Socialization

John Howard

This infant monkey and others studied by psychologist Harry Harlow grew up locked in individual cages without social contact. As a result, they had difficulty learning how to have sexual intercourse or raise their own babies. These experiments suggest that even apparently innate behaviors must be developed through interaction.

© Martin Rogers/Stock Boston Inc.

What Is Socialization?

At the heart of sociology is a concern with *people*. Sociology is interesting and useful to the extent that it helps us explain why people do what they do. It should let us see ourselves, our family, and our acquaintances in a new light.

In this chapter we deal directly with individuals, focusing on **socialization:** the process through which people learn the rules and practices needed to participate successfully in their culture and society. Socialization is a lifelong process. It begins with learning and coming to accept the rules and practices of our family and our subculture. As we grow older, join new groups, and take on new identities (as parent, worker, video gamer, or anything else), we learn new norms and redefine our identities.

Learning to Be Human

But how much of what we do and believe is learned and how much is built into our genes? Are we born with a tendency to cooperate or to fight? With a love for hip-hop music, country music, or no music at all? The question of the basic nature of humankind has been a staple of philosophical debate for thousands of years. It continues to be a topic of debate because it is so difficult (some would say impossible) to separate the part of human behavior that arises from our genetic heritage from the part that is developed after birth. The one thing we are sure of is that nature is never enough.

Each of us begins life with a set of human potentials: the potential to walk, to communicate, to love, and to learn. By themselves, however, these natural capacities are not enough to enable us to join the human family. Without nurture—without love and attention and hugging—the human infant is unlikely to survive, much less prosper. The effects of neglect are sometimes fatal and, depending on severity and length, almost always result in retarded intellectual and social development.

Monkeying with Isolation and Deprivation

How can we determine the importance of nurture? In a classic series of experiments, psychologist Harry Harlow and his associates studied what happened when they raised monkeys in total isolation (Blum 2002). The infants lived in individual cages with a mechanical mother figure that provided milk. Although the infant monkeys' nutritional needs were met, their social needs were not. As a result, both their physical and social growth suffered. They exhibited bizarre behavior that resembled that of some autistic children, such as staring blankly, biting themselves, and hiding in corners.

Socialization is the process of learning the roles, statuses, and values necessary for participation in social institutions.

As adults, these monkeys refused to mate; if artificially impregnated, the females would not nurse or care for their babies (Harlow & Harlow 1966). These experiments provided dramatic evidence of the importance of social contact; even apparently innate behaviors such as sexuality and maternal behavior did not occur unless developed through social interaction.

Harlow's attempts to socialize monkeys reared in isolation for 6 months produced mixed results, with many showing no improvement at all. The best results occurred when he subsequently placed these 6-month-old monkeys with 3-month-old monkeys and their mothers, giving those raised in isolation a second chance to be socialized along with the younger monkeys (Harlow & Suomi 1971).

The Necessity of Nurture for Humans

Learning to be a monkey, however, is quite different from learning to be a human, and so the Harlow experiments can only suggest what would happen to children raised without nurturing. Of course, we cannot ethically isolate children away from caring adults to see what would happen. Unfortunately, sometimes that happens nonetheless.

Some of the clearest evidence regarding the consequences of raising children with little or no nurture comes from studies of children raised in low-quality orphanages. In these orphanages, the children's physical needs were met but they received little true nurturing. Many of these children were devastated by the experience. Some withdrew from the social world, neither crying nor showing interest in anything around them. Others became violent toward themselves or others. Even if later adopted into good homes, they were significantly more likely to experience difficulties in thinking or learning. They were also more likely to experience problems in social relationships—either engaging in indiscriminate friendliness or withdrawing into autistic or near-autistic behaviors. These effects are illustrated by a study that compared children adopted by British parents either from high-quality British orphanages or from low-quality Romanian orphanages. The researchers found that 12 percent of the

When children (such as these South African orphans) receive little true nurturing, their ability to learn, think, and develop normal human relationships may permanently decline.

Cynthia Johnson/Getty Images News/Getty Images

Romanian-born children exhibited autistic or near-autistic patterns, whereas none of the children from the British orphanages did (Rutter et al. 1999).

Other evidence on the importance of nurture comes from rare cases of children whose parents raised them in situations of extreme physical and emotional deprivation. The true story of Genie (a pseudonym) illustrates the consequences of severe deprivation (Newton 2004). Until the age of 13, Genie's abusive father kept her tied to a chair and locked in a small room. Her mother—blind, disabled, and cowed—could do nothing to help her. Genie was never spoken to or socialized in any way. When her mother finally took Genie and ran away, Genie could not talk, walk, or even use a toilet. After years of therapy, her abilities improved, but they remained far below the level needed for her to live on her own.

Genie's case is extreme. But milder forms of deprivation occur in homes in which parents fail to provide adequate social and emotional stimulation. Children who have their physical needs met but are otherwise ignored by their parents often exhibit problems similar to those of Genie and of orphans and monkeys raised without nurturing. The bottom line is that for children, as for monkeys, physical and social development depend on interaction with others of their species. Walking, talking, loving, and laughing all depend on socialization through sustained and intimate interaction.

Theoretical Perspectives on Socialization

To become a functioning member of society, each of us must be socialized. But how does socialization occur? What are the processes through which, as children and adults, we learn the rules, values, and behaviors of our society? In the following pages we look at some psychological and sociological theories of socialization.

Freudian Theory

The first modern theory of socialization was developed by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud at the beginning of the twentieth century. Freud's theory of socialization links social development to biological cues. According to Freud, to become mentally healthy adults, children must develop a proper balance between their **id**—natural biological drives, such as hunger and sexual urges—and their **superego**—internalized social ideas about right and wrong. To find that balance, children must respond successfully to a series of developmental issues, each occurring at a particular age and linked to biological changes in the body.

