Received 07/25/14
Revised 10/28/14
Accepted 11/06/14
DOI: 10.1002/jcad.12067

A Millennial Mistake: Three Arguments Against Radical Social Constructivism

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Recent scholars have argued that counseling has begun to embrace social constructivism as a paradigm for counseling. However, this commitment to social constructivist tenets may be both premature and undesirable. This article provides a critique of a dominant branch of social constructivism: radical social constructivism. Three arguments are presented establishing that radical social constructivism leads to logically impossible conclusions, violates counseling's moral convictions, and denies secure scholarship in related fields.

Keywords: radical social constructivism, cognitive constructionism, philosophy

Recent scholars have proclaimed social constructivism (SC) to be the next overarching paradigm in counseling (Brott, 2001; Cottone, 2013; Thorngren & Feit, 2001). For example, Brott (2001) pronounced that "the storied approach"—a derivative of SC—represents "the guiding metaphor of the dawn of a new century" (p. 311) and "is a strategy for our new millennium" (p. 311). With similar fervor, Gergen (2009) proposed that SC ideas "may be vital to the world's future" (p. 2) and that understanding SC views would "transform" (p. 2) one's most basic beliefs. Echoing the enthusiasm, Cottone (2013) declared that "[we are] lucky to be alive at this stage in counseling's development" (p. 57) when SC is coming to the fore.

Indeed, there is good reason to think that SC has become a dominant force in counseling. Cottone (2007) pointed out that SC provides the philosophical underpinnings for the multicultural movement in counseling. In turn, the multicultural movement has exerted a significant influence on counseling, as evidenced by multicultural accreditation and ethical standards (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2009). Furthermore, Cottone (2007) showed that SC was identified as a possible framework "to distinguish the professional identity of mental health counseling" (p. 198) from other helping professions. Cottone cited an extensive dialogue that has taken place in the *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* that reflects this integration and concluded that "arguably, the profession of counseling is beginning to embrace the tenets of social constructivism as a core to the profession's identity" (p. 198).

Is SC the "strategy for our new millennium" (Brott, 2001, p. 311)? Does SC really represent the "guiding metaphor for the dawn of a new century" (Brott, 2001, p. 311)? In this article, I provide a critical analysis of a dominant branch of SC: radical social constructivism (RSC). I defend the view that, far from being a "strategy for our new millennium" (Brott, 2001, p. 311), RSC is a millennial mistake. In my view, RSC fails on several grounds, including philosophical coherence, empirical realities, moral intuitions, and conscious experience.

Moderate Versus Radical SC

Some SC theorists, such as Ivey, Locke, and Rigazio-DiGilio (1996), recommended a "middle-of-the-road approach" (Ellis, 2000, p. 103) to SC. Ellis (2000) specifically considered this moderate approach to be more "sensible" (p. 103) and criticized more radical approaches to SC. In line with Ellis, I hold that a moderate approach to SC offers significant benefits to counseling. Many counseling theories and techniques take for granted that a large swath of clients' experience is constructed and that by altering clients' thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, the clients' experience will change significantly (Ivey, D'Andrea, & Ivey, 2012). Such a view is consistent with moderate SC. In addition, Rigazio-DiGilio, Ivey, and Locke (1997) demonstrated that moderate SC voices can provide not only a basis for current counseling theories but also powerful reasons to increase the scope of counseling by recognizing and intervening on multiple levels of clients' reality. Thus, a moderate approach to SC can substantially benefit counseling now and in the future.

Unfortunately, several theorists have rejected a moderate approach to SC in favor of a more "radical" (Cottone, 2013, p. 56) definition of SC (Brott, 2001; Cottone, 2004, 2007, 2012, 2013; Gergen, 1985, 2001, 2009; Thorngren & Feit, 2001).

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These theorists have defined SC in a way that undermines any meaningful concept of reality (Gergen, 2009) rather than expanding and illuminating reality as other SC theorists have done (Kelly, 1955; Rigazio-DiGilio et al., 1997). In this article, I focus exclusively on RSC and demonstrate that RSC asserts logically impossible conclusions, violates counseling's deeply held moral convictions, and disregards basic truths about the world affirmed by Western intellectual traditions for almost 400 years (Descartes, 1641/2005; Durant, 1953).

