

## Chapter 3: Socialization

### Chapter Summary

There has been and continues to be considerable debate over whether “nature” (heredity) or “nurture” (social environment) most determines human behavior. Studies of feral, isolated, and institutionalized children indicate that although heredity certainly plays a role in the “human equation,” 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.

People are not born with an intrinsic knowledge of themselves or others. Rather, as the theoretical insights of Charles Horton Cooley, George Herbert Mead, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Carol Gilligan demonstrate, they develop reasoning skills, morality, personality, and a sense of self through *social* observation, contact, and interaction.

Cooley’s conceptualization of the “looking glass self” shows how a person’s sense of self is inextricably linked to that person’s sense of others; an individual imagines how other people see him or her, interprets their reactions to his or her behaviors, and develops a self-concept based on those interpretations. Mead’s insights into “taking the role of the other”—as well as how children learn through stages of imitation, play, and games—illustrate the process by which people learn to become cooperative members of the human community and internalize the “rules” of the game of life. Furthermore, his formulation of the self as subject (the “I”) and object (the “me”) shows how socialization is an active process and how the human mind, as well as the self, is a social product.

Through observations of—and experiments with—young children, Piaget detailed four stages by which children typically develop the ability to reason: the sensorimotor stage (from birth to about age two), the preoperational stage (from about age two to age seven), the concrete operational stage (from about age seven to about age twelve), and the formal operational stage (after the age of about twelve). Building on Piaget’s work, Kohlberg theorized that human beings develop morality through a series of stages: the amoral stage (from birth to about age seven), the preconventional stage (from about age seven to about age ten), the conventional stage (after the age of about ten), and the postconventional stage (a stage that, according to Kohlberg, most people do not reach).

Gilligan examined how gender affects the development of morality. Based on interviews with approximately 200 men and women, she concluded that women are more likely to evaluate morality in terms of personal relationships, while men tend to define right or wrong along the lines of abstract principles.

Cooley’s insights into the looking-glass self and Mead’s insights into role taking and the mind appear to be universally applicable. Researchers are more divided, however, on Piaget’s four stages of human development. Noting cultural and individual variations in the development of reasoning skills, some researchers argue that human beings develop reasoning skills more gradually and flexibly than Piaget’s model suggests. Subsequent research and testing raised questions about Gilligan’s work on gender and morality, when the results found no gender differences between males and females in moral reasoning. Because of these findings, Gilligan no longer fully supports her original position.

Sigmund Freud formulated personality in terms of the id (the inborn drives for self-gratification), the ego (the balancing force between the id and the demands of society that suppress it), and the superego (the conscience, representing culture within us). Many sociologists reject Freud’s contention that inborn and unconscious motivations are the primary determinants of human behavior. However, many sociologists are attracted to

Freud's notion that the super-ego represents the internalization of social norms. Feminists criticize Freud's theoretical assumption that "maleness" is "normal" and that females can be analyzed as inferior, castrated males suffering from "penis envy."

Socialization is not only critical internalizing social norms, to the development of the mind, but also to the development of emotions. Although there are some basic emotions that all people experience, all people do not express these emotions the same way or to the same extent. Different socialization experiences tied to regional, gender, and class differences, for example, may not only affect how people express their emotions, but also the particular emotions they may feel. Males and females *learn* what it means to be boys and girls and, later, men and women through gender socialization—the ways in which society sets children onto different courses in life *because* they are male or female. From the time of their birth, children are constantly presented with cultural messages that *teach* them how to *act* masculine or feminine based on their sex.

Human beings learn how to think, behave, and act through agents of socialization—those people or groups that influence our self-concept, attitudes, behaviors, or other orientations toward life. Major agents of socialization include the family, religion, daycare, school, peer groups, sports, and the workplace. When people move from one place, job, and/or life situation to another, they often have to undergo resocialization—the process of learning new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors.

Special settings that require intense resocialization, such as boot camps, prisons, and mental institutions, are called "total institutions," a term coined by Erving Goffman to refer to a place where people are cut off from the rest of society and are almost totally controlled by the officials in charge. Socialization is not just limited to childhood; it is a lifelong process in which people, are taught, learn, and/or adjust to the needs, expectations, and responsibilities that typically accompany different stages in life.

Although socialization has a tremendous influence, within the limitations of the framework laid down by our social location, on how people think and act, human beings are not prisoners of socialization. They have a considerable degree of freedom of choice, for example, to choose which agents of socialization to follow (except for family), and which cultural practices or messages to accept or reject from those agents of socialization. We can even change our sense of self. Humans are not robots, and are therefore, unpredictable which makes the job of the sociologist more difficult. Humans are not sponges that passively absorb environmental influences. They are in fact active in their own environments and receive different treatment from others around them. Even identical twins do not receive identical reactions from others.

