

SOCIALIZATION

There has been and continues to be considerable debate over whether “nature” (heredity) or “nurture” (social environment) most determines human behavior. It is society that makes people “human. People *learn* what it means to be and, consequently, *become* members of the human community through language, social interaction, and other forms of human contact.

Babies do not develop “naturally” into social adults; although their bodies grow, human interaction is required for them to acquire the traits we consider normal for human beings. The process, by which we learn the ways of our society, through interaction with others, is called socialization, is what sociologists have in mind when they say “Society makes us human.”

SOCIETY MAKES US HUMANS

Society Makes Us Human Apparently, babies do not develop “naturally” into human adults. If children are reared in isolation, their bodies grow, but they become little more than big animals. Without the concepts that language provides, they can’t experience or even grasp relationships between people (the “connections” we call brother, sister, parent, friend, teacher, and so on). And without warm, friendly interactions, they don’t become “friendly” in the accepted sense of the term, nor do they cooperate with others. In short, it is through human contact that people learn to be members of the human community.

Feral Children

Over the centuries, people have occasionally found children living in the forests. Supposedly, these children could not speak; they bit, scratched, growled, and walked on all fours. They drank by lapping water, ate grass, tore ravenously at raw meat, and showed insensitivity to pain and cold. These stories of what are called **feral children** sound like exaggerations, and it is easy to dismiss them as folk myth. Because of what happened in 1798, however, we can’t be so sure. In that year, a child who walked and could not speak was found in the forests of Aveyron, France. “The wild boy of Aveyron,” as this child became known, would have been simply another of those legends, except that French scientists took the child to a laboratory and studied him. Like the children in the earlier informal reports, this child, too, gave no indication of feeling the cold. Most startling, though, the boy would growl when he saw a small animal, pounce on it, and devour it uncooked. If we were untouched by society, would we be like feral children? By nature, would our behavior be like that of wild animals? That is the sociological question.

Isolated Children

We can say conclude that humans have no natural language, language is the key to human development. Without language, people have no mechanism for developing and communicating thought. Unlike animals, humans have no instincts that take the place of language. If an individual lacks language, he or she lives in an isolated world—a world of internal silence, without shared ideas, lacking connections to others.

Institutionalized Children

A recent experiment in India confirms the Skeels and Dye research. Many of India’s orphanages are similar to the ones that Skeels and Dye studied, dismal places where unattended children lie in bed all day. When experimenters added stimulating play and interaction to the children’s activities, the children’s motor skills improved and their IQs increased. The longer that children lack stimulating interaction, though, the more difficulty they have intellectually. Institutionalized children show that traits such as intelligence, cooperative behavior, and friendliness are the result of early close relations with other humans. Research with children reared in orphanages and cases like Genie—the 13-year-old who had been kept locked in a small room for years—demonstrates the importance of early interaction for human development.

Deprived Animals

In one of their many experiments, the Harlows isolated baby monkeys for different lengths of time. They found that when monkeys were isolated for shorter periods (about three months), they were able to overcome the effects of their isolation. Those isolated for six months or more, however, were unable to

adjust to normal monkey life. They could not play or engage in pretend fights, and the other monkeys rejected them. In other words, the longer the period of isolation, the more difficult its effects are to overcome. In addition, a critical learning stage may exist: If that stage is missed, it may be impossible to compensate for what has been lost. Because humans are not monkeys, we must be careful about extrapolating from animal studies to human behavior. The Harlow experiments, however, support what we know about children who are reared in isolation.

SOCIALIZATION INTO THE SELF AND MIND

Charles H. Cooley (1864-1929) concluded that human development is socially created—that our sense of self develops from interaction with others. He coined the term “looking-glass self” to describe this process.

1. According to Cooley, this process contains three steps: (1) we imagine how we look to others; (2) we interpret others’ reactions (how they evaluate us); and (3) we develop a self-concept.
2. A favorable reflection in the “social mirror” leads to a positive self-concept, while a negative reflection leads to a negative self-concept.
3. Even if we misjudge others’ reactions, the misjudgments become part of our self-concept.
4. This development process is an ongoing, lifelong process.

George H. Mead (1863-1931) agreed with Cooley but added that play is critical to the development of a self. In play, we learn to take the role of others—to understand and anticipate how others feel and think.

