

**SOCI 101**  
**INTRODUCTION TO**  
**SOCIOLOGY**

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[www.morrisville.edu/sociology](http://www.morrisville.edu/sociology)

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### D. Social Construction

#### 1. Food Production, Energy, and Types of Society

The importance of food production lies in the fact that how a society gets its food correlates to that society's:

Group Size	Settlements
Economy	Political Structure

10,000 years ago, domestication of plants and animals (known as the agricultural or "neolithic" revolution) led to the rise of civilization and brought forth new types of human organization, **the social institution**.

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### D. Social Construction:

#### 1. Types of Societies

**a. Reference Point: Food**

Development of **social institutions** coincides with the introduction of **food production**. Essentially **four different "subsistence strategies"** have provided humans with our most basic resource: **FOOD**

Pre-Industrial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Food Collection</b> (hunting/gathering; tribal) vs. (← all prehistory)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ii. <b>Pastoralism</b> (raising animals; tribal/feudal) (~10kya → present)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>iii. <b>Farming</b> (horti-/agriculture; tribal/feudal/early industrial) (~10kya → present)</li> </ul>
(Post) Industrial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>iv. <b>Industrial</b> (1800 BCE → present) (industrial/post-industrial) (tractors, CAFOs, factory farms, pseudomeat)</li> </ul>

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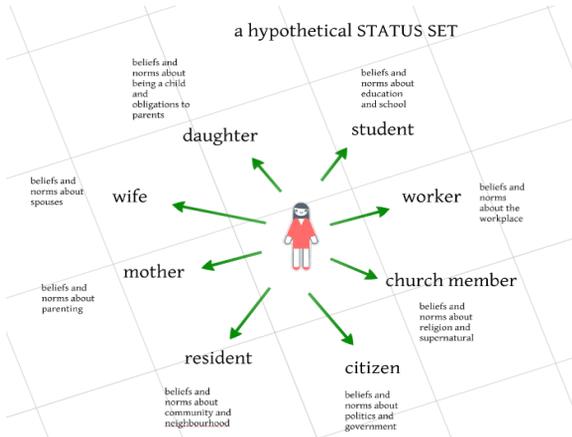
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### D. Social Construction

#### 2.b. How are statuses obtained?

- Ascribed status: involuntary positions**  
*for example,*  
 - male or female (sex), skin color (race), daughter or son (family relation)
- Achieved status: voluntary positions**  
*for example,*  
 - college student/professor, athlete, officer, criminal

Note that **the two types of status work together**: what we are ascribed often helps/hinders us to achieve other statuses.

- A status of particular importance to others** in defining actors is called a **master status**.

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### D. Social Construction

#### 2.b. ROLE

The **behavior** expected of someone who fills a particular status. "Role" is active and dynamic.

- ROLE SET: A number of roles attached to a single status;**  
*for example, Status = Mother*  
*Role Set = disciplinarian, cook, caregiver, nurse, cleaner, driver*

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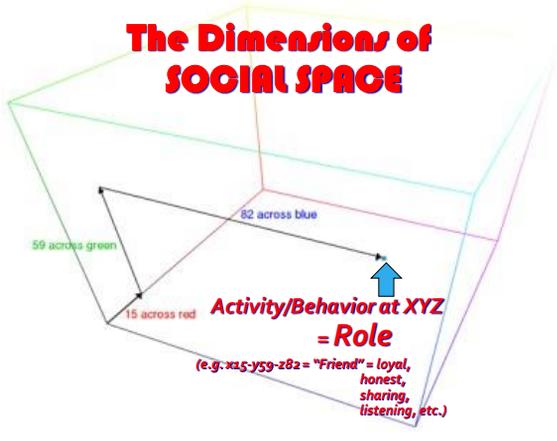
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# The Dimensions of SOCIAL SPACE




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## D. The Sociology of the Everyday

3. **Role Problems:** Social Roles demand a lot of a person's time and energy

a. **Role Conflict**

Involves **conflicts between two or more statuses**  
(*what role do I play?*)

*For example:*  
Conflict between role expectations of a police officer who catches her own son selling drugs – mother and police officer.

b. **Role Strain**

Involves a **strain from a single status**  
(*who should I satisfy?*)

*For example:*  
Student who tries to balance demands from two Professors urging student to study for two different exams on the same day.

