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## Chapter 3

### Socialization and Social Interaction

#### Social Issues in the News

“Lessons from Charlie Howard’s Death,” the headline of the op-ed column said. On July 7, 2009, Bangor, Maine, marked the 25th anniversary of the death of Charlie Howard, an openly gay, 23-year-old man who was beaten and thrown off a bridge into a river by three teenagers on July 7, 1984. Howard could not swim and drowned. His three assailants eventually pleaded guilty to manslaughter and were sentenced to a juvenile correction center. One of the lessons of his death, wrote the columnist, a theology professor, is the need to challenge the hateful mindset that underlies homophobia. “The three youth who killed Charlie Howard were not social rebels acting out against societal norms and values,” he wrote, but instead “were social conformists who thought they would be rewarded for acting in conformity to this community’s norms. In fact, when the three boys returned to Bangor High School, they were cheered as heroes by their peers and some adults.” (Ellison, 2009) Ellison, M. M. (2009, July 7). Lessons from Charlie Howard’s death. *Bangor Daily News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bangordailynews.com/detail/110121.html>

Why did three teenagers in a small town beat a gay man and hurl him to his death a quarter-century ago? We may never know, but it seems obvious that they had learned to hate gays from community norms back then and perhaps also from some of the many people with whom they interacted every day. This was not the first hate crime against a gay man or other individual, nor was it the last, but it nonetheless illustrates one of the ugly aspects of the many things we learn from our culture and from the people around us. We learn many good things, all necessary to have a society, but we can also learn some very harmful ideas.

The stories of Sarah Patton Boyle and Lillian Smith illustrate this all too well. Sarah Patton Boyle was born in 1906 to one of the leading families of Virginia. A great-grandfather had been a prominent attorney and acting governor of the state; both her grandfathers led illustrious military careers; her father was a respected Episcopalian minister. She was raised on the plantation on which her ancestors had once owned slaves, and her family employed several African American servants.

It was in this setting that little Sarah learned to be racially prejudiced. She was forbidden to visit the servants’ rooms, which, she was told, were filthy and ridden

with disease. The servants themselves were not allowed to use the family's bathroom or china, lest they spread disease from the germs they were assumed to harbor. Sarah's mother loved her servants the same way she loved the family's pets, "without the slightest feeling that they were much like herself," and taught Sarah that African Americans "belonged to a lower order of man than we" (Boyle, 1962, p. 14). Boyle, S. P. (1962). *The desegregated heart: A Virginian's stand in time of transition*. New York, NY: William Morrow. When Sarah turned 12, she was told to stop playing with the servants' children because she was now too old to be "familiar" with black youngsters, and she then endured a "dreadful training period" in which she was scolded if she forgot her new, standoffish role. She learned during the next few years to treat whites better than blacks. When Sarah's adolescence ended, she was "as close to a typical Southern lady as anyone ever is to a typical anything" (Boyle, 1962, pp. 14, 29). Boyle, S. P. (1962). *The desegregated heart: A Virginian's stand in time of transition*. New York, NY: William Morrow. Her racial views stayed with her for many years.

Lillian Smith learned similar beliefs after her birth, a few years before Sarah's, to a wealthy family in Florida. She learned about taboos and manners in race relations just as she learned her games, prayers, and other childhood practices. A central lesson was that "I was better than a Negro, that all black folks have their place and must be kept in it,...that a terrifying disaster would befall the South if ever I treated a Negro as my social equal" (Smith, 1949, p. 17). Smith, L. (1949). *Killers of the dream*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. Her parents played a prime role in this learning process: "The mother who taught me what I know of tenderness and love and compassion taught me also the bleak rituals of keeping Negroes in their place. The father who...reminding me that 'all men are brothers,' trained me in the steel-rigid decorums I must demand of every colored male. They...taught me also to split my conscience from my acts and Christianity from Southern tradition" (Smith, 1949, pp. 17-18). Smith, L. (1949). *Killers of the dream*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton. These racial views also stuck with her for many years.

Thanks to the civil rights movement, the South is much different, of course, from when Sarah Patton Boyle and Lillian Smith were growing up, but their poignant descriptions and Charlie Howard's death remind us that children and adolescents learn all sorts of things, good

Figure 3.1



Whites like Sarah Patton Boyle and Lillian Smith, who grew up in the South before the 1960s civil rights movement, learned to be racially prejudiced toward African Americans.

Source: Photo courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress, <http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8c10944>.

or bad, without formal instruction. They learn these things from their parents, their friends, and other parts of their social environment. The things they learn constitute their culture: norms, values, and symbols. **Socialization**<sup>1</sup> is the term sociologists use to describe the process by which people learn their culture. Socialization occurs in societies big and small, simple and complex, preindustrial and industrial. It happens in the United States, in Brazil, in Saudi Arabia, and in Indonesia. Without socialization we would not learn our culture, and, as the previous chapter indicated, without culture we could not have a society. Socialization, then, is an essential process for any society to be possible.

This chapter examines several aspects of socialization and social interaction. In so doing it continues developing the sociological perspective addressed by the previous two chapters, as we will again see the ways in which our social environment shapes our thoughts, actions, and life chances.

1. The process whereby individuals learn the culture of their society.

## 3.1 The Importance of Socialization

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe why socialization is important for being fully human.

We have just noted that socialization is how culture is learned, but socialization is also important for another important reason. To illustrate this importance, let's pretend we find a 6-year-old child who has had almost no human contact since birth. After the child was born, her mother changed her diapers and fed her a minimal diet but otherwise did not interact with her. The child was left alone all day and night for years and never went outside. We now find her at age 6. How will her behavior and actions differ from those of the average 6-year-old? Take a moment and write down all the differences you would find.

In no particular order, here is the list you probably wrote. First, the child would not be able to speak; at most, she could utter a few grunts and other sounds. Second, the child would be afraid of us and probably cower in a corner. Third, the child would not know how to play games and interact with us. If we gave her some food and utensils, she would eat with her hands and not know how to use the utensils. Fourth, the child would be unable to express a full range of emotions. For example, she might be able to cry but would not know how to laugh. Fifth, the child would be unfamiliar with, and probably afraid of, our culture's material objects, including cell phones and televisions. In these and many other respects, this child would differ dramatically from the average 6-year-old youngster in the United States. She would *look* human, but she would not *act* human. In fact, in many ways she would act more like a frightened animal than like a young human being, and she would be less able than a typical dog to follow orders and obey commands.

As this example indicates, socialization makes it possible for us to fully function as human beings. Without socialization, we could not have our society and culture. And without social interaction, we could not have socialization. Our example of a socially isolated child was hypothetical, but real-life examples of such children, often called **feral**<sup>2</sup> children, have unfortunately occurred and provide poignant proof of the importance of social interaction for socialization and of socialization for our ability to function as humans.

2. A term used for children who have been extremely socially isolated.

One of the most famous feral children was Victor of Aveyron, who was found wandering in the woods in southern France in 1797. He then escaped custody but

emerged from the woods in 1800. Victor was thought to be about age 12 and to have been abandoned some years earlier by his parents; he was unable to speak and acted much more like a wild animal than a human child. Victor first lived in an institution and then in a private home. He never learned to speak, and his cognitive and social development eventually was no better than a toddler's when he finally died at about age 40 (Lane, 1976). Lane, H. L. (1976). *The wild boy of Aveyron*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Another such child, found more than about a half-century ago, was called Anna, who “had been deprived of normal contact and had received a minimum of human care for almost the whole of her first six years of life” (Davis, 1940, p. 554). Davis, K. (1940). Extreme social isolation of a child. *American Journal of Sociology*, 45, 554–565. After being shuttled from one residence to another for her first 5 months, Anna ended up living with her mother in her grandfather's house and was kept in a small, airless room on the second floor because the grandfather was so dismayed by her birth out of wedlock that he hated seeing her. Because her mother worked all day and would go out at night, Anna was alone almost all the time and lived in filth, often barely alive. Her only food in all those years was milk.

When Anna was found at age 6, she could not talk or walk or “do anything that showed intelligence” (Davis, 1940, p. 554). Davis, K. (1940). Extreme social isolation of a child. *American Journal of Sociology*, 45, 554–565. She was also extremely undernourished and emaciated. Two years later, she had learned to walk, understand simple commands, feed herself, and remember faces, but she could not talk and in these respects resembled a 1-year-old infant more than the 7-year-old child she really was. By the time she died of jaundice at about age 9, she had acquired the speech of a 2-year-old.

Shortly after Anna was discovered, another girl, called Isabelle, was found in similar circumstances at age 6. She was also born out of wedlock and lived alone with her mother in a dark room isolated from the rest of the mother's family. Because her mother was mute, Isabelle did not learn to speak, although she did communicate with her mother via some simple gestures. When she was finally found, she acted like a wild animal around strangers, and in other

Figure 3.2



In rare cases, children have grown up in extreme isolation and end up lacking several qualities that make them fully human. This is a photo of Victor of Aveyron, who emerged from the woods in southern France in 1800 after apparently being abandoned by his parents some years earlier. He could not speak, and his cognitive and social skills never advanced beyond those of a small child before he died at the age of 40.

