

these therapist self-care issues with the same respectful and empowering manner she brings to the clients in her groups.

I highly recommended this book for new or experienced therapists who use multiple strategies to enhance and encourage therapeutic change. It is a well-balanced and useful resource for working with women survivors of childhood sexual abuse within a group context.

---

Jack Martin and Jeff Sugarman (1999). *The Psychology of Human Possibility and Constraint*. Albany: SUNY Press.

---

*Reviewed by:* Patrick Keeney, Education Program, Okanagan University College

In this century, the social sciences have been dominated by two incommensurable conceptions of human agency. The first posits that human agency is determined by the sociocultural matrix in which the individual is existentially landed. The second is a robust individualistic ideology, one in which the individual is conceptualized as an isolated, atomistic whole, thus negating the relevance of the social world to the achievement of personhood. (This view was neatly captured by Mrs. Thatcher's quip that, "There is no such thing as society, only individuals and families.")

Despite its relative brevity, this is an ambitious book. The authors set themselves the challenge of finding a theoretical bridge between the dichotomies which have plagued psychology. What is most needed is a theory of human agency which eschews sharp delineations between the individual and society, a *via media* or middle way, one which can overcome the inherent difficulties in theories of the self which fail to account for either the sociocultural or the psychological. Any such theory — if it is to have genuine explanatory force — must recognize that while individuals necessarily interpret their experiences within a specific sociocultural world (and so are constrained by the particularities of social forms and practices), human agency is "not merely the invention and expression of social structures" (11), so that the individual remains open to transformative possibility.

Martin and Sugarman characterize their positive thesis as one which provides a fusion of the insights garnered by both social and cognitive constructivism, for the simple truth is that, "Both sociocultural and psychological phenomena are real in a way that requires each other. . . ." (116). They label this middle position "dynamic interactionism": "Our view is that the psychological is emergent from the sociocultural in interaction with biological and existential givens of an individual human life" (114).

Having forcefully articulated their theory in the first half of the book, the authors then examine how dynamic interactionism plays out in practical understandings, a move which involves "reconceptualizing more traditional and common views and assumptions" (69). Here, they focus on psychotherapy and education, areas which share a practical concern for inducing change in how an individual experiences the world. For example, by reconceptualizing the role of creativity in education, dynamic interactionism shifts our emphasis away from a purely individualistic concern with

the mind of the isolated creator. Instead, our focus is directed to that confluence where the student's creative possibilities meet the constraints of publicly elaborated and established practices and norms.

The book has an obvious appeal to psychologists, educators, and counsellors, and would make a fine text for psychology courses at the advanced undergraduate level and beyond. The authors make their arguments cogently and lucidly, and demonstrate a sure grasp of the relevant psychological literature. But one of the unexpected pleasures of this book is the manner in which Martin and Sugarman seamlessly incorporate into the text an impressive grasp of contemporary philosophical debates, drawing in particular on the work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Taylor. The book abounds in ideas, and the authors possess real skill in quickly and accurately summarizing the essential contributions of various thinkers.

The resultant tapestry is a rich and heady mixture, one which amply repays the reader with insight and understanding. And while I happen to find the book's central argument compelling — and, in a sense, unassailable — even those who are unlikely to be entirely convinced by “dynamic interactionism” will be well rewarded for traveling with such intelligent and sympathetic guides.