

PAPERS:

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Why Postmodern Theory may be a Problematic Basis for Therapeutic Practice: A Feminist Perspective¹

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Both poststructural and social constructionist thinking are imbued with a masculine bias. First, I demonstrate that Foucault's theory of power and knowledge fails to take into account the female experience of power and the gendered nature of knowledge production. With the support of psychoanalytic theory I also claim that Foucault's theory of the 'social', 'discursive' production of 'selves' omits the contribution of the prelinguistic but no less 'social' mother-infant relationship, and in so doing obscures the prelinguistic foundations of emotionality. This poststructural reduction of 'selves' to, and subsequent subsuming of emotionality within, the instance of 'language', 'discourse' or 'narrative', is, I claim, replicated in the social constructionist thinking of Gergen and Bruner. Finally, I consider some of the consequences of a therapeutic practice which has its foundations in these two interrelated bodies of thought, suggesting, from a feminist perspective, that a major shortcoming of this narrative practice is its failure to attend to emotionality.

INTRODUCTION

I begin by locating myself as writing from the perspective of a white, western feminist, and in so doing, do not presume that the theories on which I draw and the observations which I make are necessarily generalisable to the situations of women who are differently located.

In 'Poststructuralism in Family Therapy: Interrogating the Narrative/Conversational Mode', Vincent Fish notes that the 'narrative', 'conversational', or 'linguistic', mode of therapy has, in recent times, been 'extolled rather unequivocally within the family therapy field' (1993: 222). He lists Anderson and Goolishian, de Shazer, Hoffman, White and Epston among the proponents of this model. While Fish considers the 'narrative' model to be an evolution of Batesonian and constructivist ideas, he notes its close alliance with the recent French poststructural thinking of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida (1993: 221-222). The main aim of Fish's article is to raise concerns that this uptake of poststructural

thinking by narrative therapy, by White and Epston and de Shazer in particular, serves to reinforce a political conservatism already present in Batesonian and constructivist ideas. Specifically, Fish claims that 'splitting off a separate world of language' or narrative, from the social and material contexts in which those narratives are embedded, is like assuming a tapestry to have only a front (1993: 228). If we ignore the reverse side of the tapestry, Fish notes, we essentially disconnect language, the pattern on the front, from all the contextual factors which, along with language, make up social reality. In so doing we 'perpetuate' rather than 'resolve' 'problems about power' (1993: 22). Fish attempts to redress the conservatism of this narrative use of poststructuralism by suggesting a more radical (and more correct?) uptake. He suggests that poststructuralism be seized by therapists as an opportunity to reflect on 'our work and ... ourselves as an institution', to reflect on how we can and do become part of the power that subjugates (1993: 228).

I have no argument with Fish that poststructural thinking provides an opportunity for therapists to take a reflexive stance in relation to their own work, and acknowledge fully that this same body of thought has lent considerable support to the feminist desire to challenge the marginalising effects of power. However, I am not as convinced as Fish that the conservatism to which he draws our attention lies *primarily* in 'selective' or 'mis' readings of poststructural thought. As I see it, poststructuralism is *itself* imbued with a conservatism which severely undermines its own radical edge. Most importantly from a feminist perspective, this conserva-

¹I use the term 'postmodern' rather than 'poststructural' in the title of this paper as it appears to be a more commonly understood term in therapeutic circles. Although in my understanding they are not strictly one and the same thing, it seems to be accepted practice in therapeutic writings to use the terms interchangeably.

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tism is one that works against women. There are a number of academic feminists who, like me, remain unconvinced that poststructuralism and feminism are *always* convergent (Bordo, 1990; Braidotti, 1986, 1991; Diprose, 1987; Flax, 1990; Hartsock, 1990; McNay, 1991). Within the therapeutic arena, Hare-Mustin and Marecek have expressed some similar concerns (1994).

What I think is conservative about poststructuralism is that it is permeated by an *unacknowledged masculinism*, which remains obscured in much the same way as the reverse side of the tapestry. Specifically I suggest that poststructuralism, just like the narrative model derived from it, does itself split off a separate world of language, which has the effect of obscuring its own social, material, and historical context. Just as importantly, this split severs the 'selves' it claims to be created by 'language' from aspects of the 'self' which are first and foremost non-linguistic in origin. Indeed, according to poststructuralism, and also social constructionism after it, there are no aspects of the self which are not linguistic in origin: 'selves' have their origins solely in the discursive arena. From my feminist perspective this amounts to a reduction of what is 'social' to the world of linguistic interchange, and as such, represents a disavowal of the contribution of the prelinguistic mother-infant relationship to the production of 'selves'. My suspicion is that this severing and disavowal is a product of a 'masculine' style of thinking which has been with us in the West for centuries, and which has tended to silence 'feminine' perspectives.

