4. *Formal operational stage* (age twelve through adolescence). By this stage, adolescents are able to engage in highly abstract thought and understand places, things, and events they have never seen. They can think about the future and evaluate different options or courses of action.

Piaget provided useful insights on the emergence of logical thinking as the result of biological maturation and socialization. However, critics have noted several weaknesses in Piaget's approach to cognitive development. For one thing, the theory says little about individual differences among children, nor does it provide for cultural differences. For another, as the psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) has noted, Piaget did not take into account how gender affects the process of social development.

▼ Psychologist Jean Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development, including the preoperative stage, in which children have limited ability to realize that physical objects may change in shape or appearance. Piaget poured liquid from one beaker into a taller, narrower beaker and then asked children about the amounts of liquid in each beaker.

Kohlberg and the Stages of Moral Development

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) elaborated on Piaget's theories of cognitive reasoning by conducting a series of studies in which children, adolescents, and adults were presented with moral dilemmas that took the form of stories. Based on his findings, Kohlberg (1969, 1981) classified moral reasoning into three sequential levels:

1. *Preconventional level* (age seven to ten). Children's perceptions are based on punishment and obedience. Evil behavior is that which is likely to be punished; good conduct is based on obedience and avoidance of unwanted consequences.
2. *Conventional level* (age ten through adulthood). People are most concerned with how they are perceived by their peers and with how one conforms to rules.
3. *Postconventional level* (few adults reach this stage). People view morality in terms of individual rights; "moral conduct" is judged by principles based on human rights that transcend government and laws.

Although Kohlberg presents interesting ideas about the moral judgments of children, some critics have challenged the universality of his stages of moral development. They have also suggested that the elaborate "moral dilemmas" he used are too abstract for children. In one story, for example, a husband contemplates stealing for his critically ill wife medicine that he cannot afford. When questions are made simpler, or when children and adolescents are observed in natural (as opposed to laboratory) settings, they often demonstrate sophisticated levels of moral reasoning (Darley and Shultz, 1990; Lapsley, 1990).

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◀ How do these teenagers' perceptions of the world differ from their perceptions ten years earlier, according to Piaget?

Gilligan's View on Gender and Moral Development

Psychologist Carol Gilligan (b. 1936) is one of the major critics of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. According to Gilligan (1982), Kohlberg's model was developed solely on the basis of research with male respondents, and women and men often have divergent views on morality based on differences in socialization and life experiences. Gilligan believes that men become more concerned with law and order but that women tend to analyze social relationships and the social consequences of behavior. For example, in Kohlberg's story about the man who is thinking about stealing medicine for his wife, Gilligan argues that male respondents are more likely to use *abstract standards* of right and wrong, whereas female respondents are more likely to be concerned about what *consequences* his stealing the drug might have for the man and his family. Does this constitute a "moral deficiency" on the part of either women or men? Not according to Gilligan.

Subsequent research that directly compared women's and men's reasoning about moral dilemmas has supported some of Gilligan's assertions but not others. For example, some other researchers have not found that women are more compassionate than men (Tavris, 1993). Overall, however, Gilligan's argument that people make moral decisions according to both abstract principles of justice and principles of compassion and care is an important contribution to our knowledge about moral reasoning.

Sociological Theories of Human Development

Although social scientists acknowledge the contributions of psychoanalytic and psychologically based explanations of human development, sociologists believe that it is important to bring a sociological perspective to bear on how people develop an awareness of self and learn about the culture in which they live. According to a sociological perspective, we cannot form a sense of self or personal identity without intense social contact with others. The self represents the sum total of perceptions and feelings that an individual has of being a distinct, unique person—a sense of who and what one is. When we speak of the "self," we typically use words such as *I, me, my, mine,* and *myself* (Cooley, 1998/1902). This sense of self (also referred to *self-concept*) is not present at birth; it arises in the process of social experience. ***Self-concept* is the totality of our beliefs and feelings about ourselves.** Four components make up our self-concept: (1) the physical self ("I am tall"), (2) the active self ("I am good at soccer"), (3) the social self ("I am nice to others"), and (4) the psychological self ("I believe in world peace"). Between early and late childhood, a child's focus tends to shift from the physical and active dimensions of self toward the social and psychological aspects. Self-concept is the foundation for communication with others; it continues to develop and change throughout our lives.

