

# Socialization leads to identity formation



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

What is socialization? Socialization is the process in which human beings interact with each other individually and in groups. It is the process by which one learns the traditions, customs and accepted behaviour in any given society. It is not a onetime process, but it is a lifelong process that provides individuals with skills, values and attitudes that are necessary for interacting with the society. Human beings need social experiences to learn their culture and survive in the society. They are not born with values and skills. They learn from what they see, hear and experience throughout their life. They have the capability to learn and absorb from what they see around them. Socialization is not a just a simple term that can be seen at face value. It has many layers, and each layer is different from the other and leads to different processes and situations. Socialization has three layers; primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary is what we learn from our family and when we are young, secondary is what we learn in school, and tertiary is what we learn throughout our lives.

We now know what socialization means, but what is identity? Identity is what makes an individual who he really is and what his purpose in life is. It is what makes an individual definable and recognizable. It is who you are and where you come from and what makes you unique from every other human being. It gives an individual a sense of being. Identity can be defined as individuality, personality, distinctiveness or uniqueness that makes an individual stand out. Like socialization, identity too cannot be seen at face value. Identity has many layers to itself, and as we walk through life, each new layer keeps unfolding in front of us.

Now, since we know what socialization and identity both mean, we can bring them together and relate them to answer our question – ‘ does socialization lead to identity formation?’ Well, I think yes, socialization does lead to identity formation as we discover who we really are and where we fit in, only in the midst of people and in our interaction with them. Once we start interacting with the society, we learn so much about ourselves as well as about others (individuals or societies), their culture, customs, behaviour, etc. We learn that we are similar to some people, and different from others. Socialization makes an individual more confident. The more people we talk to, the more topics we talk about, and this in turn widens our scope. Also, we make ourselves more visible to society and hence people recognize us. Thus socialization helps in building ones identity. Today’s world is all about power and identity. If one has an identity as well as the right attitude, he can achieve whatever he wants. Socializing also leads to better networking. Better networking means more connections and more connections means higher opportunities at work or elsewhere as well. Hence socialization leads to a boost in ones career or talent and thus helps in identity formation.

The more we interact with people, the more we discover ourselves and form judgements about ourselves as well as others. One is only able to discover his true self when he interacts with others and reacts in certain ways that are different from others. Everyone has a different and unique reaction to a certain situation. This uniqueness is what gives an individual his identity. For example, if we see Phillip Zimbardo’s Stanford Prison Study Experiment (Zimbardo, 1971), that was undertaken to study the behavioural and psychological consequences of becoming a prisoner or prison guard, we

observe that the prisoners started to lose their identity, and didn't see it as an experiment, but as a real prison run by psychologist. They forgot that they were actually just college students and not actually prisoners. The prisoners actually gave up their freedom and forgot their rights and liberties. The situation was such that it made them feel that way. The environment was so realistic that they actually believed they were prisoners and thus behaved in rebellion. It is the prisoners who created in the guards a sadistic impulse. The guards were compelled to act in ways that were totally opposite from what they were feeling inside. But few of the guards were actually cruel, and felt no guilt or regret while doing their job. They had completely lost themselves and started behaving in the role that was assigned to them, i. e. the role of a prison guard. The prisoners as well as the guards lost their true identity and became what the situation required them to be. The fresh prison routine, the ' privilege cell' for the obedient ones and the ' hole' for those who were punished, the clothes they were made to wear, the food they were made to eat, the number given to them by which they were now addressed, made them lose their true identity and become someone else. Thus, from this experiment we learn that situations affect us more than we think. What the volunteers in this experiment experienced was the ' power of the situation' and not anything to do with their personality. Prisons are institutions which attempt to rid individuals of their previous identity, and this can be clearly seen in Zimbardo's prison experiment.

Another example is The Clark Doll Experiment (Clark, 1939) that was carried out by Dr. Kenneth Clark and his wife, where they asked black children to choose between a black doll and a white doll. Most of the children said the

white doll was nicer, prettier and the one they preferred playing with, whereas the black doll was the 'bad doll'. All these children were aged from 6 to 9 only and were already so damaged by racism at such a young age. This racism was due to the school segregation between white and black kids. It was distorting their minds, causing them to have stereotypes and hate themselves. When asked the last question of the experiment-' which doll looks like you?' the children hesitated and answered. They wanted to choose the white doll, but reluctantly pick the black one. Thus, prejudice, discrimination and segregation caused black children to develop a sense of inferiority and self hatred. These children were embarrassed of who they truly were, and hated themselves for being black. They wanted to be white like the other kids. Thus, they lost their identity at such a young age and in fact were ashamed of who they actually were. They preferred being someone else.

Thus, socialization does lead to identity formation, and this identity formation starts at a young age itself. Even before children learn the basic do's and don'ts. So, it is very important to keep children away from bad influences and situations that can make them form bad judgements and ideas about themselves.

Now, arguing against the motion, ' socialization leads to identity formation', I would completely disagree upon this statement. Identity is who we are and where we come from. We form our identity by how we behave, how our family has brought us up, what education we get, where our interests lie, etc. It is what we do and how we behave as individuals that form our identity and make us who we truly are. Socialization has nothing to do with identity

formation. Socialization will not pour knowledge or talents into an individual; it will not build one's identity. It is important because we get to know more people, and get to widen our base. But it doesn't form who we are. It is 'we' ourselves who form who we are, not the people around us.

Primary and Tertiary socialization may lead to identity formation, but I can confidently say that Secondary socialization does not lead to identity formation. This can be proved by Paul Willis's 'Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs' (Willis, 1977). In this study, we see that it is the family that gives the children their identity and even schooling could not change this identity. This is because the school did not teach them what they actually required in life and what they need to live life the way their society lives it. It is the students who distance themselves from the school culture and requirements, and develop their own counterculture. They are resistant to the schooling, and reject what the school offers to them. Willis finds that they are not less talented, but they do develop an antagonism towards the "work hard move forward" mentality of modern education, and develop what Willis terms as "counter school culture" (Willis, 1977). Thus, these children do not form a different identity that their school wants them to become. They stick to what their family has taught them and what their family requires them to be. Their family requires them to be labourers, who earn their living by hard work and labour, not by sitting on a desk and signing papers. Thus, these children reject the education and school culture that schooling is supposed to embed in a student, and prefer living life the way their family has been doing so, not because they want to, but because it is their duty, it is who they are and where they belong.