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POSTMODERN APPROACHES AND GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY: CLINICAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Developmental approaches to group psychotherapy have rested so far on a relatively circumscribed group of theories, including psychodynamic approaches (particularly classical and object relations perspectives) and general systems theory. In this chapter, we focus on recently emerging theoretical perspectives that share common ground associated with these theories. We label these emerging perspectives *postmodern* because they abandon the epistemological assumption of relatively modern times that human beings can know an objectively verifiable reality. These approaches may not only be enriched by a group developmental perspective but they may also have a great deal to contribute to the understanding and practical implications of this perspective. The particular postmodern approaches we present here were selected because they best illustrate this mutually beneficial relationship.

We begin by providing an overview and history of constructivism; social constructionism; and the intersubjective approaches, including narrative methods. Next, we consider how these approaches are congruent with a developmental approach to group process and group psychotherapy and how

each provides the developmentally focused clinician with tools for understanding group process and for negotiating the stages of development.

CONSTRUCTIVISM, SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM, AND INTERSUBJECTIVE APPROACHES

Although constructivism has its roots in the postmodern, late-20th-century era, it has significant roots in the writings of Immanuel Kant (1791/1969) who posited that human beings are knowing agents whose understanding of the world is sculpted and fashioned by them. The vehicle for such crafting is a universal set of concepts or categories, which he called *categories of the mind*. Kant (unlike Hegel, who held that the mind can know only itself) did not see human knowledge as a detached intellectual product but rather the result of the individual's immersion in the world. Similarly, the epistemological assumption underlying modern constructivism is that all knowledge is constructed in that it involves the active shaping and organizing of the knower (Mahoney & Moes, 1997). In other words, individuals are not passive receptacles capable of achieving pure knowledge about the world uncontaminated by the person as knower.

From a social perspective, constructivism (Gergen, 1994), social constructionism, and intersubjective approaches to treatment associated with these frameworks all rest on an epistemological assumption about how human beings come to know one another, which distinguishes these approaches from earlier schools of thought that were based on Western positivist thinking (i.e., objective knowledge as achievable). In application to therapy, positivism would indicate that the therapist *can* know the client in an objective way. That is, with training and careful attention to potential blocks in the therapist's perception of the client, he or she can achieve accuracy in the understanding of, or the "truth" about, the client. To the extent that the therapist allows his or her own subjectivity to color the perception of the client, the therapist's acumen is deficient.

A somewhat revised perspective still within the positivist framework is the more recent idea that the therapist's subjectivity can be used as a tool (Racker, 1972). This viewpoint holds that the client actively influences the therapist to react as he or she does, and by reflecting on his or her own reactions, the therapist can learn something about the client. Because the therapist's observations are understood as referring back to only the client, this framework can be understood as a one-person psychology (Ogden, 1997).

Constructivism is primarily concerned with the social character of the individual's world (i.e., much of what defines an individual's world are other people). Understanding is achieved in the context of a human interaction (such as the therapy situation) and involves at least two knowing agents. Such understanding is coconstructed: Each person is affected by the other in

the views they form of themselves, the other person, and the events that proceed between them but also actively organizes (and in that sense “constructs”) those views (Neimeyer, 1993, 1995a).

The recognition of the social aspect of experience necessitates the introduction of another meta-theory related to constructivism—*social constructionism*, or *social constructivism*, as it is sometimes called (Franklin, 1995). Both constructivism and social constructionism share the rejection of the possibility of direct contact with some identifiable objective reality in favor of a view of knowledge as inextricably tied and actively fashioned from one’s experience in the social world. Yet, whereas constructivism emphasizes the sculpting role of the individual’s cognitive structures in organizing experience, social constructionism explores the individual’s relationship to his or her context (e.g., cultural and familiar environment) and the meanings he or she finds in experiences (Franklin, 1995).

Both constructivism and social constructionism are relevant to group psychotherapy. For example, suppose the therapist sees the client’s questioning of the therapist’s credentials as an act of rebellion against the therapist’s authority. From a classical psychodynamic perspective, this interpretation would be seen as having potential accuracy and usefulness to the client. From both constructivist and social constructionist standpoints, although the statement may capture some aspect of the therapist–client interaction, it most likely does not do descriptive justice to its complexity.

The constructivist, focusing on cognitive structures, would explore how the therapist sifted through all of his or her experiences with the client and selected this particular behavior as worthy of speculation about client motives. The constructivist would also take great interest in both the client’s and the therapist’s language. Using the perspective of George Kelly (1955) on the relationship between language and experience, the constructivist might note the client’s use of language that may suggest that the client thinks in dichotomous terms about the therapist—as being qualified or not.

For the social constructionist who focuses more on contextual factors, the client may be seen as rebellious because the therapist has adopted a stance of privilege leading to an expectation that expertise should be assumed by clients. In fact, the acknowledgment that privilege or power alters an individual’s perspective is a contribution of social constructionism (O’Leary & Wright, 2005). The client may question the therapist’s credentials because the therapist manifested a series of misattunements in relation to the client’s experiences. In such a case, the rebellion may be “a valid challenge” rather than a resistance to some alternate awareness (Billow, 2006, p. 274).

Still within this framework, we posit that the client may question the therapist because to do so is typical within his or her culture. It may not be typical of individuals within the therapist’s culture, and hence, the therapist may see it as something out of the ordinary and in need of explanation. This examination of how culture or context affects human transactions is another

major contribution of social constructionism. From this vantage, none, some, or all of the previously mentioned possibilities concerning the therapist–client interaction may have descriptive and practical value.

As the example suggests, the social constructionist perspective is a two-person psychology in that both parties (in the individual therapy setting, both therapist and client) are recognized as contributing to the understanding each has of the other. Within this perspective, not only the client's but also the therapist's internal life is acknowledged as a significant force in shaping the communications between them.

Although constructivism and social constructionism are broad epistemological frameworks, intersubjectivism refers specifically to modes of treatment that embrace the assumptions of social constructionism. That is, the intersubjective perspective embodies the idea that one's experience is inherently and thoroughly subjective, emerging through the interaction with others' subjectivities (Stolorow, 2002). This participation in another's experience, such as when a patient and therapist ascertain each others' feelings, is what is meant by *intersubjectivity*.¹

In our discussion of the relationship of the group to constructivism and social constructionism, we first examine how the social constructionist perspective provides an understanding of the relationships between interactions among members and members' development of meaning systems related to their group experiences. However, constructivism becomes important as we look at how members' organizing proclivities change over time as a consequence of being in the group.

