

SOCIALIZATION

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this chapter you will be able to do the following.

- Define socialization.
- Compare nature and nurture as socialization influences.
- Identify agents and agencies of socialization.
- Evaluate the study of cases of feral children in terms of their importance to our knowledge of socialization.
- Recall and define the steps in determining a self-concept.
- Evaluate Dramaturgy for its application to every day life.

WHAT IS SOCIALIZATION?

Socialization is the process by which people learn characteristics of their group's norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors. Through socialization we learn the culture of the society into which we have been born. In the course of this process, a personality develops. A **personality** is comprised of *patterns of behavior and ways of thinking and feeling that are distinctive for each individual.*



Babies are not born with the social or emotional tools needed to contribute to society as properly functioning social actors. They have to learn all the nuances of proper behavior, how to meet expectations for what is expected of them, and everything else needed to become members of society. As newborns interact with family and friends they learn the expectations of their society (family, community, state, and nation).

From the first moments of life, children begin a process of socialization wherein parents, family, and friends establish an infant's **social construction of reality**, or *what people define as real because of their background assumptions and life experiences with others.* An average U.S. child's social construction of reality includes knowledge that he or she belongs, and can depend on others to meet his or her needs. It also includes the privileges and obligations that accompany membership in his or her family and community. In a typical set of social circumstances, children grow up through a predictable set of life stages: infancy, preschool, K-12 school years, young adulthood, adulthood, middle adulthood, and finally later-life adulthood. Most will leave home as young adults, find a spouse or life partner in their mid-to late 20s and work in a job for pay.

THREE LEVELS OF SOCIALIZATION

When discussing the average U.S. child, most agree that the most imperative socialization takes place early in life and in identifiable levels. Primary socialization typically begins at birth and moves forward until the beginning of the school years. **Primary socialization** *includes all the ways the newborn is molded into a social being capable of interacting in and meeting the expectations of society.* Most primary socialization is facilitated by the family, friends, day care, and to a certain degree various forms of media. Children watch about three hours of TV per day (by the time the average child attends kindergarten she has watched about 5,000 hours of TV). They also play video games, surf the Internet, play with friends, and read.

Children learn how to talk, interact with others, share, manage frustrations, follow the rules, and grow up to be like older family and friends they know. When they live up to expectations they are big boys and girls, when they don't they are naughty. In the early years, tremendous attention is required in the safety and nurturance of infants. As they begin to walk and talk they learn to communicate their needs and wants and also to feed and clothe themselves. Younger children do not have strong abstract reasoning skills until adolescence, so they rely heavily on the judgment of their caregivers. Most importantly, they form significant attachments to the older people who care for them.

Around age 4 to 5, pre-school and kindergarten are presented as expectations for children. Once they begin their schooling, they begin another different level of socialization.

Secondary socialization *occurs in later childhood and adolescence when children go to school and come under the influence of non-family members.* This level runs concurrently with primary socialization. Children realize that at school that they are judged for their performance now and are no longer accepted unconditionally. In fact, to obtain approval from teachers and school employees a tremendous amount of conformity is required. Now, as students, children have to learn to belong and cooperate in large groups. They learn a new culture that extends beyond their narrow family culture. This new culture with its complexities and challenges requires effort on their part and that creates stressors for children. By the time of graduation from high school, the average U.S. child has attended



15,000 hours of school away from home; they've also probably watched 15,000 hours of TV, and spent 5-10,000 hours playing.

Friends, classmates, and peers become increasingly important in the lives of children in their secondary educational stage of socialization. Most 0-5 year olds yearn for their parents and family member's affection and approval. By the time of the pre-teen years, the desire for family diminishes and the yearning now becomes

for friends and peers. Parents often lament the loss of influence over their children once

the teen years arrive. Studies show that parents preserve at least some of their influence over their children by influencing their children's peers. Parents who host parties, excursions, and get-togethers find that their relationship with their children's friends keeps them better connected to their children.

The K-12 schooling years are brutal in terms of peer pressure. Often, people live much of their adult lives under the labels they were given in high school. Many new high school graduates face the strikingly harsh realities of adulthood shortly after graduation. Anomie often follows and it takes months and even years for young adults to discover new regulating norms which ground them back into expectable routines of life.

The third level of socialization includes college, work, marriage/significant relationships, and a variety of adult roles and adventures. **Adult socialization** *occurs as we assume adult roles such as wife, husband, parent, or employee.* We adapt to new roles which meet our needs and wants throughout the adult life course. Freshmen in college, new recruits in the military, volunteers for Peace Corps and Vista, employees, travellers, and others find themselves following the same game plan that leads to their success during their primary and secondary socialization years—find out what's expected and strive to reach those expectations.

