

A DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY FOR OUR TIMES: INTEGRATING DISCOURSE AND PERSONAL CONSTRUCT APPROACHES

Jonathan Norton

Counselling Service, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Intersections between social constructionism and personal construct psychology (PCP) are increasingly been explored. Not only are these traditions compatible, but they may require each other. For when constructs are seen not as personal cognitions in any way causing or "behind" behaviour, but configurations of thought and feeling which occur in action, then the social context of that action arises as of interest. At the same time, how ideas and cultural practices - or "discourses" - become embodied in individuals and their actions, is critical. Discourse psychology presents an opportunity to develop a coherent blending of social constructionist ideas around discourse, with PCP. This paper outlines the key features of such an attempt. An account of a discourse approach to psychology is provided, and this is then used to make connections with, and expand upon, an account of PCP that thereby becomes more fully informed by discursive social constructionism.

Key words: *Depth psychology, discourse psychology, social constructionism, personal construct psychology*

INTRODUCTION

From time to time there is lip service paid to the need for psychologists to take into account the 'social context' of behaviour. In practice, there has been a paucity of theoretical and methodological suggestions for achieving this laudable aim. In this paper it is suggested that we can conceive of ourselves as both social and individual, somewhat like physicists regard light as simultaneous a wave and a particle. As with physics, exactly what we see depends on how and why we look at it. A big picture requires a superordinate vision, and a powerful theory can provide this.

One of the consequences of this view is that it allows us to see that people are made up of different and sometimes conflicting elements determined by a variety of cultural demands, as their experience is created through language in particular social practices. In short, we fashion for ourselves a life out of the social resources - the discourses - around us.

Vivien Burr (1995, 2003) has been at the forefront of providing a discourse oriented, social constructionist account for understanding psychological phenomena. As she notes, a danger in this shift in understanding is that the scope for personal inter-

vention can appear minimised, and it may seem that people become tools of language and social practice, lacking agency. This is the reason why a fully realised depth psychological theory must have something to say about the reciprocal processes whereby social forces create individual experience and behaviour, yet are modified and transformed by those individual actions. This brings us to the personal construct psychology of George Kelly (1955). It is argued that Kelly's account of personality is well suited to augment a discourse approach. I call such an integrated theoretical account 'discourse psychology'. It views discursive practices and individual 'construing' (sense making) as different facets of the same phenomena. What follows is an elaboration of this idea. Both elements are founded in the use of language, and so it is to language we must first turn.

A PRIMER ON DISCOURSE

Language and discourse

A major shift in the grounds of psychological investigation has been occurring over the past twenty

years. This shift challenges assumptions, held both inside and outside of psychology, about the nature of persons, and the proper focus for studying them. Above all else, this shift is characterised by a focus on language and meaning.

As part of this shift, language is seen as not merely representing the world, or functioning as a mirror which reflects the meanings people have in their minds (Davies and Harre, 1990). Rather, social conditions - the circumstances under which it is possible to have shared meanings which can be communicated in language - give rise to the very forms of speech or writing which are possible. These forms of language in turn give rise to the meanings and understandings available for people to use, so that "what we can know is what can be said," (Walker, 1988, p.74).

Further, in this view, psychological phenomena are not things 'in' a person which a psychologist can discover or reveal, but are created by the very language used to describe them, and the meanings which become attached to that use (Shotter, 1993). These phenomena have a public reality, and it is a mistake to believe they have their origin in the heads of individuals (Burman and Parker, 1993).

Central to this argument is the idea that our talk and writing are constructed out of existing cultural resources which only make sense in an interpersonal context. These resources are sometimes referred to as 'discourses'. One does not create these resources; they are borrowed and refashioned for one's own purposes in any instantiation of language use (Marshall and Raabe, 1993).

Foucault (1972, 1977, 1980, 1981) studied the ways in which, and under what conditions, different forms of knowledge emerged historically from social practices and cultural settings. He argued that meaning and knowledge are not universal, objective, and 'real', but always local, constructed and contested. For Foucault, knowledges are products of concrete social formations situated within, and inevitably linked to, networks of power relations.