Importance of Philosophical Discussion in Counseling

Some counselors may think that all the discussion about philosophy in counseling is irrelevant. They may believe that the argument over minute changes in philosophical positions is impractical or unnecessary. Following William James, these counselors may pragmatically believe that "to find the meaning of an idea we must examine the consequences to which it leads in action; otherwise dispute about it will be without end, and will surely be without fruit" (Durant, 1953, p. 383). However, there is good reason to believe that counseling is steeped with issues and problems that can be adequately addressed or handled only with philosophical tools (Christopher, 1996; Hamilton, 2013; Tjeltveit, 1999). The discussion over the value of RSC ideas to counseling brings these philosophical issues to the forefront.

There are at least two reasons why the discussion about moderate or radical SC in counseling is critical. First, a moderate approach to SC allows counseling to fit more with both mainstream science and mainstream culture, whereas a radical approach decreases this connection. Modern science is based on the wedding of empiricism and logic (Popper, 1953/2002; Slife, Smith, & Burchfield, 2003). Thus, modern science values knowledge about the world that can be measured, verified, and replicated (Westfall, 1977). Knowledge developed in such a way—modern science would argue—furnishes a view of the world that is more intelligible than other ways of knowing (Dear, 2006). If counseling adopted RSC tenets, counselors would lose the ability to communicate effectively within the language game of modern science (Gergen, 1985, 2001, 2009). For example, Gergen (1985), an RSC theorist, stated,

> Although casting doubt on the process of objective warranting, [RSC] offers no alternative truth criteria. Accounts of social construction cannot themselves be warranted empirically . . . the success of such accounts depends primarily on the analyst's capacity to invite, compel, stimulate, or delight the audience, and not on criteria of veracity. (p. 272)

Thus, Gergen rejected any standards for veracity or warrant and offered instead a world where people were persuaded only by content that was stimulating, persuasive, compelling, and delightful. For Gergen, there is no difference between rational human inquiry—such as science, mathematics, and logic—and propaganda. This is similar to other RSC authors who have heavily criticized common scientific methods (Cottone, 2012, 2013). The consequence can be seen clearly in RSC-based counseling techniques and theories that are intentionally designed to be nonfalsifiable for modern scientific methods and reduce counseling's focus on subjective human experience (Freedman & Combs, 2002; Hansen, 2005).

The second reason why the discussion regarding RSC is critical to counseling is because RSC provides a superficial and illusory escape from deep, complex, and relevant philosophical problems facing counseling. As previously noted, counseling is immersed in philosophical issues (Christopher, 1996; Hamilton, 2013; Tjeltveit, 1999). Several authors have commented on the reticence that counselors already display toward philosophical reflection about their work (Harrist & Richardson, 2012; Tjeltveit, 1999). Specifically, Tjeltveit (1999) stated, "I am convinced that psychologists' [or counselors'] profound resistance to philosophical reflection has contributed substantially to the failure of mental health professionals to develop a more intellectually satisfying understanding of ethics and values in psychotherapy" (p. 10). Furthermore, Rigazio-DiGilio et al. (1997) observed the difficulty in obtaining a consensus regarding "what components of reality warrant our primary focus" (p. 233). Thus, counseling and the mental health field in general face pivotal philosophical questions regarding ethics, ontology, and reality (Francis & Dugger, 2014; Herlihy, Hermann, & Greden, 2014; Kaplan, 2014).