A Social Constructionist Approach to Psychotherapy Groups

As Brower (1996) noted, the mediums of group psychotherapy, group developmental concepts, and social constructionism are highly compatible. He wrote,

small groups can provide an ideal arena for the study of the operations of social constructionism, because a group's development of norms, roles, rules, and beliefs can serve as an analogue to the process that society goes through to develop its own norms, roles, rules, and beliefs. (p. 337)

This idea of the relationship between the group and society may have the familiar ring of interpersonal theory's concept of the group qua microcosm (Yalom, 1995). However, important differences are present, the awareness of which reveals the distinctive contributions of social constructionism. Both interpersonal theory and social constructivism plumb the intricacies and deli-

¹The relationship among these theoretical frameworks is complex and characterized in different ways by different writers. However, many writers regard intersubjectivity as an outgrowth of self psychology, and relational psychology as a development of object relations theory (Stern, 2005).

ciencies of perceptions and meanings, yet each in a different way. Within interpersonal theory (Sullivan, 1953), the individual is afforded the opportunity to correct parataxic distortions, perceptions based on past (and probably early) experiences. Parataxic distortions lead to social behaviors that are maladaptive because of their lack of fit with contemporary reality. The notion of distortion locates this concept squarely within an objectivist epistemology wherein perceptions can be more or less on target versus off base vis-à-vis current social realities. For social constructionism, perceptions are creative products. In the absence of an objectively discernible reality, they can be neither true nor false. Yet, they may have certain characteristics that either serve the individual's well-being or beget unhappiness.

Social constructionists see the group as a place where members can explore their perceptions and meanings and those of other members. More specifically, members have the opportunity to achieve a clearer and more explicit awareness of what their perceptions of interpersonal events are and the meanings (or set of meanings, which is defined as a narrative) that they assign to those perceptions. However, within constructionism, meaning is not a product resident in an isolated human mind but rather emerges from the interactions individuals have with one another (Gergen, 1994). In this vein, O'Leary and Wright (2005) stated, "To a large extent, mental life is social life" (pp. 262–263). Group psychotherapy naturally provides a medium in which the social embeddedness of narratives can be understood (Laube, 1998). Through members' explorations of their involvements with the other members of the group, they come to appreciate the contextual basis for the meanings assigned to experiences.

Narrative psychotherapy approaches, methods that center on "the storied nature of human knowledge" (Hoshmand, 2000, p. 382), are particularly important within this framework. For those individuals who have in the past encountered malignant cultural and familial contexts, the supportive environment of the group provides an opportunity for the cocreation of an alternate narrative. Even as members revisit past experiences and see them in relation to current social conversations in the group, the organization of those experiences changes (O'Leary & Wright, 2005). The new narrative gains power as the member articulates it in front of an audience—the other group members (Laube & Trefz, 1994).

The following vignette illustrates this process:

Blythe disclosed to the group that her adoptive mother frequently deprecated her biological mother for giving her up for adoption. She described her own sense of worthlessness in relation to the realization that she was not of sufficient value to her biological mother to keep and raise. Another member of the group had given up a child because of her inability to care for him. She described her own anguish in taking that step but awareness that to do otherwise would be to serve her own needs at the cost of the child's. As other members talked about difficult decisions in

parenting, Blythe expanded her narrative to encompass other possibilities about her biological mother in a way that bolstered her self-regard.

The group did not seek to correct Blythe's narrative as might have been done within an objectivist-based treatment. Rather, this "rebiographing" (Howard, 1990) aims to enhance the effectiveness of the individual's narrative. This example also highlights one way in which social constructionism departs from interpersonal theory, particularly as it has been explicated by Yalom (1995). Within interpersonal theory, the therapist attempts to move group members from a discussion of past events to a focus on here-and-now phenomena. For the social constructionist, an individual's narrative about the past does dwell in the here and now. Blythe's adoption story is carried into current life events, including her time in the group.

This narrative work not only effects changes in the content of the narratives but also in the individual group member's attitude toward meaning. The member becomes a constructivist who understands that "truth" is one's momentary individual truth. It is not, by necessity, another's truth. Nor is it what will be experienced by the member as the truth in the future across all contexts. The cultivation of this sensibility addresses the disconnections that create unhappiness in relationships. For some members, what is critical to the benefit they derive from group participation is its engendering of openness to other viewpoints and acceptance of differences. In the absence of an attitude that is doctrinaire and judgmental, the individual is more likely both to approach dialogue with curiosity—for others' meaning systems necessarily have worth—and to face his or her own meanings with uncertainty—for all seeming truths are temporary (O'Leary & Wright, 2005; Wright, 2005). For others, a move away from objectivism may be helpful in learning to *privilege* (or value over others) one's own narrative, particularly if the individual has had a history of privileging his or her own narratives less than others.

A Social Constructionist Approach to Group Development

How does group development fit into the social constructionism perspective as a setting in which members can explore their multiconstructed narratives? For the social constructionist, narratives are inherently developmental. The account of group development is itself a narrative developed by a community of group psychotherapists. It is a scheme that many group psychotherapists have found to be helpful in conducting groups. The question of whether group development is real lacks standing with the social constructionist because it assumes an objectivist epistemology. Instead, the social constructionist asks, "Does the idea of group development capture aspects of the therapist's and members' experiences?" and "Are developmental ideas helpful in the therapist's work with the group?"

Social constructionism, on the one hand, does not exact from the group psychotherapist the kind of justification for developmental stages that we

provide in chapter 3 of this volume. The fact that this narrative has been developed from the shared experiences of a community of group psychotherapists is sufficient. On the other hand, this perspective discourages the therapist from reifying group developmental concepts. To the extent that in any group at any moment these concepts do justice neither to the therapist's nor members' experiences, the concepts should be put aside in favor of constructs that have greater here-and-now congruence. Social constructionism liberates the therapist from the seeming obligation to impose a collective narrative on his or her individual, unique experiences within a particular context.

