

**SOCI 101**

# INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

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> SOCI 101**

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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**

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

*Pre-Industrial* (left side of diagram)  
*(Post) Industrial* (right side of diagram)

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## D. Social Construction and Theory

### Types of Societies

### 1. 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**.



- a. **Pre-industrial society: Hunter-Gatherer, Pastoralism, Horticulture / Agriculture**  
- The notion of **industrialization has not arisen** in these societies. Much time is spent producing food using **human and animal labor** as energy sources.
- b. **Industrial society – Factory-based, market-based**  
- **Acceptance of industry and social changes** that go along with it. **Manufacturing** a strong sector of the economy.
- c. **Post-industrial society – Service/Information-based**  
- **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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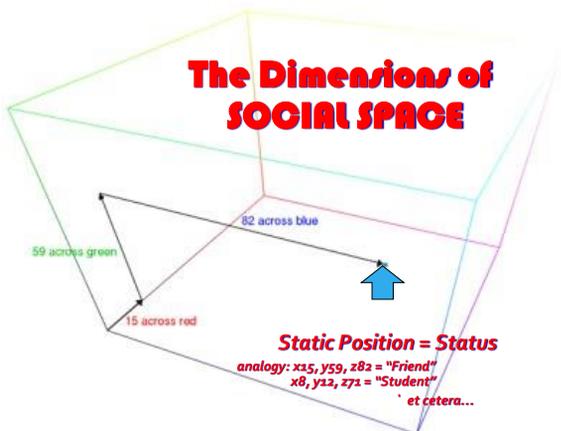
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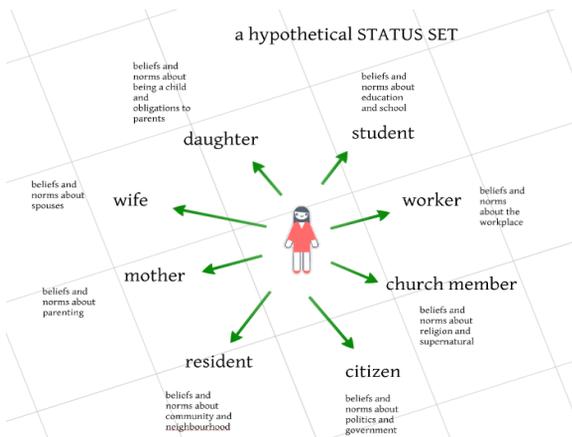
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## D. Social Construction

### 2.a.ii. Types of Status

#### 1. Ascribed status: involuntary positions

for example,

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

#### 2. 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.

#### 3. Master Status: A status of particular importance to others in defining actors.

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## D.2.b. Social Roles



By our nature, we imitate and we learn from our institutional interactions our **social ROLES**, or **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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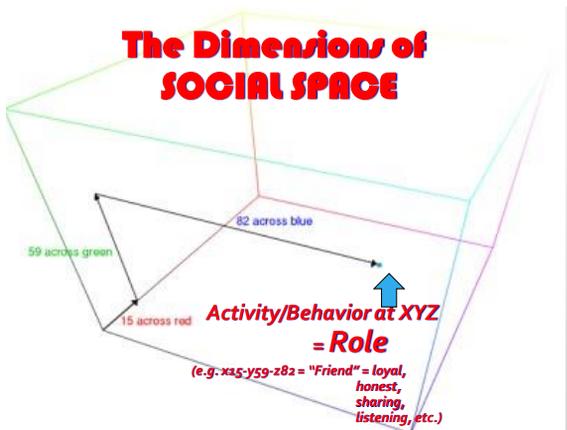
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## The Dimensions of SOCIAL SPACE



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## D. The Sociology of the Everyday

### 2.c. Role Problems: Social roles cause us trouble

#### i. Role Conflict

Involves **conflicts between two or more statuses**

For example: *(what role do I play?)*

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

#### ii. Role Strain

Involves a **strain from a single status**

For example: *(who should I satisfy?)*

Student who tries to balance demands from two professors urging student to study for two different exams on the same day.

#### iii. Role Exit

*(becoming an "ex")*

**Disengaging from social roles** can be 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.

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## D. Social Construction

### 3. "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**, culturally defined and difficult to resist, individually.

**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; The Pill of Blue Pill = will you exercise your CHOICE, FREE WILL, or not?)*

**What is reality?** It is a concoction of the material and non-material world, a mixture of sensory information and how we **make sense** of it:

**Information**      **Knowledge**  
**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**.

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## D. Social Construction

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

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 socially 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 socially 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 socially 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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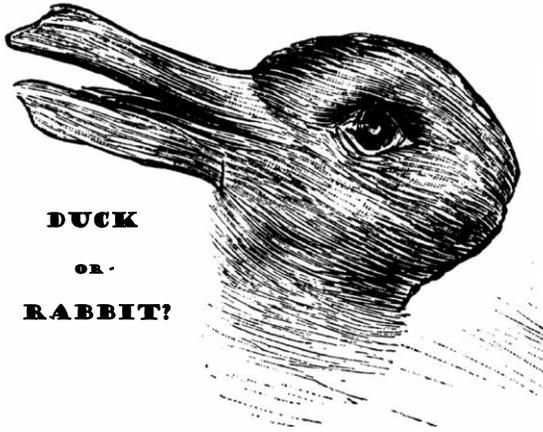
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**DUCK**  
**OR**  
**RABBIT?**

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**D. Social Construction**  
**4. Sociological Perspectives**  
**a. Symbolic-Interaction Theory**

**Max Weber**, (Germany, 1864-1920) and followers  
*Focus: Social Meaning*

- **Ideas and Concepts**
  - The Work Ethic:** *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* sewed together two institutions - economy and religion- to see how the meaning system of each changed the other.
  - Rational-Legal Society:** A rational-legal society is one built around logic, efficiency, and law rather than morality, tradition, and self-determination.
  - 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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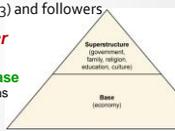
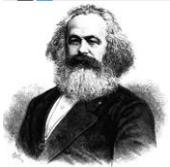
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**D. Social Construction**  
**4. Sociological Perspectives**  
**b. Social-Conflict Theory**

**Karl Marx** (Germany, 1818-1883) and followers  
*Focus: Social Power*

- **Ideas and Concepts**
  - Economic condition** is at the **base** of the social order – other institutions are part of the **super-structure**.
  - 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
  - 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 it's 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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## D. Social Construction

### 4. Sociological Perspectives

#### c. 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

**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 "socially 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.



**Q: How do people react?**  
**Q: What does this tell you about social norms and their power?**

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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*, I)

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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