

# Essentialism

## Definition of Essentialism

(*noun*) The theory that any entity such as an individual, group, object, or concept has innate and universal qualities.

## Examples of Essentialism

- Gender is biologically determined.
- People are born gay.

## Notes

- The essentialist perspective advocates that individuals in categories such as class, ethnicity, gender, or sex share an intrinsic quality that is verifiable through empirical methods (whether currently known or unknown). Furthermore, essentialism focuses on *what* individuals are, not *who* they are and individuals are viewed as inherently a certain way and not developing through dynamic social processes.
- Essentialist ideas can exist within the framework of social constructionism, but social constructionism cannot fit into the framework of essentialism.
- Essentialism is contrasted to social constructionism.
- Essentialism contends agency is limited.
- A type of reductionism.
- Also called biological reductionism.
- An (*noun*) **essentialist** studies (*adjective*) **essentialistic** aspects of society (*adverb*) **essentially** to understand its (*noun*) **essentiality** or (*noun*) **essentialness**.

# Social Constructionism

## Definition of Social Constructionism

(*noun*) The theory that all reality and meaning is subjective and created through dynamic interactions with other individuals and groups.

## Examples of Social Constructionism

- The meaning of words in a language such as the definitions of sociological terms.
- The social construction of race.

## Notes

- Plural: social constructionism
- Theory developed by Peter Berger (1929–2017) and Thomas Luckman (1927–2016) in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966).
- The social constructionist perspective contends that individuals and their differences are created or constructed through social processes (e.g., political, religious, and economic) rather than an innate quality within the individual. Furthermore, the categorization of individuals into groups explains more about how society functions than about individuals.
- Social constructionism is contrasted to essentialism.
- Essentialist ideas can exist within the framework of social constructionism but social constructionism cannot fit into the framework of essentialism.
- Also called:
  - constructed reality

- constructionism
- social construction
- social construction of reality
- social constructionist perspective
- A (noun) social constructionist studies (adjective) social constructionistic or (adjective) social constructionistal topics (adverb) **social constructionistically**.

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