twin, Tony, who, besides being the best social work practitioner that I know, is an incredible brother and friend. If it were not for your role in getting me into Kent School, and our almost daily conversations concerning practice, and life, I would not be here writing these words. We have a long, great road ahead of us.

ABSTRACT

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM A UNIFYING METAPERSPECTIVE FOR

SOCIAL WORK

J. Christopher Hall

July 20, 2005

The shift of social work training programs from the practicing agency to the academic institution in the early part of the 20th century created defining shock waves within the profession that still resonate today. This move created both a physical and theoretical fissure between what is taught in the academy and what is practiced in the field. This dissertation focuses on those academics, practitioners, and academic/practitioners who seek to build a unifying bridge between the academy and practice with social constructionism as the foundation. It explores, through qualitative interviews and analyses, what 13 leading social constructionist scholars and practitioners believe social work practice education should entail and how education from a social constructionist framework might influence the field and the client-social worker relationship.

The research question posed to these scholars was: What value, if any, do you see in social constructionist ideas informing the education of social work practitioners? The resulting data analysis constructed a main philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice and six applications of this

framework in social work practice education (a) the eclectic-hybrid application, (b) the eclectic-collaborative application, (c) the process application, (d) the political practice application, (e) the political practice and institution deconstruction application, and (f) the community polyvocal partnership application. In addition to these six applications of the constructionist philosophical framework, an application of the philosophical framework for teaching social work practice was constructed.

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Once upon a time, when the world was just a pancake,
fears would arise that if you went too far you'd fall.
But with the outset of time, it all became more of a ball,
we're as sure of that, as we all once were when the world was flat.
So, I wonder this, as life billows smoke inside my head,
this little game where nothing is sure,
why would you play by 'the rules?'
(Matthews, 2003, track 1)

CHAPTER I

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The shift of social work training programs from the practicing agency to the academic institution in the early part of the last century created defining shock waves within the profession that still resonate today. This move created both a physical and theoretical fissure between what is taught in the academy and what is practiced in the field (Goldstein, 1990b; Hartman, 1994; Myers & Thyer, 1997; Saleebey, 1989; Sellick, Delaney, & Brownlee, 2002). Academic institutions on one bank, and the practicing agency on the other, stare across the distance with differing ideas about how to build a solid bridge across, if one is to be built at all. Bridges do exist, some old and worn, some new and narrow, but not a bridge of definition upon which all can freely cross without the sacrifice of values in both directions.

Conflict concerning the paradigm to serve as the foundation for a unifying bridge does not limit its divisiveness to the academy and practice. Conflict

resides in a privileged place within the walls of each camp as well, often entertaining itself by encouraging heated exchanges between camp members about whether one side's views are *truer* than the other's. Phrases such as *multiple perspectives* and *ethical practice* fly, often acrimoniously, in conversations. Some camp members are admonished for taking the smaller bridges across, those based on collaborative approaches without empirical support. Some are ridiculed for maintaining the old bridges of community and non-pathology based practice. Others stand on empirically based bridges of evidence-based practice. Whispered phrases can be overheard, *that bridge is dangerous*, *that one has no foundation*, *that one is a dead end for you*, *education will help you see these bridges clearly,* and heard most of all, *watch your step, you might fall*. Professional reputations are at stake. Eyes dart, faces flare, unspoken threats are understood. This is no laughing matter; conflict makes good work of that. Some disagree about the need for one defining bridge; perhaps multiple bridges should be accepted and supported. The ability to privilege knowledge equates to power, and power equates to the control of knowledge (Foucault, 1979, 1980).

This dissertation focuses on those academics, practitioners, and academic/practitioners who seek to build a unifying bridge in the social work profession with social constructionism as the foundation. It explores, through qualitative interviews and analyses, how 13 leading social constructionist scholars and practitioners believe social constructionist theory can inform the education of social work practitioners and how those practitioners may then

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influence the field of social work with learned and experienced social constructionist ideas. Social constructionism in this envisioning would serve as the theoretical bridge between the academy and practitioners in the field. Scholars selected are nationally and internationally recognized for their work. Participants are listed in Table 1 and full biographical information is presented in Appendix A.

Table 1

List of Study Participants

Participant	Institution
Harlene Anderson	Houston Galveston Institute
Ruth Dean	Simmons College
Jan Fook	La Trobe University, Australia
Jill Freedman	Evanston Family Therapy Center
Ken Gergen	Swarthmore College
Ann Hartman	Smith College of Social Work
Allan Irving	University of Western Ontario, Canada
Joan Laird	Smith College of Social Work
Stephen Madigan	Yaletown Family Therapy
Nigel Parton	University of Huddersfield, England
Susan Robbins	University of Houston
Dennis Saleebey	University of Kansas
Stanley Witkin	University of Vermont

The research question posed to these scholars was: **What value, if any, do you see in social constructionist ideas informing the education of social work practitioners?** Through the research interviews the following areas were discussed:

1.   What skills, values, and beliefs might be taught in a social constructionist informed classroom?

2.   How might they be taught?

3.   How might a shift to a social constructionist paradigm influence the practices of future social workers?

4.   How might these social workers influence their communities?

5.   How might the profession itself change?

The interviews were unstructured and collaboratively guided from the grand tour question. A discussion of the findings is presented in Chapter IV.

This chapter presents a brief history of the problem, a discussion of the writing style chosen for the work, a discussion of the biases of the author, and finally, an introduction to the theory chosen to guide the research.

Brief History of the Problem

It is important to note that this discussion/debate represents the latest in a long line of birth pangs, or perhaps now, adolescent definitional struggles, in the development of the field of social work. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter II, the history of social work has not been linear or smooth. The trajectory falls more in line with what Kuhn (1962) describes as conflicting paradigms,

revolutions occurring with the introduction of new paradigms that vie for dominance over those established.

At the end of the 19th century, debates about the appropriate direction of social work occurred between workers of The Charitable Organizations (Richmond, 1917) and the Settlement Houses (Addams, 1925). These differences became more acute when the training of social workers moved from the field into the academy in the early 1900s. The call for social work to unify under one theoretical base was heightened in 1915, by Flexner's famous statement that social work (was) not a profession (Flexner, 1915). And then again after World War I, when the Progressive Era had come to a close, conservatism reigned, and at the National Conference, Lee (1937) constructed two paths for social work. The first aligned itself with individual idealism and psychiatric casework, which had an established theoretical base, and seemingly was paved in gold; the second, of social service and policy change, which had no unifying theory and, in Lee's opinion, would lead to more conflict within the profession and with national policymakers. The events that followed in the evolution of social work served to divide the field into social advocacy and casework in the early part of the century. In the latter part of the century and today, the field is divided into social advocacy, casework, clinical practice, and research. Certainly there are other areas but these are the most dominant as represented by social work curriculum and employment across the country (Gibbleman & Schervish, 1996).

The central theme underlying the debate concerning the development and direction of social work has centered on whether social work should be considered a science, a service, or both (Epstein, in press b; Goldstein, 1990b, 1992; Irving, in press; Saleebey, 1979, 1989). Most recently the debate concerning the incorporation of positivism and social work has centered on the idea of evidence-based practice (EBP). This debate has enhanced the ideological divide between social work researchers and social work service providers (Karger, 1983, 1999; Pardeck & Meinhert, 1999; Raw, 1998; Sheldon, 1984, 2001; Web, 2001; Witkin, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1998). The division between research and practice perspectives will be discussed in detail in Chapters II, IV, and V.

EBP is an adopted model taken from the medical field of randomized clinical trials (RCTs). It was accepted by psychology in the early 1990s and has been invited into social work since the mid-1990s (Gambrill, 1999; Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Myers & Thyer, 1997; Sheldon, 2001; Thyer & Myers, 1998a, 1998b, 1999). The term intervention is borrowed from the medical RCTs and in social work refers to practice methodologies. The equivalence of these terms is a point of debate but within the positivist paradigm the main purpose of EBP research is to discover, through falsification, which interventions are most efficacious with which specific problems (Gambrill, 2005).

Proponents of EBP and RCTs cite the adoption of evidence-based practice by the field of psychology and the recent adoption by the National Institute of Health (NIH) of the RCT model to bolster claims that social work

should adopt the EBP model on a wide scale. As will be discussed in detail in Chapters III and V, some social constructionist scholars maintain that positivist notions of linear causality do not capture the complexities of life and are possibly culturally oppressive.

In sum, the purpose of this study is to develop a framework for the application of social constructionism to social work practice education and to explore its potential influence on clients, communities, and the profession. This framework will benefit the field of social work by offering a perspective upon which social work can evolve that may be congruent with its original social purposes, values, and ideals. The paper will now progress to a discussion of the writing style chosen for this study.

Writing Style

Norwegian psychiatrist Tom Andersen, who pioneered the use of the reflecting approach in social constructionist informed practice, was once asked by an interviewer to discuss his thoughts on writing. Andersen replied "I got bored of my own writing, so I thought writing must be about myself, and suddenly it became less boring" (Soderlund, 2001, p. 1). I have chosen to follow Andersen's lead and have thoughtfully and deliberately chosen to take steps to openly include my voice in this work and to reflect on my thoughts, feelings, and ideas in the research and writing process. As will soon be discussed I do not believe that the objective, neutral position is tenable, preferable, or possible in writing, or in any endeavor for that matter. I have therefore adopted a stance of transparency and will make public my views and understandings. To this end, I

will break from tradition and adopt a first-person style for this work. A first person style is fitting for this study for several reasons: (1) Transparency and the inclusion of the author's voice is an integral part of increasing the rigor, trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility of the findings of a qualitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By making present the author's position, exposing biases, and transparently presenting the research process, the author is inviting the reader to serve as an outside observer to the method and results. (2) The inclusion of the author's voice is congruent with social constructionist theory and the importance of decentering oneself (Derrida, 1967). Decentering involves the process of making one's position present so that a hierarchy of knower and known may be avoided. This occurs through the deprivileging of the place of knowledge by providing a window to the manner in which knowledge is negotiated and created in context. Decentering has been the hallmark of social constructionist research and practice for it recognizes the position of the interpreter in the construction of truth (Lather, 1991). (3) It is fitting that the paper utilize a non-traditional style for it seeks to both discuss and illustrate non-traditional approaches to research, practice, and education. (4) A first person style, coupled with a transparent position in which understandings are made public, is consistent with a feminist, non-patriarchal perspective. Transparency is accomplished by readily presenting the voice of the author, not as an expert, but as a fellow human being offering one perspective (Learner, 1991). Male researchers, in particular, have an ethical responsibility to be transparent in their practices and research to assure that they do not construct

their studies and interpret their data in hegemonic ways. By not being transparent with bias, the male researcher may inadvertently contribute to a culture of research that has all too often injected a male perspective into the discourse of truth. (5) Much like the traditional use of Latin for text in the Middle Ages, research has adopted a style of writing that may be exclusionary to a wide selection of readers. It is hoped that a first person style reduces the alienation and exclusion sometimes felt by readers who are not a part of the culture of research (Riggins, 1997; Witkin, 1999), and finally, (6) a first person style affords me flexibility as a writer to create a paper that, it is hoped, will keep the reader's attention while remaining scholarly.

In the next section I will introduce the concept of *transparency*. This is being done both to introduce the reader to social constructionist theory as related to objectivity, and to discuss the origin of my chosen position in this study.

A Look at the Lens: A Discussion of Transparency and Objectivity

From a social constructionist perspective a researcher may be viewed as an interpretive lens. To enhance a study's rigor it is important to explore the lens to make biases transparent so that the reader may make decisions as to the credibility or trustworthiness of the findings. From a social constructionist view, the position of transparency decenters the researcher and is an attempt at revealing hegemonic relationships (Derrida, 1967). Through the decentering process it is hoped that binaries of reader-author, researcher-subject, and practitioner-client break down and evolve into collaborations of meaning-making in the exploration of the construction of understanding. It is my hope that through

a transparent process, reader and author can, as Rumi invited us, meet "out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing" (Barks, 1997, p. 36).

To this end, I will share a brief overview of how I came to hold social constructionist ideas, to sit at this desk, and to write these words. Beyond the theoretical logic to do so, I have chosen to include a short personal narrative intertwined with the problem statement because I ethically feel that I cannot define a problem, construct and conduct a study, and interpret the words and perceptions of others, without sharing the origin of my perceptions.

Origin of Social Constructionist Biases: The Longitudinal Louisville Twin Study

My history with social constructionist ideas is rooted in my experience of being an identical twin. Growing up as a twin gave my brother, Tony, and me a keen awareness of ourselves in relation to one another. We were always being judged, studied, and analyzed concerning such things as who was taller, heavier, smarter, and so forth. This was a constant occurrence and a ritual that is expected, even to this day. The ongoing comparison had the effect of emphasizing that others were defining us. We often felt as though we were objects. We were in a constant state of being *objectified*.

Social constructionism maintains that identity is not static but changes as it is formed in contextual relationships. My brother and I were almost always viewed as twins first and as individuals second. This had a very limiting effect on how we could understand ourselves, and of the control that we had in negotiating the meaning of ourselves in relationships. Nowhere was this more evident than in

our 30 plus-year participation with the Louisville Twin Study, where we were compared to each other by being measured, poked, prodded, and given batteries of tests since birth.

The Louisville Twin study was initiated more than 37 years ago with approximately 500 pairs of twins participating (Falkner, 1957). During this longitudinal study we were tested initially at 3 months of age, and then subsequently tested every 3 months during our first year, every 6 months until age 3, annually until age 9, a follow-up test at 15 years, and finally, in my case, testing at 32 years of age. During these visits the following testing protocol was used:

> The Bayley Mental Scale has been administered at 3, 6, 9, 12, 18, and 24 months of age; the Stanford-Binet at 30 and 36 months; the WIPPSI at 4, 5, and 6 years; and the WISC or WISC-R at 7, 8, 9 and 15 years. (Wilson, 1983, p. 300)

In addition to these tests, we were used to norm developing scales and took personality measures when we were older such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). There were also interactive play observations, parent-child observations, height and weight measurements, with a discussion about diet and general information, and a home visit to observe us in our natural environment.

The effect of these tests, along with the constant comparison by others, placed my brother and me in what became a definitionally competitive position. This position was, by virtue of the dominant individualized paradigm of

observation, a binary one in which one of us won or lost by having more or less of some judged variable. Tony was bigger, I was taller, Tony smiled more, I was quieter. This constant comparison to each other left both of us feeling quite undefined without the other. We were in effect, growing up as objects of comparison. Both Tony and I recall feeling as though we were never truly seen as whole individuals, rather, as a collection of variables in comparison to another collection of variables.

The segmenting of our personal identities could only be tolerated for so long, until Tony and I finally rebelled around the age of 6. The tension and nervousness involved in going to the clinic to be compared by imposing experts wearing white coats became too much. The hour-long drive from our small town to the tall building in downtown Louisville, with all the doctors in white coats scurrying around the hallways was quite intimidating for a child. This was a dangerous place. The door was always locked to protect against the homeless people trying to get in; and inside was found a squad of busy scientists and doctors searching for truth in serious ways, with hard looks on their faces as they passed in the halls. This was serious business and we were their subjects. We were the mines from which the truth could be excavated. These scientists could probe us for the core strengths and weaknesses of who we were, or would become, and not just as individuals, but in comparison to one another. They had the power of definition and the searching methods to find truth.

Serving to increase this outside power of definition was the policy that after completing the three-hour battery of tests, we were not told our scores.

"How did I do Mom? Did I pass? How did I do compared to Tony, to everyone else?" She would reply, "It doesn't make any difference, you did fine." "Then why are we doing this Mom?"

There was a mystery in this veiled scientific process. The data took on larger proportions. Why couldn't I know? Was this definition something I couldn't handle? What do these numbers say that I am? Am I being protected from something that I am, should be, or am not? Am I that much dumber than Tony that they would want to protect me? Am I normal? Is there some larger truth about me? Am I blind to myself?

Research sometimes forgets that it exacts a toll on its subjects. Even though attempts at reducing harm are always paramount, the influence of the "objective" relationship and scientific data, which is culturally privileged over other ways of knowing, sometimes goes unnoticed, especially with children or those intimidated by the "experts" to the extent that they hesitate to ask questions. If I could not see my results, what question could I ask that would be answered in this place of secrecy and confidentiality?

This tension created conflict between Tony and me that ultimately resulted in rebellion against the outside attempts at defining who we were. We no longer acquiesced to the separation of our identity into variables through objectification. We wanted to be subjectively understood rather than objectively defined.

It is the following paragraph from the study protocol that brings a smile to my face and is perhaps the basis of my present views on the scientific method in social sciences today. It was certainly what my brother and I were most

intimidated by, resisted, and later had the most fun with, when taking these "objective" tests.

> At each visit, the twins were tested by separate examiners, who also alternated between the twins over successive visits. The test procedures were rehearsed intensively to assure comparability among examiners. (Wilson, 1983, p. 300)

This sounds quite official but in application, it was chilling. I remember the strain the researchers were under to remain silent and to be coordinately objective so as to not contaminate the findings by latent variables. I am reminded of the way ornamental guards stare blankly and stand quietly when guarding the capital of wherever. It was quite intimidating. I distinctly recall wanting to speak with my interviewers. It took years before I gained the nerve to do so. I would ask, "Why are you acting so weird?" 'Who is behind the mirror and why are they watching?" Why won't you talk to me?" and as I got older, "How can you define me if you don't speak with me?"

As mentioned previously, research sometimes forgets that it exacts a toll on its subjects. Objectivity is not just a position of neutrality but is controlling of relationships in that if one party takes an objective position, the other must take the position of being the object. It is in this way that objectivity can be seen to inflict certain *relational consequences* on subjects. Objectivity demands that subjects acquiesce to the position of being an object. Accepting a position as an object involves placing certain restrictions on oneself. In my situation it was expected that I behave by being quiet, not asking questions, not moving around,

focusing, doing my best, not thinking about Tony, not thinking about what I should or shouldn't be doing, if I missed a question or not, how the results may affect me or my future, who the person was sitting in front of me, who was behind the mirror, if my Mom was behind the mirror, what my Mom thought, if I was letting her down, and so on; and all the while, I was supposed to "just act naturally." Thus, objectivity is not simply controlling variables in an attempt to determine definitional truth or to gain a valid assessment; it is a relational game that *both* parties must play. I was being invited to forget myself in context. The pressure of sitting in a room with an "expert" who was trained to define me by the parameters of some paradigm that would take precedence over anything that I said was quite intimidating. After 30 years of testing I can confidently state that the social sciences are remise in recognizing that objectivity changes the context, the relationship, the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the human being objectified. If this is not definitionally oppressive, I am not sure what is.

The silence that so intimidated us later gave way as we resisted the invitation to objectify ourselves. In retrospect, by rejecting objectification we were choosing to self-define by challenging these outside definitions of we were or who we were supposed to become. Our resistance took many forms. We began asking the examiners why they were acting so weird. "Just answer the questions" would be the reply, and the test resumed. A card would be held up and the tester would ask "what do you see?" "I see a guy holding a card." "No, what do you see in the card?" "I see a guy's fingers over part of the picture in the card." "No,

what's in the card?" "What did my brother see?" "I am going to ask you again, what do you see?" "A guy getting angry holding a card."

We ran up to the one-way mirrors and peeked in. We talked to each other during testing by going to the bathroom at the same time. We asked questions about the examiners' height and weight, if they had gained or lost pounds, how smart they were, if they had kids. The climactic event was when a tester broke under Tony's questioning. The examiner got up from the desk and yelled, "I quit, I am not doing this anymore, you're screwing with these kids' heads, I will not be a part of this, I can't take it." Tony and I looked nervously at one another but the hour-long ride home was full of smiles.

In hindsight, we were making attempts to re-contextualize the experience. Tony and I were playing with social constructionist concepts of identity in context, the negotiation of self, and the multiplicity of identity (Gergen, 1991). As objectified twins, we were continuously being invited to co-opt our identities into the viewer's way of understanding. Over time we recognized that we were perceived differently by different individuals in different contexts and that outside definitions of us were of little worth or value. We began to recognize that identity was not static, but rather dynamic and that we were perceived in completely different ways based on (a) the viewer, (b) our context, (c) our moods, which were always viewed by others as permanent character traits regardless of context, (d) whether we were together or separate, and (e) identity confusion (if someone thought I was Tony or he was me).

The Construction of the Normalized Twin

While social work clients generally do not have a twin to which they are compared, they are judged by some standard of cultural normality. This cultural normality, when applied to an understanding of the self, could be understood to create a *normalized comparative twin*, a normalized parallel self representing the expectations of what one believes one should be, or how one should think, act, or score, to be considered *normal*. The construction of the normalized twin cannot occur without some form of judgment based upon a theory of normality. This theory of normality is cultural. As a result of being measured and quantified by this yardstick of normality, individuals may find themselves overcome by the pressure to compete with their normalized twin. As a result, individuals may begin to define themselves as something other than normal, perhaps as failures. This self-judgment has implications. They may find themselves giving up on their ability to live up to the cultural ideal of their normalized twins. They may feel like failures in their inability to compete with the idea of the normalized twin and all it represents for them. Perhaps clients, like Tony and me, wish to be subjectively understood as unique, dynamic individuals in contexts rather than objectified and compared to an expert-oriented, culturally biased idea of their normalized twin.

Conclusion of a Discussion of My Biases

In conclusion, I have come to accept my biases as a natural part of who I am. I question the culture of research in its construction of individuals as a collection of psychological and environmental predictor variables. I have chosen not to dissect myself into the two constructed halves of subjective and objective. I

transparently choose to keep together the passionate, caring, sensitive, irrational parts of me with the intellectual, cognitive, logical parts of me. More directly, I have chosen not to break myself up into parts-of-me. I have chosen not to engage in the personal mining of "strengths" and weeding out of "weaknesses." Through these choices, from my perspective, I am left whole.

The effect of the segmentation of self into variables has ramifications. Just as the operation of objectivity creates demands on the object studied, it also creates demands on the observer. The process of objectivity is not without costs. The discussion of this cost is not a new one in literature and is the basis of several classic novels in the past era. Shelley's *Frankenstein* and more directly Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, are works which put into question the practices of constructing the self as rational and irrational, with the notion of the objective observation of reality stemming from the control of these parts of the self. The possible long-term effect of self-dissection may be best summarized by Charles Darwin (1887) in his autobiography:

> I have said that in one respect my mind has changed during the last twenty or thirty years. Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds . . . gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare, especially in the historical plays. I have also said that formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music very great, delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also lost almost any taste for pictures or music. . . . My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive. . . . The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature. (p. 81)

While I am still becoming comfortable with the uncertainties and multiple perspectives of life that social constructionist thought invites, I am drawn to the dynamic light of possibility that is exposed in the absence of the shadow of mono-truth. I have come to accept and respect the opinions of others and the ambiguity of life that is understood in social constructionist ways of thinking. The final result of these personal experiences for me is that I am left with an appreciation for the multiple possible interpretations of life. I nourish the ongoing awareness of, and respect for, diverse understandings in the ways that people come to understand themselves and the worlds around them. I will now continue our discussion by presenting an overview of social constructionist theory.

Introduction to Social Constructionism

It seems wise at this phase of our journey together to state the theory under-girding the study so that I make clear the paradigm in which we are traveling. For the basis of this study it will be social constructionism that will fill our sails and provide us with the theoretical road map for the journey to follow.

Social constructionism is a philosophical approach maintaining that reality is uniquely experienced, interpreted, and created by individuals in relationships (Gergen, 1999). Truth, from this perspective, is not something that is located outside of the observer that can be discovered through techniques of variable control aimed at enhancing the clarity of vision. Rather, truth is interpreted, constructed, and socially negotiated by individuals in relationships. Truth is not discovered outside of the context of which it is a part (Gergen, 1991; Lyotard, 1984; Rorty, 1989). Understanding is premised on the belief that events do not

inherently contain meaning to be assessed and deciphered by the observer, rather, that individuals create their own meaning about the events in their lives based on past understandings, education, socialization, and the internalization of ideas about the world. This premise affords an understanding of reality as a multi-verse rather than a uni-verse because every individual may interpret an event, or series of events, in a unique and equally valid manner (Gergen, 1991, 1996, 1999).

Free from the notion of correct interpretation, social constructionism is not interested in facts, but the construction of facts; not in normality, but the construction of normality. The exploration of multiple truths, theories, and understandings that are viewed as contextually and culturally created and the implications of these accepted truths, are of utmost interest to the social constructionist scholar and student.

Social constructionist scholars maintain that there is a world which exists outside the individual but that the understanding and meaning attributed to the objects which comprise this outside world are jointly constructed in relationships through a process of interpretive negotiation, and further, that this social interpretive process is governed by the structure of language (Baudrillard, 1995; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Gergen, 1991; Kuhn, 1962). In other words, the members of a society construct the manner in which events will be interpreted, through, in part, the development and control of language. This social negotiation then influences individuals when constructing meanings in their lives. Language is a constructed medium through which objects and events are interpreted and

understood. This interpretation, within the meaning of language, both expands

and limits our possible understandings of truth. By way of example, in George

Orwell's (1990) novel *1984, Big Brother* controlled the population by both

surveillance and the control of the society's lexicon. This had the effect of limiting

perception and possible social responses because certain terms no longer

existed, *rebellion* for example.

Witkin and Gottschalk (1988) have outlined four basic tenets of social

constructionism: (a) understanding of the world is created largely through

linguistic conventions and cultural/historical contexts, (b) understanding occurs

through social interaction, (c) dominant ways of understanding are socially

negotiated, and (d) the categorization of understanding social phenomena

"constrain certain patterns and reinforce others" (p. 211). Taken as a whole,

these four tenets may best be understood and described as a *social process* in

which dominant notions of truth are negotiated and maintained. The process of

the creation of truth through cultural and historical context, the method by which

understanding occurs, how the dominant way of understanding has been

negotiated, and how these prevailing truths marginalize other ways of knowing

may be described as a process of *reification* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The

process of reification will now be discussed.

Reification

Reification may be understood as

> . . . the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were
> something else than human products - such as facts of nature, results of
> cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man

[sic] is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world. (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 89)

Reification occurs through three loose, overlapping processes that put into process the tenets of Witkin and Gottschalk (1988). These processes are: Typification, Institutionalization, and Legitimization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Best, 1995; Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Typification

Typification is the process by which people make sense of the world through the construction of categories and the organization of life within these confines. Examples include race, religion, gender, seasons, days, educational subject areas, food groups, and economic status. In addition to categories that create meaning in our worlds, examples of constructed binaries that influence perception include good/bad, nice/mean, tough/easy, winner/loser, success/failure, happy/sad, normal/not-normal, and polite/impolite. These opposites serve as taken-for-granted categories by which we structure the events in our lives. These categories are socially constructed and their meanings patterned according to cultural preferences and traditions. This typification process is directly related to Witkin and Gottschalk's tenets that understandings of the world are governed by language and that language is negotiated in cultural context.

Institutionalization

Institutionalization involves the construction of cultures and institutions according to the categories established by typification. These institutions carry with them taken-for-granted sets of rules which support the typification. These

are the *shoulds* of each typification. Note that these examples are, as are all discourses, culturally, (context and time) related. Examples include the following:

1. **Masculinity:** (physically strong, driven, competitive, rational)

2. **Femininity:** (emotional, thin, pretty, understanding, desirable)

3. **Motherhood:** (good with children, good homemaker, nurturing)

4. **Fatherhood:** (provider, hard worker, household leader, protector)

4. **Adulthood:** (responsible, accountable, good citizen)

6. **Social classes:** (upper/refined/tasteful --*continuum*-- lower/unsocialized)

7. **All professions:** (such as lawyer, scientist, accountant, teacher)

Institutionalization represents the continuation of the construction of reality in that, as Witkin and Gottschalk noted, language has been created through typification, categorizations have been negotiated, and institutions developed based on constructed understandings. With these institutions now developed the *act* of understanding and living according to these institutions is legitimizing of their construction.

Legitimization

Legitimization involves the actions and processes of legitimizing the constructed institutions and typifications. Institutions are legitimized by their incorporation into the everyday taken-for-granted expectations of members of society and by their development of a specialized language. This specialized language serves to bond the institutions and also serves to maintain the culture in affirmative and negative ways. For example "un-masculine" men are often called effeminate or gay; women who are "too masculine" are labeled in similarly

negative ways; notions of professionalism and un-professionalism evolve out of professional cultures and normalized ways of being within those cultures. Examples include:

1. **Masculinity:** The acts of being "macho," playing sports, controlling others, commanding respect, winning (or there are cultural consequences)

2. **Femininity:** The acts of being desirable (wearing make-up, being thin), being emotional, being subservient in relationships (or there are cultural consequences)

3. **Motherhood:** The acts of mothering (giving up jobs, changing diapers, caring for children), doing domestic responsibilities (or there are cultural consequences)

4. **Fatherhood:** The acts of fathering--not giving up jobs, making as much money as possible, being head of the household, protecting the family (or there are cultural consequences)

5. **Specializations:** The act of performing the Law (language, ritual), science (language, ritual) and acting out other constructed professional cultures (or there are professional consequences)

Taken as a whole, the processes of reification (typification, institutionalization, and legitimization) put into action the tenets of the construction of reality as set forth by Witkin and Gottschalk (1988). Through the reification process understandings of the world are recognized as created largely through linguistic conventions and cultural/historical contexts. These understandings develop through social interaction and as dominant ways of

understanding are socially negotiated. The meanings that are negotiated to be

dominant limit alternative understandings. In the next section I explore the last

point further to consider the potential influences of the limitation of meaning by a

dominant understanding of the world.

Power-Knowledge and Discourse

Weick (1991) maintains that human knowing or ways-of-understanding are

shaped by culture to the extent that understanding something "as it really is, is no

longer tenable" (p.17). How one understands is inextricably linked to the ideas of

the culture of which one is a part; "culture forms mind" (Bruner, 1991, p. 24). With

an acceptance that culture influences how individuals perceive reality, both the

creation and methods of maintenance of the culture, and the creation and

maintenance of self-in-culture are viewed no longer as static; instead they are

dynamic and continuously constructed. Therefore, the nature of self and

individualism are put into question.

Foucault (1979) extensively explored the link between the creation of self

in a negotiated reality and the apparatus of cultural power and social control. He

maintained that perception and concepts of self might be controlled by

internalized social expectations, and maintained via self-subjugation based on

these expectations. Social constructionists maintain that societies are created

through a continuous process of negotiation and that individuals born into these

societies develop their sense of the world, as well as their sense of self, from

interactions with other members of the society in differing contexts.

Constructionists hold that identity formation occurs through dialogue and that

specific words or utterances carry with them fragments of heritage that when used, make present and carry forward, traditional meanings specific to that society. These meanings and modes of interaction represent social discourse and members of a society are gradually indoctrinated into these dominant ways of understanding via social interactions and contact with institutions such as schools and families. Discourse may be understood to encompass the taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings underlying social practices that are accepted as truth and reality. It is the taken-for-granted web of meaning that permeates a society's understanding of certain things and events. Discourse acts as invisible, intersecting rivers of meaning and influence that pull individuals in different definitional directions (Adrienne Chambon, personal communication, October 24, 2002).

Discourse is conveyed in subtle and not so subtle ways, often without realization or effort. By way of example, gender discourse transferal in this country includes the colors pink for girls and blue for boys, understood beliefs that boys do not cry, that the mark of a man is toughness, that girls do not get dirty, toddler beauty pageants, and gender-controlling terms often negatively connected with sexual preferences like sissy, fag, and gay. Thus, discourse teaches one what is expected of self as a male or female, as well as what is expected of the opposite gender. Each person in society internalizes ideas of gender for both self and other.

Social discourse influences identity when it is internalized and members of a society begin to regulate their thoughts and actions according to their

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understanding of what society expects them to be. This self-restriction process is called self-subjugation (White, 1991). In *Discipline and Punish* (1979) Michel Foucault traces how social discipline, as an external, and subsequently internal, monitoring system, evolved from the practice of public punishment to the process of self-subjugation through the internalization of social expectations. The most efficient monitoring system is one in which the fewest number of people can monitor the largest number of people. This concept was perfected by the architect Jeremy Bentham (1791) through his structure the panopticon (Figure 1). The surveillance philosophy behind this structure served to influence the social monitoring, punishment, and educational systems that followed. It was a surveillance designed to be both global and individualizing (Foucault, 1979).
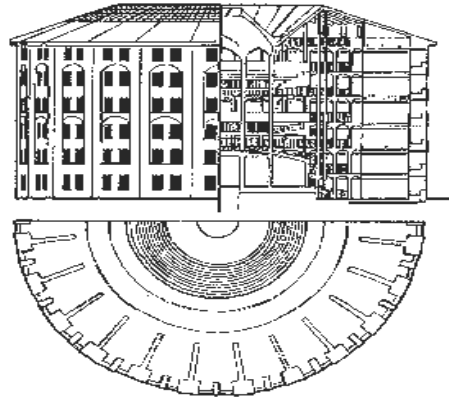
Figure 1. **The panopticon of Jeremy Bentham (1791).**

The panopticon is comprised of an octagonal, multi-story building with many small cells each lit by one outside window. In the middle of this building stands a guard tower from which all cells are visible, but from which tower guards are not. The result is that a prisoner can never know if (s)he is being watched.

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Because of this unknown *gaze*, prisoners monitor and discipline themselves by doing what they believe the system requires of them. With this system, the soul is the prison of the body because individuals are now limiting themselves, their actions, thoughts, beliefs, opportunities, and so forth, based on the internalized expectations of the gaze. Through this internalized self-discipline, subjects control themselves via feelings of guilt, shame, depression, and so on. This coupling of social and internal monitoring produces *docile bodies* or humans who act based on the gaze's subtle demands (now internalized beliefs) of what they are supposed to be and supposed to do. This notion of social-demand limits alternative ways of being and forces individuals into social norms as dictated by the gaze's requirements. Through panopticism, ideas of right, wrong, success, failure, norms, values, guilt, shame, and depression can be revealed as socially constructed tools of self-control.

Panopticisim applied to social structure serves as a conduit for any philosophy of the social system of which it is a part. For instance, in the Western world at the present time, thinness is valued, hence anorexia may be seen, in this context, as self-deprivation of food to meet the gaze's values of self-worth (Madigan, 1994). Likewise, the oppression of women may be seen as a system of patriarchal values acting on both men and women to convince women that they are to be subservient, and men that they are entitled to dominance according to the gaze's "natural order" of things.

In an effort to provide a brief example of Witkin and Gottschalk's (1988) tenets, coupled with the processes of the social construction of reality as related

to Foucault's concept of power/knowledge and self-subjugation, I have developed an explanatory exercise (Figure 2). The exercise involves (a) the construction of two perceptions of the same event, (b) the negotiation for the dominant perception, (c) the subsequent construction of categories (typification), and based on these perceptions, (d) the rise of institutions around these types, (e) the reification of rules, (f) the marginalization or other ways of knowing, (g) the legitimization of this "true" way of perceiving, and ultimately (h) the self-subjugation of members based on the constructed dominant discourse.

In summary, one of the major assumptions of social constructionism is that physical events do not inherently contain meaning but that the link between meaning and an event is a result of personal interpretation predicated by experience and imbedded cultural discourse. Discourse encompasses the taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings underlying social practices that are accepted as truth and reality. In this light, event interpretation can be revealed as an individual and subjective act influenced by cultural discourse.

Social Constructionism and Social Work

Social constructionism applied to social work begins with an understanding of identity. One view of identity for the constructionist is comprised of the story-of-self that is called a *narrative*. A narrative is a series of life events that are linked together in a sequence and across time, according to a specific plot. This series and organizing plot form a story that is understood to be *identity* (Bruner, 1986, 1991; White, 1991, White & Epston, 1990). The concept of

An Illustrative Exercise of Foucault's Concept of Power Knowledge and Discourse Development

This picture may be seen in two (or possible more) ways. Please consider this picture individually and then we will discuss the following:

Whose perception is "correct"? Whose voice would be marginalized if a group of people (a society) chose to privilege one perception over the other? What meanings may be applied to the differing perceptions? Would a theory of normality develop? How would this society develop for those who perceived in the "correct" manner? How about for those who do not? How would those who perceive in a different way be thought of, treated, labeled? What systems of control might develop to restrain "incorrect perception?" Would interventions be designed to adjust dysfunctional perception? Would research seek to determine the effectiveness of these interventions? How might your perception of self change and/or be limited via this construction of correct interpretation? How would you feel if you perceived incorrectly? Would you operate in controlling ways on yourself? What would these operations look like? Would others control you? If so, how, and why would this control occur? How would the school system teach children to perceive? How would the media teach your children to perceive? How would friends and relatives perceive? How would they want you and your children to perceive? How would feelings such as shame, guilt, frustration, anger, etc. serve to maintain the "correct perspective?"

Now please consider and apply these questions to discourses involving such things as gender, sexuality, religion, professionalism, age, education, marriage, beauty, and "mental health."

Figure 2. **An illustrative exercise of Foucault's concept of power/knowledge**

(photo, 2005).

narrative will be discussed fully in Chapter II but with this initial understanding of identity as a perception of life events and relationships, a major shift occurs from the place of self-understanding as an *individual process* to understanding of self as a *social process*. An explanation of the concept of self-understanding as social may be readily found in feminist thought.

Feminist scholars have argued that in most societies, power is not equal; hence interpersonal negotiation for meaning is skewed because the dominant belief systems, internalized by members of the society, represent the mainstream values and beliefs of those established as the authority (hooks, 1995; Flax, 1990, Minnich, 1990). Mainstream values become traditions, while alternative values are marginalized and the requirements of social perception are reified. Because of this power imbalance, some members of society are covertly recruited into adopting beliefs of self that are contrary to their best interests. This has the effect of limiting their narratives, in that the possibilities for interpreting meaning from the relationships and events in their lives are guided, and thus restricted, by social and familial discourse. For example, feminist scholars argue that patriarchal beliefs have oppressed women for centuries by marginalizing their voices and casting them into the role of the *other*.

Shifting this discussion to the field of mental health, a social constructionist perspective invites the challenging of technologies that restrict the realm of client possibilities and understandings of self. For example, when viewed through the lens of social constructionism, identity may be seen as a construct related to culture, with discourse as the conduit for norms. Taking this

premise, the Diagnostic Statistical Manual IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) and its diagnostic labels, such as borderline and narcissistic disorders, can be seen as oppressive in that it enforces *culturally created* binary ideas of normality and abnormality through the creation of clinically diagnosable categories. *Normal* has traditionally been defined by a White, and male, dominated value system. The discourses of diagnosis and assessment have therefore, from a social constructionist perspective, served to isolate clients by separating them from the social context in which the problem was created. This separation limits the ways that clients can understand themselves and the problem via both the imposition of "expert knowledge," and through the processes of constructing them as people who are flawed and who need to be *fixed* by an expert in the mental health field (Kutchins & Kirk, 1997).

Clients from a constructionist discourse perspective may be understood to have been recruited into a dominant way of perceiving themselves and may be limiting themselves according to this definition. The discourse of mental health reifies these limitations. For example, clients may have been recruited into what Foucault (1965) called *bio-power,* an understanding of themselves as flawed, not normal, and in need of an expert in which to confess, so that the flawed aspect of themselves can be removed through the guidance of an outside mental health expert who can somehow help them to "see the truth." Foucault views this as an extension of disciplinary power and a system designed to keep people *docile*. Diagnostic labels are understood to close off collaborative possibilities between client and social worker because the underlying positivism behind the words

recruit both speaker and listener to believe that a deviation from "normal" must represent a "mental illness." Further, in the assessment process, little attention is paid to political, historical, and social influences that may be acting to influence the clinician's way of *seeing* the problem. The differences between modern and social constructionist perceptions of the problem, and the differences in perception of practice will be discussed further in Chapters II and V.

The DSM and problem internalizing processes represent one way to understand and construct client problems. This study seeks to explore social constructionism as another option in conceptualizing problems by discussing how a social perspective of knowledge and problem creation could serve to link the academy with the field.

Choice of Underlying Theory

My reason for choosing social constructionism as the theoretical base for this study, besides the obvious connection that the study is about the development of a social constructionist framework that could link the academy and practice, is its firm foundation in the recognition and promotion of multiple perspectives. The recognition and acceptance of multiple ways of understanding is congruent with the exploratory purpose of this study and a qualitative approach to research. Utilizing a social constructionist position to guide my discussions with these scholars, to analyze those data that come from the interviews, and to present the findings, will allow me to explore the many possible perspectives concerning how, and if, social constructionist theory would be of value to social

work and in potentially creating greater harmony between the academy and the field.

In addition to utilizing a theory that is congruent with the exploration that we are embarking upon, it is important for me personally to use a theory that is consistent with my convictions. To that end, I have chosen social constructionist theory because it recognizes the subjectivity in relational interaction and the co-construction of self in relationships.

Summary of the Problem Statement

In conclusion, the purpose of the study is to explore with 13 social constructionist scholars the development of a framework to construct a unifying bridge between the academy and social work practice. I have chosen a writing style that is consistent with constructionist theory and a qualitative methodology. Social constructionism has been chosen as the guiding theory of the study and has been explained to espouse that individuals perceive uniquely and that by virtue of this perception, the world may be understood to be a *multi-* rather than *uni-* verse.

Social constructionism maintains that truth does not exist outside of the negotiated construction of culture and that truth is created not found. From this view, perceptions of truth may be explored via discussions with individuals about how they have come to their unique understandings. Exploring subjects' perceptions of their worlds is the basis of qualitative research.

For this study a stance of transparency has been taken in order to increase the rigor of the findings. It has also been stated that the purpose of this

study is not to define the truth but to offer a discussion of the perception of possibilities for the field of social work at this point in its history.

The paper will now progress to a review of the literature. I will first provide an introduction to differing social work practice theories, then give an example of social constructionist informed practice, followed by a history of social work as related to cultural and professional expectations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this literature review I present the history of social work as it relates to

the history of the perception of the problem that it seeks to solve. As will be

discussed, those things that have been constructed to be social and individual

problems are conceptualized in historical and cultural context. From this vantage

point, problems are not static but are continuously constructed and negotiated in

a dynamic and socially driven process. Problems change as societies engage in

a process of negotiation about the nature of the real and the good. The concepts

of *intervention* and *outcome* are directly linked to how problems have been

constructed in historical periods. Problem construction, intervention and outcome

are guided by the nature of culturally and historically constructed normality.

Social work evolved, and continues to evolve, within a cultural-historical context

to assist with problems constructed in the same context. Thus, as the perception

of problems have changed through time, social work has adapted to meet the

problems' challenges in differing ways, with differing outcomes, based on

differing notions of normality. The goal of the literature review is to re-

contextualize social work historically in relation to the changing perception of the

problem.

The purpose of a literature review is to provide a summary of the problem that places it "in the context of related theory and research" (Singleton & Straits, 1999, p. 544). I will fulfill this goal by breaking from the traditional literature review format. It will be untraditional in that I will present the literature review as a therapeutic dialogue with *Social Work* as a client. The presentation will be consistent with the purpose and requirements of a literature review as outlined by Singleton and Straits.

The use of dialogue originated in philosophy by Plato (c.427 BC - c.347 BC), who borrowed the idea from Sicilian poets. Inspired by Plato, other scholars have followed in the dialogic tradition including Tasso, (1586), Fontenelle (1683), Berkeley (1713), Galiani (1770), Landor (1821), and Helps, (1847). Most recently, the philosopher Martin Buber in *I and Thou* (1923) discussed the intertwined nature of dialogue, religion and spirituality. Besides Plato, perhaps the most famous use of dialogue was in 1623 when Galileo cunningly utilized the form in his work *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* to circumvent the Catholic censors who sought to screen perspectives other than those represented by the Bible. By presenting a discussion between two characters and an outside observer, Galileo was able to express his ideas while thinly meeting the requirement that he not openly support a position contrary to the Church. Dialogue is consistent with the social constructionist notion of the co-construction of meaning through negotiation and collaborative understandings. The form has a long tradition in scholarly work and will be utilized in this study.

The choice of an alternative presentation has been made for six reasons.

First, in this dissertation I offer a discussion of how social constructionism can influence social work and social work education, thus presenting a literature review in a progressive way is consistent with this aim.

Second, I seek to familiarize the reader with some forms of social constructionist informed practice; by presenting the literature review in a non-traditional style, the reader is both informed of the literature and familiarized with a social constructionist approach in working with clients.

Third, this presentation style affords a more encompassing exploration of how social work has been influenced by the problem that it is attempting to solve. It offers the opportunity to explore and recognize that social work is a collection of individuals that are influenced by the society of which they are a part. Personifying social work may provide an opportunity to represent emotional responses which could reflect some of the sentiment felt by individuals within the field. This view is consistent with both feminist (hooks, 1995; Laird, 2000, Learner, 1986; Minnich, 1990; Wood & Roche, 2001) and social constructionist theory (Witkin, 2001a).

Fourth, the therapeutic technique demonstrated is designed to invite collaborative discussion of the problem through a process of externalization (to be discussed in detail below), which shifts the perception of the problem from client pathology to relational space. This approach may invite social workers to come together to discuss how the construct of professional expectations may influence us all.

Fifth, I am interested in creating a piece of work that while merges both process and content also maintains the reader's attention. Frankly, literature reviews have been notoriously boring to read and worse to write.

Finally, all works, even scientific studies, are stories that recount actions and understandings. These stories privilege events and omit others based on multiple influences including, cultural perceptions, plot, and interpreted meanings. Freud was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature instead of science, indicating that his work was based on meanings and interpretations that defied linear causality. Most recently, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004), written by an independent investigatory committee, was nominated for the 2004 National Book Award.

With inspiration from the work of Hartman (1991) and Witkin (1999) concerning the use of words in the construction of perception and their call for alternative writing styles that may serve to expand traditional thinking, I move ahead with the aim of offering an interesting format that will hopefully add depth to the meaning and content of the paper.

The literature review will begin with an introduction to three guiding paradigms of psychotherapy, first, second, and post-order cybernetics. This overview is important to extend the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity into the area of social work practice. Then, an overview of the social constructionist informed practice utilized in the literature review will be discussed, followed by a collaborative session with *Social Work* in which historical and present perspectives of the problem that is to be solved are explored.

The Cybernetic and Post Cybernetic Perspectives

A brief overview of three major paradigms of intervention is important for establishing the foundation for the discussion of the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity as applied in social work practice. A first-order perspective maintains that practitioners can be objective in relationships, while second and post order perspectives maintain that objectivity is not possible.

Theories of helping have historically approached the client-practitioner relationship from two diametrically opposed paradigms, first-order and second-order cybernetics. Post order is an extension of second order and denies the use of mechanistic metaphor in relationships. The term cybernetics is derived from engineering and was developed by Norbert Wiener (1949) during World War II. Mathematicians were working on a targeting system for naval guns to better hit rival aircraft. Formulations began by using a first-order cybernetic system designed for firing naval guns at land targets. This system considered the target's coordinates and calculated a firing solution, but met with few positive results when applied to ship-to-aircraft targeting. After some time it was realized that in order to hit an air target one had to consider the movement of the firing platform as well as the movement of the targeted aircraft by continuously reflecting on the movements of both in relation to one another. This shift in thinking represented a move from a first to a second-order cybernetic view. Upon making these continuous adjustments targeting improved dramatically.

The concept of cybernetics gained entry into relationships through the systems theory of Bateson (1979) and other family therapists (Boscolo, Cecchin,

Hoffman, & Penn, 1987; Hoffman, 1985; Watzlawick, 1978). Applied to therapy, the first-order view maintains that it is possible for a practitioner to be static, neutral and objective. Through this neutrality it is possible to control the way one sees the world, including values, biases, beliefs, and so forth, such that these variables will not influence objectivity in the client-practitioner relationship. Hence, the view maintains that practitioners are to be objective and neutral in their interactions with clients at all times. From this perspective neutrality ensures that a safe environment is created in which clients can express their struggles while the practitioner can explore the presenting symptoms, assess client troubles, and implement appropriate treatment methodologies (Beck, 1976; Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974; Skinner, 1976).

A first-order approach has been the bedrock of biophysical, psychoanalytic, behavioral and systemic micro-theories since their inception. It is now used with evidence-based practice and intervention research. It is considered an expert approach in that the practitioner takes an objective position, uses the knowledge of a specific modality to diagnose the individual or family, and guides the relationship such that the client or family system is treated or is bettered in some way.

In contrast, second and post-order cybernetic approaches maintain that objectivity is not possible. These approaches represent a movement toward collaboration with the client that is congruent with social constructionist thinking with respect to the notion that each of us experiences the world in our own unique ways and have come to form and accept values and biases relative to our

experiences. These experiences, values, and biases cannot be set apart from who we are to create a therapeutic blank slate because they form the lens through which we understand and view the world. Furthermore, gender scholars hold that gender is instrumental in forming the way we see the world and cannot be arbitrarily taken off and put back on (Gilligan, 1982; Hare-Mustin, 1994; Hare-Mustin and Marececk, 1988). Thus, the only way to not be biased from a second-order, or post-cybernetic perspective is to admit that one is biased and be as transparent as possible with that bias (Anderson & Goolishan, 1990; Lax, 1996).

