¶ 2.1

Lecture 2: Culture and Socialization

Exploring the invisible rules of society and how we learn them.

A visual guide to material and nonmaterial culture, norms, sanctions, and the construction of the self.



¶2.2

Biology provides the hardware, socialization provides the software

Infant Reflexes + Enormous Learning Capacity → Socialized Human



Biology (Genes).

The download process: Socialization.

Result: Speaks a particular language, eats specific foods, feels shame, expects specific behaviors from strangers.

The dual system of culture: ideas and objects

¶2.3

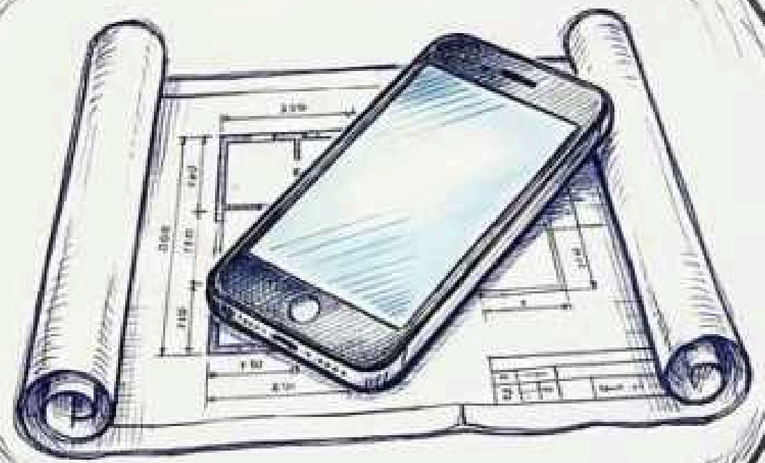
The Ideas.



What people believe, value, and expect.

New technologies change human expectations, and vice versa.

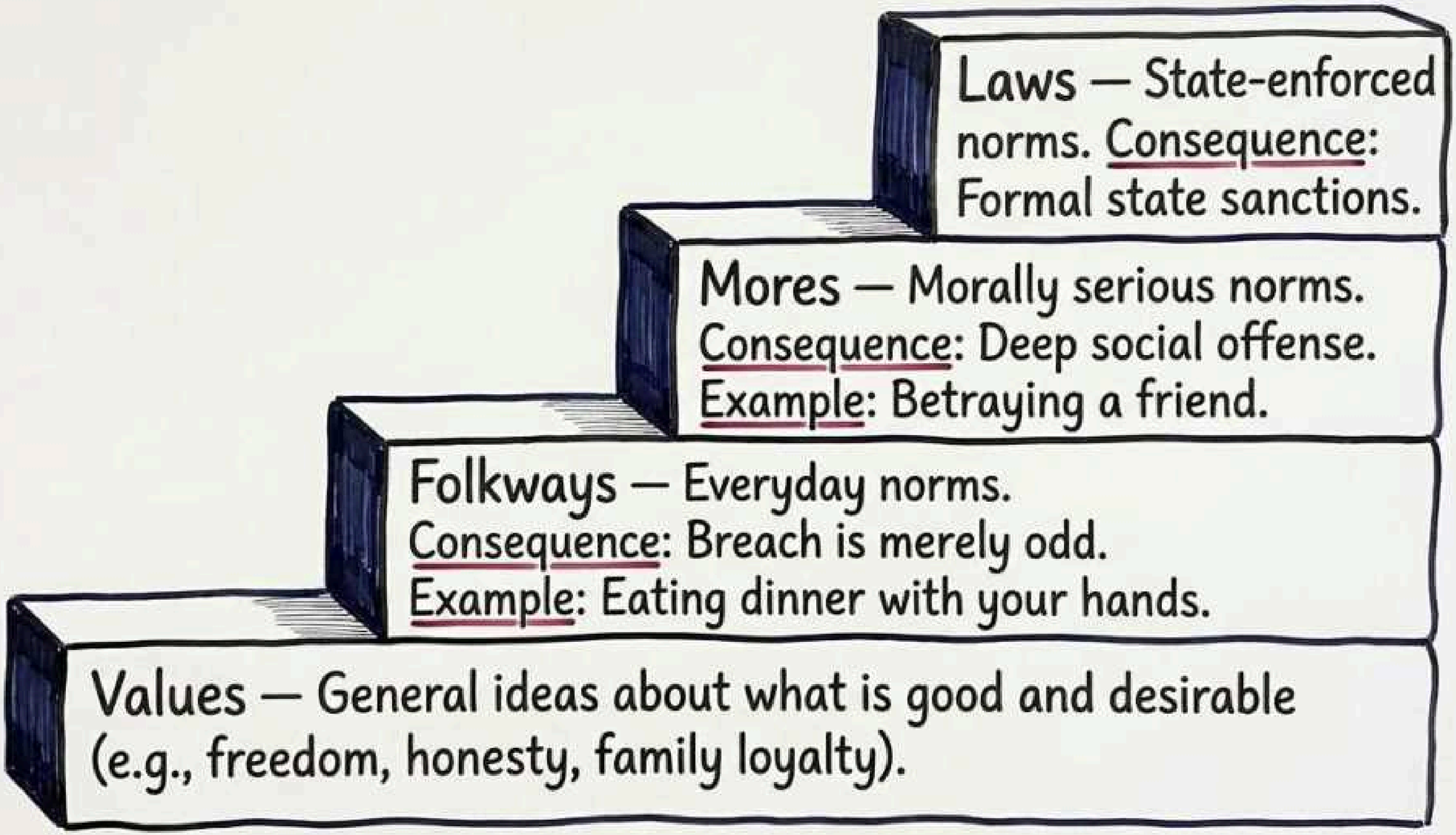
The Things.



