Agenda

Social construction of disability

1. Administrative
2. Social construction
3. Social construction of disability
4. *Theoretical tradition 3*: conflict theory

Sythesis essay 1

- *Everyone should have received an email on Tuesday* listing two of the required 'scholarly' readings to juxtapose for the first synthesis essay

- Note that we have not gotten to some of the readings yet

- 800-1,000 words
  References do not count toward word count
  Students should include word count in the submitted document

- Essays are due on MyCourses Feb 12

- Peer assessments of essays (3) are due on MyCourses Feb 19

A:

| Mahtani (2002): *Interrogating the hyphen-nation* | Westbrook and Schilt (2014): *Doing gender, determining gender* |

B:

| Mahtani (2002): *Interrogating the hyphen-nation* | Gilchrist (2010): *'Newsworthy' Victims?* |

C:

| Gilchrist (2010): *'Newsworthy' Victims?* | Denis (2015): *Contact theory in a small-town settler-colonial context* |

D:

| Wendell (1996): *Chapter 2 — The social construction of disability* | Westbrook and Schilt (2014): *Doing gender, determining gender* |

Essays should have:

1. A summary of the **main arguments, methods, and findings** from each of the two readings

2. A description of significant **parallels** in the theoretical approach, findings, and broader implications of each of the two readings

3. A description of significant **divergences** in the theoretical approach, findings, and broader implications of each of the two readings

4. A summary of insights that can be gained through the **juxtaposition** of these readings in the context of the course (beyond what is contained in the texts individually)

Social construc-tion

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 (or deliberate misrepresentation) of social construction.*

Gender's a social construct, remember. Just have half the scientists "identify" as female. #problemsolved

2:10 AM · May 5, 2017

James Lindsay, honorary Canuck, eh
@ConceptualJames

"Unvaccinated" is a social construct. So is "fully vaccinated." All artificial. All hyperreal.

1:20 PM · Oct 1, 2021

Dr Jordan B Peterson ✔
@jordanbpeterson

Science is a social construct, remember? That's why planes fly....

Feb 16, 2018

Replying to @jordanbpeterson
Both of the statements singled out as discriminatory & harassing are scientifically established. I guess they didn't bother to consult the literature.

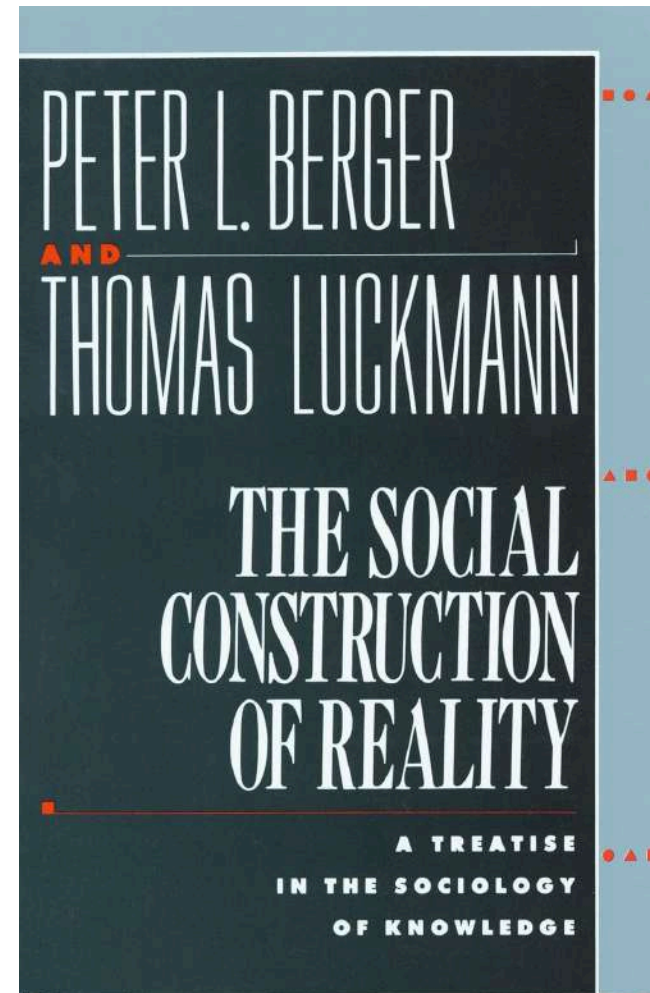11:54 PM · Feb 16, 2018

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.

