

This site was developed for a group of therapists who study postmodern thinkers. If you are a therapist interested in the postmodern movement among therapists, you might like read more about it by [clicking here](#).

## Provisional Definitions of Common Postmodern Terms from D to I

**DSM-IV** - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (of Mental Disorders), fourth edition. This manual is published by the American Psychiatric Association and is a list of mental disorders together with detailed definitions. The pages describing a disorder typically list from 4 to 15 criteria and allow the diagnosis if a certain number of these criteria are met. Diagnoses are differential, that is, the diagnostician reads through the criteria to find the best fit even though it is possible for a given person to fall within more than one very similar categories. The DSM-IV guides the diagnostician in this differential effort by saying things such as "Panic Disorder is not diagnosed if the Panic Attacks are judged to be...." and this is so even if the patient would otherwise fit the criteria for a "panic disorder." Many insurance companies require a DSM-IV diagnosis in order to pay for therapy. These diagnoses are typically given by either psychiatrists or clinical psychologists. The DSM-IV was published in 1994. The earlier editions of this manual were as follows: DSM-I 1952, DSM-II 1968, DSM-III 1979, DSM-III-R 1987. DSM I and DSM II were quite short and non-specific in criteria compared to later editions, they also included a number of "disorders" that are no longer listed as forms of mental illness. [return](#)

**decenter** - to look at the world through another's eyes or to include the other's perspective within one's own vision of things. [return](#)

**deconstruction** - A term that, for all practical purposes, was introduced in the literature by Derrida. It means to undermine the conceptual order imposed by a concept that has captivated our imaginations and ways of seeing things. (See [Shawver, 1996](#)) see "[deconstruction quilt](#)" [return](#)

**deconstruction quilt** - a visual representation for [deconstruction](#) and [differAnce](#). [Click here](#) to see an image of the deconstruction quilt and read a related article. [return](#)

**deductive logic** - a way of reasoning from one set of statements to another. It has the form: If this is the case and this other thing is also the case, then we can conclude, without direct evidence, only our reasoning, that this third thing is the case, too. People use deductive logic in a loose way when they think and talk, but it is used in a highly formalized way in philosophy circles. There, in the last century especially, the rules of logic become quite complex and the deduction (the reasoning leading to the conclusion) follows rules that are so formal that they are often thought to be, or hoped to be, a kind of mathematical calculus. Note that deduction does not require any factual or observed information. One can deduce something false if one reasons with false ideas or premises. Contrast "deductive logic" with "inductive logic." [return](#)

**deduction** - in ordinary language, a deduction is just reasoning your way to a conclusion. In philosophy, however, it has a more technical sense, and means that the reasoning conforms to the rules of [deductive logic](#). [return](#)

**differAnce** - This is a term coined by Jacques [Derrida](#), father deconstructionism. (However, Derrida does not capitalize the "A".) Derrida explains "differance" as that which is different and deferred (put out of mind). It's a philosophical term that causes many people headaches and Derrida does not explain it in an introductory way. However, in many contexts, you will have a rough understanding of what is said if you think of the differAnce as the shadows of our understanding, something we know but forget and need to be reminded. Or, you might think of it as the cultural Unconscious, something that the whole culture puts mostly out of mind. [Click here for an article on differAnce](#). [Click here to see the deconstruction quilt, which will also help clarify the meaning of differAnce](#). Arguably, the differAnce is a source of our creativity. Mostly we forget it, but sometimes people think of these largely unconscious aspects of life and weave them creatively into new moments of understanding. [return](#)

**dialectic** - In classical Greece, a process of discussion that is illustrated in [Plato](#)'s dialogues was called dialectic. It is a way of questioning and conversing and reasoning. [Kant](#) referred to the "transcendental dialectic" as metaphysical reasoning that tried, without success (or possible success) to figure out what the truth was beyond our senses. The German philosopher, [Hegel](#), applied the term to a process of development in which one idea (the thesis) begets its opposite (the antithesis) and the two come together to form a synthesis. [Marx](#) built on this Hegelian notion of dialectic in his version of dialectical materialism. [return](#)

