

Socialization

Nothing could have gone more wrong for me on my first day [as a student] at Penn State. I didn't know who Joe Paterno [the school's long-time, championship-winning football coach] is or why the library is named after him. I hadn't bought any of my books yet because I thought they would be passed out to me as was customary in high school, and, worst of all, I had never really read a map on my own before so finding the classrooms in the huge main campus was really hard. Avoid looking like an idiot on your first day of higher education by following a few pieces of advice, all of which revolve around the two most important things I learned about being a college student: stay organized and make friends whenever possible. . . . Good luck on your first day!

—As a student, Mdmse. Amelie (2010) found that she was completely unprepared for the first day of college, so she now helps other students with the socialization process by providing Web tips on how to survive in college.

The white coat ceremony . . . was intended to herald our introduction into the [Harvard Medical School] community on our first day of medical school. While not the long coat of a physician or resident, the white coat signaled our medical affiliation and differentiated us from the civilian visitors and volunteers.

This was not an affiliation I was ready to claim as a first-year medical student. Over the course of the year, after taking courses in anatomy, pharmacology, physiology, genetics, and embryology, I was more deeply impressed by how little I knew than by how much I had



▲ For students attending college for the first time, the socialization process is complex and immediate. What socialization issues did you face during your first term in higher education?

learned. Yet every Monday in our Patient–Doctor course I found myself in my white coat interviewing still another patient.

Despite the uncertainty of my place in the medical world, my white coat ushered me into the foreign world of the patient–doctor dynamic. . . . These weekly interviews as part of our Patient–Doctor course were about learning the important questions, the right mannerisms, and the appropriate responses to our patients. Our instructors taught us to take a careful, methodical history, which I more or less skillfully replicated every week with a different patient. Although the goal of these weekly patient interactions was to discover a person’s experience with illness, these interviews were more about my learning process than about the patient’s story. . . .

When I interviewed patients, they saw my white coat. . . . The white coat masked my youth. It masked my inexperience. It masked my nervousness. Yet in the medical world my white coat did not offer the solace of anonymity but forced me to take on power that I was not ready to accept.

—Ellen Lerner Rothman, M.D. (1999: 2–3), describing the professional socialization process that she and most other medical students encounter in the early years of their training as they learn what is expected of them as doctors in training and how to communicate most effectively with patients

In this chapter

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- Socialization Through the Life Course
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Chapter Focus Question

How does socialization occur throughout our lives, including our college years?

What do the comments by Mdmse. Amelie and Dr. Ellen Lerner Rothman have in common? Sociologically speaking, their statements express concern about the socialization process and how we learn to adapt when we join a new social organization. Many of us experience stress when we take on new and seemingly unfamiliar roles and find that we must learn the appropriate norms regarding how persons in a specific role should think, act, and communicate with others.

Look around in your classes at the beginning of each semester, and you will probably see other students who are trying to find out what is going to be expected of them as a student in a particular course. What is the course going to cover? What are the instructor's requirements? How should students communicate with the instructor and other students in the class? Some information of this type is learned through formal instruction, such as in a classroom, but much of what we know about school is learned informally through our observations of other people, by listening to what they say when we are in their physical presence, or through interacting with them by cell phone, e-mail, or text messaging when we are apart. Sociologists use the term *socialization* to refer to both the formal and informal processes by which people learn a new role and find out how to be a part of a group or organization. As we shall see in this chapter, this process takes place throughout our life.

In this chapter, we examine the process of socialization and identify reasons why socialization is crucial to the well-being of individuals, groups, and societies. We discuss both sociological and social psychological theories of human development. We look at the dynamics of socialization—how it occurs and what shapes it. Throughout the chapter, we focus on positive and negative aspects of the socialization process, including the daily stresses that may be involved in this process. Before reading on, test your knowledge about socialization and the college experience by taking the quiz in the Sociology and Everyday Life box.

Why Is Socialization Important Around the Globe?