Foucault proposed that discourses encompass both the symbolic application of meaning in contexts of interaction, and the conventions and relationships which make up the forms of human life in which these interactions take place (what we might also call 'culture'). He stated that discourses can be treated as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972, p.49). This

definition has some important consequences. It implies that objects - such as the 'self' - do not exist independently of the way in which they are spoken about in language. Indeed they only come to exist as objects when they are given existence through discourses. Further, the emphasis on discourse as practice implies that discourses themselves do not have some superordinate reality. They are not things, but processes linked to human action. A discursive practice is the use of a sign system directed at or to some human interaction. Any use of language is itself a form of embodied action.

This account connects behaviour, language and meaning in a compelling way. For discourses abound in our social world. One *experiences* things like gender, race, class and identity through meanings available in discourses (Davies and Harre, 1990). Thus subjective experience itself is produced through the construction of possible realities, mediated by available discourses. Discourses specify certain things about the way the world is, and those things are then taken for granted as the terms and concepts of the discourses are used in language. For example, the idea of a more or less fixed human essence, a human nature, is specified in many ancient and modern discourses. But discourses do not just describe phenomena. They bring them into sight (Parker, 1992a). In this way discourses are constitutive of experience. The psychological and social field is constructed, defined and articulated through discourse (Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

Discourses "permit and provoke the phenomena we call cognition, and which we learn, in contemporary western culture, to funnel into single minds," (Parker, 1992a, p.92). They are historically evolved and make up important parts of the common sense of culture, as well as structuring the operation of multifarious institutions including the law, academia, politics, and popular culture. As Davies and Harre put it: "To know anything is to know in terms of one or more discourses" (1990, p.45).

In psychology, an approach founded on discourse "demands a shift of topic from measured behaviour to the dynamics of meaning," (Parker, 1992a, p.69). It is compatible with psychology as a discipline dedicated to understanding meaning and human action, through being concerned with "the diversity of discourses we live in and are shaped by, use and are used by" (Mair, 1989b, p.2).

Social construction

Discourse approaches embrace, and contribute to, the broader canvas of social constructionism. This is a dedicated movement with many origins, and one which has had some influence in psychology (Gergen, 1985; Burr, 1995). A social constructionist holds that all so-called realities of social life are constructed, 'imaginary', contested, and situated in specific historical circumstances. The assumption of an already stable and well formed reality beyond appearances (which can be perceived through an abstract set of principles or by revealing the 'true' inner workings of the psyche) must instead be replaced by that of a "vague, only partially specified, unstable world, open to further specification as a result of human, communicative activity" (Shotter, 1993, p.179). The focus is less on understanding how a person comes to operate in, and know, the real external world around them. Rather, emphasis is placed on how people are related to others and to their world, and then on how that creates their reality. For Burr, the social constructionist critique also extends to revealing that psychological theorising does not depict reality, but is partial in being only one way of seeing the world among many, and reflects vested interests (Burr, 1995 & 2003)

Subjectivity

Sampson (1989) has argued that we do not begin with two independent entities, individual and society, which are formed and defined apart from one another and interact as though each were external to the other. Rather, "society constitutes and inhabits the very core of whatever passes for personhood" (Sampson, 1988, p.4). In this sense, every self presupposes a 'world' (Mair, 1989a).

Discourse approaches allow for deconstruction of the modernist split between individual and society. Outside psychology, for example in social theory and political science, attempts have been made to marry the social with the individual, usually with the help of psychoanalysis. The concept of 'subjectivity' is central to this. It is a specialised notion which is not to be understood as simply meaning the opposite of objectivity. Rather, it is synonymous with subjective 'experience' - but with a particular slant: the experience of being constituted in language by discourses. It is used to signify that 'ob-

jects' like selfhood and individuality are constructed within networks of meaning. What a person is taken to be, and the qualities and capacities that accrue to persons, depend on the language used to describe them, and on what can possibly be said within the constraints of discourses.

Thus "a subject, a sense of self, is a location constructed within the expressive sphere which finds its voice through the cluster of attributes and responsibilities assigned to it as a variety of object" (Parker, 1992a, p.9). An 'individual' is an entity constituted through, or signified by, the various discursive practices in which it is given space to participate. The result can be thought of as the way things appear to a person in relation to a discursive context.

Such a concept goes a long way to bridging the individual-society split in a psychological manner, through understanding societies as organised, 'brought forth' and given realisation by discourses, and at the same time through viewing individuals and their psychological worlds as the located 'claims' of identity allowed for, and constructed within, a multitude of coexisting discourses.

