tinctive personalities and world views.

SOCIALIZATION AND THE LIFE COURSE

Although childhood has special importance in the socialization process, learning continues throughout life. Our society organizes human experience according to age, so we think of the life course as four distinct stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and, finally, old age.

CHILDHOOD

Michael Jordan recently came under fire for endorsing Nike athletic shoes, because they are made in Taiwan and Indonesia by children who do not go to school but work full time for roughly fifty cents an hour. Such wages are typical for workers in poor countries, which include perhaps 200 million of the world's children (Gibbs, 1996). Global Map 5–1 shows that child labor is most common in nations of Africa and Asia.

Michael Jordan was criticized because North Americans think of *childhood*—the first twelve years of life—as a time for learning and carefree play. Many people might be surprised to learn, however, that, even a century ago, children in North America and Europe had much the same life as children in poor countries today: They worked long hours, often under hazardous conditions, for little pay.

In fact, according to historian Philippe Ariès (1965), the whole idea of "childhood" is a fairly recent invention. During the Middle Ages, Ariès explains, children of four or five were treated like adults and expected to fend for themselves.

Today, our notion of childhood is grounded in biological differences that set youngsters apart from adults. But, as historical and global comparisons show us, the concept of "childhood" is also rooted in culture. In rich countries, not everyone has to work. In addition, societies such as our own stretch out childhood to allow time for young people to learn the skills they will need in a high-technology workplace.

Recently, some social scientists think, our conception of childhood may be changing yet again. In an age of high divorce rates, with both mothers and fathers in the work force, and an increasing level of "adult" programming on television, children are no longer "protected" from grown-up concerns as in past generations.

There is no better example of how parents can "hurry" their children into adulthood than beauty pageants for young girls. In this scene from a Georgia "baby beauty pageant," we see a girl, not even old enough for school, straining to embody traits usually associated with grown-up women. What are these traits? Would you want your daughter to compete in such pageants? Why or why not?

Rather, we are seeing a "hurried child" syndrome: Children have to grapple with sex, drugs, and violence as well as fend more and more for themselves (Elkind, 1981; Winn, 1983). Critics, however, counter that there is not yet convincing evidence of any dramatic shift in our society's conception of childhood. Further, they note, the "hurried child" thesis overlooks the fact that children in the lower class have always assumed adult responsibilities sooner than their middle- and upper-class counterparts (Lynott & Logue, 1993).

ADOLESCENCE

As industrialization gradually turned childhood into a distinct stage of life, adolescence emerged as a buffer between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence, or the teenage years, is the stage of life for establishing some independence and learning specialized skills required for adult life.

We generally associate adolescence with emotional and social turmoil—young people in conflict with their parents as they struggle to develop their own, separate identities. We may be tempted to attribute teenage turbulence to the physiological changes of puberty. But comparative research suggests that, like childhood, adolescence depends on culture. Studying the Samoan Islanders in the 1920s, Margaret Mead (1961; orig. 1928) found little evidence of stress among teenagers; there, children appeared to move easily to adult standing. Our society, however, defines childhood and adulthood in somewhat opposing terms, making the transition from one stage to the other more difficult.

Our society also seems to have mixed feelings about when exactly young people become adults. Eighteen-year-olds may vote and go to war; yet they cannot drink alcohol and they have a hard time getting a bank loan. We send the same mixed messages when it comes to adolescent sexuality. The mass media often encourage sexual activity, while parents urge restraint, and for their part, schools discourage casual sex even as they hand out condoms to students.

As is true of all stages of life, the experience of adolescence varies according to social background. Most young people from working-class families move directly from high school into the adult world of work and parenting. Wealthier teens, however, with the resources to attend college and perhaps graduate school, may extend adolescence into the late twenties and even the thirties. For different reasons, of course, poverty also can extend adolescence. Especially in the inner cities, many young minorities cannot attain full adult standing because jobs are not available.

ADULTHOOD

- Early Adulthood (20-4
- Middle Adulthood (40-6
- Old Age (60—

At the age of thirty-five, Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the most widely admired women in the United States, wrote in her diary: "I do not think I have ever felt so strangely as in the past year . . . all my self-confidence is gone and I am on the edge, though I never was better physically I feel sure" (quoted in Sheehy, 1976:260). Perhaps Eleanor Roosevelt was troubled by the attention her husband was paying to another, younger woman; perhaps as she looked to the future, she could not see what challenges or accomplishments might bring satisfaction to her life.