Socialization is the lifelong process of social interaction through which individuals acquire a

self-identity and the physical, mental, and social skills needed for survival in society. It is the essential link between the individual and society because it helps us to become aware of ourselves as a part of the larger groups and organizations of which we are a part. Socialization also helps us to learn how to communicate with other people and to have knowledge of how other people expect us to behave in a variety of social settings. Briefly stated, socialization enables us to develop our human potential and to learn the ways of thinking, talking, and acting that are necessary for social living.

Socialization is most crucial during childhood because it is essential for the individual's survival and for human development. The many people who met the early material and social needs of each of us were central to our establishing our own identity. During the first three years of our life, we begin to develop both a unique identity and the ability to manipulate things and to walk. We acquire sophisticated cognitive tools for thinking and for analyzing a wide variety of situations, and we learn effective communication skills. In the process, we begin a socialization process that takes place throughout our lives and through which we also have an effect on other people who watch us.

Socialization is also essential for the survival and stability of society. Members of a society must be socialized to support and maintain the existing social structure. From a functionalist perspective, individual conformity to existing norms is not taken for granted; rather, basic individual needs and desires must be balanced against the needs of the social structure. The socialization process is most effective when people conform to the norms of society because they believe that doing so is the best course of action. Socialization enables a society to "reproduce" itself by passing on its culture from one generation to the next.

Although the techniques used to teach newcomers the beliefs, values, and rules of behavior are somewhat similar in many nations, the *content* of socialization differs greatly from society to society. How people walk, talk, eat, make love, and wage war are all functions of the culture in which they are raised. At the same time, we are also influenced by our exposure to subcultures of class, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. In addition, each of us has unique experiences in our family and friendship



sociology and everyday life

How Much Do You Know About Socialization and the College Experience?

True False

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. Professors are the primary agents of socialization for college students. |
| T | F | 2. In recent studies, few students report that they spend time studying with other students. |
| T | F | 3. Many students find that taking college courses is stressful because it is an abrupt change from high school. |
| T | F | 4. Law and medical students often report that they experience a high level of academic pressure because they know their classmates were top students during their undergraduate years. |
| T | F | 5. Academic stress may be positive for students: It does not necessarily trigger psychological stress. |
| T | F | 6. College students typically find the socialization process in higher education to be less stressful than the professional socialization process they experience when they enter an occupation or profession. |
| T | F | 7. Students who have paid employment (outside of school) experience higher levels of stress than students who are not employed during their college years. |
| T | F | 8. Getting good grades and completing schoolwork are the top sources of stress reported by college students. |

Answers on page 78.

groupings. The kind of human being that we become depends greatly on the particular society and social groups that surround us at birth and during early childhood. What we believe about ourselves, our society, and the world does not spring full-blown from inside ourselves; rather, we learn these things from our interactions with others.

Human Development: Biology and Society

What does it mean to be “human”? To be human includes being conscious of ourselves as individuals with unique identities, personalities, and relationships with others. As humans, we have ideas, emotions, and values. We have the capacity to think and to make rational decisions. But what is the source of “humanness”? Are we born with these human characteristics, or do we develop them through our interactions with others?

When we are born, we are totally dependent on others for our survival. We cannot turn ourselves over, speak, reason, plan, or do many of the things that are associated with being human. Although we can nurse, wet, and cry, most small mammals can also do those things. As discussed in Chapter 2, we

humans differ from nonhuman animals because we lack instincts and must rely on learning for our survival. Human infants have the potential to develop human characteristics if they are exposed to an adequate socialization process.

Every human being is a product of biology, society, and personal experiences—that is, of heredity and environment or, in even more basic terms, “nature” and “nurture.” How much of our development can be explained by socialization? How much by our genetic heritage? Sociologists focus on how humans design their own culture and transmit it from generation to generation through socialization. By contrast, sociobiologists assert that nature, in the form of our genetic makeup, is a major factor in shaping human behavior. **Sociobiology is the systematic study of how biology affects social behavior** (Wilson, 1975). According to the zoologist Edward O. Wilson, who pioneered sociobiology,