What people make and use (tools, clothing, buildings, phones).

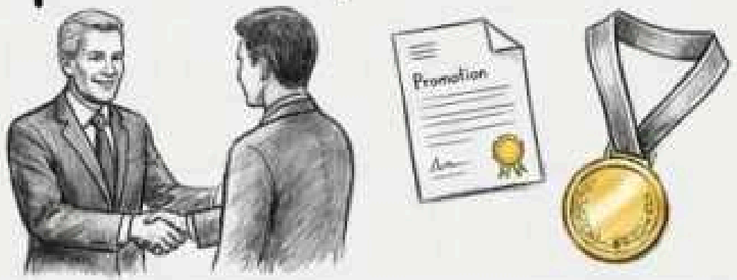
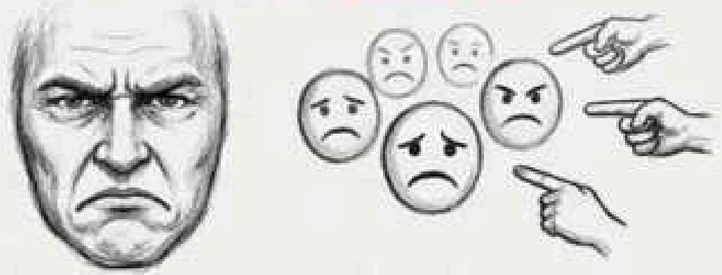
The escalating hierarchy of societal norms