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

Katherine Cross
@Quinnae_Moon

Follow · · ·

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.

11:38 PM · Jul 27, 2018

The social is real

- We often 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 short: social constructs …

- … have socially-negotiated definition and meaning
- … have real consequences in the world to
- … require widespread, collective action to subvert or change

Three terms (loosely)

Social construct

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

Social construct*ionism*

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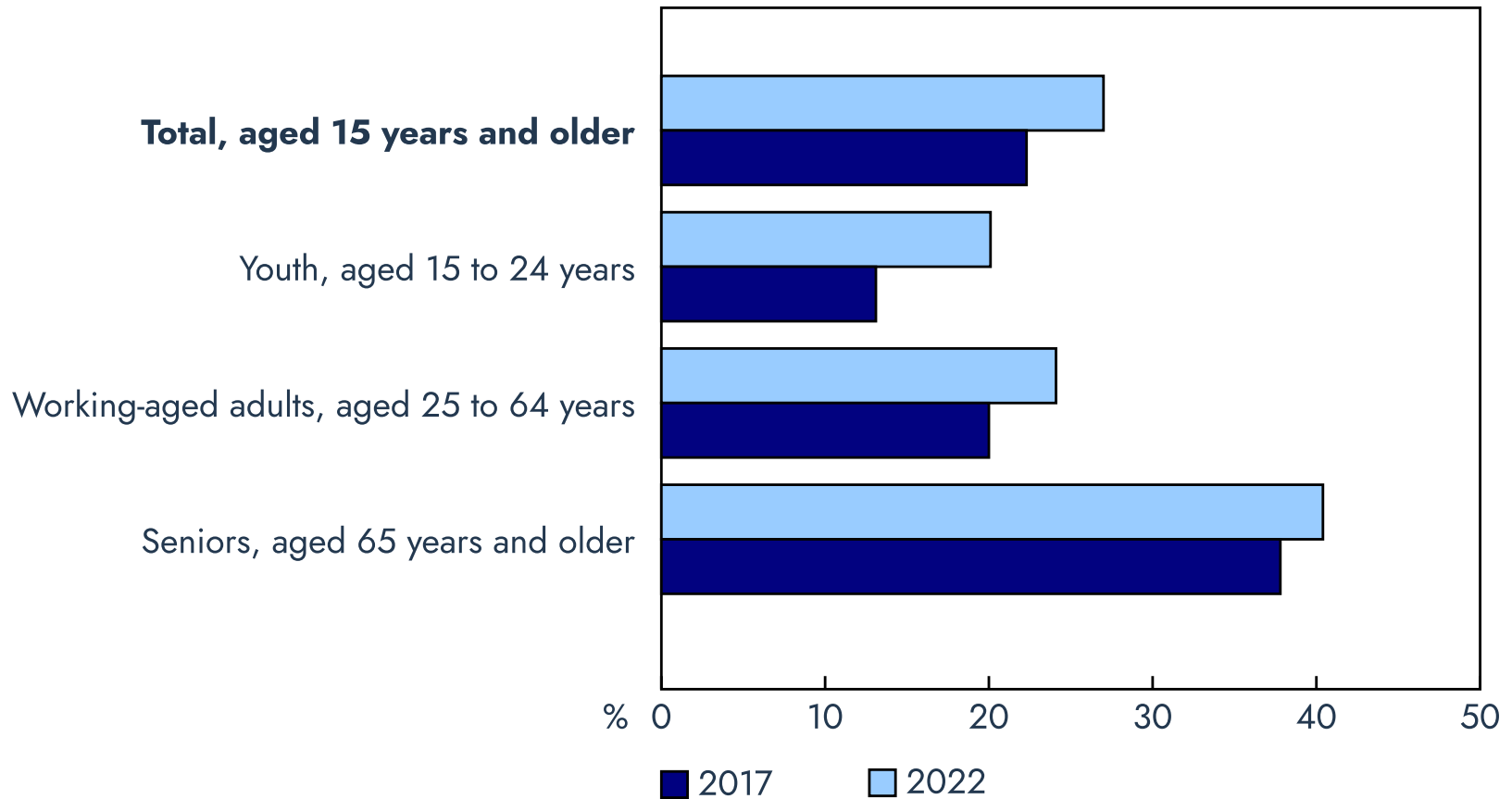
Social construct*ivism*