Source:  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Victor\\_of\\_Aveyron.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Victor_of_Aveyron.jpg)

respects she behaved more like a child of 6 months than one of more than 6 years. When first shown a ball, she stared at it, held it in her hand, and then rubbed an adult's face with it. Intense training afterward helped Isabelle recover, and 2 years later she had reached a normal speaking level for a child her age (Davis, 1940). Davis, K. (1940). Extreme social isolation of a child. *American Journal of Sociology*, 45, 554–565.

The cases of Anna and Isabelle show that extreme isolation—or, to put it another way, lack of socialization—deprives children of the obvious and not-so-obvious qualities that make them human and in other respects retards their social, cognitive, and emotional development. A series of famous experiments by psychologists Harry and Margaret Harlow (1962) Harlow, H. F., & Harlow, M. K. (1962). Social deprivation in monkeys. *Scientific American*, 207, 137–146. reinforced the latter point by showing it to be true of monkeys as well. The Harlows studied rhesus monkeys that had been removed from their mothers at birth; some were raised in complete isolation, while others were given fake mothers made of cloth and wire with which to cuddle. Neither group developed normally, although the monkeys cuddling with the fake mothers fared somewhat better than those who were totally isolated. In general, the monkeys were not able to interact later with other monkeys, and female infants abused their young when they became mothers. The longer their isolation, the more the monkeys' development suffered. By showing the dire effects of social isolation, the Harlows' experiment reinforced the significance of social interaction for normal development. Combined with the tragic examples of feral children, their experiments remind us of the critical importance of socialization and social interaction for human society.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Socialization is the process through which individuals learn their culture and become fully human.
- Unfortunate examples of extreme human isolation illustrate the importance of socialization for children's social and cognitive development.

**FOR YOUR REVIEW**

1. Do you agree that effective socialization is necessary for an individual to be fully human? Could this assumption imply that children with severe developmental disabilities, who cannot undergo effective socialization, are not fully human?
2. Do you know anyone with negative views in regard to race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, or religious preference? If so, how do you think this person acquired these views?

## 3.2 Explaining Socialization

### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe the theories of Cooley, Mead, Freud, Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Erikson.

Because socialization is so important, scholars in various fields have tried to understand how and why it occurs, with different scholars looking at different aspects of the process. Their efforts mostly focus on infancy, childhood, and adolescence, which are the critical years for socialization, but some have also looked at how socialization continues through the life course. Let's examine some of the major theories of socialization, which are summarized in [Table 3.1 "Theory Snapshot"](#).

Table 3.1 Theory Snapshot

Theory	Major figure(s)	Major assumptions
Looking-glass self	Charles Horton Cooley	Children gain an impression of how people perceive them as the children interact with them. In effect, children “see” themselves when they interact with other people, as if they are looking in a mirror. Individuals use the perceptions that others have of them to develop judgments and feelings about themselves.
Taking the role of the other	George Herbert Mead	Children pretend to be other people in their play and in so doing learn what these other people expect of them. Younger children take the role of significant others, or the people, most typically parents and siblings, who have the most contact with them; older children when they play sports and other games take on the roles of other people and internalize the expectations of the generalized other, or society itself.
Psychoanalytic	Sigmund Freud	The personality consists of the id, ego, and superego. If a child does not develop normally and the superego does not become strong enough to overcome the id, antisocial behavior may result.
Cognitive development	Jean Piaget	Cognitive development occurs through four stages. The final stage is the formal operational stage, which begins at age 12 as

Theory	Major figure(s)	Major assumptions
		children begin to use general principles to resolve various problems.
Moral development	Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan	Children develop their ability to think and act morally through several stages. If they fail to reach the conventional stage, in which adolescents realize that their parents and society have rules that should be followed because they are morally right to follow, they might well engage in harmful behavior. Whereas boys tend to use formal rules to decide what is right or wrong, girls tend to take personal relationships into account.
Identity development	Erik Erikson	Identity development encompasses eight stages across the life course. The fifth stage occurs in adolescence and is especially critical because teenagers often experience an identity crisis as they move from childhood to adulthood.

### Sociological Explanations: The Development of the Self

One set of explanations, and the most sociological of those we discuss, looks at how the **self**<sup>3</sup>, or one’s identity, self-concept, and self-image, develops. These explanations stress that we learn how to interact by first interacting with others and that we do so by using this interaction to gain an idea of who we are and what they expect of us.

#### Charles Horton Cooley

Among the first to advance this view was Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), who said that by interacting with other people we gain an impression of how they perceive us. In effect, we “see” ourselves when we interact with other people, as if we are looking in a mirror when we are with them. Cooley (1902)Cooley, C. H. (1902). *Social organization*. New York, NY: Scribner’s. developed his famous concept of the **looking-glass self**<sup>4</sup> to summarize this process. Cooley said we first imagine how we appear to others and then imagine how they think of us and, more specifically, whether they are evaluating us positively or negatively. We then use these perceptions to develop judgments and feelings about ourselves, such as pride or embarrassment.

3. Self-image, self-identity, or self-concept.

4. Charles Horton Cooley’s term for one aspect of the process whereby we gain an understanding of our self-image and self-identity.

Sometimes errors occur in this complex process, as we may misperceive how others regard us and develop misguided judgments of our behavior and feelings. For example, you may have been in a situation where someone laughed at what you said, and you thought they were mocking you, when in fact they just thought you were being funny. Although you should have interpreted their laughter positively, you interpreted it negatively and probably felt stupid or embarrassed.

Whether errors occur or not, the process Cooley described is especially critical during childhood and adolescence, when our self is still in a state of flux. Imagine how much better children on a sports team feel after being cheered for making a great play or how children in the school band feel after a standing ovation at the end of the band's performance. If they feel better about themselves, they may do that much better next time. For better or worse, the reverse is also true. If children do poorly on the sports field or in a school performance and the applause they hoped for does not occur, they may feel dejected and worse about themselves and from frustration or anxiety perform worse the next time around.

Yet it is also true that the looking-glass-self process affects us throughout our lives. By the time we get out of late adolescence and into our early adult years, we have very much developed our conception of our self, yet this development is never complete. As young, middle-aged, or older adults, we continue to react to our perceptions of how others are viewing us, and these perceptions influence our conception of our self, even if this influence is often less than was true in our younger years. Whether our social interaction is with friends, relatives, coworkers, supervisors, or even strangers, our self continues to change.

### George Herbert Mead

Another scholar who discussed the development of the self was George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), a founder of the field of symbolic interactionism discussed in [Chapter 1 "Sociology and the Sociological Perspective"](#). Mead's (1934) *Mind, self, and society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. main emphasis was on children's playing, which he saw as central to their understanding of how people should interact. When they play, Mead said, children **take the role of the**

Figure 3.3



Charles Horton Cooley wrote that we gain an impression of ourselves by interacting with other people. By doing so, we “see” ourselves as if we are looking in a mirror when we are with them. Cooley developed his famous concept of the looking-glass self to summarize this process.

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**other**<sup>5</sup>. This means they pretend to be other people in their play and in so doing learn what these other people expect of them. For example, when children play house and pretend to be their parents, they treat their dolls the way they think their parents treat them. In so doing, they get a better idea of how they are expected to behave. Another way of saying this is that they internalize the expectations other people have of them.

Younger children, said Mead, take the role of **significant others**<sup>6</sup>, or the people, most typically parents and siblings, who have the most contact with them. Older children take on the roles of other people and learn society's expectations as a whole. In so doing they internalize the expectations of what Mead called the **generalized other**<sup>7</sup>, or society itself.

This whole process, Mead wrote, involves several stages. In the *imitation* stage, infants can only imitate behavior without really understanding its purposes. If their parents rub their own bellies and laugh, 1-year-olds may do likewise. After they reach the age of 3, they are in the *play* stage. Here most of their play is by themselves or with only one or two other children, and much of it involves pretending to be other people: their parents, teachers, superheroes, television characters, and so forth. In this stage they begin taking the role of the other. Once they reach age 6 or 7, or roughly the time school begins, the *games* stage begins, and children start playing in team sports and games. The many players in these games perform many kinds of roles, and they must all learn to anticipate the actions of other members of their team. In so doing, they learn what is expected of the roles all team members are supposed to play and by extension begin to understand the roles society wants us to play, or to use Mead's term, the expectations of the generalized other.

Mead felt that the self has two parts, the "I" and the "me." The "I" is the creative, spontaneous part of the self, while the "me" is the more passive part of the self stemming from the internalized expectations of the larger society. These two parts are not at odds, he thought, but instead complement each other and thus enhance the individual's contributions to society. Society needs creativity, but it also needs at least some minimum of conformity. The development of both these parts of the self is important not only for the individual but also for the society to which the individual belongs.

5. George Herbert Mead's term for what children do when they play that helps them acquire an understanding of their self.