I recognise that my creation of a masculine-feminine dichotomy here is likely to raise instant objections. After all, if 'masculine' and 'feminine' are social constructions, then why can't we just be rid of them? However, I don't think that our 'selves' as socially created beings are quite so easy to dispense with. Earlier this century Virginia Woolf wrote the following, which I think has not lost its relevance:

'we'—meaning by 'we' a whole made up of body, brain, and spirit, influenced by memory and tradition—must still differ in some essential respects from 'you', whose body, brain and spirit have been so differently trained and so differently influenced by memory and tradition. Though we see the same world, we see it through different eyes (1966: 22).

The feminism exemplified in this passage is known as 'feminism of difference', and while it recognises the source of gendered selves as 'social', it also suspects that there may yet be much to learn from the 'feminine' perspectives that have had little airplay in a society run largely along 'masculine' lines. Accordingly, the risk of foregoing claim to a 'feminine' perspective at this point in time is that we may inadvertently reinforce an unacknowledged masculinism. This masculinism, I suggest, is evident not only in poststructuralism, but also in social constructionism and the narrative model of therapy that derives from these two interrelated bodies of thought.

A Feminist Review of the History of Western Thought

To assist in my analysis and critique of both poststructural and social constructionist thinking I will give a brief feminist review of the history of western thought. Despite his own focus on the genealogy of knowledge, this is not a history that Foucault himself chose to bring to light. In her book *The Man of Reason* (1984), Genevieve Lloyd notes that throughout the history of western philosophy, the 'selves' of 'man' on the one hand, and 'woman' on the other, have been understood in very consistent ways. Specifically, women have been aligned on what has ultimately become the 'feminine' side of a dichotomy with, among other things, nature, the body, the emotions or passions, the private and the particular. Men on the other hand have been aligned on the 'masculine' side of the same dichotomous pairs with culture, the mind, reason or rationality, the public, and the universal. It seems, possibly because of women's capacity for pregnancy and the presence of related bodily functions such as menstruation, that other experiences such as sexuality or emotions which are as much bodily as they are mental or cognitive, have become, according to this division, the realm of female beings. In other words, men, since it is men, as Lloyd notes, who have historically been the producers of Western thought, have required female 'selves' to 'carry' all that is connected with bodily existence, and in so doing, have been able to construct and understand their own 'selves' as somehow transcending the body, as made up of only mind or rationality.

However, as Lloyd further notes, despite this consistent differentiation between 'masculine' and 'feminine', the 'self' that has been assumed to be the 'subject' of western philosophy has been a 'self' modelled on the 'masculine' side of the dichotomy. That is, the universal subject of western thought has been a transcendent, bodiless, 'self', equated with 'mind' and 'reason'. In short, hidden beneath what for all intents and purposes is a gender-neutral 'subject' of western theorising has been a masculine 'self' who denies the body. This denial can be understood as a double denial, of both the more bodily (rather than cognitive) aspects of experience, and of the fact that the persons speaking within the traditions of western thought have been those with male bodies.

FOUCAULT'S THEORY OF POWER AND SUBJECTIVITY

Foucault's theorising about power, knowledge and the creation of 'selves' has appealed to feminists for the reason that, unlike the tradition of theorising before it, it has taken 'the body' to be central to the 'self'. Also, the originality of his analysis of power has captured feminist attention. For Foucault, power operates not so much centrally as a unified repressive force but peripherally at the level of everyday 'material' existence (1975: 57, 1977b). Here power in its many and varied forms, he

claims, is interwoven into the social relations and networks that form our everyday lives: family, school, church etc. (1977a: 142). According to Foucault, centralised power is only able to exist by making use of these 'concrete', localised, and specific 'techniques' and 'tactics' that he refers to as micro or biopower (1977c: 116, 122). Most importantly for Foucault, micropower is said to produce rather than prohibit, and this is so in two important senses.

First, micropower both produces and operates through knowledges, through 'relationships of communication which transmit information by means of language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium' (1982: 217). By conceptualising knowledge in this way, as socially produced in multiple forms rather than a single metaphysically given 'Truth', Foucault reveals power's operation within the discourses by which we collectively come to understand the world. It is in this manner that, as Fish points out, power comes to operate as a relatively autonomous realm (1993: 223-224) not tied to the actions or intentions of particular individuals. Yet, as Foucault adds, discourses become competing truths in the service of power struggles (1986a: 87).