Our *self-identity* is our perception about what kind of person we are. As we have seen, socially isolated children do not have typical self-identities because they have had no experience of "humanness." According to symbolic interactionists, we do not know who we are until we see ourselves as we

self-concept the totality of our beliefs and feelings about ourselves.

believe that others see us. The perspectives of symbolic interactionists Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead help us understand how our self-identity is developed through our interactions with others.

Cooley and the Looking-Glass Self

According to the sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), the ***looking-glass self*** **refers to the way in which a person's sense of self is derived from the perceptions of others.** Our looking-glass self is based on our perception of *how* other people think of us (Cooley, 1998/1902). As ▶ Figure 3.2 shows, the looking-glass self is a self-concept derived from a three-step process:

1. We imagine how our personality and appearance will look to other people.
2. We imagine how other people judge the appearance and personality that we think we present.
3. We develop a self-concept. If we think the evaluation of others is favorable, our self-concept is enhanced. If we think the evaluation is unfavorable, our self-concept is diminished. (Cooley, 1998/1902)

The self develops only through contact with others, just as social institutions and societies do not exist independently of the interaction of individuals (Schubert, 1998).

Mead and Role-Taking

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) extended Cooley's insights by linking the idea of self-concept to ***role-taking***—**the process by which a person mentally assumes the role of another person or group in order to understand the world from that person's or group's point of view.** Role-taking often occurs through play and games, as children try out different roles (such as being mommy, daddy, doctor, or teacher) and gain an appreciation of them. First, people come to take the role of the other (role-taking). By taking the roles of others, the individual hopes to ascertain the intention or direction of the acts of others. Then the person begins to construct his or her own roles (role-making) and to anticipate other individuals' responses. Finally, the person plays at her or his particular role (role-playing).

According to Mead (1934), in the early months of life, children do not realize that they are separate from others. However, they do begin early on to see a mirrored image of themselves in others. Shortly after birth, infants start to notice the faces of those around them, especially the significant others, whose faces start to have meaning because they are associated with experiences such as feeding and cuddling. ***Significant others*** **are those persons whose care, affection, and approval are especially desired and who are most important in the development of the self.** Gradually, we distinguish ourselves from our caregivers and begin to perceive ourselves in contrast to them. As we develop language skills and learn to understand symbols, we begin to develop a self-concept. When we can represent ourselves in our minds as objects distinct from everything else, our self has been formed.

▶ FIGURE 3.2 **HOW THE LOOKING-GLASS SELF WORKS**

Source: Based on Katzer, Cook, and Crouch, 1991.

Mead (1934) divided the self into the "I" and the "me." The "I" is the subjective element of the self and represents the spontaneous and unique traits of each person. The "me" is the objective element of the self, which is composed of the internalized attitudes and demands of other members of society and the individual's awareness of those demands. Both the "I" and the "me" are needed to form the social self. The unity of the two constitutes the full development of the individual. According to Mead, the "I" develops first, and the "me" takes form during the three stages of self-development:

1. During the *preparatory stage,* up to about age three, interactions lack meaning, and children largely imitate the people around them. At this stage, children are preparing for role-taking.
2. In the *play stage,* from about age three to five, children learn to use language and other symbols, thus enabling them to pretend to take the roles of specific people. At this stage, they begin to see themselves in relation to others, but they do not see role-taking as something they have to do.
3. During the *game stage,* which begins in the early school years, children understand not only their own social position but also the positions of others around them. In contrast to play, games are structured by rules, are often competitive, and involve a number of other "players." At this time, children become concerned about the demands and expectations of others and of the larger

looking-glass self Charles Horton Cooley's term for the way in which a person's sense of self is derived from the perceptions of others.

role-taking the process by which a person mentally assumes the role of another person in order to understand the world from that person's point of view.

significant others those persons whose care, affection, and approval are especially desired and who are most important in the development of the self.

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◀ According to sociologist George Herbert Mead, the self develops through three stages. In the preparatory stage, children imitate others; in the play stage, children pretend to take the roles of specific people; and in the game stage, children become aware of the "rules of the game" and the expectations of others.

sociology works!

"Good Job!": Mead's Generalized Other and the Issue of Excessive Praise

> Hang out at a playground, visit a school, or show up at a child's birthday party, and there's one phrase you can count on hearing repeatedly: "Good job!" Even tiny infants are praised for smacking their hands together ("Good clapping!"). Many of us blurt out these judgments of our children to the point that it has become almost a verbal tic. (Kohn, 2001)

Educational analyst Alfie Kohn describes the common practice of praising children for practically everything they say or do. According to Kohn, excessive praise or unearned compliments may be problematic for children because, rather than bolstering their self-esteem, such praise may increase a child's dependence on adults. As children increasingly rely on constant praise and on significant others to identify what is good or bad about their performance, they may not develop the ability to make meaningful judgments about what they have done. As Kohn suggests (2001), "Sadly, some of these kids will grow into adults who continue to need someone to pat them on the head and tell them whether what they did was OK."