The second-order approach and the movement into post-cybernetic realms espouse that practitioners must be transparent in the therapeutic session by offering their views of the world and the experiences that shape them in discussions with the clients (Hoffman, 1985, 1990). Additionally, a learning and curious attitude is taken to offset the expert position, and diagnosis gives way to the skilled use of questions that explore the client's situation from his or her perspective. In this way, differing views may be discussed, and all ways of understanding respected, in an atmosphere of acceptance and openness in which clients are free to explore ideas and alternative paths, including questioning the practitioner's view. From this paradigm clients are understood as the expert of their lives and traditional hierarchical client-practitioner relationships are challenged. Because of the view that biases are inevitable, practitioners are required to continuously self-reflect and monitor themselves in the relationships of which they are a part. As further evidence of the dedication of this methodology to unbiased practice, reflecting teams are often invited to watch the

therapy and comment on the interactions. In this reflective process, all ideas and thoughts are open for discussion including the histories of those comprising the reflecting team. The points from this discussion are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Overview of First-Order, Second-order and Post-Cybernetics

Cybernetic Order	Expectations of Practitioner	View of Client
First	Practitioner as expert	Flawed individual who needs professional diagnosis and assistance.
	Neutral/objective stance	Client empowerment is a ruse (B. Thyer, personal communication, September 19, 2001).
	Director of therapeutic modality	Client's perception must be assessed and controlled.
	Practitioner view is privileged	
Second and Post	Client as expert of his/her life	Individual who is seeking assistance for a problem.
	Practitioner as expert of collaboration	The individual has strengths and skills that have been used to manage the problem successfully.
	Transparent stance	Clients always do the best they can at any given moment and in any given context.
	Cultural views are discussed	People are shaped by the affiliations they have (and have had) in the world.

Narrative Therapy: A Social Constructionist Informed Practice

Arguably, the most well known social constructionist informed approach to practice is narrative therapy. This approach assists clients in exploring how social ideas may have influenced their understanding of themselves and others. The Narrative approach will be utilized in the literature review to assist in the exploration of the development of Social Work as related to the changing cultural-historical influences acting upon it. One of the major tenets of social constructionism is that physical events do not inherently contain meaning but that the link between meaning and an event is a product of personal interpretation predicated by experience and imbedded cultural discourse. Discourse encompasses the taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings underlying social practices that are accepted as truth and reality. In this light, event interpretation can be revealed as an individual and subjective act influenced by cultural discourse. Given culturally influenced personal reality, it follows that any intervention designed to assist clients in long-term change must address cultural influences on the creation of self and the perceptual lens.

Michael White and David Epston developed narrative therapy as a part of their ongoing work as practitioners in Australia and New Zealand. Heavily influenced by the ideas of Foucault (1965, 1975, 1979, 1980), White and Epston took Foucault's work concerning the instruments of power and control in society (e.g., language, discourse, self-subjugation) and developed a therapeutic approach that aims to help clients liberate themselves from learned oppressive ways of being. For the narrative practitioner, the problems of clients are linked to

discourses into which clients have been overtly and covertly recruited. Discourses are invisible webs of meaning which serve to form self-definition by providing a rigid template of self-understanding and behavior (i.e., gender discourse, heterosexual discourse, racial discourse), as well as ideas or beliefs which masquerade as truth about material things (status representation and power), and authority (science and positivism). These discourses can originate from multiple sources (e.g., family, region, culture) and are political in that they are almost always a source of control for those who benefit from the dominant understanding of the real and the good in a society.

The goal for the narrative relationship is to help clients to broaden their view of the problem to a cultural and/or familial context to the extent that clients may begin to see how they are self-subjugating according to the discourse's constraints. By exposing this self-constraint it is hoped that clients may understand that their story of self, or narrative, has been defined by the problem rather than by themselves. Narratives, in this sense, are events that are linked together in a particular sequence, through time, according to a specific plot (Bruner 1991, White, 1991; White & Epston, 1990). The meaning applied to an event, and the way it has been perceived, can be affected by the norms and values of the society in which one lives. Having been recruited into accepting cultural ways of understanding, persons are then limited in their perceptions of alternatives. A narrative approach seeks to loosen the grip of the problem story, expose times in the client's life when the problem has been resisted, and to explore a new story of resilience, strength and self-definition.

Under this paradigm, a client is not seen as flawed but as self-subjugating according to a belief that may not be in his/her best interest. For example, the DSM IV diagnosis of depression may be seen as a client having been recruited into a belief that is manifesting itself as depression rather than as a biological flaw. Depression would be explored and the underlying belief exposed. Perhaps depression may have come into a female client's life because she has been recruited into a discourse that she is responsible for the happiness of her family. This belief may be operating in self-subjugating ways that limit the possibilities of how she could know herself and experience those around her. Through a narrative approach this discourse would be deconstructed, discussed, and questioned. The client would be asked if the discourse is one that she would like to keep in her life. If she rejects the discourse then perhaps the family could work collaboratively to challenge the problem discourse's effects on them all. By exploring discourses and self-subjugation, it is hoped that clients may recognize the familial and cultural beliefs that they have been recruited into and question whether these discourses are congruent with the ways they wish to lead and understand their lives.

Steps of the narrative process begin with an externalization of the problem. The problem is seen as the problematic belief which has encompassed a person's or family's identity. Upon naming and externalizing this problem (i.e., depression, anxiety, fear), it is then traced in the life of the client to determine its influence on the individual, persons, places and contexts. The problem is explored with a particular eye toward where the problem originated and the ideas

that are behind it. Examples of discourses underlying depression include: *I am not a good mother*; *I am not a successful male unless I have attained a high economic status*; *I am responsible for keeping my husband happy*; *homosexuality is a sin*, and so on. Upon exploration, these ideas are deconstructed and clients determine whether they are in their best interest.

Deconstruction has been defined as a process of unpacking the taken-for-granted assumptions and ideas underlying social practices that masquerade as truth or reality (Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston, 1997). In a narrative approach these taken-for-granted beliefs are pulled apart by client and social worker in order to discover their origin and the motives behind their negotiation and construction. Worker and client act as socio-anthropological partners in a mutual exploration of cultural beliefs that may have, unknown to the client, influenced the meaning that the client has given to the events in his or her life. Making visible this influence creates space for alternative understandings.

Upon deconstruction of the problem, times that the individual or family has resisted the problem are discovered and discussed, making them as vivid as possible through the utilization of landscape of action and landscape of meaning questions (White, 1991). Landscape of action questions are questions which bring a *counteract* (event of resistance) to light, examining what happened and how they were able to offset the problem's influence in that situation. Landscape of meaning questions highlight what the act of protest meant for them and what it says about the client or family that they could stand up to the problem. These moments of control over the problem are, then, linked and thickened via

perspectival questions (questions which bring in the perspective of others) to reveal a person of strength and resilience.

Thus, the therapeutic goal of narrative therapy is to collaboratively expose the problem and loosen its grip on the individual and/or family such that they can see alternate ways of being. This will allow the individual and/or family to unpack the problem and recognize how they have control over it, and then to consciously take over defining who they are and would like to be, in absence of the problem's influence. A summary is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Overview of a Narrative Approach

Methodology	Order	Problem	Modality	Practitioner Skills
Narrative	Post	Internalized Belief	Collaborate with client/family to expose and deconstruct the underlying belief that has been internalized.	Transparency Learning stance Curiosity Relentless Optimism Exploratory use of questioning

A Narrative Session with Social Work

I will now present both the process of a social constructionist approach to therapy as well as an historical review of theories, research, and perceptions relevant to the topic of the development of social work. The process will begin with an externalization of the problem.

Externalization of the Problem

The initial goal will be to establish rapport with Social Work, gain some understanding of its perception of the problem, and to externalize this problem. The purpose of externalization is to reduce any sense that the client has that (s)he is personally flawed or inadequate in some way. This approach will serve to strengthen the client's perception of self, while aligning the social worker and client together as a collaborative team. This collaboration reduces the notion that the social worker is imposing any form of normative knowledge on the client but is instead, assisting in an exploration through the skilled use of questioning. In sum, both client and social worker are viewed as experts, each holding unique skills and knowledge to be discussed with the mutual goal of understanding the problem.

Social Work (SW) entered my office tentatively and looked rather down. After a brief hello I invited Social Work to sit anywhere that was comfortable and our conversation began.[1]

Chris: Hi, my name is Chris; it's nice to meet you.

SW: Nice to meet you, too.

Chris: I was wondering what brought you in today?

SW: Well, I've been really bummed out, confused, depressed, and just generally freaked out for about as long as I can remember. This should come as no surprise to you; it's all right there in my file.

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[1] In the interest of better flow and readability of the dialogue style in this chapter, I will use endnotes instead of the standard APA style of citing the literature.

Chris: Social Work, may I call you Social Work or is there a name that would be more comfortable?

SW: Sure, Social Work is fine.

Chris: Social Work, I should tell you that I really don't pay much attention to files. I see no reason to read someone's interpretation of you when I can speak with you directly. I find the original much more interesting.

SW: But I have several files.

Chris: Yes, I see that. If it is important for you, we can look through them together but in the past, I have found that clients find it more helpful to weigh them, than to read them. The weight may give us a truer representation of the amount that you have been through than the interpretive words of others.[1] Would it be okay if we talked for a while and then later we could decide if it would be helpful to explore how others have interpreted you in these files?

SW: Sure, this a little different than I am used to.

Chris: In what way? What is different?

SW: Well, I am used to social workers reading my files, then asking me very direct questions about symptoms, and then giving me a diagnosis. Don't you need to know my diagnosis? They said that I have an identity disorder.[2]

Chris: Identity disorder? Wow, what exactly is that to you?

SW: What do you mean? I thought you could tell me.

Chris: Well, I can tell you that the name comes from a book called the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.[3] You are welcome to take the book home with you. It, like the file, is an interpretation of the problem from one perspective. Specifically,

from a medical model perspective in which behavior is constructed into symptoms, that are then generalized broadly into categories. If that would be of assistance for us to do we can discuss it, but I am most interested in your perception of the problem and what it means to you.[4]

SW: Okay, well, I just feel so undefined, I feel like a bit of a failure sometimes.

Chris: Undefined according to what? A failure in relation to what?

SW: Well, you know, to find this definition of myself. There are a lot of critics you know who say that I am not a profession, that I am undefined, that I have no scientific integrity.[5] They say that my quantitative research methodology does not fit with my purpose[6] and others who say I am becoming a watered down version of psychiatry. In fact, just this past month there was a guy who said I have no academic integrity[7] and that all my journals offer shoddy attempts at scholarship.[8] He basically said, hey, I know science, and you ain't it Social Work. He went so far as to say that I am "committing suicide."[9] How the hell do you think that made me feel? Oh, is it okay if I cuss in here?

Chris: That's fine, I am not here to be a restrictor of language and expression, or an upholder of any normalized way of interacting or being, in fact just the opposite. I am here to help you explore the options of who you would like to be and some of the obstacles that may be inhibiting you in that journey.[10]

SW: I mean this is just crazy. I can't win for losing. I am trying so damned hard. I have all these expectations that I feel like I can't meet. It's just overwhelming.

Chris: Wow, this is something that you are really struggling with?

SW: Yeah.

Chris: Could you tell me about these expectations?

SW: What do you mean?

Chris: Well, I was interested in hearing more about these expectations you mentioned. It sounds like there are some ideas that you have about what you are supposed to be.

SW: The expectations that I am struggling with?

Chris: Yes, do you think discussing those would be of assistance to you?

SW: Sure, I think the biggest thing I am struggling with is being valid. I am really trying to validate myself. I have to be valid, I have to be based in evidence[11] in order to be recognized and be taken seriously.

Chris: And validated by whom or what?

SW: You know that's a really good question. I think by the funders, particularly the National Institute of Health (NIH). I think by all the other professions, by psychology and psychiatry, they all kind of look down on me you know. They're always whispering to each other in meetings, and I can tell by the way they look at me that I am not respected. I have very little voice because they think I'm soft. I swear that I have heard them say "inferiority complex." I know they did, and there have been whispers about Axis II diagnosis, too. It's all just freaking me out.

Chris: This really sounds tough for you. As I mentioned before, I am not into labeling who you are with the DSM IV or any other assessment tool, but I would like to ask some more questions to help explore how this struggle with expectation is affecting you. Would that be okay? Are you finding this helpful?[12]

SW: Yeah, a little bit, yeah. It's kind of nice that we're just talking in here you know. It kind of puts me at ease that you're not defining me. You keep saying that. It's like it gives me a bit of space, I feel okay to open up about this a bit more.

Chris: Great, you said a second ago that you feel soft.

SW: Well, they see me that way and I feel that, yeah.

Chris: They see you that way. All right, do you see yourself that way?

SW: Sometimes I do, well, yes, most of the time I do.

Chris: But there are times you don't? It sounds like there may be a bit of a difference in your definition of who you are and the expectations of what you are supposed to be? Am I understanding this correctly?

SW: Yeah, I think so.

Chris: And what does that look like, soft, I mean, what does that look like in relation to, say, hard?

SW: Soft is like mushy, you know, empirically mushy, like with no data or evidence, no definitions. Like truth. That's what I mean. It's like I have no defining truth. I have not offered the professions any evidential truth about the way things are. My studies are flawed. And, hell, there are some who think that I shouldn't even worry about being soft. They say that as a social science I am soft but that soft is okay because evidence is a misnomer in a field with people and perceptions. They say that meaning should be privileged over quantified evidence.[13] It's just so confusing.

Chris: Yes, it sounds like there are many expectations for you to live up to.

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SW: I mean, am I crazy? Am I the only one experiencing this? Have you ever felt like this? Oh, I'm sorry, I shouldn't ask that.

Chris: No, no, it's fine. I am not one to restrict this relationship by notions of objectivity, which, from my perspective, box people into perceiving problems as individual flaws, which then serves to isolate them.[14] Yes, I have felt like that.

SW: So what should I do? Tell me what I should do. I am having dysfunctional thoughts aren't I? That's what the last practitioner said, something about situation, automatic thought that was dysfunctional, emotion, response, consequence.[15] Is that right? How do I change my thinking so it is not dysfunctional? Tell me.

Chris: If that would be helpful to you we could certainly take that approach.[16] If we were to make that choice, I would be interested to know some of your understanding of the ideas behind this notion of dysfunction.[17] You can't have the presumption of dysfunction without a notion of normality.[18] So, the cognitive process that you describe only makes sense in a therapeutic relationship in which a social worker holds ideas of cultural normality.[19] The approach presently is not to analyze your thinking in order to put normative labels on you, or your thoughts or ideas; rather to expose and explore the ideas by which you may be guiding your life to determine whether these are ideas which help or hinder who you would ideally wish to be. Does this make sense? Perhaps this idea of dysfunction is a part of the idea of failure. Failure means different things to different people. Would you like to explore this idea of dysfunction or the idea of failure? Does this sound helpful to you?

SW: So you're not going to tell me what to do?

Chris: No, that is not my place. But if you would like someone to do that, I may be able to recommend another practitioner if you would find that kind of cognitive analysis helpful.[20]

SW: No, that's okay, this feels pretty good.

Chris: What feels good about this?

SW: Well, I kind of like the idea that you are interested in my view without analyzing that view. I feel like I have a voice in the room. I don't feel so judged.

Chris: Please let me know if at anytime you do feel judged or if you feel uncomfortable, or if this is becoming unhelpful. Is it okay if I ask you another question that may be of interest?

SW: Sure.

Chris: You mentioned the term dysfunction and have described your efforts to measure-up to adequacy's expectations of you. I was wondering what this is like for you, what you are experiencing in your efforts to measure-up?

SW: It sucks, it really does. Sometimes I just feel unappreciated, like nothing I do really matters.

Chris: Would you mind sharing with me what steps you have taken to measure up? Is that an appropriate phrase for what you are experiencing? Is there another word or phrase that may describe it better? Attempts at adequacy? Attempts at definition?

SW: No, I mean I'm really trying hard to define myself in relation to what I feel I am supposed to be to cut it as a real profession, so I am okay with that phrase, with "measuring up."

Chris: Could you help me understand what steps you have taken to measure up to these expectations?

SW: How far do you want me to go back?

Chris: As far as you would like to go back, and we do not have to go in the direction of back if you do not want. I am interested in what you think would be important for us to talk about in regards to your efforts to meet expectation's requirements of you? What is it that you are supposed to do to become a profession, to be respected? Perhaps we could start with when these expectations first made themselves present in your life.

SW: Well, that's the frustrating part, because it has changed so much over the years. I mean how can I become solidified if the expectations are always changing? Everyone wants me to be something else depending on the era that I am in.

Chris: So there is a history to these expectations?

SW: You could say that.

Chris: Would you mind sharing this history with me? I would like you to introduce these expectations to me so that we can explore their shifting requirements of you and the influence this has had.

SW: Okay.

Tracing the Effects of Expectations: The Birth of a Problem

In the preceding section Social Work and I have established rapport and have externalized the problem as *expectations*. These expectations seem to be operating on Social Work in ways that it finds frustrating. In the next section the goal will be to trace the effects of these expectations in the historical and ongoing development of Social Work in its endeavor to define itself as a profession. This tracing will involve exploring the historical origins of these expectations and their influence on Social Work and significant others in differing times and contexts. The purpose of this exploration is to open up definitional space for Social Work by making present the discourses by which it may be operating. White has described this as a process of "exoticising the domestic" (White, 2004, p. vi) and is a process in which the familiar is made visible so that clients can more readily see the cultural discourses making demands of them (Foucault, 1979).

As the conversation progressed we explored Social Work's historical endeavor to measure-up and meet expectation's requirements of it. Social Work has been under tremendous pressure to define itself as a profession while simultaneously adapting to the cultural shifting of the perception of the problem. As the conversation unfolded we crafted Table 4. The table represents a guide for what Social Work has defined as "my contextual journey to become a profession." The table represents patterns in the development of Social Work. Categorical boxes should be understood as constructions and overlap in their concepts. One does not immediately supersede another. The table is meant to bring together several

Table 4

Social Work's Contextual Journey to Become a Profession

Dominant Event	Time	Grand Narrative Plot/discourse	Problem Perception	Related Fields	SW Major Goal	SW Education Focus	Methodologies
Immigration, Urbanization, Progressive era	1850s-1917	Move to city, Social Darwinism	Morality	None	Mary Richmond, friendly visitors	Teach skill of morality	Casework and screenings for philanthropy
					Jane Addams Hull house	Influence cultural and social change	Social activism and community development
WWI	1914-1919	Mechanistic era Conservatism	Individual intrapsychic WWI: "shell shock"	Psychiatry	Fix the individual	Skills to help individuals	Freudian psychotherapy and Richmond's *Social Diagnosis*
Depression	1929-1941	Poverty, social ills	Individual and economic	Psychiatry and Psycho-logy	Individual and economic	Skills to help individuals	Freudian psychotherapy and Richmond's social diagnosis
WWII	1941-1945	World Conflict	Individual, Intrapsychic and behavioral WWII: "Post trauma"	Psychiatry and Psychology	Fix the individual	Skills to help individuals	Freudian psychotherapy, Behavioral therapy
Communication era, technological age, Cold War, Korea, social confidence	1945-1963	New Age, Modernity	Individual Communication	Psychiatry, Psychology,	Fix individuals, groups	Skills to help individuals, groups, families	Behavioral, Humanistic, Cognitive, Family therapies
Questioning of the grand narrative (Cold War, Vietnam, Watergate)	1963-1979	Questioning of authority and truth	Individual Family Cultural domination	Psychiatry, Psychology, Marriage and Family	Fix individuals, groups, families, influence cultural and social change	Skills to help individuals	Behavioral, Humanistic, Experiential, Cognitive, Systemic therapies
Break down of the grand narrative (internet, media, TV)	1979-present	Mono-culture or Multi-culture	Individual Family	Psychiatry, Psychology, Marriage and Family	Fix individuals, groups, families	Skills to help individuals	Behavioral, Cognitive Behavioral Systemic, Social Constructionist, Evidence-based Practice

concepts in a general manner in an effort to re-contextualize the path that Social Work has taken to the present.

SW: I was developed during the end of the 19th century under the prevailing ideology of Social Darwinism and "rugged individualism" espoused by the dominant philosophers and scientists of that era, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and J. Allen Smith among others.[21] The Industrial Revolution was in full swing and a tremendous number of people were moving into the cities. Anthropologists have noted that not since the Neolithic Revolution, where societies made the transition from hunter gatherers to farmers, has such a massive social change occurred as the Industrial Revolution. The fabric of society was changed with the advent of the industrial steam engine and division of labor. Families that, before this time, were primarily self sufficient, working together as a unit, could no longer afford to do so. Hundreds of thousands uprooted and moved to the cities in order to make ends meet. In 1860, there were only 9 American cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants; by 1900, there were 38. The government in the United States was heavily influenced by the English Poor Laws and conservative Protestant thinking of the time. The prevailing view was one of idealism. This was a view that society was being perfected and moving forward into a new age based on Darwin's revolutionary theory of evolution. This guiding paradigm led members of the upper class to feel some responsibility for helping the poor which they fulfilled through charitable donations. This individualized ideology influenced the development of my beginnings on two differing branched paths, the Charitable Organization

Societies espoused by Mary Richmond, and the Settlement Houses led by Jane Addams.

By 1877, there were so many individuals, families, and companies giving to the poor that there was a need for an organization by which to both regulate the charitable giving and to screen appropriate applicants.[22] In 1877, Reverend Humphries Gurteen established the first Charity Organization Society (COS) in Buffalo, in an effort to provide such organizational and oversight services. These new organizations were designed to assist the poor but were tempered with the new vision of the day, individual responsibility. Their mission was not to help the poor through direct giving, but to help the poor help themselves. This involved the elimination of indiscriminate giving through a process of screening that was called scientific charity. Their motto: "No relief (except in extreme cases of despair or imminent death) without previous and searching examination."[23]

Under the COS, *friendly visitors* were assigned to each family who would go to their homes and discuss with them what they could do to better their present situations. As a part of the investigation to assess for the qualification of services the appropriateness of habits, morals, levels of self-control and beliefs were considered. Mary Richmond was at the forefront of this movement and developed a protocol for the investigation by the friendly visitor called *social diagnosis,* which was later published as a book under the same name in 1917. This work represented the first text used by social workers in field education. The actual social diagnosis involved the consideration of many social forces, more akin to systems theory than individual diagnosis, in which the individual or family

was situated. The text provided a list of information gathering questions which the friendly visitors could follow in gathering evidence.

Chris: So how then was this problematic for you? You had an established vocation and a text to follow. Help me understand.

SW: Well, the problem was twofold. First, Richmond's scientific charity protocol, while of service to the poor to some extent, was not really a method in helping; it was more of a way to gather evidence to determine if a person or family was eligible for services.[24] This became problematic shortly after, which I will explain in a moment, when in 1915 Abraham Flexner used this point to claim that I was not a profession. The second problem for me was that the other branch of my formation, the settlement house movement, was more political in nature than were the charitable organizations.

Chris: And this was problematic in what way?

SW: I was torn by each camp's expectations of me. Richmond and the COS wanted me to screen applicants and assist through charity and the education of moral habits, while Addams strived for social change on a larger level.

Chris: And you could not meet both expectations?

SW: Yes and no, let me explain the settlement house movement and then I will speak to that question. Drawing from the settlement house movement that began in England in the 1800s, in which middle class to affluent citizens relocated into poor areas in an effort to provide social assistance to their neighbors, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr rented a building in a working class, immigrant neighborhood in Chicago in 1889, and named it the Hull House. The Hull House

was both their residence and their office. They opened their home to the neighborhood and sought to not only provide services but to become part of the community. Four years after opening, activities and clubs prospered in the neighborhood including a nursery, playgrounds and multiple community groups. The idea spread and by 1915, there were more than 300 settlement houses around the country.

It can't be overstated how different the agendas of the COS and the settlement house movement were. Addams recognized the need for immigrants to hold on to their cultural roots, she encouraged not just a view of moral development but also education in the arts, culture and science.[25] Perhaps the most striking difference between these two movements was that Addams had a broader view of what helping should entail. She believed that my mission was to change communities and societies to better the positions of the poor. By way of example, she was openly active in the Labor Movement. To this effect Jane Addams published the following in 1895:

> . . . at this point the settlement enters into what is more technically known as the labor movement. The labor movement may be called a concerted effort among the workers in all trades to obtain a more equitable distribution of the products, and to secure a more orderly existence for the laborers . . . . Trade-unionism, in spite of the many pits into which it has fallen, has the ring of altruism about it. It is clearly the duty of the settlement to keep it to its best ideal.[26]

She went on to publish books on social advocacy including, *Democracy and Social Ethics,*[27] *Twenty Years at Hull-House,*[28] and *The Long Road of Woman's Memory.*[29] She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, but by that time she had been shunned by many patriots as being radical and subversive to democracy.

So, from the beginning, though I had one goal, to help the poor and needy, there were different expectations of me based on two separate perceptions of the problem: (1) The problem seen as an individual and/or family having bad habits, morals, and self-control who needed caseworker services, financial and training assistance, and ultimately a form of re-culturation.[30] (2) The problem viewed as a product of disconnected communities and social exploitation of workers who needed neighbors and advocates, rather than caseworkers, to live with the poor and help establish healthy neighborhoods and communities.[31] Both paths seemed to work until I was invited to professionalize in the early 1900s by moving into the universities. My inability to fully choose one of these paths during this time created a great amount of tension within me.

Further Exploration of Professional Expectations

In the previous section we traced the beginning of the problem in Social Work's life. Social Work felt that it was under definitional pressure to meet the expectations of the two paths being laid out for it. These expectations were making demands on Social Work that it felt it could not meet. The conversation continues as the main source of Social Work's internalized ideas of what a "profession" is supposed to be, are discovered.

Chris: So expectations came into your life very early on? How did these differing expectations affect you?

SW: It created a lot of conflict in my life. I had an accepted mission, to help the poor and the indigent, but no shared methodology. I just wanted to help people but I was being berated by which way was the best way, how I should best spend my time. I realized that some of my work was a threat, or could be perceived that way. Things just got very confusing. The problem kept changing. I felt like I could never find my feet because the ground kept moving.

Chris: In what way was the ground moving?

SW: Well, things became political. Members of the profession wanted to offer formal training in the universities. World War I was about to start, psychiatric medicine had evolved out of the mental hospitals and was making its way into mainstream society. The works of Freud reified the individualization of problems and moved the view of society away from perceiving problems as social, to seeing problems as existing *within* individuals. In many ways I think that the wealthy were let off the hook by this shifting.

Chris: In what way?

SW: Well, with the new definition of problems as psychiatric instead of social, society, and especially the wealthy of the society, could shuttle off the obligation to assist the impoverished to science. Science and the new developing mental health field were also invested in the perception of problems shifting from social to psychological. I was stuck in the middle again, I didn't know which direction that I should take.

Chris: And you felt like you needed to take a direction?

SW: Oh yeah, all the professions that are now called social sciences were being developed, psychiatry, psychology and social work. We were all trying to figure out how we should develop based on how problems were perceived. Are they social problems as Jane Addams espoused? Are they moral problems as Richmond maintained? Or are they intrapsychic problems, as the new Austrian psychotherapy described?

Chris: So these expectations changed as the perception of the problem changed?

SW: Oh yeah, it was crazy. We were confused as to what we should teach, how to align ourselves theoretically, it was nuts. Progress was the theory of the day. Thoughts of machines seemed to permeate even ideas of individuals and society. Freud had a mechanistic view of the individual, and science and the power of diagnosis was becoming prevalent. The dominant view held that if it was broken then it could be taken apart and fixed. There was a great rush toward modernity and positivism. Darwinism and evolutionary theory had, by then, evolved into the efficiency of the human race, and race as the machine. I was being invited to go along or be wiped out by fields that would.

Chris: So the spirit of the time was imposing certain pressures on you to make a choice to define yourself professionally and these expectations were pulling you in many different directions?

SW: Everywhere. The culmination of the confusion for me was when Dr. Abraham Flexner was invited to the National Conference of Charities and

Corrections in 1915. Dr. Flexner had published an influential book five years earlier entitled *Medical Education in the United States and Canada.*[32] In his presentation he outlined the reason that I am not a profession. Are you freakin' serious? I mean talk about expectations! Here it is, a national conference, I am already feeling horrible and confused, and this guy comes in and just lays me out.

Chris: That must have been very tough for you.

SW: Yep, I mean are you kidding me? This guy laid it on thick. He methodically spelled out all the reasons I am not a profession. The guy just stripped me down right there in front of everyone. The title of his presentation was "Is Social Work a Profession?" I couldn't believe it! I mean, it was nuts! So, he said that I am not a profession because (a) I have no systematic body of knowledge and theory, (b) I lack authority given by society to serve in specific areas of expertise, and (c) I am an auxiliary profession to other professions including medicine and law.[33]

Chris: So it sounds, to me, like Flexner introduced many of the ideas underpinning the expectations that have been a part of your life since that time?

SW: He sure did.

Social Work's Endeavor to Meet Flexner's Professional Expectations
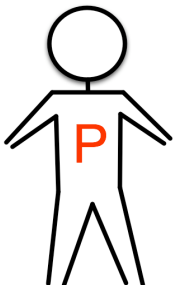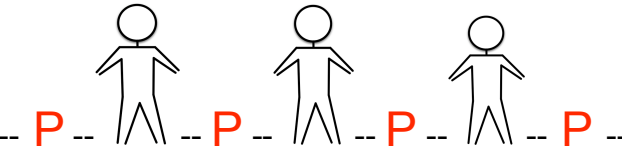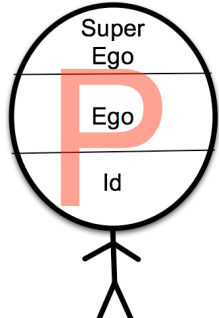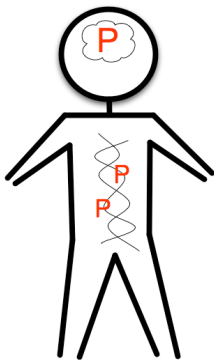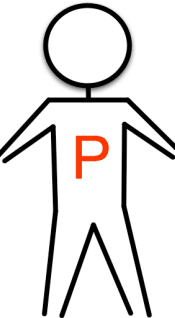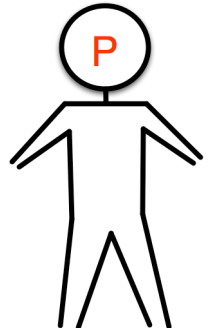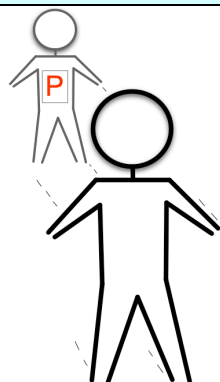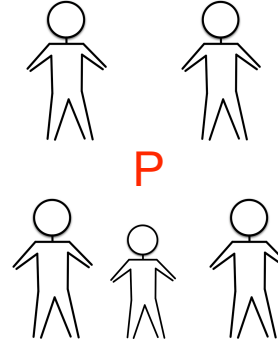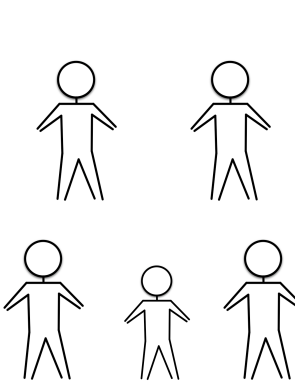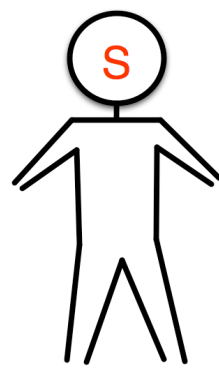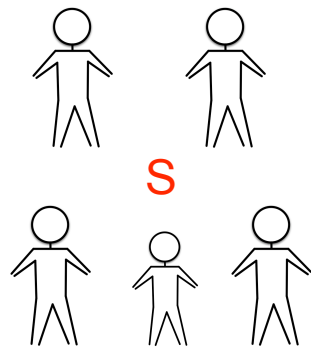
It seems that Social Work has been recruited into an understanding of professionalism and is attempting to mold itself by these ideals. With the internalization of the discourse of professionalism, Social Work may be operating in ways that have been governed by these expectations.

Social Work also stated that it was having difficulty choosing a path because the construction of the "problem" by society kept changing historically. As the conversation progressed Social Work and I put together Table 5 representing the changing theoretical construction of the problem. Social Work used a "P" and an "S" to show me how the problem and solution were located in different places depending on the construction. With each new shift the problem was located in a different place and was described with a different language system. Social Work described being a bit lost in trying to keep up with all the languages and was trying desperately to follow the problem as it was conceptualized differently in each historical period. Social work felt that it didn't know which way to move to become a profession. It was confused as to which version of the problem to choose and where the problem was located. The changing conceptualization of the problem made it increasingly more difficult to meet the expectations placed upon it. We continue to trace the effects of these expectations to explore how they have influenced Social Work's choices and sense of self.

Chris: And what was your response to Flexner and his expectations of you?

SW: Oh, wow, after that the game was on. Have you ever been to the circus and seen the clown act where they scurry in and out of a fire truck trying to put out a fire in a little bucket? Well it was like that. I was split into so many groups I couldn't think straight. If there is such a thing as multiple personality disorder, that's what I had.

Table 5: *The Shifting Construction of the Problem: Language Cultures of Mental Health*

Religious Moral	Community	Psychodynamic	Biophysical
Marry Richmond (1917)	Jane Addams (1925)	Freud (1900)	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (APA, 1952)

Behavioral	Cognitive Behavioral	Experiential	Systemic
Watson (1920) Pavlov (1927) Skinner (1953)	Beck (1976)	Perls (1973) Rogers (1951)	Bowen (1978) Minuchin (1974)

Social Constructionist			
Narrative	Solution Focused	Collaborative Language Systems	Open Dialogue Treatment
White & Epston (1990)	O'Hanlon (1993) De Shazer (1985)	Anderson (1995, 1997) Anderson & Goolishian (1988)	Seikkula, Arnkil, & Eriksson (2003) Seikkula & Olson (2003)

Chris: Well, I am certainly glad that you used the past tense. So expectations were making certain demands of you and you felt pulled in many directions?

SW: Yeah, but I had to choose one. I had to take a defined path and it created one heck of a mess.

Chris: I am very interested in why you felt you had to choose?

SW: To define myself. I had to choose, as Flexner put it, to be based on a systematic body of knowledge and theory. To have some guiding direction based on truth.

Chris: This is of interest to me, this belief that you had to choose, that you had to accept these expectations. Would it be okay if we made a note to come back to this later?

SW: Sure, wow, you even ask if it is okay to write things down? This is different.

Chris: So how did you respond to Flexner's invitation to accept these expectations into your life?

SW: Well, I began to splinter into different groups all vying to define my direction. Mary Richmond was very upset as she felt that her book *Social Diagnosis*[34] would have served as a unifying theory for Flexner. Jane Addams was less influenced by these comments, as "professionalism" was not one of her main concerns. Addams was interested less in casework and science and more in community building and social change. Addams felt that a move toward professionalism would have a negative effect on the goals of social work by creating distance between social workers and their community.[35]

Regardless of the views of Addams and Richmond, the fracturing occurred and many different factions were organized. The American Association of Social Workers (AASW) was formed in 1921 to represent social work practitioners. Its evolution parallels the changing popular theories of the time, as it became the American Association of Psychiatric Social Workers in 1926, and was a prelude to the licensed clinical social worker in the 1970s, and today. In addition, the American Association of Medical Social Workers formed in 1918, and the American Association of Visiting Teachers in 1919. Educational associations were also formed to vie for the establishment of curriculum requirements. The control of education meant to the ability to control the field.[36] These groups included: The American Association of Schools of Social Work (AASSW) formed in 1919, and The National Association of Schools of Social Administration (NASSA), which came later in 1942, as an active "revolt" against the AASSW.

Chris: So these groups were all being formed to meet the expectation that to be an established profession you were to find a unifying theory and vision?

SW: Crazy, isn't it?

Chris: I can only imagine that all these groups invited other expectations of you?

SW: Yep, it was nuts and there was a lot of conflict. Each of these groups sought a unifying method and theory to fill the professional void constructed by Flexner. Freud and the rise of psychiatric social work were supported by the return of many soldiers from WWI. They were faced with what was diagnosed at the time as shell shock. This event, and the individual based paradigm through which it was viewed, left little room for a social advocacy perspective.

Psychiatric social work and the new psychotherapy flourished during this period. The final move away from social activism and toward professional service was forced to a head in 1929, again at the National Conference of Social Work, when Porter Lee,[37] the director of the New York School of Philanthropy gave the field two choices: the road to professionalism and respect via casework based on theory, or to political activism and social conflict. This had the effect of forcing me into a position of having to choose a direction. The speech was ironic in that the stock market crashed the same year and the country was thrown into the Great Depression. Regardless, Lee's speech, combined with WWI and the general outlook of the day, led most in the field to choose the former path.

Chris: How did Addams react to this?

SW: She was a pacifist during WWI and the country had moved away from the liberal social reforms of the Progressive era. Under the new conservative mood she and the settlement houses had lost much of their social influence.[38]

The move toward the casework paradigm rocketed in the 1930s when Roosevelt enacted the New Deal programs to help curtail the effect of the Great Depression. Some social workers returned to social advocacy during this period but by and large, casework flourished as welfare programs offered new jobs and new opportunities for social workers.

At the end of the Great Depression there was no turning back from the casework model and with the lure of a ready made professional theory of practice found in psychotherapy, *clinical* social work was about to take hold. Directly after the Great Depression, clinical social work gained a boost from World War II, as

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soldiers were in need of individualized care for what was defined as mental

stress. The Smith College of Social Work had been teaching psychiatric social

work since 1918. The AASSW was in full support of psychiatric social work as

was the practice organization, the AASW. Since 1920, both groups had been

molding educational institutions toward an individual casework paradigm via

membership requirements involving the merging of field experience and graduate

education.

The first membership requirement for the AASSW schools involved the

adoption of an admission criterion that no applicant would be considered without

four years of social work experience. In 1933, this requirement was replaced by

the option of a 300-hour field work requirement supervised by AASW members

and to coincide with a list of professional courses taught by AASW members.

This agreement between social work practitioners and graduate social work

educators created a considerable amount of angst for the undergraduate schools

of social work.

Chris: Angst in what way? Were you being invited to exclude one section of

social workers in favor of another?

SW: This angst stemmed from two points of contention in the field.

Undergraduate schools of social work saw as their mission to prepare students

for service in a variety of settings. Their main focus was a broad, liberal

education including policy and social service in a variety of areas. The AASSW

graduate schools, highly motivated by Flexner's call to adopt a systematic body

of knowledge and theory, tailored their goal to teaching students specific

techniques of casework, based for most schools on an adopted body of knowledge stemming mainly from the dominant paradigms of the day, casework and psychoanalysis.

The conflict between clinical social work and social administration came to a head when, in 1939, the AASSW took the bold step of limiting membership to only graduate schools of social work. They adopted a program that was two years and awarded the master's degree. This had the effect of casting the undergraduate schools into what could be considered second class status. The result was the formation of The National Association of Schools of Social Administration (NASSA) in 1942. This organization was described as a revolt and it immediately launched seven grievances:

1.   AASSW programs were adaptable to large institutions only and failed to be responsive to small schools.

2.   AASSW policies reflected the goals and structure of privately endowed schools and were unresponsive to publicly funded universities.

3.   AASSW was urban oriented and failed to recognize rural needs.

4.   AASSW failed to respond to the fact that social workers in public agencies are paid by public funds and that the public schools are charged with the responsibility to train them.

5.   AASSW curriculum requirements were too rigid to accommodate the full scope of social work practice.

6.   AASSW's failure to include undergraduate education left large geographic regions underserved by social work education.

7.   AASSW's emphasis on specialization was a too narrow approach to social work.[39]

The struggle between these two institutions eventually had to be mediated by the development of a new organization, the National Council on Social Work Education in 1946. The main goal of this organization was to bring these two groups together in an effort to save me from being torn apart.

Chris: So it sounds like things had come to a head again?

SW: You could say that. It was very much like what Kuhn described in *The History of Scientific Revolutions,*[40] I was experiencing a paradigm conflict over my direction. The whole thing was becoming quite an embarrassment and did little for my reputation with the other professions. One would think that of all places, a field of helping could find solutions for it own problems.

Chris: That is an interesting idea, that there could be one solution. We seem to keep coming back to the idea that you are to find one way, one path, one unifying truth. This seems to be one of the dominant expectations by which you are leading your life; that you must define yourself singularly. So you were grappling with which direction to go, how to define yourself?

SW: Yes, but the impetus for a solution, regrettably, was found elsewhere. In 1947, the Joint Committee on Accrediting gave an ultimatum to both groups stating that,

. . . unless the American Association of Schools of Social Work and the National Association of Schools of Social Administration agree on an

accreditation program for Social Work by January 1, 1948, there will be no recognized accreditation in the field.[41]

The result was the formation of the National Council on Social Work Education in 1946, which became the Council on Social Work Education in 1952. After an extensive study funded by the Carnegie Foundation and conducted by Hollis and Taylor[42] this body decided to allow the two-year graduate program leading to a master's degree, but also kept in place the undergraduate program leading to a Bachelor's, with a caveat. Those holding a bachelors degree could receive a master's degree in just one year through "advanced standing." The Council left considerable leeway for the colleges and universities to decide what they would like to teach but required that they follow the new Manual of Accrediting Standards.[43] This manual outlined six new goals:

1. To assist schools toward sound educational goals.

2. To help schools achieve high standards rather than standardization of educational programs.

3. To encourage well-advised and planned experimentation in social work education.

4. To foster continuing self-analysis and self-improvement of schools so as to encourage imaginative educational development.

5. To assist the school and the university of which it is a part to function in constructive and co-operative activities aimed at the realization of common educational objectives.

6. To relate social work educational programs to the needs of the related social work field.[44]

For the aim of fulfilling these goals the Council established the submittal by each school of a self-study and followed this with on-site visits by educators to provide recommendations to the program.

The first curriculum policy provided a tremendous amount of leeway for the schools to decide their theoretical direction. The CSWE required all two-year programs to fulfill instruction in the following categories: (a) knowledge and understanding of the social services, (b) knowledge and understanding of human behavior, and (c) knowledge and understanding of social work practice. Since the original publication in 1952, these guidelines have slowly become more specific.

Chris: So what was this like for you? It sounds like expectations were being more clearly defined and you had the freedom to move in differing directions. How did that influence you?

SW: Well, regardless of this openness to subject area, after the 1950s and World War II, I moved very quickly into clinical social work practice. Talk therapies began to dominate as the social perspective of the problem became firmly entrenched in the individual and then later in the family structure. The development of differing methodologies during this period flourished. Behaviorism was developed as a counter to Freud.[45] It was based on the works of Pavlov and viewed human behavior as a process of conditioning. Skinner maintained that any behavior could be adjusted by a form of clinical treatment called operant conditioning. This involved positive and negative consequences

for behaviors. The behavioral paradigm was later expanded by Beck to include cognition.[46] This cognitive behavioral therapy relied on the process of testing automatic thoughts, which surfaced in specific situations. The location of dysfunctional thinking became the topic of the time and continues to this day. Humanistic and experiential theories were developed, in part to offset Freud's mechanistic view of the human brain, but also to counter the behavioral and cognitive views of human "operations." These theories centered on the power of experience in human life. Experience was viewed as the catalyst for present and future decision-making and an exploration of this experience was paramount to change.[47] Still other practitioners during this period responded to the individual nature of these experiential therapies by expanding therapeutic interventions to include the family.[48]

These new theories promoted the development of a new competing profession, Marriage and Family Therapy. The development of these new theories and approaches to helping, as well as the new profession of Marriage and Family Therapy only sped the field further away from social action and toward individual therapeutic interventions. In 1964, The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) officially sanctioned private practice service delivery. From this point on there was no turning back. By 1970, 13% of social workers were in private practice, by 1991, approximately 40%.[49] In 1990, a California survey found that 29.5 % of social workers were in private practice, 36 % in private agencies, and 34.5 % in public agencies.[50]

With the focus of the field now in casework and practice, the advent of new therapeutic approaches brought new debates; to find which approach is "best," and further, would psychiatric diagnosis be imported into social work practice?

Chris: So it sounds as though a direction was chosen but a new struggle ensued?

SW: Yes, social advocacy is still around in the form of macro practice, but often this is taught as a non-profit management sequence rather than as a discussion of social advocacy theory and methods.

Chris: And this is acceptable to you?

SW: Only in that it has been, for the most part, forgotten and the expectation is not forcefully in my life at the present time.

Chris: Does this sit well with your value base and who you would like to be?

SW: No, not really, but the struggle between social advocacy and individual work has been replaced by a debate concerning the method by which case and clinical work is to be conducted.

Chris: Could you help me understand this a bit more?

SW: The present struggle is a manifestation of the original argument of whether I should be a science, a service, or both. Tension exists between researchers in the academy and practitioners in the field because researchers are making claims that they can empirically determine which practice methodologies work best[51] and have begun a labeling process ranking the best practice models. Many practitioners disagree with the theoretical premise that *methods* of practice

can be studied because when these methods are applied clinically they become relationships; relationships with multiple variables, and still more variables when these relationships continues over time.[52] In addition, some practitioners espouse a view that is related to the differences in individual clients and individual relationships, maintaining that a one-size-fits-all therapy is unattainable and that even if a model could be proven effective in one relationship, this would not be a determinant that it would have the same effect in a new relationship with differing variables. Further, social constructionist scholars suggest that the positivist approach to practice seems to overlook that problems have been constructed in different ways in cultural-historical context and that interventions to solve problems void of context may be misguided.

So while the argument of social advocacy versus clinical practice is still present, it has been overshadowed by the rise of economic considerations (i.e. insurance reimbursement) and empiricism to determine effectiveness.

Chris: And this is problematic for you?

SW: Yes, because I do not know which way I should turn. I do not recognize myself in my original mission to help the poor. I have been co-opted into an individualized way of working with people and I am being invited further to quantify these clients and their outcomes. Researchers and institutions are beginning to dictate practice. In all this confusion I have considered a name change to *individual work* rather than *social work*. This would at least be a truer representation of my new path.

Chris: And why is this a new path for you?

SW: Well, it's not a new path really. It is the latest manifestation of the idea that I am supposed to be a science. That to be taken seriously as a profession and to "really" help people I have to have a knowledge base that is built on positivist ideas of evidence and outcomes to prove it. It's the same thing all over again that started with Flexner in 1915. To be a social science I am supposed to be empirical and guided by positivist theory. The most recent version of this is evidence-based practice (EBP). Based on EBP I am to find the best researched intervention for a specific problem and then prove outcomes.

Chris: Would it be okay if we explored this idea of evidence-based practice and the latest manifestation of these expectations that continue in your life?

SW: Sure. EBP came about as a movement in the medical field in the mid-1980s involving randomized clinical trials (RCTs). These RCTs were designed to find the best medical intervention for specific diseases. Psychology adopted the model in the 1990s. Insurance companies were pleased because it provided a measured return on investment and funders have adopted it as a way to track investment return (Metro United Way, National Institute of Health). This has resulted in a mass of studies to determine the best practice models.

Chris: What are the results of these studies?

SW: It depends on whom you ask and the study you read.

Chris: Could we begin with those who promote the expectation that you are to guide yourself based on notions of evidence?

SW: These scholars maintain that "psychosocial interventions with some credible evidence . . . should be preferred treatments over interventions lacking similar

levels of empirical support."[53] They make the claim that it is scientifically possible to determine which interventions work best with differing populations and differing problems. They move away from notions of rational positivism and claim that they are relying on Popper and his falsification theory, whereby one method is found and then falsified and so on until the best method is found.[54] Scholars Myers and Thyer,[55] are so convinced with the evidence practice approach that they are seeking to write EBP into my Code of Ethics, requiring that practitioners use these methods first. In support of this view they make the following claims: (a) that the field of social work should model itself after the medical profession by requiring clinicians to offer "proven" empirically validated intervention to clients for specific problems, just as physicians are required to do, (b) that the empirical validation of treatment and the requirement of its use are ethical, and (c) that researchers are in the best position to decide what effective practice is and to define the words *effective*, *problem* and *intervention*.[56]

This latter point directly addresses the views made by contrary research/practitioners who maintain that evidence of efficacy should come from the client's point-of-view (practice-based evidence) rather than from the determination of the researcher or the practitioner (evidence-based practice).[57] EBP proponents are also wishing to change the CSWE curriculum requirements such that EBP models will have to be taught in schools of social work. They maintain this argument on both ethical and political grounds, for funding opportunities are greatest for the research of EBP models from the NIH and elsewhere.

Chris: Could you help me understand how EBP is applied in practice?

SW: Myers and Thyer[58] make the following procedural recommendations for evidence-based practice: (a) review practice literature via electronic database, (b) critically evaluate literature for degree of empirical support, (c) rank intervention according to empirical support. So following Gibbs[59] the practitioner is to first categorize the client into a specific grouping, review the literature according to that grouping, and then refine this list based on the empirical strength of the study (i.e., reduce down by searching for random sampling, sampling size, control group). The resulting studies should be analyzed to determine the appropriate evidence-based practice that should be used with the client.