The 'Self' as Product of the Power-Knowledge Interaction

It is through this power-knowledge relationship that power can be understood to be productive in a second sense, and that is in the constitution of 'selves'. According to Foucault, sense of 'self' or identity is a direct product of the discourses and truth claims by which we and others describe our lives. That is, as individuals we are 'destined to certain modes of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power' (1977d: 94). In short, it is only through discursive forces that we can 'know' or recognise our 'selves' at all, that we can become 'self' conscious (1982: 212). Foucault summarises this constituting effect of power in language in his reference to individuals as the 'field of application' or the 'real effects' of power (1977d: 97).

Foucault's elaboration of the processes by which the 'self' is created poses a major challenge to the earlier enlightenment notions of the 'self', not only because it proposes that the 'self' is socially produced rather than divinely given (Braidotti 1991: 38, 55), but because the body, irrelevant to earlier concepts of the 'self', is central in Foucault's notion of the subject. For him 'the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language ...)' (1986a: 83). That is, it is 'knowledge' that 'cuts', that shapes the embodied subject (1986a: 88). Further, because at any one time there are a number of truth claims competing to give shape to our embodied 'selves', the 'self' is, according to Foucault continually 'dissolved by ideas', 'a volume in perpetual disintegration' (1986a: 87, 83). The embodied 'self' is, in other words, a potentiality of 'selves' that are as multiple as the discourses that would construct us.

Having claimed that discourse creates and shapes

the 'embodied self', Foucault subsequently claims that some knowledges become marginalised by dominant 'Truth' claims, especially dominant 'Truths' such as science (1977d: 82-85). The intellectual can assist in the process of giving airplay to such subjugated knowledges, Foucault claims, not by speaking and operating from the level of collective consciousness, but rather, by operating from 'within specific sectors, at the precise point where their own conditions of life and work situate them' (1977c: 126). In other words, anyone who plays a role in foregrounding subjugated discourses must do so from a stance which acknowledges the material specifics of their own located existence, for example, within a particular class, employment group, race, etc.

According to Foucault, such social action in the form of resistance to dominant truth claims is possible because, while 'selves' are the 'effects' of power, they are also 'the vehicles of power' (1977d: 98). By this Foucault does not mean that power is the product of the individual subject's 'conscious intention or decision' but rather something 'which every individual holds' (1977d: 97, 98) in the form of a potential to act upon the action of others (1982: 220). Another way of saying this is that all relations of power contain the possibility of resistance, where resistance is to be understood 'not so much (as) what stands outside relations of power as their limit, their underside, their counterstroke' (1977a: 138). According to Foucault, because power always contains this possibility of resistance, individuals are never trapped by power but always free to respond to power in a myriad possible ways. He writes: 'Power is exercised only over free subjects and only in so far as they are free' (1982: 221).

Remaking The Self

It follows that as 'selves' constituted through discursive truths, we are free to resist and contest those 'truths' by which we have been made, that is, free to remake or refashion ourselves. In fact, Foucault endorses such resistance to the normalising effects of micropower. He writes: 'We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries' (1982: 216). Apparently drawn to the relationship that the classical Greek individual has to himself, which he describes as 'aesthetic', Foucault suggests that in remaking ourselves 'we have to create ourselves as a work of art' (1986: 351). This relationship to the self he contrasts with that of 'the Californian cult of the self' in which 'one is supposed to discover' or 'decipher' 'one's true self' (1986: 362). By implication it seems that for Foucault, in remaking the self:

The point is not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the non-said, but on the contrary, to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of the self (1986: 365).

In short, he appears to be suggesting that we reconsti-

tute our 'selves' by rearranging what has already been said into more desirable discourses and thus truths.

Vincent Fish is critical of White's interpretation of Foucault's notion of 'discourse' as a 'colloquial' phenomenon, claiming that Foucault's 'discourses' are broader cultural phenomena existing independently of individuals or groups. Fish also doubts that Foucault's reasoning is supportive of White and Epston's idea that individuals can counteract local meanings (1993: 223). However, in my reading of Foucault, above, I find ample evidence that White and Epston may be justified in their interpretations of the meaning of 'discourse'. First, for Foucault, the embodied 'self' is a direct and localised effect of discourse; second, resistance is something that can, and according to Foucault should, happen at a local level; and third, remaking the 'self' by refusing dominant meanings and reassembling new meanings is something which, in his later writings at least, he actively promotes. To say that White's and Epston's interpretation of Foucault is reasonable is not however to absolve them of the charge of masculinism that I direct at Foucault, and to which I shall now turn.

