

out the life cycle. Very practical and interesting case material is provided to illustrate concepts and techniques.

The third section, "Facilitating Complex Family Processes Through Ritual" illustrates the use of rituals with complex family issues such as alcoholism, adoption, sexual dysfunction and remarriage. This section is particularly useful to therapists who are interested in introducing creative and often magical activities into their work.

The fourth section, "Rituals, Families and the Wider Social Context" examines the healing qualities of rituals during family struggles and the influences of larger systems and the broader political and social context such as the role of gender in the development of interpersonal conflict. The case is made that many normative rituals tend to preserve traditional sex roles and other status quo events. Examples of rituals are provided which empower women and foster social change.

The final section, "Rituals and Family Training" examines rituals in student's families of origin and the design and use of rituals within training groups. The author proposes that many transitions and shifts in training can be enriched by the use of ritual in the learning process such as asking students to bring a symbol to class that is characteristic of their relationship to self and others, or assigning a short paper that requests students to write about their family's use of rituals.

Overall, this book is an inspiring and valuable resource to marriage and family practitioners as well as students in academic settings. The reader is made aware of the multiple benefits to be derived from the effective use of rituals in individual and family life. The authors have provided well researched and clinically relevant concepts and practices which are helpful in the counselling process. I highly recommend this book.

Gergen, Kenneth. (1991). *The Saturated Self*. New York: Basic Books. 295 pp.

Reviewed by: Kelvin Seifert.

Kenneth Gergen has long been a social constructivist and critic of classic psychological theorizing, and this recent book extends that perspective to provocative, postmodernist conclusions. In nine chapters, he describes the historical transformation and ultimate demise of the notion of *self*—certainly an idea that is central to Western society in general, and to counselors in particular. Some of the history is disturbing: Gergen argues that given postmodern social conditions, it is hard to know who "I" am any more. But he offers hope for the future, if only we can give up our conventional belief in selfhood and individuality, and immerse ourselves fully in the complexities of social relationships.

As Gergen sees it, our postmodern problem is that communication has become so easy and so plentiful. In addition to ordinary mail and long-distance telephones, the newer e-mail networks, FAX machines, and courier

delivery systems have allowed people to develop and maintain many more relationships than in times past. Increasing access to the media, such as through cable television and home viewing of videos, furthermore, has created more vivid and numerous "relationships" with celebrities; I feel that I "know" these people personally because they have visited my living room so often. In each of my relationships, I develop a different public role—and sometimes also contradictory ones. I develop one persona for my e-mail partners, another for an old friend who phones from the West Coast, still another for a casual acquaintance met at a conference.

The result is a *saturated self*, as Gergen terms it. Rich, diverse contacts with the social world make it hard to feel sure of who "I" am, and challenge my assumption that a stable, essential "me" (seen by others) or "I" (felt by myself) even exists. So I am nagged by fears of inauthenticity: feelings that I may be a hypocrite, lack integrity, and manipulate relationships. In the past these particular fears were not socially prominent. Two centuries ago, Western society subscribed strongly to a "romantic" view of the *self*: that there is a deep interior, filled with intensity and purity of feeling, constituting the self or the essence of each person. A century later, this view began to fade and was dominated by a rational, modernist view of *self*: that inside each of us is a (potentially) logical decision-maker, an essential self who can formulate general life goals and principles, and can sensibly guide actions.

Gergen argues that neither the romantic nor the modernist view of *self* fits current social circumstances. Ironically, the very rationalism of the modernist *self* contributed to its own demise by supporting the growth of modern technologies, including modern communications that create a saturated self in the first place. The loss of romantic and modernist *self* is often felt as a problem by thoughtful people—including counsellors, presumably—particularly in the initial stages of their transformation away from romantic and modernist perspectives. Too many people, it seems, compete for our personal care and attention: how shall I balance them all? How shall I balance the time my children expect against the time my spouse expects—or my boss, or a colleague from a distant city who is proposing to collaborate on a project? Some of these people have not even met each other, and the rest scarcely know each other's priorities and needs in any deep way. To each of them I present, and am expected to present, a different "me," because our roles and relationships are so diverse. So there does not even seem to be a single person transcending all my relationships, one who can help set priorities in my complex social world. Yet somehow I must.

Believe it or not, Gergen offers solutions to these dilemmas, and I recommend the book in order to find out what they are. His writing style is lively and accessible throughout; readers familiar with his earlier works (e.g. *The Social Construction of the Self*) will find this book couched in more everyday, less psychological language. The style therefore makes the book suitable both for counsellors and for their more book-oriented clients. Unlike many self-help and popular psychology books, *The Saturated Self* does not hold up impossible standards of "self" development, in the older sense of achieving isolated, (allegedly) autonomous individuality. To do so would contradict Gergen's major thesis: that we have overdeveloped selfhood in Western

society, and that we should concern ourselves more with relationships than with individuality.

The solution for postmodern stress, writes Gergen, is not to resist it, but to dive into it fully. We should enjoy the multitude of roles and relationships that postmodern life provides; treat each social role as a game to be played, though nonetheless a serious game. Think of postmodern life as a carnival, he argues: and like any carnival, it will have events and activities that are both scary and exhilarating, happy and sad, nourishing and frustrating.

This is an important message for the 1990s, I think, but only if the metaphor of the carnival does not trivialize life as a whole. Postmodern life may be potentially playful, but some of the play must surely still be serious. Is child sexual abuse "merely" a playful experience? How about grief over the death of a spouse? Gergen is sensible enough to recognize problems like these as serious events, but he does not explain well how the "serious playfulness" of such problems therefore fits into his overall vision of postmodernism. I wish that he had done so; but of course, maybe my desire just shows a merely modernist temperament, one that chronically hopes to tie up every loose, logical end.

Lowman, Rodney. (1993). *Counseling and Psychotherapy of Work Dysfunctions*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. 333 pp., \$24.95 US (soft cover).

Reviewed by: Marilyn Fitzpatrick.

Counseling and Psychotherapy of Work Dysfunctions is a book targeted to all mental health practitioners whose clients experience work concerns and who wish to increase their competence in diagnosing and treating these problems. Lowman defines work dysfunctions as psychological conditions which significantly impair the capacity to work and are caused either by personal characteristics or by an interaction of those characteristics with the environment. The distinguishing feature of this book is its attempt to interest a wide group of clinicians in the domain of work-related counseling, and to give them a basis for working effectively in this area. It provides a conceptual framework for organizing our understanding of these dysfunctions. Within that framework, the author reviews the relevant literature, discusses diagnostic and treatment issues, and provides a number of interesting case illustrations.

The author's ideal world is one in which all mental health professions would have minimal competence in evaluating the psychological state of the client's work role, much as we currently assume qualified therapists be able to address marital or sexual concerns.

Lowman begins by describing the work environment outlining a number of principles of how organizations operate. The chapter is targeted to clinicians who have little personal experience in corporate life and may seem somewhat obvious to anyone who has that experience. Nonetheless,