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Communication Conference to Explore Social Construction and Relational Practices

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Communication Conference to Explore Social Construction and Relational Practices
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Relational Practices

By Tracy Manforte
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- How do we achieve more humane
and viable forms of relationship in our daily
interactions, within our local communities and
organizations, and within the rapidly growing global
community? This question will be the focus of "Social
Construction and Relational Practices," an international,
interdisciplinary conference convened by the
Department of Communication at the University of
New Hampshire and the Taos Institute, Sept. 16 - 19, at
the New England Conference Center.

The conference will address how social constructionism
and relational practices have created and transformed
diverse aspects of cultural life, and many academic and
professional disciplines.

Speakers include Kenneth Gergen, professor of
psychology and interpretive studies at Swarthmore
College, director of the Taos Institute, and author of
The Saturated Self; John Shotter, UNH professor of
communication, an associate of the Taos Institute and
author of the recently published Conversational
Realities; Sallyann Roth, noted family therapist and co-
creator of the Public Conversation Project; and Melissa
Griffith and James Griffith from the George
Washington University Medical Center and authors of
The Body Speaks: Therapeutic Dialogues for Mind-
Body Problems. Sessions include: New Directions in
Constructionist Therapies; Discourse and Change
Practices in Organizations; New Directions in
Qualitative Research; Constructing Health and Illness,
and more. In addition, roundtable discussions,
participant presentations, drama, art, music and dance
will be held throughout the conference.

The Taos Institute is an association of scholars and
practitioners dedicated to exploring ways to integrate
social constructionist ideas with everyday practices.

According to Sheila McNamee, UNH professor of
communication, social construction involves the study
of ways in which people create meaning together.
"Through our conversations we form the nature of what
we take to be reality," she says. "As we develop
meaning and take practical action, the future is created.

"Social constructionism has led to a deeper examination
of important societal concerns, for example, how we
create and sustain our beliefs in the real, what we
consider the rational and what we take to be the just and
the good," she continues. "Social constructionism
involves understanding human activity in a most
profound way."

The dialogue of social constructionism is becoming the
common ground for such wide-ranging disciplines as
education, social sciences, therapy, psychology, social
work, community building and organizational change.

The conference is supported by the UNH Center for the
Humanities and Sage Publications Ltd., London. For
more information contact Kathleen Williams,
University Conference Office, at 862-1900, or visit the
conference website at www.unh.edu/taos/.

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