6. George Herbert Mead's term for parents and other important individuals in the lives of children.

7. George Herbert Mead's term for society's conscience.

### **Social-Psychological Explanations: Personality and Cognitive and Moral Development**

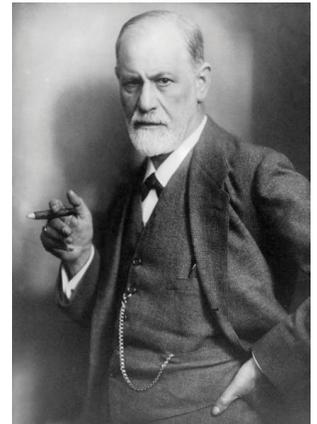
A second set of explanations is more psychological, as it focuses on the development of personality, cognitive ability, and morality.

### Sigmund Freud and the Unconscious Personality

Whereas Cooley and Mead focused on interaction with others in explaining the development of the self, the great psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) focused on unconscious, biological forces that he felt shape individual personality. Freud (1933)Freud, S. (1933). *New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis*. New York, NY: Norton. thought that the personality consists of three parts: the **id**<sup>8</sup>, the **ego**<sup>9</sup>, and the **superego**<sup>10</sup>. The id is the selfish part of the personality and consists of biological instincts that all babies have, including the need for food and, more generally, the demand for immediate gratification. As babies get older, they learn that not all their needs can be immediately satisfied and thus develop the ego, or the rational part of the personality. As children get older still, they internalize society's norms and values and thus begin to develop their superego, which represents society's conscience. If a child does not develop normally and the superego does not become strong enough, the individual is more at risk for being driven by the id to commit antisocial behavior.

Freud's basic view that an individual's personality and behavior develop from within conflicts with sociology's emphasis on the social environment. That is not to say his view is wrong, but it is to say that it neglects the many very important influences highlighted by sociologists. In another problem, Freud's views on women reflected the sexism of the Victorian era in which he lived. He thought that having and raising babies was women's natural, desired role in life and that women who desired careers were mentally ill because they had not adjusted to this role. Freud's views on women were heavily criticized by the contemporary women's movement at its outset in the 1960s (Friedan, 1963; Millett, 1970).Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton; Millett, K. (1970). *Sexual politics*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Figure 3.4



Sigmund Freud believed that the personality consists of three parts: the id, ego, and superego. The development of these biological forces helps shape an individual's personality.

Source: Photo courtesy of LIFE Photo Archive,  
<http://images.google.com/>

8. Sigmund Freud's term for the instinctual, selfish part of the personality.
9. Sigmund Freud's term for the rational part of the personality.
10. Sigmund Freud's term for society's conscience.

### Piaget and Cognitive Development

Children acquire a self and personality, but they also learn how to think and reason. The way they acquire such cognitive development was the focus of research by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980). Piaget (1954) Piaget, J. (1954). *The construction of reality in the child*. New York, NY: Basic Books. thought that cognitive development occurs through four stages and that proper maturation of the brain and socialization were necessary for adequate development.

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l?imgurl=e45a47b1b422cca3.](#)

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The first stage is the *sensorimotor* stage, in which infants cannot really think or reason and instead use their hearing, vision, and other senses to discover the world around them. The second stage is the *preoperational* stage, lasting from about age 2 to age 7, in which children begin to use symbols, especially words, to understand objects and simple ideas. The third stage is the *concrete operational* stage, lasting from about age 7 to age 11 or 12, in which children begin to think in terms of cause and effect but still do not understand underlying principles of fairness, justice, and related concepts. The fourth and final stage is the *formal operational* stage, which begins about the age of 12. Here children begin to think abstractly and use general principles to resolve various problems.

Recent research supports Piaget's emphasis on the importance of the early years for children's cognitive development. Scientists have found that brain activity develops rapidly in the earliest years of life, and that stimulation from a child's social environment enhances this development. Conversely, a lack of stimulation impairs it, and children whose parents or other caregivers routinely play with them and talk, sing, and read to them have much better neurological and cognitive development than other children (Riley, San Juan, Klinkner, & Ramminger, 2009). Riley, D., San Juan, R. R., Klinkner, J., & Ramminger, A. (2009). *Intellectual development: Connecting science and practice in early childhood settings*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press. By providing a biological basis for the importance of human stimulation for children, this research underscores both the significance of interaction and the dangers of social isolation. For both biological and social reasons, socialization is not fully possible without extensive social interaction.

### Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Moral Development

An important part of children's reasoning is their ability to distinguish right from wrong and to decide on what is morally correct to do. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) said that children develop their ability to think and act morally through several stages. In the *preconventional* stage, young children equate what is morally right simply to what keeps them from getting punished. In the

*conventional* stage, adolescents realize that their parents and society have rules that should be followed because they are morally right to follow, not just because disobeying them leads to punishment. At the *postconventional* stage, which occurs in late adolescence and early adulthood, individuals realize that higher moral standards may supersede those of their own society and even decide to disobey the law in the name of these higher standards. If people fail to reach at least the conventional stage, Kohlberg (1969) said, they do not develop a conscience and instead might well engage in harmful behavior if they think they will not be punished. Incomplete moral development, Kohlberg concluded, was a prime cause of antisocial behavior.

One problem with Kohlberg's research was that he studied only boys. That raises the question of whether girls go through similar stages of moral development. Carol Gilligan (1982) concluded that they do not. Whereas boys tend to use formal rules to decide what is right or wrong, she wrote, girls tend to take personal relationships into account. If people break a rule because of some important personal need or because they are trying to help someone, then their behavior may not be wrong. To use other terminology, males tend to use impersonal, *universalistic* criteria for moral decision making, whereas females tend to use more individual, *particularistic* criteria.

Figure 3.5



Carol Gilligan believes that girls take personal relationships into account during their moral development.

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An example from children's play may illustrate the difference between these two forms of moral reasoning.

If boys are playing a sport, say basketball, and a player says he was fouled, they may disagree—sometimes heatedly—over how much contact occurred and whether it indeed was enough to be a foul. In contrast, girls in a similar situation may decide in the interest of having everyone get along to call the play a “do-over.”

## Erikson and Identity Development

We noted earlier that the development of the self is not limited to childhood but instead continues throughout the life span. More generally, although socialization is most important during childhood and adolescence, it, too, continues throughout the life span. Psychologist Erik Erikson (1902–1990) explicitly recognized this central fact in his theory of *identity development* (Erikson, 1980). Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York, NY: Norton. This sort of development, he said,

encompasses eight stages of life across the life course. In the first four stages, occurring in succession from birth to age 12, children ideally learn trust, self-control, and independence and also learn how to do tasks whose complexity increases with their age. If all this development goes well, they develop a positive identity, or self-image.

The fifth stage occurs in adolescence and is especially critical, said Erikson, because teenagers often experience an *identity crisis*. This crisis occurs because adolescence is a transition between childhood and adulthood: adolescents are leaving childhood but have not yet achieved adulthood. As they try to work through all the complexities of adolescence, teenagers may become rebellious at times, but most eventually enter young adulthood with their identities mostly settled. Stages 6, 7, and 8 involve young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood, respectively. In each of these stages, people's identity development is directly related to their family and work roles. In late adulthood, people reflect on their lives while trying to remain contributing members of society. Stage 8 can be a particularly troubling stage for many people, as they realize their lives are almost over.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Cooley and Mead explained how one's self-concept and self-image develop.
- Freud focused on the need to develop a proper balance among the id, ego, and superego.
- Piaget wrote that cognitive development among children and adolescents occurs from four stages of social interaction.
- Kohlberg wrote about stages of moral development and emphasized the importance of formal rules, while Gilligan emphasized that girls' moral development takes into account personal relationships.
- Erikson's theory of identity development encompasses eight stages, from infancy through old age.

### FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Select one of the theories of socialization in this section, and write about how it helps you to understand your own socialization.
2. Gilligan emphasized that girls take social relationships into account in their moral development, while boys tend to stress the importance of formal rules. Do you agree with her argument? Why or why not?

## 3.3 Agents of Socialization

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify five agents of socialization.
2. Describe good and bad aspects of the socialization these agents produce.

Several institutional and other sources of socialization exist and are called *agents of socialization*. The first of these, the family, is certainly the most important agent of socialization for infants and young children.

### The Family

Should parents get the credit when their children turn out to be good kids and even go on to accomplish great things in life? Should they get the blame if their children turn out to be bad? No parent deserves all the credit or blame for their children's successes and failures in life, but the evidence indicates that our parents do affect us profoundly. In many ways, we even end up resembling our parents in more than just appearance.

The reason we turn out much like our parents, for better or worse, is that our families are such an important part of our socialization process. When we are born, our primary caregivers are almost always one or both of our parents. For several years we have more contact with them than with any other adults. Because this contact occurs in our most formative years, our parents' interaction with us and the messages they teach us can have a profound impact throughout our lives, as indicated by the stories of Sarah Patton Boyle and Lillian Smith presented earlier.