But as Eleanor Roosevelt struggled with what today we might call a "midlife crisis," there was much that she could not foresee. Her husband, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, was shortly to become disabled by polio, although his rising political career ultimately would lead to the White House. And Eleanor herself was to become one of the most active and influential of all First Ladies. Even after her husband's death, she remained in public life, serving as a delegate to the United Nations.

Eleanor Roosevelt's life illustrates two major characteristics of *adulthood*, which our culture defines as beginning during the twenties. First, adulthood is a time of accomplishment, when we pursue careers and raise families. Second, in later adulthood, as Erik Erikson explained, people reflect upon what they have achieved, perhaps with great satisfaction or with the sobering realization that the dreams of their youth will never come true.

Early Adulthood

By the onset of adulthood, personalities are largely formed. Even so, a marked shift in an individual's life

situation—brought on by unemployment, divorce, or serious illness—can cause significant change in the self (Dannefer, 1984).

Early adulthood—from twenty to about age forty—is generally a time of pursuing goals set earlier in life. Young adults break free of parents and learn to manage day-to-day responsibilities for themselves. With the birth of children, parents draw on their own upbringing, although, as children, they may not have understood much about adult life. In addition, young adults must work out how to live with a partner in an intimate relationship.

Early adulthood is also a period of juggling conflicting priorities: parents, partner, children, schooling, and work (Levinson et al., 1978). Women, especially, face the difficulty of "doing it all," since they still have primary responsibility for child rearing and household chores, even if they have demanding occupations outside the home (Hochschild, 1989).

Middle Adulthood

Young adults usually cope optimistically with the tensions in their lives. But in middle adulthood—roughly ages forty to sixty—people begin to sense that their life circumstances are pretty well set. In middle adulthood, then, we assess actual achievement in light of earlier expectations. At midlife, people also become more aware of the fragility of health, which the young typically take for granted.

Some women who have spent many years raising a family find middle adulthood especially trying. Children grow up and require less attention, and husbands become absorbed in their careers, leaving these women with spaces in their lives that they find difficult to fill. Women who divorce during middle adulthood also may experience serious financial problems (Weitzman, 1985, 1996). For all these reasons, an increasing number of women in middle adulthood return to school and seek new careers.

For both men and women, growing older means facing physical decline, but in our society, this prospect is more painful for women. Because good looks are considered more important for women, wrinkles, added weight, and hair loss can be traumatic. Men, of course, have their own particular difficulties. Some must admit that they are never going to reach their career goals. Others, now realizing that the price of career success has been neglect of family or personal health, harbor uncertainties about their self-worth even as they bask in the praise of others (Farrell & Rosenberg, 1981). Women, too, who devote themselves single-mindedly to careers in early adulthood, may regret what they gave up in relationships, health, or personal goals.

Eleanor Roosevelt's midlife crisis may well have involved some of the personal transitions we have described. But her story also illustrates the fact that most people experience their greatest productivity and personal satisfaction after midlife—in later adulthood. In our youth-oriented culture, many people (especially the young) think life ends at forty. But as life expectancy in the United States has increased, such limiting notions are beginning to dissolve. Major transformations may become less likely, but the potential for learning and new beginnings fills this stage of life with promise.

OLD AGE

Old age—the later years of adulthood and the final stage of life itself—begins about the mid-sixties. Again, societies attach different meanings to this time of life. As explained in Chapter 14 ("Aging and the Elderly"), traditional societies often give older people control over most of the land and other wealth. Also, since traditional societies change slowly, older people amass great wisdom during their lifetime, which earns them respect (Sheehan, 1976; Hareven, 1982).

In industrial societies, however, most younger people work apart from the family, becoming independent of their elders. Rapid change fosters a youth orientation that leads us to define what is old as unimportant or even obsolete. To younger people, the elderly appear unaware of new trends and fashions, and their knowledge and experience often seem irrelevant.