¶2.4



The matrix of social sanctions

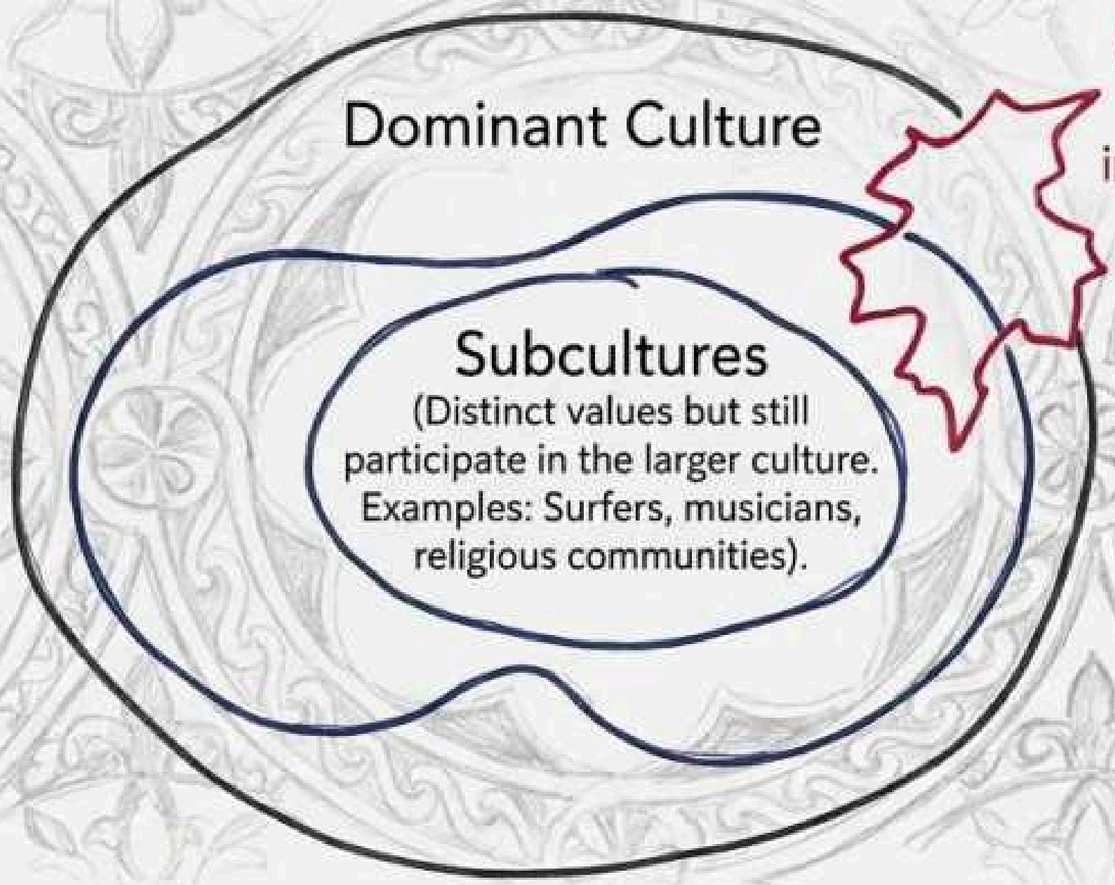
¶ 2.5

Y-Axis	X-Axis: Informal (Social)	X-Axis: Formal (Institutional)
Positive (Reward)	A smile, peer approval. 	A promotion, a medal. 
Negative (Punishment)	A frown, ridicule. 	A fine, a prison sentence. 

Most social control is informal. We queue and greet seeking approval, not because anyone holds a rulebook.

The cultural mosaic of modern societies

¶ 2.6



Countercultures
(Actively rejecting important parts of the dominant culture).

{ Individuals do not just belong to one group; they belong to several of these simultaneously. }

Two distinct lenses for viewing unfamiliar cultures

¶ 2.7

Ethnocentrism

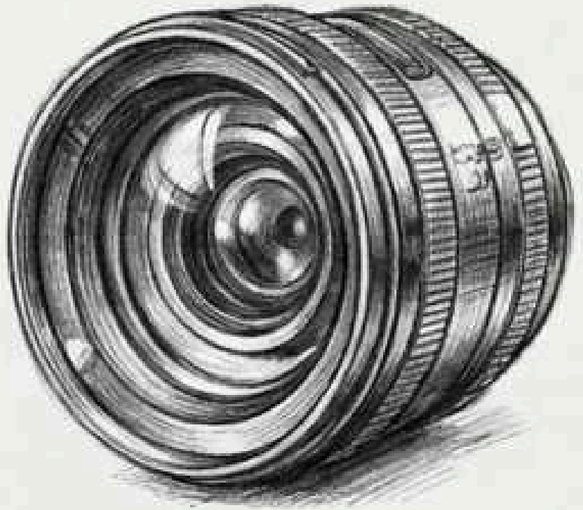


Judging another culture by your own standard.