Fragmentation

In the twentieth century, psychoanalysis has mounted a substantial critique of the idea of the person as a coherent, unified, uncontradictory entity. It has suggested that people are internally divided between different aspects of personality: between conscious and unconscious, and between competing impulses.

With the discourse approach, the notion of the rational, unitary self is also put into question, through the study of fragments of subjectivity which operate through different discourses. Internal conflict is not considered a sign of dissonance or ambivalence in the emotional and cognitive apparatuses of individuals, but a normal discursive (and therefore psychological) process. Frameworks compete in articulating issues.

The fragmentation point means that subjectivity is multiple - it draws on multiple discourses. This is sometimes referred to as the 'divided subject' (Henriques, et al, 1984). Our identity is both continuous and discontinuous, in that we have "the continuity of a multiplicity of selves" (Davies and Harre, 1990, p.47). In addition, people acquire beliefs about

themselves which do not form a unified whole. They shift from one way of thinking about themselves to another as the discourse shifts and their 'positions' are taken up within different contexts.

Positioning

Another valuable tool that emerges from an approach based on discourse and subjectivity is that of the 'position'. As the discussion of subjectivity above suggested, whilst a discourse is 'about' objects, it also 'contains' subjects (Parker, 1992a). That is, a discourse makes available a space or a 'position' into which a particular type of self may step. The idea of 'positioning' gives recognition to the ways in which people are located by discursive practices. Subjectivity is generated through the use of discourses from specific positions. This is a much more useful concept than the more static notion of 'role' (Davies and Harre, 1990).

It is the positioning by discourses which produces what is called experience. The positions of 'psychotherapist' and 'client' set up a relation within which utterances are made sense of in particular ways. Similarly, the positions of 'research psychologist' and 'experimental subject' inscribe two people within a discourse and confer on them differentiated and relatively specific functions and powers. The concept of positioning "recognises both the power of culturally available discourses to frame our experience and constrain our behaviour while allowing room for the person to actively engage with those discourses and employ them in social situations" (Burr, 2003, p.113).

Positioning in turn throws light on the idea of fragmentation and what has come to be referred to as the 'divided subject'. Fragmentation can be understood as resulting from conflicts between different discursive positions which may be drawn on at different times. Alternatively, a subject may be in a position (or use language) which signifies simultaneously in a multiple number of potentially contradictory ways, depending on numerous factors including other social actors involved and the particular context.

Ideology

Discourses are 'productive'. That is, they give rise to possibilities for action and being. But they also

exclude possibilities. They circumscribe ways of representing and understanding the social world, which thereby preclude seeing things in alternative ways. They enable and constrain, facilitate and limit what can be said, by whom, where and when (Parker, 1992a; Howarth, 2001). These constraining and enabling functions of discursive practices mean that discourses can be appropriated to effect relations of power. Contemporary social theory uses the term 'ideology' to refer to such relations.

According to Althusser (1968), ideological discourses 'interpellate' or 'call' subjects to positions so as to achieve specific effects of power. In other words, an ideology constructs a series of social positions which provide ways of giving meaning to, and representing reality. It thereby offers believable ways of making sense of experience. Ideology then becomes a label which identifies the coercive function of meaning in specific social contexts (Thompson, 1984). Processes of legitimatisation, rationalisation, naturalisation and justification are central to the ways ideology works (the historical silence and marginalisation of the experience of women is an example). Ideology is thus tied to social institutions, as "Institutions do not simply structure social life, they also constrain what can be said, who can say it, and how people may act and conceive of their own agency and subjectivity" (Parker, 1994, p. 103).

Ideology is not just about ideas or beliefs. It concerns material life, practical and moral conduct, and bodily existence. As a series of relationships, ideology drives social production and reproduction through the combined effects of the circulation of preexisting discourses ('stories' about the world) with the exercise of power. Ideology allows certain groups to tell their narratives about the past to justify the present (Said, 1993), whilst preventing others from making history.

