

Feb 1

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

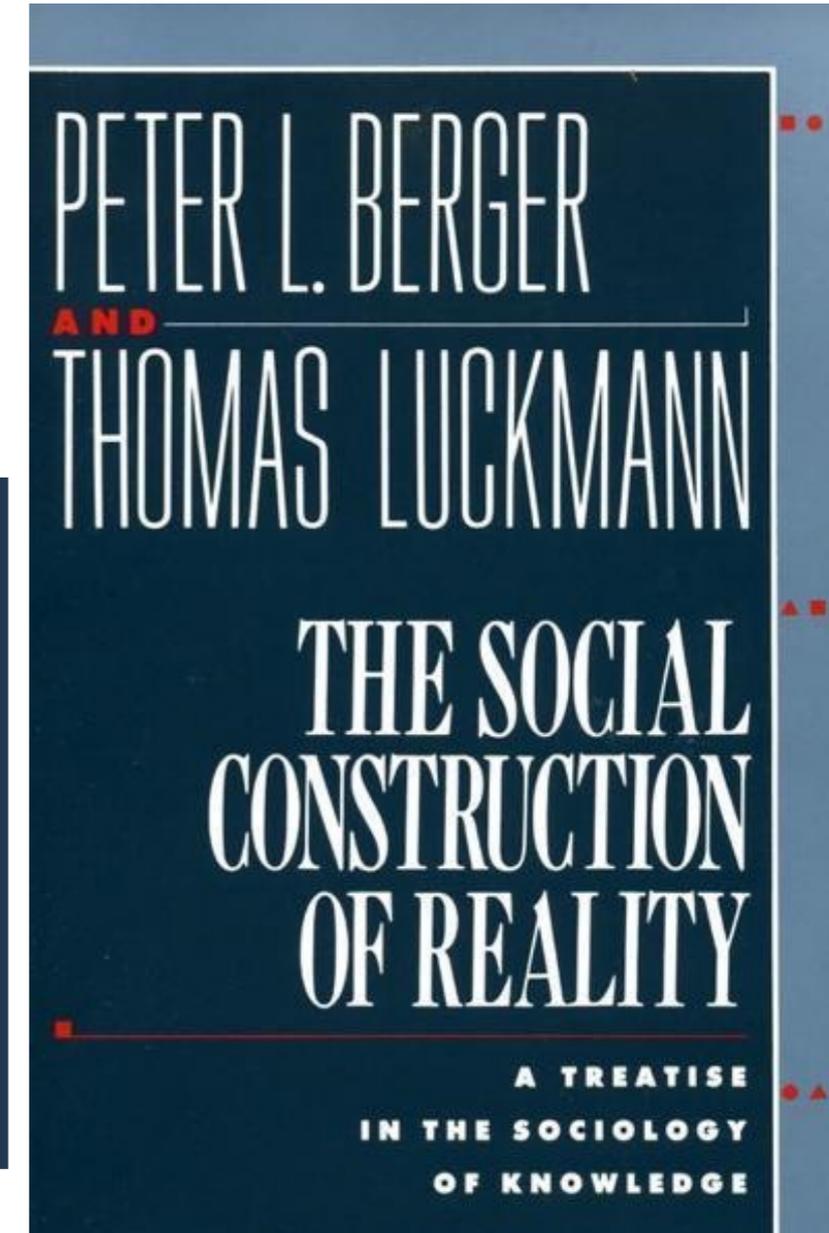
∴ *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966)
Peter Berger & Thomas Luckman

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

Does all of this mean that social construc(tion/iv)ists think **race, gender, science, disability, etc.** 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

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.
- ∴ 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, collective action to subvert or change

Social construction

Three terms (loosely)

Social construct

- ∴ A '*social fact*' that is actively maintained, widely held to be true, and consequential.
- ∴ E.g.: race, gender, local customs, scientific method, ...

Social constructionism

- ∴ A *sociological stance* that focuses on social constructs, their maintenance, and their meanings.

Social constructivism

- ∴ An *epistemological stance* that focuses on the ways that social constructs inform what people know

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