The belief that one's own way of life is the natural or superior one.

Leads directly to prejudice and conflict.

Cultural Relativism



Understanding a custom in its own context before judging it.

A disciplined method of understanding, not a claim that all practices are equally acceptable.

The crucial nuance of cultural relativism

¶2.8

Understanding ≠ Approval

Understanding

Relativism forbids the lazy assumption that unfamiliar customs are irrational. Many puzzling customs make sense once you see the specific problems they solve.



Judgment

A sociologist can study a practice to fully understand why people do it, while still maintaining the belief that some practices cause objective harm.

Biology is always expressed within a social context

¶2.9

Trait Expression = f (Genes × Environment)

Child's Height depends on →

↓

Genes + Nutrition.

↓

Nutrition is dictated by →
Family Income + Food Availability.

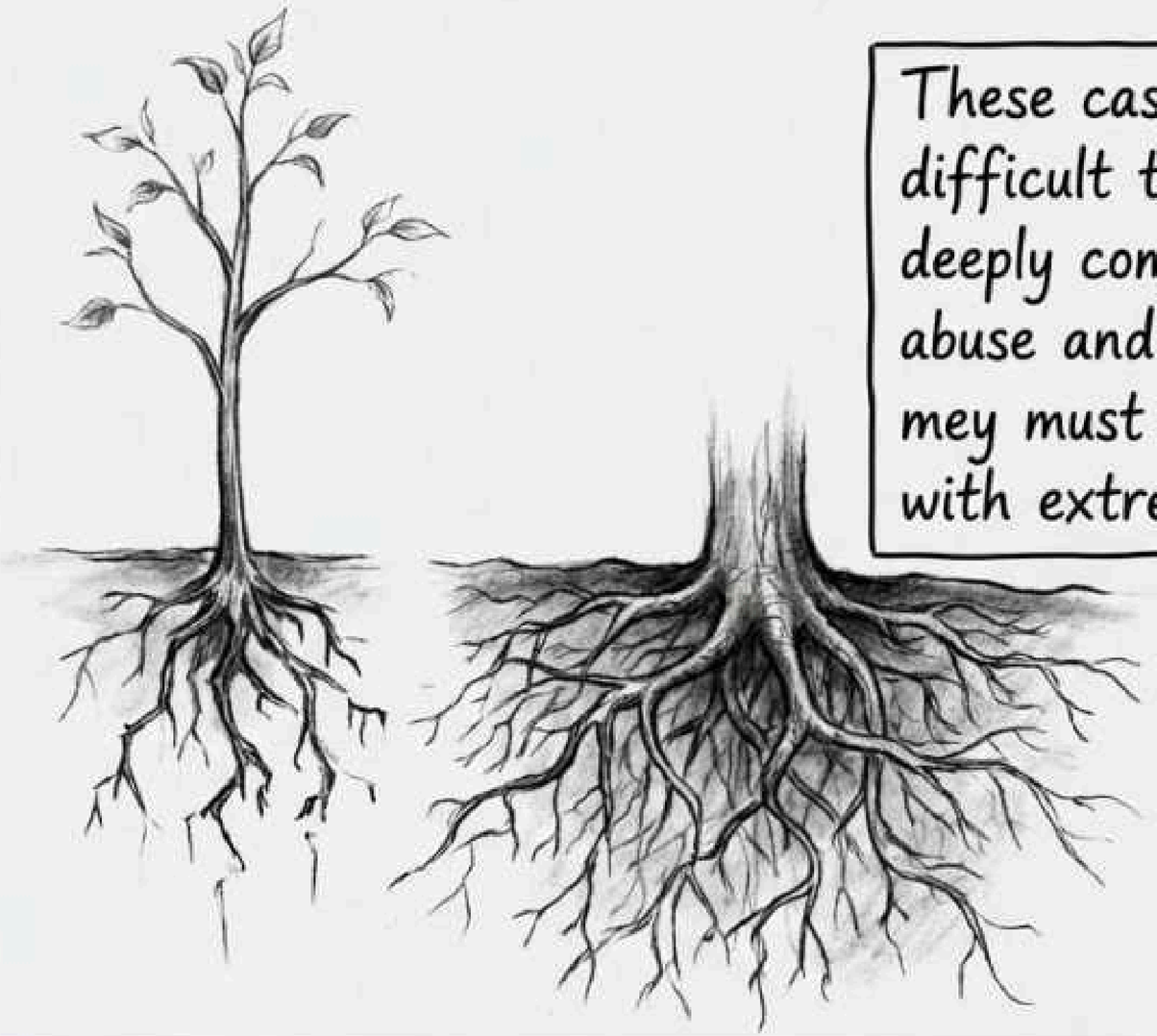


Nature and nurture are not opposing forces; they are interacting variables.

Human capacities require other people to fully develop

¶ 2.10