The above depiction of ideology might give the impression that humans have limited agency, that we are all just 'subjected' to positions within a rigid system in which we (mis)recognise ourselves, leaving no space for freedom. There is indeed controversy here, and tensions exist between personal construct approaches and social constructionism on the subject (Warren, 2005). But some of the most insightful discussion of ideology can be found in the work of the eminent scholar Bob Connell (Connell, 1987, 1993, 1995, 2002). Writing in the context of gender, Connell has elaborated a hegemonic view of

ideology, in which individuals are subject to “emergent sets of pressures and possibilities within which the actual diversity of personality is composed” (Connell, 1987, p.224). Ideological social practices and individual experiences (which are different perspectives on the one set of processes) are potentially *transformative*. As Connell notes in discussing masculinity, one cannot be masculine in a particular way without “affecting the conditions in which that form of masculinity arose; whether to reproduce them, intensify them, or subvert them” (1993, p.302).

From this stance it is held both that subjects ‘use’ discourses, and that discourses play themselves out through the actions and inner worlds of individuals who identify themselves through particular meanings, ideas and ideals. In other words, one is positioned in discourses both by oneself, and yet also through the operations of power. Parker expresses this when he revises a dictum of Marx: “People ‘make’ discourse, but not in discursive conditions of their own choosing” (1992a, p.32).

Consideration of ideology allows us to examine psychological phenomena not in terms of a search for truth, but as one set of ‘truths’ held in place by language and power. Adding ideology to the discourse psychology oeuvre permits, more than anything else, understanding that power relations enter into the construction of what it means to be human in the first place, and into the possible worlds that can be imagined.

Personality theory

Finally, as noted in the introduction, a discourse approach requires ‘models of the person’ compatible with it (Parker, 1990). Without such models, there is a danger that a discourse account will tell us nothing about the uniqueness of the experience of human beings, or about the scope and degree of their freedom. For “to say that people are negotiators of positions, or that their subjectivity is formed by discourses says nothing about how these processes are supposed to operate” (Burr, 2003, p.180). We need to explain and understand these very real phenomena.

The model of the person which theorists have generally used to elaborate the discourse approach has been one influenced by psychoanalysis. There are several reasons for this. First, psychoanalysis

theorises a divided and fragmented subject, and so is immediately appealing to any discursive account of subjectivity (Henriques et al, 1984). Second, the poststructuralist and social constructionist traditions from which the psychological study of discourses has in part emerged, retain an abiding fascination with psychoanalysis, particularly of the Lacanian variety. In many cases the appropriation of psychoanalysis seems to have been undertaken with little examination of the weaknesses of this move, or of other possibilities (Burr, 2003). An alternative does exist in the form of personal construct psychology.

A DISCOURSE-CONSTRUCTIVIST MODEL

There have been some recent explorations of how personal construct psychology can be used to enhance a understanding of the social construction of knowledge and reality (Butt and Burr, 1994; Warren, 2004). In particular Harre and Gillett (1994) have sketched a reading of Kelly which links personal construct thought with a discourse approach in psychology; what follows draws and expands upon their account.

In accordance with a discourse approach to psychology, Kelly believed that social psychology needs to be a psychology of interpersonal understandings (Kenny, 1984). Our constructions of the world emerge not through the abstracted and detached inner processing of a self-contained individual; they result from our interactions with the world, and our encounter with surrounding social structures and relationships. In this sense, like the dialectic between subjectivity and discourse, there is a recursive relationship between person and events – “not a rigid or destructive forcing of the person’s perspective of the event, not an overly passive flooding of the person by events” (Epting and Amerikaner, 1980, p.58).

From here, there are some immediately striking connections between a psychology informed by discourse theory, and personal construct theory. In both, meaning-making is central. The metaphor of construction is also common to both personal construct and discourse approaches. It is instructive that Kelly even considered using the term ‘reconstruction’ rather than therapy to describe what he was trying to do clinically (Fransella, 1985). Further, Kelly’s ‘as if’ approach to psychological under-

standing accords with a discourse perspective emphasising the constructed and contingent nature of meaning, wherein people see themselves *as if* they 'really' are the way that discourses portray them to be.

Linking constructs and discourses

Constructs, like discourses, create and constrain new experience. They determine what will be perceived as reality. They bring phenomena into being. Indeed constructs can be seen as effects or artefacts of discourses. People do make 'personal' discriminations between features of an event, but the categories they use and the criteria for distinguishing are both thoroughly discursive and thoroughly idiosyncratic. So are the means for validating constructs. A person "depends on and appropriates those meanings available in discourse," (Harre and Gillett, 1994, p.140). Kelly himself acknowledged that cultural influence exists within a person's construct system and 'limits the kinds of evidence at his [sic] disposal,' (Kelly, 1955, p.693).

