Reflections on *Constructing Social Problems*

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This paper is a reflection on Spector and Kitsuse's claims-making approach to social problems construction, and to the subsequent studies that the approach inspired. Spector and Kitsuse argued that social problems are constructed as putative conditions that justify societal responses designed to manage, if not eliminate, them. Early sections of the paper examine basic themes in the constructionist literature on social problems. Two major themes in this literature focus on how social problems claims-making activities orient to social policy development and institutional interventions. Later sections consider two ways in which the constructionist approach might be expanded to consider additional claims-making contexts and constructionist perspectives. Social problems claims-making in popular culture contexts and Burke's dramatistic perspective are discussed as examples of how constructionist studies of social problems might be expanded upon.

The publication of Spector and Kitsuse's *Constructing Social Problems* in 1977 [2001] was a signal event in the sociology of social problems. Their perspective was presented as an alternative to analyzing social problems as social pathologies, forms of social disorganization or dysfunctions within social systems. While building on themes in symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1971) and labelling theory (Becker 1963, Lemert 1972), Spector and Kitsuse also linked the sociology of social problems to other developments in interpretive social science emergent in the 1960's and 70's, notably ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), Edelman's (1971) studies of political symbolism and Hewitt and Hall's (1973) analysis of problematic situations as quasi-theories.

Spector and Kitsuse's text was published in the context of an international social constructionist movement cutting across literary criticism, legal studies, philosophy and theology, as well as the social sciences, in the latter half of the twentieth century. The contributions of cultural studies scholars, Foucauldian discourse scholars, feminist theorists and analysts of the social construction of race are notable examples of the diversity of social constructionism (Butler 1993, Gordon 1972, Haslanger 2008, Schneider 2008). Constructionist perspectives have also reoriented social scientists' studies of science as the con-

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struction of facts (Sismondo 2010). Scholarly uses of constructionist perspectives have been accompanied by the emergence of constructionist concerns in some applied social science communities, such as therapy, urban planning and occupations concerned with environmental resources (Fopp 2008, Hall 1997, Miller 1997, Williams 2000). Themes in the international constructionist movement form a background for my reflections on *Constructing Social Problems*.

My thoughts are also related to conversations involving members of the Society for the Study of Social Problems about the future direction of constructionist studies of social problems. My interpretation is that many constructionists see the approach as having stalled. While studies of diverse social problems claims-makers and their campaigns continue, the perspective is not being sufficiently advanced. That is my assessment as well. My reflections focus on Spector and Kitsuse's text and the legacy that others have built around it. Some readers may interpret my comments as overly critical of past constructionist studies of social problems. They might have a point, although I see the paper as a way of assessing where we are and imagining where we might go from here.

Notable in its absence is an extended discussion of Woolgar and Pawluch's (1985) analysis of ontological gerrymandering in constructionist studies of social problems and subsequent debates about strict vs. contextual constructionism (Miller and Holstein 1993, Weinberg 2009). While Woolgar and Pawluch's critique and the ensuing debates are important events in the evolution of the claims-making approach, they involve disagreements within a community of researchers who are intellectually invested in developing the full potential of Spector and Kitsuse's claims-making approach. The debates do little to connect the claims-making approach with other constructionist perspectives.

I see this paper as an early step in making a case for an expanded vision of the issues at stake in studies of the construction of social problems. Thus, my purpose is modest. It is to explore some central themes in Spector and Kitsuse's initial constructionist project and in subsequent constructionist contributions to the study of social problems. I then turn to some thoughts about how constructionist studies might be reoriented to include additional perspectives and questions. These discussions largely focus on perspectives that have been minimized by constructionist social problems analysts despite being available to them for many years. Sometimes we learn more about ourselves by considering what we have overlooked rather than what we have emphasized. Finally, I should say that the paper has a sort of rambling quality to it. I – self-servingly – choose to believe that this is because it is a set of reflections, not a position from which I advocate.