Chris: Have there been any interventions that have "proven" to be better than any other from this empirical perspective?

SW: Yes, when research studies are taken individually there have been a few models which have shown greater efficacy over other methodologies.

Chris: Then why are you resisting?

SW: Because the contrary scholars also have good points which throw into question many of these findings as well as the ethics of the premise of evidence-based practice.

Chris: Could you help me understand their perspectives?

Exploring Social Work's Current Resistance to the Expectations of Positivism

To this point, Social Work and I have explored the effects that conflicting expectations have had on its development across time. Social Work has described being under immense pressure to keep up with society's changing perception of the problem and to adapt itself accordingly. The winding journey it has taken in relation to the historical changing of the perception of the problem has most recently led to the new expectation that it embrace evidence-based practice. Social Work and I continued the conversation as it sought to answer my question regarding those who would seek to resist EBP. I did not speak often during the next section of continuing dialogue. I adopted a learning position and listened as Social Work answered my question.

SW: Primarily, scholars question the validity of the empirical methodology of EBP. In quantitative research the goal is to control variables to the extent that a non-spurious cause and effect relationship can be proven or disproven.[60] Scholars maintain that this non-spurious relationship is not established in EBP research studies for several reasons: (a) variables are difficult to operationalize, (b) reliability of diagnosis is problematic, (c) history and maturation are not controlled, and (d) the generalization of findings is problematic.

Social Work Questions the Operationalization of Variables

SW: In research one of the paramount procedures of a valid study is the operationalization of variables. A criterion for the most basic of statistical methods involving nominal data is that the operationalization of variables occurs

such that each variable is exhaustive and mutually exclusive.[61] Mirroring the research procedure in EBP practice, the first step is to operationalize the problem variable.[62] The only standardized problem categorization method developed to date is the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (APA, 1994). The DSM IV in this process does not effectively operationalize the problem variable in such a manner that even the most rudimentary statistical procedures can be utilized because the DSM IV categories are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. This weakness in operationalization occurs "because psychiatric diagnoses…are still defined by syndromes that have not been demonstrated to have natural boundaries."[63] Thus, it is empirically impossible to distinguish a diagnosed problem from a similar diagnosis or from a normal life stressor.

In addition, the DSM IV categories are not specific to the point that the category represents the same experience of a problem. By way of example, Duncan, Miller, and Sparks[64] discuss 126 possible ways to diagnose Borderline Personality Disorder. To complicate operationalization further, very few clients seeking services enter the room with one, and only one, problem. This presents the EBP researcher with a choice of which problem to introduce as the problem variable and how the other problems will be controlled. Further still, it is not uncommon for the initial presenting problem of the client to change as the relationship evolves.

Chris: Have EBP scholars recognized this resistance, or responded in any way?

SW: Several EBP scholars have recognized the problem with operationalization and have insisted that a reliance on the DSM IV to categorize problems is not

needed,[65] but this does little to change the operationalization challenges faced to produce a valid quantitative study. The result has been a move away from the term *empirical* to the term *falsify*.[66] Regardless of the terms used, the extreme difficulty of operationalization in EBP studies brings into question the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Social Work Questions the Reliability of Diagnosis

SW: If studies are to be compared across the field then there must be a general assurance (reliability) that problems have been operationalized in the same manner. The reliability of diagnosis is in question.[67] Feminist scholars for years have demonstrated that diagnosis is inherently gender biased.[68] Still other research demonstrates that 87% of practitioners tend to under-diagnose to avoid labeling clients as much as possible.[69] How then, is it possible to compare studies, or utilize studies in practice, if there is little significant relationship between the operationalization of the problem variable between research studies?

Social Work Questions History and Maturation Problems

SW: Two of the major threats to the validity of quantitative studies are the effects of maturation and history.[70] These threats fall outside of the factors comprising dependent and independent variables and are usually considered latent variables. Generally, in quantitative research, maturation and history are controlled by random sampling and the use of control groups. Studies that do not use random sampling and control groups bring their validity into question as latent variables have not been controlled and could threaten the spuriousness of

the findings. Most therapy is outpatient and occurs in a one hour time frame. There is continued debate that control groups are not enough to adequately control for the multitude of variables that exist in the 167 hours of the week that clients are not in therapy

A second factor arising from the use of control groups is whether the control is given an alternative treatment. Studies which show efficacy compared to no treatment do not offer evidence which proves that it is more effective than any other intervention, rather it is showing that talk therapy works better than no intervention. From a positivist paradigm the efficacy of talk therapy has been well documented in the literature, as most studies show that people who participate in some form of talk-therapy, regardless of type, are 80% better off than those who do not.[71] Studies must be considered based on their use of control groups and whether interventions are being tested against one another.

Social Work Questions Other Mediating Factors

SW: In addition to the above concerns, critics of EBP have questioned the statistical power of the studies, claiming that many, if not all, do not have an adequate number of participants to generalize findings to a larger population. The factoring, or non-factoring, of participant attrition into the results, and the time of efficacy measurement is also questioned.

In addition, scholars question the replicablility of such studies in real clinical settings due to context changes and scripting factors. Scripting factors involve the scripting of models to reduce variability between therapeutic conversations. Context factors include the frequency of services and the location

of those services. Scripting and the isolation of variables via a lab are not readily transferable to real life clinical work as most practitioners do not use scripts and social worker-client relationships are not designed to reduce latent variables.

There are also questions concerning whose measure of effectiveness is utilized in the research.[72] When reviewing a study it must be noted if the measurement of change was determined by the researcher or the client. In most studies this measurement of change is made by the researcher.[73]

Social Work Questions Efficacy Study Results

SW: Apart from the problems discussed, several scholars have questioned the findings of individual studies of efficacy by conducting large meta-analytic studies using advanced statistical procedures.[74] These studies have consistently shown that in 40 years of research there have been no significant differences between models of practice. "Decades of psychotherapy research have failed to find a scintilla of evidence that any specific ingredient is necessary for therapeutic change."[75] Duncan, Miller, and Sparks[76] point out that of those few studies which show some efficacy of one intervention over another, the number of these studies, when taken as a whole, is fewer than could be expected from chance. They also point out that when allegiances researchers may have to specific methodologies are taken into account the significant results in these few studies all but disappear.[77]

In summary, opponents of EBP have made claims that the movement is politically biased to align the field with science, individual diagnosis and psychiatry.[78] Further, that it reifies patriarchal ways of viewing individuals as

being responsible for their own troubles, particularly women.[79] That the research designs lack validity and reliability, and perhaps most challenging to the EBP movement are meta-studies conducted which show that when analyzed together these individual studies have not yet found any significant difference between methodology and outcome.[80] Finally, the question of the ethics of the application of evidence-based practice is raised because it assumes that the practitioner is neutral in the helping relationship.

Chris: Could you help me understand this last statement?

SW: Well, the core notion of EBP makes sense if it could address the problems discussed above but the application of EBP is problematic because even if it were to actually work, the present application does not fit my value base. My Code of Ethics maintains that I am to honor diversity and recognize that differing cultures and peoples are valued. I have an expressed mandate to not oppress.[81]

Chris: How is EBP oppressive?

Social Work Questions the Ethics of Using EBP

 SW: Well, in two ways, first it situates the problem in the person, second, it ignores the practitioner by assuming that he or she is neutral. I will address each point.

First, because I am using an intervention designed to control variables by isolating and constructing the problem as one specific thing that can be *fixed*, the operationalization of the problem in this way situates it in the client and not in society, or the culture of which the client is a part. It forgets that this is only one of many ways to see the problem. For example, if I am an African American male

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living in poverty in the worst part of town with little to no job opportunities, trying

to raise my children, and the only jobs available to me are at minimum wage,

which is not enough to pay my rent, then I may seek services from a social

worker. For this social worker to locate the problem in me by diagnosing or

categorizing me as depressed, and then pull EBP models from research, most

likely cognitive behavioral therapy,[82] in which the problem is perceived to be

dysfunctional thinking which needs to be tested and adjusted to solve *my*

depression, then this therapeutic intervention is a process which continues the

cultural racism and oppression that I am experiencing because it sees me as

flawed just as does the larger society, without recognizing structural and

economic inequalities.

Second, the EBP research model may be viewed as oppressive because

it does not suggest that the social worker be considered a variable, or collection

of variables, in the relationship. The social worker is assumed to be neutral. If

social workers do not consider their positions then this is oppressive because

they are ignoring themselves and their influence in the creation of the contextual

relationship.[83] Remember that a second-order perspective invites social workers

to recognize themselves and the influence they have in forming the contextual

relationship. Remember also that the steps outlined by Gibbs[84] are to first,

categorize the client as specifically as possible, second, categorize the problem

as specifically as possible, third, conduct a literature review based on these

categories, and finally, use the most effective treatment. This leaves one of the

key components out of the study, the social worker.

Chris: How is this unethical?

SW: Well, EBP presents these interventions as if they are treatments to be administered by the social worker. The assumption is that the social worker is neutral, but an EBP model ceases to be a script or protocol when it is applied in a real life situation, it then becomes a part of a relationship. With the recognition of relationship, do you think it may be of importance that a White male social worker would need to include the variables of his race and gender in the example discussed above? Or consider the gender, race, or marital status of the social worker when searching for a methodology to work with an African American domestic abuse survivor experiencing "depression?" Do you think the relationship dynamics would influence the administering of the intervention? Would the variables of race be important if a middle class Southern Baptist Caucasian male was working with an atheist Black, teenage gang member? What if he was working with a pregnant 12-year-old? Further, do you think context may be important to consider if I am working with women in say Appalachia, Kentucky, which has an accepted culture of abuse and racism[85], if I am a male, or an African American male? I don't mean to nitpick here, but think about all the factors that context brings into the relationship. Think of the messages that the pictures in your room send to the client. Is the social worker married, single, an only child? How might this affect his or her perception of the client or problem? Think just for a moment about religion and religious beliefs. How might they influence how a client is seen and understood?

In addition, Mehrabian[86] found that 93 % of emotional communication is non-verbal. The meaning of words is intertwined with the emotions connected to them in relationship and context.[87] If 38% of emotion is communicated by paralanguage, through the use of the voice such as tone and inflection, and 55% comes through nonverbal behavior (i.e., gestures, posture, facial expressions), then how is this captured in EBP research?

EBP research assumes a first-order cybernetic position by social workers. All first-order methodologies rely on a theory of normality and the objective social worker position. This must be inherent in the research because second and post-order methodologies do not control for variables, are experiential, and do not rely on scripts, but focus instead on the relationship and the client's perception of the problem as the primary agent of change. Thus, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible to create a quantitative study which would show a non-spurious cause and effect relationship between the steps of a second or post-order methodology, and change. How are any of these variables controlled in EBP research? Perhaps the cause and effect paradigm may not readily transfer to social work because of the multiple, uncontrollable, unoperationalizable, ungeneralizable, and unquantifiable variables of life, problems and relationships.

Chris: So I would like to summarize our conversation up to this point to see if I understand correctly. Expectation has been in your life for sometime. It has been a guiding force for you but also a source of frustration. Expectation's requirements of you seem to change with each era based on that period's view of society and the problem. Historically these expectations have guided you in

different directions in your work with clients, some factions inviting you to be focused on social change, other factions moving you into individual therapy, and still others into the medical paradigm. Most recently you have moved almost entirely away from social advocacy, with this discussion being traced back to Porter Lee in 1929, carrying through to the rise of the psychiatric paradigm, the DSM (I-IV), and the growth of insurance companies, as well as the other competing professions of psychology, marriage and family therapy, and mental health counseling.

The latest manifestation of these expectations has led you to be experiencing some frustration because of the mounting pressure to define a professional truth by demonstrating quantifiable evidence of your efficacy that will lead to best practice models. These best practice models are first-order and by nature, expert-oriented and political, but seen by others as being the only form of ethical practice. You are torn about moving in this direction and are not sure about alternatives and the threat to your professional reputation, and have some fear that you will be marginalized if you choose not to give in to the dominant expectations of this period. This leaves you at an impasse. Am I understanding this correctly?

SW: You said it pretty well.

Chris: Well so did you. I am appreciative of your openness and courageous way of describing what you have been facing.

SW: Thanks.

Deconstruction of the Professional Science Discourse

In the preceding sections we have traced the history of the problem in Social Work's life and explored the changing expectations that Social Work feels it must live up to in order to be a profession. In the next section, we will deconstruct these ideas in which Social Work has been recruited. Specifically, the ideas that it internalized from Flexner, that it must have one theoretical base, and the idea from the social sciences that this base must be rooted in scientific theory. The purpose is to bring these ideas to the surface so that Social Work can see them clearly and can make a decision as to whether it would like to continue with these ideas in its life.

Chris: In listening to your telling of the history of expectation's influence on you I am struck by your ability to adapt to these changing expectations. You have moved and shifted in relation to the cultural perception of the problem. You have traversed funding problems and the rise of new professions in your effort to achieve adequacy's expectations of you, to "measure up" as a profession. This could be viewed as quite a success, do you see it that way?

SW: No, I don't. I still have yet to fully define myself. This changing of positions shows weakness. I invalidate myself and show my subjectivity every time I switch. I feel like some kind of theoretical schizophrenic.

Chris: What does the term Schizophrenic mean to you?

SW: I just feel like I am so many things and trying to figure out which is right, who I am, and who I am supposed to be as a profession.

Chris: I am very curious about this idea that to be defined and valid is to be static. I see such strength in your ability to remain un-static and dynamic. Could you help me understand where this idea came from that to be defined, to be valid, is to be static?

SW: I don't know, I never thought of it really. Well, all the sciences are based on positivism and positivism is rooted in objectivity.[88] Let me make this as clear as possible. The social work social scientists have backed away from the term logical positivism and empiricism and now prefer the term "falsification."[89] "Popper . . . approached science as the critical activity of 'falsification' . . . that is, science can never show what is absolutely true, but is limited to demonstrating that an explanation of some phenomenon (a theory) is either false, or, at best, not false."[90] But, falsification, empiricism and logical positivism are all based on controlling variables in order to achieve a state of objectivity in the sense that I can stand back, control my biases and discover the truth of the reality that is out there beyond my interpretation of it. In fact, all of validity rests on objectivity so, this is what I must be in order to be valid, to be considered professional and accepted by science.

Chris: Who benefits from this belief?

SW: What do you mean?

Chris: I am interested in whether this belief is of benefit to you or your clients?

SW: I am not sure, do you mean the belief that I can discover the truth in things objectively?

Chris: Yes, this positivist, empirical, scientific notion that it is possible to find universal truth, or "falsify" to achieve the same goal, and that with these discovered truths in relationships, in people, in things, then you can better lead your clients to this correct perception. You can use this discovered truth as a type of normative yard stick upon which to analyze individuals and then design interventions to assist them in seeing correctly. Who does this idea benefit?

SW: I am not sure. Well, you usually have to have that belief to be funded, so if you want funding then you have to be objective in discovering truth. If you want to be respected as a social science profession then the discovery of social phenomena and truth is important to increase your reputation. Social science journals are all looking for studies which purport findings that help illuminate the truth. But does it benefit clients? I am not sure. All of the above is predicated on the power of one paradigm. The EBP studies show it helps with clients' individual problems but as discussed before I have doubts as to whose evidence this is, whose operationalized problem, and further, if it can really be applied ethically. I do know that I am trying to assist clients to have better and happier lives, so does this endeavor to find truth on a universal scale assist them? I don't know. It really will depend on who you ask.

Chris: What is your reservation based on?

SW: I have such a hard time of it because I work with clients who are oppressed and I am not sure that their needs and perceptions are being heard.[91]

Chris: Could you tell me a bit more about this reservation?

SW: Well, I have clients who are not privileged in the system, so it is hard for me to take an objective position. I recall that Jane Addams was not interested in professionalism because it would put distance between the settlement houses and their neighbors. This notion of objective researcher and subject creates a hierarchy that she fought to resist as something which interfered with helping her neighbors in ways in which they wanted to be helped.

Chris: In what way did it interfere?

SW: Well, in a sense, through the process of objectification, and I mean here variable control, I am putting myself in a position of analysis, of judgment, and not a position of collaboration. In taking this position it may appear that I am not a part of the same system that they are, that I am somehow separate, different, objective, rational, clear thinking, and all those words and phrases that sets one apart. Isn't the very act of truth claiming an oppressive act? For inherent in the definition is the exclusion of other views. This is exactly what Addams fought against in the Hull house.

Chris: And this position is one that you have trouble with?

SW: Yes, I think it does not sit well with my values. I think that there is a difference between having truth put upon someone versus having it come out of them.[92] An intervention from this view could be seen as being imposed on someone in an effort to have them conform to an outside notion of truth. This is similar to Foucault's notion of the normative gaze.[93] Hare-Mustin provides theoretical support for this view and examples for many of these ideas in her 1994 presentation of the *mirrored room*, an analogy for the clinical session which

does not open space for marginalized voices but instead reifies ideas of normality. Therapy under this light may then become a type of social control because the efforts of the social worker represent the dominant discourse of the society in which they are a part. This process of normalizing involves *fixing* one into traditional roles based on present social values, norms and institutions. This is different than having an intervention that is collaborative and leads to a place that is of unique preference to the individual.[94] Jane Addams worked very hard for her neighbors to keep their cultural identity and to not accept dominant notions of truth.

Chris: So it sounds like your value base does not entirely support the notion of objectivity?

SW: I don't think so.[95]

Chris: Could you help me understand the beliefs that may be behind this hesitancy you have about EBP, positivism, empiricism, science, and falsification? What is this hesitancy based on? Is there a value that you have, or an idea, that is supporting this hesitancy?

SW: Well, my goal is to promote the welfare of my clients so I am not sure how positivism can fit. My mission is to serve the disenfranchised and to work toward social justice. Specific areas of my Code state that I am to honor diversity and recognize social oppression. The goal of all quantitative research is prediction;[96] nowhere in my Code is the word prediction used, but the word *understand* is used 8 times, *respect* 17 times, and *diversity* 7 times.

Chris: So your resistance to these ideas seems to be based on your core values and the paradigm of scientific falsification does not seem to align itself with your mission?

SW: Isn't this almost the same struggle that Addams and Richards had at the beginning of my inception? Addams promoting social change and the client's voice, while Richards was promoting social diagnosis from an objective viewpoint? Have I really evolved at all?

Chris: You have described experiencing a tremendous amount of conflict in your life in your attempt to meet the expectation of one unifying theory. It is my understanding that you have incorporated into your value base the need to respect your clients, their cultures, views, perspectives and ultimately their truth(s). This seems to have put you in a difficult position of choosing a unified theory that will not silence or marginalize the voices of your clients. Is this idea of a unifying theory in your best interest?

SW: Yes, I think it, but as mentioned before, it can't be one that marginalizes beliefs. This is so difficult to do. I mean the world is experiencing the same problem. Lyotard,[97] Berlin,[98] and others discussed the breakdown of the grand narratives, such as Catholicism and science in the Western world, which served to hold us all together under one common belief and cause. But after the age of modernity and the dissolving of the unifying idea we are left with differing factions. We are presently at a time of conflicting world paradigms, with some factions looking for a new grand narrative to create a mono-culture, and others trying to find a unifying narrative which recognizes the diversity of all ideas.

Gergen,[99] Derrida,[100] Foucault,[101] and others have described this theory as a social constructionist theory.

Chris: Do you see some relevance in the application of this theory to social work?

SW: Well, in the sense that perspectives are important to respect and objectivity is not always possible ethically, yes. But I am not sure how I could incorporate social constructionist ideas. I mean, wouldn't the other professions think I was off my rocker? I am already in a vulnerable place as it is. Big medicine companies are breathing down my neck, first-order methodologies are rampant. I mean, I have to have practitioners who assess, prescribe treatment, and diagnose or they won't be taken seriously, and that is science and medicine. It is scary out there. If I were to accept these ideas of subjectivity and the multiple perspectives of truth, that could be it for me. I am into self-preservation too. Let's see a study get funded by NIH based on a multiple-truth theory, are you kidding me? I mean, hey, I know several scholars have shown the weaknesses in these EBP studies but politically is it the right move for me? Do you know how many lobbyists drug companies have? Do you know that in 2004 more than $550 billion was spent on prescriptions worldwide,[102] and that of the top 20 best selling drugs, 5 are psychotropic. Studies show that their efficacy is horrible but no one notices or cares. I mean I understand poverty, but look, medicine and individual diagnosis is the wave of the future, and it is risky as hell to get left out. Just think of the research money. Universities are ranked around the country not on the number of impoverished people helped, but by the amount of grant money attained. EBP

is the place where the money is, the power, fame, and if you speak out against these ideas of evidence your career is marginalized, whole schools are marginalized. This is about power and knowledge isn't it?[103] I have to make sure that I am in line with the political expectations of me, or another profession could take over. Contracts cut. So I am doing the best I can to define myself in line with those expectations. Is that okay?

Chris: Sure, it is your decision. But I am wondering if this decision is so clear why you may be here? Empiricism and its derivatives present themselves as the perfect unifying theory on which Flexner's expectations of a profession can be met, but you are reluctant to go down that path. I am interested in why?

SW: Well, regardless of my last rant, I feel that it would limit me and I am not totally convinced that it is in the best interest of my clients.

Chris: You mentioned that you are not sure how this theory could be applied in social work, what do you mean by that?

SW: I mean that the idea has merit, but I am not sure how it would influence practice and education, how it would change the field, and even if it would be applicable to this field.

Chris: What have social constructionist scholars written in the area of its application to you?

SW: They recommend a move toward recognizing that truth is not something that is discovered, but rather is created by the observer through the process of interpretation. From this vantage point there can be equally valid multiple-truths and ways of understanding the world. Based on this view social work practice

with individuals would involve not the imposition of researched truth on them, or the application of a normative yardstick involving diagnosis or categorization. Instead, the goal would be to explore the client's understanding of the world, how this understanding came to be formed, what influences may have guided this formation, and if these ideas are in the client's best interest.[104] Still other social constructionist methodologies focus on client understanding of the problem and the solution,[105] or of family and neighborhood understanding of the problem and solution.[106] The core component of social constructionist theory is that it is respectful of multiple ways of knowing and being.

From the social constructionist paradigm there is no such thing as a generalizable client who can readily be put into categories. Because of this view that social work is collaborative and explorative, social work practice may be seen more as an art than as science. "Artistry makes itself known when any method is applied in the personal style of a subjective, mindful helper who is sensitive to the emotional climate and the countless nuances and tinges that configure the special human situation. If this is not the case, what then is social work practice?"[107] With social constructionist practice and the understanding of the ungeneralizable client, outside evidence of effectiveness gives way to client notions of effectiveness. Clients are asked if the social work relationship is of assistance to them.[108] The relationship is one of collaboration and mutual expertise. The artistry of social work practice lies in knowledge of practice models designed to explore the client's perspective, and knowledge of relationships and self-reflection. The reflective process looks at what has worked,

what hasn't, and whose values are being privileged through meaning making in the therapeutic process. Both client and social worker determine "Are we doing what we hope to be doing?" and "Where are we going and are we getting there?"

From a social constructionist viewpoint, education is not a process of learning facts but learning about facts, how they are formed, who benefits, who loses, what power structures exist behind those facts and what institutions they support. For the constructionist, facts are theories to be deconstructed and meaning does not exist independently, but is created. In this view, life itself is a theory and its simplest components are language and word meaning.

Several constructionist scholars have suggested ways in which social constructionism can be introduced into social work education (Papell and Skolnik,[109] Scott,[110] Millstein,[111] and Witkin[112]). In addition, several compilations have emerged: *Transforming social work practice: Postmodern Critical Perspectives,[113] Radical Casework: A Theory of Practice,[114] Practice and Research in Social Work: Postmodern Feminist Perspectives,[115] Constructivism in Education,[116]* and *Revisioning Social Work Education: A Social Constructionist Approach*,[117] and a related book has been written: *Experiential Learning.[118]*

Specifically, Schön[119] suggests five elements which should be included in the education of the social work practitioner: (a) the need for a new practice epistemology, (b) the rejection of linear thinking, (c) the recognition that each encounter with individuals is unique, (d) the inclusion of art, intuition, creativity, and practice wisdom as essential for professional functioning, and (e) the incorporation of research in practice via reflection. The latter issue was expanded

by Scott (1990) and Millstein (1993) who promote the exploration of practice wisdom as a new epistemology of practice research. Practice wisdom has been defined as "competency in the application of social work values . . . to the helping process in which social worker and client engage."[120] Tacit knowledge concerning relationships and experience has been espoused by Goldstein,[121] Gowdy.[122] Imre,[123] Klein and Bloom,[124] and Tyson[125] among others.

Social constructionism has been directly applied by Phebe Sessions[126] at Smith College. She presents a course in clinical social work, rooted in C. Wright Mills phrase *private troubles and public issues*,[127] which seeks to bridge positivistic DSM IV assessment with social theory, in particular social constructionism. Session's goal was for the students to see that knowledge is not unbiased and neutral but rather historically influenced, cultural, and negotiated. Through this understanding it is her hope that students will begin to question DSM diagnostic labels and see beyond symptoms to social pressures that may be the true cause of clients' troubles. Sessions gives an example of the narcissistic personality disorder described by clinicians as "the disorder of our times."[128] She suggests that clinicians analyze problems in two ways, first by looking at what social arrangements may have contributed to the problem by analyzing demographic information, family structure, social structure and aspects of power relations and second, by examining why clinicians are focused on this diagnosis through an exploration into the demographics of the client population for whom the theory was developed, where it was developed, and what present conditions may be contributing to giving this diagnosis.

Other proponents of social constructionist education include Witkin[129] and Goldstein[130] who maintain that the education of social workers should involve discussion and critical thinking of the construction of problems, the construction of treatment methodologies, the construction of differing helping paradigms, and the construction of the field of social work itself. Emphasis is placed on deconstructive thinking and the recognition of the cultural construction of truth and of learning methods designed to offset oppressive discourses and the reification of these discourses.

Chris: This is certainly different from an empirical approach. Do you think that it would be possible to accept this social constructionist perspective into practice and education?

SW: Perhaps, the theory is in line with my value base, but I have a great fear of being marginalized and lost as a profession if I choose a path away from positivism.

Chris: Positivist expectations have been in your life for some time. These expectations make certain demands of you and the resistance of these demands is not without consequence. Is there anything that would help you make a clearer decision about whether you would like to keep these expectations in your life?

SW: I would like to know more about the adoption of social constructionism into my education of social work practitioners and the use of it in their practices. Particularly I would like to know if it is a viable alternative to a medical model and the positivist framework.

Chris: I am aware of several social constructionist scholars who have written extensively in the field who may be of interest to you. Perhaps they, at some time in their careers, may also have felt the tug of some of these expectations that you are feeling. Would you find it helpful to speak with these individuals? Perhaps they could share with you their perspectives and reflections on what you could be if you were to adopt social constructionist ideas. Would it be of interest to speak with them?

SW: Sure, I think that it would help.

Chris: And what would you like to ask them?

SW: I would be very interested to know what value, if any, they see in social constructionist ideas informing the education of social work practitioners.

Chris: And this knowledge would help you in what way?

SW: It would help me to decide whether it is feasible for me to adopt these social constructionist ideas, and if I were to do so, what the practice sequence would look like, how it would potentially affect field work, and how my standing as a profession might change.

Conclusion

At this point we have deconstructed the idea that in order to remain viable as a profession, Social Work must adopt a positivist unifying theory. We have made visible these ideas and have questioned whether Social Work would like them in its life. Specifically, Social Work is concerned about the consequences of being marginalized if it does not adopt the dominant scientific discourse of the present period in time. Social Work has some reservations because it is not sure

whether these scientific expectations fit with its values and who it would like to be

in order to serve the best interest of its clients. We have examined social

constructionism and Social Work wishes to explore the possibility further by

speaking with some of the leading social constructionist scholars to discuss their

views on what value, if any, do they see in social constructionist ideas informing

the education of social work practitioners? Social constructionism in this

envisioning would serve as the theoretical bridge between the academy and

practitioners in the field.

Chapter II: Endnotes

[1]   M. White, personal communication, October 9, 2004.

[2]   Epstein, in press; Flexner,1915; Hollis & Taylor, 1951; Lee, 1929; Myers & Thyer, 1997

[3]   American Psychiatric Association, 1998

[4]   Andersen, 1995, 1997; White & Epston, 1990

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[6]   Heineman, 1981; Saleebey, 1979, Witkin, 2001

[7]   Epstein, in press a, in press b

[8]   Duncan, 1999; Epstein, 1999, Pardeck & Meinhert, 1999

[9]   Epstein, in press, p. 1

[10]   Anderson, 1997; Gergen, 1999; Goldstein, 1983, 1990a; White, 1991

[11]   Gambrill, 1999; Gambrill & Gibbs, 2002; Gibbs, 1990; Gibbs & Gambrill, 2005; Sheldon, 2001; Thyer & Myers, 1999

[12]   Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004; Fook, 2002

[13]   Gergen, 1985, 1992, 2000b; Goldstein, 1983, 1986, 1990b; Saleebey, 1979, 1989; Witkin, 1991, 1998, Witkin & Harrison, 2001

[14]   Foucault,1979; Hare-Mustin, 1994; Hare-Mustin & Marecek. 1997

[15]   Beck, 1976

[16]   Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004

[17]   Foucault, 1979; White, 1991

[18]   Derrida, 1967; Foucault, 1975; Saleebey, 1988

[19]   Hare-Mustin, 1994; Tamasese & Waldegrave, 1996

[20] Duncan, Miller & Sparks, 2004

[21] Lemert, 2004

[22] Karger & Stoesz, 1998

[23] Specht & Courtney, 1994, p. 74

[24] Specht & Courtney, 1994

[25] Addams, 1925

[26] Addams, 2004, p. 70

[27] Adams, 1902

[28] Adams, 1912

[29] Adams, 1916

[30] Richmond, 1917

[31] Addams, 1925

[32] Flexner, 1978

[33] Flexner, 1915

[34] Richmond, need

[35] Specht & Courtney, 1994

[36] Foucault, 1979; Minnich, 1990

[37] Lee, 1937

[38] Karger & Stoesz, 1998

[39] Kendall, 2002, p. 14

[40] Kuhn, 1962

[41] Kendall, 2002, p.43

[42] Hollis & Taylor, 1951

[43]   Council on Social Work Education, 1953

[44]   Kendall, 2003, pp. 147-148

[45]   Skinner, 1953, 1976

[46]   Beck, 1976

[47]   Perls, 1973; Rogers, 1951

[48]   Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974

[49]   Specht & Courtney, 1994

[50]   Gibleman & Schervish, 1996

[51]   Gambrill, 1999, Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Sheldon, 2001; Thyer & Myers, 1999

[52]   Web, 2001; Witkin, 1991, 1998

[53]   Myers & Thyer, 1997, p.478

[54]   Bolland & Atherton, 2002

[55]   Myers & Thyer, 1997; Thyer & Myers, 1998a, 1998b, 1999;

[56]   Myers, & Thyer, 1997

[57]   Duncan, Sparks, & Hubble, 2004; Witkin & Harrison, 2001

[58]   Meyers and Thyer, 1997

[59]   Gibbs, 1990

[60]   Campbell & Stanley, 1963

[61]   Singleton & Straits, 1999

[62]   Gibbs, 1990; Myers & Thyer, 1997

[63]   Kendell & Zablansky, 2003, p. 7

[64]   Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004

[65]   Gibbs, 1990; Thyer & Myers, 1998a

[66]   Bolland & Atherton, 2002; Gambrill, 1999

[67]   Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999; Kutchins & Kirk, 1986, 1989, 1997; Williams, Gibbon, First, Spitzer, Davies, Borus, Howes, Kane, Pope, Rounsadville, & Wittchen, 1992

[68]   Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1997

[69]   Kirk & Kutchins, 1988

[70]   Campbell & Stanley, 1963

[71]   Duncan, Miller & Sparks, 2004; Lambert, 1999; Lambert & Cattani-Thompson 1996; Lambert & Barley, 1999; Lambert & Bergin, 1994; Smith, Glass, & Miller, 1980

[72]   Witkin & Harrison, 2001

[73]   Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004

[74]   Assay & Lambert, 1999; Lambert & Bergin, 1994; Lambert, Shapiro, & Bergin, 1986; Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975; Shadish, Montgomery, Wilson, Bright, & Okwumabua, 1993; Wampold, 2001a, 2001b; Wampold, Minami, Baskin, & Tierney, 2002; Wampold, Mondin, Moody, Stich, Benson, & Ahn,1997

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[76]   Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004

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[79] Flax, 1990; Hare-Mustin, 1992, 1994

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[81] NASW Code of Ethics, 1999

[82] Beck, 1976

[83] Hare-Mustin, 1994

[84] Gibbs, 1990

[85] Websdale, 1998

[86] Mehrabian, 1972

[87] Middleman & Goldberg-Wood, 1991

[88] Popper, 1972

[89] Bolland & Atherton, 2002

[90] Bolland & Atherton, 2002, p. 12

[91] Hare-Mustin, 1992, 1994; hooks, 1995; Wood & Roche, 2001

[92] Towle, 1954

[93] Foucault, 1979

[94] Anderson 1997; de Shazer, 1995; O'Hanlon, 1993; White & Epston, 1990

[95] Goldstein, 1983, 1986, 1991, 1992 1998; Hoffman, 1985; Saleebey, 1979, 1988; Witkin, 1991, 1998, 2001a

[96] Kerlinger & Pedhazur, 1973; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001

[97] Lyotard, 1984

[98] Berlin, 1990

[99] Gergen, 1991

[100] Derida, 1967

[101] Foucault, 1979

[102] IMS Health, no acronym, 2005

[103] Foucault, 1965,1975, 1979

[104] White & Epston, 1990

[105] de Shazer, 1988; O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1989

[106] Anderson, 1997; Seikkula, Arnkil, & Eriksson, 2003; Seikkula & Olson, 2003

[107] Goldstein, 2001, p. 56

[108] Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004

[109] Papell & Skolnik, 1992

[110] Scott, 1989

[111] Millstein, 1993

[112] Witkin, 1990

[113] Pease & Fook, 1999

[114] Fook, 1993

[115] Fawcett, Featherstone, Fook, & Rossiter, 2000

[116] Steffe & Gale, 1995

[117] Laird, 1993

[118] Goldstein, 2001

[119] Schön, 1995

[120] Dybicz, 2004 p. 202

[121] Goldstein, 1990a, 1990b

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[124] Klein & Bloom, 1995

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[126] Sessions, 1993

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical grounding of this study is social constructionism. This paradigm has been thoroughly described in Chapter I and will be reflected upon throughout the methodology section. This chapter will move forward from the theoretical position of social constructionism and present a justification of the use of a qualitative methodology as the paradigmatic vehicle of exploration, followed by a discussion of the specific qualitative methodology utilized, the interview technique chosen, criteria for theory evaluation, the research and sampling design, data coding and analysis, a discussion of rigor and trustworthiness, and finally, a detailed presentation of procedure.

The Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach to research can loosely be defined as a collection of methods (ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, constructivism, phenomenology, cultural studies) designed to discover or construct meaning from participants in their own environments and from their perspectives, which does not involve the process of quantification or statistical procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1988). Qualitative research may be said to be inductive rather than deductive, in that it seeks to discover, or explore the creation of meaning and then organize this emergent meaning into theory or an

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interpretive framework. A qualitative approach seeks meaning in as unconfined a manner as possible in the hopes of gaining some insight into the participant's understanding of a situation, topic, event, or series of events.

A qualitative approach for this study is appropriate because it seeks the views of the participants concerning social constructionism and social work with the aim of exploring emergent theories of how social constructionism could be applied to social work education.

Participants for this study are leading social constructionist scholars and practitioners from around the globe. In order to be considered leading they must have published extensively in peer reviewed journals, be cited often by other scholars, and be well known and generally recognized by all within their fields. To this end, the study seeks to explore the subjective experiences and views of the participants. Because of the breadth and depth of these goals, a qualitative methodology was warranted.

Specific Methodologies Utilized

In keeping with the social constructionist underpinnings of the study, a qualitative approach that honors the negotiation of meaning in relationships and the social construction of knowledge in cultural context was sought. After a thorough examination of the literature I decided to utilize the following approaches for the study, which will be presented here and discussed below. The primary approach for interviewing was the reflective dyadic approach (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Gubruim & Holstein, 1997). The methodology utilized was constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000), and narrative inquiry (Clandinin

& Connelly, 2000). After themes were constructed, I utilized four prominent critical perspectives to discuss their applications in social work. These included: (a) Evidence-based positivism (Gambrill, 1999, Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Sheldon, 2001; Thyer & Myers, 1999), (b) Witkin & Gottschalk's (1988) proposed alternative criteria for theory evaluation, (c) Hare-Mustin's discussion of feminist based ethical practice (1994), and (d) the Social Work Code of Ethics (NASW, 1999). These approaches are summarized in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 6

Summary of How Different Methodological Approaches Inform the Study

Approach	How It informs the Research
Interviewing Reflective Dyadic Interviewing (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997)	Recognizes the interviewer's influence in the social construction of meaning by understanding that data are created through relationships in context. Requires that the interviewer self-reflect, be transparent, and maintain a learning position in order to create an atmosphere of unheirarchical mutual openness and sharing.
Method Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000)	Considers the process of data collection and interpretation as an emergent, circular social construction of meaning. Meaning is mutually created through dialogue by the interviewer and interviewee; this created meaning is interpreted from the perspective of the interviewer, this interpretation influences the next interview, researcher changes in understanding with each conversation, which in turn influences meaning creation during the subsequent interviews.
Additional Theory of Interpretation Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)	Meaning emerges in the form of privileged shared events in the interviewee's life that serves to influence present perspectives and life decisions.

Table 7

Summary of How Different Critical Perspectives Inform the Study

Critical Perspective	How it informs the Research
Evidence-Based Positivism (Gambrill, 1999, 2005; Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Sheldon, 2002; Thyer, 1999)	Challenges constructed themes to determine if their application has empirical support and evidence of efficacy in assisting clients.
Social Constructionism (Witkin & Gottschalk, 1985)	Challenges the privileging of one perspective over others, seeks to determine the underlying values of the constructed themes, seeks to determine if the application of the findings is socially just.
Feminism (Hare-Mustin, 1995)	Challenges the constructed themes to determine if their application is active in promoting social change, if the perspective moves individuals, groups, and societies toward a place of equality and mutually respected self-definition.
National Association Social Work Code of Ethics (NASW, 1999)	Seeks to test the ethicality of the application of the constructed perspective by its agreement with the mission statement, goals, and directives of the field of social work.

Reflective Dyadic Interviewing

In concert with the social constructionist theory underpinning the study, a social constructionist interview technique was sought. After a thoughtful review of the literature, I decided to use the reflexive dyadic interviewing approach (Ellis & Berger 2003; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). The approach is consistent with social constructionist ideals and maintains that the interviewer is not value-free (Reinharz, 1992) and that the interview process is one of collaboration in which meaning is created rather than discovered (Lather, 1991). To this end the approach requires that the interview occur more as a conversation than as a

traditional interview, such that both parties can ask questions of the other and respectful reciprocity can develop. A grand tour question is offered at the beginning of the discussion and questions followed naturally based on the flow of the conversation. The approach offers an alternative to the traditional guided interview and seeks to break down the binaries of expert and subject. This serves to privilege both the meaning of the interviewer and of the interviewee, a goal striven for in both constructivist grounded theory and in social constructionist informed practice.

Several specific social constructionist positions are adopted with reflective dyadic interviewing and included (a) adopting a learning position in which a space of suspended causal linearity is created, (b) perspectival interviewing in which different perspectives are brought into the conversation to help guide question development that explored the interviewee's ideas, (c) listening for word choice and when words fail, and (d) listening for what is not present (e.g., tones, words, viewpoints, pauses). The approach fits very well with constructivist grounded theory as both are based in social constructionism and are consistent with the constructivist directive that qualitative researchers gather data with thick, rich description that goes deeper than the surface level of facts (Charmaz, 1995, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory is a modification of the traditional grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a method by which qualitative data are coded, analyzed for emergent themes, and re-analyzed for emergent

theory. This approach has been criticized by social constructionists for its alignment with a positivist tradition in that it assumes that a reality exists separate from interpretation, that a position of researcher neutrality is attainable through processes of researcher control, and that the findings of a study may be viewed as objectively discovered rather than as constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In an effort to address these criticisms, Strauss and Corbin (1988) developed postpositivist grounded theory, which recognizes the possibility of differing interpretations between interviewer and interviewee, and requires continued reflection by the interviewer. But the approach falls short of social constructionist standards because it continues to rely on the positivist paradigm by espousing that an external reality exists apart from interpretation and that a neutral position in research is attainable through rigid procedural control (Charmaz, 2000).

Constructivist grounded theory was developed in response to postpositivist grounded theory. True to social constructionism, constructivist grounded theory challenges the notion of researcher objectivity, that data are found rather than created, and that procedures need to be rigid to control for bias that is inherent in all people (Charmaz, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

> A constructivist grounded theory distinguishes between the real and the true . . . The approach does not seek truth—single, universal, and lasting. Still, it remains realist because it addresses human *realities* and assumes the existence of real worlds . . . the interpretation is objectivist only to the extent that it seeks to construct analyses that show how respondents and the social scientists who study them construct those realities without viewing those realities as uni-demential, universal, and immutable. (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523)

Constructivist grounded theory may be understood to be an attempt to describe a constructed reality in context, and not a description of generalized truth. Results are viewed as a social construction (e.g., interpretation), of a social construction (e.g., relationship between interviewer and interviewee around subject and in context). Charmaz (2000) describes the process of constructivist grounded theory as seeking both the meaning of the respondents and the meaning of the researcher. This approach demands that the researcher be openly transparent about biases and look beyond surface responses by respondents to recognize and notice values and beliefs that these views may be based upon. "We must look for views and values as well as for acts and facts. We need to look for beliefs and ideologies as well as situations and structures. By studying tacit meanings, we clarify, rather than challenge, respondents' views about reality" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 525).

The methods of constructivist grounded theory are discussed in the data analysis and coding section. The theoretical differences between constructivist grounded theory and traditional grounded theory are summarized in Table 8.

Narrative inquiry will be used as an additional theory for interpreting these data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It will be used to determine if the interactions between myself and the participants are congruent with the themes presented in the study.

Table 8

Comparison of Grounded Theory and Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (Glasser, 1992)	Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000)
Reality exists separate from interpretation	Reality is constructed by interpretation
An objective researcher position is possible	A position of research neutrality is not possible. The researcher and context influences the relationship, which influences the social construction of meaning
Data are discovered	Data are created
Attempts to capture truth within context	Attempts to capture one of many ways of understanding in context
Data are singular	Data are privileged and interpretive
Seeks replicability and trustworthiness of the truth of the findings	Does not seek replicability for replicability is impossible due to the changing influence of the participants and context. Seeks trustworthiness in the descriptive meaning constructed from the relationship in context
Research guidelines are didactic and prescriptive	Research guides are emergent and interactive, and flexible so as not to constrain emergent theory

Critical Perspectives

Four critical perspectives were used to examine the relevance and ethicality of the constructed themes for social work practice. (1) Evidence-based practice (Gambrill, 1999, 2005; Gambrill & Gibbs, 2002; Sheldon, 2001; Thyer & Myers, 1999) was chosen due to its prominence in the literature as the latest articulation of empiricism for social work. It was utilized as the foundation for a discussion to determine if the approaches constructed from the data have evidential support; (2) Witkin and Gottschalk's (1988) criteria for social theory evaluation was utilized to determine if the approaches constructed from the data

meet the criteria of social constructionist understandings; (3) feminist theory (Hare-Mustin, 1994) was utilized to determine if the practices derived from the application of social constructionism to social work practice education is oppressive to any group; and (4) the NASW Code of Ethics (1999) was utilized to determine if these practices met all ethical requirements of the Code.

Data Collection and Participant Selection

Telephone interviews were utilized due to the location of the interviewees and the limited budget of the study. Each interview was approximately one hour long. The free-flowing, unstructured discussions stemmed from the grand tour question: **What value, if any, do you see in social constructionist ideas informing the education of social work practitioners?** The interviews were recorded via an electronic recording device and the data then transcribed and analyzed for themes.

Purposive sampling was utilized for this study as the purpose and design was such that experts in the area of social constructionist theory and practice were warranted. A sample size of 13 participants was selected, (Table 9).

Participants were chosen based on their recognition in the field as prominent social constructionist scholars. Eleven participants had advanced degrees in social work. Two participants were chosen who had advanced degrees in psychology. The decision to include these participants was made due to their high standing in the field of social work as based on the numerous citations of their work in the social work literature.

Table 9

Social Constructionist Scholars Interviewed

Name	Country	Occupation	Background
Harlene Anderson	United States	Academic/Practitioner	Psychology, Marriage and Family Therapy
Ruth Dean	United States	Academic/Practitioner	Social Work
Jan Fook	Australia	Academic/Practitioner	Social Work
Jill Freedman	United States	Trainer/Practitioner	Social Work
Ken Gergen	United States	Academic	Social Psychology
Ann Hartman	United States	Academic/Practitioner	Social Work
Allan Irving	Canada	Academic	Social Work
Joan Laird	United States	Academic/Practitioner	Social Work/ Anthropology
Stephen Madigan	Canada	Practitioner/Trainer	Social Work
Nigel Parton	England	Academic/Practitioner	Social Work
Susan Robbins	United States	Academic/Practitioner	Social Work
Dennis Salebeey	United States	Academic	Social Work
Stanely Witkin	United States	Academic	Social Work

Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Anonymity

Issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity followed the

guidelines established by the University of Louisville Institutional Review Board.

Informed consent information was presented in two ways. First, the consent

preamble was sent via e-mail as a part of the invitation to participate; (Appendix

B). Second, consent and issues of confidentiality and anonymity were discussed

with each participant at the beginning of the interview. Thus, informed consent

was given in two ways, first, by the respondents replying to the e-mailed

invitation to participate, second, by a verbal consent given at the beginning of the

interview. All participants granted permission to present their comments in an

unidentifiable manner and agreed to be listed as participants in Appendix A.

Coding and Data Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory is an approach in which participant and interviewer come together to have a collaborative conversation sparked by the grand tour question. This conversation is understood to be co-constructed, and data that originate from the discussion are understood to be collaboratively formed. The analysis of the data is an interpretation of the co-constructed data from the researcher's perspective.

In the analysis of the constructed data, constructivist grounded theory utilizes many of the same techniques of postpositivist grounded theory (Stauss & Corbin, 1998) but with the realization that: (a) data are not objective, (b) that data are mutually constructed, (c) a description of the meaning in context is sought instead of a cornering of truth, and (d) interpretation of data involves turning an eye to both the data and the construction of the data.

The analytic processes utilized in coding and analysis are open coding, memoing, constant comparison analysis, modified axial coding, and selective coding (Charmaz, 2000). It is understood that these techniques are to be flexible so as not to confine constructed data into preconceived categories but to allow theory to be constructed from the data. I will now discuss these concepts and their direct application will be presented Chapter IV.

Description of Constructivist Grounded Coding

The process of coding and analysis in constructive grounded theory is unguarded and free-flowing (Figure 3). Data collection, coding, memoing, and sorting
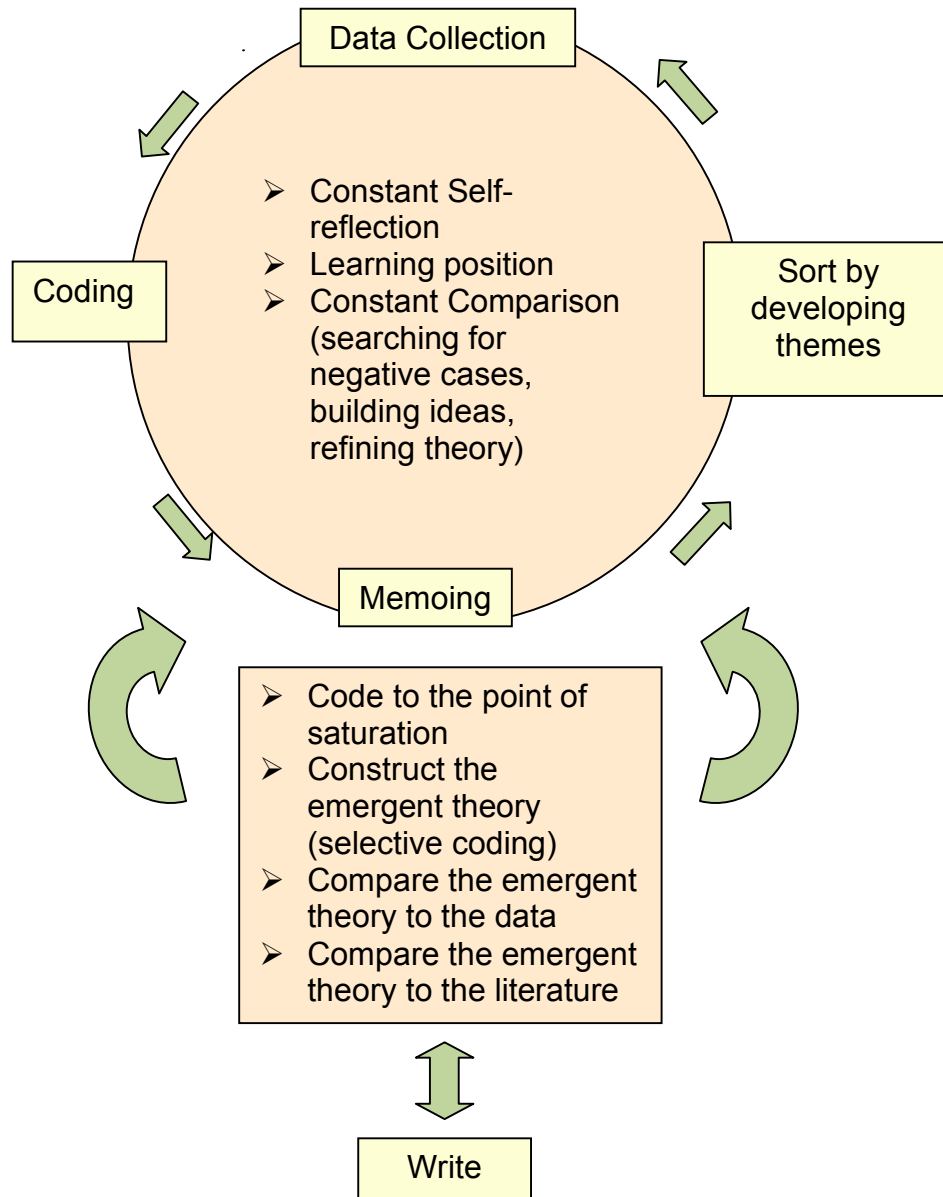
Figure 3: **Constructivist grounded theory.**

by theme (modified axial coding), is a circular process involving constant

comparison, self reflection, and the adoption of a learning stance.