The resources for building a construct system are therefore always pre-existent, and carry meanings and effects beyond what is intended by an individual's 'appropriation' of them. Similarly, psychological phenomena, being discursive, are connected to meanings and effects which extend beyond the immediate occurrence of those phenomena. To construe oneself as 'depressed' does not give insight into the 'true' condition of one's psyche; it demonstrates an awareness of a (relatively fuzzy) resource inscribed within a contemporary discourse of mental illness, which is being used to interpret, enact and thereby *bring existence* to a form of one's embodied existence.

This view opposes two assumptions of conventional psychology: that there are 'real' phenomena (like depression) to be recognised in people, and that there are definite ways to represent these phenomena (for example, through an 'accurate' model of depression). These assumptions are replaced by the idea that all phenomena exist only in so far as they are brought into existence through discursive practices (that is, through construing). This 'bringing forth' in the context of interaction thus constitutes both the phenomena and their representation. Depression becomes an outcome of the network of meaning structures people have about themselves

and the world (Rowe, 2004).

Kelly suggested that to construe is to hear the whisper of recurring themes which reverberate around us. In other words, 'people personify themselves with socially embedded meanings' (Hoshmond, 1993, p.181). Psychological similarity to others is seen in terms of common ways of interpreting the world, which results from the common pool of discursive resources available. Realities are created by and through the conversational (and therefore discursive) practices which people are involved in and undertake (Mair, 1989a; Shotter, 1993).

From here it is possible to discern that "self location within discourse is the key to understanding constructs and through them personality. People adopt or commit themselves to certain positions in the discourse that they...inhabit" (Harre and Gillett, 1994, p.140). This directs attention to the meanings or images in terms of which people construe their own identities.

In such an approach, the study of the mind can be seen as a way of understanding the phenomena that arise when discourses are represented within an individual person who is positioned (and positions oneself) in relation to those discourses. Human uniqueness is accounted for, in that each individual has an idiosyncratic or 'personal' ordering of constructs, with discourses nonetheless inhabiting the very heart of the constructs that define one's self-conceived 'essence'. The discourse view of personality does not then need to find a distinct set of inner processes to explain the uniqueness of each human being, because every human being is unique in ways directly relevant to psychological explanation. "Each human individual stands at a unique intersection point of human discourses and relationships" (Harre and Gillett, 1994, p.132-3).

In short, people are 'coherent' entities to the extent that they adopt various positions within different discourses and thereby fashion for themselves a unique system of personalised constructs (Butt and Burr, 1994). Human understanding of self and world thus involves being well versed in discourses. This echoes Wittgenstein's (1980) conception of knowledge not as accuracy of representation, but a matter of knowing one's way about. Self knowledge becomes not so much the product of in-depth probing of the psyche, as the result of a skill with discourses, a knowing how, an understanding of what

determines oneself (Gergen, 1989). This also confirms why discourses are an appropriate subject matter for psychology: "A lesser conception of human beings and of psychology... fails to display the richness of the human mind and personality, which draw on meaning and value as determined within discursive contexts" (Harre and Gillett, 1994, p.143).

Back to ideology

We can only ever learn what our construct system allows us to see in events (Kenny, 1984). This provides a clear link to the operation of ideology. It aids in understanding how ideology inhabits the core of subjectivities -- by things being portrayed in one way rather than in other ways. This is an underemphasised part of Harre and Gillett's account. Kelly thought that where one places oneself along a construct dimension is not as important as the fact that the construct has evolved in the first place. Constructs derive from discourses which can achieve certain ideological effects, and which are often sustained by ideological supports. Experience is linked to ideology because discourses direct construing along certain lines. In this sense, people are not so much 'dominated' by ideological power, as solicited into linking personal interpretations, constructions and hypotheses with institutionally valued ways of living (Rose, 1990).

But discourses enter into the psychology of personal constructs in another way relating to ideology. Kelly suggested that cultural dictates and preferences are often the validators of constructs. So not only do discourses provide the resources for construing, but they also constitute the meanings in relation to which anticipations are tested. To the extent that an ideology promotes certain social arrangements as 'normal' or 'natural', it validates certain sorts of experience and not others. Thus it contributes to the maintenance of construct systems which at least in part serve ideological ends.