The ways in which our parents socialize us depend on many factors, two of the most important of which are our parents' social class and our own biological sex. Melvin Kohn (1965; 1977) Kohn, M. (1965). Social class and parent-child relationships: An interpretation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 68, 471–480; Kohn, M. (1977). *Class and conformity*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey.

Figure 3.6



*The family is perhaps the most important agent of socialization for children. Parents' values and behavior patterns profoundly influence those of their daughters and sons.*

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found that working-class and middle-class parents tend to socialize their children very differently. Kohn reasoned that working-class parents tend to hold factory and other jobs in which they have little autonomy and instead are told what to do and how to do it. In such jobs, obedience is an important value, lest the workers be punished for not doing their jobs correctly. Working-class parents, Kohn thought, should thus emphasize obedience and respect for authority as they raise their children, and they should favor spanking as a primary way of disciplining their kids when they disobey. In contrast, middle-class parents tend to hold white-collar jobs where autonomy and independent judgment are valued and workers get ahead by being creative. These parents should emphasize independence as they raise their children and should be less likely than working-class parents to spank their kids when they disobey.

## Sociology Making a Difference

### Understanding Racial Socialization

In a society that is still racially prejudiced, African American parents continue to find it necessary to teach their children about African American culture and to prepare them for the bias and discrimination they can expect to encounter. Scholars in sociology and other disciplines have studied this process of *racial socialization*. One of their most interesting findings is that African American parents differ in the degree of racial socialization they practice: some parents emphasize African American identity and racial prejudice to a considerable degree, while other parents mention these topics to their children only minimally. The reasons for these differences have remained unclear.

Sociologist Jason E. Shelton (2008) analyzed data from a national random sample of African Americans to determine these reasons, in what he called “one of the most comprehensive analyses to date of racial socialization strategies among African Americans” (p. 237). Among other questions, respondents were asked whether “in raising your children, have you done or told them things to help them know what it means to be Black.” They were also asked whether “there are any other things you’ve done or told your children to help them know how to get along with White people.”

In his major results, Shelton found that respondents were more likely to practice racial socialization if they were older, female, and living outside the South; if they perceived that racial discrimination was a growing problem and were members of civil rights and other organizations aimed at helping African Americans; and if they had higher incomes.

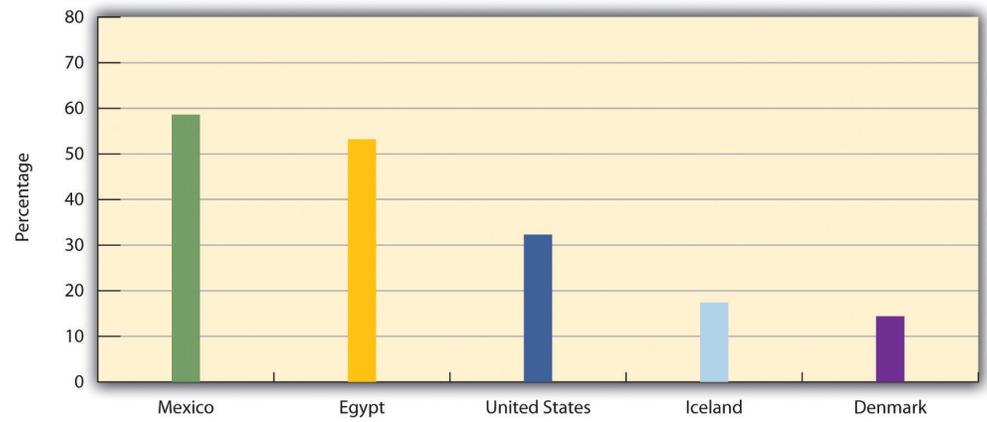
These results led Shelton to conclude that “African Americans are not a culturally monolithic group,” as they differ in “the parental lessons they impart to their children about race relations” (p. 253). Further, the parents who do practice racial socialization “do so in order to demystify and empower their offspring to seize opportunities in the larger society” (p. 253).

Shelton's study helps us to understand the factors accounting for differences in racial socialization by African American parents, and it also helps us understand that the parents who do attempt to make their children aware of U.S. race relations are merely trying, as most parents do, to help their children get ahead in life. By increasing our understanding of these matters, Shelton's research has helped make a difference.

If parents' social class influences how they raise their children, it is also true that the sex of their children affects how they are socialized by their parents. Many studies find that parents raise their daughters and sons quite differently as they interact with them from birth. We will explore this further in [Chapter 8 "Gender and Gender Inequality"](#), but suffice it to say here that parents help their girls learn how to act and think "like girls," and they help their boys learn how to act and think "like boys." That is, they help their daughters and sons learn their gender (Wood, 2009). Wood, J. T. (2009). *Gendered lives: Communication, gender, and culture*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. For example, they are gentler with their daughters and rougher with their sons. They give their girls dolls to play with, and their sons guns. Girls may be made of "sugar and spice and everything nice" and boys something quite different, but their parents help them greatly, for better or worse, to turn out that way. To the extent this is true, our gender stems much more from socialization than from biological differences between the sexes, or so most sociologists probably assume. To return to a question posed earlier, if Gilligan is right that boys and girls reach moral judgments differently, socialization matters more than biology for how they reach these judgments.

As the "Learning From Other Societies" box illustrates, various cultures socialize their children differently. We can also examine cross-cultural variation in socialization with data from the World Values Survey, which was administered to almost six dozen nations. [Figure 3.7 "Percentage Believing That Obedience Is Especially Important for a Child to Learn"](#) shows the percentage of people in several countries who think it is "especially important for children to learn obedience at home." Here we see some striking differences in the value placed on obedience, with the United States falling somewhat in between the nations in the figure.

Figure 3.7 *Percentage Believing That Obedience Is Especially Important for a Child to Learn*



Source: Data from World Values Survey, 2002.

## Learning From Other Societies

### Children and Socialization in Japan

This chapter ends with the observation that American children need to be socialized with certain values in order for our society to be able to address many of the social issues, including hate crimes and violence against women, facing it. As we consider the socialization of American children, the experience of Japan offers a valuable lesson.

Recall from [Chapter 2 "Culture and Society"](#) that Japan's culture emphasizes harmony, cooperation, and respect for authority in Japan's culture. Socialization in Japan is highly oriented toward the teaching of the values just listed, with much of it stressing the importance of belonging to a group and dependence, instead of individual autonomy and independence. This is especially true in Japanese schools, which, as two sociologists write, "stress the similarity of all children, and the importance of the group" (Schneider & Silverman, 2010, p. 24). Schneider, L., & Silverman, A. (2010). *Global sociology: Introducing five contemporary societies*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. Let's see how this happens (Hendry, 1987; Schwalb & Schwalb, 1996). Hendry, J. (1987). *Understanding Japanese society*. London, England: Croom Helm; Schwalb, D. W., & Schwalb, B. J. (Eds.). (1996). *Japanese childrearing: Two generations of scholarship*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

From the time they begin school, Japanese children learn to value their membership in their homeroom, or *kumi*, and they spend several years in the same *kumi*. Each *kumi* treats its classroom as a "home away from home," as the children arrange the classroom furniture, bring in plants and other things from their own homes, and clean the classroom every day. At recess one *kumi* will play against another. In an interesting difference from standard practice in the United States, a *kumi* in junior high school will stay in its classroom while the teachers for, say, math and social science move from one classroom to another. In the United States, of course, the opposite is true: teachers stay in their classrooms, and students move from one room to another.

Other practices in Japanese schools further the learning of Japanese values. Young schoolchildren wear the same uniforms. Japanese teachers use constant drills to teach them how to bow, and they have the children repeatedly stand up and sit down as a group. These practices help students learn respect for

authority and help to enhance the sense of group belonging that the *kumi* represents. Whereas teachers in the United States routinely call on individual students to answer a question, Japanese teachers rarely do this. Rather than competing with each other for a good grade, Japanese schoolchildren are evaluated according to the performance of the *kumi* as a whole. Because decision making within the *kumi* is done by consensus, the children learn the need to compromise and to respect each other's feelings.

Because the members of a *kumi* spend so much time together for so many years, they develop extremely close friendships and think of themselves more as members of the *kumi* than as individuals. They become very loyal to the *kumi* and put its interests above their own individual interests. In these and other ways, socialization in Japanese schools helps the children and adolescents there learn the Japanese values of harmony, group loyalty, and respect for authority. If American children learned these values to a greater degree, it would be easier to address violence and other issues facing the United States.

## Schools

Schools socialize children by teaching them their formal curriculum but also a **hidden curriculum**<sup>11</sup>. The formal curriculum is the “three Rs”: reading, writing, and arithmetic. But there is also a *hidden curriculum* that schools impart, and that is the cultural values of the society in which the schools are found.

To help you understand the hidden curriculum, pretend you could wave a magic wand and start your own society. Because you would probably want children to grow up loving their country and respecting your authority, you realize their schooling needs to help them grow up this way. What would you do in the schools to make sure this happens? Write a few ideas down on a separate sheet of paper.