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sociology and everyday life

ANSWERS to the Sociology Quiz on Socialization and the College Experience

1. **False.** Numerous studies have concluded that although professors are important in helping students learn about the academic side of the college experience, our friends and acquaintances help us adapt to higher education.
2. **False.** A recent study reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* found that 87.7 percent of first-year students at four-year colleges stated that they studied with other students. Similar data are not available for students at two-year schools. Would this percentage be higher, lower, or about the same at two-year and community colleges?
3. **True.** The college environment is stressful for many students who find that it is an abrupt change from high school because workloads increase, students are expected to manage their time independently and effectively, and grades are increasingly important for a person's career goals and other future endeavors.
4. **True.** The competitive nature of the admission process in law schools and medical schools virtually guarantees that new students will be surrounded by classmates who were exceptional students during their undergraduate years. However, this level of achievement may be a source of stimulation for some students rather than a source of discomfort and stress.
5. **True.** Some amount of academic stress may be positive in helping students reach their academic and career goals; however, excessive stress may be detrimental if it results in high levels of psychological stress or problematic behaviors such as alcohol abuse.
6. **False.** Recent studies that found that stress levels among college students are higher than those of people entering a new occupation or profession. For this reason, students are encouraged to develop good coping skills and build support networks of friends, family, and other individuals in the college community so that they have someone they can turn to if they believe that the pressure has become excessive.
7. **False.** Although numerous studies have been conducted to determine whether or not paid employment (outside of school) contributes to higher stress levels among college students, most research has not shown a significant relationship between the number of hours worked and levels of stress among students. Earning more money for school and personal expenses appears to offset additional time and responsibility in the workplace.
8. **True.** The two top stressors most frequently reported on college campuses are getting good grades and completing schoolwork. However, first-year college students also report that changes in eating and sleeping habits, increased workloads and new responsibilities, and going home for holidays and other breaks are major sources of stress for them.

Sources: *Campus Times*, 2008; *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2009; *Messenger*, 2009; *Reuters*, 2008; Ross, Niebling, and Heckert, 1999; and Whitman, 1985.

genetic inheritance underlies many forms of social behavior such as war and peace, envy of and concern for others, and competition and cooperation. Most sociologists disagree with the notion that biological principles can be used to explain all human behavior. Obviously, however, some aspects of our physical makeup—such as eye color, hair color, height, and weight—are largely determined by our heredity.

How important is social influence (“nurture”) in human development? There is hardly a single

behavior that is not influenced socially. Except for simple reflexes, most human actions are social, either in their causes or in their consequences. Even solitary actions such as crying or brushing our teeth are ultimately social. We cry because someone has hurt us. We brush our teeth because our parents (or dentist) told us it was important. Social environment probably has a greater effect than heredity on the way we develop and the way we act. However, heredity does provide the basic material from which other people help to mold an individual's human characteristics.

Our biological and emotional needs are related in a complex equation. Children whose needs are met in settings characterized by affection, warmth, and closeness see the world as a safe and comfortable place and see other people as trustworthy and helpful. By contrast, infants and children who receive less-than-adequate care or who are emotionally rejected or abused often view the world as hostile and have feelings of suspicion and fear.

Problems Associated with Social Isolation and Maltreatment

Social environment, then, is a crucial part of an individual's socialization. Even nonhuman primates such as monkeys and chimpanzees need social contact with others of their species in order to develop properly. As we will see, appropriate social contact is even more important for humans.

Isolation and Nonhuman Primates Researchers have attempted to demonstrate the effects of social isolation on nonhuman primates raised without contact with others of their own species. In a series of laboratory experiments, the psychologists Harry and Margaret Harlow (1962, 1977) took infant rhesus monkeys from their mothers and isolated them in separate cages. Each cage contained two nonliving “mother substitutes” made of wire, one with a feeding bottle attached and the other covered with soft terry cloth but without a bottle. The infant monkeys instinctively clung to the cloth “mother” and would not abandon it until hunger drove them to the bottle attached to the wire “mother.” As soon as they were full, they went back to the cloth “mother” seeking warmth, affection, and physical comfort.