- An epistemological stance that focuses on the ways that social constructs inform what people know
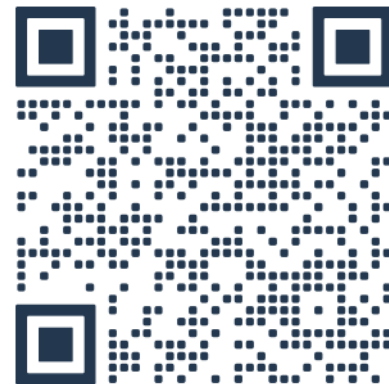
Social construction of disability

Disability in Canada

Source:
Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability

Terminology

- "People with disabilities" (*people-first*)
  or
  "Disabled people" (*identity-first*)
- Stigmatizing terms *should not be used*

  Crip/cripple (by someone non-disabled), lame, ...
- Euphemisms that try to avoid saying the word "disability" are considered inappropriate and infantilizing
  "Differently abled"
  "Special needs"
  ...
- A good resource for those writing about disability:

  https://cdrnys.org/disability-writing-journalism-guidelines/

Moral model

Medical model

Social model

Moral model of disability

⋮ Views disability as a *moral failing* of an individual

⋮ Disabled person (or parents/caregivers) are culpable for disability

⋮ Divine punishment (e.g. sin, witchcraft, etc.)

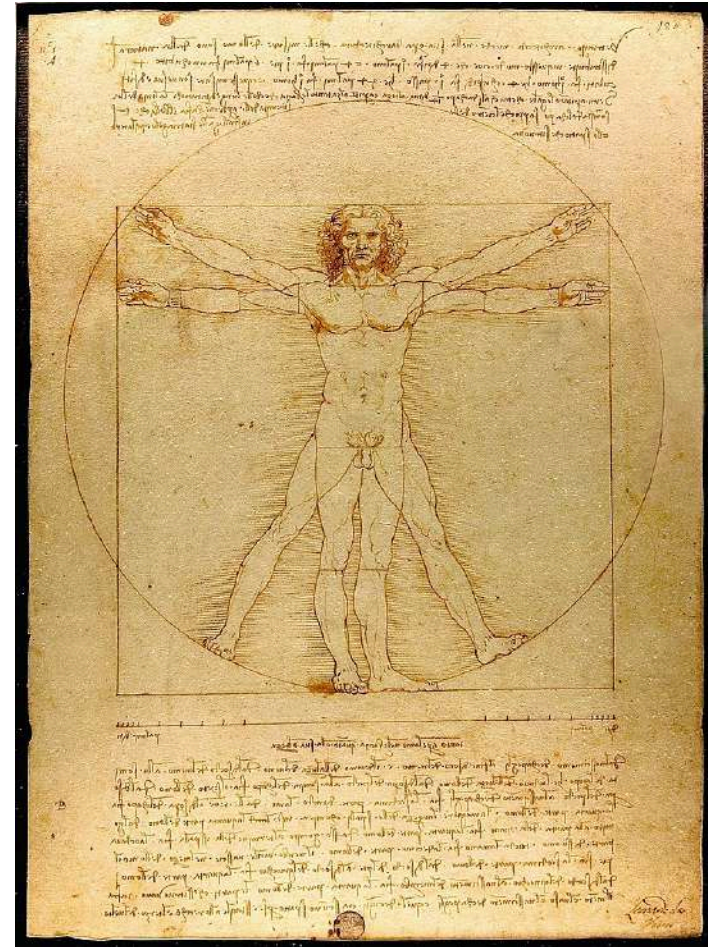⋮ "Deserved" disability (fatness, diabetes, lung cancer, neurodivergence, etc.)