Though most live an average life course, few life paths conform perfectly to it. People die of disease and accidents, marry and divorce, become parents, change careers, go bankrupt, win lotteries, or pay off their mortgages. In each change that comes into their lives, they find themselves adapting to new roles, new expectations, and new limitations. Socialization is an ongoing process for everyone starting at birth and ending at death.

IS IT NATURE OR NURTURE?

There has been much said and written about how important socialization is to our eventual human adult natures. Historically, there has also been much research into the biological influence of who we eventually become. Think about this question, "How much of our socialization is influenced by our genetics and biology, and how much is influenced by the social environment we are born into and in which we are raised?" Nature versus Nurture is the debate over the influence of biological versus social influences in socialization.

Heritability *is the proportion of our personality, self, and biological traits which stem from genetic factors.*

In the history of social science the Blank Slate Theory was widely accepted. **Tabula Rasa** is Latin for Blank Slate. It was a theoretical claim that *humans are born with no mental or intellectual capacities and all that they learn is written upon them by those who provide their primary and secondary socialization* (this claim was for 100% nurture in how we become human). Most social scientists reject any notion of 100% nurture, simply because the research does not support the theory. Socialization alone does not explain adult outcomes.

Geneticists have conducted many studies of heritability which have yielded overriding conclusion that biological factors alone do not explain socialization outcomes. Biological and environmental factors are both influential, yet neither are deterministic. Steven Pinker argued that the brain is the core issue in understanding how biology and social environment interact in the process of how we become human. He argues that current scientific knowledge has articulated much of the biological factor and some of the sociological factor, but fails to consider the brain's influence in how a child becomes an adult wherever she grows up in this world. He states in his conclusion: "The human brain has been called the most complex object in the known universe."¹

No doubt, hypotheses that pit nature against nurture as a dichotomy or that correlate genes or environment with behavior without looking at the intervening brain will turn out to be simplistic or wrong. But that complexity does not mean we should fuzz up the issues by saying that it's all just too complicated to think about, or that some hypotheses should be treated as obviously true, obviously false, or too dangerous to mention. As with inflation, cancer, and global warming, we have no choice but to try to disentangle the multiple causes.²

Musical talents, genius intelligence levels, athletic abilities, various forms of intelligence, homosexuality, heterosexuality, conformity, and other traits have been correlated with biological and environmental factors. Most scientists can conclude at this time that the biological factors are only correlated to, not causally deterministic of, any adult outcomes. From the sociological perspective, the focus is heavily on environmental factors which account for conflict, functional, and interactionist theoretical underpinnings of nature versus nurture studies.

As was mentioned, part of socialization is the development of self-concept. It begins at birth and continues through the school years, with slight modifications throughout the adult years. Your **self** is at the core of your personality, representing your conscious experience of having a separate and unique identity. Your **self-concept** is the sum total of your perceptions and beliefs about yourself. It is crucial to note that your self-concept is based heavily on your social construction of reality—that means others influence your perception of your self-worth and definition.

WILD HUMAN CHILDREN AND ANIMALS

Feral children are wild or untamed children who grow up without typical socialization influences. They are rare because most human newborns will not typically survive if they are not cared for by an older individual. One of the earliest documented sociological studies of an isolated feral child was reported on by Kingsley Davis in 1940. He discussed two similar cases of Anna and Isabelle. Anna was five years old when she was discovered. She lived for years isolated in an attic and kept barely alive. Anna only learned a few basic life skills before she died at age 10. Isabelle was also isolated, but in her case she had the company of her deaf and mute mother. When Isabelle was discovered at age six she quickly learned the basic human social skills needed and was able to eventually attend

school. Davis attributes the difference in outcome to nutrition and the fact that Isabelle had at least some social interaction with her mother.³

In rare cases, human feral children have survived. There are three categories of feral children 1) Children raised in isolation, 2) children raised in confinement, and 3) children raised by animals (much less common). To grow up feral is perhaps the cruelest version of child abuse because the crucial primary socialization does not occur. This means that feral children lack a sense of self-concept; a pattern of multiple attachments and significant others; an awareness of self, others, groups, and society; and ultimately a void where socialization and acculturation should be.

A few movies are available that portray the complications of being a feral child, especially when he or she tries to interact with socialized members of society. *Nell* is based on a true story about a girl who grew up alone in the Carolina back woods after her mother and sister died. *The Young Savage of Aveyron* is a true story about a French boy discovered in the woods and taken into the care of a physician. *Tarzan* and *The Jungle Book* are believed to have been inspired by true accounts of feral children raised by animals. For example, Amala (8 years old) and Kamala (1½ years old) were discovered living with wolves in Mindapore, India in 1920. See the artist sketch in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Artist Caricature of Amala and Kamala.⁴



You already know that most humans can't co-exist with wolves and other carnivorous animals. It is rare to survive such an encounter, especially for an 18 month old child. Yet, cross-species nurturing has been documented from time to time (e.g., dogs nurturing kittens or pigs).

