Social Construction

Nature

Sceptical Threat of Individualism
Everything is within each person's Subjective Experience
- No such thing as society and Knowledge of it

Society
- People act in organised ways
    - Given the limited cognitive capacity of an individual
    - Laws of Morality and Women's Rights movements
    - Social Construction allows for Knowledge beyond Individual Experience
- Practices not necessarily innate, natural or commonsensical

Ideology
Describes how groups believe certain things about the world
- Types
1. Belief Structures: Religion and Nation Group
2. Identity Structures: Gender and Race
3. Civilisations: East vs West
4. Abstract Structures: Progress
5. Organisational Structures: Government and Media
- Coherent System between people
- Paradigmatic Nature
- Examples of Social Construction
    - Gender Roles
        - However: Many Gender categories allow for one's gender to always be in flux
        - However: Gender now cannot be defined objectively; solipsistic
            - No falsifiability or verifiability
    - Racial Categories

Construction & Validity

Social Construction
Background Social Values > Evidence → Construction of Knowledge
- Can be extended to all beliefs: Even the Sciences
    - Consensus and Peer Review
    - Agreed upon Arbitrary Scales
- Kant: There is a world independent of the human mind (the noumena)
    - Structureless without categories or facts
    - Structure is imposed on the world through our beliefs

Context of Structuralism
- Knowledge is built on fundamental structures and assumptions/narratives: e.g. the superiority of reason
    - Metanarratives: The entire social world can be encompassed in one all-embracing principle
    - =/= Pluralism in Postmodernism: Co-existence of a variety of situation-dependent ways of life
- Believed in ultimate structures of reality which define objective rights and wrongs

Qualities of Social Constructionism
1. A critical stance towards conventional taken-for-granted stances of understanding the world
    a. Critical of enlightenment-age view that objective reality is accessible through senses and reason
        i. Contradicts Positivism and Empiricism: That the nature of the world can be revealed by observation + scientific method
    b. All knowledge comes from a particular structure of beliefs
        i. Objective and Unbiased Observation is impossible
    c. Rationale: The categories with which we apprehend the world →/ real divisions
        i. Wittgenstein: Language finds meaning in pragmatic use of communicating meaning objectively between different agents → Causes us to categorise the world into objective socially constructed boxes
            1. Impossible to actually describe subjective experiences
        ii. Language exists in a particular "game" or context as a family resemblance → Deeply ambiguous and contextual
        iii. Suggests that our contingent practices could have been different given differing needs of society
        iv. Conceptual frameworks and categories form the preconditions for thought
2. One's perspective is created by historical and cultural specificity
    a. Categories and concepts are historically and culturally created
        i. Change with time and location
    b. E.g. Differences in Eastern and Western perceptions of science and medicine
3. Knowledge is sustained by social processes
    a. People reinforce socially constructed ideas by daily interactions over the course of social life
        i. E.g. Dyslexia is a phenomenon due to exchanges between those who have difficulties with reading and writing + others who can teach them/offer diagnostic tests
        ii. 'Truth' = current accepted understandings of the world > objective observation of the world

        b. Interactions → Shared Perspective → Use of Shared Perspective to interpret new information and inform new interactions → Past Interactions also reinterpreted in the light of new evidence/perspectives
            i. Ultimately based off the nature of the group and its activities/history/structure
        c. Cooperation and Competition
    4. Knowledge and Social Action reinforce each other in a self-reinforcing process
        a. Power Relations that determine what is permissible for different people → Change patterns of social actions → Change Social Ideas
            i. Temperance Movement: Imprisonment of Alcoholics under the assumption that they were responsible for their behavior
            ii. Now: Medical and Psychological Treatment
            iii. BUT: Constant social idea that people are only responsible for their behavior if they can control it
        b. Symbolic Interactionism: Identities are constructed by everyday encounters of social interaction
        c. Factors of Justification
            i. Individual Pragmatism in navigating the social sphere
            ii. Internal Coherence of Perspective
                1. *A coherentist theory of justification does not imply a correspondence theory of truth -- the consistency we seek within systems seems to suggest that objective normativity exists*
                2. Explanatory power of historical facts
            iii. Isomporphism: Power, Legitimacy (Set Laws and Practices), Interactions
                1. The desire to sustain power
                2. Power as determined by social position & changes of position within systems (e.g. through age)
            iv. Social and Personal Identification
                1. Pressures to be a consistent self
                2. Utility in navigating the social sphere and its interactions
                3. Desire for Social Support
             v. Reward-Punishment Systems
            vi. Globalisation and Integration

Contrast to Traditional Psychology

Anti-Essentialism: No determined nature to the world/people
- No essential definable and discoverable nature
  - Personalities or Identities

Non-Realism: Socially Constructed > Objective perception of Reality
- All knowledge comes from a historical/cultural perspective
- Different Descriptions of one thing based on vested concerns out of a large variety of possible perspectives

- ○ E.g. Table: "Made of Excellent wood" vs "Contemporary Design" vs "Too small to be Practical"
  - ■ None are "the truth" of the table
  - ■ *However some notion of consistency?*
- Language is performative: Statements are passive vehicles for thoughts and emotions without truth-value
  - ○ *// Emotivism in Ethics*

Criticisms
1. Presuppositional: Would our perceptions of other cultures, and the perception of social constructionism itself be a social construct
   a. Assumes that the current understanding is superior to previous understandings/that of other cultures

Implications
- Relativism: No method of describing the world is more certain/objective
  - ○ Merely fulfills contextual purposes more effectively
- Minimised Role of Justification: Social Values move us towards beliefs
  - ○ Rationality (the need for Justification) and Understanding of Good Justification are socially constructed
  - ○ Social Construction may → Coherence → Objectivity

Western Assumptions
1. Everyone has the same basic thought processes
   a. Different Knowledge across cultures → Different exposure and Teachings
2. Reasoning relies on formal laws of logic
3. Reasoning is separate from what is reasoned about and the reasoner
   a. E.g. Scientist is distinct from Observations

Western	Eastern
Analysis: Consideration of objects in terms of parts and Categories • A company is a structure of Functions • Focus on individual abstracted roles and functions	Holism: Consideration of objects in terms of systems in their entirety • A company is a network of people
Greek Emphasis • Attributes of Objects and Abstractions → Universality • Objects considered in Isolation • Categorisation: Minimise Context • Laws of Logic	Chinese Emphasis • Collection • Connectedness • Interrelation • Contextualisation

Causality: Find the Agent and Outcome/Cause and Effect ● Explicit Simple and Falsifiable Models ● More susceptible to causal attribution error and overestimating predictability	Causality: Understand the Context

Categories
● Tendency to Categorise
  ○ A wider variety of observations is better
● Ease of Induction: Properties of Category can be applied to particular cases
● Induction across instances to Whole
● Focus on objects and Nouns
	Relationships
	● Focus on the relationships between elements
	  ○ A closer relationship between elements is better
	● Focus on Verbs
	● Elements considered in Flux

Key Principles 1. Law of Identity 2. Law of Non-contradiction 3. Law of the Excluded Middle	Key Principles 1. Principle of change 2. Principle of Contradiction 3. Principle of Relationship Taoism ● Things are in eternal flux ● Things are open to change ● Categories reside in a context