Reading Constructing Social Problems

A useful starting point for reading *Constructing Social Problems* is Spector and Kitsuse's framing of their approach as a paradigmatic shift in the study of social problems. They explicitly orient their project toward the conditions defined by Kuhn (1970) as fundamental to scientific revolutions. The first condition involves asking new questions about the purposes and focus of the activities organizing a community of scientists. The questions transform scientists' established perspectives and practices. The second condition is the specification of new procedures for exploring the new questions. Following Kuhn, Spector and Kitsuse stress the importance of exemplars in constructing new paradigms. Exemplars operate as justifications of new paradigms and guides in developing paradigms through research.

Spector and Kitsuse provide sociologists with a clear analytic focus. Social problems are claims made through the activities of persons (claims-makers) advocating for their preferred orientations to putative conditions, indeed, to reality. As putative conditions, social problems are selective depictions of life circumstances that might be interpreted in different ways, including as unproblematic. Social problems claims-making is organized within moral discourses that justify treating putative conditions as intolerable and as matters that are manageable, if not fully controllable, through institutional intervention. Spector and Kitsuse (1977 [2001]: 85) stress the close connection between these aspects of social problems claims-making in stating that each makes the other "possible, perceptible, nameable, and actionable".

Spector and Kitsuse's purpose was to build a sociological approach to social problems that paralleled analytic procedures used by Hughes (1970) and his students at the University of Chicago in conducting qualitative studies of work settings and processes. Such studies would describe how claims-making activities are sites for the construction of social problems. They mention such work-like activities as boycotts, petition drives and publicity campaigns as examples of social problems claims-making activities. Spector and Kitsuse (1977 [2001]: 82) emphasize that constructionist analyses consider «how those activities become organized as they are, rather than why participants become involved in them».

Spector and Kitsuse turn to the empirical possibilities of their paradigm in discussing two examples of constructionist research and analysis. The first example describes how – in the 1970's - members of the American Psychiatric Association and related groups oriented to charges that political dissidents in the Soviet Union were being diagnosed as mentally ill and hospitalized. They use the example to underscore how constructionist analysts of social problems need not judge the adequacy of claims-makers' claims. Rather, construction-

ist analysts should focus on how groups become involved in social problems claims-making, their depictions of the causes of putative social problems, and the evidence claims-makers cite in justifying their claims. Spector and Kitsuse state that an important advantage of this focus is that it allows researchers to analyze the origins of social problem definitions without making claims about their causes.

Spector and Kitsuse's second example involves a four-stage provisional model of the natural history of social problems development. The model begins with the emergence and institutionalization of social problems as claims-makers successfully persuade other that claims-makers' concerns are justified (stage one) and that claims-makers are advocating for reasonable responses to putative conditions (stage two). Once established, institutional definitions of social problems become the focus of new claims-making activities that challenge the appropriateness of established responses to particular social problems (stage three). Stage four is achieved when claims-makers organize «to create alternative, parallel, or counter-institutions as responses to the established procedures» (Spector and Kitsuse 1977 [2001]: 142).

Spector and Kitsuse's paradigm turns on their delineation of a distinctive definition of social problems, coherent body of empirical and analytic concerns, and how existing research methods might be used to examine available contexts of social problems construction. While their definition of social problems centers the paradigm on a limited array of observable activities, Spector and Kitsuse's interest in the activities orients to a variety of lines of research development. Potential lines range from studies of claims-making efforts intended to create new social problems, to the problematizing of institutional responses to established social problems and the construction of new institutional responses that – to varying degrees – redefine previously constructed social problems. Of course, newly created alternative institutions may become the focus of future claims-making groups and activities.