Initial hypotheses are neither formed, nor their validation sought, rather, a space

of possibility is opened where ideas and thoughts can reside without the

necessity of being fit together in a quick manner or organized by a preconceived category. In constructivist research, interpretations change and move, multiple interpretations may be possible. Theory is constructed from this space of open interpretation as data are systematically collected, coded, and compared. In traditional grounded theory open coding involves analyzing the data for concepts, whereas in constructivist grounded theory, I am looking for concepts, values, and feelings. I am interested in ideas and in tacit meanings (Chamaz, 2002) that may expand the constructed theory.

During the process of coding and comparison, themes begin to be constructed. These themes have been traditionally categorized by axial coding (Stauss & Corbin, 1998). Chamaz recommends modifying this coding to avoid the use of scientific jargon and suggests instead the use of "active codes and subsequent categories (that) preserve images of experience" (p.526). This involves using terms that capture the tacit qualities, feelings, and holistic meanings of the interviewer rather than terms designed to capture facts. Examples of non-scientific, active codes include, "recasting life," "pulling in," and "facing dependency" (Chamaz, 2003, p. 526.)

Extending this concept further, self-reflection during the interpretive process is of utmost importance. The recognition of emotional responses and feelings, and a reflection upon these feelings in addition to a monitoring of the clarity of thought, should be the aim, for it is in this way that "the viewer is part of what is viewed rather than separate from it" (Chamaz, p. 524).

The process of constant comparison involves a continued and persistent comparison of codes, constructed themes, and theories to the differing interviews that comprise the data. Data should be viewed afresh with each re-reading and constructed themes should be tested by their fit with the data. Negative cases should be diligently sought as a process of discrediting, or focusing the constructed themes. The constant comparison process is the hallmark of qualitative theory development. Making continuous comparisons serves to develop themes from the data and the continuous focusing of those themes refines them. Just as constructionists refrain from the use of technical terms in coding, there is also a resistance to the use of contextual maps involved in traditional grounded theories, such as the conditional matrix (Stauss & Corbin, 1990), because they are overly complicated and may serve to obscure experience and meaning (Charmaz, 2000).

Trustworthiness and Credibility: A Discussion of Rigor

Quantitative studies provide a set of concepts and terms to determine the credibility of a study's findings. These terms include internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Constructivist qualitative studies have a different set of concepts to determine the trustworthiness of the findings. These are credibility, transferability, auditability, and confirmability (Padgett, 1988). Taken as a whole these areas comprise the level of rigor of the study and involve six strategies for enhancing trustworthiness: Prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing and support, member checking, negative case analysis, and audit trail (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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Of the six strategies to enhance the rigor of a qualitative study, triangulation, peer debriefing and support, negative case analysis, and an audit trail were utilized and are described below. Prolonged engagement was not a possibility due to the stature of the interviewees and the limited amount of time available to me. This time limitation also precluded the use of member checking though a brief version was utilized and is described below.

Triangulation

Triangulation is defined in qualitative research as the endeavor to use multiple sources of data, perspectives, theories, and observations to focus the qualitative themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Padgett, 1998). Denzin (1978) identified four types of triangulation used to enhance the rigor of a qualitative study:

1. **Theory and theme triangulation:** The use of multiple theories to interpret the data and findings.

2. **Methodological triangulation:** The use of different research methods to derive data, such as qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

3. **Observer triangulation:** The use of outside observers in an effort to achieve intersubjective agreement. The use of outside readers is included in this category.

4. **Data triangulation:** The use of more than one source of data (e.g., interviews, observations, and literature).

Triangulation occurs in this study in three ways, (a) theme triangulation, (b) outside readers, and (c) brief member checking. These will now be discussed.

Theme Triangulation

Theme triangulation occurred through the use of multiple theories to interpret the data and the findings. Specifically, applications of social constructionism that were constructed from the data were critically examined through the lens of four critical perspectives. These perspectives were, (a) evidence-based practice (Gambrill, 1999, Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Sheldon, 2002; Thyer & Myers, 1999), (b) Witkin and Gottschalk's (1988) criteria for theory evaluation, (c) feminism (Hare-Mustin, 1994), and (d) the NASW Code of Ethics (1999).

In addition a small narrative analysis was conducted to determine if the ways in which these scholars interacted with me were congruent with the collaborative interactions they espouse. This analysis served to strengthen the themes that were constructed from the data.

Outside Readers

Reader triangulation occurred through the utilization of my five committee members as outside readers. These readers reviewed the study on four separate occasions (a) the concept paper and proposed methodology, (b) Chapters I-III, (c) Chapter IV, and (d) the completed project. At each review methodological and theoretical rigor, trustworthiness and consistency were evaluated.

Brief Member Checking

Brief member checking occurred through a reflection of the constructed themes and applications of the project with the last interviewee. While ideally I

would like to have been able to do the same with all participants their limited time made this impractical.

Peer Debriefing and Support

Peer debriefing and support occurred through conversations with the study chair, Dr. Dan Wulff, the qualitative methodologist on the committee, as well as other committee members. The purpose of peer support is to check biased perspectives and help keep the researcher focused by both monitoring the research process and introducing alternative ideas and perceptions that may serve to refine the research and perceptually thicken the emergent theory.

Negative Case Analysis

Of particular importance in the process of analysis is the use of negative case analysis to refine and focus the constructed themes. This has the effect of enhancing the trustworthiness of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). During the ongoing process of constant comparison, themes were tested for fit by both seeking their support in the data and also seeking their falsification. This dual process allowed for strong theme development and assisted greatly in the development of the six applications to be discussed in Chapter IV.

Audit Trail

An audit trail includes all transcribed data, codes, memos, and direct written material from the research. In addition, it involves the maintenance of a journal in which the researcher records thoughts, feelings, ideas, and reflections related to the research process itself. These records form a methodological trail that can be checked to determine how the study was constructed and conducted.

In constructivist grounded theory the audit trail is a further endeavor at transparency and represents the social construction of the research.

Procedure

This study used constructivist grounded theory and progressed procedurally in the following manner:

1. Participants were sent an invitation letter (Appendix B) via e-mail and asked if they would like to participate. Upon a positive response, a call was placed and the interview scheduled.

2. The interview began with the attainment of verbal informed consent and issues of anonymity and confidentiality were discussed.

3. An unstructured interview using reflective dyadic interviewing took place for approximately one hour.

    A. Each interview was audio-taped.

    B. The interview was unstructured and free-flowing stemming from the grand tour question: **What value, if any, do you see in social constructionist ideas informing the education of social work practitioners?**

4. Data was transcribed and coded between interviews using the constant comparison method. This circular process is consistent with constructionist grounded methodology (Charmaz, 2000).

5. Data was analyzed in the following manner (continuous comparison utilized throughout the analysis).

    A. Open coding was utilized to analyze transcripts

B. Open coding was performed again to determine if codes remained consistent or if other ideas appeared

C. Transcripts were coded until the point of saturation (no new codes constructed)

D. Coded transcripts were compared to each other and codes organized into themes

E. Codes were compared to the point of saturation (no new themes constructed)

F. Themes were tested and refined by returning to the transcripts and considering supportive and unsupportive cases (negative case analysis)

G. Constructed themes and applications were organized into frameworks

Determination of Analysis Completion

After theme development and comparison to the transcripts through negative case analysis, I organized the themes into conceptual frameworks. The next step in the constructivist grounded theory analysis process was to further synthesize these themes into a theory. It was at this point that I paused. After repeated attempts I could not reduce the emergent themes into a theory without feeling as though I was reducing possibilities and other interpretations. After much deliberation I decided not to risk losing meaning by reducing the themes any further. The incorporation of these themes into a theory of explanation was incongruent with social constructionist informed research because coming to a

conclusion concerning these scholars' interpretations was limiting to the possibilities that these themes represent. To that end, I decided to present the themes as openly as possible to allow for other interpretations and discussions. Themes are organized into frameworks and build upon each other conceptually.

Conclusion

The methodology and procedure of the study have been presented, including a discussion of reflexive dyadic interviewing, constructionist grounded theory, narrative inquiry, rigor and trustworthiness, and strategies to achieve rigor and trustworthiness. Thirteen interviews were held with leading social constructionist scholars and practitioners. The grand tour question was: **What value, if any, do you see in social constructionist ideas informing the education of social work practitioners?** These interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The resulting constructed themes and applications were examined using four critical perspectives (a) evidence-based practice (Gambrill, 1999, Gibbs & Gambrill, 2002; Sheldon, 2001; Thyer, & Myers, 1999), (b), Witkin & Gottschalk's (1988) evaluation criteria, (c) feminist theory (Hare-Mustin, 1994), and (d) The NASW Code of Ethics (1999).

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

At the outset of this phase of our journey let us take pause to briefly reflect on the purpose of this project. The study seeks to explore how social constructionist theory can inform the education of social work practitioners and how those practitioners may then influence the field of social work with learned and experienced social constructionist ideals. Specifically, the research, or grand tour question asked of these scholars was: **What value, if any, do you see in social constructionist ideas informing the education of social work practitioners?** Social constructionism in this envisioning would serve as the theoretical bridge between the academy and practitioners in the field.

The study maintains that social work teachers and trainers are in the best positions to influence the direction and shape of the field because they are the conveyers of theory and collaborators in the development of student practices. Likewise, social constructionist scholars, trainers, and practitioners are in the best position to discuss how social constructionism can be conveyed to students, assist in the formation of their practices, and explore the direction of the field as influenced by social constructionist ideas.

Upon lengthy consideration of the organization of themes and the construction of the framework derived from the data, I have concluded that a

philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice has been developed. A philosophy may be understood to be a way of understanding that is comprised of multiple core principles or values (Reynolds, 1971). Themes constructed represent core principles of a social constructionist approach to social work practice. The inability to further reduce these concepts provides support for their recognition as principles of a philosophical framework as their condensing had the effect of reducing their complexity and breadth. The philosophical framework developed encompasses both the *conceptualization* of practice and education as well as offering a discussion of *how* to practice and teach. Therefore, **a philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice** is presented which encompasses both a discussion of the understanding of practice and methods of practice. Six applications of this philosophical framework in social work education are offered (a) **the eclectic-hybrid application**, (b) **the eclectic-collaborative application**, (c) **the process application**, (d) **the political practice application**, (e) **the political practice and institution deconstruction application**, and (f) **the community polyvocal partnership application.** In addition to presenting applications of the philosophical framework for practice, a further **application of the philosophical framework for teaching social work practice** is presented. This application represents ways of being in the classroom and ways of approaching education that are guided by the larger philosophical framework. In addition, as a form of triangulation to increase the rigor of the constructed philosophical framework, I present a short narrative analysis to determine if participant ways of interacting

with me were congruent with the premises that were constructed in our dialogues.

The chapter will begin with a decentering of my position that will add to the trustworthiness of the study. Decentering is consistent with a social constructionist approach to research and is being offered to provide readers with an understanding of my perceptions concerning social work. By making public my views I hope that this transparency will allow the reader to contextualize my perceptions with views presented from these scholars. After decentering, the paper will progress as follows: (a) discussion of the interview process, (b) reflection on the interview process, (d) discussion of the analysis process, (e) reflection on the analysis process, (f) presentation of a philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice, (g) presentation of its six applications, and (h) presentation of an application of the philosophical framework for teaching social work practice. In addition to these analyses, a brief narrative analysis will be presented to determine if dialogues held between participants and myself were congruent with the philosophical framework presented. This brief discussion will serve to support the developing framework.

Decentering: Making Public My Position

As previously discussed, a social constructionist approach to research does not make claims of truth discovery, rather, that knowledge is created collaboratively in relational dialogue. With this understanding of knowledge the project seeks not to present findings in an objective manner but to describe the process of these discussions, and the thoughts, ideas, concepts, and feelings

that emerged. Constructed themes presented represent ideas that have been interpreted as the most important across the conversations with these 13 social constructionist scholars. My conversations with the participants were most enlightening in ways that move beyond the scope of this study and I am deeply grateful for their time and for sharing their life courses and understandings with me. With this in mind the chapter begins with a brief discussion of my views on social work and research. In a study underpinned by a social constructionist framework it is hoped that making public my views will decenter me in the research process and allow the reader to be aware of the lens through which I have constructed the philosophical framework. It is hoped that this contextualization will increase the trustworthiness of the research.

Statement of My Position and Beliefs

In Chapters I and II, I discussed my journey to this point and how I came to be drawn to social constructionist views. Before proceeding with analysis I would like to make public my views concerning social work so that the reader may have insight into my biases in these discussions.

From my way of understanding, social work has been recruited into adopting a positivist understanding of professionalism and is limited and controlled by the expectations of these discourses. Paradigms of knowledge and those who participate in their creation may be considered, from an anthropological view, a culture. Certain norms and ideals are negotiated and categorical language is created in conjunction with those ideas. Consequences for not subjugating according to the ideals of the culture are enacted. Mental

health and social science professionalism in the 20th century developed a culture

rooted in the notions of objectivity and positivist science. This culture evolved

from a patriarchal paradigm in which objectivity is possible and that truth can be

discovered if the viewer is scientifically controlled and disciplined to "see" clearly

enough. This detached, controlled ability to see the truth *in* things has

subsequently been incorporated as a part of the real and the good of scientific

culture. Professionalism has been constructed as scientific objectivity.

In order to validate itself as a profession, social work has been recruited

into operating under the influence of the culture of science. In a 100-plus year

endeavor to gain the approval of the scientific culture, social work has attempted

to rise to its demands to (a) find a knowledge base of truth, (b) provide

interventions based on this knowledge base, and (c) prove to others that the

interventions and services it provides are effective. Perceived consequences of

not following these expectations include (a) not gaining approval of the culture of

science, (b) losing professional prestige and social influence, and (c) reduced

funding from sources that have adopted the scientific model.

Social work has several choices. The field can meet the expectations of

the scientific culture, negotiate a new position for itself with the communities and

clients it seeks to assist, or find some balance between the two. From a social

constructionist position I feel that social work has an ethical obligation to

collaboratively engage with clients to assist in liberating them from problems as

clients understand them, not as *science* understands them. In acting

collaboratively, social work and clients may choose to meet the requirements of

the dominant scientific paradigm of showing helpfulness but only as a secondary effect of the main work of assisting individuals and communities lead better, more informed, and directed lives. In the next three sections I discuss each of the requirements above in turn.

Develop a Knowledge Base

From a social constructionist position knowledge and meaning are created in dialogue via language. From this view, social work's knowledge base emanates from the clients themselves. Knowledge is created in each social worker-client interaction that is as important, if not more so, than knowledge created in any other interaction, scientific or otherwise. Therefore, knowledge can be understood to be unique and context derived. It is the act of engaging, exploring, reflecting, and collaborating that is social work's expertise. This represents a shift from generalized knowledge to local, indigenous knowledge. Social workers should be skilled at exploring problems and solutions with clients that honor, and expand upon, client-indigenous knowledge. Clients should be understood to be the keepers of the social work knowledge base and respected accordingly. They should be appreciated for the knowledge they bring as experts of their own lives and social work should recognize its strength from the 100-plus year dedication it has had in adapting to clients' needs. The flexibility, respect, and recognition of diversity involved in social work's endeavor to collaborate with a multitude of clients and populations over ongoing historical time periods, *is* a knowledge base. The ability to remain flexible across time in relation to the

changing construction of social problems also contributes to a knowledge base. This knowledge base must be more fully recognized and articulated by the field.

Provide Interventions Based on this Knowledge Base

If the knowledge base of social work resides in the indigenous, local knowledges of its clients, and the expertise of the social worker is the ability to collaboratively explore this knowledge and adapt to society's understandings of the problem, then interventions should put client knowledge at the forefront, seek to understand client perceptions, and work collaboratively and flexibly based on the unique context of every relationship. From a social constructionist view, people are understood to be created in relationships, in both family and culture; interventions should therefore explore how the problem may have been conceived in cultural and family relational space. As Hoffman (1990) described, people are not trapped in biological isolation booths, rather they are born into relationships. Social work by its nature must help clients recognize that they are created in relationships and that cultural understandings and discourses act on these relationships by limiting how they can understand themselves and the ways in which they can give meaning to the events in their world.

Interventions that honor client knowledge should help clients recognize and explore the cultural and familial beliefs they have been recruited into, and invite them to consider whether these ideas are in their best interest, whether these cultural and familial beliefs influence them in ways that are acceptable to them. Through the recognition of the restriction of relational space and self envisioning possibilities, clients are in positions to make informed choices as to

whether they should adopt familial or cultural beliefs or resist them in ways which

expand the possibilities for their lives in directions which they find more

comfortable than their present understandings. By working in culturally aware

ways social work is intervening both at the individual and cultural level.

Therefore, social work interventions that are built on the knowledge base of the

field should be collaborative, recognize indigenous knowledge, be flexible,

reflective, and consider the cultural, familial context of problems in relational

space. In accepting clients as experts, social workers are honoring the diversity

of understandings and are consciously aware of operating in a culturally just

manner.

"Prove" that the Interventions and Services Provided are Effective (Flexner, 1915)

At the outset of considering this requirement to *prove* that interventions

and services are effective, three questions must be asked: (1) For what purpose

is proof needed? (2) Who provides the source of proof? And, (3) to whom is proof

given?

If shifting an understanding of the knowledge base of social work to

clients, then interventions based on respecting and exploring that knowledge

base should be collaborative, respectful, and culturally aware. *Proof*, in this

sense of practice, would be exposed as a culturally manifested idea of giving

information to a higher source of power concerning the success of an operation

that is performed on someone. Proof in a collaborative and culturally aware

relationship would be re-envisioned from being an end report presented to a

higher authority, to a continual reflective process that occurs collaboratively within the helping relationship. This collaborative reflection on the helpfulness of the relationship would guide the movement of the relationship. The revisioning of traditional proof to constructionist collaborative reflection answers the three questions above (Why proof? Who provides proof? And to whom is proof given?). Again, if proof is not given as an end report, but is created in collaboration with clients, the source of proof is the relationship itself. This relationship is open and continually shifting in respectful ways to collaboratively reflect on whether the process is helpful to clients in improving their understandings of self and their worlds in some way. The ultimate and final authority on the nature of helping is clients, therefore proof should not be viewed as an end product but as a reflective process of which the client is always a part.

The concept of proof has traditionally been used to collect generalizable data to determine which practices works best for which problems. Providing proof that social work is assisting people to lead better lives is not necessarily congruent with creating one practice to which all social workers should adhere. It is *in*congruent with the social work values of supporting the diversity of people, relationships, and contexts to assume that one way of working can be imposed on all. It is incongruent with the values of social work to assume that problems can be generalized and categorized like cans on a shelf.

The requirement that social work must provide proof that interventions are helpful can be separated from a drive to standardize practice. A move away from notions of mass approved practices stamped with the evidence seal, to the more

collaborative notions of helpfulness is warranted given the individualized, fluid, and diverse nature of social work's clients and the cultures of which they are a part.

What, then, is the alternative to an EBP approach? If I accept that each individual is unique, then just as every client is unique, so is every social worker. If I then accept that every relationship is unique, as well as context, then I must move to a collaborative and fluid way of practicing and of determining the effectiveness of my work that honors this diversity. Therefore, a shift from what has been called evidence-based practice (Gambrill, 1999, 2005) to a model which privileges the uniqueness of each collaborative relationship is warranted. Duncan, Miller, and Sparks (2004) have presented an alternative model of determining effectiveness. Their model is presented as "practice-based evidence" (p. 15). In this model, social workers are charged with tracking the development of their practices and determining collaboratively with clients if they are moving in helpful directions. While this model shifts to a more collaborative approach the word *evidence* moves us away from constructionist and culturally aware understandings.

Further, because in a constructionist approach there is no longer the need to generalize findings to prove one series of questions better than another, the need for quantitative paradigmatic concepts of variables is no longer present. Therefore the term *evidence* can be dispensed altogether. The phrase "practice based" seems to define context well enough so we may then arrive at "practice based collaboration." Social workers using this approach would be ethically

required to collaboratively monitor their developing practices to determine whether their relationships are moving in helpful ways for clients. The client is then in a position to collaborate with the social worker on how (s)he would like to be helped and a reflective monitoring process incorporated into the relationship. In this approach the social worker is in a position to learn from the client how to move in relation to client needs. This movement and collaborative flexibility will increase social workers' helpfulness.

I have presented my views to expose my biases before beginning the data analysis process. I invite the reader to reflect upon my views when considering the framework presented to determine and consider how they may have shaped my interpretation of the data. I will now proceed to a presentation of the research process.

Description of the Interview Process

Participants were selected based on their expertise in social constructionist theory and practice. The group was composed of leading scholars in social work and related fields. Eleven of the 13 participants had advanced social work degrees. The two who had advanced degrees in psychology were chosen due to their strong contributions to the field of social work. Participants were sent an invitation e-mail asking for their participation in a dissertation focusing on the application of social constructionism to the education of social work practitioners. Included in the e-mail was the written preamble found in Appendix B. Most participants responded within two weeks. Those who did not respond were sent follow-up e-mails after two weeks from the original request.

In total, 16 scholars were contacted and 15 agreed to the interview. The one participant who declined cited a lack of time. Of the two who agreed to participate but did not, one was unable to do so due to a family emergency, the other was on an extensive training tour and was unable to schedule with me.

Those who agreed to participate were contacted and a telephone interview appointment was made. The interviews began with a brief re-introduction to the study and a discussion of the Institutional Review Board preamble requirements. The interviews were audio-recorded using a Sony ICD digital recorder attached between the phone receiver and the phone base unit. Upon completion of each interview, the data were downloaded to an Apple G5 computer and transcribed by hand. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour with the longest being 1-½ hours, and the shortest 50 minutes.

Interviews were unstructured and began with the following grand tour question: **What value, if any, do you see in social constructionist ideas informing the education of social work practitioners?** Participants were invited to move in whatever direction they liked in answering the question. In retrospect, the use of an unstructured interview with a broad grand tour question created enough space to capture richness and diversity in responses. This question, more than any other, established the broadness for the study as each participant began the discussion in a unique way based on his or her conceptualization of the application of social constructionism to the area of social work he or she wished to discuss.

I utilized a social constructionist informed, non-directive approach to interviewing in which I asked open-ended questions. My goal was to follow rather than lead in order to allow space for their ideas and understandings to emerge. On several occasions, especially at the beginning of the interview, I was asked if the direction they were taking was appropriate: "Is that the kinda' thing you're looking for?" "Is this where you want to go with this question?" "Is this the kind of thing that you want?" In these instances I responded in ways that were reassuring to their choice of direction, "I'm most interested in where you would like to go," We could go in that direction or another, whatever draws you," "Oh, absolutely! Sure! And there are no wrongs or rights here, this is fantastic."

As interviews continued and themes were constructed from the transcribed interviews I began to ask questions around the themes. This was done to flesh out ideas and to expand the richness of the data. I occasionally took contrary positions to the respondent's views in an effort to expand the detail of their understandings and positions: "Now critics of this view will say . . ." "Some contrary views maintain . . . how might you respond to those ideas?"

Follow-up questions evolved from the unstructured discussions. Utilizing a reflexive framework I chose to actively participate in the discussions rather than to make attempts at being an objective interviewer. My hope was that this participation would add to the richness of the data. My intent for the decision was to (a) summarize my understanding of their comments, as a form of in vivo member checking, (b) clarify their comments by not making assumptions, (c) broaden there comments by asking follow-up detailed questions, (d) broaden

their comments by taking the opposite perspective, (d) support their comments to create safety, and (e) self-disclose to promote collaborative knowledge creation. In addition to these types of questions, I allowed my passionate curiosity to be expressed in my vocal tone and comments. I was intentionally transparent with my emotions, laughing often, and sharing my curiosity if a comment was not clear to me. I also shared my appreciation and excitement in speaking with the participants. My reasoning was that if I engaged them in an open manner they would return in kind and I wished to dispel the illusion of objectivity.

I took notes on a sheet of paper as ideas and questions came to me. My note-taking served to connect ideas and to help me stay in the here-and-now moment of my dialogue with participants. I reflected back on ideas in an attempt to tie concepts together and to ask participants about my perceptions of links. This movement from idea to idea created depth to the interviews and detail to the data.

While impossible to generalize, participants were engaged in the process and very receptive to the questions asked. The entire process felt enjoyable and at no time as a relational co-partner did I feel that there was any discomfort or problem.

Reflections on the Interview Process

Wow! was the first word that came to mind. Unscholarly as it is, it aptly describes my feelings. When I first envisioned this project I had no idea what I would learn and how enthralling the process would be. I knew that it would be interesting but I had not anticipated the level of invigoration that I would feel. I

have been excited for the last 8 months and the magnitude of that can only be realized when taking into consideration that this is my dissertation. How can I be enthralled, excited, and happy about the prospect of writing 200 plus pages? I feel that I have somehow escaped the hazing ritual of drudgery in the academic dungeons that many dissertations become. This has been a wonderfully enjoyable process and I thank these scholars for that feeling.

The interview process for me was a personal evolution away from nervousness and toward collaborative discussion. I was quite nervous before the first interview. I am a practitioner and have spent countless hours in discussions with individuals, families, and groups but I was nervous to speak with these participants. Thoughts that came to me before the first few interviews involved my level of knowledge: Do I know enough? What if I say something silly? Can I keep an unstructured interview going for an hour? As the interviews began and progressed, I realized that I do know quite a bit, and in my own way, we all say silly things, and the interview was collaborative so the participant and I were mutually in the process. I became so engrossed in the conversations that I frequently forgot about the time.

My position as a social constructionist informed practitioner helped tremendously. Asking open-ended, exploring questions that follows the lead of the participant feels very natural to me. I chose to occasionally reframe questions to get at the corners of understandings that were difficult to flesh out. In one interview a participant inquired about this, (note that P represents participant and C, myself).

P: *Is that the same question asked in a different way?*
C: *I think it is. (Both laugh) I'm trying to kind of prod your thinking here, or maybe I'm just trying to continue to push for an answer, I don't know.*
P: *Yeah, yeah.*
C: *And maybe it's not, maybe it's something that you don't feel would be that important, I don't know.*

I followed up each interview with an e-mail thank you and in many cases participants forwarded other reference material to me, as well as information for conferences and events they were either participating in or hosting. The process was life altering and I am quite humbled to have been able to speak with these scholars.

Description of the Analysis Process

This section will present an overview of the analysis process followed by my reflections. Before the analysis I will explain the reason for excluding one participant's responses from the analysis of data leading to the emergent theory of social constructionism in social work.

In the course of the interviews one participant self-described as having both positivist and social constructionist leanings, "I have my feet firmly in both camps." While this position has much to offer the field of social work and is certainly to be respected, the participant's interview was not used as part of the philosophical framework presented. This choice was made because the study's purpose is to explore the application of social constructionism to the education of social work practitioners and how they may practice in the field. The utilization of this participant's data would confound the themes by including a constructionist-positivist hybrid perspective. While excluded from the main framework the

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participant's views were included in the discussion of the six applications of social constructionism in social work education. The application of social constructionism along side positivist theory is worthy of discussion and certainly falls within the scope of this project.

After the completion of each interview the voice recording was transcribed within a week and reviewed. Interviews were transcribed by hand using Sony Digital Voice Editor 2.0 for playback in digital format on the computer. After transcribing I had approximately 400 pages of interview data and the detailed analysis process commenced.

Each transcript was read through once and then the page was put in landscape format and divided into three columns. The transcription was placed in the left column, open coding for theory was done in the second column, and narrative coding was done in the third. Narrative coding specifically looked at the interaction between the participant and me. As will be discussed, I wished to do a short analysis to determine whether the participants' ways of being with me were congruent with the relational beliefs espoused. This analysis serves as another interpretation of the data that will strengthen the constructed themes.

As the transcripts were re-read, sections were highlighted with different colors and coded. For the first three interviews the highlighted colors represented emergent ideas. Yellow represented social constructionist theory, green represented skills for students, gray represented teaching in a social constructionist manner, and blue represented interactions with the interviewer. Color coding was discontinued after the third interview because I felt that there

was too much overlap between the categories represented by the codes. Categorizing in this manner felt too constricting early in the data analysis process. Color coding was changed to one highlight color (yellow) for the remainder of the analysis and represented surfacing ideas. Ideas were coded using the language of the participant as much as possible. Quotes were often pulled under the code to ensure no loss of meaning in continued analysis.

Upon completion of all transcription and coding, a large 23" computer screen was utilized to compare the codes across interviews. The size of the screen allowed for three word programs to be open side by side. Two coded interviews would be placed on the screen to the left and middle and compared to determine if codes matched. The screen size made it easier to compare similar ideas. Codes that matched were placed under categories in the theme development page located on the far right of the screen. All coded transcripts were compared with one another and ideas categorized on the theme development page. Ideas for which there was little to no comparison were included at the bottom of the constructed theme page to be used to compare and contrast constructed themes. Ideas on the constructed theme page were further compared to determine similarities and to consider similarities and differences in conceptualizations. These ideas were grouped according to conceptualization and then compared to the original transcripts to ensure that original meanings were retained. Quotes were then used from participants to represent each emerging idea.

After coding the data and collapsing into categories I was left with about 40 pages of categories and supporting quotes. I collapsed those categories further to 20 pages and began to think about the task that lay before me, how to present the constructed themes. Ideas arrived in a hodge-podge manner, I then organized the themes in as logical a manner as possible.

It became apparent during the analysis process that themes were coming together related to the idea of the value of social constructionism for social work but that several other themes were also present. I began grouping data into these emerging frameworks as they evolved. With the construction of new themes the project began to expand beyond my original comprehension.

I tried several times to reduce these emerging themes into theory but each time I found that it limited the possible interpretations of the themes. After deliberation, I made the determination that a philosophical framework had been created based on (a) the inability to further reduce the themes, and (b) their reference to both *the conceptualization* and *doing* of social work. The resulting data analysis constructed one main **philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice** and six applications of this framework in social work practice education (a) **the eclectic-hybrid application**, (b) **the eclectic-collaborative application**, (c) **the process application**, (d) **the political practice application**, (e) **the political practice and institution deconstruction application**, and (f) **the community polyvocal partnership application.** In addition **an application of the philosophical framework for teaching social work practice** was constructed**.**

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The decision to separate the constructed philosophical framework from its six applications was based on much consideration. The philosophical framework constructed is sound but there were differences in the application within education and practice. It was decided to separate the main framework from its applications so as not to simplify the themes and to represent the complexity of the data as they were being interpreted. This held true for the application of the philosophical framework for teaching social work practice as well. It is hoped that through the ensuing presentation the framework and the reason for separation of applications will become clearer.

To verify whether separating the philosophical framework and the applications was the most effective way to present the findings, an informal form of member checking was done with the final participant. Upon completion of the interview the constructed framework and the applications were presented and the participant asked to reflect upon them. This scholar encouraged the philosophical framework, the applications, and the split between the framework and its six applications. The application of the philosophical framework to teaching was also supported. The participant suggested that a discussion of values also be included, which was added.

Reflections on the Analysis Process

As I read through the interviews I would find myself suddenly walking around the room; I could not sit still with the ideas. I would walk around thinking, finding myself having to move in order to process. These ideas affected me; they drew my thinking into different areas, spaces, and places that I had not

considered. I would walk and think through their implications. There were times that I would read an idea, have a thought, and need to speak with someone to process it, to let the idea out. I found myself sharing with my wife, almost in urgency, to express my ideas about what was surfacing from the analysis. My wife would see me racing down the stairs with "that look" and I would begin in mid-sentence, seeking her thoughts and asking her opinion. If she was not immediately available, I would seek out others to process my interpretation; I found myself calling and e-mailing and calling again. When others were not available I would sometimes find myself speaking out loud. I was looking for ways to release ideas into dialogue.

I could feel myself and my thinking expanding, and changing. After these dialogical voyages away from the data I would race back to the computer to write or to read further. The act of coding was a difficult process because I did not like having to categorize ideas. I felt as though I was limiting the ideas in some way by putting them in the form of a phrases or categories. It felt too encapsulating. As I continued coding I found myself pulling out blocks of quotes which described ideas rather than single words. I slowly found a balance between the words of my participants and the themes that were constructed. Because of the stature of my participants I chose to highlight their responses along side my description of themes. I recognize that my interpretations are simply that, interpretations. They are not meant as conclusions but as doors to further dialogue.

The analysis process was an intellectually and emotionally invigorating experience. I found myself then and now struggling, straining, opening, exploring, laughing, thinking, considering, protecting, moving, fearing, wondering, creating.

After coding and analyzing I was ready to present the constructed themes. It was at this point that I encountered resistance in myself concerning how to write up the findings. I took a step back from the work and dialogued with several friends and family members regarding how the expectations of my work were influencing me. Through conversations with others I recognized that I was finding myself constrained as a result of the process of coding. The act of reading, re-reading, coding, segmenting, shifting, comparing, identifying, collapsing, expanding, and re-constructing had operated in constricting ways on me. The vision for my work had been affected. As I attempted to move forward I found myself paralyzed by questions. Had I coded correctly? Had I reduced too much or too little? Could I give the assurance of truth in my work? I became focused on the scientificness of my analysis and the defense of the findings, such that I was losing my sense of the larger purpose of this journey. To move forward I had to dialogically process out of the corner of scientific defensiveness and into the open field of constructionist collaborative understanding. My work is a construction that springs from collaborative discussions with these scholars. These findings are created from another layer of dialogical collaboration between myself and the transcripts of which I am a part. My presentation represents my story of deriving comparative meaning from my dialogues with these 13 scholars.

Presentation of the Findings

I will begin by presenting the **philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice,** I will then move into a discussion of the six applications of this framework to social work education, (a) **the eclectic-hybrid application**, (b) **the eclectic-collaborative application**, (c) **the process application**, (d) **the political practice application**, (e) **the political practice and institution deconstruction application**, and (f) **the community polyvocal partnership application** followed by a presentation of the **application of the philosophical framework for teaching social work practice.** Lastly I will present a short narrative analysis of our interactions.

I should mention that for the sake of clarity and for keeping participant comments close to the text I have chosen to deviate from APA (5th edition) format by presenting participant comments in italicized, single spaced, block format rather than in double-spaced format. In addition, I present participant comments without the use of aliases (i.e., participant A, B, C). This decision was made because I want the reader to focus on the concepts and ideas that evolved from dialogue with these scholars and not be distracted by individual indicators of who may have responded in what manner. In this way I hope to emphasize the communal nature of knowledge and knowledge creation.

Without the use of indicators I share that comments were used from all participants in this analysis equally, with one exception; the participant who self-disclosed as aligning with both a positivist and social constructionist position was not used in the construction of the philosophical framework. Though excluded

from the development of the framework, this participant's comments were used in constructing the six applications of the philosophical framework to education and to the application of the philosophical framework to teaching. The decision to include this scholar's comments in these applications was made based on the merit of a social constructionist-positivist hybrid view.

A Philosophical Framework for Constructionist Social Work Practice

The grand tour question of these scholars was **what value, if any do you see in social constructionism informing the education of social work practitioners?** Because our conversations were unstructured, each participant interpreted the question uniquely and the subsequent conversations moved in different ways. This resulted in data that were rich and broad. As the conversations progressed the study became larger than the original question. I purposely chose to allow this broadening as I felt the direction participants wished to go was of utmost importance in understanding their conceptualizations of social constructionism, education, and practice. The results presented reflect this broadening.

The first themes interpreted from the data reflected a belief that social constructionist ideas hold great value for the field of social work. These beliefs are presented in an organizational schema, or philosophical framework in which one idea builds on another, each becoming increasingly complex. It is my hope that the organization of this philosophical framework will allow readers to consider and reflect upon these building themes.

The Value of Social Constructionism for Social Work

Not surprisingly, these scholars found great value in social constructionist thought guiding the practice and direction of social work. Before breaking these thoughts into further categories of influence for social work I present several of their comments here, which encapsulate the main premises of the constructionist philosophical framework:

> *Social work, to me, has to take into account multiple constructions of the world. You've got enormous variation in the kind of clients that you serve, so you've got all sorts of subgroups, subcultures of various sorts. With different ideas about good and evil, different ideas about the nature of the real. And somehow if you can't work through that, across that, in multiple worlds, it seems to me that you're really stunted in terms of being able to do, and to offer, effective services. It's a natural connection--social work and social construction.*

> *Social construction is congruent with the long standing values of social work, starting where the client is, working in partnership, working strengths.*

> *Social constructionist ideas are more in sync with what is happening in our Western culture and society and globally, in particular. In terms of the ways in which people's lives are touching each other when they didn't before, because of technology and the associated changes which are shrinking the world. So, because we each, I think, are operating in a much more polyvocal and diverse world than we were previously-- even if that is our own local community--keeping in mind some of the social construction premises, I think, are quite helpful, in terms of the ideas of the social construction of knowledge, and emphasis on the importance of local knowledge that has relevancy and usefulness to the people involved.*

> *Social constructionism . . . helps people recognize the importance of the relational, dialogical, negotiated form of human interaction. And that things do change, there's possibility of change, and they can be influential social workers, but also as clients and users–they're influential actors in that. Which is not to say that they're not constrained by social structures and things like poverty, inequality, et cetera., but that people can actually have agency in that process.*

The only real possibility for creating viable, livable, humane societies is through pluralism, y'know, dialogues, conversations, and not through measurement.

The next section will break down the areas in which these scholars believed social constructionist theory could be of particular value to social work.

Social Constructionism is a Metaperspective

As I sorted through the transcripts a reoccurring theme was that social constructionism is not to be understood as a theory or modality to be applied in practice but as a way of understanding the world that *guides* social work practice. It was described as a metaperspective, a way of understanding and applying other modalities, theories, and paradigms as constructions. These respondents certainly felt that social constructionist ideology could provide a foundation for interaction but that the idea of a social constructionist practice was not tenable. As one respondent described,

The idea of there being something called social constructionist practice, for me, wouldn't make sense . . . because I don't see it as prescriptive in any way. It sort of bounds it too much. And, that would be sort of contradicting, from my point of view, what I understand constructionist thinking to be about. I think it's a philosophical position, and it's a political position. I mean it's sort of a, it's not a practice theory, in a way. It guides practice.

These views were echoed and expanded by another respondent who added that social constructionist thinking seeks to critically inquire about certain understandings:

I don't see social constructionism as a body of theory so much as a way of thinking, and a way of asking questions and responding to those questions. . . . What's going on here? What's going on here personally; why are you thinking like this, why are you feeling like this? What's going on here, in terms of the cases, in terms of the contexts in which you're

> *working? Something doesn't quite fit here, something new is emerging.*
> *What's going on here?*

And another:

> *I don't think in terms of methodologies or skills and techniques, I think in*
> *terms of the philosophy that informs my practice and forming a*
> *philosophical stance.*

And another:

> *I don't see it as a theory so much as a stance, or what I would call a*
> *metaperspective. And I can just tell you by example that when I began to*
> *take that perspective and that stance in teaching, I just found it incredibly*
> *freeing to be able, then, to look at all theories, as stories of sorts, as*
> *constructions.*

Social Constructionism is Personal: It is a Way of Being

During our conversations it became clear to me that social constructionism

is a philosophy that is personally influential for the participants. This way of

understanding is not something that is utilized as an intellectual tool, rather it

permeates all parts of their understandings. Language, relationships, and

understandings cannot be separated from these ideas very easily once

embraced.

> *For me, one of the things that happened, in moving into (this) way of*
> *practice, as I entered more and more into that, it effected my life more and*
> *more, and my perceptions more and more. So it's not like when I step into*
> *the therapy room I enter this way of position, it's more like it's really*
> *changed the way I am seeing the world. The world's just become much*
> *more complex.*

It may be understood from these participants that social constructionism

applied to practice with individuals, groups, families, and communities is not a

technique, or series of techniques or steps, it is a way of understanding, it is a

way of being. It is not a modality of practice but a way of understanding the

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world. It is a way of perception, recognizing that language and relationships create meaning in context. Through this realization a way of being and seeing the world occurs. A reflexiveness, humility, and openness occur in the self and with others. Knowing gives way to experiencing. Recognizing the creation of knowledge leads to openness and curiosity. Theory assists in opening space to put client meaning at the forefront. Boundaries fall away as possibilities are expanded and selves are created in relational context.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice is Based on Valuing Diversity and Polyvocality

Throughout our conversations the respondents described value-oriented positions. Based on the frequency of this occurrence I began to question the relativistic notion of social constructionism, understanding previously that a social constructionist view was embracing of all ways of understanding and therefore did not take a value position. Constructed themes began to show that this was not the case. The social constructionist approach to practice appears to be based on strong values of polyvocality, diversity, and the open construction of knowledge. These social constructionist scholars and practitioners took strong, value-laden positions in terms of creating space to include multiple voices and to expand the sources of knowledge to include clients and marginalized populations.

> *There are a lot of values embedded in all this stuff, very value-driven very political, ultimately, it's about, people wanting, hoping that the world will be, some way better.*

> *The idea of relational values, and thinking about the effects of what we do together are really important, I think that gives people a bit more room.*

Participants challenged traditional dominant sources of knowledge and the manner in which dominant knowledge marginalized other ways of knowing. These scholars made demands that a critical analysis take place with clients, and in the profession, concerning what counts as knowledge. They ask, what counts as professional knowledge, as helpful knowledge, and as outcome knowledge. As one respondent stated,

Social work must ask what gets to be said, who gets to say it, and with what authority.

From participant comments it became clear that social work practice based on social constructionist thinking questions the construction of knowledge and explores power and the co-construction of selves in relationships. This respectful understanding of self-*and*-culture and self-*in*-culture does not preclude social workers from taking positions which keep others out of harm or others from doing harm. In this way it may be understood that social constructionism is based on the value of mutual respect. Those members of a society who do not respect others are operating in dominant and oppressive ways, and should be assisted to stop. This view is very congruent with social constructionist thinking and ways of practicing.

One thing that's really, really important to me, in this kind of work, is making sure that I am not dehumanizing somebody who has been dehumanizing other people through violence. I'm trying as hard as I can to keep thinking about, keep seeing that person as a person and find a way to collaboratively look at the effects and think about what those have meant in their lives and the lives of people around them. (Pause) So, I'm not neutral, and I don't think of it as being relativistic. All stories aren't equal. And I think one of the ways you can think about the worth of a story has to do with what the real effects are in the world.

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Social Constructionist Informed Practice Offers an Appreciation for

Perspectives: Is not Relativistic

Participants held that understanding knowledge as a social construction does not preclude working within certain culturally negotiated mores and norms, provided that both therapist and client recognize that they are doing so, meaning that they are not assuming that cultural ways are truth. The recognition of knowledge and mores as socially constructed in fact puts the onus squarely on the culture itself to work to hold citizens accountable for doing those things which it has negotiated as unjust. Therefore, if a social worker is working with a husband who is abusing, the social worker can explore the man's construction of his position, if this view is of benefit to him and others, and can also take a stand against violence based on the constructed norms of the society in which they are both participating, recognizing that cultures and humans have developed strong fundamental beliefs that hurting others for personal gain is unacceptable. As a participant described,

> *I think that there's some point at which we say . . . this is our story, y'know, and maybe you don't think it's the right one, maybe yours is different, but this is what my experience teaches me and this is what the community says and we have to go with that.*

Further, the worker can operate within this understanding in a respectful manner by making public the social belief, as well as the social worker's own beliefs. In this way client and social worker can openly discuss these constructed social requirements and the individual positions of those participating in the discussion.

Social work and social workers need to be able to work on this often very fine balance, often very tense relationship between the needs of the client, as articulated by the client, and the demands of the state, as articulated through statute. I think it's quite helpful, it's neither one nor the other, it's both. And those, therefore, have to be negotiated and worked with on each and every occasion in which those situations are presented. So, there is a degree of fluidity and flexibility in all of that, but I think it forces— that's strong, I know—but it forces, encourages the students to recognize that they're often carrying —as social workers, they're carrying a variety of different roles at any one time. It's good and important to get those out on the table.

If one of the premises of social constructionist theory is that no one is objective, then it can be understood that everyone has constructed and privileged certain understandings of the world. Practice based on social constructionist theory is practice that invites social workers into continuous reflection with the aim of monitoring how they understand others.

We're not neutral, and I think it's important to let people know where we're coming from so that they know how to take what we're saying. I think that's important. So that we're not speaking as the voice of the profession, we're speaking as particular people in positions as social workers.

Participants felt that this reflection is motivated by values. Those values include a view that all views are to be respected and that knowledge and understanding are constructed in relationships. Social workers practicing from this stance reflect at all times on the construction of knowledge. A social constructionist informed practice would, therefore, take a stand based on culturally negotiated non-oppressive values constructed for the common good of all and invite clients to discuss those ideas and the implication of those ideas for others. A participant offered a series of questions as one example of the direction this conversation could take follows:

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It needs to be demonstrated to me that what you claim is the case is the case, that you don't have a problem. So how are we going to work that out, what's it going to look like? How are you going to demonstrate to me, as I've got this statutory responsibility, that you don't have a problem, so I can, with a degree of integrity, confirm that or not?

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Recognizes the Social in Social Work: We are Dialogical, Relational, Social Beings

One of the major premises of social constructionism is that individuals are understood to be constructed within relationships, within dialogue.

Social constructionism, as I understand it, sort of foregrounds the social over the individual…. a lot more consistent with a profession called "social work.

Social constructionism therefore throws into question the notion of the individual self, and shifts self to the relational. This move opens up the possibilities of multiple selves in different relationships, in different contexts, and moves the concept of self as a static thing composed of static variables to a dynamic dialogical construct in relationships. It may then be said that social constructionism questions the notion of the mono-self and expands it to the dialogical-self**.**

You've got to get away from realism into individualism and out of individualism into relational space, and then you've really, you've sort of stepped out of the whole Western tradition of what it is to have knowledge. Relationships become the basis of everything.

It follows that if relationships are the basis of everything then these respondents felt that social workers who are practicing in a socially constructed informed manner must begin with an awareness of the process of helping itself. They must take notice of the process and their position in influencing the other and of the language systems that are being used to communicate.

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As a participant described, social workers must begin by

> *. . . looking at the discourses that are influencing the ideas that social work students have about people. . . the shaping of meaning through language. And the idea that you are creating me, and I am creating you, and that we are always in response.*

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Invites Social Workers to Attend to Language

Relationships occur in language. Language and language systems are understood to be the coded sounds, pictures, symbols, physical movements, that we use to transmit meaning with each other. The language used limits the way in which meaning can be ascribed to events and subsequently, the ways in which problems can be understood and solutions to those constructed problems envisioned.

> *Truth, so to speak, needs to always be seen in the context of sort of a language community. Then you can start asking about what language community does this particular discourse belong to and, where--try to understand it from a culture-historical phenomenon. Language constitutes what we take to be real.*

This leads to questions that social workers must ask themselves in their practice with clients.