Early Group Development and Anomie

Social constructionist writers such as Brower (1989, 1996) and Laube (1998) have not only recognized the compatibility between social constructionist ideas and group developmental approaches but also have sought to invigorate the latter by showing how this lens provides a fresh perspective on developmental phenomena. Their ideas incorporate a constructive emphasis on the cognitive scheme of the group member and the shifts in this scheme that occur across a sequence of interactions with other members. We look at the succession of stages as they would be seen from social constructionist and constructivist frameworks. Our description primarily draws on Brower's work (1989, 1996) but incorporates other contributions from the slim literature on social constructionism, constructivism, and group development.

In the beginning of the group, members are overwhelmed by a sense of anomie as it was proposed by the sociologist Emile Durkheim (1893/1984) and described further by Robert K. Merton (1957) to explain social deviance on a group level. *Anomie* is a state in which a breakdown occurs in societal norms and in which individuals no longer know what to expect of one another. Anomie entails a sense of disconnection between goals and means to achieve them, self and others, and self and environment. Members navigate the situation by accessing their schemas or conceptual frames of group situations. For example, the individual's belief may be that

new groups are precarious because I don't know at a deep level others' values, wishes, needs, or habitual behaviors. The safest course of action is for me to just play it safe until I figure out what is going on.

Kelly (1955) noted that it is in this circumstance that individuals lack constructs or schemes to understand their current situation that they react with anxiety. According to personal construct theory, anxiety motivates the individual to find ways to make his or her present situation more predictable. For the group member, this effort takes the form of attending to cues. In determining whether any given scheme fits, the member will select from the array of potential cues. For example, the member may notice that one member grimaced while another member was speaking and privately say, "Yes, this

group is filled with danger; see how that member is evincing disapproval of another member.”

Group Development and Schemas

The schemas of members are likely to differ from one another because these members have had diverse group histories from which they have developed varying sensitivity to different cues in social situations. For example, whereas the previously cited member noticed the grimace, another member might see the therapist nodding her head and construe an opposite meaning—that a behavior had been manifested in the group that elicited approval.

As the group proceeds, the differences in members' schemas become increasingly evident to them. Members wonder which schema is correct. Is the group one in which members are likely to be at odds and find fault with one another? Is it a setting in which expressiveness is likely to be valued and rewarded over self-restraint? Brower (1996) referred to this juncture as constituting a “reality crisis” (p. 338) because members see others' definition of the group situation in opposition to their own. These clashing perceptions create apprehension among members who then seek to determine which perceptual frame is accurate. Brower further noted that members have in place a ready means for resolving the question of which schema is the correct one. They merely do what is often done in any ambiguous circumstance in which an authority figure is present: learn which schema the therapist regards as correct. When the therapist accommodates the group, anxiety abates: Members now have a schema that can regulate their interactions. However, the cost is that they submerge their own power in the group by deferring to the therapist's power.

The importance of the leader's schema to the containment of anxiety motivates members to defend that schema if need be. Cohen and Schermer (2002) pointed out that scapegoating emerges as a means of safeguarding the leader's schema or later in the group whatever schema has achieved dominance. Within their perspective, the schema is a kind of moral order that encompasses the collective conscience and ego of the group. The scapegoat is the one who presents to the group psychological elements at odds with that ideal. By repudiating the targeted member, members can both preserve the moral order and see themselves as acting in accord with it.

Externalization: A Different View

Developmental theorists recognize members' tendencies to use externalization during the early periods of group development (e.g., Agazarian & Peters, 1981). Social constructionism provides a different perspective on externalization by seeing this mechanism as a helpful tool in enabling members to establish distance between their identities and their difficulties (White & Epston, 1990). Hence, the goal of the constructionist would be not to dismantle this tool but rather to accept its emergence and flowering in the

group for the developmental benefits of this mechanism to be realized. For example, early in the group, members often will adopt the position, "They [individuals outside the group] don't understand us. They are the problem." The social constructionist would respect the legitimacy of this perspective. In his or her context, the member may experience a lack of understanding that is tied to the person's unhappiness. Additionally, however, the therapist would recognize that by members' placing their difficulties outside the group, they have the freedom to relate to one another bereft of difficulties and thereby begin to craft a set of shared meanings that are not symptom based.

Later Group Development: Tolerating Chaos and Achieving Organization

Even with the benefit of scapegoating and externalization, members rarely find the moral order or schema provided by the leader to be serviceable for any length of time. As experiences accrue, members increasingly appreciate that the schema does not provide a blueprint for members' negotiation of the more intricate circumstances that they encounter. For example, if the schema they adopt on the basis of the therapist's communications is "share your reactions as openly as possible," members soon discover that hefty consequences can result from the candid sharing of reactions. Although many observers of group life have noted that members face a crisis at this juncture, Brower (1989) saw the social constructionist's way of describing the crisis as distinctive. Increasingly, the member doubts the value of the therapist's and other members' schemas and attempts to have his or her own schema shape interactions. Stated otherwise, members undergo a shift from an acceptance of the therapist's power to a realization of their own (Brower, 1989).

Brower (1996) made the point that whereas the earliest stage of group life presents members with a common problem, the dilemma in which members find themselves at this time is less familiar and the solutions more variable. Members may drop out, become disorganized (being present in the group without embracing any schema), or begin to negotiate with one another. The alternative of negotiation has several aspects. First, it entails a lessened commitment to the schema borrowed from the therapist, which was so critical in members' early involvement in the group. Second, it incorporates loyalty to important aspects of one's own schema. Third, it encompasses openness to others' schemas. This openness may activate that experience of anomie that was salient in members' early involvement. Yet, although some schematic fluidity occurs that begets anxiety, members, tethered by their beliefs and values, find it more bearable than they did early in the group. In this way, members learn how to approach the experience of anomie, which can arise outside the group when they encounter a changing or unfamiliar environment with ambiguous norms.

The depiction of group life as a shift from anomie to organization is compatible with the notion of chaos–complexity theory described in chapter 1 of this volume: Complex systems moving through periods of chaos from

which organization emerges (Masterpasqua & Perna, 1997). This group work enables members to achieve a tolerance of chaos that is supported by a hopefulness of emerging organization (Brabender, 2000). The circumstance of having a solid access to their own schemas while being receptive to others sets the stage for members' movement into the next stage.

