

THREE PERSPECTIVES/ THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

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CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE

- Emphasizes how social order arises from dominance and coercion
- Society viewed as struggle between “haves” and “have-nots”
- Marx focused on economic “haves” and “have-nots” (class struggle)
- Current conflict theorists also interested in other sources of conflict
 - Feminist perspective focuses on gender as the most important source of conflict and inequality in social life (p. 47)
- Main focus on how society affects people, especially stratification



Karl Marx

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SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

- Society viewed as ongoing interaction using symbols
- Unlike other perspectives, focus is micro/interactional level, not social structure
- Social order is possible because of shared meanings, which arise from interaction and interpretation
- Three main premises (Herbert Blumer):
 1. People act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them
 2. These meanings arise out of interaction with other people
 3. These meanings are modified through interpretation as people deal with the things they encounter
- More than other perspectives, focuses on how people construct social reality



George H. Mead

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SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

- Example from instructor’s research on door-to-door sales
- Research question: Why do college students salespersons continue working difficult job? (or How does company organize students to work difficult job?)
- Method: Participant observation, interviews, focus groups, etc.
- Three premises guide research approach
 1. People act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them
 - Meaning of selling books included maintaining “positive mental attitude,” finishing what you started, becoming a man or woman, improving job marketability, supporting teammates, serving customers, demonstrating love for parents, spite for doubting friends, pleasing God
 2. These meanings arise out of interaction with other people
 - Observations of training sessions, personal conferences, team meetings and sales school sessions showed how students learned these meanings from managers and each other
 3. These meanings are modified through interpretation as people deal with the things they encounter
 - Observations of salespersons working showed how they used, modified and/or rejected meanings as they negotiated problems of their work

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THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

- Social construction of reality (Newman): process through which the members of a society discover, make known, reaffirm, and alter a collective version of facts, knowledge, and “truth” (p. 53)
 - In constructing reality, people attach meaning to things and then act on the basis of those meanings (sometimes forgetting they are the source of those meanings)
 - The socially constructed world also acts back on us
- We live in two worlds, the physical world and the world of meanings
- Three steps in attaching meanings to things:
 - Categorizing: dividing up physical world into parts
 - Naming: Attaching symbols ('X') to those parts
 - Typifying: Characterizing what a typical 'X' is like

CUP VS. GLASS



- Age 3: cup, little cup, big cup, coffee cup, paper cup
- Age 12: cup, glass, fruit cup, wine glass, juice glass, Dixie cup, measuring cup, mug, beer mug, etc.

Anderson, E.S. 1975. "Cups and Glasses." *Journal of Child Language* 2:79-103.

COLOR: SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED

Spectrum						
English	red	orange	yellow	green	blue	purple
Shona	cipsuka		cicena	citema	cipsuka	
Bassa	hui			zita		



CONSTRUCTING THE MEANING OF MEAT, PART I