Kohn's ideas remind us of the earlier sociological insights of George Herbert Mead, who described how children learn to take into account the expectations of the larger society and to balance the "I" (the subjective element of the self: the spontaneous and unique traits of each person) with the "me" (the objective element of the self: the internalized attitudes and demands of other members of society and the individual's awareness of those demands). As Mead (1934: 160) stated, "What goes on in the game goes on in the life of the child at all times. He is continually taking the attitudes of those about him, especially the roles of those who in some sense control him and on whom he depends." According to Mead, role-taking is vital to the formation of a mature sense of self as each individual learns to visualize the intentions and expectations of other people and groups. Excessively praising children may make it more difficult for them to develop a positive self-concept and visualize an accurate picture of what is expected of them as they grow into young adulthood.

Does this mean that children should not be praised? Definitely not! It means that we should think about when and how to praise children. What children may need sometimes is not praise, but encouragement. As child development specialist Docia Zavitkovsky has stated,

> I sometimes say that praise is fine "when praise is due." We get into the habit of praising when it isn't praise that is appropriate but encouragement. For example, we're always saying to young children: "Oh, what a beautiful picture," even when their pictures aren't necessarily beautiful. So why not really look at each picture? Maybe a child has painted a picture with many wonderful colors. Why don't we comment on that—on the reality of the picture? (qtd. in *Scholastic Parent & Child*, 2007)

From this perspective, positive feedback can have a very important influence on a child's self-esteem because he or she can learn how to do a "good job" when engaging in a specific activity or accomplishing a task rather than simply being praised for any effort expended. Mead's concept of the *generalized other* makes us aware of the importance of other people's actions in how self-concept develops.

reflect & analyze

What effect does receiving praise when we are young have on us when we are college students? Also, when we are dealing with our peers, how might we thoughtfully use the phrase "Good job!" without making it into an overworked expression?

society. Mead used the example of a baseball game to describe this stage because children, like baseball players, must take into account the roles of all the other players at the same time. Mead's concept of the ***generalized other*** **refers to the child's awareness of the demands and expectations of the society as a whole or of the child's subculture.**

How useful are symbolic interactionist perspectives in enhancing our understanding of the socialization process? Certainly, this approach contributes to our understanding of how the self develops (see "Sociology Works!"). However, this approach has certain limitations. Sociologist Anne Kaspar (1986) suggests that Mead's ideas about the social self may be more applicable to men than to women

[concept quick review 3.1]

Psychological and Sociological Theories of Human Development

Social Psychological Theories of Human Development	Freud's psychoanalytic perspective	Children first develop the id (drives and needs), then the ego (restrictions on the id), and then the superego (moral and ethical aspects of personality).
	Piaget's cognitive development	Children go through four stages of cognitive (intellectual) development, going from understanding only through sensory contact to engaging in highly abstract thought.
	Kohlberg's stages of moral development	People go through three stages of moral development, from avoidance of unwanted consequences to viewing morality based on human rights.
	Gilligan: gender and moral development	Women go through stages of moral development from personal wants to the greatest good for themselves and others.
Sociological Theories of Human Development	Cooley's looking-glass self	A person's sense of self is derived from his or her perception of how others view him or her.
	Mead's three stages of self-development	In the preparatory stage, children imitate the people around them; in the play stage, children pretend to take the roles of specific people; and in the game stage, children learn the demands and expectations of roles.

because women are more likely to experience inherent conflicts between the meanings they derive from their personal experiences and those they take from the culture, particularly in regard to balancing the responsibilities of family life and paid employment. (This chapter's Concept Quick Review summarizes the major theories of human development.)

Recent Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives

The symbolic interactionist approach emphasizes that socialization is a collective process in which children are active and creative agents, not just passive recipients of the socialization process. From this view, childhood is a *socially constructed* category (Adler and Adler, 1998). Children are capable of actively constructing their own shared meanings as they acquire language skills and accumulate interactive experiences (Qvortrup, 1990). According to the "orb web model" of the sociologist William A. Corsaro (1985, 1997), children's cultural knowledge reflects not only the beliefs of the adult world but also the unique interpretations and aspects of the children's own peer culture. Corsaro (1992: 162) states that *peer culture* is "a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share." This peer culture emerges through interactions as children "borrow" from the adult culture but transform it so that it fits their own situation. In fact, Corsaro (1992) believes that the peer group is the most significant arena in which children and young people acquire cultural knowledge.