The member's own schema serves as a platform for his or her engagement with others' schemas, particularly elements of others' schemas that are also found in the member's schema. The give and take of comparing one another's schemas leads to a very gradual carving out of a common understanding of what will be the rules and norms of the group. Still later, members recognize the characteristic behaviors of each member, the perception of which results in a shared view of one another's roles.

In this period of group life, members rely on the exchange of feedback to further detail their shared understandings. However, feedback is construed somewhat differently than within an interpersonal approach in several respects. Within interpersonal theory, emphasis is given to the informational value of the feedback for the recipient. In social constructionism, feedback is seen as being at least as revealing about the donor as it is about the recipient (Cohen, 2000). The feedback a member gives tells what that member emphasizes in his or her perceptual world. Further, within interpersonal theory, an advantage of the group format is the multiplicity of observations: This feature enables members to receive feedback that is presumed to have some sturdiness, particularly in areas in which observers agree. In social constructionism, consensual observations are not privileged: All points of view, even those that are unique, are seen as having value (Cohen, 2000; Efran & Fauber, 1995). Within interpersonal theory, feedback is typically regarded as sharing of perceptions and reactions to members' experiences of one another within the here and now. In social constructionism, the past dwells within the present, so reactions to a historical event narrated by the member are also part of the feedback process.

For the social constructionist, the concept of feedback must also be supplemented by concepts that capture the anticipatory nature of the individual's experience in the world (Neimeyer, 1993). One such concept is the notion of a feed-forward system wherein the individual structures how and what information he or she obtains from other members on their perspectives (Adams-Webber, 1989). Within this stage, the individual's ability to obtain information pertinent to the reconstruction of a narrative increases. Consider the following example.

Kateri shared with the group that her family always saw her as the smart person who is incompetent in negotiating life's practical difficulties. She tended to think of herself the same way. She asked members if their perception of her was similar to that of her family. Members responded that they were impressed with Kateri's ability to help the group proceed through an effective decision-making process when the therapist ap-

proached the group about whether a new member should be brought into the group. Two members, however, noted that they were surprised that Kateri was so able because she often had a confused expression on her face. This information helped Kateri to construct a more complex narrative with broader contextual grounding than that derived from her family experiences.

In this example, what is important is not merely the alteration in the content of the Kateri's narrative but also the change in the characteristics of her feed-forward system (Adams-Webber, 1989) in that she achieved a system that involved weaving different narratives lines. At this mature point of the group's development, members' anomie is drastically reduced; their perceptions of the group are substantially shared; and their orientation is group centered rather than self-centered (Brower, 1996).

Mature Group Development: Building Narratives

For Brower (1996), once the group has achieved maturity and has acquired a set of shared understandings, the social constructionist therapist can most productively use the many techniques particular to this theoretical perspective, techniques that will enable members to use maximally the group's resources in the service of their well-being. Preeminent among these is the use of narratives or stories, which on general level helps members find meaning in and continuity among their experiences. Neimeyer (1995b) wrote,

The function of client-generated narratives is as varied as the clients' writings themselves, which may historicize their struggles, reach into the past, or project into the future, consolidating a sense of oneself over time and suggesting new choices or life directions. (p. 241)

One function the therapist serves is helping members to learn how to build narratives. The narrative, members are told, involves the positing of an endpoint with a series of actions leading to that endpoint (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). Narratives are inherently integrative in that they involve the three realms of temporal experience: the past or historical context, the present or current circumstance, and the future or anticipated endpoint. Members practice developing narratives by maintaining journals in which they routinely write stories about themselves from three standpoints: their lives outside of the group, themselves within the group, and the group as a whole (Brower, 1996). Within the group, time is then allocated for members to share journal material and to help one another to edit and refine their narratives and to recognize new options for their development. Through this journaling, members pull in a greater array of experiences and their meanings than would be possible otherwise, as in the following example:

Dottie's interactional style in the group was mild. Her customary response was to identify common ground among members who had staked out different positions. When members would commend her for this service,

she would smile wryly and say, in effect, "If only you knew how I am at home." Her journal entries, shared with the group, were studded with vague references to feelings of annoyance with family members for various misdeeds. However, as her journaling progressed, she described incidents in which she would become verbally abusive when her family members did not live up to her expectations. The sharing of these entries was marked by the expression of feelings of shame. In response, members would disclose the painfulness of disappointments they suffered in their relationships with persons in their lives outside the group. As this process proceeded, Dottie was able to broaden her repertoire of behaviors in the group, clinging less tenaciously to the persona of herself as an unwaveringly supportive helpmate. As she did so, her self-narrative became more consolidated and less fragmented. Furthermore, because she experienced herself as more deeply known by members, she was able to assume a less dismissive and more embracing stance to their contributions.

Role-playing is another tool of social constructionist group psychotherapy. *Role-plays* refers to a set of dramatic techniques designed to expose group members to new ways of being in the world and to emancipate themselves from the behaviors associated with encrusted roles. For example, in the case of Kateri described earlier, the therapist might have Kateri experiment with more confident ways of comporting herself during problem solving to emancipate herself from her tendency to communicate more perplexity and less capability than she possesses.

Social Constructionist Views on Termination

Although Brower (1989, 1996) did not posit a separate termination stage, other social constructions' writings have implications for the last period of group life. The social constructionist view recognizes that termination invites a multiplicity of meanings. According to constructionists Epston and White (1995), termination, when addressed in traditional therapy, has been dominated by a loss metaphor in which the transition is portrayed as a movement from a state of support to one of lonely independence. They noted further that this conception of the isolation of the posttermination state is based on a Western culture privileging of the individual above all other social units. Therapy is complete when the individual is able to be alone. According to Epston and White (1995), this perspective for dealing with loss

subtly reinforces the dependency of the person seeking assistance on the "expert knowledge" of the therapist . . . this dominant metaphor fails to legitimize the person's own role in freeing himself or herself from the problem-saturated identity that brought him or her to therapy in the first place. (pp. 340–341)

Epston and White's (1995) critique of the traditional view of termination has less applicability to group psychotherapy than it does to individual

therapy. The entire point of interpersonally oriented group psychotherapy is to enhance an individual's capacity to have satisfying relationships outside of the group. Termination is typically construed as the acknowledgment of the member's readiness to have successful external relationships. Moreover, inattention to loss would devalue the relationships members have formed with one another. Still, group psychotherapists can learn from Epston and White's social constructionist view of termination as a rite of passage. This metaphor, they argue, facilitates members' transition from a view of themselves as a person beset by psychological difficulties to one who has established distance between the self and his or her problems and, therefore, can define the self in other terms. One potentially useful way the individual can define him- or herself, Epston and White held, is as a consultant possessing knowledge that will benefit him- or herself and others, including members of the group, the therapist, and others outside the group. To assist members in cultivating this aspect of their identity, they encourage the therapist to raise with the departing member questions such as the following:

- When reviewing your problem-solving capabilities, which of these do you think you could depend on most in the future? Would it be helpful to keep your knowledge of these capabilities alive and well? How could this be done?
- Just imagine that I was meeting with a person or family experiencing a problem like you used to have. From what you know, what advice do you think I could give that person or family?

