



Social constructionism is a school of thought that views social reality as a construction. It argues that our way of perceiving and making sense of the world is shaped by social interactions, language, and culture. This approach has major implications for understanding the construction of identities, notably gender identities and sexual orientations.

A key concept of social constructionism is that of discourse. Discourses are systems of thought, meaning, and practices that structure our understanding of the world. They are produced and reproduced through social interactions, media, and institutions. Concerning gender and sexuality, different dominant discourses can be identified: the medical discourse that pathologizes trans and non-binary identities, the religious discourse that condemns homosexuality as a sin, the heteronormative discourse that presents heterosexuality as the norm... These discourses shape collective representations and influence the way individuals perceive and experience their identity.

For social constructionists, identity is not a fixed essence, but a dynamic and relational process. We construct our identity through our interactions with others, by internalizing or resisting social norms. Coming out can be seen as a process of identity construction, in which an individual appropriates and affirms an LGBTQ+ identity in a given social context. This process often involves a deconstruction of internalized dominant discourses (homophobia, transphobia) and a reconstruction of self through new discourses (pride, self-assertion).

For example, a young gay man may have grown up in a religious family where homosexuality was presented as a sin. By internalizing this discourse, he may develop internalized homophobia and shame about his desires. The coming-out process will involve deconstructing this internalized discourse, questioning it, and rebuilding a positive

relationship with himself by relying on other discourses (gay pride, LGBTQ+ rights). This process of deconstruction-reconstruction is at the heart of identity construction.

Social constructionism urges us to be attentive to the effects of discourses on the lives of LGBTQ+ people. The discourses of pathologization and stigmatization have harmful effects on mental health and self-esteem. They can lead to phenomena of self-stigmatization, where LGBTQ+ people internalize social prejudices and develop a negative image of themselves. Conversely, discourses of affirmation and celebration of LGBTQ+ identities can have beneficial effects, promoting resilience and well-being.

Another important concept is that of gender performativity, developed by philosopher Judith Butler. For Butler, gender is not an essence but a performance, a set of repeated acts that create the illusion of a stable gendered identity. We perform our gender through our gestures, our clothing, our way of speaking... These performances are constrained by social norms, which define what a "real" man or a "real" woman is. But they can also be subverted and re-signified, especially by trans and non-binary people who play with gender codes and reveal its constructed nature.

Thus, a non-binary person who uses neutral pronouns and dresses androgynously performs a gender that escapes the male/female binary. Through this subversive performance, they challenge gender norms and open up spaces for new identities. They show that gender is not a given, but a social construct that can be played with and reinvented.

Social constructionism has implications for the support of LGBTQ+ people. It invites us to be attentive to discourses and social norms that shape the experiences of those we accompany. The role of the caregiver is not to discover a pre-existing identity, but to support the person in their process of identity construction, helping them to deconstruct internalized oppressive discourses and to appropriate more emancipatory discourses.

For example, when supporting a trans person, care will be taken to deconstruct pathologizing medical discourses that condition access to care to conformity to binary gender norms. The person will be supported in exploring their gender identity, helping them to find their own words and to construct a unique narrative of the self. They may be encouraged to experiment with different gender performances, through dress, makeup, pronouns... The aim will be to help them build an authentic and comfortable gender identity, resisting normative injunctions.

In short, social constructionism offers a stimulating framework for understanding the construction of LGBTQ+ identities. By emphasizing the role of discourses and social interactions in the production of identities, it invites us to deconstruct obviousness and to denaturalize gender and sexuality categories. Its critical and political approach makes it a valuable ally in supporting LGBTQ+ people in their identity journey and their emancipation from oppressive norms.

Key points:

- Social constructionism views social reality, including gender identities and sexual orientations, as a construction shaped by social interactions, language, and culture.
- Discourses, socially produced systems of thought and meaning, structure our understanding of the world and influence how individuals perceive and live their identity.
- Identity is a dynamic and relational process that is constructed through social interactions, by internalizing or resisting norms. Coming out involves deconstructing internalized dominant discourses and reconstructing oneself.
- Discourses have concrete effects on the lives of LGBTQ+ people, leading to self-stigmatization or conversely promoting resilience and well-being.
- According to Judith Butler, gender is performative: a set of repeated acts create the illusion of a stable gendered identity. These performances can be subverted by trans and non-binary individuals.
- In support, it is important to be attentive to the discourses that shape experiences, to help to deconstruct internalized oppressive discourses and to appropriate emancipatory discourses to construct an authentic identity.