

ANT research and argumentation, studies proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s that politicized the idea that the very nature and contents of science were “socially constructed” (see Haraway 1991). The earlier argument that scientific representations (facts, laws, etc.) were not inevitable or determined by “nature” alone was compounded by explicit denunciations of particular scientific representations (of gendered bodies, racial characteristics, normal and pathological conditions, etc.) and of conceptions of scientific objectivity (as “male,” exploitative of “female” nature, expressing cultural privilege and domination). Social construction—both the SSK version and the more politicized cultural studies version—became a target of a flurry of books, articles, conferences, and a massive number of Web postings in the 1990s. The *science wars* were epitomized by the publication in the cultural studies journal *Social Text* of a “hoax” article by physicist Alan Sokal, which argued for a conceptual affinity between poststructuralist literary theory and current theories in quantum gravity physics. Sokal’s hoax was celebrated by many opponents of constructionism and related “relativist” trends in the humanities and social sciences, and for a short time it attracted unwanted media attention to the social studies of science field. During the science wars, debates about the “construction” of science were rarely argued with much care or philosophical sophistication, and by the end of the 1990s, the heated rhetoric began to be toned down (see Labinger and Collins 2001). The field of social studies of science continued to thrive, despite the highly charged polemics about it in the 1990s, and much (indeed most) research in the field consists in uncontroversial studies of (often controversial) developments in science, engineering, and medicine. Consistent with the tendency to question conceptual boundaries between science and nonscience and between science and technology, current research explores the complex way in which science has become embedded in, and inflected by, popular social movements, legal cases and regulations, economic institutions, and systems of governance.

— Michael Lynch

*See also* Actor Network Theory; Ethnomethodology; Feminism; Feminist Epistemology; Garfinkel, Harold; Latour, Bruno; Merton, Robert; Postcolonialism; Postmodernism; Social Constructionism; Symbolic Interaction

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## SOCIAL WORLDS

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Combining notions of culture, social structure, and collective action, *social worlds* are collections of actors with shared understandings and shared institutionalized arrangements that convene, communicate, and coordinate behaviors on the basis of some shared interest. The conceptualization originally stems from work by Tamotsu Shibutani, Anselm Strauss, and Howard Becker, with roots traceable to John Dewey.

Social worlds is a symbolic interactionist concept that distinguishes social actors as they negotiate interactions with one another. Actors negotiate conflict when their perspectives are different, since they represent different social worlds within the same *arena*. When their perspectives are shared, the actors develop and maintain a social world as they communicate with one another and coordinate their behaviors in regard to the phenomenon of interest. Whether it is a baseball game, a soap opera, an advertising campaign, or a medical treatment program, a social world emerges as those with shared perspectives on the phenomenon interact with one another about that phenomenon. In contrast, as those with different perspectives experience conflict over it, different social worlds within a single arena can be identified.

As an interactionist concept, social worlds can be applied at micro-, meso-, or macro-levels of interaction. However, most research using the social worlds concept has been either at the micro-level, such as research on “serious leisure”—including studies on role-playing computer games, bridge playing, and bass tournament fishing—or at the meso-level in science and technology studies (STS). While the former body of research has tended to focus on how social worlds are developed and maintained, the latter STS research has tended to describe how conflicts between social worlds are negotiated at the organizational and institutional levels.

The social worlds analysis in STS is most attributable to Strauss, who thought of social worlds as the unit of interaction in society. The concept allows the analyst to account for any actor involved in a contested phenomenon. Actors

can include those who are little more than observers—such as consumers, an electorate, or community members—who help form the context of the contest. As actors become increasingly involved in the contest and mobilize their resources, their social world becomes more important in determining the contest's outcome. In this way, social worlds analysis is able to account for the influence of social movements and a society's emergent awareness of social problems on how phenomena are defined and treated.

Indeed, researchers in STS using social worlds analysis see conflict as the generic social process they study; cooperation and collaboration typically have to be mandated and cannot be taken for granted. The model of scientists producing science and recruiting supporters of it on the basis of reason and evidence was first challenged by an interests model in the 1970s. That model has since been supplanted by a number of others, including that of social worlds analysis. Unlike other perspectives, social worlds analysis tends to include nonscientific actors in its models.

Social worlds analysis raises the issue of how social worlds are distinguished. To address this issue, Adele Clarke developed the concept of *boundary objects*: things about which there is disagreement among members of different social worlds interacting in the same arena. Debate over the meaning of those boundary objects can reveal the conflicting nature of the different perspectives delineating the social worlds. For example, religious texts, government documents, and organizational policies can all constitute boundary objects; they serve as referents for common identity and consensus at a general level but can also be interpreted specifically and quite differently at local levels. The emergent conflicts over the meaning of boundary objects can thus reveal the varied perspectives constituting the different social worlds of the parties involved. Using such concepts, social worlds analyses often uncover the conflict beneath what is supposedly harmonious. These analysts have, for example, found that seeming congruous collaborations brought together by funding opportunities for democratic and community-oriented appearances are often characterized by mistrust and misunderstandings.

While social worlds analysis focuses on the mesolevel in STS, examining strategies and tactics used in conflicts between worlds, social worlds theory, used more often at the microlevel of interaction, concentrates more on the causes and consequences of an individual's involvement in a given social world, the patterns of functioning of social worlds in general. Among the questions addressed in such research are how social worlds are developed and maintained, what kinds of systems of power and hierarchy exist within them, and how personal identity and commitment to social worlds emerge.

Personal involvement is critical to social worlds. Among the findings to have emerged from this research are categorizations of involvement. Unruh describes four types of social

world members: strangers, tourists, regulars, and insiders. Strangers participate little, tourists occasionally, and regulars routinely, but insiders perform the tasks critical to the creation and maintenance of the social world. Insiders tend to have the most time, experience, and resources invested in the social world and are the most committed to its existence.

An additional use of the phrase "social worlds" is a psychologically subjective use, referring to constellations of actors held in an individual's imagination. "Imaginary social worlds" has been a concept central to some dream research, which has found such worlds to reflect individuals' culture and social surroundings. For example, Caughey (1984) found that nearly 11 percent of his sample of subjects had media figures in their dreams. He also points out that all our social worlds (in the individually subjective sense) must be imaginary to some degree, in that we are all expected to know people in our society whom we have never met. Last, social worlds have also been used in reference to the social development of children. Scholars have described how in the course of developing identity, displaying mastery, and gaining a sense of agency, children's social worlds tend to coalesce around characteristics they hold in common, such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and skill.

—Loren Demerath

See also Social Studies of Science; Strauss, Anselm; Symbolic Interaction

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## SOCIALISM

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Socialism is the theory and practice directed toward shared ownership and collective property holding of social