No doubt, however, our society's anti-elderly bias will diminish as the proportion of older people steadily increases. The share of our population over sixty-five has almost tripled since the beginning of this century, so that today there are more elderly men and women than there are teenagers. Moreover, life expectancy is still increasing, so that most men and women in the mid-sixties (the "young elderly") can look forward to decades more of life. In fact, the Census Bureau (1996) predicts that the fastest-growing segment of our population in the next century will be people over eighty-five, whose numbers will soar sixfold.

Old age differs in an important way from earlier stages of the life course. Growing up means entering new roles and assuming new responsibilities; growing old is the opposite experience of leaving roles that provided both satisfaction and social identity. Retirement, for example, may be a period of restful activity, but it can mean the loss of valued routines and sometimes

outright boredom. Like any life transition, retirement demands learning new, different patterns while simultaneously *un*learning familiar habits from the past. A nonworking wife or husband who must accommodate a partner spending more time at home has an equally difficult transition to make.

DYING

Through most of human history, low living standards and primitive medical technology meant that death, caused by disease or accident, came at any stage of life. Today, however, almost 85 percent of people in the United States die after the age of fifty-five (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1997).

After observing many dying people, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) described death as an orderly transition involving five distinct responses. A person's first reaction to the prospect of dying is usually *denial*, since our culture tends to ignore the reality of death. The second phase is *anger* by which a person begins to face the prospect of dying but views it as a gross injustice. Third, anger gives way to *negotiation*, as the person imagines that death may not be inevitable and tries to strike a bargain with God in order to continue living. The fourth response, *resignation*, is often accompanied by psychological depression. Finally, adjustment to death is completed in the fifth stage, *acceptance*. At this point, rather than being paralyzed by fear and anxiety, the person whose life is ending sets out to make the most of whatever time remains.

As the proportion of women and men in old age increases, we can expect our culture to become more comfortable with the idea of death. In recent years, for example, people in the United States and elsewhere are discussing death more than in decades past, and the trend is to view dying as preferable to painful or prolonged suffering. Moreover, more married couples now anticipate their own deaths with legal and financial planning. This openness may ease somewhat the pain of the surviving spouse—a consideration for women, who usually outlive their husbands.

GEORGE HERBERT MEAD: THE SOCIAL SELF

A major contribution to our understanding of socialization comes from George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). Mead's theory of *social behaviorism* (1962; orig. 1934) calls to mind the behaviorism of psychologist John B. Watson, described earlier. Both recognized the power of the environment to shape human behavior. But Watson focused on outward behavior, while Mead studied inward *thinking*, which he considered humanity's defining trait.

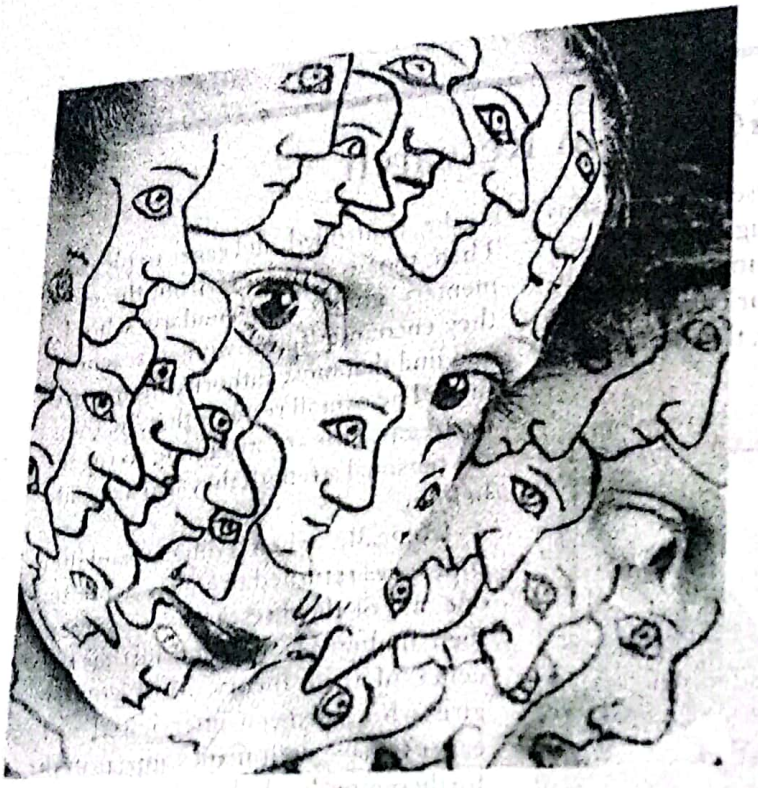
The Self

Mead's central concept is the **self**, *a dimension of personality composed of an individual's self-awareness and self-image.* Mead's genius lay in seeing that the self is inseparable from social experience, a connection explained in a series of steps.

