

What is a social construction and why is it important to a sociological understand...

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Social construction Giddens (1989) defined sociology as the academic discipline concerned with the study of human social life. Social construction is a sociological concept, which refers to individuals or groups' perceptions or ideas that are created through social and cultural practice. Through social construction, society assigns meaning to classifications that would otherwise mean nothing. More often than not, classifications created through social construction segregate individuals by assigning stereotyped traits to each specific group. Discussed below is gender and social class, which are both socially constructed classifications.

Sex is a biological term used to distinguish between males and females based on the differences in their biological makeup. It is a valid, non-biased mode of classification unlike gender, which is a socially constructed term. In "Night to His Day: The Social Construction of Gender", author Judith Lorber highlights the role of socialization in advancing the concept of gender. From an early age, various socialization agents such as parents, peers and teachers among others socialize children into their gender differentiated social roles. Male children learn that they are more superior to their female counterparts as they develop traits associated with leadership such as competitiveness, strength, toughness and control (Johnson, 1997 p. 160). Conversely, female children learn how to care, empathize and submit to domineering males around them. Gender socialization advances discrimination of women by exalting men. As a result, inequality persists within different facets of society such as discrimination at the workplace, in educational institutions and in the political arena. In response to the oppressive masculine culture, feminism emerged advocating for equality of

all sexes and an end to gender discrimination. The feminist movement continues to make great strides towards equalizing the playing field by empowering women intellectually, financially and socially. For example, single women no longer bear the burden of choosing to pursue their careers instead of raising a family. Despite milestones accomplished by feminists, deconstruction of gender remains an on-going process.

Stratification of groups based on socio-economic status (SES) is also another example of social construction. Hoyt et al (1999) distinguished between three social classes, which included upper, middle and lower classes. They used financial security as their criterion for distinguishing between the different classes. Such a classification fuels discrimination whereby, those in the upper and middle classes find it easier to access high quality services and gain political and economic power, which they use to oppress those in the lower economic social class. Philosopher Nietzsche's master-slave analogy best explains the relationship between those in the higher and lower social classes. According to him, people in the upper class (master) gain control over limited resources in order to retain power over those in lower class (slaves), and further set laws that advance their personal interests (Nietzsche, 1887).

In conclusion, studying social construction enables one to understand factors predisposing people's perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. For example, stereotypes based on gender or social classes are products of social construction. However, social construction does not always result in negative outcomes. For example, racial formation points to positive qualities unique to specific race such as Africans especially Ethiopians and Kenyans are stellar

athletes.

Works Cited

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