Positioning

The notion of 'positioning' has found some elaboration in the context of personal construct theory. Salmon argues that people's placement in relation to their worlds is a fundamental means by which they are defined: "If we see people as embodying their

experience, and as taking stances towards their lives, we can, I think, achieve a better understanding of what they do, since it is our position towards our lives which governs the kinds of engagements possible for us" (1985, p.181). Another way of saying this is that reality is constructed by 'translating' discourses into personal terms. In this way, people both are positioned, and position themselves in discursive space (Burr, 2003). It is possible to read in Kelly an implicit view of positioning when he says that "the use of constructs is a matter of choosing vestibules through which one passes" (1955, p.66). So we do still need a personal psychology, as the nature and form of the putative 'translation' is neither fixed nor predictable (again drawing on arguments for personal agency within hegemonic forms of ideology). To adequately understand people, we need to analyse *both* the discourses in which they are located, and their positioning of themselves in relation to those contexts.

Threat

In personal construct theory something is defined as 'threatening' if it "makes us aware at some level of imminent change in the ways in which we see ourselves" (Fransella, 1983, p.92). It occurs "whenever we perceive at some level of awareness, imminent change in some central personal commitment, in some cherished view of ourselves" (Fransella, 1983, p.92). In other words, change is threatening when it brings about awareness of the need to reconstrue our identity in some radical manner. This awareness may be explicit but also at the very edges of understanding.

This provides a powerful account of the robustness of identities and of concepts like gender, and adherence to particular self constructions and discursive positions. The apparent implications of some forms of change can be threatening to our core constructs, and threatening in terms of the very ways and means by which we make sense of the world (Viney, 1993). Our familiar identity and known world tend to be protected so as to keep our present 'story' about ourselves safe. In turn, we feel more able to manage an often shifting and unstable life.

Kelly's theory is free of postulations about drives, impulses and inner energy (Kenny, 1984). People are not moved by forces in relation to which they are passive. They are moved by their own ways

of construing events and objects. People are constantly in this process of movement. The 'motivation' of wanting to anticipate events -- as part of sense making -- is enough to explain that subjects will adopt and maintain at least some subject positions. Kelly's notion of 'threat' can therefore help explain persistent adherence to particular positions, and regularised use of certain discourses.

In constituting oneself through social practice, one enters into a relation with discourses which "may act powerfully as motives, defences, identifications, commitments and fears" (Connell, 1987, p.223). It is these features which 'fix' us as subjects in the context of threat associated with awareness of radical alternatives and possibilities of change. There is a security in limiting ourselves and accommodating to the ideological world which pre-exists and creates us. Thus power inserts itself into subjectivity, through influencing the ongoing aims of anticipating the world and one's place in it.

Fragmentation and subjectivity

An account of fragmentation follows from this. Indeed, one of the assertions which Kelly offered as part of the formalisation of his theory, the 'fragmentation corollary', marks a clear link with the 'divided subject'. It states: *A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other* (Kelly, 1955). Or, in discourse terms, a person may, at different times, or even at the same time, be located in conflicting positions in social space, so that "each of the possible selves can be internally contradictory or contradictory with other possible selves located in different story lines" (Davies and Harre, 1990, p.58-9).

In terms of a theory of subjectivity, it is evident that Kelly's notion of the person refers not to entities understood in isolation, but to individuals' hypotheses about how to be in connection with others. The postulation of core role constructs underlines this, in emphasising that we know ourselves by the sense of social space we occupy in relation to others. It is entirely consistent with a view that "our subjective experience of ourselves, of being the person we take ourselves to be, is given by they variety of subject positions... that we take up in discourse" (Burr, 2003, p.120).

Advantages of connecting discourses with constructs

I have proposed that discursive practices can be seen as resources for the ongoing elaboration of construct systems. At the same time, people are positioned or constituted in certain ways by those practices. The personal construct approach involves understanding people from their point of view, concerned with their meanings and constructions. This is important, too, for discourse psychology (Shotter, 1990), and installing personal construct theory within discourse psychology account balances tendencies towards abstraction in analysing the operation of discourses.

