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things" (p. 74). Such news delineates the order of things, the procedures, the organizational arrangements, and legal and policing provisions. This type of news helps shape the moral order, provides stable meanings that lead to recognition of authority, and ensures survival of society under the status quo.

One problem that bothered this reader was the way the researchers operationalized the distinction between popular and quality media; the reader is never quite sure if what is being measured is the difference between publicly and privately owned media, or broadcast outlets with and without national network affiliation, or liberal and right-wing newspapers. Another problem is the muddling of the micro and macro — the separation of conscious from unconscious actions and values on the part of news operatives. On the one hand, the media are viewed as fluid and pluralistic. For example, quality media favor investigative and adversarial stories, while popular media favor strong ideological positions (e.g., nationalism and anticommunism) stated explicitly. Yet when all is said and done, the news media are found to be so entwined in matters of deviance and control that they are "as much an agency of policing as the law enforcement agencies" (p. 74). If news operatives have any values, they are subsumed under journalistic routines — event orientation, personalization, focus on procedures, realism, and precedent — that help them represent moral

and social order and authority. Through blending of fact and value, through "constructive interpretations," through fictive accounts (popular narratives), journalists produce news that provides notions, images, and myths that confirm society's institutional arrangements and "meld the is and the ought" (p. 109).

The authors seem to be saying that, within the considerable confines of medium format and market orientation, the media engage in a variety of interpretations, yet, ultimately, the cultural templates come together in such a way that media of all bent and persuasion are accomplices at best, and lackeys at worst, in upholding the system of crime, law, and justice.

Research and Reflexivity

By Frederick Steier (Ed.). London: Sage, 1991. 257 pp. \$60.00 (hard), \$24.00 (soft).

A review by Noshir Contractor
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This volume contains chapters by theorists and researchers who reject traditional notions that knowledge in, and about, social systems can be objectively observed and studied from the "outside." Rather, constructionist scholars contend, all knowledge is socially constructed and "the world we experience is the world we construct" (von Glaserfeld, p. 18). Furthermore, the constructionists represented in this book consider as "naive" (Steier, p. 4; Krippen-

dorff, p. 115) or “trivial” (von Glaserfeld, p. 17) those scholars who consider individual knowledge as constructed but in response to an independently existing objective reality. Thus from this more narrowly defined constructionist viewpoint, all knowledge is self-reflexive “in the sense that the knower always is a constitutive part of his or her own process of knowing and moreover, that much of it is negotiated with others” (Krippendorff, p. 115). The editor, Frederick Steier (director at the Center for Cybernetic Studies in Complex Systems at Old Dominion University), points out that there are multiple viewpoints among constructionist scholars. This book has contributions representing many of these viewpoints, including social constructionism (Gergen & Gergen), radical constructivism (von Glaserfeld), co-constructionism (Jorgenson), embodied constructionism (Soderqvist), and ecological constructionism (Steier & Krippendorff).

Steier’s central thesis is that researchers working from any one of these constructionist perspectives must systematically attempt to apply the principles they espouse to their own roles as researchers. Hence, he argues, it would be intellectually inconsistent for these scholars to study how social systems construct representations without explicitly recognizing that they — the researchers — are an integral part of the social construction. Scholars outside the constructionist perspective also recognize the obtrusiveness of researchers and

devise techniques to minimize, or at least assess, this effect.

In contrast, constructionist scholars argue that researchers should not only accept the inevitability of this obtrusiveness, but examine and report on the processes involved when such concerns enter their research. The authors represent a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, linguistics, psychology, communication, urban studies, physics, biology, and system sciences. The chapters are, without exception, intellectually engaging and draw upon literature and arguments that may not be familiar, but are certainly relevant, to communication researchers.

Some chapters, while not explicitly discussing the role of researchers in the social construction process, provide an excellent overview for those not well acquainted with constructionist research and self-reflexivity. Von Glaserfeld traces the development of the constructionist movement, and provides a spirited defense against the more common, if naive, criticisms of this approach. Maturana argues that the criteria used to validate scientific explanations do not test against some objective reality. In his view, “science is an operational domain in which the standard observer recursively creates knowledge in his or her practise of living” (p. 48). As a result, Maturana points out that researchers must be held ethically responsible for the manner in which they participate in the creation of knowledge. Von Foerster points out that the study of self-referencing processes has recently received attention in several disci-

plines — autopoiesis (in biology), eigen behavior (in mathematics), a calculus of self-reference (in logic), performance utterances (in linguistics), and reality as social construct (in epistemology). Unlike the remaining authors in this volume, von Foerster discusses the causal model as an explanatory framework but rejects the assumptions embedded in most contemporary linear models. Instead, he makes a compelling case for describing self-referencing processes in terms of a “non-trivial machine” (p. 70) that recognizes nonlinear feedback.

