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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Size</th>
<th>Settlements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Political Structure</td>
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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.

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

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

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?
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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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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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 Institution: 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 (lit. "without law") collective consciousness; social disorder
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3. Sociological Perspectives
b. Social-Conflict Theory

Karl Marx (Germany, 1818-1883) and followers

Focus: Social Power

i. Ideas and Concepts

- Economic condition is at the base of the social order – other institutions are part of the superstructure.

ii. Alienation: the condition in which the individual is isolated and divorced from his or her society, work, or the sense of self. Alienation can exist from:

  - product of labor
  - process of labor
  - others
  - self

iii. False consciousness: a condition in which the beliefs, ideals, or ideology of a person are not in the person's own best interest. Marx believed that capitalism, in its creation of two classes that are in conflict (bourgeoisie – owners and proletariat – workers), creates a false among workers who are distracted by media and religion. The only way to overcome false consciousness is to have a class consciousness, or the awareness of one's rank in society.

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3. Sociological Perspectives
c. Symbolic-Interaction Theory

Max Weber (Germany, 1864-1920) and followers

Focus: Social Meaning

i. Ideas and Concepts

- Rational Society: A rational society is one built around logic and efficiency rather than morality or tradition.

ii. The "irrationality of rationality": this is seen when rigid routines and strict design lead to a mechanized environment in work or government ("bureaucracy"), leading to a society lacking meaning for the individual, yet one in which the individual is powerless to change it (the "iron cage" of rationality).

For example, see Charlie Chaplin’s classic film, "Modern Times."

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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:

ACTION

THOUGHT

PERCEPTS (SENSES) & CONCEPTS (IDEAS)

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.
D. Social Construction


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: Pounds)

- A third example: TIME is social constructed

Anon. Watts: “Play to 4:40”

What we measure as time for social purposes (one hour lunch, 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 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.

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

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
- Decor – 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?
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 = 6.37 x 10^6 meters wide

Cell = 2.2 x 10^-6 meters wide

NASA’s Powers of 10 (YouTube)