Epston and White's (1995) ideas are likely to be more easily implemented in the open-ended group psychotherapy situation than in individual therapy. Because the psychotherapy group offers in the immediacy of the situation a number of individuals who might benefit from this departing member's consultation, the consultative role is more than hypothetical.

POTENTIAL INTEGRATIONS OF DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Traditional approaches to group development and social constructionism can enrich one another. At a theoretical level, social constructionism helps the group psychotherapist to recognize that theories are constructions based on shared experiences in the community of group psychotherapists (Schermer, 2006). Like any narrative, a theory is subject to continual revision based on new contexts and experiences (O'Leary & Wright, 2005). This view encourages the group psychotherapist not to be so fettered by specific conceptions of stages that he or she fails to recognize the unique and novel in the psychotherapy group and thereby develop alternate narratives of the group process (Brabender, 2000; Elfant, 1997).

A second overarching theoretical notion is the coconstructed meanings assigned by group psychotherapist and group members. For example, in the initial stage of group development, members' dependency on the group psychotherapist is based not only on transference but also on the therapist's placement of members in an unfamiliar situation. Members' disappointment with the therapist is based in part on the therapist's actual demonstration of inability to meet the members' expectations. The acceptance of the coconstructed aspect of experience and the therapist's explicit acknowledgment of his or her contribution to members' experiences help the therapist to convey attunement with members' reactions.

Yet, misattunements to members' experiences by the therapist are inevitable in group life, and social constructionism argues that an important function of the group psychotherapist is to repair such ruptures. At times, the therapist may have a sense that a misattunement has occurred but be unable to identify its locus. Both traditional developmental theory and social constructionism have different contributions to make to the generation of hypotheses to elucidate misattunements. Traditional developmental theory can aid social constructionism by providing the therapist with some hypotheses concerning potential developmentally based obstacles to attunement. For example, in Stage 1, therapists can succumb to finding members' idealism of them so gratifying that they strive unduly to perpetuate it (Brabender, 1987). Alternatively, therapists may respond to it with a sense of shame-laden unworthiness that compels them to challenge the idealism (e.g., by making blatant mistakes such as calling members by the wrong names). Once therapists recognize these obstacles, social constructionism sees not only their removal as important to the reestablishment of reconnection with members but also in many cases their acknowledgment to members.

Social constructionism helps the traditional therapist appreciate that cultural background can make a difference in understanding moments of disconnection in the therapeutic relationship, as in the example that follows:

Eloise became silent and withdrawn after the therapist interrupted her. In fact, the therapist believed she was finished speaking but the halting quality of her utterances created ambiguity as to whether she had completed her thought. Nonetheless, the therapist recognized that his own cultural background and family environment created a proneness to behavior that might be experienced by others as rude or even aggressive. He commented to Eloise that he noticed her lack of participation and wondered aloud whether he had cut her off. Eloise said she thought he was giving her a message that she should get to the point more readily.

Having little confidence in her ability to speak incisively, she remained silent. The therapist admitted that he struggled with sensitivity in this area and that this challenge was rooted in his own cultural background. A discussion about conversational norms ensued, with different members sharing the messages they had received from their cultural and fa-

miliar backgrounds. This discussion seemed to foster greater sensitivity from the more verbally uninhibited members and less reactivity to interruptions on the part of more inhibited members such as Eloise. In other words, members of the latter subgroup could impute a more varied set of meanings to another's interrupting behavior than the notion that interruptions signify a deficiency in the interrupted party. The developmental and cultural perspectives can be considered in an integrative fashion. For example, Eloise's scheme of the meaning of interruptions may exert itself in a more strenuous way before the group has addressed and resolved conflicts related to authority.

Social constructionism and traditional development theory offer each other technological enrichments. Social construction offers the developmental therapist the tool of narratives. The narrative is particularly suited to developmental work because a narrative can be created to tell the story of the group. As Neimeyer and Stewart (2000) noted, a narrative avoids the reductionism that occurs when therapists work with small units of meaning. Narratives capture the multifaceted and textured aspects of experience. Social constructionists provide the therapist with an array of interventions to help members to develop their narratives.

Social constructionist Real (1990) regarded the therapy session as a conversation in which the therapist participates not by "standing apart and acting *upon* a system but, rather, as positioned in potentially useful ways within the system" (p. 259). Real described five positions or stances that the therapist, in his or her role as "participant-facilitator," can assume. All of these stances can assist members in clarifying and revising narratives. For example, the *eliciting* stance entails the therapist's taking a one-down position in relation to group members and conversing with them in such a way to merely abet them in drawing out their positions. Successively, the therapist seeks clarifications of a member's position, progressively asking for greater specificity, and as that process proceeds, the individual's narrative develops by his or her giving attention to what was considered only minimally previously. As Real noted, this stance is most effective with individuals whose narratives have become petrified over time and, therefore, *nondialogic* (closed to the input of others). This method, which members are likely to experience as more supportive than challenging, might have great usefulness in the earliest stage of group development in which members' assertion of fixed schemas hinders them from hearing or identifying with others. Table 8.1 lists all of the stances identified by Real and indicates when they may have particular developmental usefulness.