I see two general threads in Spector and Kitsuse's text as warranting particular notice. One thread is connected to their use of Kuhn's analysis of scientific paradigms in organizing their text. This rhetorical move suggests that their project is designed to produce a science of social problems as constructed realities. I do not note this aspect of the text to criticize Spector and Kitsuse's choice but to contrast this contextualization of social constructionism with others that might align it more closely with disciplines classified as the humanities. The second thread involves Spector and Kitsuse's interest in how social problems claims are transformed into institutional realities. We might say that successful social problems claims-making is defined by the extent to which they are legitimated in institutional policies and practices. I address

the implications of these threads throughout the paper, including in the next section which deals with how constructionist social scientists have extended Spector and Kitsuse's paradigm.

The legacy of Constructing Social Problems

Spector and Kitsuse's text has inspired significant developments in the social scientific study of social problems. It is the basis for a wide array of case studies that detail the extent to which social problems claims-making is present in diverse contemporary social settings (Gentry 1988, Martin 2010, Petonito and Muschert 2018, Rains 2004, Spencer 1994). Constructionist studies also document the wide range of contemporary institutions that are organized to address putative social problems. We may draw at least two lessons from the body of research associated with Spector and Kitsuse's paradigm. The first is that virtually any aspect of life in society is susceptible to being implicated in social problems claims-making, be it in the production, sustenance or amelioration of social problems. The second lesson underscores how social problems claims-making is an ongoing process of reality construction having shifting consequences for diverse groups and institutions in contemporary societies.

I see the rich literature of case studies as a point of departure in documenting processes of social problems construction and assessing the adequacy of analysts' concepts and generalizations. The case studies make comparative analysis of claims-making activities and their contexts possible. The usefulness of the comparative perspective is evident in Loseke's (2003) and Best's (2016) summaries and extensions of the constructionist literature on social problems. Loseke extends the literature in conceptualizing social problems construction as a game involving competition between claims-making groups seeking to take ownership of particular social problems (See also Gusfield 1975, 1989). A claims-making group owns a social problem when it is publicly recognized as "the accepted authority on that problem" (Loseke 2003: 69).

Loseke also discusses how social problems claims-makers construct multifaceted realities in seeking support for their causes. Specifically, she discusses how three social problems frames organize different aspects of social problems construction. Diagnostic frames define particular putative conditions as social problems caused by particular groups, events or social structures. Motivational frames consist of appeals to logic and emotion used by claims-makers in justifying their preferred constructions of reality. Prognostic frames justify claims-makers' preferred responses to putative social problems. Loseke also discusses how claims-makers use formula stories in advancing their causes.

Formula stories involve standardized characters and story lines that justify predictable moral and practical outcomes (Loseke 2001). The stories assert that objectively real conditions exist, the conditions are intolerable and institutional officials should follow claims-makers' recommendations in responding to the conditions.

Best's approach to the constructionist literature updates Spector and Kitsuse's analysis of the natural history of social problems construction. Best analyzes social problem construction as a multistage process consisting of advocacy groups' initial claims-making, media and public responses to the claims, the institutionalization of putative social problems and, finally, to public assessments of the outcomes of the institutional responses. Particularly significant is Best's use of the literature to analyze the micro-political relations between claims-making groups involved in each stage of the process. His analysis reveals an ecology of claims-making games through which social problems claims evolve into institutional realities. It also points to the range of contingencies and uncertainties that claims-makers manage in constructing social problems.

Loseke's and Best's texts are suggestive of the progress that constructionist researchers have made in developing the implications of Spector and Kitsuse's paradigm over the past 40 years. These analysts have shown the usefulness of a constructionist stance that looks for the origins of social problems in the claims of groups seeking to shape public opinion and policy. They have also created an analytic vocabulary for depicting the activities of diverse claims-making groups and the larger processes of social problems construction. Clearly, constructionist analysts of social problems have good reasons for taking heart in their past accomplishments. Nonetheless, analytic development of the paradigm has slowed over the past decade or more, even as constructionist perspectives have been increasingly accepted in the social sciences and beyond. I turn to some ways that constructionist researchers might elaborate on the claims-making perspective by more fully incorporating new social contexts and constructionist perspectives into their studies of social problems construction in the next two sections.

