

Sept. 29

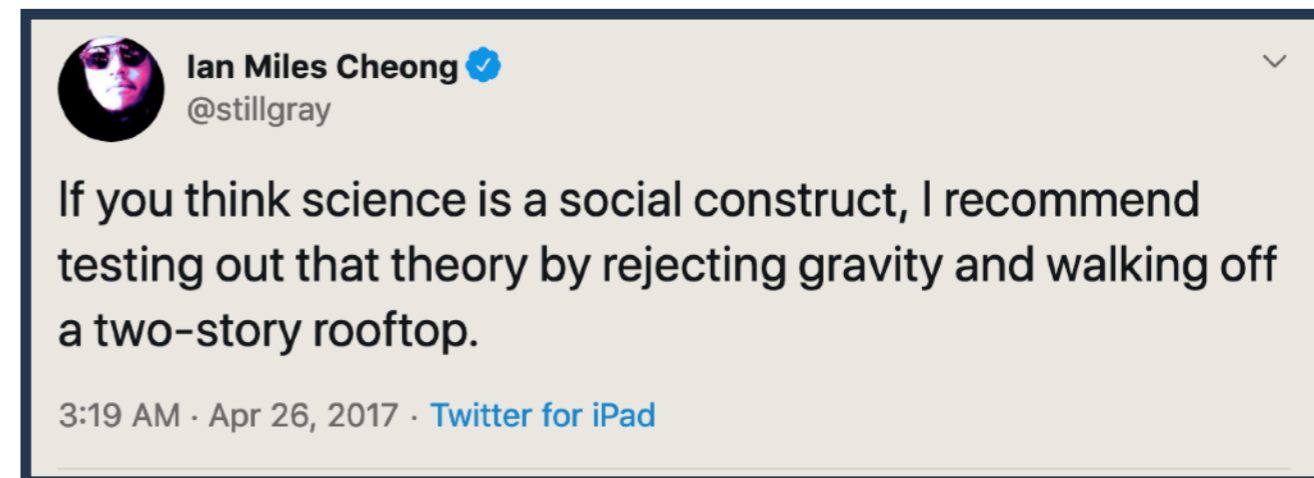
1. **Social constructionism**
2. Social construction of disability

Social Constructionism

Social construction

Social construction in popular discourse

- “If something is a ‘socially construct’, that means it can be whatever you want it to be.”
- “Socially constructed = fake”
- *These interpretations are usually based on a serious misunderstanding of social construction.*



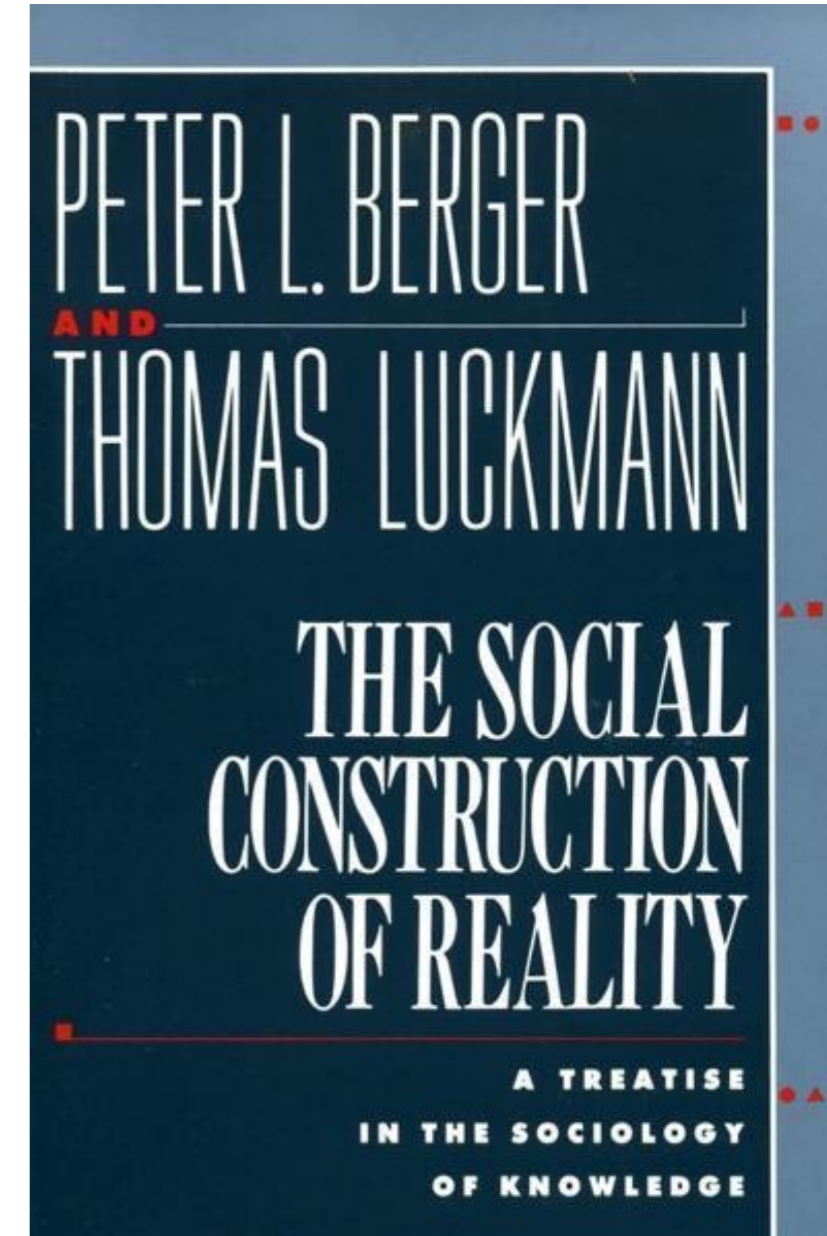
Social construction

Sociology of knowledge

- *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966)
Peter Berger & Thomas Luckman

Basic argument:

- Humans learn about the world through social interaction.
- Interactions reinforce the things we agree on, and push us to come to agreement on everything else.
- This process reinforces *norms* — how the world *ought* to be.
- Over time, shared expectations become so regular that we do not think of them as something we came to agree on. They become something we *know*.



Symbolic interactionism

- The ‘meaning’ of things is not essential to those things. It is *negotiated* through social interactions.

Social construction

Social constructs

- Social construction has become widely accepted in social sciences
- Notably: arguments that race, gender, and scientific facts are socially constructed

Social constructionism

- Broad theoretical and substantive approach (most often symbolic interactionist)
- How things considered objective facts are influenced by social processes
- Examples:
 - Race
 - Self (Charles Cooley, Erving Goffman)
 - Scientific findings (Bruno Latour)
 - 'The market' (Karen Knorr-Cetina)

Social construction

Does all of this mean that social constructionists think **race, gender, science, disability, or the self** are *not real*?

- No.

Social construction



A popular critique of social construction is that it denies the reality of the world

This is false. Religion is socially constructed, but I can't declare that a table is now a cathedral and have it mean anything. That last bit, meaning, is the key. We can play however we like. But most social constructs are like their physical counterparts: durable.

@Quinnae_Moon (2018)

https://twitter.com/Quinnae_Moon/status/1023050061641654275?s=20

Social construction

The social is real

- We often to think of the social as somehow less real than the physical or biological.
- A social construct is real because it has real consequences. It 'pushes back' on our attempts to alter it.
- Sociologists study how social systems are consequential and durable.
- In many situations, the social is as 'real' as anything else.

In short: social constructs ...

- ... have socially-negotiated definition and meaning
- ... have real consequences in the world
- ... require widespread will to subvert or change