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## Book Review/ Compte rendu

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Parker, Ian (Editor). (1999). *Deconstructing Psychotherapy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

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This is Ian Parker's third critical look at the "taken-for-granted" of modern psychology — following volumes on social psychology and psychopathology in turn. Each book reflects what the author himself calls the "discursive turn". From the credo that problems, not people, are the problem, a group of therapies have turned a critical eye on what passes for our "realities" of living. Parker, a Professor of Discourse and Critical Psychology at Britain's Bolton Institute, argues that when we deconstruct, or critically dismantle a problem by tracing it to its origins in cultural meaning making, we begin to recognize "the patterns of power in setting out positions for people which serve to reinforce the idea that they can do nothing about it themselves" (p. 3). This book suggests that if therapists are not mindful of these issues, they may inadvertently promote the same view, and help clients merely adjust to unjust circumstances.

Parker opens the book by presenting a critical and discursive framework, later acutely articulated by Ian Law: "Discursive practices are ways of talking, thinking, feeling and acting that, when enacted, serve to reinforce, reproduce or support a given discourse and at the same time deny, disqualify or silence that which does not fit within that discourse" (p. 119). Parker views psychotherapy as a deconstructive process that can be used both to re-story problems, and to critique 'helping' traditions that often perpetuate destructive power imbalances.

The next four edited chapters turn to the theoretical implications of thinking in discourse terms, highlighting the work of French philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. These chapters request that we seriously reflect on the ethical practices involved in the meaning-making activities of counselling. For these authors, a discursive view highlights the ways in which therapeutic conversation can be a context where clients' meanings can be received, negated, critically reflected together, or reconstructed together in ways that afford greater preferred possibilities. Lowe, for example, asks counsellors to reflect upon their "location" in the discourses of counselling as they practice with clients: "How collaborative can collaboration be, and how transparent can transparency be if they are institutionalized within a particular mode of practice?" (p. 82). We (and our clients) can be blindly entrapped by our forms of discourse, so how can we practice in ways that open counselling to our blind spots?

The middle section of the book looks specifically at dominating forms of discourse in areas such as gender relations, spirituality, and mental health discourse. It is here readers will find ways to engage clients in deconstructive practice, such as introducing the discourses of patriarchy and feminism into conversations about problems and solutions; seeking spiritual meanings beyond the constraints of funda-

mentalist denominational forms of discourse; and describing problems without solely tying them to a biomedical explanation or regime of treatment.

In the book's final section, the authors invite us to look at a much bigger deconstructive project: critically reflecting upon how psychotherapists have constructed the roles of client and counsellor, and the context and purpose of therapy. The book is a challenging but rewarding read; one that may require some preparation via more accessible discursively-oriented authors and therapists such as Kenneth Gergen or Harlene Anderson. For counsellors intrigued by the possibilities offered by contemporary thinking in discourse psychology, *Deconstructing Psychotherapy* offers much to think about.