Children raised with almost no human contact (found after years of isolation) severely struggle to learn language and ordinary social skills.



These cases are rare, difficult to study, and deeply complicated by abuse and neglect. They mey must be interpreted with extreme care.

Cooley (1902): The Looking-Glass Self

¶ 2.11

We imagine how we appear to others.



We imagine how they judge that appearance.

We feel pride or shame in response.

A child told repeatedly that she is clever begins to see herself exactly that way.

The self is a social product from the very start.

Mead: The developmental stages of the social self

¶ 2.12









Imitation

Small children mimic those close to them.

Play

Pretending to take on specific roles.

Team Games

Grasping the roles of many others simultaneously.

The Generalized Other

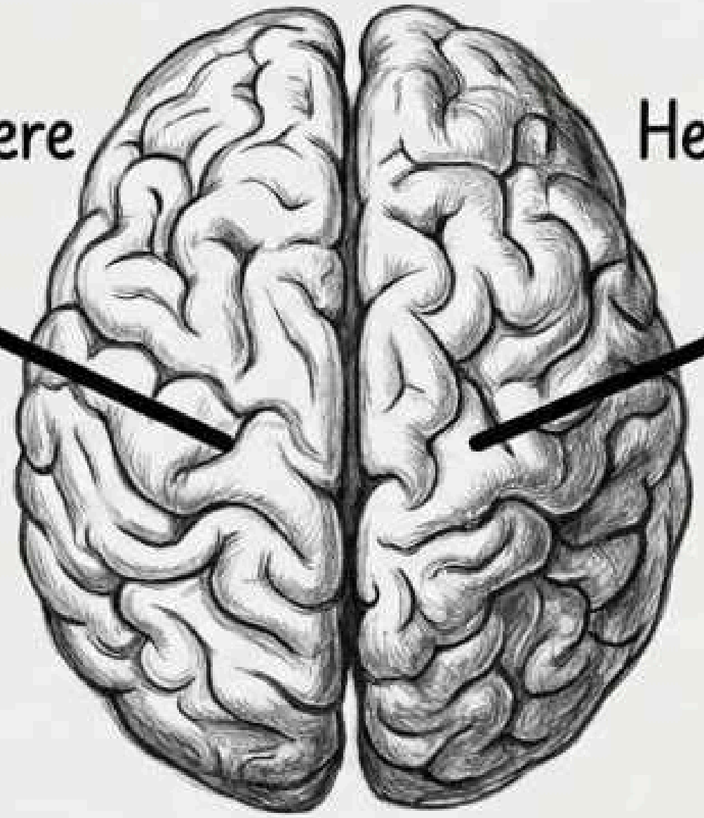
Developing an internal picture of societal expectations used to self-regulate behavior.

Mead: The internal dialogue between the "I" and the "Me"

¶ 2.13

The "Me"

The socialized part of the self. Completely shaped by the expectations of others. The societal copy.



The "I"

The spontaneous, creative response. Capable of surprising, refusing, and innovating.