Recontextualizing Constructing Social Problems

My assessment that Spector and Kitsuse's project has stalled is not intended to suggest that social scientists' interest in claims-making activities is misplaced, although I have serious concerns about the usefulness of the natural history emphasis in the literature. I have noted how this emphasis justifies defining

social problems as institutional realities. Even analyses of the initial stages of social problems construction typically look at claims-making campaigns that ultimately become institutionalized. Such researcher decisions define what will count as "real" social problems, that is, as worthy of scientific consideration. Thus, constructionist analyses of social problems involve their own unacknowledged claims-making activities.

My point from above remains, studies of claims-making activities need to orient to more encompassing interpretive frameworks and social contexts than those proposed by Spector and Kitsuse. The wider orientations should include consideration of how social problems claims-making is organized and accomplished within diverse groups and activities in contemporary societies. An expanded vision is helpful in seeing that social problems claims-making need not be linked to campaigns designed to incite public concern or to transform social problems claims into institutional realities. A beginning step in expanding the claims-making approach involves rereading the constructionist literature for the purpose of identifying possible lines of analysis that have been ignored or inadequately developed.

For example, Miller and Holstein (1989) define social problems work as the interpretive practices people use in applying social problems categories to particular people, events, or issues; adding that social problems work is a potential aspect of any social interaction. They further explain that a recurring feature of social problems work involves deliberations about whether putative conditions fit with particular social problems categories or are better understood as acceptable forms of everyday life. Holstein and Miller (1993: 145) state,

The interpretive activity that differentiates "childish pranks" from "juvenile delinquency" is commonplace. As mundane as it is, and as overlooked in the study of social problems as it might be, the process by which "nothing" is made of a candidate problem is an important aspect of social problems work.

It is telling that even as Holstein and Miller make the case for moving beyond the limitations of the natural history orientation to social problems construction, they also marginalize interactions in which established social problems categories are assessed as less relevant than other constructions of reality. They do so by depicting interactions that do not result in the assignment of institutionalized social problems categories to situations as making "nothing" of these categories. An alternative interpretation is that people make something of social problems categories by engaging them, by treating them as potentially useful frameworks for making sense of and responding to putative conditions. I see the latter interpretation as opening new possibilities for advancing social scientific studies of social problems as social construc-

tions. It expands constructionists' field of inquiry to include a wide array of social interactions in which social problems categories are negotiated, if not always applied.

This interpretive shift also foregrounds questions about the multiple ways in which people use social problems categories in going about their lives. It justifies asking about social problems work in such mundane interactions as conversations at family gatherings, friendly discussions about popular movies or television shows, and ongoing interactions between co-workers or neighbors about social issues having potential implications for their careers or neighborhoods. Such questions challenge constructionist analysts to examine a wider range of claims-making activities and their social significance in diverse social interactions.

A colorful example of how social problems claims offered in one social context are redefined in another context is the public response to the film, *Reefer Madness*, in the late 1930's in the United States (Schlosser 2003). The film chronicles the moral decline of a group of young people resulting from their use of marijuana. The movie links marijuana use to sexual promiscuity, violent assaults, hallucinations, insanity, and suicide. These claims are augmented by a speaker who explains that such events happen regularly in response to marijuana use. The movie's historical importance derives from its close fit with themes in an ongoing claims-making campaign to criminalize marijuana use in the 1930's. The meaning of *Reefer Madness* was transformed, however, in the cultural context of the 1970's where audiences (mostly college students) treated it as absurdly entertaining. This interpretation was further encouraged in later musical adaptations of the film and continues today.