Not as sweet as you think

Every 30 seconds, a leg is amputated due to Diabetes - International Diabetes Federation

Moral model

Medical model

Social model

Medical model of disability

⋮ Views disability as a *disorder afflicting* a person

⋮ Defines an idealized state for human body, with disability defined as deviation from norm

⋮ Disability is 'problem' to be 'fixed'

⋮ Encourages stigmatization, marginalization

MODELS OF DISABILITY

Moral model

Medical model

Social model

Social model of disability

⋮ Views disability as the result of *systematic barriers to participation* in everyday society

⋮ Differentiates between *disability* (social) and *impairment* (medical/physical)

⋮ Disability is not deviation from a norm, as in the medical model

⋮ Disability is the failure of society to account for human variability Steps leading to courthouse entrance Vancouver, BC (Infrastructure, laws, culture, behavior, …)

⋮ Dominant model among disability activists

IN CASE OF FIRE USE STAIRS

Disability …

✓ has socially-negotiated definition and meaning

has consequences in the real world

requires widespread will to subvert or change

Contested social construct

⋮ The definition and meaning of disability is determined socially

⋮ Conflicting models

Medical, social, moral, …

⋮ Institutionally determined thresholds

What are the criteria for visual impairment to be a disability?
In which contexts?

⋮ Categorical delineation (medicalization)

⋮ Historical variation

E.g. homosexuality, drapetomania, Asperger, DSM…

Disability ...

✓ **has socially-negotiated definition and meaning**

✓ **has consequences in the real world**

requires widespread will to subvert or change

Social consequences

Employment
Discrimination for jobs.
Minimum-wage exemptions.

Immigration and travel
People with certain disabilities are not allowed to immigrate to Canada (and many other countries).

State violence
Historically: murder, forced sterilization, forced abortion, ...
Currently: disproportionate police violence, forced sterilization, ...

Non-state violence
Increased risk of homicide, domestic abuse, and sexual violence.

Intersectional
Women, Black and Indigenous people, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and people in poverty are all disproportionately likely to be disabled.

DAILY WIRE+

THE DAILY WIRE

NEWS

CDC Director: Over 75% Of COVID Deaths In Vaccinated Had 'At Least 4 Comorbidities'

By Hank Berrien

Jan 10, 2022 DailyWire.com

Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

"**The overwhelming number of deaths, over 75%, occurred in people who had at least four comorbidities. So, really, these are people who were unwell to begin with. And yes, *really encouraging news* in the context of Omicron; this means not only just to get your primary series but to get your booster series. And yes, we're really encouraged by these results.**"

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control

Mar Hicks
@histoftech

"It is very encouraging news," said the government, "that only people like you will die."

"Excuse me?" I said.

"Very encouraging news," they repeated 🤗

1:57 AM · Jan 8, 2022

Disability ...

