

**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    (Post) Industrial	i. <b>Food Collection</b> (hunting/gathering; <b>tribal</b> ) vs. (← all prehistory)
	<b>Food Production</b> (10 kya →)
	ii. <b>Pastoralism</b> (raising animals; <b>tribal/feudal</b> ) (~10kya → present)
	iii. <b>Farming</b> (horti-/agriculture; <b>tribal/feudal/early industrial</b> ) (~8kya → present)
	iv. <b>Industrial</b> (1800 BCE → present) ( <b>industrial/post-industrial</b> ) (tractors, CAFOs, factory farms, pseudomeat)

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## D. Social Construction

### 1. Types of Societies

#### b. Reference Point: The Industrial Age

Societies are often categorized in relation to their acceptance of **industrialism**, or the idea that the application of science to create technologies that transform labor is valued.

##### i. Pre-industrial society

- The notion of **industrialization** has not arisen in these societies. Much time is spent producing food using **human and animal labor** as energy sources.

##### ii. Industrial society

- **Acceptance of industry and social changes** that go along with it. **Manufacturing** a strong sector of the economy.

##### iii. Post-industrial society

- **Machinery and technology** fully integrated into society  
- **Energy production and food production** become **equally important** in industrial societies.

- Post-industrial societies are sophisticated enough not to rely on internal production, but are truly **globalized societies**. **Strong service sector of the economy**.



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## D. Social Construction

Many sociologists believe that our social lives are **constructed**. The building blocks of the social construction are our statuses and roles.

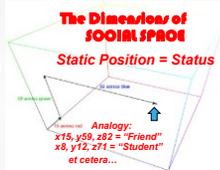
### 2. STATUS vs. ROLE

#### a. Status:

A recognized social position that an individual occupies. STATUS is **passive** and **static**. Status exists in our mind as an **IDEA**.

##### i. Status Set:

All possible statuses that a person can move between over time;  
for example,



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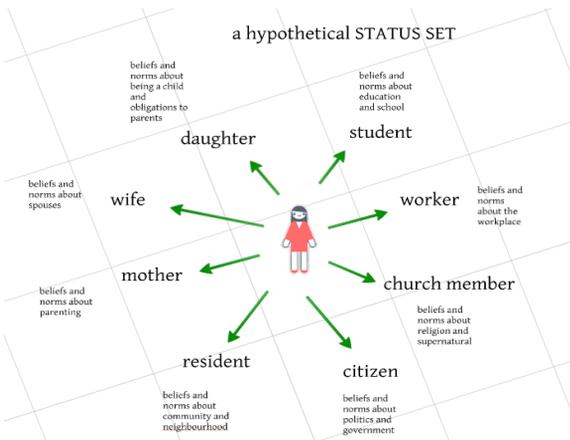
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## D. Social Construction

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

#### i. Ascribed status: involuntary positions

for example,

- male or female (sex), skin color (race), daughter or son (family relation)

#### ii. 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.

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

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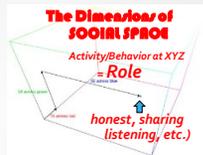
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## D. Social Construction

### 2.b. ROLE

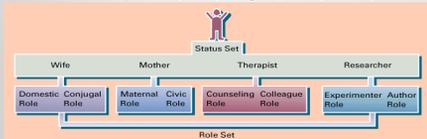
The **behavior** expected of someone who fills a particular status. "Role" is active and dynamic.



#### i. **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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## 3.b. Social Roles



By our nature, we imitate and we learn from our institutional interactions our **social ROLES**, or **expected social behaviors ACTUALLY performed** by individuals.

**BEHAVIOR = ACTION**

The word and concept (originally French, *rôle*) borrows from the field of theater, "acting" on the "stage of life," so to speak.

#### Questions:

- What role are you "playing" now? What are its **expected behaviors**?
- What other roles have you "played" in your life?
- Are you always aware of the roles you are playing?

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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

### 3. Sociological Perspectives

#### a. Structural-Functional Theory

**Emile Durkheim** (France, 1858-1917) and followers  
*Focus: Social Order*

#### • Ideas and Concepts

i. **Manifest function:** recognized purpose

vs. **Latent function:** unrecognized/unintended

Ex: Educational Institutions: *manifest function* = to learn  
*latent function* = develop social life

ii. **Conscience collective:** “the communal beliefs, morals, and attitudes of a society”; leads to social integration

iii. **Mechanical Solidarity:** “a type of social order in which there is an intense sharing of morals and values”; *preindustrial society*

vs. **Organic Solidarity:** “social order based around an acceptance of economic and social differences”; *industrial society*

iv. **Anomie:** society no longer has the support of a firm collective consciousness; **social disorder**  
(lit. “without law”)



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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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## D. Social Construction

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

f. 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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## D. Social Construction

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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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