The Harlows' experiments show the detrimental effects of isolation on nonhuman primates. When the young monkeys were later introduced to other members of their species, they cringed in the corner. Having been deprived of social contact with other monkeys during their first six months of life, they never learned how to relate to other monkeys or to become well-adjusted adults—they were fearful of

or hostile toward other monkeys (Harlow and Harlow, 1962, 1977).

Because humans rely more heavily on social learning than do monkeys, the process of socialization is even more important for us.

Isolated Children Of course, sociologists would never place children in isolated circumstances so that they could observe what happened to them. However, some cases have arisen in which parents or other caregivers failed to fulfill their responsibilities, leaving children alone or placing them in isolated circumstances. From analysis of these situations, social scientists have documented cases in which children were deliberately raised in isolation. A look at the lives of two children who suffered such emotional abuse provides important insights into the importance of a positive socialization process and the negative effects of social isolation.

Anna Born in 1932 to an unmarried, mentally impaired woman, Anna was an unwanted child. She



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► As Harry and Margaret Harlow discovered, humans are not the only primates that need contact with others. Deprived of its mother, this infant monkey found a substitute.

was kept in an attic-like room in her grandfather's house. Her mother, who worked on the farm all day and often went out at night, gave Anna just enough care to keep her alive; she received no other care. Sociologist Kingsley Davis (1940) described Anna's condition when she was found in 1938:

[Anna] had no glimmering of speech, absolutely no ability to walk, no sense of gesture, not the least capacity to feed herself even when the food was put in front of her, and no comprehension of cleanliness. She was so apathetic that it was hard to tell whether or not she could hear. And all of this at the age of nearly six years.

When she was placed in a special school and given the necessary care, Anna slowly learned to walk, talk, and care for herself. Just before her death at the age of ten, Anna reportedly could follow directions, talk in phrases, wash her hands, brush her teeth, and try to help other children (Davis, 1940).

Genie About three decades later, Genie was found in 1970 at the age of thirteen. She had been locked in a bedroom alone, alternately strapped down to a child's potty chair or straitjacketed into a sleeping bag, since she was twenty months old. She had been fed baby food and beaten with a wooden paddle when she whimpered. She had not heard the sounds of human speech because no one talked to her and there was no television or radio in her room (Curtiss, 1977; Pines, 1981). Genie was placed in a pediatric hospital, where one of the psychologists described her condition:

At the time of her admission she was virtually unsocialized. She could not stand erect, salivated continuously, had never been toilet-trained and had no control over her urinary or bowel functions. She was unable to chew solid food and had the weight, height and appearance of a child half her age. (Rigler, 1993: 35)

In addition to her physical condition, Genie showed psychological traits associated with neglect, as described by one of her psychiatrists:

If you gave [Genie] a toy, she would reach out and touch it, hold it, caress it with her fingertips, as though she didn't trust her eyes. She would rub it against her cheek to feel it. So when I met her and

she began to notice me standing beside her bed, I held my hand out and she reached out and took my hand and carefully felt my thumb and fingers individually, and then put my hand against her cheek. She was exactly like a blind child. (Rymer, 1993: 45)

Extensive therapy was used in an attempt to socialize Genie and develop her language abilities (Curtiss, 1977; Pines, 1981). These efforts met with limited success: In the 1990s, Genie was living in a board-and-care home for retarded adults (see Angier, 1993; Rigler, 1993; Rymer, 1993).

Why do we discuss children who have been the victims of maltreatment in a chapter that looks at the socialization process? The answer lies in the fact that such cases are important to our understanding of the socialization process because they show the importance of this process and reflect how detrimental social isolation and neglect can be to the well-being of people.



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▲ A victim of extreme child abuse, Genie was isolated from human contact and tortured until she was rescued at the age of thirteen. Subsequent attempts to socialize her were largely unsuccessful.