✓ has socially-negotiated definition and meaning

✓ has consequences in the real world

✓ requires widespread will to subvert or change

Conflict theory

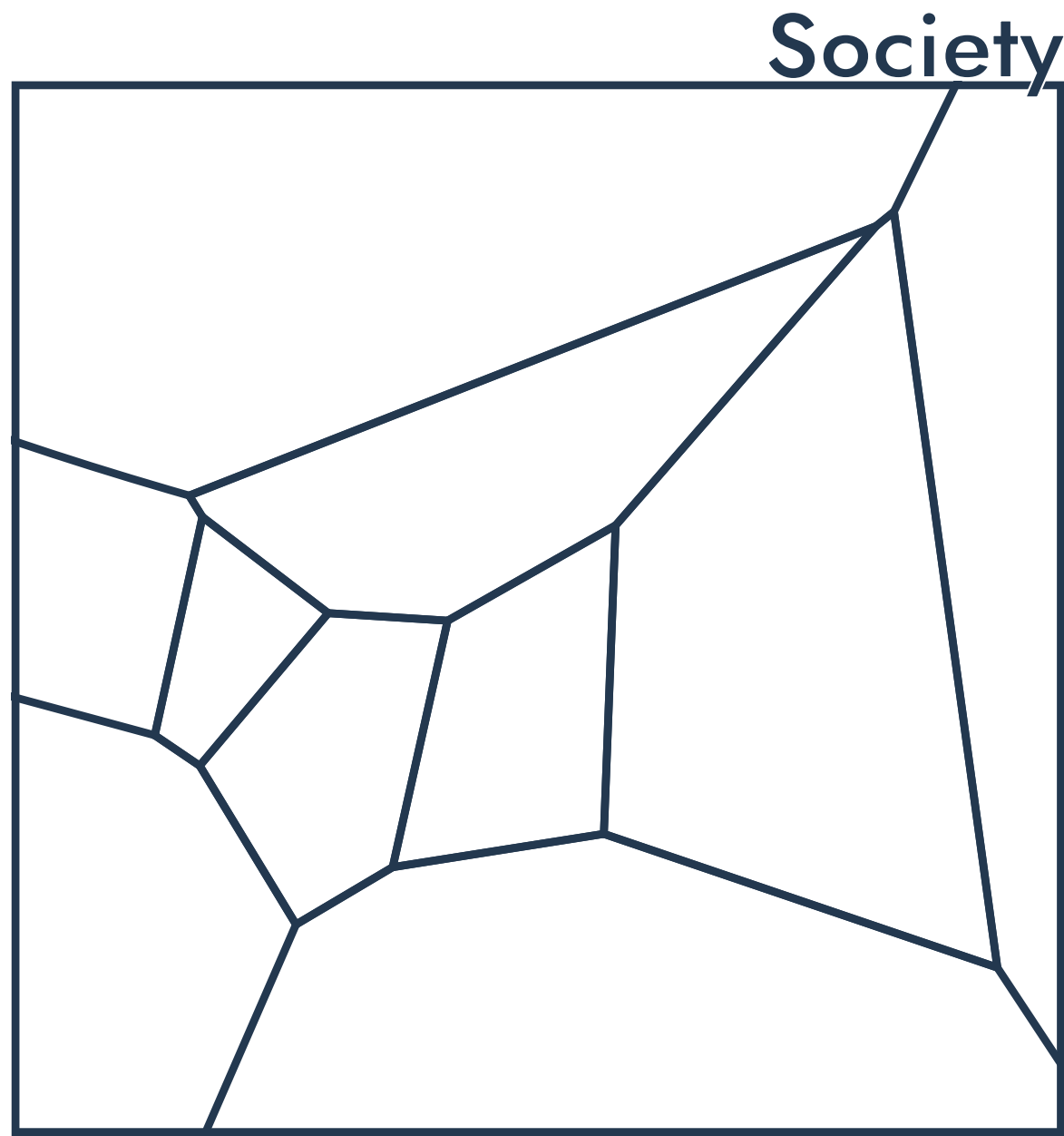