Agents of Socialization

***Agents of socialization* are the persons, groups, or institutions that teach us what we need to know in order to participate in society.** We are exposed to many agents of socialization throughout our

generalized other George Herbert Mead's term for the child's awareness of the demands and expectations of the society as a whole or of the child's subculture.

agents of socialization the persons, groups, or institutions that teach us what we need to know in order to participate in society.

lifetime; in turn, we have an influence on those socializing agents and organizations. Here, we look at the most pervasive ones in childhood—the family, the school, peer groups, and the mass media.

The Family

The family is the most important agent of socialization in all societies. From our infancy onward, our families transmit cultural and social values to us. As discussed later in this book, families vary in size and structure. Some families consist of two parents and their biological children, whereas others consist of a single parent and one or more children. Still other families reflect changing patterns of divorce and remarriage, and an increasing number are made up of same-sex partners and their children. Over time, patterns have changed in some two-parent families so that fathers, rather than mothers, are the primary daytime agents of socialization for their young children.

Theorists using a functionalist perspective emphasize that families serve important functions in society because they are the primary locus for the procreation and socialization of children. Most of us form an emerging sense of self and acquire most of our beliefs and values within the family context. We also learn about the larger dominant culture (including language, attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms) and the primary subcultures to which our parents and other relatives belong.

Families are also the primary source of emotional support. Ideally, people receive love, understanding, security, acceptance, intimacy, and companionship within families. The role of the family is especially significant because young children have little social experience beyond the family's boundaries; they have no basis for comparing or evaluating how they are treated by their own family.

To a large extent, the family is where we acquire our specific social position in society. From birth, we are a part of the specific racial, ethnic, class, religious, and regional subcultural grouping of our family. Studies show that families socialize their children somewhat differently based on race, ethnicity, and class (Kohn, 1977; Kohn et al., 1990; Harrison et al., 1990). For example, sociologist Melvin Kohn (1977; Kohn et al., 1990) has suggested that social class (as measured by parental occupation) is one of the strongest influences on what and how parents teach their children. On the one hand, working-class parents, who are closely supervised and expected to follow orders at work, typically emphasize to their children the importance of obedience and conformity. On the other hand, parents from the middle and professional classes, who have more freedom and flexibility at work, tend to give their children more freedom to make their own decisions and to be creative. Kohn concluded that differences in the parents' occupations are a better predictor of child-rearing practices than is social class itself.

Whether or not Kohn's findings are valid today, the issues he examined make us aware that not everyone has the same family experiences. Many factors—including our cultural background, nation of origin, religion, and gender—are important in determining how we are socialized by family members and others who are a part of our daily life.

Conflict theorists stress that socialization contributes to false consciousness—a lack of awareness and a distorted perception of the reality of class as it affects all aspects of social life. As a result, socialization reaffirms and reproduces the class structure in the next generation rather than challenging the conditions that presently exist. For example, children in low-income families may be unintentionally socialized to believe that acquiring an education and aspiring to lofty ambitions are pointless because

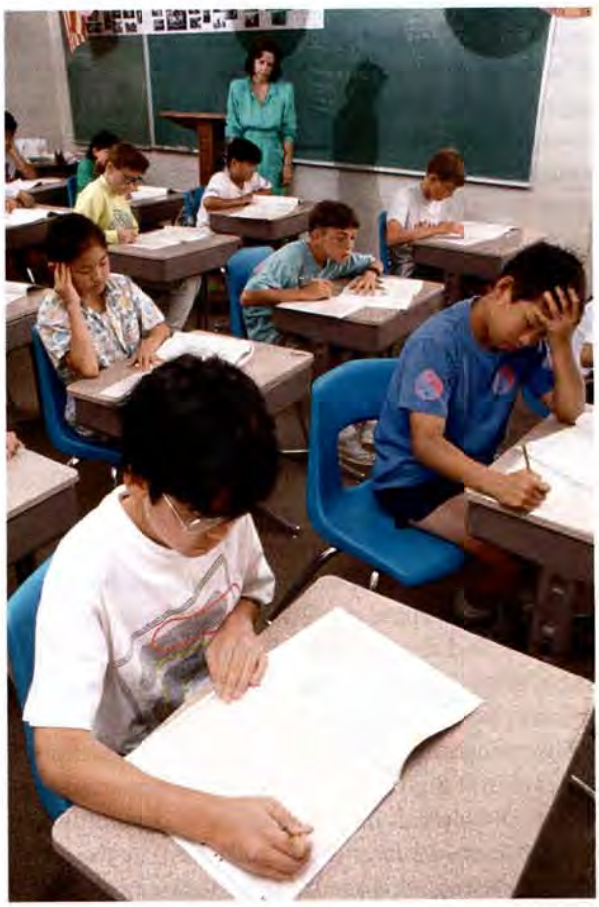
▲ As this celebration attended by three generations of family members illustrates, socialization enables society to "reproduce" itself.

