



Constructing (in)competence: Disabling Evaluations in Clinical and Social interaction

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Competence and incompetence are constructs that emerge in the social milieu of everyday life. Individuals are continually making and revising judgments about each other's abilities as they interact. The flexible, situated view of competence conveyed by the research of the authors in this volume is a departure from the way that competence is usually thought about in the fields of communication disabilities and education. In the social constructivist view, competence is not a fixed mass, residing within an individual, or a fixed judgment, defined externally. Rather, it is variable, sensitive to what is going on in the here and now, and coconstructed by those present. Constructions of competence are tied to evaluations implicit in the communication of the participants as well as to explicit evaluations of how things are going.

The authors address the social construction of competence in a variety of situations: engaging in therapy for communication and other disorders, working and living with people with disabilities, speaking a second language, living with deafness, and giving and receiving instruction. Their studies focus on adults and children, including those with disabilities (aphasia, traumatic brain injury, augmentative systems users), as they go about managing their lives and identities. They examine the all-important context in which participants make competence judgments, assess the impact of implicit judgments and formal diagnoses, and look at the types of evaluations made during interaction.

This book makes an argument all helping professionals need to hear: institutional, clinical, and social practices promoting judgments must be changed to practices that are more positive and empowering.

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