For Freud, the years from 3 to 6 are especially important because this is when he believed the superego developed. According to Freud, during this stage children first start noticing genitalia. When boys learn that girls lack penises, they conclude that girls must have been castrated by their fathers as punishment for some wrongdoing. To avoid this fate, boys quickly adopt their father's rules and values, thus developing a strong superego. In contrast, Freud argued that because girls need not fear castration they can never develop a strong superego (Freud [1925] 1971, 241–260).

Freud based his theory on his personal interpretations of his patients' lives and dreams, rather than on scientific research. Nevertheless, his conception of human nature and socialization continues to permeate American culture and social science: The theory is still used (in a much revamped form) by some psychologists and even some sociologists (e.g., Chodorow 1999).

The **id** is the natural, unsocialized, biological portion of self, including hunger and sexual urges.

The **superego** is composed of internalized social ideas about right and wrong.

Piaget and Cognitive Development

Another influential psychological theory of socialization is cognitive development theory. This theory has its roots in the work of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1954). Piaget developed his theory through intensive observations of normal young children. His goal was to identify the stages that children go through in the process of learning to think about the world.

Piaget's observations led him to conclude that there are four stages of cognitive development. In the first stage, children learn to understand things they see, touch, feel, smell, or hear, but they do not understand cause and effect. So, for example, very young children love playing peekaboo because it is a delightful surprise each time the person playing with them removes his or her hands to reveal his or her presence. In later stages, children may learn to use language, symbols, and numbers; to understand cause and effect; and to understand abstract concepts such as truth or justice. Piaget recognized, however, that some children lack the capacity to reach the highest stages of development.

Critics of Piaget's work suggest that Piaget's model is too simplistic. They argue that in addition to individual differences among children, cultural and gender differences may also affect the nature and trajectory of cognitive development (Gilligan 1993). They also question whether Piaget's ideas reflect only one culture's definitions of what it means to have high cognitive development.

Structural-Functional Theory

The starting premise of all structural-functionalist analyses is that in a properly functioning society, all elements of society work together harmoniously for the good of all. The same is true for structural-functionalist analyses of socialization.

As we'll see in later chapters, structural functionalists believe that schools, religious institutions, families, and the other social arenas in which children are socialized are designed to integrate the young smoothly into the broader culture, avoiding

Structural functionalists point out that schools teach children not only to read and write but also to obey authority and conform to society's rules.

altrendo images/Altrendo/Getty Images

conflict or chaotic social change. In families, children learn to mind their manners, and in schools they learn to be on time and obey the rules. In places of worship, children learn to practice accepted rituals (lighting candles at Mass or on the Sabbath, praying to the east or on Sundays) and to respect traditional ideas about good and bad, right and wrong.

From the perspective of structural functionalism, this socialization is all for the good: Through socialization, young people learn how to become happy and productive members of society. And in the best situations, socialization does work as structural functionalists claim: Children learn both to fit into the world of their elders and to think for themselves, so that they can adapt to any changes the future brings. Critics of this theory, on the other hand, point out that in socializing children to the world as it is, we also teach them to accept existing inequalities and make it difficult for them to see how to change the world for the better. This is the perspective taken by conflict theorists.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory's approach to socialization is the opposite of structural functionalism's. Whereas structural functionalism assumes that socialization benefits everyone, conflict theory assumes it benefits only those in power.

Conflict theorists focus on how socialization reinforces unequal power arrangements. Some look at how parents socialize children to consider girls less valuable than boys by requiring girls to wash dishes after dinner but allowing boys to go outside to play. Others investigate how teachers socialize working-class children to fill working-class jobs by punishing signs of creativity and rewarding strict obedience. Still others explore how priests, ministers, rabbis, and other religious leaders may socialize congregants to believe that the privileges of the wealthy and of dominant ethnic groups have been granted by God.

Conflict theory is useful for understanding how socialization can quash dissent and social change and reproduce inequalities. It is less useful for explaining the sources and benefits of a stable social system.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Sociologists who use symbolic interaction theory begin with three basic premises:

1. To understand human behaviors, we must first understand what those behaviors mean to individuals.
2. Those meanings develop within social relationships.
3. Individuals actively construct their self-concepts, within limits imposed by social structures and social relationships.

In addition, symbolic interaction theorists use two central concepts—the *looking-glass self* and *role taking*—to understand how individuals construct their self-concepts. The next sections explore these two concepts.

The Looking-Glass Self

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) provided a classic description of how we develop our self-concept. The **self-concept** is our sense of who we are as individuals, in terms of both our personalities and our position in society. Cooley proposed that we develop our self-concept by learning to view ourselves as we think others view us. He called this the **looking-glass self** (see the Concept Summary on the

The **self-concept** is our sense of who we are as individuals.

The **looking-glass self** is the process of learning to view ourselves as we think others view us.

Looking-Glass Self). According to Cooley, there are three steps in the formation of the looking-glass self:

1. We imagine how we appear to others.
2. We imagine how others judge us based on those appearances.
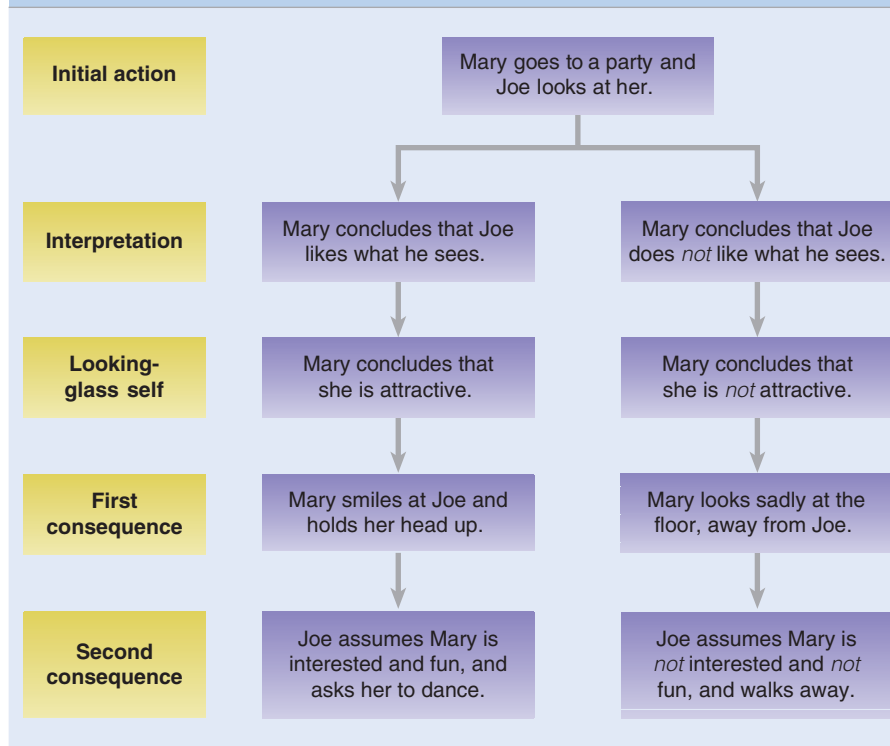3. We ponder, internalize, or reject these judgments.