Read a book that postmodern therapists criticize:

[Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-IV-TR Fourth Edition \(Text Revision\)](#)

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Check out an important critique:

[The Selling of DSM: The Rhetoric of Science in Psychiatry \(Social Problems and Social Issues\) \(Social Problems and Social Issues\)](#)

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Don't miss this popular critique:

[They Say You're Crazy: How the World's Most Powerful Psychiatrists Decide Who's Normal](#)

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Learn how therapists became postmodern

[Nostalgic Postmodernism: Postmodern Therapy](#)

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More books every postmodern should read will appear in this column soon.

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**dialogic** - having to do with dialogue. A dialogic theory of therapy would be one which emphasized the importance of there being room for different opinions to be expressed. [return](#)

**discourse analysis** - inquiry that leads us to reflect critically and creatively on our common ways of life. [return](#)

**differend** - [Lyotard's](#) term for a dispute resulting from the fact that one party cannot voice her complaints (or points) because the other insists on speaking within a different language game or genre of discourse (such as one person speaking within narration and the other within speculation). [return](#)

**dominant discourse** - A [Foucaultian](#) term that indicates a certain way thinking and talking is the most common and most accepted way. Often it implies an institutionalized way of thinking about things. [return](#)

**dominant narrative** - a term that [Michael White](#) and [David Epston](#) seem to have picked up from [Jerome Bruner](#). [return](#)

**discourse** - sometimes this term refers to any kind of talk, but often it refers to particular unified ways of talking that represents a kind of conversation across texts from different but related communities. [return](#)

**The Enlightenment.** A philosophical movement of the 18th century that emphasized the use of reason to scrutinize previously accepted doctrines and traditions which it called "superstition." The Enlightenment philosophy encouraged the American and French revolutionary overthrow of aristocracies and replaced it with the dream of science liberating us from the scourge of one human's inhumanity to another. Postmodernism is disillusioned with the power of the Enlightenment dream to bring us to this utopia and points, among other things, to the science behind the Nazi slaughter of the Jews in World War II. [return](#)

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**erasure** - (or "under erasure" or "putting [something] under erasure"). This is [Derrida's](#) term. It means presenting our ideas as though they were undeconstructable but with awareness that they can be deconstructed. One might say, "I say [such and such], but I am putting it under erasure." [return](#)

**ethnomethodology** - A term coined by [Garfinkel](#). It refers to the study of the body of common-sense knowledge and any sense making procedure. (See Heritage, pp.4-5)

**externalization** - a term introduced by [Michael White](#) and [David Epston](#). It is the name given to the process of asking relative influence questions that assists the client in separating from a pressing problem so that it is possible to see the self as authoring a life that weakens or overcomes the influence of the problem. [return](#)

**explicate order** - a term introduced by [David Bohm](#). The "explicate order" is the reality that we see around us. It is distinguished from the "[implicate order](#)".

**face validity** - one of the forms of [validity](#) for an [operational definition](#). If an operational definition has "face validity" then, on the face of things, it appears to measure what it is supposed to measure. If a test that called itself a test for creativity, for example, consisted of questions testing the subject's ability to memorize, then the test would not have "face validity." This would be so even if later studies showed that people who scored high on this test actually were more creative than people who scored low on the test. Contrast "face validity" with "[construct validity](#)." [return](#)

**facts** - a concept that differentiates the social constructionist from the realist. The realist says that facts exist independent of our construction. The social constructionist feels that we socially construct facts. Compare [Tom Strong's](#) [review](#) of [Jonathan Potter's](#) social [constructionist](#) concept of "facts" with [Jerry Shaffer's](#) [review](#) of [John Searle's](#) concept of facts, and ask yourself if the dispute is a [differend](#). [return](#)