> *How does the discourse and language that's used . . . how does it create what we see as real? What are other ways, or what could be other ways or, what is this, what are these, what are the ways that we're doing it now, where does it lead us? Social workers must be attuned to the languages of subcultures. And the way in which languages divides people. The way it can bring them together. The way it can bring about change.*

Examples of discourse and language subcultures offered by participants include the Diagnostic Statistic manual (DSM), the mental health establishment, outcome research cultures, economic, racial, and ethnic cultures. Participants

recommended that social workers practicing from a social constructionist paradigm must be aware of the language culture that they are using to define the problem, and whether that language is congruent with the client's way of seeing. Questions offered included,

> *How does language limit or expand understanding? How does this influence the client? Does the language separate or join them? Are they imposing cultural language? How is the person understanding or interpreting the words and messages being sent? How are my actions influencing the other person?*

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Invites Shared Responsibility for Problem Perception and Change

Participants held that if importance is placed on language and process in relation to one another, then it invites the client into shared responsibility for the direction of the dialogue, shared responsibility for the construction of the problem, and shared responsibility for the outcome. This recognition and way of practicing is congruent with the social constructionist value of opening the notion of what contributes to the concept of knowledge. Knowledge can be understood to be local and indigenous from this perspective. According to participants the process of shared knowledge creation in context must be recognized by social workers.

> *Social constructionism helps us have an awareness of the risk that when we assume that we know the meaning behind the other person's words or what thoughts are in their heads, that it cautions us to always think that we are always in a process of assuming, interpreting, and translating another person's words and meanings. It helps us have an awareness of the importance that we may not share the same meaning, or that even if we share the same meaning, there are most likely some nuances to each person's meanings that are different. Each person has a uniqueness to their meanings. It helps us be aware of the importance of trying to learn about that and check out your assumptions, interpretations or translations.*

If social workers and clients collaboratively co-construct one another in relationships, if they become actions and reactions to the other, and this relationship is influenced by context and the languages and sub-languages utilized in discussion, then the notion of helping becomes collaborative and shared. Participants felt that the notion of interpreting the other must also become open, collaborative, and shared. This invites reflexivity on the part of the social worker in the interpretation of the other's conveyed meanings. This collaborative reflexivity and interpretation moves us into the realm of the co-construction of knowledge and the need for continuous mono-, dio-, and poly-reflexivity.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Invites Social Workers to Reflect on Their Part in the Collaborative Creation of Knowledge

If people are created in contextual dialogue then knowledge is created in relations, communally or in dyads.

> P: *Social construction has a bias toward language being something alive, creative, and inventive, and that it is something that we do with each other, and that we construct meanings and understandings with each other.*
> C: *So, meaning and understanding come from relationships?*
> P: *You can think of it as a communal or as relational.*

The ability for social workers to reflect on the part they play in the construction of knowledge with the client, on what is understood as real and true, is of tremendous importance to a relationship guided by social constructionism.

> *Reflexivity is of absolutely vital value. I think that if social workers are not prepared to be aware of how they construct their own knowledge and how they participate in that, then they're always going to be limited as social work practitioners.*

From a social constructionist position, participants felt that social workers are invited to recognize how they participate in the construction of the problem, the intervention, and the outcome. They are invited to recognize that the context and the developing client-social worker relationship are constructions.

> *Reflexivity is attempting to understand what is involved, how we construct knowledge so I try to teach students how to critically reflect. And some of that does involve sort of unearthing the assumptions that people make, and then understanding how those assumptions then construct what we see . . . . By reflexivity, I mean the act of inquiry, the act of being out to construct and create knowledge.*

> *If you're meeting with a client, you can have ideas and assumptions about that client that inform the way you interpret, sort out, all of their words and actions, that influences the kinds of questions that you ask. And it's easy-- or there's always a risk, I would say--of developing one idea about a client and holding onto that, and that's the only lens, . . . through which you may hear or see or experience them. They're many ways to try and shift out of that.*

Suggested ways to open perceptions in relationships will be discussed in the application of social constructionist teaching section. Some will be listed here by way of example: self-reflection, making public one's views, a transparent stance, maintaining a learning curious position, deconstructing the taken for granted, and problematizing the problem.

For participants, the purpose of this open stance for social constructionist informed practitioners would be to recognize that they are co-constructors of assessments and therapeutic understandings. Participants hoped that social workers would recognize the part that context and what they bring to the relationship plays in their understanding of the client. The goal for social work practitioners was explained by one participant in this way:

I would hope they would be much more open, I think, to their environment and their places within it. And when I say environment, I mean the whole social and physical context. . . .An ability to be aware of how they themselves participate in constructing their environment. How they themselves act to create their own knowledge about their environment. So, really, it's in teaching them an awareness of how they are actually researchers with a small 'r.' In fact, the everyday business of living is research. They're constantly aware of how they, as researchers, are taking in information, they're changing it, they're creating it, they're selecting it, they're interpreting it . . . in order to make meaning of their environment, in order to act.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Invites Social Workers to Expand Notions of Diversity to Include Ideas, Understandings, and Constructions of Self in Relationships

The recognition of the construction of selves in relationships leading to the co-construction of knowledge then leads us to a recognition that if knowledge is created in relationships then multiple-perspectives and meanings are possible. Truth evolves into truth(s) and knowledge into contextual, relational, cultural, indigenous, and local knowledge(s). Truths become interpretive, constituting frameworks by which people try to understand and give meaning to the events in their worlds. Multiple perspectives allow for comparison of ideas and an enrichment of possibilities.

For the social worker, the recognition of multiple knowledges has huge implications. Collaboration is opened to include not just client input but client as an equal partner in the dynamic understanding of what constitutes the problem, the helping relationship, and the possible outcomes. Linearity and causality give way to meanings and possibilities. Participant comments concerning the recognition of diverse knowledges include:

We see people from all kinds of social circumstances, cultures, ethnic groups, and part of our job is to do what we can to get into their worlds and how they can construct and how they construe their daily lives, their futures, their pasts, their relationships, their troubles. So I think social constructionism gives us a set of appreciations and some tools to actually do that more effectively than we might otherwise do.

Multiple perspectives are important in the field, because you're trying to make sense of various confusing situations, and it's useful to have a way of trying to understand. Once you realize how you participate in creating knowledge, then you can actually work much more easily alongside a client, I think, in doing that. Rather than actually just saying, 'my views are right, and I'm going to impose them,' you become much more humble about the whole thing, and that humility allows you to connect, I think, much more as an equal with people.

This recognition of multiple perspectives and knowledge equality shifts the social worker position from the traditional expert assessor and dispenser of treatment to an expert in collaboration with another. As one participant stated,

It forces us to sort of get beyond our usual ways of thinking about things.

And another:

I would see us, much differently. Rather than seeing ourselves as people who are experts, I think we would still have professional expertise. But that expertise would be much more about engaging with people as equals and working on life problems together, if you like. Coming up with solutions together. So even where there might be bureaucratic solutions that are imposed, the way of working with those might be much more collegiate and equal.

The result for the social worker is a shift in the concept of professionalism and relational ethics to a more collaborative understanding of helping and of the field of social work as a whole.

This shift changes the nature of professionalism in social work, what the professional becomes expert in is the process of engaging with people, rather than knowing the right content. So I still would say that, yes, the professional is expert at some things, but it's not the knowledge. They're expert at understanding the process of engaging with that knowledge and if they do that, they're better able to engage with other people. Because

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*they then see themselves as another human being, who is involved in the
process of constructing my knowledge.*

Social Constructionists Informed Practice Values Collaborative Understandings

Participants maintained that the recognition of multiple truths allows for a

diversity of views. This diversity of views is freeing for those involved in the

relationship, culture, community, and world. It is also freeing for the social

worker. These scholars held that social workers do not have to act as interpreters

of life, as the applicators of specific interpretive theories or applicators of

objective assessments or labels. This freedom enriches the possibilities that may

occur in relationships. Assessment, intervention, and outcome become

negotiated and may be deconstructed, modified, or disbanded in whatever way

will be most helpful to the client in cultural context.

> *You put your own thoughts out in the space between you. So, the process
> of checking out with another person is the process also of participating in
> the creation of their meanings and your meanings and shared meanings
> that will develop.*

> *Social constructionism allows for a lot of room and a lot of different
> possible approaches, interpretations, and a sort of comparing and
> contrasting.*

The enrichment of relationships with a respect for multiple perceptions is

also freeing of other individuals besides the client. From this approach the social

worker is invited to reflect on professional relationships. As one respondent

stated,

> *Social constructionism can help social workers to very much reflect on the
> nature and impact on them from more bureaucratic, case-manager roles,
> and that opens up a whole variety of new possibilities, which aren't
> sensitized by the organization functionary role.*

As will be discussed in a later section, the expansion of knowledge to multiple understandings influences all relationships. Teaching in a social constructionist informed manner that recognizes the multiplicity of knowledge is liberating for student and teacher alike.

> *It is quite a relief, and very freeing to be able to teach different ideas without having to claim a truth status, for any of them; and to let my students sort of experiment, think about things and come to their own conclusions.*

Social constructionist oriented supervision is also an area in which possibilities are expanded and changed.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Invites Social Workers to be Reflexively Attuned to the Developing Client-Social Worker Relationship

In moving from a traditional position of expert in the application of knowledge to an expert in the process of relationships and the co-creation of knowledge, participants felt that social workers have a responsibility to reflect on how well their interactions with the client are opening-up possibilities and creating avenues to explore other possible understandings.

> *The concept of social constructionism and reflective systems helps you work out why and how you're thinking and doing this sort of thing, even if you're claiming it is a social constructionist approach. You need to reflexively, all the time, reflect back on the claims that you are providing a social constructionist frame for the work that you're doing.*

The approach invites social workers into critically questioning aspects of professionalism. Participants felt that with an understanding of multiple perceptions, social workers must begin from this approach to explore the construction of the case itself and how it came to sit on their desks by asking such questions as:

What cultural understandings may be present in the case that are not given voice?. . . What perspectives may be present that are marginalized? . . . To whom is the problem presenting itself?. . . Whose view of the problem is being privileged?

One respondent described it in this way,

The way the case is presented to social workers is a construction and changes according to context. How a case comes to the notice of social workers is socially negotiated.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Invites Social Workers to be Transparent by Making Beliefs Public

One of the paramount approaches to practice that recurred with respondents was the notion of being transparent with clients, of making ideas and beliefs held by the therapist public. This was deemed important because if we approach knowledge as co-created then a respectful position with the client is to make known our understandings of the world, along with our particular positions and biases. This is another way in which practice informed by social constructionism may be seen as non-relativistic but based on values of open communication and open discussion.

There was some discussion about the possibilities of being transparent and the collective responses seem to maintain that both transparency and making something public are based on the value of openness with the client and represent ways of being within relationships. Making something public may be understood as the actual act of presenting an idea or held belief. One respondent discussed it in the following manner:

I don't believe that you can do that (transparency). You can only show certain aspects of yourself, those will be different depending on the context and the relationship, the situation. And that the other person is

always involved in the process of attributing meaning, interpreting, and translating what it is that you think you are being transparent about. So, I use the word 'public'—making something public.

The process of being reflectively open by making the aspects of one's self public is both a state of openness and a form of reflection on beliefs and values held by the social worker. Reflection emerged as a very important part of social constructionist informed practice. This reflection involved both self-reflection, and dialogical reflection. Respondents shared that the key components in reflection are that assumptions are questioned and beliefs and ideas deconstructed through a process of asking reflective questions such as:

What's going on here? . . . What assumptions, or languages are driving these thoughts, these processes, this assessment? . . . How can we open up space to understand things in a different manner?

Respondents have used words and phrases such as *critical inquiry, critical reflection, team reflection, reflexiveness,* and *dialogic reflection* to describe this process.

One respondent shared the need to ensure that, while self-reflection was helpful, a social constructionist-oriented practice recognizes self as a part of dialogue and should always include a reflection with others:

With self-reflection, I think in terms of having an inner conversation with oneself. And to make a point, I often talk in terms of monologue versus dialogic. Soft talk, or inner talk, although I do believe that most conversation is, of course, to some extent dialogic. But often even in our, quote-unquote 'self-reflections,' we can slip into a monologue and have the same conversation with ourselves over and over again, and it doesn't end up being generative. I value self-reflection, but I think one has to be aware that in self-reflection, it's easy to slip into a monologue and to find, when you're doing that, how to bring in something else to help you shift to a dialogue.

Respondents were highly passionate about the process of reflection and stressed the importance of it for students and any working social worker regardless of job or position. The effects of reflexivity were to open up possible meanings for the persons in the relationship and for the relationship itself.

I really want them to be able to be attuned to other people's perspectives and interpretations of events, relationships, ideas, futures, y'know, whatever it might be. I want them to be able to be open to hear those; and to not put a grid on it.

People actually do start to respect and understand and tolerate difference in a much more in-depth way than they had before.

Social constructionism helps people to work out the importance of living with uncertainty and contingency, it might stop them from getting into corners in the first place.

Not being authoritarian and controlling and everything else that so many social workers seem to be all the time. And, I mean, who can blame them? That's how they've been treated in our schools. I would hope they would have a slightly different approach to the world and to other people, regardless of who they work with.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Recognizes the Political Nature of the Construction of Knowledge

Participants held that if we consider that there are multiple perspectives and multiple truths, then this moves our conversation into a political arena when we ask questions such as,

How is one way of understanding privileged over another or what are the effects of this privileging? Who is excluded from this claim for truth? Who benefits and in what ways? What institutions develop around this truth? How do these institutions operate on the citizens of a society and society itself?

Foucault's notion of knowledge and power being inseparable begins to become clear with this line of questioning. Most respondents felt that social work

practice informed by social constructionist understandings is a political act

because understanding cannot be expanded and explored without throwing

dominant ways of understanding into question. Many felt that the constructed

concept of normality and knowledge must be explored in some manner in a

social constructionist oriented practice. A common thread between conversations

was that social work by its nature is a political field as such represents those

individuals marginalized in multiple ways by institutions and practices which have

made truth claims.

> *Social work is a really good home for these kinds of ideas, because in general I think social work is one of the arenas of therapy that has not been de-politicized. So I think there can be an appreciation for that. For what social work has always stood for, working with underserved people and being more aware of context.*

Social work informed by social constructionism explores relationships, the

process of constructing knowledge in relationships, and expands possible

meanings for clients. The questioning of knowledge is linked with the questioning

of power. This leads to the opening of possibilities and a co-empowerment of the

client or community.

> *Knowledge and the truth are whatever the power configurations are at any given point. And, it seems to me that postmodernism can shift these around.*

In the process of exploring power/knowledge, social work unpacks the

privileging of knowledge. This shifting from one truth to multiple truths, from one

correct way to multiple correct ways, represents an honoring of diversity.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Honors Diversity and Questions

Traditional Forms of Knowing

If we consider that diversity itself is recognition of multiple cultures, multiple skin tones, multiple traditions, multiple ways of dressing, speaking, and interacting, it is not much of a leap into social constructionist understandings that diversity also includes multiple understandings, multiple perceptions, multiple meanings, multiple truths, and multiple selves. Traditional social work has stopped short in this understanding perhaps due to discourses of scientific professionalism that have controlled the field's ability to expand itself in ways which would recognize other knowledge sources besides those cast as experts. As one participant boldly stated,

Social work speaks of diversity but wants to standardize everything.

Participants felt that diversity within social work, from a social constructionist paradigm, questions constructions of the real and the good as represented by dominant ways of understanding. Traditions are thrown into question, traditions such as the construction of normality, of pathology, of the academy, of practice, of social work itself. This inquiry is done not in an effort to define wrong or right but to create an awareness of the languages, the cultures, and the constructions of the institutions so that through the exposure of the assumptions of truth, other possibilities may be seen.

Social constructionist thinking helps to do away with certain kinds of prejudices, even if we don't want to call them biases, about how families are supposed to be and what constitutes a normal family.

A postmodern perspectives is so valuable, because I think it brings in discourses that have been, shut out and often obliterated, whether it's First Nations, gays, lesbians, transgendered, African Americans, any group that has been pretty well shut out of the discourse. Because, I mean, the Enlightenment was basically a White male European perspective and that was essentially what got defined as the truth.

Diversity from a social constructionist perspective expands the discussion of issues of race and other categories by deconstructing the discourse or meaning ascribed to these categories and exploring how this meaning may have influenced a person's sense of self. Social constructionist informed social work helps a person interrogate the assumptions and beliefs of life in an effort to recognize the chains of meaning which may be binding and to slowly disentangle notions of the real and the good which may not be in the best interest of the person. Participants recommended questions such as,

How did we get to this point? What do we take as the warrant for what these beliefs are? Why do we accept this way or could there be other ways?

Social work challenges us to question the culturality of our understanding. Envisioned in this manner social constructionist practice may be said to be a political practice of liberation.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Recognizes Problems as Constructions with Communal Effects

If social constructionist informed social work moves us away from notions of static individuality and static mono-truth to an area of the dynamic relational self in context and dynamic multiple understandings of the world, then this view also throws the concept of the flawed or broken individual into question. Problems from a social constructionist paradigm may be said to be constructed;

constructed in the sense that certain behaviors have been categorized and

deemed problematic, that certain behaviors have been labeled as being

abnormal, and that these ways of being need to be changed to move closer to a

place of normality. The participants felt that this place, or theory of normality, is a

culturally negotiated idea of the way people are supposed to be. Problems then

can be perceived and categorized as the socially constructed distance between

what someone is and what the culturally constructed normative theory prescribes

that they are supposed to be. Categorization occurs based on the direction and

distance away from the culturally constructed theory of normality.

> *The present state of SW is not adventurous, inventive. No sense of power relations or no real sense of structural equalities. With internalized problem conversations, we are looking at problems the way dominant psychology and HMOs and all of those sorts of things, and DSM technologies are asking us to look at it. It's very monologic. I mean, we are created in dialogue but we are diagnosed in monologue. It doesn't make sense.*

These ideas of normality, or discourses, guide the direction which lives

can appropriately take. Several participants held that placing problems within

people, without recognizing their social origin, could be viewed as an oppressive

act.

> *Bodies, or persons, are not the sites of which problems should be privatized or located.*

Another respondent summarized it in this way:

> *It becomes kind of a shared responsibility for the way the things are and the way things could be. I think it is a different approach than, for example, thinking of issues as sort of inside a person, or as a product of their minds. I think for example (when I'm thinking about practice) I think it potentially changes the dynamic between the practitioner and the person or persons that the practitioner is working with. The idea, for example that what is presented and what outcomes, if you will, might occur are really co-*

constructions of the people involved, I think is a bit different. I think the shift toward dialogue and toward discourse, in my own view of these things, I think the social constructionist shift toward discourse in particular and dialogue secondarily is just a huge shift. And of which, I think, the ramifications are still being explored. I've looked at my own work more from the point of view of inquiry.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Invites Social Workers to Problematize the Nature of the Problem

Social constructionist informed practice invites collaborative inquiry into the nature of the problem itself. As one respondent put it,

You problematize the problem.

This involves a recognition that how a problem is presented and defined, historically, and in context, has different implications for the nature of the work that will occur. Problems, if understood as constructions, must be explored for meanings.

You would problematize the nature of the problem that is being presented to you on the original referral. Discuss with the client how the problem has been framed, what is the nature of the problem; it helps you analyze and understand where a particular problem comes from. How it's framed and how it changes over time. The problem and historical context in itself frames the sort of work that people like social workers are expected to do. The nature of that problem needs to be explicitly articulated with the person who's presenting themselves. What sort of problem is it, according to what criteria, who defines it? Is that different to other people's views of those problems, criteria, definitions, et cetera?

If we're looking at the way that things are constructed, if we're looking at larger social contexts, we're thinking that a lot of problems have to do with the context people find themselves in that it is not a level playing field. I think that that leads to more respect and collaboration in relationship to clients. We might well also think economically; what are we talking about in terms of economics? What are we talking about in terms of jobs? I mean, sort of simple things, it also ought to enter into the equation of relationships.

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In the course of problematizing the problem social constructionist informed practices are also invited to question the construction of assessments, particularly with which language subculture, or theory of normality, they are constructed. Respondent shared the following questions,

> What are we really trying to get at? Is there a pathology model going on here? Are we looking for deficits?

> What is it that the questionnaire is trying to get at, and what are the things the questionnaire's not asking that it should be asking? In other words, what is missing from those questionnaires?

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Creates Space for the Client's Voice

Social constructionist informed social work is focused on client understanding and client voice. Theory should not be applied that will interpret the client voice. Social constructionist informed practice emphasizes client direction, understanding, and interpretations.

> If you're theory-directed, you're not client-directed, and I think theory gets in between us and clients. . . . I was brought up to run a tape in my head. It was saying, 'Now what is this really meaning and what is this really saying and what theory,' y'know, blah, blah, blah. And that tape, get rid of it, just listen to people. Don't bother with all the interpretation about what it means and try to push it into a theoretical frame, which is what the psychoanalytic thing does all the time, they keep re-interpreting and re-interpreting everything that's said based on a theory, and I think that is a violation to what people have to say.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice Expands the Possibilities for Helping in Social Work

Social constructionist thought invites the questioning of all constructed ways of being and interacting. Social constructionist social work challenges the tradition of practice as well by seeking to expand the possibilities of helping. One

respondent discussed the use of group therapy involving multiple therapists

sitting on the floor with a single client. Others discussed the use of reflecting

teams in multiple ways, including reflecting with other families. Still others

discussed the opening of practice itself to involve helping that is not confined to

language or the therapy room.

> *Language alone isn't sufficient. Yes, we're working in the regeneration of meanings, and spoken and written language is one of our major ways of doing that but we've got to take into account all sorts of other factors which enter into the equation, in terms of the ethos and which language is working. So it isn't sufficient to focus simply on language, but also to bring into account all sorts of other ways you can work within relationships to bring about change.*

This can include meditation and other non-verbal forms of taking care of oneself.

> *I mean at this point, within people who do sort of constructionist-oriented therapy or working within meaning systems, they've got to be prepared to open up those meaning systems to other kinds of activities.*

If people change in relationship to one another then social constructionist

ways of helping can be utilized in ways that move beyond language. This could

mean adding new relationships, changing to new contexts or locations, anything

that will assist individuals in feeling differently about themselves. One participant

recommended that something as simple as suggesting to a client that he or she

get a pet can have positive effects.

> *Having someone to care for brings out nurturing qualities, and so you've created a whole other relationship which has no sort of verbal language or very little, and it's a very supportive relationship.*

As will be further discussed in the application of social constructionist

framework, other participants discussed the use of community theater,

community art projects, and community activism as ways in which the tradition of practice can be expanded or disbanded depending on one's view.

The Adoption of a Social Constructionist Metaperspective will Advance Social Work Beyond a Modernist Frame

When these scholars were asked about the present direction of social work and the direction they would like to see it take for the future, they expressed great concern regarding the conservative perspective that social work has adopted. Many discussed the lack of creativity, the closing down of options for clients, the medicalization of what could be considered life problems, the lack of diversity and exclusion of voices in the field, the mechanistic and individualized view of problems, and other topics along that vein. I will present several of these comments as I feel that they are of tremendous value for summarizing the general tone of our conversations and the ideas that evolved from them.

> *To me, social work is a product of a modernist worldview, where there are presumptions of progress and presumptions of what movements for the good are. And it looks at society pretty much in terms of a set of problems to solve and to make things better by its standards. So in some sense, as a tradition, it's not unlike medicine, psychiatry, or clinical psychology. It works on people. You come in and we work on you, and you go out better. Now, as an overall movement, I would rather see social work become, not a discipline or a practice or an orientation which works on people, but with them. So that it becomes part of institutions and institutional ways of thinking. It becomes joined in as part of their dialogue, as opposed to taking the problems as they're spewed out and working on them. Why shouldn't there be social work, for example, in large organizations, as part of the dialogue and the way those organizations work, and the way in which families are parts of the organization, and working with the organization on human betterment, which takes into account more voices. So I could imagine social work being part of many, many different kinds of institutions, working with, adding a voice, collaborating to create futures, as opposed, again, to taking the problems once they're spewed out and trying to cure those problems based on its own ideas of what's good.*

I think what's doing a disservice to people is going out as some sort of pretend expert and claiming that you can fix them up like a car mechanic. It's complexity. Part of the problem with all of this social work stuff is the belief that there's a problem and there's a way of fixing it, and social work students learn how to fix it and then they go out and fix it. Well, seems to me this is a very mechanical, mechanistic idea about human existence and a disservice to people, and to the students themselves. I think it's misleading them in some sort of false belief. False Enlightenment belief about perfectibility, about fixing things up, applying the right model.

Social work, ironically, from my point of view, is an intellectually conservative profession. I think in a sense that we're a profession that seems to believe that we're the antithesis of being conservative in the social realm. And yet intellectually I think that we're very conservative. That we're a very conservative profession. It's very interesting. My own view is probably that part of our historical legacy has to do with striving for legitimacy . . . and, so, I think that drives you toward a more middle-of-the-road view. I think there's a sort of a schism in the profession that we try to advocate for sort of socially progressive ideas, but we do it from a very intellectually conservative position.

Unlike medicine, social work is based on the meanings that are generated within it, and it's continuously in motion and is highly variegated. Today's knowledge is tomorrow's silliness, so it's not as if you can build it, it's got to keep being recreated all the time. And, to me the judgment won't be in terms of whether you've got a knowledge base but what are you doing.

The Adoption of a Social Constructionist Metaperspective will Expand Possibilities for the Academy

Hopes for changes in the field will be discussed in more detail under each application section but common themes which emerged for the hope for the future of social work included (a) a complete overhaul of accreditation standards, (b) a less hierarchical and more collegial field and academy, (c) sharing knowledge without personal attacks, (d) an expansion of voices to come into the field to push for diversity, and (e) an expansion of diversity to include diverse ideas, thoughts, understandings, research, and what constitutes as evidence. All participants had very gloomy outlooks concerning the possibility that any of this

would happen and I, with many respondents, had to playfully cajole them to entertain the idea and discuss it. Below is a response that represented the general theme of accreditation. Other responses will be included in the framework application discussion.

> *Get rid of accreditation I mean, the whole idea of accreditation, the way it's currently done, I mean, it really doesn't allow for much room. In some ways, if you look at it strictly, it's pretty limiting, it's very bounding and limiting and let's face it, the accreditation standards themselves are the expression of a political process in many cases. If you look at the research standards, nobody could ever really teach everything in there, nobody could.*

The Adoption of a Social Constructionist Metaperspective will Change the Nature of Practice and Helping

Hopes for social workers, their practices, and the client relationships will be discussed fully under each theory application but the general themes presented here hold across all applications. These scholars hope that a social constructionist approach to practice education can result in students having personal understandings that life and meaning are constructed, and as such, can be understood in a myriad of ways. A respect for this understanding is the root of collaborative practice with clients, families, and communities.

Respondents hope that students will have an appreciation for a reflective and open stance with clients and co-workers that results in more collegial, collaborative and respectful relationships. Table 10 is a sampling of words and phrases used to describe the knowledges hoped that students would gain.

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Table 10

Words and Phrases Used to Describe the Knowledges Hoped for Students

Being practice theory multilingual	Sensing	Opening Curiosity
Reflectiveness	Opening Space	Attuned to process
Critically Reflective	Good Listening	Recognizing context
Being aware of the other	Deconstructing	Recognizing multiple understandings
Abandonment of power position		Reflecting on Interpretations
Reflecting on meaning creation		Appreciating indigenous knowledge
Recognizing local knowledge		Aware of the assumptions they bring
Recognition of an imbalanced playing field		
Recognizing if they are opening or closing space		
Collaborative process and outcome		
Being aware of how they participate in the creation of knowledge		

A selection of participant's summaries include

> *Open curiosity, good listening, making space, put your own concerns aside, put your own questions aside, be really open to taking in what someone else is saying and then finding the part of yourself that's responding to that, being able to reflect on that. All of this leads you into a position, a way of understanding relationships that leads you into asking questions that can help you understand, or help someone else make sense out of things.*

> *Openness, I think it breeds a kind of openness that I think would allow a graduate to be curious about how people put things together and do things, but not imposing certain values.*

> *Critical thinking, moving back and forth and seeing through different theoretical lenses, determining from the client what is helpful.*

> *An appreciation of the client's own wisdom, of the indigenous skills and knowledge that clients have, the more level playing field, the abandonment of, the attempts in every way possible to abandon the power position, in even the most troubled people you can find strengths, you can find things to build on.*

We would conceptualize our practices quite differently. And even our roles as professionals. It would be much more about working alongside clients as co-researchers, almost co-facilitators. The client is the expert.

Six Applications of the Philosophical Framework to Social Work Practice Education

Though most participants were in agreement concerning social constructionism informing social work, differences emerged. Most of those differences involved the application of social constructionism to the education of social work practitioners. These differences were the basis for the constructed categories of application.

Considerable thought went into the manner of presentation of the six applications of the philosophical framework to social work education. Several presentations were considered including overlapping circles, telescoping ideas that narrow and broadened out to the right, and finally it was decided to represent the applications of the philosophical framework as overlapping ovals because it seemed to visually represent an expansion of application and broadening of influence as it moved further out (Figure 4).

I struggled with using a categorization given the social constructionist theory that underpins the study but decided that I could not present this information without using a charting of ideas (Table 11). The categories in Table 11 are to be understood as general foci of the application of social constructionism to the education of social work practitioners and lines separating the categories represent overlaps from one approach to another.
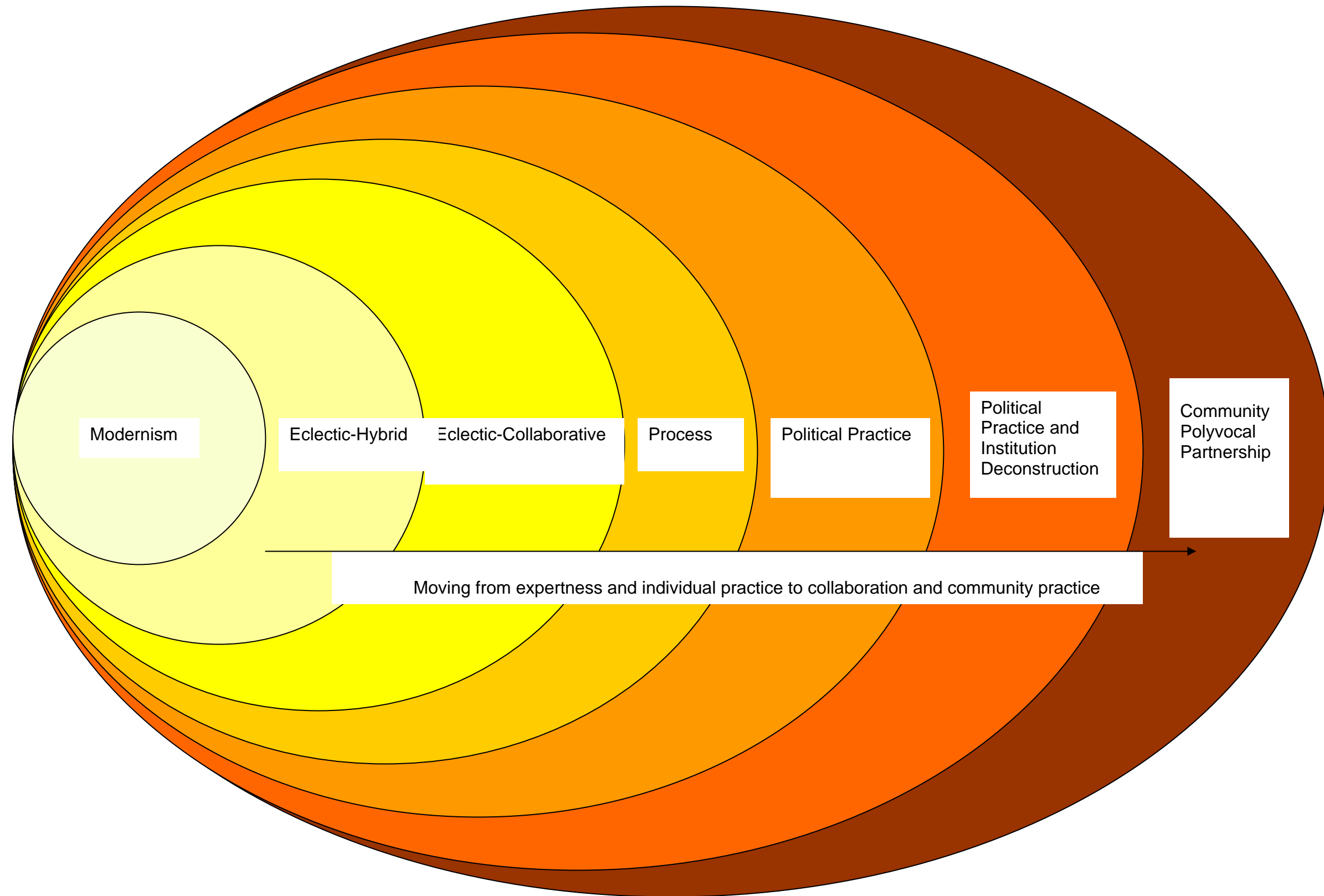
Figure 4: Six applications of a philosophical consructionist framework to social work practice education.

Table 11: *Six Aplications of a Philosophical Constructionist Famework to Social Work Practice Education*

Application	Goal	Teaching Methods	DSM IV	Practice Monitoring	Practice	Potentials for the Field
Eclectic-Hybrid Application	Deconstruct philosophies, theories, and modalities. Differentiate between well-constructed science and poor science. Teach multiple modalities. Consider EBP when practicing.	Focus: Deconstruction of philosophies, theories and modalities Teaching style: Traditional lecture. Discussion and presentations Methods: Assignments designed to deconstruct, research into which practices have evidential support. Discussions about historical developments and influences in world view.	DSM as construction, power/knowledge. Privileges diagnoses that do have empirical support. Recommends teaching it for use.	Utilize measurement, evidence based practice.	Students will practice by first looking at the paradigm of fact, supporting diagnosis in fact, if no evidence, then other approaches can be used	Better informed practitioners. Protection of clients from practices which could harm.
Eclectic-Collaborative Application	Assist students in understanding practice modalities as languages. Students are to become multi-lingual and practice from a recognition of the construction of self and other in relationships. Reflect upon how the language used limits or expands the relationship and possibilities.	Focus: Teaching modalities Teaching style: Experiential, reflection, lecture, discussions, trying different modalities in class, role-plays with clients. Methods: Role-play, teacher adopts a not-knowing position, collaborative self-reflection, discussion of the use of modalities and how they frame the problem, modalities as language systems.	DSM as construction, DSM is another sub-language, may be useful at times, teach it as a construction. Social workers must be aware of how it closes or opens possibilities in context and relationship	Collaborative assessments, Some felt that EBP could be mixed with collaborative approaches.	Students will work collaboratively with clients following their lead, being attuned to the opening and closing of possibilities in relationships and the use of how languages (modalities) constructs the problem.	Social workers recognize the fluidity and flexibility of practice. Understanding and appreciation for the use of multiple models in social constructionist ways. A recognition that each client and situation is unique.
Process Application	Assist students in the development of their own practice styles, then facilitate students' expansion to the literature to supplement their own ideas.	Focus: Process Teaching style: experiential learning, reflecting Methods: Group practice, group assignments, self-motivated learning, multiple reflections, collaborations, role-play, shadowing of multiple therapists, use of reflecting teams, critical reflections.	DSM as a construct, internalizes problems inhibits possibilities in the helping process.	Monitoring moves from end state objective process outside of the practice to a collaborative reflective process within practice.	Practice becomes more creative. Client and social worker are free to move in ways they feel would be beneficial. Social worker and client develop individualized theories of helping with reflexivity.	Relationships between colleagues will become more reflective, open, honest, and team-oriented. Problem solving becomes collaborative and reflexive, open dialogue and communication.
Political Practice Application	Assists students in the recognition and deconstruction of social discourse. Instruct modalities which emphasize collaboration with clients, the exploration of client understandings and the influences on those understandings, meaning-focused rather than problem-focused.	Focus: Teaching social constructionist methods of practice which separates the problem from the person and places it in the cultural and/or family context. Teaching Style: Experiential learning, deconstruction of cultural and family discourse, role plays, methodological exercises, shadowing of practitioners, practicing in freeing ways, working with clients linking them with others.	DSM as a political manifestation of power. Internalizes problems. Teach it so that students can dialogue and change it.	Collaborative understanding and reflection upon the helping process. Local, indigenous knowledge and perception takes precedence over generalized understandings of helpfulness.	Students will work collaboratively with clients assisting them in a process of de-pathologizing by placing the problem in cultural and family context. Change will occur as clients are assisted to re-vision their past, present, and future understandings of self, family, and community.	A de-medicalization of problems and a recognition of the influence of social discourse and dominant understandings on people. Clients are linked to other clients, and operate in ways to challenge dominant discourse and work in traditionally macro ways.
Political Practice and Institution Deconstruction Application	In addition to above, an emphasis placed on expanding the creation of knowledge from the academy to the community and the individual. Challenges monovocality and seeks polyvocality and diverse representation in all institutions. Seeks to hold those in the academy accountable for change and relinquishing of the power to control and define. Do away with the Micro-Macro split.	Focus: All outlined in the political application in addition to a strong emphasis in polyvocality, teaching non-oppressive practices, social constructionist methods. Teaching style: All teachers are actively practicing in the area they are discussing, some readings are local, diversity represented by the individuals who are teaching, many guest speakers from the community. Some classes are held in the clinics and in the community. Practicing in clinics, collaborations with the field, teaching un-pathologizing political practices.	DSM as methodological fundamentalism. Political tool for locating problems within people. DSM is oppressive. Do not teach the DSM.	Collaborative understandings and co-directed practices; also a recognition that practice does not create change but change comes from the individual, family, and community. Therefore any claims for the responsibility of change by therapists may be misguided.	Students will work collaboratively with clients to explore the ways in which social discourse may be influencing; will work to assist institutions in becoming more polyvocal and diverse in views to offset dominant discourses.	Academic institutions will become more polyvocal as diversity of members and ideas occurs. Knowledge will be recognized as coming from multiple sources and not just privileged in the academic institutions. Communities and individuals will have a better sense of belonging and connection.
The Community Polyvocal Partnership Application	Incorporate humanities in the field. Social work informed by the arts. Deconstruct and do away with individual practice and research.	Focus: Teach the humanities as a way to break down the Enlightenment notion of static reality. Explore the concept of self and other as dynamic acts of fiction. Teaching style: Working in the community doing collaborative art projects, classes are free flowing, no syllabi, hands on experience, no grades.	Do not teach the DSM or practice.	EBP is methodological fundamentalism. Community collaboration and joint monitoring of the helping relationship.	Students will work collaboratively with communities as a part. Art forms including theater, painting, photography, sculpture, poetry, will be used to assist communities in connecting with one another and finding a sense of voice, direction and collaborative pride in being.	Stronger communities, diversity, connection between people, a recognition that life offers no conclusions only ambiguous, dynamic interactions.

Both Figure 4 and Table 11 represent a shifting position away from modernism toward a social constructionist understanding. As the approaches shift to the right the social constructionist framework encompasses more of the realm of understanding in our field. It is important to note that participants were not categorized in these applications rather it was their ideas as related to the education of social work practitioners. Because applications were constructed through qualitative analysis of interview data, most participant comments tended to fall into one or two of the six applications, with some overlap between adjacent applications. Three participant's comments spanned the entire range of applications.

In Table 11, summarized applications, characteristics, and primary teaching methods are present. The discussion that follows presents an overview of each application and concludes with a discussion of the major differences across applications. It should be noted that the chart shows different teaching foci for each approach. A discussion of specific teaching methods will be presented under the theory of social constructionist teaching section.

Eclectic-Hybrid Application

The eclectic-hybrid position focuses on the instruction of practice theories as evolving from philosophical thought. It is considered a positivist-social constructionist hybrid because the use of these models is governed, in part, by quantitative evidence of effectiveness. The eclectic-hybrid model espouses that students should understand basic concepts of the philosophy of science, as well as multiple theories and models of practice. From this approach it is important

that students know the philosophical thought that goes into the theories including the underpinnings of theory and practice. Social constructionism is used in this approach as a guide to help students deconstruct the philosophies, theories, and practice models, as well as to situate them in historical context. The guiding logic behind this approach is that if students understand the origin and production of knowledge, including an understanding of "good and bad science," they will be better informed, critically thinking social workers. From this perspective knowledge and critical thinking ability will lead to better social workers.

Understanding the philosophical base of all theories and approaches is a core component of this approach:

> *What were the theorists thinking about the nature of human beings? About the nature of the world? It starts with the history of the theory and the philosophical assumptions that underlie those theories. It has to do with the nature of the world, how we know the world and the nature of knowledge.*

This approach invites students to consider the construction of evidence-based research, critique each study and to use it as a guide for practice if the study has scientific merit.

> *I teach them something about evidence-based practice and these ideas that promote it, and then I also have them read some things to critique it. So they see it at a particular perspective and see what the limits of it are. A lot of what we do is very hard to test and prove and validate in any kind of so-called scientific way. So I sort of take that approach to it. I try to get them to see it from, again, more than one perspective.*

> *I have my feet planted firmly in both camps. I'm one of these constructionists who also believes firmly that we need to balance constructionism with hard science, when hard science is relevant. I think that we owe our clients a professional obligation to be familiar with whether or not there is research done on the therapies, and if there is, to use what works. That doesn't mean that I eschew scientific knowledge when there is scientific knowledge available, and there isn't for all things.*

I'm not exclusionary, and I believe that students do have to recognize good and bad science.

From this hybrid approach curriculum decisions about which models should be taught in schools of social work should consider the evidence of effectiveness in the literature. Those modalities that are not supported by research can be taught but with the preface that they have not yet been adequately assessed.

I think it's okay to teach them (models with no empirical support) but I think you have to let students know while you're teaching them that this is something new, this is something novel, and we don't know yet whether it works very well.

The eclectic-hybrid approach makes a difference between models that have some support in the literature to reduce symptoms and those models which have little to no support, but are focused on exploring life problems. It was stressed that social work practice should be governed by well-constructed science and that those methods, which have "*proven*" support, should be used first to reduce symptoms. Only after symptom reduction should other "unproven" methods be used.

I do have a biological bias. So I think, for example, if you've got somebody who's dealing with phobias or anxiety, you've got to take a look at the literature and see what works to get rid of those symptoms. And once you've got symptom reduction based on the therapy that works, I see no problem with using narrative therapy or other kinds of therapy to help them make more sense out of their lives so that hopefully they can keep those symptoms down.

Through this approach to practice and education the social worker is understood to be flexible in the client-social worker relationship and to meet the client in ways that are determined to be helpful.

I think you can move in and out of being more diagnostic and expert to more collaborative, and that often in practice we're required to move back and forth along that range of ways-of-being as clinicians.

The goal of this approach for students was described by an interviewee in

this way:

I want students to understand that theory is not fact. That even when theories are supported, they may be 'factual' at one point in time, but can change historically. I want students to understand where their thinking comes from. I want them to understand the origins of their thinking. The philosophical assumptions behind their thinking. Because if they're looking at any one method, I want them to fully understand, where it came from and what its limitations are. I want better-informed practitioners who critically analyze what they're doing, have constructionist knowledge behind it, and understand constructionism.

Eclectic-Collaborative Application

The eclectic-collaborative application is based on the idea that differing

modalities are taught as social constructions and the use of those modalities in

practice is governed by a collaborative decision between the client and the social

worker. The major distinctions between the eclectic-collaborative model

application and the hybrid application above is that this application puts more

emphasis on the therapist's ability to work with the client in ways that are

collaboratively decided rather than empirically driven. Practice approaches are

understood as different language cultures and great emphasis is placed on social

workers to be multilingual, such that they are able to operate within many of

these ways of helping.

Social workers should not be one voiced ponies—therapists need to be polyvocal.

The client-social worker interaction takes precedence and the use of modalities is

informed by collaboration between social worker and client.

I would want to look polyvocally so that you become familiar with, and able to use, any form of language movement within the therapeutic process. That is, that you don't have a method of therapy. Rather what you have is a set of ways of talking. You might need a miracle question on one day, you may need a story-telling on another day, you may need to suspend all theories and adopt a not-knowing position on another day or with another client. The whole slew of therapies ought to be there, I think in the long run, why should you not have an enormous array of linguistic techniques at your disposal?

While this approach maintains a poly-method view of practice it recommends that those methods which are more congruent with a social constructionist frame be privileged. It also recommends a strong grounding in social constructionist informed process as the undercarriage for the use of any method.

Emphasize those therapies that are conscious of language and its use in the creation of meaning. Re-appropriating those therapeutic languages that are unconscious of themselves as constructions but yet do some work in constructing. Once you've gotten a thorough appreciation of the way in which language is used, and the way in which we jointly create meaning and the pragmatics of language use and so on, and forms of therapy which are conscious of that, then there's room, at that point, to say, 'Well, okay, what do they say in a cognitive behavioral therapy that might be useful for some people some of the time?'

This approach to practice and practice education relies on multiple modalities to be used in flexible ways uniquely with each client and in each context. The questions which arise are how would a decision be made as to which modality, or part of a modality, to use, and in what direction the relationship should move, if move at all? The response to these questions places a very strong emphasis on relational process and open interaction. This moves us into the realm of the co-construction of identity and the importance of reflexivity.

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P: *Well, there's no way of deciding, just, like there's no set of equations that you can bring to bare, saying, 'Well, now I use the X voice.'*

C: *Sure, there's no decision tree.*

P: *No decision tree. Right. But rather a kind of a feeling with, that is, when that voice comes from the other person, what is it inviting? And it will invite certain things. It won't invite everything, so you've got to be inventive, as well. But how could you supplement that voice in a way that would move things within that space that you're calling progress, in a progressive way? And there's a way in which you don't have total control after that, because once you've supplemented, they're not your words anymore, the other person will do something with them. And you have no sort of control over that, over the meaning of those words, so it's like a continuous movement back and forth, where you're supplementing in a way that will create those other's words as something, and then you respond to it in a way, and hope that it will move in certain directions, but you've got to be prepared for movement in a continuous improvisation. I'd say it's more like an art form.*

With the collaborative-eclectic model approach, process is privileged and models of practice are taught as constructions that are active language cultures. The approach places a great emphasis on understanding these language cultures and questioning their origins and their effects in relationships.

> *It is important to understand them–from where they come and their influence. I wouldn't encourage people to see (one model) as their primary modus operandi. I would only do that within asking questions about 'What's going on here?' What, who says so, what sort of criteria, who's defining the problem, et cetera? So I would always try to problematize those sorts of issues. You must know something about them to problematize them . . . I think it's helpful to locate them within a broader understanding of social constructionism, they provide different things. I think it's helpful to have that introduction to all of them.*

Though this application does not place an emphasis on the use of research as a guide to practice it does seek to explain it as another language or way of knowing. This application places emphasis on collaborative

understandings of helpfulness and reflecting with clients on the co-construction of goals and flexibility in those ideas.

> *It is important to be collaborative with the client. Work out with the client where they want to get to, and how you do that . . . maybe, where they want to get to, the outcomes they would want to aspire to may not be the same outcomes as those that are imposed upon the agency itself.*

Ultimately, the goals of this application are to have social workers who are educated in multiple approaches and understandings of the helping process and who are versed in the use of these multiple helping languages. Collaborative process governs the use of these languages in helpful ways. Helpfulness is collaboratively constructed and collaboratively reflected upon.

The Process Application

The process application espouses the teaching of relational process over theory. It is an approach which privileges the act of offering relational experience over teaching theories and modalities that describe or govern interactions. The approach allows space for students to experience the act of being a part of a helping relationship and to gradually develop their own theories of practice from their interactions and reflections. Students come to learn the process of helping in personal ways as they are gradually invited into more intense forms of experience. These experiences begin with simply sitting with another, then moving to helpful discussion, shadowing other practitioners, practicing in conjunction with other therapists, and practicing with clients.

> *With practice, the first thing is to not try to do therapy. All I want you to do is go into the therapy room and sit down and have a conversation with this person and learn about this person. All I want you to do is just refreshen all those social skills that you've probably been using all your life.*

It's a process-driven process, rather than content-driven, if you like. It's actually about helping people experience the process of how they construct knowledge. And I think that for me, that seems to teach it much more effectively than just telling people about the ideas.

Dialogical reflections on these incremental experiences is a large component in learning. It also places heavy emphasis on student group learning and project development. From this approach, students are invited to explore social constructionist informed modalities of practice only in support of their own developing practices.

It challenges the notions in graduate school that there are certain kinds of questions you should ask, there are certain kinds of information you should gather. You do an interview for a diagnosis, which then tells you what outcomes should be and what the strategies for reaching that outcome should be. We've always been much more interested in the clients' hypothesis than our own.

Through the approach of teaching process the students gradually develop their own ways of working. A sensitization happens as attention is focused on the relationship and interaction, the co-construction of selves. The respondents believe that if theories or modalities of practice are introduced before the experience of doing, then the theory interferes with the development of reflexivity, awareness, and understanding.

What I'm teaching is for them to actually integrate the theory and practice for themselves. So in fact they do end up coming out with their own model of practice. What they learn is absolutely radical—readily applicable now to their practices because it's based on their bringings, you see. Yes, we do teach a model of practice, but actually what we're doing is teaching them to create their own models of practice, rather than our imposing one.

After students experience practice and begin to develop their own understandings they are invited to explore theories of practice and to reflect upon

how they would incorporate or not incorporate these ideas in the way they work

with others in helpful relationships.