Here is a list you might have written. First, because you want children to grow up respecting your authority, it is important for them to respect authority in general. You would thus have them sit in rows and learn from kindergarten on that they should do whatever their teacher and principal tell them. Second, you would make sure that their history lessons emphasize only positive things about the country's past. Of course, because you just invented this country with a magic wand, it has no past, so you make it up. Naturally, you want to pretend that the country had a great past—that it was a land that promised freedom and opportunity to people moving

11. The beliefs and values that children learn in school.

to it from poor, oppressed countries overseas, for example, and that many people indeed were able to find this opportunity and become quite successful.

Third, you would probably want schoolchildren to learn songs that extolled your country's virtues. At a minimum, these songs would talk about the freedom in your country and about its natural beauty. Ideally, children would sing these songs every day, or at least once or twice a week. After several years of coming to school and learning to obey their teachers and principal, of learning about how great their country was in the past, and of singing songs praising their country, you would have gone a long way toward socializing the children in your society to love their country and to respect your authority.

Now this has been magic wand time, but weren't you raised (assuming you grew up in the United States) in a society that sounds suspiciously like this one? Wasn't your schooling eerily similar to the type just described? No one deliberately went out to brainwash you once you started kindergarten, of course, but the processes and consequences of your early schooling were still quite similar to the more conspiratorial type just described. There is not necessarily anything wrong with that, but it does illustrate, for better or worse, that schools are an important agent of socialization. As the "Learning From Other Societies" box illustrated, this is especially true in Japan, where schooling helps instill the traditional Japanese values of harmony, group loyalty, and respect for authority.

Besides the values and beliefs just discussed, schools also teach us through their tests and grading to be competitive. Implicitly, they teach us that failure—in this case poor grades—stems from not studying hard enough and, more generally, from not trying hard enough (Booher-Jennings, 2008; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Booher-Jennings, J. (2008). Learning to label: Socialisation, gender, and the hidden curriculum of high-stakes testing. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29, 149–160; Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reforms and the contradictions of economic life*. New York, NY: Basic Books. This process reinforces the blaming-the-victim ideology discussed in the previous chapters. Again, no one conspires for this to happen, but it happens nonetheless. Schools are also a significant source of gender socialization, as even in this modern day, teachers and curriculum send out various messages that reinforce the qualities traditionally ascribed to females and males, and students engage in recess and other extracurricular activities that do the same thing (Booher-Jennings, 2008; Thorne, 1993). Booher-Jennings, J. (2008). Learning to label: Socialisation, gender, and the hidden curriculum of high-stakes testing. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29, 149–160; Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

## Peers

When you were a 16-year-old, how many times did you complain to your parent(s), “All of my friends are [doing so and so]. Why can’t I? It isn’t fair!” As this all-too-common example indicates, our friends play a very important role in our lives. This is especially true during adolescence, when peers influence our tastes in music, clothes, and so many other aspects of our lives, as the now common image of the teenager always on a cell phone reminds us. But friends are important during other parts of the life course as well. We rely on them for fun, for emotional comfort and support, and for companionship.

That is the upside of friendships. The downside is called *peer pressure*, with which you are undoubtedly familiar. Suppose it is Friday night and you are studying for a big exam on Monday. Your friends come by and ask you to go with them to get a pizza and the beverage of your choice. You would probably agree to go with them, partly because you really dislike studying on a Friday night, but also because there is at least some subtle pressure on you to do so. As this example indicates, our friends can influence us in many ways. During adolescence, their interests can affect our own interests in film, music, and other aspects of popular culture. More ominously, adolescent peer influences have been implicated in underage drinking, drug use, delinquency, and hate crimes, such as the killing of Charlie Howard, recounted at the beginning of this chapter (Agnew, 2007) Agnew, R. (2007). *Pressured into crime: An overview of general strain theory*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (see [Chapter 5 "Deviance, Crime, and Social Control"](#)).

Figure 3.8



Our peers also help socialize us and may even induce us to violate social norms.

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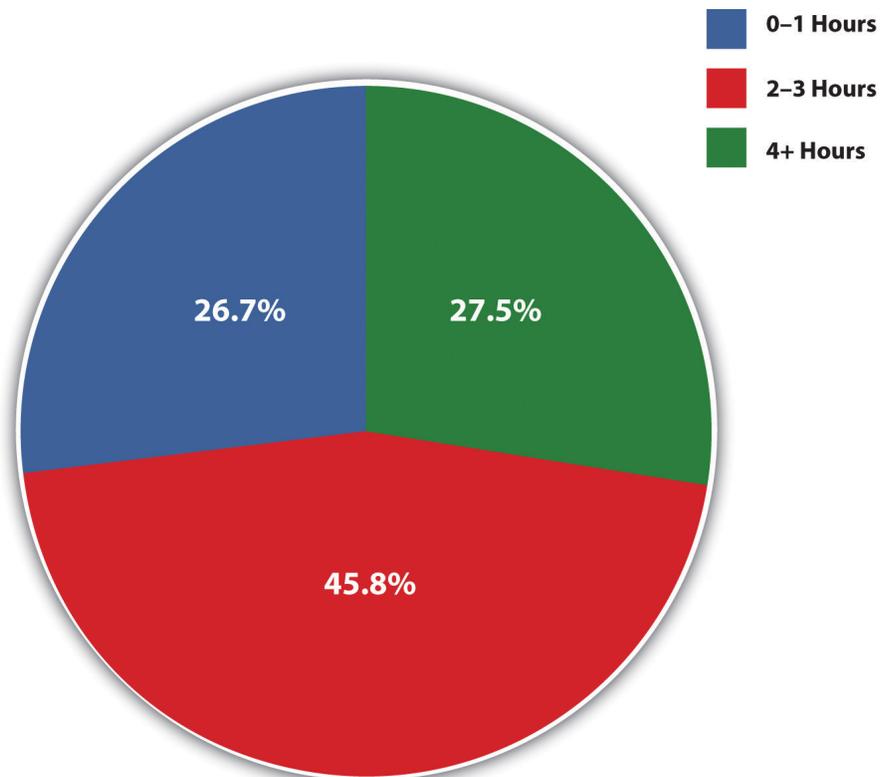
After we reach our 20s and 30s, our peers become less important in our lives, especially if we get married. Yet even then our peers do not lose all their importance, as married couples with young children still manage to get out with friends now and then. Scholars have also begun to emphasize the importance of friendships with coworkers for emotional and practical support and for our continuing socialization (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Marks, 1994). Elsesser, K., & Peplau, L. A. (2006). The glass partition: Obstacles to cross-sex friendships at work. *Human Relations*, 59, 1077–1100; Marks, S. R. (1994). Intimacy in the public realm: The case of co-workers. *Social Forces*, 72, 843–858.

## The Mass Media

The mass media are another agent of socialization. Television shows, movies, popular music, magazines, Web sites, and other aspects of the mass media influence our political views; our tastes in popular culture; our views of women, people of color, and gays; and many other beliefs and practices.

In an ongoing controversy, the mass media are often blamed for youth violence and many other of our society's ills. The average child sees thousands of acts of violence on television and in the movies before reaching young adulthood. Rap lyrics often seemingly extol very ugly violence, including violence against women. Commercials can greatly influence our choice of soda, shoes, and countless other products. The mass media also reinforce racial and gender stereotypes, including the belief that women are sex objects and suitable targets of male violence. In the General Social Survey (GSS), about 28% of respondents said that they watch four or more hours of television every day, while another 46% watch 2-3 hours daily (see [Figure 3.9 "Average Number of Hours of Television Watched Daily"](#)). The mass media certainly are an important source of socialization unimaginable a half-century ago.

Figure 3.9 Average Number of Hours of Television Watched Daily



Source: Data from General Social Survey, 2008.

