THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY
Sept. 12, 2008

ON-LINE READINGS

- Chapter 2
  - Solomon Asch: Social Pressure and Perception
  - Bibb Latane and John Darley: Why Don’t People Help?
  - Philip Zimbardo: The Psychology of Imprisonment
- Chapter 3
  - Constructing Reality in Stages
  - Harold Garfinkel: Putting Meaning into Meaningless Situations
  - Robert Rosenthal & Lenore Jacobson: Pygmalion in the Classroom
  - Richard Sennett & Jonathan Cobb: The Hidden Injuries of Class

ANIMALS: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTED

Pet or food?
Sports or animal cruelty?
Rats with wings? Dirty immigrants?
_Columba livia_ Sparrow
Pigeon or dove?

CONSTRUCTING THE MEANING OF MEAT, PART 2
MORE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED CATEGORIES

- Time: weeks, linear, cyclical, clock time, time as commodity
- Races: white, black, Asian, American Indian, etc.
- Sexes: man, woman, etc.
- Moral/legal/medical labels: Criminal, sinner, mentally ill; juvenile delinquent vs. super predator; registered sex offender
- Social problems (e.g., domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment, acquaintance rape)

SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

- Self-fulfilling prophecies: assumption or prediction that in itself causes the expected event to occur, thus seeming to confirm the prophecy’s accuracy (p. 58)
- A self-fulfilling prophecy is a socially constructed situation whose meaning tells us what is going to happen
- Thomas Theorem: “If [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”
- Examples from our educational system:
  - Tracking: students get placed into “tracks” that determine treatment and outcomes; factors such as class, race, gender, appearance, room size, teaching preferences, etc. affect track assignment
  - Pygmalion in the Classroom (see on-line reading)

PYGMALION IN THE CLASSROOM

- Researchers: Robert Rosenthal & Lenore Jacobson
- Method: Experiment
- Students were given imaginary “Havard Test of Inflected Acquisition”
- Teachers were given randomly generated list of “academic spurters” who would make rapid progress during the upcoming year
- At the end of the year, “spurters” had increased IQs and teachers believed they were better behaved, more intellectually curious, more friendly and had brighter futures
- Why? Teachers spent more time with students and taught them more material, allowed them to talk more, gave them more feedback, were more enthusiastic about teaching them, and showed them more warmth

THE LEG UP PROGRAM