The "I" + The "Me" = Cultural Change

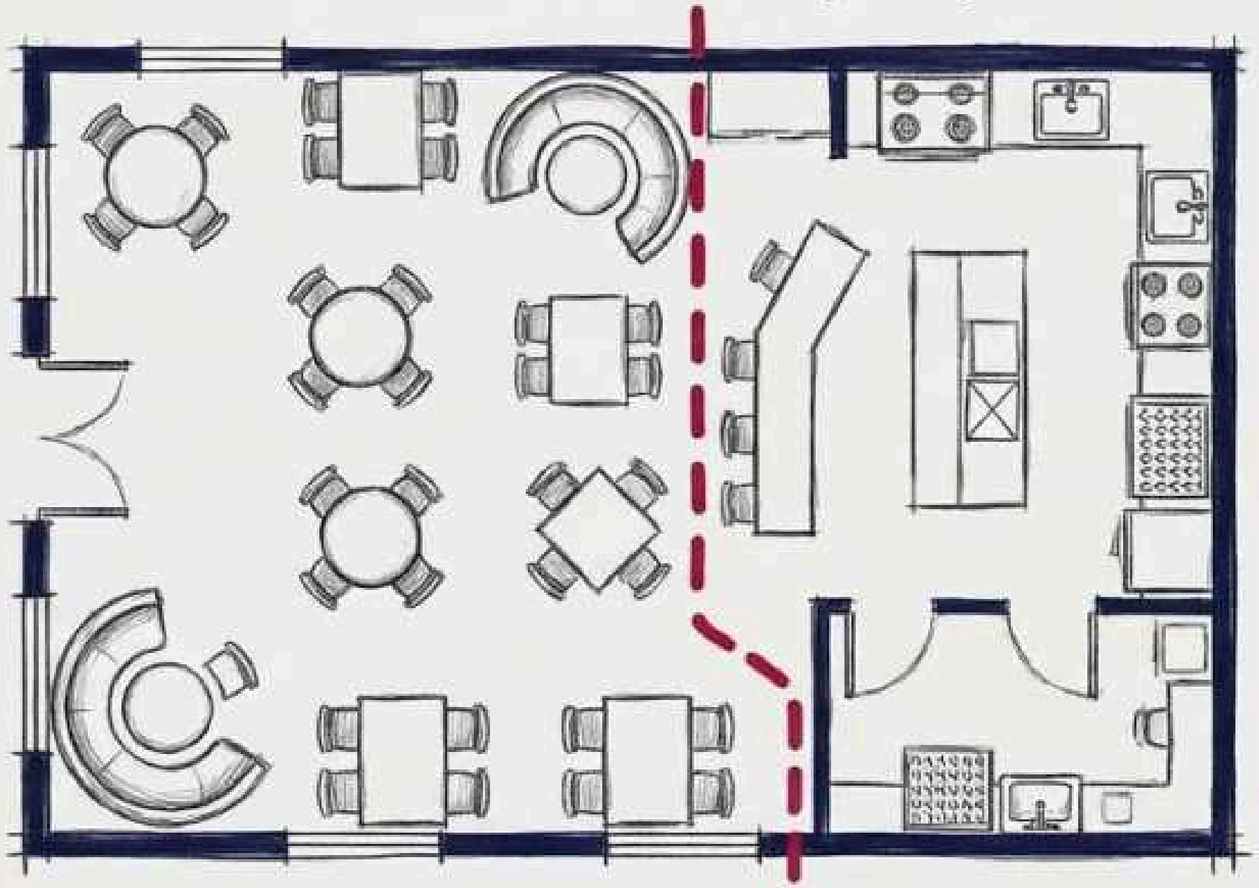
(Individuals act in new ways via the "I", and sometimes society follows).

Goffman (1959): Dramaturgy and the theatre of everyday life

¶ 2.14

Front Stage
(The Dining Room)

Where we perform and play our expected societal roles. We actively manage impressions (e.g., the polite waiter).



Back Stage
(The Kitchen)

Where we drop the performance, relax, and step out of character (e.g., joking freely away from the customers).

Everyday encounters are theatrical performances.
Even ordinary politeness requires immense effort to maintain.