For example, an instructor whose students doze during class may well conclude that the students consider him a bad teacher. He may internalize their view of his teaching abilities and conclude that he needs to seek another line of work. Alternatively, however, he may recall colleagues who have complimented him on his teaching and other classes that seemed to appreciate his style. As a result, he may instead conclude that this semester's students are simply not smart enough to appreciate his teaching.

As this suggests, our self-concept is not merely a mechanical reflection of the views of those around us; rather it rests on our interpretations of and reactions to their judgments. We engage actively in defining our self-concept, choosing whose looking-glass we want to pay attention to and using past experiences to aid us in interpreting others' responses.

concept summary

The Looking-Glass Self

The concept of a looking-glass self suggests that we often view ourselves as we believe others view us and that these subjective interpretations have real consequences. Imagine two scenarios:

Initial action	Mary goes to a party and Joe looks at her.	
Interpretation	Mary concludes that Joe likes what he sees.	Mary concludes that Joe does *not* like what he sees.
Looking-glass self	Mary concludes that she is attractive.	Mary concludes that she is *not* attractive.
First consequence	Mary smiles at Joe and holds her head up.	Mary looks sadly at the floor, away from Joe.
Second consequence	Joe assumes Mary is interested and fun, and asks her to dance.	Joe assumes Mary is *not* interested and *not* fun, and walks away.

Symbolic interaction considers subjective interpretations to be extremely important determinants of the self-concept. This premise of symbolic interactionism is apparent in W. I. Thomas's classic statement: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Thomas 1928, 572). People interact with others based on their subjective interpretations of how others think about them and about the world. Thus subjective interpretations have real consequences—whether or not they accurately reflect what others are thinking.

Role Taking

The most influential contributor to symbolic interaction theory during the last century was George Herbert Mead (1934). To Mead, the self had two components, which he referred to as the *I* and the *me*. In English grammar, we use the word *I* when *we* do something and use the word *me* when someone else does something to us ("*I* disobeyed my mom. Then she punished *me*."). Similarly, Mead used the word *I* to refer to the spontaneous, creative part of the self and the word *me* to describe the part of the self that responds to others' expectations.

Mead argued that we learn to function in society and to balance the desires of the *I* with the social awareness of the *me* through the process of **role taking**. This means learning how others important to us see the world and gradually adopting their perspectives.

According to Mead, role taking begins in childhood, when we learn the rights and obligations associated with being a child in our particular family. To understand what is expected of us as children, we must learn our mother's and father's views. We must learn to see ourselves from our parents' perspective and to evaluate our behavior from their point of view. Only when we have learned their views as well as our own will we really understand what our own obligations are.

Mead maintained that children develop their knowledge of how to function in society by playing games. When children play, they develop their ideas of how different sorts of adults relate to one another, based on what they see in the world around them. In households where moms are responsible for cooking and dads for home repair, little girls may enjoy playing with toy stoves and boys with toy hammers. In households with a single parent or where both parents leave each day for work, girls and boys may both enjoy driving around in their toy cars, with toy briefcases or tool chests beside them.

As this suggests, children's play often focuses on the behavior of their **significant others**—individuals with whom they have close personal relationships. Parents and siblings, for example, can deeply affect children's self-concepts. As children grow older and interact increasingly with people outside their families, they begin to learn what others—including their teachers, neighbors, and employers—expect of them. Eventually, they come to judge their behavior not only from the perspective of significant others but also from what Mead calls the **generalized other**—the composite expectations of all people with whom they interact. Learning the expectations of the generalized other is equivalent to learning the norms and values of a culture. Through this process, we learn how to act like an American or a Pole or a Nigerian.

Saying that everyone learns the norms and values of the culture does not mean that everyone will behave alike or that everyone will follow the same rules. In addition to having unique personalities, each of us has a different set of significant others, each grows up within certain cultures and subcultures, and each has different levels of access to social resources such as education and money. As a result, we may be more or less inclined to follow society's rules and more or less able to choose a different path.

Role taking involves imagining ourselves in the role of others in order to determine the criteria they will use to judge our behavior.

Significant others are the role players with whom we have close personal relationships.

The **generalized other** combines the expectations of all with whom we interact.

Agents of Socialization

Socialization is a continual process of learning. Each time we encounter new experiences, we must reassess who we are and where we fit into society. This challenge is most evident when we undergo important life transitions—when we leave home for the first time, join the military, change careers, or get divorced, for example. Each of these shifts requires us to expand our skills, adjust our attitudes, and accommodate ourselves to new realities.

Socialization takes place in many contexts. We learn what others expect of us from our parents, teachers, bosses, religious leaders, and friends, as well as from television, movies, and even comic books. These **agents of socialization**—the individuals, groups, and media that teach us social norms—profoundly affect our personalities, self-concepts, values, and behaviors, especially if the messages learned in one setting are reinforced elsewhere. (See Focus on Media and Culture: Girls' Hair, Girls' Identities.) Each of these agents of socialization is discussed more fully in later chapters. They are introduced here to illustrate the importance of social structures for learning.