Foucault's theory of the 'self' as socially constituted has clearly freed women from the constraints accompanying a notion of the 'self' as given essence, allowing women to contest the ways in which they have been constructed in dominant and 'Truthful' discourses and to begin to experiment with other ways of being. Foucault's understanding of the 'self' also appears to overcome the mind-body disconnection characteristic of much of the western thinking that went before him. Thirdly, his understandings of power overcome dualistic models in which power is something people who 'have it' wield over those who 'don't'. However, my contention is that Foucault's notions of power, knowledge, and subjectivity suffer from an unacknowledged masculine bias which works against feminist efforts to utilise his thinking.

A number of feminist writers have noted that a key problem with Foucault's theory of the 'self' is his indifference to sexual difference (Braidotti, 1991; Flax, 1990; Hartsock, 1990; McNay, 1991). The 'embodied selves' that Foucault conceptualises have no anatomical sex: they remain the abstract gender-neutral subjects that have pervaded western philosophy for centuries. On this point it is possible to turn Foucault's argument back on itself. If, as he suggests, I, or anyone, can only speak and know from my 'real, material' location, then surely the sex of both my body, and his body, is as central to both my location and context and his location and context as is membership in a particular, community, action group, employment group, race, etc. However, at no point does Foucault locate himself as speaking as a man. He speaks, he knows, he theorises for all, and in so doing he perpetuates a western tradition of subsuming the 'feminine' within a masculine viewpoint which parades as universal. In so doing he fails to take account of, and thus silences, the ways in which female experience may differ from male experience.

Power is a Gendered Experience

First, to his theory of power. Foucault's focus on the dynamics of micropower as productive rather than repressive has been invaluable to feminism for the reason that it has enabled women to begin to recognise themselves as holders of power, rather than passive victims of power. However, *his lack of attention to more central or institutional forms of power, and his suggestion of a rather chance or arbitrary connection between micropower and this more centralised power allows him to overlook the fact that universally, those with male bodies are more powerful.*

In an attempt to redress this oversight Nancy Hartsock claims that masculine domination is 'systematic' (1990: 165), which the dictionary (*Concise Oxford*, 1976) defines as 'methodical, according to a plan, not casual or sporadic or unintentional'. According to such a definition, we would have to understand masculine domination as the product of the intentions of men, a conspiracy in which all men collude against women. Clearly this is exactly the understanding of power that Foucault wished to move away from. Also, from a feminist perspective such an understanding allows no space for female power: women can only be understood as victims. In addition, it allows no space for recognising that at times men themselves feel alienated by patriarchy.

Differing from Hartsock somewhat, but staying with her concern about the universality of male privilege, I think it is possible to understand masculine domination as 'systemic' rather than 'systematic', where 'systemic' is defined as meaning 'of the bodily system as a whole, not confined to a particular part' (*Concise Oxford*, 1976). While according to such an understanding of power there is no suggestion that masculine domination is either intentional or consistent, masculine power understood as 'systemic' does imply much more than the arbitrary connection between the everyday and the institutional levels of power suggested by Foucault's analysis. It allows for the possibility that male domination at the microlevel of everyday relationships can become institutionalised in enduring ways at the higher, more centralised levels of social practices and discourses.

But one may wish to object: 'Why would women necessarily be subordinated, if, as Foucault says, at the everyday level all subjects are free to exercise power?' However as I see it, not all bodies are equally free to resist and respond to power in the way Foucault describes. In fact, in Foucault's own terms, a large number of microlevel relationships between men and women have not been relationships of power at all, but rather relationships of what he terms 'violence'. For Foucault, relationships of power involve interacting subjects who are free to respond to the actions of the other in a myriad possible ways. Violence, on the other hand, is that which

acts upon a body or things, it forces, it bends, it breaks ... , it destroys, or closes the doors on all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity (1982: 220).

Clearly one does not have to argue that throughout

history a considerable number of relationships between men and women have been such that they only permit passivity on the part of women. Also and most importantly, given the historical tendency for the higher level institutions to ignore the operation of relationships of violence at this microlevel, it is likely that, for many women, even those not involved in violent relationships, the *possibility of violence* means that they are not as free as men to resist. In short, *women are not as free as men to exercise power in the way that Foucault describes*. Foucault's theory of power would seem to reflect the experience of male bodies who by and large experience themselves on an equal footing with other masculine 'selves'.