1. Mead concluded that children are first able to take only the role of significant others (parents or siblings, for example); as the self develops, children internalize the expectations of other people, and eventually the entire group. Mead referred to the norms, values, attitudes, and expectations of people “in general” as the generalized other.
2. According to Mead, the development of the self goes through stages: (1) imitation (children initially can only mimic the gestures and words of others); (2) play (beginning at age three, children play the roles of specific people, such as a firefighter or the Lone Ranger); and (3) team games (in the first years of school, children become involved in organized team games and must learn the role of each member of the team).
3. He distinguished the “I” from the “me” in development of the self: the “I” component is the subjective, active, spontaneous, creative part of the social self (for instance, “I shoved him”), while the “me” component is the objective part—attitudes internalized from interactions with others (for instance, “He shoved me”).
4. Mead concluded that not only the self, but also the mind is a social product. We cannot think without symbols, and it is our society that gives us our symbols by giving us our language.

Jean Piaget, after years of research (1896-1980) concluded that there are four stages in the development of cognitive skills.

1. The sensorimotor stage (0-2 years): Understanding is limited to direct contact with the environment (touching, listening, seeing).
2. The preoperational stage (2-7 years): Children develop the ability to use symbols (especially language), which allow them to experience things without direct contact.
3. The concrete operational stage (7-12 years): Reasoning abilities become much more developed. Children now can understand numbers, size, causation, and speed, but have difficulty with abstract concepts such as truth.
4. The formal operational stage (12+ years): Children become capable of abstract thinking, and can use rules to solve abstract problems. (“If X is true, why doesn’t Y follow?”)

Conclusions that Cooley, Mead, and Piaget came to, regarding the self and reasoning, appear to be universal. However, there is not consensus about the universality of Piaget’s four stages of cognitive development.

1. Some adults never appear to reach the fourth stage, whether due to particular social experiences or to biology.

2. The content of what we learn varies from one culture to another; having very different experiences and the thinking processes that revolve around these experiences, we cannot assume that the developmental sequences will be the same for everyone.

LEARNING PERSONALITY, EMOTIONS AND INTERNAL CONTROL

Socialization is essential for our development as human beings. From interaction with others, we learn how to think, reason, and feel. The net result is the shaping of our behavior—including our thinking and emotions—according to cultural standards.

Freud and the Development of Personality

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) believed that personality consisted of three elements: the id, ego, and superego.

Each child is born with the first element, an **id**, Freud's term for inborn drives that cause us to seek self-gratification. The id of the newborn is evident in its cries of hunger or pain. The pleasure-seeking id operates throughout life. It demands the immediate fulfillment of basic needs: food, safety, attention, sex, and so on.

The **ego** is the balancing force between the id and the demands of society that suppress it. The ego also serves to balance the id and the **superego**, the third component of the personality, more commonly called the *conscience*. The superego represents *culture within us*, the norms and values we have internalized from our social groups. As the *moral* component of the personality, the superego provokes feelings of guilt or shame when we break social rules or pride and self-satisfaction when we follow them.

The id and the superego are always in conflict. When the id gets out of hand, pleasure rules. We break society's norms, and get in trouble. When the superego gets out of hand, we go in the other direction. Becoming overly rigid in following society's norms, we end up wearing a straitjacket of rules that inhibit our lives. In the emotionally healthy individual, the ego succeeds in balancing these conflicting demands. In the maladjusted individual, however, the ego fails to control this conflict between the id and the superego. Either the id or the superego dominates this person, leading to internal confusion and problem behaviors.

Socialization into Emotions

Emotions, too, are an essential aspect of who we become. Emotions are not simply the result of biology; they also depend on socialization within a particular society.

1. Anthropologist Paul Ekman concluded that everyone experiences six basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise.
2. The expression of emotions varies according to gender, social class, culture, and relationships.
3. Socialization not only leads to different ways of expressing emotions but even to expressing what we feel.
4. More cross-cultural research is needed to determine whether emotions are universal and how culture guides us in what we feel and how we express our feelings.

Society Within Us: The Self and Emotions as Social Control

Much of our socialization is intended to turn us into conforming members of society. Socialization into the self and emotions is an essential part of this process, for both the self and our emotions mold our behavior. Although we like to think that we are "free," consider for a moment just some of the factors that influence how we act: the expectations of friends and parents, of neighbors and teachers; classroom norms and college rules; city, state, and federal laws. For example, if in a moment of intense frustration, or out of a devilish desire to shock people, you wanted to tear off your clothes and run naked down the street, what would stop you? The answer is your socialization—society within you. Your experiences in society have resulted in a self that thinks along certain lines and feels particular emotions. This helps to keep you in line.