Clearly, the history of *Reefer Madness* is not a typical trajectory for claims-making campaigns and the institutional realities that they justify. The movie is, however, indicative of how aspects of such campaigns are potentially subject to reinterpretation in new social contexts fostering alternative forms of social problems work. Indeed, one need not wait for historical shifts to observe alternative interpretations of social problems claims. Consider, for example, Lowney and Best (1996) analysis of jokes told about a tragic standoff in Waco, Texas between law enforcement officers and members of the Branch Davidian sect in 1993. Lowney and Best orient to Spector and Kitsuse's paradigm in analyzing how the jokes aligned speakers with positions represented in public debates about the culpability of law enforcement officials versus sect members for the tragedy. We might expand their analysis by considering other implications of joking as claims-making activity, such as how jokes divert attention from the mundane tasks and worries of everyday life, foster social bonds, display persons' sociability skills and may be used to cast one's self as a moral actor.

An alternative interpretive framework for analyzing social problems claims-making is Fiske's (1989) analysis of popular culture as sites where people use cultural resources available within official or mainstream constructions of reality to build alternative meanings and experiences. Popular culture constructions highlight the concerns of claims-making groups who are excluded from or have little interest in the production of institutional realities. Group members may, however, share a keen interest in developing the potential for expressing and celebrating alternative identities and social alignments provided by institutional realities. As popular culture, social problems work consists of the interpretive skills that people use in incorporating social problems categories into their life experiences.

Fiske (1989: 161) analyzes popular culture reality construction as a process of linking "the micro-politics of everyday life and macro-politics of organized action." Consider the case of country music in the United States. Fiske explains that country music fosters a sense of difference between rural and urban cultures. Country music privileges values and institutions associated with the putative condition called "country," a condition that is cast as potentially at risk from dominant and decadent urban values and institutions. Fiske states that country music sustains a sense of marginalization among people who identify with "country", including those who live in cities. Similar analyses might be applied to rumors and legends (Fine and Ellis 2010), narratives of victimization shared by people worried about neighborhood crime (Wachs 1988), and gossip that links moral indignation with social typing (Bergmann 1993). The impact of such claims-making activities is not always obvious in typical studies of social problems construction.

While some aspects of Spector and Kitsuse's constructionist approach to social problems and Fiske's perspective on popular culture are complementary, these interpretive frameworks rest on a fundamental contrast that makes them incompatible in their present forms. The contrast revolves around Spector and Kitsuse's focus on social problems as institutional realities and Fiske's treatment of them as popular culture, as a process of constructing and affirming cultural subcultural relationships and orientations. We need a third standpoint for comparatively linking aspects of the approaches. Burke's dramatistic method is on such standpoint.

Dramatizing Constructing Social Problems

For Burke (1941 [1973]: 310), «*Human relations should be analyzed with respect to the leads discovered by a study of drama*. Thus, social problems and other claims-mak-

ing activities are aspects of the drama of human life. Aspects of the drama of life may be observed in literature and poetry, the performing arts, and philosophy as well as in activities making up people's everyday lives. The drama turns on people's uses of symbols in engaging the environments in which they live by making choices having practical and moral implications for themselves and others (Ruekert 1982). People's choices emerge as they rhetorically construct themselves as acting in accord with a "more or less organized system of meanings» (Burke 1937 [1984]: 5).

The processes of social construction, choice-making and action are ongoing because the circumstances of life are recalcitrant. Life resists people's efforts to make sense of and shape their lives by presenting them with circumstances that might be interpreted as justifications for new constructions of reality (Burke 1937 [1984]). Recalcitrant circumstances remind us of how we are ensnared in terminologies that are never fully capable of anticipating or accounting for the practical circumstances to which our constructions of reality are answerable. The drama of life may be observed in how people participate in the dialectical interplay of agency and constraint, sense-making and uncertainty, and chaos and order that organize life in recalcitrant worlds.