In other chapters, researchers report on the use of self-reflexive techniques in their research. Jorgenson reports on a study in which she interviewed family members on their definitions of “family.” She found that often “the person to whom a research subject speaks is not the person an interviewer thinks herself to be” (p. 211). Instead, her respondents actively fashioned an identity for her. During the period when the research was conducted, Jorgenson notes that she was visibly pregnant. She claims that this facilitated her acceptance among respondents who were first-time parents. Many answered her research questions, couched in the form of advice to the soon-to-be mother.

Soderqvist, a biographer, observes that from a constructionist perspective, biographies are also constructive enterprise — even though this is not immediately apparent to many authors (or readers) of biographies. He suggests that in order to be reflexive, authors should introduce elements

of the “biographer’s autobiography” (p. 155) into their writing. Steier draws upon several folk accounts and two research encounters to provide evidence of “mirrored activities.” Upon being reflexive, he discovered that many of the questions he was attempting to understand in the groups he studied mirrored activities in which he was himself engaged. Further, he notes that while he, as a researcher, was observing groups and framing a situation based on certain streams of behavior, their behavior was in turn based on observing and framing his behavior and intentions.

Gergen and Gergen suggest several strategies for self-reflexive inquiry. Perhaps the most intriguing begins with the design of a traditional hypothesis-testing study. But instead of actually conducting a study, Gergen and Gergen urge the researcher to generate hypothetically alternative patterns of findings, and ask reflexively for a theoretical accounting. Even though they provide this as an example for constructionist research, I believe their recommendation is (or should be) profitably used by any competent researcher before embarking on actual data collection.

The chapter by Krippendorff provides the most well-developed attempt at fulfilling Steier’s aim for this book. Krippendorff compares the traditional mass media effects model with a self-reflexive model, which explicitly recognizes the mass media as being “integral to a recursive process that converges to

some kind of equilibrium in which everyone's interests, to the extent they are asserted, become served as a condition for their participation in the system" (p. 136). The mass media offer a means for a society "to talk to itself while perturbations from the outside enter but in its own terms" (p. 138). Further, Krippendorff notes that the theories and findings of communication researchers reenter the very media they observe. Hence researchers must be held socially accountable for the realities their theories bring about.

In the introduction, Steier states that "the chapters in this volume deal with, not just a recognition of the 'fact that' researchers must be included in their own research ... but, more importantly, what such a recognition means for the development of social constructionist methodologies" (p. 5). The essays in this book provide strong evidence of the "fact that" researchers must be included in their own research. It lays the groundwork — but not much more — for addressing the implications of this recognition for the development of social constructionist methodologies.

**Public Opinion in America:
Moods, Cycles and Swings**

By James A. Stimson. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991. 164 pp. \$49.95 (hard), \$14.95 (soft).

A review by D. Charles Whitney
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For anyone who teaches, or cares about, public opinion and who has

ever had to grapple with the slippery concept of the "climate of opinion," *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles and Swings* is a blessing.

Less about the broad title suggested before the colon than it is about the topic of the subtitle (moods, cycles, and swings in American public opinion), the book is a largely successful attempt to account for U.S. policy choices and electoral results of the past 35 years by changes in the public mood. "Mood" is discerned by tracking changes in responses to 77 questions posed at different times in series from 1956 to 1989, from the National Opinion Research Center, General Social Survey, the Michigan Center for Political Studies biennial survey, the Gallup Poll, and the like. The items are policy preference measures (favor/oppose handgun control, spend more/less on urban problems, for example). The book's well-documented thesis is that the marginal responses across a wide variety of policy items (abortion policy is an exception) move in tandem across the past 35 years. When these shifting marginals are fitted into several competing statistical causal models, we can find a "policy mood." Moreover, Stimson, a professor of political science at the University of Iowa, argues, this mood changes over time and in ways that make sense.

"Policy mood" is in some senses a surrogate term for public opinion. It expresses aggregate policy preferences, defining upper and lower limits for the acceptability of