> *I then make them rework their practice theories, taking into account how they might change any of their ideas or assumptions on the basis of what they've had a look at. And then I ask them to look at what they would do differently as a result.*

Teaching content with this approach is also guided by the privileging of

experience. Students are invited to work in small groups and to discuss and

develop projects on their own. The intent is to provide active learning

experiences and possibilities rather than a traditional lecture.

> *I think the philosophy with this kind of teaching is not so much that you try and cover all of the relevant areas of content, but more that you teach people an in-depth relationship with how they connect with the knowledge that's involved in that content. I think much more about process, rather than content. So that would mean, in a sense, that any content could be taught, as long as it was taught from a critical reflective perspective. Because what you're trying to teach people is not to learn the content, but you're trying to teach them about how they connect with knowledge. So how do they connect, with them participating, creating knowledge? That is the final outcome you want. You teach people an in-depth relationship with how they connect with the knowledge that's involved in that content.*

> *It's much more effective than just teaching particular step-by-step models, because it actually takes all the other practices the person's working with at the present time and helps them improve that. And I've actually found that's much more effective than just trying to impose a more generalizable model from wherever else.*

Not surprisingly, the process approach does not place much emphasis on

the idea of modality effectiveness presented in literature. It does, however, place

emphasis on monitoring one's practice in collaboration with clients. This

approach to practice effectiveness becomes much more participatory and places

the consideration of helpfulness in the realm of dialogical reflexivity and process.

Rather than retrospective outcome research, it's more what I think of as 'as we go along together' research. You always need to think about outcome, always need in some ways to demonstrate or document that what you are doing has usefulness. From a social constructionist or a postmodern perspective, you think more in terms of insider versus outsider research. So you think in terms of doing research or evaluation with your client, whether that's a client in the therapy room or a community group you're working with out in the community. Where you're continually researching what it is you're doing together and using what you are learning to inform, then, your next step. So that rather than retrospective outcome research, it's more what I think of as 'as we go along together' research—similar to collaborative inquiry or participatory action research.

I would say that everyone is ethically bound to constantly evaluate what they're doing. But they need to do that evaluation in a number of different ways, because their practice involves so many different facets. So some of those evaluations might be outcome measures, but some might be more qualitative, some might be reflective, et cetera. But my belief is that good practice won't have one model's stamp on it, but that good practice is going to look more like being able to practice with a divergence of different people in different kinds of contexts and being able to be flexible and adaptable in your approach. Therefore, if you're evaluating it, it needs to have that kind of transferability.

At least one scholar shared that the act of collaborating with clients on helpfulness of treatment was itself a form of working which could enhance clients' therapeutic goals.

The work would begin to be somewhat more successful in the sense that if you begin to collaborate with your client—if they participate in designing their own treatment, so to speak, it's going have much more relevancy to them and they're going to have more of a sense of ownership. And when something is more relevant to you and you have more of a sense of ownership, it's going to be more successful and more sustainable.

The process approach seeks to assist students in the development of knowledge through experiential learning and process. Students graduating from a process oriented program are hoped to be confident, reflexive, collaborative, respectful, experienced, and effective social workers.

Our students come in much more confident than the other students. And they have had much more clinical experience, because the students are on these teams for two years.

They come away with a sense of competency, they come away with being able to live with uncertainty, they come away just totally surprised and amazed at the ways in which they have grown and transformed themselves as people, as individuals. The impact that the professional learning has had on them in their personal lives, and the usefulness of what they've learned in their personal lives. And for the most part, they all value collaboration or collaborative perspectives.

A process approach is one that can be influential in the client-therapist relationships as well as influential for the field of social work. It is hoped that by teaching collaborative knowledge development and dialogical reflectivity that workers will begin to have better collaborative and generative relationships with one another. These relationships would provide fertile ground for mutual problem-solving and the development of creative and polyvocal solutions.

People would be more into collaborative relationships and, therefore, could mutually and jointly tackle whatever it is that they are trying to tackle and the outcomes will have more relevancy to them.

The Political Practice Application

The political practice approach espouses that the curriculum should focus on constructionist informed modalities that recognize the influence of dominant culture on individuals' experiences of themselves, both individually and in relationships. Specifically, it seeks to instruct students in practice approaches that challenge naturalistic accounts of human nature and the traditional belief that the self is a collection of traits and variables. This approach places great emphasis on self as a culturally influenced construction.

If persons are a part of a culture, we are reproducing culture if we buy that identities are manufactured. We can't transcend culture. Why can't we

look at problems that way? Why can't we just say that problems don't belong inside persons' bodies because they weren't created there? They're created in response.

This approach is considered political because it views problems as not residing in individuals but as existing in relational space. This relational space represents the ways in which we can interact and co-construct meaning with others. Ideally, this space is full of possibilities in the negotiation of meaning: life event meanings, relational meanings, and situational understandings. Cultural and family discourse can operate in restricting ways on the meanings that can develop in this relational space. This restriction of meaning development then influences the possibilities of co-construction. Discourse, therefore, puts limitations on the possibilities of relational meaning creation. This has the effect of limiting knowledges and ways of understanding, marginalizes voices and perceptions, and reduces the possibilities of life. From this perspective, individuals who are experiencing problems may be struggling against discourses which are operating in limiting ways on their ability to co-construct the meaning of the events in their lives. This limitation effectively shuts off life possibilities as one may find oneself drowning in a problem-saturated story, a discourse of negativity that controls past, present, and future meanings.

For example, a White American male may find himself experiencing what has been traditionally defined as depression. Depression from a political approach would not be seen as an individual disorder located in the body but as a possible restriction of the meanings by cultural discourse of how he can understand himself and the events in his life. He may have internalized cultural

beliefs about economic success and may be self-subjugating around the ways in which he can perceive and construct his life. He may be questioning whether he has lived up to these cultural notions of success placed upon him. Cultural discourse may be operating in his relational space with others, limiting the possibilities of co-constructing meaning for himself with another. This shift in understanding a problem as cultural rather than individual creates space for an awareness of selves in context and in relations.

Approaches that seek to assist in helping people free the meanings in their lives from the influence of problems take on political tones. These approaches challenge the nature of self, relationships, co-constructions and knowledges by placing the problem outside the person and in cultural and historical context. Social work practice form a political appliation seeks to assist individuals, families, groups, and communities to unearth and expose internalized cultural assumptions that may be operating in restricting ways in their lives. This practice seeks to help loosen the grip of cultural influence and discourse.

> *My reading of social constructionism sees persons in meaning under the influence of much larger institutional, agreed-upon discourse—looking at the lines of intersection in meaning and how it is that meaning is constructed within fields of power and fields of knowledge, and that knowledge and power are inseparable. So that when we look at social work, specifically, we are looking at things like identity, meaning how it is that someone has come to know themselves within the political structures from which they have been created and helped to create. So within those structures, we would also look at structural inequalities that might then have us look at issues of poverty and race and sexuality and money-privilege, et cetera. And how that might affect the so-called 'problems' that people come to social workers like us to talk about and to hope for change.*

The approach is in harmony with the social work idea of thinking about larger contexts, rather than thinking so much about people as being problematic, they can think about their experiences in different ways than they have perhaps before. They can think about other ways of making sense of their experiences but it's a very different focus than 'What's wrong with me?'

It is helpful to think about things that people get caught up in as constructions because that leaves room about other ways it could be constructed, rather than thinking about what the implications might be about a particular person, if we're talking about problems—it leaves more room than thinking about some of the more traditional ways of thinking about the way things got to be problematic.

Political approaches to therapy such as narrative often involve a deconstruction of discourse and assisting clients in liberation from oppressive ideas that may have been internalized. This approach places a heavy emphasis on understandings being related to individual, family, and cultural stories. Often these stories are said to be problem-saturated. Relational helping focuses on ways in which meanings can be un-marginalized in the life of a client, family, or group. Space is opened to be able to construct life events in ways not dominated by the problem's influence. This is often done by looking at the resistance the person has given to the problem. It seeks to move away from problem-saturated stories and into new ways of understanding.

Traditional approaches to therapy just exaggerate and emphasize the problem-saturated story. Instead we could ask, 'Think of some times when things have gone well between you and your children, and what does that tell you about yourself?' You are always looking for stuff outside the problem-saturated story, rather than focusing on the problem. Now that is a huge difference. Bringing in the possibility of not focusing on the problem, 'When does this not happen? Can you think of a time when you weren't feeling this way? What does that tell you about yourself? What were the circumstances that day, what did you do?'

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A strong emphasis is placed on collaboration with clients and privileging their indigenous knowledges. The client-social worker interaction is viewed as political in the sense that social workers must constantly monitor that they are not overpowering or discounting their clients' understandings. Clients' understandings should be privileged and expanded. Political practice focuses on an exploration of clients' understandings, attempts and successes at negotiating life while under the influence of the problem.

> *Every single remark is a political remark in some sense and the politics of therapy is extraordinarily important. So I hope that students who are taught in this way begin to understand about the issues of power and the power in the therapeutic position and learn how to shift power in various ways. I'll give you just one example—in fact I've just been sitting here reading student cases from the field, and they're trying to educate parents. You know, our young, single, childless students are out there trying to tell parents what they're doing wrong when their kids are troubled. And, these students are getting a great education but it doesn't work, it doesn't help, and it gets handed right back to them over and over and over again. I've just spent the morning being discouraged. I think the advantages of this stance have to do with teaching students to listen in a new way to try to empower their clients—not that they can empower them, but create context in which the clients can feel empowered. And maybe the most central thing of all; the shift is to begin to really search for strength where clients hadn't been able to see any before.*

A political application of social constructionism espouses that the curriculum address inequalities and political structures in the classroom. Courses should deconstruct dominant ways of understanding and seek to increase the discussion of marginalized cultural views as much as possible. The politics of power and knowledge should be a part of every course.

> *We are more political about our teaching . . . we've been using some of Freire's way of analyzing problems and getting students to think about the problems that they see, not only in terms of what it tells you on the individual level and on the community, family, sort of cultural level, but*

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also to see how anybody's particular problem is related to larger systems, sometimes political issues.

As compared to eclectic models political approaches see practice as political and question the ability to combine models of practice.

You cannot really put things together that don't include a similar way of thinking, a similar way of positioning yourself, a certain way of seeing the world. The worldview is the most important part.

Not surprisingly this application of social constructionism places no importance on notions of effectiveness being related to the literature. As with other applications, scholars felt that a collaborative approach to helpfulness was more in line with the practice approach and would not distract from the work. In addition, in the political approach the political nature of claims of best practice models by researchers are questioned.

I think it's really important to do a critique of what evidence-based means. The whole focus becomes having certain things count as evidence, other things not, keeping records about all of that, and I think what you're there for sort of gets lost. And, I don't understand why people's experiences of, the conversations that they are involved in and how they affect their lives—why that doesn't count as evidence? It's really a very distressing situation to me.

You should do everything with clients. Clients, for example, should have a say in what is written in a record. They should not only read it, but maybe be able to amend it.

Collaborative outcome studies—in community-building we do that all the time—you involve the residents, build the research and then conduct it and interpret it. How can you do this in a participatory way that makes sense and has some degree of power?

Proponents of the political application of social constructionism to the education of social work practitioners hoped that graduates would be aware of the political nature of their work and of the effects of cultural discourse. These

goals tended to be of a political nature and sought liberation for clients and the field.

> *I think the most important thing of all is that they would know how to listen in a different way. And I know listening is the old cliché, but I really feel so strongly that our theories influence what we hear and how we interpret it. I think taking a constructionist stance and really understanding that looking for meanings rather than symptoms makes a profound difference in what people hear.*

> *People not only reach their goals but they feel better about themselves. So it changes not only their goals but they have an ownership of having done that, and it changes their relationship with themselves, with their identity. I don't know how measurable that is.*

One participant was strongly vocal about the political nature of the mental health field and hoped that future social workers would make strides to change the system.

> *I want there to be a difference between the medical system and what's thought about as mental health. A lot of the problems that people come to social workers for don't have to do with medical problems. Insurance companies ask 'Is there medical necessity for this treatment?' I'm not even sure what that means, exactly.*

The future of the academy was also addressed in the hope for change.

> P: *The academy is such a problem in the first place. Survival depends on beating out your colleagues, which by the way sets up a horrible situation of competition rather than collaboration. That's one reason the faculties are so nasty. They're all fighting for limited resources. I suppose ideally, everyone would be scholars together and the system less hierarchical. But I think that's not gonna happen.*
> C: *Pie-in-the-sky?*
> P: *Yeah, pie-in-the-sky. You see, it's really not so bad just to go along on the fringe. Y'know, I've been on a border all my life, and it's a very good place to be; it enhances your critical thinking.*

The Political Practice and Institution Deconstruction Application

The political practice and institution deconstruction applications are similar to the political practice approach with clients, but seeks also to intervene at the

institutional level by challenging traditional places of knowledge. This approach

seeks a more polyvocal understanding of the world and encourages the

recognition of indigenous, local, community knowledge. The goal is to assist

clients to unearth problematic discourses in the therapeutic contexts and to

challenge the institutions that serve to reify many of the discourses. The

academy in particular is put into question and is pushed to have a greater

recognition of the community and engage as partners in training future citizens

and creating knowledge. Through this shifting of the source of knowledge from

the academy exclusively to the community in partnership, it is hoped that a more

polyvocal society can be created.

This application, like the political approach, questions the traditional

mental health discourse and its insistence on placing the problem within the

person. This approach goes further and begins to make claims that social

workers who do not address the cultural sources of problems are, themselves,

acting in oppressive and unethical ways.

> *Historically, the acceptable version of where problems are located is within the self. What we might do is extend our field's ideas around systems thinking and really look at cultural knowledges, and issues of power, and how problems are shaped, and how persons are shaped. If we don't get around to looking at how it is that (a client) responds to her position in a place of poverty that might be considered unethical. I'd just be reproducing common knowledges about who sole parent women are, and how they got there, and all the languaging that goes along with that. To not invoke issues of class and gender and possibly race and sexuality as that may or may not influence this person's sadness with the conditions in which they're living, and the conditions that their children are living within . . . would be unethical.*

Practice, itself, is questioned under this model and is deconstructed to be seen

as another potential form of control if not expanded to include other voices and

opinions, the client's in particular. It is felt that at minimum the act of practice should be placed under the same deconstructive inquiry as other constructions in a social constructionist framework.

> *What I don't find them doing actually, interestingly enough, is questioning the whole idea of therapy. I'm thinking of the whole idea of therapy itself as a social institution. You might ask questions about the language of practice and you might ask questions about whose language is it? Who gets to speak that language? What is the language of practice and where does it come from? Where does it come from historically and culturally? Whose language is it? Who gets to speak it, and who's at the table? Who gets to say who gets left out of this discourse? What makes sense and what doesn't make sense? Constructionism always has sensitized me to who's silenced. How did this kind of social institution itself develop and what is that about?*

Practice curriculum and the teaching of practice are also viewed as political from this perspective and must be deconstructed and reconstructed in a more polyvocal manner. The segmenting of practice into micro and macro must be addressed and considered from a political lens.

> *I think that the people behind separating them* (micro and macro practice) *are really what is at issue. There is public policy and then there are private matters when we work in therapy. We should be, in many ways, thinking about policy and attempting to change policy, and I think when we're working in policy we should also be looking therapeutically at what is the common good. How do we make good citizens and how can we participate in that?*

The construction of the academy is also thrown into question as the dominant place of truth creation for a society. From a social constructionist political deconstruction framework, knowledge—the construction of knowledge— must be both shared and transparent. Polyvocality must be present in the academy and the academy must share the creation of knowledge with the community of which it is a part. Each community must address the questions

concerning the development of knowledge, "what gets to be said, who gets to say it, and with what authority?"

> *There's a multiplicity of sites of knowledge, right? But if we cut the academy off, then what we say is that knowledge is only located in specific places, through specific persons.*

The question of the construction of the academy and the domination of knowledge creation behind its walls becomes such an axial point that curriculum takes a secondary position to who is doing the teaching. If community members and marginalized voices are present in powerful enough positions to have their voices heard then the curriculum will be diverse. Diversity in curriculum, then, is not an intellectual goal but a question of a representation of polyvocality in the university.

> *I would be more concerned about who's teaching. If I we're looking at issues of race and class and gender, then we might be very particular as to who it is that we want to speak within the academy about the conditions that we're going to be working in. Now, there are issues that I have when someone like myself, a White heterosexual money-privileged person is teaching about class. I come from the working class, however, so my opinion might be an opinion of how it was that I jumped class, but we also need to have persons who are from the sites that we're talking about—they must be given the opportunity to teach.*

It is also stressed in this application of social constructionism that the notion of polyvocality and the sharing of knowledge not be trivialized by bringing in guests who do not participate in other areas of the school. Instead, diverse voices are invited to participate actively in decision-making and curriculum development.

> *It isn't, 'Oh, aren't we great for doing this project!' It's truly about if you're on board, then how far do we take the legitimacy of their knowledge? Will we put it alongside the knowledge of the academy? What is the worth of knowledge and who gets to say what? How do we put all of this together for the benefit of the community that we're working with?*

Polyvocality and an opening of knowledge creation to include the

community and marginalized voices must include a lowering of traditional

boundaries. Practices and courses must be held in the community.

> *There obviously has to be a clinic, a working clinic, a volunteer working clinic that works in your community, where the community might service the school and the school might service the community. Where the community has a say in terms of how the community is serviced….if we're going to work in a community, then we need to help the community be an agent—a very generative agent—of change.*

In addition to therapy and the act of helping being a political act, under this

application, teaching is also viewed as a political act. Viewed as such, teachers

must be held accountable for the knowledge that they transmit to their students.

Does this knowledge expand cultural understandings? Does this knowledge open

up space for polyvocality? Does this knowledge work in ways to offset

oppression? A scholar responded in this way when I mentioned teaching

pathological taxonomy and problem-internalizing-practice-methodology:

> *The teachers do have to ask themselves 'What is at stake?' They're thinking employment, I'm thinking people on the front lines who are getting crushed by problems. Now I'm not saying that people's hearts aren't in the right direction, but that can only go so far. There really needs to be a stronger and thicker layer of accountability and responsibility and I think it's the teachers that need to take that on.*

The participant went further, demanding that teachers are in powerful positions to

ensure that oppressive internalizing social worker-client practices do not

continue:

> *We have to ask what is at stake in terms of teaching what we wish to teach them? How do we prepare them, what do we want to prepare them for? Are they aware of the combat zone in which they're going to be working, within words, within problems, within the social issues that are at hand? How much responsibility, how will we be accountable, not only to*

the students but to the people the students will be working with? That, to me, would be really crucial.

The approach sees the act of working with an individual, family, group or community as a form of political activism. The application questions how the construction of all parts of the culture, including the economy, influence problems that have been traditionally constructed within individuals.

How people are produced in capitalism and what happens with that? Now, I'm not anti-capitalist, but we have to look at how the person responds and the community responds under the influence that is isolating us off from each other more and more and more.

These comments move social work into an area of liberating clients from cultural forces and oppressive ways of knowing.

We can draw parallels to liberation theology. Jesus could've taught people how to get jobs with the establishment and to survive, or he could've taught people to work with the poor and the dispossessed. And he chose the latter. Now I'm not up on my New Testament, but, I mean, as far as my last reading of it, that's what was happening.

Therapy in this sense becomes a kind of community building and reattachment of people isolated by culture and discourse.

People come to see me in therapy from a lack of connection. So I'll invite people's family members, I invite community members, but I also do things like letter-writing campaigns. . . .Therapy must address the discourse of pathology and helping.

The political practice and institutional deconstruction approach also values collaborative discussions of effectiveness with clients. Like the political approach discussed above, it seeks to question the political motives of the need for quantitative measurement and the use of outcome data collected.

I'm not suggesting that we banish and outlaw measurement, but we just need to figure out methods of accountability that have less to do with a disciplinary practice of the worker. So if we could somehow find a way to

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document what it is that we think the therapist is doing without taking that therapist away from the client it would help. I also think that we should use a lot of client involvement, like, 'I know that we all think this is worthy practice, but was it helpful? Did it address your cultural and community concern?'

Geez, they've got social workers exactly where they want them, the filling-out and the production of the box for the boss becomes much more important, in many ways, because of the practice disciplines that go on with this methodology. It moves us, again, one step away from the pain that we're supposed to be interacting with and addressing.

From this perspective it is hoped that social work graduates would practice collaboratively with clients and communities in a culturally liberating manner. The influence of culture and discourse would be explored with clients, and this influence lessoned if it was problematic for the client. The worker would have an understanding of oppression as being the presence of mono-vocality and the absence of other voices. These workers would take active steps to push institutions toward more open, collaborative, polyvocal practices. The approach would seek to replace the traditional therapy of pathology with a new paradigm of therapy as appreciative liberation.

They would have a very different relationship with their clients because they would be seeing their clients in a much broader light, and they would be seeing problems in a much broader light. So whether you're working policy, community, individual, couple, family, group, whatever it might be, you'd have a very different understanding of the person who is sitting in front of you. And you're not actually looking at trying to fix them from a mechanistic metaphor, but what you'd be looking at is how they're responding. You'd be looking at sites of resistance, as Foucault would say. You'd be looking at them under the influence but that they responded in certain ways, and in some ways they've acted against the reproduction. What would happen is that it would move from a therapy of pathology toward a therapy of appreciation.

Scholars from this view hope that the field of social work would change to include diversity of members, as well as diversity in power. With a new diversity

in power, decision-making would recognize multiple-understandings and knowledges.

> *I use the metaphor of a conference. Our conference, the look of our conference, would change. I mean, we would be having a great diversity as to who could speak, and the topics that are spoken on, and who would be invited. And what ideas we would support. And we would use our power to get the voices of people to be pushing, and always pushing the field, further into more and more painful domains where someone like myself has to be more and more accountable to internalized racism, internalized homophobia—just to push us in those ways. That would be the metaphor, to change the structures of our current structures.*

The Community Polyvocal Partnership Application

The community polyvocal partnership application is the broadest application of social constructionist theory and seeks to move the place of learning and helping to the community itself. This application deconstructs the notion of the academy as the place of learning, questions the traditional concept of practice, recognizing it as a mechanistic vestige of the Enlightenment, and harkens back to Jane Addams by considering the place of helping to be in collaboration with the community. The approach invites community and student to come together in collaborative learning to create a stronger voiced community. Community helping, process, and learning all occur together through the act of doing. This collaborative community work has most recently taken place in the area of the visual arts and community activist theater.

While these approaches to education have sometimes been met with disdain by the schools of social work where they are tried,

> *. . . the faculty were really upset and unsupportive*

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the projects for community, students, and university are often eye opening and beneficial.

> *I got the students involved through an art gallery in a very impoverished city. We didn't meet in a classroom at all. We got involved in various projects in the community with various artists, whether it was photographers, or painters, poets, musicians, all sorts of working toward community development, and trying to help this very impoverished community. So we didn't even use a standard community textbook. It turned out to be very successful. In fact, one of the student groups documented the various projects the other students were doing on tape, and it's a great tape they made, in fact the university is now using it (chuckles) as a kind of promotional recruitment tape.*

> *We look at social activism theatre and theatre of social change. So the students are working up performance pieces representing different aspects of the community here. And we have a community theatre space in the downtown part of the city and they're going to put on these performances.*

The approach espouses a move away from social science as the guiding paradigm for social work and instead recommends humanities and philosophy as the North Star upon which to focus social work's journey. The position maintained is that the act of measurement affects us individually, and as a field, such that humanness, inter-relatedness, and community-ness is forgotten and superceded by variables, categories, and separation. The categories we create alienate us, and re-construct us in un-interconnected ways. This is dehumanizing not only for the clients of social work but for social workers as well. The application throws into question the need to create thin conclusions in a naturally dynamic and ambiguous world.

> *The Enlightenment of the 18th century has shaped social work extensively, and, in my view we need to really get away from it. I turn to the arts more, open up things that wouldn't be certainly defined, unambiguous, linear, and explainable through some sort of universal theory or universal set of ideas, but would leave everything much more, open, uncertain,*

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'unfinalizable' is Bahtkin's word. We don't have to pin it all down, in fact it's probably not desirable to pin too much down. I think of all of those things, which is a very different take than the Enlightenment has, I think, where we have to explain everything and carry out these experimental research procedures and whatnot. It has caused enormous harm.

I desire to see the humanities a much more central part of social work education as opposed to the quantitative, empirical, positivist social sciences —medical sciences as a foundation for social work, or for anything, for that matter. Humanities really have introduced complexity in a way that the social sciences often don't.

A call to move social work's educational base from the social sciences to the humanities is a call for an overhaul of the university itself. This approach questions the modernist notion that a university's highest goal is the creation of truth rather than service to the community of which it is a part.

Universities always say, 'Well, the highest thing we do is pursue the truth.' Well, it seems to me that this is kind of an antiquated notion now. Why not pursue ways of living together or ways of being together as a society, or possibilities, or multi-ways of existence, rather than the truth. The other thing that it's of course done is exclude large numbers of people from history.

In this envisioning, schools of social work would begin to focus attention on service in collaboration with communities rather than research *on* communities and quantification of humans into variables from which data can be collected, analyzed, and used as fuel to heat the test tube of truth creation. The shift to social work as community collaborator would necessitate a move away from traditional course work.

I would do away with required courses in research and statistics. Which sort of lays it out—here's the way it is. There's no reason in my mind why you couldn't replace that with some basic courses, in the humanities that would kind of look at human existence from a whole bunch of difference perspectives and approaches, whether it's through literature, poetry, visual arts, y'know, photography, dance, philosophy. I mean, why haven't we included those things in our current curriculum? Why do we persist in this

other way, where it's a claim that we can, sort of know everything for certain. And I think it's the humanities that can bring in the kind of ambiguity that seems to me is the basis for viable societies. I don't think…in today's world you can really survive without ambiguity, pluralism, all of these things. And I guess the trick is to try and make it work in various times and places. Rather than saying 'This is how it should be.'

Do away with Human Growth and Behavior and Development, I mean, as if there's some sort of standard way all of this can be kind of categorized and thought about. People don't live their lives that way. Erickson's stuff, some of this is still taught. Y'know, the old, Maslow, all these people--I know it's been sort of superceded, but we still persist in sort of having to categorize everything all the time. So I'd be for a total change in the curriculum.

Re-visioning the curriculum toward collaborative community partnership would also involve questioning the construction of practice as an individual, family, and group act of helping.

Models of practice are a waste of time—I wouldn't teach them. I wouldn't even have a course called advanced social work practice, to start with. I mean, introductory practice and then advanced practice, I mean the whole thing, again, is leading toward measurement categories. Knowledge defined as operating in different levels, all of these things. Y'know, you're chopping it up into these sort of bits and pieces really. I just wouldn't call the courses that to start with. It doesn't seem to me that what we're doing now is particularly helpful. Poverty still exists extensively and, suicides are up. It doesn't seem to me that what we're doing is really all that useful.

We're doing a disservice to people, it's based on the assumption that there's a core self that can be prepared or fixed up, rather than the self as a kind of performed fantasy, it's sort of a learned performance over time. And the assumption is that you can maybe learn new performances, new languages, but that also involves a lot of discussion and dialogue, and it's not something that I think can just be imparted by an expert. And that's why I think that things like theatre hold out a great deal of promise for social work practice. I would rather have a course called Advanced Theatre for Social Work Practice, or Advanced Social Activism for Social Work Practice.

Not surprisingly, scholars espousing this social constructionist application had strong views on the idea of evidence and the idea that it is possible to

measure effectiveness in any manner that could be deemed a conclusion. The motivation for measurement itself is challenged and the values that underlie the motivation are put into question. A strong comparison is made between the perfect society that Nazi Germany attempted to create and the idea of evidence-based practice and modalities that are designed to internalize problems and convince people that their thinking is flawed.

> *I find (evidence-based practice) horrible, horrific. Why do we have to measure these human things? I think it ultimately leads to far more destruction than anything else. It reminds me of the 'Deadly Medicine,' Nazi exhibit, how it sort of measured everything to be effective, to create this perfect society. And again, I think this whole evidence-based practice thing comes out of medicine, obviously. They've pretty well abandoned it now, I think, in a lot of medical schools, but social work always takes another 15 years to abandon anything that everyone else has long done away with.*

> *Measurement and categorization is a very destructive sort of way of looking at things. And, what it does, of course, is take away from the complexity of human things and put it into some sort of a mechanical measurement that you can then make claims about; and you lose sight of the person.*

Scholars from this approach hope that social workers who graduate from a curriculum informed by the humanities might come away with a better vision for the diversity of people, culture, and communities. These social workers would recognize themselves first, as a part of the community and second, as fellow collaborators rather than as expert professionals who comes in to do practice with individuals. Graduates would be liberated from the need to measure, assess, and analyze which would allow them to keep their humanness intact when working alongside communities. Free from the weight of the scientific paradigm these graduates would not feel the pressure to categorize the world

and force the ambiguity of life into an illusory box of static conclusions. Graduates would recognize social work as being a field in partnership with communities rather than of practitioners who fix problems and researchers who analyze them.

Differences in the Application Models

The models presented represent different applications of the philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice. Differences in the applications include (a) the curriculum (many clinical models, no clinical models, or a few), (b) the instruction of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV (DSM) (1998), and (c) use of an evidence-based practice model to guide practice.

Curricula: Teaching Models of Practice

Participants disagreed as to whether a large variety of practice models should be taught. Those participants who felt they should be taught spoke of the need to understand multiple languages of practice and to apply these collaboratively as needed. Those who disagreed with this approach felt that exposing students to many models left little time for these students to learn to practice well.

> *If the idea is to be able to come out and be effective as a therapist or a social worker, it would be good to learn something. And the question is how much exposure is important to have before people pick something that they're going to really learn?*

Other respondents felt that some practice models, particularly those based in ways of helping which require an internalized problem, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, should not be taught because they are oppressive practices. Still others felt that not putting emphasis on practice models was the best

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approach as this allowed room for the students to create their own practices with clients and could come to the model literature after they had developed an understanding of the process. At least one other felt that models of practice were a waste of time and that the focus of education should be assisting communities rather than individuals, questioning the idea of a separation of social work into micro and macro practice orientations.

Instruction of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV)

No topic raised blood pressure more than the DSM. A sample of responses when the name came up in conversation ranged from "the DSM is another language" to, "get me a gin." All respondents felt that if the DSM is taught that it should be taught in an historical and deconstructive manner. Several scholars voiced concern,

> *The DSM should be taught as an example of Enlightenment madness—a perfect example of Foucault's notion of power and knowledge. I'd have them be aware of it, but I certainly wouldn't advocate its use. I think, again, it's the worst example of categorization you can think of. It's madness. I do think it can be used very well to illustrate the dangers of how truths are constructed, and then become set as truths, rather than just verbal constructions based on who is controlling dominant power constellations at any given time; it was basically all men who put it together.*

> *My thinking is that 98% of those who support teaching the DSM-IV are suggesting that people can survive in the system, they're making the assumption that people can have a voice in that system, and believe me, it's very difficult, especially for new students coming in. They will be co-opted and they'll be manufactured and that is what happens. I mean, it's very difficult, and I think in order for them to be able to have a voice in a new system and create change (a) they're going to have to be very lucky in terms of the site in which they choose to work, and (b) they're going to have to have a massive support system around them.*

At least one respondent felt that the DSM should not be taught because it was an oppressive practice. This respondent further put the onus on the academy and individual professors to stop teaching these practices, requesting that they be held responsible for damaging clients if they did.

> *What we are attempting to do is to squeeze people into these gross generalizations without any notion of class, without any notion of money privilege, or gender, our treatment is a furthering of isolation. It's like, when we're all together, you're one of us, but if you have a problem then you go off, and you're severed off like an isolated strip. Look, if they want to teach DSM technology, then they can. But, again, I ask Spivak's question, what is at stake? You are responsible for students, so what are you telling them? You are packing them up like little soldiers, to be a part in this psycho-pharmicalogical war on people. And that's fine. So maybe they need to be introduced to it, but it needs to be in a very cautionary deconstructive way. Say, 'This is the result, if you participate.'*

Those scholars who felt that it should be taught tended to agree on its application stating that it should be applied with deconstructive care and as one way of viewing a person.

> *My hope would be that people would not mistake the diagnosis for the reality, for one thing. That people would begin to see every other individual or family or whatever, even communities, in much broader terms than are provided by something as narrow as the DSM. They're gonna have to use the DSM, but what they add to it is . . . greater understanding, and possibility of other, more—what would I say?—more humane or more relevant interventions for people.*

> *I would hope that a student could talk to clients about what these diagnoses mean, and what does it mean to them? And how does it influence their lives and— I would like to teach students to use it pragmatically and collaboratively.*

"Evidence" as a Guide for Practice

A major difference between respondents existed when it came to a discussion of evidence-based practice. By far, most scholars felt that a quantitative model of effectiveness was too linear and could not measure all the

intricacies and interactions that are a part of a relationship. This view was

summarized most strongly by one participant comment:

Evidence-based practice is methodological fundamentalism.

But at least one respondent believed that quantitative evidence should be used.

This view was represented in the eclectic-hybrid approach. Most felt that a

collaborative approach to assessment and outcome could be utilized as a check

for effectiveness but needed to be supplemented.

> *I actually offer some workshops in evidence-based practice, in which we incorporate a critical reflection framework. I'm not against evidence-based practice at all, but all I am against, I guess, is the imperialist kind of culture that it implies. So it often implies very positivistic ways of dealing with things, and I would say that we should have evidence-based practice, but it needs to be much more inclusive in its approaches and methods. There will also be lots of other kinds of evidence that we need to be aware of in order to practice effectively. And some of those may not be measurable. Some of them may not even be tangible. So that if we're going to truly achieve what evidence-based practice is about—which I think is about accountability—then we actually need to be much more generally critical about what we do, and that would include things like being critically reflective and reflexive in our practices in order to expose the assumptions that are behind what we're doing and sometimes we may not be able to test or measure those assumptions. I would take what I believe would be a much more broad and inclusive view of evidence-based practice than probably what's happened in practice, which has tended to be more positivistic, I think. I do say that our view can sit with an evidence-based practice one, as long as the evidence-based practice's view is broader.*

Other respondents perceived the process of evidential research as a

game played by the dominant subculture of the present period. These scholars

felt that if this language needed to be used to support culturally-oriented practice

that it could be used.

> *I think if you wanted to play the game of numbers, you could, like all those therapies that have played that game, you could generate the numbers. I mean, all you have to do is ask the right questions based on the kinds of things that you think are right, and you can create effects.*

One scholar shared concern for the stifling of creative work and the exclusion of individuals from the field:

> *When absolutely everything demands evidentiary accountability—it's one of the reasons I think a lot of very creative people just try to stay out of a very oppressive business, where you can't be helpful to people, or where you're so limited in the ways you can be helpful.*

Finally, a scholar believed that ideas of linear causality in practice are an impossibility given the complexity of life.

> *Part of my answer is that so much is going on in people's lives and in their worlds that it is hopeless to think that—is that the right word?—to think that something you say or do in the space of a minute is going to account for particular kinds of changes—because multiple things are going on in people's lives all the time, and the contexts outside of therapy are more powerful than you are in bringing about change. So that's the first thing; I don't think, you can demonstrate that A leads to B and screen out everything else that's happening. You can't apply laboratory principles to real life.*

Conclusion of the Presentation of a Philosophical Framework for Constructionist Social Work Practice and Its Six Applications

A philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice has been presented. The presentation encompassed a discussion of both the philosophical framework and the six applications in social work education. These applications consisted of (a) the eclectic-hybrid application, (b) the eclectic-collaborative application, (c) the process application, (d) the political practice application, (e) the political practice and institution deconstruction application, and (f) the community polyvocal partnership application. The application of the social constructionist philosophical framework to the teaching of social constructionist practice will now be discussed.

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Application of the Philosophical Framework for Teaching Social Work

One of the goals of this study was to present a framework for the application of social constructionism to social work practice. To that end I present a discussion of the social constructionist philosophical framework for the teaching of social constructionist practice in social constructionist ways. As one respondent stated,

Teaching and doing social constructionism are linked.

The information, attitudes, approaches, understandings, and in vivo exercises are presented from my discussions with the participants of this study. This section proceeds with a discussion of a social constructionist curriculum, followed by the application of a philosophy of social constructionist teaching.

Social Constructionism in Social Work Curriculum

A common theme running through participant responses and across applications was that if social constructionism is not used as the guiding framework of a school's social work curriculum, but is instead taught as a component, then the paradigm should be introduced to students as early as possible. Most expressed concerns and stories about students who were exposed to constructionist ways of understanding after having been taught more traditional approaches to practice (which tend to be linear and privilege one way of understanding). These students subsequently found themselves in binary positions of having to either give up the idea of a modern approach to truth or to not accept a social constructionist view that truths are created. To avoid placing students in this binary position, scholars felt that students should be exposed to a

social constructionist way of knowing first, followed by an introduction to modern

theories if the curriculum called for this combination. One participant shared the

following observation about students being exposed to constructionism later in

the curriculum:

> *They would be exposed to a lot of things, and then at the end they could pick an elective, and they could pick narrative therapy. What happened was people said, 'I've just spent a year and a half learning all this stuff, this is so different. Why are you doing this? I can't pay attention to this, I've just learned this other way of thinking!'*

> *I always felt that students should begin with a constructionist perspective and to begin to then think about, to really use critical theory in the best sense of the word about what they're learning instead of being fed various theories and then later learning to critique them, but to have a sense of what's involved in a theory or in ideas about human behavior as you go along. And to be able to stand back from it and look at it as a construction that makes more or less sense and is more or less useful and that has certain drawbacks.*

The difficulty of this approach for students was also mentioned.

Participants thought that the social constructionist approach required students to

learn material twice, first, the logic of the theory, and second, a deconstruction of

the theory. All felt this was a more rigorous approach to education and

challenged students to be critical, independent thinkers.

> *In a sense you're almost saying to students, 'You have to learn twice as much.' I mean, it's much easier to just be a true believer, let's face it. It always is. That's true in most things, y'know. It's a much easier way to go.*

Approach to Social Constructionist Teaching

Participants were remarkably similar in their descriptions of their teaching

styles. Each discussed the importance of teaching in a manner that was

congruent with the social constructionist approach they were espousing. This

approach was particularly attuned to the expertness of the students, an

understanding of multiple perspectives and multiple truths, and an understanding

that the process of teaching is a relationship that can model and convey the

process of collaborative social work client interactions.

> *What I strive to do is to try to conduct the class in a manner that's consistent with the very ideas that we're talking about. So, I think that's key here. It's not just running the class one way and talking about these ideas, but saying, how do we do it?*

> *I think your teaching has to model. You can't say, 'Do as I say, not as I do.' So that as a teacher, I just have been working on the students' expertise, a strengths perspective with the students, getting out of the position of expert, drawing on their indigenous knowledge, on their experience.*

They also expressed difficulty and frustration in their ability to teach in

social constructionist ways in traditional, modernist universities. Many discussed

the limitations to which they had to acquiesce and their disdain in doing so.

> *We teach in very modernist universities. Very modernist universities. I think that creates a very challenging situation. We have to give students grades or you have to have a syllabus. I mean, the very idea of a syllabus is in some ways antagonistic to some of the ideas of social construction. The idea that everything's laid out in advance . . . again, it's not bad or good, it's just a different tradition, you might say. A different intellectual learning tradition. So you're trying to do one inside of the other, and that's kind of tough.*

Ways-of-Being as a Social Constructionist Teacher

Participants shared with me basic ways-of-being with students that may

serve as a foundation for social constructionist teaching. They stressed the

importance of being in the moment with students and that this in vivo experience

took precedence over all else in the classroom. It is understood that content is

secondary to class process and interaction. The focus is on the student's ability

to interact with all others in the room and to reflect on how knowledge is created,

processed, interpreted, negotiated and understood. This reflection process

teaches the student through experience rather than lecture how to reflect and

process with clients in collaborative helping relationships. I present several

general recommendations from the participants on ways-of-being as a social

constructionist informed teacher:

> *Listen and ask questions and be responsive and sensitive.*

> *I absolutely credit others with their learning. I am learning myself, I admit my own mistakes or my own wandering off like we all do. But I think the transparency's trying to level the playing field.*

> *What you have to do is surrender the role of expert. . . .. you have to suspend your own disbelief. . . and belief, and you have to create an environment where people understand that you understand that there may be many truths about a situation.*

> *Be attuned to what is happening in the room and open it for discussion. Allow the group and individuals within the group to collaborate in teaching and learning.*

> *The way of being is to stop being the end-all-be-all authority, for one thing, to be a student with them—we're all learners. To be transparent in our own learning.*

> *I don't want to abandon my own expertise or my own knowledge, but I have to understand more clearly what their's is. And sometimes that requires a sort of a rethinking—this is the collaborative part—about how they've answered.*

> *In the beginning what people wanna do with their clients is tell them what to think and what to do most of the time, rather than exploring with them. I suspect teachers are the same, they just want to tell students what they should think and then they assume that students will think that, rather than helping the students arrive at someplace for themselves. And the place that they arrive at could be quite different from what the teacher wanted. But the point of that is that it's the process that's important, not so much the outcome.*

> *I've also got to think about the physical environment, I've got to think about the cultural and social environments, as well. And I've got to then think about how I, as the teacher, participate in creating a particular*

environment. So it makes me have to think about what messages I actually communicate about learning and about knowledge, et cetera? And how can I model the right sorts of messages that will fit with a social constructionist perspective? So then it makes me think about what am I projecting as a teacher? Am I modeling the idea that people can be open to arrive at their own ideas, or am I actually sort of modeling the idea that my ideas are better and I'm gonna impose them? So what it does, I think, is throw the onus back on me, as the teacher, to be aware of the kind of things that I'm constructing . . . it's quite a different way of conceptualizing teaching.

What I am trying to do is be honest, I think, and open, about my own doubts or responsibilities or influence or whatever. Because what I'm actually saying is, 'We're all people, we're all human beings, we all participate in this process. Let's simply be aware and open and honest enough to look at it.'

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching Invites the Creation of Space for Teacher and Student to Learn Together

Many respondents shared that one of the results of a social constructionist informed classroom is freedom for students and teachers to learn from one another as ideas are explored in multiple ways and with multiple interpretations, applications, and possibilities. Instructors are in positions to collaboratively explore and reflect upon student understandings rather than rely on traditional lecture and learning formats of telling, memorizing, and rehashing.

I have to say I've been humbled when doing it, because people often arrive at quite different ways of thinking about things than my way of thinking. But I've had to recognize in that process that often those ways of thinking are just as legitimate and in fact stretched my own thinking, as well.

I just found it very freeing and I think that that's its greatest contribution to social work education. It takes us away from more narrow, and I guess I'd say essentialist kinds of ways of viewing the world.

Students themselves will come up with ways of applying this, and, it's actually quite interesting. I won't tell them—I'll never say 'Here's the technique for how to do X or Y,' but they themselves will oftentimes come

up with things. Because we do talk about, trying to think about these ideas in the context of, for example, their field placements and things like that and they generate, I guess you might say, practices themselves. And sometimes they might sound fairly simple but I think in many cases are pretty big shifts for the students, are pretty profound shifts.

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching is Process Oriented Teaching

The emerging theory of social constructionism as related to social work education stresses in vivo experience,

> *The best exercises are to do it, I suppose, and then . . . when we do it, we also make sure we're sort of processing the material at another level, as well.*

Participants all stressed the need to focus on process over content in classes and that content would be learned in relationships with others. To this end, while some exercises to explore meaning with students were suggested and will be presented here, they were all prefaced with the understanding that exercises were to be flexible and never to overshadow process and the interactions in the class.

> *I'm not an exercise guy . . . if things come up in the moment, then you create something out of that. And sometimes students create things that look like exercises, feel like exercises.*

The approaches here may be modified in any constructionist way. Again, it was stressed that it is of utmost importance that any constructed exercise does not get in the way or hinder in vivo experience.

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching Invites the Creation of Safety in

the Classroom: A Place Where Proving and Disproving are Suspended

The importance of creating safety in the classroom cannot be overstated. Every participant discussed the importance of safety for students in a social constructionist approach to teaching:

> *If you're going to put an emphasis on dialogue as a kind of learning, or knowledge as something that we do together, through dialogue, then I think that safety becomes a very paramount issue . . . trying to create a safe space that brings people together so they can have dialogue and form relationships. I think that itself is really important.*

> *It is very important to create new space. Create a space, an environment, for relationships, conversations in which students can begin to value what they bring.*

> *Safety is so critical, because in the current system . . . there's a very large disparity in the authority that teachers have versus students. And it's not always a safe place for students.*

> *Safety is paramount when talking and doing social constructionist ideas.*

How Safety is Created in a Social Constructionist Informed Classroom

Participants shared their views on how to create safety in the classroom and these are presented in order of least complex to most complex. In sum, participants suggested creating safety with students by (a) welcoming perspectives, (b) making a game of the acceptance of multiple truths, (c) inviting unhierarchical discussion of class needs, (d) the use of imagery exercises, (e) the deconstruction of academic traditions, (e) reducing the expertness of the teacher, (f) reducing the importance of grades, and (g) the deconstruction of assumptions about the world.

Welcoming perspectives. Welcoming perspectives, not surprisingly,

was a running theme in setting a safe context for students. Both discussing and

modeling openness for the students allows them to recognize that the room is a

comfortable place to share and express thoughts, feeling, ideas, and

impressions.

> *Safety is created by welcoming multiple perspectives, allowing students to express opinions and views, not placing values of right and wrong from the teacher, getting them to respond, respecting different ways of understanding.*
>
> *There has to be transition time . . . you can't expect a modernist to move easily . . . its far too different a view . . . demonstrate it, let them experience it in small increments.*
>
> *Giving students a chance to say what they think. Not saying, 'You're right' or 'You're wrong,' but really getting other people to respond and getting them to notice that they may have more than one way.*
>
> *We try to set up a culture where everybody in the group practices asking questions or making statements in a way that helps a person who's reflecting consider it, rather than telling that person what they should think.*
>
> *I model it first, and I find that helps set up the climate as well. So, my thinking there is that if I do want people to participate fully as equals, then I need to be an equal.*

Making a game of the acceptance of multiple truths. One respondent

found great success in creating a space in which traditional rules could be

suspended for the length of the class by making a game out of the process.

Students were asked to play along with the idea of multiple truths. By framing it

as a game the respondent found that students could more easily accept the

ideas of ambiguity and not-knowing.

> *I try to lessen the threat of ambiguity in the beginning. So what I do is set up the group culture for learning from the beginning, and I will say to students, 'You might not believe this but there are many rights, and we're*

not looking for right or wrong, we're just wanting to recognize as many different ways of seeing as we can.' So I might say to them, 'Look, you might find that you don't agree with that idea,' and I say 'that's okay. I'm not expecting you to agree or disagree with it. All I'm expecting is that you take this on as one of the rules for this game that we're gonna play in this class, or in this group.' And I say, 'Just try it on for the purposes of this group, for this period of time.' So, I'm not expecting them to change their ideas and to ditch their own ideas, or whatever. And I also say things like 'Whatever you say, we accept, we're not here to disprove or prove what you say. But we are simply here to create an environment where you might be open to considering other ideas. So that means that you can still hold your idea, you don't have to give it up just because someone comes up with a contradictory idea. But we're simply saying we want you to be prepared to listen to and understand the contradictory idea.' So then I say, 'And that's just a rule we're asking you to abide by for the purposes of this group.'

Inviting unhierarchical discussion of class needs. Many respondents mentioned that class discussion in which all perspectives were welcomed was vital for creating class safety. In addition to creating this class openness some scholars stressed the need to give students the opportunity to discuss what they need in order to feel safe. This discussion is held between the students in the class as well as between the class and the teacher.

> *At the very first class, I just told them to have their own conversation about what would it take to make the classroom feel like a safe place, what do they need to have in place, and I just leave (the room) and tell them to call me when they're done.*

The use of imagery exercises. Imagery exercises were also discussed as a way in which students could shift themselves into a place of safety. This exercise has roots in gestalt therapy (Perls, 1973) and seeks to begin with past feelings followed by a discussion of a collaborative re-creation of those feelings in a new context.

> They have kind of imagery, visualizing exercises where students visualize some places in their lives—any time in their lives that were really safe.

And they do a whole imagery thing about it—what it would look like, smell like, and where it was. It could be the apple pie that was baking in the oven, whatever. And they use that imagery to then say, 'How do we create this? Is there any way we can approach this or recreate those feelings that you had?'

The deconstruction of academic traditions. A very large part of a social constructionist guided practice is the critical questioning of cultural assumptions that may be operating on clients in unhelpful ways. This deconstruction can also be the basis of creating safety in the class when applied to the assumption of traditional educational practices. Some participants felt that conversations which invite discussion and collaborative exploration of the notions of academic power can be tremendously helpful in alleviating the fears that come with these traditional academic discourses.