## **Chapter Outline**

### **I. What Is Human Nature?**

- A. For centuries, people have tried to find an answer to the question of what is human about human nature. Studies of identical twins who have been reared apart help answer the question.
- B. Feral (wild) children have occasionally found children living in the woods who may have been raised by wild animals. These stories lead one to wonder what humans would be like if left untouched by society.
- C. Isolated children show what humans might be like if secluded from society at an early age. Isabelle is a case in point. Although initially believed to be retarded, a surprising thing happened when she was given intensive language training. She began to acquire language and in only two years she had reached the normal intellectual level for her age. Without language there can be no culture or shared way of living.
- D. 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 13½-year-old who had been kept locked in a small room for years, demonstrate the importance of early interaction for human development.

- E. The Harlow's studies of monkeys reared in isolation have reached similar results. They concluded that if isolated for that longer than six months, the more difficult adjustment becomes.
- F. Babies do not "naturally" develop into human 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 socialization.

## II. Socialization into Self, Mind, and Emotions

- A. 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.
- B. 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) 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.
- C. After years of research, Jean Piaget (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, 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?").
- D. 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; with 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.
- E. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) believed that personality consists of three elements: the id, ego, and superego.
1. The id, inherited drives for self-gratification, demands fulfillment of basic needs such as attention, safety, food, and sex.
  2. The ego balances between the needs of the id and the demands of society.
  3. The superego, the social conscience we have internalized from social groups, gives us feelings of guilt or shame when we break rules, and feelings of pride and self-satisfaction when we follow them.
  4. Sociologists object to Freud's view that inborn and unconscious motivations are the primary reasons for human behavior, for this view denies the central tenet of sociology—that social factors shape people's behaviors.
  5. Feminist sociologists have been especially critical of Freud. According to Freud, females are inferior, castrated males.
- F. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg concluded that humans go through a sequence of stages in the development of morality.
1. The amoral stage is when the child does not distinguish between right and wrong.
  2. The preconventional stage is when the child follows the rules in order to stay out of trouble.
  3. The conventional stage is when the child follows the norms and values of society.
  4. The postconventional stage is when the child reflects on abstract principles of right and wrong, using these principles to judge behavior.
- G. Carol Gilligan studied differences between males and females in how they view morality.
1. Gilligan disagreed with Kohlberg's conclusions because they did not match her own experience and he had only used boys in his studies.
  2. She found that females tend to evaluate morality in terms of personal relationships and how actions will affect others.
  3. Males think in terms of abstract principles of right and wrong.
  4. Other researchers tested Gilligan's conclusions and found no gender differences. Based on this subsequent work, Gilligan no longer supports her original position.
  5. Although it appears that the looking-glass self, role taking, and the social mind are universal phenomena,
- H. 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.
- I. Most socialization is meant to turn us into conforming members of society. We do some things and not others as a result of socialization. When we contemplate an action, we know the emotion (good or bad) that would result; thus society sets up controls on our behavior.

### III. Socialization into Gender

- A. By expecting different behaviors from people because they are male or female, society nudges boys and girls in separate directions from an early age, and this foundation carries over into adulthood.

- B. Parents begin the process; researchers have concluded that in our society, mothers unconsciously reward their female children for being passive and dependent and their male children for being active and independent.
- C. The mass media reinforce society's expectations of gender in many ways:
  - 1. Ads perpetuate stereotypes by portraying males as dominant and rugged and females as sexy and 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. Sociologist Melissa Milkie concluded that males use media images to discover who they are and what is expected of them as males.
  - 5. 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.