Unfortunately, RSC denies the basic tools necessary to deal with these critical questions and substitutes them with "unlimited flexibility" (Cottone, 2007, p. 199). For example, Cottone (2013) affirmed that, because of RSC,

> counselors are no longer bound to the concept of individual responsibility and blame (as in the psychological paradigm) or the conception of circular cause (as in the systemic-relational paradigm). Rather, the cause of problems can be consensualized to be either linear and individual or circular and relational. Treatment would differ depending on the understanding of participants about the nature of a problem and the collaboratively and consensually defined approach to a solution. (p. 57)

Thus, Cottone (2013) believed that RSC benefits counseling by allowing flexibility between theories. Unfortunately, this same flexibility quickly becomes unguided arbitrariness given that there are no absolute standards by which to judge the applicability of different theories to different circumstances (Cottone, 2012, 2013; Gergen, 1985, 2009). Flexibility without accompanying thoughtful criteria is like a ship without propulsion: The ship is free to drift in any direction with

"unlimited flexibility" (Cottone, 2007, p. 199) but lacks the capacity to move purposefully in the direction of its choice. Thus, RSC is woefully inadequate to deal with the relevant and pressing philosophical and theoretical problems facing counseling.

In summary, the question of whether counselors ought to adopt and incorporate RSC ideas into their theories and techniques is a pivotal question. Several negative consequences would accrue to counseling if an integration of RSC ideas continues in the field, including an increased disconnect with modern science and society and an illusory escape from pressing philosophical questions. Furthermore, addressing the question requires recourse to basic philosophical tools and methods (Hamilton, 2013; Howard-Snyder, Howard-Snyder, & Wasserman, 2009; Tjeltveit, 1999). The following sections represent an attempt to model the use of philosophical methodology to the issue of adopting RSC views for counseling.

Three Arguments Against RSC

In the subsequent sections, I present three arguments against RSC. These arguments are intended to show that RSC leads to logically impossible conclusions, violates counseling's deeply held moral convictions, and denies basic truths about the world that were held strongly for over 400 years (Descartes, 1641/2005). However, before presenting these arguments, I first develop a working definition of some of the major theses of RSC by synthesizing the works of several RSC scholars (Cottone, 2004, 2013; Gergen, 1985, 2009; Maturana, 1978).

Defining RSC

Both Cottone (2007) and Gergen (2009) commented on the difficulty of defining RSC. Cottone (2007) stated that "defining 'constructivism' is complicated" (p. 193) and that no single definition exists. Similarly, Gergen (2009) wrote,

> You should also realize that the ideas generally called social constructionist, do not belong to any one individual. There is no single book or school of philosophy that defines social construction. . . . As a result, however, there is no one, authoritative account that represents all the participants. (p. 2)

Although both authors expressed these difficulties, they also stated that some general theses could be identified in the RSC movement (Cottone, 2007; Gergen, 2009). I concur with these characterizations that the RSC movement is challenging to define. For example, at times, RSC theorists may express themselves in an extreme way for pedagogical purposes, which makes identifying their actual beliefs difficult. Nevertheless, by identifying patterns across several publications, I felt confident that I was able to accurately extract at least four theses from RSC theorists.

In distilling common theses of RSC, I attempted to avoid committing a straw man logical fallacy. The straw man fallacy occurs when an "arguer attacks a misrepresentation of the opponent's view . . . [by describing] something that *sounds like* the opponent's view but is easier to knock down and then to refute" (Howard-Snyder et al., 2009, p. 151). Thus, my goal was not to misrepresent RSC thought to make it easier to refute. I wanted to construct an accurate set of theses to honestly evaluate the value of RSC to counseling. In addition to creating a trustworthy characterization of RSC views, I also wanted to hold RSC theorists accountable for implications that necessarily flow from their assertions. Evaluating RSC requires facing squarely the consequences of ideas. My intention was to provide an honest evaluation that both accurately portrays the views of RSC theorists and examines unflinchingly the consequences and implications of their ideas.