> *Invite students to discuss the discourse of education, how teachers and students are supposed to be in this society.*

> *I might ask students something about their own views about learning and knowledge. What constitutes knowledge? What constitutes learning? And have them engage in some discussions with each other about that. And to try to then tease out from that what we are bringing to the table. What are the beliefs? What are the assumptions that we're coming together with? And where does this fit? And then by doing it, I'm also trying to model a bit. I talked about the power issues. I opened up the issue of the power issues between them and me and the meaning that has for them, and for me, and how we could handle it there in the room, and we surfaced it, we made it transparent and we struggled with it.*

Reducing the expertness of the teacher. The social constructionist paradigm invites us to question the position of dominant knowledge in our culture as a static collection of facts and truths. It invites us to recognize facts and truths as a negotiated way of understanding the world. Social constructionist classrooms seek to deconstruct facts, theories, and assumptions to see them as

one of many ways to understand the world. This is a process of the deprivileging

of knowledge. A social constructionist classroom must also make strides to

deprivilege the place of knowledge in the student-teacher relationship. This is a

different thought all together than a traditional classroom and the presentation of

facts.

Trying to deprivilege--if that's a word--deprivilege my own position in the classroom. At least my own position as sort of the ultimate authority.

I tell students where I get my ideas. I mean, instead of saying that, 'These were handed down from the Mount Ararat (laughs) on a tablet.' I say 'no, I read this' or 'I went to this conference' or 'this was a client of mine,' so it all becomes approachable knowledge, and then of course I draw from them (the students).

The class begins with these questions: 'What was the journey that led you to be here today? How did you come to be here today?' Students go around the room. They refer back to their experiences and their indigenous knowledges. That starts it out, you see, with the notion that they're bringing a tremendous amount to the classroom of their living and their experiences that we call on all the time.

Reducing the importance of grades. The discussion of grades was a

source of division among participants. While all recognized that grades are

socially constructed and the grade, itself, should be diminished as much as

possible in the course to open up space for understandings, the level of sharing

this act with students varied. Applications of a social constructionist approach to

education that were closer to a modernist understanding tended to have less

sharing of the act of grading with students than those applications that were more

collaborative. The range varied from a discussion of grades as authoritarian, but

an act which is required, to the middle ground of allowing students to negotiate

their grades with the professor to demonstrate the negotiation of meaning and

the act of truth claiming, to the far position of allowing students to grade

themselves. Each of these three levels is represented with a comment below.

> *And I do have to mark them, and they know that, and I try to be as clear as possible—it's called a strengths perspective.*

> *I talk about grading as an interpretive, evaluative moment. We all understand it's an interpretive thing. I try to make grading collaborative— as much as I can. They can tell me what they think their grade is, or what they've striven for in their work and I'll respect that. But we have to engage in a conversation about it if it's different—if we finally end up with a grade, and they don't like it, then they write me a little essay about why they think that's so, and it's a request for me to rethink it. And often that involves a conversation with them.*

> *We talk about empowerment, and then we walk into a classroom and immediately disempower students by telling them how we're going to grade them. I mean, I can't think of anything more disempowering to a student than that. For years, I have let students grade themselves and I haven't really had a problem with it.*

The deconstruction of assumptions about the world. Many

participants discussed the unsettling nature of throwing assumed truths into

question. Students were often said to be a little uncomfortable with such

discussions as they began to recognize that their perceived horizons may not be

another's and that their world views do not encapsulate the views of all.

Participants felt that this discomfort is to be recognized as a sign of expansion for

it is a sign that new ideas may be shifting their perceptual understandings such

that space opens for learning possibilities and the idea of a diversity of views and

a diversity of understandings can be fully recognized. Unsettling students gets

them to realize that they are not alone in the world, and that other views are

viable. Education from a social constructionist perspective should be unsettling,

questioning, identity challenging, and personal.

This approach is sometimes a little unsettling—in a good way—for students, to get them to think about these things from a social constructionist perspective.

I might ask them to write down what's one 'fact' about human behavior, something that they truly believe about human beings. And then engage in the process of discussing that. What did they come up with? Where did it come from? What is assumed in that belief?

The Goal for the Creation of Safety in the Classroom

Ultimately, it is hoped that through the development of class safety students will feel as though they are in an environment in which they can share their views without the fear of being disproven, invalidated, or marginalized. It is the creation of a space in which, as one participant described, "belief and disbelief can be suspended," and where respectful attempts at understanding can reside. Another participant summarized this place of understanding in this manner:

What I hear students begin to say is that they reach a point where all of a sudden, there's a lot of certainty in being uncertain. The first person I ever heard say this, about 8 years ago, at least, maybe 10, he said, 'Well, once you realize that there's no correct answer, there's no right or wrong question, there's no one way to do it, you have a lot of freedom and flexibility. And you can feel more competent because you're not afraid that you're going to ask the wrong question or get it wrong. You have the sense that no matter what mistake you make, that you will be able to deal with it or handle it in some way.'

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching Invites Sharing the Direction of the Class and Learning with Students

One strong emergent component of social constructionist teaching was collaboration with students concerning the direction of the class and the assignments. As with grading, the level of collaboration became greater as the

application approach moved further from a modernist frame. Many scholars

discussed the limitations of traditional lecture.

> *I've been trying over the last decade to do less lecturing. Because it's sort of a least educative and most hierarchical form, and to create as many dialogues as possible. So that, I mean, you learn less by watching than you do by doing by a long shot, by a long shot.*

Collaboration was deemed important to help students gain ownership of

their education. Participants consistently stressed that a social constructionist

paradigm was a metaperspective, and as such, was often personally influential

for students. This influence was compounding and affected students'

relationships with clients, family, friends and ultimately influenced their

understandings of the future. In an effort to move the frame from class learning to

lifetime learning, a collaboration of learning in the classroom was important.

> *Learning social constructionism is one phase of a really much longer process.*

> *For me a lot of this is trying to find ways to share responsibility for learning in the class. To really share it, to get to a point where students feel that they have some kind of co-responsibility for what happens in the room. We can have different responsibilities, I think that's fine. But for them to feel like, they and I, we share what is going to happen.*

Collaboration with students fell into the following areas, (a) co-construction of

assignments, (b) co-construction of classes, and (c) co-construction of syllabi.

Co-construction of Assignments

Assignments were discussed as collaborations which were to have

personal benefit for students. Students were often invited to reflect on

discussions, role-plays, videos, stories, and articles. Assignments tended to be

very open and experiential.

Options, —a lot of options, they could really write anything they wanted to—but I would give several suggestions. And then the other option was to write any paper you wanted, just check with me before you do it.

I give assignments that are going to be useful to them in terms of thinking about, learning something about themselves, rather than, y'know, something that's like a quiz.

I give assignments to understand themselves better in the process of learning… I'm interested in developing the sort of reflective parts of themselves.

Assignment are focused on their own families of origin, I would never require it, they're using their own experiences and their own families and it's a very powerful assignment. They do the study and they contact one or two people and get information. I've had former students come up to me in conferences years later and say, 'Y'know, my work started in that paper.'

Co-construction of Classes

Participants placed great emphasis on generative class discussion and in vivo experiences. To this end, many discussed ways in which to incorporate in vivo experiences and collaboration directly into the course by allowing students to construct the classes themselves or to participate strongly in the direction the course would take.

I'm never sure what's going to occur in the class before I'm there. Because I try to set up, I try to structure it so that much of the content is generated by the students and what they're doing and the questions that they have. And then we discuss it.

I get two classes that divide up into groups so that every week I've got one of the groups which is responsible for the class. And they've got to work with me to make that class do what it's going to do. And I don't have complete control over that. So they, in fact, will co-create with me what it is we're going to do in that class, whether I'm going to lecture or whether they want to have specific issues they want to deal with, whether they want to have some sort of film, whether they want to go down to a computer classroom, whether they want to take a field trip, or some combination of anything that would be, to them, important and useful.

The faculty for the course gives the students an assignment, but does not instruct them in how they are to tackle the assignment or how it should look when it's finished. Students are in 8 hours of classroom work every other week, and then they're in 8 hours of Peer Orchestrated Development (POD) every other week. In addition to this, of course, is their own reading, their own individual learning. They also, for each class, do a reflection. So they share their inner talk with the faculty member and the other members of their classes. All of this is a way of helping students learn that someone does not stand up at the front of the class or hand you a book, and you gain knowledge that way, but you actively participate in the construction of it. And that it's not something that just happens in the classroom, but that it is a continuing, ongoing process. So the reflections demonstrate another way of helping students have dialogue with themselves and with each other.

Co-construction of Syllabi

Several scholars shared that the requirement of a syllabus was often a source of frustration for them as it was prohibitive of true collaboration. This level of frustration ranged from little, for scholars with views that were represented in both hybrid application models, to extreme, for those scholars closer to the polyvocal community partnership model. Below is a comment representing the position furthest away from modernism.

Most of my colleagues still seem to week-by-week, say 'This is what we'll do this week and here are the readings and this is what we'll do this week and here are the readings.' I just don't do that anymore. I mean we work on these sorts of community projects, and it works.

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching Invites Teaching Through Process: Co-Creation of Knowledge and Reflexive Practice Opportunities

The next section moves into ways in which participants work with students to assist in their learning content through practice and collaborative action and doing. These collaborative exercises and approaches are focused on privileging the process of the helping relationship and the creation of knowledge in the

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classroom. These approaches have been divided into the following areas: the use of videos, the use of writing reflections, the use of process focused technology, the use of in-class reflections, and the use of role-plays.

The Use of Videos

Most participants felt that the use of expert therapy videos should be kept to a minimum, if used at all, and always reflected upon. The reasoning for this was to reduce the privileging of one way as optimal, which could reduce a student's innovation. In cases where videos are shown it was advised to show several to offset the influence of one being viewed as expert. Other types of videos involved role- plays, interviews, and simulated interviews.

> *There is the possibility of quite creative ways of teaching, in terms of potential use of videos, and analyzing text. So, for example, it's quite a helpful way of getting into something called 'reflective practice.'*

> *I have the students watch a videotape of an interview, it's actually a simulated interview (30-40 minutes). And then everybody has to write down the story of what happened and everybody reads what they've written. I try to get them to notice the different ways that people all listening to the same material construct it. I give them a copy of a transcript of the interview, and ask them to now go home and see what they think about their own version of this interview. What does it say about them? What does it say about the client? And then I say 'Now that's all happening, and you weren't interacting with that client, you were just observing a video. . . . Think of how different an experience you might've had with some of you, as opposed to others of you, and how your own subjectivity would play out in some of that.'*

The Use of Writing Reflections

Writing surfaced as a means to critically reflect on the construction of problems and how a student's biases and assumptions come into play when interpreting. The use of vignettes was suggested as the catalyst for class discussions on such things as the construction of the problem, the construction of

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cases, and a recognition that how the case is framed leads to the creation and application of interventions.

> *I get students to write up critical incidents to help them then reflect on those, say, on an individual basis. I invite them to think through the sort of perspectives they have taken, so the way you think about something informs the way that something is informed and then responded to.*

The following participant wanted students to be particularly attuned to the language that they used when writing responses to a video of a practice session. The participant used the reflection on student responses as a way to reduce the power of professional knowledge. This unprivileging of the objective style assists in opening space for other ways of understanding.

> *In reflections and writings ask reflecting questions like 'You really, you wrote that up like a clinician. I didn't say you needed to, but notice how quickly you moved into a certain sort of professional role instead of some other.' What happens is there may be one or two people who will write it in the first person, for example. They'll take the role of the woman, or of her son, or somebody else. 'It's not like you all got it right, but what you all did was move into a particular way.'*

The Use of Processes Focused Technology

Because of the focus on in vivo experience, the use of online technology was not discussed often. One participant discussed the use of internet technology to teach the process of interaction in ways that it would hope would assist students in expanding ideas with one another, in exploring relational possibilities, and in collaborative reflection of self and process.

> *Instead of a term paper or a very individual kind of thing for themselves, I'll set up computer groups, E-mail groups, like five or six people. And they'll have a major issue to discuss, as in a dialogue over a period of weeks. And they get judged or evaluated on the quality of the dialogue. What they bring into it, what they do with it, how they treat each other and how they add, lament the issues, expand on them, evaluate all sorts of pockets and possibilities. And the way they treat each other through all this. And what I*

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get is a printout at the end of the week of the whole dialogue. . . . They love it.

The Use of In-Class Reflections

In-class reflections place emphasis on group participation and openly sharing views. This collaborative reflection assists students in exploring how they participate in the construction of their own interpretations, as well as the process of knowledge creation with the class. Class reflections give primary focus to the interaction process and secondary focus to the content.

Have a vignette of a situation, let's say, where a child is in a potentially abusive situation, or at least, that's one interpretation of it. And you get people to respond to the vignette independently, compare notes, and you'll probably find that people respond to the vignette quite differently, and that provides you an opportunity for talking about that.

Discussions of interpretation are important because people are always implicated in the judgments they make about clients, and it can't be purely objective, it is an impression and it partly comes from what they privilege and what they leave out.

Getting people in a small peer group to help each other critically reflect on their practices. So I get people to actually cite or describe incidents from their practice, and then the rest of the group helps them unearth the assumptions that are underneath that, and then help them see how they've constructed the situation.

As mentioned previously participants felt that a very large part of in-class reflection is aimed at assisting students to reflect upon their own values and the ways in which those values color the ways a person or situation is interpreted. Participants offer some ideas to invite students to have this kind of reflection in class via their comments below.

In discussions they're engaged always in looking at where their own ideas and truths are coming from, and how they're affecting what they're seeing and hearing and listening to.

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One of the core things that you do is ask people to reflect on how they interpret certain elements of the world, whether it's relationships, or parent-child relationships, or understandings of people who are different from they are, or spiritual understandings. If you get people to share their interpretations of parts of the world that are important to them, and you'll notice right off, as you well know, that they are different. They're not totally different. There are similarities and themes that run across what different people would say, but there are differences.

It is essential to critique our own assumptions, not just having a different set of discourses, but trying to make those things visible. Questioning assumptions about practice, questioning assumptions about the profession, questioning assumptions about ethics? . . . Those assumptions are not necessarily bad assumptions, but we should be thinking about them as assumptions rather than as truths.

The Use of Role-Plays

Next to actual experience with clients and communities, participants felt that role-plays were one of the most helpful ways in assisting students to gain an understanding of the process of practice.

Role-plays help with feelings and understandings.

Students are encouraged to play multiple roles in role play: child, mother, father, police officer, social worker, neighbor, friend, and to reflect on questions of feelings and personal change in each role. One respondent recommended many reflective questions including asking the student;

How did you feel in that role? How does that connect with how you construed the role? How does how you construed the role influence what you've done and how you've responded?

Role plays can assist students not only in process but in recognizing how they change based on the role they play, how their voices are strengthened or diminished, how their perceptions are privileged or unprivileged in context with

the other. Below are presented several examples of role-plays designed to get at

process and reflection of self in context.

A participant suggested that three people participate in a role-play and

take turns being the client, social worker, and observer. While the interview is

taking place the observer asks the interviewer:

> *'What assumption are you making? And, how are those assumptions guiding what you're asking?' And then asking them to ask another question that didn't rely on that assumption . . . an exercise like that can make visible the pathologizing discourses that people bring, and give people an opportunity to see if they were asking the question not based on that, what might happen.*

The same turn taking role-play can be used but with the class taking the observer

position and reflecting with the participants concerning

> *What it felt like to be the interviewee. What feedback can you give your partner, what was it like being in the client role and switching back and forth to the social worker role, so that they really get a feeling for what's different. Get everyone to reflect on what it was like for the client, what you think it was like, what she was going to say, for the person who's playing the role of the client.*

The group who did the role-play may then be invited to reflect with the

class on their interpretations of what was transpiring in the role-play, asking

questions such as:

> *What are the various ways in which you think you saw or heard? How did your understandings come into play in your interpretations?*

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching Invites Continual Class

Reflection

Many of the reflection exercises discussed by participants were based on

Tom Andersen's (1991) reflecting work. Reflecting groups are hoped to expand

and open knowledge for participants. The general framework involves a

practicing group being observed by an observing group. At some point the

practice group stops and the observation group reflects with each other on what

they saw and how it affected them individually. The practicing group watches and

listens to this interaction and at some point the reflection stops. The practicing

group then reflects on what they heard from the observing group. Many

variations of this format have been used and all are suitable provided that open

reflection center around in vivo experience. Ideas from participants concerning

reflection groups are listed below.

> *Have one student interview another about an issue that's come up in placement, in their work with a family, or in their work with people, and have reflecting teams.*

Other ideas involve bringing in guests to participate in differing forms of

role-play, videos, or discussion reflections. Ideas include:

> *Bringing in therapists who are working, those who are working in narrative ways with families and would be open to this.*

As well as ideas about other possibilities,

> *If people had families or clients that were willing to come into class . . . that would be fantastic.*

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching Invites the Expansion of Learning Experiences in Practice

Social constructionist informed teaching stresses process, and in vivo

experience. Participants felt that nowhere is reflection on process and in vivo

experience as related to working with others more possible than in an actual

helpful relationship with another. The following areas were discussed as being

ways in which experiential learning can be offered and enhanced from a social

constructionist informed social work education paradigm. These participants'

suggestions have been grouped as: shadowing and practicing, reflections, and

exercises with clients.

Shadowing and Practicing

 Participants felt that shadowing or observing other social workers and

practitioners can be a learning experience for students but they stressed that

while shadowing is helpful in providing examples, it is important that the student

be exposed to as many practitioners as possible so that the student can see

many different ways of practicing.

> *What we want them to begin to experience is that although these therapists, these faculty members, share the same theoretical and philosophical biases, the way that it's actualized in the therapy room varies from person to person and varies from client to client, situation to situation, context to context. It helps them see the various ways in which the ideas can come alive in the room.*

Reflections

Whether observing a video, an enactment, or a live counseling session,

participants time and time again stressed the importance of reflecting with

students on the process first, and the content second, if at all.

> *Reflect on process, not content when sessions are over, I try to get them to focus on process and not content, although you can't really separate the two. But I don't want them to rehash the client's story or to become experts on the client, but I want them to talk about what happened between the client and the therapist, what was the therapist doing, what was their experience of the reflecting process, et cetera. So they begin to focus on what happens as therapy goes along, in terms of the process of it, in terms of the conversation, the relationships, rather than the content of the story.*

Exercises with Clients

Possibilities for learning with clients are numerous and require a collaborative relationship between client and student. Asking questions of the client as to what is helpful is the most direct form of feedback for learning. This involves being open and honest with the client. One participant gave an example of an honest collaborative interaction with a client in which feedback was solicited:

> *Say to the client whatever is happening, perhaps, 'You know, that as you've been talking this hour, I must tell you that I've just been sitting here and thinking so-and-so' or 'While you were just talking, I'm sorry, I found myself not fully concentrating on what you were saying because -duh-duh.' Or 'It occurred to me that I've been asking you a lot about X, when, I'm not sure that's where you are, what you really want to talk about.'*

Reflecting with the client about possibilities and adapting to those possibilities is a way in which students can learn what is helpful for each individual client. Reflecting teams with families is another way. As students and clients become mutual partners in learning, ideas for helping may also expand. Here a participant shares an idea for reflecting with a client on their interactions.

> *The client is given, let's say, videos to watch to reflect on the nature of the conversations that are taking place. They need not be therapeutic conversations. For example, you've got a client with anger problems, could they observe conversations in which anger was a part with an eye towards 'Well, why does it, where does it get triggered? How could it have been avoided? What could have been said, where would it have been said?' Simply to get sensitized into the ways in which anger is not independent of a context of conversation. So, in some sense, you'd train the client to be as aware of language used as the therapist.*

Participants stressed the need to have practica that allowed direct practice with communities, families, and individuals, and good reflection processes for the

students. A participant expressed the reason for this need as well as the

possibility that a client could also be a part of the reflection:

> Students need a practicum that involves conversation in which you're in interchange with one or more people, and you've got others who are going to give you feedback as you move through it. So that you've become very conscious of how it works and the multiple ways in which something can be interpreted. In this way you've got to be sensitive to all kinds of continuous motions and openings and closings. So the most important level is actual immersion in conversation, and then getting feedback on that immersion. Something like a reflecting team, only they're not reflecting on the client, they're reflecting on you.

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching Emphasizes the Diversity of Experience

Throughout my conversations with these scholars it became increasingly

clear that one of the major themes of a social constructionist informed education

is that learning happens primarily through experience and a collaborative

reflection on that experience. Discussions centering around multiple perspectives

and the polyvocality of understanding were grounded in the values of diversity.

This diversity included diverse voices, languages, interpretations, feelings, and,

literally, diverse anythings. For the enhancement of education into the

experiential realm students must be encouraged to take risks and broaden their

life horizons. As one participant articulates:

> *Anything. Picking up a magazine on an airplane. Reading a novel, reading poetry, going to movies, going to art museums, any way in which you can interact with your world, or sort of expand your world. The more you have those kinds of experiences, as well as the more you experience people different than yourself, and certainly a way to do that is to travel or go to a little restaurant in the part of town where you usually don't go—anything. The more you begin to be aware that people come in all shapes and sizes and more aware of the differences between people, although they may look very similar. Since particularly, I think, in our Western culture we are*

so apt to stereotype people by different categories, whether that's race, socioeconomic, community, or by type of work.

Social Constructionist Informed Teaching Seeks Polyvocality

Social constructionist informed education stresses multiple perspectives, polyvocality and deprivileging knowledge. Social constructionist informed teaching can assist students in understanding these ideas through discussion and reflection as well as exposing them to the voices of those who hold different perspectives. Bringing in speakers and taking students out to communities can be a very powerful way to assist students to come to a broader understanding of their communities, other communities, and ultimately the world. If we accept from the social constructionist position that people are constructed in relationships with others, this exposure to another is very important both in understanding the other's views as well as in experiencing oneself co-constructed in relationship with the diverse other. Students are taught to attend to the following questions: How does one change in relation to context? How does one change in relation to another, in conversation, collaboration, and striving with another?

Experience in diverse relationships is of utmost importance in conveying, feeling, and co-reflecting upon the self and the other. A sample of participant comments that broaden polyvocality include:

I had some community playwrights come in, activist theatre groups come in…

I took the students on a trip to Toronto (about 120 miles east of where this university is) to see a performance play, and that really helped.

Therapists came into the classroom and in some cases they had written up situations, in some cases they had videotapes, it was immensely helpful.

In a couple of instances, the clients came in and that was really wonderful. I mean, for students to be able to hear their stories and interview them and find out what they found helpful and what they didn't find helpful. . . that was great.

A strong component of polyvocality is expanding the sources of knowledge. Views concerning reducing the privileging of knowledge in the academy included having classes in the community, having community members teach the courses, requiring that all faculty members practice with clients.

Social work must ask who gets to speak and with what authority? Recognize and challenge where knowledge is located. There are many sites of knowledge, right? But if we cut the academy off, then what we say is that knowledge is only located in specific places, through specific persons.

Other suggestions for deprivileging the location of knowledge and creating a more polyvocal class included using a collection of articles and writing in courses instead of one main text, using articles and voices from other fields, and including work from traditionally non-academic places (e.g., magazines, poems, short stories, novels).

To Teach the DSM or Not to Teach the DSM, That is the Question

While there was disagreement as to whether the DSM should be taught (most felt that it should) there was little to no disagreement about the manner in which it should be taught. Most felt that it should not be taught as truth but as an historical construction of abnormality in relation to a changing historical notion of normality. Participants perceived it as a language that students needed to know in order to function in the mental health arena at the present time. Most scholars also felt that students would not be in positions to make changes in the mental

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health field unless they know the DSM culture. This would afford them greater

options in how to apply it with clients in less restrictive ways.

Discussions about teaching the DSM were lively and a selection of ideas

follows:

> *We start the course talking about the words mental health and psychopathology, what does that all mean. Then discuss collaboratively 'how can you use it?' Students come up with a lot of really interesting ideas about how to do it, but to do it from a standpoint of a respect for different viewpoints. I mean, some of the ideas are encouraging the person they're working with to come up with their own assessment. That's the working assessment, but you don't put it down on paper . . . the basic idea is to expand the range of interpretations one can take of people's experience. . . . 'Which ones do you want to talk about, which ones do you think would be most helpful to you?'*

> *I tell students they have to become bilingual and it is quite challenging. I tell them that they need to be conversant in the dominant discourse of research, because if they're not, then they won't be able to participate in it; they'll be discounted, they won't be part of it. But at the same time, they also have to learn an alternate discourse so that they can use that discourse to challenge, not only to challenge but to come up with alternatives to what's dominant. And I think the same thing applies in practice, and with the DSM. I think students have to understand that discourse, and even if they want to be able to change it, or if they want to be able to protect the people they work with from it, or if they want to believe it they can do that, too. But even if they decide to use it, I think they need to have that understanding of it as a product of discourse rather than a reflection of truth, which is very different.*

> *Bring in people who have been diagnosed to share their experiences, good and bad. Talk about the discrepancy between their experience and the diagnosis, the process of being diagnosed, their views of themselves and how being diagnosed may have brought change in their lives—and sometimes the changes are good. 'This is what I wish would've happened, this is what I needed, this is what I wanted, this is what really was helpful to me.'*

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Conclusion of an Application of the Constructionist Philosophical

Framework to the Teaching of Social Constructionist Informed Practice

Social constructionist informed teaching is a way of being which honors student expertise and collaborative learning. It is a way of interacting collaboratively with a class in a respectful way that privileges the discussion of knowledge creation and the process of working with others in a helpful manner. The social constructionist instructor interacts with the class in ways that promote honesty, openness, collaborative understandings, sharing of views, transparency, deprivileging knowledge, risk taking, and an optimistic, joyous inquiry into life.

Narrative Analysis of Our Conversations

In addition to analysis to construct themes relating to the application of social constructionism to social work, narrative analysis was conducted to determine how interviewees interacted with me. Knowledge of our interaction may give additional credibility to the constructed philosophical framework if interactions with these scholars were congruent with the views they espoused. I was particularly interested, from a social constructionist vantage point, in how the relationship was constructed with each individual, how knowledge was constructed, and if our ways of interacting were congruent with the constructed philosophical framework. As mentioned previously a separate column was established to code our interactions. Just as with the framework development the same 23" screen was used to compare transcripts to determine if there were similarities in the ways in which our conversations were constructed. Similar

interactions and traits were noted and listed in the emergent narrative page. The results are listed below.

Results of Narrative Analysis

Interviewee's interactions with me were congruent with the social constructionist beliefs they espoused. Their actions mirrored their beliefs concerning ways in which social workers should interact with others. Those who espoused views of collaboration and non-expert positions interacted with me in that manner. The following social constructionist informed interactions were noted and described: (a) reducing the expert role, (b) transparency concerning their thoughts and lives, (c) making knowledge accessible, (d) recognizing and encouraging my indigenous knowledge, and (e) emphasizing polyvocality.

Reducing the Expert Role

Participants reduced their expert role by sharing personal and professional mistakes, risks taken that did not work, and personal understandings of my mistakes. For example with one interview I made a mistake on time conversion and called the participant twenty minutes later than scheduled. After my explanation, the participant responded in an open transparent compassionate manner stating,

That's all right; I've done it before.

Other comments congruent to reducing the expert role included phrases before and after comments that reflect the humanness of the participant:

I'm not exactly sure where to start.

I'm not the person to do it, because I have no research expertise.

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I am rambling here, I know.

I've lost my stream of thought here.

So, I feel that I'm wandering all over the place, I know.

Transparency Concerning Their Thoughts and Lives

While not presented in this study, many participants shared with me the origins of their views and the challenges faced in coming to social constructionist understandings. This pointed to the adoption of a transparent position. Mistakes were also shared in humorous ways. In one situation I was scheduled to call a participant when I realized that I had not received a contact number. The participant called me instead and apologized. After receiving the number I returned the call and the scholar responded,

> *I was just sitting here like a dummy thinking, 'Oh, maybe I didn't give him my number' (Chris chuckles) . . .(Laughs) I don't know where my head is.*

Comments like these are transparent and congruent with constructionist interactions. Participants certainly put me at ease during these conversations, through their manner and reflective interactions, much more so than if they had not adopted a transparent position.

Making Knowledge Accessible

Participants often prefaced that their views were their own and that they were not speaking for the field or from a higher place of authority. They continuously prefaced their thoughts and comments to both separate their beliefs and to respect the beliefs of others. Prefacing comments like the following were used often:

> *That fits much better for me . . .*

This is the way I see it . . .

There are other views . . .

To me . . .

As I see it . . .

Many of the participants also shared the struggle of coming to social

constructionist understandings. This had a way of deprivileging their knowledge

and making it accessible to me. Comments included:

In fact, I struggled with this a long time.

It took awhile in the beginning . . .

I was groping around, too.

Recognizing and Encouraging My Indigenous Knowledge

Participants reduced expertise and were congruent in social

constructionist understandings through in part, their curiosity concerning my

ideas and life. Many wanted to know my school, who was on my committee,

others wanted to know my views on social constructionism, where I was going in

my career, and actively attempted to connect me with others, including

researchers, and former students, through conferences and readings. Comments

included:

You're gratifying to talk with.

Have you ever heard of . . .

I should put you in contact with . . .

We have a conference coming up that you should attend.

Emphasizing Polyvocality

A strong social constructionist theme running throughout every interview was the act of bringing in other voices to the conversation. Every scholar spoke of someone else's viewpoint in his or her conversation with me. These included the voices and perspectives of students, clients, relatives, colleagues, museum exhibits, art exhibits, theatrical performances, books, journals, and newspapers. Participant comments included:

> *I had a client say to me . . .*
>
> *I had a student once who . . .*
>
> *I have an older brother, who's a psychiatrist who . . .*
>
> *My colleagues thought . . .*
>
> *I've just been sitting here reading student cases and the cases are . . .*
>
> *I was just at the Holocaust Museum and . . .*

In total these scholars' interactions with me were very congruent with the views that they espouse. As a student speaking with scholars whose careers are far more advanced than mine I can say that the approach they took with me was respectful and personally empowering as they listened to what I had to say and considered my opinions in their reflections with me. I can imagine that clients would feel the same way when social constructionist ways of being are the basis for the development of the helping relationship.

CHAPTER V

CRITIQUE AND DISCUSSION: WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

In Chapter IV, I presented an in-depth review of the findings of this study. In Chapter V, I present a critique of the practices that result from the six applications of the philosophical framework. This discussion will complete the connection between the academy and field by analyzing the practices of students educated in social constructionist informed classrooms guided by one of the six applications of the larger philosophical framework. The critique will involve considering the appropriateness of the philosophical framework and its six applications to social work from four unique critical perspectives: (1) an evidence-based practice perspective (Gambrill, 1999, 2005), (2) Witkin and Gottschalk's (1988) theory evaluation criteria, (3) Hare-Mustin's (1994) feminist ethical practice perspective, and (4) the NASW Code of Ethics criteria (1999).

Evidence-Based Practice Criteria

As discussed thoroughly in Chapter III, evidence-based practice is the latest manifestation of positivism and continues the historical debate concerning whether social work should be based in science. The EBP approach originates from randomized clinical trials (RCTs) in the medical field. Some scholars are inviting the adoption of the RCT model by social work to determine the effectiveness of interventions (Gambrill, 1999, Myers & Thyer, 1997).

This adoption has been named evidence-based practice. As discussed

thoroughly in Chapter III, there are many problems and questions concerning the

application of a positivist, linear approach to a field as dynamic as social work.

Regardless of these problems and limitations, I believe that a discussion of the

EBP paradigm as related to the application of the constructionist philosophical

framework is warranted. Social constructionist theory does not seek to exclude

ways of understanding, rather to un-marginalize others. An examination of social

constructionist thought by a positivist paradigm is congruent with constructionist

understandings of accepting diverse ways of knowing. To that end, I will present

a discussion of the six applications based on EBP requirements. In addition to

the discussion presented here I have included a deconstruction of EBP and an

introduction to a new collaborative model for monitoring the efficacy of practice in

Appendix C.

EBP Critique of the Six Applications of the Philosophical Framework for Constructionist Social Work Practice

In order to meet the requirements of the EBP position a model of practice

must be proven to have performed better at solving a specific problem than other

models of practice. In addition, practitioners must include a literature search at

the beginning of their work with each client to determine which method should be

utilized to solve each client's assessed problem.

Applying these two criteria to the six applications, it becomes readily

apparent that only the *eclectic-hybrid* application meets these requirements

(Table 12). Recall that the *eclectic-hybrid* application requires that practitioners

Table 12

An Application of EBP Criteria to the Six Applications

Eclectic-Hybrid Application	May meet the requirements of EBP because it requires a literature review but may also be too empirically stringent in that it requires the evidential support of a diagnosis before it can be considered in a literature review.
Eclectic-Collaborative Application	Does not meet the requirements of EBP because it does not require a literature review. Decisions in practice are based on collaboration and not generalized research knowledge.
The Process Application	Does not meet the requirements of EBP because it does not require a literature review. Decisions in practice are based on collaboration and not generalized research knowledge.
The Political Practice Application	Does not meet the requirements of EBP because it does not require a literature review. Decisions in practice are based on collaboration and not generalized research knowledge.
The Political Practice and Institution Deconstruction Application	Does not meet the requirements of EBP because it does not require a literature review. Decisions in practice are based on collaboration and not generalized research knowledge.
The Community Polyvocal Partnership Application	Does not meet the requirements of EBP because it does not require a literature review. Decisions in practice are based on collaboration and not generalized research knowledge.

consider EBP processes in determining which method to utilize with clients. It is

debatable if the *eclectic-hybrid* model would be too empirically stringent for EBP

because the hybrid model requires that if a diagnosis is given that the social

workers conduct a review of the literature to determine if there is evidence to

support the diagnosis. EBP does not require this step and assumes the existence of categorized problems as represented in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (1994). The other five applications do not have requirements of a literature review and would therefore be considered by EBP scholars to be inferior to practice approaches that utilize a routine review of literature based on the problem assessment. A full discussion of EBP and positivist evidence which supports social constructionist informed practice is included in Appendix C. The discussion will now progress to a consideration of Witkin and Gottschalk's theory evaluation (1988).

Witkin and Gottschalk Theory Evaluation

At the outset of this discussion, the irony of using criteria of theory analysis co-created by Stanley Witkin to analyze a constructed theory based in part on an interview conduct with Stanley Witkin cannot go unmentioned. With a smile on my face I proceed.

Witkin and Gottschalk (1988) were motivated to develop criteria for theory evaluation because they felt that "traditional criteria for theory evaluation are inadequate to meet the demands of a constructionist meta-theory and social work ideology" (p. 218). To create a more encompassing criteria for evaluation, Witkin and Gottschalk proposed that any theory fulfill the following requirements, (1) be explicitly critical, (2) recognize humans as active agents, (3) account for the life experiences of the client, and (4) promote social justice. Each of these criteria will be discussed in relation to the six applications of the constructed framework. An overview is presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Witkin and Gottchalk's Criteria as Applied to the Six Applications

Eclectic-Hybrid Application	The privileging of EBP in this model may potentially supercede the indigenous knowledge of the client. This may reduce the recognition of the client as an active agent, reduce the importance of exploring the meaning the client has of his/her life experience, reduce diverse ways of knowing and could be counter-productive to social justice depending on application.
Eclectic-Collaborative Application	Meets these requirements provided that clinical modalities are used in ways that are guided by client understanding and these understandings are questioned, explored, and expanded.
The Process Application	May meet these requirements provided that client understandings are questioned, explored and expanded.
The Political Practice Application	Meets these requirements by exploring client understanding and expanding this understanding by questioning social and family discourse.
The Political Practice and Institution Deconstruction Application	Meets these requirements by exploring client understanding and expanding this understanding by questioning social and family discourse, as well as questioning the location of the construction of knowledge.
The Community Polyvocal Partnership Application	May meet these requirements if community practices are explicitly questioning of knowledge construction and expanding of polyvocality.

Criterion 1: The Theory Should be Explicitly Critical

Social constructionist informed practice and education is, by its nature,

critical. It invites critical reflection on the mutual construction of understandings in

relationships, societies, cultures, and historical contexts. It seeks to deconstruct

the taken-for-granted nature of truth. It invites students, practitioners, and clients into a continuous critical self-reflection, attuning them to how the assumptions that they make in life shape and limit their perceptions. All six applications of social constructionism are highly questioning of how truth is constructed but at least one may fall short of this criterion and two may potentially not meet it depending on the social worker working within the application.

While the *eclectic-hybrid* application is partially congruent with positivistic notions of evidence-based practice, it invites critical exploration of the evidence of diagnosis by requiring a literature review of the DSM categories. What it does not do, and where it may fall short of this criterion, is question the paradigm of positivism and critically question the social construction of "evidence." Subsequently, by accepting a positivist paradigm as "fact" and other paradigms as "interpretations of meaning," this approach may privilege positivist-generalized understandings over client indigenous knowledge by not considering the positivist paradigm as a social construction.

Interestingly, in the opposite direction, if the *eclectic-collaborative* and *process applications* follow the perceptions of the client to the extent that those perceptions are not questioned, then these applications may fall short of this criterion as well. Client understandings should be questioned if this criterion is to be met. Because these two applications are so dynamic this questioning would depend on the social worker operating within the application.

Both *political applications* meet this requirement by questioning discourse and the construction of truth for both the client and the social worker. Core

components of both applications stress the critical questioning of the assumptions of life.

The *community polyvocal partnership application* may meet this requirement provided that it explore the different ways-of-being with all members and question discourse that acts on both the individual and the community. Through the exploration and expansion of understanding self and other in community context this application would most likely meet the criterion.

Criterion 2: The Theory Should Recognize that Humans Are Active Agents

Social constructionist informed social work places great emphasis in privileging the client voice and recognizing and encouraging the agency that each person possesses. The process of helping begins with client understanding and is guided by the rudder of client and social worker reflections on the process. Recognizing and reflecting upon the agency and the indigenous knowledge of the client are central components of any social constructionist informed practice. In addition, recognizing the social bearers to client agency through deconstruction and discussion is also an important component of helping.

All six applications of social constructionism in social work recognize that humans are active agents. It may be debated that the *eclectic-hybrid* application affords less recognition of agency than other social constructionist informed applications if notions of outside generalized truth in the form of research supersedes client understanding.

Criterion 3: The Theory Should Account for the Life Experiences of the Client

In addition to agency, social constructionist informed approaches place great emphasis on accounting for the life experiences of the client. Not only are life experiences recognized, but privileged, and the meanings of those experiences discussed. The life experiences of the clients, and their understandings of those life experiences, form the core components of social constructionist informed practice.

The six applications account for the life experience of clients through the consideration of client voice, knowledge, and engaging in reflexive understanding of how they have constructed the meaning of the event in their lives. Four of the models (*Community Polyvocal, Political and Deconstruction, Political,* and *Process*) are very congruent with accounting for the life experiences of the client because they follow the client's understanding and are collaborative. Debate may arise with both *hybrid* applications if methods are utilized with clients that impose theories of interpretation that supercede client understanding of the meaning in their lives. An example is the use of cognitive behavioral therapy, which rather than exploring understanding from the client's perspective, imposes cognitive theory of normality. This kind of imposed interpretation would not fit the criteria of Witkin and Gottschalk's theory evaluation as the outside cognitive theory may not align with the client's understandings. Thus, the interpretation of life experiences may be restricted to the binary frame of functional and dysfunctional thinking that the model espouses rather than on client interpretations and understandings.

Criterion 4: The Theory Should Promote Social Justice

At the core of Witkin and Gottschalk's criteria is the promotion of social justice, "The principle of social justice is implicit in the preceding three criteria" (p. 220). Social constructionist informed practices promote social justice by seeking to liberate clients' voices from the problems that may have overwhelmed them. This is done in ways that are conducive to respecting the diversity of clients and their understandings. The method of this liberation is based on client experience and client perspectives, not on the imposition of theories of interpretation. By privileging client indigenous knowledge, social constructionist informed practices seek to honor diverse ways of being and understanding. Honoring, respecting, and promoting diversity is practicing in a socially just manner. Further, exposing through exploratory discussion, those beliefs and ideas in society that may be operating in subjugating and oppressive ways, is also a form of social justice promotion. Through the recognition that the source and place of problems is not necessarily within individuals, social constructionist informed practice seeks to explore how society, and the expectations that society may impose, could participate in problem creation. This movement of the location of the problem from the individual to social and relational space places onus on the society to operate in a socially just manner. All applications seek social justice in some way but it may debated that both *hybrid* models, if using clinical modalities which impose a theoretical framework on clients which supercedes their understandings, could be viewed as practicing in a manner that does not promote social justice, for diversity of knowing is not emphasized.

Witkin and Gottschalk's criteria invite us to question theory and the application of that theory to determine if it is socially just. These criteria are not simply an end state for theory analysis but should be applied continuously in practice through a questioning of the evolving client and social worker relationship. Questions that should be asked include: Are we moving in ways that promote the agency of the client? Is the discussion accounting for client ways of understandings? Is social justice being promoted in this discussion by opening up avenues of exploration and exploring the social contributions to the problem?

Feminist Perspective

One of the most influential articles I have had the pleasure to read over the course of my career has been Hare-Mustin's (1994) *Discourse in the mirrored room.* In this article, Hare-Mustin articulates the need for practitioners to recognize, address, and explore the discourses that are influencing the clients with whom they are working, as well as the discourses influencing the notion of practice. Hare-Mustin maintains that it is an ethical obligation for all practitioners to challenge the nature of reality that clients may have been recruited into accepting as real. While Hare-Mustin did not set forth criteria for the analysis of practice, I feel so strongly about her position that I would like to apply Hare-Mustin's thinking to the potential practices of social constructionist trained social workers. This analysis will determine if social constructionist informed practices meet the standards of ethical practice from a feminist framework as espoused by Hare-Mustin.

In her article, Hare-Mustin placed great emphasis on the work of philosophers Rawls and Foucault. The presenting requirements are a derivative of their work. To that end, I have constructed criteria from Hare-Mustin for ethical practice. For theory of practice to be ethical from this framework it must: (1) "Regard justice as seeing things from the perspective of others" (p.31), (2) When selecting among competing interests "those individuals who are the most disadvantaged should be accorded the greatest benefit" (p. 31). (3) The approach should take "an orientation opposing totalizing regimes" (p. 31). (4) The approach should "call attention to marginalized and subjugated discourses" (p. 32) and, (5) the approach should "challenge the assumptions of dominant discourses" (p. 33). Given this understanding, each criterion will be discussed first, followed by an overall discussion of these criteria to the six applications of the philosophical framework.

Criterion 1: Must Regard Justice as Seeing Things from the Perspective of Others

Justice, from Hare-Mustin's perspective, involves the recognition of multiple perspectives. Perspectives are often marginalized by dominant ways of understanding. A core component of feminist theory is the unmasking of oppressive and limiting ways of understanding. Justice involves unmasking marginalized understandings and creating an equal playing field upon which all ways of perceiving may be viewed and considered. Therefore, in the therapeutic context, seeking to understand the perspective of others is a key component of respectful interaction. Practice based on justice explores the understanding of

the client and does not impose theories of normality, which obscure client perspectives and marginalizes indigenous and context-created knowledge.

Criterion 2: Those Individuals Who Are Most Disadvantaged Should Be Accorded the Greatest Benefit

If dominant discourses have operated in restricting ways such that other ways of understanding have been marginalized and obscured then those who are in power guide the way events are to be understood. As Foucault (1980) describes, power and knowledge are forever linked. Ethical practice must, therefore, seek to understand the perceptions of those individuals who have been disadvantaged by the dominant way of understanding and being. Benefit should be accorded to them by recognizing that they are doing the best they can in the situations they find themselves. This benefit includes accepting their understandings of the problems and their ideas concerning change and assistance that could support this change.

Criterion 3: The Approach Should Take an Orientation Opposing Totalizing Regimes

Totalizing regimes is a phrase that denotes power and the ability to obscure other ways of knowing through the totality of perspectival dominance. Taking positions against these positions of ultimate truth enhances social justice by expanding the possibilities of knowing, understanding, and being. This is a shift from mono-understanding to multiple-understandings, from uni-verse, to multi-verse. Recognizing this diversity creates and enhances social justice.

Marginalized voices can only be un-marginalized through the creation of space that occurs when the dominant way of understanding is challenged.

Practice should challenge the dominant way of knowing through the deconstruction of knowledge. Deconstructing the process by which something has been created as "fact" is most important. This challenging of taken-for-granted knowledge in the therapeutic relationship is collaborative and potentially empowering for the client. Assisting clients in recognizing the definitional power dominant discourse has had over them by exploring the expectations in their lives can be quite liberating. The questioning and unmasking of these truths reveal windows of possibilities that were hidden by drapery woven in the fabric of fact.

Criterion 4: The Approach Should Call Attention to Marginalized and Subjugated Discourse

Challenging totalizing regimes opens space for the recognition of other ways of understanding that may have been marginalized and cast aside by the dominant. Calling attention to marginalized discourse involves exploring subjugated ways of knowing with the client. There are multiple examples that could be given, for both males and females, but for the purpose of explanation, I will use an example based on female gender discourse in Western culture at the present time. A female may have been recruited into accepting dominant notions of what she is supposed to be in order to be considered successful in the Western world. At the present time this could most likely mean being a mother, a wife, and holding a job. Within the course of her life she may have begun to

experience anxiety and depression due to not being able to keep up with the social demands placed upon her. In the therapeutic context exposing the dominant discourse of the expectations that she has been recruited into accepting in order to feel "successful" helps create definitional space. Calling attention to those marginalized discourses of success that have been overshadowed by the dominant may assist her in revisioning her sense of self. By way of example, a sample of marginalized understandings that could be collaboratively explored include success as (a) having a sense of belonging (b) being good to oneself and others, and (c) appreciating the beauty of life. Marginalized discourse would not be imposed but explored based on the values of the client.

Criterion 5: The Approach Should Challenge the Assumptions of Dominant Discourse

Challenging the assumptions of dominant discourse involves questioning those assumptions of life that have ceased to be assumptions and have been internalized as facts. Examples of discourses presented by Hare-Mustin include the male sexual drive discourse which recruits women into accepting a subservient role, "Men's sexual urges are assumed to be natural and compelling; thus, the male is expected to be pushy and aggressive in seeking to satisfy them" (p. 24) This discourse places women in the position of being the objects of men's desire. Gender discourse is also filled with messages of how one should be in society. Challenging the assumptions of these discourses helps clients begin to recognize the pressures put on them by societal expectations. Exposing these

expectations reveals assumptions as social constructions. This recognition opens space for marginalized ideas and understandings.

Application of Feminist Theory to the Six Applications

While the major theory of social constructionism as applied to social work meets these requirements, only two of the applications specifically address the deconstruction of discourse (Table 14). These are the *political practice* and the *political practice and institutional deconstruction* approaches. These approaches meet all requirements as set forth in Hare-Mustin's article. Both *eclectic* applications and the *process* application may meet these requirements provided that the social worker asks questions that will challenge the nature of dominant discourse. None of these three applications directly requires this deconstruction. It is very possible that the *process* and *eclectic-collaborative* applications would meet these requirements if they followed the lead of the client, for by placing priority on client understanding a natural deconstruction may occur.

The *collaborative polyvocal partnership* may meet these requirements by working at the community level in assisting community members to privilege their unique understandings via community projects such as plays and art exhibits. From a community perspective, discourse is challenged, and marginalized discourse discussed, in community interaction. Without the context of clinical practice, it is debatable that members of this community would be able to fully explore the discourses operating in personal ways on their understanding of self and others.

Table 14

Application of Feminist Theory to the Six Applications

Eclectic-Hybrid Application	May be counter to feminist thought because by privileging EBP over indigenous knowledge it may not call attention to marginalized discourse. The use of the DSM may be counter to challenging totalizing regimes. The DSM may internalize problems in people and obscure the effects of cultural discourses.
Eclectic-Collaborative Application	Closer to feminist thinking; may be counter if internalizing models are used.
The Process Application	Meets criteria for feminist theory collaborations if challenging discourse is utilized
The Political Practice Application	Very much in line with feminist thinking, challenges discourse.
The Political Practice and Institution Deconstruction Application	Very much in line with feminist thinking, challenges discourse, seeks and encourages polyvocality.
The Community Polyvocal Partnership Application	Possibly in line with thinking depending on application.

The *eclectic-hybrid* application may not meet these requirements for by privileging DSM pathology and research of effective practice, totalizing regimes and dominant notions of pathology may not be challenged. Accepting the notion of "behavioral" and "personality disorders" places problems within people and does not address the discourses that may be acting to both drive the actions of the individual and to construct the DSM labels.

NASW Code of Ethics

The NASW Code of Ethics is a list of flexible categories meant to be utilized as a guide for the development and ongoing interaction of the social

worker-client relationship. The Code stresses an honoring of diversity and

respectful interaction with those in need. A discussion of the six applications as

related to the NASW Code of Ethics (1999) is presented here. The discussion

begins with the NASW Preamble**:**

> The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human
> well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with
> particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are
> vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. . . . Fundamental to social
> work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and
> address problems in living. Social workers promote social justice and
> social change with and on behalf of clients. Clients is used inclusively to
> refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. (p.
> 2)

Social constructionist informed practices meet these requirements by

seeking to enhance client well-being by collaboratively exploring *client notions* of

well-being and *client expectations* for their lives. Attention to environmental

forces includes exploring and deconstructing discourses that may be operating in

restricting ways. Practice which is non-pathology based seeks to challenge

oppressive social practices and beliefs which may have influenced the client to

the extent that the client is experiencing problems. Social constructionist

informed practices are applicable with individuals, groups, families, and

communities. The approach honors diversity, considers clients in context, and

espouses interactions that are based on meeting clients where they are, and

encouraging changes based on their understandings.