SOCIALIZATION INTO GENDER

For a child, society is uncharted territory. A major signpost on society's map is **socialization into gender**. As we learn what is expected of us *because* we are a male or a female, we are nudged into different lanes in life, into contrasting attitudes and behaviors. We take direction so well that, as adults, most of us act, think, and even feel according to this gender map, our culture's guidelines of what is appropriate for our sex.

Gender Messages in the Family

Our parents are the first significant others who show us how to follow the gender map. Their own gender orientations have become embedded so firmly that they do most of this teaching without being aware of what they are doing. Goldberg and Lewis concluded that mothers subconsciously reward daughters for being passive and dependent, and sons for being active and independent. These lessons continue throughout childhood.

On the basis of their sex, children are given different kinds of toys. Boys are more likely to get guns and "action figures" that destroy enemies. Girls are more likely to get dolls and jewelry. Parents also subtly encourage the boys to participate in more rough-and-tumble play. They expect their sons to get dirtier and to be more defiant, their daughters to be daintier and more compliant. In large part, they get what they expect. Such experiences in socialization lie at the heart of the sociological explanation of male–female differences.

Gender Messages from Peers

Sociologists stress how this sorting process that begins in the family is reinforced as the child is exposed to other aspects of society. Of those other influences, one of the most powerful is the **peer group**, individuals of roughly the same age who are linked by common interests. Examples of peer groups are friends, classmates, and "the kids in the neighborhood." As you grew up, you regularly saw girls and boys teach one another what it means to be a female or a male. Boys, of course, also reinforce cultural expectations of gender. When sociologist Melissa Milkie (1994) studied junior high school boys, she found that much of their talk centered on movies and TV programs. They would amuse one another by repeating lines, acting out parts, and joking and laughing at what they had seen.

Gender Messages in the Mass Media

Also guiding us in learning our gender map are the **mass media**, forms of communication that are directed to large audiences. Let's look at how their images reinforce **gender roles**, the behaviors and attitudes considered appropriate for our sex.

1. Ads perpetuate stereotypes by portraying males as dominant and rugged, and females as submissive.
2. On television, male characters outnumber females and are more likely to be portrayed in higher-status positions.
3. Males are much more likely than females to play video games; we have no studies of how these games affect their players' ideas of gender.
4. We are not simply passive consumers of media images; we select those that are significant to our situation and use them to help us construct our understanding of the world.

SOCIALIZATION THROUGH THE LIFE COURSE

Socialization occurs throughout a person's entire lifetime and can be broken up into different stages.

Childhood (from birth to about age 12): In earlier times, children were seen as miniature adults, who served an apprenticeship. To keep them in line, they were beaten and subjected to psychological torture. Industrialization changed the way we see children. The current view is that children are tender and innocent, and parents should guide the physical, emotional, and social development of their children while providing them with care, comfort, and protection.

Adolescence (ages 13-17): Adolescence is a social invention. Economic changes resulting from the Industrial Revolution brought about material surpluses that allowed millions of teenagers to remain outside the labor force, while at the same time, increasing the demand for education. Biologically equipped for both work and marriage but denied both, adolescents suffer inner turmoil and develop their own standards of clothing, hairstyles, language, music, and other claims to separate identities.

Transitional Adulthood (ages 18-29): Adult responsibilities are postponed through extended education such as college. Even after college, many young people are returning to live with parents in order to live cheaply and establish their careers.

The Middle Years (ages 30-65): This can be separated into two periods.

1. Early Middle Years (ages 30-49): People are surer of themselves and their goals in life than earlier, but severe jolts such as divorce or losing a job can occur. For U.S. women, it can be a trying period, as they try to “have it all”—career and family, etc.

2. Later Middle Years (ages 50-65): A different view of life emerges, including trying to evaluate the past and coming to terms with what lies ahead. Individuals may feel they are not likely to get much farther in life, while health and mortality become concerns. However, for most people it is the most comfortable period in their entire lives.

F. Older years (about age 65 and on): This can also be separated into two periods.

1. The Transitional Older Years: Improvements in nutrition, public health, and medical care delay the onset of old age. For many, this period is an extension of middle years. Those who still work or are socially active are unlikely to see themselves as old.

2. The Later Older Years: Growing frailty and illness, and eventually death marks this period.

The social significance of the life course is how it is shaped by social factors—the period in which the person is born and lives his or her life, as well as social location—social class, gender, and race.