Family

Perhaps the most important agent of socialization is the family. As the tragic cases of child neglect and the monkey experiments so clearly demonstrate, the initial warmth and nurturance we receive at home are essential to normal cognitive, emotional, and physical development. In addition, our family members—usually our parents but sometimes our grandparents, stepparents, or others—are our first teachers. From them we learn not only how to tie our shoes and hold a crayon but also beliefs and goals that may stay with us for the rest of our lives.

The activities required to meet the physical needs of a newborn provide the initial basis for social interaction. Feeding and diaper changing give opportunities for cuddling, smiling, and talking. These nurturant activities are all vital; without them, the child's social, emotional, and physical growth will be stunted (Handel, Cahill, & Elkin 2007; Blum 2002; Rutter et al. 1999).

In addition to these basic developmental tasks, the child has a staggering amount of learning to do before becoming a full member of society. Much of this early learning occurs in the family as a result of daily interactions: The child learns to talk and communicate, to play house, and to get along with others (Handel, Cahill, & Elkin 2007). As the child becomes older, teaching is more direct, and parents attempt to produce conformity and obedience, impart basic skills, and prepare the child for life outside the family. Families differ, however, in the means they use to impart these values and skills: Some will try to rely only on hugs and praise, others will consider a "good spanking" a useful tool, and a small percentage will beat a child who disobeys. Decoding the Data: Attitudes toward Spanking explores these differences.

One reason the family is the most important agent of socialization is that the self-concept formed during childhood has lasting consequences. In later stages of development, we pursue experiences and activities that integrate and build on the foundations established in the primary years. Although our personalities and self-concepts do not take final, fixed form in childhood, childhood experiences set the stage for our later development.

The family is also an important agent of socialization in that the parents' religion, social class, and ethnicity influence the child's behaviors, beliefs, self-concept,

The **agents of socialization** are all the individuals, groups, and media that teach social norms.

focus on MEDIA AND CULTURE

Girls' Hair, Girls' Identities

Why does a "bad hair day" matter so much to girls and women that some will just stay home; some will go through their day cranky, unconfident, or depressed; and most will sacrifice time and money to avoid this fate? This is the question that led Rose Weitz, one of the authors of this textbook, to write the book *Rapunzel's Daughters: What Women's Hair Tells Us about Women's Lives* (2004). A good part of the answer to this question, she found, lies in girls' socialization.

As Weitz discovered, parents, teachers, friends, neighbors, and even strangers passing on the street all teach girls to consider their hair central to their identity and to their position in the world. Parents praise their daughters when their hair is neatly styled, refuse to take them to church or the mall when it isn't, and drag them to beauty parlors even when their daughters could care less. Teachers will pull out a comb and fix girls' hair when they consider it too unruly, and strangers will comment on how a girl's "beautiful blonde curls" (if she is white) or naturally long, straight hair (if she is African American) will surely garner her a rich husband.

Girls are also socialized to consider their hair central to their identity through material culture and the mass media. Through toys and other gifts, girls learn to consider hair work both fun and meaningful. Barbie dolls are an especially clear example. In addition to garden-variety Barbies, girls can get (among many others) Fashion Queen Barbie, which comes with blonde, brunette, and "titian-haired" wigs; Growin' Pretty Hair Barbie, whose hair can be pulled to make it longer; and Totally Hair Barbie, the most popular Barbie ever, which comes with hair to her toes, styling gel, a hair pick, and a styling book. The Barbie "Styling Head," which consists of

A vast array of toys teach young girls to consider their hair central to their identies and to consider it a source of fun, pleasure, and personal meaning.

nothing but a head with long hair, is also popular. Similarly, although few would think it appropriate to give boys curling irons or blow dryers as gifts, many parents, aunts, and uncles give such gifts to girls, further reinforcing the importance of their hair.

The importance of girls' hair is also reinforced by the mass media. Time after time, in movies like *Pretty Woman* or *America's Sweethearts*, apparently plain women get the guy once they get a new hairstyle (and ditch the glasses). If you see a girl or woman in a movie with bad hair, she is either the villain, the comic sidekick, or about to get both a makeover and the guy. Even children's cartoons follow this pattern: Smurfette, the only female on the show *The Smurfs*, was created by the wicked wizard Gargamel to be an evil, conniving seductress who would cause the Smurfs' downfall. When Papa Smurf changed her into a good Smurfette, her messy, medium-length, brown hair became long, smooth, and blonde.

Magazines aimed at teenagers more directly socialize girls to focus on their hair and appearance. Weitz found that about half of advertisements and articles in recent issues of *Seventeen* (the most popular teen magazine) focused on how girls could change their hair or bodies. Similarly, makeover stories—in which ugly ducklings become swans by changing their hair, makeup, clothes, and even bone structure—are a regular feature on television talk shows and provide the entire focus of various television programs.

Although some girls are more immune than others to media messages, few escape their effects fully. As discussed in the previous chapter, even when individual girls reject the idea that they should define themselves through their appearance, they still feel obligated to *act* as if they accept that idea because they believe that others accept it and judge them on that basis (Milkie 1999).

Foto Begsteiger/Alexa Bente WoodyStock/Alamy

decoding the data

Attitudes Toward Spanking

Caption: Education significantly affects Americans' attitudes toward spanking children: Those who have graduated college are less likely than others to approve of spanking.

Question: Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree that it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good, hard spanking?

SOURCE: General Social Survey (2009). **http://sda.berkeley.edu**. Accessed June 2009.

	Less than 12 Years' Education	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate
Strongly Agree	27%	31%	24%	17%
Agree	49	45	48	45
Disagree	17	19	24	30
Strongly Disagree	7	5	4	8

Explaining the Data: Although you probably haven't discussed the merits of spanking in any of your classes, something about attending college may make you less likely to approve of spanking by the time you graduate. How is college changing your ideas about families and personal relationships? How is college changing your ideas about how people learn? Your ideas about "proper" ways to behave? Might any of these changes affect your attitudes toward spanking?