Table 1 presents the statements I identified and the corresponding quotes from RSC authors. I did not attempt an

TABLE 1

General Theses of Radical Social Constructivism (RSC)

General Thesis of RSC	Representative Quotes From RSC Authors
There is no absolute truth.	"Not only does [RSC] suggest that there is no truth—words that truly map the world. Further, it suggests there is nothing we can hold onto, nothing solid on which we can rest our beliefs, nothing secure" (Gergen, 2009, p. 5). "In fact, any knowledge of a transcendental absolute reality is intrinsically impossible; if a supposed transcendental reality were to become accessible to description then it would not be transcendental, because a description always implies interactions and, hence, reveals only a subject-dependent reality" (Maturana, 1978, p. 45). "Constructionism offers no foundational rules of warrant and in this sense is relativistic" (Gergen, 1985, p. 273).
There is no free will.	"There is no free will" (Cottone, 2013, p. 56). "The explanatory locus of human action shifts from the interior region of the mind to the processes and structure of human interaction" (Gergen, 1985, p. 271).
There is no mind.	"There is no such thing as individual thought" (Cottone, 2004, p. 6). "Mind is not a thing—it is a relationship" (Cottone, 2013, p. 56). "Each concept (emotion, motive, etc.) is cut away from an ontological base within the head and is made a constituent of social process" (Gergen, 1985, p. 271).
There is no psychology of the individual.	"There is no psychology of the individual" (Cottone, 2013, p. 56). "The self-concept is removed from the head and placed within the sphere of social discourse" (Gergen, 1985, p. 271). "Social constructivists argue that psychological phenomena can be better explained by looking at the biological and social forces affecting behaviour. In fact, by this view, psychology is irrelevant" (Cottone, 2004, p. 6).

exhaustive list of RSC ideas but merely a sufficient list to engage in a dialogue about the value of embracing RSC views within counseling as well as to provide a critique of RSC. As shown on Table 1, I identified four general proposals associated with RSC thought:

1. There is no absolute truth.
2. There is no free will.
3. There is no mind.
4. There is no psychology of the individual.

In the following sections, I present three arguments critiquing RSC as defined by these four statements. These arguments are intended to show that RSC is logically incoherent, disrupts foundational moral principles, and defies fundamental truths about experiences held sacrosanct in Western tradition for almost 400 years (Descartes, 1641/2005).

Argument From Logical Coherence

The argument from logical coherence takes a page out of the history of ethics. In the early 20th century, ethical philosophers grappled briefly with the verification principle from logical positivism, which holds that "a statement is meaningful if and only if it is either tautological or empirically verifiable" (Pojman & Fieser, 2009, p. 195). Shortly after the movement began, philosophers presented a knockdown objection to the verification principle—it fails its own test. That is, the verification principle is not a tautology and it cannot be empirically verified. Thus, if people asserted the verification principle, then they would be obligated to reject the verification principle; put simply, the verification principle of logical positivism is logically incoherent (Pojman & Fieser, 2009).

RSC fails on similar grounds. The logical coherence argument against RSC can be expressed as follows:

5. If RSC is true, then there are no absolute statements.
6. If there are no absolute statements, then RSC is false.
7. Therefore, RSC is false.

Figure 1 shows proof of the logical coherence argument demonstrating that it is valid. Valid in this context means that if the premises of the argument are true, then the conclusion necessarily follows (Howard-Snyder et al., 2009). This argument simply identifies that Statement 1—from the aforementioned general theses—is logically incoherent. That is, Statement 1 is an absolute statement that denies absolute statements.

Given that this is a valid argument, I briefly defend each premise and then respond to some possible objections. Statement 5 is merely a restatement of Statement 1. Statement 1 was identified as a common belief of RSC; hence, if RSC is true, there are no absolute truths. Statement 6 unpacks

Argument From Logical Coherence

1. RSC → ~ A	
2. ~ A → ~ RSC	∴ ~ RSC
3. RSC	assume, RAA
4. ~ A	1, 3, MP
5. ~ RSC	4, 2, MP
6. RSC · ~RSC	3, 5, CONJ
7. Therefore, ~ RSC	

RSC = Radical social constructivism is true. A = There are absolute true statements.

Argument From Morality

1. RSC → ~ M	
2. M	∴ ~ RSC
3. ~~ M	2, DN
4. Therefore, ~ RSC	1, 3, MT

RSC = Radical social constructivism is true. M = There are objective moral values and duties.