These aspects of Burke's perspective form a background for dramatism, a methodology for revealing the "dialectical interaction among the symbols that compose the substance of statements" (Heath 1986, p. 43). Burke uses his dramatistic method in examining the possibilities for reality construction in different social interactions. Dramatism is often defined as the operations of the pentad which consists of five narrative concerns: *agents* using their *agency* in *acting* within *scenes* to pursue discernible *purposes* (Burke 1945 [1969], Overington 1977). The interaction of these concerns may be seen in how each concern influences how other concerns may be defined within emergent narratives. For example, narratives organized around a particular type of scene are culturally associated with a limited range of acts performed by a limited range of agents pursuing a limited range of purposes. Alternative constructions of what may appear to be the same situation emerge when a particular kind of agent is positioned at the center of the narrative. Different kinds of agents use different types of agency in participating in and sometimes transforming scenes.

Burke's dramatistic perspective is a standpoint for elaborating on Spector and Kitsuse's paradigm. It represents a wider interpretive context for understanding some basic themes in *Constructing Social Problems*. For example, Burke's depiction of drama as the ways in which people symbolically engage their environments is consistent with the idea that social problems are constructed through claims-making activities. Burke's pentad extends the claims-

making paradigm by showing how social problems claims are narratively organized. Gusfield's (1976) dramatistic analysis of drinking driver research is an exemplar for such research (Also see Canal and Gurrionero 2016, Järvinen and Miller 2014). Dramatism is also a useful framework for comparatively analyzing dominant constructions of social problems and the narratives of groups voicing different constructions of reality (Järvinen and Miller 2015, Kenney 2001).

For example, Rutten, Mottart and Soetaert (2010) analyze accounts constructed by students about a play and film (based on the play) centered in interactions between a group of Dutch-Flemish vacationers renting a house in southern Europe and a group of Ghanaian refugees seeking temporary shelter. The students detail how their orientations to the positions represented by the characters in the performances change as they emphasize different aspects of the pentad. Rutten, Mottart's and Soetaert's study is particularly useful in showing how social problems work oriented toward constructing or affirming institutional realties creates conditions for constructing alternative orientations to reality and action. The pentad is a resource used by claims-makers and their critics in constructing their differing orientations to reality.

Burke's pentad is also a framework for analyzing ethics in social problems claims-making and other human activities. It is important to note that Burke does not propose an ethics *of* action, that is, a stable framework for distinguishing ethical from unethical actions that apply across different times and interactions. Rather, he locates ethics *in* claims-making activities by examining how human action orients to preferences that are at least partly ethical choices. Human actions cannot be neatly classified as practical or ethical for Burke (1941 [1973]). As drama, social problems claims-making involves making choices having practical and ethical implications.

I see Burke's dramatism as a standpoint for developing a clearer and expanded understanding of claims-making as constitutive activity. The ethics of social problems claims-making are neither preordained by claims-makers' (agents') strategic choices nor straightforward adaptations to recalcitrant circumstances (scenes) that limit claims-makers' agency. Claims-making acts constitute themselves as ethical and practical dramas by engaging differences between claims-makers' ethical preferences and the constraints of practical situations. The differences form a dialectic through which claims-making acts transform situations (Burke 1945 [1969]). Wess (1996) explains the transformative potential of claims-making acts by comparing them to a game in which the rules are continuously negotiated as the game proceeds. The purpose and organization of each playing of the game can only be known by playing it.

For Burke, ongoing dialectical negotiation within social problems and other claims-making activities is related to the limitations associated within any use of language to describe, categorize or explain life circumstances. Different uses of language reveal different aspects of situations but they are also screens that obscure other aspects. Thus, ongoing social problems claims-making activities always stand in potential need of revision or replacement by terminologies that reveal new possibilities for constructing reality, be they activities designed to alter public opinion about putative conditions, apply institutional categories to particular people or events, or reframe others' social problems claims within popular culture contexts.

Burke's interests in the transformative potential of the dialectic of ethics and practicality and in the limitations of claims-makers' discourse have some important implications for studies of social problems construction. Burke's analysis challenges the usual way in which constructionists conceptualize the ownership of social problems and social problems games. The concept of ownership for Burke is not a matter of achieving control over how a putative condition is defined as a social problem but a process of continuously making claims that are susceptible to challenge by others voicing alternative standpoints and emergent recalcitrant circumstances associated with one's own claims-making activities (See, for example, Effler, 2010, Fiske 1989, Weinberg 2005). Similar to Wess's game of evolving rules, social problems claims-makers construct conditions making their claims-making activities possible as they construct putative conditions as social problems.

