

Snippets related to social construction from a variety of sources (Only the snippets are assigned for this week's reading; the links are provided for the benefit of those who wish to view a full item)

1. Cialdini, R. B., & Goldstein, N. J. (2004). [Social influence: Compliance and conformity](#). *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 591-621. (abstract)

Abstract This review covers recent developments in the social influence literature, focusing primarily on compliance and conformity research published between 1997 and 2002. The principles and processes underlying a target's susceptibility to outside influences are considered in light of three goals fundamental to rewarding human functioning. Specifically, targets are motivated to form accurate perceptions of reality and react accordingly, to develop and preserve meaningful social relationships, and to maintain a favorable self-concept. Consistent with the current movement in compliance and conformity research, this review emphasizes the ways in which these goals interact with external forces to engender social influence processes that are subtle, indirect, and outside of awareness.

2. Solnit, R. (April, 2015). [Abolish high school](#). *Harper's Magazine*, 330(1979), 5-7.

A teenager can act very differently outside his or her peer group than inside it. A large majority of hate crimes and gang rapes are committed by groups of boys and young men, and studies suggest that the perpetrators are more concerned with impressing one another and conforming to their group's codes than with actual hatred toward outsiders. Attempts to address this issue usually focus on changing the social values to which such groups adhere, but dispersing or diluting these groups seems worth consideration, too.

High school in America is too often a place where one learns to conform or take punishment - and conformity is itself a kind of punishment, one that can flatten out your soul or estrange you from it.

3. McPherson, J. M. (April 12, 2001). [Southern comfort](#). *The New York Review*.

To salvage as much honor and respectability as they could from their lost cause, they set to work to purge it of any association with the now dead and discredited institution of human bondage.

Thus the Civil War was not a war to preserve the nation and, ultimately, to abolish slavery, but instead a war of Northern aggression against Southern constitutional rights. The superb anthology of essays, *The Myth of the Lost Cause*, edited by Gary Gallagher and Alan Nolan, explores all aspects of this myth. The editors intend the word "myth" to be understood not as "falsehood" but in its anthropological meaning: the collective memory of a people about their past, which sustains a belief system shaping their view of the world in which they live.

4. Parker, I. (February 17 & 24, 2020). [The really big picture](#). *The New Yorker*, 48- 59.

In the schema of "Sapiens," money is a "fiction," as are corporations and nations. Harari uses "fiction" where another might say "social construct." (He explained to me, "I would almost always go for the day-to-day word, even if the nuance of the professional word is a bit more accurate.") Harari further proposes that fictions require believers, and exert power only as long as a "communal belief" in them persists. Every social construct, then, is a kind of religion: a declaration of universal human rights is not a

manifesto, or a program, but the expression of a benign delusion; an activity like using money, or obeying a stoplight, is a collective fantasy, not a ritual. When I asked him if he really meant this, he laughed, and said, "It's like the weak force in physics - which is weak, but still strong enough to hold the entire universe together!" (In fact, the weak force is responsible for the disintegration of subatomic particles.) "It's the same with these fictions - they are strong enough to hold millions of people together."

5. Blewett, K., LaVecchia, C., Micciche, L., & Morris, J. (2019). [Editing as inclusion activism](#). *College English*, 81(4), 273-296.

What persists ... is systemic inequality, or inequality baked into the systems that make the university function. Unchecked racism, sexism, homo- and transphobia, ableism, and nativism reproduce inequalities that become ordinary, entering into the common sense of a place—and of a discipline. Where or how to jam the system? To make the ordinary understood as made and, with painstaking effort, able to be remade?

One of the biggest challenges to editing practices we see is how to implement widespread change so that individual editors of singular journals are not working in isolation or on the margins of the field. We need individual and local moves, but we also need a broader collective response from the field and from our organizations. ... Such work is crucial to inclusion activism, which has the potential to create a new normal. As field members, we have a responsibility to challenge exclusionary practices and to support and include voices traditionally denied.

6. Board of Directors, Rhetoric Society of America (2020). [Statement condemning anti-black violence](#). Rhetoric Society of America.

We affirm the capacity of rhetoric to improve our conditions: to expand our abilities to empathize, to mobilize demands for justice, and to disclose more ethical worlds made by words.