If, as I have suggested above, masculine domination is indeed 'systemic', then it would seem reasonable to assume that such domination will also be formalised at the institutional level of knowledge production. As Genevieve Lloyd reminds us, it is male bodies who have outnumbered (and I think still continue, although to a lesser extent, to outnumber) women in the institutions where theories are produced. More importantly, it is these male bodies who tend to hold the privileged positions which determine the rules of knowledge production, that is, who gets to say what counts as legitimate knowledge. It is likely therefore that the theories produced in these institutions will reflect collective masculine experience, and equally likely that ways of thinking and theorising which are at odds with masculine experience will be disqualified by this masculine gatekeeping process. In short, just as not all bodies are equally free to exercise power, *not all knowledges are equal on the discursive playing field. Because of the operation of unacknowledged masculine rules of knowledge production, discourses based in female experience are likely to be more subjugated than others*.

Foucault's Theory of the Self Omits the Role of Maternity

The masculine bias of Foucault's theory is further and I think most importantly revealed in his failure to take into account the female experience of maternity, and most specifically in his failure to consider the role of maternity in the production of 'selves'. By *claiming that all aspects of the 'self' originate in the discursive arena, by making the 'self' solely and nothing more than 'a field of language'*, to use Kirby's words (1991: 98), Foucault obscures *entirely the contribution made by the pre-linguistic mother-infant relationship to the creation of 'selves'*.

My understanding of the formation of the earliest seeds of the 'self' is gleaned from psychoanalytic theory, and is summarised as follows. The mother's attention to the infant's survival and pleasure needs establishes, according to Freud, 'mnemonic traces' or 'memory records' within the infant, of its earliest sensory (tactile, kin-aesthetic, acoustic, visual) experiences (Freud, 1900, 1950; Kristeva, 1982, 1984). Specifically, these are memory traces of: 'the excitation produced by the need', such

as hunger; the flow of 'affects' in the form of screaming, kicking, etc. which accompany such needs; and the 'experience of satisfaction' of the need (Freud 1900: 604-605; 1950: 295-297). Because these memories are laid down prior to the advent of language, they must, as I see it, be understood as bodily rather than thought-based memories.

Although occurring prior to the infant's experience of itself as differentiated from the mother as sustaining environment, for both Brennan (1992) and Kristeva (1982, 1984) these memories, this imprint of the mother's attentions, constitute within the infant the first seeds of the 'self'. In addition for Brennan, they constitute an identification with the mother. The dual nature of this imprint as both embryo of 'self' and identification is also encapsulated in the object relations term 'introjection'. Introjection refers to the process whereby the mother's attention to the infant's needs, (symbolised by 'the breast') are internalised by the infant, such that there occurs within the infant 'the crystallisation of the "feeling of self" around which a "sense of identity" will become established' (Chodorow 1978: 67).

While Kristeva, Brennan, and a number of object relations theorists date the foundation of the 'self' at this very early stage, Freud for much of his writing placed the beginnings of the 'self' at a date much closer to differentiation and the development of language, in a stage he refers to as 'primary narcissism'. However, as the following observation by Brennan suggests, at the end of Freud's life his thinking about the beginnings of the 'self' had a resonance with the object relations theorists who came after him:

In a throwaway note in the last year of his life, [he] said exactly this: the first form of identification involves no differentiation, one is the breast (1992: 165).

In short, even Freud in the end appeared to move towards an understanding that the first seeds of 'self' have their origins in the earliest prelinguistic interactions with the mother. From this discussion I think it is possible to draw out two main points about the production of 'selves'. First, that the 'social interactions' out of which the 'self' emerges clearly extend beyond Foucault's discursive or linguistic interactions to earlier non-linguistic but no less 'social' interactions of the mother-infant relationship. Second, the embryo of subjectivity formed through this prelinguistic relationship is largely bodily and emotional. As such, central to this 'self' are bodily memories of survival linked emotions to which we may give the names 'fear', 'anger', 'loss', 'want', 'joy'.

In this sense then, the infant must be understood to move into the world of language with an inaugural emotionality already in place, and to claim that the 'self' is solely a product of language is to obscure this emotionality. However, in saying that emotionality predates language I am not suggesting that the emotional 'sense of self' remains fixed. Rather, I am suggesting that because emotionality has its roots, first and foremost, in a realm of experience which exists prior to the realm of language or discourse, *emotionality must be understood to*

form a distinct facet of the 'self' and 'experience' which is not reducible to an effect of discourse.