Personal construct theory thereby adds to the components for human understanding that are available to a discourse psychologist. It helps understand that change (which is always both personal and social) comes about as a recursive process involving the reconstruction of meaning systems within the changing discourses made available through evolving material and cultural conditions. This is a type of 'structuration' account of social relations (Giddens, 1984; Cash 1996) where one both reproduces and transforms social structures every time one instantiates some aspect of those structures.

One is both created by a social order, and creates it. In this connection, it is possible to conceive of experience as mediated by meanings available through discourses, and the product of the way a person constructs particular encounters. After all, what a person 'is' results from the fact that they have had one cumulative set of experiences rather than another (Scholes, 1987). In this sense, we are beings always 'in motion'.

This combination of discourses and constructs also helps envisage that both who one is, and what one is like 'psychologically', are achievements and accomplishments brought about via a simultaneously public and private process of construction. It makes clear that "the power relations of the society become a constitutive principle of personality dynamics through being adopted as a personal project, whether acknowledged or not" (Connell, 1987, p.215).

Kelly's theory complements a discourse approach, and vice versa, each refusing the notion of a human essence, and emphasising the different things which humans have made of themselves. Fur-

ther, it connects strongly with a discursive orientation to the future stressing the openness of what we may become, of what people may make of themselves (Mair, 1977).

Limitations and tensions

Nonetheless things are a bit more complicated than have so far been portrayed. A difficult issue concerns the status of 'preverbal constructs'. If meaning is thoroughly discursive, what is the status of constructs which are functional but not inscribed in language? Could 'discursive resources' include extralinguistic entities, or could discourses be inscribed in the body? In fact, Foucault tries to make precisely the latter point: "Power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending on the mediation of the subject's own representations" (Foucault, 1980, p.186).

So maybe a theory of discourse can learn from the personal construct approach here. If sense-making can include somatic and physiological dimensions, then, given the wish to hold that discourses are the stuff of sense-making, it may pay to have an understanding of discourses as encompassing such dimensions, as being embodied (Butt, 1998). It will still be possible to view discourses as historical and contingent, and to maintain that the *apprehension* of those dimensions in any sense-making procedure is in the final instance a linguistic enterprise. All this provides a strong reminder that construing is not merely 'cognitive' whilst retaining the idea that psychological reality is brought forth in language as experiences are created through our discursive conversational practices.

Kelly too is illuminating here. He says a preverbal construct "is one which continues to be used even though it has no consistent word symbol" (1955, p.564). So perhaps preverbal constructs exist in a shifting, playful relation to language, and are brought forth in multiple and varying ways.

One of the alleged weaknesses of personal construct theory is that it fails to specify conditions under which one construct is 'adopted' or devised rather than another (Hall and Lindzey, 1978). Similarly, one could ask under what conditions one discourse is chosen and not another. But maybe we should stand in this uncertain space. It could be considered as the space in which freedom exists. This introduces a radical indeterminacy into the

evolution of subjectivities (and hence an openness to possibilities of social change), and also acknowledges that it is impossible to conceive of human life with perfect cause and effect precision. Curiously, this same type of argument has recently been made in relation to neuroscience (Horgan, 1999).

CONCLUSION

Discourses create positions and resources for construing, with power conferring varying effects on the different positions within which construing takes place. This adds to our understanding of how people make sense of their world through personal constructs. On the other hand, understanding how discourses are taken up and used as resources in *consistent* and *robust* ways is enhanced by personal construct theory through the importance accorded to human needs to anticipate events and validate constructs, and the influence on individuals of threat which arises from potential changes to self-conceptions. At the end of the day, the emphasis here returns to people being engaged in meaning making, and thereby as 'beings in motion'.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Norton is a counselling psychologist who has practiced in Dublin, London and Melbourne in a variety of health, education, community and private settings. He presently works at the Counselling Service at the University of Melbourne, and is Honorary Lecturer in Psychology at Monash University. Email: jnorton@unimelb.edu.au

REFERENCE

Norton, J. (2006). A depth psychology for our times: Integrating discourse and personal construct approaches. *Personal Construct Theory & Practice*, 3, 16-26.

Retrieved from:

<http://www.pcp-net.org/journal/pctp06/norton06.pdf>

Received: 10 March 2006 - Accepted: 14 August 2006 -
Published: 15 August 2006

A depth psychology for our times: Integrating discourse and personal construct approaches