Argument From Conscious Experience

1. RSC → ~ C	
2. C	∴ ~ RSC
3. ~~ C	2, DN
4. Therefore, ~ RSC	1, 3, MT

RSC = Radical social constructivism is true. C = There is conscious experience and mind.

FIGURE 1

Proofs for the Argument From Logical Coherence, the Argument From Morality, and the Argument From Conscious Experience

Note. The numbered lines in the figure do not match the statements referred to in the text because Figure 1—following the conventions of proofs in statement logic—contains each rule of inference, whereas the statements referred to in the text are only the premises and conclusions of the arguments. RSC = radical social constructivism; RAA = *reductio ad absurdum* (Latin for "reduction to absurdity"); MP = *modus ponens* (Latin for "mode that affirms"); CONJ = conjunction; DN = double negation; MT = *modus tollens* (Latin for "mode that denies").

elements of Statement 1 and recognizes that Statement 1 is itself an absolute statement. Finally, Statement 7 represents the conclusion that necessarily follows from the truth of Statements 5 and 6.

Some may object that this argument relies on methods from a modernist paradigm. For example, readers may object to the use of logic, numbered premises, and valid argument forms to analyze RSC views. They may think that this method represents the use of tools from one paradigm to criticize another. Indeed, scholars advancing a postmodern epistemology may consider logic to be socially constructed and thus unable to legitimately critique RSC theses (Gergen, 2001; Hansen, 2006). However, logic predates both modernism and postmodernism and provides a secure place from which to analyze claims about the world (Durant, 1953; Klement, 1995; Popper, 1953/2002). For example, Kant (1785/2002; see also Durant, 1953) held that logic represents necessary truths about the world similar to mathematics. Denying the

applicability of logic to analyzing worldviews would be like denying that two plus two equals four. One cannot imagine a possible world in which logic and mathematics would not apply in this sense. Thus, logic represents a set of necessary truths about one's experience of the world (Durant, 1953). In addition, the argument forms used here follow necessarily from the three laws of logic as formulated by Aristotle (Klement, 1995) and so clearly predate modernism by at least 2,000 years. Hence, there is good reason to believe that the philosophical methods used here do apply to RSC views because they represent necessary rules about which language about the world must follow (Popper, 1953/2002) and do not arise from modernism. Given that these methods do not arise from modernism but both predate and transcend modernism, these methods are appropriately used to analyze and evaluate RSC claims.

Others may object to the argument from logical coherence because they believe that to characterize Statement 1 as an absolute statement misrepresents RSC. For example, Gergen (2001)—in responding to a similar argument—stated,

> The kind of postmodern constructionism to which I am drawn makes no claims for the truth, objectivity, universality, or moral superiority of its own position. To be sure, certain arguments of the traditional kind are put forth (e.g., they follow certain conventions of rational argument, they make reference to an assumed reality, etc.), but this is not to impress them with the stamp of truth. . . . To construe the proposals in this way would be to give them a modernist reading. (p. 807)

Thus, Gergen (2001) held that his views were internally consistent because he was not making any claim to universal truth. Yet this statement is not entirely accurate. In Gergen's (1985, 2001, 2009) work, although he might not be making a statement regarding universal metaphysics, he was attempting to defend one set of values over another. Gergen (2001) admitted as much when he stated that "the domain of postmodern dialogue contains very substantial and far-reaching critiques of [modernism]" (p. 803). How could postmodern dialogue contain a "substantial" critique of modernism if Gergen did not intend his views to be truer or better in some sense than alternative views? If Gergen (2001) intended Statement 1 to be a limited claim (i.e., that only some statements are not absolute), then no substantial critique would have been leveled against modernism. It is clear that Gergen (2001) viewed Statement 1 as an absolute statement. Therefore, the argument from logical coherence can be applied to RSC and leads necessarily to the conclusion that RSC is a logically impossible description of the world.

Argument From Morality

The argument from morality is adapted from a commonly used argument in the philosophy of religion (Craig, 2008). This argument hinges on the fact that RSC denies several critical components of morality, including universality, free will, and the existence of individual moral agents. Thus, in this argument, RSC Statements 1, 2, and 3 will be implicated. The argument can be expressed as follows:

8. If RSC is true, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.
9. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
10. Therefore, RSC is false.