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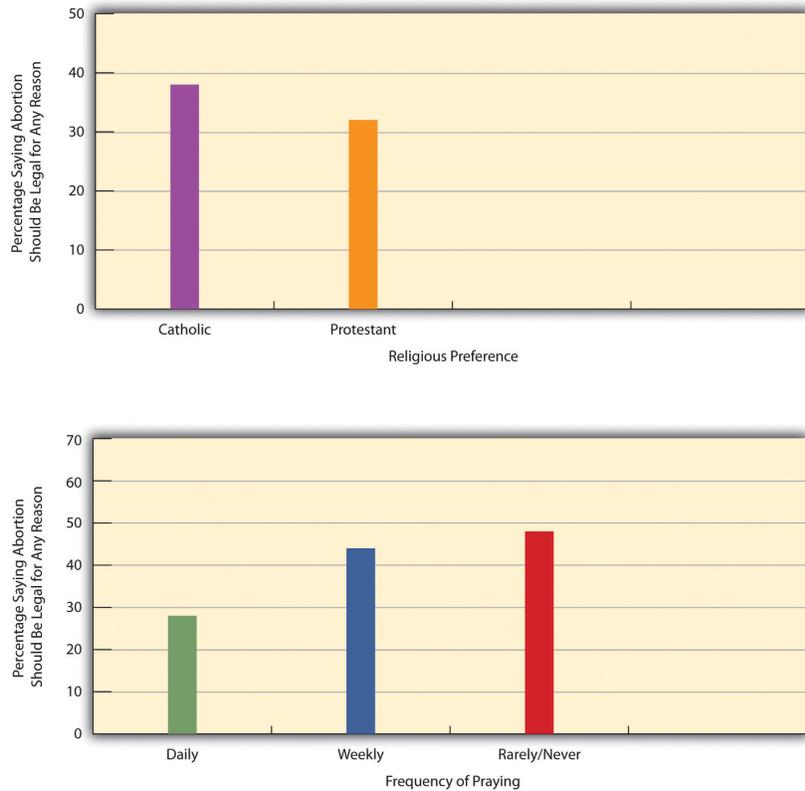
As the mass media socialize children, adolescents, and even adults, a key question is the extent to which media violence causes violence in our society (Surette, 2011). Surette, R. (2011). *Media, crime, and criminal justice: Images, realities, and policies* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. Studies consistently uncover a strong correlation between watching violent television shows and movies and committing violence. However, this does not necessarily mean that watching the violence actually causes violent behavior: perhaps people watch violence because they are already interested in it and perhaps even committing it. Scholars continue to debate the effect of media violence on youth violence. In a free society, this question is especially important, as the belief in this effect has prompted calls for monitoring the media and the banning of certain acts of violence. Civil libertarians argue that such calls smack of censorship that violates the First Amendment to the Constitution, while others argue that they fall within the First Amendment and would make for a safer society. Certainly the concern and debate over mass media violence will continue for years to come.

### Religion

One final agent of socialization is religion, discussed further in [Chapter 12 "Education and Religion"](#). Although religion is arguably less important in people's lives now than it was a few generations ago, it still continues to exert considerable influence on our beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Here we should distinguish between *religious preference* (e.g., Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish) and *religiosity* (e.g., how often people pray or attend religious services). Both these aspects of religion can affect your values and beliefs on religious and nonreligious issues alike, but their particular effects vary from issue to issue. To illustrate this, consider the emotionally charged issue of abortion. People hold very strong views on abortion, and many of their views stem from their religious beliefs. Yet which aspect of religion matters the most, religious preference or religiosity? General Social Survey data help us answer this question ([Figure 3.10 "Religious Preference, Religiosity, and Belief That Abortion Should Be Legal for Any Reason"](#)). It turns out that religious preference, if we limit it for the sake of this discussion to Catholics versus Protestants, does not matter at all: Catholics and Protestants in the GSS exhibit roughly equal beliefs on the abortion issue, as about one-third of each group thinks abortion should be allowed for any reason. (The slight difference shown in the table is not statistically significant.) However, religiosity matters a lot: GSS respondents who pray daily are only about half as likely as those who rarely or never pray to think abortion should be allowed.

Figure 3.10 Religious Preference, Religiosity, and Belief That Abortion Should Be Legal for Any Reason



Source: Data from General Social Survey, 2008.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The ways in which parents socialize children depend in part on the parents' social class and on their child's biological sex.
- Schools socialize children by teaching them both the formal curriculum and a hidden curriculum.
- Peers are an important source of emotional support and companionship, but peer pressure can induce individuals to behave in ways they might ordinarily regard as wrong.
- The mass media are another important agent of socialization, and scholars debate the effect the media have on violence in society.
- In considering the effects of religion on socialization, we need to distinguish between religious preference and religiosity.

**FOR YOUR REVIEW**

1. Describe one important value or attitude you have that is the result of socialization by your parent(s).
2. Do you agree that there is a hidden curriculum in secondary schools? Explain your answer.
3. Briefly describe one example of how peers influenced you or someone you know in a way that you now regard as negative.

### 3.4 Resocialization and Total Institutions

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss what is meant by resocialization.
2. List any two characteristics of a total institution.

Some people live in settings where their lives are so controlled that their values and beliefs change drastically. This change is so drastic, in fact, that these people are in effect resocialized. Such **resocialization**<sup>12</sup> occurs in what Erving Goffman (1961) called **total institutions**<sup>13</sup>. As their name implies, these institutions have total control over the lives of the people who live in them.

Several types of total institutions exist: mental asylums, Nazi concentration camps, military boot camps, convents, and monasteries. Some scholars would also say that criminal prisons are total institutions, as they exhibit some of the same processes found in the other types. As this list implies, total institutions can be used for good or bad purposes. Resocialization is not necessarily good or bad in and of itself; what is more important is the ends to which it is put.

Whether we are talking about total institutions that are good or bad, they all share certain processes and procedures that make them total institutions. The most important characteristic is that they have total control over the lives of their inmates, patients, or whatever name is given to the people who live in them. These residents, to use a generic term, have no freedom or autonomy. They are told what to do and when to do it, and punishment for rule infraction can be quite severe. In Nazi concentration camps, punishment was torture or death; in religious cloisters, it may be banishment; in boot camp, it may be a court-martial; in mental asylums, it may be solitary confinement in a straitjacket.

Figure 3.11



A boot camp is an example of a total institution.

Source: Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy, [http://www.navy.mil/view\\_single.asp?id=47674](http://www.navy.mil/view_single.asp?id=47674).

12. A dramatic change in a person's beliefs, values, and behavior, often occurring in total institutions.
13. Institutions that have total control over their residents' lives.

Second, total institutions take away the identity of their residents in an effort to weaken their self-identity and ensure conformity to the institutions' rules. Their residents typically wear uniforms and often have their heads shaved and, depending on the institution, may be known by a number or a new name. These procedures make everyone look more similar to each other than they otherwise would and help to weaken the residents' self-identity. Whether these outcomes are good or bad depends again on which total institution we have in mind.

Third, total institutions subject their residents to harsh treatment and, quite often, abuse, although the nature of this abuse, and whether it occurs at all, obviously depends on which total institution we have in mind. Nazis starved concentration camp inmates, tortured them, stripped them naked, conducted hideous experiments on them, and, of course, exterminated millions (Gigliotti & Lang, 2005). Gigliotti, S., & Lang, B. (Eds.). (2005). *The Holocaust: A reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Literature on mental asylums is filled with examples of abuses of the patients living there (Goffman, 1961). Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books. Drill sergeants have also been known for harshly treating new recruits: some observers defend this practice as necessary for military discipline and readiness, while others consider it to be unjustified abuse.

Resocialization is often accompanied via a **degradation ceremony**<sup>14</sup>, an encounter in which a total institution's resident is humiliated, often in front of the institution's other residents or officials (Goffman, 1961). Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books. A drill sergeant may call a physically unconditioned male recruit a "girl" or "lady" and question his manhood in front of other recruits. In a mental asylum or prison, an inmate may be stripped naked and checked in their private areas for lice and other vermin. Shaving the heads of new military recruits or prison inmates is another example of a degradation ceremony.

Resocialization also occurs in groups that are not institutional settings. Alcoholics Anonymous is one such group, as it tries to change the alcoholics' value system by having them internalize several principles about how to live one's life. The goal here, of course, is to have the alcoholic stop drinking and to continue to refrain from drinking (Davis & Jansen, 1998). Davis, D. R., & Jansen, G. G. (1998). Making meaning of Alcoholics Anonymous for social workers: Myths, metaphors, and realities. *Social Work*, 43, 169-182. Some religious cults also resocialize their members and continue to spark much controversy in today's society (Cowan & Bromley, 2008). Cowan, D. E., & Bromley, D. G. (2008). *Cults and new religions: A brief history*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

14. An encounter designed to humiliate an individual.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Resocialization involves far-reaching changes in an individual's values, beliefs, and behavior.
- Total institutions exert total control over the lives of their residents. They typically try to eliminate the individual identity of their residents and often subject them to harsh treatment.

### FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you know anyone who has spent time in a total institution of any kind? If so, describe how this person's experience there changed the person to the best of your knowledge.

## 3.5 Social Interaction

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe what is meant by dramaturgy and by impression management.
2. Distinguish between role and status.
3. Provide one example of role conflict or role strain.
4. Explain why new patterns of socialization might help address certain social ills in American society.

If socialization results from our social interaction with others, it is also true that we learn how to interact from our socialization. We have seen many examples of this process in this and previous chapters. Among other things, we learn how far apart to stand when talking to someone else, we learn to enjoy kissing, we learn how to stand and behave in an elevator, and we learn to shake hands when greeting someone.

### Dramaturgy and Impression Management

From a sociological standpoint, much of our social interaction can be understood by likening it to a performance in a play. As with so many things, Shakespeare said it best when he wrote,

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their entrances;

And one man in his time plays many parts. (As You Like It, act 2, scene 7)

From this perspective, each individual has many parts or roles to play in society, and many of these roles specify how we should interact in any given situation. These roles exist before we are born, and they continue long after we die. The culture of society is thus similar to the script of a play. Just as actors in a play learn

what lines to say, where to stand on the stage, how to position their bodies, and so many other things, so do we learn as members of society the roles that specify how we should interact.

