The Social Construction of Reality
Sociology: The Basic Argument

People interact →

People intuitively develop rules of interaction →

Over time and with repetition, people become accustomed to these rules →

The rules become normalized →

People internalize the norms →

The norms begin creating people’s identity
Social Construction of Reality

We construct social structures....

AND

Social structures in turn construct us.

SOCIOLOGY 403: SOCIAL PROBLEMS
Worldviews

One product of social interaction is identity.

Another product of social interaction is a worldview, a particular perspective or way of framing and interpreting events.

Our worldview shapes our perceptions, how we see reality.
Social Location

A third product of social interaction is social location, or our place in various social hierarchies and social institutions.

Social location also influences our perceptions of reality, and hence, our worldviews and our identities.
Social Location

Examples of factors that influence our social location:

Gender
Race-Ethnicity
Religion
Social Class
Age/Generation
Place of Birth/Socialization

SOCIOMETRY 403: SOCIAL PROBLEMS
Question:

Why do we humans construct these social systems?
Social Problems

Ultimately, social problems stem from conflicts in:

- worldviews
- identities
- social location
Social Problems

“When people have problems, they usually see them in highly personal – and often, emotional – terms. Their perspective is limited primarily to their immediate situation, and they fail to see the broader context in which those problems arise. Because people seldom connect their personal lives with the larger social context, they tend to blame themselves and one another for their troubles.”

-Henslin, p. 2
Sociological Imagination

C. Wright Mills says: "the sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals."

Using our sociological imagination allows us to contextualize our experiences, and expand our worldviews, reshaping our perceptions.
Objective vs. Subjective Reality

Objective
Facts
Data
Empirical Observations

Subjective
Perceptions
Opinions
Attitudes

SOCILOGY 403: SOCIAL PROBLEMS
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<td>People Who Favor Abortion</td>
<td>A Woman’s Right</td>
<td>Fetus</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Service to Women</td>
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Source: Henslin, from Roe 1989