Critiquing the Data: Are there any reasons why college graduates might be less likely than others to *admit* that they approve of spanking?

College graduates differ from others in many ways. Most importantly, they disproportionately come from middle- or upper-class families and themselves have middle- or upper-class income. Can you think of any reasons why higher-income persons would be less likely to rely on spanking? Might income, rather than college, explain the difference in attitudes?

---

and position in society. They influence the expectations that others have for the child, and they determine the groups with which the child will interact outside the family. Thus, the family's race, class, and religion shape the child's initial experiences in the neighborhood, at school, and at work.

Peers

In past centuries, and in some parts of the world today, children often lived on isolated farms where their families remained almost the only important agent of socialization throughout their childhood. For the last several decades, however, compulsory education together with the late age at which most youths become full-time workers have led to the emergence of a youth subculture in modern societies. In recent years, this development has been accelerated by the tendency for both parents to work outside the home, creating a vacuum that may be filled by interaction within a *peer group* (Osgood et al. 1996). The **peer group** refers to all individuals who share a similar age and social status; each member of the peer group is referred to as a **peer**. Most children

The **peer group** refers to all individuals who share a similar age and social status.

A **peer** is a member of a peer group.

All peer groups—from cheerleaders to gang members—pressure their members toward dressing, thinking, and behaving similarly.

place a high value on peer acceptance and quickly adopt peer culture (Harris 1998; Handel, Cahill, & Elkin 2007).

What are the consequences of peer interaction for socialization and the development of the self-concept? Because kids who hang out together tend to dress and act similarly, peer pressure creates conformity to the peer group—whether the group is cheerleaders, honor students, or gang members. As a result, conformity to peer values and lifestyles can be a source of family conflict when, for example, your friends urge you to pierce your tongue and your parents express horror at the idea. The more time you have to hang out with friends unsupervised by adults, the more likely it is that your friends will affect you (Haynie & Osgood 2005).

The impact of peers is so great that some scholars now believe it is stronger than that of family (Corsaro 2003, 2004). Because the judgments of one's peers are unclouded by love or duty, they are particularly important in helping us get an accurate picture of how we appear to others. In addition, the peer group is often a mechanism for learning behaviors and values different from those of adults. For example, peer groups teach their own cultural norms about everything from whether one should share with another child to whether one should smoke or drink.

However, the effects of peer pressure are often overestimated (Haynie & Osgood 2005). First, it may appear that kids share attitudes and behaviors because they hang out together, when in fact they chose to become friends because they *already* shared attitudes and behaviors. Mormons seek other Mormons, ravers seek other ravers, and heavy drinkers seek other heavy drinkers. Second, adolescents remain concerned about their parents' opinions as well as their friends'. Even if they engage in behavior with their friends that their parents disapprove of, they usually do so only if they think their parents won't find out.

Schools

Around the world, schools serve as important agents of socialization—for those who can attend. In poorer countries, many children attend school for only a few years at most, as Map 3.1 shows. Even in these circumstances, schools provide the opportunity to learn basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills that can enormously improve individuals' economic prospects.

In wealthier nations such as the United States, schooling has become accepted as a natural part of childhood. The central function of schools in these nations is to impart the skills and abilities necessary to function in a highly technological society.

In both poor and wealthy nations, schools teach much more than just basic skills and technical knowledge. They also transmit society's central values. For minorities and immigrants, this typically means learning the values of the dominant culture (Rothstein 2004; Spring 2004; Handel, Cahill, & Elkin 2007). In addition, whereas families typically treat their children as special persons with unique needs and problems, teachers must deal with children en masse and so cannot afford to offer individualized attention. Partly as a result, schools place a high value on teaching children

MAP 3.1: Percentage of First-Graders Who Continue through Fifth Grade

In Western countries, almost all students who enter first grade continue their schooling at least through fifth grade. In other countries, especially in Africa, far fewer children do so. Note that this map does not include those—usually girls—who never enter school at all.

SOURCE: Human Development Reports. Literacy and Enrollment Statistics. http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/117.html. Accessed June 2009.

(especially if they are poor or working-class) to sit still, follow orders, and otherwise fit in (Gatto 2002). In addition, schools may teach children to compete with others and to evaluate themselves and others according to their level of achievement. In all these ways, then, schools serve as training grounds for the workplace, the military, and other bureaucracies.

Mass Media

Throughout our lives we are bombarded with messages from television, websites, podcasts, magazines, films, billboards, and other mass media. The **mass media** are communication forms designed to reach broad audiences. (The term *mass medium* refers to any *one* mode of mass media.) The most important mass medium for socialization is undoubtedly television. Nearly every home has one, and the average person in the United States spends many hours a week watching it (although many young people now spend even more time each day using other forms of media, as Table 3.1 shows).

Scholars continue to vigorously debate the effects of television viewing. Many suggest that the media promote violence, sexism, racism, and other problematic ideas and behaviors, but the evidence is contradictory (Felson 1996). The most universally accepted conclusion is that the mass media can be an important means of supporting and validating what we already know. Through a process of selective perception, we

sociology and you

If you have chosen your major, you likely have begun professional socialization. Whether your major is English or engineering, your professors have begun teaching you technical concepts and skills. They also have stressed certain ways of thinking about the world: to place more value on working with numbers versus working with words, working with your hands versus with your mind, and working collaboratively versus competitively.

The mass media are all forms of communication designed to reach broad audiences.

TABLE 3.1 Daily Hours and Minutes of Media Usage among 8- to 18-Year-Olds
On average, both boys and girls are exposed to media during about half of their waking hours. Boys spend more time playing video games, while girls spend more time listening to music.

Medium	Boys	Girls	Total
Television	3:17	3:20	3:18
Movies	1:01	:53	:57
Video games	1:12	:25	:45
Print media	:40	:45	:43
Music media	1:29	2:00	1:45
Computers	1:00	1:04	1:02
Total	8:38	8:27	8:33

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation (2005).

tend to give special notice to material that supports our beliefs and self-concept and to ignore material that challenges us.

