

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY/THE NATURE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

Feb. 1, 2009

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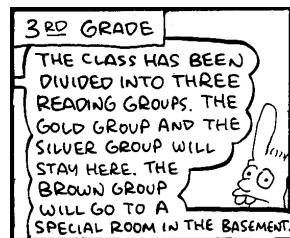
MORE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED CATEGORIES

- 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)

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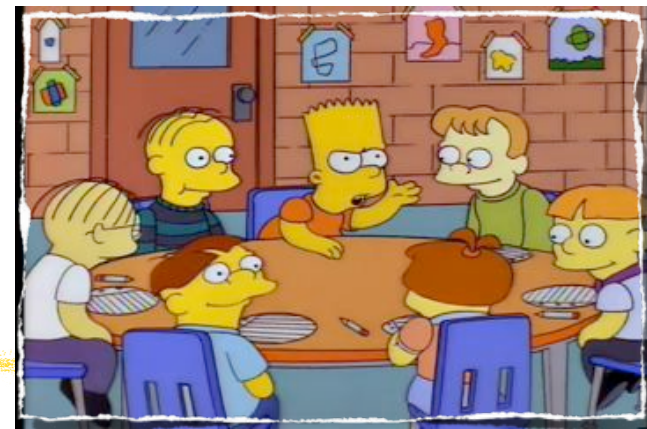
SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES

- 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)



Groening, Matt. 1987. *School is Hell*. Pantheon Books.

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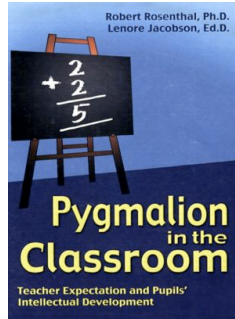


THE LEG UP PROGRAM

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PYGMALION IN THE CLASSROOM

- Researchers: Robert Rosenthal & Lenore Jacobson
- Method: Experiment
- Students were given imaginary “Harvard 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



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THE NATURE OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

- There are many ways of knowing about the world
- Personal experience and common sense knowledge enable us to get things done in everyday life
- Personal experience and common sense knowledge cannot be reliably generalized
- Social research is empirical & probabilistic
 - Empirical research: research that operates from the ideological position that questions about human behavior can be answered only through controlled, systematic observations of the real world
 - Probabilistic: capable of identifying only those forces that have a high likelihood, but not a certainty, of influencing human action

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SOCIOLOGIST CONSIDERS OWN BEHAVIOR INDICATIVE OF LARGER TRENDS (FROM THE ONION)

Boston—According to the findings of a paper published Monday in *The American Journal of Sociology*, the behaviors and experiences of Boston sociologist Dr. Steven Piers are indicative of a host of wider societal trends.

“My observations indicate that the typical married American man has had increasing difficulty relating to his spouse over the last two and a half years, ever since she starting taking those yoga classes,” wrote Piers, 56, in his *Interpersonal Connections Within The Marriage Paradigm: A Study in Causality*.

In the paper, Piers asserted that the most pressing issue for American men is maintaining healthy sexual relations with their wives.

“Back in 1999, American men’s frustration derived mostly from the infrequency of sex,” the paper read. “Recently, however, that trend has shifted as husbands report a decreasing interest in intimacy, particularly if there is a Celtics game or a new NYPD Blue on TV. While many men cite increased job responsibilities and stress as possible catalysts, many more blame the affair their wives had with some textile salesman during a training conference in Seattle.”



<http://www.theonion.com/content/node/28670>

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