ALL EXPERIENCE REDUCED TO LANGUAGE

The reduction of the 'self' and 'experience' to discourse or language, and the subsequent obscuring of the pre-linguistic and of emotionality, is not confined to Foucault's poststructural thought. In my view it is replicated in the social constructionist thinking that has been equally influential in the therapeutic arena in recent years. To justify my claims here I will consider the writings of Gergen (1985) and Bruner (1990). Drawing on philosophers such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Rorty, Feyerabend, and Spinoza, Gergen outlines a theory of social constructionism which in many respects parallels Foucault's poststructural argument. Social constructionism, according to Gergen, challenges earlier claims that knowledge is representational, that knowledge reveals a given reality or an 'objective truth' which can be empirically validated. Social constructionism suggests instead that knowledges, and 'what we take to be experience of the world' are 'social artefacts', the products of 'common understandings' and more specifically of 'historically situated interchanges among people' (1985: 266, 267). What this means in terms of the experience of the 'self', Gergen claims, is that 'the self-concept ... is removed from the head and placed within the sphere of social discourse' (1985: 271). In other words 'selves' too are the product of shared understandings and not given essences. Also, like Foucault for whom 'selves' are in perpetual disintegration, for social constructionists the conception and presumably therefore the experience of the 'self' is 'subject to deterioration and decay as social history unfolds' (Gergen, 1985: 271). Finally, again like Foucauldian poststructuralism, social constructionism seizes this recognition of the social origins of 'selves' as an opportunity to rethink, and thus to remake, 'selves'. Thus, for Gergen the experiences of gender can be 'remade' through the process of creating new understandings:

By examining the variations in the way differing cultures and subcultural groups understand gender, the referents for the terms *man* and *woman* are obscured. Possibilities are opened for alternative means of understanding gender differences or of abandoning such distinctions altogether (1985: 267).

This statement by Gergen I consider to be problematic for two reasons which relate to social constructionism's reduction, much like Foucault's, of 'social interchange' to discourse. While highlighting the *productive* role of discourse is, I think, extremely useful, to reduce what is 'shared' or 'social' to language or common understandings is to obscure, first, the 'social' nature of the pre-linguistic mother-infant bond and second, the interpersonal power inequities which, as Fish has already suggested, are an important part of the material context of discursive interchanges. Thus, for Gergen to suggest that the problems of gender can be resolved simply by changing our shared understandings of gender is to

ignore the historical gender-power connection that I have outlined above. In case some may feel that my charging Gergen's social constructionism with reducing the 'social' to language is somewhat unfair, a quick perusal of Gergen's paper gives ample evidence that my claim is justified.

At least initially, Gergen claims that the 'social interchange' which shapes 'reality' and 'selves' is inclusive of non-linguistic, emotionally founded modes of interaction. He writes that 'facial expressions, bodily postures, and movement' are an 'integral part' of these 'negotiated understandings' (1985: 268). However, as we progress through Gergen's paper these non-linguistic modes of social interaction seem to disappear. In the following, for instance, social interchange as 'knowledge' is reduced to 'language':

Knowledge is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do together. Languages are essentially shared activities. Indeed, until the sounds or markings come to be shared within a community, it is inappropriate to speak of language at all (1985: 270).

On the following page the social interchanges which become the focus of Gergen's analysis are solely the 'various linguistic figures or tropes (which) serve to organise or guide the attempt to "describe" reality' (1985: 271). And again on the final page the only system of social participation to which Gergen refers is language. 'The functions of language, both as a system of reference and as a form of social participation must be elaborated' (1985: 273).

I acknowledge that Gergen's reference to 'language' as 'describing reality' and as 'a system of reference' does leave open the possibility that the reality being described in language could be an 'emotional' reality. However, because for Gergen, emotionality (and here he draws on the works of Averill) is conceptualised as an expression of an historically contingent social role rather than an internal state (267, 271), emotion is accordingly always dependent on shared meanings, that is, always secondary to discourse. This claim is indeed the thrust of a collection of social constructionist papers on emotion edited by Harré (1986). While I have absolutely no problem with the argument that some emotions are culturally specific, to claim that emotions are solely derivative of shared understandings is to ignore both *the universality of the capacity for emotionality*, and also *the universality of certain survival linked emotions such as 'fear' 'loss', 'anger', 'want', 'joy'*. It is because, as I have argued above, the capacity for emotion is founded first and foremost prior to the capacity for language, through the pre-linguistic connection to the mother, that *emotion cannot be subsumed within the instance of shared meanings as discursive interchanges*.

What I think we are confronted with in the social constructionist argument is an attempt to overcome 'the bifurcation between reason and emotion' (Gergen, 1985: 267) clearly evidenced in Lloyd's overview of the history of western thought. However, in the attempt to overcome this dualism, social constructionism manages to

subsume the emotional within the rational. That is, in creating a more inclusive rationalism, social constructionism preserves the hierarchical relationship between the two terms. Indeed, Gergen refers to this new social constructionist way of conceptualising reality as 'socio-rationalist' (1985: 272). Given that rationality is historically linked to masculine forms of thinking, it is, I think, worth considering the collective masculine viewpoint which is reinforced by this new hierarchical connection between the rational and the emotional.