Because the Code's guidelines are unspecific for practice, each of the six

applications would meet its requirements (Table 15). With that said, all six

applications of social constructionist informed practice could be questioned

Table 15

The Application of the NASW Code to the Six Applications

Eclectic-Hybrid Application	In line with the NASW Code requirements. May be least questioned about client/social worker boundaries because an expert position is sometimes taken.
Eclectic-Collaborative Application	In line with the NASW Code requirements. May be occasionally questioned about client/social worker boundaries because a collaborative position is taken.
The Process Application	In line with the NASW Code requirements. May be occasionally questioned about client/social worker boundaries because a collaborative position is taken.
The Political Practice Application	In line with the NASW Code requirements. May be occasionally questioned about client/social worker boundaries because a collaborative position is taken.
The Political Practice and Institution Deconstruction Application	In line with the NASW Code requirements. May be questioned about client/social worker boundaries because a collaborative position is taken and the social worker and client work as partners to change institutional structures.
The Community Polyvocal Partnership Application	In line with the NASW Code requirements. Will most likely be questioned concerning boundaries because the roles of client and social worker are disbanded and replaced with collaboration as mutual members of a community.

concerning the adherence to professional boundaries as discussed in the NASW

Code of Ethics. In seeking to reduce hierarchy, social constructionist informed

practice does away with the development of boundaries based on positivist

notions of objectivity and seeks to join with the client in collaboration. While this collaboration is based in the therapeutic context, and on the values of increasing perspectives and polyvocality, it does not condone such extreme positions as bartering for services or the development of sexual relationships with clients. The applications do seek to expand the notion of helping by considering the client as an equal partner. The *collaborative polyvocal partnership* application would be most questioned concerning boundaries because the roles of practitioner and client are disbanded and replaced by a mutual collaboration as community members.

Besides the reduction of boundaries between the practitioner and client, social constructionist informed social work is strongly supported by the NASW Code of Ethics. Appendix D lists several sections that are particularly supportive of social constructionist informed approaches.

Implications for Social Work: Loosening Tied Ends

Conclusions seek to tie ends together, to wrap-up, to make tidy. This tradition is based on Enlightenment discourse that invites us to structure projects along the line of stories, with introduction, middle, and end (Irving, in press). I hesitate to be seduced into this framework because conclusions may give the illusion of closing off possibilities and this work is about expanding perceptions and honoring the diversity of knowing. This work is, as all of life, an ongoing process of which we are all participants. I find myself left with many questions and a desire to reflect with you on your understandings of what you have read. Thus, the only conclusion I am comfortable in making is that this project has no

conclusion; in fact I tend to see it as an unraveling, no tidy strings, no knots, only the creation of more strings through ongoing discussions and reflexive questioning. For instance, we could begin with a discussion of how is it that ideas have been constructed as "ends" that are to be tied? Perhaps we can each tie loose ends in our own unique manner if the need strikes us for whatever reason. What would the choice to tie or not say about you? What would it say about your values? What cultural forces may be operating in that decision?

With that said, I will share some of my reflections on the study as I feel it is important for you to know my thoughts in the hopes that you may gain greater insight into my perceptions. Reflecting back, I would have liked very much to have conducted the interviews face to face. In changing the context it may have allowed us to construct ideas in different ways. I am not sure if the results would have been different but the level of contact would have been greater.

I would also have liked to present the findings to the participants so that they could reflect on them. I was able to do this briefly with one participant and found it tremendously generative. Because of the underlying theoretical premise of the study that knowledge is constructed, this reflection would have been immensely valuable. I plan to give each participant a copy of this work and invite comments, so it is my hope that this reflection will occur at a later time.

For the future, I would like to explore the concept of evidence and how different people construct and interpret its meaning. Terms such as proof, outcomes, evidence, collaborative proof, and collaborative outcomes are used often without a full explanation of the assumptions that may underlie them and

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the purposes of their use. These terms are understood to have tremendous social power and their construction and application are worthy of exploration.

I would also like to conduct a similar qualitative study with positivist scholars who espouse that social work move in the direction of science. I am curious as to how they perceive social work, clients, and collaborative relationships. In exploring modernism with them we may be able to construct a range of modernist applications for social work. Perhaps common ground could then be found between constructionist and modernist perspectives.

Returning to this work, I have given great thought to continuing the conversation with Social Work presented in Chapter III, but after long consideration I recognize that what is presented is *my* conversation with Social Work, and continuing the conversation to some conclusion may not represent *your* conclusions. In addition, perhaps the direction of a conclusion is not one which you would like to take. So, if dialogue is to be stressed, I would encourage you to continue the conversation with Social Work in your own manner, and, in doing so, recognize the positions that you may take in the relationship. How does Social Work respond to you? How do you move in the relationship with it? What assumptions about truth, diversity, practice, outcomes, might you be bringing into the conversation that may shape Social Work in relation to you? How is space being created in your conversation? Are you and Social Work moving in ways that allow for flexibility of knowing? Are you moving in ways that recognize historical context and expand possible interpretations? What notions of good and bad, right and wrong, might you be bringing into the conversation? Where do

these binaries originate? How is Social Work influenced by these notions? Do you find yourself privileging the voices of some over others? If so, on what grounds are you doing this? How is this helpful? Are you engaging in ways that honor diversity?

Perhaps an even more radical realization is that from my frame of reference I never left dialogue. I consider your reading of these words a form of dialogue. This dialogue between us is more real than my dialogue with Social Work. In fact you are Social Work much more than my manifestation of it in these pages. You are in a position to move the field in directions of collaborative choosing. You are in a mutually influencing dialogue constructed in relationship with one another and with me, from which knowledge is being created through language. Recognize that the language we are using is socially constructed. Are the words and phrases that we have constructed for Social Work limiting the range of our understandings? How are we closing or opening up understandings and perspectives within the profession? How are we participating in knowledge creation for the field and how can this knowledge be expanded while not marginalizing other ways of knowing?

Lastly, I would like to invite you to reflect on what you have read. What was it that resonated with you? What was it that struck you? Think about a word or a phrase or an idea that captured your attention. Why were you drawn to this idea? I would ask you to sit for a while and consider what this idea may conjure up for you. Why this idea rather than any other? How does it move you? How are you different from the experience of that thought? How can you take this idea

and shape social work in ways that also honor those ideas that may resonate within others?

If for any reason you would like to contact me to continue this conversation I enthusiastically invite you to do so. I would be most interested in your thoughts and the continuation of this dialogue in ways that are important to you.

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APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANT SCHOLARS

Harlene Anderson

Harlene is an internationally renowned social constructionist practitioner, trainer and teacher. She is a founding member and Co-Director of the Houston Galveston Institute, Taos Institute, and Access Success International. Harlene has written widely in the areas of social constructionist informed practice and collaborative inquiry with over 70 publications to her credit. She has edited and authored several books including *Conversation, Language and Possibilities: A Postmodern Approach to Therapy* (1996). Harlene teaches at the Houston Galveston Institute, is in private practice, and offers workshops, trainings, consultations, and coaching across the globe.


Ruth Dean

Ruth is professor and chair of the practice sequence at Simmons College School of Social Work in Boston. She is the 1999 recipient of The Greatest Contribution to Social Work Education Award from the NASW Massachusetts chapter and she has twice won the Beatrice Phillips Sacks writing award. Ruth's writing focuses on themes of social constructionism, ethical dilemmas, and narrative approaches. Dr. Dean's latest writing includes two chapters for social work texts: *Good Talk: The Art of Transforming Conversations,* and *Social Work and The Community of Concern in an Urban American Public Elementary School: An Interim Report.* She serves on the editorial board of *Smith College Studies in Social Work* and *Families in Society*. In addition to teaching and academic endeavors, Ruth has an active private practice in Boston.

Jan Fook

Jan is the Director of the Centre for Professional Development at La Trobe University in Australia. She has written nine books and has authored or co-authored over 45 book chapters and articles. A selection of her works include: *Radical Casework: A Theory of Practice* (1992), *Social Work: Critical Theory and Practice* (2002), as well as serving as co-author or editor on works including *Professional Expertise: Practice Theory and Education for Working in Uncertainty* (2000) and *Breakthroughs in Practice: Social Workers Theories Critical Moments* (2001)*.* Her work centers on themes of critical practice, critical reflection, practice research, and professional expertise. Jan is active in the international talk circuit and is a much sought-after speaker.
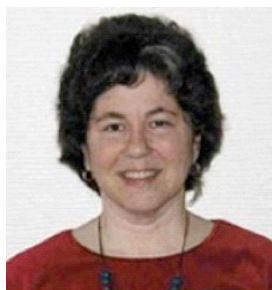
Jill Freedman

Both an active author and practitioner, Jill is a seasoned therapist with over 20 years in the field. Jill currently serves as the Co-Director of the Evanston Family Counseling Center and teaches at the Chicago Center for Family Health. With her husband, Gene Combs, Jill has written several narrative and social construction informed books including: *Narrative Therapy: The Social Construction of Preferred Realities* (1996)*, Symbol, Story, and Ceremony: Using Metaphor in Individual and Family Therapy* (1990)*,* and *Narrative Therapy with Couples* (2000). Jill is a sought-after public speaker and routinely gives trainings nationally and internationally.
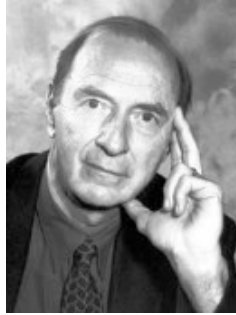
Ken Gergen

Considered one of the most sought-after and cited social constructionist authors in the world, Dr. Gergen has authored and co-authored over twenty-eight books including: *An Invitation to Social Construction* (1999)*, The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (1991)*,* and *Social Construction in Context* (2001)*.* His books have been translated into seven different languages. Ken is the co-founder of the social constructionist organization known as the Taos Institute and, with this organization, is active in seminars, workshops and consulting throughout the world. Ken is a professor of psychology as Swarthmore College and an affiliate professor with Tilburg University.

Ann Hartman

Dr. Ann Hartman is former Dean of The Smith College School of Social Work. Presently she serves as a visiting professor at Fordham University School of Social Service. Prior to becoming dean of Smith College of Social Work, Ann taught at the University of Michigan for twelve years during which time she co-founded the Ann Arbor Center for the Family and directed the National Child Welfare Training Center. She has been recognized by the National Association of Social Workers as a pioneer in the development of the field and is considered an expert in family therapy, social work theory and social work practice. Ann has authored several books including *Family Centered Social Work Practice* (1999), *Out of the Arms of Mothers: What Will Happen to Children if Proposed Family Income Support Cuts Leave Some Parents Unable to Care for Them?* (1995), *Reflection & Controversy: Essays on Social Work* (1993), and *Working with Adoptive Families Beyond Placement* (1984). She is a former Editor-in-Chief of *Social Work,* the membership journal of the National Association of Social Workers.

Allen Irving

Allan is a professor in the School of Social Work at King's University College, University of Western Ontario. Prior to this position, he was faculty at the University of Toronto School of Social Work and at Widener University. He has a background in literature and philosophy that he readily incorporates into his courses. Known for his constructionist teaching style and course designs that incorporate collaborative community projects, Allen places strong emphasis on expanding the learning and helping context. He has published extensively including co-editing the books, *Essays on Postmodernism and Social Work* (1994), *Reading Foucault for Social Work* (1999), and has authored the book *Brock Chisholm: Doctor to the World* (1998). Currently, Professor Irving is completing a book with Tom Young of Widener University entitled, *Escaping the Enlightenment: Social Work Practice in the Postmodern Era.*

Joan Laird

Joan Laird is Professor Emeritus at the Smith College of Social Work. Joan has a history in anthropology and in much of her writing has explored the concepts of story and narrative as influences on the construction of the self. She has edited several books including *Lesbians and Gays in Couples and Families: A Handbook for Therapists* (1996) and *Revisioning Social Work Education: A Social Constructionist Approach* (1994). In addition to her numerous journal publications and presentations around the country, she has authored *Lesbians and Lesbian Families* (1999) and *Handbook of Child Welfare* (1985). She has spoken extensively around the country in the areas of family stories and gay and lesbian relationships.
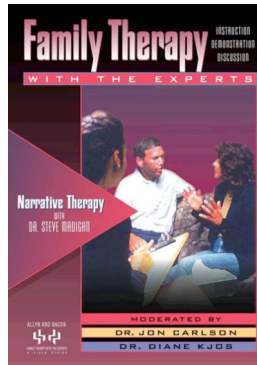
Steven Madigan
Photo unavailable, image above is the cover of his training video.

Author, trainer and practitioner, Dr. Madigan has served as script editor for over 60 television shows, has created his own videotaped trainings and has been on a multitude of TV and radio programs discussing the use of social constructionist informed approaches to helping. Dr. Madigan's central ideas revolve around social construction and its applications. His discussions and writings explore approaches to therapy that are non-pathologizing and have a strong base in exposing and undermining the effects of cultural discourse. Dr. Madigan is founder and Director of Yaletown Family Therapy and planet-therapy.com. He is very active in trainings and seminars throughout the world. His latest book *The Social Life of Problems – Essays in Narrative Ideas and Therapeutic Practice -* will be released in the spring of 2005.

Nigel Parton

Nigel is a professor at the University of Huddersfield, England, in the Department of Applied Childhood Studies. Dr. Parton's area of focus is child welfare, child protection, risk, social theory and social construction. Over the course of his career he has authored over 60 articles and several books. A selection of his books includes *Safeguarding Childhood in a Late Modern Society* (Forthcoming), *Governing the Family: Child Care, Child Protection and the State* (1991), and *The Politics of Child Abuse* (1985). Nigel serves as co-editor of a forthcoming collection entitled *Constructive Work with Offenders.* He is Co-Editor of the journal *Children & Society.*

Susan Robbins

Susan is a professor at the University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work where she has been teaching for over twenty years. She has written widely in the areas of cultural contexts, drugs, alcohol, and juveniles. Among her more than 50 published articles and reports she has also co-authored the book *Contemporary Human Behavior Theory: A Critical Perspective for Social Work* (1997) and has authored, *Delinquency Among Seminole Indian Youth* (1981). She has been Associate Editor of *Families in Society* since 1999. In addition to her academic work she has an active private practice in the Houston area and writes and records music.
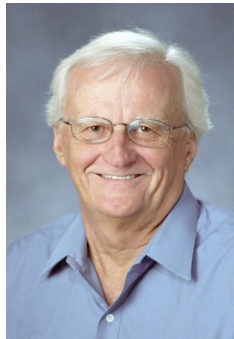
Dennis Saleebey

Dennis is Professor Emeritus at the School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas. He has been active in many community building and outreach programs, as well as writing in the areas of strength-based approaches to social work. In addition to numerous articles and chapters, he has authored several books including three editions of *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice* (2001)*,* and *Human Behavior and Social Environments: A Biopsychosocial Approach* (2001)*.* Dennis is a champion of the strengths perspective and is highly regarded as an author, speaker, and trainer throughout the world.

Stanley Witkin

Stanley has been a professor in the Department of Social Work at the University of Vermont since 1991. He was permanent Chair of the department from his arrival until 1998. Dr. Witkin has previously taught at Florida State University and Cornell University. He has been a visiting scholar at the University of Newcastle (Australia), the University of Lapland (Finland) and has served as an examiner for the University of Hong Kong. Stanley served as the Editor-in-Chief of *Social Work,* the membership journal of the National Association of Social Workers, from 1998 through 2001, and has written many articles in the advancement of social work and the diversity of knowing. He writes and gives workshops in a variety of subjects; chief among them is the application of social construction to the areas of inquiry, ethics, education and international collaboration. Among his numerous writings he has received considerable recognition for his 20 essays in *Social Work* and is widely cited in academic journals and texts.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT

KENT SCHOOL
OF SOCIAL WORK

Oppenheimer Hall
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40292

Hi, my name is Chris Hall and I am calling from the University of Louisville, Kent School of Social Work where I am a doctoral candidate. For my dissertation I am conducting a qualitative research study concerning the application of social constructionist theory to the education of social work practitioners. The study is under the direction of Dr. Dan Wulff, the chair of my committee.

You have been selected as 1 of 12 participants because my dissertation committee and I recognize you as a social constructionist scholar. We are specifically seeking your opinions, thoughts and ideas in the following four areas: (a) what would be taught in a social constructionist social work practice class, (b) what methods would be used to teach in a social constructionist classroom, (c) what skills, values, beliefs should a social work student have upon graduation, (d) how would these social constructionist ideas affect students' future social worker/client relationships, and (e) how might the field of social work as a whole be changed?

This discussion will take approximately one hour and I will be audio recording the interview for later transcription and qualitative data analysis. Your participation is voluntary and the knowledge gained through this process could benefit many social work students, academicians, practitioners, clients, and the social work field as a whole. If you agree to participate, you may decline to answer any specific question during the interview and may stop the discussion at any time. There are no risks or costs to you regardless of whether you choose to participate.

If you choose to participate the information you provide will be presented in an unidentifiable manner but I would like to list you as a participant at the end of the study. This list will include your name and a short bio of your work related to social constructionist theory and practice. All information gathered will be held in confidence. Transcripts and audiotapes will be kept under lock and key in the office of Chris Hall at the University of Louisville.

If you are willing to participate in a telephone interview, please respond back to me with a time and place that is convenient for you, including nights and weekends for me, as some of you live out of the country. I hope to have completed the interviews by the end of February, 2005. Thank you for your time and I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Chris Hall, MSSW, ABD
Office 502-852-2919
Home 502-259-9090
jchall03@louisville.edu

APPENDIX C

A DECONSTRUCTION OF EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE AND AN

INTRODUCTION TO AN ALTERNATIVE COLABERATIVE MODEL

A Deconstruction of Evidence Based Practice (EBP)

At the outset of this deconstruction it must be pointed out that the debate concerning the appropriateness of positivism for social work is not new and that EBP is the latest incarnation of positivist ideas. The discussion of any practice application from an evidence-based practice (EBP) approach must begin with the following question: Is there evidence to support the efficacy of the approach? In order to address this question appropriately we must first deconstruct the assumptions of EBP and the question that it demands. A discussion of a positivist perspective falls within a social constructionist presentation because social constructionist theory is not exclusive and may consider other ways of understanding.

At the outset of this discussion I wish to make a distinction between the core values of evidence-based practice, and the methods by which EBP seeks to fulfill its goal of finding the best approaches to solve specific problems. The core values of evidence-based practice should be commended; it is the application of linear logic to relationships in context, and the generalizability of the findings, that are questioned. I feel that ethical practice should begin with the knowledge base of the client. Research cultures that seek to impose generalized findings from one relational context to another relational context privilege generalized constructions of knowledge over indigenous constructions of knowledge. From a social constructionist view the relational act of helping and the point of change begins with the client, not from imposed knowledge. The major point of debate between social constructionist informed practice and EBP resides in which

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source of knowledge is privileged; generalized research knowledge or indigenous client knowledge. EBP privileges research and generalized knowledge. This privileging involves utilizing a standard linear protocol that begins with a standardized assessment to determine the problem, and the use of a standardized approach to solve that problem. In contrast, social constructionist informed practice privileges the indigenous knowledge of the client and utilizes methods designed to expertly explore and expand the nature of that knowledge in unique, flexible, relational, and context-driven ways.

Questioning the Linearity of EBP

Evidence-based practice espouses that practice decisions should be based, in part, on research that shows effectiveness in working with the diagnosed problem. All quantitative research and standardized protocols can be put into a linear cause and effect equation. The linear equation of EBP may be represented as follows:

client + problem + literature review = intervention

My critique of this equation will consist of an examination to determine if EBP meets the requirements of quantitative research. EBP, first and foremost, must meet the requirements of the logic of its own paradigm, positivism, before it can be presented as a sound approach to Social Work or any other social field.

The Positivist Requirements of EBP

Regardless of which term is used to describe the EBP process (i.e. *falsification, empiricism, science, positivism)* EBP scholars must meet the demands of the term it uses to judge clinical approaches. The process espoused

by these scholars is not *falsification*-best practice, it is *evidence*-based practice. Evidence is a term derived from the positivist paradigm that equates to *proof.* In EBP, proof is sought that will demonstrate one method of practice has worked better than another at solving some problem. Therefore, from a positivist paradigm the goal of any quantitative research is to prove or disprove a non-spurious relationship between two or more variables. This is done through the rigorous control of variables that could be contaminating to the linear equation of causality. A vital component of establishing this causality is the operationalization of the variables under study. The first scientific problem with the EBP equation is operationalization. How is the client operationalized? Who is defined as the client?

    Operationalization of the client. To discuss these questions let us move from the clean pages of text and linear logic into the real world of practice, by taking an example from my practice a few days ago. I should inform the reader that this case, like most cases, is complicated.

    I am working with a seven-year-old boy (Johnny) who has been diagnosed by a psychiatrist as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In my discussions with him, I was surprised to find that he does very well in school, in fact, has won three awards for attendance and good behavior, but has been doing poorly at home. Upon discussion with the family it was found that Johnny lives with his aunt, while his two younger sisters live with his mother. Johnny lives apart from them because the mother's new boyfriend (who is the father to his sisters) does not like him. Johnny's mother has chosen to ask him to live with his

aunt rather than with her. She has made this decision because her boyfriend gets drunk most nights and screams at Johnny. Johnny's mother and aunt do not get along well, so Johnny often finds himself caught in the middle. Johnny does not understand the family situation and is very confused and hurt about why his sisters get to stay with his mother while he does not. (It is very important to recognize that this information was solicited and recognized only because I did not immediately accept the psychiatric diagnosis of ADHD for the boy, or the two other diagnoses of Oppositional Defiant disorder from previous workers in his case file).

From an EBP point of view the complicated nature of the case throws into question who is to be operationalized as the client. Is it Johnny? Perhaps it should be the mother and the aunt who are in conflict? Perhaps it should be the family, as a whole, since all are influenced by the conflict? The new boyfriend and the estranged father, who is not in the picture, could also be considered clients. So, the first problem with the equation above is: Who is operationalized as the client?

Operationalization of the problem. The second operationalizing dilemma involves an operationalization of the problem. The operationalization of any category should be mutually exclusive, and exhaustive. In the scenario above, I now have four opinions of the problem, mine, the psychiatrists and the two other diagnoses in Johnny's file. I may also have five opinions if I ask the boy, a six if the mother is asked, a seven if another is asked, and so on, depending on how far I would like to extend the conversation.

This raises a second issue in EBP, to whom is authority given to operationalize the problem? In addition to this question, how do we choose which problem to privilege? In our scenario we could view this as ADHD, as the psychiatrist diagnosed, or as a family problem, an economic problem placing stress on the family, an alcohol problem of the boyfriend influencing family members, or as many individual problems operating together. This raises yet another question, why does there have to be only one problem? Why can we not view all of these problems as working in combination? Why do we need one problem and one client? These questions unmask one of the assumption of linear causality and EBP, that there must be one variable operationalized as the client and one variable operationalized as the problem in order to begin the equation that may lead to a non-spurious relationship between intervention and solution.

Is it always the same problem? Once the problem is operationalized there is an assumption that the problem will not change. This raises the question, what happens if the problem changes? Again, I turn to a real life example. I was working with a female client who was concerned about depression. We worked together for three weeks and on the fourth week she shared with me that she had been sexually molested by her father from the age of 4 until the age of 16. From an EBP approach what does one do when the problem changes? Do I re-operationalize the problem? Let me preface that I do not see the problem in the following manner but a DSM paradigm could possibly label the problem as shifting from Major Depressive Disorder, to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

From a positivist paradigm, the operationalization of the problem must change. But, we must now consider the effects of utilizing the modality suggested by the first literature review based on the operationalization of Major Depressive Disorder. Prevailing positivist literature suggests that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the best choice for depression. Several questions are now raised. If I had been using CBT, which places the problem in the client's thinking, would the relationship have developed in such a way that she would have felt comfortable enough to have shared with me that she was abused? Perhaps the problem would have been so concretely defined that open exploration would not be needed and this information would never have been shared. By way of example my client explained to me that when growing-up she was hospitalized eight times for suicide attempts and had never felt comfortable enough to disclose that she had been abused because as she put it, "they were too busy trying to teach me what I was supposed to think and do."

Now, for the sake of this discussion let us assume that she did share her abuse with me while I was utilizing CBT. As an EBP social worker, what do I do now? Do I go back to the EBP drawing board and start a search again? How do I undo the three weeks of convincing that her thoughts were dysfunctional? I have now spent three weeks working on the wrong disorder. What damage could this have caused in terms of convincing her of certain things about herself and her thinking?

Why are Practitioner Variables not Considered?

EBP protocol recommends that the client be operationalized, the problem operationalized, and that a literature review be conducted based on these two variables (**client + problem + literature review = intervention**). Absent from this equation is the practitioner. Why are practitioner variables left out of this equation and how are they accounted for and controlled? These practitioner variables are many. To appropriately reflect the control of these variables the equation must be changed to:

practitioner + client + problem + literature review = intervention

The range of practitioner variables is great and could include such things as: race, age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, number of children, time in practice, methodological practice preferences, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and career satisfaction.

Why are Context Variables not Considered?

EBP must also account for the influence of variables related to context. These considerations may seem trivial but they are variables that should be considered and controlled if positivist truth claims of *evidence* and the *effectiveness* of interventions are to be made. Whether this context is obvious, like outpatient and inpatient, or less obvious, like the location of the office, the building, the part of town, distance the client drove, the use of public or private transportation, the ease of arriving, the cultural composition of the neighborhood in which the office is located, client comfort level in being in the neighborhood and office, what day and time of the week services are provided (Mondays and

Fridays in particular should be considered), and what time of the year services

are provided (winter, fall, summer, spring), they must still be controlled and

accounted. Why are these variables not considered in the literature review for

effective treatment and how are they controlled in empirical studies of efficacy?

Utilizing multiple locations of service delivery in experimental design does not

account for the specific contexts in which clients and practitioners interact. The

use of control groups has traditionally been used to statistically control for some

of these factors but issues of statistical power and the generalizability of findings

from one context to another are strongly questioned. Therefore, to appropriately

control variables from a positivist perspective the equation must be changed to:

practitioner + client + context + literature review = intervention

Why are Client-Practitioner Relationship Variables not Considered?

It is not only social constructionism that places emphasis on the effects of

relationships in constructing individuals, other areas of study more aligned with

positivist thinking also agree. For example, social psychology emphasizes

relationship and group dynamic variables and their influence on how people

interact with one another and subsequently come to understand themselves.

From an EBP approach, consideration must be given to the type and quality of

the relationship between practitioner and client and how this relationship will

influence the effectiveness of any intervention. In addition, if others (family

members, friends) are brought into the therapeutic context how does the

relationship change? How does the practitioner change? And how does this

influence the application of the intervention? The multitude of relational variables

must be accounted for if a non-spurious relationship is to be made between problem, intervention, and outcome. Further, the generalizability of these findings must also include these relational variables. These variables are endless and would include the reflexive interaction between variables for both practitioner and client such as: their races, nationalities, economic statuses, family backgrounds, biases and beliefs, marital statuses, life experiences, and so forth. All of these variables will influence the relationship between client and practitioner. This relationship will influence the intervention itself. To control for these relational variables they must be include in the equation.

practitioner + client + context + relationship + lit. review = intervention

Questions Considered

With the addition of the unique and complex variables of the practitioner, context, and relationship it becomes more difficult to conduct an EBP literature review that will return results of generalized effectiveness. The space liberated by this lack of imposed generality is ripe with possibilities. Void of generalized knowledge the space may be recognized as being filled with client knowledge, and knowledge in context, which leads to client possibilities and relational possibilities. The creation of this space from an empty literature review points to the main difference between social constructionist and EBP approaches. Social constructionist approaches seek to honor this space by placing the client in focus and exploring their understandings, honoring the diversity of context, individual, relational, and cultural ways of understanding through the privileging of the indigenous knowledge of the client. Social constructionism places emphasis on

the relational processes of practice and the knowledge that comes from within that context. Clients are assisted in the exploration of their understandings and of their constructed worlds. With this understanding of practice, outcomes are not cast aside as irrelevant but are tracked in collaborative ways. This collaborative outcomes approach will be discussed below.

A deconstruction of the underlying assumptions of EBP has been presented and questions have been raised concerning the appropriateness of a linear positivist approach to the practice of social work. A discussion of evidence will now ensue followed by a presentation of a collaborative alternative to EBP.

The Dodo Bird Verdict

Research has shown that talk therapy, regardless of type is 80% more effective than the use of no talk therapy (Smith, glass & Miller, 1980). These findings have been supported and most would agree that talk therapy is beneficial. Guided by the discourse of competition and efficiency, positivist research has chosen to take the next step by asking the question, which therapy works best? This is the fundamental goal of EBP.

What, then, has been the result of the goal to find the best method to solve client problems? In addition to questions concerning the appropriateness of the positivist paradigm in social work, the research findings do not yet demonstrate that one practice is more successful at treating a specific problem than any other. Meta-analytical studies that compare multiple studies with one another have been conducted by numerous researchers and show that no method has proven itself more effective than any other method at treating any

problem (Duncan, Scott and Miller, 2004). Demonstrating this finding Assay &

Lambert summarize several meta-studies in their book *The Heart and Soul of*

Change (2002). In addition to Assay and Lambert, Wampold, (1997) has

conducted multiple meta-studies and has found a few studies which have shown

effectiveness of one method over another but maintains that this number is less

than would be predicted by chance. The same year, Wampold, Mondin, Moody,

Stich, Benson, and Ahn (1997) reviewed 277 studies spanning 35 years of

research and found the exact result, that no method has demonstrated itself to

be better than any other method at alleviating client problems. The 1988 National

Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funded study of intervention with depression

conducted by Elkin, Shea, Watkins, Imber, Scotsky, Collins, Glass, Pilkonis,

Leber, Docherty, Fiester, and Parloff (1989) utilized three groups plus a control

group with 250 participants and returned the same result, no method works

better than any other. In 1936, Saul Rosenzweig predicted that findings

concerning which method worked best would be equivalent to the dodo bird

verdict of the caucus race from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll, 1962).

Since that time researchers have named the present lack of difference between

modalities the *dodo bird verdict*.

An Alternative: A Collaborative Model

The positivist persistent but not yet successful endeavor to find the best

method for helping has seemingly overlooked the evidence that points to the

effectiveness of talk therapy as a whole. Void of any evidence that one method

works better than any other, a paradigm shift is warranted which places focus on

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those common factors across all models, which promote change. Duncan, Miller and Scott, (2004), as well as Hubble, Duncan and Miller (2002) advocate for a move away from a competition paradigm to a discussion of what works across all approaches. Research on these common factors of therapy show that variables which contribute to client change include (a) 40%, extratherapeutic factors; those things that the client brings into the relationship and that occur outside of therapy, (b) 30%, the quality of the client-practitioner relationship as perceived by the client, (c) 15%, placebo and client hope for change, and (d) 15%, the model or technique used (Assay & Lambert, 1999; Lambert, 1992). This is represented in Figure 5.
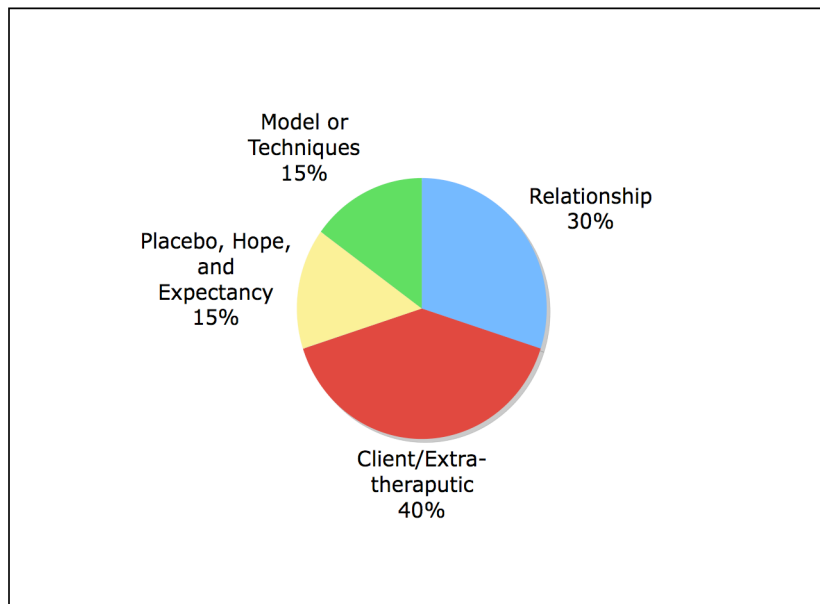

Figure 5. **Factors accounting for change in therapy (Assay & Lambert, 1999).**

The most conservative findings of client factors accounting for change are presented here. In another large meta-study Wampold (2001) attributed 87 % of change to client extratherapeutic factors. Given these findings, if research is to be used to improve the effectiveness of practice, a shift is suggested from a global, evidence-based practice approach to a practice-based outcome approach (Duncan, Scott and Miller, 2004). A practice-based outcome approach would seek effectiveness based on each client-practitioner relationship and would be based on collaborative perceptions of helping. The goal would be not to create generalizable knowledge of model efficacy but to collaboratively discuss change in each relationship with each client. The practitioner would use this information to reflect on his or her practice and adapt to better meet client needs. The goal for practitioners would shift from creating generalized models of efficacy to developing effective individual practices. This shifting would recognize the diversity of each relationship, each client, and each practitioner. Client understanding would take the central position of importance in the relationship. This would mean that practitioners who wish to practice from a base of evidence would seek to enhance the factors that promote change in each individual relationship and reflect with the client on those things that may be assisting. This practice would not be based in one methodology but would be guided by a strong recognition of the client's perception of the problem. It would seek to meet the client in his or her understanding. It would seek to privilege those extratheraputic factors that promote change by enhancing and discussing client successes and attributing those successes to him or her.

Practitioners using this practice-based approach would pay special attention to the relational needs of the client and adapt accordingly. Client and practitioner would continuously reflect on the development of their relationship. Client's expectations would be discussed and privileged. This relationship would leave room for flexibility, adaptability, and creativeness. The practitioner could enhance factors of client hope by remaining optimistic, curious, and excited about changes the client is making. Past understandings could be explored to reveal client successes to encourage hope for change in the present and the future.

Social Constructionist Informed Practice is Supported by Evidence

A comparison of the philosophical framework for constructionist social work practice and those evidence-based factors that contribute to change, show that the two overlap tremendously. I invite the reader to compare the premises described in this study with the factors that contribute to change represented in Figure 5. Social constructionist informed practice enhances all the factors proven in the positivist paradigm to contribute to client change and is thus, for a positivist perspective, constitutive of a practice based in evidence. Social constructionist informed practice is practice that privileges client perception and understanding. The practice is very attuned to the creation of a supportive and reflective client-practitioner relationship, and seeks to enhance client self-determination and control over the problem. Based on the analysis of research spanning over 40 years conducted by the researchers discussed, it may be said that a social constructionist informed practice has evidential support.

APPENDIX D

SELECTIONS FROM THE NASW CODE OF ETHICS (1999) IN SUPPORT OF

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST INFORMED PRACTICES

Preamble: The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty…Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living. Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. "Clients" is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Ethical Principles:

Value: *Service* **Ethical Principle:** *Social worker's primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems…*Social workers draw on their knowledge, values, and skills…to address social problems.

Value: *Social justice* **Ethical Principle:** *Social workers challenge social justice.* Social workers pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people…These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression.

Value: *Dignity and Worth of the Person* **Ethical Principle:** *Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person…*Social workers are cognizant of their dual responsibility to clients and to the broader society. They seek to resolve conflicts between clients' interests and the broader society's interests in a socially responsible manner consistent with the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the profession.

1. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients

1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity, (c): Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion, and…physical disability.

6. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibility to the Broader Society

6.01 Social Welfare: Social workers should promote the general welfare of society…and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.

6.02 Public Participation: Social workers should facilitate informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions.

6.04, (a): Social and Political Action: Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to insure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their

basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.

6.04 (b): Social and Political Action: Social workers should act to expand choice and opportunity for all people, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited people and groups.

6.04 (c): Social and Political Action: Social workers should…promote policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people.

6.04 (d): Social and Political Action: Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion,…or physical disability.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Jon Christopher Hall, Ph.D., LSW, CSW

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jchristopherhall@bellsouth.net

OBJECTIVE

To maintain a high standard of accomplishment through happiness, integrity, and the respect of others by utilizing skills attained through education and life, so that I may encourage, enrich, and motivate others through my knowledge and they may, in turn, expand and enrich my life.

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE/UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY JOINT PH.D. IN SOCIAL WORK

- Ph.D. 2005
- GPA 4.0
- University Fellow

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE, KENT SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

- MSSW, *2001*
  Double specialization in:
  - o Direct Practice   (Micro-track)
  - o Community Advocacy and Management   (Macro-track)
  - o GPA: 3.99

RHODES COLLEGE

- *BA Theater/ Education, 1995*

CURRENT RESEARCH AND TEACHING POSITION

RESEARCH FACULTY MEMBER, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE, KENT SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

08/05-present
Contact: Dr. Anita Barbee,   Tel: 502-852-0416
Responsibilities include work on the following grants:
- KY State Research Grants:
  - o Public Child Welfare Certification Program (PCWCP) outcome research
  - o Field Training Specialist (FTS) program outcome research
  - o Kids Now research project
- Federal Grants:
  - o PACT grant, development of clinical interventions to assist high conflict and highly litigious divorced couples

TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

Teaching *Advanced Clinical Practice 640 and 641*
Contact: Dr. Dan Wulff, Tel: 502-852-3906
Responsibilities include:
- Development of 640 and 641 course syllabi
- Prepare and teach all classes
- Prepare and grade all assignments and exams
- Assist and support students in reaching their full capacities as masters level social workers

CURRENT CLINICAL PRACTICE POSITION

COUNSELING ASSOCIATES OF SOUTHERN INDIANA
Contracted Practitioner, 12/03-present
Contact: Dr. Minucher Moofidi, MD or Gene Sparks, Tel: 812-949-1435
Responsibilities Include:
- Providing direct individual and family therapy

PAST RESEARCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PROJECT COORDINATOR, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE, KENT SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
05/04-08/05
Contact: Dr. Anita Barbee, Tel: 502-852-0416
Responsibilities include work on the following Grants:
KY State Research Grants:
- Public Child Welfare Certification Program (PCWCP) outcome research
- Field Training Specialist (FTS) program outcome research
- Kids Now research project
KY State Research and Development Grants:
- Development team member for the Foster Care Clinic Assessment Team (FORCAST)
Federal Grants:
- Strengthening Relationships Grant

KENT SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK, RESEARCH ASSISTANT
Research Assistant, 8/03-05/04
Contact: Dr. Anita Barbee, Tel: 502-852-0416
Responsibilities Include:
- Assist Dr. Barbee in ongoing research, programs, grants and development

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE DOCTORAL FELLOW
8/01-05/04
Contact: Dr. Ruth Huber, Tel: 502-852-0435
Responsibilities Include:
- Maintain a minimum 3.5 GPA (GPA is 4.0)
- Maintain full time status: 30 hours per year

PAST TEACHING POSITIONS

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE, ADJUNCT PROFESSOR
Advanced Clinical Practice 640 and 641, 12/02-08/05
Contact: Dr. Andy Frey, Tel: 502-852-0431
Responsibilities Include:
- Development of 640 and 641 course syllabi
- Prepare and teach all classes
- Prepare and grade all assignments and exams
- Assist and support students in reaching their full capacities as masters level social workers

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE, TEACHING ASSISTANT

Teaching Assistant: Advanced Clinical Practice 640 and 641, 8/02-12/02
Contact: Dr. Gale Goldberg Wood, Tel: 502-459-2757
Responsibilities Include:
- Assist in the development of 640 and 641 course syllabi
    o Teach all weekly classes for both semesters
    o Grade all tests and papers

ABS BILINGUAL SCHOOL, PRIVATE OWNER OPERATOR (Iwaki, Japan)

Private Owner Operator 8/95-1/98
Responsibilities Included:
- Designing and implementing lesson plans for high level professionals representing a variety of fields
- Scheduling group and private classes
- Managing domestic (Japanese) finances
- Investing decisions such as exchange rate valuations and money management domestically and internationally (USA).
- Editing English documents and web sites.
    o Tomiyoka City web site for Tomiyoka City Hall
    o Editor for Dr. Seiichi Sudo Dept. Of Mechanical Engineering
      Iwaki Meisei University
        The flight mechanics of the dragonfly by Dr. Seiichi Sudo for robotics publication and presentation at mechanical engineering conferences in Korea and Japan.
        The mechanics of the dragonfly wing by Seiichi Sudo for robotics publication and presentation at mechanical engineering conferences in Japan and the United States.

THE ENGLISH ACADEMY, HEAD ENGLISH TEACHER (Iwaki, Japan)

Head English Teacher, 4/95-1/98
Contact: Koko Kanari Director
        Tel: 011-81-246-42-2490 (Japan) Fax: 011-81-246-42-2490
Responsibilities Included:
- Designing lesson plans for seven grades, with children ranging in ages from 5-14
- Implementing these plans two sessions per week with each grade
- Recording progress through testing and review
- Designing and teaching specialized study classes for Japanese Government English Proficiency tests such as the Aiken and the Step tests.
- Editing English correspondence from the main office
- Analyzing international visa regulations and meeting all requirements through appointments, travel plans, and correspondence with Japanese Immigration offices in Korea, US, and Japan.

CHARLES UNIVERSITY/PURKYNE MILITARY MEDICAL ACADEMY

(Czech Republic)
Head English Professor, 6/94-4/95
Contact: Colonel J. Beran M.D.
        Tel: 011-42-49-25-339 (Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic)
Responsibilities Included:
- Established and taught beginner through advanced TEFL courses for the following departments:
    o Charles University/ MMA fourth and fifth-year medical students
    o Department of Surgery, Marsyrk Hospital
    o Department of Military Toxicology
    o Emergency Medical Service of East Bohemia
    o Z. Paravova M.D. Ph.D., Chief of Nursing Department
    o MMA Vice President Col. Beran M.D. Ph.D.

- English Editor: (A. Ferko M.D. Tel: 011-42-49-43-400 (Czech Republic))

    o Ferko A. Krajina A. Voboril Z. Lesko M. Jon B. Zizka J. Odrazkova Z. Elias P. (1996) Polyester-covered spiral Z stent initial clinical experience with endovascular treatment of aortic aneurysms. *Rozhledy V Chirurgii. 75(9), 450-60.*

    o Ferko A. Lesko M. Hukek P. Krajina A. Pipal R. (1995) A new approach to modelling prehepatic portal hypertension: Preliminary experimental results. *Rozhledy V Chirurgii. 74(2), 70-4.*
    o Ferko A. Krajina A. Voboril Z. Lesko M. Pipal R. Elias P. Steiner I. (1995) Endoluminal grafts in the therapy of aneurysms of the abdominal aorta. *Rozhledy V Chirurgii. 74(2), 61-6.*

    o *The City of Hradec Kralove Annual Bulletin (1995)*

- Presentations Editor:
    o Col. Beran for NATO Deputy Secretary, J.M. Cadrou
    o Col. Beran for The International EMS Conference

- English Consultant:
    o *Learning English Through Fairytales(1995)* a children's tutorial by Dr. Zdenek Nejezchleb

- Audio Recording:
    o Vocal recording of *Learning English Through Fairytales (1995)*, by Dr.Nejezchleb

SOUTH FORTY REHABILITATION
Trainer, NYC, USA *6/93-5/94*
- Trained New York City area prisoners in job skills through a joint program between the New York University Executive Dining Room/ Presidential Catering and South Forty

MEMPHIS CHILDREN'S THEATER
Assistant Instructor   12/91-6/92
- Taught beginning acting, advanced acting, and theater crafts construction

MEMPHIS CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER
Teaching Assistant   8/90-3/91
- Assisted in the teaching and counseling of special education students in the Memphis area

PAST CLINICAL PRACTICE POSITIONS

FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S COUNSELING CENTER SOUTHWEST
8/00-6/01
Contact: Barbara Hedsbeth,   Tel: 502-995-3161
Practicum Responsibilities Included:
- Direct individual and family therapy
- Group therapy
- Case Management
- Procedural paperwork

COUNSELING ASSOCIATES OF SOUTHERN INDIANA
8/99-5/00
Contact: Dana Parker, LCSW, LMFT or Patricia Fulkerson, LCSW
Tel: 812-949-1435
Practicum Responsibilities Included:
- Direct individual and family therapy
- Case management
- Client intake
- Procedural paperwork

BOARDS AND PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

NASW-	National Association of Social Workers
NOMAS-	National Organization of Men Against Sexism
AMSA-	American Men's Studies Association
TIM-	Taos Institute Member

CONSULTING EDITOR-	*Families in Society*

Bardstown, KY Chamber of Commerce- Board of Directors	1/99-2001
-Internet and Technology Committee Chair	1999-2000
-Community Development and Special Events Chair	2000-2001
Nominee to Kentucky State Chamber of Commerce	2/99

PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC HONORS

• University Fellowship, University of Louisville	2001-2004
• Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society	2001-present
• National Honor Society	2001-present
• Ruth Middleman Award for Principled and Ethical Positions in Social Work	2001
• Kentucky Colonel	1992
• Guest Analyst for discussion on Miroslav Macek's book of translated Shakespearean Sonnets, Hradec Kralove Czech Republic	1994
• Two *Memphis Magazine* Best Actor Nominations for *A Mid Summer Nights Dream* *Six Characters in Search of an Author*	1991-1992
• Three *Memphis Magazine* Awards for *A Mid Summer Nights Dream* *Six Characters in Search of an Author* *A School for Scandal*	1991-1992
• Rotary Ambassador of Goodwill to Italy	1984-1985

INVITED OR COMMISSIONED PUBLICATIONS AND REPORTS

Hall, J. C., Sulivan, D., Antle, B., & Barbee, A. (March, 2005). *The Public Child Welfare Certification Program annual statistical report.* Commissioned by The Cabinet for Families and Children, Kentucky State Government.

Hall, J. C. (February, 2003). *Domestic violence variables for research of couples in conflictual relationships.* Cabinet for Families and Children, Kentucky State Government.

ARTICLES UNDER REVIEW OR BEING REVISED

Hall, J. C. Need as profit or need as oppression: An analysis of the ethicality of the non-activist male social work practice. *Families in Society.*

Hall, J. C. Historical perspectives: The ethicality of the male, non-activist mental health practice. *Men and Masculinities*.

ARTICLES TO BE SUBMITTED

Hall, J. C. Therapeutic modalities and male practitioners: Approaches for helping or control? *The Journal of Social Work*

Hall, J. C. The utilization of double deconstruction in the liberation of oppressor identity. *Families in Society*

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

Hall, J. C. (2004, November). *Postmodern therapeutic approaches: New ways of understanding.* The Counseling Associates of Southern Indiana.

Hall, J. C., & Hall, J. M. (2004, October). Japan: A discourse perspective and cultural journey. *The Crane House,* Louisville, KY.

Hall, J. C. (2004, May). *Spalding University Graduate Research Presentation.* Guest panelist, Louisville, KY.

Hall, J. C. (2002, October). Social work as discourse: A three-day invitational discussion with Stanley Witkin, Phebe Sessions, Adrienne Chambon, Ruth Dean, Marli Souza, Roberta Iverson, Cecilia Chan, Gale Wood & Dianne Butra. *Transforming Social Work Practice, Education and Inquiry,* Burlington, VT.

Hall, J. C. (2002, September). Postmodernism and theory development in social work. *Guest Lecture to SW755-75: Theory Development,* for Professor Gale Goldberg Wood.

Hall, J. C. (2001, September). Postmodernism and social work: An analysis of Michel Foucault's, *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and the implications for social work. *Guest Lecture to SW755-75 Theory Development,* for Professor Gale Goldberg Wood.

Hall, J. C. (2001, June). Training development: A narrative intervention for substance abusers and their families. *Helping Children of Addicted Families,* (presented by Tony Hall), Brooklawn Youth Services, Louisville, KY.

GRANTS WRITTEN

Gender Role Conflict and Paternal Interaction to be submitted to the National Institute of Health (NIH)

SELECTED SEMINARS ATTENDED:

Narrative Therapy, Exoticising the Domestic	Michael White
Resolving Sexual Abuse and Other Trauma	Yvonne M. Dolan
Family Dynamics of Child Sexual Abuse	Sam Wyatt
Therapeutic Approaches to Trauma Resolution	Mark Schawrtz
Compulsive Gambling Core Curriculum (21-hours)	American-Compulsive-Gambling-Cert. Board
Teaching Seminar	Tokyo, Japan, Shisheda Child Academy
Personnel Management Seminar	University of Hartford, CT
Personnel Management Seminar	Massachusetts Institute of Technology

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

Soccer (coached high school varsity and Jr. varsity from 2000-2002, Bardstown High School, KY), Guitar, Kayaking, Mountain Biking, Reading, Travel, Cooking, Home Remodeling