Television, however, may play a more active part than this. Studies suggest that characters seen regularly on television can become role models whose imagined opinions become important as we develop our own beliefs and behaviors (Felson 1996). For example, adolescents might watch *Grey's Anatomy* for ideas about how to deal with the opposite sex. They then can use the show to supplement knowledge about U.S. norms gained through their own experiences. These findings imply that the content of television can have an important influence.

Religion

In every society, religion is an important source of individual direction. The values and moral principles in religious doctrine give guidance about appropriate values and behaviors. Often the values we learn through religion are compatible with the ideals we learn through other agents of socialization. For example, the golden rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") taught in religious education fits easily with similar messages heard at home and at school.

The role of religion, however, cannot be reduced to a mere reinforcer of society's norms and values. As we point out in Chapter 12, participation in religions can change individuals' beliefs, self-concepts, and social position, and political movements based on religious differences can change whole societies. Moreover, even within modern U.S. society, there are important differences in the messages delivered by, say, the Mormon, Jewish, and Baptist religions, as well as differences between the conservative and liberal wings of each of these religions. These differences account for some significant variability in socialization experiences.

Case Study: Learning Social Class at the Toy Store

Socialization can occur in many different places and forms. During the 12 weeks sociologist Christine L. Williams (2006) spent working at two toy stores, she observed how children learned to understand their own and others' social class. Most basically,

children learned how many toys their parents would buy for them, learned to compare what they received to what was available and to what others were purchasing, and learned to view those purchases as one measure of their worth. White parents also, if unconsciously, taught their children that they (both parents and children) were more important than store clerks by expecting the clerks to put aside their other work, follow the parents around the store, and wait patiently until the parents needed them. Meanwhile, poor children who came to the stores on their own were quickly shooed outside by store employees, thus teaching these children that others considered them unwanted or even dangerous.

Socialization through the Life Course

As our discussion of agents of socialization suggested, socialization occurs throughout life, beginning in childhood and continuing throughout our adult lives, even into old age.

Childhood

Early childhood socialization is called **primary socialization**. It is primary in two senses: It occurs first, and it is most critical for later development. During this period, children develop personality and self-concept; acquire motor abilities, reasoning, and language skills; and begin learning the values and behaviors considered appropriate in their society. The Concept Summary on Types of Socialization illustrates primary and other types of socialization.

During the period of primary socialization, children also are expected to learn and embrace the norms and values of society. Most learn that conforming to social rules is an important key to gaining acceptance and love, first from their family and then from others. Because young children are so dependent on the love and acceptance of their

concept summary

Types of Socialization

Type	Definition	Example
Primary socialization	Socialization in earliest childhood	Tiffany's two moms hug, hold, and talk to her often, teaching her the basics of language and social interaction.
Anticipatory socialization	Socialization that prepares us for anticipated future social positions	Manuel's parents buy him a toy medical kit, and he plays at being a doctor.
Professional socialization	Socialization to the values, behaviors, and skills of a profession	Jody's law professors teach her to analyze legal cases and to compete, rather than cooperate, with her fellow students.
Resocialization	Socialization—often involuntary—to replace previously learned values and behaviors with new ones	Mark is ordered by a judge to take a course in anger management.

Primary socialization is personality development and role learning that occurs during early childhood.

focus on   A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Preschool Socialization in Japan and the United States

Because each culture holds different values and traditions, each culture socializes its children differently. Compare, for example, Japanese and American kindergartens (Small 2001, 129–132).

A central value of Japanese culture is the sense of belonging to a unified, homogeneous nation with common goals. Reflecting this, kindergartens across Japan are state-regulated, have similar facilities, and use similar curricula, which have changed little over the years. In this way, the country ensures that all children—across generations and regions—are socialized into the same values, and that all have more or less equal access to the resources they need to be successfully socialized and to succeed in their later studies. In contrast, American culture values individual rights vis-á-vis the state, and states' rights vis-á-vis the national government. As a result, we expect and accept great differences in how and what young children are taught—even subsidizing parents who choose to school their children on their own.

Another central value of Japanese culture is an emphasis on cooperation and group accomplishment over individual achievement. Japanese adults are expected to take pride in the successes of their work groups and to humbly downplay their own successes. Similarly, national preschool curricula in Japan stress cooperation over individual

Whereas American kindergartens emphasize individual achievement and pride, Japanese kindergartens socialize children to value cooperation and group accomplishment.

achievement. Teachers speak to their students in ways that emphasize the students' "groupness"; use games, songs, and other activities designed to teach students to work together and to think of themselves as a group; and continually urge students to consider how their actions affect others. When children misbehave, teachers integrate them back into the group and into acceptable behavior, rather than highlighting the misbehaviors. In contrast, in the United States, kindergarteners are taught from the start to interpret their successes as resulting from their individual achievements rather than from group support or activity, and

they learn to take pride in those successes. Teachers goad children—or at least middle-class children—to perform better by praising those who are succeeding and by correcting or chastising those who are not. Finally, teachers quickly conclude that certain students are troublemakers, best dealt with by isolating them from the group rather than by trying to integrate them into it.

In sum, socialization in both Japanese and U.S. kindergartens both reflects and reinforces the different cultural values of these two countries.

family, they are under especially strong pressure to conform to their family's expectations. This is a critical step in turning them into conforming members of society. If this learning does not take place in childhood, conformity is unlikely to develop in later life. Focus on a Global Perspective: Preschool Socialization in Japan and the United States compares the values taught in these two countries.