of existing economic conditions in the family. By contrast, middle- and upper-income families typically instill ideas of monetary and social success in children while encouraging them to think and behave in "socially acceptable" ways.

The School

As the amount of specialized technical and scientific knowledge has expanded rapidly and as the amount of time that children are in educational settings has increased, schools continue to play an enormous role in the socialization of young people. For many people, the formal education process is an undertaking that lasts up to twenty years.

As the number of one-parent families and families in which both parents work outside the home has increased dramatically, the number of children in day-care and preschool programs has also grown rapidly. Currently, about 60 percent of all U.S. preschool children are in day care, either in private homes or institutional settings, and this percentage continues to climb (Children's Defense Fund, 2009). Generally, studies have found that quality day-care and preschool programs have a positive effect on the overall socialization of children. These programs provide children with the opportunity to have frequent interactions with teachers and to learn how to build their language and literacy skills. High-quality programs also have a positive effect on the academic performance of children, particularly those from low-income families. Today, however, the cost of child-care programs has become a major concern for many families.



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▲ Students are sent to school to be educated. However, what else will they learn in school beyond the academic curriculum? Sociologists differ in their responses to this question.

Although schools teach specific knowledge and skills, they also have a profound effect on children's self-image, beliefs, and values. As children enter school for the first time, they are evaluated and systematically compared with one another by the teacher. A permanent, official record is kept of each child's personal behavior and academic activities. From a functionalist perspective, schools are responsible for (1) socialization, or teaching students to be productive members of society; (2) transmission of culture; (3) social control and personal development; and (4) the selection, training, and placement of individuals on different rungs in the society (Ballantine and Hammack, 2009).

In contrast, conflict theorists assert that students have different experiences in the school system depending on their social class, their racial–ethnic background, the neighborhood in which they live, their gender, and other factors. According to the sociologists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), much of what happens in school amounts to teaching a hidden curriculum in which children learn to be neat, to be on time, to be quiet, to wait their turn, and to remain attentive to their work. Thus, schools do not socialize children for their own well-being but rather for their later roles in the workforce, where it is important to be punctual and to show deference to supervisors. Students who are destined for leadership or elite positions acquire different skills and knowledge than those who will enter working-class and middle-class occupations (see Cookson and Persell, 1985).

Peer Groups

As soon as we are old enough to have acquaintances outside the home, most of us begin to rely heavily on peer groups as a source of information and approval about social behavior. A ***peer group* is a group of people who are linked by common interests, equal social position, and (usually) similar age.** In early childhood, peer groups are often composed of classmates in day care, preschool, and elementary school. Recent studies have found that preadolescence—the latter part of the elementary school years—is an age period in which children's peer culture has an important effect on how children perceive themselves and how they internalize society's expectations (Adler and Adler, 1998). In adolescence, peer groups are typically made up of people with similar interests and social activities. As adults, we continue to participate in peer groups of people with whom we share common interests and comparable occupations, income, and/or social position.

Peer groups function as agents of socialization by contributing to our sense of "belonging" and our feelings of self-worth. As early as the preschool years, peer groups provide children with an opportunity for successful adaptation to situations such as gaining access to ongoing play, protecting shared activities from intruders, and building solidarity and mutual trust during ongoing activities (Corsaro, 1985; Rizzo and Corsaro, 1995). Unlike families and schools, peer groups provide children and adolescents with some degree of freedom from parents and other authority figures (Corsaro, 1992). Although peer groups afford children some degree of freedom, they also teach cultural norms such as what constitutes "acceptable" behavior in a specific situation. Peer groups simultaneously reflect the larger culture and serve as a conduit for passing on culture to young people. As a result, the peer group is both a product of culture and one of its major transmitters (Elkin and Handel, 1989).