This fundamental metaphor was developed and popularized by sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday. in what he called a **dramaturgical approach**<sup>15</sup>. By this he meant that we can understand social interaction as if it were a theatrical performance. People who interact are actors on a stage, the things they say and do are equivalent to the parts actors play, and the people who observe their interaction are equivalent to the audience at a play.

Beyond these aspects of his theatrical analogy, Goffman also stressed that the *presentation of self* guides social interaction just as it guides behavior in a play. Actors in a play, he wrote, aim to act properly, which at a minimum means they need to say their lines correctly and in other ways carry out their parts as they were written. They try to convey the impression of their character the playwright had in mind when the play was written and the director has in mind when the play is presented.

Such **impression management**<sup>16</sup>, Goffman wrote, also guides social interaction in everyday life. When people interact, they routinely try to convey a positive impression of themselves to the people with whom they interact. Our behavior in a job interview differs dramatically (pun intended) from our behavior at a party. The key dimension of social interaction, then, involves trying to manage the impressions we convey to the people with whom we interact. We usually do our best, consciously or unconsciously, to manage the impressions we convey to others and so to evoke from them reactions that will please us.

Goffman wrote about other aspects of social interaction that affect our efforts to manage these impressions. Again using his dramaturgical metaphor, he said that some interaction occurs in the “frontstage,” or front region, while other interaction occurs in the “backstage,” or back region. In a play, of course, the frontstage is what the audience sees and is obviously the location in which the actors are performing their lines. Backstage, they can do whatever they want, and the audience will have no idea of what they are doing (as long as they are quiet). Much of our everyday interaction is on the frontstage, where an audience can see everything we do and hear everything we say. But we also spend a lot of time on the backstage, by

Figure 3.12



15. Erving Goffman’s metaphor for understanding social interaction.

16. Erving Goffman’s term for the process whereby individuals who are interacting try to convey a favorable impression of themselves.

ourselves, when we can do and say things in private (such as singing in the shower) that we would not dare do or say in public.

*Social interaction involves impression management. How a student behaves with a professor is probably very different from how the same student behaves when out on the town with friends.*

How we dress is also a form of impression management. You are the same person regardless of what clothes you wear, but if you dress for a job interview as you would dress for a party (to use our earlier example), the person interviewing you would get an impression you might not want to be conveying. If you showed up for a medical visit and your physician were wearing a bathing suit, wouldn't you feel just a bit uneasy?

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People convey impressions not only through how they act and dress but also through how they arrange the appearance of the settings in which they interact. Consider the medical visit just mentioned. A physician tries to convey an impression of a serious, knowledgeable professional not only by how she or he dresses but also by how the waiting room looks. Usually the room is well furnished with clean, comfortable chairs and such magazines as *People*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. What impression would be conveyed if the physician's office looked shabby and even had a bad odor? What if it had *Playboy* in it? How long would you stay in that office?

Life is filled with impression management. Compare the decor of your favorite fast-food restaurant with that of a very expensive restaurant with which you might be familiar. Compare the appearance, dress, and demeanor of the servers and other personnel in the two establishments. The expensive restaurant is trying to convey an image that the food will be wonderful and that the time you spend there will be memorable and well worth the money. The fast-food restaurant is trying to convey just the opposite impression. In fact, if it looked too fancy, you would probably think it was too expensive.

Some people go to great efforts to manage the impressions they convey. You have probably done so in a job interview or on a date. In New York City, the capital of book publishing, editors of large publishing companies and "superagents" for authors are very conscious of the impressions they convey, because much of the publishing industry depends on gossip, impressions, and the development of rapport. Editors and agents often dine together in one of a few very expensive "power" restaurants, where their presence is certain to be noted. Publishers or senior editors who dine at these restaurants will eat only with celebrity authors, other senior editors or publishers, or important agents. Such agents rarely dine with junior editors, who are only "allowed" to eat with junior agents. To eat with

someone “beneath” your standing would convey the wrong impression (Arnold, 1998). Arnold, M. (1998, June 11). Art of foreplay at the table. *The New York Times*, p. B3.

As these examples indicate, social reality is to a large extent socially constructed. It is what we make of it, and the individuals who interact help construct the reality of the situation in which they interact. Sociologists refer to this process as the **social construction of reality**<sup>17</sup> (Berger & Luckmann, 1963). Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1963). *The social construction of reality*. New York, NY: Doubleday. Although we usually come into a situation with shared understandings of what is about to happen, as the interaction proceeds the actors continue to define the situation and thus to construct its reality. This view lies at the heart of the symbolic interactionist perspective discussed in Chapter 1 "Sociology and the Sociological Perspective".

## Roles and Statuses

The related concepts of **role**<sup>18</sup> and **status**<sup>19</sup> help us further understand social interaction. *Status* has many meanings in the dictionary and also within sociology, but for now we will define it as the position that someone occupies in society. This position is often a job title, but many other types of positions exist: parent, sibling, relative, friend, and so forth. Any one individual often occupies several different statuses at the same time, and someone can simultaneously be a banker, Girl Scout troop leader, mother, school board member, volunteer at a homeless shelter, and wife. This someone would be very busy! We call all the positions an individual occupies that person’s **status set**<sup>20</sup>.

17. The process by which individuals understand and create reality through their interaction with other individuals.
18. Behavior expected of an individual in a particular status.
19. A position a person occupies in society, such as parent, sibling, or teacher.
20. All the statuses that an individual holds.

Sociologists often speak of three kinds of statuses. The first type is **ascribed status**<sup>21</sup>, which is the status that someone is born with and has no control over. There are relatively few ascribed statuses; the most common ones are our biological sex, race, and parents' social class and religious affiliation. The second kind of status is called **achieved status**<sup>22</sup>, which, as the name implies, is a status you achieve, at some point after birth, sometimes through your own efforts and sometimes because good or bad luck befalls you. All the statuses in the example of the woman in the previous paragraph would be achieved statuses. The third type of status is called a **master status**<sup>23</sup>. This is a status that is so important that it overrides other statuses you may hold. A physical disability often becomes a master status, because if you are confined to a wheelchair, to take one type of disability, this confinement becomes more important than the other statuses you have. For similar reasons, gender, race, and sexual orientation may also be considered master statuses, as these statuses often subject women, people of color, and gays and lesbians, respectively, to discrimination and other problems, no matter what other statuses they may have.

Figure 3.13



*Any individual occupies several statuses and thus has several roles. Many employees are also parents and must often juggle the expectations their employers have of them with the needs of their children.*

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Whatever its type, every status is accompanied by a *role*, which is the behavior expected of someone—and in fact *everyone*—with a certain status. You and most other people reading this book are students. Despite all the other differences among you, you have at least this one status in common. As such, there is a role expected of you as a student (at least by your professors): this role includes coming to class regularly, doing all the reading assigned from this textbook, and studying the best you can for exams.

Because roles are the behavior expected of people in various statuses, they help us interact because we are familiar with the roles in the first place. Suppose you are shopping in a department store. Your status is a shopper, and the role expected of you as a shopper—and of all shoppers—involves looking quietly at various items in the store, taking the ones you want to purchase to a checkout line, and paying for them. The person who takes your money is occupying another status in the store that we call a cashier. The role expected of that cashier—and of all cashiers not only in that store but in every other store—is to accept your payment in a businesslike way and put your items in a bag.

21. A status that a person is born with and has no control over, such as biological sex or race.
22. A status that a person gains voluntarily, such as a job title.
23. A status such as race, gender, or disability that overrides a person's other statuses.

This is all very automatic, and we often perform our roles without thinking about them. That is why social interaction is possible: if we always had to think about our roles before we performed them, social interaction would be slow, tedious, and fraught with error. (Analogously, if actors in a play always had to read the script before performing their lines, as an understudy sometimes does, the play would be slow and stilted.) It is when people violate their roles that the importance of roles is thrown into sharp relief. Suppose you were shopping in that department store just mentioned, and while you were in the checkout line the cashier asked you how your sex life has been! Now, you might expect such an intimate question from a very close friend, because discussions of intimate matters are part of the roles close friends play, but you would definitely *not* expect it from a cashier you do not know.

As this example suggests, the social construction of reality rests on shared assumptions, including our understanding of the roles expected of people in a given encounter, that are easily violated if one has the nerve to do so. If they are violated, social order might well break down, as you would quickly find if you dared to ask your cashier how her or his sex life has been, or if two people sitting in the front of a large lecture hall started kissing each other passionately. Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1967) Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press. argued that unexpected events like these underscore how fragile social order is and remind us that people are constantly constructing the social reality of the situations in which they find themselves. To illustrate his point, he had his students perform a series of experiments, including acting like a stranger in their parents' home. Not surprisingly, their parents quickly became flustered and wondered what college was doing to their daughters and sons!