What we learn—or don't learn—in childhood can affect us for the rest of our lives. For example, the number of words we learn by age 3 highly predicts our reading ability and our likelihood of graduating from high school (Farkas & Beron 2003). Unfortunately, compared to more affluent and white parents, on average, poor, working-class, and African American parents speak far less to their children and use a smaller vocabulary when they do speak. As a result, by age 3 poor children know 33 percent fewer words than do working-class children and 50 percent fewer words than do middle-class children (Farkas & Beron 2003). The good news is that most of these differences evaporate when poor or African American parents expose their children to more words; many organizations now work either to change parents' behavior or to expose their children to more words in special preschool programs.

Adolescence

Adolescence serves as a bridge between childhood and adulthood. As such, the central task of adolescence is to begin to establish independence from one's parents.

During adolescence, we often engage in **anticipatory socialization**—learning the beliefs and behaviors needed to prepare us for the social positions we are likely to assume in the future. Until about 1980, for instance, all American girls were required to take "home economics" courses to learn how to sew and cook. Boys were required to take "shop" courses to learn how to fix cars and use woodworking tools. These days, boys can take cooking and girls can take woodworking. Nevertheless, teenagers' household chores, part-time jobs, and volunteer work still tend to divide along traditional lines. While boys sometimes help around the house, girls more often are expected to cook, clean house, and care for their younger siblings (Lee, Schneider, & Waite 2003). If a boy does help at home, he's likely to take on such "masculine" tasks as mowing the lawn or washing the car. Similarly, girls' part-time jobs (such as babysitting) often teach caregiving, whereas boys' work more often teaches mechanical skills. And when boys and girls take part-time jobs at restaurants, boys more often are assigned to heavy, riskier work such as running the deep fryer while girls more often are assigned to run the cash registers and required to wear skimpy clothes. In all these ways, girls and boys prepare for the family and work positions they anticipate holding as adults.

Adulthood

Because of anticipatory socialization, most of us are more or less prepared for the responsibilities we will face as spouses, parents, and workers. Goals have been established, skills acquired, and attitudes developed that prepare us to accept and even embrace the positions we are likely to hold as adults, in the family and in the world. Because anticipatory socialization is never complete, however, anyone who wants to enter a professional field must first undergo **professional socialization**. The purpose of professional socialization is to learn not only the knowledge and skills but also the *culture* of a profession. Medical training provides an example of this process.

© O'Brien Productions/CORBIS

Anticipatory socialization prepares us for the roles we will take in the future. Children everywhere play out their visions of how mommies and daddies ought to behave.

sociology and you

On television, the Internet, billboards, and elsewhere, advertising also plays an important part in socialization. Soda ads, for example, not only suggest that one brand tastes better than another, but also aim to convince us that users of that brand are funnier, wealthier, more attractive, and more popular than others. How is your favorite beverage advertised?

Anticipatory socialization is the process that prepares us for roles we are likely to assume in the future.

Professional socialization is the process of learning the knowledge, skills, and cultural values of a profession.

Through their professional socialization, medical students learn both technical skills and the cultural values of the medical world.

Most commonly, people choose to become doctors out of a desire to help others. Yet one of the primary tenets of medical culture is that doctors should be emotionally detached—distancing themselves from their patients and avoiding any show of emotion (Weitz 2010). According to sociologist and medical school professor Frederic Hafferty (1991), this cultural norm is taught from the beginning of medical education. Through his observations, Hafferty discovered that when new students first enter medical school, second-year students almost invariably take them to the school's anatomy laboratory. There the second-year students proudly display the most grotesque partially dissected human cadaver available. Although officially they do so to show off the school's laboratory facilities, their true purpose seems to evoke horror and disgust in the new students so that the second-year students can make fun of them. Through this process, the second-year students both demonstrate how "tough" they have become and teach the new students that medical culture stigmatizes "weakness." This is a particularly vivid example of professional socialization, but every job change we make as adults requires some socialization to new responsibilities and demands.

Age 65 and Beyond

More and more Americans now live far beyond age 65. Some will continue holding down full-time jobs into their seventies, eighties, and even beyond, and others will go back to school and embark on socialization for a new career. But for most, growing older means developing a new identity as a retiree. To do so successfully, some individuals engage in anticipatory socialization: trying out volunteer work before retirement, developing new hobbies or educational interests to pursue after retirement, or thinking through a retirement "game plan" for where they will live and what they will do. Others must learn how to find meaning and fill their time once their days are no longer structured around work and their job is no longer central to their identity. In this process, they may ponder the choices made by friends and relatives who retired earlier, and may use those choices as models of what they should—or should not—do themselves. They may also seek services from the many nonprofit organizations that have emerged specifically to help "active retirees" learn to contribute to their communities in new ways.

For those who worked solely as homemakers before age 65, growing older presents a different set of challenges. For some, the most difficult challenge is figuring out how to be a homemaker when one's spouse is also home full-time. In these cases, both individuals may need to adapt their beliefs and behaviors. For example, despite their earlier socialization, a couple might conclude that the only way to avoid fighting is for both of them to agree on new ideas regarding how to divide household chores.

Unfortunately, many older people also must figure out who they are and what they will do with their lives after their spouse or long-term partner dies. Some will eventually find others to love, while others must learn to live alone. As in other stages of life, peers can help socialize the newly widowed into their new status and into new ways of thinking about and acting in the world, from teaching new skills (how to

cook, change a light bulb, or have safe sex) to teaching how to value independence and solitude.

Older age also typically means coming to terms with declining physical abilities. As a result, individuals who learned to prize independence must come to depend on their spouses, partners, children, or paid caregivers. This transition is easiest for those who gradually adopt new ways of looking at the world, replacing older beliefs and practices with a new set that better matches their circumstances.

Resocialization

As our discussion of socialization across the life course suggests, socialization is usually a gradual process. Sometimes, though, our position in society changes abruptly and extremely, forcing us to abandon our self-concept and way of life for a radically different one. The process of learning the beliefs and values associated with a new way of life is called **resocialization**. Typically, this term refers to circumstances in which people are forced to change their way of life rapidly and against their will.