The primary agents of socialization

¶ 2.15

Family

The first and most powerful agent. Teaches language, core values, and one's place in society.

Schools

Teaches academic subjects, but also the "hidden curriculum" (punctuality, strict rules, and competition).



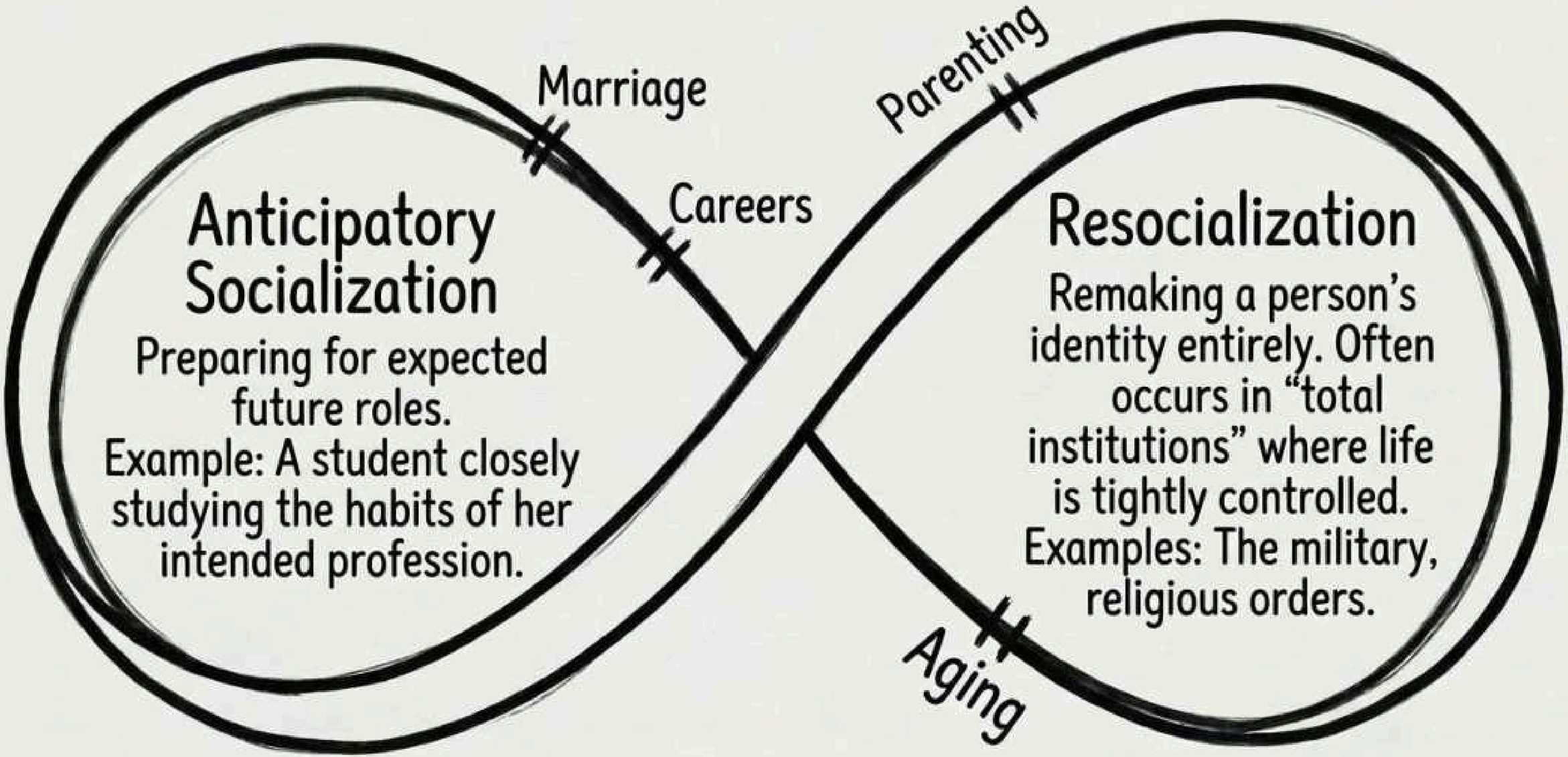
Peer Groups

Crucial during adolescence; teaches independence away from adult supervision.