Figure 1 shows the proof demonstrating that the argument from morality is valid. In fact, the argument from morality is an example of a simple but famous argument form called the "*modus tollens*" (Howard-Snyder et al., 2009, p. 19). As before, I defend the premises and then respond to some possible objections.

Statement 8 follows from Statements 1, 2, and 3. That is, if RSC denies any absolute truth, then it also denies the heart of morality, which is universality (Kant, 1785/2002). Kant (1785/2002) held that the core aspect of morality was its ability to apply to all people; that is, for Kant, morality that applies only to a local group (see Cottone, 2004) is not even worth the name. Also, Statements 2 and 3 violate the "ought to implies can" principle that is commonly taken to be intuitively true in philosophy (Gluer & Asa, 2009), which holds that if someone is unable to do something, then they cannot be held morally responsible for that thing. Regrettably, RSC asserts that people do not *do* anything—because there is no free will—and that there is no *person* to produce actions—because there is no mind or self. Thus, Statements 2 and 3 deny both aspects that are required for moral responsibility: personhood and the ability to act.

Finally, Statement 9 is simply an assertion that some actions, such as rape and murder, are actually wrong to do. In fact, there is wide agreement on Statement 9 from RSC authors (Cottone, 2004, 2013; Gergen, 1985). Cottone (2013) criticized circular models of causality because they could implicate victims in their own abuse, stating that this is "unacceptable in specific and identified contexts" (p. 56). In addition, Gergen (1985) clarified that RSC "does not mean that 'anything goes' . . . [actions] must be evaluated in terms of good and ill" (p. 273). Thus, several RSC theorists seem to recognize the importance of morality and universally denounce some actions. In fact, the only author who seemed to come close to moral nihilism is Gergen (2009), who stated in the form of a question: "Isn't [RSC] nihilistic? Perhaps this state of insecurity is not as bad as it might appear. In daily life, many of our categories lead to untold suffering" (p. 5). According to this quote, Gergen may be defending moral nihilism on the grounds that it might not be that "bad," but whether he truly endorses moral nihilism is still unclear because of his use of a rhetorical question at the beginning

of the quote. Hence, there seems to be an agreement from several theorists that Statement 9 is true although there are possibly some theorists who dissent.

Furthermore, the *ACA Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2014) supports Statement 9. The code affirms some actions such as "respect[ing] the dignity and promot[ing] the welfare of clients" (p. 4) and denigrates other actions such as having sex with "current clients" (p. 5). There is also good reason for people to accept Statement 9 as true because of their own personal experience, which seems to be universal in that people believe that some actions are really wrong and some actions are really good (Pojman & Fieser, 2009). Thus, Statement 9 is affirmed by several RSC theorists, the *ACA Code of Ethics*, and personal experiences. Finally, Statement 10 is the necessary conclusion that follows from accepting Statements 8 and 9.

Some might object that RSC does not lead to relativism. For example, Cottone (2013) explained,

> Some might argue (I think mistakenly) that [RSC] philosophy represents a sort of moral relativism, but within a group, the beliefs of members are not relative at all—they are viewed as indisputable moral standards. One must leave the group to see beliefs as relative, and then only from another absolutist perspective. So, social constructivism takes philosophy off of the absolute–relative continuum and places understanding in a third or triadic position called *bracketed absolute truth*. (p. 57)