Thus far, social constructionists have considered extensively the individual narrative and the individual operating in the circumstance of a dyad. Although a few exceptions exist (e.g., Laube & Trefz's [1994] work on the use of narratives in the group treatment of depression), narratives at the subgroup and group-as-a-whole levels of organization are less commonly used by

TABLE 8.1
Real's (1990) Social Constructionist Stances, Description of Stances, and Group Developmental Uses

Stance	Description	Developmental use	Relevant stages
Eliciting	The therapist queries the member in a way to encourage the member to achieve greater specificity.	Helpful early in development or whenever a member or combinations of members show rigidity in their way of narrating some aspect of their experience.	1, 2
Probing	The therapist provides the member an alternative perspective without conveying that that perspective has greater privilege.	Useful when the developmental demand requires members to tolerate differences in the group.	2, 3, 4
Contextualizing	The therapist shifts the focus away from the internal reactions of the individual to their embeddedness (especially political) in the broader social system.	Enables the undoing of a projective identification that may be unhelpful to both the group and to the individual who is the target of the identification (e.g., removing a group member from the position of scapegoat).	2, 4
Matching	The therapist reflects back to individuals or the system as a whole what has been manifested.	Fosters a group's movement through the early period of any stage in which the psychological elements relevant to that stage are appearing nascently.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Amplifying	The therapist facilitates the emergence of an element already in evidence in the system that may serve as a resource in the group's work.	Helpful when one side of a conflict is privileged over the other (e.g., when members can attest to their dependency on the therapist but give only minimal expression to longings to rebel).	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

social constructionists. In fact, O'Leary and Wright (2005) saw social constructionism as providing an antidote to the theoretical neglect of the individual group member and his or her internal functioning in deference to the broader social units. Yet as these same authors admit, social context is impor-

tant to consider in understanding the individual. Traditional developmental theories provide techniques for helping therapists to illumine those narratives existing at different levels of group organization. For example, Agazarian (1997) described a variety of therapist interventions for facilitating members in recognizing elements of their narratives that are shared, first by helping members to coalesce into subgroups and then by fostering their identification with the positions of members of alternate subgroups. Agazarian's technology could help the social constructionist assist members in seeing opportunities for new narratives. The developmental stages are another means of helping members to expand on narratives. Laube and Trefz (1994) suggested the therapist's explicit use of the concepts of group development and group dynamics would enable members to develop their group narrative in as full a way possible.

AN INTERSUBJECTIVE APPROACH TO GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

Recall that intersubjectivism embraces the assumptions of social constructionism and clinically refers to such experiences as when a patient and therapist ascertain and perhaps clarify each other's thoughts and feelings. The focus on intersubjectivity, Stern (2005) held, has permeated a number of contemporary psychoanalytic approaches including self psychology, relational therapy, and social constructionism. Although this section focuses on the intersubjectivist application, much of the material has relevance for the other applications.

Creating an Intersubjective Field in Individual and Group Psychotherapy

According to Stern (2005), one of the leaders in the intersubjectivist movement, the capacity to achieve intersubjectivity is of critical importance to human beings because it enables them to function in groups, and it is through group functioning that problems are solved and survival needs are met. Evidence exists that babies have a core intersubjective capacity or readiness to become involved in another's subjectivity. However, this ability develops over time and is influenced by the various interpersonal contexts in which the person resides. For example, a child who received attunement from important figures in her life is likely to have nurtured both her confidence in the validity of her own subjectivity and her capacity for engaging in others' subjective lives. Conversely, when a child's cognitive-affective states are routinely ignored, misunderstood, or rejected, that child's own sense of self and ability to participate meaningfully in others' subjective lives will be compromised (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987).

Within therapy, an intersubjective field is created in which the subjective experiences of patient and therapist are codetermined. Inevitably, the patient's symptoms will emerge out of the subjectivity that the patient brings to the relationship but also the therapist's lapses in grasping, understanding, and affirming the patient's psychological states. For example, the splitting that is often discussed in relation to borderline pathology is seen within an intersubjective perspective as responses to oscillations in the therapist's responsiveness. When the therapist achieves attunement, the patient responds with intense pleasure; failures of attunement lead to extremely negative responses (anger, disillusionment, etc.). When moments of disjunction occur between patient and therapist, both parties are given the opportunity to appreciate the truth (or validity) of the patient's reaction to the therapist and the conscious and unconscious meanings of the event. In this way, disjunctions are repaired enabling the development process, which had been thwarted by these disjunctions, to move forward (Stolorow, 2002; Stolorow et al., 1987). The therapist's and patient's careful attention to and immersion in the microevents occurring within the therapeutic process, particularly the affect associated with those events, enables the self to become more robust, vitalized, and available for full and rich engagement in the intersubjective field.

Group psychotherapy is an intersubjective field that invites the interplay of multiple subjectivities. Within the sessions, the therapist and members can forge relationships in which all participants can grow through the exploration of their codetermined subjectivities. The multiplicities of subjectivities create many occasions for conjunctions and disjunctions, both of which constitute the therapeutic resources of the group work. Intersubjective group psychotherapists create safety in the group by their stance of affirming the subjective reality of each member's experience and by monitoring and responding with empathy to the affect and emerging vulnerabilities in the group, with the latter being defined as "the subjective sense of newness and risk, and in the sense of being exposed and seen; it is the subjective experience of relinquishing habitual patterns of self-protectiveness" (Livingston & Livingston, 2006, p. 74). As group members have the ongoing experience of having their affects and subjective states recognized and understood, they are increasingly able to perform these functions for other members.

Stages Versus Themes in Group Development

Given that the intersubjective approach entails the therapist's full immersion in the moment, to what extent might developmental concepts have usefulness? As Schermer (2005) pointed out, the intersubjectivists do not affirm the existence of group-as-a-whole phenomena but rather see them as constructions of the community of group psychotherapists.² Traditional de-

²To the extent that the observations of group psychotherapy writers are dismissed as being mere constructions, intersubjectivist writers are adopting a nonintersubjectivist view in that they are

developmental stage theories illumine the functioning of the group as a whole rather than the individual. For the intersubjectivist, the primary focus is the individual and his or her subjectivity. At first blush, then, it would seem that developmental stages have little relevance to an intersubjective perspective. Yet, if the group psychotherapist regards stages not as a set of group dynamics that inexorably unfold over time but rather as a grouping of themes capturing the shared conscious and unconscious aspects of the subjectivities of all members of the group over its history, then a developmental view would be pertinent.