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## D. Social Construction

3. **Role Problems, cont.**

c. **Role Exit – (becoming an “ex”)**

**Disengaging from social roles** can be very traumatic if not properly prepared.

*For example:*  
- Ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-husband or wife, ex-worker (retiree), ex-student (graduate), ex-con (criminal), ex-patriate (traitor), etc.

d. **Role Synchronicity – (“coherent self”)**

**Making multiple roles into a coherent identity;** the process of “self-making.” Can lead to identity crises.

*For example:* Environmentalist Identity  
Role Set: teacher, father, scientist, musician, activist

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## D. Social Construction

### 4. "The Social Construction of Reality"

Berger and Luckmann, 1966

Note that different cultures offer alternative statuses and roles. The creation of status and role is a **SOCIAL PROCESS**.

**How we collectively act and react defines the statuses and roles accepted by society.**

#### a. Reality is constructed out of the meanings and values of the observer.

Understanding this allows one to see through the "façade" of society. This has been likened to "**WAKING UP**" by various philosophers and even in modern film.

(cf. *The Matrix* - **SOCIETY**  
*Red Pill or Blue Pill* = will you exercise your **CHOICE, FREE WILL, or not?**);

**What is reality?** To us it is a mixture of:

**PERCEPTS (SENSES) & CONCEPTS (IDEAS)**  
*ACTION*                      *THOUGHT*

Our **concept** of reality is more than mere sensory stimuli – we **make sense** of the world using the mental tools offered to us by our culture.

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## D. Social Construction

### 4. "The Social Construction of Reality"

#### a. Reality is constructed out of the meanings and values of observers.

#### b. What we agree is real in society becomes real.

For example, **TERRITORY** is social constructed

In what way are the **borders** between states or countries made "real" if they don't have any geographical or **cultural "markers"**?

#### - Another example: **MONEY** is social constructed

We all agree on a value for the symbol-filled paper that we call "money" – without such agreement, money is worthless (e.g. *Germany 1920s* : **PBS**);

#### - A third example: **TIME** is social constructed (*Alan Watts – play to 4:40*)

What we measure as **time for social purposes** (one hour lunches, 50 minute classes, daylight savings time, etc.) does NOT conform to the **nature and experience** of time (time flies when you're having fun and drags when you're bored). Different cultures have **different calendars** and different days, weeks, months, etc. (not just different names but different time spans). **Clocks and calendars are artifacts of human social construction.**

A fourth example: **YOU** are socially constructed. But you are also **Shiva**.



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## D. Social Construction

### 4. The social construction of reality

**d. The Thomas Theorem:** (from *W.I. Thomas, 1931, Chicago School of Sociology*)

"A situation **defined as real is real** in its consequences."

Socially constructed realities have **real implications** for individuals' lives and welfare. **Ex:** violating territory, stealing money

#### e. How do we study this "constructed reality"?

Using **ethnomethodology** - a technique that involves "**breaking the rules**", or norms, to evaluate people's responses.

For example, riding an elevator backwards, pointing in the air at nothing, or asking for someone's seat on the subway



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## E. Sociology of Knowledge

Using the *Thomas Theorem*, we can see that life is a drama played out by individuals reacting to situational definitions.

### e. Erving Goffman: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life aka "Dramaturgy":

- Examines *social interaction* in terms of *theatrical performances*  
Shakespeare: "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." (*As You Like It*.)

Dramaturgy involves:

#### i. *Presentation of self*

- Impression management* - making oneself appear in the best light possible;
- Fronts* - the part we play to satisfy our master status
- Deceit* - using any means to stabilize the definition of self and situation

#### ii. *Role performance*

- Real life stage "regions" (front stage, back stage, off stage), use of props, and scripts define social expectations

*Example: Doctor's office* - what "regions", "props" and scripts exist in that social setting?

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Social Constructions are more easily seen if you have a sense of RELATIVITY:

### *Getting Perspective*

On the *holistic, non-ethnocentric, relative perspective....*

...and getting the BIG PICTURE!

## Powers of 10

Exponential Notation

Earth =  $12.76 \times 10^6 = 12,760,000$  meters wide  
(12.76 million meters)

Cell =  $12.76 \times 10^{-6} = 0.00001276$  meters wide  
(12.76 millionths of a meter)

[NASA's Powers of 10 \(YouTube\)](#)

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