Child Maltreatment What do the terms *child maltreatment* and *child abuse* mean to you? When asked what constitutes child maltreatment, many people first think of cases that involve severe physical injuries or sexual abuse. However, neglect is the most frequent form of child maltreatment (Dubowitz et al., 1993). Child neglect occurs when children's basic needs—including emotional warmth and security, adequate shelter, food, health care, education, clothing, and protection—are not met, regardless of cause (Dubowitz et al., 1993: 12). Neglect often involves acts of omission (where parents or caregivers fail to provide adequate physical or emotional care for children) rather than acts of commission (such as physical or sexual abuse). Of course, what constitutes child maltreatment differs from society to society.

Social Psychological Theories of Human Development

Over the past hundred years, a variety of psychological and sociological theories have been developed not

only to explain child abuse but also to describe how a positive process of socialization occurs. Let's look first at several social psychological theories that focus primarily on how the individual personality develops.

Freud and the Psychoanalytic Perspective

The basic assumption in Sigmund Freud's (1924) psychoanalytic approach is that human behavior and personality originate from unconscious forces within individuals. Freud (1856–1939), who is known as the founder of psychoanalytic theory, developed his major theories in the Victorian era, when biological explanations of human behavior were prevalent. It was also an era of extreme sexual repression and male dominance when compared to contemporary U.S. standards. Freud's theory was greatly influenced by these cultural factors, as reflected in the importance he assigned to sexual motives in explaining behavior. For example, Freud based his ideas on the belief that people have two basic tendencies: the urge to survive and the urge to procreate.

◀ What are the consequences to children of isolation and physical abuse, as contrasted with social interaction and parental affection? Sociologists emphasize that social environment is a crucial part of an individual's socialization.



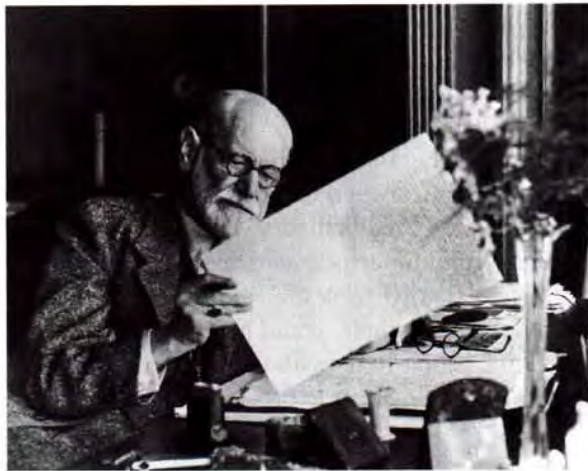
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According to Freud (1924), human development occurs in three states that reflect different levels of the personality, which he referred to as the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. The ***id* is the component of personality that includes all of the individual's basic biological drives and needs that demand immediate gratification.** For Freud, the newborn child's

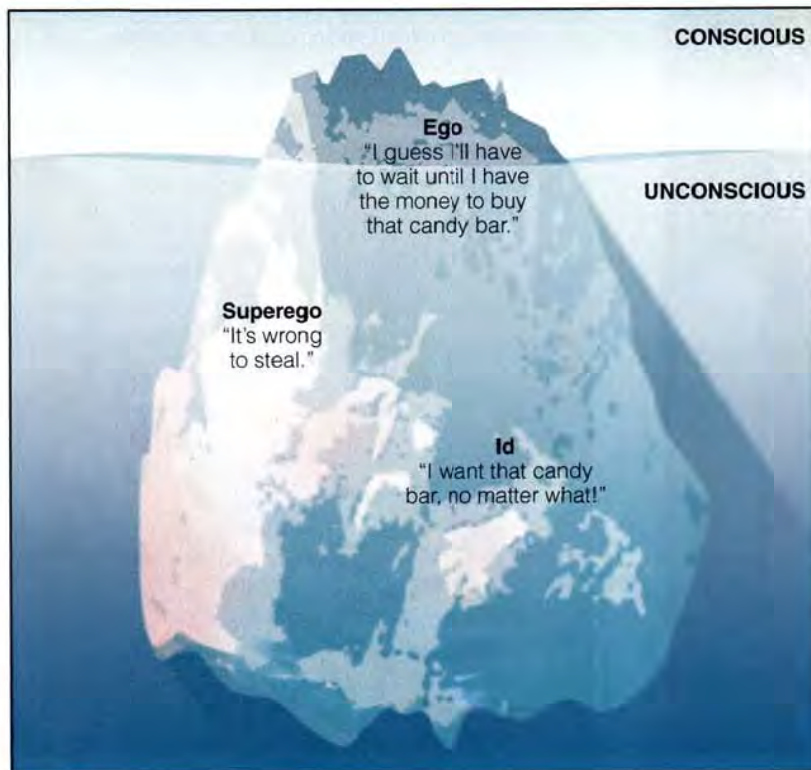
▼ Sigmund Freud, founder of the psychoanalytic perspective.