#### **IV. Agents of Socialization**

- A. Our experiences in the family have a lifelong impact on us, laying down a basic sense of self, motivation, values, and beliefs.
  - 1. Parents—often unaware of what they are doing—send subtle messages to their children about society's expectations for them as males or females.
  - 2. Research by Melvin Kohn suggests that there are social class and occupational differences in child rearing. The main concern of working-class parents often is their children's outward conformity while middle-class parents show greater concern for the motivations for their children's behavior. The type of job held by the parent is also a factor: the more closely supervised the job is, the more likely the parent is to insist on outward conformity.
- B. The neighborhood has an impact on children's development. Some neighborhoods are better places for children to grow up than other neighborhoods. For example, residents of more affluent neighborhood watch out for children more than do residents of poorer neighborhoods.
- C. Religion plays a major role in the socialization of most Americans, even if they are not raised in a religious family. Religion especially influences morality, but also ideas about the dress, speech, and manners that are appropriate.
- D. With more mothers today working for wages, day care is now a significant agent of socialization.
  - 1. One national study that followed 1300 children, in ten cities, from infancy into kindergarten found that the more hours per week that a child spends in day care, the weaker the bonds between mother and child and the greater the child's behavior problems.
  - 2. Children who spent less time in day care were more affectionate to their mothers and more cooperative.
  - 3. This pattern held regardless of the quality of day care, the family's social class, or whether the child is a boy or girl.
  - 4. We do not know how to explain these patterns. It could be that children who spend many hours in day care do not have their emotional needs met or that mothers who put their children in day care for more hours are less sensitive to their children in the first place.
  - 5. These same researchers also found that the more hours children spend in day care, the higher they score on language tests. This was especially true for children in low income or abusive homes.
- E. Schools serve many manifest (intended) functions for society, including teaching skills and values thought to be appropriate. Schools also have several latent (unintended) functions.
  - 1. At school, children are placed outside the direct control of friends/relatives and exposed to new values and ways of looking at the world. They learn universality, or that the same rules apply to everyone.
  - 2. Schools also have a hidden curriculum—values not explicitly taught but inherent in school activities. For example, the wording of stories may carry messages about patriotism and

- democracy; by teaching that our economic system is just, schools may teach children to believe problems such as poverty are never caused by oppression and exploitation.
3. Schools also have a corridor curriculum—where students are taught by one another outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, these are often not positive values.
  4. Conflict theorists note that schools teach children to take their place in the work force. Children of the wealthy go to private schools, where they acquire the skills and values appropriate to their eventual higher position, while children of working class parents attend public schools, where they are rarely placed in college prep classes.
- F. One of the most significant aspects of education is that it exposes children to peer groups. A peer group is a group of people of roughly the same age who share common interests. Next to the family, peer groups are the most powerful socializing force in society.
1. Research by Patricia and Peter Adler document how elementary age children separated themselves by sex and developed their own worlds and norms. They found that popular boys were athletic, cool, and tough. Popular girls depended on family background, physical appearance, and the ability to attract popular boys.
  2. It is almost impossible to go against a peer group, whose cardinal rule is to conform or be rejected. As a result, the standards of peer groups tend to dominate our lives.
- G. Sports are also powerful socializing agents; children are taught not only physical skills, but also values. Boys often learn that masculinity is related to success in sports—the more successful a boy is in a sport, the more masculine he is considered, and the more he is accepted.
- H. The workplace is a major agent of socialization for adults; from jobs, we learn not only skills, but also matching attitudes and values. We may engage in anticipatory socialization, learning to play a role before actually entering it, and enabling us to gradually identify with the role.

## **V. Resocialization**

- A. Resocialization refers to the process of learning new norms, values, attitudes and behaviors. Resocialization in its most common form occurs each time we learn something contrary to our previous experiences, such as going to work in a new job. It can be an intense experience, although it does not have to be.
- B. Erving Goffman used the term total institution to refer to places such as boot camps, prisons, concentration camps, or some mental hospitals, religious cults, and boarding schools—places where people are cut off from the rest of society and are under almost total control of agents of the institution.
1. A person entering the institution is greeted with a degradation ceremony, which may include fingerprinting, shaving the head, banning personal items, and being forced to strip and wear a uniform. In this way, his current identity is stripped away and a new identity is created.
  2. Total institutions are quite effective in isolating people from outside influences and information; supervising their activities; suppressing previous roles, statuses, and norms and replacing them with new rules and values; and controlling rewards and punishments.

## **VI. Socialization Through the Life Course**

- A. Socialization occurs throughout a person's entire lifetime and can be broken up into different stages.
- B. Childhood (birth to 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.
- C. Adolescence (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.

- D. Transitional Adulthood (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.
- E. The Middle Years (30-65): This can be separated into two periods.
  - 1. Early Middle Years (30-49): People are more sure of themselves and their goals in life than before, but severe jolts such as divorce or being fired can occur. For U.S. women, it can be a trying period, as they try to “have it all”—job, family, and everything else.
  - 2. Later Middle Years (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 (65 and beyond): This can also be separated into two periods.
  - 1. The Early 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.
- G. 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.

## VII. Are We Prisoners of Socialization?

- A. Sociologists do not think of people as little robots who simply are the result of their exposure to socializing agents. Although socialization is powerful and profoundly affects us all, we have a self, and the self is dynamic. Each of us uses his or her own mind to reason and make choices.
- B. In this way, each of us is actively involved even in the social construction of the self. Our experiences have an impact on us, but we are not doomed to keep our orientations if we do not like them. We can choose to change our experiences by exposing ourselves to other groups and ideas.