Meanings and Affect States

The intersubjectivist group psychotherapist's knowledge of the common themes that emerge during different periods of group life may enhance the therapist's sensitivity to the affects and vulnerabilities associated with these themes. This sensitivity is especially likely to be enhanced when affects are nascent and vulnerabilities hidden. For example, anxiety that members experience early in their group participation is often masked by an adherence to social protocol. The early manifestations of hostility or disappointment in relation to the therapist are diffuse and mild, often appearing as crankiness or lethargy. Members' fear of the emerging closeness in the group often initially shows itself as remoteness. By the therapist's awareness of the feelings that may reside latently in members' reactions, the therapist can strive to create an environment hospitable to their full flowering. Part of that work may be achieving an understanding of what aspect of the therapist's relating to the group that might hinder members from allowing certain affects to come forth.

Just as developmental theory can help the intersubjectivist attune him- or herself to members' reactions, so too can this theory facilitate intersubjectivists in coming to an appreciation of the meanings associated with affect states. In exploring the complex meanings associated with affects, the intersubjective group psychotherapist might be helped to clarify meanings by thinking developmentally about such situations as the following:

Enrico walks into the group and says to another member who typically sits adjacent to him, "In the last session, you kept bumping your chair into mine. I didn't want to say anything because the session was under way, but it got annoying. Could you move your chair over so it doesn't happen again?"

Most experienced group psychotherapists will recognize that there may be more to this confrontation than initially evident and see it as worthy of

denying the influence of the group members with whom these group psychotherapy authors have interacted as influencing these depictions of group life. Intersubjectivists do acknowledge the importance of context (see Miller, 2008). Stages of group development can be seen as an aspect of temporal context.

exploration in the group. Additional meaning may be found if the therapist keeps in mind developmental stages. Suppose, for instance, Enrico's statement was made after the group members partook of a high level of self-disclosure following expressions of hostility toward the therapist. His reaction could be not merely to his neighbor but also to the culture of the group. Enrico may be saying to the group as well as his neighbor, "I do not like the cloying and invasive quality of members' interactions and want my own psychological space."

Like the constructivist, the intersubjectivist would insist that the group psychotherapist's use of theory should never interfere with his or her attendance to what is occurring in the moment. Were developmental thinking to remove the therapist from the moment, to have reduced sensitivity to the individual member's subjectivity, to deliver experience-remote interventions, or to obscure what is unique in the present interaction, then its influence would be more negative than otherwise.

Intersubjectivism and Traditional Stage Approaches

What usefulness might the intersubjective approach have within a more traditional developmental approach? Group developmental writers have given scant attention to the broader contextual aspect of the developmental phenomena commonly observed. The unfolding of developmental stages is seen as residing in the inherent properties of group life. The intersubjective approach calls attention to the cocreated aspect of developmental phenomena (Eig, 2005). The intersubjective lens helps the group psychotherapist to recognize that many of the commonly documented reactions that members show over time can be traced back to the activity of the therapist within the group. The anxieties that members evince early in their participation in the group are a consequence of the therapist's creation of an ambiguous environment in which processes and norms are unfamiliar if not unknown. As the therapist conveys appreciation of the subjective reality of these reactions, members' sense of being understood provides containment of the anxiety and safety. Yet, members' experiences early in the life of the group are cocreated with the therapist, not created by the therapist. The group members' own organizing principles, which include their expectations and apprehensions about group involvement, shape their early group experience. The therapist's responsiveness to members' anxiety may allow a sense of safety that enables members to explore how the current situation triggers expectations and apprehensions that are rooted in what Stolorow et al. (1987) called "developmentally preformed themes" (p. 12). Members' yearning for some direction from the therapist is also highly reasonable given that it is the therapist to whom members have come for relief of their suffering. Furthermore, in the unstructured group, the therapist's lack of directiveness enhances the members' longings for the therapist's provisions.

As the group progresses, the frustration and challenges that can be observed have in part been created by the therapist's continued failure to provide members the direction they seek. In groups in which the therapist is directive, members' subjectivities are less likely to contain frustration, disappointment, and anger. Were the therapist to react negatively to members' challenges, the members' subjective experience would be modified accordingly. As writers on group development have noted, members will differ on how they respond to violated expectations of the therapist. This variation highlights the different organizing principles that members bring to their group interactions, organizing principles that become available for exploration.

Once the therapist's behavior shows acceptance of members' rebellious strivings, intimacy and yearnings for closeness follow. The intensity of members' feelings of triumph and closeness naturally elicits worries of the perils of extreme intimacy, especially from those members who have directly experienced those perils. Each of members' reactions in the session is determined by each member's own organizing principles and the organizing principles of the other members. Here again the notion of feedback is modified from the traditional interpersonal perspective. If Member A provides feedback to Member B, the feedback reflects on both the lived experience and organizing principles of Member A. Although Member B earlier in the group's development may construe the feedback as merely an objective appraisal of his or her person (particularly if other members resonate to Member A's perceptions), Cohen (2000) believed that with the group's development, members increasingly appreciate one another's subjectivities. They recognize that other members' comments and how they behave is a result of those members' world views (in addition to their own behavior). The function of the group psychotherapist is to illumine the multiconstructed character of the intersubjective field, a field that includes members' and therapist's experiences, with the goal of assisting members to participate fully and richly in this field.

Thus far, the therapist's activity and authority have been considered to grasp how these realms are instrumental in the creation of the developmental stages. Billow (2003) has described a set of therapist anxieties and emotional states characteristic of each of Bion's basic assumptions and resistances to the analysis of these anxieties and states.³ How intense the resistance is and how the therapist manifests the resistance is determined by the therapist's present and historical intrapsychic and interpersonal life as well as by the intersubjective pressures placed by the group members. For them, the dismantling of the therapist's resistance sets the stage for the analysis of their

³Schermer (2006) in a review of Billow's text, *Relational Group Psychotherapy: From Basic Assumptions to Passion*, argued that the postulation of basic assumptions, particularly when they are seen as endemic to group life, is not wholly intersubjective; he also argued that objectivism and intersubjectivity can each provide a useful perspective on group life.

own. Unless the therapist's resistance is overcome, he noted, it leads to therapist-member enactments that produce stagnation, locking the group in the current basic assumption pattern. The therapist must be passionate, he observed, in his or her willingness to grapple with personal resistance in the search for emotional truth. As discussed in chapter 3 of this volume, the basic assumptions are the conceptual ancestors of the developmental stages. Consequently, Billow's insights about what psychological contents are activated in the therapist during the basic assumptions have relevance for the therapist's subjectivity during the developmental stages.