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personality is all *id*, and from birth the child finds that urges for self-gratification—such as wanting to be held, fed, or changed—are not going to be satisfied immediately. However, *id* remains with people throughout their life in the form of *psychic energy*, the urges and desires that account for behavior. By contrast, the second level of personality—the *ego*—develops as infants discover that their most basic desires are not always going to be met by others. The ***ego* is the rational, reality-oriented component of personality that imposes restrictions on the innate pleasure-seeking drives of the *id*.** The *ego* channels the desire of the *id* for immediate gratification into the most advantageous direction for the individual. The third level of personality—the *superego*—is in opposition to both the *id* and the *ego*. The ***superego*, or conscience, consists of the moral and ethical aspects of personality.** It is first expressed as the recognition of parental control and eventually matures as the child learns that parental control is a reflection of the values and moral demands of the larger society. When a person is well adjusted, the *ego* successfully manages the opposing forces of the *id* and the *superego*. ► Figure 3.1 illustrates Freud's theory of personality.

Although subject to harsh criticism, Freud's theory made people aware of the importance of early childhood experiences, including abuse and neglect. His theories have also had a profound influence on contemporary mental health



◀ **FIGURE 3.1 FREUD'S THEORY OF PERSONALITY**

This illustration shows how Freud might picture a person's internal conflict over whether to commit an antisocial act such as stealing a candy bar. In addition to dividing personality into three components, Freud theorized that our personalities are largely unconscious—hidden from our normal awareness. To dramatize his point, Freud compared conscious awareness (portions of the *ego* and *superego*) to the visible tip of an iceberg. Most of personality—including the *id*, with its raw desires and impulses—lies submerged in our subconscious.

practitioners and on other human development theories.

Piaget and Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget (1896–1980), a Swiss psychologist, was a pioneer in the field of cognitive (intellectual) development. Cognitive theorists are interested in how people obtain, process, and use information—that is, in how we think. Cognitive development relates to changes over time in how we think.

Piaget (1954) believed that in each stage of development (from birth through adolescence), children's activities are governed by their perception of the world around them. His four stages of cognitive development are organized around specific tasks that, when mastered, lead to the acquisition of new mental capacities, which then serve as the basis for the next level of development. Piaget emphasized that all children must go through each stage in sequence

▼ Jean Piaget, a pioneer in the field of cognitive development.



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before moving on to the next one, although some children move through them faster than others.

1. *Sensorimotor stage* (birth to age two). During this period, children understand the world only through sensory contact and immediate action because they cannot engage in symbolic thought or use language. Toward the end of the second year, children comprehend *object permanence*; in other words, they start to realize that objects continue to exist even when the items are out of sight.
2. *Preoperational stage* (age two to seven). In this stage, children begin to use words as mental symbols and to form mental images. However, they still are limited in their ability to use logic to solve problems or to realize that physical objects may change in shape or appearance while still retaining their physical properties. For example, Piaget showed children two identical beakers filled with the same amount of water. After the children agreed that both beakers held the same amount of water, Piaget poured the water from one beaker into a taller, narrower beaker and then asked them about the amounts of water in each beaker. Those still in the preoperational stage believed that the taller beaker held more water because the water line was higher than in the shorter, wider beaker.
3. *Concrete operational stage* (age seven to eleven). During this stage, children think in terms of tangible objects and actual events. They can draw conclusions about the likely physical consequences of an action without always having to try the action out. Children begin to take the role of others and start to empathize with the viewpoints of others.

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