### Key Terms

*After studying the chapter, review the definition for each of the following terms.*

**agents of socialization:** people or groups that affect our self-concept, attitudes, or other orientations towards life (81)

**anticipatory socialization:** because one anticipates a future role, one learns part of it now (87)

**degradation ceremony:** a term coined by Harold Garfinkel to describe an attempt to remake the self by stripping away an individual’s self-identity and stamping a new identity in its place (88)

**ego:** Freud’s term for a balancing force between the id and the demands of society (73)

**feral children:** children assumed to have been raised by animals, in the wilderness, isolated from other humans (67)

**gender role:** the behaviors and attitudes considered appropriate because one is male or female (80)

**gender socialization:** the ways in which society sets children onto different courses in life because they are male or female (78)

**generalized other:** the norms, values, attitudes, and expectations of people “in general”; the child’s ability to take the role of the generalized other is a significant step in the development of a self (71)

**id:** Freud’s term for our inborn basic drives (73)

**latent function:** unintended beneficial consequences of people’s actions (84)

**life course:** the stages of our life as we go from birth to death (88)

**looking-glass self:** a term coined by Charles Horton Cooley to refer to the process by which our self develops through internalizing others’ reactions to us (70)

**manifest function:** the intended consequences of people's actions designed to help some part of the social system (84)

**mass media:** forms of communication, such as radio, newspapers, and television, that are directed to mass audiences (80)

**peer group:** a group of individuals roughly the same age linked by common interests (80)

**resocialization:** process of learning new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors (87)

**self:** the unique human capacity of being able to see ourselves "from the outside"; the picture we gain of how others see us (70)

**significant other:** an individual who significantly influences someone else's life (71)

**social environment:** the entire human environment, including direct contact with others (66)

**social inequality:** a social condition in which privileges and obligations are given to some but denied to others (81)

**socialization:** the process by which people learn the characteristics of their group—the attitudes, values, and actions thought appropriate for them (70)

**superego:** Freud's term for the conscience, the internalized norms and values of our social groups (74)

**taking the role of the other:** putting oneself in someone else's shoes; understanding how someone else feels and thinks and thus anticipating how that person will act (71)

**total institution:** a place in which people are cut off from the rest of society and are almost totally controlled by the officials who run the place (88)

**transitional adulthood:** a term that refers to a period following high school when young adults have not yet taken on the responsibilities ordinarily associated with adulthood; also called adulescence (91)

### Key People

*Review the major theoretical contributions or findings of these people.*

**Patricia and Peter Adler:** These sociologists have documented how peer groups socialize children into gender-appropriate behavior. (86)

**Charles Horton Cooley:** Cooley studied the development of the self, coining the term "the looking-glass self." (70)

**Donna Eder:** She studied conversations between middle school girls and examined how girls reinforce what they think is appropriate for females. (80)

**Paul Ekman:** This anthropologist studied emotions in several countries and concluded that people everywhere experience six basic emotions—anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise. (76-77)

**Sigmund Freud:** Freud developed a theory of personality development that took into consideration inborn drives (id), the internalized norms and values of one's society (superego), and the individual's ability to balance the two competing forces (ego). (73,75)

**Carol Gilligan:** Gilligan was uncomfortable with Kohlberg's conclusions regarding the development of morality because they did not match her own experiences and Kohlberg had used only boys in his studies. She studied gender differences in morality, concluding that men and women use different criteria in evaluating morality. (75-76)

**Erving Goffman:** Goffman studied the process of resocialization in total institutions. (88)

**Susan Goldberg and Michael Lewis:** Two psychologists studied how parents' unconscious expectations about gender behavior are communicated to their young children. (78-79)

**Harry and Margaret Harlow:** These psychologists studied the behavior of monkeys raised in isolation and found that the length of time they were isolated affected their ability to overcome its effects. (69)

**Lawrence Kohlberg:** This psychologist studied the development of morality, concluding that individuals go through a sequence of developmental stages. (75)

**Melvin Kohn:** Kohn has done extensive research on the social class differences in child-rearing between working-class and middle-class parents. (83)



**George Herbert Mead:** Mead emphasized the importance of play in the development of the self, noting that children learn to take on the role of the other and eventually learn to perceive themselves as others do. (71-72)

**Melissa Milkie:** This sociologist studied how adolescent boys used media images to discover who they are as males. (80)

**Michael Messner:** He notes that girls are more likely to construct their identities on meaningful relationships whereas the identity for boys develops out of competitive success. (87)

**Jean Piaget:** Piaget studied the development of reasoning skills in children and identified four stages. (72-73)

**H. M. Skeels and H. B. Dye:** These psychologists studied how close social interaction affected the social and intellectual development of institutionalized children. (67-68)