While different in other respects, this thread in Burke's analysis resonates with Foucault's (1972) examinations of gaps and ruptures in institutional discourses. Social realities are sustained by people's participation in discourses that are typically associated with established orientations to putative conditions and alternative discourses that may be said to more adequately address exceptions to normal circumstances. Frohman's (1996) study of how prosecutors justified taking legal action in cases that they normally defined as unconvictable illustrates one way in which claims-makers reinterpret the rules of their social problems work as they do it. Claims-makers' occasional and short term recourse to alternative discourses also involves risk. They are potential transition points to new claims-making activities and constructions of reality. The complexity of this process may be seen by considering the range of connected, but different, games within which social problems are constructed (Best 2016).

This interpretation of Burke's dramatism points to the shifting foundations on which social problems claims-making rests. The processes through which social problems are constructed are also conditions for undermining

those claims and the activities through which they are constructed. Points of potential transformation abound in diverse social interactions concerned with whether putative conditions are social problems. Burke's dramatistic methodology represents one strategy for revealing such points of potential transformation.

Final reflections

I have sought to contribute to the legacy of Spector and Kitsuse's *Constructing Social Problems* by suggesting two ways in which their paradigm might be extended and modified. The first suggestion is to recast Spector and Kitsuse's project as the study of social problems as cultural constructions. Such constructions include claims-making activities oriented to social policy development and institutional realities but they are not limited to these concerns. People's interests in social problems construction are varied and shifting, and their claims-making activities are directed to diverse audiences. My suggestion to explore how social problems are constructed as popular culture is only a start to exploring the many worlds that people make through social problems claims-making.

My second suggestion is to expand the range of constructionist perspectives used by social scientists in organizing their studies of social problems claims-making. I have used Burke's dramatistic perspective as one example of how social problems construction might be analyzed differently. Burke's perspective is one basis for adding constructionist perspectives from the humanities to social scientists' conversations about the social construction of social problems. It is a standpoint for seeing how both Shakespeare and Donald Trump are social problems claims-makers, albeit claims-makers of widely different rhetorical imaginations and abilities. Burke's analysis of the dialectic of ethics and practicality is also a framework for expanding on processual and interactional themes in Spector and Kitsuse's paradigm. It is a way of seeing social problems construction as artful practice.

I recognize that my preferences for further developing the claims-making approach are not held by other social constructionists. I encourage them to show how their preferred orientations might contribute to our shared interest in fostering new and creative studies of social problems as constructed realities. To repeat myself, I see the expansive literatures making up the international social constructionist movement as a rich source of ideas and guidance in developing such studies. For example, I wonder if LaTour's (2004) exploration of social constructionism as the study of matters of fact vs. matters of

concern has relevance for constructionist studies of social problems. I also ponder the possible implications of collaborative projects involving academically-oriented constructionists and applied constructionists who are skilled at helping others deal with recalcitrant circumstances that are often defined as social problems.

The world has changed significantly since 1977. Constructionist perspectives are more widely known and used today. Thus, constructionist analysts are challenged to adapt their studies to reveal new aspects of claims-makers' activities and experiences. This may involve rethinking such concepts as social problems ownership, games and work, or the idea that social problems constructions evolve as a natural history. It certainly requires that we recognize that the number of social problems claims-making activities available to individuals and groups is vastly extended in a world where every blogger or person with a You Tube or Facebook account is a potential constructor of social problems. These claims-making contexts also remind us of the many possible ways that audiences of such claims-making might use them. These aspects of the contemporary world make it important that we share our reflections on possible future developments within the constructionist approach to social problems.

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