This is a remarkable claim. Unfortunately, this claim fails to save RSC from a relativistic fate for at least two reasons. First, taken literally, the concept of bracketed absolute truth (BAT) is conceptually absurd. If something is universal, it is—by definition—not bracketed; similarly, if something is bracketed, it is—by definition—not universal. Thus, when understood at face value, the concept of BAT is similar to the concept of a round square or a married bachelor: It is logically absurd. However, RSC theorists hold that words gain their meaning from use in dialogue; therefore, this logical critique may not apply here. Nevertheless, when the meaning of BAT is examined by its use in dialogue (Cottone, 2012, 2013), BAT seems to have the same meaning and consequence as relativism. Although a full critique of the use of BAT in dialogue is beyond the scope of this article, closer inspection reveals that Cottone (2013) may have simply renamed *relativism* to be BAT. Thus, BAT must still answer to the common objections to relativism, of which there are legion (Craig, 2008; Pojman & Fieser, 2009). As Shakespeare said, "What's in a name? that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, scene 2). As it is with roses, so it is with relativistic moral claims. Renaming relativism does not change its essential properties. Therefore, I reject Cottone's (2013) attempt to save RSC from relativism and affirm Statement 8, which holds that RSC denies the objectivity of moral values and duties.

Argument From Conscious Experience

The argument from conscious experience comes from the work of Descartes (1641/2005), who is commonly held to be the father of modern philosophy (Skirry, 1995). One of his major works is *Meditations on First Philosophy*, first published in 1641, in which Descartes engaged in a program of systematic doubt. His purpose was to find a solid footing for scientific inquiry, which required a first principle that was unquestionably certain. Descartes methodically introduced doubt into many areas previously thought to be secure, such as medical or scientific knowledge, basic beliefs about the world, and even bodily sensations. Finally, in his second meditation, Descartes realized that there existed at least one idea he could not possibly doubt: "So that it must, in fine, be maintained . . . that this proposition . . . *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind" (Descartes, 1641/2005, Meditation II, para. 3). Thus, Descartes' famous saying: "*cogito ergo sum* or 'I think, therefore, I am'" (Skirry, 1995, section 4a). Unfortunately, this one proposition—that Descartes held was impossible to doubt—RSC scholars have discarded in their development of a radical understanding of the world.

The argument from conscious experience captures this significant error in RSC thinking and can be expressed as follows:

11. If RSC is true, then there is no mind.
12. There is a mind.
13. Therefore, RSC is false.

Figure 1 shows proof demonstrating that the argument from conscious experience is valid. What follows is a brief defense and response to objections. Statement 11 is merely a restatement of Statements 3 and 4. RSC theorists have consistently rejected concepts such as the mind and the psychology of the individual. To illustrate, Cottone (2004) stated that "there is no such thing as individual thought" (p. 6), and Gergen (1985) asserted that with RSC "the explanatory locus of human action shifts from the interior region of the mind to the processes and structure of human interaction" (p. 271). Thus, there is good reason to believe that Statement 11 represents a central belief of RSC.

However, the belief that there is no mind is an astonishing creed that would be rejected by many philosophers and scientists from Descartes (1641/2005) onward (Evans, 2008; Heil, 2013). For example, a survey of contemporary philosophy of mind (Heil, 2013) reveals nothing similar to RSC views but instead a strong affirmation of Statement 12. In fact, I think it is safe to say that many scholars would balk at Cottone's (2004) remarkable declarations that "psychology is irrelevant" (p. 6) and that RSC has helped to "unravel the mystery of the mind" (p. 12). As Watts (2003) noted, if there is no "self-reflexive individual and situatedness is indeed inescapable"

(p. 139), then how can meaningful dialogue occur? Who is having the dialogue so critical to RSC if there are no minds? Thus, RSC assertions about the mind seem entirely without warrant and surprisingly far from the known evidence. Therefore, strong scholarship from Descartes to modern psychology and philosophy (Evans, 2008; Heil, 2013) affirms Statement 12 that there is a mind and that there is a legitimate field of study that focuses on the mind. Statement 13, of course, is the necessary conclusion that follows from accepting Statements 11 and 12. Although some RSC scholars may object to the conclusion by denying the existence of a mind or a unified self (Cottone, 2004, 2013; Gergen, 1985, 2009), I have shown that such denials hold little weight. Hence, one is justified in accepting the argument from conscious experience.

Past RSC: A Way Forward

In the previous sections, I discussed three arguments for rejecting RSC, including the argument from logical coherence, the argument from morality, and the argument from conscious experience. Taken together, these arguments form a powerful case for rejecting RSC as a credible worldview. In addition, I gave several reasons why accepting an RSC outlook would disconnect counseling from modern society and provide a superficial escape from pressing philosophical questions.