### **Roles and Personalities**

As we have just seen, roles help us interact and help make social order possible. But they even can shape our personalities. The idea here is that if we assume a new role, the expectations of that role can change how we interact with others and the way we even think about ourselves. In short, roles can change our personalities.

A telling example of this effect comes from the story of a criminal justice professor from Florida named George Kirkham. In his classes, Kirkham would be critical of the harshness with which police treated suspects and other citizens. One day, some police officers in one of his classes said Kirkham could not begin to understand what it was like being a police officer, and they challenged him to become one. He took up the challenge by gaining admission to a police academy and going through the regular training program for all recruits. Kirkham (1984) Kirkham, G. L. (1984). A professor's "street lessons." In R. G. Culbertson (Ed.), *"Order Under Law": Readings in Criminal Justice* (pp. 77–89). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. later recounted what happened on his first few days on the job. In one episode, he and his veteran partner went into a bar where an intoxicated patron had been causing trouble. Kirkham politely asked the patron to go with him outside. Evidently surprised by this new police officer's politeness, the man instead swung at Kirkham and landed a blow. Kirkham could not believe this happened and was forced to subdue his assailant. In another episode, Kirkham and his partner were checking out the drivers of a double-parked car. An ugly crowd soon gathered and began making threats. Alarmed, Kirkham opened up his car's trunk and pulled out a shotgun to keep the crowd away. In recounting this episode, Kirkham wrote that as a professor he quickly would have condemned the police officer he had now become. In a few short days, he had turned from a polite, kind professor into a gruff, angry police officer. His role had changed and, along with it, his personality.

Figure 3.14



*Roles can shape personalities. When individuals become police officers, the nature of their job can prompt them to act and think in a more authoritarian manner.*

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## Role Problems

Roles can help our interactions run smoothly and automatically and, for better or worse, shape our personalities, but they can also cause various kinds of problems. One such problem is **role conflict**<sup>24</sup>, which occurs when the roles of our many statuses conflict with each other. For example, say you are a student and also a parent. Your 3-year-old child gets sick. You now have a conflict between your role as a parent and your role as a student. To perform your role as a parent, you should stay home with your sick child. To perform your role as a student, you should go to your classes and take the big exam that had been scheduled weeks ago. What do you do?

Obviously, you cannot perform both roles at the same time. To resolve role conflict, we ordinarily have to choose between one role or the other, which is often a

24. The problems arising when a person has to deal with competing demands on two or more roles that the person is expected to play.

difficult choice to make. In this example, if you take care of your child, you miss your classes and exam; if you go to your classes, you have to leave your child at home alone, an unacceptable and illegal option. Another way to resolve role conflict is to find some alternative that would meet the needs of your conflicting roles. In our sick child example, you might be able to find someone to watch your child until you can get back from classes. It is certainly desirable to find such alternatives, but, unfortunately, they are not always forthcoming. If role conflict becomes too frequent and severe, a final option is to leave one of your statuses altogether. In our example, if you find it too difficult to juggle your roles as parent and student, you could stop being a parent—hardly likely!—or, more likely, take time off from school until your child is older. Most of us in these circumstances would try our best to avoid having to do this.

Another role-related problem is called **role strain**<sup>25</sup>. Here you have one status, and a role associated with it, that is causing problems because of all the demands coming to you from people in other statuses with which your own status is involved. Suppose you were a high school principal. In your one role as a principal, you come into contact with people in several different statuses: teachers, students, custodial and support staff, the superintendent, school board members, the community as a whole, and the news media. These statuses may make competing demands on you in your one role as a principal. If your high school has a dress code, for example, the students may want you to abolish it, the teachers and superintendent may want you to keep it, and maybe the school board would agree with the students. As you try to please all of these competing factions, you certainly might experience some role strain!

A third type of role problem occurs when we occupy a status whose role demands a certain type of personality that differs from the one we actually have. Can you imagine a police officer who was afraid of guns? An athlete who was not competitive? Although most people avoid this type of role problem by not taking on a role to which their personality is ill suited, such problems occur nonetheless. For example, some people who dislike children and do not have the patience to be good parents end up being parents anyway. In another example, your author once knew a new professor who was woefully nervous lecturing in front of students. You might wonder why he became a professor in the first place, but he probably just loved the subject matter so much that he thought he would overcome his nervousness. He did not.

### Socialization Practices and Improving Society

This chapter began with a news story about the beating and killing of a gay man and proceeded with the stories of two women who grew up in the South when it was racially segregated. These stories illustrate the power of socialization, which can

25. The problems arising when a person performing a role has to deal with competing demands on that role.

have both good and bad consequences. Socialization into one's culture is necessary for any society to exist, and socialization is also necessary for any one individual to be "human" in the social sense of the term, as our discussion of feral children indicated. Yet socialization can also result in attitudes and behaviors that most of us would rightly condemn. Socialization created the homophobic mentality that led three teenagers to beat Charlie Howard and throw him into a river, and it also created the racist mentality that Sarah Patton Boyle and Lillian Smith described in their accounts of growing up in the South. We learn to be good, cooperative members of society, but some of us also learn to hate and to think that other kinds of people are inferior and perhaps even less than human.

For many of the social issues confronting the United States today—hate crimes, other crimes, violence against women, sexism, racism, and so forth—it might not be an exaggeration to say that new patterns of socialization are ultimately necessary if our society wants to be able to address these issues effectively. Parents of young children and adolescents bear a major responsibility for making sure our children do not learn to hate and commit harm to others, but so do our schools, mass media, and religious bodies. No nation is perfect, but nations like Japan have long been more successful than the United States in raising their children to be generous and cooperative. Their examples hold many good lessons for the United States to follow.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A dramaturgical approach likens social interaction to a dramatic production.
- Individuals ordinarily try to manage the impression they make when interacting with others. Social interaction can be understood as a series of attempts at impression management.
- Roles exist before we are born and will endure after we die and mightily affect individual behavior.
- Various kinds of role strains and problems often occur as individuals try to perform the roles expected of them from the many statuses they occupy.
- New socialization practices might be necessary to address many of the social ills facing the United States and other societies.

**FOR YOUR REVIEW**

1. Describe a recent example of how you tried to manage the impression you were conveying in a social interaction.
2. Describe a recent example of a role problem that you experienced and what you did, if anything, to reduce this problem.
3. If you were in charge of our society, what socialization practice would you most try to change to help improve our society? Explain your answer.

## **3.6 End-of-Chapter Material**

## Summary

1. Socialization is important for at least two reasons. First, it is the process by which people learn the culture of their society. Second, it is the process by which they become fully human in terms of behavior, emotions, and cognitive ability. The unfortunate examples of feral children reinforce the importance of socialization in these respects.
2. Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead both theorized about how the self develops through socialization. Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self recognized that we see ourselves when we interact with other people and through this process develop our self-image. Mead's concept of "taking the role of the other" stressed that children play at various roles and so learn what others expect of them.
3. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of personality development stressed the role of unconscious forces. Every individual is born with a selfish id and will achieve a normal personality if the individual's ego and superego develop properly. If the id, ego, and superego are in the wrong balance, the individual may engage in antisocial or other mentally disordered behavior.
4. Jean Piaget theorized that people go through several stages of cognitive development, while Lawrence Kohlberg said the same for moral development. Carol Gilligan argued that boys and girls engage in different types of moral reasoning, with the boys' type resting on formal rules and the girls' resting more on social relationships.
5. Erik Erikson discussed identity development throughout the life span while calling attention to adolescence as a stage in which many individuals experience an identity crisis.
6. Several agents of socialization exist. The most important one is arguably the family, as parents socialize their children in any number of ways; children end up resembling their parents not only biologically but also sociologically. Schools, peers, the mass media, and, to some extent, religion all also play important roles in socializing not only children but also older individuals.
7. Resocialization involves a dramatic change in an individual's values, beliefs, and behavior. It is often the goal of total institutions, such as military boot camp, convents and monasteries, mental institutions, and prisons, as it was with the Nazi death camps. Total institutions often exercise arbitrary power and in many ways try to achieve total control over the individual and remove their sense of individual identity.
8. Erving Goffman used a theatrical metaphor called dramaturgy to understand social interaction, which he likened to behavior on a stage in a play. More generally, many sociologists stress the concept of roles in social interaction. Although we usually play our roles automatically, social order occasionally breaks down when people don't play their roles. This breakdown illustrates the fragility of social order.
9. Although roles help us interact, they can also lead to problems such as role conflict and role strain. In another problem, some individuals may be expected to carry out a role that demands a personality they do not have.

### USING SOCIOLOGY

Imagine that you are sitting with two friends in a dining hall or cafeteria on your campus. An openly gay student you know walks by on his way out the door and you wave to him. As he exits the room, you hear someone at a table behind you utter an antigay remark. Angered by this slur, you feel that you need to say something, but you also are not ordinarily the type of person to raise a ruckus. Do you decide to do or say something, or do you remain silent? Explain your answer.