

# Socialization



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## What is Socialization

Socialization is an integral part of the process every human being, regardless of gender, culture or geographical location, goes through from childhood through adulthood. It is a never-ending process. But it is especially important during the formative years of a person's life. In brief, socialization can be described as the process by which an individual acquires his or her own personal identity. He or she learns the values, norms, social behavioral patterns and social skills needed to integrate in and become a functioning member of their particular society.

## What are The Major Agents of Socialization?

From this simplified definition it can be seen that any attempt to define a set of factors or agents that contribute to the socialization process must differ from culture to culture. However, despite the differences inherent in unique cultures, a number of socialization factors are common to all cultures or have a similar equivalent.

In Western industrial societies, by way of example, it is generally accepted that there are four central agents of socialization. Some researchers claim that there are actually 10 primary socialization agents. The proponents of the four agent model hold that the additional agents are but subsets of the four main socialization agents.

## Family: The Primary Social Group That Teaches Socialization

The family is the first social group that one comes into contact with and from which the individual learns the basic values of living in a family orientated society. Within this grouping many vital social lessons and skills are learned

that are essential if the individual is to develop and find a place in society. These include language skills, physical control of one's body, recognition and control of emotions, accepted behavioral patterns both in the home and the outside environment, and moral and ethical values.

Additional skills and lessons learned in the family include the ability to bond with and empathize with others, building the individual's picture of "I" which includes self-esteem, character, identity and emotional health, gender roles and ethnic and religious preferences.

These agents, along with others, are the basic building blocks for an individual's life. The skills and lessons learned and developed during a child's formative years will be those that enable him or her to grow and develop as an adult. They provide the abilities to build relationships outside of the family, to become a productive member of society and ultimately to fulfill a role in continuing the species by forming and starting their own family unit.

#### Mass Media: The Second Group That Teaches Socialization

The second major element of socialization is the mass media. This is comprised of television, the Internet, radio, music, movies, books, magazines and newspapers. In Western society, the age at which children are first exposed to mass media, usually in the form of television, is constantly getting younger. Today infants of only a few months of age may well be placed in front of the television. The television may serve as a "baby sitter" for busy parents. Some research shows that in many respects, the mass media, and in particular television and movies, present a serious challenge to the authority of the parents. These elements in today's culture often contain messages that contradict the values of the parents.

### Peer Groups: The Third Group That Teaches Socialization

The third area of socialization are peer groups. These are those people of a similar age or with some other shared characteristic, such as sports preference, place of work, musical taste and so forth. As the child progresses through life, the influence of peer groups grows. Peer group influence reaches its peak during a child's teenage years. Peer group influence on adults is much weaker.

### School: The Fourth Group That Teaches Socialization

School is the fourth major element of socialization. In school, one is taught the basic skills that are needed in the development as functioning, productive adults (e. g., reading, writing and mathematics). School also reinforces lessons learned in the family such as obedience, the need to complete tasks, self-esteem and competitiveness.

### How do Social Groups Influence Us?

Social groups can be defined as groups of people who share some social relations. A social group can be found in traditional forms, such as church groups, groups of friends or a group of colleagues. Social groups can also be formed without direct face-to-face contact such as what occurs in Internet chat-rooms.

### Social Groups Positive Effect On Society

Social groups are blamed for many negative aspects in society, from street violence and suicide cults to drug and alcohol abuse. Social groups also have a positive effect on society and on the individual. For example, alcoholic support groups and weight loss groups are successful in helping people

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reach their goals. Social groups also influence how people view consumer products, society and themselves.

The U. K.'s National Health Service uses support groups to help people quit smoking. Alcoholics Anonymous and Overeaters Anonymous groups meet in thousands of locations worldwide. They have proven to be highly successful. Research has shown that support received and given by members of Alcoholics Anonymous were consistent contributors to long-lasting (defined as three or more years) abstinence from alcohol. Specialized support groups such as these provide ongoing supportive networks that are conducive for a change in lifestyle. There has been an increase in the use of support groups aimed at preventing chronic disease such as diabetes or heart disease. These groups work on the principle that each participant will gain from and provide support for other members.

#### Social Groups Influence People's Attitudes Towards Work

Researchers have found that when teams of colleagues are very heterogeneous in age, there were significant benefits. When employees were of similar ages and they began working for the employer at roughly the same time, they had better levels of technical communication than other groups. Social groups can sometimes affect the work ethic negatively. While collective performance of a group increases with the size of the group, the increase in work output is often lower than the expected total of individual efforts. When people work in larger teams, they are more likely to work less efficiently. Scientists label it “ social loafing.”

#### Making People Better At Their Roles

Social groups can push people to be better at their roles by making them feel part of a wider community. In business, pressure groups push large corporations into being honest about finances, research or environmental issues. Unions allow employees to collectively gain better rights from employers. In individuals' private lives, the support of other people is valuable in helping people to cope in unfamiliar territory. In a recent study of infant-mother bonding, it was found that in cases of maternal stress or crises, those with support from spouses or close kin were able to overcome issues quicker and with fewer complications than those who felt alienated.

Social groups can influence people negatively. In a recent study of heroin addicts, researchers found that most addicts questioned were introduced to drugs by others. Many used drugs in a group setting and many lived with fellow heroin users or former users. Research has shown that negative behavior can sometimes even stem from support groups. In a recent study of support groups for chronic illness, some members found that they compared their ability to cope with those other members. Some found that they felt their coping ability was inferior to that of others, and it had a negative effect on their ability to cope.

### Social Groups Can Influence People To Buy

A social group can influence what people choose to buy. In 1954, Leon Festinger published his research on social group influence. He concluded that people compare themselves with others in order to judge the potential consequence of their planned actions. Social comparison can confirm or undermine one's own evaluation. Some theorists suggest that people conform with society in order to avoid some kind of punishment or social

exclusion. Recent research suggests that what people really crave is “optimal distinction.” They can satisfy their needs for validation, while at the same time enjoy and value their uniqueness.