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What Constitutive Means to Me

Initially, my understanding of the term "constitutive" was limited, perceiving it solely as the result or final action. I had encountered the term a few times before, but it was in this course that I truly delved into its meaning and application. Through the material, discussions, and assignments, my perspective on what it means for something to be constitutive has evolved significantly. For something to be constitutive, it involves not just the result itself but the intricate network of underlying factors, processes, and practices that shape and bring about that phenomenon.

The word "constitutive" means being an important component that helps create and form the basic nature of something. In the context of this class, we explored how constitutive elements are not just about the final act or outcome but also the steps and processes that lead to that result. I learned that to analyze phenomena constitutively, one must go through 4 steps: emergence, performance, dissemination, and reception. For emergence to occur, one must begin a process involving acknowledgment, defamiliarization, self-scrutiny, and praxis. These interconnected elements help facilitate the manifestation of emergence as the first stage in constitutive analysis.

For example, doing my laundry is a mundane and mindless task for me. I only think of the outcome of having clean clothes to wear, never about the process of it. When I purposefully acknowledge the process of doing my laundry, I realize how much effort goes into having clean clothes. By defamiliarizing myself with my laundry routine, I think about the steps that I go through. First, I put my clothes into the washer, add detergent, and then push a couple of buttons

to turn it on and start the cycle. I can hear the machine filling with water, the faint smell of detergent, and the rumble and spin of the cycles. Once the wash cycle is done, I move my clothes to the dryer. I think about the dryer filling with heat and airflow that is fluffing and tossing around my wet clothes until they are dry and wearable again. I walk away, not returning until they are ready to be folded or hung up. Self-scrutiny brings to light why I take this weekly task for granted. To be fair, all I have ever known is the convenience of having machines like these. In the 1800s, laundry was much more laborious than it is now. If I were doing laundry during that period, I would have to scrub every piece of clothing on a washboard. To dry my clothes, I would have to meticulously hang up every piece of clothing one by one to air dry. Praxis lets me reflect on the privilege of having a washing machine. It allows me to take the time to slow down and think about having clean clothes and the actual process. Taking in all the sounds and smells of the initial laundry process allows me to alter it from a tedious routine chore into an opportunity to develop a sense of appreciation and privilege.

The context of emergence includes not just our daily routines but also the underlying structures that shape our everyday lives and guide our actions. For instance, consider the clothes we wear. They were likely manufactured in a different country than where the raw materials were sourced. The cotton may have been grown in the southern United States, but it was likely shipped to Bangladesh or China to be woven into fabric and sewn into garments. Another significant factor is the labor force involved in the production process. Clothing manufacturing often relies heavily on women's labor, who typically comprise the majority of the workforce in garment factories. This ties into broader societal patterns, where household chores and domestic responsibilities also tend to fall disproportionately on women's shoulders. These elements – the

global supply chains, the gendered division of labor, and the socioeconomic structures that reinforce our daily routines – are essential to understanding the context of emergence.

Not only did I learn about how to analyze something constitutively, but I learned how constitutive elements can vary across different contexts. This means that constitutive elements are not one-size-fits-all across various contexts. What may be constitutive in one could play an entirely different constitutive role in another setting. Recognizing this has encouraged me to approach problems and phenomena from multiple angles and consider all the constitutive elements involved. Identifying the constitutive elements allows me to go beyond making surface-level observations and dive deeper to understand why things are the way they are. This deeper understanding of constitutive rhetoric has proven to be a valuable tool in various aspects of my life. In my personal relationships, I now try to not only hear what someone is saying, but also to identify the constitutive factors that shape their perspectives. Even mundane daily activities have taken on new layers of meaning as I recognize the constitutive emergence, performance, dissemination, and reception of habits and routines. This practical application of constitutive rhetoric has not only enhanced my understanding but also improved my interactions and problem-solving skills.

This class has introduced me to constitutive rhetoric as an analytical lens. While taking simple observations at face-value was my previous approach, I now obtained the tools for a more profound constitutive view that reveals the dynamic complexities and contexts beneath the surface. This expanded perspective promises to enhance my skills as an analyst, communicator, and problem solver across all aspects of life. This course has truly changed my approach to understanding and analyzing the world around me.