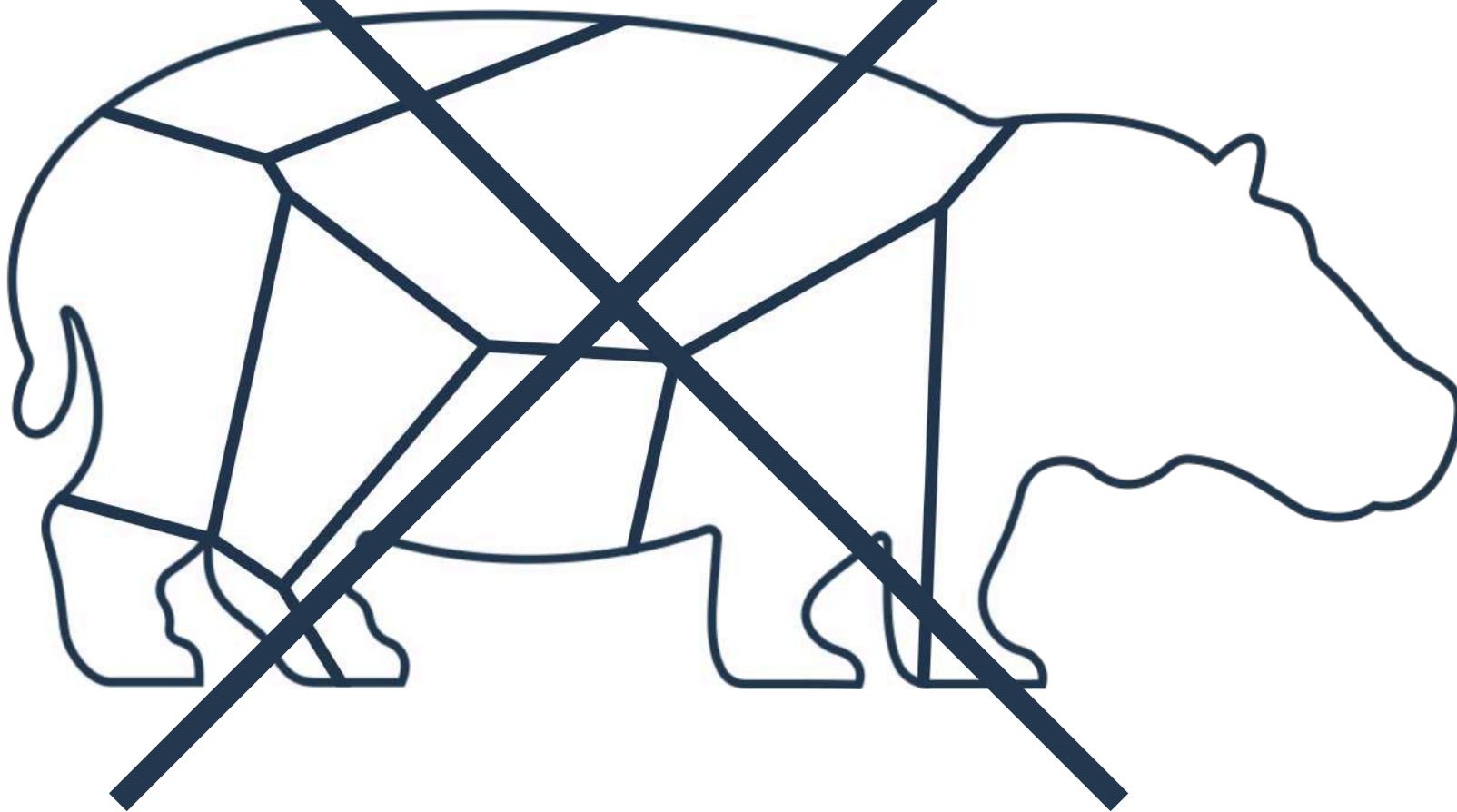Throughout the semester, we will be be using *three broad theoretical lenses* to make sense of social phenomena:
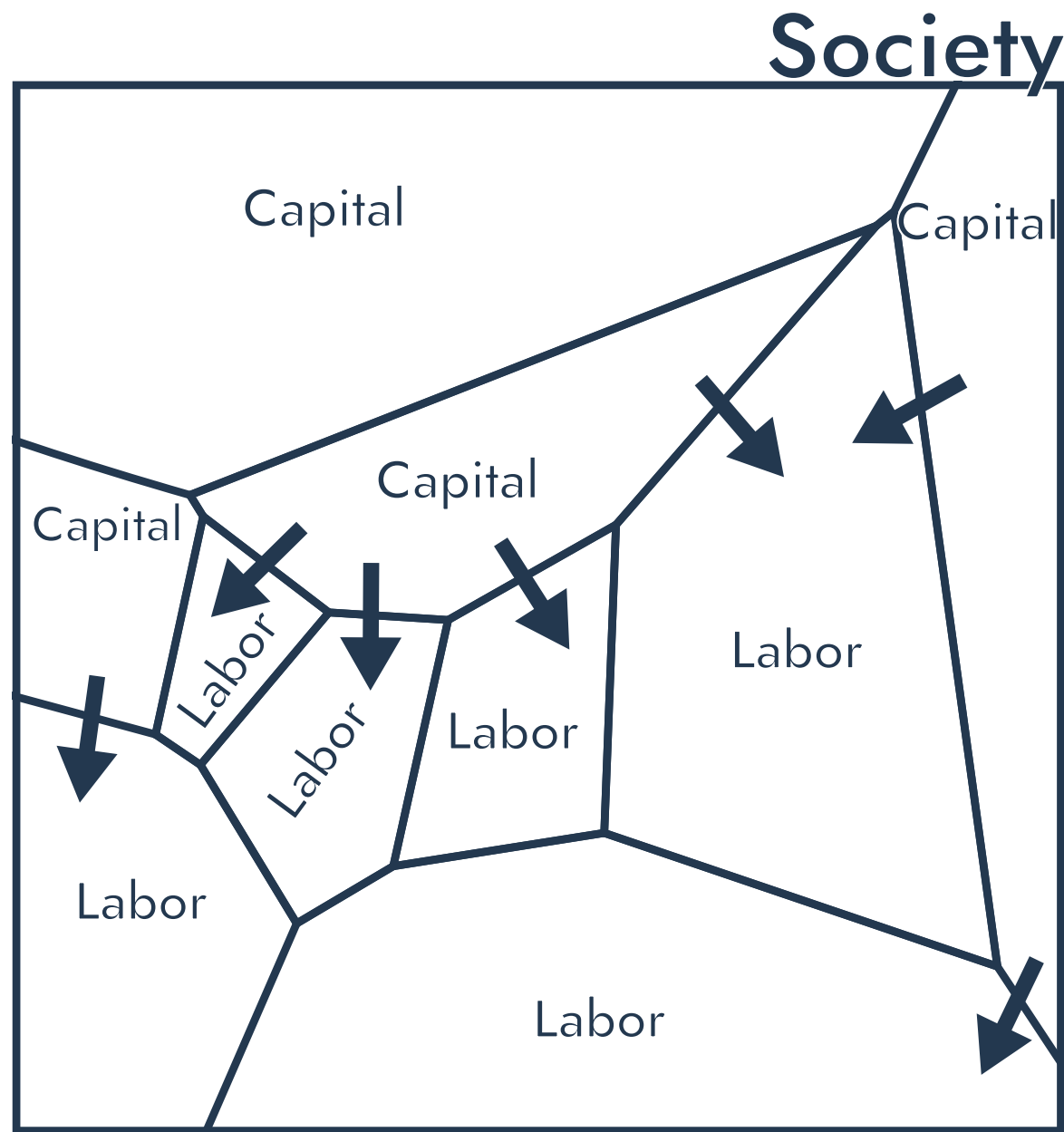
1. Structural functionalism