**facticity** - objectivity, an illusory objectivity [return](#)

**felt sense** - Shawver's term for Lyotard's word "[pagan](#)." [return](#)

**finitism** - The belief that there are not enough rules to explain how things work. Finitism rejects the belief that there can be an ideal language, for example, in which the meaning of statements are entirely determined by a set of self-consistent implicit rules. It also rejects the notion that a research program could conceivably determine a sufficiently elaborate set of rules that completely explains how things

work. Both [Wittgenstein](#) and [Garfinkel](#) were finitists. [PMTH has a series of articles on finitism in Wittgenstein and Garfinkel.](#)[return](#)

**foundationalism** - The foundationalists are philosophers who argue that we must have certain [apodictic truths](#) that are self-evident in order for knowledge claims to be deduced from them. [return](#)

**Foucauldian** - a common way of spelling or meaning what we would ordinarily imply by "Foucaultian", or related to [Foucault](#). [return](#)

**fly-bottle** - [Wittgenstein's](#) term for the confusion that results when one is mystified by language complications. The term comes from aphorism 309 of the Philosophical Investigations, in which Wittgenstein says, "309. What is your aim in philosophy? -- To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." The linguistically confused person is the "fly." [return](#)

Frankfurt School - Also called "critical theory" emerged in the early twentieth century in Frankfurt, Germany.

**generous listening (or reading)** - [Shawver's](#) term for one of the things we do to promote [paralogy](#). It involves accepting the other person's key terms in their distinctive senses. Generous listening does not require us to accept the other person's conclusions, but it does require us to be generous in their distinctive use of words. It is to be distinguished from critical listening. The concept and the history of this term is detailed in [Shawver, 1998, Postmodernizing the Unconscious](#). [return](#)

**generative metaphor** - A term introduced by [Schon](#). A generative metaphor is an implicit metaphor that can cast a kind of spell on a community. All solutions are understood in terms of the implicit metaphor. "Under the spell of metaphor, it appears obvious that [one thing or another] is bad and [the other] is good." [Schon, p. 255](#). If someone can introduce a new generative metaphor, new solutions can be found. [return](#)

**gerundic** - the turning of a verb into a noun, as drinking becomes a noun in the phrase "his drinking." A gerundic switch in culture would take an action and turn it into a thing. For example, the action homosexual sex becomes a thing when we speak of "homosexuality" or "homosexuals." [return](#)

**grammatology** - Derrida's term for the science of [writing \(in his sense of "writing"\)](#). [return](#)

**grammatical fiction** - Wittgenstein's term (see aphorism #307) for myth that is communicated to all the speakers of a natural language by a peculiarity in our standard way of talking. It is as though we are a tribe who thinks because we say that love is in the heart that we assumed that this was physically true. The languages in western culture teach us key grammatical fictions and some of these have to do with the way in which we think about the human mind. (see a PMTH NEWS article called "Is Wittgenstein a behaviorist? Part 1" discussing grammatical fictions by [clicking here](#)).

**grand narratives** - another name for Lyotard's concept of [metanarratives](#). [return](#)

**hegemony** - a culture or institution is a hegemony if it is so dominant that other cultures and institutions do not have a voice. [return](#)

**heteroglossia** - [Bakhtin's](#) key term. "Heteroglossia" is a weave of different ways of talking and thinking, their intersection and interaction.

**heterotopia** - literally, it means the displacement of a body part to an abnormal location. [return](#)

**hermeneutic circle** - A concept of Martin Heidegger's that was used by his student Hans-Georg Gadamer, and, finally, incorporated into the therapy theory of [Harlene Anderson](#) and [Harry Goolishian](#). For Heidegger it meant that one cannot understand the beginning of a text until one has understood the end of the text. And one did not understand the end of a text until one had read it through from the beginning. Thus one's study of any text cannot be linear but must be circular. This translates into therapy theory so as to say one's understanding of the client must move back in an interactive dialogic way with the text of what the client says. [return](#)

**hermeneutics** - The science of interpretation. [return](#)

**HGI** - Houston-Galveston Institute, formerly known as the Galveston Family Institute. The institute was founded by [Harlene Anderson](#) and [Harry Goolishian](#), two authors that developed a form of postmodern therapy called "[Collaborative Language Systems](#)" or CLS. [return](#)