

Reflection #9: Phenomenology, Social Constructionism and Hermeneutics

Family, peer groups, communities, organizations and institutions play a role in the social construction of individual reality. We give meaning to the construct of the self and our identity is created by interactions with others and what society expects from us. Over time, the way we interact with society within the social system, will have an impact on the way we create mental representations of our interactions. According to Luckmann and Berger, society is a human product and also an objective reality by which the self and social order are produced by subjective processes in interaction with others (p.352). Our behavior depends on our subjective interpretation of reality. The way we perceive ourselves and present ourselves to society is shaped by the way we interact with others as well as our life experiences. Phenomenologists suggest that all aspects of reality must be studied to determine the ways as which people come to see them as real. This is done through bracketing, which is setting aside the idea that the world is naturally ordered, therefore world of objects and all phenomena must be approached with doubt and question to understand the way in which people construct reality (p.348). According to our textbook, the self is portrayed as a consequence of either social and cultural forces such as social structure, social organization, roles, norms and values or a consequence of internal forces (such as ego strivings, attachment needs or personality traits) (p.351). In regards to social construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann believed that people are born into a pre-existing society and through socialization and shared cultural patterns of behavior, they develop habitualized patterns of acting (p.352). Behaviors will be constantly repeated and become habits. Habitualization will lead to institutionalization as our actions become symbolized in terms of routines that become common with that of other actors (p.352). Institutions play an important role in controlling our behavior by setting pre-defined patterns of conduct to which we are expected to follow. Socialization also plays a role in our internalization of institutional norms for conduct and through this process it is that socially acquired ways of doing things develop an existence of their own. According to social constructionism and postmodern thought, there is no truth criteria and the self and society are socially constructed. Since social construction of individual reality are socially constructed, they can also be deconstructed and as social workers we can help the client deconstruct their negative beliefs about themselves and their interpretations of problems. We experience the world through the lens of our own opinions as well as others' opinions.

References:

Robbins, S. P., Chatterjee, P., Canda, E.R., & Leibowitz, G. S. (2019). *Contemporary human behavior theory: A critical perspective for social work practice* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Pearson.