2. Symbolic interactionism

Today ▶ # 3. Conflict theory
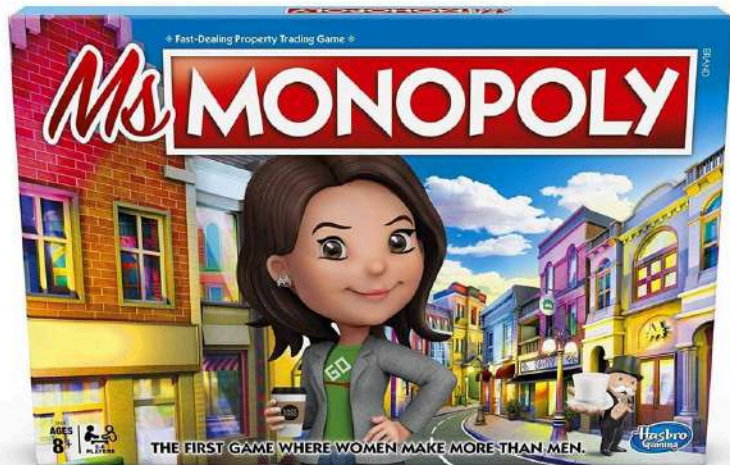
Society

Society

Society

Some major themes from conflict theory:

Alienation (Karl Marx)

- Humans relate to the products of their work in a very real way
- Capitalism disconnects workers from the goods they produce
- This necessarily yields feelings of alienation, dehumanizing workers

Ideology (Karl Marx)

- The ideology of the oppressors is adopted by oppressed
- Ownership of means of production yields material and ideological power
- Unified ideology of a culture is not due to a sense of collective belonging (as in Durkheim) but the imposition of that ideology by those in power

CONFLICT THEORY

Some major themes from conflict theory:

Authority (Max Weber)

⋮ Domination does not always come from a direct use of force

⋮ Government authority based on monopoly on "legitimate" means of force

⋮ Authority is given as much as taken Rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic authority

Multi-faceted (Weber, Du Bois, ...)

⋮ Conflict is not just about capital versus labor

⋮ Many dimensions of society are defined by conflict within and between them
Class, status, party stratification (Weber) Race, "Double consciousness" (Du Bois)

⋮ Many contemporary theoretical approaches can be thought of in the tradition of conflict theory (or critical theory)

Image credit

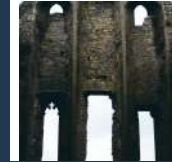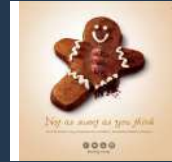*Pferd Pyramiden der Mädchen* by Heinrich Hamann (ca. 1902)

Photo of Hore Abbey by Christian Bowen on Unsplash

Photo by Jelle van Leest on Unsplash

Ad from Diabetes Association of Sri Lanka, via Ads of the World

Vitruvian Man by Leonardo di Vinci, via Wikimedia

Image via Winmark Stamp & Sign Company

Photo via Patch