Mass Media / Digital Platforms

Supplies the prevailing images of how to look, how to behave, and how to belong.

Socialization is a lifelong process of adaptation ¶ 2.16



¶ 2.17

Reflection: The invisible power of unwritten rules

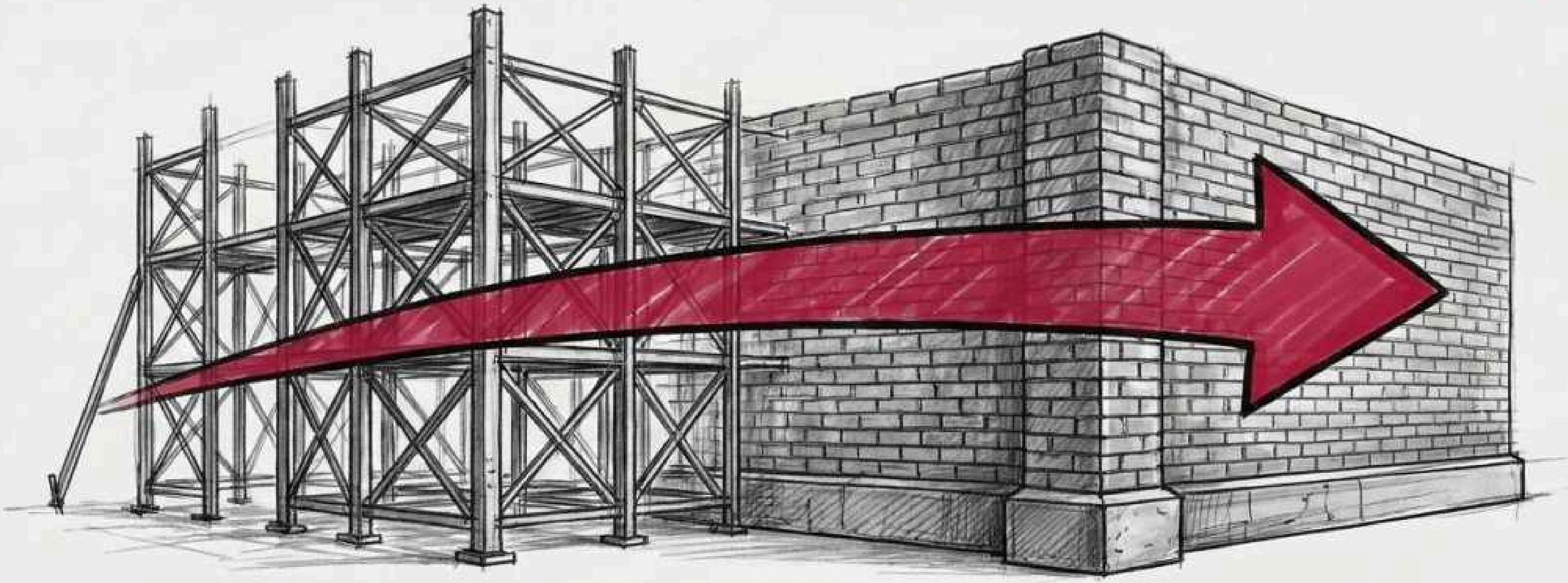


- Think of a norm you follow without ever having been explicitly told to do so (e.g., how close to stand to a stranger in a lift).
- Who taught this to you, and how exactly did you learn it?
- What would happen if you broke it on purpose today? What does that visceral reaction reveal about the absolute power of culture?



Looking Ahead: From Culture to Social Structure

¶ 2.18



Culture (Lecture 2)
The invisible rules, beliefs, and expectations of society.

Social Structure (Lecture 3)
The tangible architecture of society.

Next time, we examine the patterns of statuses, roles, groups, and organizations that give society its definitive shape.