Another feral child was discovered in 1970 in a Los Angeles suburb. A neighbor reported that a child was locked in the back of a house. Police discovered a girl that was eventually nicknamed Genie. Genie was about 12. Nova created a documentary on her called "Secret

of the Wild Child.” In it you see what feral really means in the deprivation of acting, understanding, experiencing, and living without having been socialized. See Figure 2 for a sketch of Genie.

Figure 2. Artist Caricature of Genie.⁵



Genie’s hair was cut short to keep her from eating it. Even though she was chained to a potty chair her entire life, she needed to wear diapers. She spat, clawed, rubbed, and self-groomed more like an animal than a human. She had to be taught the basics of everything, and she did learn, but nowhere near at the capacity of an average child.

George Herbert Mead argued that the self emerged out of social interactions as a result of countless symbolic interactions with other human beings. To Mead, play and playful interactions laid the foundation of becoming human and gaining our sense of self. Knowing that, how troubling must it be for children kept in isolation to play, gain experiences through interaction, and come to know their self?

THEORIES OF DEVELOPMENT

Charles Horton Cooley believed that the self developed through the process of social interaction with others. He used the phrase **looking-glass self** to describe the *three-stage process through which each of us develops a sense of ourselves*. First, we imagine how our actions might appear to others. Second, we interpret how other people judge these actions. We do this regularly. If you act up as child your parent gives you *the look*, you stop what you’re doing because you have internalized what that look means, your parent is not happy with your behaviour. Finally, we make some sort of self-judgement based on the presumed judgements of others. In other words, other people become our mirror, or looking-glass, for ourselves.⁷ For example, 1. You imagine you are a good child and then your parent smiles at you . 2. You interpret this smile as your parent being pleased with you because you are a good child, and so 3. You feel good about yourself, the good child.

George Herbert Mead argued that the self becomes the sum total of our beliefs and feelings about ourselves. The self is composed of two parts: the “I” and the “me.” The “I” is the portion of the self which wishes to have free expression, to be active and spontaneous.

The “I” also wishes to be free from the control of others and to take the initiative in situations. It is also the part of the self that is unique and distinctive. The “me” portion of the self is made up of those things learned through socialization from family, friends, peers, and so on. The “me” regulates the “I’s” behaviors.

Mead uses the term **significant others** to refer to *those other people whose evaluations of the individual are important and regularly considered during interactions*, such as parents and teachers. **Generalized others** are *the viewpoints, attitudes, and expectations of a society as a whole, or of a community of people whom we are aware of and who are important to us.*⁸ Significant others affect our behaviors starting from a very early age, generalized others influence us as our world expands to school and broader society.

Erik Erikson stressed that development is a lifelong process, and that a person continues to pass through new stages even during adulthood. He also paid greater attention to the social and cultural forces operating on the individual at each step along the way. Human development is completed in eight stages (Table 1) with each stage amounting to a crisis of sorts brought on by two factors: the biological changes in the developing individual and the social expectations and stresses. In each stage, the individual is pulled into two opposite directions to resolve the crisis. A resolution in the positive direction positions a person well to enter the next stage. Stages that have been resolved in a negative direction can be revisited later in life.

LARGER SOCIAL ISSUES

Let’s shift the focus of attention away from the socialization of individuals and towards the larger socialization picture. In every society in the world today, there are both agents and agencies of socialization. In the U.S., our agents include parents, siblings, relatives, friends, teachers, religious leaders, bosses, and peers. Our agencies include the family, religion, schools, places of employment, and the media. The cultures vary dramatically between the U.S. and Darfur, but the structure of agents and agencies is very similar. In Darfur, agents are parents, other family, friends, farmers, military leaders, religious leaders, and tribal leaders. The agencies also include the family, religion, clan or tribe, military, and political structures. In general, **agents** are *people involved in our socialization* while **agencies** represent *the organizations involved in our socialization*.

some members of society experience a total institution at some point in their lives and the intense socialization that comes with them. A **total institution** is *an institution that controls almost all aspects of its members’ lives, and all aspects of the individual’s life is controlled by those in authority in the institution*. Boarding schools, orphanages, the military, juvenile detention facilities, and prisons are examples of total institutions. To a certain degree sororities and fraternities mimic the nature of a total institution in the strict rules and regulations required. A core difference among these total institutions is the fact that some are voluntary while others are mandated.