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▲ The pleasure of participating in activities with friends is one of the many attractions of adolescent peer groups. What groups have contributed the most to your sense of belonging and self-worth?

Is there such a thing as "peer pressure"? Individuals must earn their acceptance with their peers by conforming to a given group's norms, attitudes, speech patterns, and dress codes. When we conform to our peer group's expectations, we are rewarded; if we do not conform, we may be ridiculed or even expelled from the group. Conforming to the demands of peers frequently places children and adolescents at cross-purposes with their parents. For example, young people are frequently under pressure to obtain certain valued material possessions (such as toys, clothing, athletic shoes, or cell phones); they then pass the pressure on to their parents through emotional pleas to purchase the desired items.

Mass Media

An agent of socialization that has a profound impact on both children and adults is the ***mass media*, composed of large-scale organizations that use print or electronic means (such as radio, television, film, and the Internet) to communicate with large numbers of people.** The media function as socializing agents in several ways: (1) they inform us about events; (2) they introduce us to a wide variety of people; (3) they provide an array of viewpoints on current issues; (4) they make us aware of products and services that, if we purchase them, will supposedly help us to be accepted by others; and (5) they entertain us by providing the opportunity to live vicariously (through other people's experiences). Although most of us take for granted that the media play an important part in contemporary socialization, we frequently underestimate the enormous influence this agent of socialization may have on children's attitudes and behavior.

Recent studies have shown that U.S. children, on average, are spending more time each year in front of TV sets, computers, and video games.

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▲ For decades, analysts have been concerned about the effects of television viewing on the young. However, the relatively recent advent of video games, the Internet, cellular phones, and texting devices have exacerbated the problem. Today, it is possible—*and common*—for every spare minute of a young person's day to be spent on audiovisual and digital entertainment.

According to the Annenberg Public Policy Center (University of Pennsylvania) study on media in the home, "The introduction of new media continues to transform the environment in American homes with children. . . . Rather than displacing television as the dominant medium, new technologies have supplemented it, resulting in an aggregate increase in electronic media penetration and use by America's youth" (qtd. in Dart, 1999: A5). Recent research indicates that children between the ages of 2 and 5 spend about 24.85 hours per week watching television. Add to that an additional 7 hours per week that children spend playing video games, watching DVDs, and TiVo-style time-shifted television, and more time than ever is spent with electronic media. Here is a pattern of viewing for 2–5-year-olds as reported by one researcher: "[Children begin] heavy viewing around 9 A.M., when, perhaps, an older sibling leaves for school; an early afternoon dip; then a rise in the after-school hours, consonant with older children's viewing patterns, and a second peak around 8 P.M. . . . For better or worse, TV is a frequent companion to our lives" (Mindlin, 2009: B3). Consider the fact that U.S. children spend about 1,000 hours per year in school. If we think of television-watching time alone, by the time that students graduate from high school, they will have spent more time in front of the television set than sitting in the classroom.

Parents, educators, social scientists, and public officials have widely debated the consequences of young people watching that much television. Television has been praised for offering numerous positive experiences to children. Some scholars suggest that television (when used wisely) can enhance children's development by improving their language abilities, concept-formation skills, and reading skills and by encouraging prosocial development (Winn, 1985). However, other studies have shown that children and adolescents who spend a lot of time watching television often have lower grades in school, read fewer books, exercise less, and are overweight (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1997).

Of special concern to many people is the issue of television violence. It is estimated that the typical young person who watches 28 hours of television per week will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence by the time he or she reaches age 18. A report by the American Psychological Association states that about 80 percent of all television programs contain acts of violence and that commercial television for children is 50 to 60 times more violent than prime-time television for adults. For example, some cartoons average more than 80 violent acts per hour (APA Online, 2000). The violent content of media programming and the marketing and advertising practices of mass media industries that routinely target children under age 17 have come under the scrutiny of government agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission due to concerns raised by parents and social analysts.

In addition to concerns about violence in television programming, motion pictures, and electronic games, television shows have been criticized for projecting negative images of women and people of color. Although the mass media have changed some of the roles that they depict women as playing, some newer characters tend to reinforce existing stereotypes of women as sex objects even when they are in professional roles such as doctors or lawyers.

peer group a group of people who are linked by common interests, equal social position, and (usually) similar age.

mass media large-scale organizations that use print or electronic means (such as radio, television, film, and the Internet) to communicate with large numbers of people.