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Why Am I Here, And What Is Here Anyway?:
A Social Constructionist Window Into Clinical Psychology.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Arts
in
Psychology
at Massey University, Turitea, Palmerston North,
New Zealand.

Dean Adam
2001
Abstract

Understandings of why people enter into careers as clinical psychologists are underdeveloped. This thesis uses a social construction perspective to explore the question of how clinical psychology students explain their career choice, and in particular how expectations and understandings of a career in clinical psychology are constructed as influencing such a decision. Interview transcripts from six clinical psychology students were analysed using a combined methodology of Heideggerian hermeneutics and discourse analysis of a thematic nature. The themes developed outline how the participants constructed clinical psychology, the process of choosing such a career, related professions, what it meant to ‘be’ a clinical psychologist, and other peoples’ perceptions of clinical psychology. The conclusion of these findings suggest the need for multidisciplinary awareness in the training of clinical psychologists, the need for an increased focus on long term career satisfaction and goal achievement, and attention to the education of the public about the role and utility of clinical psychology.
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A Social Constructionist Window Into Clinical Psychology.
Throughout this thesis italicised paragraphs, such as this one, are to be found on the opposing page of the main thesis document. These sections represent my thoughts and ideas around particular aspects of the work. This style of commentary, known as reflexivity (Edwards & Potter, 1992), is an integral aspect of any constructionist-based work such as this thesis. While the importance of this concept is explained further when discussing the ontology of this thesis, it is necessary for you as the reader to understand the role of this commentary from the onset. Primarily, for me, being able to be reflective over the process of writing this thesis was to contribute to other students some of the considerations required in writing in such a style. Secondly and more commonly, reflexivity serves to make the research process transparent for the reader to maximise the validity of the research (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). By seeing my reasoning, and the assumptions behind why I have chosen to conduct my research in particular ways, it is hoped that you as the reader will be in a better position to judge the merits of this thesis. Additionally, reflexivity can provide a forum for the author to communicate with the reader in a more informal manner than is often allowed within an academic document, creating a sense of engagement between the reader and the myself and making the thesis more enjoyable to read.