First, Mead asserted, *the self develops over time.* The self is not part of the body, and it does not exist at birth. Mead rejected the idea that personality is guided by biological drives (as asserted by Freud) or biological maturation (as Piaget claimed). For Mead, self develops *only* through social experience. In the absence of interaction, as we see from the cases of isolated children, the body may grow but no self will emerge.

Second, Mead explained, *social experience is the exchange of symbols.* Using words, a wave of the hand, or a smile, people create meaning, which is a distinctively human experience. We can train a dog using reward and punishment, but the dog attaches no meaning to its actions. Human beings, by contrast, make sense of action by imagining people's underlying intentions. In short, a dog responds to *what you do*; a human responds to *what you have in mind* as you do it.

Return, for a moment, to our friendly dog. You can train a dog to walk to the corner and return carrying an umbrella. But the dog grasps no meaning in the act, no intention behind the command. Thus, if the dog cannot find the umbrella, it is incapable of the *human* response: to look for a raincoat instead.



George Herbert Mead wrote: "No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others." The painting Manyness *by Rimma Gerlovina and Valeriy Gerlovin conveys this important truth. Although we tend to think of ourselves as unique individuals, each person's characteristics develop in an ongoing process of interaction with others.*

Rimma Gerlovina & Valeriy Gerlovin, *Manyness*, 1990. © the artists, Pomona, N.Y.

Third, says Mead, *to understand intention, you must imagine the situation from another person's point of view.* Using symbols, we can imaginatively place ourselves in another person's shoes and thus see ourselves as that person does. This capacity allows us to anticipate how others will respond to us even before we act. A simple toss of a ball requires stepping outside ourselves to imagine how another will respond to our throw. Social interaction, then, involves seeing ourselves as others see us—a process that Mead termed *taking the role of the other.*

The Looking-Glass Self

How do we take the role of the other? Imagine that others represent a mirror (which people used to call a "looking glass") in which we can see ourselves. What we think of ourselves, then, depends in large measure on what we think others think of us. In other words, if we think others see us as clever, we will think of ourselves as clever. If we think others believe we are clumsy and worthless, we will imagine ourselves in the same way. Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929), one of Mead's colleagues, used the phrase **looking-glass self** to designate *the self-image we have based on how we suppose others perceive us* (1964; orig. 1902). The concept of the looking-glass self goes a long way toward explaining Carol Gilligan's finding that young women lose self-confidence as they come of age in a society that discourages assertiveness in women.

The I and the Me

Our capacity to see ourselves through others suggests that the self has two parts. First, as we initiate social action, *the self operates as a subject.* Humans are inherently active and spontaneous, according to Mead. He called this subjective element of the self the *I* (the subjective form of the personal pronoun).

Second, as we take the role of the other, the self *operates as an object.* In interaction, in other words, we look at others and see ourselves. Mead called this objective element of the self the *me* (the objective form of the personal pronoun). All social experience has both components: We initiate an action (the I-phase of self), and then we continue the action based on how others respond (the me-phase of self). Taking the role of the other is, then, the interplay of the I and the me.

Mead stressed that thinking as well as action is social. Our thoughts are partly creative (representing the I), but in thought we also become objects to ourselves (representing the me), as we imagine how others will respond to us.

Development of the Self

According to Mead, we develop a self as we learn to take the role of the other. Like Freud and Piaget, Mead thought the process began in early childhood, but he emphasized that it goes on as long as we continue to have social experience.

Infants, said Mead, respond to others through *imitation.* They mimic behavior without understanding underlying intentions. Unable to use symbols (thus, unable to take the role of the other), infants have no self.

Children first learn to use language and other symbols in the form of *play,* especially, role playing. Initially, they model themselves on important figures in their lives—such as parents—we call *significant others.* Playing "mommy and daddy," for example, helps children imagine the world from their parents' point of view.