At this point, some may be wondering if any alternatives exist that could provide the benefits of SC without the problems of RSC. As Cottone (2007) pointed out, SC is connected to the movement of multiculturalism in counseling, which has greatly increased counseling's ability to reach a wide range of clients. Is there any way to conceptualize and save SC from its radical excursion? Yes, the answer is simple: Take a moderate approach to SC.

In the introduction, I briefly discussed the moderate approach to SC, which was supported by Ellis (2000) and Ivey et al. (1996). Furthermore, there appears to be a wide range of scholarly work developing a balanced view of the world that recognizes a self and also honors people's connections to one another (Kelly, 1955; Mahoney & Marquis, 2002; Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995; Watts, 2003, 2011). In addition to a strong theoretical base, substantial work was done to translate these views into practical therapeutic modalities (Beck & Haigh, 2014; Belangee, 2012; Society of Clinical Psychology, 2013). In fact, many of these techniques and theories represent the mainstream of contemporary counseling practice (Ivey et al., 2012).

For example, Watts (2003) demonstrated that Adlerian theory represents "an integrative bridge between cognitive constructivist and social constructionist approaches to therapy" (p. 139). According to Watts (2003), "the Adlerian approach resonates with social constructionism regarding the sociocultural origins of human psychological development . . . [and] affirms cognitive constructivism's emphasis on the importance of humans as active agents creatively involved in the coconstruction of their own psychology" (p. 139). Thus, Adlerian therapy seems to represent a promising example of a moderate approach to SC—a view that honors the significant relationships one has with others but does not empty the self. Watts (2003) concluded, "In both theory and practice, the Adlerian approach clearly resonates with both cognitive constructivist and social constructionist approaches and can therefore be correctly identified as a relational constructivist approach" (p. 145).

To be fair, Cottone (2013) was aware of and responded to the moderate approaches by stating,

> Some people will label (mistakenly in my view) classical psychological theories as constructivist. For instance, some say Adlerian theory is constructivist, and Albert Ellis labeled his own theory as constructivist at the end of his career. A radical social constructivist would argue that those theories are highly cognitively based psychological theories that address social issues. If a theory purports that there is a mind in the head weighing social data, it is not a social constructivism theory in its radical sense. (p. 56)

Thus, Cottone adamantly rejected moderate approaches to SC on the grounds that they were not "radical" enough interpretations of SC. However, as I have demonstrated, RSC fails on many levels and leads to several negative consequences for the counseling field. Thus, a moderate approach to SC can provide many of the benefits of RSC without leading to logical incoherence and decreased societal relevance.

Conclusion

In this article, I presented three arguments against RSC that demonstrated that RSC is logically incoherent, interrupts basic moral claims, and denies solid scholarship in both philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Furthermore, I argued that RSC leads to several negative consequences for counseling, such as a disconnection to modern society and decreased philosophical discourse. Finally, I presented an alternative to RSC in the form of a moderate approach by presenting the work of Watts (2003) and others.

Cottone (2007) argued that "counseling practiced outside of philosophy is not counseling practice . . . implicit in professionalism is an intellectual attitude" (p. 200). I heartily agree. For that reason, I reject RSC as a credible worldview for counselors. To move forward as a profession, counselors should use philosophical tools to examine and ultimately reject RSC ideas. An increased level of philosophical reflection—the kind denied by RSC views—is necessary to deal with the pressing ethical and ontological issues facing counseling (Christopher, 1996; Francis & Dugger, 2014; Hansen, 2005; Harrist & Richardson, 2012; Herlihy et al., 2014; Kaplan, 2014; Slife et al., 2003; Tjeltveit, 1999). The purpose of this article was

to model such a philosophical methodology and apply it to a current issue in counseling. By engaging in philosophical reflection, counselors can begin to reach a "satisfying" (Tjeltveit, 1999, p. 10) and shared understanding of the ethics and ontology inherent in the field of counseling.

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