Billow (2003) gave a number of examples of ways therapists, given their personality proclivities, engage with the basic assumptions. For example, operating within a pairing basic assumption culture, the therapist may support members in a turn-taking pattern wherein individual members are targeted as being the patient and are cured by other members playing the role of therapist. In a dependency basic assumption group, the therapist may succumb to members' longings for individual ministrations and provide individual therapy within the group. Billow averred that in some cases, the therapist's disclosure of some part of his or her reaction may be useful; yet, what is always needed is the therapist's analysis of the elements underlying his or her resistance specific to each basic assumption mode.

The Role of Therapist Self-Disclosure

The intersubjectivist, in underscoring the coconstructed aspect of members' group experiences, may provide group developmentalists with an opportunity to work in a way that creates safety and allows for a greater depth of exploration of members' intrapsychic lives than would be so were the group psychotherapist to disavow his or her own subjectivity and its influence. The intersubjectivist point that validation of members' subjective experience, which comes through the acknowledgment that the members' reactions are in part determined by the therapist's activity, fortifies members' commitment to and courage in self-exploration bears further consideration. This notion also invites a revisiting of the psychodynamic therapist's stance on self-disclosure. The therapist's sharing of reactions and associations catalyzes the treatment by affirming members' subjectivities:

Monica began the session saying that she had felt irritated with the therapist off and on all week because she noticed that the therapist had seemed uninterested while Cecil, a typically reticent group member, was giving a rather lengthy account of an argument he had had with his spouse. The therapist immediately acknowledged to herself that she had been preoccupied by what she experienced as this member's rant against his wife. She asked herself why it might be that the member had behaved in a way to induce her to have this feeling. However, she detected within herself some element of defensiveness and on exploring it further, realized that

some of his criticisms of his wife could also pertain to his reaction to her. She shared this thought with Cecil, and he acknowledged that in prior sessions, the therapist had manifested some of the same tendencies that he disliked in his spouse. His mood appeared to lighten, and he said it was a relief to be able to have a direct discussion about his feelings—something he had not managed to do with his wife.

The content of this session is characteristic of Stage 2 within our approach. At this time, members have achieved comfort with negatively toned feelings, and this comfort would support the members' capacities to assimilate the self-disclosure. Within Stage 1 of our model, this same self-disclosure would likely be more threatening to a member. Consequently, whether and how the therapist's shares his or her subjectivity is always a matter of judgment.

The Role of Enactments

Like the constructivist approach, intersubjectivism provides the traditional psychodynamic group psychotherapist with a set of potentially helpful concepts and tools that can enable the group to continue its development. One means by which members and therapist explore their interacting subjectivities is through investigation of enactments. Wright (2004) indicated that within the relational school, the *enactment* is defined as

an automatic, unformulated, nonreflective moment involving all participants in the therapeutic interaction. It can be deleterious or beneficial, repeating old traumas or advancing new experiences of growth. It differs from acting out in that it is mainly an interactive concept reflecting what occurs in the relationship between patient(s) and therapist. (p. 239)

The enactment provides a medium par excellence for members to develop new organizing principles for their experiences. Each period of the group's development invites the emergence of a number of enactments. It is through the enactment that the therapist and member can explore the coconstructed aspects of their experience and, thereby, in a more subjectively vibrant and immediate way than would be otherwise possible, grapple with the fulcrum points of development. For example, the enactment that follows occurred between the therapist and a member after the group:

The therapist had noticed that when members complained about the temperature in the group room, she began to focus on the heat controls. Every few minutes, she would get up and manipulate the dial. After her third effort, Chase said with irritation, "I think it's okay now," and the therapist acknowledged the tone of his communication. He said, "Well, it was annoying how you kept popping up. It seemed excessive, but I felt bad being annoyed with you. You were trying so hard to make us comfortable." The therapist pondered Chase's reaction and realized that she

had been sensing members' growing hostility toward her. Her excessive reaction to the complaint, she recognized, was an effort to stave off hostility, if only temporarily. She revealed to the group that she thought she had been unwittingly appeasing them to avoid the unpleasantness of having the group express anger. She also acknowledged how important it was for members to explore these feelings and speculated that this awareness drove her to placate members in such a clumsy way. Chase went on to talk about his mother's tendency to become extremely sad whenever he would show anger as he was growing up, the guilt he felt in relation to her sadness, and his heightened sensitivity to others' reactions to his negative feelings.

In this instance, the group was facing a set of emotional reactions typical of Stage 2. These reactions could have been dealt with in a variety of ways, such as interpreting derivatives (Brabender & Fallon, 1993) or assisting the group in forming subgroups (Agazarian, 1997). However, what the analysis of the enactment does is to enable members to experience in vivo disconnections and ruptures in a way that is potentially healing and validating of members' subjective reactions. Whether the exploration of enactments provides the group psychotherapist with a more powerful and effective way to enable members to move forward is an empirical question. Given the promising case studies on this tool (e.g., Wright, 2005), it is a question worthy of investigation.

SUMMARY

Group development can occur under a variety of structural conditions. Whether the group psychotherapist allows developmental considerations to inform his or her thinking about the group and behavior in it potentially affects the extent to which developmental phenomena operate in the service of members' treatment goals. This chapter and chapter 7 of this volume form a couplet in showing how group development can be used with a wide range of theoretical approaches. This chapter has focused on postmodern approaches that do not embrace the epistemological assumption of modernity that an external reality is knowable. Rather, these approaches see knowledge as inherently subjective. Both approaches, social constructionism or constructivism and intersubjectivity, entail seeing developmental theory itself as a constructive act rather than a description lying outside of the therapist's perspective. However, even with this reformulation, developmental theory provides the therapist with the potential for heightened awareness of common affects, yearnings, cognitions, and vulnerabilities that are associated with the history of members' relationships with one another. Reciprocally, postmodern psychodynamic perspectives offer a more comprehensive understanding of members' experiences, including their rootedness

in the therapist's reactions and activities and the structure the therapist has created. By embracing the codetermination of members' and therapist's subjectivity, the therapist is more favorably situated to respond affirmingly to members' reactions and to repair the inevitable disconnections that inevitably occur when human beings interact.