Bruner's writing, like Gergen's, has been influential in the arena of therapeutic practice, and like Gergen's writing, I think, suffers from the same tendency to reduce the social to the linguistic and in so doing to obscure the place of emotionality in 'selves'. However, Bruner's much more conflicted and inconsistent reasoning gives hints of this other prelinguistic 'social' realm at risk of being silenced by the poststructural and social constructionist focus on language alone. According to Bruner, meaning 'is public and communal rather than private or autistic' (1990: 33). More specifically, it is 'the symbolic systems of culture' through which our 'experiences', 'acts' and 'intentional states' are 'realised', such that 'what does not get structured narratively suffers loss in memory' (1990: 33, 56). Where Gergen's social constructionism implies that experience is public before it is experienced privately, Bruner's conceptualisation is more suggestive that some experiences may be first and foremost private (but no less social), but that such experiences will fade and become meaningless if not put into language.

In other words, Bruner's writing seems to suggest a 'something' outside of or exceeding the world of shared understandings. Yet Bruner himself remains ambivalent about such an 'outside'. On the one hand, in line with Gergen, he claims that the 'self' is 'a concept constructed much as we construct other concepts' through 'reflection', in other words through language-based thought (1990: 100). He reinforces this notion of the 'self' as linguistic in origin by opposing ideas which claim the 'self' to be 'a substance or an essence that pre-exist(s) our effort to describe it' (1990: 99). Yet, in the next breath, Bruner insists that the infant, prior to the achievement of 'linguistic expression', exhibits a 'pre-linguistic context sensitivity', a 'mastery' which he refers to as a 'praxis of social interaction' (1990: 72-77). If it is the case that the infant lives, experiences, and masters an interactive reality prior to its capacity for language, and if in this 'praxis' the infant exhibits a 'context sensitivity', then, counter to Bruner's claim, there *must* be an aspect of an 'self experience' which does 'pre-exist our efforts to describe it' (99).

The sense that Bruner makes of this prelinguistic 'praxis' or 'context sensitivity' is to conceptualise it in strictly linguistic terms as 'protolinguistic', a sort of linguistic readiness. Reflecting the psychoanalytic claims above, and probably my own feminine viewpoint, I prefer to conceptualise this prelinguistic 'context sensitivity' as 'emotional' as much as 'protolinguistic'. Further, I wonder if Braidotti may be right when she suggests that

this prelinguistic emotionality may itself provide the impetus for language and thought. She writes: 'One can only start thinking in experiencing the *visceral fear* of the loss of the primary object that is the mother's body' (1991: 31, italics added).

If indeed the inaugural emotional 'self' suggested by psychoanalytic theory does provide the impetus for the development of language and thus thought, then it follows that *emotionality cannot be reduced to an effect of language as shared knowledges*. Rather, emotionality must be, as I have suggested earlier, understood as a distinct type of social interchange which is first and foremost bodily in its medium. While emotionality undoubtedly interacts with language, it can never be subsumed within the instance of linguistic interchanges and meanings.

Therapeutic Consequences of the Reduction of Experience to Language

In this final part of the paper I would like to consider briefly the ways in which the poststructural and social constructionist reduction of 'social interchange' and 'selves' to language, and the subsequent obscuring of emotionality, is reflected in the therapeutic practices for which these theories are foundational. In particular, I want to examine the extent to which, under the sway of these interrelated theories, therapy becomes limited to an attention to 'the content and arrangement of words' (Fish, 1993: 228).

The following quotations from *Therapy as Social Construction* (1992) reveal that the influence of post-structuralism and social constructionism has produced, within therapeutic thinking, notions of 'self', 'experience' and 'social' as fundamentally discursive or linguistic, and a structuring of therapeutic interventions according to this reduction:

- Communication and discourse define social organization ... All human systems are linguistic systems ... *The therapeutic system is such a linguistic system* (Anderson and Goolishian, 1992: 27).
- We live in and through narrative identities that we develop in conversation with one another (ibid: 28).
- Problems exist in language and problems are unique to the narrative context from which they derive their meaning (ibid).
- The self is conceived not as a reified entity, but as a narrative (Lax, 1992: 69).
- This narrative or sense of self arises not only through discourse with others, but is our discourse with others. There is no hidden self to be interpreted (ibid: 71).
- Lives are situated in texts or stories ... lives are shaped through the storying of experience and through the performance of these stories (Epston, White and Murray, 1992: 98-99).
- Language and the constitution of being (Anderson, 1992: 64).
- Therapy is a linguistic event (Anderson and Goolishian, 1992: 27).