A drastic example of resocialization occurs when people become permanently disabled. Those who become paralyzed experience intense resocialization to adjust to their handicap. Their social position and capacities suddenly change, and their old self-concepts no longer cover the situation. They may lose the ability to control their bladders and bowels, to walk or dress themselves, or to function sexually as they had previously. If they are younger, they may wonder whether they will ever marry or have children; if they are older, they may have to reevaluate their adequacy as lovers, spouses, or parents. These changes require a radical redefinition of self. If self-esteem is to remain high, priorities will have to be rearranged and new, less physically active behaviors given prominence.

Resocialization may also be deliberately imposed by society. When individuals' behavior leads to social problems—as with criminals, alcoholics, and mentally disturbed individuals—society may decree that they must abandon their old identities and accept more conventional ones.

Total Institutions

Generally speaking, a radical change in self-concept requires a radical change in environment. Drug counseling one night a week is not likely to alter drastically the beliefs and behaviors of a teenager who spends the rest of the week with peers who are constantly "wasted." Thus, the first step in the resocialization process often involves isolating the individual from his or her past environment in **total institutions**—facilities in which all aspects of life are strictly controlled for the purpose of radical resocialization (Goffman 1961a). Monasteries, prisons, boot camps, and mental hospitals are good examples. Within these total institutions, inmates lose the statuses, social positions, and relationships that had formed the bases of their self-concepts. Even their clothes are taken from them, replaced by uniforms. Inmates also lose control over the structure of their days and instead are forced to follow rigid schedules set by others. Finally, inmates are often expected to engage in self-criticism to reveal the inferiority of their past perspectives, peer groups, and behaviors.

Resocialization occurs when we abandon our self-concept and way of life for a radically different one (often against our will).

Total institutions are facilities in which all aspects of life are strictly controlled for the purpose of radical resocialization.

Case Study: Resocializing Young Offenders

How should society deal with young people who commit crimes? Most Americans believe that young offenders should be treated differently from adult criminals, in part because we have more faith that young offenders can be resocialized. But how should that resocialization work?

Beginning in the 1980s, one popular model was to use prison boot camps. In these total institutions, youths were locked away from any competing influences and kept on a strict schedule of strenuous calisthenics, military drilling, hard physical labor, drug counseling, and study (Anderson 1998). To teach them to respect authority and to leave their old self-concepts behind, their heads were shaved, they were called derogatory names, and they were forbidden from even looking prison officials in the eye. As research on boot camps accumulated, however, it became clear that most of these strategies had little if any effect (MacKenzie, Wilson, & Kider 2001). Essentially, the boot camps taught young people how to follow the rules in the camps, but did not give them tools needed to succeed once they returned to ordinary life.

Because of these problems, many communities have instead begun to emphasize rehabilitation over punishment and therapy over discipline (Anne E. Casey Foundation 2009; Moore 2009). Most importantly, youths in these programs are taught nonviolent ways of handling interpersonal conflict, often while living at home or in supervised group homes, rather than in detention centers, jails, or prisons. These programs have resulted in significant declines in costs, in the numbers of youths convicted of second crimes, and in the number of youths in prison—by more than 50 percent, in some places (Anne E. Casey Foundation 2009; Moore 2009).

Where This Leaves Us

Each of us is unique, a product of our individual biology, abilities, personality, experiences, and choices. But each of us is also a social creation. Through socialization we come to learn the behaviors and values expected of us and, more often than not, to take on those behaviors and values as our own. Sometimes that process is obvious: a parent slapping a child's hand for grabbing a cookie without permission, a minister preaching a sermon on the wages of sin, one girl giving another girl pointers on how to flirt. Other times, we are no more aware of the socialization process than a fish is aware of water; it is simply a part of the life around us. The typical American, for example, now spends several hours each day watching television. During those hours we not only learn who murdered this week's victim on *CSI*, who is this season's *American Idol*, and who's sleeping with our favorite desperate housewife, but we also learn ways of looking at the world: to fear random violence and trust the police; to value success, talent, and fame; to honor wealth; and so on.

Summary

1. Socialization is the process of learning the rules and values of a given culture.
2. Although we are all a product of socialization, this does not mean that we have no choices in our lives. But unless we understand the ways in which we have been socialized, we will be unable to see our choices clearly and to turn those choices into realities.
3. Although biological capacities enter into human development, our identities are socially bestowed and socially sustained. Without human relationships, even our natural capacities would not develop.
4. Freudian theory links social development to biological cues. Freud believed that to become a healthy adult, children must develop a reasonable balance between id and superego.
5. Piaget theorized that cognition develops through a series of stages. Only in the last stage do children develop the capacity to understand and think abstractly, and some children may never reach that stage.
6. Structural functionalists theorize that socialization—in schools, religious institutions, families, and elsewhere—smoothly integrates the young into the broader culture, avoiding conflict or chaotic social change. It is most useful for explaining the benefits of a stable social system.
7. Conflict theory focuses on how socialization reinforces unequal power arrangements. It is most useful for understanding how socialization can quash dissent and social change and reproduce inequalities.
8. Symbolic interaction theory emphasizes that self-concept develops through actively interpreting our interactions with others and the images of ourselves that we glean from others. Two important concepts connected with this theory are the looking-glass self and role taking.
9. Socialization occurs across the life course. Four important types of socialization are primary socialization, anticipatory socialization, professional socialization, and resocialization.
10. The two most important agents of socialization are the family and peers. Other important agents of socialization include teachers, the mass media, and religion.

Thinking Critically

1. Think about the behaviors that teachers expect of college students. How does the socialization you received in your family make it easier or harder for you to meet teachers' expectations? How about socialization from your peers?
2. List some ways that a family's social class might influence what a child learns through socialization. Can you think of any ways that living in the city versus living in the country might matter?
3. Thinking back to your childhood, what values *might* you have learned from your two favorite television shows? *Did* you learn from them? How do you explain why you did or did not?

Book Companion Website

www.cengage.com/sociology/brinkerhoff
Prepare for quizzes and exams with online resources—including tutorial quizzes, a glossary, interactive flash cards, crossword puzzles, essay questions, virtual explorations, and more.