



What is the so called process of “**Reification**” in Sociology?

Two famous sociologists of the 60's introduced for the very first time this popular definition: **Thomas Luckmann*** and **Peter Berger****. They are famous for “**The Social Construction of Reality: a Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge**”, published in 1966. This book finally became a milestone in sociological theory. The concept of Reification has now become a useful theoretical tool for any sociologist and even a basic theory in Sociology of Knowledge.

Basic definitions:

- a) **Sociology of Knowledge** studies how humans produce (**social origin of Knowledge**), distribute and use (**social distribution of Knowledge**) collective and individual knowledge (like science, religion, common sense, tradition, political ideology) for the purpose of sharing, dominating, creating and organizing their social world at every level (cognition, political power, economics, faith, prejudice).
- b) **Reification** refers to the process by means of which any institution (school system, court of justice, hospital and so on), any behavioral pattern and any other result of social action as “taken for granted” by humans belonging to a society, can be experienced by these single individuals as a “real” fact, a solid “thing”, an eternal “fact”, which will keep surviving and **lasting** long after our short single existence in time as individuals. So: institutions and social patterns just become “real objects”.

Examples of Reification are: trial and law procedures in the justice system, sex and gender differences, rules of respect and *owe* inside the family, or huge social institutions like the educational system, the army, the health care system: all these are looked at, by the single individual, as “hard things” that exist and persist **notwithstanding** our own existence. They were here long before our birth and will keep existing here long after our death. But humans contributed once in shaping and developing these institutions using Language, Symbolic Systems and **Typification Processes** (mental “routines”, able to save time when thinking). Humans created these institutions long time ago; then these institutions became by the time more and more solid: they became recognized and perceived as **overwhelming** powers upon single individuals; finally they are experienced as “natural things”, since humans do not recall anymore, that they were themselves the historical creators of these institutions. These are simply taken for granted.

The circle is now closed: humans created social institutions for establishing social order and justice (**Construction**); social institutions grew bigger and more complex by the time; humans forgot having been once the real creators of these institutions and legitimated them (**Legitimation**): now they believe in them as “solid things”, that is “res” (Latin). Things that have the authority and the power to decide for them (Justice and Law, University and Education, Hospital and **Health Care**). Single individuals cannot use any power against social institutions (**Institutionalization**). The three processes are fully **interlaced**.

Hence: man was the origin and has even become the target himself of this whole pre-conscious process: he created his own social laws and rules. Every social structure is the final result of mental processes, group rituals, linguistic plays, symbolic interaction and **typification patterns**. So, Berger and Luckmann speak of two main processes: the **social origin of knowledge** and the **social distribution of knowledge**. Social order exists; it is, however, constructed from below, that is by human beings. It is not superimposed from above, like Functionalism prefers to understand it. **Constructivism** is now born.

***Thomas Luckmann (1927-)** Sociologist born in Slovenia: sociological education partly in Europe (Universities of Vienna and Innsbruck) and partly in North America (New School for Social Research in New York); honorary doctorates from the Universities of Linköping (Sweden) and Ljubljana (Slovenia). International teaching career: New York State, Frankfurt, Constance, New York, Harvard, and as a fellow at Stanford (CA). He is a major figure in the postwar development of the social sciences. Author of “The Social Construction of Reality” Doubleday 1966 together with Peter Berger.

****Peter Berger (1929 -)** Professor Emeritus of Religion, Sociology and Theology. Director, Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs. B.A. Wagner College; M.A., Ph.D., New School for Social Research. Previously at the New School for Social Research, at Rutgers University, and at Boston College. He has written numerous books on sociological theory, Sociology of Religion, and Third World Development. Co-author of “The Social Construction of Reality” with Thomas Luckmann, in 1966.

- Main reference: “The Social Construction of Reality” 1966, by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann – sociologists of Knowledge. What is SofK.
- Social facts as “Things”, Durkheim.
- Origin of Institutionalization-Legitimation-Sedimentation-Tradition-Internalization-Primary and Secondary Socialization . Definition.
- The Reification Process: definition, reading the definition together.
- A) Order’s Problem (the Leviathan by Thomas Hobbes: the final solution to the order problem) and its solution.
- B) Creating related Institutions from scratch, and letting them develop and grow bigger and tougher.
- C) Perceiving Institutions as real, objective, solid, hard, overwhelming, and above all as “taken for granted”.
- Defining “Taken for granted”. Defining “Routine” and “Typification”.
- The original creational process gets lost: only the myth and the legend/rituals remain.
- Human Typification Models + Symbolic Interaction + Language = social Construction.
- Constructionist Theory or Social Constructivism VS. Functionalism (T. Parsons).
- Social origin of Knowledge VS. Social distribution of knowledge: definitions and examples.
- Main concept: man creating himself. Man is the origin and the target of his own mental processes in creating solid and really perceivable institutions and social structures.
- Hence: Reification as mission accomplished in our globalized society.