Table 1. Erikson's Eight Stages of Development.⁹

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Age Period</i>	<i>Achieved Characteristic</i>	<i>Possible Hazards</i>
Trust vs. mistrust	Birth to 1 year	Sense of trust or security	Neglect, abuse, or deprivation
Autonomy vs. shame and doubt	1 to 4 years	Sense of autonomy	Conditions making a child feel inadequate
Initiative vs. guilt	4 to 5 years	Sense of initiative	Guilt produced by overly strict discipline interfering with child's spontaneity
Industry vs. inferiority	6 to 12 years	Sense of duty and accomplishment	Feelings of inadequacy
Identity vs. role confusion	Adolescence	Sense of identity	Role confusion resulting from inferior role models
Intimacy vs. isolation	Young adulthood	Sense of intimacy	Difficulty getting close to others
Generativity vs. stagnation	30s to 50s	Sense of productivity and creativity	Sense of stagnation produced by feelings of inadequacy
Integrity vs. despair	Old age	Sense of ego integrity	Feelings of despair and dissatisfaction with one's role as a senior member of society

Erving Goffman was interested in total institutions and wrote *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and other Inmates*.¹⁰ Goffman defines total institutions as places where "like-situated individuals are cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life..."¹¹ He also suggested that total institutions have a method of depriving individuals of their former life. "The recruit comes into the establishment with a conception of himself made possible by certain stable social arrangements in his home world. Upon entrance, he is immediately stripped of the support provided by these arrangements. In the accurate language of some of our oldest total institutions, he begins a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations and profanations of self. His self systematically, if often unintentionally, mortified..."¹²

Do fraternity orientation rituals fit the definition of what Goffman described above? True enough, fraternities often strip down pledges emotionally, physically, and at times sexually to degrade and humiliate them. Many force pledges to eat and drink disgusting things, while all the time testing their loyalty to the fraternity. But, keep in mind that few if any fraternities incarcerate their pledges, have total control of every aspect of their lives for

extended periods of time (*rounds of life* as Goffman put it), and rarely attempt to deprive pledges of their former life. Yet, urban legends abound about how institutionalized fraternities and their rituals have become.

Goffman's other significant contribution to the understanding of socialization is called **Dramaturgy** which comes out of symbolic interactionism. His book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* outlines his *assumptions about how individuals manage others' impressions of themselves*. Individuals are described as actors, and much like actors on a stage their actions are governed by the time, the place, and the audience. The goal of a presentation of self is to be accepted by the audience and viewed as the actor intends.¹³

It "...is common in many social interactions [to have a]... division between front and back stages. The front stage is what confronts the audience—what they see. The back stage, by contrast, is a place where all the support activities necessary for maintaining the performance on the main stage will go on. In theater, the back stage is where actors who are not involved in the scene going on at the moment mill about; where props that will be used at other times are stored; and where the counterbalances, lights, and so on that make the scenery convincing to the audience are hidden."¹⁴ Just as in the theater, individuals use props and costumes to help maintain their impressions. Would you feel more confident seeing a physician who wears a white coat or scrubs, or with one who wears torn jeans and a Grateful Dead t-shirt? How about an attorney with torn jeans and a AC/DC shirt? Most people would be more confident being represented by an attorney wearing a nice suit. Costumes are more important than most people think. Try shopping in a nice store in grungy jeans and worn out shirt, then the next day go to that same store in a nice outfit; see if you are treated differently. You may be ready to argue about how unfair that is, but sociology is not necessarily about fairness; it's more about how society is.

¹ http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/~dgentile/Psy101_notes/nature%20or%20nurture.htm

² Why Nature and Nurture Won't Go Away. *Dædalus*, Fall 2004, 1-13.

³ See Davis, K. 1940 Extreme Social Isolation of A Child. *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Jan., 1940), pp. 554-565 Published by: The University of Chicago Press and Davis, K. 1949 *Human Society* by McMillan Pub. New York; and Davis, K. 1993, "Final Note on a Case of extreme Isolation. Irvington Pub. CA.

⁴ © 2009 Ron J. Hammond, Ph.D.

⁵ © 2009 Ron J. Hammond, Ph.D.

⁷ "Social Organizations" by Charles Cooley

⁸ "Mind, Self, and Society" by George Herbert Mead

⁹ See "Childhood and Society" by Erik Erikson

¹⁰ 1961 NY Doubleday

¹¹ Page xiii

¹² Page 14

¹³ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dramaturgy_\(sociology\)#cite_note-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dramaturgy_(sociology)#cite_note-0)

¹⁴ http://www.pineforge.com/upm-data/16569_Chapter_10.pdf