- The role of the therapist is that of a conversational artist (ibid.).
- Therapeutic questions always stem from a need to know more about what has been said (ibid: 27, 29).

I acknowledge that the above statements do vary in degree of reductionism, and these differences are worthy of further discussion. However, the main thing I want to draw attention to is that there is nothing in any of the above statements which would lead the therapist to pay attention to anything but the 'words' being said. None of these statements would direct the therapist, for example, to notice and respond to a puzzled expression on a person's face, a glazed look in a person's eyes, a slumped body posture, or the holding back of tears. That is, none of these statements would suggest that the therapist might enquire about the person's feeling state. Facial expressions, body posture, etc., are all aspects of the experience of the 'self' and are all potential communications that could be attended to. Also, in my experience, what comes to be expressed in more bodily ways and what is ultimately 'said' when feelings are attended to, can often be quite different from what is 'said' when the focus is solely on the content of the narrative.

Further, not one of these statements would encourage the therapist to consider the client's *emotional history* and the way in which this may impinge on the interactions in the therapy room. For instance, chronically abused individuals may give their power away as a matter of course, and may constantly doubt their own authority about what is real for them; a person who is emotionally trained in being a pleaser may not speak up readily about the discomforts he/she may experience in the therapeutic process; relatedly, a person who has an strong need for approval may be inclined to follow wherever the therapist leads, possibly even against his/her own better interests. In my experience, all of these emotional givens form an unspoken agenda which influences therapeutic interactions often without the conscious awareness of either the client or the therapist. In order to be vigilant about and attentive to such unspoken factors it is necessary that the therapist pay attention to many things other than the contents of the narrative.

I am not attempting to suggest that therapists trained in social constructionist or poststructural thinking will never attend to emotional aspects of the 'self' nor to the more bodily-emotional aspects of human interaction. Indeed in *Therapy as Social Construction* there is evidence that at least some do. For instance, while the term is not explained, Epston et al. claim that "empathy" is a critical factor in the interpretation or understanding of the experiences of others' (1992: 96). Also, more explicitly, Tom Andersen says that we can 'know when our contributions are too unusual':

[By attending to] signs in that conversation that tell us that it is uncomfortable for the client to take part ... We are thereby challenged to be acquainted with and sensitive to those particular signs that various individual send us. We must rely on our intuition in noticing these signs (1992: 59).

However, the point I wish to make is that these non-

linguistic awarenesses on the part of the therapist and these interactions at the level of feeling or intuition would appear to occur, not *because* of the therapist's theoretical training in social constructionism or post-structuralism, but rather *in spite of* that training. My contention is that as long as emotionality remains either untheorised, excluded from notions of the 'self' (as in past theorising), or subsumed within the case of 'language' (as in current poststructural and social constructionist theorising), it will continue to exist not only as a *chance* component of therapeutic interaction, but also as one that is difficult to justify.

Indeed there is evidence in this same collection of papers that 'attention to emotionality' in therapy lacks legitimacy. Hoffman notes that as she became increasingly concerned about the 'technocratic coldness' of a number of models of psychotherapy, prompted by the writings of Carol Gilligan she began to search for different ways of proceeding in therapy. She writes:

When unobserved, I would show a far more sympathetic side to clients than my training allowed. I would show my feelings, even weep. I called this practice 'corny therapy' and never told my supervisor about it ... other women ... too used to do secretly what I did and also had pet names for this practice (1992: 15, 16).

Given the masculine history of western thinking, the dissociation of emotion from this historical masculine self, and the gatekeeping role of masculine ideas, there is no wonder, I think, that Hoffman labels her emotional interactions with her clients 'corny'; that it is her women colleagues who also admit to the practice: and that it is something that is done 'secretly' rather than openly?²

In highlighting the ways in which poststructural and social constructionist ideas, and the therapeutic practices arising from them, are a continuation of a masculine tradition, I, like Held (1995), am challenging the myth that these currently popular theories and practices are somehow beyond 'assumptions' and 'truth claims'. Most importantly I have aimed to reveal that the truth implied in these theories and practices is that the 'self' is solely linguistic or discursive. This assumption or implied truth, serves, I have suggested, to obscure emotionality as both an ingredient of 'self' and as a form of social interchange which is not reducible to discourse or narrative. Because both the 'truth claim' of poststructuralism and social constructionism and its origins in collective masculine experience have been largely unacknowledged, the effect has been that other 'feminine' ways of thinking about the 'self' and proceeding in therapy have been delegitimated and subjugated.

²I add provocatively that secrecy has been a noted component of abuse, and wonder if the secrecy to which Hoffman draws attention could be evidence of, not just a discounting, but an 'abuse' of female perspectives.

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